

# ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

MICHAEL  
RAITER

## Making music worship

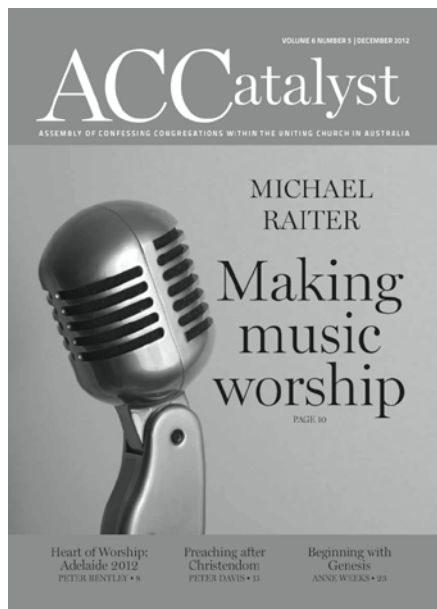
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## EDITORIAL

# Worth the trip

I wish I had been there. Those ACCatalyst readers lucky enough to be at the Assembly of confessing Congregations annual conference in Adelaide had a real feast. A Smörgåsbord in fact, where an array of tempting dishes invite you to eat more than you should.

You will find two of the dishes in this *ACCatalyst*. Michael Raiter speaks up for the power of words in

song, which he wants us to weigh very carefully. Peter Davis on the other hand is sceptical (in a post-modern way) on how well we can communicate with words and preaching. I suspect readers will have to taste and see which flavour they like.

These two recipes are so different that no one can say that *ACCatalyst* does not give you a varied diet.

*John Sandeman*

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# Woman v weeds

The war has begun in earnest. Robyn vs. caltrop. Up until now there have been battles and raids. I have swept up seeds with brush and dustpan, and patrolled ready to swoop on any emerging plants. In counter attack the caltrop plants have emerged here and there around the garden, seeing how far they can grow before being discovered and destroyed.

But now full battle has been engaged, with caltrop plants having emerged in their thousands in the last two days. Their objective? To grow big and produce many seeds and so take over the whole garden - and eventually the world. My objective is complete annihilation. My hope is that one day it will be possible to walk over the whole garden in bare feet without getting attacked by caltrops. Who will win? That is still to be decided.

Of course the reason why the battle has begun now was the rain, and wasn't it a ripper of a rainfall! The rain caused all of the seeds to germinate.

Does that mean it's the rain's fault? Is the rain to blame for all those plants? No, the rain didn't put the



plants there. The seeds were already there. The rain was doing what it should do - bringing life and growth.

So the rain did not cause the prob-

lem, it simply highlighted a problem that already existed.

Something similar happens in people's lives when God's Spirit enters in. His job is to bring life and growth in us. Unfortunately, all of us are people with failings and problems and undealt with issues in our lives. We carry with us unforgiveness, bitterness, anger and jealousy. We try to keep these things buried, but in our own strength we can't make them go away. So things lie hidden in our lives, like caltrop seeds.

Then we ask Jesus into our lives and his spirit comes in as life-bringing rain, and we find he brings a lot of those things to the surface. Old hurts and past issues raise their ugly heads once more. Does that mean the Holy Spirit's presence causes those feelings and problems? No, he just shows us what's already inside of us. And he does it so they can be dealt with. God, our Father is the gardener who removes the bad stuff in us and replaces it with the good.

Then, all of those things that we have buried are no longer buried, they're gone!

*Robyn*



Dr Max Champion addresses the NSW ACC movement in Bexley

## Advocating Marriage

A group of nearly 60 people gathered at Bexley Uniting Church on Saturday 13th October to hear two challenging and informative talks by Rev Dr Max Champion. Speaking on "Marriage - Heart of Creation; Heart of Redemption", Max highlighted the importance of working ecumenically in relation to marriage, and drew on the teachings of Pope John-Paul II and Ephesians 5 to show how Christian marriage is a reflection of Christ's love for the church.

Drawing on Acts 17, Max illustrated the nature of a confessing movement in "A Confessing Voice: Good for Society; Good for the Church":

He outlined how Paul's engagement with the Athenian public is a model for us as we engage the public sphere of our own time. Max noted that Paul's speech was not met with universal acclaim or great worldly success, and quoting Leslie Newbigin, demonstrated that modern secular culture is in fact a paganism borne out of a rejection of Christianity that is far more resistant to the gospel than the pagan culture that the first Christians encountered.

Members also heard reports from the 13th Assembly and the Adelaide ACC Conference.

*Rev Peter Chapman, NSW ACC Secretary.*

## Touring? Just drop in

*Robyn Painter reports on a mini-ACC gathering at Peterborough Uniting Church before the annual ACC conference.*

We had an excellent morning at church, but it was unusual in that we had three groups of visitors from ACC churches.

'Booked in' were Grahame and Fran Abrahams and Heather Graham from Shellharbour Village Church. Grahame, a past National Council member preached, and it was a cracker of a sermon—the congregation broke into spontaneous applause at the end. There was also

couples from ACC congregations in Queensland and Western Australia. One member paid us a compliment afterwards when she said, "I should have guessed this was an ACC congregation, because it was such a wonderful service." So, it was a very nice ACC get together.

If you are travelling check out the ACC website for the state by state listing of congregational members, or contact the ACC office.

You may be able to attend a worship service or a special event that just happens to be on during your visit.

## ACC creates a conversation

*This is Love – Conversation No. 3*

The 2012 ACC Discipleship and Evangelism DVD considers God's Amazing Love. Three UCA ministers Derek Schiller, Deane Meatheringham and Jonathon Button converse about the following topics.

*Conversation 1*

Love is of God

*Conversation 2*

Does God get angry with us?

*Conversation 3*

All debts are off!

*Conversation 4*

The Judge's Verdict

*Conversation 5*

How reconciled can you be?

*Conversation 6*

Holy Communion with God

The previous two DVDs have been warmly received and used by many study groups in a variety of UCA congregations. All ACC congregations and groups should have received copies of the DVD and the Study Booklet (either at the 2012 conference or by mail). Both the DVD and Study booklet can be freely copied for non-commercial purposes. They can also be purchased from the ACC office for \$10.00 a set (posted). Contact the ACC office for further information.



## Support for Uniting-inclined students at Ridley College

UCA and ACC member Paul Langkamp has given a private donation to provide for financial support for students studying at Ridley College who may feel called to offer themselves to the Uniting Church as a ministerial candidate. Interested persons should contact Ridley College for full information and an outline of the arrangement: <http://www.ridley.edu.au/>



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## PUBLIC SQUARE

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

### Misogyny

PM Julia Gillard's stinging parliamentary attack on Tony Abbott (9/10) for being a sexist and misogynist has echoed around the world on YouTube. Her comments re-ignited the 'gender wars,' with men's attitudes to women in public office once again in the spotlight. In an extraordinary development, Sue Butler, editor of the Macquarie Dictionary, updated the meaning of misogyny on-line to include, not only "hatred" of women, but also "deep prejudice" towards them.

Language is a powerful tool in ideological battles. Re-shaping the meaning of words enhances the power of those who are committed to radical social change. Words like 'exploitation' and 'discrimination'—once descriptors of strong, positive human values—now refer to ugly, unacceptable attitudes and behaviour.

Is 'misogyny' now to be applied to every man (and woman) who questions parts of the extreme feminist agenda? Will all criticisms be deemed to be the result of 'deep prejudice'? If so then discussion of significant public issues, such as female genital mutilation, abortion and the roles of mothers and fathers in family life, will be silenced. Few will risk the opprobrium of being 'misogynists.'

Most seriously, weakening the term risks blinding us to the difference between inappropriate or unwise speech about women and brutal oppression of women. In "Islamic world unleashes the demons of misogyny" (*The Age*, 27/10), Roya Hakakian writes about the brutal shooting of a 15 year old girl by the Taliban. She concludes:

'The real enemy is misogyny. Malala Yousafzai is not just a teenager in Pakistan's Swat Valley but a victim of the greatest apartheid of our time, and a wounded warrior in feminism's newest front line.'

Protests by outraged Muslim women, and others, at this barbarous act should make us wary of misusing or weakening a term that describes a "deep hatred of women".

The line between hurtful attitudes and brutal action is often fine, but it must be maintained. Otherwise, appeal to delicate feelings, rather than real evils, will be used to stifle public opinion on complex social issues.

### The Senator and the philosopher

Senators are thought to be prudent, philosophers are deemed to be wise. Clive Skewes reports that, according to *Conjugality's* Michael Cook (21/9/12), Senator Cory Bernardi's speech in the Senate linking bestiality and same sex 'marriage' was not a smart move in the debate.

It allowed supporters of same sex marriage to claim a slur, legitimised hysterical media coverage that ignored the context of his remarks, and guaranteed political isolation.

But the Senator's remarks still made sense, says Cook, insofar as the consistent rationale underlying arguments for same sex 'marriage' has been that marriage is a public recognition of loving sexual relationships and has nothing to do with the procreation of children, or that possibility.

Supporters of same sex 'marriage' were indignant with Senator Bernardi because of the assumed comparison between consensual sexual relationships between persons and sexual relationships between persons and animals, where mutual consent is impossible.

What is astonishing is that the Senator has been publicly vilified when he was quoting the well-known views of Australian ethicist, Prof. Peter Singer of Princeton University. A fierce critic of 'speciesism', Singer argues that, because animals and humans are morally equal, there is no logical bar to consensual sex between humans and animals.

Such is the toxic state of our democracy that the philosopher's very public views have earned him an Order of Australia, whereas the Senator's public concerns about those views have earned him the Order of the Boot.

### Forced Adoptions

On 25 October, a joint sitting of the Victorian Parliament apologised for the trauma caused to unwed mothers by forced adoption of their babies at birth between the 1950s and 1970s. Their physical and mental scars were acknowledged. Pledges were made to never repeat such inhuman practices.

Leigh Hubbard, chairman of Vanish, points out that the removal of babies was often justified on altruistic grounds. "It's all for the best' became the catchcry that many mothers remember well." (*The Age*, 26/10, p17)

At the time, it was widely thought 'best' for the woman, who had no support, and 'best' for married adoptive



parents who were infertile. Such was the misplaced idealism of the age.

Wrongs done by forced adoption are unlikely to be repeated. But are we less likely to adopt practices that are harmful to a sense of identity and belonging?

Hubbard thinks not. He says that Parliament “will probably remain silent about the lessons of traditional adoption for donor conception, surrogacy and assisted reproductive technology”.

These are complex issues ...(but) “What hasn’t been discussed is what we are doing for thousands of young people produced using these technologies; children born into the same half-world and who face similar challenges as the adoptive generations. The ‘right’ to have a child often appears to dominate the landscape in comparison to the future rights and interests of the children who are being brought into being.”

The people of the Cross should be wary of assuming a greater sense of altruism and moral superiority than their forbears. New forms of idealism are already blinding us to the tragic consequences of well-meaning policies that separate what should be united—the social and biological unity of the person.

## Beyond redemption?

In “*Behind the walls lives evil past redemption*” (*The Age* 27/10) crime reporter John Silvester writes about “a small group of men who ... have dark obsessions that defy logic, imagination or explanation.” He argues that, unlike “lost souls who have been damaged by environment, accident or drug abuse’ or ‘success stories of crooks who see the light, go straight and fly right,” these violent re-offenders should never be released.

It’s not that Silvester thinks incarceration is the answer to their problems. Far from it. Prisons are harsh, soulless places. No. Life imprisonment is necessary “not to punish them but to protect us”.

Christians often wince at the idea that some people are irredeemably evil—thinking to find a “little bit of good in everybody”. Surely, instead of focussing on the negative, we should be trying to bolster self-esteem!

Chuck Colson sees things differently. Converted at about the time he was jailed for his part in the Watergate affair during the Nixon Presidency, he knows that evil is real and that positive thinking is a poor substitute for grace. Founder of Prison Fellow-

ship Ministries and a campaigner for Prison Reform until his death in April 2012, Colson says that prisoners often understand the Gospel better than most. In his DVD *The Faith—Given Once*, for all he speaks about the response of many hardened prisoners to Jesus’ crucifixion.

Knowing what it is to be justly convicted of vicious crimes, and cynical of well-meaning attempts to ‘understand’ them, many of them were moved to tears by the accounts of

Jesus’ death between two criminals.

It may be, as Silvester says, that there are a few men whose evil is so terrible and impenetrable that society should be protected by law. It may also be that the Church should regain a sense of the seriousness of sin (including its own) in the knowledge that all of us are justified by grace through faith. If we were to recover this evangelical word then many prisoners in jails and churches would both be transformed.

IAN CLARKSON

## Deep Joys

A common perception—and deception—is that the closer you get to God the further you are cut off from pleasures and joys. And if you are enjoying yourself God is like drumming his fingers and rolling his eyes at the angels waiting for you to get back to the serious joyless stuff of obedience!

Wait a minute! Joy is in the constitution of the kingdom of God. If Satan can’t rip off God’s power and majesty he will certainly try to deface and slander the One who dwells in the unapproachable light of the beauty of holiness. The Biblical fact is our Creator delights in making his humans happy. Israel was at peace, they ate, they drank and they were happy. The cosmos is set up to thrill the sons of God. The Covenants take it further. For David, bringing the ark, the holy Covenant containing the great law of God for Israel, back to Jerusalem was one of the most ecstatically happy moments of his life. David knew the joy that flows from obedience and the symbol of obedience to the law energised him with joy—he skipped and laughed his way into the city as the priests brought the tabernacle home.

It is right to be joyous before God. Keep your joy! Nourish it by thanksgiving.

Remember Eric Liddell’s comment to his sister when she tried to persuade him to give up athletics and keep himself for missionary work, “but when I run I feel God’s smile upon me”.

Childlike faith is the joy that finds you humming away. Watch a preschooler: When they are absorbed

in the happinesses of the day they are often singing and murmuring with all sorts of indistinguishable sounds. Elementary speaking in tongues, I wonder?

Become like children to enter the Kingdom, urged Jesus. Catch your frowns and use them to realise afresh that our all powerful Judge of the living and the dead can look at us and say “how beautiful you are my darling” in the whisper of the blood-paying Redeemer.

“Be happy!” is the living Word from our true home where the forerunner Son has anchored our souls and our forever parent watches and enjoys! If our Lord urges us to “rejoice”! it must be right to do so—and there must be good grounds to do so! Go with him against emotions and circumstances to the contrary if necessary.

This is the climax of Pauls teaching in Romans. Believing and receiving this gift of reconciliation: this eternal, embracing largesse of friendship with our creator and redeemer-lover must give way to a rejoicing of song. We are DNA’d to overflow with joy. The lying tragedy is that many in these “days of Noah” who despise the law of Christ are blinded by the spirit of the age from walking as repentant and forgiven in righteousness. Conscience precedes emotion in the journey of joy.

The whole of heaven and its millions of angels sing for joy as the great One breaks the fixed seals and opens up the possibility of God’s avenging judgements.

Let the Holy Spirit attune our hearts to solid joys and lasting pleasures. The real joy to the world!

## Promoting Crossan is offensive

Fifteen years ago, the UCA Assembly decided to remove the obligation on ministers to 'adhere' to the Basis of Union, and merely required them to be 'guided' by the Basis. The result has been very far reaching, since it now seems a minister can advocate anything without sanction.

For example, I find it personally offensive that the NSW Synod is promoting through its web page, the forthcoming visit of John Crossan. Crossan's views are well-known.

He may be an acknowledged student of life in first century Palestine, but his outrageous resurrection of the of the ancient discredited myth, that Jesus was the illegitimate son of a Roman Soldier named Panthera, should

disqualify him from UCA sponsorship. He also claims that Jesus was forsaken by the disciples when on the cross, and his body was devoured by wild animals. The apparent abandonment of orthodoxy by the UCA, has serious implications for the future of the church.

*(Rev) Arthur Oakley*

### Carter and Corney

In his fine article in the June issue on the forgiveness petition in the Lord's Prayer, Ross Carter does not use the parable of the prodigal son as much as he might: the turning and returning (conversion) of the son and the receptivity of 'the Waiting Father'

(Thielicke's phrase). The article does not have a lot of illustration. It might have used Psalm 51 and the David narratives behind it. Also, readers would be interested in the relationship between the teaching of Jesus and the petition.

Peter Corney writes an excellent article on some aspects of the decline of the Australian protestant Church in the past 50 years.

However, some aspects are shallow. For example, GBRE and JBCE, and he uses only one statistic! He puts the decline down to liberal theology and liberal theologians, but he does not specify these. He should name names.

*Rev Rowan Gill*

## BOOK REVIEW

### Teen Sex

*Teen Sex By the Book (pp 221) rated MA 15+ By Dr Patricia Weerakoon Reviewed by Peter Bentley*

This relatively short book is quite easy to read and is a timely resource. I am not sure if young people will buy it—after all they are spending their time on the web (as the book recognises), so a suggestion later.

Sex educator, researcher and therapist Dr Patricia Weerakoon accepts the reality of the situation for teenagers today and their sexual experiences and contact, for example, with regard to pornography, she is clearly not condoning, but also does not want to create a burdensome guilt, but to

liberate and help those caught up or who could be caught in this web.

ACCatalyst readers may know Patricia as one of the panellists from the excellent ACL Webcast 'Defining Marriage' held in June 2012.

I see this book more for Christian kids before they are sucked into the contemporary mores and culture, but it may be one parents and grandparents may need to buy. The discussion is clear and fulsome in parts, and has a helpful approach to a variety of sexual topics. I especially appreciated her subtle and reasonable approach to homosexuality. Overall this is a counter-culture book. It is actually refreshing to highlight the revolutionary aspects of a Christian approach to sex in a

world where sex is devalued and exploited.

Some thoughts for further work:

1. Produce a series of short booklets based on the areas discussed to be given away.

2. Produce a more readable print edition (this may depend who really ends up reading this, but the print, some of the font and type used are not helpful for print-based reading.

Having said this, I still believe this is a very helpful resource and reflective book for parents and grandparents. Helpful to know what is going on and also for the cyber world discussion, as your children or grandchildren probably know more than you do, or than you think. <http://fervr.net/teen-sex-by-the-book>



# Deliver us from evil

Ross Carter concludes his series on the Lord's Prayer

It is startling to see that the Lord's Prayer, as we find it in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, ends with a fearful cry of distress – “deliver us from evil”! And we should make no mistake these words do constitute a desperate and urgent plea to God to snatch human beings from the clutches of evil and death.

As we shall see this is a gut wrenching petition that was taught by one who was not delivered from evil. However before taking up this point we can note that there are at least two kinds of people who could be irritated by this final petition.

Firstly there are those people who hold the view that if one truly has faith then things will go well for them, or at least go better than it does for others. These are the kind of people who secretly are persuaded that people who are engulfed by disaster must be those of little faith; those who have not prayed long or hard enough. We can, therefore, why these people will pray “deliver us from evil”, but the true believers do not need this petition.

On other hand there is another kind of person who may be a little irritated by “deliver us from evil” as the ending of the prayer. They might argue that things are not in such a bad way as “deliver us from evil” suggests they are. On the whole, they could say, our society is not in the grip of evil. Sure unfortunate things happen, even bad things, but labeling them as evil is over the top. And even in those countries afflicted by famines and wars the people there are assisted by the United Nations and helping agencies so things aren't as bad as they seem.

These may be understandable responses to the last petition of the prayer but they are inadequate because they do not take seriously who it is that teaches the church the prayer and, as a consequence, they do not take evil seriously enough.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed that he would be delivered from evil when he prayed that the cup of the crucifixion may “pass from him.”

But he was not delivered from evil! Instead he delivered himself to evil. As Albert Schweitzer once put it, Jesus was called by the one he called “Father”, to throw himself upon the wheel of world history so that, even though he was ruthlessly crushed by it, it might start to turn in the opposite direction.

What happens when Jesus is crucified is that the one absolutely innocent man, who is also an utterly peaceable man, is engulfed by the power of dehumanizing evil. At Jesus' crucifixion we see the irrational and inexplicable forces of anti-creation and anti-redemption doing their worst.

But of course, as the New Testament, makes clear, we view the crucifixion in the light of the resurrection of Jesus. It witnesses that the man who was broken by evil has been raised to new life by God whom he called ‘Father’. This confirmed for those who were encountered by the risen Jesus that the kingdom, the new order of God, on which Jesus had staked everything, was and would be the world's ultimate reality. We see in the resurrection, therefore, the victory of the Trinity over evil, a victory that is real and powerful.

From the perspective of the resurrection and crucifixion, then, we see what has always encompassed us, but which only now we see clearly and without illusion. We see evil in all of its terrifying power. We see that it is a power that is all around us. It is murderous because however and wherever it manifests itself it destroys human lives. We see this in the wars that conflict the nations. We see it in the torture and rape that so often used as weapons of war. We see in the everyday procedures that abort embryos and fetuses. We see our human folly and the appalling results it can produce. We see arrogance and pride and the awful things they make individuals, societies, and nations do. We see that evil is more

than the sum total of evil impulses and actions; see that with these impulses we give authority to forces of destruction and dehumanization that are greater than individuals.

But as we have seen we also see from the perspective of the resurrection and cross that evil has been defeated; we see that the realization of God's Kingdom cannot be thwarted.

The person grasped by this reality can no longer put up with the wretchedness of the world.

Because we know that the crying of the broken and maimed is not God's future for human beings, because we know God will not allow humanity to be sucked down into its own morass, our hungering and thirsting for the Kingdom cannot and will not be subdued.

It is, then, from these two perspectives that we pray “deliver us from evil”. Because the spectacle of Jesus not being delivered from evil reveals evil in its terrifying destructiveness, the only authentic human response is the cry “deliver us from evil”.

But at the same time it only makes sense to direct this cry to God because we know evil has been thwarted and will ultimately be thwarted. If this were not so it would be a despairing petition. It would be the last and futile breath of a drowning man.

One thing remains to be said. You cannot pray “deliver us from evil” from a safe distance.

You can only pray the petition when you are saying, with all your being, Yes to the coming of God's Kingdom, and when you are saying this Yes knowing that as you do evil is close at hand.

For it was at the centre of this broken world where Jesus was encompassed by evil and where the Father and Spirit raised him to new life. And because of this it is at the centre of a groaning world where the Kingdom is planted.

The person who yearns for the Kingdom has to stand where the Kingdom has been planted and where evil is still present. Only from there can the cry “deliver us from evil” be authentic.



# Heart of worship

## Peter Bentley on ACC's 2012 national get together

As well as being the AGM for the Assembly of Confessing Congregations, the annual gathering for the ACC held 13-15 September at the beautiful Nunyara Conference Centre in the Adelaide Hills brought members and interested persons together to worship and hear from four keynote speakers about worship today. The gathering spent significant time hearing reports from the ACC specialised commissions (Cross-Cultural, Dis-

spoke about his love of singing in the church and captured people's attention with his initial reference to an article he had penned about the slow death of congregational singing. He led a full consideration (including significant discussion and questions) about the place of singing in evangelical worship in his presentation on Music in Evangelical Worship and consideration of 'The Congregation's Other Preachers'. Who are these preachers - they are the congregation's song leaders; people involved in music ministry. He raised the issue of giving someone (or a group) the up-front role and increasingly powerful microphone(s) which was leading

thesis - the need to have good songs well-sung.

Well-known SA Minister Rev Deane Meatheringham took his text from Hebrews 12:18-29 in preaching at the Friday night rally on 'What do we expect to happen in worship?' Deane focused on the gift worship is, providing a picture of the nature of worship that is God-centred (and not the 'generic' God that is often bandied around). "If you are a fancy worship leader you are getting in the way." Nor is the congregation the dispenser of God's presence. We were encouraged to accept Jesus Christ as the leader of our worship; to never strain to have God's presence - God is with us. Deane's affirmation of Christ's presence continued the conference theme that worship is not about us, nor is it about singing or preaching better.

Wesley Institute theology and homiletics lecturer and ACC Council member Rev Dr Peter Davis concluded the conference with a reflection on "Preaching after Christendom". He outlined "the crisis in preaching", new preaching theories, providing an overview of the issues in relation to the change within our world (transition from the centre of the culture, and from institutions to movements). Peter brought people back to the gospel; preaching centred on God - Christ is central. Peter also confirmed the conference theme with his stimulating and provocative comment that "the role of the preacher is to get out of the way."

The papers will be published in the *ACCatalyst* magazine (see the next few pages for two of the papers), and the presentations are now available as downloads -full vimeo list on page xx. Overall, ACC 2012 was a refreshing time of teaching and fellowship, especially helpful for many lay leaders in ACC member congregations. Thank you to our host group, the SA ACC Movement and to the Nunyara Conference staff for undertaking all the practical and personal arrangements.

Next year ACC meets in Queensland: 12-14 September 2013.



A breakout session for the NSW group

cipliship and Evangelism, Doctrine and Theology, Social Responsibility, and also reporting on the 13th Assembly, and considering the future connection the ACC will have on the matter of marriage following the 13th Assembly resolution.

Among the keynote speakers, SA Anglican Minister and teacher in New Creation Ministries Rev Martin Bleby addressed the gathering on 'Singing the Lord's Song', conveying a marvellous overview of the many biblical references which illustrate singing and music, and also the range of emotions that are featured. The nature of, and place for lament was explored. Martin's session included and concluded with some 'practical' singing to highlight his thesis about the important role of singing.

Rev Mike Raiter from the Centre for Biblical Preaching in Melbourne

to congregational members becoming more listeners or watchers. He encouraged 'song leaders' to help members to sing, outlining "you must decrease while others increase". Simply put, congregational singing was something we did together.

Mike also spoke about the way songs were written, highlighting that many great hymns were written out of great pain, outlining the nature of lament and the need to have songs that relate to people where they are at. He also addressed the link of preaching to singing, especially in history as songs were often written for the Sunday to teach people. He also pointed out that we all sing (and many remember) Charles Wesley's hymns, but how many study John Wesley's sermons?

It was enlightening to consider the story of the Philippians gaoler. Why was he converted? Mike's overall





**Faces of the 2012 ACC conference:  
From the top: Lulu Senituli,  
Walter Abetz and Max Champion  
Jonathan Button, Anne Hibbard,  
Pictures by Robyn Painter**



# The Heart of the Matter:

## Music in Evangelical Worship

**Mike Raiter gave the keynote address on the the “other preacher”— the worship leader.**

### **Introduction: The Next Best Thing to Theology**

Arguably the greatest musical composition of all time is the work of George Frederic Handel. It was simply called *Messiah* and was first performed in 1741.

Prior to its composition Handel had been a celebrated composer in his adopted home of Britain: he even had a statue erected in his honour. Then at the age of 56 a friend gave him a libretto based on the life of Christ stretching from Isaiah’s prophecies of his coming through to his glorification in heaven.

Handel then shut himself up in his room in Brook St, London and in 24 days—hardly stopping to eat or drink—totally absorbed in his work, he completed the work all the way to its orchestration.

Later as he tried to describe the experience, he called to mind the words of the apostle Paul, who on describing his mysterious transportation to the third heaven, said, “whether I was in the body or out of my body when I wrote it I know not”.

He was a man profoundly moved, gripped and inspired. On one occasion his servant went into the room to plead with him to eat something and found Handel with tears running down his face saying, “I did think I did see all heaven before me, and the great God Himself”.

It was first performed in Dublin and so that the largest possible audience could be admitted to the concert, gentlemen were requested to remove their swords, and ladies were asked not to wear hoops in their dresses.

The performance earned unanimous praise from the assembled press. One clergyman, a Rev. Delaney, was so overcome by Susanna Cibber’s rendering of “He was despised” that reportedly he leapt to his feet and cried: “Woman, for this be all thy sins forgiven thee.”

Someone has said that *Messiah’s* music has done more to convince thousands of mankind that there is a God about us, than all the theological works ever written.

Martin Luther said, “After theology, I give the highest place and greatest honour to music”.

I’ve been asked to address you this morning on the important topic—and I believe it is important—of music in evangelical worship. or the place of singing in the weekly gatherings of God’s people.

A couple of years ago I wrote an article for a magazine called *The Briefing*. I entitled it ‘The Slow Death of Congregational Singing’.

I began this way: “I was at a convention recently, seated near the rear of the auditorium. The music team at the front were ‘leading’ (and I use that word advisedly) and we were singing. Well, we were meant to be singing. And so I did what I’ve done quite often lately and closed my eyes and listened to the singing.

“The song leaders with their microphones were clear and distinct. One could identify each of the several instruments accompanying the singers. But if you could block out the ‘worship team’, all that was left was a barely audible murmur around the building.

“I opened my eyes and looked around. Most folk were either standing silently, not even making pretense of singing, or appeared little engaged in the activity. I turned to a friend next to me and commented, ‘No one’s singing’.

“He looked it me as if I’d just observed that no-one was flying. Of course, they’re not singing. We haven’t really sung here for years. Whatever was happening that morning, it was decidedly not congregational singing. Genuine, heartfelt congregational singing has been in its death throes in many churches for some years now.”

A well-known pastor read this article and then wrote to his church: “If Bethlehem is not ‘singing and making melody to the Lord with [our] heart’, it’s all over. We close up shop. This is no small commitment.” I’d be very surprised if many pastors would react that strongly.

If you ask “why do we sing in church?” the impression you could get is that it is for practical purposes:

- we sing a few songs at the beginning to give latecomers time to arrive and find a seat.
- we sing before the sermon to stretch our legs because we’ve been sitting for a while and will be sitting for a little while longer.
- and we sing at the end to mark the end of the service—and give those rostered on morning tea time to nip into the kitchen and put the kettle on.



**George Frideric Handel (left) and King George I on the River Thames, 17 July 1717, by Edouard Jean Conrad Hamman (1819–88).**

But this underappreciation of singing (in some places) is an evangelical anomaly. For centuries Christians, especially evangelical Christians, have given a very high place to singing. Indeed, I think that's one of the things that sets Christianity apart from other faiths. Christians sing. We sing like no other world religion. Some chant, some sing, but no-one sings like Christians sing.

And evangelicalism is the well from which hymn-singing has sprung. And it sprang from men with fine theological minds and spiritually passionate hearts.

Men like Isaac Watts, considered the father of modern hymns. He wrote: *When I Survey.. Joy to the World, Jesus shall reign where e'er the sun, O God, our help in ages past.*

Not a pretty man, he was five 5 feet tall, a sickly body with a disproportionately large head, he and suffered from psychiatric illnesses. But he was a genius: he'd learned Latin by the age of 4, Greek at 9, French at 11, and Hebrew at 13. As a working pastor, he wrote a textbook on logic that was used for decades at Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard and Yale. He wrote major works on metaphysics and astronomy. And he wrote hymns.

Mind you, when he grew up hymns weren't sung in English churches, in most churches people just sang the psalms.

The story goes that from an early age, Isaac displayed a propensity for rhyme. Once, he had to explain how he came to have his eyes open during prayers:

*A little mouse for want of stairs  
ran up a rope to say its prayers.*

His Dad, who was a pastor, gave him a whack for his impudence and little Isaac cried out:

*O father, father, pity take  
And I will no more verses make.*

Coming home from church one Sunday morning Isaac complained vehemently to his father about the stodgy psalm-singing that put people off worship.

Well, his father said, "Why don't you write a hymn suitable for congregational singing?" and that afternoon he did and that night at evening worship the congregation sang Isaac Watts hymn #1, *Behold the glories of the Lamb*, and he was to write over 700 more.

Mind you his hymns outraged many people, split congregations, and got pastors fired. But why did he write

them? Because God had seized his heart.

*Turn, turn us mighty God,  
And mould our souls afresh;  
Break, sovereign grace, these hearts of stone,  
And give us hearts of flesh.*

For all his incredible intellectual gifts, he knew that God was to be loved with both the mind and the heart. And so he wrote and he sang.

Charles Wesley wrote over 7,300 hymns, but not one before he was converted. But after his 'heart warming' experience on Whitsunday, 1738, he wrote his first hymn, *Where shall my wondering soul begin?* and he couldn't stop singing. That's our heritage.

Although I was converted back in high school, my Christian life lacked assurance, confidence, any dynamism. I was a shy, embarrassed Christian living with one foot in the church and one foot in the world.

That all changed for me during my 1st year at Uni. I went on a camp, God filled me by his Spirit, and everything changed.

Immediately, spontaneously, things changed. I now wanted people to know I was a Christian. I splattered my little white Volkswagen with those awful stickers: *Honk if you love Jesus; Read the Bible: it will scare the hell out of you.* But while I cringe now, at least they demonstrated my confidence, my boldness, my enthusiasm.

More importantly, I now had assurance: I understood the atonement and what that meant for my being a child of God. And I began to sing. Which, I've got to say was a mixed blessing for the rest of the human race.

*Scripture in Song* had just come out, that's how long ago it was, with brand new, epoch-making songs like *Rejoice in the Lord always, This is the day, His banner over me is love*, and *Therefore the redeemed of the Lord*.

And I took three non-Christian friends to see *Godspell* and sang them choruses all the way back to Wollongong. "Did I really do that!!"

Terrible evangelism. But spontaneous Christian living: a Spirit-filled church is a singing church.

#### **The Context: The Clothes of the Kingdom**

I want to begin this morning with Paul's words to the Colossians, chapter 3. Throughout this chapter Paul has been describing life in the new age.

Once we become Christians, metaphorically, we take

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off our old dirty clothes and put on clean, new ones.

We've taken off lives marked by anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive language, and if we haven't then we're still wearing my old clothes. And we put on the new clothes of compassion, kindness, meekness, humility, patience and love.

Well, how do we do that? Because let's be honest we still quite like those old clothes sometimes. Regularly, I go to my wardrobe to find my tattered pair of slippers, or my really comfy floral short, or my lovely beige cardigan, only to find my wife has chucked them out.

So, how do we get rid of those clothes we need to chuck out and get used to the new ones?

Well, v.16 is part of the answer to that. Because Paul tells us here to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly and there are 2 dimensions to that: we teach and we admonish.

But then the verse takes a very, very surprising twist.

I mean if I were to ask you, how practically would you apply this truth: how would you let the word of Christ lavishly, bountifully fill you, what would you say?

If I'd been writing v.16, I'd have written something like this: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with regular Bible studies, daily quiet times, hearing lots of great sermons, and reading really good Christian books".

But that's not what Paul says, although none of those things would be wrong.

What example does he give of how we can let Christ's word sink deep into our souls? "Singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God".

## Let's Just Praise the Lord? 1 Corinthians 14:26

Let me ask you, what do we think we're doing when we sing together in church? I think you'd say, "We're praising the Lord, of course." And that's absolutely right, but is that all we're doing? Actually, we're doing much, much more than that.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul is helping the Corinthians to better understand why they come together as the church and so he outlines some of the activities that mark their Christian assembly:

"When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church" (14:26).

Notice what Paul does not say. He doesn't say, "When you come together to instruct each other and build each other up (that is, through instruction, a revelation and a tongue) don't forget to also praise the Lord and have a time of worship: sing a hymn."

No, the four activities Paul mentions: hymn, word of instruction, revelation, tongue and interpretation—all serve the same purpose the strengthening of the church.

Of course, we'd see the word of instruction (what today we might call the sermon), and the revelation and the interpreted tongue as various ways of bringing God's word to his people but would we see the hymn in the same way?

In fact, in this verse which is his list of word-based activities that build up the church, Paul places the song at the head. Yes, in song we praise the Lord. But here, and elsewhere, Paul sees congregational singing as important in teaching and strengthening the congregation. Which

is exactly what he's saying here in Colossians: let Christ's word dwell in you richly, and do it as you sing.

## The Singing Prophets: 1 Chronicles 25

Now, before we look at those words, where on earth did Paul get the idea the idea that we teach and admonish through singing?

Did the Spirit just reveal that to him?

Had he just been reading Psalms in his quiet time? Quite possibly. But I think he got it from his Jewish background, his experience in Temple worship.

In 1 Chronicles we find the story of King David. But it's a very selective version. There's no defeat of Goliath, no adultery with Bathsheba, and no rebellion by Absalom.

Instead, the two events which are of most interest to the author are the bringing of the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem. And, most important of all, the preparations for the building of the Temple: the sign that, at last, God is dwelling in the midst of his people.

Much of the section comprises various lists of names of those involved in this work: the priests, the gatekeepers, the treasurers, the soldiers ... and the singers.

The singers and musicians are set apart "for the ministry of prophesying" (v.1). Repeatedly, as the Chronicler tables the names of the singers and musicians he describes them as the ones who, "prophesied, using the harp in thanking and praising the Lord" (25:3).

Singers as prophets! Singing as prophesying!

Prophecy is the communication of God's word to his people: the prophets reminded people of God's great acts in the past, told them what God expected of them in the present, and spoke words of comfort and warning about the future. And that's why the apostle Paul includes the hymn as part of the teaching ministry that takes place when God's people gather.

That's what lies behind these words in Colossians. Having Christ's word dwell in us is tantamount to the dwelling of God himself. As we've seen in Chronicles, when God dwells in his people it is expressed in singing and thanksgiving. For both Paul and David there is a teaching and prophetic dimension to this singing.

Paul says almost the very same thing in Eph 5, but rather than exhorting us to have the word of Christ dwell in us richly, we're to be filled with (or by) the Spirit. So, there's a clear parallel between the filling of the Spirit and the filling of the Word.

And one of the fruits of both is congregational singing.

## Singing to One Another

Both Colossians and Ephesians say that we teach and admonish one another as we sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. The psalms, of course, is a reference to the book of Psalms. "Hymns" may be the other songs of the Bible like the song of Moses, Deborah, Hannah. And spiritual songs are any other songs inspired by the Spirit.

We talk of hymns, choruses and Christian songs but by these three terms Paul is covering the whole gamut of Christians songs: those songs which, ultimately, have their origin and inspiration in the Holy Spirit.

And in summary Paul is saying that there are 2 dimensions to our singing – the horizontal and the vertical.

So, his first point is that there's a horizontal dimension to our singing: we sing to one another in order to teach and encourage one another.

Now, let me make clear that I'm not making a case



for hymns over choruses, or old songs over new. I'm not talking about the age of a song. Or its length.

There are theologically-dodgy, unsingable old hymns. And there are vacuous, impossible-to-sing new ones. I'm making a case for good songs, sung well.

How powerful songs are as a medium for teaching came home to me a few years ago when I was preaching at a church. It was their missions weekend and on one night I was asked to give the talk an evangelistic thrust.

I'd decided I'd speak on Acts 4:11: "There's no other name under heaven given to men by which they must be saved." It was quite a strong talk about Jesus' uncompromising uniqueness as the Saviour of the world—the lostness of people without Jesus—and the utter imperative of preaching Jesus and believing on his name.

Before I spoke we spent about three quarters of an hour singing choruses about God's love and faithfulness: how he wraps his arms around us and enfolds us in the power of his love, how he'll never leave us, is always for us, how special we are to him.

And then I got up to preach. The clash in tone was obvious, not just to me, but to any discerning person there. How could a God like the one we'd sung about ever judge someone or demand they believe only in Jesus!

On that night we had two sermons and they didn't give the same message. People were almost being taught about two different gods and being called upon to choose between the two. Songs teach. We must be so careful that they teach the whole counsel of God.

We've already mentioned men like Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley.

Wesley was part of the great Evangelical Awakening of the 18th century that produced so many great songwriters. Under the power of the Spirit the gospel had spread across Britain and North America and gripped the hearts of thousands. As we have seen, when one's heart is inflamed, spontaneously singing flows.

But it was much more than just an overflow of praise to God. It was a clear and calculated strategy to educate and disciple large congregations of Biblically illiterate believers.

You see, men like Watts and Wesley wrote and encouraged hymn singing because they saw hymns as effective vehicles for teaching the great truths of the faith. The hymns not only expressed the personal, saving experiences of these new Christians, they were memorable essays on doctrine.

Interestingly, the custom used to be that pastors wrote the hymns. They'd prepare their sermon for Sunday during the week and then at the end of the week encapsulate all they wanted to teach in the words of a song.

For example, the most famous hymn of all time, *Amazing Grace*, was written by John Newton after he had spent the week reflecting upon 1 Chronicles 17, where the Lord tells King David: How I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be leader over my people, Israel (v.7).

Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my family that you have brought me this far? And if this were not enough in your sight, O God, you have spoken about the future of the house of your servant. You have looked on my as though I were the most exalted of men, O God. (vv.16-17)

Newton then asks, isn't that the heart of the gospel? And, like David he is stunned by God's amazing grace.

And a week's meditation on Scripture is transformed into an unforgettable song which is indelibly printed on the memories of millions.

Let me say that all of our songs, no matter what stable they come from, fail us when it comes to teaching the whole counsel of God. It's striking that when we open the Psalter that there is variety of songs.

Where for example, are our modern songs of lament? "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" "How long, O Lord?" "O Lord the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you."

We can be sure that when God's people gather together at church there are as many who are heartbroken as there are those who are rejoicing.

The Bible recognises, in it's songs, that doubt and frustration and suffering is the lot of the believer. "By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion" yet our modern song writers haven't given us the songs to sing.

Where are the songs of judgment? I'm sure most of you know that the word Hallelujah, which adorns so many of our songs, only appears four times in the NT. They're all in Rev 19 and they're all in the songs of judgment: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments.

"He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.

"He has avenged on her the blood of his servants."

Where are the songs on the sovereignty of God and his predestinating grace, songs on mission, songs on the second coming? There are a tiny handful, but we need more. Because songs teach.

### **Making Music to the Lord**

But if music has a ministry to one another, it also has a Godward dimension. We give thanks in our hearts to the Lord. God delights in the praises of his people.

John Piper makes the observation that we sing because the truths about God are so wonderful—so sublime, so majestic—that they demand more than prose.

We sing, not just because we're commanded to or even because it's something that people filled with the Holy Spirit are instinctively prompted to do. But because the realities of God and Christ, creation and salvation, heaven and hell are so great that when they are known truly and felt duly, they demand more than discussion and analysis and description.

Some truths, Piper says, are so wonderful that only poetry and song does them justice. Singing is the Christian's way of saying: God is so great that thinking will not suffice, there must be deep feeling; and talking will not suffice, there must be singing.

And exhorts us to sing songs of thanksgiving in our hearts, that is, with every part of us – with every fibre of our being.

– singing is a physical, emotional, intellectual, volitional, psychological activity.

We don't switch off our minds and just let the words and music flow over us. And conversely we don't stand there emotionally detached from the whole event and reflect upon the theology of the words – we engage the whole person.

Of course, what makes singing so effective in praising God is that enables to remember what God has done for us.

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Ever since I became a Christian I've been encouraged to memorize Scripture. And I've read and heard about missionaries, who found themselves in a remote places without a Bible, and were able to sustain themselves spiritually because they'd memorised large portions of Scripture.

And I've been told that devout Muslims memorise the Qur'an, and devout Jews memorize the Torah, so how much more, then, should we hide his word in our hearts.

But I don't know about you - it's never worked for me. A couple of weeks ago I was catching a plane and dropped my car off at a car park near the airport.

I handed the girl my keys and she said, 'What's your rego number?' I've had the car 10 years but had to go out and check. How embarrassing.

Look, I know it's a good thing to do—and I've tried—but the fact is that I have a good short-term memory, but a lousy long-term memory.

But put the verse to a tune... I was speaking at a conference a while ago and, impromptu, I decided to take the audience with me on a walk down a musical memory lane. A lot of the folk there were my vintage, baby boomers from the 1970s, and so we began to sing some the old 'Scripture in Song' classic, *His Banner over me is Love*. And every proud Baby Boomer immediately joined in with the actions. I reckon we could have sung dozens of those 1970's 'Scripture in Song' choruses, which we haven't sung in decades, and for most people the words would have come flooding back.

Of course, that's why so much of the old church liturgies were sung and not spoken: the people back then were largely illiterate and would remember what they sung.

In 1991 my brother-in-law was kidnapped by the Mujahideen in Afghanistan and spent six months in captivity in the central part of the country.

For much of the time he was largely alone, and he sustained himself by singing over and over the many choruses and hymns he'd learnt as a child.

Incredibly he could remember the words to some 600 spiritual songs.

And it was by meditating on these songs that he fed his troubled soul.

Maybe we couldn't all remember that many songs - but when words are accompanied by music then the ability to remember is greatly enhanced.

For a couple of years, while in pastoral ministry in South Turrumurra, I'd regularly visit a Retirement Village - and conduct a brief service for the residents there.

Of the dozen or so who came along most had lost the capacity to concentrate for more than a few moments. For most of the time they were completely out of it. As I spoke or prayed I saw their heads drop, and their eyes close. Even the few who kept their eyes open they had that distant look which told me the lights were on but there was nobody home.

Until we sang. Once my wife began to play on the piano the opening chords of a familiar old hymn I'd see their heads lift, their lips begin to move, and a smile cross their faces. Their recall of the words was remarkable.

One of the great imperatives of Scripture is 'Remember'. And so those over the years who have exhorted me to memorise Scripture have done the right thing. But those who have taught me psalms, hymns and spiritual

songs have done much much more to aid my remembering.

## Conclusion

One of the distinctive features of singing is that a communal activity. Sure, people sing solo, but it's always been something that communities have done together.

And for Christians, congregational singing is one of the few things we do in church where we all actively participate. Very few churches now have any formal liturgy. If there is public prayer in church—and often there isn't any—it's now spoken entirely by an individual from the front.

In very few places do we say the creed together.

Growing up in an Anglican church we said prayers together: psalms, creed, various responses, confession. But now, about the only thing left we do corporately is sing.

And one of the great things about congregational singing is that when we do that for a few minutes we forget our individuality. In fact, one of the features of congregational singing is that no one voice dominates.

As one guy says, "We agree, in effect, not to be soloists, or competitors, but to compromise with each other, keep the same tempo, and thus love each other in the act of singing".

I've got to say that, sadly, with the advent of the dominant song leader, whose voice is strengthened and magnified by the microphone, that communal dimension can be lost. The song leader may think she's encouraging congregational participation by her leading, but unless the volume is lowered her amplified voice overwhelms and smothers the community.

Look, I love instrumentation in worship. I love the guitars, drums, electric piano, sax, violin. But you know my favourite instrument? The human voice.

Get 50, 100, 500, 1000, 10,000 voices singing. It's a goosebumps-on-your-arms, shivers-down-your-spine, taste-of-heaven moment.

In the light of what we've just heard a want to say one thing to those of you involved in the music ministry of your church.

And that is to remember that you're the congregations other preachers. People hear the word of God from the mouths of the pastors and the Bible expositors but they also hear a sermon in the time of singing.

Someone said to me recently that we think that of the two, John and Charles Wesley, John was the greater preacher. But he wasn't because 250 years later no-one is still reading any of John's sermons but we're all still singing Charles' songs, which were his sermons put to music.

Because the songs you sing and select—the songs you write—they teach us about God, about the way of salvation, and about life and death.

And, where we'll forget the words of most sermons: 10, 20, 30, 50, 80 years later we can still recall the words of a song. Please ensure they're very, very good words.

You have a wonderful role to play in the life of the people of God. May God deliver you from the temptations - we all face, to make yourselves great in the eyes of men and women, and may he empower you as you prophesy. as you teach us and to lead us as we praise the One who is worthy of all praise worthy of all honour worthy of all glory, wisdom and power.

*Rev Mike Raiter*

*Centre for Biblical Preaching: Melbourne*

# Preaching after Christendom

## Peter Davis on how preaching is changing

I want to do a number of things:

- 1) To give an overview of some of changes going on in the world of preaching
- 2) Identify what I think is the most important change
- 3) Examine ways that preaching can understand itself in light of that, and
- 4) Interact with content over last two days of the ACC annual conference.

Contemporary Christians face one of the greatest transitions in the history of the Christian movement

### Preaching's Missional Crisis

John Killinger's *Preaching to a Church in Crisis* (1995) presents a "crisis" of mainline Western churches. He likens the situation to a game of Blind Man's Bluff in a room with displaced furniture "Everything around us has been shifted. Nothing seems to be what it was or seemed to be."<sup>1</sup> Killinger writes as a respected leader within the mainline American church seeking to respond to what he sees as the haemorrhaging of the mainline church mixture of pain, fear and confusion.

Killinger pioneered experimental preaching in the 1960s and early 1970s, which seemed exciting and full of possibilities. "This is a propitious moment for preachers to throw off the bondage of homiletical traditions grown fat and sassy like mistresses too sure of themselves. Experimentalism is in the air everywhere . . . A yeast ferment is at work in almost every area of human existence. Walls of tradition are brought tumbling down. Slaves are in a panic – their whole world is collapsing. . . . Free men exult – a new world is being born."<sup>2</sup>

Ironically, the excitement of "a new world being born" has become the anguish of "a church in crisis"

### Reasons for the Crisis in Preaching

#### 1. The Emergence of Postmodernity

Some people locate the source of crisis within culture. The impact of postmodernism has raised significant challenges for preachers.

Barbara Brown Taylor, an episcopalian writer, says that until recently, we believed in a world that could be understood & managed. We modelled our nations/economies/families lives upon Enlightenment principles in a world that operated mechanistically.

During our lifetime this paradigm has come undone

#### 2 Distrust of Words

A profound distrust of human speech within the wider culture at the same time as humanity is bombarded with diverse forms of communication means there is a deep mistrust of words.

Elizabeth Achtemeier, an evangelical Presbyterian put it this way: people are cynical about words which have lost all credence in the popular mindset.<sup>3</sup>

Talk is commonly perceived as being cheap

Words are also associated in people's experience with parochial morality on the one hand and the fast-talking

television preacher on the other.<sup>4</sup> People are sceptical of both. How can anyone regard words as a means of grace in a world like this?

#### 3 Overemphasis on the Personality of the Preacher

Richard Lischer professor of homiletics at Duke Divinity School argues that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries homiletics never quit talking about the personality of the preacher, neglecting an adequate focus on preaching as a theological task.<sup>5</sup>

Achtemeier sees this leading to a situation where the preacher focuses on the "glory of me" articulating the preacher's thoughts, technical skills and opinions.<sup>6</sup> In turn this led to an overemphasis on the preacher's part in preaching a devaluing of God's activity in human speech.

As a result there is great pressures on contemporary preachers to be "deep, practical and entertaining".<sup>7</sup>

#### 4 Too Cognitive

A Western tendency to "preach primarily to mental faculties"<sup>8</sup> creates difficulty for the preacher in communicating in forms that are creative or holistic

#### 5 Hearers have Changed

If the late 19th and early 20th century focussed on the personality of the preacher, the last 50 years have seen a turn to the listener. Chris Altrock, himself a preacher, notes that the preacher's audience has changed significantly woken from a deep sleep to find themselves in a foreign country the audience has changed but preaching methods have not.<sup>9</sup>

Not enough for a preacher to know the content of their message but they must know their audiences as well.<sup>10</sup>

David Schlafer, an Episcopalian writer on preaching, notes that a consumer mindset dominates many Western contexts.<sup>11</sup> This means for many the measure of a 'good' sermon now resides with the hearer not with the preacher or in the academy.

Daniel Bauman notes that preaching has sometimes been life changing and nation shaking but preaching could be more frequently described as innocuous 'preaching is dull, boring, uninteresting, irrelevant, void of courage and incomprehensible'.<sup>12</sup>

#### 6 New Technology

Communications revolution changed the way congregations hear and process sermons past five decades of preaching revolution from print culture to an electronic culture people process information in largely visual ways

I'm no philosopher, but those among who are will tell us Postmodernism is dead. According to Alan Kirby it has been replaced by *Digimodernism* (the name of his 2009 book) way we know things is radically changing

Contemporary communication is shaped by the convergence of multiple media forms and the ability of people to quickly and affordably produce their own multimedia communications. Contemporary hearers rapidly process information and respond to multiple stimuli. Preachers frequently feel under-resourced and inadequately trained to communicate in this highly competitive environment.

## 7 *Ambiguous Place of God*

In what way can the preacher speak an authentic word? Alan Walker said “preaching is not just speaking or lecturing daring to proclaim a message in the name and with the authority of Jesus Christ.”<sup>13</sup>

But the idea that human beings might express the mind of God in their own speech appears both audacious and worrisome. It seems presumptuous to argue that preaching is part of God’s action in history

## 8 *Biblical Interpretation*

Some people believe that insufficient consideration is given to the Bible focussing instead on the human needs and problems of human. Other writers locate the dilemma in preachers not knowing what to do with biblical texts. For example Walter Brueggemann (an influential OT scholar and rhetorical critic) states that the preacher faces a “crisis of interpretation in our culture has either dismissed or controlled the text”<sup>14</sup> imperative that preachers create space for the Bible in preaching/allow it speak on its own terms.

As Charles Campbell observes: “New theories and forms of preaching abound at every turn. These are unquestionably exciting days for homiletics. Beneath the surface, however, signs of trouble can be discerned. The new preaching theories and resources do not appear to have brought new life to the church.”<sup>15</sup>

## **Preaching and Missional Crisis**

So, which is it? what is the matter with preaching? Why is it in crisis in the Western world?

None of these in themselves adequately locate the current crisis moving into a post-Christendom era

Winding down of Christendom has been occurring for at least two centuries. It is growing increasingly obvious that the church as we have known it is undergoing tremendous transformation particularly in the old, historic ‘mainline’ denominations of the Western church.

If you watch watch Alain de Botton, on video *The School of Life, Sunday Sermon* (22 January 2012) <http://vimeo.com/35701336> you see listening to a talking head is as relevant as it ever was.

There is a clash of worldview. The world no longer likes our ideas. This reality has been emerging for a considerable period of time: some commentators are calling “the End of Christendom”<sup>16</sup>

Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom* (2001, p1) defines it this way “A culture in which the central features of the Christian story are unknown and churches are alien institutions whose rhythms do not normally impinge on most members of society”.

Michael Frost’s definition: “the sacral culture that has dominated European society from around the eleventh century until the end of the twentieth. Its sources go back to the time when Constantine came to the throne of the Roman Empire and granted Christians complete freedom of worship and even favoured Christianity.”<sup>17</sup>

Christianity was at the centre of Western civilization and presumed for itself a privileged voice but Christendom is no longer on top in the western world.

Chicago theologian/pedagogue John Dally notes that the word *krisis* is used in the New Testament as a decisive action of God that exhibits: “an urgency to interpret God’s intervention in human history and a clear understanding that the world is divided into ‘then’ and ‘now’ by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.... Today a crisis means something we have to fix – fast. For

the New Testament it describes the permanent new state of living with one foot in the world where God’s reign is the only power to be reckoned with.”<sup>19</sup>

As Yoder argues, exile and diaspora may well be the ‘normal’ existence of the people of God.<sup>20</sup> What will it be like to be Christian, when Christian values no longer dominate society? Rabbi Irving Greenberg says:

“A parallel exists between what Christians are now experiencing and what happened to Judaism with destruction of the temple in 70AD. What occurred then was the birth of Rabbinic Judaism - i.e. of the synagogue, a place of learning and prayer, where dispersed Jews were enabled to hold onto the wisdom that had been handed over to them ... Judaism has never been allowed to be imperial. It has had to live precisely on the ‘edge of empire’ and has achieved a remarkably humanising role within a society that excluded and persecuted it.”<sup>21</sup>

## **What do we do when we preach?**

Walter Brueggemann attempts to offer a different metanarrative contrastive to and subversive of the dominant metanarrative in Western society:

It endeavours to state in the boldest, most extreme ways the contrast between how people in our society generally think and what it would mean to think life or to act life through the gospel.<sup>22</sup>

At least four aspects:

- 1) There is a power dynamic at the centre of our experienced world. The gospel is perceived as one voice, in this struggle to name and shape reality
- 2) The gospel subverts those dominant metanarratives. It is confrontational, not aggressive, but challenging.
- 3) Deliberately state the contrast, rather than minimising the difference opens up the gap between world-views, thus creating space for transformation.
- 4) The gracious invitation of God who refuses to let the divine purpose for creation be thwarted.

## **Implications for Preaching**

### *1. Centrality of God*

Our preaching is centred on God, not us. The preacher is not central, neither is the congregation central. Important though they are, the great issues of our day don’t take centre stage.

As Deane Meatheingham reminded as last night Christ is present in worship so Christ is central and everything else flows from this.

### *2. Power of the Scriptures to shape a People*

The task of the preacher is to get out of the way and let the Scriptures speak on their own terms.

So the task of the preachers is to hold people in the text to allow it to speak and shape their lives. When that is done consistently people with distinctive character will be formed.

At Wesley Institute we teach students to preach in series preaching through a book. In class a few years ago we preached through Luke’s gospel with 10-12 sermons in a 4 hour period. This Festival of Preaching was very intense and exhausting. The class recognised that something significant had happened when we let Luke wash over us. There were ten different preachers but Luke did what Luke does.

At the end Vanessa was very moved. She felt like God was leading her to sell her house—the house they’d always dreamed of and worked all their lives to get. After they bought something smaller—still a nice house, but smaller—she said “we were never happy in that large



house and nobody misses it”.

Where did that come from? Luke’s gospel, doing what it does.

### 3. *Maintaining Identity*

Nurturing identity lies at the heart of Christian preaching: “Who am I?” “Whose am I?”

Bryan Stone’s asserts that “The most evangelistic thing the church can do today is to be the church – to be formed imaginatively by the Holy Spirit through core practices such as worship, forgiveness, hospitality and economic sharing into a distinctive people in the world, a new social option, the body of Christ ... The missio dei is the creation of a people who in every culture are both ‘pulpit and paradigm’ of a new humanity.”<sup>23</sup>

### 4. *Story-formed Community*

We are a story formed community continually living with a clash of stories pull us in different directions

That’s why Brueggemann’s description of preaching as identifying the differences between how the gospel sees reality & the world around us is important.

“The role of the preacher is not to close gaps, but to open the gap between us and our experience.

“The prime evangelistic moment is the gap between us and God. . . . After twenty years of thinking of preaching as my attempt to close the gap, I now conceive of faithful preaching as opening up the gap. For it is in the gaps that we can be reborn.”<sup>24</sup>

### 5. *Importance of Memory*

“Remember” is an important theme in scripture. Remember the story of Josiah’s reforms in 2 Chronicles 34. The Book of the Law is found during the Temple repairs, and then read in presence of the king. “What is this?” asks Josiah, who then grieves. This is a story of dusting off forgotten texts. Texts that tell us who we are, when we have forgotten.

### Conclusion

John V. Taylor (1990) describes the Western church’s present crisis:

If, at this moment before the dawn of a new century, the church in the industrial nations is confused, not knowing what to do with its inheritance, this is because it cannot yet see clearly the new cultural milieu into which it is already moving....However, the church can take heart from the evidence that each time the cultural base of the Christian religion was about to crumble, Christianity has been saved by its diffusion into a new milieu.<sup>25</sup>

Barbara Brown Taylor describes “God’s action in the unfolding crisis: In a kind of proverb for our times, biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann says, ‘the world for which you have been so carefully prepared is being taken away from you, by the grace of God.’ It is the last part which is the kicker, of course. The upheaval going on around us may be God’s work, not the devil’s.”

Martin Copenhaver grew up in ministry household in 1950s/ordained in 1980s.<sup>27</sup> makes a similar “Sitting on the four corners of the central intersection in the small suburban town in which I grew up there is the public school, the library, the town hall, and my home church. Every morning an American flag is raised over the lawn in from of each of the four buildings. The church, however, sits on a hill above the other public buildings, as if presiding over all. The church is built of stone, its sturdy Norman architecture seemingly rising out of the massive rock formations that jut forth from the earth throughout the town, as if the stone of the church were rooted in

the very foundations of the earth. . . . My father was the senior minister of the church. When he looked out of the window of his study, perched high in the church on the hill, he could survey the town as if it were all his parish, and in a sense it was no wonder: during much of the time that my father served there, the church membership was over a third of the population of the town.

Today the world is different from the one into which I was born, and today’s church is different from the one in which I was baptised. To a certain extent this could be said in any generation. But many of us sense that what we are experiencing today is something more. It is nothing less than a seismic shift. . . . This “kingdom of American liberal Protestantism no longer exists. We are not in charge any more, if we ever really were in charge. Many respond to this experience of “exile” by calling for a return to a time when the culture accommodated religious practice and supported the Christian values that we aim to instil in our children. . . . By contrast, I have come to believe that for liberal Protestants there is no returning to another time and circumstance when we seemed to be [in] charge, and that there are ways in which we can welcome these changes, as unsettling as they may be. That is, I am convinced that there is good news in exile. Today the secular culture makes not the slightest apology for defying or simply ignoring the challenges of the gospel. This should not surprise us. The world is once again acting like the world. This leaves the church with the challenge of once again acting like the church.”

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## Getting down to business

### The 2012 Annual General Meeting

*Full reports and approved minutes will be available to members in the near future.*

#### ACC National Council

Membership for 2011-12:

*Chair:* Rev Dr Max Champion (Vic)

*Deputy Chair:* Rev Dr Hedley Fihaki (Qld)

*Secretary:* Rev Walter Abetz (Tas)

*Treasurer:* Dr Colin Adams (Vic)

Rev Anne Hibbard (NSW)

Rev Rod James (SA)

Rev Shane Kammermann (Qld)

Ms Robyn Painter (SA)

Rev Dr Ian Breward (Vic)

Rev Derek Schiller (SA)

Rev Peter Davis (NSW)

Ms Fatai Tapueluelu (NSW)

*Meetings:* Since the last Annual General Meeting, the National Council (NC) has convened by three teleconference and a two day meeting in Sydney 5th-6th March 2012. This meeting included the chairs or delegates from the Commissions and Boards.

#### *National Director and staffing:*

No further action has been taken with regard to specific fundraising. Louise Carr has been appointed on a part time basis to assist Peter Bentley with administration.

#### *Matters referred to the National Council by the Annual General Meeting*

- The establishment of the Robert Iles Memorial Lecture and the associated fund was finalised. (A report will be provided in a future magazine)
- A letter has been sent, with regard to the Amendment of Clause 39 of the UCA Constitution, but no reply as yet from the Assembly General Secretary to ACC.
- The critique of the Sacred Union Liturgy was forwarded to heads of churches.
- A letter has been written to the Church Unity Working Group, protesting against the misrepresenta-

tion of the ACC in the UCA-Lutheran dialogue.

- Financial support: The Council wish to acknowledge the ongoing support by congregations and individuals through membership fees and donations.

#### **Congregational and Group Membership at 30 June 2012.**

During the last year two congregations ceased as Uniting Church congregations, two congregations decided not to renew membership due to their small size and two new congregations joined.

Year (at 30 June)	2011	2012
Congregations	124	122
Groups	10	10
Clusters	7	7
Total	141	139

#### **ACC Administration and Office and Executive Consultant**

Some of the areas of responsibility

- ACC E-News with the help of Rev Dr Hedley Fihaki for the Prayer Diary.

- Articles for ACCatalyst, including the film reviews, as well as liaising and help with arranging material and themes.

- Speaking at meetings and visiting local churches, particularly in NSW. Providing oversight of material and changes to the website.

- Working closely with the ACC Chair and ACC Secretary in business arrangements for National Council business, and also the Board of Management and Commissions.

- Planning and liaison with members and the council regarding the 13th UCA Assembly (July 15-22).

- The planning and oversight of the annual ACC Conference.

#### **Administration:**

This last year has been slightly different. While Peter Bentley has continued to handle many aspects of day to day administrative, financial, and membership arrangements, since September 2011, ACC has been pleased to have Louise Carr help on a part-time basis with administration and mailings, including the database system. Anne Weeks has

also provided some helpful voluntary assistance at peak times. The number of e-mails that the office sends is considerable as this is the prime business tool used today. I hope I do not overdo this but I try to keep the Council and other members as up-to-date as needed.

I wish to also acknowledge the fine service of our National Council, the Chair especially and members of our Commissions and also the many ordinary members who have sent words of encouragement and prayer advice.

*Peter Bentley*

### ACC Treasurer's Report

Last financial year, 2010 -2011, we were able to increase our reserves due to a successful response to an appeal for donations. Our long term intention is to accumulate funds for the appointment of a full-time National Director. This has not been possible, largely due to insufficient funds. We were able to secure some excellent part-time support in the ACC office last September by appointing Louise Carr, which allowed Peter Bentley to assume some "National Director" responsibilities.

We commenced the financial year with \$49,782 in our cash accounts, up \$9,432 from last year's \$40,350 and we finished the year with diminished reserves of \$18,508. During the twelve months ACC income from fees and donations reduced to \$146,746, and we spent \$179,632. This expenditure was what we had budgeted for, and was \$5,106 more than our expenditure of \$174, 526 during the previous year. This forced our Board of Management to use \$35,000 of our Capital reserve to fund our ongoing operations during the year, and for the appointment of a part-time office assistant. This reflected our commitment to continuing our normal range of ACC initiatives. We finished the financial year with an account balance of \$18,508 representing an operating deficit of \$31,275 for the year. Ste-



Pratising what was being preached about: worship

phen Andrews, who reorganised our accounts, has continued to provide excellent accounting services to ACC.

The accounts have been audited and are in order. Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues on our Management Board—Kevin Fielke and Ron Clough—for their wise guidance and commitment to the ACC during this past year.

We may have to wait to see the full extent of the success of our donations before committing to any new ACC initiatives later this year. We believe that the Lord will provide for opportunities to act as good stewards for His Kingdom, and we are grateful for His, and your, support.

*Colin Adam ACC Treasurer*

## ACC Board of Communication

The Board of Communication (BOC) co-ordinates activity via a one day meeting. This was held on 16th August 2012 in Sydney. Note: The BOC meeting is a wide-ranging group as ACC members involved in the website, publications, review, and magazine attend. The BOC received reports from the various committees: Review, Website, Media and Public Relations and Magazine.

Most of the meeting time was spent on a wide-ranging discussion about issues and ideas for articles in relation to the UCA and the wider church. The meeting discussed the

problem of the use of language and how many Evangelical Christian terms had been taken over by other groups in the church and had lost the meaning that they had for evangelicals. Examples included conversion, resurrection, orthodox, salvation. A series of articles is being planned on the use of words.

Frequency of editions of ACCatalyst: The BOC accepted the revised publication schedule moving from 6 issues to 5 issues per calendar from this calendar year, with the final edition to be prepared in October for release in November, dated November 2012.

ACC Confessing Congregations Website and Uniting Views website.

The BOC is considering the possibility of utilising more video and having a more dynamic visual approach, for example including Maximus Public Square on Uniting Views website.

Facebook The increased use of the ACC Facebook site was highlighted.

*Professor Pat Noller, Convenor.*

## Social Responsibility Commission

Since the last AGM a statement on Integral Mission, setting out the relationship between social responsibility and evangelism was published in ACCatalyst. The Commission has produced brief statements that clarify notions of compassion and di-

versity as they are used and misused in contemporary discussion. These have been submitted for publication in the ACCatalyst. The Commission proposes to produce similar statements on tolerance and equality.

## Caring for the Creation Working Group

The Caring for the Creation Working group (CCWG) consists of 5 members: Rev Dr Peter Davis, Mr Graeme Lacey, Mrs Joy Lacey, Ross Macmillan and Nola Stewart (convener), together with two corresponding members, Dr Ian Breward and Paul Langkamp. Additional members are welcome.

- The CCWG is responsible to National Council through the Social Responsibility Commission (SRC). Dr Nell Muirden is currently acting as liaison with the SRC.
- The CCWG aims to place the care of Creation on a sound scriptural and theological basis and to communicate this message both with the Uniting Church and beyond it. To this end, Bible Studies on “Caring for the Creation” have been prepared and made available.

• A web page on the ACC site has been set up for the use of the CCWG. It is recommended that those interested look at this webpage: [www.confessingcongregations.com/resources/creation-care-resources/](http://www.confessingcongregations.com/resources/creation-care-resources/)  
*Nola Stewart, Co-ordinator*

## Doctrine and Theology Commission

*Note: this was the last report for retiring convenor Dr Rosalie Hudson. The ACC AGM recorded its deep appreciation to Rosalie for her foundational work and leadership.*

The ACC Doctrine and Theology Commission, based in Melbourne, meets four times per year with business between meetings conducted via email.

Membership: Dr Rosalie Hudson (convenor), Rev Ross Carter, Rev Clive Skewes, Rev John Hudson, Rev Dr Max Champion (ex-officio).

Corresponding members: Rev Dr Gordon Watson, Rev Ivan Kirk, Bella Hibbard.

Advice is sought from time to time by four 'consultants': Rev Bruce Barber, Rev Dr Alan Crawford, Rev Dr Craig Thomson, Rev Martin Wright.

The work of the commission in the past year is described according to our Terms of Reference:

1. *To develop doctrinal and theological resources as required by the ACC or its National Council.* Our five main tasks have been

- a short paper on worship,
- a working paper on discipline,
- series on the Lord's Prayer for *ACCatalyst*,
- critique of the 'sacred union' liturgy,
- framework for Task Group on marriage arising from Assembly in July 2012.

In relation to the working paper on discipline, the National Council (NC) received the draft paper and sought comments from NC members by mid August 2012. The NC recommended the paper be forwarded to the Assembly when finalised. (Refer Appendix 1)

2. *To provide doctrinal and theological advice to ACC members, including responses to doctrinal decisions of the UCA and matters arising from the UCA Working Group on Doctrine (AWGD).* We published a paper lamenting the demise of the Bioethics Committee (Vic/Tas Synod) as our theological commentary clearly states doctrine and ethics may not be divided. We continued to follow closely the various documents published by the AWGD via their website. We provided critical

commentary on the AWGD's 'Friendship in the Presence of Difference: A statement of the UCA on serving the reconciling and renewing purposes of God in a nation of many faiths'.

The NC asked the commission to prepare a framework for the 'task group on marriage dialogue with the AWGD', for discussion at the 2012 AGM. (See separate notice)

3. *To provide specific doctrinal and theological resources and advice*

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## We encourage all members of the ACC to use the theological declaration and commentary; trusting they will continue to provide members with a sound doctrinal basis...

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*to other commissions and boards of the ACC, as required.* In response to a request for advice relating to catechetical material for new ACC members, we alert members to the ACC's Theological Declaration and commentary, together with other ACC foundational documents.

4. *To provide responses to doctrinal and theological matters referred to the commission by other ACC commissions and boards.* We were pleased to collaborate with the Cross Cultural Commission in developing their statement on marriage. We urged the NC to consider the nature of worship (as opposed to a discussion on styles of worship) at the 2012 AGM and conference. We commend the Social Responsibility Commission's work on euthanasia.

5. *To assist the ACC to doctrinally specify the faith of the church.* We encourage all members of the ACC to use the theological declaration and commentary; trusting they will continue to provide members with a sound doctrinal basis for refuting some of the contemporary 'doctrines' which are clearly antithetical to the witness of the one holy, catholic and

apostolic church. We continue to recommend their use for preaching, teaching and group discussion.

Thanks to members. I take this opportunity as convenor to thank the members, corresponding members and consultants for their significant contribution to the commission's work during the past year. John Hudson's resignation was received, and he was thanked for his contribution over five years. In particular, we have appreciated Max Champion's attendance at every meeting.

*Dr Rosalie Hudson  
Convenor*

## New ACC Task Group on Marriage

Following on from the inclusion of the ACC as one group for the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine to provide their paper on marriage for comment (see the August *ACCatalyst* and UCA Assembly website) the ACC AGM decided to establish a task group be appointed consisting of all members of the doctrine and theology commission, with the addition of co-opted members, and reference to the commission's corresponding members and consultants where appropriate. The major task of the group is to prepare a paper for the ACC to submit to the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine (AWGD) for discussion as they prepare to respond to the Assembly's remit by 2014.

## Ecumenical Commission

The work of the Ecumenical Commission has been co-ordinated mostly by the National Chair, and focussed this year on drafting and then sending a letter to Australian heads of churches prior to the National Assembly meeting held in July 2012. Owen Davis and Peter Bentley assisted in this task. It was helpful to have this contact with other denominations, especially at a time when the UnitingJustice submission to the same-sex marriage inquiry had become more prominent and had raised questions about the governance and oversight within the UCA.



# Reports from the state movements

## New South Wales

*God is at work – in Ruth, and in us!*

In Chapter 3 of Ruth, I think Naomi begins to question whether Ruth & Boaz will ever get together. It seems that in her directions to Ruth in vv 1 – 4, Naomi is asking that question that I'm sure many of us have asked at some time: "God, are you still at work? Why are things going so slowly? Lord, have you fallen asleep or forgotten about us?"

These are the questions we ask when things don't seem to be going at the pace we would like; when our prayers are not answered in the timing we would prefer.

They are the type of questions that are asked of me quite frequently as I meet with members of the UCA in various places: "Why haven't things changed in the Synod/Assembly of the UCA yet? Why hasn't revival come yet?" They are difficult and testing questions. But I take great comfort as I read the Book of Ruth again, and see God's hand at work in the little "co-incidences" of that story, and in the answered prayers of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz.

We may like to see things changing for the better in the UCA more quickly. We may like to see revival come sooner. And so we keep on praying and keep on working in the Spirit towards these goals. And as we patiently work and wait, we have the confidence to know that God is accomplishing His eternal plans and purposes.

As Paul reminds us, as we wait patiently: "endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope" (Rom 5:4) I pray that you will keep on enduring and looking to see the gracious hand of our faithful God at work.

The NSW Committee has been seeking to be faithfully doing this also as we have met to try and find ways to encourage ACC Congregations, groups and individuals throughout NSW.

We welcome invitations to come and share with your congregation or group about the work of the ACC. It is a real blessing for us to hear of the

exciting things that are being done in various Congregations in NSW. What an encouragement to know that there are ACC congregations in NSW having wonderful Gospel opportunities in their local communities.

This past year our fellowship has extended beyond the bounds of the UCA. ACC NSW subsidised 10 ACC NSW Pastors to attend a large gathering of pastors and church leaders across the denominational spectrum for quality Bible teaching, encouragement, networking and refreshment (Oxygen August 2011 organised by KCC). We hope that there will be future opportunities to be involved in similar like-minded ecumenical ventures.

I am grateful for the faithful

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## Please keep us in your prayers those serving in isolated areas that are separated from an ACC fellowship by very large distances.

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labours of the NSW Committee. I especially thank Mr Bruce Fairhall for his efficient and diligent work as Secretary for a number of years until April 2012. Rev Peter Chapman has kindly agreed to be our secretary. My appreciation also extends to all the members of the Committee. The NSW Committee has been meeting four times a year on a Friday morning at Wesley Mission (we are grateful for the use of Wesley Mission facilities for our meetings) in Pitt St, Sydney CBD. Please prayerfully consider your availability to serve on the NSW Committee.

The work of the ACC goes on. Our labours for the Gospel go on. All working together with God's eternal plans of redemption, coming together for His glory and our eternal benefit – that is our hope and prayer.  
*Rev. Ian Weeks Chairperson*

## Queensland

The committee meets on a quarterly basis to plan and encourage the confessional movement in our State. In November we were delighted to have the Revd. Rod James visit us for a speaking tour. He gave addresses in Brisbane, Sunshine Coast and Gold Coast on 'Why gay marriage is not good for Australia'. We very much appreciated his commitment to serve us and his addresses arrested the interest of some outside of our confessional movement and outside the membership of the Uniting Church. The folk in far North and Central Queensland also enjoyed a visit from Peter Bentley earlier in the year.

The committee continues to encourage the regional formation of groups of ACC members and provides support to individuals in their ministry. Our group on the Southside of Brisbane meets every month. During the course of the year we have covered a range of studies including bible studies and ACC resources such as: the DVD production on the New Heavens and the New Earth. We are currently studying James Torrance's book *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*.

Please do keep us in your prayers and especially those serving in isolated areas that are separated from an ACC fellowship by very large distances. We wish to record our gratitude for all the good work our National Council does on our behalf and for the publication of *ACCatalyst* that is widely distributed and read.

*Revd Ivan Kirk Chairperson*

## South Australia

*Emerging Leaders Award*

ACC-SA began the year with a reunion event for those who took part in the Emerging Leaders Award weekend in February 2011. While a number of the participants were unable to attend because of distance and other commitments, those present enjoyed reacquainting and hearing how each one had progressed as a young leader. Rev. Simon Dent

# ACC CONVENTION 2012

gave a very helpful address on the theme 'Leadership and Ministry belong to Christ'. Everyone was keen for another ELA weekend to be held in 2013, and it was suggested that alumni from the first ELA could act as mentors in the second one.

We are pleased to report that plans are underway for the second ELA which will be held at the same camp-site at Longwood from Thursday January 31 to Sunday February 3. We are particularly pleased that Rev Don Purdey is able to play a key role in its planning.

*Special events in cooperation with HopeNet*

The South Australian Synod is one Presbytery/Synod with Mission Networks. One of the networks is HopeNet which is affiliated with the ACC. Most of the congregations in HopeNet belong to the ACC. This year discussions have been held leading to HopeNet and ACC-SA working more closely together, particularly when holding special events.

- A two day encouragement and equipping event called 'Stir the fire' was held at the Tea Tree Gully UC on Friday 27th-Saturday 28th April. The emphasis was on outreach and evangelism.

- ACC-SA also supported HopeNet's evangelistic outreach with visiting evangelist Bishop Joel Kakembo from Africa. This series of meetings involved ACC/SA congregations in the Adelaide Hills, on Yorke Peninsula and in the mid North.

HopeNet and ACC-SA are also exploring ways in which their two executives can work more closely together.

*Major events in Adelaide*

In October 2011 we held a 'Living Waters' seminar in Mt Gambier on the theme of 'Marriage and Family'. Our program this year has been somewhat preoccupied with the two major events of the UCA 13th Assembly and the ACC National Conference. We have continued with our general meetings every couple of months with prayer at 5pm, tea at 6, and meeting 7-9pm.

*ACC-SA PrayerNet*

After an active and supportive few years our state PrayerNet has gone into recess. . We are currently seeking others to take up this important work. Special thanks to Mandy Scott who so energetically and innovatively headed up the PrayerNet.

## The ACC speakers on Vimeo

**Peter Davis**

*Preaching after Christendom*

<http://vimeo.com/50907764>

About this video

Rev Peter Davis addresses the ACC 2012 Conference on the subject "Preaching after Christendom"

**Mike Raiter**

*The Congregation's Other Preachers: The place of singing in Evangelical worship."*

<http://vimeo.com/50301976>

About this video

Mike spoke at ACC 2012 Conference on the subject of worship

**Derek Schiller**

*Assurance*

<http://vimeo.com/50004435>

About this video

This sermon was preached at Assembly of Confessing Congregations Annual Conference 2012 prior to Holy Communion.

**Deane Meatheringham**

*What do we expect from worship?*

<http://vimeo.com/50409851>

About this video

Deane Meatheringham spoke at the 2012 Friday Night Rally.

**Shane Kammermann**

*Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*

<http://vimeo.com/50045288>

About this video

Shane Kammermann Bible Study Opening Worship ACC Conference 2012

**Martin Bleby**

*Singing the Lord's Song*

<http://vimeo.com/51028986>

About this video

Martin Bleby addresses ACC 2012 Conference on the subject "Singing the Lord's Song".

# Beginning with Genesis

## Anne Weeks invites us to begin reading at the beginning

**L**ast Friday a 17-year-old was out jogging. She saw a small bundle under a tree – and it was wriggling. A baby! Now safe and well in hospital, this baby has no known origin. The police are searching for his mother. He was named Andy, after the ambulance driver Andy Menere, who brought the baby in to the hospital. Apart from his name, baby Andy has nothing.

We all have a very strong sense of needing to know our roots, our origins – our childhood, our ancestry. People are desperate to know who Andy's mother is. Ask anyone who was adopted – they feel they are different until they find their birth mother and learn about their background.

In *The Sound of Music*, Julie Andrews sings a touching son in the garden, when her love for Herr Von Trapp is allowed to be displayed:

“So here am I standing here loving you...” and she sings “nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could...”

I think those are very true words. Everything has an origin, a beginning. Genesis is God's gift to us. He has generously given us His Word—His communication to us of all we need to know about how to live. And as the opening book of the Bible, He's given us Genesis. “In the beginning.” He doesn't start off in the middle of the story and assume we know what came before. He starts with the introduction.

When I meet someone in Berry, I introduce myself and ask, “How long have you been in Berry?” If it's not long, I often ask, “Where did you move from?” [If they've lived here a long time, I ask instead “Who are you related to?” ;-)] We want to know people's origins, their own story, where they've come from. It helps me build a friendship with them.

It's the same with God and us. God wants to build a friendship with us, so He has introduced Himself. God wants you to get to know him better. Will you risk that?

So what's in the Bible? The Old Testament is the Jewish Scriptures. the New Testament is the story of Jesus and the beginnings of the Christian church. Genesis is the first book of the Bible and Revelation is the last book. If we think of it like a stage-play, the Old Testament is Act 1, there's an intermission of about 400 years, and then the New Testament is Act 2.

In Genesis we are introduced to the God of the universe who created everything and assessed his creation as “Very good.” In Genesis we are also introduced to people – ancient people yet with familiar problems – a wife not trusting her husband; brothers who are jealous; people who on the morning after regret their drunken excesses...

We only reach chapter 6 before we read that God saw how great humanity's corruption was and He “was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and his



Dale M. Moore/Flickr.com

heart was filled with pain. So Yahweh said, ‘I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth.’” What hope is left?

Ah, but our God is the God of hope! He's the God of new beginnings. Even way back in Genesis He gives us the first clues about how he will bring hope to every person. God offers to redeem us from our predicament.

The wonderful world that God created was so quickly spoilt. Only 3 chapters into Genesis we read about the man and woman doubting God's word and rebelling against God. They are punished, and the evil serpent who has tempted them is cursed by God. Yet even in this tragic time, God provides hope. In cursing the snake, God says that the offspring of the woman will crush the serpent's head. At the end of Genesis 3 we are left wondering about this serpent-crusher. Who will he be? And when will he do his work?

It's not surprising that chapter 4 opens with Eve giving birth. Will this offspring be the one to crush the serpent? No, Cain is not the one. He feels he's a victim of unfair dismissal and kills his brother, Abel, in anger. As Cain's descendants are born, concluding with the appalling Lamech it becomes clear that we will have to look elsewhere for a serpent-crusher.

Characters come and go until at the end of Genesis we meet Jacob. He is chosen and loved by God. I sometimes wonder why! His name means “deceiver”. He is not the Satan-crusher! He has 12 sons and the final chapters of Genesis follow the highs and lows of his son, Joseph. Joseph is a bit like Allan Bond – third most powerful in the nation at one time, forgotten in jail at another. Yet Joseph emerges as a person with integrity. He is not corrupted by power and he does not forget his family. Is he, perhaps, the offspring of the woman who will crush the serpent's head? (sigh) But no, Joseph dies and Genesis closes with God's chosen people, Abraham's family, living in Egypt! They are far from seeing God's blessing that He promised to Abraham in Genesis chapter 12. The question still lingers: who will be the one to slay the serpent and destroy his evil work?

*Continued page 24*

# The power of perspective

## Michael Harvey on the insight older people bring to Church.

**P**erspective comes originally from the Latin *perspicere*, “to see through”. We need to see people in our congregation, better than they presently are. Very often I hear church leader’s say to me. I can see invitation work well over in that church over there

“but you should see my congregation!”

I can almost hear Jesus saying  
“you should see my disciples!”

Jesus ‘saw’ Simon differently than he saw himself. In fact he renamed him “Cephas” the rock. It’s just that Simon didn’t act like a rock. He was all over the place. But Simon Peter became very influential for Christ

Never underestimate the power of perspective. Indeed, the perspective influence of those around us is so powerful! Many times we don’t even realize we’re being strongly affected because influences generally develop over an extended period of time.

I have been concerned for a while that we have a tendency to write off our congregations that have a majority of senior citizens. In a recent study of churches the Back to Church Sunday Team in the UK we discovered that even if a congregation is senior it can still have powerful influence over younger people. In fact the survey found that 60% of those invited by our senior congregations were under the age of 50. Why is this so? I think we have far too long called our congregations elderly, rather than elders. There is a difference between the two. Elders have respect, and have over a long time done a

lot for their kith and kin. Therefore their adult children and grandchildren will often be open to an invite from Grandma and Grandpa. It may well be by using phrases like aging, and elderly that we have spoken death to the church and many of our best people have become “Road” Christians (Retired on active duty). We need to re-recruit the senior members of the congregations and envision them of their position of elders and of their powerful influence on those around them.

Everyone ought to have a dream which leads to a perspective that lasts beyond a lifetime, to leave a legacy behind. A legacy is something that someone has achieved that continues to exist after they die. Many of us are someone else’s legacy. We were probably invited by someone, to enable us to cross the threshold of a church building, and many of us would not be here if someone had not come alongside us, at key points in our spiritual life.

Jesus of course left a massive legacy behind but I want to finish on his final vision Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This legacy has led down the years to you and me.

Now we have a chance to leave our own legacy behind by offering an invitation that may very well last beyond your own lifetime and remember Jesus ends his final words of legacy by saying (and as you go)

‘lo I am with you always’ Matt 28:20 KJV

Borrow my eyes and gain a new perspective to see beyond your fear and offer an invitation which might also change the perspective of your friend or relative.

*Michael Harvey is the author of Unlocking the Growth available through Augsburg Fortress*

*From page 23* Although Genesis poses that question to us, the answer does not become clear until the New Testament. It opens with a list of names: “A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.” Does this sound familiar? Matthew picks up where Genesis was going. “These are the generations of...” Matthew says (in Greek) ‘biblos geneseos Iesous Christos.’ Here he is! Here at last the Satan-crusher has arrived!!

And Jesus was victorious over Satan. “that ancient serpent, called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray” (Rev 12:9) was hurled down and defeated. In dying and then getting up again and walking away, Jesus crushed the serpent’s head. Jesus is the promised one. He is the mighty deliverer who comes to restore God’s creation to its true beauty and comes to restore us into a perfect relationship with God. Genesis gives us such a firm foundation for understanding Jesus Christ. Genesis gives us the introductory elements we need to understand the whole Bible. It even gives us the pieces we need to build a view of the world that makes sense.

Why is there so much suffering? Why would a mother abandon her newborn baby and leave him to be named after the ambulance driver? Why is there so much friction in my family?

We are all in need of new beginnings in our lives. Studying Genesis, the book of beginnings, gives us a chance to re-evaluate our lives and our relationships – with our family, with our church family, and most importantly with our God.

Let’s make a start today. Let’s commit ourselves to really digging into Genesis and finding out exactly what God wants us to learn from it – and from Him.

Let’s pray each day that God’s Spirit will help us to understand the words and ideas.

Let’s expect God to give us new things – new beginnings with Him.

The Bible says God’s mercies are new every morning (Lam 3:23). I’ve lived a lot of days already and that’s a lot of mornings. God is still eager to reveal more of Himself to you and to me. Will you risk that?

Let’s pray that God will bless us with new beginnings and new mercies as we study Genesis.



# Insights into Bonhoeffer

*Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* by Eric Metaxas, Reviewed by Professor Pat Noller, ACC Queens-land secretary

This 'new' biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer was published in April, 2010 to coincide with the 65th anniversary of Bonhoeffer's execution by the Nazis not long before the Allies arrived to end the war. Although I already knew some of the basic elements of the story, Metaxas managed to keep my attention right to the end.

We get a real insight into the thinking and experience of Bonhoeffer as this book is full of quotations from Bonhoeffer himself, from his sermons, his diary, his other writings and his letters, including letters between him and his fiancée, Maria von Wedermeyer when he was in prison. These letters were published in 1992 as *Love Letters from Cell 92*. An English translation by John Brownjohn was published in 1995.

Bonhoeffer was a twin and one of eight children born to a well-to-do family with an impressive lineage and for whom education was a high priority. We are told that although the family members were not keen churchgoers, their "daily life was filled with Bible-reading and hymn singing". God was a real part of their lives. Dietrich's childhood is best summed up in a comment by his father, Karl who was Professor of Psychiatry and Neurology at the university in Breslau: "Despite having eight children – which seems an enormous number in times like these—we have the impression that there are not too many of them! The house is big, the children develop normally, we parents are not too old, and so we endeavor not to spoil them and to make their young years enjoyable" (pp.8-9).

At a mass in St Peter's in Rome, the 18-year-old Bonhoeffer received his first glimpse of the universality of the church, a topic on which he concentrated in his doctoral dissertation and in his postdoctoral work. His thinking on this topic also led him to get involved in the ecumenical movement in Europe and to reject the idea of "a church defined by racial

identity" (p.53) as pushed by the Nazis. He argued that it was not important whether someone was designated as a Protestant or a Catholic. What was important was being faithful to God's word.

As the previous statement suggests, Bonhoeffer had a strong view of the Bible. He argued that preachers should not try to make the Bible relevant, or spend time defending it. What was needed was Christians who were prepared to testify to God's Word. According to Bonhoeffer, "the challenge was to deliver the Word of God as purely as possible" because "it alone had the power to touch the human heart" (p.291). "For him a sermon was nothing less than the very word of God, a place where God could speak to his people" (p.272). Inge Karding remembered him saying, "When you read the Bible you must think that here and now God is speaking with me."

Bonhoeffer was very disappointed with the German church and its capitulation to Hitler and the Third Reich. He was concerned, among other things, about the way that the German church, in order to pander to the Nazis, was trying to divest itself of any signs of Jewishness, including getting rid of the Old Testament, revising the New Testament and changing the image of Jesus, by such tactics as downplaying the significance of the crucifixion.

To deal with this situation where the Nazis were taking over the established church, Bonhoeffer was involved in the founding of the Confessing Church from those who believed that the German church had ceased to be the Church. The Barmen declaration, of which Karl Barth was the principal author is quoted at length by Metaxas. He notes that the purpose of this statement was to "state what the German church had always believed, to ground it in the scriptures and to differentiate it from the bastardised theology that had been coming from the German churches" (p.222).

Bonhoeffer established and taught in illegal seminaries such as Finkenwalde and believed that God was call-

ing him to save the church from the Nazis. He wrote to his friend Elizabeth Zinn "My calling is quite clear to me. What God will make of it I do not know.... I must follow the path. Perhaps it will not be a long one". This statement proved to be prophetic.

For a theologian, Bonhoeffer had a very practical approach to the Christian life, claiming that this life must be modeled by Christians in their everyday lives. After all, he argued, Jesus lived among us and showed us how to live. According to Inge Karding, "He taught us that the Bible goes directly into your life, (to) where your problems are". He also preached against "cheap grace" or grace that did not involve repentance.

In this volume, we read a lot about his friendships with both men and women. Numbered among them were Elizabeth Zinn, Eberhard Bethge, the English Bishop George Bell, Pastor Julius Rieger, Ruth von Kleist-Retzow and his young fiancée Maria von Wedermeyer. We are privy to a lot of the correspondence between Bonhoeffer and these friends.

Bonhoeffer was greatly concerned about the situation of the Jews in Nazi Germany, particularly because of the adoption of the Aryan paragraph that made it illegal for anyone of Jewish heritage to work in the Civil Service. Perhaps the best-known aspect of Bonhoeffer's life is his involvement in the plot to kill Hitler. How Hitler survived the attempt on his life by the conspirators makes fascinating reading. Bonhoeffer was arrested and sent to Tegel prison, even before the explosion that was meant to kill Hitler had happened. He carried his Bible in his hand. According to Metaxas, Bonhoeffer was the "theologian and moral compass" (p.445) of the conspirators because he saw Hitler as 'evil incarnate'. Bonhoeffer was executed in early April, 1945 just two weeks before the Allies arrived and 3 weeks before Hitler committed suicide. He saw his death as "the beginning of life".

I recommend this book to all who are seeking to be faithful to Christ in all that they do. All 542 pages make fascinating reading.

# Call for emerging leaders

The ACC SA Movement is organising the Second *Emerging Leaders Camp Award*, following the encouragement of the first Camp Award in 2011.

The award comes in the form of a high quality, fast paced camp provided free to your young and emerging leader (17-30 yrs), containing inspiring teaching, great resources and ongoing encouragement as a gift to the local church from ACC SA.

Keynote speaker is Tim Hein, who lectures at UCLT (SA training college) and was founding pastor of CitySoul, a missional church in Adelaide's CBD. Tim is a sought-after speaker for conferences, strategic consultant with Capacity Builders, and SA Co-ordinator for Arrow – Australia's peak body for developing young Christian leaders. He'll be joined by a number of respected church and lay leaders, mentors and support staff combining their talents



Memories of the first camp

to bless your emerging leader.

The camp will be held 31 January – 3 February 2013 at Longwood Camp, Stirling SA. ACC congregations and

groups should have received information about this important event. Please follow-up with your minister or church officers for more info.

## Rod James' Eyre Peninsula roadtrip

Over four days (28th September 28 to October 1, 2012) I travelled 1500 km by car to Port Lincoln and back and made contact with 10 groups or individuals for ACC.

On Friday I drove to Port Pirie for a lunch-time meeting with 7 leaders from the Pt Pirie UC (ACC Member congregation). This was an encouraging and enthusiastic meeting. These leaders were up-beat about the life in their congregation and the presence of young families and children in the congregation. I gave them an update that featured five main points:

- The period spanning the Uniting Justice's submission to the Parliamentary enquiry into marriage, the resultant protests, the debate and outcome on marriage at Assembly, and the cooperation between the evangelical groups in the UCA.
- The ACC conference, a time of encouragement, the theme of worship and the resultant resources on worship that are coming available.
- The three DVD/study booklet

resources produced by the Discipleship and Evangelism Commission, particularly the recently released *Here is love*.

- I shared copies of the brochure for the approaching Emerging Leaders Award (ELA), encouraging them to think also of young people who may have gone to Adelaide to University.
- Gave out copies of the new individual membership brochure and encouraged folk to be members. These five points were the basis of my sharing about ACC with the other groups I called on during my trip.

I stayed Friday night at Port Augusta (ACC member congregation) with Jonathan (Member of the ACC D&T Marriage Working Group) and Katherine Button and the next day after some local visitation, I drove to Arno Bay and called on Rev Bob Britton (from Port Pirie) and his wife Jeanne who were holidaying there. Then onto Cummins where I called on Rev Matthew Carratt.

I stayed Saturday night with Pastor Graham Ingram and his wife Kay

at Tumby Bay (ACC member congregation), and attended with them the Centenary Dinner of the Ungarra Church of Christ. On Sunday I preached at a parish service for Tumby Bay, Lipson and Port Neil congregations. These congregations are currently doing the ACC *Faith that Works* series on the letter of James, and, I preached on the fourth of the study themes. I also spoke about ACC making my five points. On Sunday evening I spoke with folk at the Port Lincoln church, and on Monday drove to Whyalla (ACC member congregation) and called on Rev Rob Tann and his wife Judy. This was a good visit for encouragement and I shared the above points as before. I drove home arriving in the evening.

Although attendances were affected by the October long weekend, the trip was profitable in representing ACC, updating folk on recent events, and promoting the coming ELA

*Rev. Rod James (National Council Member)*

# THIS IS THE ACC

## Who we are

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

*Our goals include*

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

## What does ACC do to help you?

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

- grow in their faith and be active in prayer, worship and fellowship
- share their faith and respond to current issues in the church and the world

- develop their congregations as vibrant expressions of the Good News.
- experience God's Word in action through healing broken lives and reconciling relationships.

## What we want to do

The objects of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations are:

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

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

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

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

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

- 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.

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

## How to join us

Please consider joining the ACC. Supporting Membership forms are available at: <http://www.confessing-congregations.com/assembly/members/individual-members/>

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

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

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

# ACC DIARY

## What happens next

- November 19: National Council Teleconference
- December 8: Hunter ACC end of year BBQ and Carols with Booragul Uniting Church: Booragul: 6.30 pm.
- 2013 - Emerging Leaders Camp Award. The camp will be held 31 January - 3 February 2013 at Longwood Camp, Stirling, SA.
- March 12-13, 2013: National Council and Commissions Sydney Gathering.

## Ways to support ACC

Some congregations have developed excellent ways of raising their membership contribution or providing an extra donation to the establishment and foundation of the ACC. Some of these are included below.

- A special Sunday offering: where an offering is taken for the work of the ACC
- A donation box: one congregation has a donation box in their church for the ACC. In less than a year they raised over \$1200, as well as giving a \$1000 membership contribution
- Purchasing Individual Supporting Memberships: some individuals and one congregation purchase supporting memberships on behalf of other members who cannot afford membership themselves. This increases the involvement of local members and provides a different way of encouraging members to support the ACC individually as well.
- Fundraising events: several regional groups have organised events to encourage and network and have also had a voluntary or retiring offering for the work of the ACC.



## Using our logo

Our logo is a composite of Christian symbols. The cross represents the work of Jesus Christ who died for our sins and rose again for our justification. The image of the Scriptures, in foreground, regulates our witness to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, represented by the Dove, enlightens our understanding and makes effective our witness to Christ. Our commitment to confess Christ, afresh, in our time and place is symbolized by the 'C' in the logo's background. All congregations and groups can use the ACC logo on their notice-boards or letterhead and emails.





Dean Cain in *The Way Home*

## Summer viewing

### **The Way Home** (2010, PG)

Dean Cain (well-known for playing ‘Superman’ in the TV series *Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*) has the lead role of the father Randy Simpkins. Randy’s Two-year old son Joe goes missing while he was supposed to be watching him. The story is based on an event in the US in 2000. The theme of community is strong, but the movie is centred on the Christian community, which gathers, prays (a prayer chain is established), and provides support to a family in need and helps to bind a community during a time of crisis. The role of the minister and also lay people in providing helpful pastoral support is a welcome feature. This movie helps one to reflect about what is important in life and also provides a good illustration of the church’s pastoral care at a time of need.

### **Rejoice and Shout** (2010, PG)

This documentary has now been released on DVD and available from Heritage HM ([movieschangepeople.com](http://movieschangepeople.com)). It shows the development of gospel music in the USA from the times of slavery, plantations and its African music roots. Later the social justice connection for the American Black Churches in the civil rights era is developed, illustrating how the singing went to saying (preaching) and vice versa. It has an amazing variety of people involved as well as some major Southern churches. The film and picture references from earlier periods build up a substantial historical record and bring to life influential people such as Thomas Dorsey, Smokey Robinson and the Staple Sisters. This is a specialised

documentary, and while I found it quite interesting, it will probably only appeal to a small group, but if you want an introduction to gospel music and some music to sing-along to, then look no further.

### For Further (adult) consideration **The Words** (2012, M)

This film can encourage consideration of a wide range of moral and ethical issues as it concerns a significant case of plagiarism (well an absolute case actually). For the people in this movie, the use of words is critical and the written word fundamental. Words for Christians are of course fundamental too. From the way we speak, preach, write and reflect, and certainly as we consider the written Word. The film helps people to consider their desires, aspirations and hopes. The reflections of the older man and younger man as they ‘spar’ with words are challenging to many people who live in major cities that seem to offer so much but are ultimately based around an emptiness. Well-known character actor Jeremy Irons is the ‘old man’. He last played the God-like figure in *Margin Call* and brings an element to these roles that I believe helps people to pause and think – ‘what is it all about’. There is an element of Ecclesiastes in this film as well – for there are many books.

### **The films of Paul Thomas Anderson**

Paul Thomas Anderson has made several high profile films which have garnered interest in religious and critical circles. I thought it would be helpful to briefly profile two. His latest film *The Master* (2012, MA), has received wide publicity, including a

considerable discussion on the ABC TV show *Gruen Planet*. Much of the discussion has centred on the connection to the story of Scientology’s founder L. Ron Hubbard.

The director has seemingly now distanced himself from talking about any Scientology connection, saying it was more of a period reference (the early 1950s) and stimulus to the wider themes. The film is a sometimes probably deliberately fatuous and mainly semi-dramatic piece revealing the disparate real life of an influential founder of a movement ‘The Cause’ and his relationships, especially to one who becomes like his ‘right-hand strong man’.

The two dramatic leads, Joaquin Phoenix as Freddie Quell, former WWII ‘ordinary’ seaman and extraordinary disturbed man who gets caught up in The Cause, and Academy Award winner Philip Seymour Hoffman as Lancaster Dodd the leader of the group are quite amazing. They inhabit characters that are both loathsome and repelling, yet draw one in to try to understand them.

The film is also a historical survey as well, following the post-Second-World-War 1950s when America boomed and many movements, theories, ideas, and groups were formed. In what is becoming the infamous line of the film, the son says to Freddie “You know he’s making it up as he goes along.” Again like Ecclesiastes it reminded me that “there is nothing new under the sun”. I would not recommend viewing the film, but you may see quite a bit of publicity and discussion about it.

An earlier film *Magnolia* (1999, MA) is well-known for its overt religious foundation. One cannot understand this film without reasonable biblical knowledge—there are words, symbols and elements of prophetic reference. The theme of the ‘sins of the father’ is vitally significant and interwoven in a multi-layered telling of the connected stories of several individuals in San Fernando County in Southern California. A warning though, there is a very strong and offensive scene with Hollywood star Tom Cruise (a Scientologist) playing a seminar leader who teaches men how to pick up women. The media have since honed in on Cruise and his connection to Paul Thomas Anderson (who is not a scientologist), but who showed *The Master* to Cruise, and said they still have a continuing friendship, with the subtext clearly being that Cruise had some issues.

*Peter Bentley*