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ACC Catalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



Kevin Rudd's U turn

NICK JENSEN PAGE 9

The DNA of the
universe

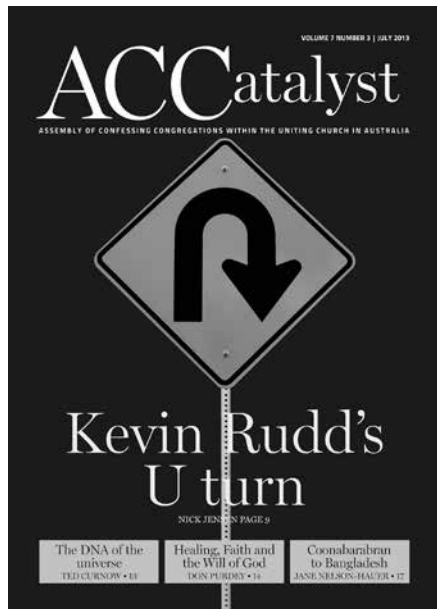
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Cover illustration DNY59/istockphoto.com

EDITORIAL

Rudd Redux

If you are tempted to see 2013 as a replay of 2007, electorally, with the return of Kevin Rudd it is worth reading Nick Jensen's piece in this edition. Because despite the leaders of both major parties being Christian again, some conservative Christians might be wishing they still had an atheist as leader of the Labor party. Irony abounds.

The issue Nick Jensen highlights is Kevin Rudd's change of mind on the issue of same-sex marriage. For some that will be a gamechanger. For others it will just be one issue to be weighed up among many others.

Will there be many Christians

who normally vote Labor who will be swayed by this issue. Or would it be true to say that those who regard this as an issue that might determine their vote are just about all within the coalition camp anyway?

Unlike our brothers and sisters in the US, Australian evangelicals do not seem to be rusted on to one particular political party. I wonder how ACC members vote? A large country contingent, and an older demographic would probably be good news for Tony Abbott. But then the ACC is full of surprises for this editor, anyway.

John Sandeman

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This week I had several days of irritations. I haven't had major issues to deal with, but a number of smaller things that have taken time and been frustrating and if you let them, those things can leave you feeling discouraged.

But also this week, in my spare time I have been sorting through photos of my life, from babyhood to adulthood. I know it's not a good idea to live in the past, but I have found it quite therapeutic. There's a photo of me learning to crawl, then I learnt to walk and to write and ride a bike. I've overcome a lot of obstacles in my life and learnt how to handle many challenges. If I could deal with all of that, then I can deal with a few small issues now.

More significantly than remembering what I have done, is looking back and remembering what God has done for me. He made me unique. He was with me as I learnt and grew. He kept me safe as a youngster when I fell into a flooded creek. He drew me back to himself when I unwisely tried to go off on my own path with-

Looking back



out him. He let me feel him near me when I was frightened. When I asked him to come into my life, he did and forgave my sin and called me his child. God has been faithful right

through my life so there's no reason why he should abandon me this week when I need him.

The Israelites were exhorted to remember what God did for them when he delivered them from Egypt. They were supposed to celebrate it each year, so that they would remember God's great power and love for them as a nation. If they had done this, they may not have been so tempted to run after powerless idols.

And as Christians, we also look back. Remembering Jesus' death and resurrection should be an encouragement to us. If Jesus had the power to defeat death and sin then he ought to be able to handle my weakness and sins and problems. If Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, he ought to be able to answer my prayers.

What Jesus did at Easter is not just a memory or a story for us; it's a reality that transforms our lives today, and gives us courage and passion as we seek to serve God in whatever situations we may find ourselves.

Robyn



Wesley's Chapel, City Road, London

Methodist story told

A museum telling the story of Methodism's immense influence on Britain and the world opened in central London on Saturday 25th May. Situated in the crypt of the "Cathedral of Methodism", Wesley's Chapel, the Museum of Methodism promises to take visitors on a journey of spiritual discovery.

It is a project that has brought together some of the UK's finest craftsmen and storytellers. The architects, John McAslan & Partners, and the designers, Barker Langham, came straight from transforming King's Cross Station and the Royal Opera House.

BBC presenter, Huw Edwards, narrates the museum's seven-minute audio-visual presentation, and the latest technology, including tablet computers, provides interactive ac-

cess to major archival documents, such as John Wesley's sermons and Charles Wesley's hymns.

The museum is pioneering the use of heritage to further the Church's mission. In the telling of Methodism's dynamic responses to poverty and social ills, it hopes to fire faith in our time. Three permanent exhibitions will be available.

- "The Warmed Heart" tells the story of John Wesley's conversion. His Field Bible is one of the objects on display in a contemplative space.

- "Mr Wesley's New Chapel" traces the history of Wesley's Chapel using a series of maps of Finsbury and Islington, the earliest of which dates to 1746.

- "Connecting the Connexion" illustrates John's Wesley's visionary *continued page 4*

Robert Iles Lecture 2013

Date: Wednesday, July 24, 7.30pm
Location: Burnside City Uniting Church, 384 Portrush Rd, Tasmore, Adelaide.

Topic: Apologetics in a Media-dominated World.

Speaker: Revd Prof David Wilkinson (Professor and Principal of St. John's College, Durham in the Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University)

Before working in Durham as a theologian, Professor Wilkinson was a scientist and then a Method-

ist minister in inner city Liverpool. He is a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society and his current research involves the relationship of the Christian theology to contemporary culture, from science to pop culture.

God, Time and Stephen Hawking (Monarch, 2001), *Christian Eschatology and the Physical Universe* (T&T Clark 2010) and *The Power of the Force: The Spirituality of the Star Wars Films* (Lion, 2000) are examples of his work.

Hunter gatherings

If you are visiting the Hunter region of NSW (wider Newcastle area) keep in mind the possibility of joining in the fellowship and time of teaching that constitutes the regular gathering of ACC members who belong to the Hunter Cluster.

On Sunday 19 May Peter Bentley, our National Executive Consultant visited the Hunter Cluster at our gathering of 17 members from 7 congregations. The meeting was held at Kotara Uniting Church. Other regular places are Maitland and Booragul.

Peter spoke on "Confessing Christ today in society and the Church", a study based on Mark 8:27-38 and alerted us to the fact that our beliefs, lifestyle and actions are controlled by who we think Jesus really is. Another Peter acknowledged Him as the Christ about 2000 years ago, perhaps without fully understanding the meaning of his confession. This belief of that Peter did eventually cost him his life.

We were reminded that the way of the cross is counter to our culture, just as it was for the early Church. In the Western world, where Christianity was formerly central to or tolerated by community, there is now a growing atheism and hatred towards Christian witness. The efforts of many churches to compromise with community standards to make our faith more acceptable is not working and leads to the eventual death of the church.

As individual Christians and as ACC we are still called to witness and dialogue with those outside the church. We must be able to give clear reasons for our faith and be prepared for some persecution as we make a stand on issues such as sexual ethics, pornography, marriage and sanctity of life issues.

A spirited discussion followed and was continued during afternoon tea.

The next Cluster meeting is to be at Maitland Uniting Church (High Street) on 21 July 2013 with the visiting speaker Haydn Sennitt from Liberty Christian Ministries. (Haydn appeared on page 2 of the May 2013 issue of "Eternity" magazine).

The Liberty website has helpful information, articles and contact details: See: <http://www1.libertychristianministries.org.au/about-us/> Alton Bowen (Cluster Co-ordinator)

Making a world of difference

It is rare for a major world congress to meet in Australia, but it was a welcome meeting of the broadly-based group the World Congress of Families in May (15-18) in Sydney. I was able to attend for part of the Congress and witnessed a breadth of material and an excellent overview of research, and advocacy for the traditional understanding of marriage and family.

All the major Australian Christian family research and advocacy groups were in attendance. The program was so packed including many multiple sessions that it is hard to do it justice in a short news item, but the link at the end of the declaration will provide you with details of the varied program. Australian and international speakers, including people from other faiths simply outlined the importance and relevance of marriage and family life today.

I was especially privileged to attend a significant youth session, with seven young adults presenting in areas of ministry or service they have developed. What a testimony to the continuing work of God through his people. Some of the areas: Working for good in Hollywood (movieguide.

com); combating the sexualisation of girls; the influence and involvement of young people in the movement to support traditional marriage in France; the introduction of a new magazine for young Christian women: MICI (Made In Christ's Image); and ways to help families with media and culture today. It is helpful to read the declaration to understand the wider interests and development of the congress. The next Congress will be held in Moscow in September 2014.

Peter Bentley

Highlights of the Declaration of World Congress of Families VII Australian Technology Park, Sydney 2013

We, the delegates of the World Congress of Families VII, assembled in Sydney Australia, this 18 May 2013 affirm that the sustained prosperity and happiness of nations rests on the foundation of strong natural families....

The natural family is the most efficient way of nurturing and educating children, of looking after the health and welfare of its members, of creating a vital domestic economy, of building cohesive communities, and of extending a compassionate hand to individuals and households,

whatever their situation.

....We affirm that the productive economy is sustained by strong families, which reliably shape the virtues needed for healthy economic exchange.

...Accordingly, we declare that a family-centred economy requires the following basic framework:

- The economy should serve the family rather than the family being a servant of the economic system and the state.
- A strong domestic, household economy is a true measure of a healthy society and the basis of a robust economy;
- Economic policies should enable families to hold productive property and to be independent of the welfare state.
- Employers and governments need to respect the needs of natural families in their wage and labour policies.
- Market policies should support and encourage entrepreneurial innovation, ensure low barriers of entry into small business, and guard against excessive concentration of economic power and financial instability.
- Family-owned businesses should be encouraged as part of a market economy.

Gross Domestic Product must be defined to include the economic value of unpaid work done in the home and the community by families, so that society can recognise the contribution of this form of labour.

wcfsydney2013.org.au



Ramon Williams

WCF founder Dr Allan Carlson reads the Sydney declaration

from page 3

organisational system of societies, classes and bands. In addition to the exhibitions, there is an examination of the hagiography that grew up around John Wesley and a kitsch Ceramics Collection made up of hundreds of mugs, plates and John Wesley figurines.

The minister in charge of Wesley's Chapel and the Museum of Methodism is the Revd Leslie Griffiths, a Labour peer and broadcaster. Lord Griffiths said the museum had been completely renewed: "Wesley's Chapel is to the 70 million Methodists

spread around the world what Canterbury Cathedral is to Anglicans and the Vatican to Roman Catholics," he said. "Our new museum will release a compelling story from its chronological and denominational wraps and allow something of the genius and power which brought it to birth to touch and inspire our contemporary world. And that's why we've turned to world-renowned experts to advise, co-ordinate, design and build this amazingly beautiful facility."

Kwanglim Methodist Church in South Korea donated £630,000 to

the project. Bishop Sundo Kim said "Methodism didn't arrive in Korea until 1885 - the latest wave of a spiritual tide that began its rise in London over a hundred years before that," he said. "There's a simple reason why we've invested seriously in this new museum. The story it tells of the power and the grace of God released through the ministry of John and Charles Wesley is our story too. It's what shaped our identity and challenges us to go on doing God's work in our own day."

From Methodist.org news

On casting your bread

C. Malcolm Macmillan on the aftermath of an act of generosity

Last August I was washing up the dishes at home near Melbourne when I did a double-take. The *Foreign Correspondent* story on TV was something about the separation of conjoint (Siamese) twins in a village hospital in India. An international team had been assembled by an Australian doctor from Sydney and the operation was taking place in an unheard of hospital in central India. The dishes were so dirty and I was not paying much attention. . . .

And then suddenly I heard a name, Gordon Thomas, and I pricked up my ears and looked again. Why, yes, that was him, the little boy who together with his sister I'd admitted to our school some 40 years before. I shouted out to my wife, Margaret, and we sat glued to the set for the rest of the programme. But I must start at the beginning.

While hailing from Melbourne, I taught in rural Victoria and spent four years as an IVF (AFES) Travelling Secretary working amongst teachers across Australia. Sydney was my base and it was here that I met Margaret and married her in April 1964. The very day of our wedding, I received a cable from India offering me the position of Principal at a famous Anglo-Indian School 300 Km northeast of New Delhi in the Himalayas.

Many such schools had initially been established as orphanages for the poor and often neglected children of mixed race who were disowned by both communities. These schools had special protection under the Indian constitution and when the numbers of Anglo-Indians dwindled due to migration to the west, some schools saw a new mission to other disadvantaged communities - in my time there, Tibetan refugees



"Two Hearts" ABC Foreign Correspondent

and the Indian Christian community. Most students came from the majority Hindu community.

Anglo Indian schools had long outgrown the 'poor brother' image. Many quickly became bastions of prestige and excellence. I think in my 12 years there, with a strong Christian Board, Wynberg-Allen maintained a deep commitment to the poor. And so, John Thomas, the founder-Head of a little Bible School in Calcutta approached me about the possible admission of his children, Gordon & Grace. They were duly admitted as boarders on generous scholarships.

Gordon went on to study medicine at Vellore Christian Medical College and then served the poor in several village hospital situations across the country for some 20 years. Later he was appointed as a paediatric surgeon to Westmead Hospital in Sydney and it was when based here that an old friend from India pleaded for his help with the conjoint twins. Although one of the twins died, the other is doing well and Gordon and his team were the toast of the town (India). The separation of conjoint twins in a village hospital was a medical first for India and a noteworthy achievement anywhere!

"He called me and told me that these girls were born and if I could come and help separate them. So I said you're kidding? You're going to do it here?"

Dr Gordon Thomas
ABC Foreign Correspondent

I was in teacher training when the Principal of Melbourne Teachers' College, speaking at the farewell assembly of my College, quoted the text, Cast your bread upon the waters, and it will return to you after many days (Eccl 11:1). I'm sure that many of you can say 'Amen' to that!

Footnotes: Gordon Thomas and his family now live in Baulkham Hills, Sydney and worship at the local Anglican church.

The Macmillans and their four children returned to Australia in 1976 after almost 12 years in India. Malcolm is a member of the Whittlesea Uniting Church.



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PUBLIC SQUARE

BY PSEUDO-MAXIMUS

The gay Gene

Celebrity US Bishop Gene Robinson was in Australia 22 May to 2 June. The world's first openly homosexual bishop, he was married to a woman with whom he had children but is now married to his male partner. He delivered the prayer of invocation at President Barack Obama's inauguration in 2009.

He was formally welcomed by the NSW Parliament and praised by the Lord Mayor of Melbourne. He preached at Uniting Churches in Pitt St and Paddington (NSW) and Toorak (Melbourne) and was a keynote speaker at public functions at Adamstown UC (Newcastle), the UC Centre for Theology and Ministry (Melbourne) and St John's Anglican Church, Toorak. He appeared on the ABC programs *Q&A* (TV) and *Sunday Nights* (Radio).

His Australian visit was "proudly sponsored" by Paddington UC (NSW), the Centre for Faith, Life and Learning of East Doncaster Baptist Church (Vic), Brunswick and Toorak UCs (Vic), the Progressive Christian Network of Victoria, along with other supporters.

Warm, approachable and, yes, genial, he is the ideal poster boy for the push for 'Marriage Equality'. In the present climate of openness, tolerance and acceptance of all things loving, it is hard to go wrong spruiking his book *Straight Talk about Gay Marriage* (2012). In a culture of entitlement based on personal choice who could disagree when he repeats the familiar LGBT slogan: "The right to love the person of your choice and have that supported by the society in which you live is a human right"?

Aligning himself with progressive Christianity, orthodox faith and traditional liturgy (he is critical of Bishop

Spong), Robinson is ideally placed to prosecute the case for same-sex marriage. But the charm offensive and the trappings of ecclesiastical conservatism should not blind us to his pseudo-scientific claim that sexual orientation is genetically determined in early childhood and that, as a consequence, Scripture and classical theology are wrong to affirm that marriage is only between a man and a woman.

Until the myths of the gay Gene are exposed—and ideas of equality, love and choice are grounded in sound theology and science—public decisions on marriage will be based on a fiction. The fact that diverse forms of sexual behaviour exist, and that people are passionate about 'Marriage Equality,' does not thereby establish the validity of same-sex unions. Studies of identical twins show that homosexual attraction has little to do with a gay gene.

As the church is called to show compassion, understanding and pastoral care for LGBT people, so she is required to re-affirm marriage as the union of male and female in the image of God. The mutual admiration between Bishop Robinson and his UC sponsors, and the silence of State and National leaders on the UCA's clear teaching on marriage, does not inspire confidence.

Gospel Gonski

In "Gillard's classroom gospel" (*Quadrant online* 23/5), Dr Kevin Donnelly, Director of the Education Standards Institute, criticises "the national civics and citizenship curriculum, where religion is rarely mentioned and Christianity is airbrushed from the nation's civic life.

"It's no secret that secular critics want to banish religion from the public square and ignore the essential

role Christianity plays in the story of Western civilisation."

While the Gonski report and school funding are front and centre as an election issue, "equally important is Prime Minister Julia Gillard's national crusade in education and her attempts to impose a culturally left, politically correct curriculum on all Australian schools".

"The danger is that students in government schools will be taught a curriculum that fails to acknowledge the central role of Christianity in the nation's history, political and legal institutions and civic life. The danger for religious schools is that they will have to implement a secular, cultural-left curriculum that belittles and undervalues the very faith on which such schools are based."

If Donnelly is correct, then a relativistic, multi-faith, multi-cultural agenda is being imposed on the nation while Christianity is quietly airbrushed from the national consciousness. That is a pity. Greater emphasis on non-Christian beliefs and traditions is welcome. But loss of collective memory, and filling it with naïve confidence in diversity, will severely weaken our national identity.

It is time for the church to speak up, not to protect her own patch, but for the sake of the Australian community.

The Nanny State

"How to demolish talk of the nanny state" is the latest idea of the Justice and International Mission unit of Victoria-Tasmania's synod. April's *Crosslight* reports that JIM is running a competition to find "the catchiest counter to the term 'nanny state'".

JIM director Dr. Mark Zirnsak says 'nanny state' refers to the government "treating us as children rather than treating us as adults capable of mak-

ing decisions for ourselves.” The aim is to invent a phrase that points to the government’s role in “protecting us from those seeking to make profit by harming us.” JIM’s point is that we need a nanny—to protect us from social predators, because we are not adults.

Dr. Zirnsak lists predatory behaviour by the pokies industry, alcohol marketing and finance companies which, he says, coined the term ‘nanny state’ as a propaganda device to tell us we don’t need consumer protection laws or marketing restrictions.

Warren Clarnette says he is wrong. ‘Nanny state’ never meant protecting the public from predatory profit-makers. It means opposing the intrusion of government into every nook and cranny of citizens’ lives, from how parents should raise their children to the rights of landowners to manage their properties—all under the watchful eye of the nearest bureaucrat.

Words being endlessly malleable, JIM reverses the definition of ‘nanny state’ to imply evil intent to industries that employ most of the nation’s workers and generate most of the taxes that allow governments to function in the first place. ‘Nanny state’ never refers to social predators or citizens too helpless to help themselves, but predatory governments.

If justice is the aim, we should be serious about using words correctly.

Narcissism

In ‘Is this the most narcissistic generation we’ve ever seen?’ Wendy Squires (*The Saturday Age* 20/4/13) worries about the high rate of narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) among modern teenagers. Defined by the Mayo Clinic as ‘a mental disorder in which people have an inflated sense of their own importance and a deep need for admiration,’ it shows up in kids who expect to be the centre of attention and are devastated when they are not. According to the authors of *The Narcissism Epidemic: living in the age of entitlement*, “narcissism rates among college students rose just as fast as obesity from the 1980s to now”.

Perhaps humour is the best way to respond. When, in a TV skit, John Cleese was accused of being a narcissist, he exploded, “Certainly not, a narcissist is foolishly infatuated with himself.” But Gen Y isn’t laughing. Nor was Christopher Lasch who, in 1979, identified narcissism as an American “cultural personality disorder” caused by a sense of entitlement

and “pseudo self-awareness” that undermined principles of sacrifice, charity and gratitude.

The question for the church is how firmly she will fix her gaze, not on her self-image, but on the image of Christ. Might not the invitation to “lose one’s life in order to save it” be his way of poking fun at our foolish

pretension? It may not be easy to tell this joke in an age obsessed with image and rights. It may be thought to be in bad taste. But perhaps it will be heard as a word of grace in small acts of gratitude, unselfconscious acts of love or bold acts of defiance that unsettle our cultural narcissism and redirect our energies?

IAN CLARKSON

Path to prosperity

The superiority of Christianity as a worldview is so obvious, demonstrable and real that the current Western contempt for it is irrational, weird and dangerous.

No other religion, or ideology has presented a worldview through which nations have been formed with such freedom order and humanity. Name a country with a majority of either Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims or atheists which has out of its own culture developed a stable, open, free, humane peaceful and economically progressive democracy? They don’t exist. But where the Bible has been preached and its message believed by the population, civilisation is created.

So powerful is the Bible message that indeed countries which since the Second World War have copied forms of governance from successful Western democracies have also advanced in these qualities.

The Bible’s worldview is based in a free, moral, personal relationship with the living God. From this relationship comes wisdom about the true relationship humans may have with creation and the ability to grow in the nature and character of God. From this also has grown the social trust, which has undergirded free democracies. Compassion and concern for neighbour, dignity and equality of all including the sick, disabled and offenders makes Bible-shaped countries the desired of the world. Ninety percent of world migration flows to them. Such societies are characterised by an internalising of law and an understanding of the rule of law. This means freedom can be enjoyed without external coercion. Though imperfect, the more pervasive biblical christianity has been in a country, the greater the benefits it enjoys. This is a result of the New Testament influencing the functioning parts of a nation.

As significant as the great individual social reformers and preachers of the Great Awakening were, the thousands of chapel and class-meeting leaders bringing the teachings of Jesus to the masses week by week, some historians consider to be of chief effectiveness in ordering and humanising British and colonial societies.

What will nourish and sustain the drying roots of this rich legacy in Australia from which all the movements and actions for liberty—including our heroes and ANZACS have drawn or assumed their best direction? It is churches that faithfully and joyously persevere in giving the account of the Bible and offering the blessings of orthodoxy! Former deputy Prime Minister Brian Howe symbolised it when he said “the work of a Sunday-School teacher is more important for the well-being of this nation than that of a prime minister”.

Those who feel the need to prepare well for Sunday teaching, who take care to publicly read the Scriptures, as well as to keep feeding personally on the written Word—these and such acts do more for the nourishment of the Christian worldview and a democratic society than anything else. The presence of Christian communities living the commands of God through Gospel grace are ultimately, the only spring of truth influencing the wider communities with the ideas and attitudes necessary for sustaining free and humane societies. You might be in a small rural or suburban church—build your little church up, follow the impulse to support actions aimed at winning people to Christ, even if simply a special Gospel celebration on Saturday night with testimonies and Gospel music. From this to ordinary daily Christian living to worrying your local member with your Christian worldview on contemporary matters is nation building first rank.

“God created.” Yes he really did.

Science works on proposing an idea (theory) and then proving it true or false. Unexpected discoveries have been made while a scientist was trying to prove a particular theory.

Today, many people believe evolution is fact even though it has only ever been a theory that has never been proved. Rather, science tends to disprove evolution.

Charles Darwin himself gave a number of reasons why his theory of evolution was incorrect. And incidentally, Darwin was not the first person to postulate evolution.

One question which Darwin asked and which readily comes to mind when a person tries to prove the theory, is, “Why, if species descended from other species by fine gradations, do we not find everywhere innumerable transitional forms?” Darwin himself said in later life, “As by this (his) theory innumerable transitional forms must have existed, why do we not find them embedded in countless numbers in the crust of the earth? Why is not all nature in confusion, instead of being as we see them, well defined species?” Darwin, in his *My Life and Letters*, admits “Not one change of species into another is on record. We cannot prove that a single species has changed.”

Opalised cockles (pipis) from South Australian opal fields and fossilised cockles from the Flinders Ranges are the same as the cockles we dig out of the sand today.

There are many stumbling blocks to the theory of evolution that other branches of science raise, such as that from botanist Dr Heribert Nilsson

No Gem

I was amazed to see the following presented as a ‘Gem’ in last Catalyst. The cross is a reminder that Christianity does not have an answer to evil or a solution to anything, really; It offers a relationship within hard times rather than a parachute out of them; It offers body and blood, not lace and incense.”

Christianity indeed offers a relationship with the living God, but what happened to the Church Militant with a vision to take the world for God? Lost in the murky mists of myopic liberalism no doubt.

What is needed is a few good Holy Ghost gusts to blow away the fog and help us to see, by the Word and the Spirit, that the Cross IS the answer and God’s totally adequate provision for the victory over evil. The fact is that the Church has not yet plumbed the depths of what was accomplished there. Jesus promised

that the Holy Spirit would lead us into all truth. We haven’t arrived yet.

“The Church in the Wilderness” [Acts 7:38] stayed in the wilderness because:

- They didn’t know who they really were
- They didn’t understand what it was they had to do and when they did they didn’t believe they could do it.
- They didn’t realize that the enemy was a defeated foe.
- They didn’t know that the hosts of heaven were waiting to do battle with them.

And that’s about where much of the Church is at. Its understanding of the cross is too small. The Kingdom of God on Earth is our Promised Land and the Great Commission is our mandate. The Cross has taken care of all the obstacles. What is lacking is the faith and vision of the Church.
Val Pym, Mackay Qld

of Sweden: “As we look at the main groups of fossil flora, we find that at definite intervals they (flora) are, all at once and quite suddenly, there! In full bloom in their manifold forms, any change is entirely lacking.”

Why, then, is evolution endorsed so thoroughly and taught in schools and universities? I believe that the reason is that God can be done away with if evolution is accepted and I further believe that it is, in part, responsible for the decline in Christian belief in the western world.

If there is no God, then issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage and euthanasia are immaterial. Servant leadership and service for others, such as volunteering, also disappear.

I am created and loved by God, with a purpose to my life and a reason for living. Christian faith and life begin with two words: God created.

Daphne Freeman, *ACC member, former nurse, journalist (with a Walkley Award to her credit), lay pastor in the Uniting Church, and electorate assistant for 17 years.*



Responding to Mr Rudd

Nick Jensen on Kevin Rudd's switch on Same Sex Marriage

There is no denying that Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's change in position on same-sex marriage is a significant moment in one of the most divisive issues in Australian history. What is most interesting however is that his foundational point was not about freedom of choice, the nature of marriage, or even what it means to have equal treatment under the law—but rather the relationship between the State and the Church.

Mr Rudd's piece is titled "Church and State are able to have different positions on same sex marriage". This is a bit misleading though, as his article is generally more focused on his own personal experiences and social justification. He does attempt to articulate one theological argument, and that is differentiating between 'cultural practices' and the 'timeless moral principles' in the Biblical texts. He uses the examples of slavery, polygamy and submission as practices which have previously been biblically justified, but are no longer relevant. His main point is that "Christian ethics... (are) subject to change" and therefore he views the uniqueness of marriage as a practice which should also fit into this category. This raised the ire of some theologians, with Anglican Archbishop Peter Jensen claiming Rudd's discussion of the Bible was "historically shallow". While this would be a fascinating discussion, what is of greater note is whether the Church and State can actually hold different 'legal' positions.

The Church/State legal relationship was at the centre when marriage was first incorporated into British law. King Henry VIII's key motivation in forming a new 'State Church', and thereby putting marriage under State control, was because of Pope Clement VII's rejection of Henry's petition of annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. In Henry's time at least, it clearly was not possible for the Church and State to hold different opinions on marriage, but it was possible to break with

Rome and thereby establish a new church body that agreed with his 'State' position.

The Church of England permitted this level of control over the sacrament of marriage by the King/State because they trusted that under a Christian king or queen, secular law would reflect God's Law. The Church of England in the 21st century however is concerned that trust has now been broken, having recently stated that the law on same-sex marriage in the UK was the 'biggest challenge to Church and State relations in 500 years'. David Starky, an atheist historian (who is also same-sex attracted), gives a clear warning about the consequences:



It seems that, as in a cooling marriage, relations between Church and State have broken down.

"It seems that, as in a cooling marriage, relations between Church and State have broken down. The gap between the values and practices of the two, which opened up with the legalisation of divorce, is now, thanks to the even more contentious issue of gay marriage, threatening to become a chasm."

This problem, though not widely understood, could be just as significant in Australia. Although most Christians in Australia outside the

Catholic and Anglican churches would have a limited understanding of 'Church Law', there is still a broad recognition of natural laws that transcend the State. One only has to look as far as the Nuremberg war-crime trials to see that State authority cannot be the highest

MARRIAGE

law. For Christians particularly, there is always going to be a tension when the laws of the State and the laws of Church conflict.

So this brings us back to the original statement by Mr Rudd. It is of course true that Church and State can hold different positions, as contrasting opinions should always be able to be held parallel in a secular society. The question however that needs to be asked really is “Can the Church hold a position contrary to State law with no consequences?”

Some might argue that there would be no adverse consequences for the Church and State holding different ‘legal’ positions around marriage, pointing to perhaps the religious exemptions held by groups such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses in being allowed to absent their democratic vote. However, this issue of marriage is not as simple, as it ultimately affects a much larger sphere.

Starting in-house, there would inevitably arise the situation where a same-sex couple wished to get married in a church that would turn them down. The couple could claim that they have been discriminated against, and indeed this would be true. Politicians may reassure that these exemptions would be put in place, but when a recent amendment of this sort was proposed in the UK parliament last month, which would remove the risk of legal action against churches in such situations—it was defeated. Even if these legal protections were put in, it is doubtful that such exemptions would hold over time when tested by human rights bodies, as was recently expressed in the European debates.

Moving wider, the opposing positions would also affect church-provided services. It is natural to expect any organisational body that receives public funds to comply with State laws. Therefore if the law defining marriage is changed, then church-run social services would be forced to comply. This situation is of no small consequence as the Church in Australia is heavily integrated into welfare, education, health, counselling, and community services. Not that this would mean churches would not serve the needs of same-sex attracted people, but there would occur cases where these organisations simply could not comply. We saw this in various US States where Catholic adoption agencies were forced to shut their doors as the Government would not legally allow the organisations to maintain their policy of only placing children with a married mother and father.

That is not even the most significant consequence however, as that would be reserved for individual Christians working in the public space. There are now scores of examples arising across districts that have legalised same-sex marriage, where individuals face significant consequences for refusing to support same-sex weddings as part of their work or business.

The most recent one was in Washington State (that only changed the law last December) where a flower-seller named Barronelle Stutzman refused to do a flower arrangement for a same-sex wedding. She had previously served the customer on many occasions with full knowledge of his sexuality, but drew the line at using her creative gift to support something she fundamentally disagreed with. She is being sued by the State Attorney-General. Other similar cases have included photographers, public servants, celebrants, sports announcers, bakers, bed and breakfast owners, mayors, teachers, and counsellors. In fact there are now dozens of cases involving termination, fines and even possible jail time for

refusing to comply with new laws that redefine marriage.

So the answer to the above question (derived from Mr Rudd’s blog title) about whether the Church and State could hold different laws on marriage without consequences, on evidence must be a resounding ‘NO’. This issue is too deeply held by the mainstream churches, ministers, and individual Christians to simply comply

with a State redefinition of the most sacred and basic of institutions. Truth be told, Christians have sacrificed a lot more for a lot less over the history of Church/State relations.

It is difficult to predict exactly how this relationship would change if there was a change to the Marriage Act by Parliament (State or Federal), but growing discussion within the Church indicates that the response could be dramatic.

It is quite possible that the vast majority of churches would simply refuse to comply, risking expensive and lengthy court cases. Many ministers may consider handing in their marriage licenses, partly as protest and partly to avoid individual legal battles.

That would not be the end of the matter, however. It would be reasonable to expect

many churches preaching against the law, encouraging Christians to reject the State’s new definition. This could take many forms but a likely position would be to encourage their congregation to stop having their marriages recognised by the State. One could even anticipate many Christians with existing marriages seeking annulment, or failing that, a legal divorce. This action may seem dramatic, but there are already people within the churches anticipating this option. They believe that to continue participating in a broader definition of marriage would be unfaithful to what they understood to be good and true.

Finally, there is even historical precedence that the Church could actually reaffirm its own existing law over and above the State law. What this means is that the loyalties of everyday citizens would be tested as to whether they obeyed the law of the land or the Law of God. As extreme as this possibility sounds, the relationship between Church and State over time is littered with examples where the leaders of both bodies have gone head-to-head politically with varying outcomes.

Mr Rudd may have gone on a very genuine and personal journey on this issue, but as he leads Australia again he’ll need to consider the wider implications. Although Church and State may be able to hold different positions on this issue, the consequences of these differing positions could be momentous. The recent events involving the splitting of the Conservative party in England, the suicide at Notre Dame, and the hundreds of thousands marching in Paris, demonstrate that this issue indeed has the potential to split a country down the middle.

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Can the Church hold a position contrary to State law with no consequences?

Rod James asks

Does it matter?

Does it matter? Does the loss of Christian belief matter for our community, for Australia, for the western world? When I was a child there were over 30 families with children attending the little Range Road Uniting Church and 60+ children on the Sunday School anniversary platform. A significant number of the pioneer families who opened up Parawa and Willow Creek after WW2 belonged to this church. They built a church (with their own hands) because the Christian faith was central to their worldview and their human values.

This snapshot of the late 1940s and the 1950s contrasts with the situation today. Of all the people now living in Parawa, Willow Creek and Torrens Vale today, only a handful come to the Range Road church to worship God. With respect to this change this district mirrors the rest of the nation. The question is—does this change matter?

As a little boy at the Second Valley school and then at the Yankalilla Area school, we would salute the flag with its four crosses—the crosses of St Andrew of Scotland, St Patrick of Ireland, St George of England, and the Southern Cross. And we would sing, “God save the Queen”.

But today we no longer salute our flag, and no longer seem aware of its Christian symbolism. And our national anthem celebrates, not God’s saving provision and protection, but our good fortune at being Aussies. Again the question is—will these changes affect our nation and community in any important way?

Is religion really a private matter?

It is generally believed that religious beliefs and values are a private matter, and should not affect community or national life. But is that a realistic expectation? The word ‘culture’ derives from the word ‘cultus’, recognising that a nation’s or community’s way of life will result from the world view and religious values which it holds in common.

Could it be that the cultural values and systems of Australia, and indeed the western world, not only come from the Christian faith, but are unsustainable apart from the Biblical world view?

The book that made your world

Recently an Indian Christian, Vishal Mangalwadi, wrote a book called *The Book that made your World (how the Bible created the soul of western civilization)*. As young Christians he and his wife, Ruth, started a Christian community in a very poor rural community in India.

There they encountered a family with four children, two boys and two girls. The second girl, Sheela, was very thin and sickly. When Vishal and his wife tried to assist with Sheela’s recovery they were met with resistance from her parents. It turned out that the parents saw a second daughter as an unbearable economic burden and were quietly starving her to death with the approval of the rest

The freedom, prosperity and well-being of people in the western world are based on the worldview and values revealed in the Bible.

of the community. Vishal explains,

From the perspective of their own culture, Sheela’s parents were not wicked people. They were ordinary human beings, as good or bad as anyone else. They loved their children as much as anyone else did...

The parents knew that Sheela’s life as an unwanted girl in their caste and culture was going to be especially miserable; her future was doomed to

be dark. Therefore, out of their deep compassion for her they shortened her suffering.

Their Hindu beliefs generated fatalism that nothing could be changed in the situation, and also a view that if human life ends it is reincarnated—better luck next time. Despite Vishal and Ruth’s repeated efforts Sheela died, and her death, like so many things that happened in that community was the direct result of the religious beliefs of the people.

Biblical foundations of the Western world

Through this and countless other experiences Vishal came to see that what a community or nation believes has an all-pervasive influence on the well-being or misery of the people. Furthermore, he was able to see, far more clearly than we can, that the freedom, prosperity and well-being of people in the western world are based on the worldview and values revealed in the Bible.

Clearly we westerners see things differently than the folk in Sheela’s community. So what are some of the views and values which are different here, and where did they come from? The answer to this question fills a whole book, and Vishal Mangalwadi has beautifully and clearly written that book. But for this occasion here are some of those views and values upon which our society in Australia and the west is built:

MARRIAGE

God is relational and personal

Jesus said, *All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.* Matthew 11:27

The values and worldview of the Western world were founded on the Biblical understanding of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and so personhood and relationship were seen to be at the centre of all reality. People came to understand that love, faithfulness, truth and compassion are the outshining of the character of God who created all things.

Mankind was created in the image of God

They also understood that the conscious, personal, individual human being is created in the image of the conscious personal God.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:27

Because of this belief, value and respect has been attributed to every human being of whatever race, ability or station in life. Hence the penalty for killing a pauper is the same as for killing a prince.

This view of human personhood, individuality and freedom contrasts both with ideas in Eastern religions and the view of humanity in atheistic materialism. The Buddhist view holds that 'individuality is an illusion, and that salvation requires dissolution of an individual's consciousness into a universal consciousness of God'. Likewise Marxism 'considered individuality to be a bourgeois concept, a manifestation of the middle-class desire for independence, private property and a free economy.'

Some 20th century scientists asserted that everything in a human being could be attributed to chemical reactions in the body, and that humans were simply biological machines, the most advanced species among the primates. It is no coincidence that more concern is being expressed by some groups today for animal welfare than for human welfare. As Ingrid Newkirk, cofounder of the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, put it, "A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy".

How Jesus Christ shaped the western view of Mankind

The western world's view of humanity has been fundamentally shaped by the following elements in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1. The Incarnation. John's gospel testifies that *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14). Far from violating God's dignity (as Islam protests), the Incarnation was to be the ultimate proof of man's dignity.

2. The Cross. But God did not become a human being because we deserved such an honour, but because He loved His image-creature and wanted to save us from our lostness and sinfulness. As communities and nations reflected on this grace they came to see the value

God had placed on humans, even the worst of us. They saw that fallen human beings *were bought with a price* (1 Cor. 6:20), 'the precious blood of Christ' (1 Peter 1:19). And so Divine forgiveness, or grace, was built into the values of western society.

3. The resurrection. Many worldviews today hold that 'once you are dead you are dead. Death is the end of our existence. There is no soul that continues beyond death.' Scientism implies that death is the original and ultimate reality. Mangalwadi articulates this view:

"In the beginning, there was no life, no God, no angels, no spirits, no cells, and no amoebae. Life emerged in a cosmic accident and has been evolving ever since, One day, perhaps a few billion years from now, another accident will cause life to completely disappear from the cosmos. That makes death the ultimate reality

"By contrast the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead changed this perception. Jesus' resurrection was testified to by 12 witnesses, 11 of whom were martyred for testifying to what they had seen. 'Having a hope in God...that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust' (Acts 24:15) meant that human beings were accountable to God after death. To those who have received God's forgiveness through repentance and faith in Christ Jesus' life, death and resurrection there is given the hope of eternal life."

Behold the western man, woman and child!

Dignity, personhood, love, faithfulness, freedom, justice, accountability, mercy, and hope—all of these flowed into western society from the Biblical worldview and the human values which came with Jesus Christ.

If atheism, scientism, and the eastern religions eclipse the Christian world view and values we could see the lights go out in the western world. Or we could see a rediscovery of who really is 'the light of the world'.

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, *I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.* John 8:12 Maybe it's time to get out of our comfort zone and share these insights with those around us, lest the lights go out on our watch!

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

If atheism, scientism, and the eastern religions eclipse the Christian worldview ... we could see the lights go out.

Vishal Mangalwadi Lecture Series

8 August 7pm: Public forum,

Mueller Performing Arts Centre, Rothwell, QLD

9 August 10am: Christian leaders' seminar,

Beenleigh Baptist Church, Beenleigh, QLD

12 August 7pm: Public forum,

Scots Church, Wynyard, Sydney, NSW

13 August 10am: Seminar,

St Anne's Anglican Centre, Ryde, NSW

15 August 7am: Breakfast, National Press Club, ACT

16 August 7.30 pm: Public forum,

Melbourne School of Theology, VIC

17 August 10am: Christian leaders' seminar,

1330 Auditorium, 1330 Ferntree Gully Rd, VIC

20 August 7pm: Public forum,

Hobart City Church of Christ, Hobart, TAS

21 August 7pm: Dinner, Fogolar Furlan, Felixtow, SA

22 August 10am: Seminar,

Edwardstown Baptist Church, St Marys, SA

24 August 7pm: Dinner, Perth Town Hall, Perth, WA

The DNA of the universe

Ted Curnow on a kingdom that will endure

Amid the changing values and social context of today's world where people march behind the banner of personal freedom and self-fulfilment, Christianity is often portrayed as imposing a stern morality and a system that limits freedom. The Ten Commandments are seen as an ancient set of rules that are largely irrelevant and it seems reasonable to suggest that much of the New Testament is about the do's and don'ts of life. Christopher Hitchens sees Christianity as a "creepy movement to impose orthodoxy on a free and pluralist and secular republic." Like other atheists Hitchens views the scientific laws of nature as objective but denies the thought of the existence of an absolute or objective morality behind life.

Many today are casualties of this way of thinking. We believe we can know scientific things with certainty, but when it comes to values and morality this area is subjective and more a matter of personal choice and opinion. It would never occur to us to say to a scientist, "Don't impose your law of gravity on me" but it is quite acceptable to say, "Don't impose your beliefs or values on me." When it comes to life values, if Christians operate on a subjective level they can be quickly engulfed in power politics, and the game of "who can shout the loudest." This game in turn engenders an anxiety that tempts us to revert to questionable tactics that are typical of secular lobby groups. In today's social climate, as we see evil gaining an upper hand, Christian action needs to rise from a more objective basis, a quiet confidence that God has given us a deep, enduring, natural moral order built into the DNA of the universe itself.

Today all sorts of things including popular opinion and social engineering influence our legislative process but from the Judaeo-Christian revelation a less obvious ontological law emerges. While technically the biblical account is not explicit about this, there is a consistent theme that points to a universal moral law that is an indispensable part of the true nature of things, and that runs through all periods of history. It is a law that could be described as the true essence of life itself and that Jesus referred to as the Kingdom of God.

In Genesis the act of Creation is followed by the statement that, "it was very good." (Gen 1.31) This meant that everything in the universe from the biggest star to the smallest blade of grass brought joy to God's heart. It was a beautiful, material, moral, spiritual symphony, a functioning harmony where everything related perfectly to everything else. As part of this harmony Genesis 1 and 2 provide a number of creational ordinances or operat-

The Ten Commandments are given as a summary expression of this creational pattern and of the will of the Creator.

ing principles that are built into the order of the universe. They are foundational and relevant to the basic instincts of life and include the following:

- The sanctity of God as Sovereign Creator.
- People are special because they are made in God's image as social, moral beings who are meant to know and obey God.
- There is a principle of gender, marriage, procreation, sabbath, labour and replenishment of the earth.

All abuses of the dignity of humanity, like violence and exploitation, are a vandalising of that which is sacred: it is like striking at the Creator. The relevance and sanctity of this order is established through history and biblical revelation. The Ten Commandments are given as a summary expression of this creational pattern and of the will of the Creator. They spell out unchanging principles of how life and order works best, but more than that they embody truths that lead to a fullness of life and that are in harmony with the Creator. They speak of honouring God and parents, the sanctity of life, of sex, of property and truth.

When we come to the New Testament the term "law" is used in a very flexible, broad way. It is used in a legal, restricted canonical sense or in the sense of an in-built governing principle, the way things regularly happen (Rom7.21). There are a number of passages of interest here that point to a universal spiritual and moral order behind the everyday events of lives.

SOCIETY

(1) In the Gospels when Jesus was questioned about Moses permitting divorce, Jesus made it clear that marriage had not been suspended. Moses neither approved nor condoned divorce because, “marriage was from the beginning” (Matt 19.8, Mark 10.6). Marriage was an unchanging creational institution, part of the moral fabric built into the creation itself (Gen 2.4).

(2) In ways beyond our comprehension, the miracles of the New Testament that interrupt the normal way of things seem to imply that the natural order itself is wired in some way to a moral, spiritual order that acknowledges the Sovereignty of God in Christ.

(3) On Palm Sunday while the hatred of leaders engulf Jesus, he enters Jerusalem fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies. In that moment Jesus asserts that it was impossible for him not to be applauded as the Messiah of God because the inanimate stones and objects of nature would cry out to honour him. In another place Paul speaks of the whole creation groaning as it awaits final restoration and freedom.

(4) It is Paul who reminds us that the world has a moral footing and that God’s will is revealed in some way to all men (Rom 1.19). All societies in their moral codes witness to a higher will that becomes the basis of a final judgement. The conscience and our moral awareness distinguish us as people from the rest of the creation so that through the conscience, like it or not, we are all wired to the laws of creation and to God himself (Rom 2.15).

It has often been said that the disintegration of past world empires has been inevitable because in the long term they forgot or abused the design and harmony of moral principles built into the universe. It is human sin that causes this dysfunction so that we fail to operate in the way and for the purpose we were created. Rather than looking beyond ourselves to God, in our disobedience it has been said, “our own secular morality is a quest to find ‘our best and truest self’ which is believed to rest within”. Again it is Paul who reminds us that there is an in-built principle linked to our autonomy and sin. Individually and corporately we reap that which we sow (Gal 6.7).

Jesus fulfilled both the legislative and moral law; he fulfilled all righteousness in the deepest sense (Matt: 3.15). In dying our death the Kingdom of God breaks open and Jesus writes the law of the Spirit of life upon our hearts. In a new way we are rewired with a disposition to love God, to walk in his ways and to love other people (Rom 8.2).

The late Selwyn Hughes asks the question, “Does the moral universe bend to evil”? He answers, “Because of the cross the answer is No!! Perhaps today, perhaps tomorrow, but the third day No! The third day evil breaks itself upon the facts of life. I am drawing a parallel between the day of resurrection and the fact that one day in the future evil will break itself on the very nature of reality. Today and tomorrow evil may be strong but the third day evil breaks itself upon that which is right. The kingdom of God is the only kingdom that will survive for that is the only kingdom that has within it the elements of truth and righteousness.” (Heb 12:28)

Rev E.A.(Ted) Curnow, is a member of the ACC Cranbourne Cluster (Victoria)

FIRST PERSON

Healing,

Rev. Don Purdey was a founding member of the ACC National Council with particular interests in strategic planning and youth. Now suffering from Motor Neurone Disease, Don has retired from ministry and assists the ACC SA Movement. He is also the instigator and coordinator of the ACC Emerging Leaders Award.

From the moment I knew I was sick I have prayed that God will change things and heal me. And many people in churches across Australia and around the world have prayed for me too. We all know that most commonly God heals through the medical profession, but we also believe that He can and often does intervene and heal outside of the confines of “our” medicine.

Our hope for God to change things for us leaps from the pages of the Gospels, as we read about Jesus’ ministry. A typical example is in Mark chapter 5 when Jesus heals the woman from the flow of blood and goes on to raise Jairus’ daughter from death. In Mark 5:34, Jesus said to her, *Daughter, your faith has healed you.* And a couple of verses later in verse 36 he says to Jairus, *Don’t be afraid, just believe.*

Faith and belief seem to be at the heart of Jesus’ healing. And I guess for most of us the power of faith gets summed up in that classic quote from Matthew’s Gospel:

Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt... you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer” (Matthew 21:21-22).

So, like any Christian with a terminal illness might, I went to some people who lead a healing ministry and have seen a lot of people healed. They prayed for me, they pleaded with God. They anointed me with oil. They prayed more. There was no apparent change in my condition, but they said to me, Don, have faith. Return to your work. Preach. Teach. Act as though the healing has happened and it will come.

Don’t you love that? I do! I get inspired by people who hold to the Word of God and the works of Jesus and have such faith that He will act. These are mountain-moving Christians who take God at His Word and act accordingly. God has inspired many faith-filled Christians all around the world to believe and act on the Word of God in that way, and they see quite a number of the people they pray for healed. I love it. I long to participate in that kind of ministry myself.

I believe that I’m healed. I can say that with certainty because Jesus promised that we would be given what we agree about in prayer (Matthew 18:19, see also 21:22 above). What I don’t yet know is the timing of that healing. It may come, as my healing ministry friends trust, on this side of the grave. If not, it will certainly come on the other side of death (Rev 21:4). Either way, it’s a cause for joy and a reason why I should, like all Christians, live in gratitude to God and seek to bring Him glory.

faith and the will of God

Jesus healed people who apparently had no faith, or didn't think enough of what he had done for them to come back and say thanks. Faith and belief are catalysts for divine healing; that doesn't mean that a lack of healing equals a lack of faith.

So, I'm excited by the ministry of healing through prayers of faith. But sometimes problems can creep into our thinking when we engage in prayers for healing, and I have experienced a couple of them since I've been sick. A very common issue is a lack of healing being explained as being because of insufficient faith on the part of the sick person.

When my friends had prayed for me and no apparent healing had occurred, they encouraged me to act as though the healing had happened in order for the healing to be realised at some later time. Now, I love the wonderful level of faith being expressed in the midst of that thinking, but there's also a subtle danger with it too. When I get on with life and act as though I am healed, I express faith, but if I am not subsequently healed then the almost unavoidable implication seems to be that it was my faith that was at fault. I mustn't believe enough. I mustn't really want to be healed. And sadly, some people in healing ministries even speak that way, presumably to deal with their own disappointment and to shore up their own faith.

I believe that is a cruel and destructive thought pattern to fall into and we must reject it as soon as it inserts itself into our minds. Many strongly faithful people have come to God for healing and yet are not healed: people who seriously believe in healing, and even people who have participated in divine healing. John Wimber, for example, started a worldwide church movement focused on healing (the Vineyard Christian Fellowship group of churches), and yet died of cancer and heart disease at the age of 64 despite his own faith and actions and the literally millions of people interceding for him.

If you want a Biblical example, think on Paul. In 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 we read: *To keep me from becoming conceited there was given me a thorn in my flesh... Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness."*

We can't be sure what Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was. It could have been a physical illness or a psychological ailment or even a troublesome companion! Most likely it was physical—perhaps poor vision (Galatians 6:11). Whatever the phrase refers to, the principle remains the same. Paul gets a comforting answer from a compassionate God, but the bottom line is it's still a "no".

[Just as a brief aside: did God cause Paul's illness—or mine? No! God loves us and would never inflict us with illness or injury. Let's give credit where credit is due: John 10:10 *The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy, I (Jesus) have come to give life in all its fullness.* So our illnesses are caused not by God but by evil—perhaps the direct intervention of the Devil, or perhaps because of our evil and broken world.]

So, if the likes of John Wimber and Paul are not automatically healed, we can say with certainty that a lack of healing is not necessarily related to a lack of faith. The mistake we make is that, because Jesus praised people who came to him in faith for healing, we assume that the reverse is also true: that if you come for healing and are not healed, that therefore your faith is lacking. Jesus never said that. Sometimes he chided his disciples – his co-workers – for a lack of faith, but he never criticised someone who came for healing for having a lack of faith. In fact, Jesus healed people who apparently had no faith, or didn't think enough of what he had done for them to come back and say thanks. To say it again: faith and belief are catalysts for divine healing; but that doesn't mean that a lack of healing equals a lack of faith.

Remember, too, that God has ways of using our imperfections and our brokenness that we must not discount. Paul continued: *That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong* (2 Corinthians 12:10).

For Christ's sake, Paul says. That phrase leads us into another area where I believe we sometimes get into trouble when we pray for healing, and that is the discernment of the will of God.

When I visited my friends for healing prayer, I got talking with them about praying the prayer that Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: that I wanted this cup of suffering to be taken away, yet I was prepared, as Jesus was, to submit to the will of God.

But my friends thought that unnecessary. They said something along the lines of: "You don't have to pray anything about what God's will is. We all know what God's will is! He's called you to be a pastor of a church and a husband and a father and a grandfather. Our loving God wants you to fulfil your whole life's calling as a minister and die an old man with your grandchildren around you. Don't you believe that's what your loving heavenly Father would want for you? Of course He does."

The argument that my friends used about God's will

FIRST PERSON

was compelling: we know that God loves us, and we know His desire is for our good and for the Kingdom's growth. So, obviously, He would want me well.

But do we truly know the will of God as clearly as my friends insisted? Everything they said was demonstrably true—yet to my mind it was some way from being the whole story.

In the pages of Scripture we see how God often works over very long periods of time. Hundreds, even thousands of years come and go before all His ways become apparent, and as we study the Scriptures we come to the realisation that God's longer term plan was both necessary and perfect.

Yet during the passing of those years many of God's people had to cope with a silence from God that seemed to leave them without rescue from their circumstances. God had chosen to help them endure rather than intervene miraculously.

As for the value of my personal ministry, I have had to face up to a very humbling realisation: that I may not be as indispensable as I'd like to think I am! The very disciples of Jesus were faced with martyrdom. According to the earliest traditions, John was the only one who died of old age! By Acts Chapter 12 James, one of Jesus' three closest friends and confidants had already been beheaded—and with the church's mission barely started! So I had to admit that any arguments that apply to me about the potential value of my ministry would have applied to James and the other key apostles who were personally trained by Jesus too! They would have achieved much for the Kingdom if their lives had been spared and their ministries had continued. But they didn't—and yet the church grew.

So the question I have had to answer is, "What if, by allowing my illness and perhaps even death to transpire, God is working to a bigger plan than I can see?" A plan that blesses my wife and children and grandchildren and the people I minister to by having them learn more of Him through my illness than I could possibly have taught them whilst well? What if God is working to a plan that will produce the next Billy Graham in three generations' time, or a Government leader with Christian integrity, or a wealthy business person with a heart to change the lot of the poor? Or all three? What if, by reading this article about my experiences, your life is dramatically changed? Who am I now to say that I know the will of God so certainly?

So here is what it comes down to for me. We can be certain of God's love and care for every single person in the world, and we can be equally certain both of God's power to heal and His desire to heal. But we cannot assume that there is a simple, almost mathematical formula that relates these things to one another in the way my friends tried to when they presumed to know God's will. We cannot assume that God will always act in the ways we expect or want. God is working to a plan far bigger than we can imagine, and our part in that plan may not be the one we think it is—or want it to be.

Jesus himself clearly put the will of the Father ahead of anything else. As I mentioned, in the Garden of Gethsemane he prayed, *Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will* (Matthew

Will I still follow him, even though, at this precise moment, God seems to be allowing my life to be sacrificed—cut short in what could be seen as an unfair, almost callous disregard for all that I am and have done? Will I still follow him?

26:39). He said in John's Gospel, *My food is to do the will of him who sent me* (John 4:34). And he taught us to pray, *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven* (Matthew 6:10).

God loved the disciples and Paul and supremely he loved Jesus, but as Jesus showed, God's will and plan must be paramount. Jesus said in John 5:19 *I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees the Father doing.*

In other words, Jesus healed people because he saw that it was the Father's will for them to be healed. And he went to the cross willingly, despite having the power and authority to rescue himself should he have chosen to. As Jesus said during his arrest: *Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?* (Matthew 26:53)

And that leads us into the area of sacrifice. Jesus willingly went to the cross. His disciples willingly undertook whatever was necessary. Paul willingly accepted his thorn in the flesh. They all made sacrifices for the Gospel. In fact, they displayed what we might call sacrificial faith.

Now, I feel as though I am being asked a similar question. Will I still follow him, even though, at this precise moment, God seems to be allowing my life to be sacrificed - cut short in what could be seen as an unfair, almost callous disregard for all that I am and have done? Will I still follow him? My answer is yes—that, as the Psalmist puts it, God's loving kindness is better than life. That's become something of a theme of my living since I became ill and was confronted with these issues directly and personally.

And like the mountain-moving, healing faith of my praying friends, I am certain that this too is a deep and mature expression of faith. It too is bold and uncompromising in its own way. This is the faith of those who will go way out of their comfort zone and minister in far-flung places or dangerous situations. It's the faith of martyrs. It too is a crucial part of the complete faith that Christ showed us. When a follower takes up this faith, he or she is saying, "Lord, whatever it takes, whenever you say, wherever you want me, I'm the one—send me." This is faith that picks up its cross and follows Jesus.

Now finally I want to say this. I think that often when people with sacrificial faith and people with mountain-moving faith who expect healing are in the same room, they seem to want to compete for attention. They seem

From Coonabarabran to Bangladesh with Love

Jane Nelson-Hauer on how one local church can make a difference

This is an extraordinary story in which members of Coonabarabran Uniting Church have become involved in making a difference in the lives of children from the slums of Bangladesh.

No doubt many of you are racking your brains to think just where Bangladesh is. It is a relatively new nation formed in 1971 out of the former East Pakistan, right next to India in the Bay of Bengal, sometimes known as the armpit of India.

A country the size of Tasmania that accommodates some 150 million people. A beautiful green country, situated on a river delta, it is known for its water lilies, pink pearls, and the world's longest beach.

However there is much hardship for the people of Bangladesh, with a per capita income of US\$444 a year and an official literacy rate of 47%.

It was through the chance encounter with Bangladesh pastor, James Karmoker, who was studying in Dubbo for two years that a number of members of Coonabarabran Uniting Church banded together in 2006 to form Restore International, an Incorporated Association with the aim of providing hope for children in situations where there is no hope.

President Jane Nelson-Hauer



New school uniforms at Shion School

recalls: "All my life I have taught Sunday school and children's Bible clubs. There was always a missionary story and I delighted in researching

and telling stories from all over the world to the children; sharing the goodness of God and the wonder of the gospel through the adventures of

to want to force a choice as to which is a truer reflection of biblical faith. Which one is right? Which shows real faith: the Christian who will walk into a volcano prepared to die for Jesus, or the Christian who believes they can move the volcano?

My answer is this: both are true reflections of faith. Both are legitimate and powerful expressions of the faith we see exhibited by Jesus in the Bible. Neither is better nor more important than the other.

In fact, let's go further: I believe that neither is complete without the other. I long to exhibit both, because

that's what Jesus did. I will pray believing for healing for myself and others. Currently I'm spending time at a Vineyard Church learning some of their healing techniques. But I will also go willingly all the way to my grave for Jesus' sake. Why? Because that's what Jesus did. He healed people - even from death; and He sacrificed himself to God's will - even unto death.

Exhibiting both kinds of faith will see my life reflecting the glory of God, whatever situation I'm in, as long as I take care to place myself constantly in submission to the will of God.

LOCAL CHURCH

the missionaries. My favourite was Amy Carmichael who rescued young girls who were being prostituted to the Hindu temples in India. I always thought: one day I would like to work with children in the developing world, but I never imagined how that would happen. You know I even wrote to some of the well-known mission organisations and asked how I could become involved but it wasn't God's time for me. Then I met this little man from Bangladesh with the big grin. I could see he had the call of God on his life and I challenged him to seek God's purpose for his time in Australia. I never imagined he would come to me and ask if I could help him to implement the vision of his church, which was to start a school for children from the slums. My first response was: no, it's too big. I can't do that. But as I talked to my friends both in and out of Church I could see the whole idea lit a fire in people's hearts. I could feel the Holy Spirit arising, bringing faith, and I knew this was it. This was an opportunity to be grasped, would I run with it or let it go and continue to do the same old, same old things I had always done?"

The vision of this first project of Restore International Inc. is to provide a basic education to children from the slums who would otherwise grow up illiterate. To help parents find hope for their children and see the difference an education could make for their future.

Pastor James Karmoker returned to Bangladesh in November 2006 and (thanks to a grant of \$3,000 from the NSW Central West Presbytery of the Uniting Church) was able to create 3 classrooms accommodating sixty children based in his local Church, the Shion Free Baptist Church. There was much preparation required in working with the various local religious communities and the Bangladesh school system. Finally the Shion Free School officially opened just prior to Easter 2007 with 3 classes: pre-school, kinder and year one. All of the children are malnourished when they begin. As part of the enrolment process, each of the children is given a health check and ongoing monitoring of both health and learning takes place. Each day the children receive a breakfast of bread and fruit when they arrive and then they have lunch before going home. The Bangladesh

curriculum is followed and children from Shion School are performing well against their peers from other schools.

It has been a story of multiple small miracles. Capping it all has been the ongoing financial provision. In spite of efforts to seek a regular income through sponsorship and commitment, these have not been forthcoming so there has been no guarantee of income. Year after year targets are met and all those involved marvel at the goodness of God.



Restore International, Bangladesh

Over the years there have been a variety of people call in, share fellowship, bring knowledge and expertise. Emma Starr a primary school teacher from Coonabarabran has visited on numerous occasions, spending 6 months in Bangladesh in 2008, working at the International school in Dhaka and spending her spare time at the Shion school helping the teachers develop their resources and teaching methods.

In 2011 Priya Kirubakaran who works in the IT industry in Brisbane raised funds for a computer room. She spent six months at the school, setting up a network of 5 computers and developing a computer curriculum.

People ask how this work promotes the gospel. Are we not being fools spending our time and money educating children of the poor in a far away country that is full of corruption and doesn't care for its own? As Tim Costello of World Vision teaches in his series "The Faith Effect", it's about bringing in the Kingdom of God, about justice and equality.

The school is run by a church; it is staffed by teachers who pray daily that they can share the love of God

with the children. On Sundays, in their own time, they go with the Pastor and visit with the families, familiarising themselves with the circumstances of each child and providing pastoral care to the family. The role of the school is to educate; it does not address religion.

The role of all churches is to share the gospel. The Shion church runs Easter and Christmas activities to which all are invited. Dubbo Baptist Church has funded the Christmas party each year and there have been up to 900 children bussed in from

all over Dhaka to hear the story of Christmas.

After six years, Restore is in a time of change. There are now 75 children, many of whom are rapidly turning into teenagers and thinking about their future careers. James Karmoker has become General Secretary for the National Christian Fellowship of Bangladesh and

relinquished his role of chairman of the board to Uttam Chakraborty who has managed community development projects in Bangladesh for many years. There is an expansion of the project to include community development and there is much excitement amongst the parents about the new sewing project. Future plans include further vocational training for the children who come through the school and an outreach program into a rural area that would provide a source of food.

The success of Restore International is dependent on the creation of relationships between Australia and Bangladesh and the integrity of its financial commitments. Without an ongoing relationship and without a first-hand report of exactly what is being done with our hard earned Aussie dollars, we could not expect people to continue to give so generously. It is a partnership in the gospel between the people of two churches so far apart, united in bringing hope and changing lives.

For further information, see www.restoreint.org

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:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How to join us

Please consider joining the ACC.

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

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

Contact (02) 9550 5358. email: accoffice@confessingcongregations.com mail:

PO Box 968 Newtown NSW 2042

What happens next

● July 7: ACC Creation Care Service and Seminar at Camperdown Stanmore Community Church (11 am service followed by lunch and then seminar 2 pm).

● July 21: ACC Hunter Cluster Meeting at Maitland Uniting Church: 2pm Speaker: Haydn Sennitt – Liberty Christian Ministries.

● July 24: Robert Iles Lecture: Burnside City Uniting Church, Adelaide: 7.30 pm. Speaker: David Wilkinson: Apologetics in a Media-dominated World.

ACC Resources List

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

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

Founding Documents

The Charter (2006)

Statement on Sexuality (2006)

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

ACC Brochures and Statements

ACC Vision and Goals 2007-2017 (2008)

Cross Cultural Commission Statement (2008)

The Church's Social Responsibility (2008)

Theological Declaration (2008)

Theological Declaration: Commentary and Study Guide (2009)

Abortion in the Australian Community (2010)

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

Marriage: An ACC Statement (2011)

Bible Studies

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

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

Faith That Works: Studies in the Letter of James ACC Bible Study No.

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

DVD Resources

Conversations Series

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

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

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

Devotional Booklets

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

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



Le Mis: Russell Crowe as Inspector Javert

Faith on the screen

Les Misérables (M, 2012)

I believe many of our members may have seen this film at the cinema, but if you did not, or indeed want to sing along again, you can readily find it now on DVD (and often at an amazing price). The book and the stage versions were incredibly popular in the late 20th century and now this popularity continues in the new century.

A new generation of people have been exposed to the Christian context and underlying message and through DVD and download, more people will also see this movie in the future. If people missed some of the underlying Christian references in this film, they were either asleep or so secularised that the heritage of our Christian foundation is now unable to be perceived.

Prisoner 24601 (Jean Valjean) is played by Hugh Jackman and Russell Crowe is Javert his nemesis who doggedly pursues him to the end, and an end that Javert simply cannot accept. Javert cannot understand the mercy that is offered by the one who has become his obsession. It appears he would rather have been shot, or at least rejected, rather than actually understood. The film version is a spectacle by itself, and follows on from other period works by director Tom Hooper who made *The King's Speech*. The period in this case is the first half of the 19th century, focusing on the turbulent 'back and forth' history of France following the end of the Napoleonic era and a period of social unrest and quasi-revolution. The era is well-captured in the costuming, the set buildings and occasional

images of the vulgar and hedonistic lifestyles that had developed.

Musicals sometimes have a little difficulty being translated from the intimacy of the stage to the large screen format, but overall this one is done well and the special effects enable some scenes to be more dramatised than before. Some aspects of the acting are slightly melodramatic and parts of the singing are limited, but Anne Hathaway's stunning turn as Fantine, especially for her version of 'I Dreamed a Dream' makes the film worthwhile by itself. She certainly deserved her Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress, and she seemed to win every other similar award in this year.

Valjean's story of a man so touched by the mercy of another that he becomes a man who also shows mercy is a wonderful theme to consider. *Les Misérables* won the Epiphany Prize from MovieGuide for most inspiring film (2013). Watching this film with a group of friends at your home (perhaps with an intermission as it is a long film) could provide a gentle way into reflecting on the Christian story of forgiveness and hope.

Blue Like Jazz (M, 2012)

While this initially seems a conventional Christian film, one is drawn into a far broader picture once the main character chooses the "broad path". The movie is based on a very popular semi-autobiographical novel by Donald Miller, and is set in a USA college.

Real-life Texan Marshall Allman plays Don, the Texas student from a Southern Baptist background who

chooses to go to a liberal arts college, rather than a bible college. For Don, the college is an eye-opener in all of the traditional ways as he is involved in various forms of experimentation, though always with a little hesitation. The film contrasts the Christian foundation he received as a child (and his application of it) with his inability to understand, let alone resist involvement in the new lifestyle, and then through a series of issues and relationships a new contrast with the beginnings of his re-considering of faith and understanding of grace and mercy.

This is a more 'adult' Christian film ...that may well lead to helpful ... conversations among those who have found similar bewilderment when their 'infant' faith is challenged

The movie is directed by Steve Taylor, who has had a well-established music and video career. Initially he struggled to secure funding, but the film is now something of an icon in terms of fundraising on 'KickStarter', a website-based arrangement where individuals from anywhere can contribute to a project they believe is worth supporting.

This is a more 'adult' Christian film for its themes and approach, but will certainly raise some issues for people to consider, and may well lead to helpful and probably pastoral conversations among those who have found similar bewilderment when their 'infant' faith is challenged. There is also the honest depiction of the developing conflict that arises from lifestyles that promise much, but in reality do not provide hope grounded in love.

Blue Like Jazz was showing as part of the Hoyts Faith on Film Sunday programme and is available on DVD.

Peter Bentley

ACC National Executive Consultant