

YARRA INSTITUTE FOR RELIGION & SOCIAL POLICY

Fourth Annual General Meeting, 6 December 2012

Report by Stephen Ames, Chair of the Board

The Yarra Institute is an independent ecumenical organisation established for:

1. Conducting research into the implications of Christian social thinking for the formulation of public policy in Australia.
2. Teaching Christian social thinking and its implications for public policy in Australia.

KEY EVENTS THIS YEAR

- Professor Therese D’Orsa and Dr Jim D’Orsa set a splendid pace with their latest book, *Catholic Curriculum: A mission to the heart of young people*, looking across the school curriculum and how it can more closely engage with fundamental Christian values. It follows their recent book, *Explorers, Guides and Meaning-Makers: Mission Theology for Catholic Educators*. Both are published by Garratt Publishing and set a high standard, involving astute use of cross-disciplinary research.
- We all celebrated the publication of Bruce Duncan’s book, *Social Justice, Fuller Life in a Fairer World*. This is a succinct overview of how Catholic social thinking developed and why it is so important today. A launch is being planned for early 2013.
- Of long-term importance is our approaching the MCD University of Divinity, seeking to become a research unit of the university. See below for more discussion.
- We applauded the involvement of Bruce Duncan in the development of a proposal for a *Christian Leadership Program*, including Professor Brian Howe, Dr Ray Cleary, Professor Randall Prior and Bruce. The project aims to prepare future church leaders more fully to participate in discussions about social policy in the public forum. It has been adopted by the MCD.
- Though not directly connected to YIRSP, we also applaud the work of Dr Paul Rule as co-editor and contributor to M. Tuohy, R. Elliott, P. Rule, and, S. Harper, eds., *Religion and Ethics in a Pluralist Society, VCE Religion and Society* (Melbourne, Nelson Cengage Learning, 2012). The volume also includes a contribution by Dr. Stephen Ames.
- We are also delighted with Stephen Ames’s, *Finding the Way, A Theology of Ageing*, (Benetas, 2012), which was commissioned by Benetas, a large Anglican Aged Care organisation. An interesting point is that this is a theology of ageing not of aged care.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

In accord with the first reason YIRSP was established, the Board has pursued a number of research opportunities during the year:

- **Transforming Australia's detention policies about asylum seekers.** With funding from the Good Shepherd Foundation, the Yarra Institute has commissioned research on how to transform Australia's treatment of asylum seekers so that they avoid lengthy periods of detention, and to ensure adequate support for settlement in the community. The initial researchers were Dr Erin Wilson from RMIT, who withdrew from the project when she accepted an overseas academic position, and Dr Tony Ward, an economist and director of Milbur Consulting, who has also done relevant project costing. Dr Ward's section of the research, *Long-term health costs of extended mandatory detention of asylum seekers*, was launched in October 2011.

The continuing research was taken up in 2012 by Ms Caz Coleman, previous director of the Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker Project, who undertook extensive interviews, drawing on her experience to establish models of best practice for refugee resettlement. Because of continual policy changes by the Federal Government, we had to keep adjusting the research. In addition, Caz was a member of a government advisory committee on refugee settlement, and was seconded by the government for other roles. She has been in the process of handing over her research and writing to date to Dr Tony Ward, who has offered to see the writing through to completion. In view of the fraught political climate about asylum seekers, this project is even more relevant now than when it started. We plan to have this completed and published by mid-2013.

- **The report by Dr. Joan Daw, "Young People, Faith and Social Justice"**, required extensive editing for a less academic audience. This has been completed largely by Ms Judy Benson and Bruce Duncan with support from Rowan Ireland and Paul Rule. The 55,000-word report has been sent to the printers and will be published by the Yarra Institute Press and formally launched in early 2013. This will be the third of YIRSP Press publications, following Dr Tony Ward's report and the Geoff Lacey's *Sufficient for the Day* in 2011.
- **A research program on 'Torture' by Dr. Cal Ledsham.** This has progressed well but has been delayed this year due to the further expanded work load of the author. We are still expecting this to be completed early in 2013 and ready for publishing by the middle of 2013.
- The online **Directory of Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support Services of the Australian Churches and Associated Organisations** has been extensively revised and updated by Susy Herlihy. This is based on the original version by Dr Kirsty Sangster under the guidance of Rowan Ireland.
- Under the general editorship of Dr Peter Price, the Yarra Institute has also been preparing an issue of the **ATF journal, Interface**, for publication in early 2013 on **Globalisation**, with chapters by Dr Paul Rule, Dr John D'Arcy May, Dr Robyn Reynolds, Dr Rowan Ireland, Dr Stephen Ames, Dr Wes Campbell, Professor Therese D'Orsa and Dr Bruce Duncan. All papers have been submitted, externally reviewed and accepted. Many thanks from all of us to Peter Price for his tireless work in shepherding this project to the publishers!
- **"I Have a Story to Tell – The Catholic Church in Timor Leste"**. Dr Jim and Professor Therese D'Orsa have continued working with Bishop Hilton Deakin to write up his recollections of the involvement of the Catholic Church in East Timor's struggles for independence. The material has been organised and research pursued, with the aim of completing the project in late 2013.
- **The development of Catholic Social Services in Victoria.** The Yarra Institute has been in contact with Fr Kevin Mogg about his long involvement with the Catholic and other agencies involved with service delivery in Victoria. Ms Anne Tuohy has undertaken initial research with Fr Mogg. Catholic Social Services Victoria has indicated that they will help fund this project. The project is complex, as it involves not just the development of CSSV, but Fr Mogg's role in developing prison ministry, seminary education, and the implementation of the renewal of the Second Vatican Council. It may be necessary for several researchers to contribute to this project.

FURTHER PROPOSALS

- Professor Therese D'Orsa is intending to rework for publication her doctoral thesis on the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, combining its history and an assessment of its significance then and now. A draft of the book is expected to be completed by the end of 2013.
- **The Cyril Hally project.** The late Columban priest, Fr Cyril Hally, was a prominent pioneer in the development of professional training programs for hundreds of Catholic missionaries before working overseas and with indigenous Australians from the 1960s. He was also significant in promoting critical Catholic social thinking and engagement, particularly in association with Pax Christi Australia. Professor Therese and Dr Jim D'Orsa are planning to write a biography of Cyril, detailing his commitment to missiology, improved inter-faith understanding, ecumenism and social thought.

TEACHING

The Yarra Institute continues to promote and develop the teaching programs within the MCD University, and to encourage the offering of units on the social justice traditions within the various Christian denominations, and how they can work collaboratively within Australia and beyond. Dr Ray Cleary in the United Faculty of Theology will be offering a new unit on Anglican traditions of social justice in 2013, and other Colleges also provide a range of social justice units, especially at Yarra Theological Union. The Yarra Institute also encourages post-graduate research, and a number of doctoral candidates are working under supervision of YIRSP Board members.

THE WORK OF THE BOARD 2012

Several matters are particularly worthy of comment. In response to John Bottomley's encouragement to step more often into our governance role rather than management matters, the Board set aside a number of meetings to consider what we are about, especially what is distinctive of YIRSP's research effort. In reflecting on a pre-publication version of Bruce Duncan's *Social Justice*, the Board readily affirmed that our understanding of social justice is deeply rooted in the Christian Bible. We especially appreciated the way Bruce's writing was accessible to non-academic readers. We also affirmed the theme, again voiced by John Bottomley that social justice is a way of being. Our minutes show numerous other important themes were voiced by Board members. I think we have not yet brought this discussion to a conclusion. One reason for thinking this is the immanent publication of the issue of the ATF journal *Interface*, on 'Globalisation', in which Board members give an indication of their own approach to Christian social thinking in relation to this important theme.

This discussion brought forward a concern that has been part of the Board's discussion, viz., the new relationship between YIRSP and the MCD University. We are clear that we want to be a research unit of the MCD and especially the University's research unit on social justice. The Board's discussions yielded a letter sent to Dr. Mark Lindsay, Director of Research, MCD University (copy appended) setting out our interest in this matter. The response from Mark Lindsay was positive but explained that the University could not progress this matter until after it had finished its own strategic planning in November 2012. It will be taken up in 2013. YIRSP is founded in an ecumenical ethos, and its further developing its ecumenical links and involvements.

To this end we have begun conversations with Professor Randal Prior, Vice-president of the United Faculty of Theology and Principal of the Uniting Church Theological College, and Dr. Ray Cleary, the Sambell Lecturer in Public Theology at the Trinity College Theological School. In 2013 we will be in touch with Whitley Theological School and with the Salvation Army Training College. We hope this whole initiative will have been very significantly advanced by the end of 2013.

A concern for the Board is the unexpectedly extended period before research projects are ready for publication. The reasons are not straightforward. One factor is that we cannot pay someone to devote themselves full time to this research. YIRSP will require more substantial funding to enable researchers to devote their energies more fully to their projects.

Conference in 2013 The Board strongly endorsed Bruce's proposal that YIRSP organise a conference in 2013 calling on the various traditions represented in the MCD University of Divinity to present the key principles of their social thinking together with significant stories valued by their tradition. This will raise the profile of social justice studies in the MCD University, widen ecumenical links, identify common ground and strengthen the capacity of the University to speak in the public arena on social justice issues. This is one of the ways we can act on the University's encouragement to promote our ecumenical connections.

FUND-RAISING

Fund-raising continues to be a significant obstacle to further development. The Director has been unable to devote time to fundraising, and our financial resources, though adequate for the moment, are limited. We need to work out new strategies for further fund-raising in 2013, and to secure significant grants for important research projects. The Institute is again greatly indebted to our previous financial supporters, particularly the Good Shepherd Foundation, the Redemptorist Congregation, the Dominican Friars, the McLeod Family Trust and Dr Jim and Professor Therese D'Orsa, along with several research grants from the MCD itself. It is apparent that to develop YIRSP further we will need the help of someone experienced in fund-raising.

WEBSITE at www.yarrainstitute.org.au

The website has continued to develop under the expert work of Matthew Howard. The Board warmly thanks Matthew for his creativity, skill and dedication to YIRSP to enable us to have the widest possible impact through our website, helping us connect with other research organisations in Australia and overseas. For instance, through the website a UK research scholar, Sally May, applied to do a placement with us. She has had previous experience in analysing settlement policies for refugees and asylum seekers. Sally wrote a report on her research, which is on our Yarra Institute website at <http://www.yarrainstitute.org.au/Publications/Articles.aspx>.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the members of the Board for their time, energies and thoughtful contributions to the deliberations and work of the Institute. On behalf of the Board I would like to express our thanks to Social Policy Connection's Susy Herlihy, who has helped us in various ways during the year, and especially to Mr Peter Whiting for his diligence in managing our banking and accounts.

We are also most grateful for the hospitality offered to YIRSP by the Yarra Theological Union, providing an office and use of facilities, as part of their commitment to promote deeper understanding of the social implications of the Gospels and closer co-operation among Christian traditions as they engage with current social issues and challenges.

Finally, on behalf of the Board may I again very warmly thank our Director, Dr Bruce Duncan, for his efforts to promote Christian social teaching, for his teaching at YTU, for his initiatives to identify research projects as well as likely researchers, and for his endeavours to raise funds to further the work of the Institute. Especially appreciated is his arranging the hospitality for the many events at YIRSP. We celebrate with him the opportunity 2012 brought for him to focus on his own writing, giving us *Social Justice, A Fuller Life in a Fairer World*.

Rev. Dr. Stephen Ames
Chair of the Board
Yarra Institute for Religion and Social Policy