



Australian Student Christian Movement

ASCM Magazine - November 2021



Dear Friends,

2021 has been a year of consolidation and renewal for the Australian Student Christian Movement. This ASCM magazine provides news of some of our recent activity and thinking, both in Australia and in relation to the global SCM family.

In Christ
ASCM

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Our Mission

ASCM seeks to be honest to God and to the spirit of Christ in the world, affirming the power of love for transformation and liberation and justice. We look to foster conversations to produce deeper understanding of Christian faith, looking to find ways to offer spiritual support for all who are struggling for a better world.

The role of universities as thought leaders in our society makes public conversation about tertiary ministry and engagement essential. Aware of the upheavals in church and society, ASCM aims to bring people together for broader-based conversations,

ASCM acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land where we live. We pay our respects to elders, past, present and emerging. ASCM supports the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#). Voice. Treaty. Truth.

respecting faith while grounded in reason.

The ASCM remains confident that our mission is as timely and relevant as ever, as we work to enable university students to develop an active, open, critical and ecumenical Christian faith. The message of Christ calls us to recognise and respect the least of the world as the first in the Kingdom of God, seeing our salvation in our shared work and vision together to do the will of God on earth.

ASCM Staffing

2021 has brought a change of leadership for ASCM. In July we farewelled John Biswas, our national coordinator since 2015, and welcomed the appointment of new National Directors, David Hale and Robbie Tulip.

At our 2021 Annual General Meeting, the ASCM national executive expressed deep thanks and appreciation to John for his leadership over the last six years, maintaining ASCM national cohesion and direction and engagement.

David Hale is our new National Director, Student Ministry and Engagement, and Robbie Tulip is our new National Director, Communications and Partnership. David lives in Brisbane, is a member of the Anglican Church, and works as a chaplain at the University of Queensland. Robbie lives in Canberra, where he manages the chaplaincy at the Australian National University and is Secretary for the Canberra Region Presbytery of the Uniting Church.

Our other National Directors continue in their roles: Andika Mongilala as Treasurer and Claudine Chionh as Technology Director. Other members of ASCM National Executive include Rev Dr Sandy Yule (Chair), Mandy Tibbey (Staffing), John Bretz (Vice Chair) and Barrie Baker (Pastoral). Christine Ledger (Membership), Shaun Whelan (Secretary), Ros Hewett, Caity Cameron and Yixin Gong are part of our wider leadership team, together with a number of other friends, including the Trustees of the ASCM Centennial Trust Fund.

Reflections on the ASCM Review

The national executive team conducted a formal review of ASCM this year. The review report, finalised in July, found ASCM has a strong basis for growth, while recognising the challenges we face. The review noted many ongoing strengths of ASCM. These include



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- clear theological vision and identity grounded in Christian faith, building upon the longstanding progressive heritage of our ASCM forebears
- effective leadership by our National Executive with members in Queensland, NSW, Victoria, ACT and WA
- regular public discussions in person and online, involving Australian and international friends
- resources provided by our supporters, including through the ASCM Centenary Trust Fund
- membership in the vibrant international family of the World Student Christian Federation
- ability to reach out through new online communication channels to a wider audience who support our ideals.
- Support for diversity, inclusion and respectful dialogue
- Longstanding advocacy for gender and racial and LGBTIQ equality
- welcoming people who are excluded elsewhere
- supporting social justice and opposing all forms of discrimination and prejudice.
- ongoing engagement with a range of supporters, including many who see ASCM as their spiritual home that resonates with their sense of Christian identity.
- the many friends of ASCM who continue to keep in contact as a loose network, valuing the intellectual and spiritual formation that SCM has provided since their student years.

Broader societal changes have seen increased scepticism about religion in response to ethical and intellectual failings of churches. For ASCM, this makes it more difficult to share a Christian vision that attracts student involvement and leadership. ASCM is meeting these challenges by working to foster attentive and consistent local leadership with thoughtful, prayerful and willing senior friends, as a solid ground to encourage campus ministry.

Despite difficulties we remain optimistic about the growth of ASCM. We occupy an important space as we work to nurture and build safe relationships among students in ways that respect our heritage of faith. Helping students to integrate the deep wisdom of the Gospels with modern secular perspectives, as SCM seeks to do, offers unique potential to foster leadership and vision in our deeply confused world.

The ASCM Review reaffirms the vitality of the ASCM mission to engage students in Christian faith. Our tradition of helping students to explore the richness

and wisdom of Christ and the call to live the Christian life in an authentic way aspires to a shared Christian discipleship that will enable our churches and communities to resonate with life, love of God and neighbour, justice and sustainability.

ASCM's enduring links with people of different traditions, across the country and internationally through the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) have included important solidarity relationships over the years. Our members have made life-changing visits to many partner SCMs, building links with movements in East Timor, Indonesia, Philippines, Korea and other places. These opportunities are helping us to build relationships with senior friends and ecumenical organizations, and also with WSCF.

Even with this good progress, ASCM remains fragile and small. Regular communication is essential to inspire our growth. We need more financial support for staff positions and to recruit additional officers, both in staff positions and as volunteers.

We would like to conduct research with university students to better understand where their situation and needs and how ASCM could contribute. Questions include what spirituality looks like for young people at present, and what would support them to explore their sense of God, themselves and the world? What would help students move from ideas to putting ideas into action for a better world? Should we partner with other organisations to undertake such research?

We want to broaden our contacts with a range of likeminded organisations and individuals who could help facilitate ecumenical Christian presence on universities. We are renewing our website to focus on making our internet presence more coherent and effective and showcasing more of our work there.

Our recent Zoom discussions have shown how ASCM can offer a free space for wide-ranging thinking about theology and religion. We want a 'think tank' function in the ASCM, supporting intellectual conversation and critical thinking, possibly with thematic newsletters on a range of topics of interest.

ASCM wants to expand our cooperation with other groups to support shared concerns, in partnership with like-minded organizations. These could include state ecumenical councils, university chaplaincies and other justice or student-based groups, whether these be in theological faculties or colleges,



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universities, etc. We encourage universities to welcome ecumenical Christian chaplaincies.

Pressures on university life make the organisation of campus branches difficult. The review suggested an active online community is essential to support in-person gatherings. We want to encourage the hospitality of dinners and meetings around themes such as Bible study, spirituality, and other issues off campus, as well as online work including on our website, and conversations on Zoom, Facebook and Twitter.

The ASCM Review Report used the parable of the tiny mustard seed, from which a huge tree can grow, as an image to give us heart and strength for the journey. The contribution of the ASCM from 1896 until now has been creative. The nurturing, friendships, intellectual and spiritual engagement opened up by being part of the ASCM have charted paths and perspectives for individuals, churches, organizations and our society beyond those that may otherwise have been followed. Hopefully they have been ways of justice, peace and grace. As the title of Renate Howe's book states, the ASCM has had "A Century of Influence". Now our task is to build on that influence for the future, charting new paths, always endeavouring to walk with Christ on the way.

Peter Fensham – ASCM Tribute

Video - <https://youtu.be/11deziF7628>

On 24 October, ASCM held an online service to remember the great contribution of Professor Peter Fensham, ASCM Chair in the 1970s and a much respected and loved mentor and friend for many in the movement. Thanks to Don MacArthur for suggesting this event, to Sandy Yule for leading it, and to all who shared their memories of Peter.



Peter Fensham set an example for the spirit of ASCM as a pioneer in progressive Christianity. Monash University published his [obituary](#), recognising his long career as a professor of science education from 1967 to 1992. At our SCM tribute gathering, friends and family spoke about Peter's warm and radical spirit, including through his leadership of the World University Service.

Peter was proud to confront the difficulties that come when you stand up for unpopular causes. He was a prophetic voice but not always a popular one.

Peter was a leader in listening to others. He had a strong focus on inequalities in school education, with passionate support for social justice in federal education funding. A gifted leader and educator, Peter had international standing in science education and communication, with a prescient focus on the politics of environment.

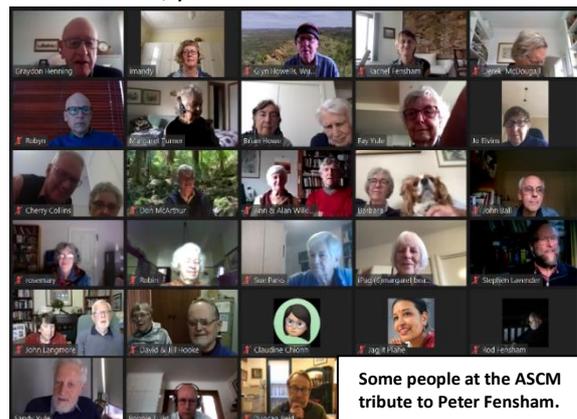
In chairing regular ASCM meetings, Peter brought clear agendas and well-prepared reflections. He made the ASCM a fun place to be, through his intellect, his political awareness and his openness. Also, his remarkable generosity, together with his beloved wife Christine, opening their Philip Island holiday house to students for meetings and holidays, and their great hospitality in welcoming guests at home.

A remarkable innovation that Peter brought to the Uniting Church was organising adult learning groups instead of sermons. These have continued in The Avenue church for the last fifty years. His interdisciplinary interests in science, technology and theology crossed the divide between arts and science.

One of his greatest joys was intelligent conversation over dinner, including at ASCM national conferences at the Chum Creek campsite. Peter saw SCM as an extended family community, complex, multi-layered and generous. As his health declined in recent years, Peter remained endlessly interested in the world and in other people.

His deep Christian faith saw God working in the world through the Holy Spirit, feeling how things moved mysteriously out of our control, joining us together with each other to transform our wider social connections.

Farewell Peter, you are in our memories.





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Communication

Our members are working to inspire wider student involvement in ASCM, with the hope that we can make significant contributions to Australia's intellectual and spiritual life. We aim to do all we can to foster and encourage these conversations and friendships, helping people to keep in touch as much as possible and learn from each other.



July 2021

The context of the ASCM review includes that the COVID-19 pandemic has prevented in-person meetings and will produce lasting changes in how we live. We pray for everyone affected by the pandemic around the world, for a new spirit of care and companionship as people deal with isolation. We have discovered how well online meeting can bring together people from different locations, around Australia and internationally. Our regular meetings are helping us to build relationships and friendships that in previous times were far less easy to maintain.

With ASCM National Executive now meeting regularly on Zoom, we have got to know each other better, with fellowship providing opportunities for more discussion of strategic direction and priorities, as well as faith perspectives.

We are regularly posting on our Facebook Page <https://www.facebook.com/AustralianSCM/> and there is also discussion on the [ASCM Facebook Group](#) with links to our broader WSCF family. We encourage even those who do not regularly use Facebook to look at the material on our Facebook Page and Group.

The recent series of NSW SCM guest talks on Zoom are now all in a library on the [ASCM YouTube channel](#), providing an excellent resource. Summaries of some talks are below. We are exploring how to make better use of the range of methods of internet communication, and look forward to expanding this, including through Facebook and revision to our website ascm.org.au.

World Student Christian Federation (WSCF)

WSCF is a global fellowship of Student Christian Movements putting their faith into action to contribute to the renewal of the ecumenical movement and to promote justice and peace in the world. Its motto in the logo, 'Ut Omnes Unum Sint' is Latin for John 17:21 "That all may be one".

WSCF is called to be a prophetic witness in the Church and the transformation of the world, where God's love for creation, justice and peace is shared by all across boundaries of race, class, ethnicity, culture, gender and sexuality. This vision is nurtured by a radical hope of God's reign in history and liberating faith in Jesus Christ.

The critical and ecumenical Christian faith advocated by ASCM is strengthened by our membership in WSCF, through our shared vision of the centrality of justice and peace in the Gospels as a message of liberation. This vision of Christian faith has differences from conventional faith traditions, while respecting the support that many people find in traditional worship, belief and prayer.

This year WSCF held a Virtual General Assembly on the theme "Looking for Justice in a World that is Suffering". The Assembly affirmed the new General Secretary Marcelo Leites and appointed a new leadership team.

The 2020 [annual report of WSCF](#) presents remarkable stories of how SCMs around the world, in Latin America, Europe, Africa and Asia, are living the Biblical message.

Here are some examples of recent activity in the five WSCF program areas described in the annual report.

1. Ecological Justice

– Nigeria SCM planted trees for climate action and awareness;

2. Identity, Diversity and Dialogue

- WSCF Middle East hosted a webinar on Women in Christianity;

- Latin America and the Caribbean held a webinar on Gender Justice and LGBTQI+, as part of a program on Democracy, Human Rights, Fundamentalisms and the Role of Ecumenical Youth;

- Bangladesh SCM held a National Cultural Workshop on Culturalisation towards Transformation, based on Philippians 2:5 'Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.'

3. Peace-Building and Dialogue

– Latin America and Caribbean Region held discussions on Ecumenical Perspectives on Christian Zionism and Fundamentalisms, Peacebuilding and Non-Violent Resistance, seeing peace not as a simple absence of conflict or war but as the construction of just societies in which human rights and the dignity of individuals and peoples are guaranteed.



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- Myanmar SCM has focused on work toward just peace and inclusive community, and action against gender-based violence.

4 Interfaith Dialogue

- WSCF Europe and five partner faith-based organisations issued an interfaith Call for Action on Climate Justice calling on religious communities and broader society to acknowledge shared responsibility and take action.

5 Bible and Theology

- WSCF Middle East hosted a webinar on A Palestinian-Christian Reading of the Old Testament; - the 2020 Universal Day of Prayer for Students used the theme Rejoice in Hope, based on Romans 12:12. WSCF also reports from each region. Our region, the Asia Pacific, has seen heavy impacts from the pandemic, as well as staff changes in the Regional Office, with long term regional executive Sunita Suna replaced in 2020 by Fanny Chung, and the Regional Office moving from Hong Kong to temporary location in South Korea.

More recently, ASCM joined a webinar convened by Indonesia SCM (GMKI) on Palestine, where WSCF General Secretary Marcelo Leites, Indonesian Senator Dr. Badikenita Sitepu and Palestine SCM leader Yasmina Rishmawi reflected on the [WSCF Solidarity Statement with the Palestinian People](#). ASCM Chair Rev Dr Sandy Yule wrote a response, published by ASCM [here](#), and below.

On 10 September ASCM leaders were able to join Fanny Chung from WSCF and SCM leaders from New Zealand and Timor Leste in a Pacific Region discussion, opening our shared interest in indigenous spirituality and identity, a theme that the Regional Office will continue to make a priority. Robbie Tulip gave a Biblical Reflection at the meeting on *Connections between The Beatitudes and Australian indigenous experience*, copied below.

ASCM's role as the Australian affiliate of WSCF offers a starting point to develop an integral ethical theology. We differ markedly from conservative evangelical churches while remaining open to respectful dialogue. Scandals in the church and the ongoing loss of familiarity with Christian worship have made people highly suspicious of Christianity. The resulting lack of interest in faith has made it more difficult for us to make contact with students. Nevertheless, opening conversations around why faith is important, in a context of respect for diverse views, can help us to generate student engagement.

Queensland ASCM News

From David Hale, ASCM Director

ASCM held a number of small group discussions in Brisbane on what we can do for the sick, for peace, and to help end poverty.

We explored the ministry of the sick across faith traditions and with secular health organizations. We heard about free medical clinics run by students and by people who are working for peace in our world by working for better health.

In our poverty discussions we heard from Catholics groups including the Jesuits, from Sikhs and Baha'i, and from secular aid groups. A special thanks to Anglican Overseas Aid and our Anabaptist representatives who joined us for every session.

We have also held a number of small group discussions on faith and culture. We heard from parish priests about their congregations, from Afghan students about how there is more to their country than war and the Taliban, from Cambodian students about the history of their country, from Kurdish students, from the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture in Canberra, from several progressive Christian student groups in California, and from the Australian Ambassador to the Holy See, Ms Chiara Porro.

We held a Thanksgiving service for the work of Christian Peacemaker Teams. Despite their Christian title, these groups are made up of people from a number of faith backgrounds, serving local populations around the world in the work of peace.

We are launching an ASCM QLD Writing Award open to university students to write a short story or essay on "What does climate justice look like through a faith lens?"

We marked the Feast Day of St Luke on 18 October with a St Luke Festival, encouraging people to do something related to St Luke. Activities included a Bible study held by Christian Students Uniting and an essay by a chaplain at Central Queensland University.

In 2021, Queensland ASCM have reflected on our heritage, marking 125 years since ASCM held its first official meeting at Ormond College in Melbourne in 1896.



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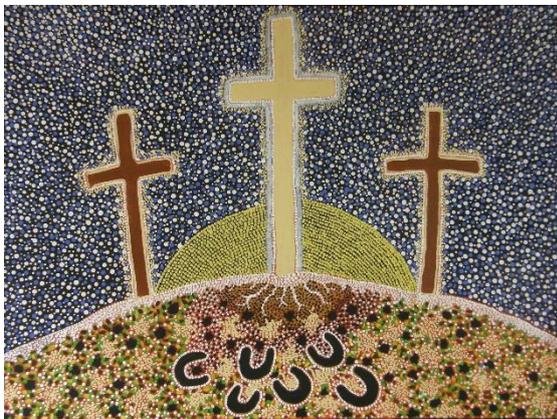
Some Connections between the

Beatitudes and Australian Indigenous Experience

A Biblical reflection for WSCF Pacific Regional Discussion, 10 September 2021, by Robbie Tulip

Christ teaches in the Sermon on the Mount 'blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth'. This profound statement has much to say to our post-colonial world and to the situation and hopes for indigenous people.

Jesus pronounces eight blessings in the Beatitudes, for the poor, for those who mourn, for the meek, for those who hunger for justice, for the merciful, for the pure, for peacemakers and for the persecuted. These eight blessings are all things that dispossessed people can easily relate to, showing the mission of God for our world. The theft of indigenous land by British invaders in Australia and Aotearoa has caused untold suffering and ongoing inter-generational trauma. In Australia, rich ancient cultures were totally destroyed in many localities through systematic genocide. Indigenous memory often now only exists through place names. Where people were not totally wiped out, they were banned from speaking their own language, from maintaining their traditions and even from mourning their loss. This barbaric system of cultural genocide was designed to deliberately sever communities from their heritage and identity. And then to grind surviving communities into the dust, children were stolen by governments, losing contact with their culture. Under this assault, indigenous communities remain the most marginalised and deprived in Australia.



The scale of cruelty, brutality, ignorance and sheer savagery in British colonial attitudes and actions is something that has still not been fully recognised or repented. A partial acknowledgement occurred in 2008 with the Australian government apology to

the stolen generations. This did not really prompt national conversation about the extent of wrongdoing in colonisation, and the need for a full process of repentance, reconciliation and recognition through a Makarrata treaty.

Looking to the Gospels can help us to place Australian history in the context of the conflict between God and the world. Jesus Christ was himself an Aborigine, standing in solidarity with the call for liberation for all the oppressed people of the world. In his poverty in Galilee, living under imperial control, Christ stood in the same relationship to the Roman Empire that indigenous Australian people had to the British Empire. The relationship was of exclusion, denigration, exploitation and oppression. His death on the cross showed the arrogant disdain of imperial powers for the dignity of human life, while his resurrection points to the eventual victory of justice in the world.

In this context of solidarity and liberation, the salvation that Jesus offers is not just for the individual, as church traditions have wrongly tried to say, but for the whole world, supporting our planetary flourishing. The conditions of our salvation that Jesus explained in Matthew 25, the parable of the sheep and goats, have nothing to do with belief, but are entirely about our actions for the world. Christ says there that our salvation comes solely from doing good works of mercy, for the hungry, thirsty, homeless, sick, imprisoned and impoverished, as we see the presence of Jesus in the meek, the least of the world. Christ's teaching of overflowing love for the world asks how we can begin to transform our situation to build the good and confront the evil, so the will of God may be done on earth as it is in heaven, in the words of the Lord's Prayer.

Recognising the blessings in the Beatitudes invites the suggestion that those who are hostile to these blessings live under a curse. The Bible identifies this curse with the story of Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve. Cain was a settled tiller of the soil, who murdered his brother Abel, a nomadic herder. For today, this story of the curse of Cain is a parable of the modern industrial destruction of indigenous societies. It tells us that when a society refuses to mourn its loss, or respect the identity of those it destroys, the psychological effect is a deep scarring of social values, creating an unethical view that lacks compassion and empathy.

To be meek is something that our society tends to ridicule. And yet to be meek means to have a proper respect for the dignity of all of God's creation. The curse upon those who denigrate the



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meek is seen in their spiritual alienation and moral emptiness. Their false values reveal indifference and ignorance about the complex richness of the divine natural and human creation. Those guilty of such arrogant hardness of heart find it impossible to see the effects of their selfish greed, whether in the destruction of cultural diversity, in the destruction of natural ecology, or in the urgent peril of climate change.

How then may we be saved? The Gospel of Saint Mark opens with the baptism of Christ, where Saint John teaches that our salvation comes through forgiveness, and is entirely conditional upon repentance. The love of God is freely given to all without limit or condition, but divine forgiveness requires that we must be sorry for our failings. An unrepentant attitude is condemned to repeat its mistakes, continuing on a path of destruction. To repent means to understand what you have done wrong, to be genuinely sorry for your mistakes, and to be sorry for unjust actions of others that you benefit from. To be sorry means to understand how these wrong actions have harmed other people, and to apologise to those who have been wronged. Repentance means support for restorative justice, to enable growth toward shared trust and identity on a journey of healing.

In Australia, the moral legitimacy of our settler society remains under the cloud of unrepentant racism. The arrogance of power refuses to acknowledge the blessing of God for the meek. To be meek means to live with deep respect and humility toward all life, seeking the grace of God with integrity and courage. When we see that the meek are blessed by God, as Jesus teaches, we can understand that Australia's indigenous cultures prior to British arrival lived in rich and ancient and diverse harmonious relationships with each other and with the complex ecology of the earth that gives us life. People of all societies have faults and failings, yet in important respects Australia's indigenous people before 1788 were living in a state of grace. Our fallen modern world has brought our state of corruption, alienating us from our natural world and therefore from God. Christ offers us the redeeming and liberating call of grace, a path to transform our world in the light of God, mourning the destruction and damage our unrepentant attitudes have caused. We are called to recognise the blessing of the meek, who Christ tells us will inherit the earth.

Israel/Palestine: An Australian Reflection

Rev Dr Sandy Yule, ASCM Chairperson

I was born in 1941, and therefore alive, though not internationally conscious, when the State of Israel was established. It has been only slowly borne in on me what a long shadow is cast by European colonialism. One aspect of the colonial project has been the establishment of nation states on territory and peoples that used to have other arrangements. Australia, South Africa and Israel/Palestine are all examples of this.

Colonial projects require agents and communities of people on the ground who are not part of the pre-existing arrangements. There is usually a commonality of race or at least culture which distinguishes the new people from the old, so that these new people are progressively privileged and the pre-existing communities left unsupported. It is regrettably traditional for this to be made to happen through the use of force.

From a Christian perspective, this is the original sin, or fatal flaw, in the whole colonial project.

Where the pre-existing communities have resorted to armed resistance, it has usually (though not always) strengthened the imposition of military solutions and a hardening of the lines between these communities.

This reflection has been stimulated by the webinar on Israel/Palestine on Thursday 10 June hosted by WSCF and GMKI (Indonesian SCM, Gerakan Mahasiswa Kristen Indonesia). The WSCF has produced a statement in solidarity with Palestinians who suffer from Israeli occupation of their ancestral lands. Marcelo Leites, WSCF General Secretary, offered a history of the imposition of the state of Israel on Palestinian territory and people, in terms of breaches of international law, as background to the solidarity statement. Dr. Badikenita Sitepu, a Senator of the Republic of Indonesia, spoke in support of a 'two state' solution. She highlighted land, settlements and Jerusalem as the important points of ongoing conflict.

Yasmina Rishmawi, a member of the Palestinian Youth Ecumenical Movement, spoke about the ongoing suffering of the Palestinian people in the sharp language of ethnic cleansing. In her account, the many isolated incidents of killing, of the expropriation of land, of the



Yasmina Rishmawi | ياسمين ريشماوي



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destruction of homes and orchards and the grinding disruption of daily life (both by Israeli settlers and by government agencies) come into focus as a slow form of ethnic cleansing.

Some participants in this webinar found this account too one sided for easy acceptance. They noted that Israelis are sometimes killed by rockets fired from Gaza and, in earlier times, by suicide bombers. This highlights both the intractability of this conflict in its present stage and the difficulty we outsiders find in promoting peace in this situation. We need to acknowledge that Israelis have arrived at this through their own need for recovery from the Nazi 'final solution' to what Nazis described as the 'Jewish problem'. The building of the 'apartheid wall', a major tool of the oppressive control of Palestinian lives, came about as a response to the killing of Israelis by Palestinian suicide bombers.

While these acknowledgements are appropriate, they really only serve to highlight the instability of the present domination of Palestinian people by the Israeli state. It is true that many Israelis sincerely desire peaceful co-existence, but the radical wing of the Israeli settler movement continues to enact this 'ethnic cleansing' agenda with impunity and the wider Israeli society seems unable as well as unwilling to intervene, despite the more generous activities of many Israeli individuals and organizations.

Yasmina encouraged us to join in the international attempts to boycott dealings with the Israeli state. This is partly in recognition of the systematic erosion of any viable infrastructure for a Palestinian state by Israeli settlers and the government of Israel. It is also follows from a recognition of the contribution of international boycotts against South Africa to the achieving of the miraculously non-violent overcoming of the apartheid regime there. To name the wall in Israel/Palestine as the 'apartheid' wall is to invoke this analogy.

Another analogy occurs to me as an Australian. We too are a colonial society imposed on Aboriginal Australia through what were effectively frontier wars, also heavily dependent upon local settlers. White Australians, or 'second peoples', as we are coming to be named, are only now beginning to

acknowledge the damage done to first peoples, or Aboriginal Australian society, in the establishment of modern Australia.

Unlike Israel/Palestine, we are not looking at a 'two state' solution. The most hopeful road map for reconciliation in Australia has come to us from the national consultation and gathering of first nations people that produced the Uluru 'Statement from the Heart' in 2018. Simply put, this calls for truth telling about our shared history, leading to the creation of a constitutional voice to parliament for first peoples. These are seen as necessary steps towards addressing the basic issues of justice that might be more completely addressed in some form of treaty.

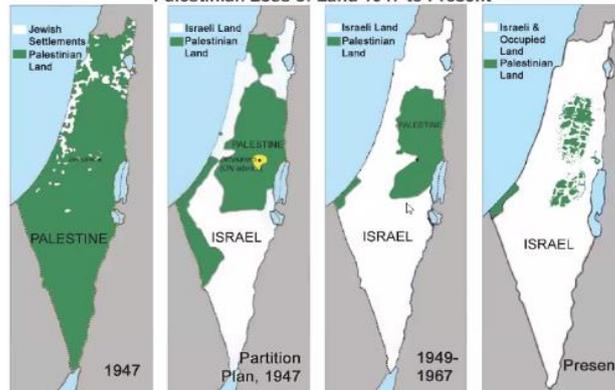
Viewed from the outside, the situation of Israel/Palestine seems intractable because trust between the two communities is at such a low level. Israelis live in fear of the Palestinians in their midst as well as of those regimes that do not accept the right of Israelis to a national existence. Palestinians

have seen their potential viability as a separate state diminish to the present low point through ongoing Israeli incursions, with no end in sight other than their annihilation as a people in their own land. Fear and hatred on both sides block the possibility of a respectful future together.

Christians are taught that we should love our enemies. Why? Because God loves them as well as us. Loving our enemies creates a journey of the spirit into the reality of those who are other than ourselves. This is as good a formula as I know for the restoration of trust where trust has disappeared. Maybe the most important thing that we who are outside this conflict can do is to pray for this miraculous love of God to melt the fear and hatred so that truth can be told and also heard. Creating spaces for truth telling is perhaps best viewed as the active part of this prayer.

The intractability of this conflict is also apparent when we consider the ideologies involved. Just as there is no negotiation possible with a suicide bomber (at least if they have reached this point from their own free will), there is no negotiation possible, or so it seems, with those on a mission from God. Some Israeli settlers appear to read the books of Joshua and Judges as more than a theologically shaped account of events in the

Palestinian Loss of Land 1947 to Present





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distant past. It seems that they believe that God requires them to clear the land of other peoples because this land is forever a gift of God to the people of Israel. The sixth commandment ('Thou shalt not kill/commit murder') seems less important to them than this quite self-serving mission. The Palestinian cult of those martyred for the cause is relatively benign by comparison.

It is hard to find a basis for hope that a positive resolution of this deep and tragic conflict can be found. Perhaps the most important contribution that Christians can make to peace building is to hold to the possibility that there can be hope despite all the forces which move against a just peace. This, it would seem to me, is what belief in the sovereignty of God allows us - indeed, compels us - to maintain.

Afghanistan & Myanmar



Attendees from around the world at a Canberra SCM online discussion on Afghanistan, reflecting on the implications of the return of the Taliban to power. ASCM supports the churches' petition [Christians United for Afghanistan](#).

ASCM condemns the 2021 military coup in Myanmar. Our [statement](#) calls on all Australians to stand in solidarity with the people of Myanmar as they seek to avoid a return to military dictatorship.

ASCM Online Discussions

The NSW Area Council of ASCM has held a superb series of discussions online with guest speakers, all available to watch in full at the ASCM [YouTube Channel](#)., with links to each conversation shown beneath each title below. Special thanks to Mandy Tibbey and Michael Mitchell for arranging these talks. Here are some highlights from these talks, which hopefully will prompt you to watch the full discussions at YouTube. These summaries have been compiled by Robbie Tulip as notes from the

online discussions. Talks by [Karen Pack](#) on Constance Duncan and by [Rev Dr Ray Williamson and colleagues](#) on Ecumenical Councils will be reported in our next issue.

WSCF Reflections

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QLLcepFOHnE&t=1s>

Reflecting the importance of WSCF for ASCM, we invited WSCF leaders Paudie Holly (Ireland), Marta Sappe Griot (Italy), and Dany Obeid (Lebanon) to reflect on the diversity of faith journeys that are part of the rich tapestry of WSCF. Marta grew up in the Waldensian church, a minority reform church that has suffered persecution in France and Italy. Paudie is a practicing Roman Catholic in Ireland, where church scandals have made church practice abnormal. He left a conservative group when he came out as gay, bringing together two sides of his personality, and studied a PhD in theology at the Irish School of Ecumenics. Dany is from the Greek Orthodox Church of Lebanon, and was raised in a Jesuit school. His work in ecojustice has combined agriculture and environment and ecumenical Christianity.

A theme in this discussion was how friendships formed through WSCF influence us through life. WSCF as a community has fought against discrimination. The ongoing discussions about ecumenism, respect and diversity are an achievement in a world where turmoil and extremism are major problems. Having female Christian leaders is an achievement, as is interfaith work with Islam, and concern about Palestine.

WSCF undermines stereotypes constantly, almost without trying, such as that Christians are against science and don't believe in climate change or equal marriage. WSCF has worked on gender and sexuality issues for a long time, while ecumenism brings the experience of praying and worshiping with people of different Christian faith traditions, approaches that take us beyond platitudes to a deeper understanding of the richness of faith.

Building Relationships with People of Other Faiths: A discussion led by Rev Dr Manas Ghosh

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2jduzQvfm&t=4s>

Rev Ghosh is a Minister in the Uniting Church in Australia, and a leader in interfaith discussions. Growing up in a devout Christian family in India, Manas was surrounded by Muslim and Hindu practice, in a nation with ancient diverse traditions that also included Jains, Jews and Sikhs, where people enjoyed each others' festivals.



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Respect for other faiths emerges when we understand that to be a Christian requires vulnerability to reach outside and create space for people, overcoming shallow divisions. Theology can be exclusive, seeing all other religious claims as false and invalid, but this wrongly places boundaries around the love of God. Alternatives are to be inclusive, seeing God present in non-Christian religions while holding a distinct Christian theology, or pluralist, believing that all religions are equally valid in communication about God and seeking unity in common experience of a liberating ethical vision.

Manas explained that belief in Jesus Christ as saviour in a context of long encounter with other faiths shows that God's mercy, presence and grace know no boundaries. The church no longer holds the power of its former Constantinian captivity, and is now entering life-enhancing relations, respecting the plurality of religions and alternatives, sharing with others who have their own integrity and beauty.

The founder of Methodism, John Wesley, cautioned about the pride in thinking others have nothing to teach us, especially those who disagree. We should respect all, love our neighbour, and recognise the imperative of Christ to love all. Australia's multicultural diversity can be celebrated and used as social capital to build harmony and peace, doing good for the world. Without crusading rudeness, we can love and respect as Jesus did, offering hospitality, forgiveness and care for others. Our way of being with others is our confession, engaging in dialogue. Jesus spoke with outcasts and foreigners, admired their faith and actions. His example leads to value all people, discovering the insights for a better world that are needed with so much sectarian violence.

Pope Francis said walls can be broken if we listen and learn, resolving differences through mutual respect. Theologian Hans Kung said there can be no peace among nations without peace among religions, through dialogue and investigation of foundations. Religion is not the sole cause of conflict, but often adds passion and fuel. It is good to go to worship places of other faith and share meals. Interfaith dialogue is helpful for understanding. Building good relations requires honest and open connection as equals, aware of potential bias and misunderstanding, how we are heard, and desire for deep listening, to seek and explore, reflect and transform. Agree to disagree, not to convert, enhance understanding by hearing others perspective, respect differences, agree on

actions, work together for common good to break down barriers and learn from one another, build friendships.

Things in common are foundations for interfaith relations - God as love, as one creator of all, bringing to humanity, God as truth apprehended from many perspectives, God in relation to humanity as foundation for relationship between humans. Friendly study of world religions helps gain informed understanding. Mutual criticism integral to interfaith dialogue, with respect and sensitivity, deepens your own faith. Finding common values can lead to joint ethical action on justice equity and environment to make a better safe more harmonious peaceful world.

Christianity and Identity Politics - Rev Dr Peter Walker

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXDoAxxvsN8>

As a church historian and theologian, and Principal of the United Theological College, Rev Walker approaches this question of identity politics as a theologian. We can compare current discussion of identity politics to the purity system in Jesus' day, to the alternative social vision of Gospels, and the astonishing vision of equality in Galatians 3:28, 'neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free, for all are one in Christ Jesus.'

The left right spectrum of 20th century politics focused on economic issues, with socialist support for fair distribution of wealth versus right wing focus on enterprise, reduced reach of government, freedom from regulation, free markets free enterprise.

In this century, the left right spectrum gave way to identity politics, with Brexit and Trump as big surprises. The tribal politics of 'us and them' produced a focus on immigration, with national and community identity defined by borders and sovereignty.

Since the 1960s, left wing advocacy for marginalised groups, women, civil rights, refugees and sexuality has clashed with right wing focus on nationalism and patriotism. Protecting form of traditional national identity, narrowly and selectively defined, was a response to the undermining perceived from advocacy of the left for those who were allowed no or marginalised space. Right wing politics seems to have made most ground out of identity focus, with leaders such as Modi, Erdawan, Putin, Trump etc. The left sought to provide identity for those who had been denied



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it. Pauline Hanson attracts right wing support for a crass vision of white Australia. Workers who might have supported the left are her greatest fans, as patriots and protectors of national identity. John Howard's assertion 'we will decide who comes to this country' established identity politics as a battle over borders.

Left and right are both implicated in a downward spiral, stoking fires by leaders, with the evil genius of the Trump machine tapping into resentment to see white Christians as marginalised.

Tradition from Marx sees political struggles as manifestation of economic struggles. The 26 wealthiest people have as much wealth as the bottom 50% of the world population. The astonishing growth of wealth disparities shows the relevance of political action against injustice.

The purity system of the Jewish world in Jesus' day established an identity that fed on deep prejudice. Purity systems are found in most cultures. Current parallels exist in systems of classification of boundaries, people and groups, mapping who belongs in the dominant culture and who doesn't. For example, prejudice around sexuality is often organised around contrast between clean and unclean, defining pure and impure people, places, things, times and social groups. Leviticus 9:2 'be holy for I God am holy' established a code defining Godliness. Leviticus 16-26 sets out a purity spectrum, with status dependent on birth, for priests, Israelites, Jews and converts, and on behaviour, through observance of codes, occupations.

The visit by Jesus to Zacchaeus the chief tax collector in Jericho breached the purity code with its matrix of classification of social meaning in terms of the righteous and sinners. Jesus posed a challenge to the identity politics of his day by presenting compassion as an alternative social vision against the Pharisees' efforts to enforce purity codes. This strong conflict appears in Luke 11:43-44, where Jesus says "woe to you pharisees who love the seat of honour, you are like unmarked graves, people walk over you without knowing." This is a stunning criticism from the Levitical code teaching of contact with death as a source of impurity, suggesting the pharisees make people impure without knowing it.

The radical social vision of Christ draws an intentional contrast with the Jewish holiness tradition, when in Luke 6:32 Jesus says to love enemies and be merciful as God is merciful. This critiques the social system centred on holiness

which separated the pure from the impure, in ways that continue today.

Purity systems of identity are still at work. Churches play identity politics grounded in perceptions of holiness that replicate disfunction, losing sight of the radical replacement of an ethic of holiness by an ethic of mercy.

Rev Dr David Gill – Students for the Renewal of the Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiPJmeytf8U&t=3s>

ASCM has a serious heritage that we can explore with courage, reflecting capacity to create lively encounters across the political spectrum. In the 1960s ASCM convened a discussion between Marcus Loane, Anglican Principal of Moore College, the renowned radical theologian and Professor of Biology Dr Charles Birch, and a young theologian, Harry Wardlaw. It is valuable to bring such contrasting voices together.

ASCM in the 1960s blessed the churches with people who had developed enduring relationships of friendship, understanding and trust. Its ecumenical basis was student-led but resourced by senior friends.

As the "[church ahead of the church](#)", in Robin Boyd's memorable phrase, ASCM has freedom to pioneer onto faiths' risky frontiers. In the 1960s, the perils, disruption and wild time for the world and students meant that governments trembled as youth rebelled against the authority of elite academic institutions and church. The World Council of Churches Assembly in Sweden in 1968 saw young protestors demonstrating against churches.

Risto Lehtonen wrote a WSCF history of this period, titled *The Story of a Storm – the Ecumenical Student Movement in the Turmoil of Revolution* (Helsinki, 1998), summarised in an article in *Student World* ([link](#)). Ideology rather than faith commitment meant that numbers and funds fell, as politics replaced biblical theology.

Can the SCM live again and become once again an effective movement for Christian renewal? Students and churches need SCM or something like it. Supporting the four attributes of the church – one, holy, catholic and apostolic - needs interdenominational community, loving churches as they are, pressing forward to the church as it is called to be.



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What kind of renewal? Times are tough, solutions are often phony. It is hard to entertain radical thoughts. Propping up shaky denominations takes precedence for churches, who are wary of mistakes. The lure of novelty leads to the view that innovation is key to renewal, seeing the new as good and scrapping the old, hillsong not plainsong. A renewal of God entails a return to sources, not replacement by fad, or the lure of better management.

Heaven help the churches if they follow the path of trimming to the dominant culture through service rather than worship, a track with no integrity, that misunderstands deepest needs.

Five points

1 God never abandons the church. Despite tough times aplenty, faith community is continually reborn in great monastic movements of reform and revival and renewal, such as the ecumenical movement.

2 Renewal of God is Jesus shaped. Be wary of uncaring spirituality, prosperity gospel, scheme that promotes distrust or division, interest in scalp hunting rather than faith. The way of love always has a cross, for renewal of community not private spiritual high.

3 The Pentecost spirit of Acts is a mighty wind bringing people together, shifting from fear to confidence to share gospel in community.

4 Surprise of authentic renewal does not come from church institutions through synod mission statements and programs.

5 The gift of God is not from us but from beyond ourselves. Clear obstacles, receive and celebrate but never create the gift of God. The gesture of open hands in charism symbol of confidence need trust and dependence.

Can SCM be the recipient and bearer of such a gift? Not as clone of past, given the world has changed. The need remains for prayer that the holy spirit may renew the life of the church and kindle within us the life of God's love.

Professor John Langmore – Peace Studies

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=au4bJ5B9CRg&t=4s>

Professor Langmore, former federal Labor member of parliament in the ACT, has convened the new [Initiative for Peacebuilding at the University of Melbourne](#). These notes are from a conversation he had with David Hale of ASCM.

John introduced his remarks by telling us that ASCM taught him how to think.

Peace and justice are major themes in the Bible. The most important is on the day of resurrection when Jesus greeted the disciples by saying 'peace be with you', a clear affirmation of the importance of peace, as something most people want. Across all cultural traditions people want the best for humanity. We can all cooperate to achieve peace. It is shocking to realize how wayward societies have been, with the frequency of war continuing. Being serious about peace would change how we now act.

Parliaments discuss safety and security. Achieving security requires peace, but repeatedly politicians see security through increased military expenditure, which is not really a way to keep secure, as it antagonises countries with whom we might be in competition.

Australia's plan to buy eight nuclear powered submarines comes at enormous cost, breaking an agreement with France and putting Australia in the position of an obedient servant of the USA. Becoming a nuclear country would contribute to proliferation, whereas contributing to peace would focus on disarming including from all nuclear technology. Submarines may not carry nuclear weapons but they do carry high grade uranium. Unscrupulous leaders could get weapons grade material outside IAEA reporting. It is unwise, risky, costly and lacking in justification. The submarine decision is hugely on people's minds, as the most important military decision by Australia since 1945. Foreign policy should aim for peace, minimising military expenditure consistent with defence from external threat. Australia now faces no threats even in the medium term, putting us in a strong position to have modest military spending and focus on minimising conflict.

Peacebuilding through diplomacy is the major way to build security through dialogue and negotiation between governments. Astonishing research shows Australia is reducing its proportionate expenditure on diplomacy. Since 1995 the share has halved from 0.4% to 0.2% of commonwealth spending. That is unreasonable. It is vital for Australia's peace to build up the number and skills and postings. We now have fewer diplomatic posts than any country in the G20 except Saudi Arabia. If we can afford military spending, now [over 2% of GDP](#), we can also afford to spend more on diplomacy. We need less military spending and more diplomacy, which needs gradual increase as a central requirement for improved peace building capacity.



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Establishing a non-government peace building unit at the University of Melbourne complements work at the University of Queensland. Research and teaching will be joined by support for people involved in work for peaceful outcomes. This is a step forward. Recruiting about eight researchers and practitioners is now underway, through dialogue on Myanmar, where the army took over on 1 February with much loss of life. Hopeful capacities are forming but the army is entrenched.

Interest in Afghanistan, now in a different situation with the Taliban, raises the problem of what should happen. Massive hunger and illness raise the problem of whether aid donors should contribute to humanitarian relief. Countries that have provided support are debating what to do. Melbourne University will discuss what countries should do.

A third country of concern is South Sudan, where civil war has raged. People are seeking more provincial autonomy and control. Australia now has many people from South Sudan who fled as refugees and want to be peacefully involved in what happens there.

Violence and fear play a major role, centrally important and penetrating as powerful motivators. Enabling less fearful lives depends on economic and social security. Australia is relatively well off with better services that constructively improve wellbeing, fundamental to enabling people to feel secure, and to be more kind and neighbourly and supportive of each other. A good consequence from the pandemic, against its massive harm, is awareness of needs of neighbours, even while lockdowns have isolated people. The threat of the virus means people are kinder to each other.

No country including China wants to invade Australia. China has many priorities, and has acted improperly with South China Sea, Taiwan, Uighurs and Tibet, but there is no evidence it is plotting to invade Australia. It exerts power by seeking obeisance without invading. If China threatened Indonesia we might be asked to assist. Taiwan and Vietnam are under most threat. Last Chinese war was 1979 with Vietnam, while USA has been almost continuously at war. China is not on the whole oriented toward military activity. Need to be careful, 'wise as serpents and humble as doves', with as little prejudice as possible, with accurate knowledge. Australia exports far more to China than we import.

Religion is a help to peacemaking, but fundamentalists are ideologically rigid. Christians need to be ashamed and sceptical of how faith can lead to war. Jesus was free of violence except for overturning tables in the temple, which was not against people. His non-violent example is of central importance.

Peace building spheres are all important, with different skills needed. John has tried in politics and UN and university teaching to contribute to peace building. It is essential to learn to ask and answer without hostility. Working in social development in UN Secretariat required imaginative responses to requests. Interest in relationships involves contribution to harmony.

Imagine more cooperative human future – diversity and multilateral approaches. Discerning priorities is often not clear in a complex world or in any group, but we must attempt to do so. Good to see more Australians from all backgrounds realizing settlement has been indigenous disaster. Finding ways to address this huge injustice is of enormous importance. Mediation can find ways to be helpful in addressing conflict. More attention is needed to honesty about history and honouring indigenous tradition. Prophets from both sides give leaderships, with many churches involved.

The Melbourne Peace Initiative invited a visiting fellow from Assam in India to discuss India-Pakistan dialogue, on how to minimise risks from both having nuclear weapons, and hopes to hold a series of expert roundtables to generate concrete consideration to steps to reduce risks. India and China have promised no first use of nuclear weapons. It would be reasonable for the US to do the same.

Cuts to diplomacy budget are bad. As an MP, John argued against the military budget. Senior officers don't want war. Many support ways to reduce risk of conflict.

Expert panels can include new and imaginative opinions. We need to include and respect a range of authentic voices.

Creating the peace centre has not been straight forward. It has been an evolving process, based on research on other countries. DFAT provided some funding. Even the US has more peacebuilding activity than Australia. John sought support for study of Australian diplomacy in peacebuilding but did not get Australian Research Council funds. DFAT and MU each provided \$125k, which was used to survey diplomats and report to DFAT, proposing a non-government peacebuilding centre as an



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identified gap. The business case was presented to Melbourne University. It took a year to evaluate, and was announced by the Vice Chancellor in April 2021. Relieved to find broad support, assessing need to spend money wisely, and risk assessment, including conflict risk and political debate risk. Board includes political science, law, medicine. John Langmore is chair of the board, with relevant background in politics and UN. The Director will need a strong peacebuilding background.

Professor Marion Maddox - Christianity and Australian Politics

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qzm_0FHjKo4

The landscape has changed recently in Australia. Election of the first Pentecostal leader in the English-speaking world, Prime Minister Scott Morrison, has significance for the shape of interaction of religion and politics.

Until the 1980s it was unusual for Prime Ministers to mention faith or religious convictions, which was thought too American. Since then, religion has become more part of Australian political discourse, with interest in private lives. Americanisation and the shift to celebrityisation of political life are factors, partly driven by leaders.

John Howard was not a regular church goer and saw religion as a small part of life. Morrison is different. He has been photographed in church and talks about himself as religious person, said he always believed in miracles, made very public in political persona. Prayed before becoming leader, Proverb 14 'righteousness will exalt the nation'. He is not shy about expressing in a theological role, but Morrison does not like to be asked questions about religion, preferring to express in his own terms. This is a change from previous approaches to religion in Australian public life.

What does it mean for a Christian to see themselves as doing God's work? There are different ways a person might think about being called in a position of national leadership. One way is by the will of people, where a leader can hope to be doing God's will because we are all fallen. Another way is when leader consider they were put in power by God therefore what they do is God's will. There is a whole spectrum of ways to see what doing God's will might mean. Biblical verses that Scott Morrison invokes incline to a sense of having a particular calling to the role. His use of the Esther verse 'for such a time as this', suggests he sees himself as a particular person called to a specific task.

How he speaks about faith is quite different from previous PMs. Howard brought faith to forefront but did not describe himself as religious, positioned in relation to religious organisations. Rudd and Abbott were religiously committed, with distinctive ways to talk about it.

Australia doesn't tend to get fundamentalist political movements in parliament like in the US. This is due to compulsory voting making Australian politics incline to the more moderate centre. Religion has a role in party machines on the conservative side, with the Christian right active in Victoria and WA, and attempting to do so in SA where a branch stack was blocked. As the electorate is getting more secular, activism is more intense. Church affiliation gives ready source of volunteers and members, gives way to say I stand for something. Party ideology fading away, blending into each other. Labor is supposed to be more egalitarian but embraces neoliberal revolution. Liberals subsidise coal mines while supporting individualism. Public cynicism is high, and religious commitment enables politicians to point to a set of values. Secular electorate can feel comfort that a politician has ties to something beyond politics.

David Smith wrote an [article](#) pointing out that even as religious conservatives lose policy battles such as abortion and voluntary assisted dying, they keep winning elections. Julia Banks [said](#) the Liberal Party is firmly a Christian, conservative, right-wing party.

Why is the conservative movement so electorally successful but so unsuccessful in policy? Conservative religious connections are not about talking to the electorate but about positioning in intra-party politics.

Activism beyond the parliamentary realm includes anti- vaccination groups of church leaders. The [Ezekiel declaration](#) and Moses statement frame resistance as freedom of worship, to allow unvaccinated to attend public worship.

The push for protection of religious freedom arose in response to the marriage equality decision in 2017. One Nation sponsored education bill to prohibit teachers from discussing gender diversity and fluidity in schools.

The theme of authority is used to theologise questions about vaccination, in terms of love of neighbour, the body as temple of holy spirit, and care for most vulnerable. For conservative Christians, the concern around authority asks who is in charge, church or state, and do not accept being bossed around by government. Conservative



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churches want to resist being told what to do by secular authorities.

The same strand occurs in religious freedom and sexual identity. Until 2009-10 most churches in Australia opposed religious freedom legislation. In a referendum in 1984, churches opposed extending the Human Rights Act to protect religious freedom, framed as rights for religious minorities eg the right for Muslim women to wear hijab on the street.

The same sex rights discourse turned around the public discussion, and conservative churches became advocates for religious freedom protection. [Elenie Poulos](#) examines this shift [in PhD analysis](#) just completed.

The upsurge in conservative activism outside parliament shows continued fascination with question of who is in charge, God or government, church or state.

With the policy of outsourcing government services, the neoliberal revolution has been handing over huge swathes of previously government activity to private areas, especially churches. Most Australian welfare activities are run by churches. The proportion increased with NDIS aged care. One third of all schools are private, and 90% of private schools are Christian. Paul Oslington wrote a 2015 paper analysing these trends, titled [Sacred and Secular in Australian Social Services](#). Since 1960 private school public funding has expanded from zero to billions. [Some Christian schools get more public money than similarly resourced public schools in the same area](#). There has been a massive shift of public resources from government activity to church activity, while the number of churchgoers falls. Most contact with churches is as service provider not at worship or faith discussion. This all has equity implications.

The Spirit of St Francis is alive and well

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qk2xYmJ1sVk&t=1s>

Discussion with Anglican Franciscans Brother Christopher John, Minister General of the Society of St Francis First Order, Rev Gemma Le Mesurier and Rev Valerie Tibbey, Franciscan Third Order about why the Franciscan tradition is important to them in their faith journeys.

The Anglican Franciscan hermitage and monastery in Stroud, NSW, has been called the Assisi of the South. Promoting a life of prayer and active ministry, it seeks to support the intuitive understanding that Saint Francis had of nature, with

everything connected. A simple life, like Christ, shared with others in hospitality.

The hermitage and monastery are a peaceful calm serene place with beautiful ecology, established by Poor Clare Sisters who came from England in 1975 and Franciscan Brothers who



were already in Australia. The sisters' community has finished but the monastery where they lived is managed by the Friends of the Monastery Stroud and open to guests who come for their own programmes. (Jan and George Garnsey, senior SCMs, have been active on the Friends).

The Society of Saint Francis has active brothers and sisters (First Order), contemplative sisters (Second Order) and lay members (Third Order) around the world. They were not founded by Francis, but inspired by his vision and concern about environment and his profound theological vision of justice and human dignity. Recognising the good in everyone, seeing goodness of God in all that God has made.



Brother Christopher John

The Third Order Rule enables crafting your own rule of life based on practices of the eucharist, prayer, study, simplicity and spiritual direction, seeking to go deeper in faith. Simplicity encourages us to look at what is important in modern frenetic

business as a sign of success, pausing to think about good life,

and seeing good life is not the same as what society says.

Dr Michael Mitchell on ASCM's international links of friendship and solidarity

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zK1ShLZNTOM>

SCM has influenced through thoughtfulness, respect, and admiration of goodness in cross-cultural links.

The WSCF Asia Pacific Human Resources Development Program, held in Indonesia in 1985,



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was Michael's introduction to WSCF. Indonesian SCM statements at the meeting were pro-government, stating there was no militarisation in Indonesian society. These statements reflected fear about the presence of government informers in the meeting, in the context of the authoritarian Soeharto regime. Philippines SCM made statements at the meeting in support of East Timor, which frightened the Indonesians. At a later WSCF conference in Jakarta just before the end of the Soeharto time, Michael brought videos about East Timor and was scared about being deported for carrying them, but was able to attend.

The people at the first conference included Ted Suro from Japan, and Niran from Thailand. They remain good friends. With Michael's Masters on the Mekong Basin, he spent time with Niran, when Thailand was going through a military coup and demonstrations. Observing the demonstrations, as Michael was leaving he heard Niran had been arrested, and was really quite worried. It made him realise SCM in Australia is in a privileged position being able to stand up for human rights and support SCM friends who are facing oppression.

Lilian was from Singapore SCM, whose members were seen by the government as part of a Marxist conspiracy. While other members fled Singapore, Lilian stayed and was followed by spies, and had her mail opened. Last Michael heard from Lilian she was supporting Burmese refugees on the Thai border.

Michael was able to visit the Burma SCM in 1998. At that time Burmese SCMs were not allowed to leave the country. A number of students had been killed in riots. The universities were closed. Michael went to Mandalay and rural areas, which was then not allowed, and wrote a report to Amnesty International about what was happening in Burma, showing we are in a privileged position to support human rights.

Russell Peterson had been human rights coordinator for WSCF Asia Pacific. Michael went to a training program with the UN Human Rights Commission, with John Laidlaw. There he spoke on arbitrary detention about an SCMer in the Philippines, and about the situations in Burma and East Timor. Michael made a joint statement with other international youth organisations, which included speaking out about the US blockade of Cuba. As a result of these experiences he wrote a strategy paper on human rights for WSCF. We had tried to write letters of protest but not many did, so

we organised regional events with human rights activists, meeting a number of wonderful people.

The message Michael wants to convey to current SCMs is that it is wonderful to be part of an international movement, and he has enjoyed the friends he has made. The theology of human rights has a profound impact. We are all made in the image of God so any desecration and oppression of humans is a desecration of God. The truth shall make you free is a catchcry - it means a lot to speak the truth. That message drives human rights work, with obligation to speak the truth.

Rev Dr Sandy Yule – The challenge of the 1960s to the churches: the ASCM experience

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7jDJj_vW2HE

Sandy Yule studied Theology at Princeton University and was General Secretary of ASCM from 1970-75. He lectured on theology in Australia and Tonga, was a Minister in the Uniting Church, and is the author of two books, 'Making Peace, Making Sense' (WSCF Asia-Pacific Book 14, 1988) and 'The Burning Mirror' (ISPCK, 2005). Another recent ASCM commentary from Sandy is [here](#).

A challenge through SCM is how we failed to maintain the faith as it had been handed down to us. Reasons are good and bad, concentrate on good reasons. *The Story of the Storm* (see notes on David Gill's talk above) is not simply an aberration, it is a turn away from the Constantinian era in which ASCM had identified simply as Australian and Christian.

These comfortable beliefs, habits and institutions were Constantinian, assuming the model of a loyal church seeing no reason to be other than good people. Before the 1960s revolution, the narrow debate on potential for a generous politics occurred within a shared understanding as Australians. ASCM saw itself as on the right side of history, blessed by God, gently led to right path, supporting the prevalent church belief system.

Challenges came from within theology, including with the Death of God discussion. Honest to God, by UK Anglican Bishop John Robinson questioned the validity and truth of cosy assumptions. Demythologising of the Bible, critically examined, led by German theologian Rudolph Bultmann, proposed re-mythologising Christianity in contemporary language.



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In 1966 the ASCM national conference had 400 attending, by 1970 this had dwindled to 100, a definite decline. The WSCF context saw the rise of third world voices at its Assemblies. WSCF no longer held secure western assumptions. Rather, WSCF discussions were characterised by nervousness, challenge and contestation. As prior views fell apart, assumptions needed to be totally revised, in what theologian Paul Tillich called *The shaking of the foundations*, no longer accepting traditional faith. We had entered a time of real searching and theological questioning.

Sandy promoted a method of dialogue in ASCM newsletters, teasing different possibilities in relation to each other, an exploratory method, not declaring a way forward but listening to each other. There is much to say on both sides of issues, finding positive views and blind spots, becoming aware of what we were missing, a journey into other points of view.

The WSCF Assembly in Addis Ababa in 1973 sought to articulate WSCF ideology. Delegates proposed that WSCF should declare itself as anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist, anti-establishment, anti-racist, anti-sexist. Underlying was a call to listen to all voices and support each other.

Such international meetings show solidarity, a way of working that visits groups in difficulty, aiming to listen on the ground. A WSCF visit to Korea in 1973 was carefully prepared, with some KSCF members in jail, portrayed as pro-North Korea. They were not executed as others were.

WSCF has asked about the absence of Aboriginal people in ASCM. Such discussions help to recognise how we are seen by others, our place in the world, the injustice of Australian occupation, and the patience of indigenous people.

Liberation theology calls us to stand with the Gospel in support of God's purposes in the world, against injustice, for liberation movement struggles as projects of God. Such ideas were not present in previous theological understanding, and have required a long journey to assimilate. All voices need to be heard, listening most to those who suffer most. God has a preferential option for the poor, and we need to step outside Constantinian privilege to be where God is. Don't expect God to keep blessing where you are.

Women's liberation and gay liberation came to the fore, listening to those who don't get recognised. With Sandy's personal identity on the wrong side of these struggles, as a straight white male Australian,

he asked how to be an ally of those seeking liberation? We need to listen better, to see who we need to be friends with and challenge our own story. Through ongoing dialogue, God calls us to listen to the dispossessed in the power of the holy spirit. Who speaks for the poor? Who knows the story? Where is truth to be found? Answering these questions needs connection through the holy spirit to hear the truth through individual stories.

Prayer and discernment are essential elements of the liberation journey, travelling with God to liberation rather than claiming it for ourselves. ASCM challenge for the church is this journey, for ever. A message from the 1960s changes of SCMs is the value and need for solidarity with those who suffer across wide contexts, holding together in the power of God's love.

What is Constantinian Christianity? Its fateful adoption set the pattern for 1700 years, assuming faith could be domesticated into national way of life. This has fallen apart in our time. ASCM grew up in the shadow of western expansion and Protestant mission. Bringing gospel with technology and health development was seen as a good thing, with the downside never interrogated. The assumed value of western culture infected Christian presence.

The whole movement of change questioned whether everything good came from the west. Seeing Christ in every culture is a process that continues today.

ASCM Weekly Bible Study
Every Wednesday, 7.30pm aedt
All Welcome
[link to Zoom Meeting](#)

We are now studying the book of Hosea, reading a few verses each week as a starting point for conversation. Our discussions take a critical analytic approach that seeks to fully respect academic scholarship within a Christian faith perspective.

Hosea raises essential questions such as the meaning of monotheism, the purpose of prophecy, the relation between faith and ethics, and how Christianity can respect the spiritual heritage of all humanity. For example, what does Hosea mean when he says the earth mourns when the state is corrupt?

Please join us!



Australian Student Christian Movement ASCM Magazine - November 2021



PLEASE SUPPORT ASCM

ASCM depends on the generous support we receive from sources outside our student membership.

Our main sources of support are our Friends. Friends include people who were members of ASCM while at University, and still wish to keep in touch with the movement, and some who were never ASCM members but support our aims.

Friends offer varying levels of support and involvement. Some are on Area Councils, others are Trustees, another maintains the membership contact list. Others support us through prayer and donations and conversation. ASCM has many Friends, and it is always a pleasure to receive news from them. We ask that if you have any news please let us know at any of our listed contact points.

Donations

The easiest way to support ASCM financially is through [PayPal at this link](#) or using the QR code below. Please consider a regular donation. You can also donate by mailing a cheque to our postal address.

Operating the ASCM requires ongoing financial support for staff, and in normal times for travel. If we had more money we could do much more to support student involvement. Meetings and conferences and conversations and publications build leadership capability of our members for the benefit of both ASCM and the broader community.

We send out an annual financial donation appeal each year, and all responses are gratefully received, including any news you might have. If you find it convenient to give at other times, you can now do so most easily by [PayPal](#).

ASCM is blessed to have our Centenary Trust Fund, set up in 1996 at the ASCM Centenary Conference to improve our financial security. Donations are always very welcome to the Trust, which is managed by our experienced Board of Trustees and has wisely placed all funds in ethical investments. Donations to the Trust can be made from the same [form](#) as for ASCM donations.

Our website also includes [information about making a bequest to ASCM in your will](#).

For further information on ASCM finances, please contact the [National Treasurer](#), Andika Mongilala

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Please contact Robbie if you would like to contribute to the magazine.

[ASCM contact form](#)

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