

# ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

## Arab Spring: Christian winter?

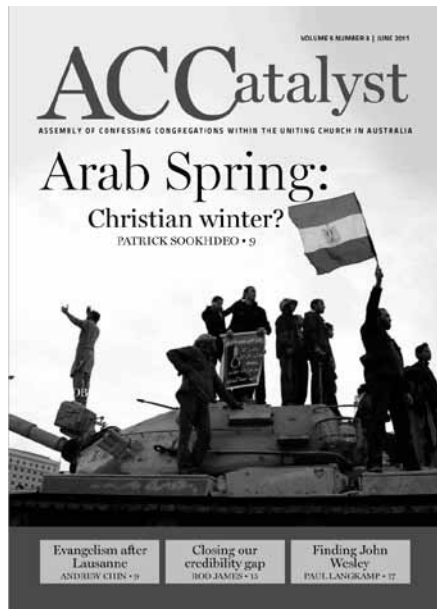
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## EDITORIAL

# Making history

When the school textbooks get around to chronicling 2011, it is likely that this year will be summed up as the year of the Arab Spring. Well, it seems like a fairly safe bet, just about halfway through the year.

Dr Patrick Soohkdeo of Barnabas Ministries looks behind the headlines for this ACCatalyst and examines what the street revolutions that began in Tunisia and Egypt will mean for our fellow believers in the

Northern African and Arab regions.

Andrew Chin, a minister at Wesley Mission in Sydney, gives us another worldwide perspective as he examines what the Lausanne Conference in late 2010 taught him. He's come back with a new sense of the urgency of spreading the gospel to the world.

This edition of the magazine is, perhaps more than usual even, a 'catalyst' for prayer.

*John Sandeman*

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The other evening I was getting ready to go to bed and thinking about how sick I was. I was recovering nicely from the laryngitis (though I still had many days ahead of me of not being allowed to talk) but I had a rotten dose of bronchitis that did not seem to have improved at all, despite all the medication I was taking. I was sick of the pain, of feeling sick and of having the taste of infection in my mouth all the time.

But it occurred to me at that moment that I had a choice. I could start feeling sorry for myself or I could choose not to. Self-pity is the easy option, and I felt as though I had plenty of reason for self-pity. But experience has taught me what self-pity leads to. When I'm feeling sorry for myself I get depressed, I become reclusive and I turn away from God, blaming him for my misfortune.

But we are fortunate because the Bible gives us an alternative to self-pity: Give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18). When you are being thankful, it is very difficult to feel sorry for yourself!

I decided that this was the right

## The Choice



approach so as I went to bed I committed my health to God and told him that I trust him as my Father. I went to sleep.

The next morning ... I still felt rotten! I spent much of the day in bed. But I no longer felt a sense of de-

spair. I started to be aware of things I had reason to be thankful about. I still believe that God is able to heal me but in the meantime there are worse things in the world than having crook lungs and no voice! And I'm learning that God doesn't think any worse of me for being sick.

The Bible says lots of stuff about attitudes. We have a choice about how we look at things and our attitudes determine our actions. Ultimately we are to have the same attitude as Jesus had (Philippians 2:5), and he was too busy being concerned for others to have self-pity!

There is a song by a great band called *Kutless* that goes, "Why can't you see, that freedom is sometimes simply another perspective away? Who could you be if your lens was changed for a moment would you still be the same?"

And now I have something else to be grateful for: Today I was well enough to write this!

*Robyn*

*Robyn Painter is Pastor of Peterborough Uniting Church in SA*

# We are still keen on marriage

A new statement on marriage has been approved by the ACC National Council. The Statement tackles the issue of sexuality in its first paragraph: "Marriage is not an exclusively Christian concept. As a human experience between a man and a woman it is witnessed in all countries, and in all faiths."

This is quickly tied to the official UCA Marriage Service "Christian marriage which is understood as 'a gift of God and a means of grace'. In the life-long union of marriage we can know the joy of God, in whose image we are made, male and female. ... Husband and wife, in giving themselves to each other in love, reflect the love of Christ for his Church. ... ('Declaration of Purpose', Marriage Order of Service, The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, Sydney, 2005)".

The statement presents six principles that define Christian Marriage:

1. Marriage is a central part of God's creation. Jesus pointed to the foundation of marriage as being in God's creation of humankind: male and female in His own image (Genesis 1:27, Matthew 19:3-5).



## Easter affront?

During Easter and the week leading up to it Newtown Mission placed a large wooden cross out the front of the mission. Mock police tape cordoned off the area and the words "crime scene" were used to draw attention to the cross and the highlighted question *Why Did Jesus Die?* Senior Pastor Doug Clements and other volunteers spent time out the front of the church, encouraging interaction and comment from people passing by. People were able to write their thoughts on a blackboard, or post-it notes.

2. Marriage is between a man and a woman.

In the most basic sense of our being (ontology) a man and a woman provide the only complementary basis for a marriage.

3. Marriage is a public acknowledgement of the love and commitment of a woman and a man to each other.

The couple's mutual decision to marry each other leads to the two being joined together with and before God and witnessed by family and friends.

4. Marriage is meant to be life-long  
This life-long covenant is a gift from God, whose love is unending.

5. Marriage is monogamous  
Sexual love in marriage is a glorious and holy gift. It is not meant to be devalued by casualness before a

marriage, or adultery after the bonds are created.

6. Marriage involves an openness to children.

Children are a blessing from God, and families provide the basis of our society. As God provides for His children, parents provide for their children and should model the strength, love, generosity and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 7:9-12).

In a final summary the statement concludes that "the marriage of a man and a woman, together with the family it enables, is a holy expression of the image and glory of God".

The statement will be published as a pamphlet in the future, and also distributed widely within the UCA and the Australian church. A full copy is available on the ACC website.

# What encourages Ian Weeks

Visiting the local congregations in Coonabarabran, Grenfell, Orange and Harden has greatly encouraged Ian Weeks, the NSW ACC Movement Chairperson.

His annual report also states that it was encouraging to hear from "the Hunter Cluster of ACC members, who even though at times may feel somewhat insignificant and powerless in the bigger picture of the Presbytery, nonetheless perform a vital ministry of encouragement to each other as they meet and pray for

each other and the wider cause of Gospel work".

Weeks reports that the NSW committee's main business was organising the 2010 ACC Annual Council that was held in Camden in September. He added: "We express again our appreciation to the Camden Congregation for their willingness to host such an event, their hospitality and ministry of service."

The report also commented on relations with the NSW UCA: "In NSW, it has been interesting

to observe the interaction between the ACC and the Synod, primarily through the Moderator's column in the monthly Synod *Insights* magazine and subsequent exchanges in the letters page of that magazine, as well as in the *ACCatalyst* magazine. A sign that our theological view is heard, even if not welcomed or respected? We have indicated to the Synod that a delegation from ACC NSW is willing and available to continue in dialogue with the Synod as the need arises."





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## PUBLIC SQUARE

BY PSEUDO-MAXIMUS

### Clash at Marriage Equality Rally

On 15 May Adelaide's *Sunday Mail* reported a conflict between supporters and opponents of Equal Marriage on 14 May at which the Rev Sue Wickham, a UC minister in a long term partnership with the Rev Leanne Jenski, symbolically married about 20 same sex couples with the words "You are now illegally husband and husband, wife and wife".

She expressed sorrow at dissent voiced by a Christian group, saying, "A celebration of love has been turned into something violent and frightening by a small minority. They don't represent the whole church and there is an alternative voice out there. I feel embarrassed that they do this in the name of God."

In the 22 May edition of the paper the Rev Robert Tann, UC minister at Whyalla, conveyed his "double distress" at news of the confrontation. On one hand, the aggressive attitude of the demonstrators did nothing to represent Christ's message of "love,

grace and understanding". On the other hand, the Rev Sue Wickham misrepresented the position of the UC which "has still never formally approved of such couples, and especially in ministry" and "upholds the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman".

Sadly, he concluded "both sides lose and neither accurately represents orthodox Christian values". For a full report see [www.adelaidenow.com.au](http://www.adelaidenow.com.au).

### Resignation from the UCA

The UCA has lost one of its, and Australia's, finest theologians and churchmen. The Rev Dr Gordon Watson has resigned from the UCA and been recognised by the Lutheran Church as a retired pastor.

In a long and distinguished ministry in the Methodist and Uniting Churches, he has made an outstanding contribution to teaching and pastoral ministry within the UCA and to greater ecumenical understanding.

Dr Watson was Head of Systematic

Theology at Trinity College, Brisbane (1994-2001) and a member and chairperson of the National Assembly Commission on Doctrine (1980-1991).

He was a UCA appointed member of dialogues with the Orthodox (1991-2001), the Roman Catholics (1995-2001) and the Lutherans (1980-2001).

Among other responsibilities, he was Presbytery Minister in the Bourke Presbytery, Victoria (1989-93), a member of the Joint Presbyteries Settlements Advisory Committee, Victoria (1980-1993) and chaplain to the President of the UCA, Professor James Haire (2000-2003).

Explaining his decision Dr Watson said: "I think it was a conviction grown over years that the UCA is not capable of such radical change as would be required for it to become again a recognisable part of the one, holy, catholic church in the Reformed tradition. It has so become part of a culture in which the old fashioned idea of the gospel as personal 'truth', that stands over against and for the church, is replaced by a groupthink in



which those in control of the church's administrative and pastoral activity regard themselves as immune from criticism and at the same time treat other individuals and groups as objects to be stereotyped, or in other ways minimised or ridiculed. This culture is so pervasive that most of those involved are not conscious of its corrosive and alienating effect on the culture of the UCA at all levels of its administrative life. This situation is no more graphically illustrated than in the long standing manipulation of the processes of the church by members of the Assembly Standing Committee with respect to the matter of ordination of practising homosexual persons."

If, as Dr Watson says, the UCA has become so enchanted by Orwellian "groupthink" that it is impervious to the Gospel of truth and blind to the abuse of bureaucratic power in promoting ideological causes, then dissent grounded in reformed, evangelical and orthodox confessions of faith will continue to be unwelcome.

Nor should it be surprising that, despite attempts by UCA leaders to convey a spirit of ecumenical co-operation, the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches still refuse to participate in serious theological dialogue with the UCA. Dr Watson's resignation will only deepen their suspicions about the integrity of the UCA.

## With love from Rowan

This is a story about a journalist with a problem. Alex Renton who writes for *The Times* is an atheist but when his daughter came home one day and wrote a letter he was taken aback.

"My daughter came home from primary school a few weeks ago and sat down to write a letter to God. It read 'To God how did you get invented? From Lulu o x'"

To simply tell Lulu that God doesn't exist suddenly struck him as self-indulgent "rigid parental rationalism". "Quite simply, I didn't want to tell Lulu there was no god, and I could not tell her there was."

He thought it was up to believers to answer this question rather than his atheist self.

So he sent the letter off to people he thought should be able to give a good answer. The Catholics sent a complicated one, the Presbyterians did not answer. But the Archbishop of Canterbury did.

## IAN CLARKSON

### Porn and Compassion

Pornography is a dreadful scourge costing billions of dollars and making misery for countless captives around the world. We are a sex-soaked society with unrestrained consensual sexual activity, decriminalised, legalised and affirmed. "With this generation, it's a battle against cheap satisfactions, that make children act like jaded whores, and adults act like spoiled children".

Biblical directions on sexuality are considered restrictive and outdated. We have an increasing preoccupation with sex as an object and an end in itself.

But the Spirit and Scripture lift us to powerful standards: "There must not be even a hint of porn", and "flee from porn". Porn, (Bible Greek "porneia") translates as "sexual immorality", and in these Scripture passages, is shown as a vicious enemy of genuine love. Porn inhibits, even prevents love, because it totally absorbs the mind in introverted egosexism.

Porn causes an implosion of energy, rather than allowing an explosion of thought and action towards another in deeds of justice and care.

Sexual impurity left unchecked, spirals into a limitless internal world of fantastical activity. It shuts off a person from feeling and seeing and giving oneself to fulfil the needs of others.

Porneia/porn is forbidden, not

just because it isn't love, but because it prevents love. Rage, greed and even things like impatience and drunkenness, have similar characteristics. Martin Bryant began to drink high-alcohol spirits, "to fill in time and relieve his loneliness". He had nothing inside coming out. Just drink coming in to glaze his conscience and drift the mind unchecked in its own internal world.

Paul in Colossians juxtaposes the things that are to be put to death, and the things in which we are to cooperate with the Spirit working within us. The first one to die is porn (verse five), so that its opposite, compassion (verse twelve), may grow in its place. A person preoccupied with porn, cannot be compassionate. But practising compassion kills porn. Compassion implies a generous action touched off by an inner feeling for someone else. An inner feeling extroverted into action. Porn is feelings introverted.

Our living Saviour bore into final judgment all our porn in his obedient death. He is on the side of such miserable captives and he will deliver!

Let the possessed cry out for his help, confess the evil and He will systemically remake a personality from the very core of their being. We should tell the porn-bound never to give up coming to Him, who alone may make something good out of nothing.

*Ian Clarkson is the Superintendent Minister of Branches Church in SA.*

Dear Lulu,

Your dad has sent on your letter and asked if I have any answers. It's a difficult one! But I think God might reply a bit like this -

"Dear Lulu - Nobody invented me - but lots of people discovered me and were quite surprised. They discovered me when they looked round at the world and thought it was really beautiful or really mysterious and wondered where it came from. They discovered me when they were very very quiet on their own and felt a sort of peace and love they hadn't expected.

"Then they invented ideas about me - some of them sensible and some of

them not very sensible. From time to time I sent them some hints - specially in the life of Jesus - to help them get closer to what I'm really like.

"But there was nothing and nobody around before me to invent me. Rather like somebody who writes a story in a book, I started making up the story of the world and eventually invented human beings like you who could ask me awkward questions!"

And then he'd send you lots of love and sign off.

I know he doesn't usually write letters, so I have to do the best I can on his behalf. Lots of love from me too.  
+Archbishop Rowan

## Big of stature and of heart

### Rev. Dr Charles Geoffrey Noller

*Minister, Psychologist & Counsellor*  
Born: Sydney (NSW) 13th June, 1934  
Died: Forest Lake (Qld) 18th February, 2011

*Tim O'Dwyer remembers Charles Noller*

Years ago at my wedding the celebrant, Reverend Dr Charles Noller, recounted how in marriage counselling husbands and wives often catalogued dates and times from way back of each other's wrongs. "Love doesn't keep a record of wrongs", Dr Noller explained, "Love involves being able to forgive, to forget and to restore a relationship from that growth point."

He was at that time not only director of Lifeline Brisbane (where my wife and I met as telephone counsellors) but also a marriage counsellor.

Because counselling remained the love of his working life no-one was surprised that, in apparent good health, he was conducting a counselling session only hours before he died in his sleep.

Charles Noller was the eldest son of Charles and Mildred Noller. He was educated at Bellevue Hill Public School, Woollahra Opportunity School (for the gifted) and Sydney Boys High. In his teens he became an evangelical Christian before successfully defending his Christian pacifism in court when called-up for National Service.

Although he wanted to be a teacher, he turned to chemical engineering while completing a science degree part-time at the University of NSW.

Teaching still featured in his multifaceted career. In his didactic but caring way he believed he was assisting others (including friends and family) to grow. The night he died, after finishing his counselling, he emailed a recommended reading list to his new parish minister.

He met Patricia Tate, the only female ever to match him, at Sunday School. They married in 1960, forged an enduring and formidable partnership and later helped found *Couples for Marriage Enrichment*.

In 1961 he entered Leigh Theo-



**Dr Charles Geoffrey Noller**

logical College. He enhanced his theological training with a first class honours degree in psychology from Sydney University before accepting a PhD scholarship at the Australian National University.

He gained his doctorate (on families of alcoholics) in 1967. A year later he was ordained a minister of the Methodist Church (later the Uniting Church). After working as a psychologist/counsellor at Lifeline Newcastle, he moved north in 1971 to become director of Lifeline Brisbane.

Ten years later, after helping to establish Lifeline centres and training counsellors across the state, he took up roles within Lifeline nationally and internationally - and struggled to ensure Lifeline might adhere to its Christian foundations.

Meanwhile he encouraged wife Pat's return to university where she earned her own doctorate, and became an internationally-renowned professor of psychology.

Following his Lifeline work Dr. Noller became involved in Legal Aid, Drug Arm, the Family Council of Queensland and in interdenominational clergy training because he

believed the future of the church depended on the emotional and spiritual health of its priests, pastors and ministers.

He had differences with, but remained loyal to, the Uniting Church. But for his membership of the strident Assembly of Confessing Congregations within that church, he may have changed denominations. He retired from ministry in 2002 to continue his private psychology/counselling practice.

Dr Noller, who was big of stature and of heart, lived his life by John Wesley's three-part edict: "Earn as much as you can, save as much as you can and give away as much as you can". The second and third parts anyway! His family lovingly remembers

a man who frequently brought home needy persons, rarely wore matching clothes, drove too fast, followed other cars too closely, sang and played music too loud and had two stomachs - one for mains and one for desserts. He was a proud, occasionally confronting, but passionately caring man who often ran his own race.

When I acted as his solicitor to sell two properties, he decided against using estate agents, advertised privately and soon had buyers for each. He achieved successful sales by treating these folk honestly, fairly and respectfully in open negotiations.

His addictions included bargaining and impulsive remote-control use. His library was vast, he was generous in lending books but zealous in getting them back. Never a mechanic or reader of instructions, he was a loving husband, a devoted father and a doting grandfather.

He is survived by Pat, one son, three daughters, eight grandchildren, two sisters and his beloved rose garden.

*Tim O'Dwyer is a Brisbane solicitor and member of the Coopers Plains Uniting Church.*



## God of the nations

I should like to make a comment or two on Ted Curnow's article "Culture War Rage." *ACCatalyst*, April 2010

"...our Sovereign God is already God of the Nations." God will be God of the Nations when the Kingdom of God comes on Earth as it is in Heaven. God in His sovereignty has given man a free will and made man to have dominion over the Earth.

*"The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's but the earth He has given to the children of men."*

God does not force Himself on the Earth nor intervene in its affairs without being invited. Everything God has done on the Earth He has done through the prayers and faith of people. Jesus, when He walked out of the Temple in Jerusalem for the last time said, "You will not see me again until you say 'Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord.'" In other words "until you want me".

Meanwhile the Biblical worldview is that "The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one." 1 John 5:19 and "the god of this age" has blinded the minds of the people of the world (2 Corinthians 4:4).

As Ted suspects, "beyond party politics there is a darker, more sinister conflict of a spiritual nature taking place." We are in a battle that must be fought on many fronts – primarily through evangelisation and prayer [as Ted states] but also on the ground where the rubber hits the road, in standing up for the values of the Kingdom.

Too long have Christians been silent while the devil has had a heyday. The people of our nation need to know that there are better values than the ones that are thrust on them by the media and the militant minorities.

Certainly it would be wrong to regard people as the enemy. God loves all people, and Jesus died for all people. On that basis we can and must do battle against the "principalities and powers and ruler of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

Gandhi once stated that "those who say that politics and religion shouldn't be mixed have understood neither." Christians have as much right as any-

### Ad hominem

Re. Letters in April 2011 edition of *ACCatalyst*, I have no idea who Rowan Gill is, but the arrogance with which he insults Rev. Naill Reid, John Sandeman and Rev. Ian Weeks is totally unacceptable.

An apology in the next issue would be the decent thing to do.

This is certainly a low point in an attempt at theological discussion.

*Arthur Oakley (Rev)*

### We are being pressured to bow to "political correctness."

one else [and indeed it is their duty] to make their voices heard.

If we don't now, the time may come when we will lose the right of free speech. Already we are being pressured to bow to "political correctness." I applaud the work done by groups like Salt Shakers and Australian Christian Lobby who bring to our notice issues that need to be addressed.

As Ted states "while it is true that many of our institutions and values have been derived from a Christian heritage, there is no such thing as a pure Christian culture..."

A truly Christian-based nation allows for freedom of worship and freedom of speech and upholds the dignity and value of each individual, because we worship a God who gave us free will. We do not use force as other religions do. These are values that everyone including atheists ought to uphold. If we forsake our Christian heritage we will lose these benefits also.

The kingdoms of this world have [not yet] become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ [Revelation 11:15] but they will, on the basis of the victory won at the Cross. Jesus has paid the price for all people and has defeated the adversary. It is for the Church to bring that victory into reality in the Earth.

*Val Pym*

### Giving an answer to the Moderator

Here is my response to the 'good' question asked by the Moderator of NSW: what is the Gospel?

A good question deserves a good answer. There is also good reason for the Moderator of a Synod to know the answer.

In fact, a Moderator who does not know the answer ought not to be a Moderator at all because, according to Uniting Church Regulation 3.5.17, one of the duties of a Moderator is to 'ensure that life of the Church expresses the faith, the policies, standards and procedures to which it is committed'.

So it is to be hoped that the Moderator is doing that.

The Uniting Church Constitution (paragraph 2) commits the Uniting Church to be guided by the Basis of Union. The Basis, paragraph 17 states that the law of the Church is always subject to revision in order that it may better serve the Gospel. A good Reason to know what the Gospel is!

The Basis of Union, paragraph 3 summarises the Gospel. In the 1992 version of the Basis of Union, paragraph 3 quotes from 2 Corinthians 5:19, a verse that leads on to conclude: 'For our sake [God] made him [i.e. Christ] to be sin who knew no sin that in him we might become the righteousness of God'.

This good news in Christ, says the Basis of Union, is a call to all people to respond in faith and a reassertion of God's claim over the whole creation. This is the Gospel in a nutshell.

The Moderator expresses uncertainty about what heaven and hell might be like. Paragraph 14 might help here since it allows room for difference of opinion in matters that do not enter into the substance of faith. But the Gospel itself is not a matter for difference of opinion.

May I respectfully suggest that the Moderator of NSW rereads the Basis of Union? I think that will answer his question.

*Katherine Abetz*

# Presbyterians vote for gay clergy

The largest Presbyterian Church in the US has voted to allow local presbyteries to appoint gay clergy.

After decades of debate, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has agreed to a proposal that removes the celibacy requirement for unmarried clergy, in the latest mainline Protestant move toward accepting gay relationships, the Associated Press reports.

The change was endorsed last year by the Presbyterian national assembly, but required approval by a majority of the denomination's 173 presbyteries, or regional church bodies. The PCUSA Book of Order will no longer require that "fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness".

From now on Presbyteries will have the "local option" to select gay clergy. The PCUSA is the largest Presbyterian Church in the USA but the Presbyterian Church of America and the Cumberland Presbyterians provide conservative alternatives. Well-known pastor Tim Keller for example belongs to the PCA.

"The Presbyterian Church (USA) has just amended its constitution to allow the ordination of officers who do not restrict their sexual activity to the bounds of Christian marriage," the Presbyterian Lay Committee (not dissimilar to ACC) reported. "By doing so the PC(USA) has undermined its own foundation of scriptural integrity."

Another confessing group, Presbyterians for Renewal gave this response: "While the ongoing voting in remaining presbyteries is important, both as a means of faithful witness and for the sake of understanding the state of our divisions, the biblical standard of fidelity in marriage between a man and a woman and chastity in singleness will soon be removed as an explicit denominational standard for ordination and/or installation of church officers.

"We deeply grieve this unfaithful action, for it brings great harm to the

life and witness of the PC(USA). We have prayed that our denomination would uphold this biblical standard, and we have worked to maintain it. But now a line has been crossed."

## Methodists stay firm

A policy adopted but not yet implemented by United Methodists in New York and Connecticut that essentially would have allowed clergy to marry someone of the same sex has been declared "null, void and of no effect" by the denomination's top court the United Methodist News Service reports

The United Methodist Judicial Council has ruled that the New York Annual (regional) Conference resolution and policy allowing clergy "to marry at their own discretion" is "neither valid nor constitutional."

Meeting April 27-29 in Detroit, the council upheld the church's current prohibition against same-sex marriage and pastors who are "self-avowed practicing homosexuals," found in Paragraph 2702 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline.

The rationale for the New York policy, adopted in 2010, is that same-sex marriage is legal in Connecticut; that such unions performed legally elsewhere "are legally recognized by state agencies in New York"; and that the church's Articles of Religion – doctrinal standards found in Paragraph 103 of the Book of Discipline – state that it is "lawful" for clergy "to marry at their own discretion".

The Rev. Thomas Lambrecht, a Wisconsin pastor representing Good News, an unofficial United Methodist evangelical caucus, spoke in opposition at the hearings.

He called the New York petition one "in a string" of actions over the years by various annual conferences to urge Judicial Council to circumvent General Conference, the church's top legislative body, and change the denomination's stance on homosexuality.

The Book of Discipline already has defined marriage as the union of one man and one woman, and an annual conference "does not have the right to legislate on the duties of clergy," Lambrecht added. Nor can it unilaterally change the definition of marriage in Article XXI to include same-gender marriage without General Conference action, he said.

Supporters of the New York Conference policy mainly use experience and cultural tolerance as the basis for their support, he contended. "Such arguments may be somewhat persuasive in a legislative arena, but they show how weak the legal standing of this policy is," he told council members.

Because marriage between one man and one woman was the norm in Wesley's time, there was no need for him to define marriage in the Articles of Religion, Lambrecht argued.

## Conservative Anglicans regroup

Conservative Anglicans are setting up durable structures. Leaders of the seven most conservative provinces (national churches) of the Anglican Communion met just after Easter in Nairobi and announced plans for another international conference as well as opening offices in London and Nairobi.

The council of Anglican leaders established by the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) in 2008, represents more than 35 million Anglicans who form a confessing movement for Anglicans.

The Primates (church leaders) are planning for a second GAFCON in 2013 preceded by a leadership conference in New York in 2012.

At the start of their meeting just after Easter, the council elected Archbishop Eliud Wabukala, Primate of the Anglican Church of Kenya, as its new Chairman to replace Archbishop Greg Venables, the Primate of the Southern Cone.

A Chairman's office will be established in Nairobi, and a GAFCON Global office will be established in London led by the Martyn Minns, of the Church of Nigeria. Sydney's Archbishop Peter Jensen is secretary of the GAFCON Primates' Council.



# Arab revolutions: which way now?

Dr Patrick Sookhdeo of Barnabas Ministries on the harm that Arab Christians face

*“Revolutions are dangerous, unpredictable events”<sup>1</sup>*

**T**he protests sweeping across the Middle East and North Africa are shaking the established order and reverberating throughout the Muslim world. Arabs have been suffering greatly from the region’s economic, social and political failings, which include oppression, injustice, corruption and discrimination.

Authoritarian police states with all-powerful and unaccountable security services, large-scale unemployment, massive gaps between rich and poor, callous and corrupt autocracies, bureaucracies that treat citizens with indignity and contempt – all these have fuelled popular grievances, anger and frustration.

The modern electronic media revolution has deprived governments of their monopoly over the news and has empowered many ordinary citizens. The Arab masses are now expressing their yearnings for individual freedoms, justice and accountability, democracy, the rule of law and civil liberties. For the first time they have breached and broken the barrier of fear imposed by their rulers, and many are exhilarated by the resulting freedom and empowerment. Established leaders such as Zine Ben Ali of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Ali Abdallah Saleh of Yemen and Bashar al-Assad of Syria have faced, and some are still facing, demands for their removal from power. The Western media have hailed the protests as an “Arab Spring”.

Yet several of the revolutions have faltered and stalled. The two states that first experienced mass protests, Tunisia and Egypt, have entered an ambiguous transition phase as the forces of change confront the old ruling classes, who are intent on clinging to power and privilege. Elsewhere, in Yemen, Syria, Bahrain and Libya, the leadership is hanging on, through violent suppression of protest coupled to offers of reform. Getting rid of dictators does not necessarily produce democracy. Old leaders have left, but the underlying political systems have not been overthrown.

The protest waves are also increasing the dangers posed by other destructive social forces in the area:

regionalism, tribalism, sectarianism and radical Islamism. The divisions between Sunni and Shia Muslims, and between Muslims and Christians, are particularly severe and have the potential to generate serious disorder and violence. The old regimes have largely succeeded in separating religion and the state and in countering the threat posed by political Islam. Their fall may dissolve the boundary between the religious and the secular altogether and lead to the establishing of Islamic states.

Even the Western media, which at first attributed the revolutions only to a popular desire for secular and democratic states, is now quietly admitting its mistake. The New York Times says:

“In post-revolutionary Egypt, where hope and confusion collide in the daily struggle to build a new nation, religion has emerged as a powerful political force, following an uprising that was based on secular ideals. The Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist group once banned by the state, is at the forefront, transformed into a tacit partner with the military government that many fear will thwart fundamental changes. It is also clear that the young, educated secular activists who initially propelled the nonideological revolution are no longer the driving political force — at least not at the moment.”<sup>2</sup>



The consequences for Christians of the current upheavals are hard to predict in detail, but they are likely to be serious and possibly harmful. Perhaps the worst scenario is that Islamism seizes control of the various revolutions, imposes a much stricter Islamic character on politics and society in each country, and suppresses the local Christian minorities. Were this to happen, the very survival of Christianity across the entire region would be in jeopardy.

In this article we consider the general role of Islam in the Arab revolutions, and how this is worked out in the

# ARAB SPRING

very different conditions of the various countries involved, including the place of the churches. We also look at the ambiguous and sometimes unhelpful involvement of the West in the movements for change, and the possible future for the churches.

## The role of Islam

No accurate analysis of the events in the Middle East and North Africa can ignore the role of Islam. The increasing Islamisation of societies and states since the 1970s has left the great majority of the population devoted to traditional and Islamist versions of Islam. Liberal and secular movements are small, marginal and repressed. There is therefore a deep dichotomy between the genuine wish of the Arab masses for freedom and justice and their devotion to Islam and sharia law. Real freedom and justice for all can never be achieved until religion and the state are fully separated and as long as sharia is seen as the main source of civil law and the source of legitimacy for governments.

A survey taken by the Pew Forum before the start of the revolution found that the overwhelming majority of Muslims in the Middle East welcomed the influence of Islam in politics and the state. In Egypt, for example, 85 per cent favoured a large role for Islam in politics; 82 per cent approved of stoning adulterers; 77 per cent wanted whippings and the cutting off of hands for robbery; and 84 per cent favoured the death penalty for Muslims who convert to another religion. The legal enforcement of gender separation in public places was favoured by 54 per cent of Muslims. Only 27 per cent of Egyptians aligned themselves with the modernisers, while 59 per cent said that they backed the Islamists. A substantial minority (20%) even favoured Al-Qaeda. The figures for other Arab states were fairly similar.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time the survey found that most people thought that democracy was the best form of government. In Egypt, some 88% wanted an impartial judiciary and 80% favoured free speech, while 75% were opposed to censorship.

The tension between the two sets of figures is apparent. Many of the protestors aspire to the individual and democratic freedoms of the West, yet in the West it was the separation of religion from the state and its coercive powers that made possible and then guaranteed those freedoms. If a greater role is given to Islam in the state in future, the prospects for positive political change will become more remote.

In fact the survey results reveal that any new system of government, even if it starts as a democracy, will tend to gravitate towards the repression of all views that it considers un-Islamic or contrary to sharia. It will also tend to discriminate against women, non-Muslims and dissident Muslims. Such a process of Islamisation is clearly evident in states outside the Arab world that are held up as models of Muslim democracy, such as Malaysia and Turkey. In countries where Islamists are both numerous and well organised, the threat of an Islamist takeover of the government will always be present.

The question is not whether Islam will play a role in determining the region's future, but what that role will be. For the moment, Islamist groups are speaking the language of democracy and national unity. They realise

they are being given an opportunity, denied to them under the old regimes, to enter the political arena, and they are seeking to use it to their best advantage. Like the liberals, they have also learned to use and manipulate modern media technology.

## Variety in the Arab World

The Western media tends to ignore the vast differences between the Arabic states. While Arabs share grievances over autocracy, brutality, corruption and unemployment, they express those grievances differently in each country. Some Arab countries have huge oil reserves and are very rich. Others have none and are desperately poor. Some (such as Syria, Iraq and Lebanon) are ethnically and religiously diverse, others are much more homogenous.

● In **Egypt** the decisive force in removing former President Mubarak was the generals, who are not reformers, and it is they who currently hold power. They are carefully guarding their own interests and making only small concessions to progressive demands, seeking to preserve their long-standing role as the main influence in the state. The government has used violence to crack down on demonstrations and has arbitrarily arrested protesters.

The military sponsored a constitutional referendum on 19 March, where proposed changes to the constitution were passed by a large majority. In fact the existing constitution has been left largely unchanged, and a wholly new one will be discussed only after parliamentary and presidential elections. Secularist, liberals and Christians wanted a new constitution promulgated before the elections. The delay would have given them time to organise politically so as to be able to compete with the well-organised Islamists.

The constitutional changes were supported by the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists who are resisting the secularisation of the state and supporting the imposition of sharia. Muslim spokesmen publicly declared that the "yes" vote was a clear affirmation that the majority of Egyptians want an Islamic state. A government minister said that the article of the present constitution that defines Islam as the official religion and sharia as the primary source of legislation, would override any new constitutional provisions. Some Islamist terrorists have been pardoned and released from prison.

Some 10% of the Egyptian population of about 85 million are Coptic Christians (the vast majority are Sunni Muslims). Since the revolution Christian leaders have complained at being left out of the political process. The dream that many had of a truly democratic, secular state seems to be fading. It is being reported that increasing numbers of Christians are seeking to leave Egypt to escape possible Islamist dominance in the new order.

In the chaos caused by political upheaval and protests, law and order are weakened, and Christians are often left without protection against attacks by hostile groups. In Egypt radical Islamists have been continuing to attack Christians, often with the collusion of the military and security forces. Christian women and girls continue to be abducted, raped and forcibly converted to Islam. In some villages in Upper Egypt, armed thugs are attacking Christians, kidnapping Christian women and children for ransom, extorting money, looting and raping. Three church buildings were attacked by militants who want

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them relocated outside Muslim areas and will not allow desperately needed repairs. The authorities and the military were again unwilling or unable to protect the Christians. At least 20 Christians have been killed in sectarian violence with Muslims, and some have even died at the hands of the army that should have been defending them. The attackers are rarely brought to justice and punished.

● **Syria** has many minorities. Arab Sunnis are in the majority, but Muslim sects also have a sizeable presence. A further 8-10% of the population are Christian (not counting the many Iraqi Christian refugees currently living in the country). The government and security forces are monopolised by the Alawi sect, a fact deeply resented by the Sunni majority.

The Syrian regime thought itself immune from the protest movement shaking other Arab countries because of its opposition to the US and Israel and its support for terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. But protests have quickly spread to many cities, resulting in more than 200 people being killed by the security forces.

At the time of writing President Assad has not resigned but has responded with both concession and coercion. On the one hand, he installed a new cabinet, which pledged to lift the emergency law, abolish the state security court and allow peaceful demonstrations. On the other hand, the security forces have also fired on demonstrators, and they arrested a prominent opposition figure and former political prisoner just after the cabinet agreed to rescind emergency rule. Security officers are immune from prosecution for any crime committed in the line of duty. So far there is little sign of real democracy or freedom emerging from the unrest.

The Christians in Syria are deeply concerned about these developments. While the Assad regime is authoritarian and presides over a strict police state, it has been good for the Christians and the other minorities. A return of Sunni majority rule could lead to their violent suppression, and in the worst case even to an anti-Christian bloodbath similar to that in Iraq.

● **Tunisia** is the most likely candidate among the affected countries for some kind of real democracy. It is the most secular of the Arab states and has a significant middle class and civil society. Ben Ali resigned quickly, and following his departure a campaign of mass civil disobedience forced the interim government to make significant reforms and announce national elections. However, few structures have been put in place to eliminate corruption, and the courts and the police still need reforming. Some pro-democracy campaigners are concerned that the army may feel forced to intervene to stabilise the country.

However, although at least 44 political parties have registered so far for the elections, the main Islamist party, al-Nahda (which was banned under Ben Ali), is one of the most likely to succeed. Unlike the disorganised revolutionary protesters, al-Nahda is well organised as a political party, and it is hoping to secure 30 to 35 per cent of the vote. Observers predict constitutional battles once the elections are over and that al-Nahda will press for a more rigorous imposition of Islamic law.

There are very few indigenous Christians in Tunisia, many of them isolated or secret believers. While political reform would be welcome in principle, a more fervently Islamic regime could turn violently against them.

● **Libya** is the country most likely to replace one totalitarian system with another. It is a tribal state that Gaddafi managed to unite only by smashing all the principal institutions of the state and civil society. The rebels have a government in waiting, and they have called in the support of a coalition that includes the West, thus transforming internal dissent into a major international conflict. If Gaddafi is finally removed, Islamist militants will most likely gain prominent positions in the new Libyan military and security services. There are very few indigenous Christians in Libya, all of them converts from Islam, and they are often vulnerable and isolated. The

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## The contribution of Western governments to the developing crisis in the region has so far been neither consistent nor constructive.

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violence and political instability puts them at still greater risk.

● **Bahrain** is unique in the Arab world in that a majority Shia population, who are poor and disempowered, are ruled by a powerful Sunni monarchy that has favoured the Sunni community. After the outbreak of unrest the government offered a modest reform, but this was rejected by the reform-

ists. As a result their movement was accused of promoting Shia sectarianism and Iranian interests, and Saudi and UAE forces entered the country to bolster the regime and brutally repressed the dissent. The indigenous Christian community in Bahrain is very small, although it enjoys greater freedom than local Christians in most of the Gulf States. As the revolution threatens to mushroom into a regional conflict between Sunni and Shia Islam, its position is becoming increasingly precarious.

● **Yemen** is falling apart and descending into chaos. The main competitors for power are President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his party, the Islamist opposition (linked to the Muslim Brotherhood), and protesters demanding democracy. Tens of thousands have been on the streets, and many have been killed by the security forces and competing factions. A Shia rebellion in the North, on the border of (Sunni) Saudi Arabia, is adding to the instability, along with a secession movement in the South that is open to influence by al-Qaeda. Tribalism is still a powerful force in the country.

Yemen is more likely than any other Arab country to fall into chaos and become a failed state in which many factions will fight each other in an endless cycle of violence. Al-Qaeda will be the big winner in this scenario. The very few Yemeni believers already have to practise their faith secretly for fear of severe reprisals, and converts from Islam face arrest and torture. If full-scale civil war breaks out, they may find themselves caught in the middle, with everyone against them.

● **In Jordan** the monarchy enjoys popular support and religious legitimacy among the East Bank Jordanians, although the Palestinians are less loyal. Recent protests have challenged the established order with demands for a constitutional monarchy. The Islamic Action Front, the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, is playing an active part in the opposition. The King has appointed



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a new Prime Minister to preside over a programme of reform. The monarchy styles itself as the protector of the country's Christian minority, and although conditions are not always easy for Christians in Jordan (especially converts), the prospect of greater Islamist influence in government is even more alarming for the churches.

● In **Morocco** King Mohammed VI has managed to quieten the unrest by announcing comprehensive constitutional reform and promising to give up some power to a Prime Minister elected by parliament. It is yet to be seen whether he can establish a modern constitutional monarchy while reaffirming the sacred nature of his kingship. Christians in Morocco enjoy a measure of freedom; the political future is too uncertain to assess their prospects under a reformed or new regime.

## The role of the West

The contribution of Western governments to the developing crisis in the region has so far been neither consistent nor constructive. In Egypt it abandoned its long-time ally Mubarak after he lost the support of key interest groups, and also applauded the fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia, but it has continued to give support to a similarly repressive regime in Bahrain, probably to safeguard its own military and oil interests. Its military involvement in Libya was ostensibly to prevent a massacre, but it has held back from similar adventures in Syria and Yemen, where hundreds have been killed.

In Syria, traditionally hostile to the US, the West is believed to be encouraging the revolutionary movement, thus risking a repeat of the Iraq scenario, when its removal of an authoritarian regime led to brutal sectarian violence. In Libya it apparently hoped to achieve a quick victory, but the resulting stalemate threatens to draw it into another military and political minefield like Afghanistan. Its interventions have aroused the hostility of Saudi Arabia (despite its failure to criticise or challenge Saudi repression), which resents its assumption of the role of the world's policeman.

The West has largely ignored the complicated nature of the Middle East and the different conditions prevailing in each nation. It has also misjudged the forces pressing for democratic reform, supposing first that these are the dominant players in the region, and secondly that "democracy" can mean the same in an Arab and Muslim context as it does in a Western one.

Most importantly, perhaps, the West has ignored the powerful hold of Islam in its various forms on the great majority of Arabs. It has opened the way for Sunni Islamists gradually to take over power in Egypt and Tunisia, while strengthening the role of Shia forces allied to Iran in Bahrain and Yemen. Its weakening of staunch allies such as Jordan and Morocco and its encouragement of instability in various countries are likely to benefit these movements more than anyone else.

## What of the churches?

In none of the countries discussed above can Christians be confident that the changes resulting from current unrest will be to their advantage. Of course, if it proves possible to establish a genuine liberal democracy

in any of these places, they can hope to enjoy greater freedom from restrictions and harassment, and something nearer to equal rights with the Muslim majority. But the obstacles to such a political system are formidable, even in the more secular states.

"Democracy" in the Middle East and North Africa is more likely to favour Islamists and may well lead to the establishing of more strongly Islamic regimes. In this scenario Christians may find themselves suffering even greater discrimination than they did under the authoritarian but largely secular governments of the past. Worse still, they may face a much fuller imposition of sharia law, further restricting their worship and witness and putting the lives of converts in still greater danger.

Finally, the growing instability of the Middle East and North Africa also puts its Christians in peril. Often perceived as allies of the West, they are easy targets of hostility from both sides of any conflict, and when law and order breaks down they are left without protection from forces that would like to eradicate them altogether. Many Iraqi Christians fled from violence in their homeland to Syria and Jordan. Where will Christians go if the whole region becomes toxic for them?

- 1 Kenneth M. Pollack, "Winds of Change in the Middle East", Brookings Institution, 9 March 2011.
- 2 Michael Slackman, "Islamist Group Is Rising Force in a New Egypt", The New York Times, 24 March 2011.
- 3 "Muslim Publics Divided on Hamas and Hezbollah", Pew Global Attitudes Projects, 2 December 2010, <http://pewglobal.org/2010/12/02/muslims-around-the-world-divided-on-hamas-and-hezbollah> (viewed 19 April 2011). See also Barry Rubin, "Poll Reveals Frightening Popularity of Revolutionary Islamism", Rubin Reports, 20 December 2010, <http://rubinreports.blogspot.com/2010/12/poll-reveals-frightening-popularity-of.html> (viewed 19 April 2011).

## FILM

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film-work—almost documentary style in its manner. The acting by the two main characters is so chillingly real and excellent that one could almost forget this is actually a film and that these were people considered by others to be simple working class ordinary Australians. In one scene, children are shown riding past on their bikes while a killing is being conducted inside the ordinary suburban house. Even "the church" makes an appearance, as the main family are shown at a local community church service. The singing and community focus of the church stand in vivid contrast to what really goes on in their lives. When asked to share something—the mother simply stammers how much she loves her family and the boys.

Some critics have felt the film has no redeeming qualities, but then why should there be any? Watching a film like this is confirmation for me of the limited value of liberal theology today. It does not understand sin, and simply cannot deal with the depths of total depravity that humans can sink to. No amount of moral re-education can deal ultimately with evil only the one true living Lord Jesus Christ.

*Peter Bentley*

# A new sense of urgency

*ACC and Wesley Mission sponsored Andrew Chin, Evangelism & Missions Pastor at Wesley International Congregation, to attend the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation in Cape Town in late 2010. After taking time for reflection, Andrew now presents the lessons of this very large conference which drew 4,000 leaders from 198 countries. His comprehensive Power-Point presentation on the Lausanne Congress is available on the ACC website.*

### Tackling the task of world evangelisation

A child once asked: "How do you eat an elephant?" The wise man responded: "One bite at a time".

At the Lausanne Congress knowing there would be vast amounts of knowledge I prayed for guidance to capture the primary lessons God would have me meditate on. Here are the challenges I believe God is putting before our local congregation, and the wider Church.

### Reaching the unreached

Firstly, I believe the Australian Church must more intensely engage with reaching the unreached (people groups that do not yet have a self-propagating gospel movement that is sustainable without external help).

There are approximately 16,596 people groups in the entire world. Of these, approximately 6,872 are still considered unreached by this definition (2.8 billion of the world population of 6.88 billion)! 41% of the global population is no small number—this situation can be considered nothing short of an emergency!

Unfortunately, little of the Church's resources, either people or money, are apportioned for global missions. Of the small percentage apportioned, a minute amount is set aside for work amongst the unreached people groups.

Jesus said to the disciples: "And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" Acts 1:8. Yet it required persecution to force them out of the comfort of Jerusalem to bring the gospel to Judea and Samaria. It required a repeated vision, interpretation and the demonstration of the Spirit's power to convince Peter that the gospel was also for the Gentiles. Only in the church of Antioch do we find a group of believers who, in the middle of worship and prayer, hear the call of God to bring the gospel beyond their region and willingly respond to this call.

What will it require for us to sense the urgency and better engage with reaching the unreached peoples of the world? At the Congress, it was reported that some of the most effective strategies to reach the unreached were the Jesus video, expansive Bible translation, Church planting and storytelling. Storytelling emphasises training in communicating biblical stories in the language of the culture as a way of spreading the gospel to people groups that have little to no translation of the bible in their own language.

There are simple things we can do. Committing to

prayer for the unreached is one. As we pray and encourage our churches to pray, God is responding by doing things that are not humanly possible by the power of His Holy Spirit. But another is to engage with ministries, which work amongst the unreached people groups and support them.

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**How can we possibly saturate the world, let alone a nation, let alone a state or even a suburb for the gospel of Christ, on our own?**

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This responsibility is not for missions agencies alone or Christians who live geographically closer to the unreached groups. It is the responsibility of every Christian community to engage in. Given our multi-cultural experience and the wealth of

our nation, I believe the Australian Church has a unique role to play in reaching the unreached. What part can your church play?

### Partnering in the gospel

Secondly, we need to work together to multiply the gospel work in our communities.

Patrick Fung, international director of Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) challenged the delegates on partnership. He explained that partnering with others requires a willingness to give and to receive; humility and reciprocity. Quoting Samuel Azariah at the Edinburgh 1910 gathering for world evangelisation, when asked if there was anything more that the Western Church could do to assist, he said: "We ask for one more thing, give us friends". In other words, please consider us as more than just as poor people who could be helped by your assistance, consider us as your friends.

In and of ourselves, within our own silos there is so little that we can do. How can we possibly saturate the world, let alone a nation, let alone a state or even a suburb for the gospel of Christ, on our own? No matter how much finance, people or influence we have, complete Gospel transformation of a city requires partnership and teamwork. It requires the Church in its various shapes and forms to join hands in prayer and outreach in order for high-potency gospel transformation to take place. In Jesus high-priestly prayer we discover a gospel proclamation power inherent in the oneness of God's people.

The Redeemer Presbyterian church in New York came to this conclusion which is why their work does far more than promote the work of their own church. They seek the transformation of New York and the world by engaging in active partnership with other churches and movements. As a result they have generously assisted in planting churches outside of their own denomination.

Our congregation has been able to engage with gospel

# AFTER LAUSANNE

work far beyond our capacity simply through supporting and engaging with ministries which are able to do things that we simply cannot. As a result, our people have grown more and sown more. More people have been saved and impacted by the gospel as a result. Do we deserve a pat on the back? Of course not! This is the power of partnering in the gospel.

Who could you work with for a local gospel impact? What churches/agencies might you connect with for global evangelisation? What can we do to foster the unity of the Body of Christ for gospel proclamation?

## Local evangelism to the diaspora

Thirdly, the Congress spoke of the global trend of a "borderless world". The latest research suggests that approximately 200 million people live and work outside their homelands. Their movements are for a number of reasons: migration, persecution, study, work.

In Australia we have a continual significant stream of people from overseas, many of whom come from nations where the gospel is not as easily accessible.

In Australia alone, between 2009-2010, visas were granted for 270,000 international students. Within the top ten countries were China, India and Indonesia, Nepal and Vietnam: nations within which there are still countless numbers of unreached peoples.

Many would not hear the gospel in their own countries, yet whilst in a foreign land, there is a great openness to new relationships, hospitality and care; and a greater openness to the gospel than usual. By the grace of God, these students could potentially be the most effective missionaries to their home countries upon completing their studies because of their professional skills, and lack of language or culture barriers.

Just recently we partnered with the English language centre next door to our church. We explained we were a church and wanted to help their students in whatever way we could. They responded extremely positively. Just recently we organised our first "Coffee Corner" with a dozen of their students simply to build friendships, shout them a coffee, and help them practise their English. It's a small start but it's amazing where a prayer and a step of faith can lead!

What opportunities might there be in your local area? Who could you work with to bring the gospel to the diaspora? There are so many opportunities: university ministries, English language centres, immigration detention centres, natural networks and local community activities. The field is ripe for harvest.

## Serving the poor

Lastly, a number of alarming statistics on poverty were raised at Lausanne:

One billion people live on less than one dollar a day. Around 24,000 children die every day of the most preventable of causes. Approximately one billion are starving. One billion have no clean water. Approximately 27 million are living as slaves. Over 50 million children are orphaned in Africa alone.

It is not enough to know these things. Something must be done and we must play our part.

Our nation is not exempt from the effects of poverty. Recent Wesley Mission research into homelessness discovered that approximately 100,000 Australians are homeless on any given night; 56% homeless for more

than a year; 30% homeless for more than 5 years; 71% cite the housing crisis pathway as the primary reason they are homeless. Of those who are homeless 50% struggle with drug abuse; 42% have a mental illness and 32% report that they abuse alcohol.

How must we the Church engage with these needs with greater urgency and resolve?

What shocked me most was discovering that approximately 90% of the global Church is comprised of the urban poor. Why was it a shock? Because the New Testament gives a resounding message that we are to care for the poor, but especially poor believers.

Matthew 25 and James 2 alone demonstrate the seriousness of the charge to care for our siblings in Christ, as it authenticates the genuineness of our faith with salvific ramifications!

These are our brothers and sisters in Christ who we share the same spiritual blood as us. Would we neglect our own siblings if they were in such need?

Richard Stearns in his book *The Hole in our Gospel* wrote an adaptation of Matthew 25 that was particularly moving...

*"I was hungry while you had all you needed; I was thirsty but you drank bottled water; I was a stranger and you wanted me deported; I needed clothes, but you needed more clothes; I was sick but you pointed out the behaviours that led to my sickness; I was in prison and you said I was getting what I deserved.*

*Many will ask: "When did we see you hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick or in prison?" Jesus will reply: "For whenever you did not do it for the least of these my brothers, you did not do it for me."*

How will we respond to the needs of the poor? The challenge given at Lausanne was for the Church to build and deepen its sense of holistic mission; to consider renewed ways of embodying hope and exercising love to poor communities; and to stir a renewed vocation within the Church toward active solidarity with the poor.

According to President Jimmy Carter the most serious and prevailing universal problem the world is facing is: "The growing chasm between the richest and poorest people on earth. Citizens of the ten wealthiest countries are now seventy five times richer than those who live in the ten poorest ones, and the separation is increasing every year, not only between nations but also within them. The results of this disparity are root causes of most of the world's unresolved problems, including starvation, illiteracy, environmental degradation, violent conflict, and unnecessary illnesses that range from Guinea worm to HIV/AIDS."

Considering the wealth of the Australian Church and the wealth of our nation, we have a Christian obligation and duty to consider urgently what Christ is calling us to do in response to these needs.

How can we challenge our churches towards simplicity in order to minister to, and stand with the poor? How do we fulfil our responsibility to our brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering in extreme poverty?

There are many needs in our nation and our world, but taking the advice of the wise man to the child, let's tackle this "One bite at a time". I believe that together by God's matchless grace, unlimited power and supernatural provision that scores of unreached, displaced and poor will be made whole as we partner with one another in power of Christ to bring the whole gospel to the whole world.



# Closing our credibility gap

*Rod James on Making our Christian walk more like our Christian talk*

**T**here's an old parental saying, "Don't do what I do, do what I say!" Human beings have always had a problem with walking the talk. That is partly because it is much easier to say something than to do it.

However, it is also because we are prone to self-deception in that we have two levels of belief. One is expressed by what we say, and the other by what we do. For example, we may say that we believe in obeying the speed limit, but our driving may reveal that we really believe it is okay to drive above the speed limit. The fact is that our practised beliefs reveal more of our real convictions than our espoused or spoken beliefs.

## **The credibility gap of the people of God**

The people of God in all ages have not been immune to this character flaw, as the following Scriptures reveal.

In Israel

*... this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men. Isaiah 29:13*

*And they come to you (i.e. to Ezekiel, the prophet) as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain." Ezekiel 33:31*

When Jesus came, the credibility gap was probably his main criticism of the people of God.

*The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you — but not what they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues. Matthew 23:2-6*

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. Matthew 23:27*

The word 'hypocrite' comes from a word that means 'an actor's mask'. It refers to someone who puts on a mask and plays a role. It would seem that when Jesus came, seven hundred years after Isaiah, it was still a case



of 'same old same old'.

*And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,*

*"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me". Mark 7:6*

Paul saw the same problem for Israel as the people of God: *But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God [18] and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself?*

*While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." Romans 2:17-24*

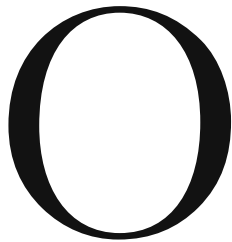
Here we see a terrible and sobering truth: it is because of the lack of the credibility of God's people that God's name is discredited among the nations! In Jesus' words, "They preach but they do not practise".

## **In the church**

*Peter foresaw that this same problem would occur among Christians. And many will follow (the false prophets and teachers') sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed (i.e. among non-believers). 2 Peter 2:2*

Jesus' strongest condemnation was reserved for those who don't practise what they preach. The word 'hypocrites' is used 18 times in the Bible and all but one of these is in the words of Jesus. He warns us earnestly that, as Christians, we will not be immune from self-deception and religious falsity.

*How can you say to your brother, "Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye," when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. Luke 6:42*



f all the books in the New Testament the one I find the least attractive is that of my namesake, James. It almost seems that James, the half-brother of Jesus, was a bit grumpy and annoyed when he wrote this letter.

His fellow Christians, without realising it or being concerned, were not walking the talk.

*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. James 2:14-17*

James points out to us that faith is real and credible, not when it is spoken only, but when it is spoken and practised.

*Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. James 2:21-23*

### Christians today

Sadly, the modern world is littered with glaring examples of the Christian credibility gap.

- In the 1930s most of the German churches endorsed Hitler and the National Socialists. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote his famous book *The Cost of Discipleship* to counter this terrible inconsistency.

- The USA has one of the highest church attendance rates of any nation, and most of its Presidents have been practising Christians.

Sadly, the massive military invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and the terrible abuses and torture committed in the Abu Ghraib prison and at Guantanamo have left the Muslim world with the view that Christians today are the same invading militarists that they were during the Crusades of the 12th century.

- Many Christian congregations in Australia come late to worship, and then sing "I love You, Lord, I worship You, I obey You, I give my life to You". Clearly the practised belief does not gel with the spoken belief, and God, who looks on the heart, sees the discrepancy.

- It is so easy for churches to be really looking after themselves, and, mission statements to the contrary, to be really concerned about their finances, buildings and programs, and the ever-present need for 'bums on pews'.

- Just as the Pharisees tithed the herbs in their garden but "neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness" (Matthew 23:23), so we as believers can observe the easier aspects of the Christian life (like going to church, and putting something in the offering) while overlooking the bigger things that really count (like what we do with all of our money, of the whole of our life.)

In all of these situations Jesus' words ring in our ears: "They preach, but they do not practise."

### The true God

There is a link between the biblical words 'true', 'faithful', 'real', 'genuine'. They all come from the same root word. The whole thing about 'the true God' is that He is utterly genuine and true.

*And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. 1 John 5:20*

### Jesus is the real deal

Jesus is the one who is "faithful and true" (Revelation 3:14,19:11), and his moral glory was seen "fleshed out" in his human life.

- born among the poor,
- spent his life helping the sick and oppressed,
- opposed the hypocrisy of the religious and political leaders,
- got into trouble for being the "friend of sinners".

It was Jesus who said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends" (John 15:13), and by his own death and resurrection he made a way into heaven for all who are serious about going there. And a Christian is someone who is "in him who is true". ...*and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. 1 John 5:20 ...as he is so also are we in this world. 1 John 4:17*

Just as Jesus is "the faithful and true witness" (Revelation 3:14), so the credibility of our witness is based upon whether we are the real deal. Like it or not, we are witnessing 24/7, like "a city set on a hill" we Christians cannot be hidden (Matthew 5:24). We are, therefore, to be... *blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world. Philippians 2:15*

### Grace and truth

All of this is a big ask for sinners like us! But when Jesus came "and dwelt among us", his glory was of one who was "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Wonderfully, our fallen nature can be the occasion of our most powerful witness. In our witness to unbelievers, we as objects of Jesus' grace are to model the repentance, gratitude, humility and faith that God is seeking from all people.

A humble, penitent and thankful spirit (rather than a superior, self-righteous and angry spirit) is part of the winsome character that persuades people to examine the state of their own souls before God.

Those who are thus winsome will surely win some! They will have credibility as the servants of him who is 'faithful and true'. They will lead people to say, "Truly, this is the real deal!"

*Rod is a UCA Minister and chairs the SA ACC Movement.*

# Finding John Wesley

PAUL LANGKAMP on a movie that strangely warms the heart

Costume drama, such as the movie *Wesley*, has constraints: It has to faithfully portray, dramatically engage and throw a useful, take-away point, relevant in the modern world. It is not a documentary with enlightening historical commentary. It is interpretation that subjects history to the whimsical methods of Hollywood.

The makers of *Wesley* have done that by focusing on a single idea, expressed in the subtitle, *A Heart Transformed Can Change the World*, and by basing the story on the journals of John Wesley and his brother Charles. The story then portrays the inner journey of John, as he slowly, and perhaps a little painfully, learns that God is greater than he is, and the better thing is to subject his fierce wilfulness to God—rather than subjecting others to himself: John finds the heart-warming joy that his brother Charles already knows. It covers this fifteen-year journey from the late 1720's to around 1740. In this, the purpose of the movie is Christian encouragement.

The first question is how well the movie succeeds here. The answer is quite well. Inner journeys aren't outwardly dramatic. The director John Jackman relies on unscripted interplay between Burgess Jenkins, who plays John Wesley (pictured) and Keith Harris who plays Charles, to reveal John's change of heart. Director Jackman explained in the special features on the DVD disk, "Burgess and Keith worked out in a lot of ways, this kind of banter between siblings... brotherly jabs that shows both the love and tension between the two brothers." Indeed, there are touching moments, nicely portrayed, between the brothers that reveal what might have been going on inside John.

For example, it is the relationship between the brothers that rescues the dramatically ultra-dull, but historically and theologically impor-



tant, moment of realization for John Wesley: a dark room in Aldersgate, filled with several dozen puffed-hat women and breeches-wearing men, sitting upright on straight wooden chairs and silently listening to slowly and tunelessly read lines from, by then, an already two-centuries old book, *Luther's Preface to Romans*. At that point all we see is Wesley's eyes become as wide as his smile. Of course, in this drama, Wesley immediately spills the beans to his brother, "I felt my heart strangely warmed." That moment on May 24, 1738 has always been an illuminating reference point for Methodists, and it might have happened just as the movie depicts it.

Other things make *Wesley* a proper, interesting, full movie: the presentation of the historical aspects – the arcane language, the dress, the manners and deportment so important in drama – seems to have been gotten acceptably right, even though it's low budget. And certain historical people—Wesley's mother Susannah, so important in Wesley's spiritual development—get into the picture, as well as references to Wesley's new methods of evangelism and the ruckus they caused in church and society. There is also a long lingering on incidents with women and the law in Georgia in the early 1730's.

The other question is how well *Wesley* represents the man John Wesley and his faith. The answer perhaps is that *Wesley* best serves as an introductory appetizer to learn more and to be encouraged in faith in Christ by John Wesley's life and witness.

For example, the opening scene claims dramatic license: It's Wesley's father Samuel, rector in Epworth, complaining to Susannah while the

rectory burns, while the young boy John sleeps. That is accurate. Samuel was a complainer, and the boy John was snatched from flames on Feb. 9th 1709. Now, in the interests of drama, *Wesley* shows the older John Wesley sweating during sleep in recall of this incident: it supports a modern view that early childhood crisis causes adult confusion. In fact, from the start, all, including Susannah and Samuel, understood John's snatching as an act of God's providence. John himself seemed to have seen the event as a sign that the Lord had a special, noble purpose for his life<sup>1</sup>.

This point opens a door to a world in which God is naturally seen to be active and into the mind of a man described as "complex and sophisticated – a man who was governed by his heart as much as by his mind, by tempers and dispositions as much as by logic."<sup>2</sup> So, in the point about Wesley's heart-warming Aldersgate experience wasn't quite the sudden grasping of the act of faith. Ten years before, in the late 1720's, John Wesley already knew the nature of faith to include assent to doctrine, trust in God, and a spiritual sense to discern the things of God<sup>3</sup>. Even after that, Wesley struggled long with reigning sin; and that found a resolution at Aldersgate. It was this long development, the interplay of Wesley with events and people in his life that led to his many useful ideas, scripturally supported, about the development of faith in a Christian.

This fine multi-layered development of life a faithful man, church leader and theologian is lost when it is made to serve the modern demand for sloganised religion. But the modern viewer, interested in further understanding Christian faith, may well be enticed to read further about John Wesley. One good introduction is Kenneth J. Collins' *A Real Christian The Life of John Wesley*.

<sup>1</sup> Collins, Kenneth J., *A Real Christian The Life of John Wesley*, 1999, p.14

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p.17

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.23

*Paul Langkamp is an ACC member, formerly in South Korea, and now in Cairns, Queensland.*



## SA Prayer retreat

On May 12<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> the ACC SA PrayerNet once again sponsored a Prayer Retreat at Halbury in the Mid North of South Australia. A special time was had by all, as we delved into the scriptures, shared ideas and encouragement in prayer.

As we delved into our core reading from Habakkuk 3 : 1 – 3, it gave us some helpful clues, as to how we could “Dig Deeper” into our relationship with God through prayer and through journaling. Combined with the cleansing of the water of God’s word, the results are life changing. At the beginning of our retreat we were challenged as we were asked to ask ourselves questions: How can I enrich my relationship with the Lord through prayer? Am I at this time positioning myself to hear God speak to me? Is there anything that would hinder my walk with the Lord?

Brian Scott spoke to us about how unique and special we all are to God, God creating us uniquely, distinctly and intimately. God loves us individually, and has adopted us into his family and cheers us on in the race of life. We were encouraged to give ourselves regular spiritual checkups and taught about how to “Keep Focus in our life and in prayer”.

Gaynor Bowden from Kanga-



roo Island South Australia, gave a personal testimony to the “Power of Prayer”, “The Power of Protective Prayer” and “The Power of United Prayer of believers”. She told us to always pray because we never know what God will do and He answers prayer in four ways: Yes, No, Wait and Surprise.

Luke reports in 5:16 how Jesus “often withdrew to the wilderness for

prayer”. It’s no exaggeration to say that Jesus went on retreat often, in fact. If the Son of God, the one who experienced unique intimacy with the Father, needed to withdraw from busyness, then we need to do the same.

If you do not have the luxury of privacy in your own home and work without interruption, a planned retreat can be a time of great encouragement. Personal retreats can help us, as we withdraw from our busy lives and ministries, to take a closer look at what God is doing in your life. *Mandy Scott*

### ACC AGM and Conference Notice

Notice of meeting and Agenda for the Annual General Meeting and Second Annual Conference of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc. (within the Uniting Church in Australia), to be held on Thursday 8 September 2011 at Brimbank Anglican Church, Ely Court and Keilor Park Drive, Keilor East, Vic, commencing at 1.30 pm.

1. Opening and welcome
2. Apologies
3. Approval of the minutes of the 2010 AGM
4. Matters arising
5. Financial accounts for 2010-11 and Budget for 2011-2012
6. Election of Chair and National Council
7. Report of the National Council
8. Reports and Business from the Boards and Commissions
9. Proposals
10. Other business
11. Adjournment or Close

## Thank You

Thank you to all ACC Members and Supporters for your support in 2010-11.

The renewals for supporting and congregational membership for the financial year 2011-12 will be sent out in early July. The ACC Council is very grateful for your continued support and the messages of Christian encouragement.

We would like to particularly thank the members who have been able to provide a donation with their membership, and those who have been able to contribute to the

Growth Fund. Some people did not want a receipt for their membership and/or donation, and while many members have been contacted in different ways (at meetings, by email or phone), please be assured of the grateful thanks of the movement you help to sustain and encourage. The support of confessing Christians is vital in ensuring ACC develops a network of fellowship and encouragement and reaches out to Uniting Church members throughout the whole of Australia.

# 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 *ACC Catalyst* 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.confessing-congregations.com/assembly/members/individual-members/>

Interested congregational contacts please contact the office or see the website.

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

# DIARY

## What happens next:

- June 17: NSW ACC Movement Executive meeting
- June 24 - 26: Combined ACC and Hope Network Gathering and Seminar: *Christ's Living Gospel - Today*: Port Augusta
- July 18: ACC National Council Meeting
- July 28: ACC Board of Communication meeting – Newtown.
- July 22: SA ACC Movement AGM – Glenunga UC. 7 pm.
- August 29–31: Oxygen 11, the First National Conference for Pastors and Leaders, in Redfern, Sydney. Speaker: John Piper (ACC NSW is helping to sponsor members to attend – please contact the office. For more information see: <http://bit.ly/k5A5gO>)
- September 8–10, 2011: ACC National Conference, at Brimbank Anglican Church, East Keilor, Melbourne). The conference commences at 1.30 pm on Thursday 8 September 2011 and concludes with lunch on Saturday 10 September.
- October 4: ACC Doctrine and Theology Commission
- November 14: ACC National Council meeting

## Consider making a Bequest to the ACC

It has been wonderful to see the support and hope evidenced for the ACC appeal, and in particular the enthusiasm for a National Director. Some members have indicated that they would like to make a larger contribution to the future work of the ACC, but are not presently able to do this, and thought one way was to provide for the ACC in their wills.

This is a very helpful suggestion, as people can contribute to the on-going and long-term work of the confessing movement. All you need to do is specify in your will the name of the organisation, and the amount to be provided:

For example, "I give .... to the Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc. For the general purposes thereof."



The Board meets

# A local church movie

## The Board – the heart and soul of the matter.

A rather novel short film is now being distributed as a DVD with additional Christian evangelistic resources and commentary and feedback from the actors. The trend in Christian cinema is confirmed again as this is another local church production – Bethesda Baptist in Brownsburg, Indiana produced *The Board* as a tool for the wider church and have demonstrated its use in evangelism, especially through inviting people to view the film and discuss the plot and issues.

The script was written by church member Gary Varvel, the editorial cartoonist for the *Indianapolis Star*. His film-maker son Brett Varvel, directed the movie, and over 60 members of the church took part as actors, crew and technical staff in the short period of filming in 2008.

The setting is familiar to any church member – a meeting. Here, different parts of what is termed the soul (the film does not consider the soul-body issues, but rather I saw the use of the soul as an overall term for the oneness of the person.

The following take part as members of the Board:

Mr Mind, Mr Memory, Mr Emotion, Mr Heart, Mr Will and Mr Conscience.

They hold meetings, take minutes and generally have an on-going discussion about their life, how they make decisions and the consequences of the decisions, or how to avoid them. The key decision the Board struggle with is their response to the gospel. At a point they were offered

the gospel, but it was rejected. They preferred their own ethics and values, which allowed them to be seen as a good person, and basically get away with what they think are the little inconsistencies and problems in their life; though Mr Conscience tries to highlight elements, other members downplay issues of significance. Eventually though the questions became too much and the sand their life is built on begins to shift and slide. They struggle with a reasonable answer for what I see as the eternal problem for humanity that Paul posed so well in Romans: “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.” (Romans 7:15),

Each part of the Board is given a strategic role and lines to enhance their position in the decision-making process and while slightly stereotyped it works to raise the points of dilemma.

The film is well-produced—it is certainly more than an amateur production. The use of the limited special effects is effective, and not overly done, and the use would bring some themes immediately to mind for the Christian viewer. It is a bit more of a lateral or unusual film than what some people may consider, but I thought this was helpful as it will not immediately meet your expectations.

In terms of its use, I see it more of value for a men’s group or event. It could be shown and then a discussion developed, but it would need to be led by a good facilitator. I also believe it would be helpful to move away from the didactic style which some may like to adopt. Allowing more personal feedback about the intrinsic questions

which are at the heart of the film could help people to echo Paul’s cry:

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7: 24-25)

*Heritage Movies are offering to send a FREE copy of the film on DVD to pastors or leaders of local churches [www.movieschangepeople.com/campaigns/board](http://www.movieschangepeople.com/campaigns/board)*

Peter Bentley

## Snowtown (rated MA)

I have occasionally mentioned a film that I have not recommended for viewing. *Snowtown* fits into that category – it is certainly compelling, but I believe it is not for most people. It is a brutal and disturbing film, but then that is the story itself. It has already received substantial coverage, especially in South Australia, and this will continue over the next twelve months, as it is likely to receive many awards.

If you have not heard of *Snowtown*, I can only presume you were overseas for all of 1999. This event dominated news reporting for several months and this then continued during the trials of the perpetrators. Sadly the small country town in mid-North South Australia is now known more for its infamy as the place with ‘the bodies in the barrels’, even though only one person was actually killed in the town itself.

This film, the first feature for director Justin Kurzel, is a dark, and worrisome story of manipulation and the development of evil. I will not mention the names of those who were involved in the killings—God knows who they are. They are more than dysfunctional, they live and breathe disorder, and the main leader is clearly a psychopath. In these situations one cannot help but wonder about the “sins of the father”, as people are led along to commit even more acts of terror and de-humanisation. A survivor of any form of abuse would have a difficult time sitting through this film. The viewer is spared seeing all the murders, though your imagination can easily fill in the gaps in the escalating chaos. The people are simply vehicles for the depraved to enjoy.

In one sense there is no defined order to the film, but that is the nature of this story and the form of *continued page 12*