Editorial

A significant role of higher education is to prepare students for their future professions, and contribute to the national research effort (Ministerial Council for Education and Youth Affairs, 2008). Research in Australian society is undertaken for the purpose of building up society's stock of knowledge over time through a progressive, self-correcting, and iterative process. Research also shows how knowledge can be applied (Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations, 2004), adapted, and interpreted (Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations, 2007). In order to undertake these two main roles, academic institutions need access to the most current and accurate material, and to disseminate their own research through conferences, publications, reports, and so forth. Any institution, which does not continually update itself and change to "meet the future," will become increasingly irrelevant, perhaps even to itself. Christian institutions, like others, need to remain up to date and avoid slipping into introspection, or developing a mediocre status quo mentality.

The term *new perspectives* is not new, as any rudimentary search of the internet will attest. New perspectives are continuously being developed in almost every discipline area, and religion (and Christianity) is no exception (e.g., on Paul, the origins of Christianity, and biblical traditions of the New Testament). Christ himself brought a radically, even perhaps revolutionary, new perspective to the religious of his day.

The research literature on Christianity in Australian society generally suggests an apparent decline of Christianity, at least in its traditional religious forms. This current phenomenon occurs in an historical context where British migrants in the 1700s colonised Australia on Christian principles. Though sometimes not acknowledged, Christianity has contributed much to the formulation and maintenance of key structures and institutions in Australia. However, in contemporary Australian society, the number of religious observances and the proportion of active Christians appear to be declining (e.g., Cahill, Bouma, Dellal, & Leahy, 2004; Kotila, 2006), though it also appears that there is still considerable interest in a less traditional spirituality. At the international level, recent data indicate a growth of Christianity in developing countries, while there is a corresponding fall in the number of Christians in mainstream religious groups in developed countries. Some revitalisation of mainstream Christian churches occurs in developed countries, where, for example, people from developing countries integrate into their congregations (Cahill et al., 2004). In this milieu of religious instability, many young people are "spiritually hungry" (European Values Study, 1999), with an increasing number of them defining themselves as being religious. They genuinely are searching for meaning, are more interested in spirituality than in doctrine, and avoid commitment to institutional religious structures. They are often more interested in other religious traditions than Christianity, or are eclectically multifaith believers.

The main purpose of this journal is to offer new perspectives on Christianity, and to identify ways and means through which Christianity can engage with, and be relevant to, people, issues, and structures existing in the twenty-first century. This purpose may be subdivided into several aims: (1) to open a portal for the ongoing scholarly analysis and evaluation of the interface between Christianity and contemporary society, most particularly Australian society; (2) to construct a forum for those new perspectives which will contribute properly and accurately to the national research effort and to improved knowledge and understanding of the world (Weltanschauung); and (3) to provide current information for young people as to how Christians may engage with social problems and thinking. Thus, rather than focusing on a form of Christianity that is "handcuffed to the past" (Cahill, Bouma, Dellal, & Leahy, 2004, p. 9), irrelevant and out of date, the journal invites papers that illuminate relevant new

perspectives (e.g., outlooks, attitudes, contexts, approaches, or views), particularly those which are of special interest to an Australian people.

In this first edition of the journal, several papers address the same issue from different vantage points (perspectives) while other papers address new but different issues. On the topic of the environmental crisis, David Tacey states that, "one way Christianity can increase relevance in Australia's primarily secular society is by showing leadership in the debate about the ecological crisis." Graham Fletcher introduces the Christian's response to Native Title legislation, and argues that the interface is based on age-old Christian principles, as well as the traditions and customs of Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders. Three papers add new perspectives concerning the New Testament and its context. Norman Young provides an analysis of Romans 14:5-6 via the New Perspective on Paul; Alanna Nobbs provides a view into Early Christians' responses to requirements in their social context; and Steven Thompson takes a new perspective on drinking and drunkenness in Greco-Roman times. Kevin de Berg discusses the interface between Christianity and Darwinism, and (the late) Eric Magnussen presents a new perspective on studying the Old and New Testaments from a viewpoint of tribal conflict.

An introductory paper by Vivienne Watts provides a brief overview of the current Australian demographic data and trends in relation to Christian denominations and other religious groups over the past 100 years. Given these trends and values in contemporary Australian society, it is opportune for Christians to ask what Christianity can contribute to groups, individuals, and the resolution of problems in Australia. As noted by Tacey (2000), "True spirituality always engages with the world and is unafraid to meet and transform it" (p. 24). Christianity can become more relevant by increasing its understanding and appreciation of contemporary issues, taking an informed and proper position on them, and finding its voice to speak out. Piggin (2006) stated further, "We can afford, when we find our voice, to speak a lot more than we have, especially if we are at pains to make sense and to speak sensitively to our distinctive Australian context" (p. 7). Of course, Christians need to do much more than speak out – they need to act! Australian Christian thinkers need to engage with the cutting edge of thought and provide *New Perspectives on Christianity* at the intersection of their particular areas of expertise, Christianity, and the problems/gaps that need to be addressed in contemporary Australian society.

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Vivienne Watts