

THE Melbourne Anglican

SEPTEMBER 2023, No 628

Sewing change for 20 years

When Dream Stitches began, it served the wave of Sudanese women who came to Box Hill in the early 2000s. Learning to sew gave them a skill, which they could use to start a business. Now volunteers mainly support Iranian women, who are often isolated, many speaking little English. Celebrating 20 years in the coming months, the program has helped dozens of women build skills and build confidence.

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First women
priests ordained
in Murray diocese

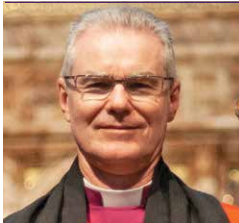


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The Voice is
our first step
toward healing



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We can
disagree,
but rejoice

Picture: Janine Eastgate



May the Spirit's wisdom inspire us as we walk together

■ Archbishop Philip Freier

I attended my first meeting of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission as co-chair in 2019. The meeting was held in Jerusalem and was the first meeting to follow the publication of "Walking Together on the Way" the previous year. Amongst other things "Walking Together on the Way" explored synodality, which has come to the forefront within the Catholic Church since then.

Just as the Catholic Church was challenged to explore and implement more participatory synodality, so Anglicans were challenged to re-receive synodality especially in its character of spiritual discernment as a means of unity.

Only last month the Anglican Schools Australia conference met in Canberra, the first in person since 2019. I was taken by how much that event was a living example of the *sunhodos*, the walking together that conceptually is the foundation of synodality. Acknowledging the diversity of Anglican Schools across the country, we worshipped together and rejoiced in the experience of meeting together in person, which we had not been able to do for four years. There was

"...to find unity across difference is a gift to the journey of our nation ... that the referendum presents us with."

a strong sense of consensus about the shared mission of an Anglican School and what needed to be done to develop resources to foster the school's Anglican identity. We left the conference with a happy expectation of future continued networking when we meet in Melbourne in August next year.

Next month the 54th synod of the Diocese of Melbourne will meet over four days. As it is the first session of the synod there will be elections to fill the positions of the various diocesan governance bodies that are populated by the decision of the synod members. This synod will build on our experiences over the time of COVID restrictions with a combination of online and in-person sessions. Our synod will agree on a range of legislation that represents our consensus on how our governance will function. Presentations on important dioc-

esan initiatives and motions on a range of ecclesial and social concerns round out the agenda. Having participated in many synods since I first attended one as an observer in 1981 I look forward to the forthcoming synod as a Spirit-filled time for God's people in the Diocese of Melbourne. I think that we always need to continue to receive the fresh gift of the Holy Spirit's presence in the life of the Church as we face the future.

To the extent that the church can be an exemplar of walking together in unity as disciples of Jesus, we manifest God's gift of synodality to the Church and to the world. As we move towards the referendum on the Voice our own capacity to find unity across difference is a gift to the journey of our nation and the opportunity that the referendum presents us with. Walking together across the divisions of political opinion is challenging, yet it is what we must do as a nation at this time. Please pray for our church as we meet in synod and for our nation as we cast our vote in the referendum. In both may the wisdom of the Spirit inspire and inform us.

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Vacant Appointments as of 21 August 2023:

St Eanswythe Altona/St Clement Altona Meadows; St Paul, Boronia; Parish of Brimbank; Christ Church, Brunswick [from April 2024]; St Michael, North Carlton [from October 2023]; St Catharine, Caulfield South; St Philip, Collingwood; St John the Divine, Croydon; St Mark, Fitzroy [from October 2023]; St Paul, Geelong; St Barnabas, Glen Waverley; Christ Church, Melton; St Peter's Murrumbidgee with Holy Nativity Hughesdale; St Aidan Noble Park; St Peter's, Ocean Grove with All Saints, Barwon Heads; St Aidan, Parkdale; Pascoe Vale-Oak Park; St Mark, Reservoir; St Mary, Sunbury; Christ Church, South Yarra; St Thomas, Werribee; St John, Wantirna South; St Matthew, Wheelers Hill; St Thomas, Winchelsea with Holy Trinity, Barrabool

Appointments:

DANIEL, The Revd Yvette, appointed Vicar, St Margaret, Eltham, effective 16 November 2023

DIAS, The Revd Jerome Shantha, appointed joint Vicar, St Martin's, Belgrave Heights and St George, Monbulk and the Parish of Upwey/Belgrave, effective 30 November 2023

DIAS, The Revd Vivianne Cherie, appointed joint Vicar, St Martin's, Belgrave Heights and St George, Monbulk and the Parish of Upwey/Belgrave, effective 30 November 2023

HUNTER, The Revd Marlene (Carmel), appointed Vicar, St Luke, Sydenham, effective 30 August 2023

POPE, The Revd Nigel, appointed Vicar, Footscray Anglican Parish, effective 19 October 2023

SPRING, The Revd Vaughn Michael, appointed Vicar, St Mark, Camberwell, effective 3 October 2023

SULLIVAN, The Revd David James, appointed Vicar Extension, St John, Frankston North with St Luke, Carrum Downs, effective 2 December 2023

VAN DER NEST, The Revd Dr Theo, appointed Parish Minister, St Luke, Sydenham, effective 10 August 2023

Permission to Officiate:

MEULMAN, The Revd Phillip James Boyce, appointed Permission to Officiate within the Diocese of Melbourne, effective 9 August 2023

ASQUITH, The Revd Stuart, appointed Permission to Officiate within the Diocese of Melbourne, effective 15 August 2023

Resignations:

MEULMAN, The Revd Phillip James Boyce, Incumbent, St Barnabas, Glen Waverley, effective 9 August 2023

POPE, The Revd Nigel, St Paul, Geelong, 19 October 2023

URWIN, The Right Revd Dr, Lindsay Gooddall, Incumbent, Christ Church, Brunswick, effective 28 March 2024

Obituaries:

LLOYD-FLANDERS, The Revd Carole, 10 August 2023

Clergy Moves



Clergy Moves is compiled by the Registry Office and all correspondence should go to registrar@melbourneanglican.org.au



The Reverends Jerome and Vivianne Dias will be commissioned as vicars of three Dandenong Ranges parishes.

Picture: Janine Eastgate

New joint leadership role for couple

■ **Jenan Taylor**

A married couple hopes a new model of leadership they are embarking on will provide a sustainable future for church leadership.

The Reverends Jerome and Vivianne Dias will be commissioned as joint vicars of three parishes in the Dandenong ranges.

The role will encompass leadership of Holy Trinity Upwey, St Martin's Belgrave Heights and St George's Monbulk.

The priests say being able to complement and support each other's competencies and abilities as equal leaders will help make the job more sustainable and healthier.

They see it as an opportunity to enhance how senior ministry in churches is performed.

Mr Dias said the complexities and responsibilities of senior church roles had grown over the years, and could be arduous.

He said it could be a particularly heavy weight for lone ministers of parishes, where they might not be supported by a team of

people. Being able to share that responsibility equally with a colleague might lighten that pressure and encourage continuity of the effort.

Mrs Dias hoped the role could be a model for young women and men to look to for quality of leadership.

"They'd be able to see that we can be better together. Not better with just women or just men in leadership, but that actually we can be better together when we work together," she said.

She believed it could also offer a model of how two different people with different gifts and ways, might be able to work as one.

Mr Dias anticipated that in joint ministry roles any differences the job sharers might have, would need to be worked through in order to lead together.

"That's a great model of unity for a parish to think about in the midst of any differences its members might have, so it would be a strength for the Church as well," he said.

Bishop of Jumbunna Paul Barker said it was possible the appointment would be the

first of its kind in the Melbourne diocese.

He said it would be positive for the priests sharing the role, and for the three parishes.

"Its biggest strength is that it will give the Upwey, Belgrave Heights and Monbulk parishes full time ministry. They're small parishes that are similar in style. Ultimately, it will be an efficient way for ministry," Bishop Barker said.

Currently holding associate minister and curate positions at St Mark's Emerald, the couple said they hoped to be able to equip the three communities to be missional worshipping communities, once they started in their new role.

Safe relationships and safe systems would also be a focus, they said.

"But we don't know the parishes well yet, so our sense of vision will come as we get to know their stories and what God has been doing," Mrs Dias said.

The new vicars will be commissioned on 30 November at 7.30pm at Holy Trinity Upwey.

Vicars impersonated in scam text spate

■ Elspeth Kernebone

Parishioners have received scam text messages claiming to be from their vicar at several Melbourne churches in recent weeks.

The texts named the vicar of the relevant church, and several asked the recipient to transfer money to an account for “mission giving”.

St Stephen's and St Mary's Mount Waverley and St Peter's Eastern Hill both alerted their parishioners on social media to the attempted scam. St John's and St Agnes' East Malvern and Glenn Huntly has also confirmed it was affected.

St Stephen's and St Mary's vicar the Venerable Dianne Sharrock said at least three of her parishioners received text messages claiming to be her, which asked them to place money into an account purporting to be for mission giving.

Mrs Sharrock said she believed the scammer may have looked through St Stephen's and St Mary's website for phone numbers, as all the people who received texts had contact details listed.

Mrs Sharrock said the texts were

“It was concerning for a number of parishioners, I think it caused a bit of anxiety...”

Alex Ross

concerning, as it was frightening for older parishioners in particular, and there was a risk someone might put money into it.

The Australian Government Scamwatch website warns that messages may be a scam if they urge the recipient to click on a link asking for their username, password or personal information, if there is an urgent request for action, or if the recipient is asked to provide personal details or money quickly.

Other signs include an organisation that the recipient believes is real saying there has been an unauthorised transaction, or asking for confirmation from a payment they hadn't made, or a business asking a recipient to use a different bank account and BSB from the last payment made.

Being contacted by someone saying they are from a government department, regulator or law enforcement threatening immediate arrest, deportation or asking for money is also a sign of a scam, as is being asked to transfer money to “keep it safe” or for “further investigation”.

St John's and St Agnes' East Malvern and Glen Huntly vicar the Reverend Dr Alex Ross said several parishioners received messages claiming to be from him asking them to purchase Amazon gift cards.

Dr Ross said all the parishioner had worked out it was a scam by the time they notified him.

He said his theory was the scammer had looked through the website or pew sheet, because only people whose names and numbers were listed had received texts.

“It was concerning for a number of parishioners, I think it caused a bit of anxiety as to whether the person knew more about them because the person knew their first name,” Dr Ross said.

Information about scams is available at: scamwatch.gov.au and cyber.gov.au.

Numbers boom at Proclaim, church seeks more space

■ Jenan Taylor

More people than expected have graced a new Clyde North congregation, but the rapid growth means there is often a space squeeze on Sundays.

Proclaim Anglican Church opened in a community centre in the south-east growth area in February, after a church launch team spent two years searching for a space.

Priest-in-charge the Reverend Reece Kelly said the response to the church so far had exceeded his expectations.

Mr Kelly said the church has welcomed an average of 60 people a week since it opened, as many as he expected by the end of its first year.

But he said space was a constant concern, because Proclaim's community centre venue could only hold 95 people.

Mr Kelly said the lack of space was a roadblock, particularly when more than 60 people came to church.

“We had 78 at one service and that was a pretty full room. Even with 15 or so free chairs, that was a squeeze because there was maybe one free chair per row,” Mr Kelly said.

He said hoped the Melbourne diocese



More people than expected have joined the new Proclaim Anglican. Picture: proclaim.org.au

might be able to secure a factory space or some land, so Proclaim could build a church.

Mr Kelly believed the church's high numbers were because of a sense of welcome, belonging and community encouraged in members and visitors.

“We want them to feel that Proclaim is their home,” he said.

He said the fast-expanding residential population in the area might play a role too.

Mr Kelly said the census data showed lots of young families in Clyde and Clyde North, which Proclaim saw represented in its youth numbers. The congregation has about eight children and 15-20 young people.

Mr Kelly said despite initially being

frustrated that the local council enforced a 9am only Sunday service time for the church, the early start appeared not to be a barrier to attendance. He said many people saw it as a positive, even in winter – as they could come together for worship, and then go on with the day. He said the time had allowed for a more natural community time after church, which members valued.

Mr Kelly said the church ran Bible studies programs and a large youth program, but had not done much missional outreach.

He said Proclaim planned to do outreach such as flier distribution, but this hadn't happened yet because he was concerned about overwhelming its space.



Hena and Fariba take part in Dream Stitches.
Picture: Janine Eastgate

Dream Stitches celebrates big birthday

■ Elspeth Kernebone

Each stitch has been small, but over 20 years they have woven a tapestry of change in dozens of women's lives.

At Dream Stitches, Anglican volunteers have helped migrant and refugee women learn to sew since 2003.

It's given the women skills as seamstresses, and built their confidence, connected otherwise isolated people, and supported their English language learning.

But at its two-decade mark, Dream Stitches needs more volunteers to keep it running. Currently, the program can only take about half the women wanting to join.

Coordinator Jenifer McKenzie said Dream Stitches was a valuable way to help women, in part by building their confidence.

The program began after a large group of Sudanese women moved to Box Hill South around 2003.

Ms McKenzie said then vicar of Box Hill, the late Father Graham Reynolds, wanted to do everything he could to help the people who had moved to the area.

She said the concept of Dream Stitches came about partly because the Sudanese women wanted a business, to make money. Since then, about 184 women have come through the program.

Now, most women at Dream Stitches are Iranian. The Sudanese women have mostly found work, and moved to other suburbs.

"They've all gained employment, so they didn't need Dream Stitches any more. And that's what we were about, so that's good," Ms McKenzie said.

"[One] Sudanese woman told me when she was here that she had not only learnt how to sew, but she had learnt how to walk tall in Dream Stitches. It gave her the confidence to mix in society."

Ms McKenzie said the Iranian women had different needs. Many felt isolated and depressed, and often did not speak much English. Some were referred by Eastern Health, or migrant resource centres, others had come through acquaintances.

So, Ms McKenzie said Dream Stitches had changed focus, to help these women with their needs. It's become a point of social connection for the women – and volunteers also encourage them to go to English classes – as well as giving them confidence as they gained a skill.

"When you see them having created something, they feel so satisfied with themselves that they've done it," Ms McKenzie said. "You can see the look on their face, it's like a lightbulb went on."

Hena BaniArdalan joined the class two

years ago, because she had always wanted to learn how to create patchwork quilts – after long admiring her grandmother's.

Now, she counts her days until Friday when she comes to Dream Stitches.

After starting to learn with small items, Mrs BaniArdalan is now working on a patchwork quilt. Her dream is to continue patchworking so she can make a quilt, to give to her children – and perhaps to make quilts for charity.

Mrs BaniArdalan said she liked the atmosphere of the classes, with everyone busy learning and teaching, and she appreciated how volunteers always tried to understand participants and teach them.

"They do everything for us, and it's amazing ... and they are very kind" she said. "We are very appreciative."

Ms McKenzie said a desire to make refugees welcome in Australia motivated most of those volunteering with the program. She said the program needed volunteers with dressmaking skills, because it couldn't take all the people wanting to join.

About 16 women take part in the program now, with a waiting list for women hoping to join.

Anyone interested in volunteering with Dream Stitches can contact Jenifer McKenzie at info@dreamstitches.org.au.



*Women priests have been ordained for the first time in the Diocese of the Murray.
Picture: Adelaide Anglicans*

‘Called by God’: First women priests ordained in the Murray diocese

■ Jenan Taylor

Women priests have been ordained for the first time in the Diocese of the Murray, an area previously opposed to women's ordination.

The diocese consecrated three women and a man to priesthood at Mount Barker in August.

It came two months after its synod voted without debate to allow the ordination of women for the first time.

Murray diocese Bishop Keith Dalby said a desire to repair discord and renew mission and ministry was central to the landmark change.

Bishop Dalby said he hoped ordaining women priests would quell dissent, anger and bitterness that had prevailed in the diocese. He said the Murray had long weathered disagreement, and negative views about

women's ordination were symptomatic of some of those problems.

Bishop Dalby believed the diocese's appetite for change had also increased as many clergy departed who would have resisted the ordination of women.

Newly ordained priest the Reverend Margo Holt was also the first woman deacon ordained in the Murray diocese six years ago.

Ms Holt said she had always been convicted that if we was ever able to be a priest, it would be in the Murray, as she wanted to serve the church and wider community of the region.

But Ms Holt said she stopped thinking about it over the years, because she never expected it would become possible.

Ms Holt said she was shocked the vote to ordain women passed the synod virtually without opposition, as many of the diocese's clergy were staunchly against women's

ordination as priests.

Ms Holt said she felt priesthood was a calling from God, that she wanted to honour, because of the synod milestone and Bishop Dalby's encouragement.

She said the consecration of women was a new beginning for the diocese and an opportunity for it to rebuild.

But Bishop Dalby said the ordination of women priests was not going to solve all the diocese's problems.

"When I was in Adelaide and the first women were ordained, we were told it would be the salvation of the church. It hasn't been the salvation of the church. It's fantastic that women are co-partners in the gospel, but it's not going to be the panacea," he said.

Women remain unable to be ordained as priests in the Dioceses of Sydney, Armidale and North-West Australia.

New group aims to build Church unity

■ **Elsbeth Kernebone**

A new network of Anglicans hopes to encourage unity in the church among those of different beliefs in the face of increasing tribalism.

The National Comprehensive Anglicanism Network wants to provide encouragement for Christians to work together for the truth that is in Jesus, rather than leaving people behind.

Leaders say it will aim to build connection through encouraging grassroots communication, and facilitating conversation, with joyfulness about the faith.

It comes as the Anglican Church worldwide and in Australia faces division over the issue of same-sex marriage within the church. Some member churches have left the Communion to become part of separate “dioceses” aligned with the Global Anglican Future Conference – an organisation opposed to same-sex marriage.

National Comprehensive Anglicanism Network chair Bishop Stephen Pickard said the network hoped to gather Anglicans concerned about one fundamental issue: the church’s witness to the gospel. He said in unity, the church had a much more credible witness to the gospel.

Bishop Pickard said he hoped the network would encourage consultation and listening at a local level by providing a means of communication.

He said the network wanted to foster a broad-based, comprehensive Anglicanism, which was welcoming of a wide range of views.

Bishop Pickard said the network hoped to encourage Anglicans to feel connected to each other on the ground in churches. He hoped conversations, consulting and listening would unlock potential for people

to have their own conversations and make their own enquiries, with an element of joyfulness.

Bishop Pickard said after the 2022 General Synod there was consensus among a group of Anglicans that the Australian church needed a platform for a variety of voices, in the context of an emerging tribalism.

At the 2022 General Synod, representatives from across the Australian Church voted not to vote on a motion *Being the Body of Christ* which called on Anglicans to respect one-and-other’s culture, build on what they had in common and where they differed to seek to discover each other’s faith as it was today in the spirit of Philippians 3:13.

It came after a week in which the synod was unable to agree on the issue of same-sex marriage within the church.

But Bishop Pickard said members planned for the network to exist in response to more than a single issue, as the question of the church’s oneness and its witness to the gospel was perennial. He said differences of opinion about the fundamentals of the faith had circulated for centuries, centred around different issues.

Bishop Pickard said the early Christian creeds’ articulation of the basic belief of the Christian community constituted the framework of the fundamentals of belief for the network.

Bishop Pickard said the network hoped to focus on places of nourishment for the church. He was concerned that energy was often spent policing the boundaries, rather than being put into mission in an increasingly secular culture.

“Where you’re looking, that’s where you throw your energy. Excessive focus on boundaries, sucks up a lot of energy for mission,” Bishop Pickard said.

“The places where [the church is] really growing, and there’s a sense of aliveness, are the places where they’re looking at the remarkable watering holes of faith, and the places that give life to people. The places where it’s struggling are places where there’s a lot of internal political issues.”

Bishop Pickard said people from all walks of Anglicanism had signed up for the network’s mailing list so far, a test of the diversity of views within the network.

Network member Dr Jane Freemantle said it was important to her to be part of a group of people who were loving, and wanted to spread the word of God as a God of love. Dr Freemantle joined about two years ago, because Anglicanism was discussed as being comprehensive and inclusive within the network.

She hoped NCAN would encourage Anglicans to come together in love.

“It really spoke to me because of the whole issue of being comprehensive and inclusive, and embracing all God’s people, and the way it was being discussed was the kind of Anglicanism I was inclined to be [part of],” Dr Freemantle said.

“In an environment when people are encouraging us to polarise. More than ever before we need to come together as God’s people.

“It’s just so important, we need to be together. We can agree to disagree. The great thing about Anglicanism is it’s a very broad spectrum, and we love each other.”

The network’s overview statement references the 1968 Lambeth Conference definition of comprehensiveness, which describes it as demanding “agreement on fundamentals, while tolerating disagreement on matters in which Christians may differ without ... breaking communion”.



New paradigm vital to easing harms

■ Jenan Taylor

Shifting blame away from betting addictions could better protect people from gambling harm, Christian reform campaigners say.

They have called for gambling to instead be treated as a public health issue.

It comes after new federal and state rules aimed at reducing gambling harm were announced in July.

In Victoria, they include stricter mandatory closing times for venues with electronic game machines.

The Alliance for Gambling Reform said the changes would go a long way towards minimising harms related to pokie machine losses, which were more than \$25 billion per year in Australia.

But chief advocate the Reverend Tim Costello said any focus on preventing gambling harms needed to move away from a culture of blaming individuals if they struggled to curb their betting.

Mr Costello said treating problem betting as a public health rather than an addiction issue could help bring meaningful change.

"The addiction paradigm, particularly with its 'gamble responsibly' focus suggests [electronic gaming] machines are harmless and that the few irresponsible people who can't control themselves are the problem," Mr Costello said.

"The machines are predatory with the most brilliant psychological games designed to addict, designed to release the dopamine in the brain when you sit in front of them."

Mr Costello said politicians, other leaders

"Increasingly, children are targeted. They're being targeted constantly when they're sitting there watching the footy and taking in gambling industry messages over and over."

Gordon Preece

and those with a public voice could help shift public attitudes by focussing on the health consequences of playing the pokies.

He said they needed to talk to and listen to the people who had been damaged by gambling, instead of the gambling industry.

They could also be aware of the language they used, and not use terms such as "gambling addict", Mr Costello said.

A 2015 Southern Cross University study found that 95 per cent of Victorian adults believed that problem gambling was an addiction. Many of the survey's 2000 respondents said they characterised affected individuals as impulsive, greedy, anti-social and untrustworthy.

But, the *Lancet Public Health* journal launched an urgent inquiry into gambling as a neglected and worsening public health predicament in 2020, citing it as a source of potentially serious harm to people, families, and communities.

Anglican Social Responsibilities Committee chair the Reverend Gordon

Preece said often a punitive approach was taken to problem gambling, but a public health one made enormous sense.

Dr Preece said unchecked gambling could cause enormous damage at the family level, causing loss of relationships and divorce, and at the mental health level where the shame and loss of dignity could result in loss of life.

Dr Preece said treating gambling as a public health issue could also help remove the stigma that often stopped people seeking help.

He said people needed to be recognised as victims rather than villains, but without denying that they did have some agency.

That agency and responsibility had been badly affected by an industry that deliberately designed programs to addict people, Dr Preece said.

But he said there was a stronger case for gambling as a public health issue, when it came to considering how young people could be affected.

"Increasingly, children are targeted. They're being targeted constantly when they're sitting there watching the footy and taking in gambling industry messages over and over," Dr Preece said.

"That has to be addressed as a major public health issue, because children have very little agency in relation to the sports betting and online betting advertising. That is a broader, whole new dimension."

If you or anyone you know needs support, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14.



'We're depriving people of their liberty ... for administrative reasons'

■ Jenan Taylor

Australia's migration policies need to be overhauled to prevent people being unfairly deprived of their liberty for years, refugee advocates have warned.

It comes after *The Age* reported that Australia's Home Affairs department unlawfully detained 115 people between 2018 and 2022, according to documents it obtained under Freedom of Information.

Amnesty International Australia refugee coordinator Graham Thom said the report highlighted some of the real issues with the way detention was used in Australia and the country's mandatory detention policy.

Dr Thom said these policies meant there would continue to be instances where people were automatically and inappropriately detained.

He said under the current rules if someone was deemed to be unlawfully in Australia they would have to be detained.

"These are people who aren't being locked up for committing a crime. This is for administrative purposes," Dr Thom said. "We're depriving people of their liberty for years for administrative reasons."

He said the policies needed checks and balances to ensure detention was used as a last resort, and for the shortest time possible.



Picture: iStock

Commonwealth Ombudsman Iain Anderson said in May that there had been a decrease in the number of people inappropriately detained and the average length of time they were held since 2017.

Mr Anderson said the Home Affairs department was addressing issues raised in the Ombudsman's investigation into people detained in immigration detention to mitigate risks associated with inappropriate detention.

But Dr Thom said there were about 1,123 people still being held in Australia in mainland as well as offshore detention centres.

"The length of time some of those people have spent in detention is outrageous. Detention really should be for

the shortest possible time and only where absolutely necessary," Dr Thom said. "The fact that you can have people detained for years without having a resolution to their particular circumstances, is totally unacceptable."

Melbourne Bishop Philip Huggins said it was important that Australia's Home Affairs department continued to reform its policies and update its visa system under its new minister Clare O'Neil.

He said it was significant that there was transparent information about the migration system available, and that mistakes reached public attention.

"But there still needs to be a just outcome for the people who have been impacted," Bishop Huggins said.

Faith groups welcome funds to protect places of worship

■ Jenan Taylor

Religious communities around Australia hope a new federal grant scheme will help ease their concerns about safety at places of worship.

The grants provide \$40 million over four years to improve security at faith-based places, including religious schools and community centres.

The program will support security system upgrades such as fencing, lighting and engagement of security guards.

A Hindu Council of Australia communications director said most of the community's temple leaders were applying for the funding because of growing security concerns.

The Reverend Bhakta Dasa said the defacement of some Hindu temples earlier this year, the community's child safety efforts,

and a few incidents with members of the public during on-site outreach activities, had become a focus.

"We want to be able to protect our places of worship as much as possible," Mr Dasa said.

He said the community planned to install a range of security measures at its properties, including CCTV cameras inside and outside places of worship.

Temple leaders wanted to be able to capture and record any criminal incidents, and give the footage to police for investigation, Mr Dasa said.

Executive Council of Australian Jewry co-chief executive Peter Wertheim said Jewish institutions faced a growing level of risk, so upgrading the security infrastructure was not an optional extra for them.

Mr Wertheim said they had been assessed

by Australian intelligence and law enforcement agencies and the council was told risk was increasing.

He said Jewish places of worship carried significant costs in terms of security infrastructure, including cameras and security guards for that reason.

Mr Wertheim said under a previous Australian government program, funding had only been available for religious schools, and the new grant made it possible for all Jewish institutions to be eligible for security funding.

The Diocese of Melbourne has asked parishes interested in submitting an application for the grant to get in touch with its property department. The deadline for applications is 11 September.

For further inquiries, please contact
PropertyDept@melbourneanglican.org.au.

Platforming Pacific voices vital: Activists

■ Jenan Taylor

Australian religious climate activists hope to strengthen their links with Pacific faith communities ahead of the United Nations Conference of Parties climate meeting in 2026.

The Inter-congregational Voice for Climate Change and Australian Religious Response to Climate Change want to collaborate with Pacific faith groups and people to address escalating climate change.

They hope their work can amplify the concerns of people in the region, saying a united approach was vital because of the scale of the threat to global security.

Rising sea levels and extreme weather events including cyclones have been increasing across the Pacific.

Nations such as Kiribati, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu have experienced some of the worst impacts, including widespread damage to homes and infrastructure.

The Pacific Conference of Churches called on the World Council of Churches to do more to raise awareness among congregations and governments about the plight of Pacific communities.

IVCC chair Father Claude Mostowik said the organisation aimed to mobilise a strong faith cohort during Australia's campaign to host COP 31.

Mr Mostowik said having the climate



Picture: iStock

conference close to home was a chance for Pacific communities to be heard on the international stage, as their concerns were often marginalised.

He said his organisation's work revolved around helping to amplify the voices and concerns of people and churches from the region.

Some of their biggest fears included the damage and loss of important cultural places and items, the salination of crops and water, and that they might have to leave their countries, Mr Mostowik said.

ARRCC president Thea Ormerod said her group and the PCC established a relationship in recent years through their common push for non-fossil fuel proliferation and fair climate finance.

Ms Ormerod said the ARRCC was preparing to draft a long-term action plan towards COP 31, and wanted to consult further with it and other Pacific community stakeholders before doing so.

She said they wanted to find out what Pacific faith leaders wanted from partnerships with Australia's religious climate change advocates.

Ms Ormerod said despite the seriousness of the Pacific states' position on the climate change frontlines, there didn't seem to be much response from Australia's religious communities to their neighbours' plight.

She said they were not moved in the way that Jesus needed people to respond to those in crisis.

Australia urged to stand up for human rights in India

■ Jenan Taylor

The Australian government must call for an end to religious and inter-ethnic violence in north-east India, human rights activists say.

It follows Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's July condemnation of a May incident in Manipur state in which people from the Hindu-majority Mei Tei community sexually assaulted women from the predominantly Christian Kuki tribe.

The incident is tied to escalating conflict between the two communities over land rights, which has caused the deaths of more than 100 people, the displacement of 50,000 more, and the torching of upwards of 250 places of worship.

In early July the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on Indian authorities to stop the violence and protect religious minorities.

Human Rights Watch Australia director

Daniela Gavshon said Australia should also be speaking up like the European Union and United States.

She said it was a crucial opportunity for the Australian government to acknowledge Modi's own words, and it should call on the Indian government to urgently protect people facing violence.

Ms Gavshon said Australia should also stress the importance of India doing a thorough and credible investigation into the violence.

"The Albanese government should unequivocally stand up for human rights in India. While ordinarily Modi might not respond well to being criticised for his government's human rights record, he has finally recognised the hideous violence that has been taking place in Manipur," Ms Gavshon said.

St Dunstan's Camberwell priest the Reverend Jobby John said it was essential

the Australian government step in to condemn the brutality in Manipur.

Mr John said he was in close contact with friends in the area and believed that religious freedoms had declined there and in other parts of the country in recent years.

"It's affecting tens of thousands of people, particularly in the states where minority religious communities live," he said.

Mr John believed political pressure from other countries would help curtail the violence in India's north-east, and that international attention would pressure the Indian government to take action.

But he said prayer was also vital and Anglicans should pray for the cessation of attacks against minority religious populations.

Senator Wong and the Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade have been approached for comment.

'Game-changing' pilot to help human trafficking victims access support

■ Jenan Taylor

Anti-slavery campaigner Christine Carolan has long received phone calls at odd times.

They might come late at night from human trafficking victims asking for sanctuary.

They might come on a Friday afternoon from a schoolteacher. She had a student facing forced marriage. Was there any where they could get help?

There was a way, but often people who had been trafficked would balk at it, Ms Carolan said.

Victims could only get help if they engaged with criminal justice agencies.

Ms Carolan's organisation, the Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans, was among the advocates pushing for change to the situation.

They recently achieved a major step.

Soon all trafficking victims will be able to access medical, financial, legal and cultural support without speaking to the police first. It may also include mental health counselling for victims, and perhaps even help with visa barriers they might face. It will be part of an 18-month pilot program to expedite referral of victims to the Australian Red Cross support program.

The new initiative could be a game changer for many survivor-victims, Ms Carolan said.

It might help bring peace of mind for some exploited people, such as the group of Pacific Islander seasonal workers that ACRATH has stood by since 2018. For months, the labourers endured poor work conditions, including abuse and wage theft.

Language and cultural barriers, and their fears about their working permits and reprisal from their employer, kept them from speaking up about their exploitation.

University of South Australia researchers say being able to access help with visas might also enable victims too traumatised to deal with police to access a stable income for accommodation or housing.

According to international and Australian monitoring agencies, trafficked people include migrant workers and students who have been forced into labour in agriculture, construction, tourism and hospitality, and domestic service. To a smaller degree they are women and girls who have been forced into sex work, or into marriage.

The Australian Red Cross said the government support program's crime-focus made gauging the scope of the human trafficking problem harder. The Red Cross helps administrate this program.

Typically, only one in five victims were able to be identified through this program, the Red Cross said. The idea of dealing with law agencies first, often dissuaded people from seeking help altogether.

Ms Carolan said many were too frightened, and would turn to church groups and community organisations for help instead. Usually, people were worried about reprisals against their family, their immigration status, or they believed they couldn't trust police.

"I've heard from emergency room staff

This included lobbying for an independent federal anti-slavery commissioner, and for aid pathways to be decoupled from law enforcement.

Seventeen years on, they are celebrating a federal government decision to trial a wider support path for trafficked people.

Red Cross trafficking program lead Lina Garcia-Daza said the pilot would also improve law enforcement agencies' chances of prosecuting slavery offences. If survivors felt comfortable about the process, they were more likely to contribute to criminal investigations, she said.

Now ACRATH and its allies want to make sure the pilot program works and becomes a permanent part of the anti-slavery package.



Picture: iStock

that there'd be some survivors who'd sustained physical injuries from their traffickers sitting there in pain and terribly distressed because they were not open to starting a conversation with police," she said.

Learning about victims' experiences sparked ACRATH's determination to combat slavery, and the exploitation of women, in particular. It also drove the organisation to form ties with other concerned clergy, churches, faith and government groups.

Some joined with ACRATH to call for change.

But there was much more to be done.

"It's important for churches, and especially churches where there are recently arrived communities, to challenge people to be aware of human trafficking and what regulations are in place," Ms Carolan said.

In an emergency call 000.

Free legal advice is available at:
antislavery.org.au/free-legal-services

Help with forced marriage situations is available at
mybluesky.org.au.



Members of the Yarra Gospel Community Choir sing gospel songs with universal truths.

Picture: supplied.

Community choir to mark 19 years singing gospel truths

■ Jenan Taylor

A Boroondara choir is celebrating 19 years as an independent ensemble for the entire community.

Yarra Gospel Community Choir has been meeting and practising at St John's Camberwell for years, but it has a long reach into the wider population.

Committee member Rosemary Kenny said the choir was a very social group with a large mix of people. Ms Kenny said some were very strong Christians, others weren't believers at all.

But she said universal truths in gospel songs appealed to such a broad

section of people.

"Caring for one another, doing things together and sharing. That's what most of the songs are about," Ms Kenny said.

Founder and St Mark's Camberwell parishioner Yvonne Giltinan said she was inspired to start the group through her own long involvement with gospel choirs.

"I saw all these people coming into church during the week, singing these fabulous gospel songs, but they wouldn't be going to church on Sunday. I thought this is a really beautiful way of reaching into the community," Ms Giltinan said.

She said even though several of the choir's songs were traditionally sung by

African American slaves, they resonated with many people.

"Many participants have told me that the songs spoke to them as they went through illnesses, and traumatic experiences. They dwelled in their hearts and minds, and helped console and sustain them," Ms Giltinan said.

"They're universal and timeless, and they still can speak to you today."

Recently retired from her choir director role, she said some of the highlights included mentoring young people to become conductors, and performing in a range of places, including at the Mission to Seafarers.

Young Anglican hopes to learn from faith diversity summit

■ Jenan Taylor

A Hume parishioner hopes to broaden his understanding of world faiths and see God in this diversity at a global interfaith gathering.

St Peter's Anglican member Adrian Dass joined people from more than 200 spiritual and faith traditions at the Parliament of the World Religions in Chicago during August.

Aimed at cultivating harmony, organisers said the convention was a call to faith leaders and communities to unite against authoritarianism.

Its program includes a

presentation from Palestinian Christian peacemaker Elias Jabbour, and an exploration of how communities face climate change challenges, the equality of indigenous peoples, and the dignity of women.

Mr Dass said he was particularly interested in exploring both the difference and commonalities that existed between religious traditions. He said it was important to strive for understanding because it would help people of diverse backgrounds and traditions find solutions to common problems.

An electrical engineer, Mr Dass has been an Anglican



Adrian Dass (centre) will head to the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago. Picture: supplied.

for most of his life.

Hume priest-in-charge the Reverend Dr Satvasheela Pandhare said it was important people embraced and respected a diversity of religious views, given the

religious violence unfolding in parts of the world.

If young people like Mr Dass took up the charge for positive change, it wouldn't take long to happen, Dr Pandhare said.

Dingley church celebrates 150 years prayer and service

■ Jenan Taylor

A Melbourne parish with humble beginnings is preparing to mark 150 years of prayer, worship and community service.

Christ Church Dingley sprang from a small, home-based prayer service for the people of the surrounding market garden and farming community in the late 1800s.

Its dedication service involved two adult baptisms and a generous donation of money to the Alfred Hospital.

Those discipleship and prayer traditions, and heart for looking outwards, remain strong today at the church.

Long time parishioner Geraldine Sheard said this heritage was the yardstick by which the church measured all its programs and offerings.

Mrs Sheard said part of Christ Church's early history included setting up a Sunday school in the area, providing water for travellers, and organising Queen carnivals to raise funds. She said the church offered a rich banquet of Christian teaching over the years with several guest speaker presentations.

Parish history co-author John Pilbrow said there were more than 300 people a week attending services by 1990, and 230 were registered in the church's home groups. Mr Pilbrow said now there were about eight "Connect" groups with 10 or so people per cluster. He said the church also raised funds for a range of missions including Tearfund, World Vision and made goods for organisations such as Purple Hands in Alice Springs.

Mrs Sheard said that although attend-



Christ Church Dingley members Geraldine Sheard and John Pilbrow are preparing to help celebrate the church's 150th anniversary. Picture: Jenan Taylor

ance had ebbed and flowed over the years, it had always been stable. She believed until recently the congregation was ageing, but youth interest in Christ Church was being revitalised through a new children's and youth minister.

About 15 young people now participate in the church, Mrs Sheard said.

"It's our responsibility to reach out and be there for them," she said. "Otherwise, all our history, our activities, all the wonderful things that have happened here won't mean anything unless we have a vision to nurture people for the future."

Mrs Sheard said prayer underwrote everything the church did, and with several prayer groups meeting each week.

Christ Church vicar the Reverend Richard Loh said God grew the church and continued to bless it with many people, largely because of its prayer focus. Mr Loh said the church needed lay ministers, so one of its aims for the near future was to equip and disciple lay people to take leadership roles.

Christ Church Dingley will be holding a service presided over by Bishop Paul Barker on Sunday 24 September to mark the anniversary. Organisers will be inviting local politicians, business and community people to the service and a lunch.

More details available at: ccd.org.au.

Church's market draws community together

■ Jenan Taylor

A Melbourne church has strengthened its wider community links through its makers' market.

Treasures and Tastes at Trinity market in Surrey Hills has helped the area's creators, artists and growers unveil their offerings for 15 years.

Holy Trinity warden Di Weetman said the market has been a major fundraiser for the parish since then, supporting



Holy Trinity Surrey Hills runs a monthly cafe at the market.

Picture: supplied.

programs such as its youth group and monthly kids' church. But she said the market's main value was in outreach and bringing the community together.

The monthly market has a cafe and

community volunteers, a barbecue, and as many as 50 stalls. Ms Weetman said many stallholders came for the social connection – for the chat, and the great atmosphere.

Much work remains for campaginers

■ Jenan Taylor

Women's ordination advocates in Sydney are preparing to mark 40 years of championing women's leadership in ministry across Australia.

The Movement for the Ordination of Women Sydney chapter will celebrate the activism of founding president Dr Patricia Brennan in particular.

Dr Brennan's arguments for the ordination of women in the Anglican Church made her a visible figure for change across the country.

Current president Dr Elaine Lindsay said through Dr Brennan's leadership the Sydney-based MOW became a force for change nationally in the Anglican church.

Dr Lindsay said Dr Brennan's work also encouraged women in the Uniting and Catholic churches to pursue women's ministry leadership.

She said some of the earlier challenges the movement navigated included different ideas for how reform might best be achieved.

Dr Lindsay said on one hand there was the idea that women shouldn't be ordained



Dr Elaine Lindsay. Picture: mowatch.com.au

because that would make them part of the problem. On the other, there was the view that to change the system you had to be inside it.

She said the MOW in Sydney continued to navigate with difficulty its location in

the heartland of opposition to women's leadership in the church.

But Dr Lindsay said the MOW had a role there.

"I call it the 'ministry of irritation' or 'ministry of witness'. We still have to say there are women who want to be ordained. It's not enough for dioceses opposing women priests to just say to women, 'well go to another diocese'," Dr Lindsay said.

"We need to remind the Sydney diocese, particularly, that there are and have been women in the pews who actually wanted to be ministered to by women as well as men."

She said the group was also there to remind people in other dioceses who thought the ordination question was settled that it was easy to slide backwards, because churches could be colonised by people who stood against women's ordination.

The 40th anniversary celebrations will be held at Christ Church St Laurence on Sunday 17 September.

For further information contact ruthchampion47@gmail.com

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THE Melbourne Anglican

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'This is about people not politics'

Picture: iStock

■ Robyn Davis

My beloved younger sister died on 1 February this year, aged 69, after a short, but fierce battle with thyroid cancer.

Our family of sisters fought alongside her and carried her to her final resting place.

She left much unfinished business.

This was the battle of our lives, but certainly not our only battle. Our family, like many other First Nations families has lived many battles. Sometimes life is a constant battle.

I have buried eight family members in the past five years, including my mother, father and younger brother. My mother and darling brother were quiet achievers, working away at both national and grass roots level on numerous cultural projects. They left unfinished business and projects in limbo.

Our family has worked – and continues to work – in community and for community over the past 30 years, with many government, non-government, education, health and private organisations.

Yet there is so much still to do. We continue to work to preserve our quickly diminishing cultural heritage sites. There are many sacred sites unknown, untended and uncared for on privately owned land. Our great grandmother's grave is ravaged by rabbits and trampled by sheep!

Our sacred places should be everyone's treasures. We have many cultural riches to share. Working together for preservation of these sites would benefit each and every one of us.

All basic human rights for Indigenous people were extinguished at first settlement. A once proud race, living under a highly regulated system of Lore, reduced to animals in a split second in history.

First Nations people were treated as inhuman, until the referendum in 1967, when we magically changed from flora and fauna into human beings.

The "Yes" vote in 1967 converted us to human – but humans without a voice. Finally, we could be seen but we were still unheard!

Our people are still the most uneducated, the most institutionalised and the most persecuted.

Our young people feel forgotten and despondent. We battle each day with unemployment, racism, incarceration, health and housing issues.

I think sometimes that we confuse the issue, overthink and dissect too much.

This situation is about people not politics. Let's just break it down to an understandable equation. This is a referendum that should not be happening. First Nations people should have had the recognition when our constitution was first drawn up. It should have been a right! This issue should have been resolved many years ago, it shouldn't be an issue now!

Australian Indigenous peoples are the oldest living culture in the world. We have inner city communities, fringe dwellers, rural, remote and traditional communities. All have varying degrees of education, understanding of governance, different traditions and values.

I have travelled this country over many years, visiting and working in rural and remote communities. I have heard the cries of some of my brothers and sisters who call for a "No" vote. We all recognise the differing levels of understanding, education, and language barriers in the very diverse communities we each live in. Our communities have different wants and needs. I believe we need to make this a simple question – one of recognition – not of politics.

This is a time to step forward into the unknown. We have been pushed to the background for so long that for some of us it's a comfortable place. The "Yes" position will be an uncomfortable place, an unknown place, but a place where we are recognised as First Peoples.

The "Yes" vote won't right the wrongs, but we need to move forward together as a nation, proud of our shared history. Maybe our place at the table won't give us all the things we want, but it will give us the opportunity to discuss the issues in a forum willing to listen and hopefully value what we bring to the table.

The issue is simply about being recognised as the First Peoples in our own country. At 65,000 years, we are certainly old enough to have a seat at the table and have a say in issues and affairs that affect each one of us.

My heart says, "Please let our voices be heard". Let us put up our hands, be recognised and counted in our own country. This may be an opportunity to work together on unfinished business, work on issues that affect our everyday lives, to share our unique perspective and protect all of our history.

My plea to you is to read the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which calls for Voice, Makarrata (Treaty) and Truth telling.

"We call on all Australians to walk together to build a better future by establishing a First Nations Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Constitution. And the establishment of a Makarrata Commission for the purpose of Treaty making and truth telling."

The Voice is our first step!

The Reverend Robyn Davis is a Wadi Wadi woman from the Balranald and Swan Hill area. She is an Indigenous artist and life member of NATSIAC.

We have so much, we must use it to grow

■ Nils von Kalm

The cost-of-living crisis Australians are facing is causing huge anxiety for many people. The increases in rents, interest rates, and utility bills are putting pressure on all of us. For many of us, our life right now is a struggle just to find enough money for the essentials.

Our natural tendency at times like this is to look inward, bunker down and do our best to look after ourselves until conditions improve.

Despite the difficulties we face, we still live in a country with great privilege and access to opportunity. Australia outperforms the average in income, jobs, education, health, environmental quality, social connections, civic engagement, and life satisfaction, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Better Life Index. We have access to fresh water, food and healthcare in ways many people don't. We have freedom of movement, and live at peace.

Of course, many Australians do not experience this privilege. For instance, Indigenous Australians experience discrimination, racism, violence – and a huge gap in life expectancy, among other issues.

But for most of us, we have been lucky enough to be born in or migrated to a nation of where we live in safety, with all we need. This certainly been my experience. Being born here has given me opportunities I might not have experienced in many other parts of the world.

With this in mind, what should those of us with privilege do with our good fortune?

How do we live in a way that is Godly, and gives something back to a society that has given us so much? In Luke 12:48, Jesus says that to those who have been given much, much is expected. How do we live that out?

“...what should those of us with privilege do with our good fortune? How do we live in a way that is Godly, and gives something back to a society that has given us so much?”

Nils von Kalm

If I am to take seriously my life as a follower of Jesus, it makes sense to go where he went. After his resurrection, as he was preparing to leave this world, Jesus said to his disciples, “as the Father has sent me, so I send you”. So, where was Jesus sent? Well, he was known as a friend of the unloved, the outcast and the despised.

Many Christians throughout history have taken up this mantle to go where Jesus was sent. Mother Theresa went to the dying in the slums of Kolkata, Francis of Assisi gave up all his possessions, and John Smith, founder of God's Squad Christian Motorcycle Club, went to outlaw bikers and other misfits of society. It was Christians who widely developed hospitals and universities and who set up charities.

It is still the case that the majority of the most well-known charitable institutions in Australia have Christian roots.

As a person of relative privilege, I am convinced that we are called to use our privilege for the good of others. It was Bono, the lead singer of the band, U2, and activist for the poor, who said he wanted to use his fame as currency, to give back what has been given to him. That's a wonderful example to follow. After all, Jesus said the whole Law and the Prophets was summed up in the command to do unto others as we would want them to do for us. For Jesus, it was all about loving God and neighbour, including our enemies.

So, what does this look like practically?

Part of going where Jesus was sent can include giving a voice to the voiceless. During my time working in aid and development over the last couple of decades, I was able to visit the Gaza Strip and see firsthand the plight of Palestinians and how they live in the light of the occupation of their land. Gaza is the third most densely populated region on the planet, 95 percent of the water there is undrinkable, unemployment is as high as 50 percent, and half of all children there have expressed no will to live. It's also a conflict zone.

When I was in Gaza, my own sense of privilege struck me deeply. During my second trip there, in 2018, Gaza came under attack from Israeli bombs. The hotel that I and my colleague was staying in shook as bombs dropped around the city. Needless to say, it was a scary time. We were asked if we wanted to leave, but we chose to stay to do what we could to continue our work



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“People living under oppression and without privilege, just like the rest of us, just want to be heard and seen. They want the world to know what is happening.”

Nils von Kalm

with women experiencing breast cancer.

The fact that I could have left at any time though reveals how privileged I am.

The people who live in Gaza can't leave. They are trapped in what is often called the world's largest open-air prison. Regular bombings are just part of life for them.

What the local people did ask us to do was to go back home and tell their stories. People living under oppression and without privilege, just like the rest of us, just want to be heard and seen. They want the world to know what is happening.

Jesus allowed the unheard to be heard through his acts of compassion and the fact that he, as God incarnate, “emptied himself” as Philippians 2 tells us, thereby showing the way for us to follow.

It is not enough to just be aware of our privilege here in Australia. Following

Jesus, loving our neighbour, means telling the stories of the unheard, giving a voice to those who are voiceless, and making sacrifices for those less privileged than us. It involves doing all we can to work for the reign of God on earth as in heaven, as we pray each week in the Lord's Prayer. By doing so, we will be participating in the healing of the world and working for that day we read of in Revelation 11:15, when the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and he will reign forever and ever.

Nils von Kalm is a Melbourne writer who focuses on the links between Christian faith and culture. He can be found online at linktr.ee/nilsvonkalm.

The Anglican Diocese of Melbourne has no tolerance for any form of abuse, harassment or other misconduct. All concerns and reports of abuse and misconduct must be reported.



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Even as we disagree, we can rejoice that

■ Christopher Porter

Take one look at our public media and it seems that our modern society is fuelled by discontent, disagreement and dissent.

A recent study from Camilla Bjarnøe at Aalborg demonstrated that political news articles that were framed as conflict increased their consumption and discussion in social settings. Chris Bail's extensive study of social media, in *Breaking the Social Media Prism*, highlighted its power to demarcate and divide, a power which is starkly elevated by its lack of physical interaction. Our 21st century culture effectively "runs" on disagreement and dissent.

But lest we think that this is a novel form of malaise, generated by screens, binary politics, or other pressures of modern life, we hear this long history of conflict in the musings of Jonathan Swift's Lemuel Gulliver:

Difference in opinions has cost many millions of lives: for instance, whether flesh be bread, or bread be flesh; whether the juice of a certain berry be blood or wine; whether whistling be a vice or a virtue; whether it be better to kiss a post, or throw it into the fire; what is the best colour for a coat, whether black, white, red, or gray; and whether it should be long or short, narrow or wide, dirty or clean; with many more. Neither are any wars so furious and bloody, or of so long a continuance, as those occasioned by difference in opinion, especially if it be in things indifferent.

How then may we – as Christians – wrestle with dissent and disagreement, especially as it inevitably infiltrates our church? The Scriptures hold a wide variety of advice, from the apparently conflicting aphorisms of Proverbs (e.g. 26:4-5), to formal mechanisms and examples of conflict resolution (e.g. Matthew 18, or Acts 15).

Among these we find in the Johannine high priestly prayer, in Jesus' words, a rationale for engaging in the mess of dispute and dissent:

I ask ... that they may all be one ... I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20-23)

Given our apparent predilection for conflict, is this degree of unity simply a pipe dream? Can we get some idea of what this

looks like in the church? One short vignette in Acts gives us some insight into how this might occur.

In Acts 15 we find a church conflicted over the question of the incorporation of Gentiles as Gentiles into the church, with Paul and Barnabas being sent down from Antioch to a gathering in Jerusalem (15:2). After significant debate at the first Jerusalem Council the outcome was to seek the unity of believers by "not making it difficult" for Gentiles (15:20), but still preserving table fellowship for Jewish believers (15:21).

"How then may we – as Christians – wrestle with dissent and disagreement, especially as it inevitably infiltrates our church?"

Christopher Porter

The council appears to be a resounding success, but only a few verses later we find the same Paul and Barnabas in such sharp disagreement over the inclusion of John Mark that they end up parting ways in the following journey. What should we make of this, and why do we find it hot on the heels of the Jerusalem Council? In many ways the answer lies in the messiness of human social interactions and the reality of groups and organisations. The theological ideal of unity, as expressed in John, tends towards the spiritual and perichoretic – the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity. Even within that gospel we see differences in opinion and approach. Indeed, we find similar today.

Social psychologists have had a particular interest in the study of dissent and division in groups and organisations, especially when it tends towards schism. Fabio Sani at the University of Dundee has had a particular interest in the schism of groups – including studying the debate over women's ordination in the Church of England – and has identified a specific problem with approaches to mediating division. Often approaches to disagreement aim to find a resolution to the dispute, so focus on a single position to be held or "correct idea". Sani has continually observed that these attempts at papering over a fracture often lead to further fracturing. In his continued

study of the Church of England he found that the suppression of both parties' ability to voice concerns only led to further dissatisfaction and dissent with the church as a whole, ultimately leading to schism and secession. Instead, the means for generating unity was to allow for robust dissent and debate, a practice that some have termed "strategic dissent".

However, this approach to dissent and division must also be placed in a broader context. In a study on strategic dissent, Codou Samba and Daan van Knippenberg found it could have the opposite effect, fomenting dissatisfaction and division within an organisation. While they found that strategic dissent allowed for a variety of approaches and positions for any given decision, the effect was not universally applicable across an organisation. Indeed, two factors came to the surface. First, dissent and division amongst senior management presented a divided picture over an organisation's strategic direction, diluting the organisation's purpose. Second, they found that once the strategic direction was diluted or divided, various work teams often retreated into entrenched positions, and believed that other groups were simply incorrect or wrong. Both are highly relatable outcomes.

"...it is on the basis of this unity of vision that we find that Paul and Barnabas are able to part company despite their disagreement, and still engage in their missions."

Christopher Porter

How can these be held in tension? Especially given Jesus' prayer for the church to be united as a witness to the world (John 17:21). Disagreement and strategic dissent can be helpful as they allow for representation, and a shared understanding of others in the group, as the social psychological studies show. Organisationally strategic dissent offers new ways to resolve issues and mitigate against schism. But this is best expressed at the "ground level", in smaller teams and groups, between those who have the opportunity to truly listen to each other. Perhaps even more critically, it is dependent

Christ is preached

19



Picture: iStock

on a core vision of the organisation, and that is set at higher levels – yes, with input from smaller teams – but directionally.

These two aspects are what we see in Acts 15, with the Jerusalem Council followed swiftly by Paul and Barnabas departing in separate ways. We can see the unity in the gospel offered by the council, with the open arms of fellowship to the Gentiles, along with instructions to maintain table worship. However, it is on the basis of this unity of vision that we find that Paul and Barnabas are able to part company despite their disagreement, and still engage in their missions. We read on in Acts of the outcomes of their missions. Indeed, Paul reflects positively about Mark in 2 Timothy and Colossians.

“Synod allows for strategic dissent, where we need not paper over divisions but can engage with them.”

Christopher Porter

So too for our church. This regular opportunity we have is exemplified at synod, which provides an opportunity to disagree well. Synod allows for strategic dissent, where we need not paper over divisions but can engage with them. However, as our second study highlighted, to do so

well we need to have a strong common vision that our entire church is aligned to.

The vision of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne is “Making the Word of God fully known”, and the strategic directions allow for a breadth of approaches to that. We will undoubtedly have different mechanisms for achieving this, and quite likely disagree over them. But if it is truly our vision we will allow for disagreement and with Paul we can say: “The important thing is that in every way ... Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice” (Philippians 1:18).

The Reverend Dr Christopher Porter is post-doctoral research fellow at Trinity College Theological School and primary investigator on Figuring the Enemy, a research project examining religious enmity.

Time will judge the ethical implications of

Gayle Woloschak is a fellow of ISCAST (Christianity and Science in Conversation) and Professor of Radiation Oncology at Northwestern University, USA. She has taught religion and science courses for more than 20 years and has a keen interest in ethics. Here she pens some thoughts on the capabilities, concerns, and benefits of artificial intelligence, and the constraints needed for this rapidly developing technology.

The new AI platform, ChatGPT, was asked to write a short limerick summarising the advantages and disadvantages of AI:

*In a world with AI by our side,
Advantages we cannot hide,
Efficiency's high,
Tasks simplified, Oh my!
Yet concerns do arise, worldwide.*

It seems to come so easily for ChatGPT to “think” about its place in the world. But how do we react to this limerick and to the fact that a non-human entity, ChatGPT, can evaluate its own merits or disadvantages? Amused? Or disturbed? This may be our spontaneous response to AI, but the critical need is for a *considered and studied* response to this new technology.

Most Christians view technology as neither good nor bad, but believe it is a technology's purpose and application that determines its ethical implications. There is, however, more to it than that. For Christians considering AI, we need reliable, high-quality knowledge about the technology to begin to reflect theologically and develop a Christian ethics of AI. It is within the science of AI where that knowledge potentially lies.

Even though it may not be apparent, science itself can drive the ethics behind decision-making. For example, when AIDS was first discovered, it was considered

ethical to quarantine AIDS-positive people away from others, based on the very real possibility that AIDS was spreading by aerosol. Then, when scientists discovered that AIDS was caused by the virus HIV-1 – a virus not spread by aerosol – the ethics of how best to handle AIDS patients changed: quarantine was no longer needed.

Because science can and does drive ethics, and even our Christian ethics, a careful handling of our knowledge of AI is very important. For example, what do we know of AI's response to ethically-charged situations? Will AI be compassionate? Or, for instance, will AI give humans answers that reflect an unhealthy internet bias? This short article outlines some of my concerns about AI, some of the possible advantages, and offers some guidelines for the “AI-future”.

Concerns over adopting ChatGPT too broadly

One of the most popular current forms of AI is ChatGPT, an algorithm that develops text for stories, articles, and so on, given just a limited amount of human input. It is trained to follow an instruction and provide a detailed response.

The resulting text can fool even the experts. For instance, scientists were unable to distinguish scientific article abstracts written by AI from those written by real people, according to a 2023 article in the journal *Nature* by H. Else. It is easy to see potential problems here for the integrity of scientific endeavour if AI pervaded the scientific method.

On a broader note, academic integrity is threatened by AI. At my university campus, cases have been found where students have used ChatGPT to write their papers. Software is needed to detect these cases more reliably, but is presently not

“With AI, one can apply all human online knowledge to a problem rather than just the amount a single brain can provide.”

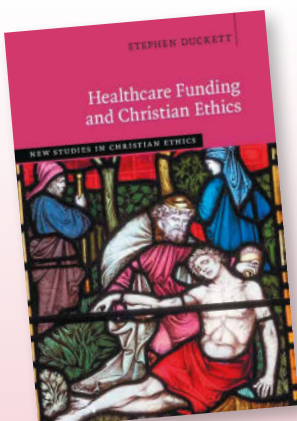
Gayle Woloschak

dependable. ChatGPT will be challenging for education.

Apart from academic integrity, another concern is that ChatGPT lacks a “feel” for how humans frame our communication. So often with human communication, the “life” surrounding what we say adds extra nuance and deeper levels of meaning – but ChatGPT leaves this out by generating generic responses. For example, a group of theologians asked ChatGPT to write a sermon on the Feast of the Transfiguration. Most of the resulting sermon was accurate with an appropriate description of the feast. But the ChatGPT-generated sermon was generic – it was applicable in a broad variety of situations, whereas sermons by pastors are typically written to suit a particular parish for a particular day.

Similar observations about the limitations of ChatGPT can also be made with ChatGPT's creation of art and movie scripts. To date, the art has been generic with little originality, has lacked the detail of human art, and also suffered from the biases of the internet. Further, a movie script written by an AI bot in 2016 and developed into a film lacked logical links: it is not clear how one line follows from the other.

A major concern is over the inherent bias that comes either from the AI itself or from the training datasets that were used to generate the AI. For example, when AI was



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AI tech

asked to do a photo identification of a blurry picture of Barack Obama, it featured him as a white man rather than being true to his dark skin color. Another concern is that AI pretrains the datasets for a world someone thinks “should be” instead of the world that is.

Difficulties in controlling AI have also been noted. Some scholars are worried about the vast knowledge that AI can amass. In a May 2023 BBC news article AI “godfather” Geoffrey Hinton warned of the dangers that AI can pose to humanity. In particular, he was concerned about AI generating humor and “laughing” at issues insensitively, or generating insults and expressing sarcasm heartlessly.

Some other concerns include the difficulties in regulating AI, predicted job loss (although data has not shown this yet), and questions about the rights of artificial or electronic persons.

These considerations grow our understanding of AI. Yet more importantly, they can shape our ethics around AI and may well guard against adopting AI’s use too broadly.

Does AI have advantages?

Despite the concerns, there are advantages that make AI worthwhile as a human endeavor. With AI, one can apply all human online knowledge to a problem rather than just the amount a single brain can provide. Analysis of huge datasets about millions of individuals, which have not been possible with other tools, are possible with AI. The information gained from this has vastly enhanced medical studies, diagnostic work, banking, cyber security, and much more. A typical example is where hundreds of thousands of radiological results from mammograms are given to computers to identify patterns to better distinguish cancer from normal tissue, without the need for a second, more detailed, examination of

patients. Diagnostic accuracy is enhanced while lessening patient and doctor time.

Goals for an ‘AI-future’

In light of these considerations, future goals have been advanced at AI conferences. These goals may help to shape our Christian ethics of AI:

1. Maintain human verification. AI in general makes many mistakes and verification that the information is valid would be important.
2. Develop rules for accountability. Some programs exist that can check for AI activity, but these are not considered fully accurate at this point.
3. Invest in a truly open system. Most ChatGPT systems that are used today are proprietary, which limits their use and their ability to be applied to some systems.
4. Widen the debate to include those who might be impacted by AI yet who are not direct users.
5. Improve transparency. There is little information on the training data that is fed to AI, and thus the biases that may

be part of the system are not clear. Are only data from North America included? Are data from selected racial populations included? Are particular groups prevented from being part of AI training datasets, and so on?

Even with these goals, few of us would think the “AI-future” is certain. Doubtless more guidelines are needed.

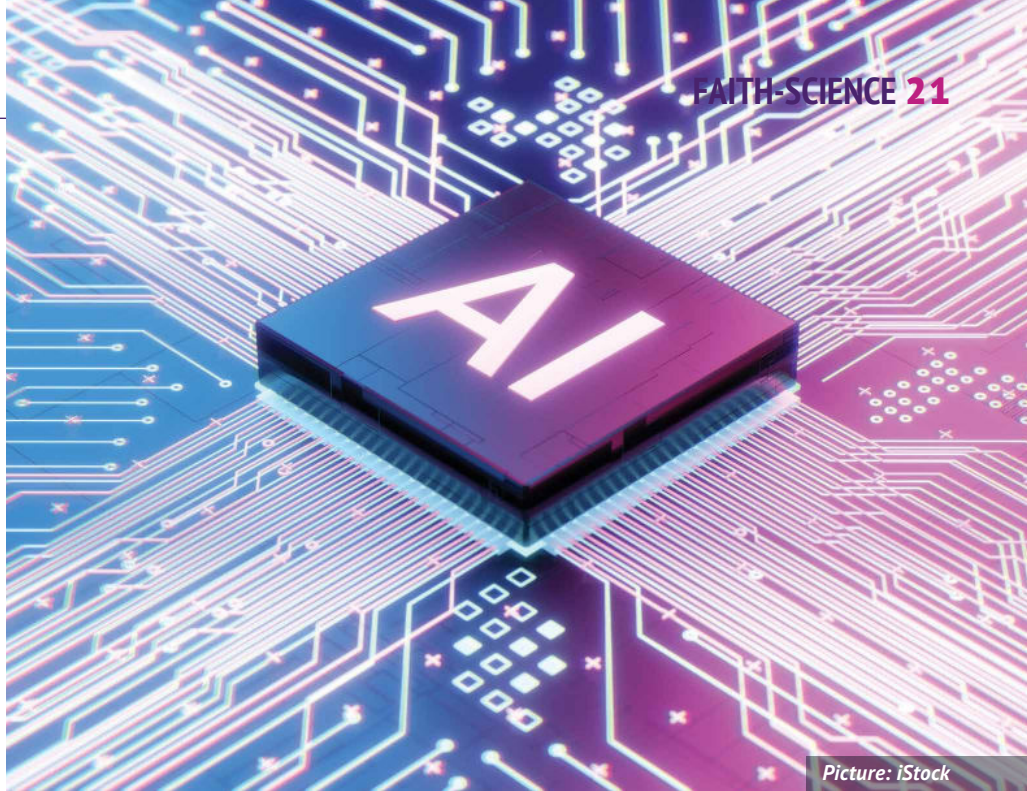
AI itself was asked to generate two short limericks, one on a future with AI and one on the future dangers of AI:

*In the future, AI's prowess will bloom,
A world of wonder it will consume
With algorithms so bright
And data as its light
New frontiers it will constantly groom.*

Or:

*In the future, beware of AI's might,
As it ventures into the night,
With intelligence keen,
A power unseen,
Its dangers could cause quite a fright.*

Which is more accurate? Time will judge if either is correct.



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■ Fergus King

Bradly Billings, Truly Called? Vocation in the Anglican Church. Mulgrave: Broughton, 2023.

Books on the nature and ministry of priesthood abound.

Bishop Brad has added a most useful volume to this body of work. His book provides a not only theological introduction to the nature of vocation, discernment and holy orders within the Anglican church, but also a focused, practical guide to the steps involved in the process. It further provides appendices including the creeds, 39 Articles, the ordinals and specifically Australian materials, which should be the foundational texts for any potential candidate to reflect on their call to ministry.

The first part of the book addresses vocation and calling, the second the nature and experience of orders within the Anglican tradition. A second, crucial, point of difference is that this book specifically describes the Australian experience of such phenomena. It further provides a neat precis of the history of the Anglican Church in Australia, and its peculiarities. In this respect, it is very much an original contribution to the extant literature given to aspirants and ordinands.

The work is the product of much reflection, practice, and reading on the processes of discernment, vocation and orders within Anglicanism. As such, it provides a valuable tapestry of quotations from both Scripture and secondary literature which speak into these processes, by reference to both theology and experience. Much of this necessarily comes out of English experience. But Bishop Brad avoids both cultural cringe and the potential

pitfall of adopting the Church of England's establishment identity as the church of the nation, which remains alien to almost every other expression of Anglicanism. (No matter how much some may wish or pretend otherwise).

Bishop Brad also rightly points out that theological education and formation must combine theoretical, reflective, and practical matters to enable an adequate depth of theological understanding to sustain ministry. He further points out that learning is not completed with formation. This in itself is nothing new and always stood behind the old practice of compulsory training curacies which lasted for periods of two or more years, and risks being lost. It is further affirmed in the promises made at ordination to pursue lifelong learning.

"This extremely worthwhile volume will be indispensable for candidates for ordination."

A book of this type cannot delve into the intricacies of the different positions within Anglican understandings of holy orders. But Bishop Brad does explore the differences between functional (doing) and ontological (being) understandings. These often distinguish functional (evangelical or low-church) understandings from the ontological (Anglo-Catholic). He notes that both aspects are present within received Anglican understandings, even if they remain a point of contention.

A possible solution to this enduring tension does, however, exist within

Orthodox thinking. John Zizioulas expresses the tension between ontological and functional understanding in *Being and Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, suggesting that a communitarian understanding of personhood obviates the problems which the promotion of individualism over personhood causes. This communitarian approach – best and most simply expressed in the Swahili proverb *Mtu ni watu* (a person is people) – means that the source of our being is grounded in the existence of the church, the eucharistic body of Christ, not ourselves as individuals. It has the merit of grounding our true being and nature in the "being born from above" of baptism, rather than the simple fact of existence. It affirms, as Bishop Brad and the term "baptismal ecclesiology" do, that baptism matters more than ordination. It is an additional reminder that this communitarian understanding explains why discernment of vocation is ultimately the decision of the church rather than the perception of the candidate, no matter how strongly felt. And, it also addresses well the old dictum that vocation and location go together, which is well-known in Anglican circles. A person is not ordained without a place in which they may function being identified.

This extremely worthwhile volume will be indispensable for candidates for ordination, not least because of the relevant material gathered conveniently within a single set of covers. It should also be on the shelves of clergy who are either encouraging laity to think of ordination, or walking with them through the processes.

The Reverend Dr Fergus King is Farnham Maynard lecturer in Ministry Education and director of the Ministry Education Centre, Trinity College Theological School.



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A challenging book, but one that risks another form of fundamentalism

■ Peter Adam

Robyn J. Whitaker, *Even the Devil Quotes Scripture: Reading the Bible on Its Own Terms*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023.

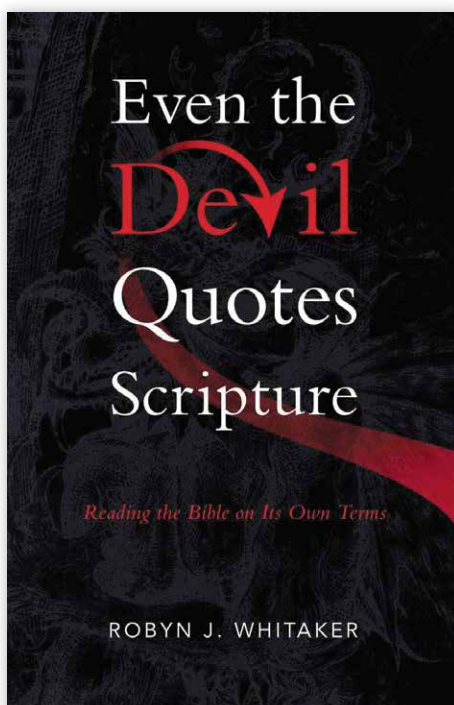
Robyn Whitaker is associate professor of New Testament at the University of Divinity, Melbourne.

In this book she tells us about the Bible, and how we read and interpret it. She also gives an account of how she moved from a fundamentalist and literalist understanding of the Bible to understanding it in the light of academic study, resulting in a more nuanced interpretation. As she writes in the introduction: "We are meant to take the Bible seriously, not literally".

The book has many good features. It shows respect for the Bible, and works to uncover its coherence. It recognises that the Bible is not a tight system, but contains different perspectives in different places, and that we must finally understand the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament. And yes, when we read the Bible seriously and attentively, we are continually finding ourselves challenged in life, thought, and actions. We also need to recognise that the Bible does not conform to modern scientific or historical practices, or to contemporary literary styles. It is an ancient book.

Whitaker follows the process of the re-interpretation which goes on throughout the Bible, most notably with Jesus' significant interpretation of the Old Testament, which of course contradicted many assumptions of his contemporaries.

However, this is where I differ from her ideas. She writes, "our goal is not to immediately apply Jesus' interpretation to



"We are meant to take the Bible seriously, not literally."

Robyn Whitaker

our own context in a literalistic way, but rather to interpret like he did, to mimic his approach rather than to treat his conclusions as prescriptions for every context" (page 122).

As disciples of Christ, we must commit to his conclusions, lest our interpretations contradict his words! For he said, "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words ... the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he

comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels" in Mark 8:38, and "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" in Mark 13:31. If we take these words seriously, we will commit to his words, his teaching!

In reality, there are more than the two options Whitaker gives. For we can "apply Jesus' interpretation to our own context" in a non-literalistic way. Jesus said, "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees" in Mark 8:15. We certainly need to think carefully about how to apply that instruction: but we must apply it and obey it.

The book sets aside the intended meaning of the authors of the books of the Bible, in favour of contemporary reinterpretation (page 129). But setting aside "authorial intent" when reading the gospels also means setting aside Jesus' intent. When reading the gospels, as St Augustine wrote, "to believe what you please, and not to believe what you please, is to believe yourselves, and not the Gospel". This can lead to yet another form of fundamentalism, in which the spirit of our age rules supreme.

Whitaker rightly features the theme of love in the Bible, our responsibility to love others. However it is dangerous to extract a single simple principle from the Bible. The principle then determines our reading of the Bible, ignores nuanced or contrary evidence, and determines the message we will find. The book's title is unfortunate, as it seems to imply that other interpretations of the Bible are Satanic.

I enjoyed reading this stirring and challenging book!

Canon Dr Peter Adam is Vicar Emeritus of St Jude's Carlton, and former Principal of Ridley College.

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Mythic and religious themes haunt this transcendent nuclear biopic

■ Tim Kroenert

Christopher Nolan's films, rarely engage with Christianity directly, but are replete with spiritual and religious themes.

Themes of guilt and regret, of the implications of one's actions for the planet and society, of the nature of time and reality, the conscious and subconscious, of humanity's place in the cosmos, and the construction of self in relation to the world and others. Nolan was raised a Catholic, though he noted in 2020 that the influence of Christianity upon his work and outlook is mostly cultural. The "cultural potsherds" of Christianity, he said, flowed around his education and upbringing. He has been inevitably shaped by them. The deeper concerns of this upbringing simmer in his films.

Nolan's *Oppenheimer* brings together many of those thematic hallmarks. It charts the experiences of theoretical physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer (Cillian Murphy) in the years leading up to, and following, the design and construction of the first atomic bomb in the United States. It traces his years-long antagonistic relationship with

Lewis Strauss (Robert Downey Jr), chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, and the accusations of communism that plagued Oppenheimer's later career. It explores the complicated corners of Oppenheimer's two great romantic relationships, with his wife Katherine Puening (Emily Blunt), and mistress Jean Tatlock (Florence Pugh).

But these individual parts add up to more than a straightforward biopic. It is a Nolan trademark to treat time as pliable – from the backwards narrative of *Memento*, to the heady games with relativity that drive the plot of *Interstellar*, to the asymmetrical chronologies weaving together in *Dunkirk*. In *Oppenheimer*, the various timelines are elegantly, intricately spliced. There is nothing linear about this telling of Oppenheimer's life. Instead, an entire life is moulded around a central moment, the successful testing of the first atomic bomb at the culmination of the Manhattan Project. This event and what it signifies seems to echo outwards into both Oppenheimer's past and future.

Oppenheimer is likened to Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods and gave it to humankind. As such the making of the bomb is an event that has a mythic and

religious resonance, both for Oppenheimer and for the world at large. The question of what humankind will do using this gift of fire plagues Oppenheimer, and is amplified by the horror that was inflicted on Japan at the conclusion of the Second World War. Oppenheimer would go on to oppose the creation of the hydrogen bomb, seemingly both as an act of penance and an attempt to arrest the horrific evolution in modern warfare that he himself had set in motion.

This is epic, transcendent filmmaking. The unrelenting, near liturgical score by Ludwig Göransson make of Oppenheimer's story something like a catechism, which probes for answers to some of the biggest geopolitical and existential questions of the 20th century. They are the fission that animates every fine performance, every immaculately crafted scene of interpersonal drama, political infighting and pursuit of terrifying scientific excellence that constitute *Oppenheimer*. The film enhances Nolan's reputation as not only one of the finest, but one of the most important American filmmakers of the 21st century.

Oppenheimer is in cinemas now.