

ACC Catalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



Noel S. Due

Word and Spirit

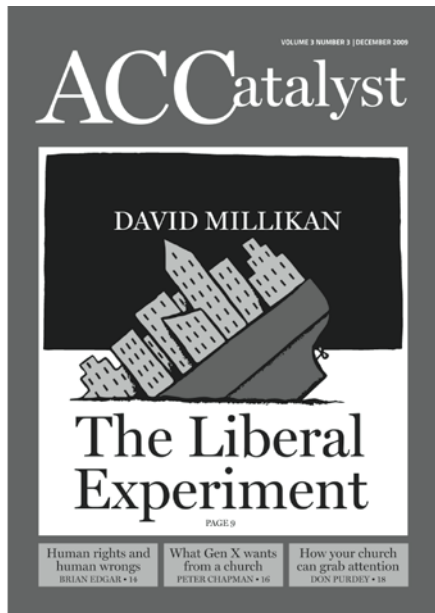
Authority and Interpretation
in a Postmodern World

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Cover photograph: John Sandeman

EDITORIAL

Post post modern

The cover story for this *ACCatalyst* reveals the cracks in the postmodern thinking that have been present for the last couple of decades.

Word and Spirit: Authority and Interpretation in a Postmodern World by Dr Noel S Due, is the first of a two-part series based on a resource paper for this year's ACC conference. Some readers will be familiar with postmodernism, others will find it quite alienated.

The point is that this is how (at least for part of the time) many of our neighbours think. Ever since Mars Hill, Christians have been seeking to understand their neighbours in order that we can help them understand Jesus.

The philosophies we encounter in Church History books that have passed away—or maybe had their names changed—serve to tell us that philosophies that reject Christianity are not new. Christians have lived in opposition to the dominant thought systems of many societies before.

We can be confident that Christianity is fit for God's purpose whatever happens in the history of thought.

Dr Due's piece is a thoughtful guide to current thinking and how to respond to it. This edition of *ACCatalyst* is definitely worth keeping.

We'd like to think they all are, but it is not very modest to actually say that. So I take it back.

John Sandeman

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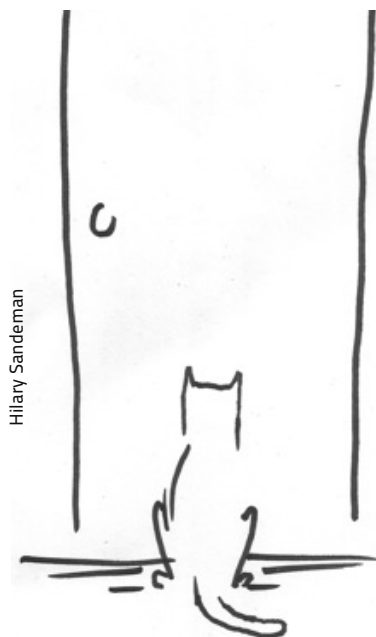
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Waiting at the door

I know at times I have complained about my cat, because she is inclined to be a bit of a pest sometimes. However, you probably realise that if she had the chance to write, she would probably have a few things to say about me as well, and it might not all be nice!

However, there was a cold evening this week when I felt sorry for Rubey. It was after tea and she wanted to go outside to do her evening business, so I let her out and shut the door. I then went off doing other stuff, and forgot about Rubey outside. I think it was a few hours later when I remembered and opened the door to let her in.

Rubey was sitting there, patiently waiting for me, and no doubt had been waiting for quite some time. If I were in her situation I would not have sat waiting. I would have been banging on all the doors and windows demanding to be let in. I would be angry. But not Rubey. She didn't



get angry with me. Instead, when I finally did let her in, she rubbed against my leg and purred in grati-

tude to me. Maybe I would get a lot less stressed about life if I could be more like that.

But as I thought about Rubey patiently waiting outside a door that she could not open I was reminded of Revelation 3:20 where Jesus says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." Jesus also wants to come in - into our lives and our hearts. He also waits patiently outside of a door that must be opened from the inside. He will not ever force his way in.

And when we open the door to him, Jesus will not grow angry with us for taking so long. He will love us and minister to us. It's not that Jesus needs shelter, or that he has nowhere else to go; it's because he loves us so much that he wants to be with us and to live in our hearts.

Robyn



Speakers: Miss Nola Stewart, Dr Miriam Pepper, Rev Evangeline Pua and in front Rev Dr David Reichardt

Caring for Creation- Worship and seminars

A big 'thank you' to Joy and Graeme Lacey and the friendly congregation of Camperdown Stanmore Community Church in Sydney for a very helpful Worship and Seminar Day on July 7th, on "Caring for the Creation." This was the first such service and seminar organised by ACC's CCWG ('Caring for the Creation Working Group').

The day began with a service of Worship at 11 am, with prayers offered by Nola Stewart. The address on "Water - The River of Life" by Rev Dr David Reichardt of the Parramatta Nepean Presbytery drew on David's thesis on the Murray Darling Basin by discussing the over-allocation of water, mainly for agriculture, and its consequences for wildlife, nature and humans alike. David pointed to passages in Scripture e.g. Psalm 104 that show the love God has for his creation.

The Seminar was addressed first by Dr Miriam Pepper of Uniting Earthweb (Uniting Church Faith and Environment Network) on the subject of *Ways Community Gardens Help in Caring for Nature.* The popularity of gardens centres around benefits to urban communities in growing food, reducing waste production, increasing urban diversity and reducing 'food miles', .

Next, David Reichardt spoke of

plans that he and his wife Lena have to go to North India later this year to work; she as a doctor and he as an ecology scientific consultant.

In India he will be implementing training in ecology, e.g. responsible disposal of rubbish such as plastics in mountain catchments, reforestation and addressing the implications of climate change such as the melting of glaciers and consequent loss of water supplies to the land.

Nola Stewart, retired Science teacher and former deaconess/missionary conducted a Bible study on the Parable of the Tenants, using her book of Bible Studies on "Caring for the Creation".

Next, she used a PowerPoint presentation to draw attention to the many scriptures that speak of God's care for other species in his creation and our responsibility to take care of them.

Rev Evangeline Pua of the Indonesian Christian Church wrapped up the proceedings, both verbally and literally, with a demonstration of how to carry fragile items using a cloth wrap as a replacement for a plastic bag.

Nola Stewart (Convenor, CCWG) Nola's PowerPoint presentation and further information is available via the ACC website link to Caring for Creation in Resources.

In the Newcastle Herald letters page

July witnessed an interesting exchange about the Jonathan Moylan case, raising the 'thorny question' again of who speaks for the church?

July 20: Silent vigil for accused

The Social Justice Committee of the Hunter Presbytery, Uniting Church of Australia, wishes to express its support for Jonathan Moylan, who is facing criminal charges which could incur a heavy fine and/or a prison sentence for allegedly sending a hoax email regarding the withdrawal of a loan from the ANZ bank to Whitehaven Coal.

This loan was to enable a massive new open-cut coal mine to be opened up at Maules Creek in the Leard State Forest.

Approval has now been given and work has recently begun...

We believe Mr Moylan's actions drew attention to the extension of mining in Leard State Forest, and the impacts on biodiversity and upon the communities who work the land in that region.

...Members of the Uniting Church in the Hunter will be joining the silent vigil to support Jonathan Moylan.... Ross Edmonds, Steve Bevis, Social Justice Committee, Hunter Presbytery UC

July 22: Truth better for the environment

I BELIEVE the letter from the Social Justice Committee of the Uniting Church Hunter Presbytery lacks credibility because of an apparent assumption by the committee that it speaks for all the membership of the church ("Silent vigil for accused" Letters 22/7).

My experiences as a church member and an ex-member of a presbytery committee alert me to an alarming trend within the Church for various office bearers to make public statements of their personal views or of their pressure group as if they were the views of the whole membership without first seeking approval.

While I share Jonathan Moylan's concern for protecting our environment, I deplore his alleged use of public misinformation for a supposedly ethical purpose. In my opinion, such tactics discredit the environmental movement....

Alton Bowen, New Lambton



ctsale / istockphoto.com

PUBLIC SQUARE

B Y P S E U D O - M A X I M U S

Negative language

Politicians regularly accuse each other of ‘negativity.’ As Frank Furedi observes, it is now used, not as the opening salvo in an argument to refute opponents but as an insult designed to smear their character (*Inquirer, Weekend Australian* 17-18 August, p20). One campaign gaffe is enough to discredit the perpetrator for being mentally unstable, stupid, unenlightened and narrow minded. “The political insult serves as a substitute for argument and debate.”

The tactic is not new. Assuming superior virtue and belittling others, those in authority have always bent political culture to their will. Nowadays it is self-styled progressives who regard supporters of traditional values as dangerously old fashioned—a sign of impoverished intellect and mental deficiency. Who wants to be “on the wrong side of history”?

Consider, too, ways in which supporters of what were once regarded as mainstream values. “Jacinta’s choice” (*The Weekend Australian Magazine* 17-18 August, pp. 23-25) is a moving story about Labor Senator Jacinta Collins. The article sympathetically outlines reasons for her traditional views on abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriage. But, in line with the current fashion, it portrays them negatively. She is “anti” what right-minded feminists and reformers believe, having a “hard line stance on social issues”.

When negative language is used, in the church and the community, to discredit the character of opponents or their unpopular views, public discourse is impoverished and decisions are made, not on the basis of rea-

soned argument, but according to the loudest, most condescending voices.

Infant morality?

On 23 July euphoria greeted the royal birth of George, the great grandson of Queen Elizabeth II. On the same day, thousands of babies were born in squalid conditions. In “Australia’s shame” (August *Crosslight* p. 3), Penny Mulvey asks why we dote on the new prince and tolerate policies that neglect refugee children and send them to Papua New Guinea where the infant mortality rate is 14 times higher than Australia.

Surely, she says, we should follow the example of Jesus, the royal son of God, whose life, death and resurrection “reshaped the world and provided a counter cultural perspective on children”. It is a national disgrace that, for short term political gain, our politicians are happy to grant the royal baby free lifetime access to Taronga Zoo but do not weep for babies denied access to a better life because they were born in “the mud and squalor of refugee camps”.

This timely lament resonates with many in the church and the community. It is unlikely that the response would be as strong if she had bemoaned the fate of babies denied access to life by the squalid business of abortion.

A Communal Word

In *Belief Matters (Insights July 2013 p. 36)* Dr Ben Myers, Lecturer in Systematic Theology at United Theological College, reflects on the Apostles’ Creed. He notes that many couples, instead of repeating traditional

words, now write their own wedding vows and that many churches, instead of affirming the creeds, prefer to write mission statements. In both cases, ‘we assume the truest thing we can say is something we’ve made up ourselves.’

Who, then, he asks, is the “I” that speaks the creed? Shunning what he regards as the conformism of this prevailing individualism, he proposes that we embrace the countercultural reality to which the creed refers.

He identifies the “I” as the body of Christ into which we are incorporated. ‘In baptism we weren’t invited to come up with our own personal statement of belief; we were invited to join our individual voices to the voice of the church.’ Thus, ‘in confessing the creed, I allow my own individual “I” to become part of the “I” of the body of Christ.’

It is to be hoped that this communal word will be heard by evangelicals, progressives, spiritualists and post-modernists who mistake credal affirmations for lifeless traditions that suppress the individual’s faith, reason, experience and opinion.

The President is pumped

You have to feel sorry for our President, the Rev. Prof. Andrew Dutney. He isn’t getting out enough. Clearly there is little excitement in his life! How else can we explain the fact that he is “pumped” about a project to re-establish a database of UCA congregations and ministers, the first since 1994.

Apparently, collecting statistics about the dramatic changes the UCA has undergone will be the basis on

which he will be able 'to tell the Unit- ing Church's story far and near' and lead to 'a refreshed missional vision' overseen and resourced by the As- sembly.

Why such an intensive survey is necessary isn't clear. Everybody, including the President, knows that the church has grown smaller, older and more culturally and linguistically diverse. And we already know the results of the count. We are a Church in which diversity of belief and prac- tice is counted more important than numbering ourselves with the cloud of witnesses who have adhered to the classical faith of the church.

It's time to let down our ecclesiasti- cal tyres. The project is an exercise in futility—a distraction to give mem- bers the impression that the UCA is serious about mission. Is it too much to hope that our leaders will get "pumped" by the truly missionary challenge facing the church in a post- modern culture? We need people we can count on to declare God's grace in Christ, resist the libertarian nostrums of progressive ideology and encour- age the curious and the doubtful to abandon nihilism and embrace the Gospel.

'Suppository' of wisdom

The Federal election campaign was noticeably short on humour. That changed with Tony Abbott's line about "the suppository of wisdom". Treated by many as a sign of unfitness to hold office, it provided comedic relief from the tiresome name-calling, slogans, claims and counter claims that marred public debate.

It also enabled sharp-witted wags to expose tactics stored up by politi- cians on all sides.

In "Suppose you answer the ques- tion" (*The Age*, 15 August, p. 20), Tony Newport says that Tony Abbott "has coined a new meaning for the humble word suppository". He explains. "A typical political response to any pointed question usually proceeds as follows. Suppose I try to be more compassionate to asylum seekers than what about people smugglers?" ... He concludes: "Suppository—the politi- cal art of giving the answer you want regardless of the question."

Cartoonist Michael Leunig (*The Saturday Age*, 17 August, p44) showed a how to vote card, complete with photo, for 'Dick Bottom, Rep- resenting the Hole of Australia.' The

accompanying poem reads: "The sup- pository of wisdom, The enema of the state; In the annals of society, It's never been so grate."

Such insights into the dark places of

political evasion truly are repositories of wisdom that Christians should wel- come as they, too, argue for integrity in public life.

IAN CLARKSON

The Bible is not a story book

Let's stop using the word 'story' or 'stories' when we refer to the New Testament. And the extensive historical sections of the Bible in general. We should readjust our language to fit the facts. We often hear 'the story of the birth of Jesus', or 'the Christmas story'. Or more generally 'Bible stories'. The TV series *The Bible* was promoted as 'tales' and the stage show *Salome*, as based on a biblical 'tale'. This kind of language suggests that all the Bible contains is stories. And stories can be anything—usually made-up yarns carrying a moral of some sort. Certainly not actual events!

We should correct the way we use language to bring it in line with the reality of the literature of the New Testament, and what it claims about itself. The apostle Peter testifies "we didn't follow invented stories". John details the physical evidence for the Gospel and reports details of the crucifixion providing the basis for fact-based faith.

Paul details eyewitness evidence of the resurrection which is open to falsification, naming eyewitnesses who were local and alive at the time of his published letter.

Historian Luke documents a care- fully investigated sequential eyewit- ness account of the teaching and work of Jesus up to his ascension. His work stands as a seminal exam- ple of historiography. His account of Paul's final sea journey provides more detailed maritime data than anywhere else in the literature of the time. In many places editors in the Old Testament note: 'as it is to this day', and in both testaments persons and events outside the Bible's theme are referred to, thus anchoring Bible events in a wider verifiable history.

If other forms of communication are used such as parables or visions,

they are clearly labelled as such. It would be better and more accurate to use a term like 'account' or 're- port'. Not story! *When Scripture is read in churches (and let it be read well) let us dispense with 'story' and use accurate terms like 'the account of... as documented by Luke', or similar terminology.* It's up to us to counter misleading and even deceptive terms with accurate ones. Uphold with relevant terms the nature of the evidence for our faith presented in the documents.

Currently there is increasing debate over religious freedom. According to assertive secularists Christians can talk about their reli- gious ideas in their church services, sharing their 'cultic tales' with self- reinforcing emotion! The notion that preachers declare historical facts, mandated by Christ openly to the world with universal trans- generational relevance is abhorrent to these elites.

Remember when the Democrats pushed that sort of thing here two elections ago? Last week a couple of newspaper articles opposed Christianity in politics claiming religion must be kept away as a private oddity. The Quebec govern- ment is currently proposing to ban religious symbols in public spaces. *They can try and bury or buy out religious sentiment and feelings, but evidenced facts with global signifi- cance can't be closeted.* We are not just a 'faith people'. We are reliant on truth revealed to faith in objectively evidenced Scripture, reason and experience.

Let our use of terms match the reality of the Bible and the challenge of the day when we do the ordinary Sunday work of reading the Bible. And not just on Sunday. Or not just in church. Lets quit using the mis- leading word, 'story'.

Creation *and* evolution

One of the oldest debating ploys is to link a highly contentious proposition with one more easily argued, in the hope that your opponent will be lured into arguing against the supportable one rather than the contentious one.

Early in the evolution controversy, those hostile to Christianity engaged in this tactic by arguing, "Since evolution is true, there is no need for a Creator God". Unfortunately, Christian apologists fell for it. Instead of arguing that, just as knowing how a piece of machinery is assembled, does not obviate the need for somebody to assemble it, so understanding the process of evolution in no way discounts the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient God, they chose to argue the falsity of evolution, an argument that they were bound to lose as knowledge expanded.

Daphne Freeman's letter (*Catalyst* July 2013), sadly, indicates that Christians are still falling for the same old debating trick.

Perhaps thirty years ago it was possible to be sceptical about evolution on the grounds of mathematical probability and teleology, and indeed I was myself. However, this is no longer tenable in the light of recent work in genetics (interestingly, much of it done by Evangelical Christians like Francis Collins and Denis Alexander).

Acknowledging the likelihood of evolution does not negate belief in God as Creator and Sustainer of the universe, but enhances it, or of the Bible as God's word. It simply means that we must read the early chapters of Genesis in a different way, accepting that they are a statement of theology in a narrative form, something quite common in early societies, rather than a history.

It also, provides a rationale for the role of pain and mutation, cutting across the challenge to belief that these present to many non-Christians.

May I suggest to those troubled by this matter that they read *Creation or Evolution: do we have to choose?* by Denis Alexander (Monarch Books).

Gary Ireland
Camden NSW

Thanks, Don

Congratulations on what may be your best issue yet. The amount of material on marriage is timely in view of the current political situation. Australia is at a crossroads where a wrong turn could have a devastating effect on future generations.

Rev Don Purdey's article is particularly encouraging as we have observed many negative answers to requests for healing going beyond the scope of the medical profession. Many thanks to Don for his perceptive article. It is particularly relevant to our efforts to accept the Divine will as we have a distant Christian relative who was diagnosed with MND. He exercised significant support to other sufferers in his final years rather than give in. We also have friends, a couple who entered the ministry from our congregation. In retirement they continue to exercise a thoughtful ministry although he is restricted by Parkinsons and she has had her ability to be his carer cut by MND.
*Alton Bowen
Hunter Cluster ACC*

Sometimes we weep

I was very disappointed to read the article by Ian Clarkson "Health to You" in the April, 2013 edition of *ACCatalyst*. I disagreed with his simplistic, moralising words from several different perspectives.

Firstly, as a Christian General Practitioner of over 30 years' experience, I found his comments about the "medical industry" highly insulting. Extreme and unsubstantiated statements like: "The medical industry is protected and fattening at the expense of welfare to vulnerable families" lose all credibility, when it is well recognised that most doctors (Christian or otherwise) are generally very willing to "bulk-bill" financially-challenged patients.

It would be much more cost-effective to charge higher fees, open only

9am to 5pm, and cut costs on clinical care standards. However, most of my colleagues are very willing to provide services at a significant discount to those in need, show compassion, provide preventative health care, spend appropriate time with patients, and behave towards all (staff, colleagues and patients) with respect and professionalism.

Mr Clarkson advises: "Christian doctors. Don't over-service, don't rush patients... take the care needed... We need New Testament health care, not worldly health snare."

It is easy to make such generalised and patronising statements, but this is contrary to what we, as Christians, are called to do. Rather, we could learn a better way: "Now we ask you brothers, to respect those who work hard among you... Hold them in the highest regard because of their work. Live in peace with each other... always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else." 1 Thess 5: 12-15. "Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers." 1 Pet 2:17.

Secondly, as a patient myself, who has had numerous complex medical problems requiring frequent hospitalisations and surgical procedures, I found Mr Clarkson's simplistic solutions for "the sick" very hard to take.

Knowing well the Scriptural injunctions to be prayed for and anointed by church elders, I have often attended healing services and have had many prayers for healing. Sadly, my illnesses have continued to cause very difficult daily problems and challenges to all aspects of my life.

Mr Clarkson's words: "What God-honouring health are we missing - what money are we wasting?" do not provide me with any sense of comfort. One of the hardest aspects of living with chronic pain and illness is handling the insensitive one-liners of others, especially Christians, who demonstrate a profound lack of care or compassion for what others live with every day. Perhaps Mr Clarkson could avoid adding to our pain and try instead to "weep with those who weep".

Dr Michele Browne Cambewarra NSW

God only knows

Peter Bentley examines what happens when a church leader is unmasked as a criminal

On what could have been any normal Sunday morning in February 2005, Pastor Michael Clark of Christ Church Lutheran in Wichita, Kansas had to inform his congregation that one of their leaders would not be at church that morning. He had been arrested on suspicion of being one of America's most notorious serial killers known as BTK. Dennis Rader was nearly 60 years old, and had been a member for thirty years, and most recently President of the church council. He was married for over 33 years, with two children.

BTK stood for bind, torture, and kill, a comment coming from one of the many twisted messages he sent over the known killing years 1974 - 1991. He had even used the church premises for one torture session. Rader pled guilty and was convicted of ten murders and sentenced to 175 years.

BTK (Rader) had come back into the spotlight in the 2000s after the re-igniting of the open cases and had been lulled into more communication. One of the keys to his capture was a package, including a computer disc, which he had sent to a media organisation. Rader had used a church computer where the disc information had recorded the memory details of the church (as owner) and last person to access the file.

How would you have reacted to this Sunday news?

Carol Costello, CNN anchor in New York interviewed Pastor Clark and a congregational member three days after the story broke.

<http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0502/28/ltn.04.html>

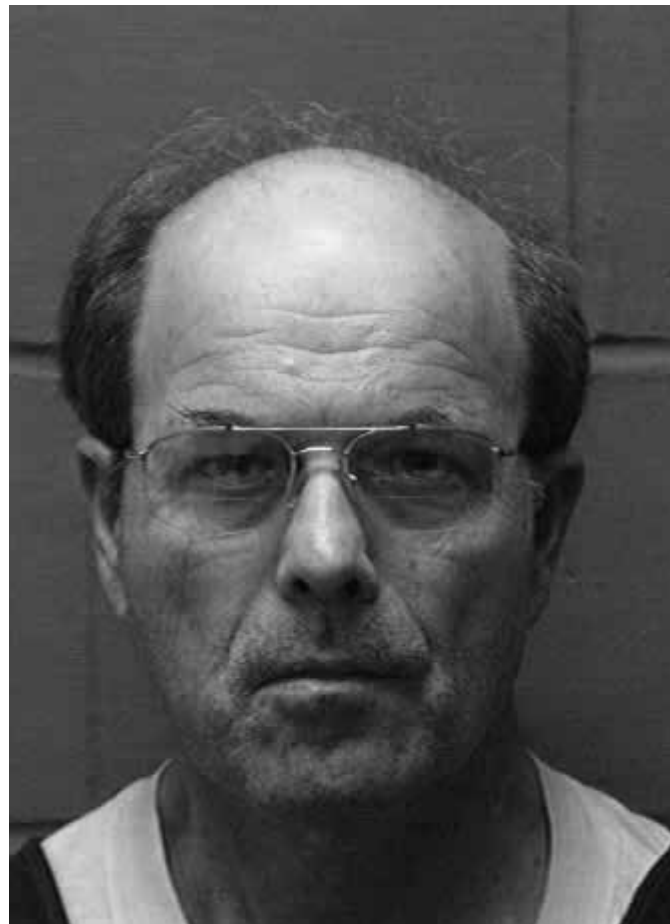
Aired on *American Morning*, February 28, 2005 - 07:30

COSTELLO: So, when you heard he was arrested for being the BTK killer, you thought?

CLARK: I was very shocked. I was bewildered, confused. I guess those are all words that came through my heart and my mind.

COSTELLO: I mean, how would you describe his personality? I know you said he's devout. Some members of the congregation say he was sweet, he was caring, but others weren't so positive.

CLARK: He was a very pleasant man to be around. He



El Dorado Police Department mugshot of Dennis Rader, taken following his arrest.

was there every Sunday. I could depend on him to handle the sound system, to usher whenever we needed it. He engaged the members of the congregation in conversation, was willing to joke with people, but not an outgoing, boisterous kind of person.

COSTELLO: Paul, I want to talk to you now. We're just trying to equate a man who dropped spaghetti off at the church's potluck dinner and a man accused of torture and murder. Has the congregation come to terms with this?

CARLSTEDT: I don't know if we'll ever come to terms with this, but we are learning to cope. This is not the Dennis that we, as a congregation, or myself personally, know. You're right. Wednesday evening I spoke with him. He stopped at the church and said he was not going to be able to be there for the meal that night, but he had signed up for something so he brought it. And that's the Dennis that I know.

COSTELLO: I have heard that some members of the

congregation were crying when they heard this came about. Is that true?

CARLSTEDT: Yes, that's true. I think the emotions will run deep because of our caring for Dennis and for Paula and the family and for the person that we know.

Pastor Clark was a regular visitor to Rader during the next two years, and at the courtroom, Clark was often seen studying Psalm 51, and spending time in prayer.

In another case, Conservative Babylon, an unfortunately growing website "dedicated to Exposing the Hypocrisy of the 'Family Values' Crowd, One Right-Winger at a Time", took the more traditional line of judgement and condemnation. Curiously, at the end of each article, a bible verse or verses is provided for the sinner who is named and shamed. The one chosen for Dennis Rader is Psalm 109: 6-8.

We will all have probably multiple reactions to this story, but perhaps similar ones. Disbelief is common. One hears anecdotally that this is the most common reaction after a serial killer is caught. No-one can really believe it.

And yet, how many judged Rader's wife? People asked, 'How could she have not known?' This is the question I noted appears in the background of many articles.

Clearly though, she and the children were devastated beyond words and now live in seclusion. The family home was bulldozed to the ground as an extension of a parkland.

Now, I don't want readers to dwell obsessively on their neighbours, or start watching them with binoculars like Jimmy Stewart in the classic Hitchcock film *Rear Window*. I believe this is a story that teaches us more about ourselves than our neighbour. I want us to reflect on who we really are.

Rader has written poems about his time. One early poem contained in a letter which was actually sold (sadly there is quite a market for serial killer memorabilia),

We will all have probably multiple reactions to this story, but perhaps similar ones.

where he expressed thoughts about his black side – the hidden side, which he now regretted had been exposed.

I well remember prominent New Zealand researcher and writer Dr Neil Whitehead, asking rhetorically in a presentation at the 2005 Reforming Alliance conference (in the context of yet another public example of a fallen prominent Christian leader): "What lies hidden in our communities? What skeletons lurk darkly in our closets? What are we hiding?"

While we can often jump up and down, condemning the church, the family and of course in this case, Rader himself, would we go the whole way, and say pull the lever for an execution? Or do we consider our own situation?

On a deeper level, I realise that we are all subject to judgement even if we have not physically murdered someone or stolen, or committed sexual immorality, even if the immoral act is not illegal. If our private thoughts and dreams were broadcast to the wider community would we be embarrassed or shamed like some US celebrities seem to be each week?

Jesus provided a counter-cultural punch in his Sermon on the Mount.

21 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. (Matthew 5: 21-22, TNIV)

We can all condemn the killer displayed so easily on the outside, but we do well to remember the killer within us, and what comes from within can not only kill us, but those we love. Perhaps we need to take the log out of our own eye first?

In a poignant piece in *The New York Times* (August 19, 2005), Jodi Wilgoren, wrote about 'A Pastor Who Stayed by a Serial Killer's Side'.

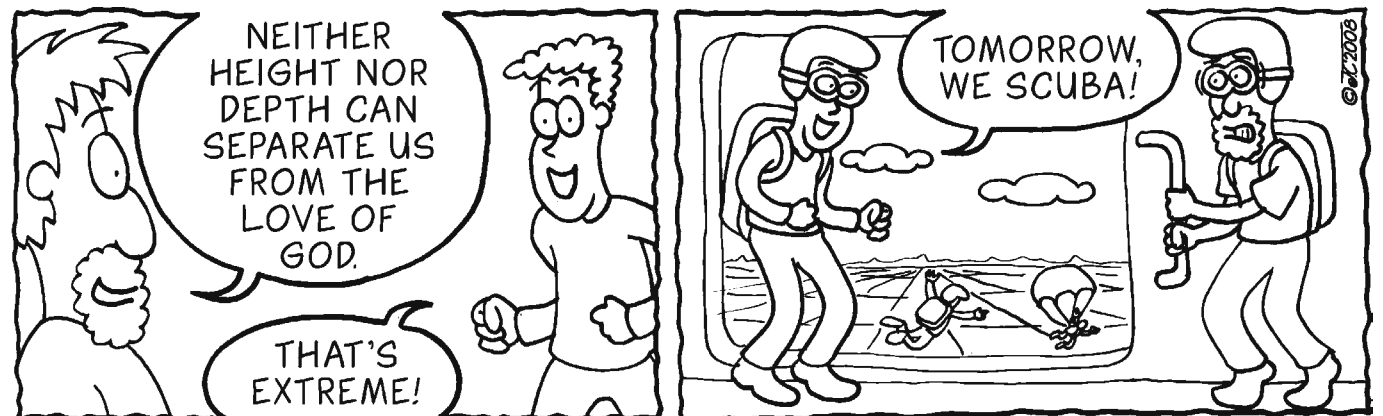
Apparently people kept asking Clark how he could visit this evil man.

"I just tell people," Pastor Clark said softly in an interview in the courtroom, "would you want me to stop coming to see you if I were your pastor?"

I am actually relieved that it is only God who really knows my heart, and also thank God that through Christ my heart can be changed for good, rather than evil.

Peter Bentley

Berntley is the ACC National Executive Consultant





Why ‘Gay Marriage’ is not good for Australia

By Rod James

Why marriage is a government-recognised and registered legal bond

The question needs to be asked today, “Why do governments of nations involve themselves in legally registering one type of domestic relationship of their citizens?” The answer is two-fold:

1. It is in the interests of children to do so.
2. What is in the interests of children is in the interests of the generational progression of the nation as a whole.

It would seem that for governments marriage is about family, and family is about the raising and the well-being of children. Dr David van Gend, general practitioner in Toowoomba and a spokesman for the Family Council of Queensland wrote to *The Australian* newspaper,

Redefining marriage to include gay and lesbian couples would eliminate entirely in law, and weaken still further in culture, the basic idea of a mother and a father for every child.

Marriage is a compound right under Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; it is not only the right to an exclusive relationship, but the right to form a family. Therefore gay marriage includes the right to form a family by artificial reproduction, but any child

created within that marriage would have no possibility of being raised by both mother and father.

Yet legalising same-sex marriage will inflict that deprivation on a child. That is why it is wrong, and that is why all laws are wrong that permit single people or same-sex couples to obtain a child by IVF, surrogacy, or adoption. (The Australian August 29, 2011)

The matrix of the human person

George Orwell once remarked, “We have now sunk to a depth at which the restatement of the obvious is the first duty of intelligent men.” To restate the obvious about human life and well-being we need to look at the matrix in which that life is created and exists. This word, ‘matrix’, is both helpful and important in understanding what is truly good for a human being. A couple of definitions:

matrix - From Latin, *mater*, meaning “breeding female”. Matrix was originally used for the uterus or womb, then for a supporting or enclosing structure.

matrix- A situation or surrounding substance within which something else originates, develops, or is contained.

So the womb is the matrix of the unborn child. However the womb itself has a matrix—the pregnant woman has a necessary matrix that is the relationship with the father of the child and indeed the whole family of which that woman and her unborn child are part. People in non-western cultures understand this principle as fundamental and essential. It is only in the artificial individual-

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ism of western cultures that the broader matrix for the child can be thought of as non-essential.

To alter the obvious matrix of human generation, for the sake of a very small minority is to tamper with the 'womb' of the nation—the life-long love-union of a man and a woman, united in domestic and familial vocation. This is the wonderful matrix from which a strong and happy nation is born.

All of this is obvious, but we have now sunk to a depth at which the restatement of the obvious is the duty of all intelligent and courageous people. So this article is really about "Why heterosexual marriage and family is vital for Australia, and, indeed, every other nation". I will, therefore, proceed by talking about family, and then return to the matter of legal marriage.

The importance of mothers

The significance of mothers in the lives of their children is widely recognised in sentimental expressions of Australian culture. It is still important, however, to plainly state just how important they actually are. Recently Bill Muehlenberg wrote a piece for Mother's Day in which he said, *It is a no-brainer to declare that mothers are important. But we live in a no-brainer age in which the very concept of motherhood is now under attack. ...as family expert Steve Biddulph writes, "It now appears that mother-baby interaction, in the first year especially, is the very foundation of human emotions and intelligence. In the most essential terms, love grows the brain. The capacities for what make us most human – empathy, co-operation, intimacy, the fine timing and sensitivity that makes a human being charismatic, loving, and self-assured – are passed from mother to baby, especially if that mother is herself possessed of these qualities, and supported and cared for, so that she can bring her self to enjoy and focus on the task."*

(CultureWatch, Bill Muehlenberg's commentary on issues of the day. *The Importance of Mothers*)

The importance of fathers

The significance of fathers in the lives of their children gets much less press, but again research is revealing the truth of the matter. Fathers and closeness tend not to go together in our Australian culture.

The pain of a distant or absent father is movingly expressed in the following poem by Ken Canfield. Ken began his working life as a drug dealer, but progressed to the point of being a world authority on marriage and family. His poem gives us some insight as to how that was able to happen.

Circles of pain

One morning I stood at the window,
made cold from the outside rain,
and rubbed a circle on the steamy glass,
exposing beneath, the pane.
Through my circle, I saw my father
climb routinely into the car.
His job would keep him distant,
his work would take him far.
"Of course your father loves you.
Can't you see how he provides?
Just accept," my mother told me,
"that he keeps his love inside."
So I, too, learned the business
and made love a transactional art.
I sold my grades to buy his time.

I played sports to buy his heart.
Yet, I imagine that once my father
made his own circles on the pane.
I know his dad had left him.
He had not heard from him again.
And I imagine that, in his young heart,
he had made a solemn vow:
He would love his sons and give them time;
he would break the cycle now.
Yet despite his noble ambition,
my dad, too, soon became
another father, the circle unbroken,
the patterns still the same.
So as time passed by and our numbers grew,
I left home in my own car.
I never returned to mend the fences.
I never returned to star.
I never returned to share the pain I felt inside
and the grief I had learned to stuff.
No, it was more than I could handle,
but less than I could bluff.
Still, something inside me beckoned,
for I, too, had come of age.
I now had children of my own
that I had begun to encage.
No longer a boy, still I desired
a father's voice accepting of me.
Too often I wanted to scream and shout.
Too often I wanted to flee.
It was time to go, and wisely so,
to find that for which I yearned.
I couldn't make sense amidst the pretence
until I finally learned
That once, two thousand years ago,
the sky burst forth in rain.
It was a Son who had gone to work,
and a Father who felt the pain.
It was His whisper that drew me close,
a voice that caused no shame.
I found the Father of my great search,
and Abba is His name.

Ken Canfield also tells the story of a group of fathers and daughters that he took on a camp. One day they all climbed to the top of a high hill, for something special that he had asked the fathers to prepare for. The weather was unpleasant and the climb hard. Ken tells what happened:

But when we finally reached the top, something extraordinary occurred. The blustery wind suddenly died down, the clouds parted, and rays of sunshine burst through, almost like a spotlight. It was as if we were on holy ground. For the next hour, the air stayed calm and warm.

Then one by one each father introduced his daughter, shared something special about her, and pronounced a blessing on her in front of the rest of us. As each father shared—talking about his pride in his daughter, her unique gifts, and his love for her—he broke down and wept at some point, no exceptions. Next, all the fathers gathered around the dad and daughter and prayed that God would bring the blessing to pass. The daughters, who had been weary and grumbling, all became attentive and bright-eyed. After hearing her father speak blessings to her, each one was relaxed, talking, and laughing. I still hear from dads and daughters who talk about that day

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and the difference it made. (from Ken Canfield, *They Call Me Dad: The Practical Art of Effective Fathering*)

Emphasising fathers and fathering almost seems politically incorrect in our Western culture. But lurking in most of this culture's men and women is an unresolved father-relationship that continues to have a significant effect on the well-being and behaviour of the person.

Messing with the matrix

"Lesbian couple want to help boy to become girl"
A LESBIAN couple in California who say their 11-year-old son Tommy wants to be a girl named Tammy are giving their child hormone blockers that delay the onset of puberty, so that he can have more time to decide if he wants to change his gender.

Tommy's parents, Pauline Moreno and Debra Lobel, told CNN they support their child and feel this is the best way for him to find an answer to a question he has been asking all his life.

They say Tommy - whom they now call Tammy -- began taking GnRH inhibitors over the summer to give him more time to explore the female gender identity with which he associates. Tommy began saying he was a girl when he was three years old, his parents said. He was learning sign language due to a speech impediment, and one of the first things he told his mothers was, "I am a girl." The child's parents also said Tommy threatened to mutilate his genitals when he was seven, and psychiatrists diagnosed a gender identity disorder. One year later, he began transitioning to Tammy.

(Adelaide Now 1 8-10-11)

Raised from the time of his conception in a female-dominated environment it is unsurprising that Tommy would prefer to be a girl, and he has the kind of close family support to encourage him go in that direction.

Australia's social engineering parenting experiments

Over the last 60-70 years there have been a number of social engineering experiments in Australia in which well-intentioned but badly informed adults have sought to engineer the lives of children by taking them out of their natural birth matrix in order to improve their life situations.

1. The 'stolen generation'. Part Aboriginal children were forcibly taken from their parents and relocated into institutions or given to white foster parents.

2. The forced migration of children. The film *'Sunshine and Oranges'* tells the story of 130,000 children taken from their homes in Britain and sent to Australia.

3. The forced adoption of the babies of single mothers. During the 1950s and 60s the babies of single mothers were forcibly taken at birth and adopted out.

In each of these instances those children have grown up to protest as adults what was done to them as children, saying in effect, 'We acknowledge that you were well meaning in seeking a better life for us. However you have no idea what you did to us when you messed with our matrix by wrenching us out of our own families and forcibly engineering a substitute matrix'.

Will the next 'stolen generation' be children who are being engineered into homosexual families? In this case the engineering is not initiated to meet supposed needs of the child, but to fulfil the desire of adults to have children. Imagine how a boy might question the love of his lesbian mother: "Mum, you say that, in your love for



me, you took me away from my father and put me in the arms of another woman whom you called my second mother. You prevented my father from being recognised on my birth certificate and replaced him with a woman to whom I am not related. You have told me that I do not have a father, that I do not need a father, and that all necessary parenting of me can be supplied by two women. Mum, some kids do not have a father because of unpreventable circumstances, but I do not have a father because you did not want me to have one. Is this what you call your love for me, your son?"

This could also be the questioning by a girl of her 'gay' father.

The marriage matrix matters

Bill Muehlenberg again: *...A parent's absence or inaccessibility, either physical or emotional, can have a profound effect on a child's emotional health. Harvard psychiatrist Armand Nicholi has observed that individuals who suffer from severe non-organic emotional illness have one thing in common: they all have experienced the "absence of a parent through death, divorce, a time demanding job or other reasons".*

The selfish inclination is for a mother or father to love their children apart from or even over against the children's other parent. This can easily become a competition for the affection and loyalty of what become "my children". However, credible research has established that the best way for a father to love his children is to love their mother, and the best way for a mother to love her children is to love their father. What is happening in the family responds to what is happening in the marriage relationship.

Research among children has shown that the most widespread fear among children today is that their parents will split up. Pat Fagan, a well-known marriage and family researcher and counsellor in the USA, says that, when dealing with problem children, in 95% of cases he did not need to work directly with the children, but just with Mum and Dad. He says, "When Mum and Dad love each other the kids are OK. They thrive on the love that Mum and Dad have for each other."

Some say 'surely a loving gay family is better than a dysfunctional heterosexual family.' However, traditional families that are dysfunctional are not an argument for altering our nation's recognition of the natural matrix. Rather, they are an argument for recognising, upholding and resourcing it.

'Gay marriage'—the bridge to 'gay parenting' and 'gay families' A significant number of homosexual couples do not have a strong aspiration to be included in marriage as it is traditionally understood, i.e. as life-long and sexually faithful. For some there is an agenda to change marriage by lowering its high ideals.

It seems that the main reason for campaigning so strongly is that legal marriage brings with it a number of recognitions, one of which is the legitimacy of 'gay par-

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enting' and 'gay families'. Access by homosexual couples to IVF and the opportunity to adopt or foster children are a matter of regulation. They could be changed if found unhelpful to children. But if 'gay marriage' becomes law these things will be the lawful right of those who are recognised by the state as married.

If marriage has to do with children, we are being worked on as a nation to bring us to the fantastical position of believing that it does not matter if the matrix of human life is the union of a man and a woman, or a man and a man, or a woman and a woman.

For Australia to affirm these innovations it is necessary for our nation to erode the rights of children and to assert that children not only do not need, but are not entitled to the benefits of having a mother and a father.

Going down the slant road

When you are driving your car and you turn off the main road and go down a slant road, as long as you continue to drive along that road you must cross any bridges that you come to if you wish to continue. The alternatives are to pull over and remain stationary, or to turn around and get back on the main road.

The Uniting Church had turned down the slant road of affirming the validity of homosexual lifestyle and relationships. The first bridge we came to was the acceptance of practising homosexual people in leadership and ministry. We crossed this bridge in 2003 by passing Resolution 84 that gave congregations and presbyteries permission to have practising homosexual people in leadership and ministry if they wished to.

The next main bridge on this road is the first of two bridges that are quite close together. They are "sacred union ceremonies" (SUC) to celebrate same gender relationships, and 'gay marriage'. These bridges are close together because Uniting Network has indicated that they see the SUC as just a stepping-stone to 'gay marriage'.

At the moment the Uniting Church has pulled over and parked rather than continue on and cross these bridges. But the time is coming soon when we will have to choose one of the other two options—either cross these bridges or turn around and get back on the main road.

When travelling a slant road, the tendency is to think that crossing the next bridge will resolve controversy and bring peace. However each bridge crossed leads to another bridge, because on a slant road the number of bridges is literally unending.

Further down the slant road are bridges such as gay parenting, polygamy, group marriage, child marriage, incestuous marriage, open marriage, the removal of gender distinctions and the right of the individual to choose their preferred gender. Supporters of each of these innovations are waiting down the road, ready to urge us to cross their bridge.

In any organisation whose life is governed by regulation, when the slant road becomes the main road then other roads are decreed off-limits for officers, employees and leaders within that organisation.

That means that leaders and ministers who do not wish to cross the bridges that the Church is crossing will be marginalised and eventually excluded.

Australia on the slant road

All that we have seen above concerning this alternative road applies not only to the Uniting Church as an

organisation, but also to Australia as a nation:

- As Australia goes down the slant road of affirming homosexuality it will come to all the bridges on that road.
- There will be campaigners at every bridge, insisting that the next bridge be crossed.
- Australia will either have to cross those bridges, dig in its heels part way along the journey, or turn around and get off that road.
- As the slant road becomes the main road in Australia all those who are not able, in good conscience, to cross the bridges that our nation has crossed will be censured and excluded from positions that act on behalf of the government (e.g. public servants, members of parliament, etc.) and professions that deal with the Australian public (e.g. teachers, doctors, social workers, etc.).

Christian churches—vocal and silent

Recently the Christian churches of Australia responded to the current push for 'gay marriage' by issuing a joint statement on marriage. It is a worthy document, and represents an excellent example of how the Christian churches can serve their nation with a collective voice. It was signed by 50 prominent leaders from most Christian Churches.

Although the statement was a good expression of the Uniting Church's stated view of marriage, the only signatory to the document from the UCA was Dr Max Champion, National Chair of the ACC. The UCA has a hair trigger on making public statements and issuing strong advice to governments about social issues, even when the Church has no stated policy on that topic. By contrast, even though the Church has a clearly stated theology of marriage, our leaders have so far refused to say anything publicly in the current debate about marriage in Australia.

The prohibited debate

When you are debating a topic and you know that your argument is weak, it may seem necessary to proceed, not by contending for your side of the debate, but by attempting to throw the opposition off their game. This strategy is used on the sports field when a team 'roughs up' the opposition hoping that will distract them from playing the ball. Such a strategy is in fact a back-handed compliment—an indirect acknowledgement that one's opposition feels the superior weight of your cause.

In the debate over 'gay marriage' the response towards anyone who advocates the heterosexual nature of marriage is definitely of the back-hander type. Indeed, it is more like a swipe with a four by two piece of hardwood! Without any attempt to engage opponents of 'gay marriage' in issue-based debate, they have been vehemently attacked and mockingly dismissed as 'homophobic', 'hateful', 'narrow', 'bigoted', 'fundamentalist', etc. This is, indeed, a back-handed compliment, albeit with the proverbial four by two.

The advocates of 'gay marriage' know that their case is an exercise in special pleading which flies in the face of the ontological matrix of human life. They therefore seek to avoid the obvious by launching a concerted personal attack on their opponents. Only courageous people who are willing to risk getting mud on their reputation will dare to oppose them. At such a time it becomes necessary to restate the obvious.

Rod James chairs the SA ACC Movement.

Helping Marriages

Peter Bentley

How can the church encourage and support marriages in Australia, and especially in our own communities and congregations?

While we can issue statements, discuss theology, and put in submissions, there is a need to also consider to also some practical ways to reach out to people in increasing times of challenge and stress and at a time when basic 'marriage knowledge' is at a very low point. I believe more work can be done especially at the pre-marriage time. I list below a few thoughts to begin a conversation and welcome your contribution and comments.

1. Community Marriage Policies

Studies in the USA have shown that local churches can influence a region by having the same basis for pre-marriage counselling, and also jointly supporting and encouraging marriage enrichment programmes. Some churches in an area have signed up to a common marriage statement.

2. Mentoring programmes in churches

Churches could also consider implementing mentoring relationships, helping younger couples with positive older role models. A very interesting article reflecting on marriage and programmes in the USA considers many aspects related to community marriage policies, mentoring and education. (*Can This Institution Be Saved?*, A curious alliance of helping professionals is working to rebuild marriage in a culture of divorce. www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/november/26.52.html)

3. Increased training for Ministers

In some cases ministers are ill-equipped to undertake pre-marriage education, marriage counselling, or even adequate referral, perhaps sometimes related to their own personal circumstances and issues. I am increasingly bemused by ministers living in circumstances other than their church's doctrinal position on marriage and then actually providing pre-marriage education and officiating at marriages declaring the church's position.

Church resources should be provided to help interested ministers have an opportunity to train and receive education and specialised training.

4. Church Schools – pre-marriage education

It is perhaps not widely considered, but denominations educate a large section of the Australian population and while certain courses on relationships and sexuality are taught, church schools could do well to prepare relevant contemporary marriage preparation courses for students that reflect the denomination's understanding of mar-

riage, not only as a foundation for society, but to help young people come to a theological understanding of marriage.

5. Increased Funding and Support for Pre-Marriage Courses

Denominations could put more money into sponsoring and encouraging pre-marriage education. Research has shown how helpful pre-marriage courses can be as a foundation for better understanding, or even to prevent a possibly disastrous marriage from happening. Far better for people to understand they should not have married, than to marry for the sake of expectation or because the wedding has been arranged.

There is a need to consider to also some practical ways to reach out

Prominent researcher Robyn Parker comments: "Examinations of the effectiveness of marriage and relationship education programs are typically relatively complex and small-scale, short-term studies of particular programs that demonstrate some improvements in couples' relation-

ship satisfaction and relational skills.

"Such studies are unable to draw conclusions as to whether these programs can reduce the likelihood of divorce. However, this article reports on a recent analysis of a large-scale survey in which lower odds of divorce were found to be associated with participation in a pre-marriage education program." (Robyn Parker, *The effectiveness of marriage and relationship education programs*, Family Matters, AFIS, No. 77)

6. Marriage Enrichment Courses

Very few denominations put significant resources into this area, and yet some even bemoan the state of marriages in their own denomination. In the UCA, fewer resources have been put into Growing Together in Marriage, though the South Australian Synod is continuing to promote this ministry which was founded by the UCA in SA in 1981. GTIM is also endorsed by Baptist Churches in SA. www.gtim.unitingchurch.org.au

7. Promote Marriage Week

Marriage Week is developing as a wider inter-denominational event with a common agenda to support marriages in a time of increasing challenge. In 2013 this was held 8-14 September. Congregations can join as members and list their events on the website. A variety of ideas and suggestions are provided and resources for services and events: <http://marriageweek.org.au/>

The website also contains a helpful link to over twenty marriage ministries and courses: <http://marriageweek.org.au/marriage/index.php>

Word and Spirit

Authority and Interpretation in a Postmodern World

A resource paper for the ACC Annual Conference 2013
Reverend Noel S. Due (D.Min.)
Regional Resourcing Pastor
The Lutheran Church of Australia

It has become a truism to say that two issues above all others define the postmodern condition: its attitude to meaning and its settled incredulity towards metanarratives. Rehashing the history of how we've come to be where we are is too big a task for us, and you'll no doubt be familiar with much of it. But we face a situation that raises fundamental questions. Can we preach the gospel with authority in a postmodern world? What are the marks of gospel authority? Do we need more of the Word or more of the Spirit? Or both? Or neither? Can we not approach the mission of the church as we would any other organisation? Is restructuring and better planning the answer? Or are we merely flogging a dead horse?

Postmodernism: Is There a Meaning in Any Text?

Postmodernity and meaning have had a difficult relationship. They met in a crisis, and they've been trying to resolve their issues ever since. Neither of them has attained closure.

With the Enlightenment and Modern projects left in the smoking ruins of revolution, war and holocaust, each was in need of a new partner, but instead of returning to their roots they struck out in a new direction. Cain-like, they've been wanderers in the land of Nod for the last sixty years or more. Like popular spirituality, in which all rivers magically lead to the same ocean (watersheds notwithstanding), the postmodern difficulty with meaning has many tributaries. You'll be familiar with some, for example:

- Jacques Derrida and the deconstructionist school stressed language as a cultural construct. Being a function of culture, language will always be captive by

culture. Because meaning is intrinsically culturally conditioned, "certainty" and "meaning" are mutually exclusive terms. We need to get used to the fact that cultural constructions of language are infinitely variable. Hermeneutically we've been asking the wrong questions.

Paul was a product of his time, and his language was the product of his culture and its antecedents, so the exegetical question "What did Paul mean when he said x, y or z" is a *non sequitur*. Paul couldn't possibly know what his cultural constructs were.

Our deconstruction expresses but a new cultural construction, to be deconstructed by another time and culture.

- Richard Rorty expounded the view that meaning must always remain contingent, never objective; not because of culture, but because of where meaning is generated. Precisely because it's a socio-linguistic phenomenon of the mind, meaning must always remain provisional; one-to-one correspondence between the inner meaning of a sentence (constructed in the mind), and an external reality (perceived in the mind) is impossible.

For Rorty, language and meaning must be viewed pragmatically—not least because where they've been linked with ideological certainty they've become oppressive.

For him, the Enlightenment project fell at the first hurdle; it believed in the idea of an objective reality to which rational thought corresponds. It didn't realise that external, object truth was a category error of the first order. Rather than demythologising the world by human reason alone (as in the Enlightenment), a sort of pragmatic pluralism now serves as our (somewhat blunt) Occam's razor. Meaning must aid the advancement of liberty and undermine oppression. Pragmatism provides the parameters by which we can construct a non-oppressive worldview.

- Roland Barthes has told us that supremacy lies with the reader. Old semiotic models were clearly inadequate to explain the complex phenomenon that communication is.

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Much of a novel's power comes from the imagination of the reader, far more than the pen sketch of any character's features or actions given by the author. Indeed, the secret of good authorship is to engage the imagination, rather than to prescribe its vision. The rise of the reader has led to death of the Author (Barthes' capital). Once a work has left the Author's hand he or she has no control over it, nor should we expect it to be otherwise.

Reader response trumps Authorial intent like a royal flush to a pair of twos; the reader holds all the cards. As with beauty, meaning is in the eye of the beholder.

Yet the realms of linguistics, literary criticism and philosophy haven't been the only challengers to old certainties. Science, especially through the mysterious and very un-Newtonian worlds of quantum physics and cosmology, is no longer the black and white realm it once was.

In addition, the post-WWII generations have experienced a cavalcade of change. Technology; economic prosperity; sociological and demographic shifts; disillusionment with the old institutions; the turn to the east for spiritual enlightenment (just try to find a garden centre that *doesn't* sell plastic Buddhas!); the hidden persuaders of advertising and marketing; and the rise of the humanistic sciences have spawned a world barely recognisable to our forebears. Consumer-driven economies rest on a plinth of humanistic psychologies and sophisticated marketing. We've forged a world with the "reader" at the very centre of all things, even the ability to construct his or her own identity. Indeed, to do so is to choose empowerment over cultural oppression. To say otherwise is clearly inappropriate. It may even be unacceptable.

We've sat at least three generations atop such creations, as on so many brightly painted merry-go-round horses. The youngsters have squealed with delight at the ups and downs of the ride, but the music, lights and mirrors are a distraction against the dank air of gathering night. They're getting sick from the ride—to the point of death—and there's some evidence to suggest the mechanism has sand in its gears. Will it throw all the riders off

Large and hotly defended volumes are written to explain it all. Literary theorists, linguists and literary critics demand to be heard and understood! They'll defend their reputations to the hilt, so say "No, I did not mean 'x', but I did mean 'y'. Even if I mean that meaning is meaningless, I want you to understand what I mean!"

in a bruising tumble? Or grind to a noisy halt, allowing the disillusioned jockeys to wander off, looking for something more substantial? Pastorally I bet you're encountering both. Regularly.

Now, lest I be accused of being simply a Naysayer we must say "Yea!" to some things.

Language, unarticulated cultural assumptions and shared cultural constructs are demonstrably intertwined, and readers—not only of the written word, but of the visual arts, film, performance and oral communication—don't always share the meanings of the authors. This is why book clubs, literary critics and minute takers at church council meetings all experience conflict about their "readings" of certain texts.

In addition, we have to face the fact that ideologically-based meaning systems have often been brutally oppressive. Meanings imposed by the mandarins of control have often allowed for no other reading—just ask Jan Hus, William Tyndale, or Martin Luther when you meet them.

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But there is also a supreme irony in all this. Large and hotly-defended volumes are written to explain it all. Literary theorists, linguists and literary critics demand to be heard and understood! They'll defend their reputations to the hilt, so say "No, I did not mean 'x', but I did mean 'y'. Even if I mean that meaning is meaningless, I want you to understand what I mean!"

I Mean What I Say, But I Don't Say What I Mean!

Other lines of critique lie closer to hand. You don't have to be a philosopher to appreciate the importance of preaching in any form. Everyone has a gospel of some sort. We've just come through many mind-numbing weeks of electioneering in which Australians have been preached at daily. As the church looks to the world for its power, comparisons between political sloganeering, business mission statements, corporate strategic plans and church vision documents reveal some unnerving similarities. But can we really package the gospel like the City packages its evangelism? Is our view of the Word and Spirit so hobbled that we've subjected the church to mechanistic cause and effect analytics? Have we become practical deists, operating under the pretence of Trinitarian orthodoxy?

In the media, weasel words, spin, and the endless chase to get a politician to answer a question are but the negative symptoms of an assumed truth: words are powerful. So powerful that we want to be in control of their meaning; we certainly don't want words put into our mouths by anyone else, least of all an opponent. Losing control of the narrative is a mortal sin.

The struggle for definition is veritably the struggle for life itself. In the typical Western two men fight desperately for the possession of a gun that has been thrown to the ground: whoever reaches the weapon first shoots and lives; his adversary is shot and dies. In ordinary life, the struggle is not for guns but for words; whoever first defines the situation is the victor; his adversary, the victim. For example, in the family, husband and wife, mother and child do not get along; who defines whom as troublesome or mentally sick?...[the one] who first seizes the word imposes reality on the other; [the one] who defines thus dominates and lives; and [the one] who is defined is subjugated and may be killed.

Thomas Szasz, *The Second Sin* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 25.

We recognise the power of words to define the ground and delineate the winning narrative. One is a "climate change denier", "homophobe", "misogynist", "fundamentalist", or "liberal". The list is endless, but with one constant feature: the emotive power of the label displaces dialogue. It condemns rather than engages.

The highly spun nature of political conversation on the one side, and the propensity to run to emotively-laden labels on the other, point to the issue—we expect communication to communicate something. The modern triumph of style over substance has its limits. At core we still recognise that words, their meanings, interpretation and power belong together. Do you get what I mean?

Does the Story Have a Happy Ending?

Yet, even if we recognise that there's a meaning in every text, we're still faced with a problem. The dilemma of contemporary society may be put like this: meaning may be uncertain, but certainty is oppressive.

This is the mantra of the other facet of the postmodern condition—the incredulity towards metanarratives. While it has been fed by a distrust of language as the agent of op-

Which is why we now stand at the roadside like the boy in the story, calling the Emperor's New Clothes for what they really are. Yet unlike him, we're .. not meek enough to see that we're the ones whose nakedness is exposed.

pression, its scepticism also has another source.

As you would be aware, a metanarrative is a big story, which seeks to explain other stories. This explanatory function is its power. A metanarrative is an overarching worldview, by which all other worldviews are examined and found wanting, or plundered to advance the dominant view. Christendom, Islam, Marxism, Nazism, Capitalism...the list of metanarratives is as endless as the shape of human thought. And the disillusionment when they fail is the stuff of revolutions and genocide.

Metanarratives are in the discard pile for a number of reasons. First, there are just too many of them! They overtake one another like the runners at Royal Ascot, with empires riding on the outcome. Warfare between metanarratives—literal or ideological—is the story of history. But, second, when the dust has settled and the dead are buried, the result is the same: each has failed to deliver on its promises. Notwithstanding different starting points, every train terminates at Dystopia Central. Why? Because, third, metanarratives are intrinsically oppressive. Being ideologically driven rather than pragmatic they're inimical to human freedom. Like the City in Revelation, their ships use human souls for ballast. So, fourth, their claims for truth and universality are self-evidently wrong.

Which is why we now stand at the roadside like the boy in the story, calling the Emperor's New Clothes for what they really are. Yet unlike him, we're too cynical to be prophetic, and not meek enough to see that we're the ones whose nakedness is exposed.

So, where do you go when you're in a big city without a GPS? Clearly, relativism is the answer! Any path is a good path provided it's not hurting anyone. Rejecting the very concept "metanarrative" is better than holding to an oppressive one. Except, this position becomes its own metanarrative! And it operates its own Inquisition—the totalitarianism of tolerance—that flexes its muscle daily in the media and increasingly in our courts.

In the end, opposites meet. Pre-Christian, pre-modern society bears a startling resemblance to post-Christian, postmodern society. The totalitarianism of Rome isn't too dissimilar to the totalitarianism of tolerance that confronts us. In their pluralism, the Emperor Cult became the overarching unifier. Allegiance to it was the litmus test of patriotism. We worship at an oxymoronic shrine: Absolute Relativism. And pragmatism drives us all.

Part 2 of this paper will be published in the next ACCatalyst

The DNA of the universe

Ted Curnow on a kingdom that will endure (Part 2)

We are engaged in a universe and a wonderful world much bigger than ourselves that surpasses our imagination. In a general way it can be said that there appears to be an intelligent design built into the universe that integrates the natural, moral and spiritual dimensions of life. While it could hardly be said, this is specifically spelt out as an important Biblical theme, nevertheless there are a number of Biblical passages that illustrate what might be called the DNA of the universe.

If we proceed with this understanding it is logical to reason that when we morally or culturally ignore or abuse God's given design for life then it is like throwing a hand-ful of gravel into an intricate machine. We can expect damage, dysfunction or breakdown. What does this mean when it comes to applying specific principles to human experience?

Human integrity.

The important starting place for a Christian approach is found in the knowledge that Creation is not an accident. Our loving Triune God brings light and life and order to the natural world. Genesis 2:7 is decisive in describing the unity and wholeness of humankind. In breathing the breath of life into us, in a wonderful way we are united to God's image and every living person inherits a dignity and the infinite worth of being a person.

When we live in accord with what we really are as people, we live with integrity and reflect the very harmony and unity of our Creator, the loving interaction and relationship of the Godhead. In other words, as people and as God's creatures we are essentially hardwired for love and worship of the Creator.

Sadly however, in our humanity we go against what we are and we put ourselves in opposition to God and his creation, hence the Bible speaks of humanity as being dead. (Gen 2:17 Eph 2:1) A kind of civil war rages within which exhausts our life force. We live in disharmony and fear and death are described as coming as a consequence of our sin. (Heb 2:14, Rom 5:12-21). What does this mean in practical terms? As a way of illustrating the interconnection between the different dimensions of life, finally we reflect on an area that touches every person.

Human health.

When it comes to our well-being and health Dr Ian Murdoch points out that the Greek word for anxiety means to "divide the mind". This means it is not correct to say that anxiety is part of the creational order of things.

Murdoch believes all creation was meant to interact in love even at a sub-molecular level. He suggests that the cells of our body not only experience stress but "the primal calling of love is felt within the human cell".

The cell or group of cells choose autonomy (and lead to health breakdown) because the effects of sin in the genetic expression of people over the years has dulled the proper choice of love. Psalm 32 also describes the connection between sin and how the whole body-function groans under this distortion. Murdoch says, "The whole dynamic of healing can only issue from the fact of the atonement applied to the person by the Holy Spirit". The knowledge that God has taken our sin and failure so seriously that in his love he has dealt with it forever through Jesus' death becomes the healing balm.

The cross not only deals with our personal sin, guilt and death and its adverse effects upon us, but by being released/forgiven, we are drawn into an experience of knowing the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Murdoch points to gifts of healing within the Christian community and concludes, "Do not underestimate the power of faithful proclamation week by week in the context of the whole church".

Not only is our faith response to the cross central to our own personal well-being, but in Christ God was reconciling the whole universe/world to himself.

The pastoral and evangelistic implications of this truth are many. The human and social sciences of our day should certainly inform us but we should not be distracted or apologetic about applying the Christian Gospel, the unique message of God's love to our social fabric, to our own lives and the real dysfunctional lives of people around us.

A genuine openness to relate and to love deeply flows from people who know they have been forgiven, restored to a relationship with God and connected to lifestyle values that are consistent with the DNA of the universe. Paul writes to Timothy, "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." 1Tim 1:5

Dr Nell Muirden (1932-2013)

Dr Nell (Nellie) Muirden died peacefully at the Austin Hospital (Victoria) on 9 June, 2013, aged 81 years. A wide range of family and friends attended her funeral service at St Aidan's UCA North Balwyn, including members of the ACC, associates from groups like Friends of Papua New Guinea, Friends of Vanuatu and former professional colleagues.

Nell was an active and vital member of the ACC Social Responsibility Commission and played a strategic role in the development of the ACC's resources on life issues for today. Research was her forte. One abiding memory SRC members have of Nell is how she would produce cuttings or references from her folders relating to almost any subject that emerged in the SRC's discussions.

Nell was also a long-standing member of the Victorian UCA Synod's Bioethics Committee until the Synod restructured it. (A news item about this was included in *ACCatalyst* at the time.)

Nell had a wide-ranging medical service and ministry. The daughter of a Presbyterian minister, Nell studied medicine at Sydney University, and graduated in 1955. Following internship, her first posting was to a town in the northern coalfields of NSW where life was raw.

As a young single woman she decided to serve the Church in Vanuatu and to save the cost of her fare, worked her passage as a ship's medical officer. Nell was petite and even in her mid-twenties was often taken for a young girl. When the ship was about to sail the captain wondered where his M.O. was, only to discover that the 'eighteen-year-old girl' who had already come aboard was in fact his M.O.

After further training and her marriage to John, also a doctor, in 1961, she served for 10 years throughout PNG. In most centres the facilities were understandably primitive in that era. Nevertheless, John's expert surgery and Nell's general medical and sociological efforts wrought much change.

At this stage Nell's speciality was Obstetrics & Gynaecology, with



Dr Nell Muirden

Pic from the Australia Pacific Hospice Palliative Care Net. work obituary

She would produce cuttings or references from her folders relating to almost any subject that emerged in the SRC's discussions.

related action on family planning. When they were moved to Port Moresby their influence escalated.

They returned to Australia for the education of their sons and after retraining, Nell moved into Palliative Care medicine at the Peter MacCallum Hospital. In June and July 2001 Nell travelled to Port Moresby General Hospital and Angau Memorial Hospital in Lae, PNG. This visit was supported by an International

Association for Hospice and Palliative Care Travelling Fellowship.

It has been recorded how Dr Muirden's visit greatly increased awareness about cancer pain and the importance of palliative care and pain relief for terminally ill patients. She produced a paper relating to the drugs needed and changes in treatment that should be made.

The Pharmaceutical Advisory Committee subsequently adopted these recommendations, which led to a better range of medications to treat pain becoming available throughout PNG. Both Nell and John were invested by the PNG government with a special honour created to recognise their invaluable roles in the country's development.

Our prayers and thoughts are with John and their children, Colin, Paul and Douglas and families.

Contributed by members of the ACC SRC

THIS IS THE ACC

Who we are

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

Our goals include

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

What does ACC do to help you?

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

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

What we want to do

The objects of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations are:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How to join us

Please consider joining the ACC.

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

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

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

PO Box 968 Newtown NSW 2042

What happens next

- October 11: SA ACC AGM at Glenunga Uniting Church
- October 19: NSW ACC and Evergreen special gathering at Pittwater Uniting Church.
- November 8: Queensland ACC Committee meeting

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

FILM



Tanner Mcguire as Tyler Doherty and Jeffrey Johnson as Brady McDaniels in *Letters to God*

Letters (ink on paper)

Letters to God (2010, PG)

Tyler Doherty is a young boy with cancer who writes letters to God. They are collected by the USA postal service that has different ways of 'delivering' this mail. After the regular postman who has looked after these letters for quite a while takes longer leave, the new postman, struggling alcoholic Brady McDaniels takes up Tyler's route. Brady finds his own life and relationships challenged by Tyler's faith. Other key characters are Tyler's Mum, her son, and her own mother.

This is a simple story about ordinary people struggling with their ordinary lives when a child's critical illness has them re-evaluate what is important in relationships and the place of faith. The tagline is 'Hope is contagious', and this film is about giving hope when it is very hard and even seems impossible. The film is also about one's life being a letter (the end-quote is from 2 Corinthians 3:3):

You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. (NIV)

It shows how seemingly ordinary lives have an impact on others in ways they would never have thought.

The co-director Patrick Doughtie has personal experience of the theme of the film, and penned the story. The other director David Nixon is well-known for his production work in

Christian films including *Fireproof*.

There are some stereotyped roles, including the pastor, though perhaps we all know pastors like this one? I still thought it was worth seeing, but

This film is about giving hope when it is very hard and even seems impossible.

I note it is a longish film if you were thinking of showing at an event (and at times it feels longer). A good edit of 30 minutes would make it a tighter and more coherent film and I believe more accessible to a wider audience.

There is a website with information about obtaining the movie for viewing, and also now an app. According to the website over 255 000 letters have been received via the app, with a revolving globe mapping out the public letters of prayer and displaying the latest ones. See: <http://www.letterstogodthemovie.com/>

The Letter Writer (2011, PG)

How long has it been since you received a postal letter? This film revolves around the endangered species known as the personal handwritten letter. In an age when short bursts dominate our increasingly social-media-oriented world, this film provides

a 'time out' for reflection and consideration.

Aley Underwood plays Maggie Fuller, a generally good, but pretty normal teenager and aspiring singer raised by her single-parent mother who has her own struggles. Maggie is trying to find a purpose in her life as she considers the world of music, her relationships, health issues, ageing, and many simply normal events. She is an unusual heroine, but certainly fits the role as she seeks to help others.

Bernie Diamond is 'The Letter Writer' Sam, an elderly man who sends letters of encouragement and affirmation by post choosing names from the telephone book. He also hand delivers letters to people he meets in his day-to-day walks or visits.

After receiving a letter, Maggie is so intrigued she tracks Bernie down and begins a journey of friendship and contact with others she would never have known unless someone had taken the opportunity to encourage her (and the way this comes about is taken as God-provided).

There are some poignant elements to this film, and certainly those involved with *Kairos* and *Emmaus* will know the power of receiving an actual letter and words of encouragement, as opposed to hearing words of abuse or degradation.

In their initial exchange upon meeting, Sam asks Maggie:

Sam Worthington: Didn't you like your letter?

Maggie Fuller: Yeah, but you don't even know me.

Sam Worthington: If I'm the one person that has something nice to say about you, I know you better than anyone else.

A central theme to the story is 'finding your role in life'. What are you meant to do on this earth? Sam puts it this way "Within every human being there is a God given ability that if you find it and nurture it you'll be able to bless the lives of others."

This is a gentle and intriguing film. I believe that it could be a film that will resonate with grandparents and parents – perhaps a good one for grandparents and grandchildren (not too young) to even view together?

Peter Bentley is the ACC's National Executive Consultant