

VOLUME 7 NUMBER 2 | APRIL 2013

# ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

## A tale of two cities

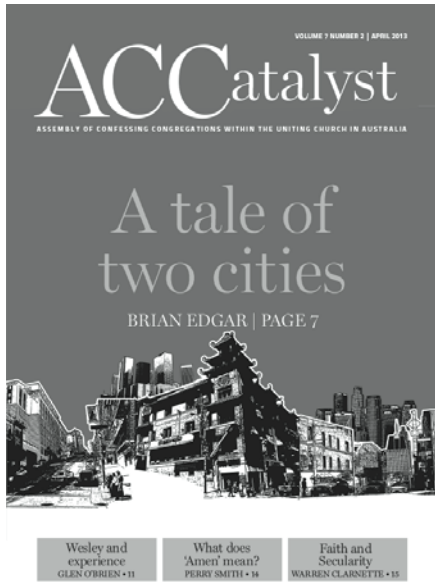
BRIAN EDGAR | PAGE 7



John Wesley and  
experience  
GLEN O'BRIEN • 11

What does  
'Amen' mean?  
PERRY SMITH • 14

Faith and  
Secularity  
WARREN CLARNETTE • 15



Cover illustration albertc111/istockphoto.com

## EDITORIAL

# Measuring up

Typing this editorial onto *ACCCatalyst* sometimes feels strange. Changing a page of white into grey by adding text is one of my favourite things, but with this publication I am both outsider and insider at the same time. Outsider because for some reason ACC lets this Anglican loose on its pages, and an insider, because, well, I see them before you. So what does this Outside Insider see?

I see an extraordinary ability to bring brains to this magazine. The Robert Iles lecture and your annual conference, and member contributions supply a lot of material.

There is even more on the ACC website because it simply can't fit in

this magazine. There is a sizable pile of articles that are waiting to get in. It is only space that keeps them out.

Peter Bentley does a lot of the gathering these days. His office funnels a torrent of words to me.

But there are some things I would like to see more of - although it may make the job of fitting things in much harder. I would like to see more stories of what it is like to be in the local church. In ACC as in much of the church we hear from leaders. They write well. But it would be good to hear from the pewsitters. Testimony, memories, and a taste of what your church is like would be most welcome. *John Sandeman*

*ACCCatalyst* is published by the Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc.  
 ABN 73 794 518 715 ARBN 128 001 785.  
 Incorporated in NSW. INC.9887628.  
 Liability of members is limited. Opinions expressed in *ACCCatalyst* do not necessarily reflect the official views of the assembly.

Executive Editor: Max Champion  
 Managing Editor: Peter Bentley  
 Editor: John Sandeman  
 Office: 2 Erskineville Rd, Newtown NSW  
 02 9550 5358  
 Website: [confessingcongregations.com](http://confessingcongregations.com)  
[accoffice@confessingcongregations.com](mailto:accoffice@confessingcongregations.com)

Email for *ACCCatalyst*:  
[catalysteditor@confessingcongregations.com](mailto:catalysteditor@confessingcongregations.com)  
*ACCCatalyst* is available as a subscription only (\$35pa) or by becoming an ACC Supporting Member (\$35pa concession or \$60pa full)  
 Printed by Brougham Press, Scoresby Rd, Baywater Vic. ISSN 1835 2073

# Petunia the Goose

When I was young my sister and I had a book about a goose called Petunia.

The story goes:

*One day Petunia found a book lying on the ground. She wondered what it was and a farmyard friend informed her it was a book and books would make you very wise.*

*So Petunia picked up the book, tucked it under her wing and thought about how wise she had become.*

*When all the animals heard that Petunia had a book and was wise they came to ask for her wisdom to solve their problems.*

*Petunia gladly gave her advice, but with disastrous effects for the animals, because Petunia wasn't actually as wise as she thought she was.*

At the end of the story, Petunia discovers that the book actually opens



and has pages inside with writing on them, and she realises that you actually have to read what's written there before you learn and become wise.

As Christians, we can become like Petunia. We have a book, the Bible,

given to us by God in order to make us wise, and to give us life and understanding about God.

But, just having a Bible sitting on the shelf at home is not enough to teach us what we need to know. We have to get it down and read it!

In God's word we find out what sort of God he is, how he wants us to live, and we learn about the history of how he has interacted with his people. Through God's word he speaks to us and encourages us and gives us life.

As 2 Timothy 3:16-17 puts it: All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the people of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So don't forget to open those pages and have a read!

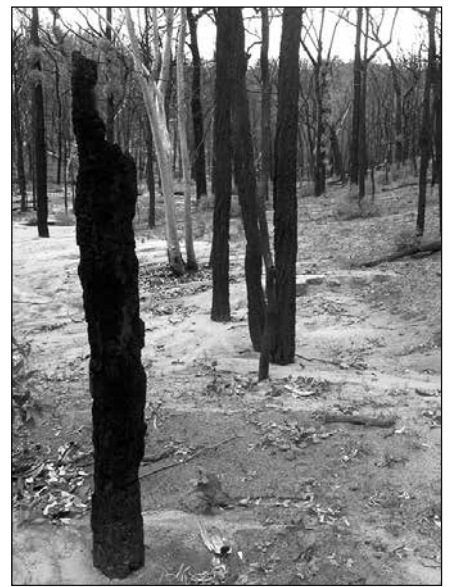
*Robyn*

# Visiting after a fire

Over the weekend of 5-7 April Peter Bentley visited Coonabarabran Uniting Church in northwestern NSW.

Peter was given a thoroughly warm country and Christian welcome and as well as being continually and wonderfully looked after, led the weekend with some teaching and overview about the continuing issues concerned with marriage in Australia as well as updating on the wider ministry of the confessing movement within the Uniting Church. There were two lovely dinners with groups of ACC members, an extensive afternoon tea after the seminar on *The Future of Marriage in Australia* on Saturday, and a shared lunch on Sunday after preaching at the morning service.

Peter also had opportunity to have a sobering look at the length and breadth of the fire damage from the January 2013 fires. Over 50 homes were destroyed, but fortunately no



**Fire rages near Coonabarabran, a blackened stump and new growth**

human lives were lost. The famous Siding Spring observatory was saved though some buildings were lost. The community came together wonderfully during this time and the churches of course played a major part, each doing certain roles, especially providing for food for the many volunteers who have been helping including those working with the strategic group 'blazeaid' (<http://blazeaid.com.au/>)

Coonabarabran has been a lay-led congregation for over a decade now,

along with ministerial help for different periods. It has a wide ministry in the community especially through many of its members who serve in local organisations and ministries. A ministry of support for a school to provide for education for children from the slums of Bangladesh: Restore International will be profiled in a future edition of the magazine.

It was a wonderful opportunity to learn about Coonabarabran Uniting Church and its witnessing to the love of Christ in the local community.

## ACC greets EFAC

Ian Weeks, NSW Convenor of the ACC NSW movement, attended the annual members' meeting of the NSW branch of the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion (EFAC) held at Pymble Anglican Church on 22nd March 2013.

EFAC is an international fellowship of individuals within the Anglican Church seeking to encourage members of that denomination in many ways very similar to the ACC.

It was interesting to note that EFAC is strongest in non-Sydney areas, and this was seen as EFAC's major ministry: encouraging evangelicals residing in a diocese where they are the minority.

The main activities of EFAC NSW have been to host an annual lecture during the CMS Summer School every January, and holding an annual weekend retreat which, by all accounts, is well attended, again mostly by members outside of Sydney. EFAC Australia also publishes a regular journal "Essentials" that

reports news and offers encouragement and teaching to its members.

The Chairperson of the meeting welcomed the presence of Ian Weeks and invited him to give a greeting from the ACC. The cross-denominational fellowship was appreciated and they invite ACC to join with them in prayer for the significant changes occurring in the Anglican Church in NSW, namely the appointment of new Bishops for Newcastle and Grafton, and a new Archbishop for Sydney.

Ian Weeks was able to distribute a few copies of *ACCatalyst* magazines to those present and they were very interested to hear where things are at in the UCA. The Annual meeting was followed by a dinner which about 30 people attended. The dinner featured guest speakers from Africa: Rev. Ross Anderson, who holds the John Stott Chair of Bible and Ministry at George Whitfield College (GWC), South Africa and Rev Chris Hingley, Principal of Petra Christian

School in Zimbabwe.

Both of these educational institutions have strong links with Australia. It was encouraging to be a part of this night, not only for the uplifting devotions, but especially to hear of the amazing work of GWC and Petra School in very difficult environments. For example, Ross Anderson from GWC was leading the Sunday evening church service of about 2,000 people at St James Kenilworth in Cape Town in July 1993 when three men burst in with hand grenades and semi-automatic weapons, killing eleven people and maiming more than fifty, in what has become infamously known in South Africa as the "St. James massacre". We are urged to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ in places like South Africa and Zimbabwe as they seek to faithfully proclaim the Gospel and train Gospel workers for the African Church.

*Ian Weeks*  
Chair ACC NSW





## PUBLIC SQUARE

BY PSEUDO-MAXIMUS

### Easter Gems

A few unexpected gems, that outshine some old dirt, are to be found in media articles on Easter. Christians used to defending the indefensible at this time of year can take heart at some splendid reflections on the cross and resurrection.

- In 'The good books' (*The Age*, 29-30 March) Fr Michael McGirr links "the significance of a tortured man on a cross" to the need for humans to "deal first with their monstrous and hilarious egos." "We are all capable of breaking the things we most love. All the great and beautiful and loving things people have done in history are the work of people who have also done some nasty, cruel and selfish stuff." We have created marvellous things while "hiding in fear from the idea of forgiveness".

"The cross is a reminder that Christianity does not have an answer to evil or a solution to anything, really. It offers a relationship within hard times rather than a parachute out of them. It offers body and blood, not lace and incense."

- In "Passion at the core of culture" (*Inquirer, The Weekend Australian* 30-31 March) Peter Craven traces the impact of the Easter story in Western culture through the story of the crucified and resurrected Christ. He says that the "figure who emerges on the third day" "is the Christ who triumphs over corruption and degradation of the world, the figure who shines through a thousand paintings that try

to capture in human form the glory of the face of God". The unrelenting starkness of Good Friday "makes the blinding light that overtakes darkness on Easter Day all the more startling. Imagine resurrection coming after this".

He ends with a word of hope for Christians faced with strident opposition to their faith. "Throughout all the dark days of Soviet communism no one could stamp out the great exchange of Orthodox Christians at Easter. Christos anesti! They say to the person next to them, and reply is Alithos Anesti! - 'Christ is risen!' 'He has risen indeed!'"

### One wonders at the hubris of identifying our causes and suffering with the messianic healing of humanity's brokenness.

- In "The best of our belief" (*The Sunday Age*, 31 March) former Uniting Church Professor of New Testament and now Dean of Trinity College Anglican Theological School, Melbourne, Dorothy Lee shows that the difficulties of belief and the impossibility of not-believing go together in

the Christian life. The combination of "rampant secularism and aggressive atheism", the power of judgmental religion and the scale of brutality and suffering often make it "hard to believe in any sort of God".

On the other hand, "it is not difficult to believe in a God who has suffered with us and for us on the cross, whose resurrection has opened endless possibilities for new life and hope".

On this view, it seems "extraordinary" that there should not be a God who is personally engaged with the world or that there is no consolation for suffering or that death should mean the end.

The events of Easter enable us to believe in "a new destiny for human beings and for creation, a transformed future in which all things will be made whole".

While faith is sorely tested in a cynical world, and must not be mistaken for "making insecure people feel secure in their world of illusions", "it is even more challenging not to believe and not to have faith. Why would people want a world without a loving creator, source of its life, restorer of its beauty, healer of its wounds?"

- The search for such a healer is behind a BBC Radio 4 program aired during Lent. ([www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk)) Benjamin Cohen, founder of *PinkNews* directly compared the 'abandonment' experienced by those who identify as gay with Jesus' abandonment on the cross. He argues that, neither Jesus nor gay people

chose to be born as they were. In both cases, it was the decision of God the Father; in both, they are put on trial and wrongfully condemned.

Andrea Williams, director of Christian Concern, said that, 'to link this experience to that of Christ is to misunderstand the biggest event in history – it is blasphemous.

Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali said that, while everyone should be treated with dignity, the comparison confuses Christ's identity as the Son of God with powerful sexual preferences that, like other temptations, need to be withstood and redeemed.

This take on Jesus' Godforsaken cry is hardly surprising. The Easter events have long been interpreted almost exclusively through the Marxian dichotomy between oppressor and victim.

When Jesus is understood only as "the representative victim"—not as the Victor who triumphs over evil and death and restores sinful humanity to God's righteous purposes—then the way is opened to claim divine approval for the claims of victim groups.

The undeniable truth that God suffers with victims of abuse who may find strength at the foot of the cross does not necessarily mean that the causes for which they advocate are congruent with the redemptive love of God mediated through the crucified Christ.

One wonders at the hubris of identifying our causes and suffering with the messianic healing of humanity's brokenness. A more apt and humbler comparison is the penitent thief who, through an act of divine mercy, is welcomed by Jesus into the kingdom of heaven!

- This Easter motif was dramatically displayed in the actions of Pope Francis during Holy Week.

Setting aside the Maundy Thursday tradition that the Pope should wash the feet of twelve priests in re-enactment of Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet, he washed and kissed the feet of twelve young prisoners, including two women and two Muslims. (*The Australian* 29 March).

This impressive act of identification with Christ's humility in eating and drinking with tax-collectors, sinners and outsiders makes clear that the Gospel is a word of hope for all. Thus Easter confronts us with our own failed humanity and illuminates the magnificence of God's grace embodied in the crucified and risen Jesus.

IAN CLARKSON

## Health to you

Dominating up to and beyond the election will be the increasing deficit blowout and more and more focus on the medical industry, which eats up the biggest bite of taxpayers' dollars. Even Australia Prayer Network quoted:

'an investigation will be launched into whether doctors and the companies that run major medical clinics across Australia are conspiring to rip off Medicare by rushing through large numbers of patients and overdoing referrals, after a former top health investigator last year warned that up to \$3 billion in taxpayer funds was at risk'.

The medical industry is protected and fattening at the expense of welfare to vulnerable families. Tucked in here somewhere is the courageous Madigan bill to cut Medicare funding for gender-selection abortions. That throws the spotlight on the worst child abuse happening in this country, as well as overseas.

So what do thinking Christians do? Take note of Scripture. Is anyone sick? What is our first port of call - not the last, after all the tests and treatments have happened, often leaving folk in an undecided painful state? 'Call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord' (James 5v14). What God-honouring health are we missing - what money are we wasting ("she had spent all her money on the physicians" (Luke 8v43)!), what ignoring of 'body of Christ' protocols for health care, what assumption of the world's ways? Sure such prayer may put you in contact with another human instrument of help - but anxieties are held at bay, fears rightly arrested by tucking up under the wing of the Lord. This is no pretence stuff - deepening courage in Christ's grace, and as the psalmist shows, persistent gut-wrenching loud cries may be drawn as we learn our sonship at another level!

Another Scripture of gentle warning yet sure promise. Look at King Asa in 1 Kings 15. 'Though his disease was severe he didn't seek help from the Lord, but only from the physicians'. Jesus said seek first

God's kingdom and righteousness and all these things (yes health anxieties, along with food and clothing daily needs) will be given-cared for as well (Matt 6v33). Let the King rule, go to him, persistently, helplessly, determinedly.

Christian patients, remember the worldly medical industry is just that. Health workers are as needy for customers as the owner of the newsagency in the same shopping complex. That's understandable, we are all the same. Don't make a medic what they are not. Patients, with their anxieties and expectations are often more of the problem.

---

### Have courage to admonish church-going patients to follow the teaching of Scripture...

---

And a word to Christian doctors. Don't over-service, don't rush patients (use patience) with the quick prescription of the latest drug the pharmaceutical vendor has talked up. Take the care needed or have the honesty to say: 'I really can't help you.' Don't conform to the AMA, or the clinic fraternity 'groupthink'. Your oath is to Christ not Hippocrates or the clinic group. Have courage to admonish church-going patients to follow the teaching of Scripture and refer them to the pastor/elders - see above. You are not their pastor. You may see less people but you will do better in the eyes of God. If correction is needed do it now, before the awful scrutiny of the world falls upon you as it has upon worldliness in the church. Let faithful Christians, pastors, doctors and all show in practice an alternative to what is becoming a trouble in our nation. We need New Testament consistent health care, not worldly health snare.

PS go to blog <http://www.confessingcongregations.com/resources/blogs/ian/> to continue discussion on this big issue

## Second Emerging Leaders' camp

The ACC's Emerging Leaders' Award was launched with the first camp, held in the Adelaide hills in February 2011. Built on a vision of encouraging young church leaders and on a formula that offered Biblical teaching, leadership and social skills in an environment of honour, testimony, prayer and servant leadership amid the usual fun and fellowship of camp life, the Award was a huge success.

When it came to mounting a second camp, in nFebruary 2013, the organisers had some big questions. Would a different team of leaders be able to prepare and conduct the camp in a way that fulfilled its vision? Would the 'formula' prove to be an enduring model? Would churches and individuals again cover the cost involved in this step of faith? The answers to all these questions proved to be a resounding "Yes!"

Awardees, like last time, told us of their joy at the sound Biblical teaching, the leadership skills sessions, the small group sharing times and the resources and choices offered through electives. Speakers again included Rev Tim Hein and Craig Bailey from the Uniting College for Leadership and Theology (SA Synod), and our own National Chair, Rev Dr Max Champion. Input also came from Rev Simon Dent who set the tone of the camp in speaking about sharing in the ministry of Christ, and others including Rev Derek Schiller and Rev Rod James.



Each camper had the opportunity to share their journey with Jesus, which produced some poignant moments and strengthening of bonds among the group. The worship and prayer, the challenging activities that promoted teamwork, and the blessing of being served by the support team all resonated with the Awardees.

A particular highlight was the formal dinner, when past alumni joined the group for a fabulous meal and an opportunity to mix with, and hear from, the Hon Robert Brokenshire MLC about being a Christian in the public and political spheres.

The group revelled in being among peers of like mind, interests and abilities, finding it a very different experience from normal youth camps.

Many young leaders had not had much knowledge of the ACC before coming on the camp. They emerged from the camp with a respect for ACC, our faithfulness to the Word and recognising our desire to have a positive impact on the UCA as a whole.

Best of all, our Awardees spoke of their growth in Christ on the camp. Reminded of God's love, the group reflected an increased ability to trust God, to give themselves more to Him and allow God to guide them. One put it this way, "The support and encouragement I received was mind-blowing. I will be able to have more of a contribution to my church and be more comfortable and confident to speak about the Lord to others."

## 2012 Pendlebury Prize winner

ACC is pleased to announce that Hafren Jones' name will be added a second time to the Thelma Pendlebury Honour Board. Hafren has shared her wonderful testimony of grace, hope and joy with ACC readers before, but for those who may not remember, a précis of her testimony follows:

Born outside of marriage in a poverty-stricken Zambian village, the only world that I knew was one of



fear, lies, theft and abuse. The rest of my years growing up in Africa were filled with both wonderfully irreplaceable experiences, and tragic memories. God saved me and told me that He had a plan and purpose for me for

good, and not for evil.

I couldn't believe Him at first but I gave Him my heart because He told me that He loved me, and that I was beautiful. My heart now cries out specifically for Satan-worshippers, homosexuals and prostitutes. I visit them in their own environment and give them arms to be held in for all the times they have been rejected.

Nevertheless, I do not want to be labelled as just another Christian who gave up her life for a good cause. God deserves to be represented by the best ambassadors of Christ and the music industry needs a higher standard of creative disciples.



# A Tale of Two Cities

*Understanding the Relationship between Christ and Culture*



**Brian Edgar Professor of Theological Studies, Asbury Theological Seminary**

*I would like to thank the Robert Iles Memorial Trust Fund for inviting me to deliver this lecture in honour of the Rev Dr Robert Iles, a man of God committed to the renewal of the church. I would also like to pay my respects to his family. The following notes provide only an abbreviated form of the lecture.*

Charles Dickens has probably the best-known opening lines of any novel in classical literature: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—”.

**A page from a manuscript of Augustine’s, City of God (De Civitate Dei) (New York Public Library, Spencer Collection MS 30) from 1470.**

This is not just about London and Paris, there is a deeper meaning concerning two different realms of thought and life. The idea of co-existing cities is also the theme of the fifth century Christian classic *The City of God* written by Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, which deals with the way that the heavenly city of God relates to the earthly city of man.

He developed the language of the apostle Paul that “our citizenship (our real home) is in Heaven” (Phil.3:20). It is one thing to know how to behave as an individual Christian within a Christian community, it is quite another thing to assess the church’s responsibilities within society as a whole, and yet another to know what it is appropriate to expect of society itself. Attitudes to specific issues are connected with one’s overall view of the relationship between the church and wider society and it is this broader question that I want to address in this lecture. I want to use the following to describe ways of conceiving of the church’s role in society.

# ILES LECTURE

1. Aliens in a foreign land
2. Examples of an alternative community
3. Rulers in Christendom
4. Residents of two cities
5. Reformers of society
6. Workers in all spheres of life
7. Citizens of a pluralist culture
8. Friends of the world

## 1. Aliens in a foreign land

The oldest model of relationship sees Christians as aliens ('temporary residents') in a foreign land. This was the situation of the early church for the first few hundred years of its life. See Hebrews 11:8 and Phil. 3:20. We may apply this to today in two ways. Firstly, there is the situation of the church in many parts of the world today where Christians exist as minority groups in societies that discriminate, oppress and persecute them. Secondly, within our own society there are those who believe they exist as aliens and they regret it, while there are those who feel this tension and who think that this is right. Christians should be out of step with culture and there is something wrong if we are not. There are three positive dimensions to this approach. Firstly, as the ancient epistle to Diognetus says, it is an illustrious position for Christians. Secondly, despite their position, Christians are to actively seek the good of the society that oppresses them. See Jeremiah 29. We ought not to understand this occurs primarily through the simple, normal, ordinary things of life—building houses and living in them, planting gardens and eating what they produce, marrying and bearing children. This understanding leads to the third dimension of being aliens, which is that through seeking the good of society one can become an example of an alternative form of community

## 2. Examples of an alternative community

Those committed to this approach believe that the primary purpose of Christians in this life is to be an example of an alternative form of community. The church may be small or even oppressed but it is seen as having a legitimate place and by living as the church it influences the world. As Stanley Hauerwas says, "the primary social task of the church is to be itself". Society is simply not able to live as God's community because most people do not have faith. According to this view the church's job is not to "clean up society", nor to impose Christian laws on people who cannot live up to them because they do not have the Spirit, nor to take society's money in return for a muted, second-class ministry. No, let there be a separation, and let the church be the church.

## 3. Rulers in Christendom

The third vision for society involves being rulers in Christendom and refers to the situation where the church has taken on an official, established role in society to the point where the distinction between the two is almost non-existent. This idea is associated with the emperor Constantine (d. 337 AD) who made Christianity the official religion of the empire. The term 'Chris-

tendom' is now used extremely broadly. It encompasses Byzantinism, the approach of many Reformers, Erastianism and some contemporary movements looking for the re-establishment of the church, a theonomy or 'Christian Reconstruction'. When church and culture come together the common good can be both helped and hindered. It certainly should provide opportunity for the values of the kingdom to permeate society. However, when political power falls into the hands of the church then the church finds itself in a strange and unusual position. Our Lord's commands to love one another and to take the gospel to the world do not include the instruction to make sure that Christians are in control and have political power.

## 4. Residents of Two Cities

Augustine spoke of the contrast between the city of man and the City of God that would ultimately triumph. Christians are residents of two cities and Christians, Augustine argued, should be concerned with spiritual matters rather than earthly politics, an idea that helped develop the idea of the separation of church and state. He therefore offers little in the way of advice about involvement in political life but he does argue that God cannot be ignored in society. The general concept of two cities/kingdoms is found in various forms—arguing for different forms of separation—but running through all versions of this view is the identifying principle concerning the fundamental need for there to be a clear distinction between the spiritual and the temporal.

## 5. Reformers of society

The Reformation brought with it elements of a new form of relationship between church and society with Christians being reformers of the world. There were elements of the Reformation that tended towards a continuation of theocratic social control. However, there were other aspects of Reformation principles (including the role of individual conscience and the concept of Christian freedom), which led to an understanding of a more dynamic relationship between church and society. It argues that God's will is for all, but it is combined with a recognition that many aspects of Christian life need to be taken voluntarily rather than by legislation or force. But we (Christians) may well disrupt the status quo. One of the greatest challenges for pastors today is to take and apply theological principles beyond the four walls of the church. Often it is assumed that important themes like baptism, grace, covenant, freedom, forgiveness, love and worship only relate to what we do within the life of the church. If we consider it properly, the principles that control the practice of worship, the use of gifts, the life of the community, and even the sacraments of baptism and Lord's Supper have profound implications for the life of the world. Consider, for example, Paul's use of baptism to discuss slavery and discrimination. Galatians 3:28 is "*the Magna Carta of Humanity*", a fundamental statement of equality before God. Also consider the effect of nationalism today.

## 6. Workers in all spheres of life

This model is represented by Dutch journalist, theologian, politician and Prime Minister, Abraham Kuyper





**We need to be aware of the approaches we adopt, but, at the very least, irrespective of what other model is adopted, we ought to be the kind of radical friend that Jesus was.**

(1837- 1920), who wrote various works on politics and faith and developed the notion of “sphere sovereignty”. Kuyper famously said, “No single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’” Christians are to be workers in all spheres of life. At least two aspects of Kuyper’s view have relevance for us today. The first is that I think that many people today are feeling the frustration of an extremely hierarchical political structure. Kuyper’s view avoids any vertical or hierarchical view of the structure of society in which government dominates and enhances the role of people in the various spheres of life (arts, education, trade, business etc) to determine their own structures and controls. The second aspect of Kuyper’s view is the way that he argues for Christian involvement in every sphere of life. The contemporary church does not, by and large, do a good job of empowering people in their Monday to Saturday roles.

## 7. Citizens of a secular culture

Another approach is a modified form of the Christendom approach which recognises the problems of Christian rule, but which does not want society to forget the contribution that Christianity makes to society. These contributions are not merely in regard to ethical principles that will lead to the common good, but particularly in regard to the principles that underpin the kind of free, secular, pluralist society that we have. This freedom is grounded in the gospel. The universal right to the gospel for all people is really the fundamental right to liberty for all people. As historian A.G Dickens argues, the real hero in the development of religious toleration is no individual or movement but the *New Testament* itself. At a time when the scriptures were more widely available it must have occurred to many “that Christ and his Apostles nowhere envisaged or advocated the winning of human hearts through juridical persecution or physical

duress”. This view argues that it must be recognised that the Christian faith has formed contemporary western society and that just as it is foolish to climb up a ladder onto a roof and then to kick away the ladder and pretend you got up there without one, so it is foolish to ignore the origin of the principles that have formed our society today.

## The value of the various approaches

One of the obvious conditions of our present world is continuous, ongoing change. There are many, many social, cultural, ethical and political issues that Christians need to engage with. One’s ability to make good decisions will be enhanced by an understanding that goes beyond that of individual issues and recognises the underlying philosophical and theological issues involved in the engagement of church and culture. Indeed, many disagreements even among Christians about the best way to deal with specific issues will be helped by an awareness of the various frameworks that people utilise. Understanding and having a consistent approach to engagement also makes it possible to deal more effectively with those challenges that come from different worldviews.

## 8. Friends of the world

This approach draws on the classic description of society and the common good that is found in Graeco-Roman philosophy. The public dimension of friendship with its focus upon self- knowledge and moral transformation was a major theme. The second major source, of course, is scripture, which encourages us to be friends with the world. Jesus was widely known as “the friend of sinners and tax collectors” (Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34). Jesus did not merely treat the sinners, the unclean and the outcast as objects of mercy and compassion, he treated them as human beings, as real people and even as friends, and in the eyes of his enemies this was the worst sin of all! There are other examples of the way that friendship changes social relationships in a way that the law cannot. The apostle Paul wrote to Philemon, a believer in Colossae, about one of his slaves, Onesimus, who had apparently run away. He did not demand that Philemon release Onesimus but he made reference to his own friendship with Philemon and then, secondly, indicated that Onesimus, as a new believer, was also a friend and therefore that Philemon ought to consider the implications of this situation. We can learn much from the various approaches that I have outlined. Some will favour one more than others, and, as noted previously, the context affects the approach very much. We need to be aware of the approaches we adopt, but, at the very least, irrespective of what other model is adopted, we ought to be the kind of radical friend that Jesus was.

*Robert Iles’ sermons and other writings are being added regularly to a website, “The Writings of George Robert Iles: Inspiration for Today – Hope for Tomorrow”, which can be accessed at <http://ilesblog.com>. There is a wealth of material available that provides a wonderful and helpful resource for preachers and laity alike.*

# The Real Treasures of Egypt

*Robert N. Rutzou*

**H**is name was Bishoy and he came to our bible study. What an impact he made.

Two young medical students of Indian and Sri Lankan descent, who were boarding with us, met Bishoy at church one Sunday.

It was Bishoy's first Sunday in Albury. I was preaching at another church and when I came home they were all sitting on the couch at home. I thought the boys had discovered another sub-continental friend but to my great surprise Bishoy was Egyptian.

The next week Bishoy came along to our Bible study. Now this Bible study was awesome: full of young Uni students, a couple of oldies and me, an ordained plumber - all hungry for God's word.

I didn't know much about Coptic Christians until I met Bishoy. His deep knowledge and love of the scriptures was edifying and when he shared in his wonderful Arabic accent, everyone listened; but when Bishoy prayed it was as if we were all transported to the very foot of the throne of the lamb.

Bishoy told us of the prayer meetings taking place in Cairo since the revolution of January 2011: Catholics, Copts and Protestants coming together in their tens of thousands for all-night prayer services. He spoke with tears in his eyes of how persecution, suffering and the revolution were bringing the Christians of Egypt together.

So how could I refuse his invitation to attend his wedding in Egypt and to see what the Lord was again doing in this most ancient of civilizations?

I won't bore you with a slide show but three things made a great impression on my wife and me.

Firstly, the incredible poverty of this once great nation. The signs of poverty are everywhere but there is a place in Cairo called "garbage city". The 50,000+ people who populate garbage city are called Zabbaleen, which means "Garbage people" in Egyptian Arabic. Most of the Zabbaleen are Christians. They collect,

sort, reuse and resell the garbage of Cairo's 20 million people. It was distressing to

drive through this place and yet the Christians complete their work,

many with smiles on their faces. What is the

reason for these smiles?

Perhaps they know far more than we that "God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

There is a church on the outskirts of 'garbage city'. But you must travel through the slum to get to this church. The Chapel is open air, carved into the face of a mountain. It is spectacular yet simple. The chapel seats 20 thousand people but many more fill its stone pews every day. This church ministers to the people of garbage city. Pray for the ministry of The Mountain Church.

The second thing that burnt into our hearts is the great faithfulness of Coptic Christians, especially their leaders. Bishoy arranged for us to meet with two church leaders Fr. Markos and Fr. Luka in the City of Fayoum: humble, kind, godly, Christ-exalting, bible-loving Christian men. Our meeting resembled an old Methodist class meeting, except there was only one question: "What have you come to share with us?" The sharing was bible-centred and inspiring. Fr. Markos, with his encyclopaedic biblical knowledge asking probing questions ever so gently. Pray for the leaders of the Coptic Church.

The third great impression was the wedding itself. To get to the church, we were not driven through a slum this time. As loud and chaotic as Egypt itself, the drive ended in what appeared to be a secure compound that enclosed the church and the reception hall. We were told the reception hall was built by a bishop as a 'safe place' to hold receptions within the security of the compound.

Don't get me wrong here. Some of the wedding guests were Muslim family friends and all the Muslims we met were very friendly but Egypt is a country with underlying tensions. There was one speech at the wedding and I was honoured to give it, with a translator at my side. A shorter version:

"Greetings from all God's people in Australia. Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ. It is wonderful for us to be in the great and ancient country of Egypt and to be present for the marriage of our cherished brother Bishoy and sister Ghoson.

My wife and I would like to thank their parents for having us here tonight and thank all Egyptians for your hospitality.

We are learning of your deep struggles and will pray for you. Be encouraged 'greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world' and be assured of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit."

Please pray for these true treasures of Egypt.

*Rev Robert N. Rutzou is an ACC member in the Riverina Presbytery.*

# John Wesley and Evangelical Experience

Glen O'Brien

Protestants don't have too many 'saints' days' but Methodists, Anglicans and Uniting Church people, among many others, continue to remember both John and Charles Wesley in commemorative services, often on 24 May, the anniversary of John Wesley's evangelical conversion at Aldersgate Street, London in 1738. Some people find this special remembering of human religious experience distasteful and unnecessary. After all were not the Wesleys simply fallen human beings, sinners like the rest of us?

For my part I see nothing to be concerned about in this, because to some extent all theology is autobiographical. Formal theological statements arise out of the Church's prior experience of God's grace. All Christian communities are constructed out of the stories we tell and retell of God's saving power in the lived experience of believers. The story of Wesley's conversion is part of that collection of stories that make us who we are as Christians. Our theology of Christian experience can be brought into focus by John Wesley's own personal experience of grace.

There is a strong historic link between the sixteenth century German Reformer Martin Luther and the eighteenth century Anglican priest John Wesley, since it was while listening to Luther's *Preface to the book of Romans* that Wesley experienced his evangelical conversion. The beginnings of both the Lutheran and Methodist traditions can be found in the search by their respective founders for a gracious God. Both Luther and Wesley had been devoutly religious yet unhappy men, seeking salvation by method, order, and discipline. Yet their spiritual disciplines had left them unsatisfied. Only through a discovery of the Pauline message of justifica-



The Aldersgate Flame Memorial, London Wall

tion by grace through faith, did they find the spiritual freedom that released them from their inhuman and impossible round of religious duties into a sense of being the happy children of God.

It was Luther's doctrine of justification by faith as mediated through Wesley's contact with Moravians in both



London and the colony of Georgia, that led to a profound revolution in his life. After thirteen years as an Anglican priest, disappointed in his own efforts to achieve perfection, his evangelical conversion brought with it a deep sense of the assurance of his salvation. After this experience of 'the new birth,' his life took on a very different complexion.

From being a failed rector and a failed missionary, unlucky in love and unsuccessful in religious aspirations, he became arguably the most remarkable religious figure of the eighteenth-century. Through his organisational genius, tireless open-air preaching, spiritual counsel, and benevolent dictatorship over "the people called Methodist" he set a pattern for Protestant religious life that would come to characterise the following century and continues to shape Evangelical piety down to the present time.



Wesley recorded in his journal the feeling of despair he had upon his return from missionary service in Georgia. "I went to America to convert the Indians: but Oh! Who shall convert me? Who, what is he that will deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief?"<sup>1</sup>

Upon arriving home in England, he met the Moravian Peter Bohler who helped him to see that salvation began with a simple act of trust in Christ. Bohler advised him to "preach faith till you have it and then, because you have it you will preach it". He preached this new message of salvation by faith to a condemned prisoner about to die and the prisoner found peace with God. Wesley was amazed. He didn't have this saving faith himself, but when he preached it to others - it worked!

Finally on that much remembered Wednesday evening, as Wesley listened to the words of Luther on the nature of faith, Wesley testified, "I felt my heart strangely warmed".

He now felt he could trust Christ and Christ alone for salvation. (His younger brother Charles had experienced a very similar conversion only a few days earlier.) Note carefully the words "I felt my heart strangely warmed". People tended to think of Methodists as all heart and no head; heavy on emotional religion but light on theology. John Wesley does not fit this caricature at all. Predict-

able as clockwork, he was disciplined, almost to the point of obsessive compulsion, with a quite dispassionate personality. His heart did not "burn" or "throb" but was "strangely warmed". It was almost as though it was an entirely new sensation for him!

Some have looked at Wesley's pre-Aldersgate religious experience and expressed scepticism over the idea that he was not genuinely Christian during that period of his life. Was Aldersgate Wesley's 'conversion' or simply another important stage in his overall growth? Some have made a distinction between his 'religious' conversion in 1725 when he first began to take religion seriously, and his 'evangelical' conversion in 1738.

He himself said later that prior to Aldersgate he did have the faith of a servant, but only after did he have the faith of a son. The disputed point is whether a person with only the faith of a servant is in a state of saving grace. Whatever one may think about exactly what happened at Aldersgate, one thing is for certain; Wesley would never be the same person again. The failed missionary to Georgia would now become probably the greatest ever missionary to the peoples of the British Isles, and of course the father of Methodism, the grandfather of the Holiness movement, the great-grandfather of Pentecostalism and the great-grandfather by marriage of the Uniting Church.

It is interesting to note how many famous conversion experiences in the history of the church involve a recovery of Paul's doctrine of justification and a rediscovery of the central themes in the book of Romans. Saint Augustine in the late fourth century was reading Romans when he 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ' and found the religious certainty he had struggled to find for so many years. Martin Luther was an Augustinian friar whose study of Romans during the early 1500s saw him "straightway born anew into paradise". And it is Luther's preface to Romans that Wesley hears when his heart is strangely warmed.

The story does not end there as it was the study of Romans that brought the Swiss German theologian Karl Barth to an existential crisis in which he heard "the mighty voice of Paul" in the "strange new world of the Bible". His commentary on Romans subsequently "dropped a bomb on the playground of the theologians" setting an entirely new agenda for theology in the twentieth century. The 'New Perspective on Paul' pioneered by E.P. Sanders has led contemporary theologians such as N.T. Wright to produce profoundly influential works that continue to shape our understanding of Paul's doctrine of justification.

In a sense Wesley's own experience became a kind of template of Methodist religious experience. A person would hear the Gospel of God's love in Christ, universally available to all, and begin to experience the conviction that his or her sins were an affront to the holiness of God. This would lead to repentance, understood not only as a sorrow for sin but a determined effort to amend one's life. The attempt would prove futile as sin's hold would be experienced as simply too great to be broken by human religious effort, no matter how heroic that effort

**It is interesting to note how many famous conversion experiences in the history of the church involve a recovery of Paul's doctrine of justification**

# THEOLOGY

might be. What was needed was 'faith,' not faith as intellectual assent to a set of propositions, but faith as *fiducia* —faith as trust. It is at this point that the profoundly personal and experiential nature of Methodist religious experience is brought into focus. It was not enough to know that Jesus was the Saviour; I must know that he is *my* Saviour; that he died for me, took away my sin and accepted me into his favour. Methodism was the religion of the first person personal pronoun.

In February 1736, during his missionary service in Georgia, Wesley had established a friendship with the German Moravian leader Augustus Spangenberg who one day asked him, "Have you the Witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?" Wesley did not quite know how to answer such questions; this way of speaking seemed almost a foreign language. But Spangenberg pressed him, "Do you know Jesus Christ?" Wesley replied, "I know he is the Saviour of the world". "True," replied Spangenberg, "but do you know he has saved you". Wesley's reply was uncertain, "I hope he has died to save me". "Do you know yourself?" At this point Wesley replied, "I do" but recorded later in his journal that he feared these were 'vain words.'<sup>2</sup>

It was at Aldersgate that he would discover the importance of the words "for me". Again this is oh so Lutheran. It comes to us in the words of Charles Wesley's famous hymn, "And can it be that *I* should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood? Died he *for me* who caused his pain, *for me* who him to death pursued? Amazing love how can it be that Christ my God should die *for me*?"

Aldersgate emphasises that at the heart of Christian experience is not uncertainty, guilt, and shame but a joyful sense of God's acceptance. To know in our hearts that God has truly forgiven all our sins and accepted us in Christ is a very liberating thing indeed. Christians are not meant to be riddled with anxiety; tortured souls looking for deliverance from this suffering existence. Rather they are to be joyful children of God, assured of God's acceptance and set free to live for the good of others and for the glory of God. Charles captures this well in the following stanzas from his hymn *Come Father Son and Holy Ghost*.

*Light in your light O may I see!  
Your grace and mercy prove!  
Revived, and cheered, and blest by Thee,  
The God of pardoning love*

*Light up your countenance serene,  
And let your happy child  
Behold, without a cloud between,  
The Godhead reconciled.*

Some historians, most notably perhaps E.P. Thompson in his influential *Making of the English Working Class*, have given the impression that eighteenth century Methodism was a rather gloomy affair of sexually-repressed people, riddled with anxiety; tortured souls looking for deliverance from this suffering existence whose "Sabbath orgasms of feeling" made more possible their exploitation as a labour force.<sup>3</sup>

The voices found in the diaries, letters and contemporary accounts provide us with a very different picture. Certainly there were some oddballs and Methodists

exhibited their share of religious mania, but overall they give the impression of being the happy children of a God of love, assured of acceptance and set free from guilt to live for the good of their neighbours.

**P**artly out of his direct experience of grace but also from his deep acquaintance with the broad Christian spiritual tradition, Wesley developed his theology from the keynote of grace. Salvation is free and undeserved. Any righteousness in a person is pure gift. Grace is the source and faith is the condition of salvation.

Wesley defined faith not merely as the belief that God exists or even that Jesus is the Son of God. Rather it involves a full reliance on Christ and the belief that our sins are forgiven for his sake. This is a present salvation, obtainable here and now, not something to be put off until the next life. It is salvation from fear and from both the guilt and the power of sin.

Wesley's early appreciation for Martin Luther's theology was influenced by the first flush of excitement over the newfound Lutheran understanding of justification that was so important to his Aldersgate experience. His enthusiasm for Luther quickly cooled off, however, when he looked at the latter's writings more closely and saw how the Reformer consistently equated the law with sin, a step which Wesley saw as fraught with the danger of moral license (though certainly Luther did not intend this). Significantly the description of Luther as "that glorious champion of the Lord of Hosts" in his sermon *Salvation by Faith*, preached in 1738 less than a month after his Aldersgate experience, was removed from the 1746 edition of the same sermon.

**W**e normally think of grace as God's willingness to forgive undeserving sinners. But grace is also empowerment. Wesley never lost sight of this and always linked justification (what God does for us) with sanctification

(what God does in us). Christ's righteousness is imputed to us, yes (this was Luther's special emphasis) but it is also imparted to us (the special emphasis of the Catholic and Orthodox spiritual traditions) so that we are not only accounted holy but actually become holy in union with Christ through the Spirit. This was not an entirely novel idea since even the Edwardian homilies, used as a model of Anglican preaching since the sixteenth century, insisted that salvation brings with it a power over sin.

Admittedly Wesley sometimes used unguarded language in speaking of 'perfection' in ways that could be easily misunderstood. In the sermon *Salvation by Faith* he insisted (drawing on the First Epistle of John) that the one who is born of God does not commit sin.

He later carefully qualified such views in sermons such as *On Sin in Believers* and *The Repentance of Believers* where he made it clear that sin remains in the hearts of those who are born again, though they are not ruled by it. In his doctrine of 'entire sanctification' or 'Christian perfection,' Wesley held out the possibility of a second work of grace that would purify the heart from all sin, and fill  
*Continued page 14*

# What does 'Amen' mean?

*Perry Smith on a word we should always mean when we use it*

**A**men is a strong and fascinating word. From the original Hebrew language it has been transliterated, keeping the same letters and sound in Greek, English and other languages. It springs from a root word meaning "to be". We could render it "so be it"... "so it is"... or "so it will be". Colloquially we could say, "That goes for me too!"

It is our human response to God, in the expectation of an answer to our prayer. It goes back thousands of years to when the Israelites worshipped in the wilderness and later when they responded to the priests who led them in praise and prayer. Responsive Amens come twelve times in Deuteronomy 27. Note in Jeremiah 11:5 how the prophet responded to God's command: "Amen, Lord". Jesus often said it, translated in the KJV as "Verily". In John's Gospel it is doubled stressing His authority: "Verily, verily". He was actually saying "Amen, amen!" The RSV renders it "Truly, truly" and the NIV as "I tell you the truth". In II Cor 1:20 Amen stresses the authoritative promises of God in Christ, and in Rev 3:14 Jesus Himself is called "the Amen".

The Psalms often express it twice, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen" (Psalm 41:13, also in 72:19 and 89:52). When David brought up the ark to Jerusalem he appointed a psalm of thanks to the Lord to be sung to the Lord by the choirmaster Asaph and his associates, after which, "All the people said 'Amen' and 'Praise the Lord.'" (I Chronicles 16:7-36).

Nehemiah met enemy opposition in his rebuilding programme and then faced disturbing unrest among the builders, needing firm and courageous handling. With strong leadership, he handled it wisely, telling them what

they should do. The successful result in Nehemiah 5:3 was that, "The whole assembly said 'Amen' and praised the Lord. And the people did as they had promised". What a lovely model for responding to God's word when settling frictions and disputes in churches today! In congregations long ago a hearty 'Amen' or a 'Hallelujah' was sometimes expressed during the preacher's prayers and sermon.

See how Ezra, on a specially built wooden platform for the open-air convention, opened and read from the Book of the Law (Nehemiah 8:1-8). Notice the exact responses as a fine model for hearing and obeying God's Word today:

"All the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law and stood up. Ezra praised the Lord, the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted up their hands and responded 'Amen! Amen!' They bowed down and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. The Levites instructed the people; they read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning

**The word Amen is the riveting of a nail to make it firm**

so that the people could understand". (My italics).

Amen expresses agreement with a doxology or benediction, and as an accepted part of synagogue worship it passed into the life of the early church. Paul used it to end letters, then others copied it. Mostly used by an individual, but also by people together.

One author, whom I once noted but cannot recall, wrote, "The word Amen is the riveting of a nail to make it firm, the sealing of a document to render it valid, the endorsing of a cheque to make it current and the addition of an oath to confirm a promise." Do you really mean your personal Amen when ending the Lord's Prayer with that extra doxology of worship and praise to God, "Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen"? Maybe today's preachers and worship leaders could invite congregations to respond to their prayers with a strong, united Amen!

*from page 13*

it with perfect love for God and neighbour. Many Methodists of the eighteenth century testified that they had experienced this second work, though significantly Wesley himself did not. Though we would want to avoid the errors of 'perfectionism' today, Wesley's ideal of 'Christian (not 'sinless') perfection' is a valuable one because it refuses to place limits on the power of God to transform the human heart. It is a genuine optimism of grace.

Ultimately Aldersgate matters because the Gospel matters. It was not just about the experience of Wesley. What we have in the founder of Methodism's experience is the book of Romans or Galatians lived out in the real flesh and blood experience of a person. It is less important

that it was John Wesley who experienced it and more important that it was Paul's Gospel that Wesley's experience exemplified so powerfully.

*Glen O'Brien is a Minister of the Word in the Uniting Church whose placement is to theological education in the Salvation Army. He is Head of Humanities and Senior Lecturer in Church History and Theology at Booth College, a member institute of the Sydney College of Divinity.*

1. John Wesley, *Journal and Diaries*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 18:211.
2. Ward and Heitzenrater, eds. *Journals and Diaries* 18:140.
3. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1968), 428.

Editor's note: The UCA Basis of Union says: In like manner the Uniting Church will listen to the preaching of John Wesley in his Forty-Four Sermons (1793). See [http://liverpooluniting.com/index.php?p=1\\_84\\_John-Wesley-s-44-sermons](http://liverpooluniting.com/index.php?p=1_84_John-Wesley-s-44-sermons)



# Faith and secularity

## Warren Clarnette on *Gabriel Vahanian and the Death of God*

The death of Gabriel Vahanian last August passed almost without notice in Australia. That was not surprising. He never visited our country despite lecturing for half a century in North and South America, Europe and Asia. Had he taught in Australia we might have gained the theological ammunition to stave off the heretical tendency that has taken root in the Uniting Church; namely, to turn Jesus into a teacher of progressive ideas and Christ into a creature of superstitious fancy.

Vahanian certainly introduced many new ideas in his long theological career, but he never discarded the classical faith of the apostles and church fathers, nor did he cut his ties with the faith of the reformed tradition.

An active member of the Reformed Church of France, Vahanian was professor of religion at Syracuse University, New York, when almost by accident he introduced the term “death of God” to mid-20th century theology. He used the phrase in his *The Death of God* (1961) and came to prominence in the United States after *Time* magazine published two cover stories that portrayed him as the initiator of the “death of God” school of theology that excited the media during the 1960s.

No-one was more surprised or bemused by the attention than Vahanian himself, who always said the theologians who expounded ‘death of God’ ideas did not understand his original intention. By ‘death of God’ he meant no more than that God is dead in the culture of the West. He devoted his life to finding ways to make Christian faith intelligible to the increasingly secularized world of the 1960s and beyond.

Vahanian insisted through a vast output of books, monographs, sermons and lectures that the immensity of biblical wisdom is far from exhausted, and that the central theme of biblical faith is to “confront the human being with the task of being human.” The proper milieu of faith in Christ is secularity, and the reality of God (so hotly denied by contemporary atheism) can be apprehended only through serious engagement with the world.

His last book (*Praise of the Secular*, 2008) summarises his theology and complements *The Death of God* in which he explained “the agony of Christianity” as caused by the rejection of traditional teaching and mistaken forms of revivalism. Christianity, he said, connives in our culture’s incapacity for God thanks to the influence of science, humanism and Christianity’s own failure to live up to its essential doctrines.

In 1967 Vahanian confided to his students that the time for theological systems was past. He kept his word by producing an endless stream of writing (in English

and French) on the themes of language, iconoclasm and ideology, cultural and literary criticism and technology in eight books and innumerable monographs and articles. Yet *Praise of the Secular* presents a sort of systematic treatment of ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ as the key to understanding the advent of Christ. They are two sides of the same coin. “Through the word become flesh, the religious is likewise inscribed in the secular.”

Declaring that Christianity cannot be renewed without an abrupt reform of religious language, which today is dominated by the terminology of scientific experiment and verification, Vahanian makes heavy demands on his readers. He coined new terms in order to mine beneath the surface of conventional language for insights into theology’s current obsolescence and the collapse of theism in public consciousness.

A shift in thinking is required. Because “the historically predominant sacral understanding of faith is no longer operative,” Christians must overcome their mental fatigue and stop basing their message on the mythological imagery of the Bible. Instead, they must learn how to express the gospel in images drawn from our technological environment. The Bible offers that paradigm, says Vahanian, through the powerful metaphorical language of Garden of Eden, Promised Land, Kingdom of God, Body of Christ and New Jerusalem. These do not hark back to the past. They point to the future.

Vahanian is no author for bedtime reading. Reading him demands alertness in the full light of day. Asked ‘what is faith in Christ?’ he answers “the human response to the faithfulness of God” then adds that faith has other dimensions. One of them is “the abdication of vainglorious man from his vainglory”.

Space permits no more than a perfunctory reference to his vast theological output. In *No Other God* which appeared in 1966 he announced “the advent of a new, culturally Christian, paganism” and the birth of secularism as the direction religion would take from then on. He always distinguished between secularism and secularity. The former “fosters an attitude that is exactly the opposite” of the biblical view that secularity embraces the goodness of the world.

Events since have vindicated his 1966 prediction. He also wrote that “the Church cannot understand itself unless the language of its self-understanding speaks to the world and unless the world itself can use the same language.”

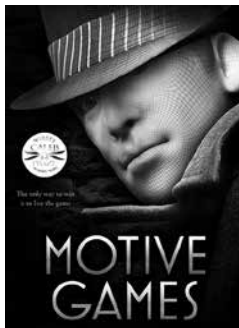
Gabriel Vahanian taught at Syracuse from 1960 until 1985 before returning to France to teach at the Université des Sciences Humaines de Strasbourg. He retained his links with Syracuse until his death.

Warren Clarnette studied with Vahanian in the 1960s and has maintained contact since, translating some articles from French to English. Warren is a former editor of *Church and Nation*, *Synod of Victoria* and also former editor of *The RA* publication *ReFORMING* and helped with the establishment of *ACCatalyst*.

# Boy questions

*Motive Games* by L.D. Taylor (pp 182, Wombat Books, 2012)

This mystery-based book revolves around the death in suspicious circumstances of Marc Roland, a brilliant computer games creator and the father of the main character Phil Roland. It has a strong computer game and computer language orientation and would primarily suit teenage boys with its male character orientation, though as an adult I found it an enjoyable and perhaps surprisingly quick read. It is educational in terms of its computer base, and also considers current ethical questions about the nature of computer games. There is a helpful glossary at the end (perhaps for the parents who probably know less than their children). I would describe it as a form of subtle gentle pre-evangelism for the consideration of faith, effectively raising questions, especially about the love of fathers (and the Father). Winner of the 2011 Caleb Prize for Young Adult manuscript (faith-inspired writing). It is available in eBook format and given its orientation I think this would be an excellent format to provide as a gift. *Peter Bentley*



## Mountaintop

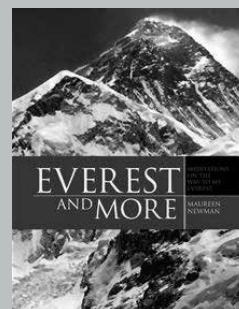
*Everest and More: Meditations on the Way to Mt. Everest* by Maureen Newman. pp 36 TraffordSG, 2012

Maureen is a member of ACC congregation Maitland (NSW)

*Ann Lycett reports from England.* At a difficult period in her life, the author, who was then teaching at an international primary school in Kathmandu, Nepal, went on a trek to Everest Base Camp.

The days of strenuous walking in an area of outstanding natural beauty proved to be a time of healing and blessing for her, a time to be aware not just of God's majestic power in creation, but also of his love for her. Daily scenes and experiences became parables in which God taught her more of his working and purposes for the lives of his children. This is a book to be savoured slowly. The author's photographs and meditations as the reader travels with her on the trek can help us to see God's parables in our own lives and circumstances, and make us more aware of his blessings to each of us.

The book is available via Amazon.



# Recovering Confidence in God's Word



*2013 ACC National Conference and AGM  
September 12-14*

*Paradise Point, Gold Coast, Queensland*

The National Council is pleased to announce that our host church is Paradise Point Uniting Church on the Gold Coast.

You may like to consider having a holiday before or after with your family. A variety of accommodation is available in the area, and billeting for the conference itself will be available. Information will be progressively provided on the ACC website and the conference brochure will be mailed with the June Magazine.

Peter Bentley visited Paradise Point Uniting Church on April 14th, preaching at the morning service, and meeting members of the church who will be involved in the arrangements for the conference. Peter also spoke at the ACC cluster at Buderim on the Sunshine Coast (Friday April 12), and a luncheon event at the Bayside Uniting Church in Brisbane (Saturday April 13). The ACC Queensland committee facilitated an excellent series of meetings focused on Confessing Christ today in society and the church. Thank you to the committee and those who hosted these events and Peter during this time.

# Dr Robert Weatherlake

*Gil Cann's Tribute at Rev Dr Robert Weatherlake's Thanksgiving Service, 2nd January 2013, Ashburton Uniting Church (Edited)*

Robert's pastoral, parish and public ministry in Victoria and NSW covered over 45 years. Now in all of these places, Robert's pastoral care, encouragement and his thoroughly-prepared teaching and preaching were very greatly appreciated by many people, and I have no doubt whatever, that there are people in all of those places following the Lord today primarily because of his teaching ministry and the encouragement and the example that he and Jessie gave to so many people in their daily lives.

But Robert's ministry concerns were much wider than his own denomination or his own parishes. He had a real kingdom vision. He was deeply involved, for example, in preparing for the Billy Graham Crusades in Melbourne in 1959 and 1969. He was very active in supporting the ministry of the Belgrave Heights Convention that served people of all denominations. And he was a guest lecturer in Old Testament at the then Melbourne Bible Institute, now the Melbourne School of Theology.

And of course, those of you who knew Robert well, know that he longed—he longed—to see the Methodist Church of his day awakened, revived and renewed. He was a keen student of revivals which have occurred throughout Christian history—those special times when God works in a sovereign, powerful way and causes whole regions and nations to be deeply affected—Christians to be renewed, many people converted and churches resurgent and in good health.

So, because of his concern to see that kind of renewal in this country, he was a co-founder and for many years the National Chairman of the Fellowship for Revival (FFR) in the then Methodist Church. This movement proved to be a great help and encouragement to many people in that denomination and then later in the Uniting Church when church union took place. Robert edited a

quarterly publication produced by FFR. His articles constantly emphasized the need for and the possibility of revival at the local, regional and national levels. His roles in all of these ministries were very, very much appreciated.

Robert often quoted from 2 Chronicles 7:14. It says *"if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and heal their land"*.

The FFR was in many ways the predecessor of later renewal and reform movements in which Robert was also deeply involved. These included EMU (Evangelical Members within the Uniting Church), the Reforming Alliance, and currently, the Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church. Robert was much encouraged by and greatly appreciated the ministry of the ACC.

Now even though all these qualities were totally true of Robert and so much part of his life, the reason that I regarded him so highly I have not yet mentioned, and it was slightly alluded to by one of his sons.

The reason I regarded Robert Weatherlake so highly was this: his boldness, fearlessness and courage whenever a situation arose where he felt it necessary to take a firm stand in defence of biblical truth. This happened quite often, especially during the late 60's, the 70's and the 80's. At that time huge changes were sweeping the Western world: ethical, moral, social, spiritual and cultural changes. And these were driven in part by the effects of humanism, secularism and what we might call scientism. In other words there were many then who believed that soon all our problems, all our questions, and all our needs would be answered and met by science, and in the process, God would become irrelevant and unnecessary. These views deeply impacted the Western world and much of the church. Consequently, even within some of the councils and assemblies and conferences of traditional denominations at the time, the authenticity, and authority and relevance

of the Bible and its application to modern life would often come under attack, especially when some current issue was being debated.

When this happened in the Methodist conferences of Methodism's latter years or in the Uniting Church synods in the Uniting Church's early years, Robert, normally reserved and fairly quiet, would declare his confidence in the Scriptures and his reasons for that confidence. And he did this with enormous boldness and courage.

He would do so even if he was virtually a lone voice in a large gathering which was quite often the case. He was totally undaunted by that situation and no matter how many disagreed with him, he was not fazed at the risk of being misquoted or misunderstood or criticized. He did not compromise anything for the sake of protecting his reputation or improving his prospects of advancement within his denomination. These things meant nothing to him compared to the importance of honouring the Lord and declaring his confidence in the Bible.

Now many years later in this new century it's very telling to observe that the churches which are thriving today, and where people's lives are being profoundly changed, are the ones that declare the same message as Robert did everywhere he served as a minister, in other words, the necessity of repenting of our sinfulness, of trusting in Jesus Christ crucified and risen as our Savior, and of surrendering our lives to him as Lord. This same message is also currently making a huge impact in many other parts of the world where vast numbers of new believers and new churches are appearing on a scale never seen before in the whole of Christian history.

Robert was fearless in the gospel's defence and like the Apostle Paul, quote, he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ because he knew - he knew—that it was the power of God to change everyone who believed it.

So we thank God very, very much for the ministry of Robert Weatherlake and the privilege we all had of knowing him. Thank you.



# God's gifts of faith, hope and love to Kevin Fielke

*Kevin Fielke, long-standing servant of the ACC, died on March 9, 2013 following a short period of illness arising from cancer and a brain tumour. Kevin served as Treasurer of ACC SA from its inception, and was EMU Treasurer in SA for many years before that. Kevin helped with the financial arrangements for the 2012 Adelaide conference, and such was his determination to fulfil his commitment to ACC to the end, he came to the second Emerging Leaders Award camp in February 2013 to finalise the paperwork. Kevin managed the ACC SA finances with ease and grace, always facilitating plans for God's work. Our prayers are with his wife Jan and the children and families.*

I have often heard Kevin described as 'stoic'. Stoicism was a philosophy that held that people should be free from passion, unmoved by joy or grief, submitting without complaint to unavoidable necessity, by which all things are governed. A stoic, therefore, was a person not easily excited; one who is apparently or professedly indifferent to pleasure or pain.

Outwardly, we may believe that there are some parallels between a stoic and Kevin. However in remembering him today it is important to declare that he had something much better and more wonderful than just stoicism.

It is with joy that we can recall Kevin's sometimes difficult life-story and see how he came to possess three great gifts that only God can give.

The first of these gifts is **faith**:

The stoic does what he does out of sheer grit and determination, simply because it seems to be the right thing to do. All a stoic has is him or herself, pitted doggedly against an indifferent universe. But Kevin had come to see and know that behind all things there was One who was much greater than he was; One who St Peter called 'the God of all grace'. Through our Lord Jesus Christ

Kevin had come to put his faith in this God. St Peter's words describe Kevin much more accurately than stoicism.

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.*

*To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:6-11)*

The second gift God gave Kevin was **hope**.

In the end the stoic does all that he does without hope. There is nothing to look forward to, and no accountability. That's the whole point; in stoicism all there is is you and your determination to be at your post when oblivion destroys everything. In stoicism, the only thing that can be said is that at least you did what was right.

But Kevin had much more than this. While he was not one to talk outwardly about heaven and God, his understanding was that expressed by the apostle Paul who described Christian believers as having a hope in God... *that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. (Acts 24:15-16)*

Kevin understood the twin implications of the resurrection of Christ:

Firstly, that there was accountability following this life. As St Paul told the stoic philosophers in Athens,

*The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by*

*a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31)*

Paul told the Corinthians that as those who have this hope *we make it our aim to please (the Lord). For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (2 Corinthians 5:9-10)*

We live today in a careless age where most live in the delusion that they will never have to give account of the way they have lived their lives. But Jesus was at pains to warn us that that is not so. He said,

*I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak. (Matthew 12:36)*

But the second implication of Jesus' resurrection that Kevin understood was the amazing mercy of God. This is the Easter good news which we are about to celebrate. *Jesus was delivered up (to death on the cross) for our trespasses and raised (from the dead) for our justification. And so the gift of God's forgiveness and God's righteousness will be counted to (all) who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord (Romans 4:24-25).*

Kevin had the inner joy of living his earthly life with this hope of the grace of God and the gift of eternal life.

Finally, and most wonderfully, God gave Kevin the gift of His love.

You see, I think that, once, Kevin was a stoic. He was brought up tough and taught to endure without flinching. But within that tough exterior was a soul waiting and longing to be touched with love. And that is what happened! On one occasion God's love for Kevin touched him so deeply that he just wept and wept and wept.

*Rod James  
Eulogy given at Kevin's funeral service at Coromandel Valley Uniting Church on March 20, 2013*

# THIS IS THE ACC

## Who we are

Within the Uniting Church context of a very broad range of theology and practice, the Assembly of Confessing Congregations is a nationwide body of congregations and individuals whose vision is confessing the Lord Jesus Christ, proclaiming the truth, renewing the church.

*Our goals include*

- Encouraging the confession of Christ according to the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, as that faith is described in the UCA's Basis of Union.
- Providing resources, seminars and conferences to build up believers, develop their gifts, and equip them for life, mission and works of service.
- Encouraging Christian believers in earnest prayer through our Prayer Network.
- Encouraging younger members of the Uniting Church in their faith and participation.
- Communicating about current events and issues through our website, our national magazine *ACCatalyst* and local newsletters.

## What does ACC do to help you?

The ACC conducts meetings, events and seminars to assist believers to

- grow in their faith and be active in prayer, worship and fellowship
- share their faith and respond to current issues in the church and the world
- develop their congregations as vibrant expressions of the Good News.
- experience God's Word in action through healing broken lives and reconciling relationships.

## What we want to do

The objects of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations are:

- a) To confess Christ according to the catholic, reformed and evangelical heritage in the Basis of Union, by:
  - i) upholding the Scriptures' prophetic and apostolic testimony to Christ as the final authority for the Uniting Church's faith and life;
  - ii) calling the Uniting Church to determine matters of doctrine and

ethics according to the teaching of the Scriptures and the faith as understood by the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church;

iii) calling the councils and congregations of the Uniting Church to uphold the Basis of Union and Constitution:

iv) providing biblically-grounded leadership in partnership with other confessing movements;

v) developing ecumenical partnerships for the more effective proclamation of the Gospel in our pluralist nation; and

vi) establishing national, state and territory bodies to implement the Charter as approved by the inaugural meeting of the Association, and seeking the renewal of the Uniting Church.

b) To undertake such religious, educational or other charitable activities which are incidental to the above objectives.

## How to join us

Please consider joining the ACC.

Supporting Membership forms are available at: <http://www.confessingcongregations.com/assembly/members/individual-members/>

Membership rates for supporting members: Concession (single or couple): \$35.00 pa. (financial year basis) Full (single or couples): \$60.00 p.a

Contact (02) 9550 5358. email: [accoffice@confessingcongregations.com](mailto:accoffice@confessingcongregations.com) mail: PO Box 968 Newtown NSW 2042

## What happens next

- May 10: Queensland ACC Committee meeting
- May 13: ACC National Council Meeting (Teleconference)
- May 19: ACC Hunter Cluster Meeting (Peter Bentley speaking)
- June 3-5: Christian Management Australia – Christian Ministry Advancement Conference: Gold Coast (ACC is a member)
- July 14: ACC Hunter Cluster Meeting
- July 24: Robert Iles Lecture: 7.30 pm. David Wilkinson: Apologetics in a Media-dominated World.

## ACC Resources List

All ACC resources (except the DVD resources) are available on the ACC Website: [www.confessingcongregations.com](http://www.confessingcongregations.com)

A selection of ACC DVD and video resources including the 2012 Conference presentations are available on vimeo; eg., Max Champion introducing the ACC: <http://vimeo.com/53983980> A limited range of earlier material is still published in Disc form, and all ACC Congregations have received ACC DVD resource material for their use.

### Founding Documents

The Charter (2006)

Statement on Sexuality (2006)

Confessing Statement from the Executives of the Reforming Alliance and Evangelical Members within the Uniting Church (EMU) (2006)

### ACC Brochures and Statements

ACC Vision and Goals 2007-2017 (2008)

Cross Cultural Commission Statement (2008)

The Church's Social Responsibility (2008)

Theological Declaration (2008)

Theological Declaration: Commentary and Study Guide (2009)

Abortion in the Australian Community (2010)

A Christian Response to Euthanasia and Medically Assisted Suicide (2011)

Marriage: An ACC Statement (2011)

### Bible Studies

Bible Study: Mark ISBN 978-0-9804493-0-3

Bible Study: Galatians ISBN 978-0-9804493-1-0

Faith That Works: Studies in the Letter of James ACC Bible Study No. 3. Brian Edgar (2008) ISBN 978-0-9804493-2-7

3. Brian Edgar (2008) ISBN 978-0-9804493-2-7

### DVD Resources

Conversations Series

No. 1 Conversations in Discipleship and Evangelism: A Study Guide with DVD (2010) ISBN 978-0-9804493-3-4

No. 2 The Hope of a New Heaven and New Earth: A Study Guide with DVD (2011) ISBN 978-0-9804493-6-5

No. 3 This is Love: A Study Guide with DVD (2012) ISBN 978-0-9804493-8-9

### Devotional Booklets

Seeds For Harvesting Vol. 1 (2011) – Rev Robert Imms ISBN 978-0-9804493-5-8

Seeds For Harvesting Vol. 2 (2012) – Rev Robert Imms ISBN 978-0-9804493-7-2



**Babette's Feast**

## Movies you can use

There are several foreign language films that have been used widely in church and film discussion circles. I thought I would highlight the main ones. I note that in terms of classification the government site is helpful in terms of providing the classification and also reasons or outline of the areas that have determined its classification: <http://www.classification.gov.au/Pages/Home.aspx>

**Babette's Feast** (Denmark, 1987, G) Set in 19th century Denmark, this somewhat disarmingly simple story is based on a story by Karen Blixen, who became well known for her book *Out of Africa*. *Babette's Feast* is the story of a meal organised by Babette a 'refugee' from France, who is the housekeeper and cook for two sisters who live in a puritan community in a remote setting in Jutland.

The sisters have the oversight of the religious community founded by their father and he is often referred to in glowing and saintly terms, but the community is struggling with ageing and health issues. The community keeps a fairly rigid lifestyle, including usually avoiding enjoyment of any food — it is just 'fuel' to keep going. After coming into some money Babette decides to provide a meal for the community in appreciation for their taking her in.

The movie is also a story about a different era of perhaps unrequited love, and following what you believe God has called you to do. A gentle film, though one that is often considered to mark the beginnings of new interest in exploring the use of film in church circles.

**Jesus of Montreal** (Canada, 1989, M) This is a film based around a group of actors putting on a passion play which achieves controversy due to its more radical interpretation of the life of Christ and its confrontation with the authorities of the modern time (part of the official church). This has some famous analogous scenes as the life of one of the actors Daniel begins to mirror elements of the life of Christ.

There is an especially contemporary scene related to the temptation of Christ by the devil. While the film has a theologically liberal base, adult viewers can certainly use this to look at biblical themes, and one can have a vibrant discussion about who Jesus really is.

**As It Is In Heaven** (2004, Sweden, M) This movie struck a chord with Western audiences and in Australia ran in one small Sydney theatre for nearly two years. It is a simple story of a famous conductor coming 'home' to rest and recover, who then becomes caught up in helping a church choir learn to sing.

This could have been a bit like *Sister Act*, but instead of a comedic foundation, it focuses on some real and sometimes disturbing issues in the not-so-pious and fragile community.

It should be noted that while religious, the theological premise is essentially humanist, as it focuses mainly on the people's responses in terms of finding their own way and even the conclusion reached while 'spiritual' is more aptly centred around the idea of earthly nostalgia

than 'as it is in heaven', that is to the glory of God.

**Adam's Apples** (Denmark, 2005, MA) This poignant story features the now well-known Danish actor Mads Dittmann Mikkelsen (the villain in *Casino Royale*) as Ivan Fjeldsted, a pastor in a remote area who takes in former prisoners who are required to spend a certain amount of time following the conclusion of their sentence in community service.

The latest arrival is Adam Pedersen, a former leader of a neo-Nazi leader gang. Each person at the church community has to choose a goal or task to undertake that will help with their rehabilitation and in an attempt to get the meddlesome pastor of his case, Adam finally resolves that he will bake an apple pie (there is an apple tree in the churchyard).

While a seemingly simple task, it becomes fraught with difficulty and also issues arise with other prisoners, Adam's past connection and also Ivan's own tragic past. One book of the Old Testament features firmly in the discussions and also theme, but I will leave this to you consider. This is an adult film for its themes, but can richly reward a discussion about God's grace, providence and questions about good and evil.

**Letters to Pastor Jaakob** (Finland, 2009, PG)

In a similar theme to *Adam's Apples*, Pastor Jaakob finds himself with Leila, a recent, though unwilling paroled prisoner who is now designated to undertake long-term community service. Jaakob has a unique ministry for today — no technology here.

He is blind and receives mail from people asking for advice and prayer. He needs an assistant to read the letters and write a response. His responses are typically scriptural references and a blessing. Needless to say some issues arise for Leila who finds the whole situation frustrating and odd, but God's love abounds.

This is an amiable and reflective film, that helps the viewer to consider the mercy and grace of God.

*Peter Bentley*