

REMEMBERING NICAEA: A CONTESTED LEGACY



JULY 1-3

Pilgrim Theological College
29 College Cres, Parkville VIC 3052



**A JOINT CONFERENCE WITH THE AUSTRALASIAN CENTRE FOR
WESLEYAN RESEARCH, CHRISTIAN RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
AND ANZATS**

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Pilgrim welcomes participants attending the ANZATS Conference *Remembering Nicea: A Contested Legacy*.

Pilgrim is the theological college of the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, and a College of the University of Divinity, equipping people for ministry and service within and beyond the Church.

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The Remembering Nicaea Conference is brought to you by:

CHRISTIAN RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1985, the Christian Research Association works with Christian denominations, church-related organisations and theological colleges throughout Australia doing research and supporting denominational research activities. It does this by undertaking commissioned research (quantitative and qualitative); assisting churches, colleges, students and other organisations with research-related projects; providing research ethics applications and advice through its independent Human Research Ethics Committee; and publishing an array of resources for use in churches, colleges and schools. For further information, please email: admin@cra.org.au



AUSTRALASIAN CENTRE FOR WESLEYAN RESEARCH

The Australasian Centre for Wesleyan Research (ACWR) is a diverse and multidisciplinary community of established and emerging scholars united by a desire to foster and promote research and scholarship on the Wesleys and the Wesleyan tradition, and to connect Wesleyan scholars across multiple disciplines. It is a working partnership formed by a number of theological institutions and libraries, including The Church of the Nazarene, The Salvation Army, The Uniting Church in Australia, The Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia, and The Wesleyan Methodist Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. For many years the ACWR published the peer-reviewed journal Aldersgate Papers and has now shifted to publishing volumes of essays derived from its annual scholarly conferences. Discover more on our website: <https://www.acwr.edu.au/>



ANZATS

Welcome to our first Joint Conference. It is great to be able to share this conference with the Australasian Centre for Wesleyan Research and the Christian Research Association. Collaboration and partnerships like these enable us to expand our thinking and learn from one another. I am grateful to the ANZATS Executive Officer, Dr Michelle Eastwood, who has taken the lead on behalf of ANZATS in helping to bring this conference into being, as well as to all those who were part of the conference committee.

The Australia and (Aotearoa) New Zealand Association of Theological Studies was formed in 1968 as a representative body of theological schools across our two nations. More recently, we changed our name to reflect that our membership is no longer limited to representatives of institutions, but encompasses the many scholars, within and beyond those institutions, who engage in the study of theology.

ANZATS aims to be a supportive association of scholars who collaborate in contextually relevant theological research. We run the journal, Colloquium, to which members receive access as part of their association membership and hold a yearly conference, such as this one. Membership in ANZATS is open, and I encourage you to consider joining the association. You can become a member through our website, anzats.edu.au.

As part of the conference, we host the ANZATS Annual General Meeting each year. It will be held over lunch on Tuesday. Members are welcome to vote and ask questions at the AGM. From this year, individual members will also be eligible to stand for election to the Council. The Council meets online six times each year to oversee the work of ANZATS, including the Conference, Colloquium, Emerging Scholars Prize, and the Book Awards. Currently, the Council is also discussing ways that ANZATS can serve the community of theological scholars that comprise our membership.

I want to thank the current ANZATS Council for their work over the past year, especially Dr Greg Liston, who has served multiple terms, including as Vice-President (New Zealand), and Dr Peter Laughlin, who has faithfully served many terms as Treasurer.

The 2024-2025 Council

- Christy Capper (President)*
- David Tombs (Vice-President, New Zealand)*
- David Neville (Vice-President, Australia)*
- Peter Laughlin (Treasurer)*
- Jeff Aernie*
- Sam Hey*
- Greg Liston*
- Edwina Murphy*
- Anna Nuernberger*
- Joan Riley*

TIMETABLE

*Monday
June 30*

14:00 – 16:00	STATIONS OF THE CROSS TOUR
16:30 - 17:30	OPENING WORSHIP
17:30 - 19:00	OPENING RECEPTION

*Tuesday
July 1*

08:00-09:00	STUDENT BREAKFAST
08:30-09:00	REGISTRATION
09:00-09:25	WORSHIP/DEVOTION
09:30-11:00	KEYNOTE 1
11:00-11:30	MORNING TEA
11:30-12:40	PARALLEL PAPERS SESSION 1
12:40-14:00	LUNCH
14:00-15:40	PARALLEL PAPERS SESSION 2
15:40-16:00	AFTERNOON TEA
16:00-17:00	WORKSHOPS

*Wednesday
July 2*

08:00-09:00	WOMENS BREAKFAST
09:00-09:25	WORSHIP/DEVOTION
09:30-11:00	KEYNOTE 2
11:00-11:30	MORNING TEA
11:30-12:40	OPEN SPACE CONVERSATION
12:40-14:00	LUNCH
14:00-15:40	PARALLEL PAPERS SESSION 3
15:40-16:00	AFTERNOON TEA
16:00-17:00	PARALLEL PAPERS SESSION 4

*Thursday
July 3*

09:00-9:25	WORSHIP/DEVOTION
09:30-11:00	PANEL
11:00-11:30	MORNING TEA
11:30-12:40	PARALLEL PAPERS SESSION 5
12:40-13:30	LUNCH
13:30-14:30	WRAP UP CONVERSATION

STATIONS OF THE CROSS TOUR

Monday June 30, 2pm

In 1998 the Melbourne City Churches in Action (MCCIA) developed an ecumenical walk through the streets of the City, to remember Jesus' walk to the Cross. The walk is marked by a series of 14 superb bronze sculptures which tell the story of the journey of Jesus from the Last Supper to the Cross. The 14 'stations' are placed outside city churches beginning at Melbourne's oldest Roman Catholic church. The final station is symbolically over the river at one of Melbourne's most recently built churches. Conference participants are invited to join us as we visit each statue culminating in the opening worship service at St John's Lutheran Church, South Gate. It is anticipated that most participants will walk between stops. If you would like transportation, please let us know. Please register to receive detailed instructions.

OPENING WORSHIP AND RECEPTION

Monday June 30, 4.30pm

The opening worship will be held at St John's Lutheran Church, 20 City Rd, Southgate. This will be followed by a reception in the church hall.

ANZATS STUDENT BREAKFAST

Tuesday July 1, 8am

ANZATS is committed to supporting students and so invites all student attendees of the conference to a free breakfast. This is an opportunity to meet other conference attendees and get to know some people before the formalities begin. Please RSVP for catering purposes.



AUSTRALIAN
UNIVERSITY OF
THEOLOGY

WOMENS SCHOLAR'S BREAKFAST

Wednesday June 2, 7.30 Venue: TBC

The Australian University of Theology is committed to supporting women in theological research and scholarship. To that end, we have established a Female Scholars' Network. One way we connect female scholars is through an annual women scholars' breakfast held as part of the ANZATS conference.

Along with Logia and Evangelical Women in Academia, we also maintain a database to make women in theology more visible. This database gives their names, fields, and research interests.

For more information, you can contact the AUT's Graduate School of Research at research@aut.edu.au

. To register, please go to [Women Scholars' Breakfast hosted by Australian University of Theology](#).
RSVPs required by 26th June, 2025.

PARALLEL PAPERS

Session 1

Yaarkon Room: Nicaea 1

- "From Nicaea to the Latent Church: Tillich and the Future of Ecclesial Identity After Christendom" – Chris Magnussen
- The Spaces between the Words: The Expansiveness of the Nicene Creed – Sally Douglas
- ~~Trinitarian Relations of Origin: One-Way from the Father or Multi-Directional? – Jacqueline Service~~

Yagilaith Room: Christian Research Association 1

- A Profile of Catholic Clergy in Australia: A Study on the Wellbeing of Catholic Clergy – Carole Gan and Stephen Reid
- The Implementation of Actions Listed in the Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000 – Woman & Man: The Bishops Respond – Katherine Jelavic

Ngarrgu Room: Divine Characteristics

- Hearing the Tonal Shades of YHWH's Character in Isaiah 3:13-15 – Catherine Fisher
- Can the Cappadocians Agree on How to Invoke the Divine Father, Son and Spirit? Consistency within the Rites of the Coptic Orthodox Church – Abraam Mikhail*

Wirraway Room: Embodiment Theology

- Enflamed and Swallowed Up: Sarah Edwards, Francis of Assisi, and the Bodily Aesthetics of Salvation – Laura Cerbus*
- The Skin as an Icon of the Incarnate Christ: A Theological Anthropology of Athanasius in Nicea I and John of Damascus in Nicea II – Toar Hutagalung

*Presented online

Session 2

Yaarkon Room: Nicaea 2

- An Appeal for a Firm Minimalism: Orthodoxy and Heresy at Nicaea and Today – Matthew Anslow
- Nicaea and Miaphysite Christology: A Perspective on Orthodox Political Theology at the Margins. – Jacob Joseph
- Constantine and Nicaea: The Emergence of State Theology – Bill Leadbetter

Yagilaith Room: God and the More than Human World

- Extinction and the God-World Relationship – Mick Pope
- Water in a Land Where No One Lives: Rehabilitating the Wilderness in the Book of Job – Marshall Scott
- ~~The Natural Will and the Divine Logos: Maximus the Confessor, Animal Spirituality, and the Boundaries of Orthodoxy – Daniela Rizzo~~

Ngarrgu Room: Sexuality and Gender

- Faith and Diversity in Sexuality and/or Gender are Not Mutually Exclusive – Emma Leitch
- "Eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom", Gender-Diversity in the Church Today. – Ruth Christa Mathieson
- Laying Down Our Weapons: How LGBTQIA+ Christian Experiences Inform Shalom Ecclesiological Praxes for Queensland Evangelical Churches – Caitlin Olsen

PARALLEL PAPERS

Session 2 (contd)

Wirraway Room: Textual Analysis

- Transcultural Transmission of the First Apocalypse of James: From Three Greek and Coptic Versions – David W Kim
 - Athanasius and Song of Songs Against the World? Bringing the (Alleged) Athanasiana on Song of Songs into Conversation with the School of Alexandria. – Erin Martine Hutton
 - "... as many as were called by grace, and displayed their first zeal, having cast aside their military girdles, but afterwards returned, like dogs, to their own vomit ..." (Canon 12, First Council of Nicaea, tr. Percival, 1900): Reflections on the Relationship Between Military and Clergy in MT, LXX, and Qumran – David Cameron Ray
-

Session 3

Yaarkon Room: Nicaea 3

- Remembering Nicea, Dismantling Colonisation – Naomi Wolfe
- Rethinking Nicaea from the Global South – Daniel Sihombing
- ~~Adventure of the Dying Teacher: Theological Belief in the Life of St Macrina – Haydn Lea~~

Yagilaith Room: Community

- Religious Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE): A Failed 40-year Experiment – Emma Leitch
- The Council of Nicaea and Finding Meaning in a Pluralistic Society – Philip Hughes
- Worldviews Education and Religion in Australian Schools – Amanda Burritt and Kerrie Handasyde

Ngarrgu Room: Heretics and Heresies

- John Wesley and the Heretics – Glen O'Brien
- Discipline and Rebuke in Augustine and Benedict – Amy J Erickson
- Why Heresy Matters: Contra Mundum Nicaenum – Thomas Fudge

Wirraway Room: Christology and the Spirit

- Newbigin and the Church's Mission – Gregory Liston
- The Islamic Belief of the Incoherence of the Incarnation: An Examination and Response – Adam Dodds
- Exploring the Benefits and Limitations of Pentecostal Christology – Sam Hey

PARALLEL PAPERS

Session 4

Yaarkon Room: Nicaea 4

- The Johannification of the Creed of Nicea – Bart B. Bruehler
- The Nicene Creed and John's Gospel – Paul Tonson

Yagilaith Room: Unity and Othering

- Approaching 1 Samuel 15 in View of the Historical Appropriation of Herem – Joseph Kohring
- Dissent to Devotion: The Psalms as a Locus of Ecclesial Unity and Dispute in Light of Nicaea – Sam T Rajkumar*

Ngarrgu Room: The Trinity

- The Doctrine of Scripture – Peter Frederick Carnley
- How the Nicene Settlement Shaped Theological Appropriations of Platonism – Albert R. Haig

Wirraway Room: Jonah, YHWH and the ICJ:

- Placing International Law in Divine Dialogue with Jonah as Absurdist Theo-Parody – Caitlin Olsen and Jacinta Zylstra

**Presented Online*

Session 5

Yaarkon Room 1: Christian Research Association 2

- Grassroots to Global: The Synodal Journey of Consultation and Decision-making at the Synod on Synodality – Trudy Dantis
- Absent from the Table: Investigating why Australian Catholics Do Not Regularly Attend Sunday Mass – Leith Dudfield

Yagilaith Room: Worldviews and Universe Building

- Horned Hero? A Theological Exploration of Hellboy and the Mignolaverse – Mick Pope

Ngarrgu Room: Rebaptism and Crucifixion

- Rebaptism of Heretics: The Influence of the Council of Nicaea on the Coptic Church – Magdi Awad
- From Confessing Christ's Suffering to Confessing Christ Crucified – David Tombs

KEYNOTES

KEYNOTE 1

Tuesday 9:30am

The Politics of Anonymous Cyzicenus: a case study in remembering Nicaea

The Ecclesiastical History written by an unknown man from Cyzicus sits in a nexus of Nicene receptions. Written in defense of the controversial Council of Chalcedon, the history offers an image of the Council of Nicaea as a prefiguration of the later council, an image intentionally crafted by the imperial architect of Chalcedon as much as by the author himself. Its detailed account of the council allowed later generations to draw upon the history as evidence in subsequent debates over the proper way to interpret the most widely accepted ancient ecumenical council. Dr. Martin Shedd will discuss the text in its fifth-century political context, in response to both the Council of Chalcedon itself and the ongoing factional disputes and civil wars decades after that prompted the author to write. Dr. Sean Tandy will then discuss the role of the history as a proof text in ecclesiological and inter-denominational debates of the early modern period. These case studies demonstrate the role of narrative construction in defining the greater meaning and importance of the Council of Nicaea for theology and politics alike.

Martin Shedd is a classicist and scholar of late antique rhetoric and historiography, with publications on both Christian and non-Christian sources. With Drs. Sean Tandy and Jeremy Schott, he co-authored *Remembering Nicaea: The Ecclesiastical History of Anonymous Cyzicenus*, the first English-language translation of this text with scholarly introduction and notes. In addition to independent work on Cyzicenus's authorial methods, he has written about the Latin *Historia Augusta*, the subject of his ongoing book project. He spent 2022–2024 working at the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae writing entries for many words starting with “R.” Outside of academia, he is an active singer and substitute organist for the Episcopal Church.

<https://atllfellowrambles.wordpress.com/>

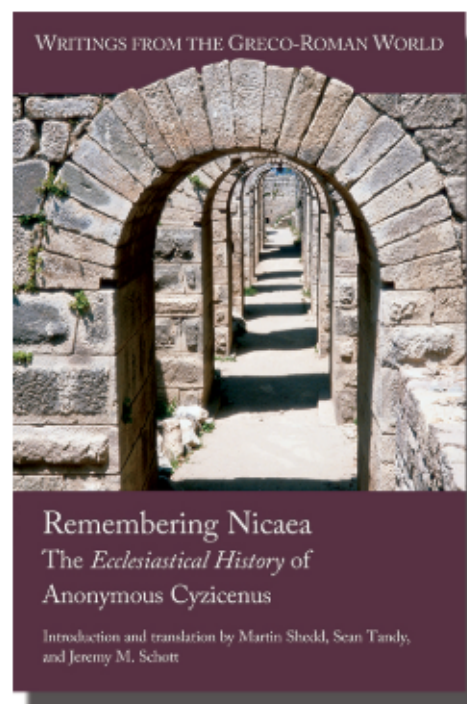
KEYNOTES

KEYNOTE 2

Wednesday 9:30am

The Council and the Individual in Popular Reception

The study of Nicaea is a study of individuals and stories as much as about ideas. Within the context of Anonymous Cyzicenus's *Ecclesiastical History*, we can see how traditions about the attendees of the council shape the reception of its doctrines. From constructing a pseudo-historical dialogue between an Arian philosopher and the notable bishops in attendance to rehabilitating his hero historian—Eusebius of Caesarea—Cyzicenus builds his historiographic argument as much on the foundation of his characters as the council's theology. The participation and consent of key individuals becomes a guarantee of ecclesiological authority, for author and audience alike. Beyond Cyzicenus, this emphasis on the authoritative and/or wonderworking individual appears in legendary accounts of the council and its participants. Thus, although the council derives substantial authority from the consent of the ecclesiastical body, tales about the participants serve a crucial function in its cultural reception and interpretation.



PANEL

PANEL

Thursday 9:30am

NICAEEA THEN AND NOW

This panel brings together a panel of respondents to discuss the significance of the Nicene Council for history, for theology, and for ecumenism. In commemorating the event in this 700th anniversary year, what are the aspects of the legacy of Nicaea that remain significant for the church? Does it represent an ecumenical achievement that continues as a model for the present or was it primarily about conformity and the silencing of minority voices? Does the idea of a 'Nicene orthodoxy' designed to secure an empire-wide conformity, still have salience in an era that often values the local and the contextual over the impulse to globalise?

Panelists

Katherin Papadopoulos is a Lecturer in History and Research Coordinator at St Athanasius College, as well as an adjunct lecturer at St Francis College, both of which are part of the University of Divinity. Her research focuses on late antique history, particularly the Greek and Syriac East. She has published items on John Chrysostom, Severian of Gabala and hagiography. Currently, she is writing the Severus of Antioch entries for the Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity database and is the author of the forthcoming book *Patterning the Past: Memory and Late Antique Syriac Martyrologies*, to be published by Brill.

Daniel Sihombing is lecturer in systematic theology at Pilgrim Theological College, Melbourne, which is part of the University of Divinity, Australia. He is also an ordained minister in the Uniting Church in Australia. He was born and raised in Indonesia, where he did his first theological degree, worked in various roles across churches, theological colleges and political magazine, and sharpened his class consciousness. He recently earned his PhD from the Protestant Theological University, Netherlands, with a thesis titled *Barth and the Shadow of Nothingness: A Post-Soeharto Contextual Reading*, where he combines a political reading of Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics with an engagement with three Indonesian theologians who served before, during and after the military dictatorship of Soeharto. He lives and works on the unceded land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation and pays his respect to their elders past and present.

Trudy Dantis is the Director of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference National Centre for Pastoral Research (formerly the ACBC Pastoral Research Office). She also heads the Conference's Policy and Research Department. She has a PhD in Pastoral Studies from the University of Divinity and tertiary qualifications in Business, Community Resource Management and Social Work. Her PhD thesis was titled "Tracing the pulse: An investigation into the vitality of Australian Catholic parishes".

Trudy is the author of two books including, *A Handbook for Building Stronger Parishes* (2016) and has co-authored several books and research reports on parish vitality, the demography of Australian Catholics and various aspects of Catholic belief and practice in Australia.

Trudy was the National Coordinator for the Synod on Synodality 2021-2024 and has co-authored several reports from Australia and the Oceania region. Trudy holds honorary appointments at the Australian Catholic University and the University of Divinity. She currently serves as Chair of the Board of the Christian Research Association.

WORKSHOPS

Monday 4pm

Leveraging the Independent Scholar: A new path to participate in the Academy
Yagilaith Room

In 1990, Australia surpassed the ratio of PhDs to job vacancies (CSIRO, 2019). This gap has and will continue to broaden, but it does not need to be a doom narrative. For the continued flourishing of the church, we need to find new ways to keep diversity of voice in the academy. As an extension of my ANZATS 2022 paper, this is a workshop for those trained and qualified to contribute to the theological academy but without the traditional institutional backing. This workshop is designed to help you self-fund your research by leveraging your current skillset in parallel fields, gain access to databases, determine which journals are open to independent scholars, and unlock the benefits of professional associations that can provide access to small-scale financial assistance. Part-time research can be a liberating experience, giving you the freedom to think and read deeply without the expectations of a teaching load. Come and be part of a new way of engaging in the Academy and walk away with a plan to make it sustainable.

Rosey Huf is a Hebrew Bible scholar with an MDiv from Bible College SA and a grad cert from SMBC and has plans to enrol in a PhD for 2026. Before theological study, Rosey trained and worked in HR, marketing, and business management, as well as working for AFES. Since graduating college in 2019, Rosey has self-funded her research contributions to the academy, including conference participation, and wants to enable others to do the same.

Exploring the Interplay Between Theology and the Social Sciences
Warraway Room

As theology connects with the world in which we live, social and other sciences become important. There has been a lengthy debate within practical theology as to how that interplay should occur. In practice, many students of theology choose to add a social research component to their studies as they seek to understand and apply the practical implications of theological or biblical concepts and ideas to contemporary Australian society.

This workshop will explore the important considerations when thinking about undertaking empirical research in conjunction with theological studies. It will include topics such as:

•The research process

- Research methodologies
- Resources for research
- Software for data analysis
- Human research ethics.

This workshop will be led by Rev Professor Philip Hughes and Dr Stephen Reid, both of the Christian Research Association.

MATTHEW ANSLOW

An Appeal for a Firm Minimalism: Orthodoxy and Heresy at Nicaea and Today

The Council of Nicaea's condemnation of Arius' christology generated a new consensus of sorts wherein relatively sharp lines of demarcation between orthodoxy and heresy could be drawn. These concepts had of course been employed prior to the Council but, at Nicaea, they took on unprecedented scope. The Nicene formulation became the yardstick for almost all subsequent christological discourse. For those living in a post-Enlightenment world, however, orthodoxy and heresy often seem antiquated and oppressive, conjuring images of ecclesial domination and imperial collusion. And yet, Nicaea's Creed and legacy have continued to be viewed as foundational and authoritative for the Christian East and the vast preponderance of the Christian West. This tension offers fecund possibilities for reevaluating orthodoxy and heresy in light of Nicene history and tradition and for contemplating their role in contemporary theological discourse.

In this paper, I will consider the Nicene construction of orthodoxy and heresy. In doing so, I will challenge key features of the so-called Bauer(-Ehrman) thesis wherein a once diverse early Christian movement yielded to a hegemonic expression of orthodoxy determined by the victors of the fourth-century christological conflicts. To the contrary, I will argue that the metaphysical assumptions that underlie most modern conceptions of heresy and orthodoxy are incommensurate with those of the Nicene period and thus misconstrue Nicaea's legacy of orthodoxy. I will suggest that, in contrast to later understandings (and abuses) of these concepts, Nicene orthodoxy and heresy was firm-yet-minimalist in nature and that it might be salvaged in contemporary theological discourse.

Matthew Anslow is the Educator for Lay Ministry with the Uniting Church's NSW/ACT Synod and Lecturer at United Theological College. He is the author of *Fulfilling the Law and the Prophets: The Prophetic Vocation of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* (2022). Matt has published numerous articles in the areas of biblical studies and theology, philosophy, peacemaking, direct action and civil disobedience, preaching, and agriculture. He lives with his wife, Ashlee, and their three children in Blackheath, NSW.

MAGDI AWAD

Rebaptism of Heretics: The Influence of the Council of Nicaea on the Coptic Church

The question of rebaptism for heretics was a significant theological controversy in the early church, particularly highlighted by the positions of Stephen, Bishop of Rome, and Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage. This issue was formally addressed at the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, establishing a canon regarding the rebaptism of heretics. However, compliance with this canon across Eastern and Western churches remains ambiguous due to ongoing theological disagreements even after the Council. This paper seeks to provide a historical analysis and theological critique of the practice of rebaptism within the Coptic Church and the extent to which the Nicene Canon influenced the Church's approach to rebaptism, particularly during the Middle Ages and modern times. Understanding the impact of the Nicene Canon on the practices of the Coptic Church can help clarify its position regarding the acceptance of baptisms performed by other churches and help in the theological dialogue between Christian denominations about accepting each other's baptism in the contemporary era.

Magdi Awad is a Senior lecturer in Church History, Dogmatic and Systematic Theology, Coptic Liturgy and Coptic Language. His areas of interest also include Christian-Arabic Studies and Philosophy. Ordained to the priesthood in the Coptic Orthodox Church in 2015 with the name Gregorios Awad. He also lectures in History of Dogma and Sacramental Theology at the Coptic Theological College in Cairo-Egypt. Pennsylvania.

BART B. BRUEHLER

The Johannification of the Creed of Nicea

The Nicene Creed has held broad ecumenical and temporal relevance rivalled by no other statement in the Christian tradition. It has served as a classic statement of key Christian beliefs, especially that of the trinity. However, this creed was also forged in the particularities and choices of the time and situation of its writing. In particular, the creed prioritizes the testimony of the Johannine writings of the New Testament for its language and understanding of the trinity. Part of the Nicene Creed's power lies in its density, brevity, and singular voice. Yet, this very nature is highly unlike the plurivocality of the Bible with its varying perspectives and resulting invitations to conversation. The formulation of the creed of Nicea can serve as an illuminating prism for theological reflection, but when doing so, it tends to obscure other scriptural perspectives. This presentation will briefly examine the foundational place the Nicene Creed has taken in the theological interpretation of Scripture movement. It will then explore the predominance of Johannine elements in the Nicene Creed in comparison to the Apostle's Creed and other early creedal statements. Finally, it will consider the ramifications of the way that the Johannine perspective is enshrined in the Nicene Creed and possible dynamics that are lost with the sidelining of other biblical perspectives on the trinity.

Bart B. Bruehler is Director of Biblical Studies at the Uniting College for Leadership and Theology in Adelaide. He has recently taken up this position after moving from America where he worked in online theological education for over a decade. He is the author of *A Public and Political Christ and Holding Hands with Pascal*. He is currently working on a sociorhetorical commentary on the Gospel of Luke and researches how our bodies, minds, and cultures work together to shape our reading of biblical texts.

AMANDA BURRITT AND KERRIE HANDASYDE

Worldviews Education and Religion in Australian Schools

Worldviews education in schools marks a pedagogical and philosophical/ideological shift away from confessional Religious Instruction with its contested legacies around orthodoxy and the mitigation of Catholic–Protestant conflict in the outer reaches of empire. As part of the Worldviews Literacy Lab at the University of Melbourne (led by Larissa McLean Davies, with Natasha Ziebell, Mahtab Janfada, Michele Herrington and ourselves), we review literature and curriculum from jurisdictions sharing Australia's colonial past and its multi-cultural, multi-faith educational landscape. We find that the implementation of Worldviews education requires attention to competing contextual and conceptual issues. We consider complexities arising in inclusion, diversity, and the inadequacies of tolerance; orthodoxy, consensus, and authority in the development of curriculum; and, with crime and disruption in Australia relating to conflict in the Middle East, we examine the contest between the instrumentalisation of religions in Worldviews education for the purposes of socio-political security and the urgent need to promote understanding for both individual well-being and the common good.

Amanda Burritt is an Honorary Research Fellow in the Faculty of Education, the University of Melbourne. She is a historian, focussing on cultural and religious history and the history of ideas. She has significant expertise in object based learning and visual culture. Her extensive professional experience as an educator includes working in secondary, tertiary and museum contexts. She researches with the Worldviews Literacy Lab at the University of Melbourne.

Kerrie Handasyde is Academic Dean and Associate Professor of History at Pilgrim Theological College, University of Divinity. She researches religious history with interests in gender and christianity, culture and the intersections of secular and sacred, and the denominations of Protestant Dissent and related churches in Australia and the Pacific. She also researches with the Worldviews Literacy Lab at the University of Melbourne.

PETER FREDERICK CARNLEY

The Doctrine of Scripture

Major differences of theological perspective with regard to the nature and status of Scripture for faith and the articulation of doctrine underlie the current division between Australian Anglicans who wish to promote the 'eternal submissiveness of the Son to the Father' and the so-called 'complementarian doctrine of the Trinity' and those who are committed to a more clearly orthodox adherence to the Nicæan homoousion and 'egalitarian Trinitarianism.' This paper will critically examine the understanding of the doctrine of Scripture of the apparently Neo-Arian commitment to the complementarian doctrine of the Trinity specifically as this view of Scripture has been articulated by Mark Thompson in *The Doctrine of Scripture: An Introduction* (Crossway, Wheaton, Ill., 2002).

By contrast with the great Word theologies of the twentieth century of Barth and Bultmann and the post-Vatican II reflection on the nature and place of Scripture in the Church of such scholars as Karl Rahner, Thompson has produced an apologetic defence of a very conservative approach to Scripture in which the Word of God is verbally equated with the biblical texts in their original languages, so as to produce an understanding of Scripture which is alleged to be trustworthy and reliable, absolutely true, perspicuous, inerrant and infallible, even in matters of science and history.

The logical coherence of this is critically examined in the belief that ecumenical consensus on the doctrine of Scripture is prerequisite to reaching any kind of agreement in matters of systematic theology, particularly as complex as the doctrine of the Trinity.

Peter Carnley was Anglican Archbishop of Perth from 1981 to 2005 and Primate of Australia for the last five of those years. He is an Honorary Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and Trinity College, Melbourne, and holds a first degree in history from the University of Melbourne, a research degree in theology from Cambridge, a Lambeth DD, and a number of honorary doctorates. Prior to his election to Perth he taught systematic theology in the Department of Studies in Religion in the University of Queensland where he was also Warden of St John's College, and since retirement has been Distinguished Visiting Professor at the General Theological Seminary of The Episcopal Church in New York, where he taught both systematic theology and Anglican Studies (2010–2015). He is the author of a number of theological works plus two books of sermons. He now lives in retirement with his wife Ann in Fremantle, Western Australia.

LAURA CERBUS

Enflamed and Swallowed Up: Sarah Edwards, Francis of Assisi, and the Bodily Aesthetics of Salvation

Within contemporary theological aesthetics, the goal of sanctification is articulated in terms of form and beauty. As the process of becoming more like Christ, sanctification involves being conformed to Christ aesthetically. The discussion here primarily focuses on Christ's moral beauty, rather than his physical beauty. While Christ's resurrected body offers saints for their own bodies, its significance is deferred until the eschaton. In contrast, Jonathan Edwards and Bonaventure of Bagnoreggio both offer portraits of the amplification of the body in sanctification. This paper considers two narratives, one of Sarah Edwards and one of Francis of Assisi, as narratives that insist that the impressive work of the Spirit on the soul ought to have expression in the body. Sanctification, in these accounts, affects the body and the soul in tandem, and we ought to expect an aesthetic, bodily expression of the Spirit's internal work. Although Edwards and Bonaventure both theologise from an integrated anthropology that refuses to divorce body and soul, their narratives do not express the same conclusions about the bodily aesthetics of sanctification. This paper will consider the significance of these differences for spiritual formation.

Laura Cerbus has a PhD in Theology from the University of Divinity. She lives and teaches in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania.

TRUDY DANTIS

Grassroots to Global: The synodal journey of consultation and decision-making at the Synod on Synodality

In March 2020, Pope Francis announced that the theme for the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops would be “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission”. He invited the entire Church to reflect on this theme that he saw as decisive for its life and mission: “It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.” The Synod, also known as the Synod on 'Synodality', was a three-year listening and discernment process that began in parishes and groups and progressed to discussions at the diocesan, national, continental, and global levels. In 2023 and 2024, two Synod Assemblies included the historic participation of 70 non-bishops (including deacons, priests, consecrated and lay men and women) with full voting rights. The Final Document was published on 26 October 2024, with Pope Francis’s approval, and the news that, in another unprecedented action, he would not write a post-synodal apostolic exhortation but would instead offer the Final Document to the entire Church for implementation.

Trudy Dantis, National Coordinator for the Synod in Australia, was active in Synodal consultations from the start and participated at all levels, eventually attending both Assemblies as a representative from the Oceania region. In this paper, she reflects on the journey, providing insights into the consultative processes at each stage and sharing her experiences at the global assemblies that assisted Church leaders in living communion, increasing participation, and preparing for ministry and mission in a synodal Church.

ADAM DODDS

The Islamic Belief of the Incoherence of the Incarnation: An Examination and Response

“The divine gesture in the Incarnation is metaphysically incoherent”, said the late Shabbir Akhtar (1960–2023), then Britain’s leading contemporary Muslim philosopher. This allegation operates as an a priori religious assumption amongst Muslims more broadly. Akhtar rightly grasps his statement’s implications, for the Incarnation – at the heart of the Nicene faith – is the “orthodox claim on which Christianity rests.” The dismissal of the incarnation as incoherent, while problematic on many levels, missiologically functions as a defeater belief for Muslim openness to the gospel. In this paper I will survey Islamic scholarly critiques of the coherence of the Incarnation, evaluate the types and strength of arguments offered, and offer Christian responses. In defence of the Incarnation’s coherence, I will conclude by offering a summary of one theological model of the Incarnation’s coherence drawing on Bruce McCormack’s *The Humility of the Eternal Son*. It is hoped that this paper will commend Nicene orthodoxy by missiologically resourcing the church in its engagement with Muslims.

Adam Dodds is Head of Theology at Alphacrucis and has a PhD and two Masters degrees in Christian Theology, as well as a Master's degree in Islamic Studies. Adam is also Teaching Pastor at Nexus Church in Brisbane. He has published academic articles on theology, mission, the Qur’an, and Christian-Muslim relations.

SALLY DOUGLAS

The Spaces between the Words: The Expansiveness of the Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed is considered to be an unhelpful remnant from an outdated construction of faith in many progressive Christian circles. There are multivalent reasons for this conclusion. The poetic and symbolic language of the creed is not readily accessible to Western sensibilities which have been pounded for centuries by the tenets of reason, scientific enquiry, and literalism. It also true that there are those within the world-wide church, often with positions of power, who have employed the Creed as a crude test for assessing faithfulness and, therefore, worthiness to belong. The situation is further complicated by the limited opportunities provided in churches, and beyond, for people to engage robustly with the conflicted context that sits behind the composition of the creed, as well as the complexity of the final document. While recognising the limitations of the Nicene Creed, this paper will highlight the riches therein. In returning to the Creed we discover that many theological debates that preoccupy contemporary churches are relativised. This early church proclamation of faith underscores what is of core concern and, as a result, what is of secondary order. Furthermore, in the spaces between the words of the Nicene Creed we discover an expansiveness. Here there is room for diverse proclamations of salvation.

Sally Douglas is a biblical scholar, theologian, author, and Uniting Church minister. Sally is a Senior Lecturer in New Testament at Pilgrim Theological College, within the University of Divinity in Melbourne, and she also teaches across the fields of theology and spirituality. Sally is committed to attending to the biblical text, early church writings, and feminist and womanist readings as she engages with ancient texts in contemporary context. Sally writes for both academic and popular level audiences, focusing on questions of christology, soteriology, spirituality, violence, and discipleship. Her books include *The Church as Salt* (2021) and *Jesus Sophia: Returning to Woman Wisdom in the Bible, Practice, and Prayer* (2023).

LEITH DUDFIELD

Absent from the Table: Investigating why Australian Catholics Do Not Regularly Attend Sunday Mass

Mass attendance has been declining in the Catholic Church in Australia for decades, a trend that has also been witnessed among other Christian churches. Declining attendance at worship services has been shown to be the precursor to changing faith patterns, leading to disaffiliation with religion altogether. Much of the research investigating changing patterns of Mass attendance in the Catholic Church in Australia has been done prior to some recent pivotal events, such as the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and the COVID-19 pandemic, and an updated and in-depth research approach is now warranted.

The National Centre for Pastoral Research, an agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, is undertaking research into this phenomenon to understand the motivations of current-day Catholics to disengage from the Mass, to determine if there have been any significant changes from previous research, and to inform future efforts for pastoral outreach. The project is being undertaken in two phases. The first phase involves a national online survey with both quantitative and qualitative data collected. The second phase involves semi-structured interviews with volunteers from the first phase, and will enable a deeper understanding of what beliefs, motivations and barriers participants have to regular, weekly Mass attendance. This presentation will provide an overview of the project to date and proffer some initial findings from the first phase.

Leith Dudfield has been a Research Assistant at the National Centre for Pastoral Research of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) since 2018. She has been involved with various research projects with the Centre including: The ACBC Response to Governance Review Project (2023), ACBC-Catholic Religious Australia Response to the Royal Commission Project (2023), Pedagogy Development: Building on Positive Learnings from COVID-19 in Catholic Schools (2021-2022), as well as the current project, *Absent from the Table: Australian Catholics Who Do Not Regularly Attend Sunday Mass* (2024-2025). She is currently studying a Master of Theological Studies at Australian Catholic University and completed her Bachelor of Science (Hons) with the University of Canberra in 2018, with her honours thesis in psychology focusing on the relationship between personality and well-being in people living with chronic wounds. She has previously completed a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Classics at The Australian National University (1999).

AMY J ERICKSON

Discipline and Rebuke in Augustine and Benedict

Augustine's 'On Grace and Rebuke' is an instance of his mature theology, written just several years before his death. It situates the task of rebuke within his most weighty theological themes: the nature of grace, will, and election. Although written in epistolary form, we could say that Augustine's account of this practice is developed within theology at its most doctrinal.

Chs 22-27 of Benedict's Rule contain instructions of how to handle excommunication within the rule of its community. Like Augustine, these chapters also detail the nature and importance of rebuke, but in the mode of a seasoned manual. We could say that Benedict's account of this practice is developed within theology at its most practical and contextual.

This paper proposes to explore the different theological valences of the tasks of rebuke and excommunication as situated in Augustine's work and Benedict's Rule. While teasing out the differences of these two accounts, it will note the complementarity of Augustine's emphasis on receptivity to rebuke and Benedict's compelling chapter on the pastoral duty of the abbot towards excommunicants. The paper will briefly consider at its close whether the council of Nicea, and its surrounding and subsequent politics, are analogs to or detractors from the task of discipline as envisioned by these two post-Nicene texts..

Amy J. Erickson received her PhD from the University of Aberdeen, where she studied the hermeneutics and ecclesiology of the contemporary Anglican scholar Ephraim Radner. She currently teaches theology and ethics at St Mark's National Theological Centre (School of Theology, CSU) in Canberra.

She is the author of 'Ephraim Radner, Hosean Wilderness, and the Church in the Post-Christendom West' (Brill, 2020) and a co-author of 'Sabbath Gospel: A New Narrative about Time, Rest and the Work of the Church' (IVP Academic, forthcoming). Her research interests include theological interpretation of scripture, ecclesiology, and church discipline.

CATHERINE FISHER

Hearing the Tonal Shades of YHWH's Character in Isaiah 3:13-15

The tonal shades in YHWH's voice often go unheard when Isaiah 3:13-15 is labelled as a "lawsuit" (Gunkel, Westermann) and YHWH is cast only as prosecutor and judge (Nielsen). Not only does this result in an inadequate characterisation of YHWH it also lacks nuance when considering how the audience encounters the text. By utilising a literary-rhetorical approach which accounts for all the imagery in the pericope, this paper demonstrates that YHWH's tone is not restricted to the timbre of accusation and condemnation.

Central to the discussion is YHWH's unexpected question מַה לָּכֶם in 3:15. While Blenkinsopp interprets the question as, "How dare you?" and Kaiser considers YHWH's tone to be "angry," alternative interpretations are examined for their contribution to the force and persuasive function of the question within the pericope. The additional tonal variations located in YHWH's voice contributes to how the audience is being shaped to review and change their perception of YHWH.

Catherine Fisher is a PhD candidate at SMBC. Her thesis reassesses the lawsuits in Isaiah from a rhetorical-critical perspective. Catherine has worked as a musician in the past and currently she is known in her local church as "Bible Ninja."

THOMAS FUDGE

Why Heresy Matters: Contra mundum Nicaenum

St Augustine noted that only great men (and great women) were heretics. Despite greatness heresy has always been feared. Intellectual adventure is a dynamic process rather than a series of still frames. Heresy matters because without it we are condemned to partial truths and understandings, the dangers of dogma and invincible ignorance. Heresy is a commitment to revising the certainties of yesterday and refining opinions based on new evidence. Heresy endeavours to avoid calcified ideologues convinced of their own rectitude by actively questioning personal and institutional beliefs. The paper explores the worst (unintended?) consequence of Nicaea touching lightly on common principles extending from patristic Christianity to contemporary Australian Anglicanism.

Thomas A. Fudge (PhD, history, Cambridge; PhD, theology, Otago) is Professor of Medieval History at the University of New England in Armidale. He is an historian of Christianity with particular interests in the European medieval and reformation periods and has also published on American and Australian religious history and thought. He teaches courses at the University of New England on medieval history, the Crusades, witch-hunting, heresy, and the Reformation and has been an academic for over thirty years. He is best known for his work on the Czech priest and martyr Jan Hus, the Hussite movement and religious reform in late medieval Bohemia.



CAROLE GAN AND STEPHEN REID

A Profile of Catholic Clergy in Australia: A Study on the Wellbeing of Catholic Clergy

The National Centre for Pastoral Research, an agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, is conducting a study on the health and wellbeing of Australian Catholic clergy. The project aimed to identify amongst Catholic clergy:

1. key issues that affect their physical wellbeing, as well as their mental and spiritual health
2. how recent social and cultural changes in Australia have affected them
3. some of their other concerns
4. how to improve the support available to them.

The study was conducted in two phases.

•Phase 1 was an online survey using a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions. The survey was completed by 825 priests and deacons from across Australia.

•Phase 2 comprised one-on-one interviews with around 80 clergy, conducted via videoconference, telephone or in-person.

A literature review was also undertaken as part of the project and covered a diverse range of methodologies and perspectives on clergy wellbeing, burnout, and related factors. While some literature supported and complemented each other, other literature offered contrasting findings or unique approaches. This paper highlights the multifaceted nature of clergy wellbeing and the need for a comprehensive understanding of the personal, professional and spiritual factors that contribute to the overall health and resilience of clergy. It demonstrates the complexity of burnout in Catholic clergy and stresses the need for further research and tailored intervention programs to address this important issue.

ALBERT R. HAIG

How the Nicene Settlement shaped theological appropriations of Platonism

The Council of Nicaea determined that the persons of the Trinity were consubstantial (ὁμοούσιον). This implied that God, the first principle of reality, was substance and Being. However, the Platonic tradition from its inception (e.g., Rep. 509b8) had maintained that the first principle of reality, the Good (τἀγαθόν), was beyond Being and substance (ἐπέκεινα τοῦ ὄντος, ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας). This claim was accentuated in the writings of Plotinus, the Father of Neoplatonism, in the third century CE. This created a serious difficulty for theologians working in the wake of Nicaea who wished for a reconciliation between Christianity and Platonism. Marius Victorinus, for example, conceded that God was indeed ἀνούσιον (without substance), but then adopted a semantic harmonisation: “For this is substance up there: to be above substance” (Adv. Ar. II.10). It was left to Augustine to develop the definitive orthodox solution to the problem, in which the Neoplatonist hypostases were “telescoped” or collapsed together in an egalitarian levelling. The result was the creation of “classical theism”. It will be argued here that Augustine’s modified appropriation of Platonism introduced unresolved tensions regarding both the question of Being and the problem of universals which were to have far-reaching consequences for Western intellectual development. Ultimately, they led to the dialectical reaction of nominalism in the 14th century, which paved the way for the emergence of the modern world.

Albert R. Haig is an independent scholar based in Townsville, Australia. His research interests include Neoplatonism (especially Plotinus), Gnosticism, early Christianity, and mysticism. His academic publications can be found at <https://www.alberthaig.com/publications>. ORCID: 0000-0002-3436-6890.

SAM HEY

Exploring the benefits and limitations of Pentecostal Christology

Pentecostalism is a rapidly growing movement that has influenced how Christian beliefs are viewed and practised. While Pentecostalism shares Christological beliefs with other denominations, it also emphasizes the roles of the Holy Spirit, personal experiences and miraculous interventions by God in unique ways. Pentecostal culture and beliefs guide how they understand Father God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit and their work in this world. Regarding Christology, Pentecostalism emphasizes a personal, realized relational experience of Jesus in salvation, transformation and future hopes. At the same time, it limits broader understandings of ways God, Jesus and the Spirit may be working. This paper examines some of the benefits and limitations associated with Pentecostal beliefs and practices, including their experientialism, bibliocentrism, and other beliefs and practices. This study also sheds light on challenges and opportunities faced in contemporary Christology.

Sam Hey is a senior lecturer at Alphacrucis University College and Christian Heritage College, Australia. He is a supervisor of PhD, DMin, and other research students. He has taught and ministered in various tertiary institutions, including the University of Queensland, Hillsong, and Tabor Colleges and from various traditions, including Anglican, Catholic, Reformed, Methodist, Baptist, Charismatic, Pentecostal and secular. He has also worked as a church minister, school chaplain, and teacher. His 2011 PhD is on Australian megachurches' history, leadership, organisation, sociology, and psychology.

PHILIP HUGHES

The Council of Nicaea and Finding Meaning in a Pluralistic Society

The Communities of Meaning' research project has examined how Australian retirees seek meaning and the role of organisations in that process. It demonstrates that meaning through personal fulfilment, often involving ways of contributing to the lives of others or to the wider society, and usually involving personal passions and interests. Connections with organisations often assist by linking people with others with similar passions and interests, by providing ways of expressing those passions and interests, and by providing opportunities of contributing to others or the wider society.

This search for meaning contrasts with the sort of meaning sought at the Council of Nicaea. Such metaphysical constructions that emerged from the Council of Nicaea have moved to the periphery or have faded totally from the thinking of the Australian retirees who were interviewed in the Communities of Meaning research project. Part of the reason may be that the metaphysics has been replaced by scientific types of thinking. Part of the reason may be that such metaphysical constructions now exist within a pluralistic environment, in which there are a range of possible constructions. This paper will explore those different ways in which 'meaning' is understood and is sought.

Philip Hughes was a senior research officer with the Christian Research Association from 1985 to 2016, and has since continued research with the Christian Research Association as a research fellow. He is also currently an honorary research fellow of the University of Divinity and the National Centre for Pastoral Research. He is Emeritus Professor of Alphacrucis University College where he supervised doctoral students and taught research methods. He is also acting Head of Pilgrim College for 2025. Philip Hughes has written around 70 books and hundreds of articles, mostly in the area of religion and society.

TOAR HUTAGALUNG

THE SKIN AS AN ICON OF THE INCARNATE CHRIST: A Theological Anthropology of Athanasius in Nicea I and John of Damascus in Nicea II

The First Council of Nicaea (325 CE) is undoubtedly a pivotal moment in the early church, as it helped shape the doctrine of the Trinity by seeking to define the relational nature of Jesus Christ within the Godhead. This led to the formulation of the Nicene Creed. Athanasius was one of the main proponents of the Creed and suggested the phrase "eternally begotten." Interestingly, the Creed also mentions that Jesus "was incarnate by the Holy Spirit."

Four centuries later, the Second Council of Nicaea (787 CE), the last of the seven ecumenical councils, addressed the issue of iconoclasm, with John of Damascus arguing that Christ can be venerated through iconography. I intend to demonstrate a strong link between these two councils and how that connection might resonate in the contemporary world. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is threefold.

First, I argue that the concept of icons of Christ cannot be detached from the Nicene understanding of Jesus as the Incarnate, the eternally begotten. Second, I suggest that we can reflect theologically on the significance of the "begottenness" of human skin (flesh) as an icon of Christ. This leads to my third and applicable point: racism is not only an issue of social justice, but also an intrinsic issue of faith in the Incarnate Christ. The Nicene Creed can be [re]interpreted as a practical and essential Christian confession in the fight against human injustices, such as racism itself. In this context, venerating skin means uplifting the begottenness of Christ, as our skin also becomes an icon of Christ.

Toar Hutagalung is an alum of Jakarta Theological Seminary and had taught there as well. He received his Master of Arts from Andover Newton Theological School and his Doctorate from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, both in the US. His major interest is in Systematic/Constructive Theology with a focus on postcolonial/decolonial studies. His previous works have appeared in the Indonesian Journal of Theology and Uniting Church Studies. He has a book titled *Toward a Decolonial Pneumatology* by Lexington Books. Toar grew up in Presbyterian Church in Indonesia and now a member of the Uniting Church of South Australia. He was also the Chair of the Association of Indonesian Theologians from 2014 to 2022.

ERIN MARTINE HUTTON

Athanasius and Song of Songs Against the World? Bringing the (alleged) Athanasiana on Song of Songs into conversation with the School of Alexandria.

Athanasius the Great, or Athanasius Contra Mundum, is arguably the author of a lesser-known work/s on Song of Songs, the so-called Athanasiana on Song of Songs. While scholars have made their arguments on whether exegetica attributed to Athanasius are of genuine Athanasian authorship, little has been written comparing “Athenasius’s” catenae on the Song with commentary on Song of Songs from other Alexandrian Fathers. I take the recent work of Reinhart Ceulemans, which focuses on two catenae (CPG 2141.6 and CPG C 84),* as my starting point. After exploring their transmission and translating the relevant fragments, Ceulemans articulates their relation to the (genuine) writings of Athanasius which cite Song of Songs. I pick up where Ceulemans leaves off and I compare the Athanasiana with Cyril of Alexandria’s exegesis of the Song and Origen’s Commentary on the Song of Songs, to explore the similarities between these fragments and the characteristically allegorical interpretations of the Alexandrian School.

*Reinhart Ceulemans, “Alleged Athanasiana on Song of Songs (CPG 2141.6)” in *Des cahiers à l’histoire de la culture à Byzance: Hommage à Paul Canart, codicologue (1927–2017)*, edited by Michel Cacouros and Jacques-Hubert Sautel, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* (Peeters, 2021).

Erin Martine Hutton is an award-winning poet and scholar researching and writing in the fields of history, literature and theology. She has recently completed her PhD on the Song of Songs and its contribution to the primary prevention of gendered violence. Erin is the Moderation and Inclusion Manager at the Australian University of Theology. She intends her puns, makes trees from old books, and bends time and space to binge-watch murder mysteries.

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KATHERINE JELAVIC

The Implementation of Actions Listed in the Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000 – Woman & Man: The Bishops Respond

When it comes to women’s role in Christian churches, the Catholic Church has for many years tussled between orthodoxy and inclusion. In November 2022, at the Fifth Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Australia, the Australian bishops committed to implementing more fully the undertakings made in 2000 in their Social Justice Sunday Statement, *Woman and Man: The Bishops Respond 2000* (SJSS2000). This statement contained two sets of practical actions and proposals that could be implemented across much of the Church. However, in the 25 years since its promulgation, no systematic collation or evaluation of the steps taken in response to SJSS2000 has been undertaken.

The National Centre for Pastoral Research, an agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, has been commissioned to investigate the implementation of the SJSS2000's practical actions. Using documentary evidence, data collection of historical records and interviews, the project seeks to identify the actions that have been implemented, where gaps lie, critical areas that require attention and potential new areas for women's participation in the Catholic Church in Australia. This presentation will provide general information about the project and its progression.

Katherine Jelavic is a Research Assistant at the National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR), an agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. Since joining the NCPR in 2023, she has been involved with The Australian Catholic Census 2021 Project (2023-24), Australian Catholic Mapping Online Census Maps (2024-25), the annual collation of diocesan statistics for The Official Directory of Catholic Church in Australia and The Implementation of Actions Listed in the Social Justice Sunday Statement 2000 – Woman & Man: The Bishops Respond (2024-25). She has a Bachelor of Theology (Hons) from the Australian Catholic University, a Bachelor of Commerce from the University of Newcastle and a Master of Commerce from the University of New South Wales.

JACOB JOSEPH

Nicaea and Miaphysite Christology: A Perspective on Orthodox Political Theology at the Margins.

The Orthodox world has yet to completely understand "margins" as a theological notion. Orthodoxy sometimes refers to "margins" as "the other" without recognizing that it is an effect of duality, which contradicts its theology. While many Eastern Orthodox scholars feel the need to reflect on 'the margins,' Oriental Orthodox traditions are still required to begin these endeavours. Living in this contradiction, according to the miaphysite (Oriental) Orthodox tradition, is a denial of the very foundation of miaphysite theology (Christology). If Nicaea had challenged the early church to coherently preserve Christ's non-duality, it would be imperative for Oriental Orthodoxy, which claims the fruits of Nicaea's proceedings, to invent a theology of margins that reflects the life of the margins in the social and political sphere. This paper, therefore, critically examines how Nicaea shaped the miaphysite vision of Christ and how it can foster Orthodoxy's political theology of the margins to be able to make Oriental Orthodoxy more relevant in today's world of division and vulnerability.

Jacob Joseph lectures in Missiology and Systematic Theology. He received a PhD from the University of Divinity and was awarded the University Medal for his doctoral thesis titled "The Christ Who Embraces: An Orthodox Theology of Margins in India (Christology of St. Severus and Social Margins)."

With his particular interest in mission among the socially marginalised youth, he served in various dioceses in India, America, and New Zealand before taking up his current priestly vocation in the Malankara Archdiocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Australia.

His research interests include Orthodox Mission Theology, Patristic and Contextual Theology, Syriac Theology and History, Indian Theology, and Mission History.

DAVID W. KIM

Transcultural Transmission of the First Apocalypse of James: From Three Greek and Coptic Versions

The discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices (NHC) in 1945 rates as one of the two most profound occurrences for biblical archaeology and interpretation during the last hundred years, along with the Dead Sea Scrolls (1946–1956). The text named the [First] Apocalypse of James, significantly, was found to be in both NHC and Codex Tchacos (CT) in different Coptic versions (from near the sacred sites of Chenoboskion and El Minya), but yet another more fragmentary version in Greek had turned up much earlier among the huge cache of papyri found at Oxyrhynchus (also, like the other places, on the banks of the Nile). Given the opportunity for comparison, what distinguishes the three versions? Does comparative analysis better tell us what this ancient text is about? This paper concentrates on three comparable passages in the three versions that apparently contain historical memories of James and his followers. It works on the reasonable hypothesis that the Greek version of Oxyrhynchus Papyri (P.Oxy. 5533) (hereafter = PO) is prior and read with different purposes than the two Coptic translated versions of CT (CT 2.10–30) and NHC (NHC V,3. 24–44). The paper argues for a literal transmission of traditions from a Jewish Christian community around James into Egypt, that the textual figure of James in the Oxyrhynchus fragments points to a ‘mutual familiarity’ between PO and CT, while the NHC tradition of James has been further elaborated by processes of compilation and addition.

David W. Kim (PhD: Syd) is an Honorary Lecturer in the School of History, Australian National University (ANU), Canberra, a Visiting Scholar at the Harvard Divinity School, Harvard University, USA (2023–2024), and an Associate Professor of History, Kookmin University, South Korea. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, UK, a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society, UK, the Editor of Brill Handbook of Contemporary Religions, Brill, the Editor of the Series East Asian Religions and Culture (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, UK). Kim has published ten books and 84 peer reviewed articles, including *Socio-Anthropological Approaches to Religion: Environmental Hope* (2024), *Sacred Sites and Sacred Stories Across Cultures* (2021), *Daesoon Jinrihoe in Modern Korea* (2020), *Colonial Transformation and Asian Religions in Modern History* (2018), *Religious Encounters in Transcultural Society* (2017), and *Religious Transformation in Modern Asia: A Transnational Movement* (2015).

JOSEPH KOHRING

Approaching 1 Samuel 15 in View of the Historical Appropriation of Herem

From Pope Urban II in the First Crusade to a pastor betraying his congregation during the Rwandan genocide, Christian history has often been marked by the [mis]appropriation of divine command—the utter destruction (herem) of the Amalekites. A common approach to understanding the herem, particularly in 1 Samuel 15, focuses on its historicity, asking: How could God? Or, did God really? Many conclusions point to a theological “otherness” to justify the divine command. This paper proposes an alternative approach that prioritizes rhetoric over historicity. As demonstrated through a rhetorical analysis of the herem of Jericho (Walton and Walton, 2017), what if the biblical narrative conveys a concern beyond the ruthless eradication of an enemy? How might this shape the reader’s interpretation of 1 Samuel 15? This paper will argue that such a rhetorical approach has significant implications for understanding how religious narratives influence present conflicts, particularly in the Middle East.

Joseph Kohring is on faculty at Alphacrucis University College and a current PhD candidate at Vrije Universiteit. He has interest in literary analysis of the Hebrew Bible, in particular, rhetorical criticism of Samuel. His current research explores the characterisation of Saul, and his paradigm of kingly power, in 1 Samuel 15.

HAYDN LEA

Adventure of the Dying Teacher: Theological Belief in the Life of St Macrina

For several decades, it has been accepted by the majority of scholars that in ancient Christianity, women predominated. This view is exemplified by sociologist Rodney Stark, who concludes that up to two-thirds of the earliest Christians were women. When explaining this prominence, Stark, and a wide array of other scholars, posit that women converted to Christianity in droves because it offered them sociological benefits which made their lives superior to that of their counterparts. The idea acknowledged across scholarship, is that early female conversion was primarily a prudent sociological choice.

However, at no point do these writers explore whether there was also a direct place for independent agency and theological conviction in the experiences of Christian women around the time of Nicea. Against this backdrop, the character of Macrina the Younger stands in stark contrast. As a wealthy, educated woman, her journey into Christian monasticism and voluntary poverty conceivably constitute a loss, rather than benefit. This paper, therefore, suggests that sociological evidence alone does not satisfactorily explain Macrina's conversion, experiences and actions. Instead, it explores the role of agency and theological belief in her example, as evidenced by the content of her teaching, prayers and declarations, as well as her role as a teacher and evangelist, in order to provide a more compelling and nuanced understanding of the experiences of women in the Nicene and immediately post-Nicene church.

Haydn Lea is a part time PhD candidate at the Australian Catholic University's Biblical and Early Christianity Studies program, where his research focuses on the intellectual agency in the conversion of women within early Christianity.

In his fulltime role, Haydn is a Squadron Leader in the Royal Australian Air Force, currently working as a Chaplain. Prior to this, he worked in Air Force ground combat, specialising in reconnaissance, sniper work, and close personal protection. In his military roles, Haydn has served operationally in Afghanistan, the United Arab Emirates, the Australian Maritime Area of Operations, and the Solomon Islands.

BILL LEADBETTER

Constantine and Nicaea: the emergence of state theology

In 325, the Christian churches of the Roman Empire found themselves in the position that they had never expected: that the state, hitherto their foe, was now, apparently, their friend. The Synod of Nicaea was called on the authority of the emperor, held in a location convenient to the emperor and paid for by the emperor. The emperor, Constantine, was also a regular attendee. Despite never having been baptized, ordained or consecrated, his status as emperor guaranteed him a decisive seat at the table. This paper examines Constantine's role both in calling the Council and his conduct within it in seeking to establish a resolution to the Arian dispute. It will be argued that, despite his army of advisers, Constantine did not understand enough of the nature of theological dispute, or of its drivers, to reach a durable solution to the Arian controversy. Rather, his intervention created a precedent for state involvement in theological discourse which ensured both the protraction of the dispute and the increasingly fractious nature of the relationships between rulers and bishops in the following decades.

Bill Leadbetter, currently Assistant Curate at St George's cathedral, and Cathedral Scholar, holds a doctorate in Ancient History from Macquarie University. He has held teaching positions at Macquarie University, Edith Cowan University and the University of Notre Dame. He is widely published in the field of late antiquity, with a special focus on the period of Diocletian and Constantine. He has also published "Galerius and the Will of Diocletian" in the Routledge Imperial Biographies Series. He spent some years working in public life, both as a policy adviser and, very briefly, a member of the Western Australian Parliament. In 2024, Dr Leadbetter was ordained to the Anglican priesthood in the Diocese of Perth where he currently serves. In 2022, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

EMMA LEITCH

Faith and Diversity in Sexuality and/or Gender are Not Mutually Exclusive

Faith and diversity in sexuality and/or gender are often thought to be mutually exclusive – that is, that there is very little intersection between the Christian and the LGBTQIA+ communities. Research shows that this assumption is not correct. American data reveals that 83–86% of LGBTQIA+ people have religious backgrounds and 46–51% still have a religious affiliation. In Australia, data reveals that 2.9% of all religious adults are sexually diverse and that there is no significant difference in church attendance patterns between sexually diverse and heterosexual people of faith. This paper collates research on the intersection of faith and diversity in sexuality and gender identity and on the challenges that LGBTQIA+ Christians face in church communities: minority stress, religion as a risk factor for mental health and suicidality, identity conflict, religious trauma and rejection. These findings highlight the urgent need to reconsider the churches' positions on inclusion.

Religious Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE): A failed 40-year experiment

Sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) have been known as "conversion therapy" or "reparative therapy," or in the religious sphere, "ex-gay ministry." The American Psychiatric Association refer to them as SOCE as there is neither an empirical basis for the treatments nor evidence of success to validate calling them a "therapy". Evidence of the harm caused by SOCE, however, is ample. This paper traces the medical, psychiatric and scientific background to religious SOCE, showing how, the Church and para-church organisations took the baton on SOCE precisely when medicine and psychiatry stopped medical change efforts. The Ex-gay ministry was based upon theories from scientific studies that were deeply flawed and already refuted and was perpetuated by hope of change rather than actual change.

Discussion of the rise and demise of the ex-gay movement is followed by a collation of research into the detrimental effects of ex-gay ministry and mixed orientation marriage. This research shows that the Church's major strategy for addressing same sex sexuality from the 1970s to the mid-2010s has failed.

Emma Leitch has recently completed her PhD in Theology at ACU, studying the themes of suffering and glory in 2 Corinthians. She has been independently researching and writing a book on faith and diversity in sexuality and gender identity called "Why Welcome is Not Enough: Addressing the 'Welcoming but not affirming' position of Christian churches toward LGBTQIA+ people". She is a mother of three adult children, one of whom identifies as bisexual, and an active member of Free Mum Hugs Australia, attending pride events to extend love and support to LGBTQIA+ people, as many do not have supportive adults in their lives.

GREGORY LISTON

Newbigin and the Church's Mission

By embracing Newbigin's insights and relying on the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, the church in Australasia can embark on a journey of missional revitalization. The central insight undergirding this journey is the recognition that it is the church actually being the church—living a gospel-centred existence—that is and always has been its primary and most effective missional strategy. In contrast to the syncretistic accommodations which see the church increasingly melding into society, Newbigin offers an attractive picture where the church leans into the differences it has with societal norms, confidently owning those distinctions, and thereby missionally affecting the community surrounding it. Recognising and embracing the tensions and challenges of choosing such an eclectic but attractive ecclesial lifestyle is central to the church's ongoing missional witness. This paper explores how the Spirit can empower us together to embrace this ecclesial calling. It argues that by leaning into our distinctive differences with society, the church can become a dynamic agent of God's love and reconciliation in the nation, offering hope and healing in a complex and changing world. .

Greg Liston is a Senior Lecturer at Laidlaw College, where he teaches primarily in systematic theology. His research interests focus on the role of the Spirit in the life of the church, and exploring how the interaction between science and theology raises fundamental questions about reality and the nature of time. His publications include *The Anointed Church* (Fortress, 2015), *Kingdom Come* (T&T Clark, 2022) and (with Myk Habets) *Starting with the Spirit* (T&T Clark, 2024). Before taking up his current role, Greg's journey has included Ph.D.s in both systematic theology and quantum physics, being the senior pastor of a local Auckland suburban Baptist church, and strategic management consulting. Greg is married with two adult children. He and his family attend Mt Albert Baptist Church.

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CHRIS MAGNUSSEN

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The Council of Nicaea (325 CE) marked Christianity's transition from a persecuted minority movement to a religion intertwined with imperial power. This alignment with empire shaped not only Christian theology but also its institutional identity, establishing patterns of authority, orthodoxy, and exclusion that continue to shape the church today. In a post-Christendom context, where Christianity no longer holds a dominant societal position, the church faces an ongoing crisis of identity and mission. The boundaries between church and culture remain fluid, raising questions about how the church should relate to spiritual movements and communities that exist beyond its formal structures.

Paul Tillich's concept of the "Latent Church" offers a theological framework for understanding these shifts. Tillich identified groups outside traditional ecclesiastical institutions that nonetheless embodied spiritual depth, justice, and transcendence—qualities he saw as essential to the church's mission. This paper argues that in light of Nicaea's legacy, the modern church must reconsider its relationship to these "latent" expressions of faith. Rather than seeing them as external or oppositional, the church can recognize and engage them as authentic movements of the Spirit. By doing so, it may recover a more dynamic and inclusive vision of its role in society today.

Chris Magnussen is a Master of Philosophy candidate at Alphacrucis University College, Australia. His research explores the relationship between Church and society, particularly through the lens of contextual theologians such as Paul Tillich and Douglas John Hall. His current project examines Tillich's concept of the Church's dual natures—"Manifest" and "Latent"—and its implications for theological engagement with culture.

RUTH CHRISTA MATHIESON

"Eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom", gender-diversity in the church today.

In Matthew 19:12 Jesus refers to three kinds of eunuchs including those "who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven". This teaching will be explored using Socio-rhetorical Interpretation (SRI). Analysis of the inner texture of Matthew 18:1-19:15 shows that this text is framed by Jesus talking about the place of children in the kingdom of heaven. Consideration is given to what this means of the place of eunuchs, who are by definition incapable of having children. Intertexts where eunuchs feature in the canon of scripture are identified, and the social and cultural construction of "eunuch" in the Mediterranean region around the time of the first century is explored. After considering how eunuchs may serve within the Matthean ecclesiology of fatherless households of faith, attention will be given to possibilities for gender-diverse people, including those who are asexual and transgender, to have a valued place in the church today.

Ruth Mathieson is the Principal of St Francis College (University of Divinity), the Anglican Theological College located in Brisbane. Ruth teaches in the area of biblical studies and loves learning more about the biblical texts with each class taught. Since completing her doctoral work in on a Matthew 22:1-14 using socio-rhetorical interpretation (SRI), Ruth continues to explore the textures of text using SRI, with a particular focus on Matthew's Gospel in preparation for commentary writing. Ruth is the mother of two adult daughters, one cisgender and one transgender.

ABRAAM MIKHAIL

Can the Cappadocians agree on how to Invoke the divine Father, Son and Spirit? Consistency within the Rites of the Coptic Orthodox Church

The Cappadocian Fathers identified 'God the Father', 'the Son of God' and the 'Spirit of God' as the correct designations to affirm the one ousia and the three hypostases. Gregory of Nazianzus insisted that only the Father can be called 'God' - that is 'God the Father' - in his Theological Orations. While Basil's On The Holy Spirit affirms the same, Basil seems to have deviated from this convention in his Letter 236 where he affirms "I believe in God the Son." (236.6). This paper will confront Basil with Gregory's dismay at the appellation in question, seek to reconcile the two Cappadocians, and come to a consensus, against the prominent heresy of Sabellius. It will also bring into focus the contemporary prayers of the Coptic Orthodox Church, wherein the Father, Son and Spirit are invoked, and elucidate an understanding of the names such that one can pray with understanding.

Abraam Mikhail earned his Master of Arts (Theological Studies) from St Vladimir's Seminary. He is a lecturer in Church History and Systematic Theology at St Athanasius College, a member college of the University of Divinity



GLEN O'BRIEN

John Wesley and the Heretics

John Wesley was surprisingly generous toward historical figures routinely discounted as 'heretical.' These included Pelagius, Montanus, and Servetus. While accepting the substance of the Athanasian Creed he disavowed its damnatory clauses as unworthy of Christians. Claiming to adhere to Anglican orthodoxy as enshrined in the formularies of the Church of England, he at the same time sought to rehabilitate the reputations of the 'unorthodox' by privileging the spiritual qualities of their lives over their doctrines. This paper will explore Wesley's approach to heresy and heretics in the light of Nicaea's contested legacy.

Glen O'Brien is Professor of Christian Thought and History in the University of Divinity and Research Coordinator at Eva Burrows College. He is a Member of the Methodist Roman Catholic International Commission and has published widely on Wesleyan and Methodist themes including *John Wesley's Political World* (Routledge, 2023), *Wesleyan Holiness Churches in Australia* (Routledge, 2018), and *Methodism in Australia: A History* edited with Hilary Carey (Ashgate, 2015).

CAITLIN OLSEN

Laying Down Our Weapons: How LGBTQIA+ Christian Experiences Inform Shalomic Ecclesiological Praxes for Queensland Evangelical Churches

Sexuality and gender's prominence within both social politics and evangelical anxieties have prompted the emergence of diverse theological interpretations on same-sex attraction and gender incongruity, motivating diverse practical Christian responses. This presentation, distilled from the presenter's masters thesis research, will approach the question of secure LGBTQIA+ inclusion within Christian community in Queensland from local historical, theological, and social-scientific perspectives.

The research, which engaged Queensland LGBTQIA+ Christians' personal experiences through an anonymous survey method, identified several key stressors that hold LGBTQIA+ Christian existence within Queensland evangelical churches in a precarious tension; these stressors were underpinned by the social environment's dependence on a binarily-valenced hierarchy of gender and sexuality. The participants' narratives indicated that a degree of LGBTQIA+ Christian identity integration is possible within even biblically traditionalist Queensland evangelicalism, through a culture of trauma-informed practice, secure relationship to church leadership, and a degree of ambiguity tolerance.

Theologically reflecting on the data rendered the participants' resistance to evangelical norms a prophetic correction away from injustice for marginalised peoples caused by cis-heteropatriarchal dynamics and towards a shalomic telos, wherein all creation is reconciled to peace and flourishing through Jesus Christ.

Caitlin Olsen is a practical theologian, speaker, and professional writer/editor. Caitlin completed a Bachelor of Arts (English Literature and Writing) degree at the University of Queensland in 2016 and a Masters of Theological Studies from Morling Theological College in 2025, while also serving as the student academic tutor for their Brisbane based Malyon campus. Caitlin previously lectured and developed courses in Academic Communication and Christian Studies for the Social Sciences department at Christian Heritage College, before commencing full-time work on a masters thesis that explored the experiences of queer and trans* Christians in a Brisbane Protestant Evangelical church. Also qualified and experienced in youth work through school chaplaincy, Caitlin is motivated to empower and encourage vulnerable and marginalised people with the Gospel as "good news" for all people.

CAITLIN OLSEN AND JACINTA ZYLSTRA

Jonah, YHWH, and the ICJ: placing international law in divine dialogue with Jonah as absurdist theo-parody

Interracial conflict, particularly between Jews and Arabs, has marked the Middle East for millennia. In 2025, this conflict manifests in the Gazan genocide; its global sociopolitical implications chronically colour newscasts, social media, and local political action. The conflict engenders both a theological and an ethical minefield riddled with colonialism, anti-semitism, Islamophobia, and even popular Christian hermeneutics. Yet the conversation rarely attends closely to the historical Israel's source text: the Hebrew Bible, specifically Jonah as an Israelite prophet culturally brutalised by the Ninevites.

Using the book of Jonah as a source text, this presentation will firstly stage the dialogue between Jonah and YHWH as a theo-parody, exploring how its absurdist themes highlight Judeo-Christian ethics that can inform theological responses to ancient Middle Eastern conflicts. Secondly, the presenters will introduce international law and its Christian history as a contemporary interlocutor to inform practical Christian responses to contemporary Middle Eastern conflicts, especially the Gazan genocide.

While the presentation requires no additional resources or venue requirements, the two halves of the presentation (Part One: "Jonah vs. YHWH"; Part Two: "Israel vs. the ICJ") will each require a 20-minute presentation time slot, plus question time. The presenters will lead their respective halves of the presentation according to their disciplines, supported by the other presenter to privilege both the dialogical nature of the source text and the interdisciplinary nature of the whole presentation.

Jacinta Zylstra (she/her) is an international legal scholar, political scientist, and policy professional. As a teenager, Jacinta moved with her family to Vanuatu for missionary work, which cultivated her strong commitment to international social justice. Jacinta completed both her Bachelor of International Studies and Master of International Law at the University of Queensland, where she currently tutors in the School of Political Science and International Studies. Her 2022 masters dissertation examined the conservative mobilisation around constitutional rights during the COVID-19 pandemic, investigating the perspective shift of right-wing actors. Her true passion lies within the intersection of law and politics through examining how legislation both impacts, and is impacted by, the people it intends to protect.

Caitlin Olsen is a practical theologian, speaker, and professional writer/editor. Caitlin completed a Bachelor of Arts (English Literature and Writing) degree at the University of Queensland in 2016 and a Masters of Theological Studies from Morling Theological College in 2025, while also serving as the student academic tutor for their Brisbane based Malyon campus. Caitlin previously lectured and developed courses in Academic Communication and Christian Studies for the Social Sciences department at Christian Heritage College, before commencing full-time work on a masters thesis that explored the experiences of queer and trans* Christians in a Brisbane Protestant Evangelical church. Also qualified and experienced in youth work through school chaplaincy, Caitlin is motivated to empower and encourage vulnerable and marginalised people with the Gospel as "good news" for all people.

MICK POPE

Extinction and the God-World Relationship

Sally McFague contends that post Nicea, the Logos became exclusively identified with the second person of the Trinity, the transcended God. This resulted in bringing to “an abrupt end” the intimacy between God and matter, as present in passages like Colossians 1, or in Stoic theology. Whether or not this separation is overstated, the focus placed on God and salvation has been throughout history, to the exclusion of the more-than-human creation.

The relationship of the Godhead to the world requires some rethinking in light of the current environmental crisis. We are living in what has been called the sixth mass extinction. However, as the name suggests the earth has undergone five other events, for which humans bear no moral responsibility. How does God relate to a creation where pain, suffering and loss of whole species is the norm?

Both McFague and Jay McDaniel develop theologies of the God-world relationship based on panentheism and process theology. God is immanent in an evolving world, suffering with it. Further, the world is envisaged as God’s body. Jurgen Moltmann offers a more explicitly Trinitarian model, where God makes way for the other to be, while eschewing Process theology for creatio ex nihilo.

This paper compares these three scholars to offer a Trinitarian panentheistic model of God’s relationship to the world.

Horned hero? A theological exploration of Hellboy and the Mignolaverse

While interest in Christianity is in decline, there continues to be a fascination with spirituality and the occult in popular culture. This ongoing interest presents an opportunity for theological reflection. One canon of material worthy of theological exploration is that of Mike Mignola, known as the Mignolaverse, the central character of which is Hellboy, a demon-human hybrid. For over 30 years, Hellboy has featured in comics, novels, cinema, and computer games. This paper explores some of the religious and theological themes that emerge in Mignola’s work.

Firstly, the Mignolaverse presents us with an analogue of biblical theodicy and eschatology. The dragons Ogdrun Jahad present a Lovecraftian cosmic horror, in turn influenced by the forces of chaos in the Priestly creation story and Enuma Elish. Hellboy is the key to the release of these primeval forces of chaos.

Secondly, as the offspring of a demon and a witch, Hellboy’s is a diabolical version of the incarnation. Unlike Christ, Hellboy struggles with and ultimately denies his diabolical heritage. Embracing his humanity, he holds back the forces of chaos, leading to his own (sacrificial) death.

Thirdly, the Mignolaverse presents no explicit theology. While Mignola’s stories include demons, priests, and holy relics, God is never mentioned. Mignola’s theology therefore resembles the book of Esther. In a time of crisis, God’s presence and actions are hidden, exercised in the faithfulness of human agents. In embracing his humanity, Hellboy does God’s work.

Mick Pope is a PhD student at Whitley College, examining mass extinction and the God-world relationship through the lens of panentheism. He also has a Masters from Whitley and a PhD in meteorology from Monash University. He has written several books and articles in the field of ecotheology.

SAM T RAJKUMAR

Dissent to Devotion: The Psalms as a Locus of Ecclesial Unity and Dispute in Light of Nicaea

The Council of Nicaea (325 CE) sought to define orthodoxy amid theological disputes concerning Christology, ecclesial authority, and communal worship. While doctrinal formulations such as the Nicene Creed emerged as unifying statements of faith, they also marked boundaries that marginalized dissenting voices. This paper explores the role of the Psalms both in the Nicene era and in contemporary ecclesial discourse as a scriptural foundation for unity and division within the church. Drawing upon historical and theological analysis, this study examines how the Psalms functioned liturgically and doctrinally in early Christianity, particularly in shaping Christological debates. The Nicene controversy often invoked Psalms such as Psalm 2 ("You are my Son; today I have begotten you") and Psalm 110 ("The Lord said to my Lord"), which were central to disputes between Nicene and Arian theologians. These texts were used both to affirm Christ's divine sonship and to challenge interpretations that subordinated the Son to the Father.

Beyond the fourth century, the Psalms have continued to serve as a space where theological and ethical tensions within the church are negotiated. In contemporary contexts, where issues of orthodoxy and inclusion remain contested whether concerning gender, race, or sexuality the Psalms still function as a resource for both resistance and reconciliation. This paper will argue that the Psalms, rather than enforcing rigid doctrinal boundaries, offer a dynamic theological and liturgical space that allows for both lament and praise, dissent and devotion, ultimately pointing toward a more inclusive vision of ecclesial unity.

Sam T. Rajkumar, an accomplished minister and theologian, holds a Master's degree in Biblical Studies (Old Testament) from The United Theological College, Bengaluru. Specializing in children's ministry, he is the author of *Resounding Faith* and *Anime Parables* and has published scholarly works in theology and biblical studies.

DAVID CAMERON RAY

"... as many as were called by grace, and displayed their first zeal, having cast aside their military girdles, but afterwards returned, like dogs, to their own vomit ..." (Canon 12, First Council of Nicaea, tr. Percival, 1900): Reflections on the relationship between military and clergy in MT, LXX, and Qumran

Canon 12 of the First Ecumenical Council reflects a return to socio-political order under Constantine, when the episcopate's rule over the church was separate from secular oversight of the military (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, IV, 24). This paper explores the biblical allusion in Canon 12 and the biblical trajectory of military and clerical leadership. Until the fall of the Israelite monarchy and during the Hasmonean dynasty, it is argued that Levitical roles mediated God as divine warrior and judge and were thus entwined in military initiatives (cf. Num 10:33-36), based on the complementary roles of priests and military in "girding", in "service", in select military offensives (e.g. Joshua 6 cf. 1QM; 1 Samuel 4-7; 1 Macc 2:1-9:22) and through the figure of the military messiah (Dan 7:13-14, 9:24-27 cf. 4Q174). By contrast, Levitical roles were limited to maintaining communal leadership under foreign rule. It is advanced that likening those who returned to the military as fools who repeat their own folly (Prov 26:11 cf. 2 Pt 2:22) contributed to setting apart the fastgrowing laity for higher service. For the Roman Empire, it follows that "the last remains of military spirit were buried in the cloister" (Liebeschuetz, 1990: 238).

David Ray is an early career researcher, based in Darwin, Northern Territory, and University Scholar at the University of Divinity (St Francis College, Brisbane). His doctoral research was published on *Conflict and Enmity in the Asaph Psalms* (FAT II 145, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023). David's interests are broadly in the Writings and deuterocanonical texts and draws on his studies in linguistics and German in his research.

DANIELA RIZZO

The Natural Will and the Divine Logoi: Maximus the Confessor, Animal Spirituality, and the Boundaries of Orthodoxy

The 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea invites renewed engagement with theological debates on orthodoxy, inclusion, and the nature of creaturely participation in the divine. This paper explores the Christological and anthropological implications of Maximus the Confessor's dyothelitism for a more-than-human theology, particularly in relation to animal spirituality and the divine logoi. Maximus distinguishes between the natural will, which is oriented toward divine purposes, and the gnostic will, which involves deliberative choice and the potential for misalignment with God's will. While traditionally ascribed only to human beings, this framework raises compelling questions about the spiritual status of non-human creatures.

If animals, lacking a gnostic will, move naturally in accordance with their divine logoi, then their relationship to God is unimpeded by the rational struggles that define human existence. Yet domesticated animals—whose lives are shaped by human influence—complicate this model, suggesting an "impelled gnosticism" in their relational orientation towards human beings. This has significant implications for theological anthropology, the place of animals within creation, and the broader discourse on deification beyond the human.

By bringing Maximus into conversation with contemporary discussions in ecotheology and animal theology, this paper will explore how his vision of cosmic reconciliation and creaturely participation in the divine can contribute to a more inclusive theological framework—one that challenges anthropocentric models of salvation while engaging with ongoing questions about orthodoxy, conciliarism, and theological boundaries. This analysis will consider whether Maximus offers a vision of inclusion aligned with the broader movement towards theological expansiveness or whether his metaphysical system implicitly reinforces certain forms of exclusion within the created order. In doing so, this paper seeks to illuminate how theological models of will and divine participation might expand our understanding of both human and non-human creatures within the ongoing work of divine restoration.

Daniela Rizzo is an Associate Lecturer in Systematic Theology at Alphacrucis University College. She has recently completed her PhD thesis which systematically develops theological foundations for a pneumatology of animals. Daniela is a dedicated advocate for compassionate conservation and an active member of the Australasian Animal Studies Association, the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, A Rocha Australia and more recently with the Pentecostal World Fellowship Creation Care Task Force. Daniela is inspired to lead proactive, tangible changes in the ways we value and care for animals and the environment in our theological context and beyond.

S

JACQUELINE SERVICE

Water in a Land where No One Lives: Rehabilitating the Wilderness in the Book of Job

While the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople were instrumental in establishing the tri-hypostatic nature of the unity of the Godhead, for centuries, questions persisted regarding how to distinguish the persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit one from the other. To clarify the distinctive properties of each divine person, theologians turned to the nature of the relations themselves in terms of processions. While the Filioque controversy seemingly divided the East from the West on this point of dogma, both traditions ultimately emphasised a one-way relation of origin. That is, the intra-Trinitarian relations were understood primarily to flow in a one-way direction from the Father. Recent scholarship has challenged this unidirectional framework, prompting a reassessment of relational dynamics within the Trinity. This paper explores the possibility that the relations of origin within the Godhead may not be strictly reduced to a one-way understanding but may in fact be inherently multidirectional.

MARSHALL SCOTT

Water in a Land where No One Lives: Rehabilitating the Wilderness in the Book of Job

In Job 38:26 Yahweh tells Job that he sends rain to the uninhabited wilderness. This is in part a denial of the assertion of Elihu that the clouds provide showers only for the benefit of human beings (36:28), but it is also providing an alternative voice to the Deuteronomic testimony that pictures the wilderness as a cipher for god-forsakenness and the Outside. God foregrounds the wilderness and the animals that dwell there, beyond the ken of human understanding. The Yahweh speeches subvert the anthropomorphic worldview of Job and his friends (as well as Elihu) that privileges the domestic world as Inside and marginalises the Outside world beyond human habitation.

I will argue that Yahweh wishes to literally expand Job's horizons to embrace a much richer understanding of the Covenant that Job believes his God has breached. Yahweh wants Job to see that his covenant care extends to the ostrich, to the wild goat, and even to Leviathan. Although many commentators have argued along these lines, it has been to use the animals instrumentally to illustrate God's love for Job. I argue that God wants to show Job his commitment to the animals for their own sake. Such a reading of Yahweh's response to Job invites the reader to a broader and richer understanding of God's generosity to the whole of creation which has obvious implications for the way we approach the ecological crisis facing our world today.

Marshall Scott serves as pastor at South-West Evangelical Church in Kingsgrove, Sydney. In his spare time he like to spend time with his wife and 3 boys, drink coffee, watch K-Dramas, read and ride his bike. Oh yes, and work towards a PhD on an ecological reading of the book of Job.

DANIEL SIHOMBING

Rethinking Nicaea from the Global South

On the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, this article reflects on the ambiguity that the Council produces through the decision on the homoousios formula and the subsequent formation of orthodoxy in the light of the present struggle for liberation in the Global South. Often seen as the moment that commenced imperial Christianity, the Council of Nicaea also generated liberative potential in its theological formula. This ambiguity is reflected in the ways theologians of the Global South reject and criticize, but also appropriate and expand Nicene Christology. This article will explore these differing responses to Nicaea and ponder on the possibility as well as the limit of treating Nicene Christology as a resource for the liberation of the Global South.

Daniel Sihombing is a lecturer in Systematic Theology at Pilgrim Theological College, University of Divinity.

T

DAVID TOMBS

From confessing Christ's suffering to confessing Christ crucified

This paper will compare the brief section in the Nicene Creed (325 CE) on the suffering of Christ with the slightly more expansive section in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381 CE). The first part of the paper argues that whilst Christ's suffering is explicitly referenced in both creeds, the additions at Constantinople are significant. In comparison with Nicea, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed refers to details in Christ's suffering that are: (1) more precise and concrete (crucified); (2) more historical (under Pontius Pilate); and (3) more theological ('for us' and 'in 'according to the Scriptures').

The second part of the paper discusses recent research on crucifixion as torture (Tombs 2023). Viewing crucifixion as torture can be seen as offering further precision, concrete detail, and historicity for remembering and confessing Christ's suffering. The final section examines reactions to this perspective on crucifixion and explores the theological challenges—and theological opportunities of affirming Christ's humanity—when addressing crucifixion more explicitly as torture.

David Tombs is an Anglican lay theologian, originally from the United Kingdom. He is Howard Paterson Chair Professor of Theology and Public Issues at the University of Otago, Aotearoa New Zealand. His work focusses on contextual approaches to public theology, including liberation theologies and theologies of reconciliation. He is best known for his investigations of crucifixion as a form of torture, an instrument of state terror, and an opportunity for sexual abuse. He also writes on how churches can make better responses to spiritual and sexual abuses. His most recent book is *The Crucifixion of Jesus: Torture, Sexual Abuse, and the Scandal of the Cross* (Routledge 2023). Read more at <http://www.david-tombs.com>.

PAUL TONSON

The Nicene Creed and John's Gospel

The creeds of the fourth century have been problematic from the beginning, even within the worldview of the fourth century. This is because of their glaring omission of any reference to Jesus' teaching about living in the Kingdom of God.

The creeds illustrate a change of focus in Christian theology from the teaching to the teacher, from his praxis to his person. Proclamation of teaching that has broad universal relevance gave way to proclamation of the Christ as uniquely GOD and Man.

This presentation reflects on the dichotomy of human and divine that is central to the Nicene Creed and on the imposition of creedal affirmations despite the historical reality of diversity in both Hebrew and Greek scriptures. An examination of a range of scriptures, especially of John's gospel, demonstrates how understandings of the human and divine in Jesus of Nazareth sit alongside each other in a way not often recognised. My study of these biblical texts matches my examination of my own life following the Way of Jesus.

I have been asking precisely how has the orthodox Christology of the creeds featured for my faith. I see that much of the New Testament assumes that the "divine" elements in the life of Jesus, especially his resurrection, are the factors that justify others following him.

However, it was the admirable human qualities of Rabbi Jesus, his living and dying, that inspired me at ages 6 and 15 to commit to the Way of life that he lived. I am still drawn to Jesus as an exemplary figure who lives out a path of purpose and empowerment that is possible also for his followers. This understanding offers a gospel that is egalitarian and universalist and full of hope.

From a study background in Maths and Economics in New Zealand, **Paul Tonson** undertook seminary studies in the USA (1971-75) focusing on Hebrew Bible. During subsequent ministry service he completed an M.Theol (MCD) around the figure of Abraham, as presented in the Bible, the Talmud and the Qur'an. This study underlies his commitment to interfaith endeavours and his earlier role in JCMA (Jews Christians and Muslims in Australia), as chair of a committee providing presentations to High school students. After three years seminary teaching in Papua New Guinea, Paul moved to Melbourne in 1994 to write a PhD (Deakin) thesis on the figure of Lot (Genesis 19), representing those, like himself, who find themselves on the edge of traditional faith. .

Over 15 years ministry in the UCA, Paul identified with the progressive Christian community and with an agnostic stance towards Christian dogma. Paul is committed to dialogue with other voices, in order to open his beliefs and his life to the test of authenticity which can be most effectively offered not by a fellow believer but by the Other. A special test of this authenticity is offered by those who are entirely without religion. During his retirement from regular ministry, Paul has maintained his personal friendships with secular minded people and groups in Melbourne, including Humanists and Rationalists who share the altruism and ethical integrity found in faith communities.

Paul has been invited to address such groups to reflect with an open stance on topics around the Bible and Spirituality. A number of his short papers are available on request.

NAOMI WOLFE

Remembering Nicea, Dismantling Colonisation

As the world of Christianity reflects on the 1700 anniversary of the Council of Nicea, it is timely to bring into that reflection the perspectives of Indigenous and marginalised members of the Church of Jesus. Indigenous Christians have participated in the life of the Church, both willingly, and as unwilling victims of colonial Christianity, but yet little has been formally documented about how historical and cultural events such as the Council of Nicea have impacted upon them. How might the legacies of both the Council of Nicea, and Indigenous communities speak to each other, and to the contemporary church? How does the legacy of the Council of Nicea continue to exclude and further marginalise Indigenous peoples? How might an Indigenous interpretation of the Council bring new and old perspectives for community?

Naomi Wolfe is a Trawlwoolway Aboriginal woman with Jewish German and Irish heritage who lives and works on Wurundjeri country (Melbourne, Australia) as a historian and theologian. She teaches Indigenous and ancient histories at the Australian Catholic University and was formerly the Academic Coordinator of the Jim-baa-yer Indigenous Higher Education Unit at ACU. Naomi is a member of the NAITS: An Indigenous Learning Community, and previously she was one of the foundation staff members of the School of Indigenous Studies, University of Divinity. She is an adjunct at St Mark's National Theological Centre, Canberra. Naomi is a kinship carer, a history nerd, and coffee tragic.



Join us next year as
ANZATS and SBL meet together in
Adelaide, South Australia for the
2026 International Meeting.

The meeting is scheduled from 5-9 July
and will feature hundreds of scholars from around the world.
We look forward to seeing you there!

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