

PM GLYNN
INSTITUTE

2024 ACU School Leaders Program

In collaboration with



Melbourne Archdiocese
Catholic Schools

Program information and schedule with pre-readings

16 Nov - 7 Dec 2024



ACU

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY



2024 ACU School Leaders Program

In collaboration with Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools

The ACU School Leaders Program provides leadership formation for Year 11 Catholic school leaders through an immersion in the Catholic tradition and Western civilisation.

THE PROGRAM:

- focuses on some of the major themes arising from the history of the Church and the development of the West
- uses a range of teaching modes and learning activities
- deepens participants' reflections on their own faith and sharpens their intellectual curiosity about the traditions to which they belong
- serves as a foundation for their own leadership and service after school.

The 2024 program will run from **16 November to 7 December** (departing Australia on 15 November and returning on 8 December), with two weeks in Rome at Domus Australia, and one week in London at the Langham Court Hotel.

Three modules will be taught, each comprising four lessons, assigned readings and visits to significant sites related to the theme of each teaching session. The program also includes a series of informal sessions to support students in their engagement with the program's themes and readings, as well as regular reflections on what they are learning.

The ACU School Leaders Program is designed for Year 11 Catholic school students who are committed to their faith and have a record of leadership and service to their school, parish or the wider community. Participants do not need to be singularly academic, but they do need to be willing to read the course materials, engage positively with the discussions and site visits, and be prepared to cultivate an interest in the ideas and influences that have helped to shape religion, arts, politics and society in the West.



Teaching

The program consists of three teaching modules, each comprising four lessons, readings and visits to significant sites related to the theme of each teaching session.

TEACHING MODULES

- **The Church and the West:** An overview of key periods in the development of the Church and its influence in shaping the Western world, from the beginnings of Christianity to the Renaissance.
- **Ideas which shaped the Church and shaped the West:** An exploration of some of the major ideas and challenges shaping the Church and the West, and how they influenced our understandings of politics, religion, knowledge and society.

- **The democratic world and papal teaching:** An introduction to how recent popes have written about democracy and the challenges of the modern world, and the Catholic response to them.

READINGS

Assigned reading for each teaching session comprises short, selected excerpts from:

- Tom Holland, *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (Little, Brown: 2019)
- a specially compiled reader of primary and secondary sources.

TYPICAL TEACHING DAY STRUCTURE			
ROME: DOMUS AUSTRALIA & ST PETER CHANEL CHAPEL AT DOMUS AUSTRALIA		LONDON: LANGHAM COURT HOTEL & ST CHARLES BORROMEO PARISH	
TIME	ACTIVITY	TIME	ACTIVITY
7.30am	Lauds (morning prayer) St Peter Chanel Chapel	7.30am	Breakfast
7.45am	Breakfast	9am – 12pm	Teaching session Reading time followed by teaching and discussion
9am – 12pm	Teaching session Reading time followed by teaching and discussion	12.30pm	Mass St Charles Borromeo
12 – 1.30pm	Lunch: Buy your own near Domus Australia	1 – 2pm	Lunch: Buy your own near hotel
2 – 5pm	Site visit: Visit to places linked to the day's reading and teaching session	2 – 5pm	Site visit: Visit to places linked to the day's reading and teaching session
6pm	Mass at St Peter Chanel Chapel Followed by reflection on the day's experiences	6pm	Vespers (evening prayer) at St Charles Borromeo Followed by reflection on the day's experiences
7.30pm	Dinner	7.30pm	Dinner

(Some days will vary with the requirements of the program)

Teaching staff

The program is taught by a team of two ACU staff and two external teachers:

- Dr Michael Casey
- Associate Professor Patrick Quirk
- Mrs Anne McIlroy
- Mrs Daniela Bortolin.

Teachers from Sydney Catholic Schools and Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools will also attend the program to assist with the supervision and pastoral care of students.



Dr Michael Casey BA Hons., LLB (Monash), PhD (La Trobe)

Dr Casey is the Director of the PM Glynn Institute, the public policy think-tank of Australian Catholic University. Before joining ACU in 2015 he worked for Cardinal George Pell AC during his time as Archbishop of Melbourne and then Sydney. He was a Visiting Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, Washington DC in 2006-7, and completed the Oxford Advanced Leadership and Management Program at Saïd Business School at the University of Oxford in 2014.



Dr Patrick Quirk BA, LLB (UQ), LLM (Tübingen) PhD (Adelaide)

Dr Quirk is Associate Professor at Australian Catholic University Brisbane Campus, and a former tenured Associate Professor and Academic Dean at Ave Maria School of Law in Naples, Florida, USA. He holds degrees in law and arts from the University of Queensland, as well as a Master of Civil Laws (Magister Legum) from the University of Tübingen, Germany. He is also a scholar-in-residence at St Mary's College at the University of Melbourne.



Mrs Anne McIlroy, BA LLB (Melb), Dip Ed (Melb State College), GCert Curriculum Leadership (Melb)

Mrs McIlroy is an English, Literature and History teacher. She has taught in public and private schools in Victoria and, as a teacher of Renaissance history has been part of and organised tours of Italy for secondary students.



Ms Daniela Bortolin, BA (Monash), GradDipEd (Institute of Catholic Education, Melb)

Ms Bortolin has spent 18 years as a teacher in Catholic Secondary Colleges in Melbourne and Perth where she also held leadership roles as English Faculty Coordinator, Year Level Coordinator and Learning Enrichment Coordinator. She has been living in Italy for 16 years where she runs an English Language Services business. She has often accompanied Australian school groups on Italian cultural tours.

Program overview

DATE	ACTIVITY
Fri 15 November	Depart for Rome <i>(Dates may vary owing to availability when flight bookings are made)</i>
Sat 16 November	Arrive in Rome – Welcome and orientation <i>Domus Australia, Via Cernaia 14B, 00185 Rome</i>
Sun 17 November	Course introduction and Mass to commence the program
Mon 18 November	Module 1: The Church and the West (18 – 21 November)
Fri 22 November	Module 2: Ideas which shaped the Church and shaped the West (22– 28 November)
Fri 29 November	Module 3: The democratic world and papal teaching (29 Nov – 5 Dec)
Sat 30 November	Depart for London <i>Langham Court Hotel, 31-35 Langham Street, London W1W 6BU</i>
Sat 7 December	Depart London for home
Sun 8 December	Arrive in Melbourne <i>(Dates may vary owing to availability when flight bookings are made)</i>

Detailed program schedule

(NB: there may be some changes to the program and some site visits are subject to confirmation).

Saturday 16 November

- Midday:** Arrival and transfer to Domus Australia
- Afternoon:** Welcome & orientation: house rules, safety, housekeeping and practicalities.
Walk around local neighbourhood
- Evening:** Domus Australia: dinner

Sunday 17 November

- Morning:** Introduction to the program: goals of the program and learning formats
- Mass:** St Peter Chanel Chapel, Domus Australia
- Introduction:** Introduction to the learning: *Dominion*: the scandal of a crucified god
– the strangeness of Christianity when it emerged in the ancient world
- Lunch:** Buy your own lunch
- Afternoon:** Walk to Borghese Gardens and Piazza del Popolo
- Evening:** Domus Australia: Vespers (evening prayer) and reflection

Module 1: The Church and the West

An overview of key periods in the development of the Church and its influence in shaping the Western world, from the beginnings of Christianity to the mediaeval world.



Colonnade of St Peter's



Classroom

1. FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHURCH

Monday 18 November

Theme: St Peter and St Paul, the foundations of the papacy

Reading: *Dominion:* St Paul and the Galatians

Reader: The Gospels and the early persecutions

Visit: Abbey of the Three Fountains
Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls

Evening: Domus Australia: Mass and reflection

2. THE EARLY CHURCH AND CONSTANTINE

Tuesday 19 November

Theme: How Christianity changed Rome; the Emperor Constantine (280 – 337AD)

Reading: *Dominion:* made in the image of God
Dominion: Constantine and the Council of Nicaea

Reader: How Christianity changed the Roman world through care of women, the sick and the poor

Visit: Catacombs of St Callisto with Mass

Evening: Domus Australia: Vespers and reflection



Catacombs of St Callisto

3. THE MEDIAEVAL CHURCH AND MONASTICISM

Wednesday 20 November

- Theme:** Monasticism: St Benedict, St Scholastica, St Francis and St Clare
Reading: *Dominion*: St Columbanus and the Irish monasteries
Reader: From the Rule of St Benedict, the Rule of St Francis, and *The Imitation of Christ*
Visit: Monastery of St Benedict at Subiaco with Mass
Evening: Domus Australia: Vespers and reflection

4. THE CHURCH IN THE EAST

Thursday 21 November

- Theme:** Christianity, Judaism, Islam and the Crusades
Reading: *Dominion*: Jews, Muslims, Christians 630 – 751AD
Reader: The founding of Constantinople; the Crusades
Lunch: Kosher restaurant
Visit: Great Synagogue and Jewish Museum of Rome; the Jewish ghetto
Evening: Domus Australia: Mass and reflection

Module 2:

Ideas which shaped the Church and shaped the West

An exploration of some of the major ideas and challenges shaping the Church and the West, and how they influenced our understandings of politics, religion, knowledge and society.

5. THE RENAISSANCE

Friday 22 November

- Theme:** Christianity and the classical world in art and philosophy
Reader: Art and philosophy; faith and classical learning; Michelangelo's *Sonnets*
Visit: Vatican museums and the Sistine Chapel
Evening: Domus Australia: Mass and reflection

Saturday 23 November

- Morning:** Mass
Reader: Emperor Nero's persecution of Christians and the Great Fire of Rome 64AD
Visit: Capitoline Hill, the Roman Forum, the Colosseum and Basilica San Clemente
Evening: Domus Australia: Vespers and reflection

Sunday 24 November

- Morning:** The architecture of a church and the celebration of the Mass
Mass: Domus Australia
Visit: Papal Basilica Santa Maria Maggiore
Evening: Opera selections at the Opera Lirica, Palazzo Santa Chiara

6. THE REFORMATION AND COUNTER-REFORMATION

Monday 25 November

- Theme:** Calvin, Knox, Luther and the Reformation in England; the Council of Trent
Reading: *Dominion*: Reformation
Reader: The Reformation in England; the Council of Trent and the Counter-Reformation
Visit: The Venerable English College
Evening: Domus Australia: Mass and reflection



Vatican Museum

7. POLITICS AND RELIGION

Tuesday 26 November

Theme: The political influence of the papacy; separation of church and state

Reading: *Dominion*: pope vs emperor; separating church and state

Reader: Religious freedom and conscience in politics

Visit: Palazzo Madama (Senate of Italy)

Evening: Domus Australia: Mass and reflection

Wednesday 27 November

Morning: St Peter's Basilica and General Audience with Pope Francis
Basilica San Bartolomeo on Tiber Island and the Shrine to the Martyrs of the 20th and 21st centuries

Afternoon: First of two writing tasks reflecting on learnings from the program

Evening: Domus Australia: Mass and reflection

8. FAITH AND SCIENCE

Thursday 28 November

Theme: Religion, reason and knowledge

Reading: *Dominion*: science, religion and Galileo

Reader: The Enlightenment; faith and reason

Visit: Vatican Observatory at Castel Gandolfo

Evening: Domus Australia: Vespers and reflection

Module 3: The democratic world and papal teaching

An introduction to the teaching of recent popes on democracy, the challenges of the modern world, and the Catholic response to them.



St James Park, London

9. THE MODERN WORLD AND CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Friday 29 November

- Theme:** The challenges of the modern era and the Church's response
- Reading:** *Dominion*: democracy and the French and American revolutions
- Reader:** Excerpts from *Rerum Novarum* and *Centesimus Annus*
- Afternoon:** Papal Basilica of St John Lateran
Free time ahead of departure to London on Saturday morning
- Evening:** Domus Australia: Mass and reflection
Final dinner in Rome

Saturday 30 November

- Morning:** Mass
Depart Domus Australia for airport
- Afternoon:** Depart for London
- Evening:** Arrive at Langham Court Hotel

Sunday 1 December

- Morning:** Excerpts from two 1940 speeches given by Winston Churchill
- Mass:** Brompton Oratory
- Afternoon:** Visit the Cabinet War Rooms; walking tour to the Australian War Memorial and Buckingham Palace
- Evening:** Langham Court Hotel

10. TRUTH, KNOWLEDGE, JUSTICE

Monday 2 December

- Theme:** Truth and moral relativism; freedom and responsibility
- Reading:** *Dominion*: loss of faith and political extremism after World War I
- Reader:** Excerpts from *Veritatis Splendor* and *Laudato Si'*
- Visit:** Tower Hill; memorials to St Thomas More and St John Fisher; Tyburn convent
- Evening:** St Charles Borromeo parish: Vespers and reflection
Langham Court Hotel: dinner

Tuesday 3 December

- Morning:** Day trip to Oxford University; seminar on St John Henry Newman
- Mass:** Oxford Catholic Chaplaincy
- Afternoon:** Lunch and walking tour of Oxford
- Evening:** Langham Court Hotel: dinner

11. DEMOCRACY AND THE CHURCH

Wednesday 4 December

- Theme:** Democracy's origins in England; religion and reason in democratic life
- Reading:** *Dominion*: capitalism, Marxism and Leninism in 19th and 20th centuries
- Reader:** Edmund Burke; George Orwell; Benedict XVI on democracy and religion
- Visit:** Palace of Westminster (Parliament of Great Britain)
- Evening:** St Charles Borromeo parish: Vespers and reflection
Langham Court Hotel: dinner

12. A LIFE IN COMMON IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD

Thursday 5 December

- Theme:** Politics as friendship; our common home; how to build a good society
- Reading:** *Dominion*: Christianity's power; how the weak shame the strong
- Reader:** Elements of political order; Aristotle on friendship; excerpts from *Fratelli Tutti*
- Visit:** British Library
- Evening:** St Charles Borromeo parish: Vespers and reflection
Langham Court Hotel: dinner

Friday 6 December

- Morning:** Second writing task reflecting on learnings from the program
Closing session: Monsignor Michael Nazir Ali *Discipleship in a Secular World*
- Afternoon:** British Museum: free time ahead of departure for home on Saturday morning
- Evening:** Final dinner at Langham Court Hotel

Saturday 7 December

- Morning:** Return flight to Australia

Program readings

Reading is a critical component of the ACU School Leaders Program. Each teaching session assigns a selection of short readings from two texts. One is specially compiled reader of primary and secondary sources, both ancient and modern. The other text is Tom Holland's book *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (Little, Brown: 2019).

Tom Holland also co-hosts the world's most popular history podcast *The Rest is History*. While this podcast is not part of the teaching materials in the program, it provides a good introduction both to Tom Holland's style and to the approach he takes to the history of Christianity and the West in *Dominion*. See for example these episodes of *The Rest is History*:

The Crucifixion (April 2022)



open.spotify.com
Search for: The Rest is
History, 175. Crucifixion

Jesus Christ: The History (December 2022)



open.spotify.com
Search for: The Rest is History,
287. Jesus Christ: The History

Jesus Christ: The Mystery (December 2022)



open.spotify.com
Search for: The Rest is History,
288: Jesus Christ: The History

Pre-readings

The ACU School Leaders Program provides leadership formation for Catholic school leavers through an immersion in the Catholic tradition and Western civilisation. The two readings that follow open up some important dimensions about the long and fascinating stories of Christianity and the West, the relationship between them, and how they continue to be rich sources of life and hope today.

Together they provide a great introduction to the world that the ACU School Leaders Program explores.

Christianity and Western Civilisation¹

Greg Sheridan

“Everybody’s got a hungry heart.”

– Bruce Springsteen

*“You have made us for yourself, O Lord,
and our hearts are restless until they rest
in you.”*

– St Augustine, *Confessions*

Easter is the triumph of the impossible and the unimaginable, the laughable story of the victory over death of the God/man Jesus 2000 years ago, which is the pivot of human history. It was a physical event and a metaphysical revolution. It upended the human condition and all of human history.

Easter is resurrection, but before resurrection comes death.

What does it have to do with us today?

Just now, in the debate about religious freedom, we confront a central question: will governments and government agencies make it impossible, or at least illegal, for Christians to practise Christianity within Christian institutions?

Can Christian schools preference teachers who support their ethos, ask its teachers not to campaign publicly against its teachings?

Can Christian hospitals continue the work they’ve undertaken for millennia of ministering to the sick and offering comfort to the afflicted without outraging the conscience of their medical practitioners?

Can Christian aged care homes work to support and comfort and glorify life, rather than to kill people?

If the answer to those questions is no, then governments are outlawing Christianity, or at least putting it on the level it sometimes occupied in the ancient Roman Empire.

Periodically, ancient Rome actively persecuted Christians, as the Chinese government does now. Quite often, it was willing to leave Christians mostly alone provided they made no public noise, and worshipped the emperor and acknowledged him as a god.

Christians couldn’t do this, and they got into a lot of trouble as a consequence.

Something similar is happening today, on a vastly less brutal scale. You can hold your Christian beliefs, the state increasingly rules, provided you do so in private, never utter in public things official “shame” ideology disapproves of, and acknowledge the majesty and infallibility of contemporary state doctrine on gender, identity and power.

The Chinese state is more explicit. Christian churches must feature portraits of Xi Jinping and acknowledge the Chinese Communist Party as the supreme arbiter of religious truth.

Christians today live in a perplexing environment, with the culture and the state turning against them. But they should be of good cheer. Christians historically have encountered circumstances a million times worse. Yet as Australian poet James McAuley wrote: “Suddenly as no one planned, behold the kingdom grow!”

No one had a worse public reputation than the first Christians. They’re a pretty good inspiration for today. Immediately after Jesus’s death, his followers initially were huddled in terror and confusion. After Easter, Jesus’s resurrection, as a matter of undeniable history, they went forth and successfully spread his message throughout the known world.

1. This article was originally published under the title “How churches can make a comeback in today’s hostile culture” in the Weekend Australian on 30 March, Easter weekend, 2024. It is republished under licence from News Corp Australia and with the author’s permission.

Today there are two billion Christians.

But there's room for no complacency here. In Australia, as in the US, Covid was the latest blow to Christianity. According to a new study, *The Great DeChurching*, 40 million

Americans across the past 25 years who used to go to church no longer do. As in Australia, a significant chunk stopped coming to church during Covid and haven't come back.

Melbourne's Catholic Archbishop, Peter Comensoli, in his recent Patrick Oration, observed that some two-thirds of Australians believe in God or a higher power, but fewer than 10 per cent actually practise religion.

Nor does the rise in the category of Spiritual But Not Religious offer much consolation, for "the generational movement of SBNR is not back towards the R, but further away from the S".

Nonetheless, as Comensoli observes, many under-40s are not hostile to Christianity, they simply have no knowledge of God or Jesus. That makes them ripe for conversation, for the first movement to faith is always a gesture of welcome.

In frequently having no knowledge of Christian belief, transcendence and spirituality, today's under-40s resemble in some ways the pagan peoples the early Christians lived among, to whom they spread the Christian message.

Societies like Australia are different from pagan societies in that they have been long softened by the ethical inheritance of Christianity, as Tom Holland demonstrates in *Dominion*. Not the least of the odd intellectual fashions of the past couple of hundred years has been the intermittent but persistent idealisation of ancient Greece and Rome. Yet the classical Greco-Roman world was just about as savage a society as humanity has known.

The savagery is evident even in the most elevated classical literature. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which tells the mythical story of the world up until Julius Caesar

is declared a god, contains much rape and murder. None is more savage than the story of Tereus, who rapes Philomena, the sister of his wife, Proce. Tereus then cuts Philomena's tongue out so that she can tell no one what happened, and repeatedly rapes her again.

The most original and revolutionary people of the Greco-Roman world were the early Christians, who stood against the ethic and aesthetics of savagery.

They produced the first great sexual revolution, in which women, in their divine relationship to God, were equal to men. Celsus, a second century Greek philosopher and fierce critic of Christianity, mocked it as appealing only to "slaves, women and little children".

Celsus had a point. The sociologist of ancient religion, Rodney Stark, estimates that in the second century, two-thirds of Christians were women. The earliest Christian church that archaeologists have found at Megiddo in Israel, had a mosaic on its floor which honoured seven local Christians. Five were women.

In the Gospels, the first person to hear of, and then proclaim, Jesus was a woman, Mary. The first person she proclaimed Jesus to was a woman, her cousin, Elizabeth. At the cross at Jesus's death only one man, John, was present, but there were half a dozen women. And then the risen Jesus shows himself first to a woman, Mary Magdalene, who proclaims the risen Christ to the apostles.

Classical Roman families valued sons far above daughters. They often left newborn daughters out to die of exposure. Even families liberal enough to keep a daughter seldom kept a second. Not only did Christian families keep and cherish their daughters, they rescued other families' abandoned daughters and gave them life and love. They reconceived marriage as an institution of mutual love.

As soon as dedicated communities of religious devotion grew up, following on from the desert fathers of the church, mystics and

others who wanted to devote their whole lives to prayer, similar communities of women flourished. Throughout Christian history, far more women than men have spent their lives wholly in religious devotion and charitable works.

The early Christians altogether are an enthralling group of human beings, even if you have no religious belief at all. They are one of the only cases in the classical world where we hear from ordinary rank and file people rather than exclusively nobility and elites. And without any notable power, they transformed the world.

Not only that, through their writings and records, and often enough their persecutions, they are remarkably accessible to moderns. At most you sometimes need to hunt out a good translation. It's an imaginative failure of Hollywood that so few of their stories have come to the screen.

The Roman idea of religion was straightforward. You propitiated the gods with specific rituals and in exchange they gave you good fortune. All the gods were designed to further the interests of the Roman Empire. It's fascinating to read Roman historians chart growing hostility to Christians as their communities grow. The great first century Roman historian, Tacitus, described Christianity as a "deadly superstition". Pliny the Younger called it "depraved and excessive".

Nijay Gupta in *Strange Religion* recounts: "One of the accusations against Jews and Christians was that they were *atheoi*, godless" because they didn't worship statues of Roman gods. Christians were subversive because they followed an executed criminal. Their sexual ethics were regarded as bizarre, then as now. Calling each other brother and sister suggested incest. They talked of eating the flesh of their God, incomprehensible to non-Christians, then as now. And while they didn't look for trouble, there were things they wouldn't compromise on, which made them stubbornly disobedient and difficult.

Also, they showed an unbecoming concern for the poor and for slaves. But when plagues came, they didn't run away, but stayed and helped, helped their fellow believers but then helped anyone they could. Lots of them died as a result, but lots of them lived as a result as well. With all their daughters, their families were naturally happier than pagan families.

Also, unlike virtually all other religious groups, they didn't belong to one tribe or territory. Their universalism was shocking to a civilisation which, then as now, regarded ethnic and racial identity as a central feature of the human condition.

Christian universalism, then and now, was distinctive: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female, but you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Without an overt ethic of universalism, humanity tends to retreat automatically into identity politics, ethnic chauvinism and tribalism, just as the *Zeitgeist* today is trying to impose a stultifying grid of identity politics on all of civic and even private life.

Christianity shockingly disregarded this completely.

Nonetheless, there is a sense in which Christianity was a colonial enterprise. From the very first, Christianity was a profound supernatural belief, an ethical imperative, a lived community and a deeply thought-out theology and philosophy.

It's a gross anachronism to think early Christians lacked intellectual sophistication or depth, just as it's a defamation to see the Jewish scriptures of the Old Testament as less than sublime.

A lot of the greatest early Christian writers, such as Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose of Milan and many others, were working bishops and pastors, fully busy looking after people, settling disputes, caring for the poor, teaching the gospels, and then at night wrote majestic masterpieces which shaped Christianity – and, incidentally, Western culture – ever after.

Three things strike me about them. So many of them had day jobs, yet wrote prolifically at astonishing depth. Second, their writing emerged from pastoral concerns; it addressed theological and human problems their own people were facing. There was no division between their spirituality and theology. And third, a surprisingly large number of them died for their faith, were martyred.

Three early Christian writers demand special attention: Augustine, Tertullian and Origen. Augustine was born in fourth century Thagaste and lived most of his life as bishop of Hippo, both in present-day Algeria. Tertullian lived in second century Carthage, in Tunisia. Origen was born in second century Alexandria, in Egypt.

More than any other early Christian thinkers, these three elucidated Christian theology and philosophy. Each got some things wrong, but they elaborated huge sections of biblical understanding, incorporating the trinity, the nature of God, the person of Christ, original sin, and much else.

Christianity began with Jewish Semitic people of the Middle East. It was authoritatively thought through and taught by three north African men of colour. So Christianity is indeed a child of a kind of spirituality and intellectual colonialism, first from the Middle East, then from Africa. We in the West are immense beneficiaries of this benign colonialism.

It's a tragedy that none of these figures, and other early Christians like Irenaeus and Gregory of Nyssa, are taught anywhere but in specialist Christian studies. One interesting aspect of Gregory of Nyssa is that he learnt his theology from his sister, Macrina. One of his most important books, on the soul and resurrection, is fashioned as a dialogue with Marina, in which she is the teacher.

But Augustine is the most fabulously accessible and compelling of the early church teachers. He is sometimes called the last man of antiquity and the first man of medieval Christianity. Really he is more like the first

modern. His *Confessions* are the first great psychological autobiography.

Find a good, modern translation and the *Confessions* are gripping. Get through the first few pages, which are very high-blown, and you fall into the compelling narrative of Augustine's spiritual and personal development. For his first 32 years he was a pretty rugged sinner. A natural journalist, he produced brilliant headlines, such as the immortal "Lord make me pure, but not yet." As a lyricist of piercing human insight, he stands with his fellow Christian, Bruce Springsteen.

Augustine rejected Christianity at first because he couldn't accept the historical accuracy of the Old Testament. He dabbled in astrology and for a time was devoted to the cult of Manichaeism, which saw nature as an endless struggle between equal forces of good and evil. He was deeply intellectual and attracted to the neo-Platonists, who got to an anaemic version of God purely through reason.

But in Milan he fell under the influence of Ambrose who taught him to read some Old Testament books, Genesis particularly, as allegory and metaphor. He picked up a Bible and struck the words: "Put on the Lord, Jesus Christ."

Augustine experienced mysticism, but his life was mostly concerned with looking after the people of Hippo. Christian villages needed protection by Roman soldiers, which led him to develop the just war theory, which informs international law today. But then Augustine witnessed the collapse of the Roman Empire, which led to his great work, *City of God*, which teaches Christians they have no abiding city on earth.

The early Christians were by no means perfect. They had their quarrels, problems, failures and episodes of wickedness. But they were overwhelmingly good. They didn't lead lives of seraphic serenity. But they never lost faith. They are hard to emulate because their courage was so striking.

Anglican Archbishop of Sydney Kanishka Raffel tells Inquirer: “It is the supernatural elements in Christianity, and a life formed in the light of them, which is attractive to people. Most early Christians were disempowered people who found to their surprise that God was interested in them. The idea that God knew them from the inside gave them great power.”

Lots of things early Christians did in their worship and community were common sense and applicable today – the emphasis on shared meals, on music, on welcome and community, and on serving the poor. But they never shied away from, and were utterly transformed by, the sheer truthful, wild, inspiring weirdness of Christianity.

Christ is risen.

Greg Sheridan is Foreign Editor at The Australian. His most recent book is Christians: the urgent case for Jesus in our world (2021).



Westminster Cathedral

Western Civilisation and Christianity¹

Tony Abbott

Years ago, I was still playing rugby football, in Oxford, England, and there were lineout calls, requiring the recognition of particular letters. If the captain called a word starting with the letter “t”, the ball went to the back. If he called a word starting with “s”, it went to the front. But on this occasion, the captain called “Tchaikovsky”. The resulting chaos among the students of a great university highlighted the need for a well-rounded classical education, even for those who took their sport as seriously as their studies.

What’s mostly lacking from today’s schooling is any grounding in the New Testament, even though it’s at the heart of our culture. There’s an absence of narrative history: our story from Abraham, Jacob, and Moses, our fathers in faith, through the ancient Greeks and Romans, to Alfred the Great, Magna Carta, the Provisions of Oxford, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the Glorious Revolution, an American Revolution for the rights of Englishmen in the New World and a French one based on worthy abstractions that ultimately descended into tyranny, and through the struggles of the twentieth century to our own times with the illusory ascendancy of market liberalism because man does not live by bread alone. There is, of course, an abundance of critical theory that’s turned great literature and the triumphs of the human spirit into a fantasy of oppressors and oppressed and regards the modern Anglosphere as irredeemably tainted.

Above all, contemporary schooling hardly conveys a spirit of progress, even though there’s still much to be grateful for. In 1990, for instance, more than 30 per cent of the world’s population lacked access to safe drinking water; by 2020, that figure was under 10 per cent. Likewise, in 1990, more

than 30 per cent of the world’s population lived in absolute poverty; that too, had declined to under 10 per cent by 2020. And in 2020, more wealth had been created, at least in dollar terms, over the previous 25 years than in the prior 2500.

Prior to the pandemic, the world at large was more free, more fair, more safe, and more rich, for more people than at any previous time in human history, largely thanks to the long Pax Americana, based on a preference for whatever makes societies freer, fairer and more prosperous under a rules-based global order. But while the Western world has never been more materially rich, it’s rarely been more spiritually bereft. Relieved of the need to build its strength and assert its values against the old Soviet Union, like a retired sportsman it has become economically, militarily and culturally flabby.

The pandemic was a largely self-inflicted wound, with the policies to deal with it more destructive than the disease itself. For years, we will face the corrosive legacy of mental illness, other diseases that were comparatively neglected, economic dislocation, the surrender to authoritarian experts; and worst of all, two years of stopping living from fear of dying.

And now there’s the ferocious assault on Ukraine; the renewed challenge of apocalyptic Islamism, especially against Israel; and Beijing’s push to be the world’s dominant power by mid-century, with all that means for free and democratic Taiwan, for the rest of East Asia and for the continued flourishing of the liberal order that has produced the best times in history so far.

In the face of an intensifying military challenge from dictatorships on the march, militarist, Islamist and communist, it might

1. *This article was originally published under the title “What’s lacking from today’s schooling? Any grounding in the New Testament” in the Weekend Australian on 30 March 2024. It is republished with the author’s permission.*

seem trivial, almost escapist, to stress the life of the mind but, in the end, this is a battle of ideas: the power of the liberal humanist dream of men and women, created with inherently equal rights and responsibilities, free to make the most of themselves, individually and in community; versus various forms of might is right, based on national glory, death to the infidel, or the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In most Western countries, people's faith in democracy is shrinking. Mental illness, especially among young people, is a new epidemic. And while this may or may not be related to the waning of the Christian belief in the God-given dignity and worth of each person, which incubated liberal democracy, and that armoured its adherents against pride and despair, it's noteworthy that the Christianity that was professed by some 90 per cent of Australians just a few decades back is now acknowledged in the Census by well under half.

Politics, it's often said, is downstream of culture, and culture is downstream of religion. It's the coarsening of our culture, exacerbated by "the long march through the institutions", that's at least partly to blame for the feeble or embarrassing leadership from which we now suffer, and for the triumph of prudence over courage, and weakness over judgment, that has produced virtue-signalling businesses, propaganda pretending to be learning, the elevation of every kind of diversity except intellectual diversity, eruptions of anti-Semitism, out-of-control social spending and a drug culture in parts of Western cities that can only be the product of moral anarchy.

In the long run, the antidote to this is to rediscover all that's given meaning to most people in every previous generation: a knowledge of our history, an appreciation of our literature, and an acquaintance with the faith stories that might not inspire every individual but have collectively moved mountains over millennia.

I was lucky enough to be schooled under Brigidine nuns, and then under Jesuit priests, and the lay teachers who took inspiration from them: fine, selfless people, who saw teaching as a calling more than a career, encouraging their charges at every turn to be their best selves. Their lives were about our fulfilment, not theirs, as reflected in the Jesuit injunction of those days to be "a man for others", because it's only in giving that we truly receive.

Later, at Sydney University, and especially at Oxford, I had teachers who valued their students' ability to assimilate the authorities and to create strong arguments for a distinctive position, rather than regurgitate lecture notes and conform to some orthodoxy. Indeed, this is the genius of Western civilisation: a respect for the best of what is, combined with a restless curiosity for more; a constant willingness to learn, because no one has the last word in knowledge and wisdom. The whole point of a good education is not to "unlearn", as Sydney University has recently put it, but to assimilate all the disciplines, intellectual and personal, that make us truly free "to have life and have it to the full".

The Oxford tutorial system, where twice a week you had to front up to someone who was a genuine expert in his field, with an essay demonstrating familiarity with the main texts and the main arguments on a particular topic, plus a considered position of your own, was the perfect preparation for any form of advocacy, especially politics, where you always have to be ready to apply good values to hard facts.

These days, as a board member of the Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation, I'm conscious of the many elements of the Western canon that I've largely missed, in over-focusing on politics, with only a smattering of philosophy and theology, from a brief pursuit of the priesthood; but am still immensely grateful for an intellectual, cultural and spiritual inheritance that I've now been drawing down over 40 years of advocacy, journalism, and public life. I have few claims to specific

expertise, save in political decision-making, and certainly no claims to personal virtue because an inevitably imperfectly and incompletely practised Christianity doesn't guarantee goodness – but it does make us better than we'd otherwise be, this constant spur to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.

Still, example and experience are often the best teachers of all. A mother who welcomed everyone into our family home. A late father who urged me to look for the good that's present in almost everyone. An inspirational teacher, the late Father Emmet Costello, who encouraged me to set no limits on what could be achieved. A boon friend, the late Father Paul Mankowski, my Oxford sparring partner, a kind of internal exile within the Jesuit order, who showed that a celibate priest could also be a real man. And the luminous George Cardinal Pell, of blessed memory, who endured a modern martyrdom, a form of living crucifixion, and whose prison diaries deserve to become modern classics. One day, I hope again to enjoy the communion of these saints.

I was lucky to have a reasonably broad experience beyond the classroom and beyond the confines of political life. Coaching football teams was an early introduction into managing egos. Running a concrete batching plant was a great antidote to pure economic theory, and to corporate flim-flam, and a goad to unconventional problem solving. Plus serving in a local volunteer fire brigade for more than two decades has been a wonderful lesson in grassroots community service.

My Jesuit mentor, Father Costello, had a favourite phrase – “*genus humanum vivit paucis*” – which he translated as “the human race lives by a few”.

Of course, there's no discredit to being among the many who largely follow, because no one can lead unless others fall in behind. And whatever our individual role, large or small, public or private, sung or unsung, our calling is to be as good as we can be, because even small things, done well or badly, make a

difference for better or for worse. Everyone's duty, indeed, is to strive to leave the world that much better for our time here: our families, our neighbourhoods, our workplaces, our classrooms, our churches, everything we do should be for the better, as best we can make it.

Still, some are called to more; more than worthily performing all the things that are expected of us. Leaders are those who go beyond what might be expected; who don't just fill the job, but expand it, even transcend it; who aren't just competent but brilliant. To paraphrase the younger Kennedy, they don't look at what is and ask why; but ponder what should be, and try to make that happen.

In my time as prime minister there were decisions to be made every day, expected and unexpected. Ultimately, the job of a national leader is to try to make sense of all the most difficult issues, and to offer people a better way forward. Inevitably, there's much that can only be managed, not resolved, because much is more-or-less intractable, at least in the short term. The challenge is to keep pushing in the right direction so that things are better, even though they may never be perfect or even especially satisfactory. No matter how many changes you make, and how much leadership you try to provide, economic reform, for instance, or Indigenous wellbeing, is always going to be a work in progress. There's no doubt leadership can be more or less effective depending on the character, conviction, and courage of the leader. This is the human factor in history that's so often decisive, such as when the British Conservative Party chose Winston Churchill rather than Lord Halifax to invigorate the war effort against Nazism. In the end, leadership is less about being right or wrong than about being able to make decisions and get things done.

In providing leadership, what matters is the judgment and the set of values brought to decision-making, at least as much as technical knowledge. The same set of facts, for instance, namely the surrender of France

and the evacuation from Dunkirk, would have produced different leadership from Halifax than from Churchill. It would hardly be fair to claim that Churchill's education at Sandhurst was better than Halifax's at Oxford. It was their character, disposition and judgment that differed. Just as the respective characters and judgment of presidents Joe Biden and Volodymyr Zelensky so sharply differed when one offered an expedient escape from Kyiv, and the other resolutely refused it.

Still, there's no doubt that education can help to shape character, and that judgment can be enhanced by the knowledge of history and the appreciation of the human condition that a good education should provide.

I'm sometimes asked by young people with an interest in politics what they should do to be more effective, and my answer is never to join a faction, to consult polling, or to seek any particular office. It's to immerse yourself in the best that's been thought and said, so that whatever you do will be better for familiarity with the wisdom of the ages.

In particular to read and re-read the New Testament, the foundation document of our culture, that's shaped our moral and mental universe, in ways we can hardly begin to grasp, and which speaks to the best instincts of human nature.

And to bury yourself in history, especially a history that's alive to the difference individuals make, and to the importance of ideas, of which a riveting example is Churchill's magnificent four-volume *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, that's also pretty much a global history, given that so much of the modern world has been made in English. And which Andrew Roberts has brought more or less up to date with his *History of the English-Speaking Peoples in the 20th Century*.

Then there's the book – I don't claim it's the finest ever written – just the one that's most colonised my own imaginings: Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*; an epic adventure in duty and service, with Christological echoes, in which the dividing line between good and evil,

wisdom and folly, honour and indulgence runs through nearly every heart, which I must have read at least a half dozen times, most recently to my adolescent children. Who naturally, preferred the movie!

There's a scene in the 1970 western *Chisum*, where John Wayne's character is trying to dissuade Billy the Kid from wanton murder. "That's all just words," says the young hothead. "Yes," replies Wayne, "but words are what men live by. Words that they say and mean." Those were the days when Hollywood still aspired to be a good moral teacher.

And as for movies, my favourites have been *Saving Private Ryan* and the Australian classic *Gallipoli*, whose protagonists were pitched into vast conflicts way beyond their control, while retaining the agency to make a difference, especially by not living in fear of dying. And by remembering that to whom much is given, much is expected. Plus the wonderful *Life of Brian*, that so presciently satirised today's decolonising and gender follies that it could now hardly be made, yet it still managed to respect the greatest story ever told. Imagine, for a moment, having to tackle every aspect of life with only your own physical and mental resources. Or with only the learning and the capability of those around you. Even with abundant goodwill, life would be a Hobbesian ordeal: poor, nasty, brutish and short.

With education, though, there's access to the accumulated wisdom of mankind. Our task is to have the wit and the decency to make the most of it. At its best, education gives us access not just to this generation's wisdom and knowledge but to all the wisdom and knowledge that's ever been. It adds to our own experience and judgment the experience and judgment of the greatest figures and the best thinkers that have ever lived. It makes their world ours too.

It's education that opens up to each of us the wisdom of Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas, the insights into human behaviour of Shakespeare and Dickens, the creative imagination of

Da Vinci and Michelangelo, the soulfulness of Handel and Bach, the scientific genius of Newton and Einstein, the daring and curiosity of James Cook and Marco Polo, and the courage and ambition of Julius Caesar and Napoleon. It gives us the world's example to reflect upon. It enables us to be so much better than would otherwise be the case, in the ceaseless endeavour that should be the object of every life, to become our very best selves.

There's hardly a heavier responsibility than the right nurturing of young people through a judicious combination of good teaching, good example and good practice. Every teacher should reflect on the gospel warning against anything that might lead young people astray, "better for him that a millstone were hanged around his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea"; ancient hyperbole perhaps, but that's how much the work of teachers matters.

When screens are demanding every minute of young people's attention, your job is to refocus their gaze. When the saturation of social media preys on young people's insecurities, it's up to you to ground them back in reality. When your students are tempted to see themselves as victims, yours is to encourage them to count what blessings they have, and still make the best choices that they can. When today's story tellers say our history is more marred by villains than illuminated by heroes, it's up to you to pass on the torch of culture, for without a vision the people perish. Your work is more important than ever, because each of us is shaped by all our lessons learned. Churchill's teachers changed the world in ways they could hardly have guessed at the time, and likewise the teachers of today can tilt the world of tomorrow towards good.

Consider the immortal words of the late Queen Elizabeth, on her twenty-first birthday, that "my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service and to the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong". No one should be in ignorance of such a life, such an exemplar

of the duty and service, the honour and the fealty, by which all should live; yet but for the faithful passing on of such lessons, what will future generations know of our mighty forebears, how they lived and how they died: for family, for country, and for God.

The Hon. Tony Abbott AC was prime minister of Australia from 2013 to 2015. This text is from an address he delivered to the National Symposium for Classical Education in Phoenix, Arizona, in March 2024.

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Cover image: St Peter's Rome

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