

THE Melbourne Anglican

MAY 2024, No 635

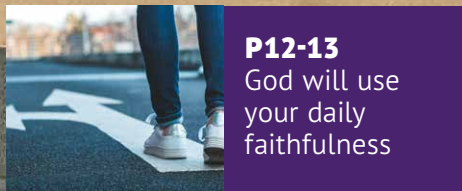
We can bless refugees if we act together

As wars and conflict grow across the world, more displaced people will seek asylum in Australia, Audrey Statham writes. Melbourne Anglicans must be equipped with knowledge, compassion, confidence and faith for discerning a just response to refugees. To do this, we must recover and sustain a social justice mission focus, and work with others to bless our city, Dr Statham writes.

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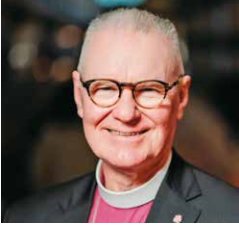
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‘Receive the Lord’s Prayer for the gift it is and pray it daily’

■ Archbishop Philip Freier

For something that is so personal and at the heart of the experience of the Christian, it is not remarkable that so much has been written about prayer over the years. This tells us that we are not unique in our desire to better embrace this dimension of spiritual intimacy with God.

In the middle of the Second World War, Dietrich Bonhoeffer published a small book about praying the psalms entitled, *Psalms: the Prayer Book of the Bible*. Bonhoeffer recognised that there is often a gap between our yearning to pray and finding the words to express that yearning. I can imagine that this is exactly what the disciples were experiencing when they asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11). They had been aware of Jesus’ own practice of prayer and desired to

participate in what they had observed. Like those disciples, Bonhoeffer receives the Lord’s Prayer as a great gift that carries yearning into words and spiritual practice. “Whatever is included in the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer is prayed aright; whatever is not included is no prayer. All the prayers of Holy Scripture are summarised in the Lord’s Prayer.”

Bonhoeffer is also a great advocate of prayer at the beginning of each day. He considered that many of the problems that weigh down a person throughout the day have their origin, “most often in the neglect of morning prayer.” It is surely true that mental and emotional turmoil have profound and far-reaching impact on us, not least of all in our disposition to pray. I recall many pastoral conversations that have revealed this tendency for us to hold our troubles to ourselves and, in the middle of these

troubles, not to pray. Counterintuitive, isn’t it, that when we most need God we often find it difficult to pray? Patterns of prayer that we embrace, whether we feel inspired or not, are a great gift as we make our way through all the experiences that make up our daily life.

Violet Teague’s 1921 painting, *Anzac Christmas* which now hangs in St Paul’s Cathedral is a visual encouragement to pray. Painted just three years after the end of the First World War she painted *Anzac Christmas* as a war memorial for St Peter’s Church, Kinglake. It is hard to imagine that time with soldiers and nurses returned from overseas with trauma fresh in their experience and so many family members still grieving for those who had been killed in battle. The memorial boards in many of our churches give us cause to contemplate this question. In that charged emotional environment, Violet Teague offered an image of two Australian “diggers” kneeling before a radiant infant Jesus in the stable of his birth in Bethlehem. Even the trauma of war could not prevent the expression of this foundational Christian experience.

I hope that you receive the Lord’s Prayer for the gift it is and pray this prayer daily. The liturgies of the Church properly give prominence to the Lord’s Prayer and it is right for us to join our prayers in this way on each occasion when we gather for corporate worship. Remember Bonhoeffer’s maxim, “Whatever is included in the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer is prayed aright”.

Vacant Appointments as of 29 April 2024:

St Alfred, Blackburn North (from September 2024); St Agnes, Black Rock; Christ Church, Brunswick; St Michael, North Carlton; St John, Camberwell; St Philip, Collingwood; Redemption Church, Craigieburn; Parish of Gisborne; St Albans, Hamlyn Heights (from June 2024); St Oswald’s, Glen Iris; St Thomas’, Langwarrin with St Peter’s, Pearcedale; Parish of Mornington -Mt Martha; Ormond Anglican Parish; St Aidan, Parkdale; Pascoe Vale-Oak Park; Mullum Mullum, Ringwood; St Luke, Vermont; St John, Wantirna South; St Thomas, Winchelsea

Appointments:

BISWAS, The Revd Argho, appointed Vicar (from Priest-in-Charge), Holy Trinity Hampton Park, effective 1 June 2024
CURLIS-GIBSON, The Revd Megan, appointed Archdeacon, Archdeaconry of Kew, effective 23 May 2024
DAVID, The Revd Sujit Soloman, appointed Vicar, St Stephen, Bayswater, effective 24 May 2024
FURPHY, The Revd Jennifer, appointed Vicar, St Paul, Geelong, effective 16 May 2024
GOODGER, The Reverend Kenneth Goodger, appointed Vicar, St Mark, Fitzroy, effective 7 May 2024
HALE, The Right Reverend Stephen John, appointed Mission Chaplain, Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, effective 22 April 2024
HANSFORD, The Revd Gavin, appointed Vicar, St Thomas, Werribee, effective 16 April 2024
KNIGHT, The Reverend Philip Wesley Graham, appointed Area Dean extension, Deanery of Knox, effective 29 April 2024
LITTRAS, The Revd Shirley Alison, appointed Vicar (from Priest-in-Charge), St Stephen, Belmont, effective 27 May 2024
LOUGHREY, The Revd Canon Glenn William, appointed Project Leader to further the Indigenous Ministry of the Anglican Province of Victoria, and Parish Minister and Cathedral Canon to St Paul’s Cathedral, effective 3 April 2024
MILLER, The Revd Rebecca Jane, appointed Parish Minister, Anglican Parish of Merri Creek, effective 26 March 2024
NADEEM, The Revd Ernest, appointed Vicar, St Aidan, Noble Park, effective on a date yet to be confirmed.
SHARROCK, The Venerable Dianne Ruth, appointed Archdeacon extension, Archdeaconry of Box Hill, effective 18 July 2024
TRIST, The Revd Canon Dr Richard McLeod, appointed Chaplain to the Anglican Institute Ridley College, Melbourne, effective 9 April 2024
WALTERS, The Revd Wayne Peter, appointed Vicar (from Priest-in-Charge), St Michael & All Angels’, Beaumaris, effective 11 August 2024
WEBSTER, The Revd Elizabeth Kaye, appointed Parish Minister (from Assistant Curate), St Hilary’s Kew, North Balwyn and Mont Albert North, effective 9 April 2024

Permission to Officiate:

DAVEY, The Revd Dr Richard, appointed Permission to Officiate within the Diocese of Melbourne, effective 10 April 2024
KELLETON, The Revd Joel Anthony, appointed Permission to Officiate within the Diocese of Melbourne, effective 8 April 2024
MACPHERSON, The Revd Peter Aggarwal, appointed Permission to Officiate within the Diocese of Melbourne, effective 1 October 2024
OLLINGTON, The Revd Bruce Rodney, appointed Permission to Officiate within the Diocese of Melbourne, effective 1 May 2024

Resignations:

TAYLOR, The Revd Jonathan Charles, Incumbent, St Albans, Hamlyn Heights, effective 23 June 2024

Obituaries:

MORGAN, The Revd Thomas, 28 March 2024
STEWART, The Right Revd John Craig, 4 April 2024

Clergy Moves



THE Melbourne Anglican



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Ballarat residents rally against men's violence after three women were killed in the area.

Picture: AAP/Con Chronis

'We haven't acted forcefully enough': Ballarat churches face men's violence

■ Jenan Taylor

Ballarat Anglicans are grappling with how to fight gendered violence after the killings of three women triggered a wave of unease and fear in the community.

Thousands of people marched through Ballarat in April, calling for an end to violence against women and mourning the victims Samantha Murphy, Hannah McGuire and Rebecca Young.

They were among 28 Australian women killed in violent incidents in 2024 to date, according to research group Counting Dead Women.

Ballarat churches said they needed to do more to help break the pattern of violence.

Church members said the community was uneasy, fear-filled and angry.

They said most people's conversations centred on safety worries for themselves and for loved ones, and a growing reluctance to be in public spaces, even in daylight.

Some parishes held public candle-light vigils and offered individuals counselling in response to the killings.

Ballarat Dean the Very Reverend Michael Davies said not enough had been done in the diocese in response to the pattern of violence.

Father Davies said more practical action was needed beyond upholding intercessory prayers for the women and their loved ones.

He said social action, including being

more vocal about zero tolerance for family violence, would make the church more visible and better able to engage with the community.

St Matthew's Wendouree parishioner and rally participant Alison Donaldson said she wanted the church to speak up about the need for more respect for women.

Mrs Donaldson said many fellow protestors talked about how unsafe they felt on the streets even during daylight, and how afraid they were for their daughters.

She said many were frustrated that they were asking their girls to be careful and cover up, when it was many boys that needed to be better educated.

Mrs Donaldson said she hoped the church would start initiatives that did this, and which showed people that churches were safe places.

She said efforts where people felt safe to talk about what was bothering them could remind people about God's love and the peace He offered.

Ballarat bishop's chaplain the Reverend Chris Keast said he wanted the church to tackle the culture towards women in schools, sporting clubs and other groups.

Mr Keast said unless something was done to confront and challenge the next generation about their attitudes towards women, gender violence would keep happening.

He said the events had unearthed

trauma for many parishioners who grew up in domestic abuse situations and until now believed they had put those memories behind them.

"There's real disappointment that people are still going through it. We haven't acted forcefully enough on this issue," Mr Keast said.

He said offering early mental health and trauma-informed care for people trapped in degrading and violent relationships could also change the pattern.

Mr Keast said he hoped the church would also encourage people to confront gendered behaviour.

Women's Health Grampians said calling people out helped dismantle the structures around gender inequality which was vital in helping to prevent violence.

Manager Strategy and Programs Rose Durey said WHG had received many enquiries from men's groups and sporting clubs about how to better educate men since the rally.

She said this was a tipping point because women had been talking about and acting on the issue for years.

Now more men were realising that violence against women was a men's problem, Ms Durey said.

If you or anyone you know needs help, please call 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732).

In an emergency please phone triple zero (000).

‘Gay and Pray’ guide to build bridges

■ Jenan Taylor

The Bendigo diocese hopes to make LGBTQIA+ people feel safer in church through a new handbook based on learnings from a parish program.

The Gay and Pray ministry started as response to the harms LGBTQIA+ people faced and their high suicide rates, at the Woodend and Daylesford parishes.

Bendigo synod members endorsed it as a program that could help churches develop a welcoming and understanding attitude toward the community four years later.

Lessons from the program will form a large part of a handbook to be published by the diocese in November.

Founder and former Christ Church Daylesford vicar the Reverend Neil Fitzgerald said the handbook was a way for churches to make amends with, and be an ally to, a community that suffered enormously from being marginalised and excluded.

He said he believed having a resource to enable better engagement with LGBTQIA+ people would help the church break down barriers with the gay community.

Mr Fitzgerald said the positive response from LGBTQIA+ people and the church encouraged him to develop the handbook.

It will give churches the terminology, concepts and statistics to be more confident about providing an inclusive space for LGBTQIA+ people.

“[The handbook]’s a big part of making people feel welcome and secure enough to start building bridges.”

Neil Fitzgerald

Mr Fitzgerald said it was about equipping staff and congregant with the confidence to make a connection with LGBTQIA+ people.

“It’s a resource for people to read and feel able to say, ‘Okay, now we can open up the conversation. Tell me, tell me about yourself.’ That’s a big part of making people feel welcome and secure enough to start building bridges,” Mr Fitzgerald said. “If church members find themselves

in the position where they can’t help, they can then suggest council and community services that can.”

Daylesford parishioner and initiative co-developer Jenny Jordan said she had LGBTQIA+ family members who suffered terribly because of social prejudice, and the manual was her passion project.

Mrs Jordan said she believed the church should be a welcoming and safe place for LGBTQIA+ people because Jesus never turned people away, especially those facing difficulty.

She said the plan was to roll out the manual to congregations across the diocese and hopefully present workshops to members to encourage people to act on it.

Bendigo Bishop Matt Brain said it was a project that gave people who might often feel excluded by some churches the encouragement to engage with God again.

He said churches ought to be well prepared to meet people whatever their circumstances and project was part of that response.

Bishop Brain said the diocese was always happy to share its resources, including the Gay and Pray program, wherever people might them useful.



Matildas fever boosts women's Christian teams

■ Jenan Taylor

More women and girls than ever have joined faith-based, grassroots soccer clubs in Victoria in the last year, a church sport governing body says.

Soccer has long been dominated by men but Football Australia reported the Women's World Cup 2023 contributed to a surge in women participants in many grassroots clubs.

The Victorian Churches Football Association said the number of women's teams launched at its clubs this year was the largest since the association started including women about two decades ago.

Women's chair Christina Hanger said there were 21 teams in the VCFA seniors competition section this year, compared to 14 at the start of 2023.

Ms Hanger said many women chose to play in a faith-based environment because of the meaningful connections it gave them, alongside safe opportunities to learn and exercise soccer skills.

She said participants ranged from driven young girls who felt inspired by the Matildas footballers to mums and older women who just wanted friendship, fun and fitness.



Victoria's faith-based soccer clubs are seeing a surge in interest from women and girls.

Picture: supplied

Professional standards set to come before special synod

■ Jenan Taylor

Synod members will consider professional standards legislation to make sure Melbourne and Bendigo dioceses meet their legal child safety obligations in a special June session.

Delegates will consider the *Professional Standards Uniform Legislation Amendment Bill 2024* during the 1 June meeting.

The registrar will also give a presentation on the legislative process for the election of a new archbishop at the end of business on the day.

The professional standards bill amends two pieces of legislation found in the *Professional Standards Uniform Act Adoption Act 2016*.

Most of the amendments proposed are to the *Professional Standards Uniform Act 2016*, which is used by the Melbourne and Bendigo dioceses. The bill also seeks to make minor amendments to the *Adoption Act*.

Business papers say the main purposes of the changes are to:

- Extend the definition of misconduct.
- Require a lay church worker to hold a clearance for service before holding or performing the work of a prescribed role, office or position.
- Update powers and functions of the Professional Standards Board, Professional Standards Committee and the Office of Professional Standards.
- Update drafting to use gender-neutral language.
- Make minor and technical amendments.

The amendments will help ensure that dioceses using the *Uniform Act* meet their obligations for child safety under secular law. The changes been developed in consultation with Kooyoora and the professional standards bodies.

Delegates will also be asked to consider the *Archbishopric Legislation Amendment Bill 2024* to make the legislation wording

clearer and tighter, remove gender-specific language and provisions now superseded.

The Bill contains amendments to the *Melbourne Archbishopric Act 1980*, the *Melbourne Anglican Diocesan Corporation Act 2015*, the *Archbishop Election Act 2022* and the *Financial Governance Act 2015*.

The special synod will also consider the *Statute Law Amendment Bill 2024* which seeks to amend the *Archbishop in Council Act 2016*, the *Parish Governance Act 2013*.

Representatives have also been invited to an optional pre-special synod online consultation about the *Professional Standards Uniform Legislation Amendment Bill* and the *Archbishopric Legislation Amendment Bill 2024*, on 16 May.

The special synod will take place in person at St Paul's Cathedral, and will end when the business is concluded.

Teleconference arrangements will be available for people who have a disability or medical condition that prevents them attending in person.

Growing plan to help Church live values

■ **Elsbeth Kernebone**

A Christian non-profit plans to ask big questions of the church's balance sheets as it enters a new phase.

Manna Gum hopes to expand its work from an individual level to a church and political level, helping organisations reclaim a biblical understanding of material life and translating this to contemporary Christian practice.

Co-founder Jonathan Cornford said Manna Gum's next phase would address how churches and Christian ministries thought about and used money.

Dr Cornford said the way the church structured itself financially was vital to its public and moral credibility, to the world and its members – and revealed its true values.

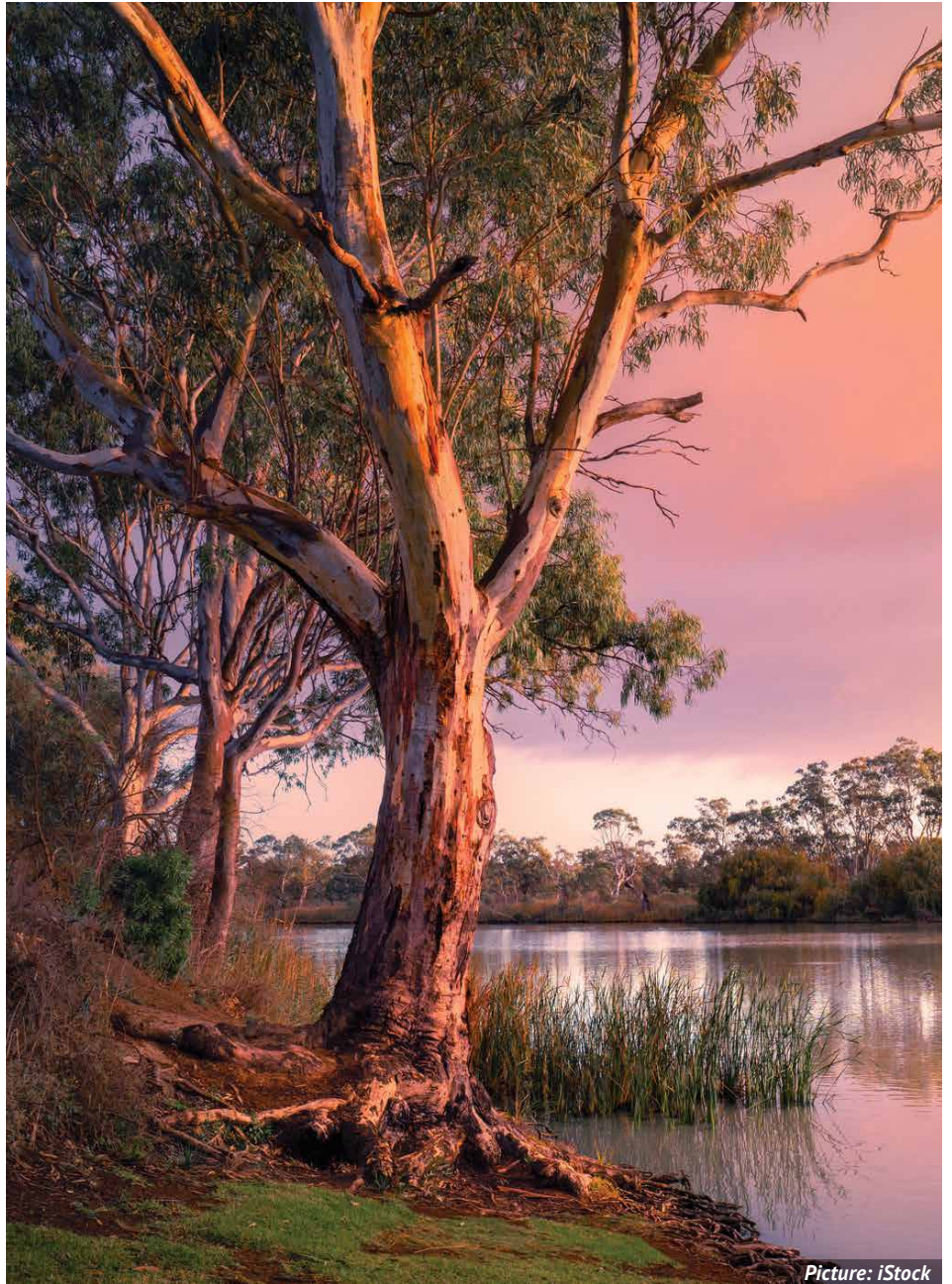
He said churches needed to ask what effect economic arrangements had on the outside world. The church was called to start to become what the world should be, rather than waiting on government, he said.

Dr Cornford said he was also keen to start thinking about how Christians influenced the economic systems in which they lived, such as the politics of economic life.

"How we think about standards of living, and how we embody that work in our economic communities, is really critical to the broader world in terms of the changes. We might need to think about major changes to the modern consumer lifestyle," Dr Cornford said.

"We can't call for a world of rapid decarbonisation, if we haven't been prepared to take hard changes ourselves to adapt our performance."

Dr Cornford said Manna Gum saw its role as pushing forward these questions, and analysis, as well as ideas around solutions.



Picture: iStock

He said Manna Gum hoped to communicate through its written work, its podcast, and through speaking and teaching.

He said Manna Gum was open to being

contacted by individual or church leaders who wanted to engage with its resources.

More information is available at: mannagum.org.au

Free course offers chance to learn about Bible, theology

■ **Jenan Taylor**

Christians have the chance to better understand the Bible and theology through free certificate study at a Melbourne theological college.

Ridley College will make all its current and future Ridley Certificate subjects free from the start of May, including an overview of the Bible.

Acting principal the Reverend Dr Andy Judd said the college decided to offer the opportunity after thousands took up its no cost online courses during the pandemic.

Dr Judd said that enthusiasm made Ridley think being able to provide the study course for free could benefit more people.

He said another goal was to expand its ability to serve more Christians from

non-English speaking communities, through translating the study materials into more languages, including Mandarin.

Dr Judd said the college wanted to make sure all brothers and sisters in the Church were able to be catered for given its growing numbers of multicultural members.

To find out more, see certificate.ridley.edu.au



Anglicare Victoria will be able to supply an extra day's hot breakfasts each week thanks to the Melbourne Grammar students' efforts.

Picture: supplied

Hot breakfast boon thanks to students

■ **Elsbeth Kernebone**

Hot breakfasts will be served an extra day a week to people experiencing homelessness in Melbourne thanks to the fundraising efforts of Melbourne Grammar students.

Ross House students raised a record amount, nearly \$11,000, through a sleep-out on their campus.

The effort was inspired by their volunteer program, in which they serve hot breakfasts to people experiencing homelessness, at Anglicare Victoria's inner city breakfast program.

Teachers say their volunteer work for the program has built empathy and encouraged them to help further, as they saw they could make a real difference in others' lives.

Anglicare Victoria Homelessness Support team leader Jack Brookes said he saw students understand that being homeless wasn't an individual failing and that they could help people in that situation, through their volunteering.

He said understanding that anyone could experience homelessness was valuable for students, who were thinking about what they would do after high school and how to make a difference in their community.

Mr Brookes said it was striking that a lot of the students wanted to come back, to volunteer further.

Melbourne Grammar School Ross House head Ali McWhirter said seeing someone else's background through volunteering, grew students' ability to consider that experience in their interactions.

Mr McWhirter said fundraising also gave the students a sense of achievement, which encouraged them to do more.

He said through volunteering, students had learnt they could build helping others into their lives.

Melbourne Grammar Ross House captain Archie Stoney said hearing from Anglicare that Victoria was one of the places with the fastest growing rate of homelessness drove the fundraising.

Archie said everyone connected with the school community supported the fundraising efforts, from friends, to family.

He hoped this would lead to other schools or groups picking up the cause.

Through the Melbourne Grammar fundraising, Anglicare Victoria has been able to open an extra day a week of hot breakfasts for the year.

The breakfast program supplies hot breakfasts to people sleeping rough or in crisis accommodation.

Mr Brookes said it offered community and belonging for people who came, which they struggled to find elsewhere.

For many, the workers at the breakfast are the first people they see after a night on the street.

Mr Brookes said the relationships they formed were a way to break down barriers between people experiencing homelessness and workers, as a step towards accessing services.



Diners at St Stephen's and St Mary's fundraising dinner.

Picture: supplied

Dining for a difference: Anglicans give to Gaza hospital

■ Jenan Taylor

Melbourne Christians hope to save lives at a Gaza Christian hospital through raising funds for its patients' treatment.

The Al-Ahli Arab Hospital was bombed in October 2023, but has continued to operate despite the devastation.

St Stephen's and St Mary's Mount Waverley held a fundraising dinner to help the hospital rebuild some of its major programs recently, including its specialist cancer initiatives.

Organiser and parishioner Irene Donohoue-Clyne said they hoped to help severely malnourished children, and marginalised women access breast cancer treatment.

"There's a huge need for medical

services especially to help the severely malnourished children, and for breast cancer services," Dr Donohoue-Clyne said. "The people in Gaza have hope this can be changed, and are heartened by international aid getting through."

The event raised \$5000. Dr Donohoue-Clyne said it was a fraction of the funds needed to help people in Gaza, but she believed it would make a difference. She said the funds would be expedited to the hospital through Anglican Overseas Aid.

AOA Disaster Response and Resilience coordinator Tim Hartley said support and encouragement mattered more than ever for the hospital and people still caught up in the crisis.

Mr Hartley said some of Al-Ahli Arab's staff were killed in the last fortnight and

there were growing concerns about the crisis escalating if Iran became involved.

He said the hospital was managing to provide about US\$300 per patient in inpatient services and US\$100 per patient in outpatient services.

Mr Hartley said AOA helped support its breast screening and mammography facility, and funds forwarded there usually covered immediate needs like fuel, water, food, anaesthetic and bandages.

Dr Donohoue-Clyne said the fund-raising dinner also aimed to educate parishioners about what was going on in the Holy Land, beyond what the media reported.

To donate to Anglican Overseas Aid visit bit.ly/AlAhliAOA.

Poetry gatherings offer faith insight at St Peter's

■ Jenan Taylor

Melburnians have the chance to discuss the connections between faith and poetry during a series of talks at St Peter's Eastern Hill.

The Poets and the Faith sessions feature the work of poets aligned with the Anglican and Catholic traditions, including Annie Dillard and Denise Levertov.

They are presented by a range of local and international Christian lovers of poetry such as former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams.

Assistant vicar the Reverend Kathryn Bellhouse said the offerings sought to enrich understandings about belief, the poets and their compositions.

Ms Bellhouse said poetry could convey insights into the world, life, faith and God in a deeply personal way while imparting a new perspective on an eternal truth.

She said participants also had the chance to hear how it had enriched the lives and faith journeys of the presenters.

Ms Bellhouse said participants at the first session heard how Gerard Manly Hopkins's work had played a part in

presenter theologian Professor Dorothy Lee's spiritual journey.

She said despite being a medium that both people of faith and non-believers could appreciate, there was a dearth of opportunities where people could gather to engage with it.

"It's meant to be read aloud in community, unlike a novel. Most forms of poetry are there to be shared," Ms Bellhouse said.

The sessions run monthly at St Peter's Eastern Hill until November.

For more details, see stpeters.org.au/poets.



Marchers at Melbourne's Palm Sunday Walk for Justice for Refugees.

Picture: Paul Dunn

Palestinian refugees need better visas: Advocates

■ Jenan Taylor

Advocates want the Australian government to grant Palestinian refugees visas that allow them to work and access Medicare and Centrelink supports, because they face additional hardship otherwise.

Refugees face increased trauma, anxiety and the chance of developing mental illness from having no accommodation, work rights, or access to financial help.

The Australian government offered 2273 visitor visas to Palestinian refugees and 2415 to Israeli citizens who met all visa requirements, between 7 October and 6 February this year.

The visitor visas allow people to stay for up to 12 months and are for tourists to visit family and friends or go on cruises.

Advocates said the visas were inadequate for people fleeing conflict, and provided no work rights or access to Medicare or Centrelink support.

The council said tourist visas could be cancelled at any time because the refugees could fail to meet visa criteria assessments, in a recent letter to the government.

Palestinian Christians in Australia said the refugees needed a better class of visa such as a bridging visa, that would allow them to work, access support and feel more secure.

PCiA president Suzan Wahhab said the refugees her organisation helped had lost everything and arrived with barely any money.

Ms Wahhab said families were displaying signs of additional anxiety and hopelessness because they had no work rights, and couldn't afford shelter without government support.

"They are being granted a visitor visa

when they are not tourists who are here to see the Opera House. They are real refugees who have lost everything," Ms Wahhab said.

She said some people on 12-month visitor visas depended on the charity for money for rent and food.

The Australia Palestine Advocacy Network said the government initially encouraged Palestinians to apply for visitor visas to enable them to quickly leave Gaza.

Network president Nasser Mashni said APAN was alarmed when the Australian government then rejected many visa applications from Palestinians because it didn't accept they intended to stay temporarily in Australia.

Mr Mashni said Palestinian refugees should receive the same urgent support and care levels the Australian government extended to Ukraine refugees.

But Amnesty International said the context in which the Palestinian refugees were arriving in Australia was more complicated than during the previous situation with Ukraine and even Afghanistan.

Refugee Rights advisor Graham Thom said after the government's initial intake of refugees from those crises, thousands more were funnelled into humanitarian programs with limited places.

He said many people endured long waits to reunite with family, or eventually were transferred on to visa classes with no access to support.

Dr Thom said the speed with which the Hamas-Israel conflict developed led the Australian government to develop arrangements in a short time frame.

Some arrangements were constrained because people trying to leave Gaza also

had to get the Israeli government and sometimes the Egyptian governments to sign off on papers.

He said it created a bottleneck for thousands of refugees and a context that was different to what had happened in Afghanistan and Ukraine.

"We sent planes into Kabul to do an emergency rescue out of the airport for people, but Australia can't do that in Gaza. The Israelis won't let them even if Australia wanted to do that. Similarly, in Ukraine, people could cross the border into Poland or any neighbouring country because those borders were open. They could then apply for a visa to Australia and get on a plane to get here," Dr Thom said.

"That's not the situation for people wanting to get out of Gaza. There's a whole different layer and a situation we've never seen before."

Ms Wahhab said the PCiA had become a settlement service for Palestinian refugees since October because it could not find organisations who were funded to help them.

She said it was focused on helping refugee families find places to live and get their children to school, and planned to get them help for post-traumatic stress.

Ms Wahhab said the Orthodox and Uniting churches, along with people in the wider community were helping with donations, but they needed government support for the refugees.

In early April the immigration minister Andrew Giles announced the government would provide \$2 million in emergency financial relief for visa holders from significantly affected areas in Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories.

What we need in a new archbishop

The diocese faces the important task of electing an archbishop following the retirement of Archbishop Philip Freier, no later than February 2025. Unity and diversity forum Victorian Anglicans Together recently ran a gathering to discuss the role of the Board of Nominators in the process, that will begin in August.

We invited five members of previous boards of nominators to share their reflections, to assist members of the incoming board. It was a broad and distinguished group: Michael Dowling, Dr Muriel Porter, the Reverend David Powys, Colin Reilly and Professor Peter Sherlock.

The gathering expressed a keen awareness of the very different climate in which the life of the church in Melbourne is expressed and what this means for the election.

We hope the diocese provides an opportunity for synod members to discuss these issues in advance of the election.

As one might expect, we want an archbishop to be a good teacher and preacher, to be above reproach, to honour Anglican polity and its different strands that provide for its richness, and to have

the ability to communicate clearly, with depth and understanding of the Christian life and teaching.

The gathering explored various ideas including an openness to consideration of those not usually elected to the role. Perhaps the electoral synod would do well to include consideration of clergy who are not already bishops or persons of high ecclesiastical status. Perhaps there should be more openness to candidates who already know and understand this diocese.

The gathering also expressed an awareness that other qualities needed include the leadership capacity to inspire, unite, motivate, and foster others, and to address differing problems as they arise. They include a capacity to consult, but also be decisive, leading in a way that conserves resources and releases them for mission and growth.

We also felt that an understanding of modern society, so different even from 2006, was important. We all want someone who can speak of and commend Christ powerfully to Melbournians as well as to the already committed members of the church.

Above all, the electoral synod needs to look past single issues and questions of church tribal allegiance and asks which candidates might be affirmed rather than blocked.

If we do this, the election synod may find its task easier to better discern the man or woman of God's calling equipped to meet the challenge of leading our diocese from 2025.

Father Stuart Soley

President Victorian Anglicans Together

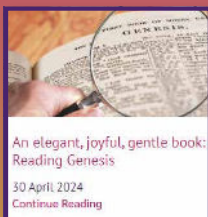
THE Melbourne Anglican

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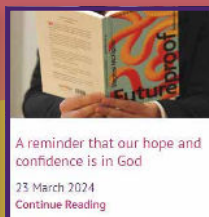
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We must urgently recover a social justice mission focus

Picture: iStock

■ Audrey Statham

As wars grow across the globe, the Australian Anglican Church must prepare to better support more refugees.

To do this, we must endeavour collectively and individually to articulate a distinctive Christian and Anglican perspective on the ethical, social, technological, ecological and economic challenges we now face.

At the recent Palm Sunday Walk for Justice for refugees, more than 350 people gathered to call for peace and for just treatment of people seeking asylum in Australia.

Among them were Melbourne Anglicans, other church, community and school groups, and many from other faiths or not affiliated with religion.

The event highlighted the urgent need for the federal government to abolish long-standing, unjust refugee policies. For instance, the former government's "Fast Track System" has left about 10,000 people in limbo, some for over a decade, due to backlogs and delays in processing applications.

The event highlighted that people on bridging visas who live in precarious conditions need basic income support while they wait for their refugee claims to be assessed.

And it highlighted that many people on temporary protection visas are still waiting to be given permanency, despite Labor's February 2023 promise to do this.

I was struck by the potential of this collective effort to bring together Australians to reflect on how refugee policy affects us all, that it shapes our society.

As it becomes harder to discern online real from fake, we need such communal spaces. In these spaces, people are free to decide the merits of a case based on arguments presented by people that one can question.

As wars increase globally, more displaced persons and asylum seekers will inevitably seek refuge in Australia.

Melbourne Anglicans must be equipped with the knowledge, compassion, confidence and faith for discerning just responses to the claims and needs of refugees.

This will depend on creating public forums such as this where people can engage in robust dialogue, and debate about what kind of society Australia is becoming.

We must ask what role Anglicans have in bringing about a more just and compassionate future for asylum seekers and other vulnerable people.

At the walk, Tamil asylum seeker Geetha Ramachandran described the warm welcome she received from communities she passed through on her 640 kilometre walk to Canberra, to raise awareness about the devastating effects of the "Fast Track" system.

The kindness shown by those strangers contrasted starkly with the cruel indifference Geetha and her family experienced under the "Fast Track" bureaucracy, which has failed for 10 years to process her asylum application.

It brought home to me that empathy with refugees, which can lead to compassionate action on their behalf, can be activated through people listening first-hand and responding to those with lived experience.

I hope our whole diocese can promote awareness of the Walk for Justice.

We must also do more to support collaboration between parishes, and with community groups on social justice issues.

Many Melbourne churches already faithfully carry out this work but are siloed from each other and church welfare agencies.

As Anglicans we could play a vital part in fostering a climate of trust in Melbourne if we created communal forums between

parishes, schools and neighbourhoods.

Inviting people of all ages, backgrounds and traditions to connect, reflect and decide how to act together to make change at the local level would nurture hope in dark times.

The same can be said for other causes for the good of our society, such as the environment, First Nations justice, lay ministry in workplaces, disability and inclusivity.

We might not agree on all points, but forums would build connections between parishes and empower Anglicans to create theologically-informed plans for building a more just community.

The upcoming election of a new archbishop is also an opportunity for us all to call on the Board of Nominators to prioritise a commitment to justice and collaboration in considering candidates.

And, through working with other faith communities we can cultivate an outward-going disposition of hospitality towards other religions while demonstrating our Christian faith in action.

As a Church, we urgently need to recover and sustain a social justice mission focus. Living justly (Micah 6:8) is integral to our heeding the gospel imperative to love "in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18) by following the Spirit's leading to serve our communities.

We, the people of God, can be a blessing to this city if we create forums for reflection and grassroots collaboration. Through this we can care for and with those in need, refugees and the vulnerable in our own immediate circles, neighbourhoods, parishes, diocese and beyond.

Dr Audrey Statham is a member of the Social Responsibilities Committee and represents the SRC on the organising committee for the Melbourne Palm Sunday Walk for Justice.

‘Ordinary faithfulness’ challenges and encourages us in our Christian walk

■ **Bec Muir**

You might have heard the economic advice, “Look after the pennies, and the pounds will take care of themselves.”

The idea behind this adage is that if you learn to be careful with the small financial decisions, you will naturally be careful with the big financial decisions. I believe that it is similar with faithfulness. It is easy to focus on the big-ticket faithfulness items, like being faithful to my spouse, or not stealing, or giving regularly at church. Or perhaps, when we think about being faithful to God, we think about how many conversations we have had about Jesus to neighbours or colleagues, or how often we have a quiet time, or whether we have been on a short-term mission trip. However, when we start looking at what the Bible says about faithfulness, we are also called to practise what I call “ordinary faithfulness”. These are the daily opportunities to make a choice to be faithful to Jesus and his values, rather than doing things our own way. It is about being faithful in the everyday details of life.

In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, Jesus has a lot to say about righteousness or faithful living. It is helpful to notice what Jesus focuses on. He talks about not insulting our brother in anger, rather than just not murdering someone (5:21-22). He talks about not ogling lustfully, rather than just not entering into an extramarital affair (5:27-28). He talks about speaking truthfully,

rather than making grandiose oaths that might give us loopholes (5:33-37)*.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is concerned with our heart attitudes, not just our actions. But He’s also concerned with daily faithfulness, with choosing to do what is right in the details of our lives, not just in the big things. It is easy to kid ourselves that we are doing ok because we acted with integrity in the big financial decision at work, and ignore the unfair angry outbursts to the family in the evening after a stressful day.

“God is not asking you to serve Him like someone else does. He is asking you to be faithful in the circumstances He has placed you in, trusting that He will provide all that you need to do that.”

Another theme connected to ordinary faithfulness is the idea of being faithful in the circumstances we find ourselves in. In Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus addressed seven churches in Asia Minor. He addressed the individual situation of each church, calling them to be faithful in their specific context.

For the Christians in Ephesus, this looked like remembering their first love and reviving their initial faithfulness (Revelation 2:2-7). For the Christians in Smyrna, it looked like being faithful to death in a coming persecution (Revelation 2:8-11). For the Christians in Thyatira who had not been drawn in by false teaching, Jesus said He would not lay any additional burden on them (Revelation 2:18-29). For the Christians in Laodicea, faithfulness looked like repentance and allowing Jesus back in (Revelation 3:14-22). Ordinary faithfulness will look different for different people in different contexts. God is not asking you to live for Him the way someone else does. He asks you to present yourself, with your faith, your gifts, your abilities, as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-8).

Back in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus talks about the need to trust God, to seek his kingdom and righteousness, trusting that God will take care of you. God is the one who sees you, who is attentive to your needs, who asks you in the middle of those needs to prioritise faithfulness, to seek the kingdom and righteousness. It is easy to become discouraged in the circumstances life throws at us. Ill health, or opposition, or financial stress, or aging parents, or any number of stresses can all make faithfulness seem harder. We can compare our capacity with someone else’s capacity, or our gifts with someone else’s gifts, and feel inadequate in our ability to serve God faithfully. However,

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God is not asking you to serve Him like someone else does. He is asking you to be faithful in the circumstances He has placed you in, trusting that He will provide all that you need to do that.

In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus says that many will come boasting of the great things they have done for Him, and He will say "I never knew you." *I never knew you.* How can we be the people that Jesus does know, who He welcomes with a smile, who He greets by name? Notice in these verses that what is *not* important is how impressive your ministry is. It is whether you do the will of God.

The idea of "ordinary faithfulness" can give us a challenge and an encouragement. The challenge is to pay attention to the

daily opportunities for faithfulness. Don't just focus on the big, impressive ways to serve God. Be listening to the Spirit's prompting in the day-to-day opportunities to do things God's way, in the details of life. Be seeking to cultivate godliness in the small things. Don't kid yourself that they don't really matter.

And the encouragement is that God cares about those daily acts of faithfulness. God is pleased with them. When He sees you put in the effort to guard your words or to be patient with your friend or to resist temptation, God celebrates. This is what matters to God, more than how many people you convert or how many church rosters you are on.

You see, it's God's project to build the

kingdom, not yours. But when you are seeking to be faithful to Him each day, in the circumstances He has placed you in, He will use you in ways you don't expect. He doesn't need a Christian superstar. He wants you, in your ordinary life, choosing ordinary, daily, deliberate faithfulness. That's a person Jesus knows. That's a person God will use. That's a person who, having been faithful in the small details, can be counted on to be faithful in the big things too.

* Jesus seems to be referring here to the Pharisee's debate about which oaths were more or less binding. This debate is recorded in the Mishnah, third division, Nedarim.

Bec Muir is assistant faculty at Ridley College and is working on a PhD in the New Testament.

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New models of evolution are fruitful for

In this article, Victoria Lorrimar, a fellow of ISCAST – “Science and Faith in Conversation,” has some surprising news: science’s own view of evolution is changing. Christians need to keep up with these recent developments if we are to engage intelligently in the science-faith space.

Hear the term “evolution” and there is a good chance you will think of Charles Darwin, who in the 19th century proposed the now widely accepted claim that all biological life evolved from a single common ancestor.

According to Darwin, evolution occurs by a process of natural selection. That is, genetic mutations which produce physiological changes that advantage an individual’s survival increase in a population over time, due to the greater reproductive success of those with the mutation. The theory of natural selection revolutionised scientific understanding. But its appropriation in non-scientific contexts has led to deeply troubling developments such as the eugenics movement.

For a Christian faith, there are challenges too. The theory of evolution by natural selection emphasises randomness and a lack of foresight, and frames all living things as fundamentally competitive with one another. For some (though by no means all) Christians, the randomness of natural selection cannot be reconciled with a God who creates lovingly and intentionally, and providentially sustains that creation. Furthermore, the long timescale of Darwin’s evolution and the geological record do not accord with an interpretation of the Scriptures that sees Genesis 1 as a chronologically precise recounting of the earth’s beginning.

For others, these tensions do not present insurmountable differences. Even so, pressure points remain between theological commitments and insights from evolution-

ary sciences. For example, how do we think about sin, and the emergence of moral culpability, in an evolutionary context? Or how do we make sense of the violence inherent in the natural world, that nature is “red in tooth and claw” as Tennyson put it? Or, if there is an element of randomness, blindness even, to evolution, then how do we understand the agency of God as creator and sustainer of all things?

I don’t have the answers to all these questions, but they are worth wrestling with. Importantly, scientific understandings of evolution have themselves evolved, making recent trajectories in evolutionary theory ripe for theological reflection. In what follows, I will outline the Extended Evolutionary Synthesis and indicate a few areas in which engaging with the EES might expand our theological horizons*.

The Extended Evolutionary Synthesis is so named because it extends (or in some places challenges) the “modern synthesis” – the traditional understanding of evolution that combined Darwin’s ideas of natural selection with Gregor Mendel’s discovery of genetic heredity. The EES draws on insights from newer fields such as evolutionary developmental biology and molecular genetics. It expands the modern synthesis by including aspects such as:

- 1. Multiple levels of selection.** While the modern synthesis understood natural selection to occur solely at the level of individual genes, the EES acknowledges that selection can occur at organism and group levels as well.



Victoria Lorrimar.

- 2. Epigenetics.** Epigenetics studies heritable changes that are not actually encoded in an individual’s DNA. These include modifications to how genes are regulated, and explain how some characteristics relating to the way genes are expressed can be passed on from generation to generation even though the DNA itself is unaltered. The modern synthesis was only able to explain how genetic material was selected for and passed on to subsequent generations. Epigenetics has been gaining attention recently in relation to intergenerational transmission of trauma, for example, in relation to past famines.
- 3. Niche construction.** This occurs when an organism modifies its environment (that is, it constructs a niche) to influence its own evolutionary fitness in that environment. Beavers constructing dams, which then alter the ecological environment, is a classic example. The identification of niche construction moves away from the more passive understanding of organisms in the modern synthesis to

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Christian engagement

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framing them as having more agency in the evolutionary process.

The EES incorporates other new emphases in addition to these examples, and it is important to note that there is ongoing debate within the evolutionary sciences over the legitimacy and necessity of the EES compared with standard models of evolution. These debates notwithstanding, here are a few reasons why I think the EES is a helpful idea for theological reflection:

It acknowledges the significant role of culture in evolution. Particularly in the concept of niche construction, the agency of organisms for shaping the conditions of their biological evolution is attested. Through such mechanisms, culture can be a source of rapid biological evolution. Humans have constructed a rich cultural niche that includes science, technology, and art – as well as worldviews and religious beliefs. There are all kinds of interesting conversations underway about the evolutionary implications of religion that continue to

advance science-faith dialogue.

It permits the language of purpose. Traditionally, the language of “teleology” (that is, goal-directed behaviour) was eschewed in evolutionary theory. The EES model is far less reticent, affording agency to organisms and acknowledging that teleology can exist within biological systems. Though this is not making any religious truth claims, it opens the door to dialogue with worldviews that look at the natural world and see order and purpose.

It moves us beyond a gene’s eye view of humanity. While the EES encompasses gene-centric evolutionary theory, it goes further. By looking at evolution at the level of organisms, rather than solely at the level of genes, ecological relationships are brought into the foreground. We now have models of evolution that can account for the interrelationships between species, which in turn allows us to re-imagine how we think of the human being from a theological perspective. For example, what does it mean to be human when our bodies

contain many more cells belonging to other microorganisms (bacteria, fungi, etc.) than “human” cells? The EES invites us to contemplate reciprocity among the creation, and challenges historical understandings of human exceptionalism.

Of course, the path from these revisions in evolutionary thought to a Christian faith is a long and indirect one and I am certainly not recruiting the EES as fodder for apologetics.

But for those who seek to maintain the integrity of both science and faith and look at the created world through the lens of Alister McGrath’s “theology of nature” engaging with these more recent trajectories in evolutionary science may prove fruitful.

* On the EES, see Chiu, L., *Extended Evolutionary Synthesis. A Review of the Latest Scientific Research*, at bit.ly/ChiuEES.

ISCAST fellow Victoria Lorrimar is a Research Fellow in the School of Philosophy and Theology, University of Notre Dame, Western Australia.

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Vexed questions, essential answers

■ **Gordon Preece**

Stephen Duckett, Health Care Funding and Christian Ethics: New Studies in Christian Ethics, Cambridge University Press, 2023.

The author of this imposing and attractive hardcover is a Melbourne Anglican lay reader, a son of the diocese, of which we can be truly proud. He integrates biblical faith, ethical thinking, the best of critical thinking and senior international experience. I can scarcely think of anyone better equipped to take on such a challenging and noble task. In the interests of full disclosure, I should declare that Stephen Duckett was also a member of the University of Divinity's Centre for Religion and Social Policy which I led, and we are now members of its network. In fact, some papers contributing towards this book have been presented there.

Health has a ubiquitous presence in modern life. We ask people "How are you?" and the older we get the longer the answers become. But Duckett's concern includes both this mutual interest in wellbeing and health, and the vexed questions of how mass-scale healthcare should be funded by enlightened and still-partly-Christian-informed secular societies.

Duckett not only notes the bilingual nature of Christian public theology, but is an exemplar of it. His first chapter explains health economists, ethical practitioners and theorists to each other with the ease of someone who does this regularly. Duckett's prolific pen's produce is often

found in the excellent, accessible platform *The Conversation*. To be able to sustain that ease for a PhD is a massive achievement. Duckett's supervisor Professor Robin Gill is not exaggerating in saying that the book makes healthcare economics accessible to non-economists.

Duckett's preliminary chapter deftly explains "the utilitarian frame of conventional economics" with a sympathetic treatment of the often-stereotyped Adam Smith, for whom "sympathy" or human connection is a critical aspect of the economic bread and butter of commodity exchange. This exchange takes place in the context of scarcity, the science of which is called economics. Scarcity is not only faced by individuals, but also by governments.

The balancing act that individuals and governments face in their budgets is, as former Sojourners director Jim Wallis used to say, due to their being "moral documents". And fair distributions of the good of health, is a critical, though not easy, part of that. Duckett makes it clear that some kind of purely scientific *homo economicus* – "egoistic, rational, utility-maximising individual unit with no social interaction ... is a fiction".

The social nature of humanity and the common good nature of socio-political economics lead into "The Alternative Frame: Economics as a Moral Science". Critical to this is the fundamental Christian humanist question of "Who is my neighbour?" The best answer to this is found in Jesus' famous parable of the Good Samaritan. The Priest and the Levite, the very people expected to respond, failed to.

While Duckett's exegesis and explana-

tion of the parable is generally very good and clear, at one point I think it is lacking. Like a Bible study leader or preacher he asks who we identify with from the characters, and us to use each character as the basis for a principle of healthcare ethics. The Samaritan exemplifies compassion, the victim a call or cry for justice and inclusion, and the Samaritan and inn-keeper, the need for stewardship and good management of resources for ongoing care. This last interaction shows the importance of lay public theology, beyond the expertise or emotional reach of the Levite and Priest. But Duckett's desire to reach for universal principles, doesn't do enough justice to an ethics of proximity or nearness, in a particular place and time. Here clericalism failed and still fails, when clergy, healthcare professionals and others, pass by on the other side of the road. It is the kind of thing our nation does repeatedly towards refugees, for instance in leaving those medivacced in limbo. And our Indigenous brothers and sisters, victims of our huge "tyranny of distance", who have the worst health outcomes in the country, as we fail to see them and their needs.

Nonetheless, this is an outstanding book, exemplifying the role of lay Christian professionals in filling the gaps, in conjunction and cooperation with their lay and professional secular sisters, equally made in God's image. In many ways they often surprise us with the essential service and goodness they show to those in need.

Dr Gordon Preece is the director of Ethos Centre for Christianity and Society and the chair of the Social Responsibilities Committee of the diocese.



No false unity on show

Picture: iStock

■ Daniel Zeunert

Michael F. Bird & Scot McKnight, eds., God's Israel and the Israel of God: Paul and Supersessionism. Bellingham: Lexham, 2023.

All Christians who read the first three quarters of their Bible ask the question at some point, “What has become of Israel, now that Christ has come?” “How are we to think of the New Testament church in relation to Old Testament Israel?” The theological term “supersessionism” describes a spectrum of views that consider Israel to have been replaced by the church. So then, does Paul present a supersessionist theology? These questions are not merely academic, but affect our church practice and evangelism.

Michael Bird and Scot McKnight's edited book, *God's Israel and the Israel of God* aims to bring some clarity to this topic. “Supersessionist” is a title that most pastors and theologians would like to avoid. An extreme caricature of supersessionism is as the belief that the Gentile church has replaced the Jewish nation of Israel in God's redemptive purposes. The term is used as a slur that is often equated with Christian antisemitism. Today in particular, as Jewish people are experiencing an alarming surge in anti-semitic attacks, Christians would prefer to distance themselves from such labelling. This book shows that the polarising rhetoric on both sides of this discussion does not paint the whole picture.

A range of views on supersessionism in Paul's writings are presented. Bird and McKnight present their case that if Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, then some level of supersessionism is unavoidable. The most basic tenet of their view is: the affirmation that “faith in Christ is necessary for salvation” is inherently supersessionist. Does the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus “supercede” the old covenant? If yes, then that is at least one version of what is known as “supersessionism”. Contrary to the strawman stereotype, Bird affirms the place of ethnic

Israel in God's purposes, while arguing that Paul's view of Israel is more correctly “expanded” to now include Gentiles.

The honest responses included in this book illustrate just how difficult this issue is to navigate. A Messianic Jewish response (David J. Rudolph) critiques the editors' view, positing that Israel remains in a unique covenant relationship with God. However, as McKnight points out, it is unclear in this view whether faith in Jesus is required for Jewish people to be saved. Much grace and understanding is needed when considering this view. It is more than reasonable that Messianic Jewish people are triggered by any hint of theological marginalisation of their people. Jesus-believing Jewish people were subject to the same horrors of the Shoah as their non-believing brothers and sisters.

This is perhaps why McKnight makes an effort to allay these fears, plainly saying that he celebrates Messianic Jewish identity within the church. Additionally, Messianic Jewish thought is not monolithic, so McKnight's critiques are not necessarily critiques of all Messianic congregations. For example, the fear that Messianic congregations rebuild the “dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14) is not true of our Melbourne context, where Beit HaMashiach welcomes a large gentile contingent in their congregation in Caulfield.

It may be surprising to protestant audiences that a Catholic response (Janelle Peters) emphasises that God still works through the old covenant with non-believing Jewish people. Majoring on, “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable,” (Romans 11:29) Peters echoes the official Catholic position since the second Vatican council in

the 1960s that the church does not replace Israel, and that Jewish people have salvation apart from Christ. The obvious result being that Catholics discourage Christians from evangelising to Jewish people.

A final contribution from a liberal approach (Ronald Charles) questions the application of any supersession on the basis that he does not accept the authority of the apostle Paul. The same old speculation of “Paul's Christianity” being but one of many divergent “Christianities” is regurgitated, and thus we are told not to uncritically accept any supersessionism we find in Paul's writings. A summary chart of the views presented in this book is below.

Rarely does one find an edited volume with such rawness in disparate views on display. Rather than presenting some kind of false unity, Bird and McKnight have left us with a realistic state-of-play of the complex debates around supersessionism. The tension felt between the contributors leaves McKnight confessing, somewhat hysterically, “I have never once enjoyed this conversation”. Rather than dissuading Christians from engaging, this frustration leaves us feeling the weight of what is at stake in this conversation. Surely, we can agree that a hardline (punitive) supersessionism excluding ethnically Jewish people wholesale from God's plans is to be rejected. Equally, we should see that the milder form of supersessionism (as presented by Bird and McKnight), retains the impetus for sharing the gospel that is, “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

Daniel Zeunert works for International Mission to Jewish People and is a tutor at Ridley College.

	SUPERSESSSIONIST		NON-SUPERSESSSIONIST	
	Bird / McKnight	Messianic	Catholic	Liberal
Does the church expand Israel?	Yes	No	No	No
Should Christians evangelise Jewish people?	Yes	Yes	No	No

An accessible entrance to Luke's works

■ **Bob Derrenbacher**

Michael F. Bird, A Bird's-Eye View of Luke and Acts: Context, Story, and Themes (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023).

In this creatively-titled book, Ridley College deputy principal and New Testament lecturer Michael Bird provides a thoughtfully written thematic introduction to the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles.

Comprising more than one-quarter of the New Testament, Luke and Acts are rightly treated together by Bird. Both were written by the same author, with the gospel written in anticipation of Acts. They share several themes, topics and interests.

Designed to accompany traditional commentaries, this book introduces its readers to questions related to their origins, purpose or purposes, and to important discussions around Luke as both historian and theologian. On these topics, Bird's conclusions are generally consistent with the consensus Luke-Acts scholarship. For example, Bird dates both works to somewhere between AD 80-90, with the author having access to the text of the Gospel of Mark as his chief written source. These are important points that directly impact how Luke and Acts are read and interpreted.

What follows is a survey of several dominant themes in Luke and Acts. Included are Luke's Christology and his understanding of salvation, his use of the Jewish scriptures, the topic of discipleship, female characters, the themes of material wealth and poverty, Luke's theology of the Holy Spirit, Luke's perspectives on Judaism and Empire, and the eschatology of both.

Bird rightly encourages his readers, for

example, to avoid the anachronistic description of Luke the author as a "feminist" when seeing his emphasis on female characters. Bird offers a more historically nuanced conclusion: "Luke-Acts was by the standards of its time a liberative work for women and very pro-women. Luke commends women, shows genuine concern for the plight of women ... and believes that women are significant in the story of Jesus and the growth of the Jesus movement".

Likewise, Bird concludes that because Luke "has much to say about possessions and wealth and about how to live faithfully whether in poverty or flush with material goods," Luke-Acts "propels us to address matters of consumerism, greed, and social justice".

Similarly, discussing Luke's eschatology, Bird concludes that much Luke-Acts scholarship has over-emphasised the significance of the "delay" of the *Parousia*. (That is, the second "coming" or "return" of Christ). Instead of being a "theologian of eschatological crisis management", Luke's vision of the end does not at all eclipse or usurp the importance of the Church manifesting "perseverance under duress and participation in mission" in the present.

Bird says many important things on Luke and Acts' themes, both in his thorough interaction with contemporary scholarship and his helpful suggestions about how his scholarly conclusions on the works can inform Christian readers. Bird introduces each chapter colloquially to lead into its topic, and helpfully concludes each with discussion questions and a bibliography. This makes the work particularly beneficial for small group church or Bible study.

While Bird discusses a broad list of Luke-

Acts topics and themes, this reviewer was surprised there was no similar treatment of important Lukan themes such as meals, food and banqueting, or the motif of prayer.

There are, for example, several food and meal-related episodes in the Gospel that are particularly "Lukan". For instance, the anointing of Jesus (Luke 7:36-50), Jesus' discourse against the Pharisees (Luke 11:37-52), the healing of the man with dropsy and Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet (Luke 14:1-24), and Jesus' post-resurrection meals with his followers (Luke 24:13-49). This emphasis in Luke (and Acts) shows how mealtime can be a venue for ministry, with meals often being symbolic of membership in the Kingdom of God.

As well, prayer is important to Luke. Prayer uniquely precedes significant events in Luke-Acts, such as Jesus' baptism (Luke 3:21-22), his transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36), and the inbreaking of divine activity (Acts 4:31, 16:25).

This reviewer recognises that books can only be so long; however, the distinctively Lukan themes of meals and prayer could have also merited chapter-length treatments.

This reviewer was also surprised that more was not made of how geography shapes the structure of both Luke and Acts. There is definite geographic movement in the Gospel from Galilee to Jerusalem where the Gospel concludes (see Luke 9:51). Then in Acts, there is a geographic movement from Jerusalem outwards as the Christian mission expands. For instance, see Acts 1:8 – "... you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth". Acts concludes with Paul making his way to Rome (chapters 27-28). The geographic movement of Luke-Acts propels its narrative movement, a vital feature of its overall story.

Regardless of these minor protests, Bird's *Birds-Eye View of Luke and Acts* is an extremely readable introduction to Luke-Acts. It makes Lukan scholarship accessible and relevant to the contemporary reader, especially readers of faith. As such, it comes highly recommended by this reviewer, a book that should be found on the bookshelves of interested laypeople, theological students, and clergy, especially in anticipation of Year C – the Year of Luke – in next year's lectionary cycle.

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Elegant, joyful, gentle: Reading Genesis

Picture: iStock

■ Paul Barker

Marilynne Robinson. *Reading Genesis*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2024.

“There is more beauty than our eyes can bear, precious things have been put into our hands and to do nothing to honour them is to do great harm.”

So wrote the elderly John Ames, a pastor coming to the end of his life, to his son in the glorious, Pulitzer winning novel, *Gilead*. Now its renowned author, Marilynne Robinson, has sought to honour the precious beauty of Genesis, the opening book of the Bible. She succeeds.

As the Psalmist delights in the law of the Lord, so Robinson delights in the first book of the law or *torah*. Hers is not an academic commentary, indeed not really a commentary at any level. Nor is this merely a literary guide written by this retired professor of English and creative writing. It is not a devotional book for daily readings. Robinson wants her readers to appreciate, but even more, delight in Genesis, its message of faith in a fallen and messy world.

Robinson sees Genesis as literature, teasing out its writing with respect and reverence. She knows about myths, and history, and ancient Babylonian and other texts, and understands the worldviews into which Genesis was written. She is hostage to no particular theory of authorship but recognises the significance of Moses in

Genesis’s evolution to sacred text. She doesn’t ignore hard texts, the deceit and betrayal, the family dysfunctions in the descendants of Abraham.

If anything characterises the style of *Reading Genesis* it is respectful musing and questions, as if Robinson is holding a precious and beautiful diamond and twisting it and angling it for different rays of light.

Her book is written for anyone, and everyone. Whether people of faith or otherwise, Robinson commends a reflective reading and pondering of this most significant book. She writes so elegantly, so gently, winsome and never adversarial. She writes of Genesis 1:1, “When I think there was a day when a human hand wrote those words, I am filled with awe”. I had never stopped and thought in awe. On the question of where did all the other people come from, of whom Cain is afraid, she writes, “the story is about something important enough to justify a departure from a standard of realism that is impressive over against comparable Babylonian or Egyptian or Greek stories”.

She comments that the “extreme compression of biblical narrative is achieved in part by the setting or framing of its stories to invite comparisons among them”. Throughout her book, Robinson shines light on the interlacing of stories, the patterns, so-called repetitions, and comparisons, in ways to open our eyes and ears and see wondrous things in God’s word. On Genesis 15 she speaks of God exulting in his power

to create, humans as numerous as the stars of heaven. My heart was warmed with joyful reflection as I for the first time imagined God’s joy showing Abram the night sky.

For Robinson, the biblical text is not naïve and we must not fall into traps of considering it so, rather approaching the text seriously and reverently. She sees the text as a “gracious and divine act”, something remarkable that demands our honour and attention. Referring to Jacob’s flight to Laban, “the text has a sense of humour”. Indeed it does.

She warns us: “The habit of reading Scripture piecemeal, whether for preaching or for the purposes of scholarly argument, or because it is considered to have its full meaning in isolated phrases or verses or episodes, is so deeply engrained that the larger structures of the text, its strategies of characterization, its arguments, can be completely overlooked.” So *Reading Genesis* is one continuous reflection on Genesis, for 230 pages, with no chapter breaks or biblical chapter and verse numbers. She is expounding a text, a book as a whole, and expects us to read it alongside her.

Robinson takes Scripture to be sacred and is commending that to us. What an elegant, joyful and gentle book, that warms my heart and moves me to honour the beauty and preciousness of Genesis more.

Bishop Paul Barker, Jumbunna Episcopate, has taught Old Testament in several seminaries for 35 years.

A plea for more deep, loving kindness



Picture: iStock

■ Muriel Porter

Julia Baird, Bright shining: how grace changes everything. Gadigal Country: Fourth Estate, 2023.

“Grace” is a familiar word to Christians. Anglican liturgies are redolent with it. The grace prayer – “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore”, from the concluding verse of St Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians – is in common use in many Christian circles.

What “grace” means theologically has been the subject of heated dispute among theologians since the days of the early church. But let’s not go down those complex rabbit holes, because this book about grace by eminent Sydney-based journalist and historian Dr Julia Baird is of a very different order. This is no theological tome or even, from this stellar scholar, an academic thesis.

Dr Baird is no stranger to theological understandings of grace. A sometime Presbyterian, later an Anglican (a Sydney Synod member for a few years, no less), then a Baptist, she now worships with the Salvation Army, in a place that also operates as a soup kitchen. I have no hesitation in calling her a woman of faith.

So, what is “grace” for Dr Baird? It is there in the main title, *Bright Shining*, words taken from a stanza added to John Newton’s supremely popular hymn *Amazing Grace*, and first published in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1852. “When

we’ve been there ten thousand years/bright shining as the sun/we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise/than when we first begun”. They were words passed down orally by African-American communities for decades before the novel appeared.

“[Grace] spawns generosity, compassion and empathy. It involves understanding, recognising another person’s humanity and walking in another’s shoes, which can pave the way for forgiveness.”

Julia Baird

The phrase “bright shining as the sun” sums up Dr Baird’s understanding of grace – grace that changes everything. And that’s what this collection of anecdotes and stories and reflections is about – it is a sustained meditation on grace emerging in acts of kindness, generosity, selflessness, decency, love and sheer goodness which shines out, transforming the potential ugliness of life. This book, in short, is a plea for more deep, loving kindness.

“Grace,” Dr Baird writes, “is like the sun: it warms us, fuels us and unerringly brings light”. While the world seems to have been drained of it, the pandemic meant that many “started looking further and asking

for more, for better”. She continues: “We began to imagine a different way of life, of being, of relating to each other”.

Grace, she says, is more than simple kindness. “Grace is both ineffable and utterable, which is why so many thinkers have grappled with it for decades. It is not esoteric, it’s wrapped in the everyday, but it is still extraordinary. It spawns generosity, compassion and empathy. It involves understanding, recognising another person’s humanity and walking in another’s shoes, which can pave the way for forgiveness.”

Dr Baird does not write out of a place of light-heartedness. She wrote it while “wrestling with the opposite of grace: my bodily gravity, the weight of a chronic, recurrent illness that keeps bringing me back to earth, that has filled me with despair, uncertainty, fear and grief”. She continues that it has made her search for grace “even more pressing – my search for the moments when we transcend the worst of ourselves, and witness or experience a moment of clarity or beauty”. She wrote “in between appointments with grim-faced surgeons...”.

So this meditation, glowing with the light of the bright sun, with the accessibility of the best of journalistic writing, nevertheless comes from a place of great depth.

It is a book to savour, and to share with those seeking a fresh expression of the grace of God.

Dr Muriel Porter is a Melbourne writer, and authorised lay reader at St Bartholomew’s, Burnley.