

# ACCatalyst

Volume 2 September 2008

## **NEW ART**

**Revelation  
ceiling  
soars over  
Sydney**



Confessing the Lord  
Jesus Christ ...

Proclaiming the truth

...

Renewing the church.



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# Humanity at stake in euthanasia debate



The Nazi propaganda film *I Accuse*, made in 1941 to test and persuade German public opinion in relation to the Nazis' euthanasia policy, is an important document in the history of the euthanasia debate. *I Accuse* was based on a novel, *Mission and Conscience* by Helmut Unger, in real life a Berlin physician who helped engineer the Nazis' notorious "euthanasia" of disabled children.

*I Accuse* shows a physician giving a lethal injection to his terminally ill wife who has pleaded desperately for this because of her pain and suffering. The film also gently planted the idea that "the state must take over the responsibility" for euthanasia in cases involving the mentally ill.

More recent German cinema, including the outstanding *Downfall*, which depicts Hitler's last days and those of his intimate entourage, also highlights the Nazis' preoccupation, bordering on obsession, with suicide pills and the notion of bringing on premature death, even in healthy children.

The historical links between voluntary euthanasia, compulsory euthanasia and the Nazis' ultimate achievement of genocide have been well-presented by Robert Jay Lifton in the book *The Nazi Doctors: medical killing and the psychology of genocide*. In an important quotation, Lifton translates the words of Alfred Hoche, professor of psychiatry at the University of Freiburg, who predicted in 1920 that a new age will come which, "from the standpoint of a higher morality, will no longer heed the demands of an inflated concept of humanity and an overestimation of the value of life as such."

With hindsight on the Holocaust, it is easy to see where the German abandonment of an "inflated concept of humanity" – an abandonment advocated passionately by apparently compassionate medicos – finally led.

In 2008 as in 1941, it is precisely our concept of humanity which is at stake in the euthanasia debate. It is too simplistic to say that the issue is only about suffering of an individual facing death. Rather it is about the context in which we all should view such suffering. Do we abandon a sufferer to death by hastening his or her passage on request, or do we engage him or her, while we may, with whatever comforts life affords? Call it a statement of faith, a statement of opinion or a statement of ideology: whatever you will. Our response reveals our view of the meaning of humanity itself.

Increasingly, the view of many people is that suicide in medical cases is nobody else's business but the victim's. We disagree. In medical as well as in non-medical cases, suicide is everybody's business. In the abstract, if not in every concrete situation, we have two choices when a fellow human being asks us to help them die. We can encourage them in the thought, by methods including the too-common human response of ignoring them and leaving them to their plight. Or we can see a request for death as making a different moral demand upon us – to help make their life worthwhile, short and hard though that life may be. This is the route chosen by most people faced with the terminal illness of a loved one, and that instinct tells us something crucial about this topical issue of the day.

Paul Gray

# The ground before the Cross is flat:

**Michele Browne**

Recently, we had the privilege of hosting a man in our home who has been a Christian for just a few years. Now in his mid-forties, he has a long history of drug addiction and bisexuality. His story includes profound abuse during his adolescence, as well as sexual abuse in childhood, and significant family dysfunction. These factors caused him deep pain, confusion and rejection early in life, and to respond with anger and hatred of the church. He told me: "I've always been afraid of straight people." (People like me.)

As I reflected on this statement, I realised a truth about myself: "I've always been afraid of people like you!" I was even able to say this to him, and we laughed together.

So how did this man find God, or how did God reach out to this man?

God used a little lady who knew that he was telling her to visit drug addicts in their homes, cook meals, and drop in groceries and Bibles for them. She didn't preach to them, she just talked with them and befriended them. Most of all, she loved them with God's love – she embodied his love – love with a smile, a kind word, a thoughtful visit, a tasty meal, a beautiful art work, a joke, and a tenacity to keep going, even when things went badly – the highs and lows of broken people in a broken world.

In his own words, our friend said: "When I first questioned her on why she seemed to trust me when the general consensus is 'Never trust a junkie', she replied that she trusted God and he had led her to my door. I knew she could trust me but I also knew that she did not know that. It was the first time I had seen a straight person step so far out of their comfort zone while remaining real to herself and sensitive to where others were at and assessing correctly what

would be appropriate and what not. It was my first experience of seeing God in action through a humble and willing servant; something I did not understand at the time but it certainly got my attention.

"Another thing that [she] did, after her trust and our friendship had formed was to share some of her own struggles with me. This was most reassuring for me as it seemed to put us on even footing. No pedestals involved here and my own struggles seemed to be eased by the fact that I did not feel so abnormal nor perceive her as being so perfect. Many broken people have false core beliefs, about themselves, about others and often about the church. This continues to be justified by the mask wearing brigade that find it difficult to walk the tight rope between reality and perfectionism. Transparency was a key factor for me not only in recognising some of my own false conclusions but also learning to understand and therefore being able to forgive others who have hurt me in the past, an essential factor in any healing process."

Our friend discovered God's love through this lady. It was a slow process of trust, breaking down fear and anger. Then there was the challenge to trust God through de-tox, through a healing ministry to address his sexual brokenness, then through drug

rehab. Now, it's trusting God for finances with full-time studies and part-time work (for the first time in his life), trusting God for wholesome friendships and a welcoming Christian fellowship. All the time, love is the bridge from brokenness to wholeness, from rejection to acceptance, from seeing Christians as abusers to trusting them as friends.

Not only this, but love, honesty and transparency between the "straight" and the "non-straight" ones helps us to see that we are all broken, we all need a Saviour. There is no room for the self-righteous "I thank you Lord, that I am not like other men..."



**Michele Browne**

because we discover who we are. Our expressions of brokenness may vary, but the essential issues of wounding and sinful reactions are often the same. The Christian lady also said in her own words: "[I am] also broken and imperfect and God still graciously chooses to work in miraculous and healing ways. God also brought healing to me as I obeyed Him in reaching out to others who were broken and hurting."

It's a true story, a wonderful story, and I could leave it there.

But there is another part to this message about putting first things first, and it relates to Christians I know with same-sex attraction who continue to be profoundly rejected

*Continued next page*



by the church - and especially by evangelicals.

Speaking as an evangelical, I was very distressed by the Uniting Church Assembly processes trying to “normalise” homosexuality, and especially to ordain those practising this life-style. My husband and I joined Reforming Alliance, we lobbied, and wrote letters and submissions. I became part of the NSW executive, met with Synod reps, and on, and on. Finally, we resigned our UCA membership in August, 2006 (when we felt we could no longer continue the debate, although we continue to be members of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations). By then, God had called us into the healing ministry we are now involved in.

So we haven’t “gone soft” on gay ordination. But I am seeing more clearly how we evangelicals tend to treat homosexuality as though it is the “unforgivable sin”.

How many people in evangelical churches have been stood down from worship ministry, or some other church position because of gossip or slander (putting down other Christians, including church leaders); theft (failing to declare all taxable income); unresolved conflicts with their parents; or greed (over-eating/obesity, not giving generously to those in need, owning more things than we really need), to name just a few? Even though all these sins are listed together in Romans 1: 24 – 31, and 1 Corinthians 6: 9 – 10, I know of Christians who have been immediately relieved of church roles when they divulge their same-sex attraction. Some of these gay Christians have left the church altogether due to such rejection, in deep pain and confusion.

We single out homosexuality as being a sin requiring immediate repercussions, whereas those of us with other struggles appreciate being treated with grace. So where is the love that shows compassion, patience

and transparency about our own weaknesses and sin (as our friend experienced from the Christian lady), especially towards gay brothers and sisters? Where is the listening ear, or the kind word that says: “I will walk with you through this difficult place. I will learn what God wants me to learn through this. I will encourage and help you in your struggles. I will continue to love and pray for you, and never abandon you. You are my brother or sister in Christ, and whatever I do to you, I do to Jesus Himself.”

I have read much and listened to people who struggle with homosexuality. The underlying issues are complex, but a significant part of the causative process almost always includes deep-seated rejection. Theological words and position statements, let alone removing people from church roles in often public, non-negotiable or humiliating ways, significantly add to this burden of rejection and confusion. This is not love. It is not putting first things first.

Singling out homosexuality as a worse kind of sin is unscriptural, and also deepens the shame experienced by gay people. Yet, as one author points out, the root causes are the same as those with which all of us struggle. “To write about the healing of the homosexual is to write about the healing of all men, for every one of us has been stuck in some diseased form of self-love. Indeed, that is what the Fall in every individual is.” Their struggles and ours have much common ground.

My friend found God’s love while he was in a very broken place. God’s love calmed his fears, helped him to trust, and encouraged him to connect with Christian programs where His grace brought healing. God’s love continues to meet him in wholesome fellowship, forgiveness when he stumbles, friendship when he is lonely, kindness when he weeps.

So why is it that we evangelicals don’t provide this same safety and compassion to Christians who come out, confused, lonely, afraid, deeply distressed by what they have discovered within themselves, and knowing the repercussions are going to be so hard to bear. If they experience further rejection by Christians, it is no wonder they seek out support and friendship in the gay community (which often welcomes and affirms them), rather than in the church. This further distances them from the love and grace that God can extend through healing communities and programs. They are then seen as rebellious, and rejected even further by Christians, and the gulf between the two lifestyles continues to widen – for some people permanently.

I openly confess that I have contributed to this process for some people, and God has had to powerfully convict me of my judgment, fear, and lack of love. I have had to humble myself, and go to gay Christians, confessing my self-righteousness and judgment. I’ve had to apologise without excuses, and so do all Christians who have behaved in similar ways. Taking responsibility for un-Christlike behaviour and acknowledging it to those we have hurt are important first steps in reconciliation, breaking free from the “mask wearing brigade”, and becoming trustworthy.

We evangelicals are good at theological declarations with scriptural references, and position statements – mostly only read by other evangelicals. But showing compassion, for many of us, has been less valued. In our fear of compromise with heresy, we have rejected people who are fellow Christians. We have done harm to our neighbours – we have failed to put first things first. Jesus has called us first and foremost to love God, and to love others as ourselves – deeply, persistently, patiently, kindly. Sound theology is important, but love is more important. My friend was not saved by theological words. He was not healed by position statements about sexual addiction. He discovered the God who loves and heals and saves

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**Romans 13: 8, 10 – Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law... Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.**

through someone who demonstrated that love in tangible, consistent, godly ways. Then, he was ready to hear the truth that would set him free.

In the ministry we are involved in, those who confess sin (homosexual or otherwise) continue to be part of the leadership team. They continue to receive grace, support, prayer, and a place of safety and accountability to continue to address their areas of weakness. They are not publicly exposed or removed from positions. In order to protect participants from receiving ministry from someone who is very vulnerable at that time (and may therefore speak or act from this position), these leaders do not lead others, but rather continue to receive within the fellowship, until they have been able to deal more fully with their struggles. Once accountability is ensured and that person has demonstrated a commitment to their own healing over six to twelve months, they are able to resume active leadership. This protects everyone involved in the ministry, and is a scriptural approach to handling sinful expressions within the body of Christ.

This approach helps all leaders to be honestly transparent about their own sin. It also enables participants and leaders to experience safety, confidentiality, and recognise that we are all on a healing journey for life. We realise that the ground before the cross is flat – no higher or lower, no pedestals, no better or worse sinners. As we all learn to deal with our wounds, struggles, and pain there, we can have much more compassion, forgiveness and acceptance of others in theirs. “Shame is eclipsed by mercy.” Who knows, but our love may be the bridge to wholeness that some others may find.

*Drs Michele & Mike Browne are Co-leaders of Living Waters Shoalhaven.*

*This is a ministry of Living Waters Australia, and Living Waters International, which seek to encourage people to pursue sexual and relational wholeness in Christ.*

*Michele, Michael and their family were formerly members of the Uniting Church of Australia, but now worship at All Saints Anglican Church, Nowra, NSW.*

*Permission has been obtained from those whose stories are included above.*

September 2008



## UCA in crisis: 'Crosslight' agrees

Readers of the August No.180 edition of *Crosslight*, the monthly publication of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, would have been shocked by several articles and analyses, including a special centre-page spread with their dire predictions about the future of and challenges facing UCA.

Headings included “Church, Change, Crunch”, “placements in crisis”, “a little problem of faith” and “Is the party over,” in reference to the money crisis facing Bomar (the Board of Mission and Resourcing). Special sessions are scheduled for 2008 Synod to discuss submissions on ‘a Spirited journey towards the future’. What is unusual is that the source of all this material is the UCA leadership -- in this case, the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

This public admission of crisis in the UCA, at least in the leadership in Victoria and Tasmania, is a matter for congratulation. Members of UCA and the general public at large have known that UCA has been in trouble for many years.

These latest revelations signal a change of mindset on the part of the UCA leadership which runs contrary to the usual past practice of ‘burying one’s head in the sand’. Any concerns raised in the past regarding problems in the UCA were met with the full force of the well-oiled PR machinery of head office, using the scarce resources of the church to explain away unfavorable surveys and downplaying if not ignoring any slight hint of ‘problems in paradise’.

Regrettably, the suggested solutions to the crisis as outlined in *Crosslight*, including a special report on the church’s strategic plan to be discussed during 2008 Synod, may predictably be viewed with suspicion as yet another church round table ‘talkfest’,

to be followed by the inevitable endless number of committees to investigate reports from each other. This may create a feel-good environment for those who will attend the Synod this year but the problems of fewer new candidates entering into the ministry, unfilled ministerial appointments in rural Congregations, fast declining membership, depleting resources, poor morale in the clergy to name a few stated in *Crosslight* are not the causes of the problems in the UCA.

They are manifestations or consequences of a much deeper crisis in our church – that ours is a church which has lost its way or is confused about its own identity and its task – a church which is no longer salt to the earth or light to the world. The solution is not to develop ‘another strategy plan’ but for the UCA to adhere to the principles and theology espoused in and founded in the Basis of Union as a foundation stone for the UCA.

Many of my friends both within and outside the church have often raised with me their impression that the UCA seems to ‘support anything and stands for nothing’ as long as it feels that it is pleasing someone or is up with the latest fashionable fad in society, and does not seem to have any core values and firm principles by which it wishes to live.

Further, they do not see anything unique or special or better in what the UCA offers which they cannot get in secular organizations. I pointed out that we have core Christian beliefs and founding principles stated in the Basis of Union. To this they responded that these are indeed sound principles, but why does the church choose to explain them away or at worst ignore them?

In an attempt to be more balanced and helpful, the solutions for the crisis in UCA (apart from those stated above) should include a more open-minded approach to appointments to leadership positions in the church, to include people with evangelical, reformed and orthodox theology, instead of what appears to be a heavy bias towards a hierarchy loaded with people of liberal theology.

We have such people among our clergy and lay people, doing very effective work in their local areas and with other organizations.

It is time to do away with what appears to be ‘revolving-door’ appointments for the same small circle of people who seem to have leadership positions in perpetuity in our church at different levels (in the past we have seen new projects and positions designed – whilst crying poor about lack of resources - to maintain these people in positions of influence in the church).

Furthermore, let us put our prime focus on nurturing the spiritual lives of our members and training them to be ‘ministers’ in their everyday lives, for it is at the coalface of daily work, recreation and family lives that God’s most effective work is done.

Research tells us that people are seeking spiritual fulfillment – the Christian Church says that this comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

Let our clergy be trained with this as the prime task, nurtured in their own faith and enabled to experience the power of Christ within. Other churches address this task in creative and effective ways – so can the UCA.

To conclude, members of UCA should be pleased that at last the UCA leadership, at least in Victoria and Tasmania, is considering a new direction and admits that the church is in crisis.

Hopefully, the UCA leadership in the National Assembly and elsewhere will not continue to deny the undeniable, but face up to the reality of what is happening to our church and also be prepared to change so that God’s work in the UCA may be refreshed and renewed.

*Ifalemi Naitoko,  
Victoria*

## **Beware extremist dangers**

A major danger facing all movements, but especially reformist ones, is that their agenda will be hijacked by extremists in their midst, rendering them either dangerous or ridiculous. Paul Gray’s editorial in the June *ACCatalyst* causes me to fear that this may already be taking place in the Assembly of Confessing Congregations.

In it he states that “Christians call any acts which are deliberately sterile sins” and “when we engage in ... any deliberately sterile sex, regardless of whether we are married, we disobey the instruction in (God’s) user manual.” Thus he argues that all sexual intercourse employing contraception is sinful, a position for which it is hard to find any Biblical warrant.

The sole reference condemning contraception that I can find in Scripture is the case of Onan practising coitus interruptus (Genesis 38:6-10), and it is clear there that what displeased the Lord was not contraception per se but rather that Onan was refusing to fulfil his responsibility under Levitic law of conceiving a child who would bear the name and receive the inheritance of his late brother. The Roman Catholic Church boosts its case against contraception by misreading verse 5 of David’s penitential Psalm 51, “Behold I was brought forth in iniquity/And in sin has my mother conceived me”, as stating that sexual intercourse is inherently sinful and thus redeemed only through reproduction, rather than what it is, a figurative rendering of the doctrine of total depravity. That Church then supplements this with Canon Law statements that an unfertilized egg or sperm cell is fully human. Few Protestants accept either of these positions.

To be charitable, I am inclined to think that Mr Gray is not seeking

to lead us on the road to Rome but, rather, indulging in euphemism to avoid saying anal intercourse or, at worst, falling into the modern vice of attempting to impress his readers by employing an inflated and imprecise abstraction rather than plain English, a virulent condition easily contracted from sociologists. In plain English, the God-endorsed place of sexual intercourse is between a man and a woman who are bound to each other by marriage, and is otherwise sin.

However, if he indeed believes what he has actually said, I can only say this. The vast majority of married Bible believing Christians will continue deliberately and joyfully “sinning” (according to his definition) and ignore his efforts to render the ACC irrelevant in an over-populated world beset with sexually transmitted diseases.

*Gary Ireland  
Camden, NSW*

## **Church images a stumbling block**

Re your June article “Icons: Couriers of a timeless message.” I grew up in an Anglican congregation. The Church building had all the trappings of Anglo Catholicism: extravagant stained glass, a plaster statue of the virgin Mary and enough candles to make any insurance rep nervous. For various reasons, my family and I joined the local Uniting Church in 1993. By contrast, the UCA building is starkly simple. It has a roof, walls and windows, and I love it!

Surely it is one of the things that sets reformed, biblical Christianity apart. Unlike Islam, Catholicism, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism, we have no need of any special building. We can’t go on pilgrimages, because Jesus is the temple at which we worship. All we need is something to keep the rain and wind out.

In my Anglican days I would

complain about the religious bric a brac that cluttered our church building.”Why can’t we be like the Anglicans of the reformation who frowned on such popish idolatry?”The answer was always the same. “people find that it helps their worship”. After all, as Warren points out, is not the imagery of Charles Wesley’s hymns just creating some pictures in our mind? It’s true that words do work in our brain to make pictures. The difference is that words are the method that God has chosen to communicate the gospel to us- not pictures or statues.

I am sure that Israel found images helpful to their worship too. After all, the golden calf that Aaron made was not some foreign god, but “this is your God who brought you up out of Egypt” (Ex 32:4). But God had specifically told them not to make any images. I realise that most of us do not worship images, but some do, and it is our duty not to put stumbling blocks in peoples paths. (1 cor 8: 9)

I suppose the obvious question is then, “what do we do with art?” I can appreciate good art as much as anyone. An afternoon in the art gallery is enjoyable to me. So why not as part of Christian worship? It seems to me to fall into the same category as alcohol. If we put on a keg with the church lunch, most of our congregation would not get drunk and start abusing the minister. But we might just have someone for whom this is a massive stumbling block. Perhaps a newly converted alcoholic. Here he is at his new church and... “well if it is alright for them, perhaps I don’t need to go through all this stress of giving up.” I have met people who admitted to me that they pray to the plaster statue of Mary. We must be prepared to forgo our own enjoyment (in this case our love of art), to avoid the risk of causing a brother, (whom Christ died for), to stumble.

My hope is that the ACC would be a truly reformed evangelical organisation. I don’t want to demean

the art of icon painters. I imagine they don’t really care what I think anyway! But I want to urge caution. I have seen how one candle becomes 20, how the building becomes more important than the builder and before you know it, saints names are being invoked in prayer and man’s wisdom trumps God’s. I have not been to Calvin’s church in Geneva. But I suspect that if I did, it would show me what was important to him. Faith alone, Christ alone, scripture alone!

There is an implication in images of any kind, that the revelation of God that we have in scripture is insufficient. Why can’t we get all our worship, all our inspiration, even all our emotion, by prayerful, careful, worshipful meditation of God’s word .

*Philip Cook  
Minlaton SA*

## Sudanese and Australian Christians work together

Have you ever thought what it must be like to read the Old Testament with a group of people for

the first time? The Revd Ivan Kirk, experienced something like this with a Sudanese Faith Community which meets at St David’s Uniting Church at Cooper’s Plains, Queensland. The Old Testament was first translated into Neur about 15 years ago so Sudanese who could not read English relied on those who could to tell them the Old Testament stories.

Since settling in Australia a number of the Sudanese at St David’s have progressed so much in learning English they are now reading the Old Testament for the first time. The study group is well assisted with a new commentary published by Zondervan called the ‘Africa Bible Commentary’ It is written by 70 African biblical scholars and their orthodox and evangelical commentary is something Ivan Kirk would commend to anyone.

Not long after the group started reading from Genesis, Ivan Kirk noticed a difference. He says; ‘the Sudanese were unconcerned about the age of the earth which sometimes gets in the way of scientifically minded Anglo Saxon’s understanding of what Genesis chapter one is about.’

A leader of the Sudanese faith community, Moses Leth, explained how Genesis chapter one challenges their African past that was given over to the worship of trees, rivers and crocodiles. Genesis presents a different view because this story,



**Ivan Kirk (back, right) with members of the Sudanese Faith Community at Cooper’s Plains, Queensland**

says Moses Leth, ‘ is all about the things God provided for the life and happiness of men and women.’

Kirk says one of the biggest challenges for African Christians is the demand of Jesus Christ upon them to leave behind practices and beliefs that make them distinctively African. But a study of the creation story helped the Sudanese revisit reasons why either they or their ancestors now worship the Creator rather than the creator.

As the group read their way through Genesis a question was asked; ‘where are all the other people? And by this was meant the great kingdoms of the ancient world such as Egypt and Persia. Kirk says: ‘The question was an opportune teaching moment to say why Old Testament references to the great kingdoms of the ancient world are purely tangential to the story of Israel which is the bearer of the Messianic promises’. God’s strange choice of Israel, which was the least among the nations left Ivan Kirk wondering if another divinely strange purpose was behind the arrival of our Sudanese brothers and sisters on Australian shores.

They come from a robust church that almost outnumbers the membership of the declining Western Church. It is a delight to wonder if God might yet renew the Uniting Church by an influx of Christian brothers and sisters from around the world. Ivan Kirk hopes that these Africans brothers and sisters will remain free of ‘white man’s burdens’ that too often make us tone deaf to hearing the living Word of God. He says perhaps we can learn from them how to listen to the Word in a way that will liberate the Western Church from the worship of false gods.

## **Australian chaplains make a difference at Beijing Games**

Freedom of religious worship has been a perennial issue for athletes at past Olympic Games. But Australian Baptist Minister Mark Tronson was pleased with the ‘Religious Services’ program put in place by organizers

at the Beijing Olympic Village for the 2008 Games.

Tronson has been involved in suggesting protocols for such programs for host Olympic cities since 2000.

Restrictions on Christian religious activities, such as Bible distribution,



**Australian Olympic chaplain David Smethurst**

were in place at the Barcelona and Sydney Games, while Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist athletes were able to engage in religious activities in an unrestricted way.

“However, in Atlanta, Seoul, Athens and now Beijing, there will be a level playing field as the ‘protocol’ recommends,” said Tronson shortly before the start of the Beijing Games.

“Each host city’s Religious Services committee, under the direction of the host city Organising Committee, determines their own philosophy in this area”.

In Beijing, Bibles and Scripture booklets were available to athletes in the Olympic Village. The Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee gave permission for its logo to be used free of charge on these publications.

Tronson said three Australian Christians were to be associated with the official Olympic Athlete Hospitality Unit. These included former Olympic swimmer Angela Harris, Sydney-based Track and Field chaplain Nett Knox and David Smethurst.

Smethurst, who speaks eight languages, was also a chaplain at the Sydney and Athens Olympics.

Tronson said there was enormous international pressure on the Beijing Olympics organizers prior to the Games to ensure there would be no discrimination against Christians in the way the Games were organized.

He said he was delighted the Australian Christian community had taken an active role in maintaining freedom of religious expression.

## **Confessing bodies face a hard road**

ACC chair Max Champion found the curate’s egg on his recent visit to England and the Czech Republic. He experienced promise and disappointment, including evidence that the Anglican world communion is fracturing, alongside strong and compassionate commitment to ecumenical Christian teaching on sexuality.

In Prague to deliver a paper at the International Bonhoeffer Conference (July 22-27) Dr. Champion found “virtually no interest” in the global confessing movement. This despite Bonhoeffer’s involvement in forming the German Confessing Church in the 1930s. Sadly, said Dr. Champion, Bonhoeffer has been misinterpreted as if he were critical only of fundamentalism, not also of nihilism and liberalism.

Three groups in the United Kingdom offered strong support to the ACC in its efforts to present evangelical, reformed and orthodox faith. He spent time with Canon Christopher Sugden of Anglican Mainstream and Dr. Christopher Hancock, director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in China, who are leaders in upholding the traditions of Anglicanism.

Chair of the United Reformed Church’s group for renewal and evangelism (GEAR), the Rev. Brian Harley, described GEAR’s leadership at the church’s general assembly level, but said an uneasy truce exists during the church’s moratorium on discussion of sexuality.

Methodist Evangelicals Together (MET) is led by the Rev. Paul Wilson. MET’s prayer meetings and its recent





**Champion**

annual lecture drew large numbers. The church's annual conference in July expressed concern to the government over legislation that contradicts 'Christian conviction'.

Dr.

Champion found that none of the confessing groups is mired in a single issue. They all publish magazines and employ part-time workers to support ongoing evangelical activities within and beyond their denominations.

*ACCatalyst* will publish excerpts from Dr. Champion's Bonhoeffer Conference paper in a future issue.

## Unsafe bill looms for dying patients

The silence of Victoria-Tasmania synod officials on euthanasia contrasts strangely with recent actions by the synod's own Bioethics Committee and an ad hoc interfaith group in Melbourne. Both bodies hold serious concerns about the likely outcome of a Medical Treatment (Physician assisted dying) bill 2008 to be presented to the Victorian parliament.

The bill provides that a doctor may prescribe a drug for an adult patient with a terminal illness, or an advanced incurable illness, which the person may swallow to cause his or her death.

Opposition to the bill was voiced by an ad hoc group of 19, whose signatures appeared in Melbourne newspapers in June. Among them were Archbishop Philip Freier (Anglican), Archbishop Denis Hart (Catholic), Archbishop Paul Saliba (Antiochan Orthodox), Imam Riad Galil (Muslim), Jewish, Presbyterian, Anglican, Uniting, Lutheran, Russian

Orthodox, Ukrainian Catholics and academics, clergy and lay people.

The group said the bill, if carried, would make Victorians suffering chronic illnesses subject to greatly increased moral pressure to relinquish their hold on life. They would be forced to depend on the strength of their will to continue.

The synod Bioethics committee has issued a 12 point summary of its concerns after intensive study of euthanasia in Australia and overseas. The proposed bill extends the scope of the 1988 Medical Treatment Act which allows refusal of life-sustaining treatment but not physician assisted dying (euthanasia). The new bill is opposed by the Australian Medical Association and medical colleges as inconsistent with the physician's role as healer.

It is not supported by carers of the aged, the dying or the chronically ill and is inconsistent with the Respecting Patient Choices initiative. The bill's scope includes not only dying patients but potentially large numbers with an advanced chronic but not terminal illness.

Experience in the Northern Territory and the Netherlands shows that euthanasia laws cannot be made safe, and safeguards are not always complied with. The bill, says the Bioethics committee, would remove the protection now enjoyed by patients by the fact that assisted death is illegal. "If assisted dying were an option it would add to the distress and guilt of those who worried that they were too great a burden on others."

## Abortion bill full of holes, says interfaith group

Melbourne's ad hoc interfaith group has urged Victorian MPs to consider carefully the welfare of women and

the concept of respect for human life, as they prepare to vote on the Abortion Law Reform Bill 2008. In an open letter to MPs the group acknowledges the deep conflict and vulnerable state of many women facing unexpected pregnancy, but says "as a matter of human solidarity with the unborn and with women, we are opposed on moral grounds to abortion as the taking of innocent and vulnerable human life. We oppose abortion on demand ... the destruction of nascent human life without limits, for which the Bill provides."

The group states that the bill is not in the best interests of women, does not adequately protect them, and does not reflect community concern about the frequency of abortion and late term abortion. More liberal than current practice, the bill would be likely to increase the rate of abortion.

Other arguments advanced by the group include :

- *No provision for scrutiny of abortion providers, or their capacity to deal with unforeseen complications such as severe haemorrhage. Most pregnancy terminations occur in private facilities and current regulations require no more of them than of day centres which undertake minor procedures like removal of skin lesions. The bill does not require abortion providers to have adequate medical standards, facilities and protocols, including a professional social work department.*
- *There is no protection for young women and those with impaired capacity who have been abused. It prescribes no protection for women who may be brought to an abortion clinic by the very person who abused them. The bill is vague in relation to current provisions of the Family Law and Guardianship and Administration Law. It specifies no clear obligations of abortion providers to report a pregnancy as evidence of the crime of sexual abuse.*
- *The bill provides no independent supportive counselling or cooling off periods, which in other areas of the law, such as reproductive technology and even buying a house or car, is considered to be protective. While mandatory counselling is contrary to the nature of counselling, the group believes women*

should have the option of client-centred non-directive counselling to provide emotional support and help in exploring all their options and making a thoughtful and informed decision.

• *The Bill lacks a no disadvantage conscientious objection clause as in the National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines, where 'Those who conscientiously object to being involved in .. research with separated fetuses or foetal tissue should not be compelled to participate, nor should they be put at a disadvantage because of their objection.'*

Instead, the Bill requires referral for abortion by doctors, nurses, pharmacists and psychiatrists. Those who regard abortion as immoral cannot also refer for abortion.

Nurses have a particular problem because they would be "under a duty to assist" in a late term abortion, if a doctor claims it is an emergency. Doctors at least can exercise their discretion that late term abortion is never medically necessary. Attempting live birth is a safer option if the woman's life is in danger. Late abortion necessarily involves an additional procedure such as fatal injection to the child in utero or destruction of the brain during delivery. Under the Bill nurses are not permitted to object even though doctors can.

The Victorian Law Reform Commission's recommendations were not subjected to public scrutiny. Given the significance of the issue, and strong community feelings and opinions, the bill should be much more responsive to the community's views - at least as responsive as the National Health and Medical Research Council which is required to follow a multi-stage process of public consultation in preparing documents of social and ethical significance.

"The VLRC appears to have dismissed both concerns about respect for human life and concerns for the welfare of women. Apart from the further destruction of nascent life, which this Bill facilitates, it delivers to generations an educative message which undermines the protection of life and fails to support women at a time of need."

## Letter to UCA President over anti-World Youth Day protest

*Following is the text of a letter from Ivan Kirk to the National President of the Uniting Church in Australia, Gregor Henderson, 21 July 2008:*

I write on behalf of members of the ACC who are concerned about the protest Pitt Street Uniting Church made against the commitments of World Youth Day. Our confessional movement thought World Youth Day was a vital Christian witness and the clear witness of Pope Benedict to the power of Jesus Christ to redeem us from sin should encourage all who confess the name of Christ.

The disapproval of Pitt Street Uniting Church of this Catholic celebration was widely reported. For example, the *Sydney Morning Herald* (July 8, 2008) published under the title 'Gays to protest at Pope's arrival' report that Michael Kelly dismissed the forthcoming event as propaganda and Dorothy McRae-Mahon is reported in 'Adelaide Now' (July 13 2008) as saying the church has betrayed gay and lesbian people.

I make these references, not because I invite a tedious discussion about who said what and why. Rather I need to convey the concerns of reasonable-minded people who take Pitt Street Uniting Church's protest as an unfolding of where the decision-making of the last two UC National Assemblies are leading the Uniting Church.

We know Resolution 108 encourages presbyteries and synods to clear the way for the appointment of ministers who practice homosexual intercourse so we don't expect criticism of the Pitt Street congregation from any who argue for the normalisation of homosexual intercourse. But that congregation's

protest ironically reinforces warnings from our association of how the Uniting Church is departing from the ecumenical faith of the church as attested in Holy Scripture.

The Greek Orthodox Church has already terminated ecumenical dialogue with the Uniting Church because of the Uniting Church's moral revisionism and the Pitt Street protest will cause thinking people to ask how much longer we will have the Catholic Church as an ecumenical partner.

I should be most grateful if you could advise me in writing of what measures the UC National Assembly Office can take to assure our members that the Pitt Street protest and celebration of homosexuality is not indicative of the direction the Uniting Church's elected leadership plans for our church.

*Rev'd Ivan Kirk  
Secretary, ACC*

*At the time of publication, no reply to Mr Kirk's letter had been received.*

## Tasmania meeting asks who is excited about Basis of Union?

Uniting Church members from congregations all over Tasmania came together on Saturday 26th July 2008 for a seminar on the Basis of Union.

Barrie Robinson led the devotion on 'The Promised End', a key idea in the Basis of Union.

Walter Abetz led discussion on biblical interpretation in the light of paragraphs 5 and 11 of the Basis of Union document. This raised questions such as 'How is our faith and obedience nourished and regulated?'

In the afternoon groups selected key quotations, some with symbolic illustrations, from the Basis of Union and arranged them in the form of a journey for 'a pilgrim people always on the way towards a promised goal'.

*Katherine Abetz*

# Universal rights and wrongs

**Brian Edgar**

In recent times the use of torture in the interrogation of terrorist suspects, the extradition processes used on escaped criminal Tony Mokbel, the use of landmines, the treatment of both alleged witches and asylum seekers and the right of the Papuan people to self-determination have all been subject to appeals to the concept of 'universal human rights'. The Australian Capital Territory and Victoria have introduced their own charters of human rights and there is a campaign to introduce one at the Federal level. What exactly are 'human rights'? And are declarations (or charters) of human rights helpful or, as some suggest, a danger?

The modern version of human rights emerged from the work of 17<sup>th</sup> century philosophers and the concept played a key role in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century struggles over slavery, factory legislation, popular education, trade unionism and universal suffrage but really developed when the term 'human rights' came into use with the formulation of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. Of course, the idea that people are to be valued and treated with respect is much, much older than that. There are strong biblical foundations for the idea and the Christian notions of justice and compassion have played an important part in human rights around the world. Such concerns are, however, by no means exclusively Christian, other religions and people of no faith often share the basic convictions that all people are to be treated with care and respect. But, having said that, it must be noted that it would be a superficial analysis which suggested that the concepts of human rights were always the same in every place; and it would be downright foolish to assume

that human rights naturally exist everywhere. Unfortunately, societies are very capable of ignoring human rights in extreme fashion for very long periods of time!

The difficulties involved in comparing different versions of human rights has led noted Christian ethicist Alistair MacIntyre to say quite bluntly that 'there are no such rights, and belief in them is one with belief in witches and in unicorns'. In a similar fashion Joan O'Donovan says that 'churchmen and theologians are, at best, naive in their facile appropriation of 'rights' talk'. On the other hand ethicist Max Stackhouse argues that human rights are intrinsically Christian and those who deny their reality are only lending support to those most likely to violate the rights of others.

MacIntyre argues that the idea of 'universal human rights' is a fallacy because *all* morality is culturally based. Thus a strong assertion of the rights expressed in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights becomes simply a form of cultural imperialism which ignores the differences between democratic and communist; North and South, the West and Islam and between the developed and the developing world. Historically, the debates in the late 1940's about the UDHR did revolve around the fact that British and North American conceptions of rights were focused upon the individual while the European and Socialist conception was more focused upon the social situation and economic rights.

The on-going process of refining and re-defining human rights depends significantly on culture and religion. For Buddhists rights need to conform to a conception of society which is patterned on the family in which

freedom consists in harmonising the individual with the leader. In Hindu tradition there are caste obligations, while in Africa the individual's self-realisation is through the community. The thinking of many in the developing world is that economic and social rights are more important than individual ones, e.g. what is the point of freedom of expression when one is hungry? There are also differences with regard to the limitations to rights in regard to public order, national security, national morals, public health etc.

Nonetheless, while recognising the point about their culturally conditioned nature it is possible to see a more recent convergence of thinking about rights and there is justification for arguing that, historically, basic principles of human rights developed out of key strands of biblical faith. This did not occur, however, without some modification of the biblical concepts. Today some have grounded their view of human rights in the existence of *the autonomous individual* ("As an individual I have rights to live and act as I please as long as I don't hurt others") and others in a form of *social consensus* ("Our society has agreed that it is OK to do this and that and so no-one should say otherwise") but, theologically, real social and individual freedom is constituted by *the sovereign act of God*. The principles governing a Christian understanding of human responsibilities – and rights – can be found in passages such as these: the Ten Responsibilities (see Exodus 20:1-17); the call of the prophets to respect others because of responsibility to God (Micah 6:8); the teaching of the Psalms concerning violence, injustice and broken rights, together with the certainty that God will vindicate the righteous and judge the wicked (Psalm 86); the account of the Good Samaritan whose 'responsibility to help' did not depend upon 'responsibility for the cause of the need' (Luke 10:25-37); and the Two Great Commandments (Mark 12:29-31) which are, in effect, 'God's Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities. And one cannot forget the message of the Cross – which tells us about God's response to the greatest possible violation of individual rights.



## Talk of rights apart from both responsibilities and relationships is not really adequate.

Note that the Christian focus is upon human *responsibilities* directed towards God. We treat others in particular ways because we have a responsibility to God. But in modern statements these states of responsibility are expressed as basic *rights* of *individuals*. Theologically, we are not primarily obliged to other people, rather, we are responsible to God for them. Thus to say that a person has certain rights is only possible because we understand that God holds others responsible for them. We should also note that a Christian view of rights is not only grounded in responsibility to God, but also that this emerges out of a covenant *relationship*. Talk of rights apart from both responsibilities and relationships is not really adequate. It may, however, at times be possible for Christians to agree with others on what constitutes human rights while differing on the nature of their foundation. At other times this may not be possible because the different foundations can produce different views on what constitutes human rights.

Human rights are often discussed in terms of individual and social rights. *Individually*, there is no higher right than to hear the gospel and to be able to receive the salvation which God offers. This right translates in the wider community to a more general 'religious liberty' because the right to hear the gospel necessarily involves the right to reject it, or even to accept another. This is the foundation for both a general theory of religious liberty and subsequently

for all other individual (eg political and democratic) liberties. *Corporately*, it cannot be said that 'groups' or 'communities' have 'human' rights in the same manner as individuals. Yet the responsibility (or, if one prefers, the right) to be a part of the church of Jesus Christ can translate into a general right of community, culture, association etc.

Human rights can thus be theologically grounded and can be seen as a helpful social concept. But the concept needs action to go with it because although the concept of human rights has a high degree of acceptance around the world, there is actually a continual and widespread disregard of them. Abstract principles cannot themselves bring about a just and humane society. It is important therefore that Christians act decisively on behalf of those who are oppressed and who suffer. Christians have a responsibility to protect those whose lives are endangered, to work against torture and other cruel and inhuman treatment and to ensure that people have fair trials, free speech, freedom of religion and access to appropriate health, education and an adequate standard of living.

Any Christian understanding of relationships, rights and responsibilities ought not forget MacIntyre's warnings about the cultural formation of rights. Rights and responsibilities change from one culture to another and, in some respects, over time. The right to certain forms of health care and the responsibility of communities to provide it, for example, is obviously

dependent upon the existence of the treatment and the social and economic capacity to provide it. There may be differences of opinion about the nature of other alleged rights, which may be grounded neither in the sovereignty of God nor in biblical theology. At the present time marriage is a concept in contention in modern western culture. In the weeks preceding writing this article there have been suggestions that there ought to be a right to polygamous marriage based on Islamic practice and gay marriage based on the rights of individuals to do as they please. This latter right has been seen to include the right to gay fostering, adoption and other family rights and therefore, by extension to the right to require those who believe differently to behave as though they do. Wesley Dalmar Child and Family Services (part of Wesley Mission in Sydney) has been forced to compensate a gay couple denied access to the foster program and ordered to "eliminate unlawful discrimination on the ground of homosexuality in the facilitation and provision of its foster care services".

In shifting the emphasis from intrinsic rights to God-given responsibilities we must remember that Christians have a responsibility to care for *all* people and that a proper understanding of rights and responsibilities is not achieved by denying all rights to others or by failing to defend them when they ought to be defended. Christians have a responsibility to care for those advocating for different positions including, for example, the economic rights of gays and their right to certain lifestyles (sodomy laws have long since been considered an inappropriate exercise of power – something illustrated in the recent, repeated politically inspired sodomy accusation against Malaysian politician Anwar Ibrahim). It is possible to do this and still argue that other alleged social rights are no rights at all. Unfortunately, just as one extreme has gone too far in restricting the behaviour of gays (as with sodomy laws) so it is possible for the advocates of gay rights to go too far and to seek

to force those who oppose changes to marriage and family laws (and even those who have supported other gay rights) to acquiesce on pain of punishment. One person's 'rights' can become another person's oppression.

In this situation it is possible to argue for heterosexual, monogamous marriage on a number of grounds. Firstly, marriage is a pre-existing social and, primarily, religious institution recognised by all major religious faiths and groups as existing uniquely between a man and a woman which has only relatively recently been recognised by legislation. Secondly, it can be argued that heterosexual marriage is a natural arrangement, as indicated by the balance of the sexes, and theologically a natural 'order of creation'. Thirdly, one can argue for marriage on the basis of good outcomes and healthy relationships for couples, children and society as a whole. Finally, marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman as established by the word of God.

Finally, there will be differences of opinion on how rights and responsibilities are best secured in our society - whether through common law (where there is no central charter but human rights are protected by a wide variety of laws which have been enacted and interpreted over a long period of time); non-binding aspirational statements (which have no legal status but which aim to inspire right conduct); declarations which rely on enforcement by other bodies (as the UNHCR relies on the national laws of signatory countries); Acts of Parliament (as with the Victorian charter where new laws have to be reviewed against the charter of rights but parliament still retains overall control of what laws are enacted); or Constitutional Declarations (as with the US and French situations where laws which are deemed contrary to the constitutional rights are automatically overturned). But debates about processes ought not diminish the Christian commitment to being in right relationship with God and other people by fulfilling our responsibilities to God and recognising the rights of others.

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# Be encouraged!

with Robyn McKay

I set out from Peterborough on a sunny afternoon, and by the time I had reached Booleroo I had successfully dodged and swerved around seven sleepy lizards which were poodling across the road. I was very satisfied with this effort and no doubt the lizards applauded too. However, here and there I saw the evidence that not all of the sleepies had been so fortunate. Their squashed carcasses lay as a warning to their comrades about the perils of the road.

Most of us are wise enough not to lie on the road when there is traffic about. Nevertheless, for us too, life is perilous and fragile. All of us have faulty bodies and any one of a hundred things could go wrong with us at any time. Does this sound a bit gloomy?

The author of Psalm 103 stuck a similar thought in the middle of his Psalm:

We humans are like grass, or wild flowers that quickly bloom.

But a scorching wind blows, and they quickly wither to be forever forgotten.

Or, if I may paraphrase it:

We humans are like sleepy lizards on a busy road. One moment everything is okay, and then...splat!

Now you would think a Psalm that says this would be depressing, but Psalm 103 begins and ends with calls to praise God and the rest of the Psalm talks about God's goodness and faithfulness. So why praise God if our lives are so fleeting? The Psalmist isn't celebrating because our lives are short, but because despite our human frailty, God still loves and knows us and God understands what it's like to be human.

God does not expect us to be anything other than weak, fragile human beings. And God's love for us is from everlasting to everlasting. You can't get much bigger than that!

Short lived creatures we may be but we are the apple of God's eye, and for Christians the news is even better. He gives us everlasting life with him. We will be truly alive long after these temporary bodies are buried in the ground.

But as for the time we have here, we have good reason to thank God for every day. Life is good!

*Robyn*



# Windows to a higher reality: icons in prayer and worship

**Warren Clarnette**

In the last issue of *ACCatalyst* we made an error in reporting on the UCA Icon School Network. We also described icons as an aid to prayer both in private and in worshipping congregations. The error referred to Dr. Robert Gallacher's decision, some years ago, to take up the raw materials of art. We were wrong to list these as

easels, brushes, oil and canvas. Icons require other materials. In fact, the offending sentence was noticed and another was written to take its place, but somewhere in the production process the correction was lost. Hence this admission.

Icons are painted not on canvas but on wooden panels, over which linen

is stretched and held firm with rabbit skin glue. Many coats of whitening are applied to produce the brilliance that characterises all iconography. Fine, soft brushes add the colors supplied by egg tempura and synthetic earth and stone pigments.

Icons are one of the most enduring practical aids to Christian prayer and worship. Before the eleventh century split between the churches of east and west, the basic designs of icons were already laid down, and they were preserved in the east as decoration for churches and aids for personal and corporate devotion.

Rob Gallacher says Renaissance humanism, with its emphasis on perspective and the naturalness of human and other forms, seemed to offer liberation from the restrictive art of the church. A new vision of human possibilities was opened up. But the orthodox tradition maintained the symbolism, abstraction and numinous power of icons in order to mediate the numinous quality of worship.



The flight to Egypt: a Coptic icon depicting the journey of the infant Christ to safety from Herod

Within the UCA's Icon Network icons are understood as aids to prayer. They are examples of art serving faith in which icon 'writing' brings mind, hand and spirit into intense involvement. Icons are tangible objects with their own character and presence, which point to the transcendent reality behind all appearances. They evoke prayer as contemplation of the presence of God, in which the icon's message moves from the mind to the heart. "In contemplative prayer," says Gallacher, "there are elements of exploration, objectivity, discovery and discipline. While this is personal, it is different from introspection – which leads to the kind of self-indulgent expression whose only reference and authority is how you happen to be feeling at the time."

Contemplative prayer before a particular icon forms part of every session of the Icon School Network. "One day," says Gallacher, "we prayed before the icon of the crucifixion. A 20-year-old stayed in the chapel for a long time. She was a forensic scientist who had just experienced her first crime scene, a body stabbed twelve times. We had a long conversation about how she could deal with the horror, without losing sensitivity to suffering. The prayer in the chapel led naturally to the subject of our conversation."

British monk, theologian and iconographer Aidan Hart in a 2003



**Pentecost: the Holy Spirit descends on the Church**

lecture describes art as a mediator between "some higher realm" and this world. He says that throughout history art is based on three premises: that there exists a higher realm, that this world is an image of or even an incarnation of that realm, and that the most sublime role of art is to mediate between these two realms.

"Western art has been in crisis in the last few decades precisely because it has, by and large, rejected or forgotten this mediatory role. It does not seek to manifest the strength and variety and beauty of a higher realm, simply because it does not believe such a realm exists. We are no longer sure why we have art, what it is to do."

Aidan Hart points out the contrast between the "mathematically accurate perspective systems of the Renaissance" and the iconic tradition. Renaissance art is seen as "an improvement on the more primitive systems of the Byzantine and medieval artists. But this rather patronising attitude fails to account for the profound metaphysical aims of these great artistic traditions. From the view of those spiritual traditions the more naturalistic art of post medieval western Europe actually appears more crude than theirs, because more opaque and spiritually truncated."

Answering the criticism that icons reflect a certain 'flatness' or lack of perspective, Hart replies that the icon wants to lead the viewer through itself to the holy person it depicts. "This is a deliberate technical 'imperfection', because the icon's purpose is not that we admire it as a work of art, as beautiful as it might be, but that through it we may come to know and love its archetype. Icon means image, and the icon's flatness keeps it true to its nature as image and helps the viewer pass through it to the saint it



**Resurrection: an angel tells the women 'He is risen, he is not here.'**

represents."

Dr. Gallacher finds that just as singing in the congregation can change the worshipper's state of being, lifting him or her to the throne of grace, so contemplative prayer before an icon can lift us into the presence of God. "Without this sense of exaltation worship descends into entertainment designed to please the consumer, or it becomes a pale reflection of the culture which has no legitimate point to it. When stillness in prayer is realised we are helped to integrate our personalities that are so often pulled this way and that by the modern media in particular, and post-modern culture in general, with its resultant fragmentation and isolation."

Icons point also to the reality of the communion of saints, the "great cloud of witnesses". Gallacher tells of an Israeli soldier who passed an orthodox church as the priest emerged with a handful of parishioners. "Not many out this morning, Father," he scoffed. The priest replied, "There were thousands there!"

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## Film

# 'Salute' – the Christian connection

**Peter Bentley**

Publicity for *Salute - The Movie* describes the film as “a journey back to the 1960's and beyond, to examine what has now become one of the most famous Olympic moments in history.”

This moment became an iconic image captured and displayed around the world, and now one of the most recognisable, if not the most recognisable sporting image of the 20th Century. It is also a very contemporary image, given the recent Beijing Olympics and the questions that have been raised about human rights and freedom.

Back forty years at the Mexico City Olympics there was a simple podium and the medal presentation for the men's 200m. Here two African-American men, Tommie Smith (Gold medallist) and John Carlos (Bronze), raised gloved fists during the American anthem, and bowed their heads in solemn reflection, thereby creating an enormous controversy that

led to their removal from the Games.

Perhaps because few people knew his name, the Australian runner and the silver medallist, Peter Norman, became 'the white guy in the photo', and in Australia at least a forgotten Olympic medallist during the last three decades. Norman supported the protest by silently standing alongside the men wearing a badge for the Olympic Project for Human Rights (which was focussing on racial equality in the Olympics).

In Sydney there is a very well known mural of this photo near Macdonaldtown Railway Station. This was previously always seen when on a train heading to Central and the city on the left hand side, but due to the noise abatement project for the Macdonald Stabling area it has sadly now been obscured by huge walls, thus limiting the opportunity for people to see and wonder about this Australian character.

The movie and the book *Salute* set out to make Peter Norman known to the Australian community, and tell the story of a time that was right for his running. It is worth noting that Peter Norman's time at the Mexico City Games still stands as the Australian record for the 200 metres – 20.06 seconds.

Norman did not compete in another Olympics and the book also provides a fuller consideration of the issues the film raises in terms of his non-selection for the 1972 Munich Games.

As the publicity further states, the film is also personal, as the director of the film, Matt Norman, is Peter Norman's nephew. With Damian Johnstone, he wrote the tie-in book *A Race to Remember: The Peter Norman Story*.

Both film and book are essential to gaining an understanding of Peter Norman, and also an appreciation of a particular time in the world and in Australia.

The film features spectacular use of footage from the Mexico City Olympics, including some wonderful, never before seen heats of some of the races (one of these features an example of great Australian humour from Peter Norman, but I will leave this for readers to see rather than spoil the surprise) and the actual final race itself. The film winds through the 1960s, reminding the viewer of the context in terms of the civil rights era in the USA. There is an extraordinary range of footage of actual events in 1968.

The book has painstaking detail about the actual running events which Peter was involved in from his youth to his eventual involvement as an Olympic contender, as well as post-Mexico sporting events. But there is also extensive information about Peter's personal life and his difficulties, changes and joys, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. Readers of the book will be interested to learn of Peter Norman's strong Salvation Army background in suburban Melbourne through his parents, friends and the significant Christian legacy from his parents and grandparents. Peter grew up



in the tightly familial world of the Salvation Army movement, and was very involved in church meetings and events (including the local band and teaching Sunday School). Peter married a Salvation Army girl, Ruth Newnham in 1964 at the Thornbury Salvation Army Hall, and their first home was in a former Hall at Newport.

It is worth considering the influence of his Salvation Army background. What did Peter Norman learn about the Christian life from the Salvation Army?

Damian Johnstone outlines many points in the chapter “Sundays belongs to the Salvos”, and it would appear that certain Christian values were the strongest lasting influence, including an acceptance of all people as being created equal, and the need to show tolerance and love (p.2).

Peter clearly struggled with some aspects of the Salvation Army and there was an early tension with the institutional side of organised religion on the question of the Sabbath. Peter could not understand how some people could use their gifts on Sundays and others could not. He said that “My gift was running, so it was only right for me to make the most of the gift I have been born with.” He had the words ‘God is Love’ stitched on the back of his tracksuit by Ruth, so he could make a statement about his faith, saying this gave him the “opportunity to tell [people] what I believe in.” (p. 129).

Later in his career Norman had ‘Jesus Saves’ stitched onto his tracksuit, though he was only allowed to wear this during training due to ‘advertising restrictions’ at the time.

It was in the area of his increasing consumption of alcohol and especially sexual relationships outside of marriage that became key areas of difficulty. Matt Norman talked about what was clearly a difficult and emotional experience, namely Peter’s leaving of Ruth and three small children in 1971, and his resulting new marriage to Jan. As Matt explains, Peter did something completely against the Salvation Army way. This was always remembered as a grave mistake and as a time when

## ‘Revelation’ inspires 300 square-metre ceiling mural at Newtown church

The largest religious ceiling mural in Australia has been unveiled at the Newtown Mission’s King Street Chapel in Sydney.

Artist Kon Parris has completed the 300 square metre oil painting after seven years’ work. The work comprises twenty 15 square metre panels. The Revelation Ceiling is a permanent art work covering the majority of the King Street Chapel ceiling.

Parris (pictured on the front of this edition) first imagined the murals while inspecting the chapel in the midst of major renovations in the year 2001. “After the service I was chatting with Pastor Rob Nance and asked how the work on the chapel was coming along. He said ‘Come and I will show you’. After pacing the chapel in silence I looked up and said to Rob ‘I see murals up there.’ I was imagining images from the book of Revelation.”

After presenting a detailed plan and proposal of the work, Newtown Mission decided to support Parris’s endeavor.

The financial cost of the work has been met by the generous support of individuals and groups in the community. Kon Parris has not received any payment for his work.

Newtown Mission determined that the cost of the project should be met by direct donation only, so that their community support work would not be impacted by the project in any way.

The Chapel opened for viewing by the public on September 1. The church is now hosting guided tours, special programs, lectures and a variety of artistic events.



Christian grace and forgiveness was tested to the limit.

From my reading of the book and other discussions, it appears that Peter Norman took on a much more worldly outlook following the 1968 Olympic Games, though initially he still spent significant time spent speaking about being a Christian athlete and attending church services and events. Factors I see as influential in this were the demands of travel, being away from the family and the resultant disconnection with his church life and family, coupled with a new freedom and increased opportunities.

A perceptive remark made by Peter’s brother Laurie in the book is that “Peter was probably what you’d call a Christian and abided by Peter’s rules and that’s why he did what he did (p. 185). Peter did appear to

pick and choose those elements of the Salvation Army and of the wider Christian community traditions that he took to heart.

Peter Norman died suddenly from a heart attack in October 2006. A celebration of his life was held at Williamstown Town Hall, with over 1000 people attending. The moving and distinctive service seen in the film provides further insight into Peter’s life, with participants including Tommie Smith and John Carlos paying tribute.

His daughters (from his second marriage) selected many interesting songs and pieces, including the theme from the film *Chariots of Fire* (one of Peter’s favourites), and this was played as Norman’s coffin was carried from the church.

I found this choice of music and the comments about his love of the

*Chariots of Fire* music by Vangelis very interesting, as this film is of course all about running in the Olympics (the 1924 Paris Games) and Christian faith. *Chariots of Fire* also raised the whole question again of the Sabbath and running on Sunday, as this was the central element of discussion in the film for Eric Liddell, the Scottish runner who eventually became a missionary in China.

With his background, Peter would have been very aware of the words from Paul the Apostle about running the race. "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. (1 Corinthians 9: 24 – 25, NIV).

I see the Peter Norman Story as a modern day parable for all of us about the potential good and also the challenges that arise from a public life. It is also a call for us to reflect deeply on our values in all areas of our life.

At the end of the film, Norman is asked about how he would like to be remembered. He said he would like to be remembered as 'interesting'. I could not help but pick up a definite sense of sadness in his eyes, and I don't think this was related to him not winning the gold medal in 1968.

One intriguing aspect of the film is the question of God's timing in the arrangement of the three people on the podium. Certainly, the now older men, Smith and Carlos, reflected on God's plan and timing, and it was clear that the event would not have had the same impression on them personally if there had not been a supportive third person. Peter Norman did not want to play up the 'right time' and divine intervention idea, but it is clear to me that it caused him to continue to reflect on God in his life.

*Salute – the Movie has been screening widely, and will continue its campaign for wider recognition of this Olympic sprinter.*

*'A Race to Remember: The Peter Norman Story' By Damian Johnstone and Matt Norman RRP \$34.99, Jo Jo Publishing, Melbourne, July 2008.*

## Attack on marriage is the gravest danger of our times: SA Senator

*Senator Cory Bernardi is a Liberal Senator for South Australia. He is the shadow parliamentary secretary for family and community services. Following is an edited version of a speech on the theme of "political correctness" delivered by Senator Bernardi as the Adelaide University Democratic Club's James McAuley lecture.*

Throughout history many great thinkers have recognised the importance of marriage and family and their role in preserving society. Aristotle once said: "...the family is something that precedes and is more necessary than the State." John Locke said that marriage is humankind's "first society."

Marriage and the family unit is the centre of our society. From them stem the sense of community and shared values that hold our society together.

The family is the place where we learn about right and wrong, about values and what's important in life. The family nurtures the next generation. It is also the first and most important structure in any free economy.

Family provides stability and continuity. And for thousands of years it has provided a firm foundation for Western civilisation.

Yet this is all being threatened by modern political correctness and social engineering.

Governments all over the world continue to support the politically correct view that no one type of family is better than any other for raising children.

But this is just not true.

There are countless studies that prove beyond a doubt that a family with a mother and father provides the best environment for raising children.

However, family life in Western societies increasingly faces the challenges of dysfunctional, splintered



Senator Cory Bernardi

or fatherless families.

And you notice that here in Australia. Many children are being brought up in homes without two parents, or without a father-figure. And in many cases, this has an adverse effect on children.

In the UK, the Social Justice Policy Group found that those not brought up in a two-parent family were 75 per cent more likely to fail at school, 40 per cent more likely to have serious personal debt, 70 per cent more likely to be drug addicts and 40 per cent more likely to have alcohol problems.

It's also interesting to note that by a child's fifth birthday less than 8 per cent of married parents had split up, compared to almost 43 per cent of cohabiting partnerships (eg de facto).

The best family structure for children is to have two parents (a man and a woman) who love each other and care for the child – and no one can tell me any different.

Family is the best form of welfare. Nothing that the government can provide even comes close.

Families offer emotional, physical and financial support.

So as a society we should be promoting the case for strong families, because strong families lead to a strong community, a strong society and a strong Australia.

Children that have grown up without the stability of a two-parent



home (ideally where the parents are married) are more likely to go on to create dysfunctional families of their own.

And so the cycle continues.

Of course, not all people brought up in a single parent or de facto parent home will go on to lead dysfunctional lives. But, when you look at these statistics, supporting the institutions of marriage and the two-parent family is a certain way to minimise some of the social problems we face.

The view that marriage and the family structure are important is now seen as intolerant and judgemental.

So our children suffer – all because of the extremes of political correctness.

And the threat is only getting worse.

Last year the Australian Family Court heard a case about a lesbian mother. The mother had been in a relationship with another woman for 10 years when she asked a gay friend to impregnate her. Now, the gay father wants his gay lover declared one of the child's parents. In an attempt to stop this, the mother alleged that the father's lover was into bondage and child porn. In wanting his lover recognised as a legal parent, the father wants the child to have two mothers and two fathers.

Is this really in the best interests of the child?

**W**e are living in a society that increasingly is putting adult lusts and interests ahead of children's well-being. And who could forget about the two lesbians who sued a Canberra doctor last year for implanting two embryos in one of the women, instead of one (which she only requested minutes before the procedure).

This resulted in the birth of twin girls in 2003. Now they are suing the doctor for medical expenses and the costs of raising one of the twins until the age of 21. These two lesbians claimed that buying a pram for twins was distressing. One even said she had lost 'the ability to love.' The mother told the court she suffered nausea during the pregnancy and had to walk

# CLARKSON



From time to time the press likes to use occasions like the Queen's Birthday holiday to fire another pro-Republican shot claiming inevitability for severing ties with the Royal Family.

Now this is a debate we'll be hearing more about.

But being a constitutional monarchy isn't about just being nice to the Queen.

And neither does being a Republic guarantee to make us more Australian.

It's what the monarchy stands for, not the person of the monarch, that is the issue here. Now why is this so?

Australian governance is based in a principle which holds the Bible and the revealed law of God to be the basis and source of our justice and structures and morality.

Thus we don't make laws, as such. We legislate or move from divine law to applications for everyday needs.

Republic or constitutional monarchy? It's what most guarantees to preserve our biblical source of law and governance.

That's the issue.

*Ian Clarkson is a Teacher and Evangelist with Branches Community Church in South Australia. This is from his "Think About It" radio segment which is broadcast regularly on Adelaide radio station Life FM.*

with a walking stick.

In all of this – where were the children's interests being considered? And how will one of the twins feel when they grow up and realise that she was not wanted, and that it was so distressing for her mothers to take care of her?

British Sociologist, Patricia Morgan called this creating 'children as trophies'. Children are not trophies; they're not commodities or burdens and should never be treated as such. They are gifts that should never be cast aside.

The values and traditions that formed our culture are being ignored, forgotten and often forbidden in public debate – all in the name of political correctness and symbolism.

Mateship, the sanctity of life, free will, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, personal responsibility and respect for the common good are among the many elements that have formed Australian culture.

People that hold traditional values are being trapped in what US professor David Woodard likes to call a "whisper zone".

Speaking out publicly about traditional marriage and family, or about religion or right to life, often results in an immediate backlash from the social engineers – those very people who claim to respect everyone's point of view.

This often takes the form of intimidation or ridicule.

Another element of our culture

that is suffering from the insanity of PC is our priorities.

We seem to be moving further away from the values and priorities that founded our society, becoming increasingly obsessed with ourselves and our own selfish interests.

And the insanity of PC fuels this selfish attitude by saying 'it's okay to do what you want', regardless of the effect on society.

**R**unning parallel to this change in priorities is the emergence of 'feel-good activism'. This means making token gestures which cost the activist almost nothing. Take Earth Hour for example. It was a symbolic gesture that achieved very little in terms of reducing the world's carbon emissions, but it did give people a warm fuzzy. In fact, people probably emitted more carbon emissions due to the candles they used. And here they are, thinking they have done something great for the environment.

It is a lot easier to write a cheque for a starving person in Africa than it is to go next door and provide actual help to your neighbour.

Many of the causes that people give to are good causes, but what is and is not regarded as a priority is the concerning part.

Newspapers today are full of stories about the slaughter of whales, the clubbing of seals, climate change and a whole range of other things.

And yet what about unborn babies?

It seems that our society is more concerned about trees and baby seals and kangaroos than they are about the worth of unborn humans (eg with abortion, cloning and embryonic stem cell research).

People say that we need to look after our environment for future generations, and yet they sanction the destruction of those who would have been those future generations.

Where is the logic in that?

It's just another case of values being turned upside down.

But making noise about the environment is easy to do, and it doesn't cost us anything or affect our lifestyle. □

Saying no to abortion or cloning or embryonic stem cell research, on the other hand, is costly. It means taking responsibility for our actions and not making the unborn scapegoats for our own irresponsible behaviour. It means acknowledging the fact that all life is valuable.

But speaking out about these issues often lands people in hot water.

Where do we draw the line?

In the past one could strongly disagree with a person's beliefs or views, while still respecting and accepting the person. But today we are expected to embrace everyone's beliefs and lifestyles – nothing is to be marginalised or rejected.

So where should we draw the line? Or doesn't the line exist anymore?

Take, for example, a local Victorian council's decision to ban ham and pork from all council functions because 12 per cent of the area's population is Muslim.

Where will this end? Will the Council ban sausages if 12 per cent of the population is vegetarian? Will it ban blood transfusions if 12 per cent of the population are Jehovah's Witness?

The Left are also big on rights.

Every now and then the debate over an Australian Bill of Rights resurfaces.

But what they really want is rights without responsibility.

They want the right to do whatever they want, regardless of the effect on the common good.

In fact, one could argue the entire concept of 'rights' has been so debased in recent times that it is difficult to know what is a right and what is simply a desire.

**P**eople say that they have a right to swim in a certain suburban pool or the right to borrow a book from the library or even that they have a right to die.

These are not rights – these are desires governed and formed by personal belief and self-interest.

And yet ironically in this new culture of rights we are often taken into the realm of a contest in deciding whose rights should prevail. □

## **The Pastor calls And they said she was 'crazy'**

The Parson never enquired. It was none of his business. They lived together, not exactly happily, but together. Her affection was mostly lavished on three small, loaded, dogs. The old man took what he could get, which wasn't much. The dogs lived in; the old man some of the time.

She was a language expert, but respected the peculiarities of the cloth. Nobody loved her. Her children, the police, who were frequent visitors, the neighbors; all hated her. Some of the neighbors also feared her. Perhaps they all did, which is a good reason for hate, if you want one. The only exception was the Parson, and he lived a few streets away.

A couple of drinks and she was noisy, aggressive and cantankerous. She was inclined to air her grievances at the top of her voice in mid-street. The only time the old man ever won a bet, at that only a place-getter, was when he got properly tanked up. Then he would win a couple of rounds but finish up in the outside toilet with the door locked. That was usually when the police and the Parson came from off-stage. Once, a new policeman found the old man in situ suggested, and mum and the Parson in the kitchen. He made a natural, if embarrassing, mistake.

She died. The post mortem revealed a massive brain tumour.

This is the bones of a complicated human situation. Clothe it with flesh to your own liking. But it must be compassionate, human and humane flesh.

JT

*'The Pastor calls' is by the late Rev John Longthorn who ministered in Methodist circuits around Australia. The stories first appeared in 1974-75 in New Spectator, the official organ of the Victoria-Methodist Conference.*

# Reflections on Edward Sugden: early moderniser

**Ted Curnow**

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Rev Dr Edward H. Sugden, who lived from 1854 to 1935, was the first Master of Queens College, Melbourne and one of those outstanding, multi-gifted leaders that history visits upon us from time to time.

Steeped in Wesleyan tradition and influenced by his father and grandfather who were powerful preachers, he was converted in early life

His gifting as a passionate leader endowed him with an amazing capacity to spread across a wide range of disciplines and pursuits. He was intellectually brilliant, a literary giant capable of publishing a “Typographical Dictionary of the Works of Shakespeare” from his knowledge of the classics as well as “Wesleyana and Methodistica” from his religious background. He was musically creative and culturally aware.

These notes don't attempt to span all his publications, interests or achievements but offer my reflections and impressions of his journey as an early Church leader and theologian in the Colony of Victoria.

As is our period today, Sugden's was a time of escalating knowledge and radical change. To humbly learn the lessons of history is extremely important if we are to discern the Word that God speaks in the present.

Sugden arrived in Australia in 1887 and lived during a period, unlike our day, when Wesleyan Methodism and Christian leaders were still very influential in shaping society. Similar to our times, however, the church needed to engage and interpret change from a Christian perspective, and then adopt new practises that were consistent with the Gospel.

A readiness to change marked Sugden's life. Even before arriving in Australia he had recognized the need to preach in a new way. This was a radical change. Instead of elaborate rhetoric and oratorical skills – such as the drama of hell fire and brimstone – he advocated a simple, direct expository style that would restore the old spiritual ideas of Methodism.

Interestingly, however, Sugden failed his first trial sermon on the grounds that it lacked doctrinal content – perhaps a hint he was more inclined to be contemporary than he was gifted in conveying the content of the faith.

In Britain, restrictions on university education for Methodists who were registered as “dissenters” were not finally lifted until 1871. This must have proved a strong motivation towards the Church ensuring that things would be different in the new Colony. The choice of a theological degree should have been possible in a place of learning and this was the challenge that was part of Sugden's appointment.

A person like Sugden could still influence social change and shape long term future directions when it came to education and the training of clergy. He was bold and ideally placed to vigorously explore a marriage between the secular and sacred in the new Colony of Victoria. Sugden's passion and mission was to bring together the Wesleyan Evangelical faith with the Liberal Humanist tradition of Melbourne University.

The real question here is do these two perspectives fit, can they in fact be bedfellows or are they essentially different? Sadly this seems to have led to training for ministry focusing on academic learning and fostering respectability at the expense of pastoral commonsense, a mark that

some would say is still typical of the U.C. Today training needs to be reshaped more along the lines of the many new independent churches that focus on ministry praxis and spirituality.

As early as 1834 the Wesleyan Conference in Britain approved the foundation of theological institutions in Britain. Knowledge and scholarship were encouraged on all fronts but from the outset there was a cry “We want preachers not scholars”.

This could have been largely dismissed as simply an anti intellectual cry or a conservative response to change. The Primitive Methodist and Bible Christian causes in part had arisen from a Wesleyan elitism that tended to distance them from the common people and at the heart of this cry I suspect there was a concern for mission and a plea for the church to connect with common people.

In his earlier years Sugden seemed more conscious of a distinction between the sacred and secular. He said preachers should preach Christ, not science, and on his arrival in Melbourne he was surprised enough by the decline of the Class Meeting to insist on its reinstatement at Queens College. This clarity and spirituality seemed to blur as his love of high culture and knowledge of the sciences grew.

Sugden became fascinated with new developments in telepathy, Egyptology, geography, palaeontology, anthropology and biology, to name a few of the new sciences until what was described as a “modernist chauvinism” prevailed. At this point Sugden, it was said could have been described with A. E. Albiston as a liberal protestant, a humanist and an evangelical. Sugden was even bold enough to dissect Wesley's Sermons in light of the modern developments in theology. He said Wesley was not to be regarded as another Pope, and so proceeded to openly criticise Wesley's exegetical method and interpretive skills

It appeared that a cultural elitism attached to both the Wesleyan and Presbyterian Churches focused on academic credibility and this, sadly, overshadowed the old urgency of



saving souls. It overshadowed an understanding of evangelism.

Sugden was well informed in his struggle to bring a number of different worlds together. He set himself to moderate between both religious and secular extremes. Over against a conservative, wooden literalism, science provided insights into creation. But Sugden understood that like faith, science was built on unprovable assumptions. When it came to Biblical interpretation, the historical context and the sciences however seemed to override everything else. While for Sugden textual criticism did not threaten the authority of the Bible, never the less his boldness came close to arrogance when he claimed that the psychology of Paul “received much light from the theory of evolution” and if the Bible said creation took place in six days while geology said it took millions of years, it was not that the Bible was wrong but that we must have misinterpreted the Bible. On another occasion Sugden claimed that we needed further light from Babylonian tablets before we could understand the Bible.

This may appear to be a reasonable approach, in that increased knowledge can certainly illuminate the Scripture. The real test comes with how well we handle new knowledge. Similar to wealth or power, knowledge can “puff up” and sadly a liberal theology has often seduced the church by yielding ultimate authority to contemporary culture and knowledge.

However spiritual truth can never be confirmed by the passing culture of the day. Today the Church is still learning that it is the Spirit of God who confirms the truth of Scripture.

**T**he interaction between culture and revelation was important, but as the sciences dominated, so the concept of “progressive revelation” – the idea that the more we know, the better we become – came into fashion. The first World War was to be the war that would end all wars. The universal Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood

of man were wonderful ideals and it was said that sinful impulses could be checked and kept in place by the love of God.

The tension between modern thought and the faith once delivered to the saints was always evident during this period, and core doctrines of the church were being re-examined and often rejected. During this time of theological ferment, evangelical scholars published a series of international papers on Fundamentals of the Faith.

Theological differences also spilled over into clear social and political differences. While not always pleasant, we need to know today that these differences have always existed and that a moderating call for reform and for the church to remain true to the Gospel is a legitimate role that is extremely important to our future.

Sugden mixed with a network of influential people such as Monash, Deakin, and Swinburne to name a few. He was part of the emerging Student Christian Movement and a Social Liberal Movement that led to clashes with conservative evangelicals, particularly Rev W H Fitchett (1841-1928) President of the Methodist Ladies College who claimed: “The introduction of modernism would be for the Methodist Church a disaster deeper, more far-reaching and more enduring from which it will scarcely survive.”

Sugden assisted in placing the University Chapels at the heart of Victorian education and gave birth to the Melbourne College of Divinity. No mean feat! Tension always existed, however, between the sacred and secular interest at the University. While the Church Colleges had powerful positions as part of the University, it was always the University teaching and influence that had a monopoly.

This must reopen the whole question of where the Christian Church is best placed in the matter of harnessing knowledge and advocating education in today’s world. Are Church schools really places of Christian learning that make a difference? Today the secularisation of Church Schools has contributed

to the birth of the independent Christian School Movement. What can the traditional churches learn about themselves from this development? Does a traditional church elitism still prevail and how well does the goal of higher education sit with the urgency of effective evangelism?

The interaction between culture and Christian revelation remains important. Sugden was socially and politically engaged in a struggle to bring reason and faith together. He was in the “world” to forge a path ahead amid the issues of the day. These included not only ministerial training but church union, a legacy many may envy.

**T**he battle once described as the encounter between the Evangel of Jerusalem and the popular ideologies of Athens has often been a conflict where Athens has prevailed. Did Sugden’s liberal views faithfully represent a sound Biblical theology? Was he objective enough to be able to train the church for its future mission task?

Sugden seems to have been more gifted and anxious to be socially and culturally progressive than he was apt as an evangelist or tutor in biblical and theological disciplines.

Today the Church needs a vigorous evangelical scholarship that is in touch with the world: a scholarship that can dissect culture with a prophetic cutting edge while being teachable enough to listen carefully to what the Spirit is saying.

In our post-modern context today the way of viewing the world in terms of sacred and secular is in decline. It is seen as part of the old ‘Christendom model.’ The form and theology of the Church may change but in the many expressions of a new emerging Church, the Spirit beckons us to move on from the past mistakes of old rationalistic liberalism to discern what it means to be faithful to Christ today.

*The picture opposite shows Queens College at The University of Melbourne as it is today. In the centre is the Sugden Tower, erected in honour of the College’s famous Master.*

□



# Spiritual lockdown – and how to defeat it

Rod James

Recently a preacher was lamenting that, after preaching the word of God with fervour to a Christian congregation, he felt frustrated that the people greeted him, one after another at the door, with an unaffected ‘Mornin’, ‘Mornin’, ‘Mornin’.

It appears that they had not been impacted at all by the great gospel theme that had fired his heart and gripped his mind.

Perhaps the people were not affected because they were in ‘lock-down’.

Lock-down is a term used in prisons to describe what takes place when the prison is stressed by some disruption. In order to cope with the situation the management locks the prison down.

All programs are cancelled, all the prisoners are locked in their cells, and all visitors are turned away. This includes chaplains who have turned up to conduct a service and preach the gospel.

There can be no hearing of the gospel because the prison is in lock-down.

Lock-down seems a useful metaphor to describe what human beings do to cope with life when it becomes too stressful.

They go into a kind of emotional and spiritual lock-down. They create a bubble or zone in which they cope by limiting life to a manageable and comfortable package.

With respect to information about the harsh realities outside their coping zone they live on a ‘don’t need to know basis’.

Like the prison there can be no hearing of the word of God while someone remains in lock-down.

Perhaps people today are even coming to church while in a ‘lock-down’ state.

They sing the hymns and songs, sit under the preaching, partake in the Lord’s Supper, but are not deeply impacted by any of it. The entire process culminates in a nice cup of tea and then we all go home.

A delightful part of Australian literature is John O’Brien’s poem ‘Said Hanrahan’.

Even though the farmers gathered for Mass at the Catholic Church, the word of God did not break in upon



Rod James

their pessimistic minds.

The prospect of drought, flood and fire had their Christian minds in lock-down and so the means of grace available to them did not penetrate.

What prevailed was Hanrahan’s assessment that “We’ll all be rooned!” (ruined).

That some Christians should be in lock-down today ought not to surprise us for there is much in our situation to cause such a reaction—the whole Western world is in decline; we could even say it is imploding.

The birth-rate in western nations is below replacement level, and populations are being supplemented by the immigration of people from other places who do not necessarily share our western traditions, culture and values.

Furthermore, legislators in western nations are turning against

the Christian faith which made their nations great.

Not only do leaders and those being led not believe, but biblical truth is regarded as intolerant and worthy of censure.

Every latest report has the potential to turn us into ‘Ooh Aah birds’ who are forever oohing and aahing at the latest thing that has taken place.

For centuries we westerners have been used to being on the top of the pile, having brought Christ, democracy, civilization and technology to the ‘developing’ nations.

Now those we have led are looking askance at us, amazed that we are turning away from the very things we have brought to them.

Our lack of moral character is offensive to them. Living in the midst of all of this it is no wonder that people show up to church in lock-down.

When Jesus took his disciples to the garden of Gethsemane for the last time he asked them to watch and pray with him. But they could not. Instead they went into lock-down and fell asleep.

Things were not going the way they had assumed they would and dark clouds were brewing.

Essentially, the disciples’ problem was that they did not have a framework of understanding that enabled them to see the true nature of the moment in which they were living.

They did not realize that the very next day the living God would make atonement for the sins of the world. They did not know that in three days time Jesus would be raised from the dead with a glorified resurrection body, and that he would be elevated as Lord of all to the glory of God the Father.

If they had had this framework of understanding (and Jesus had shared it with them), far from falling asleep in the garden, they would have been bursting with excitement and earnest in prayer.

The question we must put to ourselves as Christians is: do we have a framework of understanding for the moment in which we are now living?

I offer one which is based upon the

biblical and historical actions of God in what has been called His 'salvation history'.

It seems that since the time of Abraham nearly 4000 years ago God's people have been veering off course by departing from the will, the word and the way of God.

This is called 'apostasy' which comes from a New Testament word which means to veer or fall away. God's merciful response to the apostasy of His people has been, over and over, to raise up confessors who have bravely and faithfully spoken out God's word.

**T**hough many of these confessors have been persecuted, nevertheless in each instance God brought a reformation through them.

Have you ever wondered why there were so many Christians about 50 years ago?

There is a tendency in us to assume that it was always that way from the beginning, but that now things have changed forever. In fact the abundant supply of biblical believers in the middle of the twentieth century came about only through the reformations previous to that time, mostly notably the Wesleyan revival in Great Britain.

It is interesting to note that at the start of the eighteenth century (i.e. in 1700) the spiritual state of Britain was remarkably similar to Australia today.

JC Ryle's description of it in his book *Christian Leaders of the Eighteenth Century* shows the same spiritual darkness, apathy, materialism, moral decay and church decline which surround us in Australia today.

The reformation that occurred in the 1700s changed things radically, and ushered in a period in which Great Britain led the world with Christian initiatives such as the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Sunday School movement and a world wide missionary endeavour.

None of these were in evidence in the year 1700. In addition, so much in the fields of education, healthcare, industrial justice, and the liberty of slaves arose from this reformation.

There is an old saying that the darkest and coldest part of the night

is the hour before the dawn, and if we study these cycles of apostasy, confessing and reformation in history we find that each of the great reformations which brought so much light and liberty to the human race came in the context of a very dark and depressing moment.

We tend to think things are bad in the church today, but imagine living at the time when the leader of the entire western church (Pope Leo) was selling salvation to pay for his indulgent lifestyle.

Those who opposed this rampant heresy were in danger of losing their lives. But this was the dark hour before the dawn of the Reformation, and something happens to our hearts when the above framework of understanding dawns upon us.

In Daniel chapter nine we read that in the first year of King Darius the Mede, Daniel 'perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years' (Daniel 9:2). Historians have calculated that the first year of Darius's reign must have been very close to the end of the seventy years foretold by Jeremiah.

Jeremiah's prophesy gave Daniel a framework of understanding for the moment in which he was living—he was right at the end of the exile!

We pause to observe that at that moment things looked particularly cold and dark for God's people.

There was nothing to suggest that a restoration (or reformation) was about to occur. But by faith Daniel was able to see past the present darkness and anticipate the coming dawn which God had graciously promised.

Because of this framework of understanding he avoided going into lock-down, and, quite to the contrary, sprang into 'wake up'. With heart inflamed he went into action, confessing the sins of his people and earnestly calling upon their God to bring about the promised restoration.

That restoration came about under King Cyrus of Persia.

It is important for us to have clearly in mind that all these historic

occasions of reformation or revival were, from first to last, actions and visitations of the living God.

It is clear from Scripture that God can withdraw His presence from a nation or, by contrast, can visit it. It is also clear that only God can convert people and cause them to be born of God. Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, 'when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:8). It is this coming of God which has brought about unimagined changes in the spiritual climate of many nations over the centuries.

We need to seek God's face and earnestly desire His coming to the people of our land.

The humility required at this point in our history is that which forsakes the defiant arrogance and self-sufficiency of the western nations.

This humility acknowledges that the one thing needful in Australia today is for our people to be born of God, and this we are totally powerless to accomplish. Having nothing but our knowledge of God's grace in Jesus Christ, and our awareness of His past mercies, we need to seek God and ask that He come and do among us what only He can.

The same framework of understanding applies that applied in the time of Jeremiah:

*"For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.*

*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

*Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you.*

*You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile."* Jeremiah 29:10-14

*Rev Rod James is a field minister for Hope Mission Network in the South Australian Synod. He also represents the ACC as a travelling resource minister throughout Australia.*

# Dynamic mission – a guide for learning from the early Church

Jim Harrison

Many people ask how can the dynamic spirit of mission of early Christianity be restored.

This referenced article offers a clear four-part guide for studying the key developments in the concept of mission spanning the Old Testament and New Testament.

## 1. The hope offered the Gentiles in the Old Testament

The 'covenantal' theology of the Old Testament extends the hope of salvation for the Gentile nations by means of the establishment of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:14; 18:18; 22:17). The New Testament highlights the fulfilment of this hope in the divine offer of justification by faith to Jew and Gentile and in the gift of the Spirit (Acts 3:25; Rom 4:11-13; Gal 3:6-9, 14). The Old Testament hope for the Gentiles, however, more resided in the Gentiles being drawn to Yahweh by the distinctiveness of Israel as 'a light to the nations' (Isa 42:6) than in any specific missionary outreach to the Gentiles. In an act of divine grace, therefore, Gentiles would be grafted into God's covenant people.

Notwithstanding, there was considerable interest in the fate of the Gentiles in God's plan of salvation history. For example, there would be an end-time pilgrimage of the nations to Zion (Isa 2:2-4; 18:7; 25:6; 66:18-22; Jer 3:17; Hag 2:7; Zech 8:20-23) and the Gentiles would submit to Israel (Isa 45:14; 49:22-23; 54:1-3). The servant-role of Christ, the Root of Jesse, to the Jews confirms the patriarchal promises and brings to realisation the end-time salvation-hope of the Gentiles (Rom 15:7-12).

In sum, the notion of a 'priestly service' to the nations (Exod 19:5-6) was carried out by 'ethical apologetic', seen in Torah-obedience and prayer for the nations (e.g. 1 Kgs 8:41-43),

rather than by 'evangelistic mission' to the outsider. To be sure, there is evidence for occasional proselytising activity in the literature of Second Temple Judaism (e.g. Josephus, Antiquities 20.17-26; Philo, Special Laws 1.320-323; cf. Matt 23:15), but this is rather the product of individuals than a specific mission-commitment within Judaism.

## 2. Jesus: pioneer missionary to the 'outsider'

Whereas in the Old Testament period and beyond Gentiles were drawn into the covenant community by virtue of Israel's quietist 'ethical mission', the early church engaged in an outgoing mission to the Gentile world. The gospel moved from the confines of the Jewish synagogal communities to the establishment of house churches in the eastern Mediterranean basin. What motivated this crucial change in strategy? The answer lies in the radical nature of the 'new' covenantal community established by Jesus' atoning death (1 Cor 11:25; Luke 22:20; cf. Exod 24:8) and the way that the Spirit gradually brought the church to understand the full implications of the new covenant itself: 'through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel' (Eph 3:6)

It is undoubtedly true that Jesus restricted his mission to Israel alone (Matt 10:5ff). Jesus embarked on a restoration of the covenant people of God (1 Cor 11:), symbolically underlined in his choice of twelve disciples as a sign that the end-time restoration of Israel has begun. He enlisted his disciples in this missionary task, sending them out as 'fishers of men' (Luke 5:10; Mark 1:17), a phrase used in Jeremiah 16:16 of the restoration of Israel. However, we are confronted by certain ambiguities in Jesus' missionary practice that posed confronting questions for his contemporaries regarding the social and racial constituency of the 'restored Israel'.

Jesus' new covenant community consisted of several 'undesirable' groups, at least according to the purity canons of Second Temple

Judaism: namely, women (John 4:27), tax collectors (Matt 9:9-12), the poor (Luke 4:18; cf. Sirach 13.20), the physically disabled (Mark 2:1-11; 3:1-6; 10:46-52), the ritually impure (Mark 5:25-34; Luke 5:12-15), the demon-possessed (Mark 5:1-18), Samaritans (John 4:4-27; Luke 17:15ff), and non-Jews (i.e. Romans: Matt 8:5-13; Syrophenicians: Mark 7:24-30; Greeks: John 12:20-22). In another affront to Jewish sensibilities, Jesus boldly contrasted Gentile faith with Jewish unbelief on several occasions (Luke 4:26-27; 11:30, 32; 13:28-30). How do we explain this remarkable social phenomenon that undermined the holiness system of Second Temple Judaism?

Three factors help us to appreciate the 'newness' of the wine that had penetrated the 'new' wineskins.

First, as the end-time 'Mosaic' prophet and the Messianic Son, Jesus believed that the historical Israel would soon undergo a crisis of immense magnitude that would result in her covenantal priority before God being relativised (Matt 11:21-22; 12:41-42). There was a judgement coming that would soon fall on historical Israel, its temple and cultic officials (Mark 13:2; Luke 13:1-9). Furthermore, at the final day of judgement, any distinction between Jew and Gentile would be relativised before God (Matt 25:31-46). Consequently, Jesus' Jewish contemporaries could no longer complacently presume on their covenantal membership (John 8:31-59; cf. Matt 3:9). Thus Jesus rejects any form of Jewish nationalism (Luke 9:51-55; 17:15-19; Luke 13:1-5; John 4:21; 6:15), even though in terms of historical priority salvation had come from the Jews (John 4:22b).

Second, Jesus' openness towards the Gentiles is explained by his belief in the Old Testament promise of the pilgrimage of the nations (Matt 8:11-12), with the result that he held out the salvation hope to the Gentiles as well (Matt 12:41-42; 15:15; 11:22). One of Jesus' motives in the cleansing of the Temple Court of the Gentiles was the abuse of the Court's function as a 'house of prayer' for the nations (Mark 11:17). Moreover, Jesus laid

the grounds for a law-free mission in saying 'eat and drink whatever they put before you' (Luke 10:8), thereby eliminating the food and purity laws that were to be such stumbling blocks for the early mission to the Gentiles (Acts 10-11; Gal 2:11-14).

Finally, Jesus' covenantal and atoning death 'for the many' (Mark 14:24) has an open-ended nature about it. 'Many' was a Semitic expression denoting a large or immense number and it indicates that Jesus' death now embraced the horizons of the Gentile world. Thus, in his post-resurrection appearances, Jesus widened his disciples' original commission (Matt 10:5-6) now to include the Gentile world in their mission of teaching, making disciples and evangelism (Matt 28:18-20; cf. v.19: *panta ta ethne* [LXX: Gen 18:18; 22:18]). This was reinforced at Pentecost when, under the enabling of the Spirit, men proclaimed the gospel of Christ in the languages of the nations (Acts 2:8-11).

### 3. From Jerusalem to Rome: the role of Stephen, Philip, the church at Antioch and Paul

How then does the gospel move from the confines of Jerusalem to Rome? Four groups of people are paramount in its geographical and ethnic transformation: the witness of Stephen, the mission to the Greeks by the church at Syrian Antioch, and the conversion of the apostle Paul.

First, Stephen, after highlighting the covenantal redemption secured in Christ (Acts 7:2-8, 32), loosed the gospel, as Christ had, from the ethnic boundary markers of Jewish law and cult (Acts 6:13).

Second, Philip's dramatic encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch is a dramatic demonstration of the gospel overcoming the boundary markers of Second Temple Judaism. This influential treasury official is a highly marginalised person in terms of the Jewish holiness system. As a Gentile adherent to Judaism (Acts 8:27), he would have been excluded from full participation in the cult at Jerusalem. Nonetheless, he was probably the first African to respond to the Gospel.

Moreover, as a eunuch (Acts 8:27), he was also excluded from the Jewish holiness system (Deut 23:1; cf. Is 56:3-8). The barriers separating Jew from Gentile had been decisively abolished as the Spirit of God now formed the type of community that Jesus had pioneered in his ministry.

Third, although persecution scattered the church — but with disparate non-Judean groups and individuals being powerfully touched by God in the process (Acts 8:5, 14; 8:26ff; 10:22ff) — the decisive episode in the turning from the Jews to the Gentiles with the gospel came about through the boldness and vision of believers from Cyprus and Cyrene. They were the first to engage the Greeks directly in their own language in evangelistic outreach at Antioch (Acts 11:19-20). From this unprecedented change in missionary tactics there emerged the church at Antioch, the mother church of the Gentile mission in the eastern Mediterranean basin. As a result, Barnabas and Paul were commissioned by the church at Antioch on their first missionary journey, each evangelist inheriting the mantle of the servant of the Isaianic 'Servant' songs by being lights to the Gentile world (Acts 14:47; cf. Isa 42:6; 49:6).

Fourth, much could be said about the role of the apostle Paul in the spread of early Christianity. Paul conceived of the gospel of Christ crucified as the dynamic power of God's word that was made effective in people's lives through his Spirit (Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:18). This power is integrally related to Paul's missionary labours: it creates new churches that would continue the apostolic mission and empower the life of the church for the work of service. Paul directs imperatives to the church to evangelise (Phil 2:16; Eph 6:15-17), as well as encouragements to be a passive witness (Col 4:6; 1 Thess 4:12). Apostles and churches pray for missions and the Church (Rom 1:8; 2 Cor 9:14; Eph 6:18-20), build each other up in Christ (Rom 15:14; 1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 12:19; Eph 4:11-16), witness together the truth of the gospel being verified by miracles (Gal 3:5; 2 Cor 12:12), and suffer together

for the gospel (Rom 8:16-18; 1 Cor 4:9-13; 2 Cor 1:3-10; Col 1:24-25). This is the variegated expression of the partnership in the gospel (Phil 1:3-7; 2 Cor 9:13-15). Nonetheless, Paul also trained specific evangelists and church planters to carry forward the work of mission (Eph 4:11; 2 Tim 4:4; cf. Timothy; Epaphroditus; Titus; Acts 21:8).

### 4. Contemporary implications for mission praxis

1. The crucial task of the church is teaching, making-disciples, and evangelism: the dynamic power of the gospel propels the church towards mission through the interconnection of the three activities.

2. The mission of the church is holistic in its transformation of people and our variegated cultures for Christ. This adds another crucial dimension to our understanding of mission. Thus, in mission there are expressions of

a. An apologetic base which engages creatively and biblically with the traditional intellectual disciplines, the performance and artistic disciplines, the business world and government, the economy, and the variegated expressions of popular culture;

b. A charity base which ministers to the socially marginalised;

c. A pastoral base that restores people to wholeness;

d. A contextual base that is intergenerational, gender inclusive, multicultural, crossing class and ethnic differences.

e. A justice and reconciliation base that brings to bear in society God's own commitment to justice and reconciliation.

3. The mission of the church includes the task of equipping lay people for the work of service by training gifted people to work for Christ in the professions and trades, as well as in lay ministries in the church and for para-church ministries.

4. The mission of the church includes the task of training specific people for teaching, pastoring, and making disciples, so that through healthy churches the nations can be won to Christ.

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The more cynical may say it is a small price to pay for achieving the stature of intellectual celebrity, but Francis Fukuyama took some very hard knocks after the publication of his 1992 book, *The End of History and the Last Man*. Some critics took the "end of history" part of the title altogether too literally and had a field day lampooning Fukuyama's chronological hubris.

The book was an expansion of a 1989 article by Fukuyama, "The End of History?" The question mark should not be overlooked. And the thesis of the book is not without nuance: "What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." Then came, among other things, September 11, and many could not resist the temptation to ridicule what they depicted as Fukuyama's confidence in the world's inevitable conversion to liberal democracy.

Partly in response to Fukuyama, Samuel Huntington published in 1996 *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. That justly influential book argued that cultural and religious identities, rather than liberal ideology or economic-technological

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