



Community

Quarterly news magazine of St Paul's, Manuka, and St David's, Red Hill, in the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn

No. 35

Autumn 2016

Capturing the joy and meaning of Christmas

Christmas is such an important season of the Church's year and once again this was celebrated at St Paul's and St David's with significant numbers of people present and a rich variety of services.

Our Carol Services in early December saw us joining with our sisters and brothers from St Christopher's Cathedral. The services at St Paul's on the Tuesday and at St Christopher's on the Thursday both filled the churches and we all enjoyed glorious Christmas music.

On Christmas Eve the Children's Eucharist was filled to overflowing with over 400 people present with half of those being children. A great nativity play included about 20 children who told us the Christmas story with humour and devotion.

All the children gathered around the altar for the Prayer of Thanksgiving and joined in the celebration with enthusiasm.

Our Midnight Eucharist had orchestra and choir leading us in the Charpentier setting for Midnight. Another 400 people were present in this joyful celebration of the Saviour's birth.

On Christmas morning our services continued to celebrate the birth with about 200 people present at the 8 AM service and 400 at the 10 AM service.

In total there were some 1400



Through their participation in the nativity play 20 children told us the Christmas story with humour and devotion. Photo: Les Bohm

people present on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

It is a great privilege to welcome many to St Paul's and St David's and to once again tell the story of Jesus' coming amongst us.

We had the joy of welcoming Susan Bridge back on the Sunday after Christmas. It was great to have her ministering amongst us again.

The season of Christmas continued into Epiphany as we proclaimed the presence of the Christ-child in our world.

The Christmas nativity scene remained in front of the altar to remind us all that the joy of Christmas is not just one day in the year but a coming amongst us that lives in our hearts and minds for all our days. Christ has come into the world and we are all blessed by that presence.

Many people help to make the celebration of Christmas a success in our parish and it is with sincere thanks that we acknowledge all those people who work to prepare the church and its services and who then assist on the day. Without their willing service we could not do what we do.



The Venerable Dr Brian Douglas, Rector

Increasing religious literacy

A report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life *Living with Difference*, sub-titled “community, diversity and the common good”, observes that “there is a need for increasing religious literacy to enable an informed and critical understanding of the religious and belief in communities.”

Religious literacy is seen as an increasingly important aspect of preparedness for life in the modern world and to ensure that young people are equipped with religious literacy.

This is against the general observation that religion and belief are driving forces today. Society is not about to return to the past when religion and religious authorities dominated; it is clear, though, that both raise issues that have urgently to be addressed.

In its own limited way *Community* along with other religious media, seeks to fill a gap in media literacy and how religion is reported. As a quarterly news magazine it aims to capture an image of an active, vibrant Parish in all its communicative forms—the “total package” of the Parish, stitching together journalism and theology.

Attendances at Christmas services have demonstrated the value of how the church is portrayed in word, song, sacrament and the voices of young people.

The purpose of the Commission on Religion and Belief is to consider the place and role of religion and belief in contemporary Britain, to consider the significance of emerging trends and identities, and to make recommendations for public life and policy.

Its premise is that in a rapidly changing diverse society everyone is affected, whatever their private views on religion and belief, by how public policy and public institutions respond to social change.

The report maps a changing social landscape: the increase in the

number of people with non-religious beliefs and identities, the general decline in Christian affiliation, belief and practice, and increased diversity amongst people who have a religious faith.

Most people feel they know what the words religion and belief mean. The reality is that they can have different meanings and nuances for different people in different contexts and at different times.

The report identifies three main dimensions of religion that overlap: (a) affiliation and identity; (b) practice; and (c) doctrine and ideas.

“Ethno-religious issues and identities globally”, the report says, “are reshaping society in ways inconceivable just a few decades ago, and how we respond to such changes will have a profound impact on public life”.

“Being a positive part of an ongoing national story ... to know that their culture, religion and beliefs are embraced as part of a continuing process of mutual enrichment, that their contributions to the texture of the nation’s common life are valued”.

People come to see things from different perspectives. For many it is about belonging and community, of solidarity with each other, a sustaining force of coming together in church.

The *Living with Diversity* report suggests that the relationship between what someone believes and what they actually do is often difficult to unpick as they perform different actions.

In the view of the report it is possible to appreciate religious art, architecture, stories, poetry, music and theatre without necessarily sharing the beliefs which they express or assume.

Similarly all or most religious



and philosophical traditions contain concepts, wisdom and teachings that can valuably challenge the strategies, policies and priorities of secular governments and which therefore merit a presence and a hearing in the public square.

Almost all responses to the commission’s consultation expressed concern about the portrayal of religion and belief in the media. There was a perceived lack of religion and belief literacy among media professionals. A new phenomenon is the sharing of information via the internet and the rise of social media. These are driving profound changes in society, including understandings and experiences of religion and belief. Their impact depends on the people who use them – and how they use them. The modern world is increasingly a “sound bite” culture which has a tendency to de-personalise a sense of community, lessening the opportunity for encounter. Serious and ongoing attempts need to be made, the report concludes, to increase religion and belief literacy among all journalists and reporters.

Processes of constructive engagement and dialogue between people holding different beliefs and worldviews, and belonging to different traditions and backgrounds, have vital roles to play in the tasks of building and maintaining relationships of mutual understanding and trust, and of strengthening the bonds of community.

They help people ‘to feel they are a positive part of an ongoing national story ... to know that their culture, religion and beliefs are embraced as part of a continuing process of mutual enrichment, and that their contributions to the texture of the nation’s common life are valued’.

Primates pledge to ‘Walk Together’ in unity

Anglican Primates, the senior bishops of the 38 Anglican Provinces, joined by the Archbishop of the Anglican Church of North America, met in Canterbury for a week in January at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, to discuss their differences and to consider wider areas of concern for the unity of the Anglican Communion.

In his reflection on the meeting, Archbishop Welby said a significant part of the week was spent discussing how – or even if – we could remain together as the Anglican Communion in the light of changes made by The Episcopal Church (the historic Anglican Communion church in the USA) and some other countries to their understanding of marriage.

The unanimous decision of the Primates was to “walk together, however painful this is, and despite our differences, as a deep expression of our unity in the body of Christ”.

In their communiqué the Primates condemned homophobic prejudice and violence and resolved to work together to offer pastoral care and loving service irrespective of sexual orientation.

They recognised that the Christian church and within it the Anglican Communion had often acted in a way towards people on the basis of their sexual orientation that has caused deep hurt.

Where this had happened they expressed their profound sorrow and affirmed again that God's love for every human being is the same, regardless of their sexuality, and that the church should never by its actions give any other impression.

Archbishop Welby spoke of the response by the meeting on how to move forward as a family together in the light of unilateral action by one member – in this case, making a fundamental departure from the faith and teaching on marriage held by the large majority of Anglican Provinces globally. The question, he said, could and undoubtedly would apply in the future to other issues.

The majority of those gathered reaffirmed the church's traditional doctrine on marriage in view of the teaching of Scripture.

Provinces are described as autonomous but interdependent, linked as family to one another. Acknowledging the seriousness of the matters before them and the distance between them Archbishop Welby said: “We remain committed to being together”.

Archbishop Welby said it was clear in Christian teaching that it's not for us to divide the body of Christ, which is the church, but also that we must seek to make decisions bearing each other in mind, taking each other seriously, loving one another despite deep differences of view.

The meeting asked that The Episcopal Church for a period of three years no longer represent them on ecumenical and interfaith bodies, should not be appointed or elected to an internal standing committee and that while participating in the internal bodies of the Anglican Communion, they will not take part in decision making on any issues pertaining to doctrine or polity.

The communiqué after the meeting said that the change in the Episcopal Church's Canon on marriage represented a fundamental departure from the faith and teaching held by the majority of Provinces on the doctrine of marriage. Possible developments in other Provinces could further exacerbate this situation. These developments had caused further deep pain throughout the Communion”.

Consistent with the position of previous Primates' meetings such unilateral actions on a matter of doctrine without Catholic unity was considered by many of those attending as a departure from the mutual accountability and interdependence implied through being in relationship with each other in the Anglican Communion. Such



actions, the leaders said, further impaired our communion and created a deeper mistrust between us. “This results in significant distance between us and places huge strains on the functioning of the Instruments of Communion and the ways in which we express our historic and ongoing relationships”.

The group asked the Archbishop of Canterbury to appoint a Task Group to maintain conversation with the intention of restoring the relationship, to rebuild mutual trust, heal the legacy of hurt, recognising the extent of commonality and exploring our deep differences, ensuring they are held between us in the love and grace of Christ.

The Primates agreed the process could also be applied when any unilateral decisions on matters of doctrine and polity are taken that threaten our unity.

In a presentation on evangelism, the Primates rejoiced that the Church of Jesus Christ lives to bear witness to the transforming power of the love of God in Jesus Christ.

They committed themselves and the Anglican Church, to proclaim throughout the world the person and work of Jesus Christ, unceasingly and authentically, inviting all to embrace the beauty and joy of the Gospel.”

The meeting supported the Archbishop of Canterbury in his proposal to call a Lambeth Conference in 2020.

The Primates left after the week together “enriched by the communion we share and strengthened by the faithful witness of Anglicans across the world”.

A memory of train spotting

Rob May

I remember so little of the war. As I was a few days short of three when it finished in Europe; it's rather surprising that I recall anything, and I certainly didn't remember trying to visit my brother, Ivor, in heaven [Community 31]. But I do remember some parts in Bristol: a railway viaduct – silent, distant, smoky trains; endless, endless, endless trains of trucks clicking by at eye level as they passed me in my 'push chair'; and "I-tie (eye-tie) lorries" full of men throwing sweets to little Bobby in his pram. "I-tie lorries, Daddy" was my cry as the lorries carrying Italian prisoners of war loomed into view, off to some work somewhere, and the men would throw chocolate – yes! chocolate! – to me ... and, I must assume, any other lucky enough to be in range, but I didn't know that. Only much later did I really understand the significance of chocolate and war time: these Italian prisoners had food we civilians would not know again for quite a few years, and they were prepared to share. They are all in their nineties, now – where are they, I wonder?

Bristol to Yeoford - 'Crediton Hamlets' on some maps, which tells you its size; this must have been by train, and immediately after the war. Dad had left Bristol, assuming that the wartime staffs would be laid off, so he left to work with his brother before being 'pushed'. We went to live with their mother - Granny May, to differentiate from Gran Taylor - in a council house just across the road from the smithy and the saw mill.



Here I saw my first model train! A cob cottage, a bow window, a train of tip trucks on a track on the window ledge, and a seat to kneel on to look. It was entrancing, with my size, and so unlike what was happening down the road at Yeoford Station. From this hive of activity, Mum took us, Doug and me, shopping in Crediton, and the trains were real, close and big. Bristol's had been distant, and silent

because of that, but these were very noisy and we clapped hands over ears. There were green engines taking us into Crediton and, once, way past Yeoford on return 'cos Mum fell asleep and the only way back was to push us back in the pram along the track - miles, and miles - poor Mum, and Dad worried silly because she was not at home. There was a crane for unloading boxes, and elevators moving coal and stones and trees. And there were what must have been VERY important trains because even those with only a few coaches had lots of engines: I discovered later that this activity continued as long as the Southern needed to move engines to various lines past the junction, to Ilfracombe and Okehampton..

In the snow of 1946, trains were not getting through from Exeter because of drifts but the line from Crediton was clear to Yeoford. Mrs Holcombe and Mum, both around 30, 'borrowed' a gangers' trolley at the station and hilariously hand 'pumped' their way along the track into Crediton and brought back milk and food for the hamlet. With the snow so deep, I doubt that motor vehicles could have ventured along those lanes: I suppose horses could have done it, but I love the vision of those two young things giggling the three miles each way. They wouldn't have been cold, pumping the trolley.

Bliss was marred by very little for me here - just the terrifying monster hornets the men said had to be killed before they hurt us; and once I bounced too often and too high on Mum's lap and shattered all of her teeth. She may have forgiven me, but I've not forgotten. Ever. I do wish that I had said I was sorry, before she died, instead of at her memorial; and I'm so glad that she did not give my last clockwork engine to the Guides' jumble sale – it still runs for Nate and Will.

A special attraction, for young and old, at recent St Paul's fetes has been the model trains on display in the church under the control of Rob May, a model trains enthusiast. In this continuation of his memories of childhood Rob recalls how his love of model trains came about. "My Uncle Bob," he writes, "passed on a Hornby train set when I was nearly five. By the age of 12, at the rate of one new coach or wagon at Christmas and a tin building or a Dinky toy for birthday, I ran clockwork trains around my bedroom for hours gathering carpet fluff. I progressed from there through train sets to hand building all my own locomotives, and now run clockwork Hornby around the sitting room for hours gathering carpet fluff (with grandkids, this time, though). Such is progress". He asks: "Were these events the start of my model railways?"

Images from the Christmas Season



For the Rev'd Susan Bridge Christmas was like a "second coming" to St Paul's as she led a combined post-Christmas service, before returning to Oxford to continue her studies. She spoke eloquently of her experiences at Oxford University. The Christmas nativity scene remained in front of the altar to remind us all that the joy of Christmas is not just one day in the year but a coming amongst us that lives in our hearts and minds for all our days. Photo: Peter McDermott



Nativity photos: Les Bohm



A light that shone out of darkness

**Sometimes a light surprises the
Christian while he sings;
It is the Lord, who rises with
healing in His wings.**

**God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the
sea
And rides upon the storm.**

**O how I love Thy holy Word,
Thy gracious covenant, O Lord!
It guides me in the peaceful
way,
I think upon it all the day.**

**The Lord will happiness divine
On contrite hearts bestow:
Then tell me, gracious God, is mine
A contrite heart, or no?**

**Oh! I have seen the day,
When with a single word,
God helping me to say,
My trust is in the Lord;
My soul has quell'd a thousand
foes,
Fearless of all that could oppose**

**Thy saints are comforted, I
know,
And love thy house of pray'r;
I therefore go where others go,
But find no comfort there.
Oh make this heart rejoice, or
ache;
Decide this doubt for me;
And if it be not broken, break,
And heal it, if it be.**

**Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain:
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.**

The connection between poetry and theology in expanding our horizons of Christian understanding has long been acknowledged. The harmony between the two disciplines is captured in the hymns we sing. In our regular singing of hymns we may take for granted their inherent poetic quality. Beyond the music their words offer the opportunity to appreciate poetic inspiration as a dimension of theology.

Anthony Baker writes in the *Anglican Theological Review* that theology in itself is “a kind of poetry” because of the particular story that Christians are attempting to tell, a story that expresses what exceeds human language and visualises what exceeds human vision. Through the illumination of poetry we hear something that has not quite been said, yet could not have been said otherwise.

This poetic dimension reveals itself in the poetry/hymns of William Cowper, recognised as one of the most distinguished poets of 18th century England. Two of his hymns in the *Australian Hymn Book* (No 54 and No 55) are part a celebrated body of hymns resulting from a collaboration between him and the Rev'd John Newton, at the time curate of Olney, Buckinghamshire, slave trader turned evangelical clergyman, known for his famous hymn “Amazing Grace”.

For Cowper Olney came to represent an important period in his life, an interval between despair and hope. He moved there in 1767 as part of a recovery from the deep depression that plagued his life. Olney offered him rural seclusion with a group of understanding friends.

To aid in his recovery Newton invited him to jointly prepare hymns for the local church. Of the 348 hymns in the volume, Cowper was able to contribute only 67 before he again fell to his illness. The hymns were described as “the most beautiful and devotional effusions that ever enriched this species of composition, a joint production of the divine and the poet.” Eventually published in 1779 they became known as the Olney Hymns. They were recognised at the time as one of the most substantial achievements of 18th century hymnology.

Newton saw the primary purpose of the hymns to “promote the faith and comfort the sincere Christians” in his parish. Rather than seeking the status of art, he said, they were meant to be devotional in spirit and eminently practical for use by the “uneducated commoner”. The imagery and colouring of poetry, if admitted at all, should be indulged very sparingly and with great judgment.” They were, Newton emphasised, hymns, not odes for the use of “plain people”. Cowper’s poetry served to bring another dimension to the hymns as he devoted himself to religious contemplation, prayer and charity.

In his introduction to the Olney Hymns Newton paid a warm tribute to Cowper. Apart from promoting the faith, publication of the hymns was as a monument, to “perpetuate the remembrance of an intimate and endeared friendship”. He recalled: “We had not proceeded far upon our proposed plan, before my dear friend was prevented, by a long and affecting indisposition, from affording me any farther assistance”.

Cowper’s letters show “a hungry soul seeking the help and guidance of God” during the dark times in his personal life, searching the Scriptures for “comfort and instruction”. In them he “saw the sufficiency of atonement”. In one of his many letters to his cousin, Cowper wrote: “Dejection of spirits which I suppose may have prevented many a man from becoming an author made one of me. Composition, especially of verse absorbs me wholly”.

Occupation was an imperative for his recovery. "I have that within which hinders me wretchedly in everything that I ought to do and let time and every good thing run to waste," he wrote "My feelings," he said, "are always of the intense kind".

Driven by a strong Christian faith and fidelity to fundamental Christian doctrine, poetry for him became "the hand maiden of morality and religion". His style was meditative and conversational. He wrote in direct simple language, with clarity of mind and imagery. Each hymn was regarded as "a little sermon" revealing his deep feelings. That scriptures were the chief source of his inspiration was in part due to his constant search for an answer to his personal religious problems and to seek to explain his recurring disabling ill health. His motives, as he declared, were always the same: to write verse that would provide religious and moral instruction and the hope that he could attract readers to a careful study of the sacred text. Writing helped him understand his own shifts in mood. As one biographer wrote: "His hymns mingle recollection of anguish with thanks giving for redemption." His hymns were described as "some of the most beautiful and devotional effusions that ever enriched this species of composition". Rooted in the evangelism of the 18th century his supporters would claim him as "an evangelical preacher."

To read the hymns as poetry in sequence is to discern a narrative of faith and to perceive his different moods of personal doubt and conflict. As the Rev'd T S Grimshawse, Vicar of Bubbenham, Bedfordshire, wrote in *The works of William Cowper, His life, letters and*

poems, London, 1835: "The hymns portray the varied emotions of the human heart in its conflicts with sin, and aspirations after holiness. We there contemplate the depression of sorrow and the triumph of hope, the genuine transcript of the poet's own mind". Of his celebrated hymn "God moves in a mysterious way" Grimshawse wrote that there "we see depicted, in impressive language, the struggles of a faith trying to penetrate into the dark and mysterious dispensations of God".

In Grimshawse's words: "The poem, stands pre-eminent in that class which refer to the mysterious dealings of God, and is singularly qualified to invigorate the faith, to lead the sufferer to repose on the unerring wisdom and goodness of God". It seemed, Grimshawse concluded, that it was as if God were giving him a chart of the voyage through those seas of trouble which he was about to navigate, embodying instruction to his own mind, and the instrument to console others.

This poem, the last in the Olney collection that he composed, was written on the eve of that "afflicting malady" in January 1773 which Newman recalled in his tribute to Cowper. The affliction lasted almost 10 years while he continued to occupy himself in a variety of rural pursuits. He emerged from his "spiritual crisis" to come to be recognised as one of the most significant poets of his time. His was a form of "poetic salvation", nurtured in his experiences at Olney where he had found a peaceful and devout life.

George Menham

Things you sometimes see

Our Walking Group manage to select a series of walks each year and members of the group often ask why our numbers do not increase. There are many reasons for this, be it our ageing population, busy lifestyles or some other form of recreational fitness. Younger people are not participating in Service Clubs and other voluntary organisations? Is this true or false? Do you have an opinion on this as I am sure that our Editor would welcome your comments.

I was recently reflecting on the styles of walk leadership that we enjoy at St. Paul's. My own personal style is to often walk slightly ahead as Leader and often due to an odd number involved in the walk. Usually silence (at times) and there is a certain pleasure in looking down from a ridge and noticing aspects not seen from a motor car. Colours vary from our green to brown and we are fortunate in that our skies are a deep blue.

Then look down at an emerging suburb and sense a

lack of trees and like magic see the same view 18 months ahead and green trees are appearing. You can sometimes be lucky at Red Hill Nature Reserve and spot two hares - they seem to go in pairs, sometimes a shy wallaby.

Then at Goorooyarroo a glimpse of yellow and noise (somewhat like the Aussie Cricketers' appeal) and realise we have just seen a small family of Black Cockatoos. Again at Gooroo - walk to the dam and see the large nest in an old gum tree - we think it belongs to an Eagle.

The Australian Landscape is unique in colours, red gravel and yellow hills and farms visible below the ridge with their green crops and often distinct outbuildings. There is no reason for you to miss these free scenic wonders.

Why not come on our walks in 2016 and see and hear what makes it a pleasure to be with your Church Walking Group.

Michael Roach

Franciscans together in Community

A report by the Venerable John Gibson tssf

Once every three years Third Order Franciscans from around Australia gather for their Conference and Great Chapter (which moves around the various states.) This year's was held at the Canberra Grammar School from 1 October to 4 October last year with the theme "Together in Creation".

The Third Order of the Society of Saint Francis is a contemporary expression of the Order of Penitents founded by Saint Francis in the early thirteenth century. The Third Order is for women and men laity and clergy who live out the Gospel in their own homes and in the occupations to which they believe God has called them. In our parish, Geoff Taylor, Fr Robert Willson and Fr John Gibson are Tertiaries and Kerry Parkinson is a Novice.

The Welcome to Country by Allodial Elder, Guumaal Ngambri Mingku, set the tone for our time together with his openness and sharing with us. Assistant Bishop, Bishop Matt Brain welcomed participants to the diocese.

Rev'd Dr Alan Cadwallader, a key-note speaker, led us in the bible studies on Mark 4 and Mark 10:32-42. They were scholarly, thought provoking and interspersed with questions to think about.

Bishop Godfrey (our Provincial Minister) and Bronwyn Fryar spoke about their recent visit and experiences in Assisi, a place to which we are all emotionally linked.

Professor Matthew Colless in a very professional but relaxed manner gave us "The Big Picture" with the latest research and insights into God's unfolding creation and our part in it. He addressed three questions. What do we know? What don't we know? And how do we know the stuff we know?

The Rev'd Canon Professor Scott Cowdell gave us "A Girardian Perspective on Creation: On Being Called into Being Beyond Rivalry, and What That Can Mean for Planet Earth."

Drawing on the late Rene Girard,

a French-American thinker, his theological interpreter James Alison

and his own deep knowledge and insights, Scott touched on the Girardian take on the Genesis creation stories; Creation and Redemption, concluding with a word about St Francis.

On Saturday afternoon participants visited the Centre for Christianity and Culture where our host was the Director, Bishop Stephen Pickard, who spoke to us and gave us a guided walk. There was time to go to Floriade where we were greeted by Kym Le Riche.

The regional presentations showed the diversity of our Province, a great opportunity to find out about the varied activities and approaches of our various regions.

Our worship together was central to all that we did and we were greatly blessed by our musicians coordinated by Gemma Dashwood.

Our worship included a moving "Benedictus Service" led by the Rev'd Dr Sarah Bachelard. Sarah centred her homily on the "Canticle of the Sun" which

The Rev'd Robert Willson renews his Franciscan Third Order vows at a Wednesday Eucharist.

Archdeacon John Gibson, chaplain of the Order, conducted the renewal. All Franciscans are expected to renew each year.

Photo: Kay Pendlebury.



invites us to recognise the promise for transforming our relationship with God's good earth and with our own creatureliness. Sarah explored with us what this might mean.

On Saturday evening we celebrated the Transitus of St Francis (the anniversary of his death). The Sung Eucharist on St Francis' Day with the novicing of James Ellis from Canberra and the renewal of vows was a fitting finale.

Prior to our Eucharist we had the General Chapter (for all Tertiaries) chaired by our Provincial Minister, Bishop Godfrey Fryar. This provided the opportunity for him to report to us on matters covering our Province and for us in turn to ask questions and make suggestions to be discussed by the Provincial Chapter which handles matters between General Chapters.

Of great value was our coming together in community with its opportunities for fellowship, chatting over meals, renewing old friendships and making new friends.

The planning committee enjoyed the opportunity of welcoming Tertiaries (members of the Third Order) and friends to Canberra.

To know more speak to one of us and/or collect a brochure on the table at the entrance to St Paul's Church.



“God preserve us from religion”

Robert Willson

One evening I was watching an episode of that fine British detective series entitled “Wycliffe”. It came as a shock when the leading character, Detective Superintendent Charles Wycliffe, made the comment: “God preserve us from Religion!”

The context was interesting. The police were investigating a murder in a very aristocratic English family, with a family history going back to the Middle Ages. One of the detectives commented to Wycliffe that in the Protestant Reformation that family had been recusants. In English history recusant in the 16th century meant those who refused to attend the services of the Church of England after King Henry the VIII had broken with Rome. Such people, generally Roman Catholics or Puritans, were punished by fines and even sometimes by torture and execution. Wycliffe expressed what many would feel now, “God preserve us from Religion”, if it leads to that kind of brutal intolerance.

To us such actions seem quite revolting. But in the 16th century it was widely believed that all members of the community should follow the religious convictions of the Monarch. Those who did not do so were regarded as traitors. So when King Henry broke with the Papacy, everyone else must do so or face the consequences.

When his Protestant son, Edward VI, became the King, all must follow his views. When Henry’s daughter, Mary Tudor, became Queen in 1553, she, as a devout Roman Catholic, restored the Old Faith and tried to force compliance. She became known as “Bloody Mary” because of the hundreds of Protestants, including Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, who were burnt at the stake for refusing to follow her faith. These horrors only ended when Elizabeth became Queen.

Windows into the soul

Queen Elizabeth, one of England’s greatest monarchs, said that she refused to make windows into people’s souls and framed the liturgy of the Church of England to try to include all shades of opinion. Yet her administration also persecuted Roman Catholics, especially priests who secretly entered the country and were seen as posing a threat to the Queen.

After the English Civil War in the 17th century where religious issues again played a big part, the nation gradually settled down. By the late 20th century the sectarian bitterness of earlier years was a thing of the past in Britain and Australia. However the rise of what is called “Islamic State” has seen a terrible resurgence of religious hatred.

In our day we have seen what is called “new atheism” making a big impact in our secular society. More and more people would agree with the character in the television series who said “God preserve us from Religion”.

These days our Australian society is not only multicultural but also multi faith, or no faith at all. Yet the challenge for Christians remains. We are called upon, in the words of the New Testament Epistle of Peter, to give to everyone who asks us, a reason for the hope that we have. Yet we are also told to do it with tact and sensitivity.

Dialogue with atheists

In recent years I have tried to enter into dialogue with a number of friends who are atheists. I have made it a point to meet them over coffee and share ideas and find out why they have turned against the Christian faith and against religion in general. I find that their reasons fall into several groups.

Firstly there are those who would echo the words of the detective Wycliffe and say that the Christian faith, far from being a force for good in society, is in fact a

force for intolerance and that it has a history of bigoted behaviour. Secondly there are those who say that the Christian church has opposed scientific enquiry, as in the case of Galileo.

Many atheists seem to believe that modern science has disproved the idea of a personal creator God. Richard Dawkins, author of “The God Delusion” seems to believe this. Yet Dawkins has changed his position in recent years and now claims to be an agnostic, not an atheist.

A further problem is the Bible which is seen as a tissue of falsehoods and improbabilities. I have noticed that, while many atheists claim that there is no God, most admit that Jesus Christ did live and that he was a remarkable teacher and moral leader. Richard Dawkins is clearly uncomfortable with the idea of actually attacking Jesus Christ, though he will not accept that he was the Son of God or that he rose from the dead.

It may be that members of our own families express these ideas in various ways. I spent many years as a school chaplain and with senior girls I would explore these issues and listen to what they had to say. In Year 11 classes I used to begin the year by discussing reasons for NOT believing God exists. They had a lot to say about this! Then I would suggest reasons why there is a God and that a creator God is fully in accord with the laws and order of the world and the universe. I would suggest that science is daily uncovering more of the wonders of God’s universe.

I would suggest that if it is an act of faith to believe in God, then it is an even more daring leap of faith to deny Him and postulate this marvellous world as an accident or a coincidence. I would agree with the wise man who said that he did not have enough faith to be an atheist.

Christian Practice as Religion Reconceived

Scott Cowdell

When I was Rector of St Paul's, Manuka (2002-07), I discovered the work of French-American thinker René Girard (1923-2015). Parishioners from those days will remember how Girard's influence started to come out in my preaching.

Girard begins with the simple fact that what we desire follows the desire of others whom we admire. In close quarters this admiration can turn into envy and rivalry. If fads spread like wildfire thanks to this simple truth of desire, then so does violence.

Suddenly the time-honoured human response to the threat of escalating violence is released, deflecting violence onto somebody safe—some easy and obvious target, who we can all blame, and who has the added advantage of having nobody to avenge them. On this basis Girard offers what the sociologists call a “functional” account of religion, with “the sacred” emerging as the legacy of this scapegoat mechanism.

Apart from any question of God or absolute truth, such religion functions as “social glue”, and as our social values writ large (the flag, the monarchy, the nation, “freedom”, the free market etc.). This first type of religion, according to Girard, evolves as a protective mechanism against the rise of violence. It relies on taboos to help us avoid inciting rivalry, rituals to safely replay the social crisis and its scapegoating resolution, and myths, which celebrate our social order but with the truth of its founding violence safely under wraps. From these beginnings, stable human cultures and institutions can eventually grow up.

For Girard, this first sort of religion, a useful happenstance along the evolutionary path, is eventually challenged by a new kind of religion. In Greek tragedy; in Job, along with the Hebrew psalms and prophets; with hints in some Eastern religious

IN CONVERSATION WITH SCOTT COWDELL

Re-interpretation (or renewal) of the Christian message is an important adjunct to our Christian understanding and belief. Theological scholarship wrestles with contemporary questions in the light of the scripture to discover new meaning within the central convictions of Christian faith.

An important question for the Editor of a Parish magazine is: “How is that scholarship to be translated into the hearts and minds of regular worshippers and being Christian?”

Prominent among recent attempts to articulate a doctrine of salvation has been the following established by the French cultural anthropologist and literary critic, René Girard. Girard sought to discover what made masterpieces of literature outstanding, to find the “something” they had in common and what set them apart. In doing so he crossed the boundaries between literature and religion.

The Rev'd Canon Professor Scott Cowdell has undertaken extensive theological inquiry into Girard's writings. He has sought to incorporate Girard's vision into contemporary understanding.

Over the Christmas season *Community* began a dialogue with Scott. The opening question was: “How are we as lay people confirming the Christian faith to understand, relate to and interpret the philosophical contribution of René Girard?” Scott graciously undertook to answer the questions posed.

Scott Cowdell is Research Professor in Public and Contextual Theology, Charles Sturt University, Canberra, and Canon Theologian of the Canberra-Goulburn Diocese.

classics, but most fully revealed in the Gospels' passion narratives, the ultimately violent reality of social order is exposed. Humanity learns that it makes scapegoats, and hence the mechanism begins to lose the feeling of “religious awe” that it once generated.

So, ironically, today's familiar sense that “nothing is sacred” represents an advance. The gospel pricks the bubble of this first form of religion, of human origin, introducing something of divine origin. The old sacred has done its best to reboot itself in modern times—think Nazism, and the “scientific pseudo-religion” of communism. But its days are numbered, since we are just too sceptical nowadays. This means that the old methods of quelling violence no longer work, and our world is becoming more dangerous. Hitler needed six million scapegoats to forge unity in a fractious German nation, where only a few once sufficed.

This risk of escalation beyond restraint provides Girard with his key for understanding the so-called apocalyptic (world-ending) literature of the Bible, such as the *Book of Revelation*.

Christians sometimes wonder if Girard seeks to alter or update their traditional faith. Those of keen conscience seek more clarity about what we must do differently as Christians and as a society if he is right.

Girard is not a theologian but a social scientist and prophet. It is theologians like me who have to join the dots, relating his thought to Christian belief and practice. I conclude with brief answers to those two questions—how this fits with Christian tradition, and what it implies for Christian action.

As for Christian tradition, Girard brings new insights into God's nature, our creation as desiring creatures tied together into families and societies, the distortion of our desires by envy and rivalry—which we call sin—and the violence by

which we risk destroying ourselves and yet manage to preserve ourselves.

Into this mix comes Jesus to expose and transform, *whose* death as our scapegoat also represents God's willingness to undergo the worst in order to release the best. The resurrection is real for Girard, and the Holy Spirit—a new world of possibilities opens for a Church freed from the fear and neediness of scarcity and death, and from the fearful making of victims.

What about Christian living, and the future of society? Girard believes that the lessons of Jesus' non-violent solidarity with victims, his fearless exposure of the self-righteousness based on "law" that builds inclusion on the basis of exclusion, and his seeking after God's desire over any human

desire, all represents a pattern that humanity must learn to follow if we are to have a future. There is no simple technique, apart from the conversion of our desires.

However, there is surely a special role for communities of people throughout the world who learn to share Jesus' desire, who let go of rivalry and violence, who stand up to evil rather than huddle in fear, and who give their own lives if need be rather than join in the universal game of tit for tat. How different might things be if such groups flourished, forming their members in the habits of cultural resistance?

The Church is called to be such a community. Its sacraments and liturgies shape our

imaginings over time. Withdrawal through contemplative prayer opens us to God's desire, displacing the temptations that distort our imagination. Christian fellowship gives us new role models worth following. Church discipline liberates us from the tyranny of bad habits and group-think, strengthening allegiance to Christ. We are sent out from the Eucharist "in peace, to love and serve the Lord", into a world where all we are learning and becoming is sorely needed.

The eulogy of grace

A recent book, *The Road To Character*, by David Brooks has opened a new page on the connection between language and grace in our contemporary society. Brooks is a columnist for the *New York Times*, "born," he says "with a natural disposition towards shallowness". He aims to express religious themes in secular language. The fact that a journalist was writing about moral character and touching on the spiritual in life represented a resolving connection between the word of the journalist and the word of faith.

Brooks wrote: "I work as a pundit and a columnist.... to volley my opinions, to appear more confident, to appear smarter and more authoritative than I really am".

Brooks admits to "living a life of vague moral aspiration, wanting to be good, wanting to serve some larger purpose, while lacking a complete moral vocabulary, a clear understanding of how to live a richer inner life and how it is anchored."

"We have left the moral traditions behind," he said. "We don't live for happiness...we live for holiness. One of the great gifts

of Christianity is simply the example of Christian joy lived out in a natural way." There is, he says, hunger to live meaningfully, to know the right vocabulary to use, what he called it "a moral imagination".

He traces human virtue throughout the centuries by profiling "heroes of renunciation" who he believes serve as models of character.

In an interview with the *Huntington Post* he said he was drawn to spirituality, a natural sense of the oneness of creation, the transcendental non-material realm, views that had deepened by reading theology.

Brooks goes on to identify two dimensions in communication and action: the **resume** virtues and the **eulogy** virtues. He explained that resume virtues are those that are valued in the contemporary market place. Eulogy virtues are the aspects of character that others praise when a person isn't around to hear it: humility, kindness, bravery.

He writes: "We know at our core that eulogy virtues and values are what matters more."

The depth of the lives of the historical figures he examines illustrates the eulogy virtues he seeks to recover and whose example may prove inspirational.

Brooks had told an evangelical Christian conference that "there's something just awesome about seeing somebody stand up and imitate and live the non-negotiable truth of Jesus Christ".

We know that homily originates from the Greek word *eulogia*, which means to praise somebody or something, a literary device that is laudatory expression, a communication of high praise to honour the dead in tribute and memory.

Brooks wrote: "Grace floods in, in the form of love from friends and family, the assistance of an unexpected stranger...or from God. Gratitude fills the soul and with it the desire to serve and give back." It was what the American author Marilyn Robinson had described as "that reservoir of goodness beyond and of another kind that we are able to do each other in the ordinary cause of things."

SERVICES

St Paul's

Sunday Services

7.00 am Holy Eucharist (Book of Common Prayer)

8.00 am Holy Eucharist (A Prayer Book for Australia)

10.00 am Holy Eucharist - Sung (A Prayer Book for Australia)

Choral Evensong

6.00pm Service of Choral Evensong on the third Sunday of the month, February to November

Prayers for Healing—

on the second Wednesday of the month immediately following the 10am Eucharist

Weekday Services

10 am Wednesday- Holy Eucharist

St David's

Sunday Service

8.30am - Holy Eucharist

Weekday Service

10 am Thursday- Holy Eucharist

ST PAUL'S PARISH COUNCIL

Members of St Paul's Parish Council are: The Venerable Dr Brian Douglas (presiding member), the Rev'd Canon John Campbell, Dr Ingrid Moses (Rector's Warden), Robert Deane, Peter McDermott (People's Wardens), Catherine Bohm, Christopher Deane, Peter Cumines, Sandy White, Mary Pollard (Parish Councillors), Duncan Anderson, Lorraine Litster (St. David's Wardens), Tony Ralli (Rector's appointment). Helen Raymond. (minute taker)

Items from the Diocesan web site are included with permission

THE LIGHT THAT SHONE OUT OF DARKNESS

William Cowper (1731-1800), *Complete Poetical Works*, Delphi Classics, 2014

Rev'd T S Grimshawse, *The works of*

William Cowper, His life, letters and poems, London, 1835

Rev'd W Benham, *Letters of William Cowper*, 1913 Classic Reprint Series

Lodwick Hartley, "The worm and the thorn: a study of Cowper's Olney Hymns, *Journal of Religion* Vol 29 No 3 1949

Anthony D Baker, "Our grass-stained wings: an essay on poetry and theology", *Anglican Theological Review*, Summer 2012 Vol 94 No 3

OUR EDITORIAL PURPOSE

In the service of the Parish, and recognising that communication is at the heart of our identity as a church, *Community* aims to connect people with God, with each other and with our wider community by sharing experiences through reflective dialogue.

Community seeks to create a sense of encounter and belonging, to build relationships within the church and beyond, to recognise the capacity of religion to nourish individual lives, and to reflect the unique position of St Paul's and St David's in the life of the Diocese and the nation.

It will do this through stories of the Parish, the Diocese and the wider Anglican communion that report, inform, and enlighten in ways relevant to its readers and be a window for others beyond the church to observe our participation as a vibrant Christian community.

As the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, said: "We believe in a God who speaks and calls, seeking to communicate more fully and effectively".

Community seeks the engagement of readers and contributors to reflect the richness and diversity of the Parish and to honour and proclaim an expression of faith in our life together.

Community

Produced by:	St Paul's Parish Council, Manuka, Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn
Serving:	St Paul's Manuka St David's Red Hill
Telephone:	02 62396148
Fax	02 62394079
Website:	http://www.stpaulsmanuka.org.au
E-mail:	office@stpaulsmanuka.org.au
Rector:	The Rev'd Dr Brian Douglas
St David's:	
Warden and Associate Priest	The Rev'd Canon John Campbell
Publication:	<i>Community</i> is available in print and electronic form on the St Paul's Parish web site or by e-mail.
Printed by:	MBE, Manuka
Editor:	George Menham E-mail: menhamg@ozemail.com.au
Requests:	Please contact St Paul's Parish Office.

© 2015 All rights reserved