

CHRISTIANS FOR AN ETHICAL SOCIETY

Minutes of Seventh Annual General Meeting
Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture Boardroom
George Browning House, 15 Blackall St, Barton
Monday 29 August 2016 at 5 pm

Present

Bishop George Browning (chair), Robyn Coghlan, Bill Bush, Clive Rodger, Stephen Pickard, David Hunter, Bruce Bowman and Mary Bush.

Apologies

John Neville, Ingrid Moses, Werner Padarin, Thorwald Lorenzen, Jeremy Dawson, Heather McLaren, Gillian King, Paul and Betty Meyer.

Welcome

The Chair welcomed all members to the eighth AGM and opened with prayer.

Quorum

A quorum of eight was present.

Previous Minutes

The minutes of the previous AGM were taken as read. Robyn moved that the report be accepted and Stephen seconded the motion. The motion was passed without dissent.

Annual Report

George read the annual report, a copy of which is attached to these minutes. Membership through 2015/16 was 50. At present, 42 memberships have been paid for 2016/17. Clive extended thanks to George for his leadership through the year and moved that the report be accepted, seconded David. Agreed by all.

Financial Report

The financial report for 2015/16 showed that the bank balance at 30 June 2016 was \$10,382.54. This sum included advance payments of \$1,900 for the 2016 dinner forum which will be expended in the following financial year. A copy of the financial statement is attached to the minutes. Moved Clive, seconded Stephen, that the report be accepted. Passed without dissent.

Election of office-bearers

Bruce Bowman took the Chair for the election.

President: Clive nominated Thorwald to continue in the position of President. Agreed by all.

Chair: Clive nominated George who indicated his willingness to hold the position of chair, seconded Bill, all in favour. In the absence of any other nominations, George was declared chairperson.

Vice-Chair: Clive nominated David, seconded Robyn. There being no other nominations, David was declared elected to the position of Vice-Chair of the CES.

Secretary: Clive nominated Robyn, seconded Mary. There being no other nominations, she was declared elected to the position of Secretary for the following year.

Treasurer: Clive nominated Jeremy, seconded Stephen. There being no other nominations, he was declared elected to the position of Treasurer.

Election of other committee members

Clive nominated and Mary seconded the following existing committee members:

- Bill Bush,
- Ingrid Moses,
- Stephen Pickard and
- Werner Padarin,

Clive also nominated a new member, Cath Blunt, whom Mary also seconded.

Clive Rodger was nominated by David, seconded Robyn.

There being no other nominations, all six people were declared elected.

Other business

Bill proposed a motion of thanks to John Neville who has retired from the committee but will remain the CES contact with the NSW Ecumenical Council.

Emeritus Professor John Neville

It was with much regret that the 2016 Annual General Meeting of Christians for an Ethical Society received an email from Professor John Neville indicating his decision not to stand again for election to the CES committee. It is not easy to imagine how the organisation will continue to function without his principled commitment to ecumenism and recognition of the importance of Christian values in the public sphere. We and the broader community have much for which to thank him, especially:

- * his commitment to CES values of inclusiveness, equity, and justice;
- * his skill and wisdom in balancing economic, social and political considerations;
- * the leadership he provided CES in its formative years to establish its identity and role;
- * the stability he secured for CES as a working group of the New South Wales Ecumenical Council;
- * his contacts with other leading economic thinkers, securing speakers for many of our most important and influential forums.

His presence on the committee will be greatly missed, whilst his continuing counsel will be welcome and sought.

Clive suggested that this tribute be read at the next forum.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 5.40 pm.

Christians for an Ethical Society

Annual Report 2015-2016

In the last twelve months Australians have ridden an emotional roller coaster in terms of our hopes for a more just, equitable and fair society. Almost 12 months ago Prime Minister Tony Abbott was replaced by Malcolm Turnbull and hopes rose that we might leave behind the fractious political culture that had become the norm and enter a period in which there might be cross party commitment to policy that could build a better, more altruistic and fairer Australian future. Twelve months on there is obvious disappointment in the electorate that this has not happened, the only difference appears to be that major division has now erupted within government rather than between government and opposition.

This year our theme has been *Common Life-Common Good*. Under this umbrella we have endeavoured, through our forums, to redress the neo liberal economic movement which is seeing the privatisation of almost everything. At the heart of the Christian Gospel is belief that what we hold in common is of greater significance and value than what we might privately possess or control. As James Haire said two years ago, ‘placing the individual on a pedestal independent of the society to which they belong, and allowing everything to be exploited for profit is a very quirky idea in the context of the New Testament’.

May I point out three serious outcomes of the privatisation of everything:

1. Australians have been misled into believing we are struggling economically. On a world scale this is manifestly untrue. We can be tricked into believing it is true if we are to believe that wealth must be privately captured rather than commonly shared. If it is to be privately captured then everyone is out to capture as much as they possibly can, a few will be very substantial winners whereas most will be losers, many seriously so. On an international scale an outcome of this thinking has led Australia to contribute the lowest level of international aid as a percentage of GDP since the end of WW2. Because we need domestic ‘budget repair’, the low hanging fruit to achieve this has been to cut the help we give to others. This is not simply uncharitable, it is strategically stupid. A world in which the wealthy do not assist the poorest is a world that is much less safe, a world in which conflict is more likely, and repair of the planet on which all depend is impossible.
2. We are privatising assets which should never be for sale as profit making businesses. Perhaps the worst example is our gaols. We have shamefully seen on Nauru, Manus and more recently in the Northern Territory examples of a system which is designed to cut costs and focus almost entirely on incarceration. Apparently little if any attempt is made at rehabilitation or restitution. The cruelty meted out to those incarcerated is manifestly and shamefully obvious. What is also obvious but not sufficiently aired is that this does not make society safer, it costs an inordinate sum of money and lives that could have been rehabilitated into contributing members of our community are destined to remain despised and on the edge, sometimes generationally so. Apparently the US is rethinking the advisability of contracting out its penal system. It is past time we did the same.
3. Legislation is being passed, or sometimes not being passed, which protects profit making over the interests of communities and their social wellbeing. The NSW

Government has passed legislation which is making it very difficult for communities in the Hunter Valley, the Liverpool Plains and the Gloucester region to protect themselves and their communities from the powerful vested interests of the mining and fracking industries, despite the massive long term damage (still being debated) to the environment, water tables and prime agricultural land. Also, the Federal Government has so far refused to pass legislation which might curb poker machine gambling, despite the known fact that the vast poker machine economy is almost entirely drawn from the lower socio-economic community. This is a clear example of the poor supporting benefits to the wealthy as the government take is then re-distributed for the benefit of all.

I use these three examples to demonstrate that the need for CES and forums like it has never been greater. Debate in Australia on serious issues that affect the lives of present and future generations is seriously dumbed down. It is a serious matter that the Christian voice has almost entirely been silenced. This is partly our own fault because of the well publicised failings of the institutional Church, and also because we are perceived to be people who are besotted only with issues of private morality. But it is also because the profit gauging world does not want to hear the Christian message that there is another way. A message that human wellbeing, contentment, even happiness are not commodities that can be bought but are outcomes of a shared life within community where blessing emanates from belonging, not owning or controlling.

Once again, in the last twelve months we have been privileged to host outstanding forums:

1. 27 August: Tim Costello spoke on "*Fortress Australia - myth or reality?*"
2. 20 October: Steve Hatfield Dodds of the CSIRO discussed climate change in "*Environment or Economy: a False Dichotomy*".
3. 11 November 2015: Speaking on the Catholic Bishops' 2015-16 Social Justice Statement: *For Those Who've Come Across the Seas: Justice for refugees and asylum seekers* were Jon Stanhope, Sr Jane Keogh and Felix Macharidza (a refugee from Zimbabwe) with Genevieve Jacobs moderating – a joint forum with the Catholic Social Justice Commission.
4. 24 February 2016: Bishop George Browning gave a theological framework for the 2016 theme "*Common wealth, common good*".
5. 20 April 2016: Rt Rev'd Professor Stephen Pickard spoke on "*Religion, Violence and the Peaceable Kingdom*".
6. 25 May 2016: Dr Brendan Long of the ACCC spoke on "*A Christian Vision for Tax Reform in Australia*".

They have been well attended and appreciated.

A feature of the last 12 months has been our growing partnership with the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture. Apart from our dinner, all the other forums are held at the Centre as are our executive meetings. Our hope is that as the Centre improves its social media and on-line capacity, we will be able to benefit from this.

Our Executive over the last 12 months has comprised: myself as Chair, David Hunter (Vice Chair), Jeremy Dawson (Treasurer), Robyn Coghlan (Secretary), Stephen Pickard (ACC&C), Bill Bush, Clive Rodger, Ingrid Moses, Werner Padarin and John Nevile. We were blessed to

retain Dr Thorwald Lorenzen for a further 12 months as our patron. Thorwald remains a wonderful contributor and attends most of our executive meetings.

It is my hope that in the coming year we can increase the effectiveness of our forums beyond the night in which they are delivered and the audience that hears them. It is vital that the issues raised at these forums are heard by the wider community. What is meant by “It has never been a more exciting time to be an Australian” I am not entirely sure. However what I am sure of is that the future has to be more about collaboration and less about competition, more about shared values and less about private ambition, more about the Common Good, if future generations are going to enjoy the privileged life that has been the fortunate lot of my generation.

That this is not a voice from the political left, but from the Christian centre, needs also to be understood within Australian communities of faith.

Bishop George Browning

29 August 2016

CES FINANCIAL STATEMENT 2015/16

The tables below give results on a cash basis and "accruals" basis, mainly because, at the end of the financial year, payments totalling \$1,900 were received in advance for the dinner forum in July 2016. The cash basis statement corresponds to the bank account statements. The accruals basis statement gives a better picture of the actual financial position. This will allow the CES financial flexibility to invite interstate speakers for whom we will need to pay travelling and accommodation expenses.

We owe thanks to the ACC&C for the use of the chapel, which was previously charged at the normal fee of \$200 per forum, later reduced to \$100 per forum in support of CES and now no charge at all since CES and ACC&C have established a closer relationship.

Jeremy Dawson
CES Treasurer

26 August 2016

CES period cash balance

Opening balance	6860.44
Period Results	
Income	
Dinner	6800.00
Forums	1500.50
Donation	320.00
Interest	0.80
Membership	620.00
Total Income	9241.30
Expenses	
Dinner	~5253.75
ACTCC	~85.00
Internet	~319.85
Forums	~60.60
Total Expenses	~5719.20
Total Period Results	3522.10
Total	10382.54

CES period accrual balance

Opening balance	6720.44
Income	
Dinner	5000.00
Forums	1500.50
Donation	320.00
Interest	0.80
Membership	555.00
Total Income	7376.30
Expenses	
Dinner	~5253.95
ACTCC	~85.00
Internet	~177.40
Forums	~60.60
Total	~5576.95
Expenses	
Total Period Results	1799.35
Total	8519.79

