



Media Release

## How changes in Christianity are impacting public life

The Australian Prime Minister's very public commitment to his Pentecostal faith has prompted awareness of the potential impact of new styles of Christianity on Australian public life.

New evangelical movements have distinctive attitudes to power and authority which have major implications for society in many spheres including scientific authority, the dissemination of conspiracy theories, and attitudes to wealth and social justice.

In the US evangelicals have developed their own intellectual infrastructure, generating distinctive positions on race, sexuality, health care and the environment, and influencing believers through their own media and education networks. The same trends are now being felt in Australia.

A symposium hosted by Australian Catholic University and Deakin University on 29 and 30 July will bring together North American and Australian researchers to study the way Christianity has related to public life in each country over the past 50 years.

Symposium co-convenor ACU historian Dr Michael Thompson said Australians often perceive the influence of religion on politics as an example of American culture influencing Australia, but in fact there is traffic both ways.

“Some ideas cross really easily but others are very particular to one country or the other. The idea of a ‘Christian nation’ is one that has been embraced by both American and Australian evangelicals but the idea of a ‘Chosen Nation’ fits much better with US exceptionalism and hasn’t been taken up in Australia.

“US Christian thinking is more heavily libertarian. Government is seen as the antithesis of liberty. In Australia, the Christian view has been more to see the state as having social responsibility for the vulnerable.”

The conference will cover issues including the relationship between racism and religion, the effect of religious lobbyists on electoral politics and the place of Indigenous spirituality in Christianity.

**On racism and religion**, the symposium will welcome keynote speaker Associate Professor Willie James Jennings, from Yale Divinity School. Associate Professor Jennings is the author of *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (2020), which unveils the white supremacist and masculinist underpinnings of American theological education.

**On US politics and the Christian lobby**, Professor Kristin Kobes du Mez of Calvin University, will discuss her New York Times bestseller *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (2020) which looks at the influence of the Christian lobby on US electoral politics from Ronald Reagan to Donald Trump.

**On Indigenous Christianity, Dr Garry Deverell**, inaugural Vice-Chancellor's Fellow in Indigenous Theologies at the University of Divinity in Melbourne, will discuss post-colonial conversations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Christians. He is the author of *Gondwana theology: A Trawlolway man reflects on Christian faith* (2018).

**Symposium details:**

**Title:** Intellectual Authority and its Changing Infrastructures in North American and Australian Christianity, 1960s-2010s

**Dates:** July 29-30

**Venue:** Online and in-person at ACU Brisbane's CBD Leadership Centre

**Cost:** Free

**Details and registration:** <https://intellectual-authority.eventbrite.com.au>

**Dr Michael Thompson and the keynote speakers are available for interview.**

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