

ACC Catalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



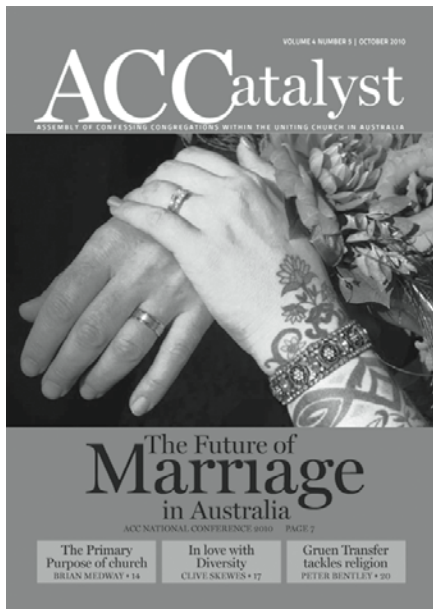
The Future of Marriage in Australia

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EDITORIAL

Married to the Mob

Besides hearing some great talks on Marriage, attending the ACC National Conference for the first time, gave this editor a better feel for the membership of the ACC. Seeing so many faces made the “assembly” more real.

It’s perhaps a little weird that we call ourselves an “assembly” when we spend most of our time apart. I am unlikely to meet most of the people who read this magazine until we meet in the great assembly above. I trust *ACCatalyst* helps us get there.

In my time as a columnist on *Southern Cross* (which serves the Anglicans in Sydney) it was common to talk of the diocese as an “imagined community”. If that was a good description of that magazine’s

role in keeping people who live from Wollongong to Sydney in touch with each other, it surely works for *ACCatalyst* with readers spread across the wide brown land.

One thing many members raised with me was a wish to see healthy, positive Christianity modelled in the magazine, alongside material that addresses ACC’s concerns with the Uniting Church.

Please be assured that *ACCatalyst* wants to meet the desires of the ACC members. So don’t be backward in coming forward—write to me!

Any comments and criticism about the paper are taken in the most positive manner possible. On my good days at least.

John Sandeman

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Rubey and the bully cat

Rubey peered through the door, her eyes wide with fear. Somewhere outside there lurked a nameless menace. Maybe it was close by or maybe not, but it was prowling somewhere, enforcing its reign of terror.

Twice Rubey had been attacked by this walking object of fear. On the second occasion she had come off badly and for days she suffered with a sore leg. She refused to go back outside for the next week.

After that she returned to the outdoors, but oh so cautiously and with so much fear.

This morning I met the menace. I saw Rubey walk outside, hiss and then quickly dash off in search of a hiding place, so I went out to meet the terror head-on. And there was a grey cat - yes, just a little kitty cat, but it was this cat who had been terrorising my Rubey and



Hilary Sandeman

peeing on the back door. “Get lost, cat,” I said. The cat looked at me for a second and then darted over the back fence in fear. He was happy to take on my cat, but he knew I was out of his league.

The size and strength of all problems and terrors are a matter of perspective. To a cat, another cat is scary. To a human being, another human may seem scary, or a human-sized problem might seem scary. To God, our enemies look like kitty cats who have jumped the back fence. They might mess with us, but they’re not brave enough to mess with our God!

Psalms 37:13 says, “The Lord laughs at the wicked for he knows their day is coming”. God is more than capable of taking care of us!

Robyn



Youth band at the ACC National Conference

ACC fellowship grows

The 2010 ACC Conference was held at Camden Uniting Church 2 – 4 September and provided confirmation of the growing fellowship within the ACC.

There were 120-150 members (depending on the session), and the ACC was warmly and well-looked after by the local ministry team at Camden Uniting Church led by Senior Pastor, Rev. Colin Seymour, Ps Carol Seymour (co-ordinating the mammoth job of catering), Ps Terry Cunningham (handling media), Ps Erin McKerral, Ps Simon Nixon (liaised impeccably with music and logistics), Ps Beck Bannister and Robyn Rudar (office secretary).

Thank you Camden Members for hosting our time – your Christian hospitality and love was a highlight. Special thanks also to Woollahra-Double Bay UC for providing buses to and from the airport, and to the NSW ACC Movement Executive for their overall co-ordination, and the ACC NSW Tonga group for the provision of a lovely lunch on Friday.

One person summed up the time as Christian love and fellowship in action.

ACC Youth at the Conference: The involvement of youth was a highlight with their leading of worship, and one elective. ACC Youth Co-ordinator Lupe Tapueluelu reports “that almost 25% of ACCY (ACC Youth who have already been contacted prior to Conference 2010) were represented at Camden, and that most of that

25% were made up of Youth/Young Adult leaders within ACC.

“I believe that the LORD is giving the Youth/Young Adults of this nation to those after his own heart”, Tapueluelu added. “There is rapid decline in the Youth/Young Adult membership within the UCA, but the LORD is giving them back, and I believe it will be through the ACC.”

The three key presenters were well received. Steve Estherby alerted members to the current challenges to marriage. In a wide-ranging address calling for “a new type of feminism”, Joanne Lucas told men that “abortion is your issue too”. Angela Shanahan spoke about politics and religion, raising questions about the growing support for the Greens.

The four electives also received good feedback, and summaries may be provided in the future editions of the magazine, and we hope to have material on the web as well.

- ‘Firewalling Family from Pornography’ – Ron and Ruth Brookman (Living Waters Australia)
- ‘Catch 22? The Future of Marriage in the UCA’ – Peter Bentley
- ‘Healthy Families, Healthy Teens’ – Professor Pat Noller (ACC Board of Communication Convenor)
- ‘Holiness and Purity 101 – a youth perspective on how to honour God in relationships’ – Lose Pouvalu (ACC Youth leader and Member of ACC Liverpool)

*Peter Bentley
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ACC Treasurer reports on appeal

This short report is to thank all ACC members and congregations who have so generously supported our recent fundraising appeal for donations, and to inform you of progress toward our financial objectives for 2011.

Up to the end of August we have received donations of about \$45,000 for the 2010 calendar year, and firm commitments averaging \$9000 per year for the following three years.

Our Capital Investment Fund stands at about \$46,000 and we have \$29,000 in our Operating account.

The recent ACC Annual General Meeting at Penrith approved an expenditure budget of \$200,000 for the current financial year.

Considering that we currently have about \$75,000 in our two accounts, the ACC will require an additional \$75,000 during the next nine months to meet our projected ACC expenditure for FY 2010/11.

It is my opinion that we do not yet have the resources to support a full-time National Director for 2011, and would need an additional commitment of about \$60,000 per year for the next three years to be able to employ a full-time director.

This was our primary objective for the Fundraising Appeal. We should, however, be able to support increased part-time activities, and our four other initiatives outlined in our Appeal brochure. These were:

- Supporting and Developing Youth Ministry
- Identifying Leaders to Support ACC Congregations and Groups
- Promotion and Wider Distribution of ACC Catalyst
- Publication of Study Materials

The National Council is very grateful for the support received so far. The purpose of this note is to encourage your prayers for support for the broader work of our ACC ministers, groups and congregations throughout Australia.

The National Council considers our ability to appoint a National Director as our most important priority, and would encourage you to do all you can to support this very worthwhile endeavour.

*Yours in Christ
Colin Adam*



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PUBLIC SQUARE

BY PSEUDO-MAXIMUS

The tyranny of consensus

Consensus is a beguiling idea—attractive in a world of conflict but dangerous as a first principle. The Federal Parliament is abuzz with the new paradigm in which robust party disagreements are to be replaced by consensus politics. It is enough to ask the members to join Charles Wesley in singing “*freely may we all agree, touched with loving sympathy*”.

Andrew Bolt does not belong to the Age of Aquarius. In “*Shun all talk of consensus*” (*Herald Sun* 25/8) he argues that a robust democracy requires “clear demarcations between both major parties”. It is starry-eyed naivety to think that reducing political debate and increasing compromise and negotiation will strengthen our national life.

He describes consensus as “just a weasely way to smother real differences in beliefs and policies and ... to force everyone to agree to what few want but to which none will object. It’s a highway to mediocrity, since every great new idea starts by challenging consensus.” (p.35)

This procedure is also well advanced in the Uniting Church. Since its inception in 1994, the consensus method of decision-making has been trumpeted as a breakthrough in civil discourse between Christians. Its adoption by other church bodies confirms its value.

In fact, when consensus is invoked before debate is held, disagreements on matters of substance are excluded in principle. Upheavals are carefully managed.

This is not new. In the 19th century Soren Kierkegaard described it as

“the levelling process”—“a deathly silence which nothing can pierce, in which everything is engulfed, powerless to resist” (*The Present Age*, p.51)

It is no accident that the recent controversy over the Sacred Union Ceremony hasn’t been reported in the Uniting Church press. Maintaining the consensus of those in power requires that conflict be silenced!

A kinder, gentler death

In the new kinder, gentler Parliament in Canberra, the Greens will introduce a bill on euthanasia, widely declared to be a kinder, gentler way of dying. PM Gillard says she is “conflicted” on the issue because of the difficulty of thinking about how to enshrine appropriate safeguards in law.

There are strong grounds for protesting against the legalisation of euthanasia. But perhaps both sides are guilty of shielding us from the harsh reality of death? Discussion on how to manage the process of dying usually takes priority over the meaning of death.

In *Faithworks* (*Herald Sun* 5/9) Bryan Patterson pinpoints the heart of the matter: “Facing the one death we will all encounter is not easy. Death-management courses cite survivors of near-death experiences to assure us dying will be a warm and comfortable experience.

The truth is death can be an awful and chaotic force. It is not ‘managed’, it is endured – often through pain, anger and bewilderment.

A death-fearing, death denying society feels uncomfortable with those who remind us of our ultimate

fate. The elderly and the seriously ill are sometimes shunned because they challenge illusions of immortality.” (p.83)

Christians must not contribute to the sanitisation of death by talk of the “passing” of the deceased. Hope in the resurrection of the dead does not bypass the harshness of death; it is grounded in the resurrection of the One who was crucified, died and was buried.

Father figure

In *Father Lode* (*The Weekend Australian Magazine* 4-5 September) Greg Callaghan interviewed Steve Biddulph, author of *Raising Boys*. Timed for Father’s Day, the article highlighted the importance of good fathers for the development of children’s self-esteem, educational achievement and law abidance.

Asked for some good news on Father’s Day, Biddulph said: “One of the things I am most happy about is that this new generation of fathers, the 20- and 30-year-olds, have tripled the amount of time they spend with their kids. This is a huge increase in just one generation, and it’s across the English speaking world.” (p13)

This statement goes against the grain of what we have been taught to believe. Hopefully, once strident foot-soldiers in the Gender Wars now realise the perils of one-sided attacks on patriarchy. Hopefully, too, a more nuanced assessment of the role of fathers will encourage us to re-open our eyes to what it means to speak of, and pray to, God as “our Father.”

Perhaps, though, in our politically correct society, such hopes are illusory?

Elders patronised

In hospital recently, David Campbell (*The Age*, 3/9) experienced what many elderly patients have felt —condescension. He was addressed as “sweetie”, “darl”, “poor old thing” and “love”. “Elderspeak” is now used by researchers to describe this common, patronising attitude that treats the elderly as dependent, incompetent children. While admiring those who work in the caring professions, and acknowledging the challenges they face, Campbell insists that older people be treated with dignity. Patronising them causes decreased self-esteem, depression, withdrawal and anger.

Condescension is not unique to aged-care workers. The ageing of congregations and the idolisation of youth cause older Christians to become disheartened. In *Icons of Grace: Ministry with the Frail Elderly* (2003) the late Rev Dr Bill Goldsworthy tells of a Presbytery meeting typical of how older people in the church are regarded.

“The devotions consisted of a lengthy discourse on the biblical story of Hannah who ‘had no children for the Lord had shut up her womb.’ The point of all this was, you may feel a barrenness in the church sometimes; you may be faced with an ageing congregation.” Goldsworthy concludes, “I was constantly faced with an ageing congregation and thought it was wonderful.”

No wonder older congregations, and their ministers, often suffer depression and withdrawal. Time to remember Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25f) – two frail old people steeped in the traditions of faith and full of hope. Instead of waiting to die, they long for a time when evil is defeated and history shall come to its glorious fulfilment. No point patronising them. In our congregations and aged-care work, Christians of all ages should learn from them.

The Pope in Britain

Pope Benedict XVI received a hostile reception in Britain. His visit was preceded by the child-abuse scandal. Once again, he apologised for the inexcusable sexual violation of children by priests and subsequent cover-ups by the church. Victim support groups were divided on the adequacy of his response.

Still, the Pope urged the British to resist aggressive secularism and atheistic extremism, and to remember the

Christian roots of their civilisation.

Opponents were not moved. Groups supporting abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality and female priests protested what they saw as the Vatican’s failure to uphold human rights.

Andrew Copson, chief executive of the British Humanist Association, spoke for many when he told *The Guardian* that “The UK is fully signed up to ... the European Convention on Human Rights. It is not hostility to religion that characterizes the negative reaction of many to the Pope’s state visit but hostility to the Holy See’s bigoted position on so many issues.” (Quoted in *The Age*, 17/9, p.10)

There you have it! Promotion of the “culture of life” and resistance to the “culture of death” is bigotry. Strangely, the refusal of the European Union to mention Christianity in the history of Europe is not considered “bigoted” but “enlightened.”

Uncertain marriage

The General Synod of the Anglican Church in Australia recently upheld the requirement of marriage that at least one partner be already baptised. In *The Age* (22/9) Barney Zwartz

reported that while “liberals and evangelicals agreed that a church wedding provided an opportunity of contact with people who knew little of the church”, others “mostly from the church’s Catholic wing, argued that Christian marriage is a sacrament of the church intended for its members.” (p.7)

Meanwhile, the sharp rise in couples choosing civil ceremonies was noted. In “Church weddings out” (*Herald Sun* 19/8) a young bride spoke for a generation when she said: “Life will ... keep going after we’re married. It doesn’t really matter what your ceremony is like, what matters is your life together.” (p.19)

In a church and a society unsure whether marriage is a Christian sacrament, an opportunity for ministry or simply a personal commitment, it is not surprising that the push for same-sex ‘marriage’ is causing such consternation.

The need for clear teaching on marriage is not helped by the failure of the President of the UCA, the Rev Alistair Macrae, to include a strong reaffirmation of the place of marriage in his recent calls to national leaders to act with integrity on matters of public importance.

IAN CLARKSON

Burqa, Bible and Boldness

Poor Jenny Brockie compering SBS *Insight* the other night trying to sort out whether the burqa should be banned or not.

“Why do you wear it?” she asked a totally burqaed woman in the audience. “Because I choose to please Allah and follow the example of the prophet’s wife” shot back the supremely confident authoritative answer, “and no one has any right to stop me”.

No appeal here to “research has shown ...” or “recent studies on women who wear the burqa indicate”... No way! Liberal relativism just had no chance on this playing field! Jenny was visibly stumped—no answer to this absolutism.

The sheikh and Muslim scholar didn’t make it any clearer or easier for her by cunningly presenting ambiguous responses declaring that only Muslims have the right to debate and decide on such issues.

Absolutism again. This was the essence of the notorious case in Victoria against the two Danny’s who dared to question Koranic authority by opening it up to scholarly investigation, in the way the Bible has become the most scrutinised book in history.

Can you imagine a Christian taking that tack on *Insight*, *Q&A*, or on any interview?

Yet, interestingly great revivals and awakenings throughout the history of Christianity including the Reformation are all characterised by positing Scripture, rationally understood, as the final appeal to Truth. Unlike the Islamist concept of Koranic authority, the testimony to Christ in the prophets and apostles radically applied has always led to wholeness for individuals and to societies and nations where liberty, openness, order, peace and the emergence of restrained and just governance are hallmarks.

The Lesson for Christians? Be humbly bold and graciously assertive with the truth of salvation.



LETTERS

Stirring the blood

Dear Catalyst,

David Logan's article (Catalyst 4:4) stirs the blood and rightly urges people to turn things around. However, I don't think the remedy is as simple as he suggests. It did not take "only one generation to kill revival." What we are seeing now is more likely the result of a century, not a generation, of change. To confront issues like same-sex marriage, abortion-on-demand and the like is in some ways doomed from the start.

These are just outcomes of decades of erosion of traditional Judeo-Christian values. The root causes are the problem.

A contributing factor was the shift from evangelical to liberal theology in many of the nation's seminaries in the early years of the twentieth century.

To take just one example: At the 1912 Methodist conference, W. G. Taylor, the first superintendent of Wesley Mission, Sydney, declared - "Back to Wesley! Back to the upper room! Rekindle the waning fires of the Church's inner life! Give the Holy Ghost an opportunity, even yet, to make us the great soul-saving force of the twentieth century!"

On another occasion, he pleaded - "Apostolic methods will still produce Apostolic results ... I tremble as I think of the bare possibility of this work ever being shifted from its old moorings. Disaster would be bound to follow."

Sadly, his words proved to be prophetic.

One recalls the endorsement of *Peake's Commentary* for seminary students by the Victorian Methodist

Conference in 1923 - a move strongly opposed by Methodist patriarch W. H. Fitchett—who saw in it the seeds of attrition.

By today's standards, Peake's work seems fairly mild, but it marked the beginning of a trend. Then there was the so-called "Angus affair" of a decade later, further indication of the tide of liberal theology growing to a swell that was not stemmed.

In subsequent years, theological and ministerial training moved increasingly away from evangelical understanding. I think it can be shown that one outcome of this move has been a weakening of community values, a decline in respect for the Church and diminution of faith in God. Not all churches followed this trend, of course, but many did.

Naturally, there are other reasons for Australia's increasing secularisation. The unquestioning acceptance of evolutionary theories is one. The Aussie passion for fairness and equality is another—an admirable quality that has been turned on its head to justify immoral causes.

But as far as the Church is concerned, turning the ship around will be a big task. No doubt God can do it quickly. Maybe one generation can change our destiny. But the change will need to penetrate deeply—especially into the area of theological scholarship, learning and teaching, so that a new generation of ministers is forthcoming who can, to quote Taylor, achieve both apostolic methods and apostolic results.

*Dr Barry Chant,
Sydney*

Why a smaller UCA has more potential

Our denomination is shrinking. In the most recent NCLS, we declined faster than any other major denomination in Australia. On any Sunday in NSW, for example, only about 30 000 people are attending Uniting Church worship.

So why am I excited? Because healthy UCA congregations are growing! Where the gospel of the atoning death and transformative resurrection power of our Lord Jesus is faithfully proclaimed, people are still being saved—praise God! Yes, even in 2010. Local churches where people admit their sin and brokenness, and seek the Spirit's power to release and change them into Christlike people, are places of joy, growth and hope.

I've been in a few lately—Coonabarabran, Camden, and Grenfell Uniting churches. And don't forget the vibrant Tongan, Korean, Indonesian, Armenian and other CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) congregations.

The way I see it, the smaller the UCA becomes, the more influence these alive, growing, repentant and Biblical churches can have!

Be encouraged—God has not given up on our congregations, so let's get out of His way and let Him renew Uniting churches. Whatever the future of the human institution misnamed the "Uniting Church", we can continue to spread the Word of God and it will not return void.

Anne Weeks

ACC NATIONAL CONFERENCE

CAMDEN NSW SEPTEMBER 2-4 2010



Robyn Painter

The Future of Marriage in Australia

Dr MAX CHAMPION,
Chair of ACC, on the
best place to begin a
discussion on marriage

In this session our focus is on the *covenantal framework* within which marriage and the family should be discussed. It would be ill-advised to start with psychological, sociological or legal matters before exploring the context in which the church's view of marriage arises. If we were to do that then, depending on one's point of view, marriage and 'family values' would be idealized or vilified.

In reflecting on the nature of the covenant in Scripture, it is important to note that:

● God is the initiator and guarantor of the covenant. It begins with God's creation *ex nihilo* of the cosmos and human beings, which was "very good." (Gen 1:31) The grand purpose of creation is that all things should thrive under the "dominion" (not domination) of men and women who shall "become one flesh" (Gen 2:24) in order to carry out this mandate.

● The covenant made with Israel is a covenant of grace established by God in a fallen world (Gen 3:1f). It is not a "contract" between equals but a relationship grounded in God's faithfulness to humanity. God's fidelity is the pre-condition of the covenant in which Israel is summoned to be faithful to God in being a "light to the nations." (Isaiah 49:6)

In Israel this grand purpose comes in the form of a calling to and through "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (Ex 2:24) to create families and pass on the history of God's

MARRIAGE

fidelity “to their children and their children’s children.” (Dt 4:9&10) God’s fidelity is marked by “steadfast love” and “discipline”. “I shall be your God and you shall be my people” (Ex 6:7; Lev 26:12) is both promise and obligation—from both parties. On our part it entails being a community which, in face of opposition, praises God and does God’s will.

● The failure of human beings to honour the covenant, and the need to recall the Hebrews to their vocation, reinforces the fact that the covenant is a covenant of grace.

● God’s covenantal grace is radicalised in the Incarnation of the Son of God. The “new covenant” means that God’s “steadfast love” for his wayward people has been embodied in the costly life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is powerfully expressed in the words of institution of the Lord’s Supper: “Drink from it all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant which is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28 // Mk 14:24; 1 Cor 11:25).

What does being a part of the covenant community mean in relation to the place of the family?

● Being part of a biological family is important but it is secondary to our participation in the covenantal family. We sometimes forget this when holding “family services”, which may attract “natural families” but discourage folk who are without families. We are called to “honour father and mother” (Ex 20:12; Lev 19:3). Jesus insists that the commandment be kept (Mk 7:10) but he also relativises the importance of family relations when he says “Who is my mother and who are my brothers?” (Mt 12:46f // Mk 3:31f // Lk 8:19f). Elsewhere he goes further, saying: “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:26 cf Mt 10:37 where the emphasis is on loving Christ more than the family).

The text must be handled carefully because it has been abused by religious groups. Nevertheless, it is clear that the family is a penultimate, not an ultimate good!

● Marriage and the family must be put in the context of the covenant. God promises Abraham that through him “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Gen 12:3) And in baptism we become “members of the faith and family of Jesus Christ” (Gal 6:10).

This means that we take our place in the community that has been founded and shaped by the love between Father, Son and Spirit. We take our place, as members of biological families, within a divinely ordained community that has its origin in the creation of the world, its end in the perfection of our humanity and its centre in the fully human Son of God who was baptised in solidarity with sinful humanity, suffered a fiery baptism on the cross and was raised from death.

We belong to the largest family on earth—the family formed from an unparalleled love for “the family of man” which originated in the love existing eternally between Father, Son and Spirit and is embodied in the One who had no family of his own.

It is often said that “blood is thicker than water”. But, in baptism “water is thicker than blood”. The natural



Dr Max Champion addresses the ACC conference

order of things is reversed! The “faith and family of Jesus Christ” into which we are baptised is not a family primarily defined by biology, nationality, colour, sex, status, wealth, denomination etc. The Christian or “christened” family is marked by the cross of the One who shed blood to break down the many “family” barriers that we erect to shield us from other “families” (see Gal 3:27-28). In baptism we are given our true identity, not by blood relations, but by being united to Christ in costly love for the world. That means being incorporated into the community of perfect love which exists within God between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. There is no higher privilege than to be included in this unique family of God. We are given our true identity within the very being of God!

The connection between what is penultimate and what is ultimate is splendidly expressed in the 1999 Report of the National Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the UCA on *Interchurch Marriages: Their Ecumenical Challenge and Significance for our Churches*. It reaffirms the churches’ mutual agreement on marriage as “the commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life”. It is a “public covenant with each other and with God” and “the unique sign of the unity which is promised us in Christ” (p.25). It states:

“Marriage for Christians derives its essence from God’s faithful covenant with his people, which is modelled again through Christ’s commitment to the church. For the Christian, marriage gains its meaning from God’s grace in Jesus Christ, and is to be seen as part of the new creation in him.” (p.26) ... “The covenant relationship of marriage is an image of and is sustained by the covenant relationship between God and his people, between Christ and the church.” (p.27)

Therefore, marriage and family are given their true importance and deepest meaning in relation to the covenant that God has initiated with humanity and graciously revealed in the history of the Hebrews and embodied in Jesus Christ.

‘Marriage leads to commitment...’

STEVE ESTHERBY says after 25 years, marriage is still an adventure

It is true that marriage does lead to commitment and so does insanity. My wife Lyndal and I recently celebrated our wedding anniversary. For 25 years she has faithfully demonstrated commitment and at the same time learnt to live with a madman. Marriage is a form of relationship about which many people have romantic notions. Some people who live in this selfish, self-seeking and self-obsessed world, think that the whole idea of marriage is just crazy. When marriage is explained they ask, “What’s in it for me?” I know from experience that Scripture’s answer doesn’t make sense until you view the world from inside the asylum of faith. Marriage speaks a message about God and I have discovered marriage is an adventure in this mad, mad world.

I have asked couples who share a mortgage and have several children, “How come you have taken so long to get married?” Often the reply is, “I wasn’t sure I could make that sort of commitment”.

We live in a society, that talks about the value of commitment yet practises expediency and is reluctant to make and keep promises. In this egocentric world there is a profound lack of trust and hope.

On Australian television in 1996 there was a series of advertisements, which ended with the words “For the most important person in the World—you!” One of the ads ran like this: Bride and groom standing at the altar, the sonorous voice of the Minister asked, “Will you take this man to be your lawfully-wedded husband ... until in eleven years he runs off with his secretary leaving you with a clapped out Holden and a bunch of screaming kids?” The subtext is of course, “You can’t trust anyone but yourself,” and of course that insurance company.

People who are not ready for “that” commitment have swallowed the doctrine of the age selfishness. Sadly they have missed out on the truth that Christian Marriage is a part of God’s cure for selfishness.

There is no let-out clause in marriage, no safety net and no nest egg. There is a profound reason for this: Christian marriage is more than a social contract. Christian marriage is a proclamation and a manifestation of the Gospel.

As a minister I hate it when a couple

wants to write their own vows. Why? They miss the point of marriage and end up trivialising the covenant.

This is what one couple offered up to me:

● *I (Groom), promise before friends and family, to clean up my dirty laundry, help you cook, clean, make the bed and put the lid back on the toothpaste. I promise to admit when I am wrong, even when I am not, bring you flowers even if I haven’t done something wrong and to love you with all my heart.*

● *I (Bride) promise before everyone and their dog, to always invite you to go shopping, never to complain when you snore and never ask you “does this make me look fat?” I promise not to talk your ears off, spend too much time on the phone talking to my friends and to fix a special dinner for you more often than you bring me flowers and to love you with all my heart.*

This is not a marriage covenant! It is some kind of insane and perverse “Let’s do a deal!”

When I first went out with Lyndal I was scared to say that I loved her. Why? What if she rejected my love? Eventually I realised that she loved me and I could speak the words.

My problem was I knew why I loved her but it was a complete *mystery* as to why she would love me. Marriage is a mystery of grace that helps us to understand the Lord’s love.

Marriage is all or nothing. You can’t have half of a union—that would just be an approach. In the marriage service there is the Declaration of Intent. Here the minister is really asking you whether or not you are willing to be committed into the asylum of marriage.

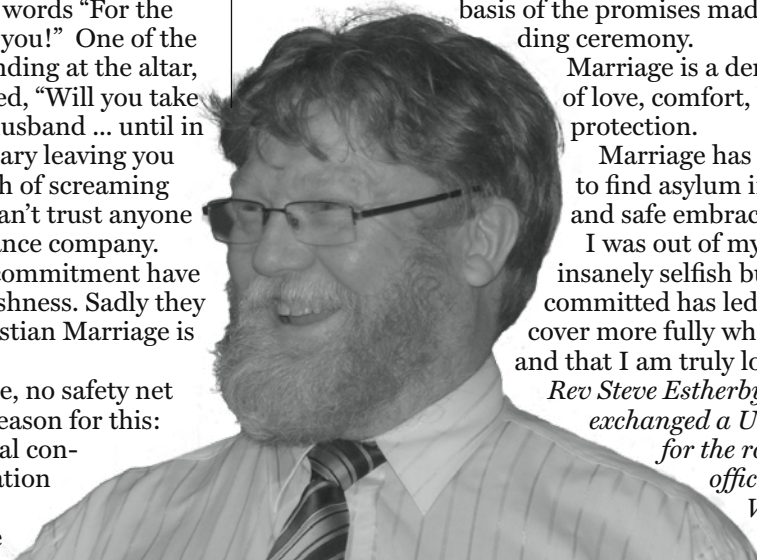
Christian marriage leads to commitment in which we give ourselves to our spouse and live together on the basis of the promises made in the wedding ceremony.

Marriage is a demonstration of love, comfort, honour and protection.

Marriage has helped me to find asylum in the secure and safe embrace of God.

I was out of my mind and insanely selfish but being committed has led me to discover more fully who I really am and that I am truly loved.

Rev Steve Estherby has exchanged a UCA pulpit for the role of state officer of Family Voice Australia



MARRIAGE

Greens fight culture war

ANGELA SHANAHAN
on the “long march
through the institutions”

The real culture war that we are fighting now probably began after the Vietnam War ended and the soldiers had come home, despite Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s confident prediction that the culture wars are over.

Surely what we should be asking ourselves now is what happened to all that communist fervour?

Did it just disappear into some countercultural Trotskyist Never Never land, where all the old ideologies end up? No, it ended up in feminism and the new “green” movement and the generally renamed “progressive” causes such as the gay lobby (a real favourite, that one) — areas quite deliberately and carefully chosen for the amount of havoc they cause to the accepted structures of stable societies.

The problem now is that the contagion that the old anti-communist guard were fighting is not eclipsed. Australia didn’t succumb to political communism, but the “Long March through the institutions”—as it was famously termed by the left wing sociological guru Gramsci—is still going on. Its focus is different, it has moved on from the unions and the academic institutions where it largely succeeded. Its focus is now the most basic building block of the structure of society itself. It is the family. Tear down the family you will tear down society—and rebuild into something else.

Curiously when she was asked whether Labor would support gay marriage, the Prime Minister Julia Gillard, an atheist, was at pains to point out that she thought it was not in line with our history and traditions—presumably our Christian traditions.

She knows as well as anyone that the new Christian movements and ecumenical alliances will not accept certain parts of the “progressive” social ideology, especially the part relating to marriage and family.

But despite this, time and again the Christian tradition is actually used to bolster the arguments of those who are trying to implement the progressive agenda. How many times have we heard “oh that’s not very Christian” when talking about homosexuality or gay marriage or abortion.

The Greens are particularly skilful at doing this. They tried it in this past election. Well aware that the electorate was fed up with both sides, the Greens launched a concerted movement to capture the disillusioned vote. And a part of that disillusioned vote was the Christian vote.

Now one might say, “Well there are a lot of dumb Christians, just as there are everywhere”—not that there



Angela Shanahan talks at the ACC National Conference

are any in this room. So let’s look at a few of those policies and see what we can expect from a Christian point of view from a Greens/Labor alliance.

Quite simply, the Greens do not have any family policy: none. I have scoured their website for a mention and while there are policies on maternity and women, and on children, which mainly affirm the right of women to work and have outside childcare, there is no category of family policy which treats the natural family as a fundamentally interdependent unit. That is surprising.

Why is this? One can only assume that this approach is because of the Greens’ conflicting ideas about humans within the natural world. For the Greens humans are just part of nature, no more important than a rare Tasmanian tree frog. The green narrative is all about humans and nature, but the natural family is not seen as a fundamental natural relationship.

The Greens’ policy on the place of religion in public life sounds tolerant enough, but in practice it would restrict the operation of Christian institutions on all sides. Calvary Hospital in Canberra, has been harassed by the ACT government which has tried to close it or take it over. This attempt was the direct result of a report by the Greens member Kerry Tucker which criticised the hospital for its lack of “the full range of reproductive services”—meaning abortions and sterilisations.

Finally, the one area of Green social policy that is often held up as most congenial to Christian thinking is their policy on refugees. But, unfortunately it is not a coherent policy from any perspective—Christian or otherwise and could lead to chaos and unjust treatment of immigrants.

So what of the political future under this nightmare scenario? Frankly, the only real opposition to this deliberate attempt to undermine Australia’s social cohesion and fragment the family unit comes from within the churches.

Only the churches have the organisation and the discipline to fight these battles and only the churches speaking in concert have the required gravitas and authority.

It is very important therefore that the message not become fragmented. It is very important that groups such as the confessing congregations and my own church remain true and faithful to the orthodox teachings of our Lord and the Church fathers on these matters. Faith and the family bolstered by the democratic tradition of public life have been the most important elements of Australian politics—despite our secularism.

Angela Shanahan is a columnist with The Australian.

MARRIAGE

Rod James: Covenant families

In the Scriptures the human story begins with our being created in the image of God.

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

Genesis 1:26-27

In Genesis 2 God “split the Adam”, making the relationship between man and woman uniquely intimate.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.
Genesis 2:23-24

We human beings are created as persons, made in the image of the personal God, and our relationships are God-given, not man-made. By God’s design our relationships are to have the following characteristics:

● *Defined by God.* Each relationship, husband-wife, parent-child, etc. has a given character. If a man has the same kind of sexual relationship with his daughter or his neighbour’s wife as he has with his wife we would say that this is against the given nature of things.

● *Given rather than chosen.* We do not choose our parents, brothers and sisters, etc. The first question the couple is asked in the Uniting Church marriage service is: “N and N, do you believe that God has guided you to each other and now calls you into marriage?”

● *Life-long relationships of covenant faithfulness.* In our families we are bound together in life to people we did not choose. Your Mum is always your Mum.

● *Relationships that are other-person-centred in love and service.* Hence God’s command: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

Just as atoms are held in structured relationship within a molecule, according to the design of the Creator, so we human beings have been placed in a well-designed relational structure of family and community.

The family is the primary school in which all relationships are learned, and so Paul is able to instruct believers to model relationships in the community of faith on their family relationships which have the above described covenantal characteristics.

Thus our covenant faithfulness in our family becomes the basis for the way we are to relate in the church and in the world.

The active agent of covenant is one’s word, and so we speak of someone being as good as his or her word. It is important children obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1), and that the parent’s word does not return to them empty (Isaiah 55:11).

The outcomes of covenant relationships are:
● Lifelong Marriages ● Stable Families ● Children raised in covenant security ● Trusting and trustworthy communities ● Strong and blessed Nations.

We can see that each of these levels of covenant faithfulness is built upon the preceding levels. Thus a nation is made strong from the bottom up. It is this structure that some elements in the modern political scene are determined to demolish.



Rod James in front of the Camden audience

In a humanist understanding of life, there are no given relationships, and so we choose, negotiate and contract our relationships according to our own independent rights and self-determination as individuals.

The word “partner” is used to express the contractual way of relating. “Partner” can mean a number of different things, e.g. spouse, defacto, homosexual partner, current escort, business or recreational associate. Inherent in the word “partner” is the idea that this relationship is something that we have initiated for our own purposes.

The outcomes of contractual relationships are: ● short-term disposable relationships ● marriage breakdown ● family disintegration ● sexually transmitted diseases ● children raised in broken homes ● abuses and perversions ● multiple-relationship burnout ● breakdown of community and national life.

From all of the above we can see that we were created for 100% covenant faithfulness. While we are allowed up to .05% alcohol in our blood when driving, even .00001% unfaithfulness will make for bad blood in our covenant relationships.

The reality of human relationships is that we have dishonoured our parents, fought with our brothers and sisters, cheated on our spouses, ignored our neighbours, exploited people in our community, and slandered and invaded other nations.

Guilt separates us from others and prevents us from developing strong and intimate covenant bonds.

A world created for covenant relationships requires a means of atonement, i.e. at-one-ment, or reconciliation. It is here that we hear the words of the Lord Jesus at the last supper, “This is my blood of the new (or renewed) covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28).

We need shed blood for the bad blood of our covenant breaking, and our older brother has made peace in the family through the shedding of his own blood for us.

None of us comes to covenant relationships out of the pure air of holiness, but rather out of the stinking smoke and filthy mud of hatred, lies, exploitation, neglect, lust, and violence.

Our own experience will demonstrate that the Divine solvent of atonement can dissolve our relationship impurities and restore our covenant power again. Because of God’s undying covenant love for us, or perhaps we should say because of His dying covenant love, John’s words become true in us and in our relationships.

“We (covenant) love because He first (covenant) loved us”. 1 John 4:19

Rod James is a member of the ACC National Council

MARRIAGE

Peter Bentley: Marriage in the UCA

Firstly I want to consider some of the changes in Australian Society with regard to marriage over the last 30-40 years. The central features of a (Christian) marriage continue to be challenged, including the public commitment; the appropriate place for sexual union; and "for life".

People generally now marry later in life (exceptions for Christians are members of more conservative churches which still maintain a belief that sex is reserved for marriage), and have children later, and fewer children.

Rates of cohabitation have increased significantly. Overall there is such a growing acceptance of defacto relationships that most people simply live together before marriage (if they do actually marry). According to the ABS 76.1% of people marrying in 2006 indicated that they had cohabited prior to registering their marriage, compared with approximately 15% in the 1970s.

One of the most significant impacts on religious marriage celebration has come about by the introduction of the broader civil celebrant programme in 1973. In that year 83.6% of marriages were undertaken by religious celebrants, but by 2008 this percentage had fallen to 35%. This change cannot be under-estimated as fewer people now have an opportunity to hear the Christian purpose of marriage declared, and for those marrying, undertake pre-marriage education courses that outline the Christian understanding of marriage.

Secondly while the nature of marriage was confirmed in legislation, there have been significant developments within Christian Denominations. In 2004 marriage was defined in terms of the Marriage Amendment Act as being "the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life".

In fact the legislation also states that "Certain unions are not marriages: A union solemnised in a foreign country between: (a) a man and another man; or (b) a woman and another woman; must not be recognised as a marriage in Australia".

This debate about the nature of marriage occurred after a period of pressure by certain sections of the church for recognition of same-sex unions and blessing ceremonies. This push has continued with an example being the ceremony held to join two men according to the marriage rites of the Religious Society of Friends (*The Religion Report*: 23 May 2007). While of course not officially recognised in Australia, the two men are recognised as married by Quakers around the world.

The UCA at present certainly confirms the Christian understanding of marriage and has excellent statements, including the declaration of purpose in the Marriage Service, the decisions of the 1997 Assembly, and agreed statements from our ecumenical dialogues. A helpful succinct statement on marriage can be found in the series produced by the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine.

However there are some issues. The following statement was included in the 1999 Agreed Declaration of Mutual Recognition by The Uniting Church in Australia and The Lutheran Church of Australia:

3.9 Marriage: We believe that marriage is instituted by God and is intended as a relationship of mutual companionship in which husband and wife complement and serve each other. We hold that the strength and stability of marriage and family life is the expression of God's purpose for the well-being of the wider society. It is the God-given institution for the expression of sexual intimacy. (See Pastoral Statement on Marriage).

It is worth noting that in adopting the whole statement at the 9th Assembly (2000), a significant clause was added with clear implications for this section: "(d) to note that this approval is without prejudice to ongoing discussions on sexuality"; and this section was not included in the revised and adopted version of the mutual declaration (2009-10).

I have also become aware of unofficial questioning of "For life", and suggesting set terms for marriages (similar in a way to placements for ministers), but the major issue for the UCA is the general acceptance of practising homosexual relationships, and of course the necessary corollary of condoning sexual relations outside of marriage.

The church is caught in a Catch 22 position with wider ramifications. If practising homosexual relationships are now allowed, why cannot ministers be in de facto relationships? Certainly, the UCA is seen as the most likely major church to change its position on marriage because it has already adopted such liberal policies.

A letter to the editor of *Crosslight* (VicTas Synod) in May 2010 headed "Support needed for gay marriage" concluded "The Uniting Church is at the forefront of progressive change. Society will commend us if we have the courage to institute equality and allow gay people to marry."

The UCA will be increasingly caught between different groups. There are some liberal ministers who see marriage as an outdated, patriarchal institution which has to be abandoned in favour of something else still to be defined. Others wish to change the church's position on marriage to include people of the same sex. Still others believe the concept of "right relationships", which in some places operates as the de facto basis for sexual ethics in the church should become the official policy. There are also liberal ministers who affirm the present understanding of the church's teaching on marriage, and are concerned about our ecumenical relationships.

Given there is a solid record of doctrine in this area it will take some significant number-crunching at the Assembly to introduce change, but

Peter Bentley

This is an edited summary of Peter's presentation at the 2010 ACC Conference and also part of his increasing work in progress on the topic of Marriage in Australia.

GOSPEL MINDED

Conversion? But we're Australian!

GREG PEARCE on the gods our neighbours reject

Even Australians die

I missed the start of *Look Both Ways*, but here's some of what I remember.

William McInnes's character, Nick, is in his cricket whites reclining on a cyclone fence, waiting to bat. He says to his mate, Andy, "Do you believe in God?"

It's an Australian movie, so you know Andy can't say "Yes". There's silence. The game continues. You think he won't answer at all.

Finally Andy explodes in white fury. "How dare you imagine that I believe in a distant, abusive, manipulative, unapproachable thug who's out to judge you wrong, wrong, wrong and send you to hell!"

Yet the question of God, or faith, remains before us as the movie unfolds. There are crucifixes, clerical collars, Madonnas and crosses throughout the imagery; a dying father's frantic spiritual search and his unconsolated death.

Near the end of the movie we find why the God question was asked: Nick tries to break a newly-forming relationship. His reason: he's riddled with cancer. He's facing death.

There's no conversion. There's a kaleidoscope of images of the relationship before the light goes out. But faith is one of the options.

That's interesting. It's also interesting why Andy vehemently eschews faith in God. His god is vicious. How would it help him to prop up this god? Rather be an atheist!

My personal deity

Ruth Ostrow, *Weekend Australian* columnist, loves Gospel music, so much that she went to church in the US. So caught up that she went forward at the end of the service! Found herself in a line of 50 people headed for baptism. She freaked: "We don't want to join the church...We're from Australia."

That says it all.

She translates the god she sings to: "Mother" (Nature) which is my personal deity of choice."

Well, no, that says it all!

Two things needful

These Australians are demanding two things. One is for believable believers; human, not wacky. How good it is when it's humans who look their friends in the eye, assuring them that God has made himself known.

I talked with a young man about Jesus making us human, not religious. His eyes moistened. He asked me to repeat it. It was such good news!

The only God

The second thing needed is to know which God. The only God is the God who has come in Jesus Christ. That does say it all! It says God is utterly for us.

Didn't Martin Luther say something like, "The only God we know is a baby suckling at its mother's breast in a stable"? Or something like, "The only God we know is a man hanging on a lump of wood between two thieves"?

Or theologian Robert Jenson: "God is whoever raised Jesus Christ from the dead".

The point is that if you meet God in Jesus you do not meet the gods Australia rejects. In Jesus you meet a God who is wanting not to be God without you.

You don't get Jesus as he is without getting the one who's died for you. You don't get faith in him without getting the one who's risen above death for you. Nor faith in him without having every mess you've made forgiven, and your future restored. The Jesus you get prays at the Father's right hand, for you.

So when you get faith in Jesus, the Father has already converted you to himself. God has utterly committed himself to be God-for-us.

Faith: how do you get it?

Australians don't come by faith easily. It is, seriously, a miracle, an act of God. Only God can awaken us from sleep or raise us from death. Only God can produce faith.

(We only trust anyone because they prove themselves. Faith is created by the trustworthiness of the one you place your faith in. We don't produce it ourselves.)

So if God alone can create faith, can we do anything to help another to faith? I believe so, and so I diarise it to seek at least one deliberate conversation a week with a seeker.

This is because we can at least talk about it! Why is it that Jesus Christ is the one you can trust with your life? Everyone we meet changes us in some way. A Christian can report how it is that an encounter with Jesus changes us beyond all other encounters – converts us to God. When we talk about that we are simply called witnesses.

In my case I have devised 5 reasons why I want to tell another about Jesus. In him I find meaning, forgiveness, direction, help and relationship. Each of these I can talk about, and so can you. That is, you can't produce faith, but you can witness to fellow Australians about who God is.

Greg is minister of Coromandel Valley Uniting Church in South Australia. He chairs the Hope Mission Network within that Presbytery, a network committed to the evangelical faith, and he's always on the lookout for evangelical expressions of the church.

The Primary

Brian Medway on what

Christian faith has lost its way in the western world. It is my intention in this paper to suggest that the problem has to do with a simple abdication of God's primary purpose. What is worse than losing our way is the fact that we have been able to cover up this loss for so long. What is worse still is the fact that our culturally-compromised way of following Jesus has been held up as the model to many other parts of the world.

The reality is that we are the least effective churches in the world. We have taken on almost every aspect of the Laodicean church described by Jesus in Revelation 1. It seems that our best subject is producing more forms of division and crass competitiveness. Add to that our penchant for moral compromise and you have a toxic brew. It is no wonder that Brother Yun, a Chinese Christian leader refers to the toxic effect that western Christianity had on the Chinese church from the moment some access to China was regained in the latter part of the last century.

The problem for western Christianity is that we have set aside the primary purpose and made other things our primary

purpose.

An appropriate Biblical parallel could be drawn from the words of Jesus about the Pharisees in Matthew 23. *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former.”*

His issue is not that they count the mint leaves on their bushes in order to satisfy themselves about tithing but the fact that they do this to the exclusion of justice, mercy and faithfulness. There is always going to be something very tempting about the idea of doing a

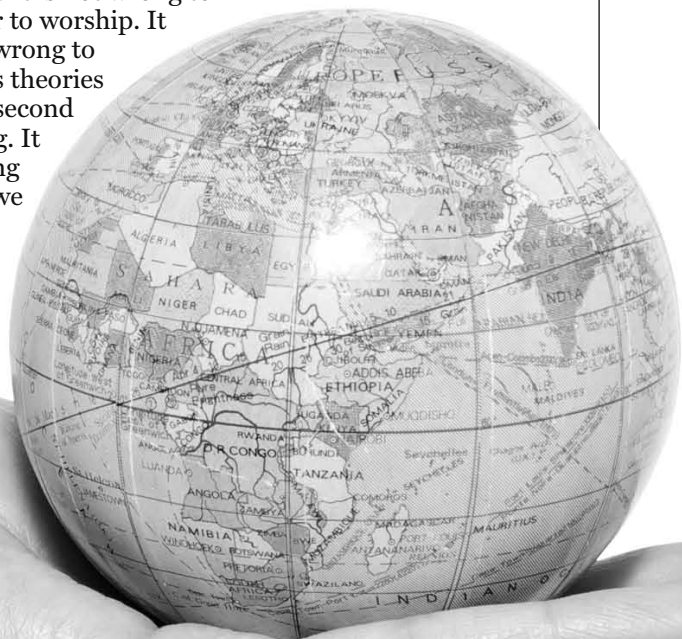
less-demanding peripheral thing well, instead of doing the most important thing at all. After all, you can count mint leaves. Justice and mercy are much harder to draw boundaries around and feel self satisfied about.

This shift and diffusion of purpose has not happened suddenly. It is the result of the steady undermining influence of our secular culture and its appeal to what the New Testament refers to as “the flesh”. Non-primary things have been allowed to sneak in and supplant what is genuinely primary.

None of these substitutes are bad things in and of themselves. The bad thing happens as a result of what they displace. These substitute preoccupations have supplanted a common passion and love for rescuing lost people. It is not wrong to pray or to worship. It is not wrong to discuss theories of the second coming. It is wrong when we spend our time doing

those things rather than loving and reaching every lost person.

Primary Purpose Substitutes. Here is a list of some of the things that have become substitutes. The issue has to do with position or function: primary or secondary.



Pakhnyushchyv

Purpose *Church is for*

It is about a good thing becoming so important that it excludes and sets aside the revealed primary purpose. Whenever a right thing is in the wrong place, it becomes a wrong thing. Here are some samples:

Bible Study, Worship services, Intercessory Prayer, Conferences, Events, Spiritual Gifts, Church structures, Theological Systems, Counselling, Prayer Summits, City Transformation.

I can hear people reacting to some idea that I am criticizing or seeking to diminish the essential importance of these emphases. The issue here is whether any of them are primary/ultimate. On the basis of Scripture the answer must be “No, no never”. If we ask the question as to whether it is possible for good-hearted believers to give themselves to one or more of these and ignore their responsibility to go and preach the gospel to every person, the answer is, “Yes, unfortunately, yes”. All of them are tools and means of grace to enable us to fulfil the only declared primary purpose. When we treat them as though they are primary these wonderful tools and weapons are turned to unnatural and internal purposes. The losers are the lost people who don’t hear, feel and see the gospel.

● None of these activities can claim the status of the Great Commission as delivered and repeated to the disciples by Jesus immediately prior to his ascension. His commission and authority were for them to go to every person and preach the gospel. If prayer were the primary purpose, Jesus would have said, “Go into all the world and pray.” If conducting church services was the primary purpose he would have said, “Go into all the world and hold church services.”

● If every believer was fully committed to any or all of these, the purpose of God defined in the words of the great commission would still not be completed. There is no Biblical justification for the premise that if we are all praying, the gospel will be fully preached to every person through our prayers. I can’t tell how many times I have heard people tell me that when Christians do some course or program on wholeness the result will be that they will have love for lost people and will go and do it. I can testify to that idea with respect to all of the activities listed above where I have had personal contact: it has never happened!

● These activities do not reflect the modelling or intent of the ministry of Jesus as a whole. Jesus himself spent his whole life preaching the gospel of the kingdom to every person in Israel.

John Mallison on why you should read “The Primary Purpose” by Brian Medway

I am well aware that your church is one that does take our Lord’s Great Commission seriously. However I felt sure you would appreciate *The Primary Purpose* by Brian Medway which I believe could have a major impact, especially in evangelical circles.

Brian heads up an independent missional church called Grace Canberra. He is now national chair of Cross-Link Network an association of independent evangelical churches throughout our nation.

Following the encouragement of a number of us Brian had 10,000 copies printed about a month ago.

I have already distributed 300 copies here and overseas. Since then there has been very significant responses to it:

- Key leaders who have read it have been most impressed and requested further copies.
- Daniel Willis, who is CEO of the Bible Society NSW, and as you are aware is a key person in the Lausanne Movement in Australia, has strongly endorsed it.
- He has arranged for all the participants from our region going to the Lausanne Congress in Capetown during October to receive a copy. As I say in my commendation included by Brian:

“However let us never forget that the obedience of the early disciples to Christ’s Great Commission which resulted in the early church, grew out of their being filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and this was preceded by their being “constantly in prayer.” Acts 1:14

“I sincerely believe that the Holy Spirit could use this document to awaken a revival across our nation as true Christ-followers seek to obey Christ’s Great Commission, constantly pray and depend upon the inspiration and empowerment of the Holy Spirit as they share Christ’s ‘Good News’ with others.”

I believe we need to help not only churches as a whole to take the Great Commission seriously but also individual true Christ followers.

If you also think this booklet is worthwhile then feel free to distribute it as plenty more are available.

Rev John Mallison is a former NSW Moderator and Evangelism Consultant



● None of these activities represents the expression of the heart of God that is revealed from one end of the Bible to the other. Only the Great Commission picks up the heart of a God seeking Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen. 3), sending Abraham to bless all the families of the earth (Gen. 12), commissioning his people to be a nation of priests (Leviticus 19), having a house built in Jerusalem that was to be a “house of prayer for all nations” (Mark 11), sending Jonah to Nineveh (Jonah) and commissioning his people in exile to bless their captors (Jeremiah 29).

Identifying Signs of Genuine Primary Purpose. We will only discover the primary purpose for the church (and therefore every believer) by figuring out what it is that will accomplish what God wants to do in the world. When we discover what God’s work is and make a commitment to do it, we will also discover why we need to do all of the other things and where they have their rightful place. In the purposes of God the secondary things are tools that serve the accomplishment of the primary thing. Our re-discovery of primary purpose will be what drives us to prayer, to read the Bible, to gather together, to resolve our differences and to seek the manifest presence of the Lord. The primary purpose will cause us to pursue those things for the grace they represent to get the job done.

For a purpose to be primary, it needs to be seen every day in the life of Jesus and it needs to be assumed on every page of the Bible. It cannot be something that needs theological professors to elucidate, or Greek and Hebrew scholars to explain. For it to be primary, it must be the passion that fires every other aspect of Christian life and experience.

The Com-mission that Became the O-mission. There is only one purpose that fulfils all of the criteria. It is found

in the statements we generally refer to as the Great Commission. Jesus clearly commissioned the church to do one thing: to disciple nations by proclaiming the good news of the kingdom to every person. It was the only thing Jesus commissioned his disciples to do. He commissioned ALL of them to do the SAME thing, not some to do one thing and others to do another. This commission is repeated in all of the gospels and again at the beginning of Acts. If we take account of the history written about each of the apostles, they all finished up suffering and dying for the advancement of the kingdom somewhere: mostly away from Jerusalem. The fact that it is so clear and yet so profoundly avoided is a mystery that I have never been able to fathom.

Two Personal Responsibilities. We were clearly given two responsibilities by Jesus in this commission: The first was to get up off our butts and go from where we were to where they are.

The second was to live, speak and act in such a way that they would know the good news of the kingdom. Our job was to be ambassadors of that intention with its message and lifestyle. One of the simple expressions of responsibility is found in Matthew 24:14. Jesus says, “*And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed in every different place in the world where there are people and to every different group of people.*” Jesus described the target group for this enterprise using two important Greek words: “*oikomene*” and “*ethnos*”. The first refers to every place where someone lives and the second refers to every different grouping of people. What Jesus was foreshadowing was that the disciples and their converts would proclaim the gospel of the kingdom to every place around the world where people were living and to every different tribal group. Another version comes from Mark 16 where Jesus says, “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every created person.*” The idea was to go from our own world into everyone else’s world and when we got there, our job was to communicate the gospel. These two things were given to us to do. We don’t have a choice about doing them. We can only be doing them or not doing them.

Brian Medway leads an independent church called Grace Canberra.

In the second part in this series Brian will discuss more on motivating a people to evangelise. This version of the Primary Purpose has been edited slightly for length.

The full leaflet of The Primary Purpose can be downloaded from www.gracecanberra.com.au

ACCatalyst’s good night in Hobart

ACCatalyst had good results at this year’s Australasian Religious Press Association awards, held on the same weekend as the ACC National Conference. A quick dash by Peter Bentley from the ACC event to the ARPA awards in Hobart turned out to be fruitful.

ACCatalyst won the Gold award for *Best review of another medium* with Peter Bentley’s “Samson and Delilah: Searching for hope amid despair”. “Placing the film in both cinematic and religious context, the reviewer astutely and convincingly

draws out a Christian appellation of this important Australian film—a perspective as he noted, that many mainstream reviewers neglected,” said the award judge.

David Millikan’s “The liberal experiment and the culture of un-

certainty” in the December 2009 issue won the silver award for best feature (single author). “A thoughtful, provocative feature inviting readers to think about Christian theology and in particular the views of Bishop Jack Spong” the award judge commented.

During his quick visit to Hobart for the ARPA Awards Peter Bentley was encouraged by his contact with ACC members at a meeting with the ACC Southern Cluster and at Woodbridge congregation where he preached.

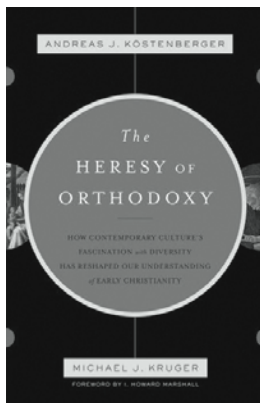


BOOK REVIEW

In love with diversity

CLIVE SKEWES reviews a critique of the way church history was re-written last century

"In the beginning was Diversity. And the Diversity was with God and the Diversity was God. Without Diversity was nothing made that was made. And it came to pass that that nasty old 'orthodox' people narrowed down Diversity and finally squeezed it out, dismissing it as heresy. But in the fullness of time (which of course is our time) Diversity rose and smote orthodoxy hip and thigh. Now, praise be, the only heresy is orthodoxy."
(D. A. Carson)



The Heresy of Orthodoxy by Andreas J. Kostenberger, and Michael J. Kruger. Publisher Crossway. Available at Word (\$20.95) and Koorong bookshops.

Much of what we know as "unity in diversity" derives from a widely accepted reconstruction of the Bible and the Church undergirding considerable scholarship on early Christianity, and much of

what we hear from John Selby Spong, Dr Francis McNab, and some gay marriage proponents.

This reconstruction originates from Walter Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (1934). Bauer claimed that before the 4th century Christianity was but a seething mass of diverse and competing factions, with no theological centre in historical continuity with Jesus and his apostles.

Orthodoxy prevailed because the Roman church rewrote this history. Bauer has influenced many, ranging from the scholarly Rudolf Bultmann to modern torrid fantasies such as *The Da Vinci Code*. Although Bauer's work was refuted by scholars when it appeared in English in 1971, today it has been resuscitated and promoted by Bart Ehrman, a prolific and popular scholar who has captured the public eye in popular magazines and various television programs.

Now a comprehensive critique of the Bauer-Ehrman thesis has appeared: *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How contemporary culture's fascination with diversity has reshaped our understanding of early Christianity*, by Andreas Kostenberger and Michael Kruger.

This readable book deals with many-layered issues as step by step it demonstrates the failure of Bauer to account reliably for the history of communities, texts and ideas that flourished in the era of early Christianity. The authors look at the origins of Gnosticism, the process that led to the canon, what our manuscript evidence

is, how texts were copied and circulated in the ancient world, and whether the New Testament text was tampered with on the way.

In doing so they demonstrate with clarity and compelling force that Bauer's thesis, though long embraced, is full of problems that need to be faced. They show that there is a unified doctrinal core in the New Testament, as well as a degree of legitimate diversity, and that the sense of orthodoxy among the New Testament writers is widespread and pervasive.

The authors ask why the discredited Bauer thesis commands paradigmatic stature. The answer lies in contemporary culture's fascination with diversity. This book is a valuable resource for all who are concerned about what is being done to the Christian faith today by those we expected to know better.

Clive Skewes is a retired UCA Minister, member of Emerald Congregation and assisting Max Champion at Mt Waverley. He is a member of the ACC Doctrine & Theology Committee.

Your own ACCatalyst!

The *Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church in Australia* exists to confess Christ, proclaim the Truth and renew the Church. From New Testament times there has been the tendency for individuals and groups in the church to veer away from the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1: 3, 1 Corinthians 11: 2, 23, 15: 3).

The Protestant churches of the Western world today contain many leaders who deny:

- That the man Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity,
- that his death on the Cross was God's way of making atonement for the sins of humanity
- and that he rose from the tomb on the third day as the first fruits of the resurrection.

In the face of such apostasy the confessing movement confesses "Jesus Christ—Son of God, Lamb of God, and Lord and God".

Subscription to *ACCatalyst* is part of an ACC supporting membership for \$60.00 per year. Member congregations or groups that subscribe to the ACC also receive *ACCatalyst* at their local church.

ACC has a regularly updated website at www.confessingcongregations.com You can download a form for ACC membership under "the Assembly" tag.

ACCatalyst subscriptions for non-members are available from accoffice@confessingcongregations.com



LOCAL CHURCH

Welcome at the Haven

Jill Walker and Phyllis Eddleston explain how they seek to create community in an isolated town, Peterborough, SA

"Taste and see that the Lord is good"
Ps 34:8

The Haven reaches members of the community of Peterborough, an old railway town on the edge of the Flinders ranges in SA, by providing a welcoming place that is not as threatening as a traditional church building.

The Haven has recently received good news of a UC grant of \$36,000 over two years through the Uniting Foundation, an initiative of the Uniting Church SA, which will allow them to move to a venue in the main street of the town.

At present the Haven uses the hall adjacent to the Peterborough Uniting Church.

Peterborough's greatest claim to fame is that it is one of only two places in Australia (the other is Gladstone) where three railway gauges met. While there is wealth in the region, Peterborough is not regarded as an upmarket town.

How did we begin?

In 2000 it was identified that within the community of Peterborough there needed to be a place where people could come to meet in a non-threatening, loving environment to experience good well-being through meeting Jesus Christ; where the marginalised, disadvantaged and lonely could be served and loved as Jesus loves and serves us.

Through prayer and planning the haven opened in 2004 as a coffee shop community in the Peterborough Uniting hall. It is a "third space" where people of all ages meet—not at home, nor in a church,



but in a comfortable and acceptable Christian environment.

What is happening now?

The day is girded in prayer: opened with study of God's Word, reflection/sharing, and prayer amongst those present.

For some this is their only point of Christian fellowship in a safe environment away from "traditional" church.

People come for a "cuppa and a chat". Fellowship is shared through the listening to others 'life journey', and the encouraging of one another. Light lunch is available and birthdays are celebrated.

Christian music is ambient, with literature & DVDs/videos available. We offer art and craft, board games, the inevitable jigsaw puzzle, and most recently instruction for beginning or rekindling of skills in basic sewing resulting in raising self-esteem through achievement.

Christian banners and other wall hangings have been completed, with

other group projects presented to the wider community.

What is the vision for the future?

Establishing a community through being available to those who are searching for sharing faith, searching for acceptance, belonging in a community where they feel comfortable in a non-traditional "church" setting is paramount to the sharing of the Gospel.

The UCA grant will allow the haven to establish a fixed venue in a more visible and central location, being open more frequently. This would help us further develop an authentic connection with the wider community.

In the new venue an evening meal could also be offered with an alternative worship service; a time of encouraging & sharing faith/testimony.

Coffee, books and more; come and see what God has in store.

A shorter version of this story was published by SA UC paper New Times in August 2010

AROUND THE ACC

ACC Pin

A pin with the ACC Logo has been produced for use by ACC members. It could be a helpful talking point about the confessing movement. The pin will be provided at state meetings and cluster gatherings, and also sent out when replying to mail and receipts. If you are keen to have copies of the pins now, please let Peter Bentley know how many you want and he will send them to you. (The pin has been generously funded by two ACC members).

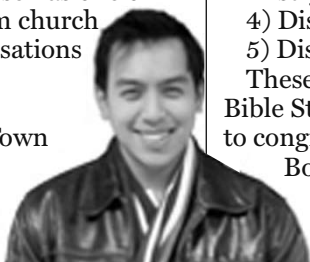


Andrew Chin off to Lausanne 2010.

ACC has sponsored Andrew Chin, the Evangelism and Missions Pastor of the International Congregation at Wesley Mission to attend the Third International Lausanne Congress in South Africa 16–25 October.

Andy was then chosen as one of the 60 delegates from church and Christian organisations in Australia.

Over 4000 leaders will gather in Cape Town to discuss and make recommendations about the major



issues of today and how they relate to evangelism and the Christian faith. Andy will report on his time in future editions of *ACCatalyst* and on the ACC website.

New ACC DVD on Evangelism

The Discipleship and Evangelism Commission has produced a DVD study series called “*Conversations in Discipleship and Evangelism*”. It was launched at the 2010 ACC conference. The DVD consists of 5 x 10-minute ‘conversations’ with study questions. A copy of this DVD and the study questions is being provided to each congregation in the ACC.

Over half the ACC congregations received the DVD at the 2010 conference (some members took a copy for a nearby congregation as well). For those who did not attend the conference, the DVD will be sent out to financial congregational members in the next month along with receipts for membership.

More DVDs will be produced and will be on sale for \$10. Details will be in the next *ACCatalyst*.

This DVD discusses 5 areas of discipleship and evangelism:

- 1) Disciples are called
- 2) Disciples are sent
- 3) Disciples participate in Christ’s ministry
- 4) Disciples and discipline
- 5) Disciples of the Gospel

These studies are ideal for use in a Bible Study, or to be handed around to congregation members.

Both the studies and DVDs may be copied, provided they are not sold for profit.

What happens next:

- October 16: Gospel Central Day Regional Seminar—Kyabram UC
- October 16: NSW ACC State Meeting—Liverpool UC: 10.45am Barry Chant and Max Champion speaking
- October 17: Dr Max Champion preaching at Richmond NSW
- October 22: SA ACC Committee—Golden Grove UC: 5 pm
- October 25: ACC Board of Communication: Teleconference meeting
- October 29–31: Dr Max Champion speaks on ‘Progressive Christianity—The Conspiracy to Re-invent Jesus’ in Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast, and preaching on the Gold Coast.
- November 15: ACC National Council
- November 19 - NSW ACC Committee—Wesley Mission: 10 am

ACC AGM news

The ACC Annual General Meeting was held during the national conference in Camden NSW in September.

We welcomed Fatai Tapueluelu as a new member of the National Council. Fatai is a member of the ACC Youth network and worships at Liverpool Uniting Church and is part of the “Hearing the Story” Tongan ACC cluster at Liverpool. We also thanked Pastor Grahame Abrahams for his time of service on the Council and with the Networks Commission.

The AGM received the reports from the Commissions and groups, showing the depth and breadth of the work of the ACC. God is doing many wonderful things through our committed volunteers and leaders. The booklet containing the AGM reports and the official minutes will be prepared by late November, and available by e-mail (and an edited version on the ACC website). A printed copy will be provided to congregations.

The date and location for the 2011 conference will be considered by the ACC National Council.

Power of a praying Church

- No one ever outgrows the need for prayer.
- No one ever outgrows the need to pray for others.

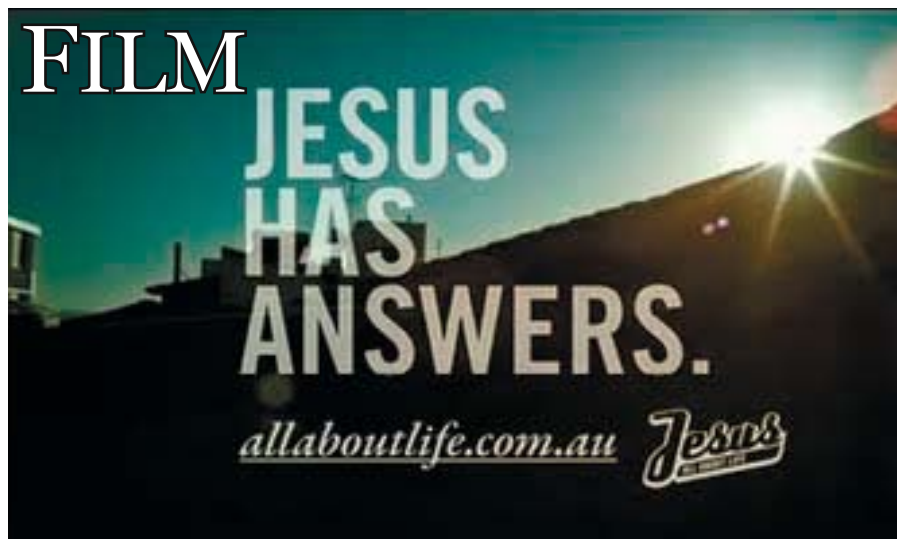
What would happen in our congregations if every member was prayed for every single day by someone? What would it do to our worship, preaching, ministries, evangelism, and relationships?

Someone you know needs

your prayers right now, for hope, patience, courage, love, insight, strength, health, and guidance.

Our churches wouldn’t be the same if we made sure, every person was prayed for every day by someone.

Mandy Scott ACC PrayerNet
ms.prayer@chariot.net.au
prayernet@confessingcongregations.com



A still from *Jesus. All About Life*, which the Gruen team liked

Gruen Transfiguration

One of the few TV shows I “religiously watch” is *The Gruen Transfer*. Screening on ABC TV, this is a show about advertising—how it is done, how it influences us and interestingly for a medium stereotyped as devoid of values and ethics, consideration of significant moral questions.

It has rated very well, averaging 1.25 million viewers in the last season, rating well across all adult demographics, and in the 2010 season, the edition which focused on religion was the second highest rating show for that week (1.482 million viewers).

The Executive Producer is well-known media identity Andrew Denton. “*The Gruen Transfer* is named after Victor Gruen, the guy who designed the very first shopping mall. The term describes that split second when the mall’s intentionally confusing layout makes our eyes glaze and our jaws slacken... the moment when ... we become impulse buyers.” (<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/gruen-transfer/theshow.htm>)

The regular panel on *The Gruen Transfer* is led by Wil Anderson, host and certainly quick wit, always ready to pounce on a comment and turn it to his advantage. He is joined by guests and regular commentators Todd Sampson, CEO of Leo Burnett and Russel Howcroft, Chairman and Managing Director of George Patter-son’ Y&R.

I have found it a helpful way of learning about the pervasive influence of the visual media culture in our society. After all, who hasn’t seen an advert, or perhaps even bought advertising. Most churches have advertised, whether for staff posi-

tions or programmes and events. Our denominational publications rely on advertising for revenue for their overall budgets.

How did Gruen promote consideration of religion on their website: “Atheism’s on the rise in Australia. In fact, religion appears to be a brand under threat. Yet few of its branches seem to advertise. Or do they? This week’s *The Gruen Transfer* rounds up religious ads ..., from the deeply spiritual to the deeply disturbing.”

The programme centred around Christianity and churches, though there was also a nod to the new campaign by Scientology, which cleverly does not mention the name until the end. There was also a brief consideration of advertising where “religion” is used to sell products, with one advert from Israel showing a high-spirited group of “religious Jews” promoting HD TV. Other examples in this category included an advert for ice cream showing a pregnant nun with the slogan “immaculately conceived”.

The key part of the programme looked at the Bible Society initiated campaign JAAL (*Jesus. All About Life*) campaign, which has been run in WA, SA, ACT and Tasmania, and had a major campaign in NSW. Clearly the main commentators had done their homework. This was introduced as “... the most high-profile religious ad of recent times”. The usual jokes were made by Wil Anderson, but it was generally a serious conversation. As Todd Sampson explained, the churches had “done their research” (which is available as a report). This research showed that “Church is bad—Jesus is cool. So they focused on their strength which is Jesus, but the

advertising certainly won’t fix the problem that brand Christianity has. If you think of Christianity as a brand or a product, then its retail shops are the churches and most people would say the retail shops are letting the brand down. ... Todd Sampson went on to say “And probably the best re-branding of the shopping experience is done by Hillsong, I mean they’ve just dramatically changed the retail shop the church through theatre and music and they modernised it ...”.

Russel Howcroft outlined a perceptive point that “They [the churches] are trying to normalise the idea of Jesus ... try and invite people to have a conversation they may otherwise feel uncomfortable to have...”, and highlighted this campaign as being successful in terms of people visiting churches. Howcroft also highlighted that it was a great success internally and publicly because it was funded by different denominations. The panel noted this was a smart marketing job as well—reinforcing for “core users”.

There was also a critique of a strongly didactic advert for the Mormons (family focus as usual), a startling gun-based advert by Answers in Genesis (from the USA), and comments about “cheese” at the end about former Christian Television Association (CTA) adverts. This last part was in the context of their spot on the search for the “Worst ad. Ever”.

An interesting comment was that the same number of people go to worship in an average month as go to a Bunnings store, so whatever you think of the debate about marketing the church, or whether the “shop fronts” are letting Jesus down, it is undeniable that there is increasing debate about the presentation and role of religion in society. This debate is fostered by atheistic commentators, but also long-standing Christian communicators like Phil Cooke. His latest book *Branding Faith*, attempts to paint a broad brushstroke about the development and influence of media and culture and the challenge to “express our faith in a media-dominated culture. How to tell our story alongside the maddening swirl of media “clutter”—TV, radio, computer, digital music player, Internet, mobile phone, and other technologies competing for our attention.”

Peter Bentley

For Peter’s longer article on “The Gruen Church” – considering similarities between Gruen and the “emergent church”, see <http://www.confessingcongregations.com/resources/item/the-gruen-church/>