



Negotiating the Sacred V: Abstracts

Keynote speakers

Lori G. Beaman



Religious diversity and family matters: Polygamy and the limits of the law

Polygamy has been the topic of much debate and controversy in Canada and the United States in the past year, often making the news with dramatic events involving alleged child and woman abuse, police raids, and the deliberate 'flaunting' of illegal activities. How can we make sense of this seeming sudden attention to a family form that has existed relatively quietly for at least a century in communities across Canada and the United States?

Biographical note

Lori G. Beaman holds a Canada Research Chair in the Contextualization of Religion in a Diverse Canada at the University of Ottawa. Trained in sociology, law and philosophy, she brings an interdisciplinary perspective to her central research focus which is religious freedom and its regulation. Her books include *Defining Harm: Religious Freedom and the Limits of the Law*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press (2008); *Religion and Canadian Society: Traditions, Transitions and Innovations*, Toronto: Scholar's Press (2006) and *Religion, Globalization and Culture*, edited with Peter Beyer, Leiden: Brill Academic Press (2007). She presents her work regularly at international conferences, and has published articles in numerous scholarly journals, including *Nova Religio*, *Sociology of Religion*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* and *Church and State*.



Gary D. Bouma



Religion and governing the family

All religions have images and ideals of the human family. These images and ideals range widely and are in no small part informed by social and cultural factors. For example, polygamy is more likely to emerge in societies with a high mortality rate among young males. Once in place, these images and ideals are likely to be given religious sanction – ‘God wants(ed) it thus’. A religiously plural society like Australia is likely to experience contestation between different religious groups as they seek to use the state to enforce their religiously sanctioned images and ideals. This is evident in the current debates about gay marriage and polygamy, the earlier debate about re-marriage of divorced persons, and debates about other aspects of family life from contraception and abortion to the provision of facilities suitable to couples in their senescence. In all of this it is the temptation, or in the case of some – e.g. Calvinists, Catholics and Wahabbi Muslims – the perceived requirement to use the state to impose on others the views of some poses a threat to the smooth functioning of democracy in a religiously plural society. There may also be situations where secularists impose their images and ideals upon others using the state.

Biographical note

Gary D. Bouma is Professor Emeritus of Sociology and UNESCO Chair in Intercultural and Interreligious Relations – Asia Pacific at Monash University, and Chair of Board of Directors for The Parliament of the World’s Religions 2009. He is



Associate Priest in the Anglican Parish of St John's East Malvern. His research in the sociology of religion examines the management of religious diversity in plural multicultural societies, postmodernity as a context for doing theology, religion and terror, inter-cultural communication, religion and public policy, women and religious minorities, and gender factors in clergy careers. Recent books include: *Australian Soul: Religion and Spirituality in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge University Press) and *Democracy in Islam* (Routledge) which he has written with Sayed Khatab.

Chandran Kukathas



Do children have interests?

It is widely held that children have interests that deserve protection, by the law, by the state, and by international conventions. But before we can consider the merits of different measures to protect children it is important to ask whether or not children do indeed have interests and, if they do, what these might be. In this paper I suggest that children do not have interests and therefore that, whatever protections they require must have some other basis than that of attending to their interests. I also suggest that they have many fewer claims to protection than is sometimes asserted.

Biographical note

Chandran Kukathas is Professor of Political Theory in the Department of Government at the London School of Economics. He previously taught at the University of Utah, and was also for many years taught political theory at the Australian Defence Force



Academy. He is the author of *Hayek and Modern Liberalism* (OUP 1989) and *The Liberal Archipelago: A Theory of Diversity and Freedom* (OUP 2003). He has also published widely on such topics as multiculturalism, immigration, freedom, equality, and global justice.

Other speakers

Ibrahim Abraham

We are all bourgeois now, or, the death and life of a model minority Muslim

Drawing on Marxist, psychoanalytic and Foucauldian social theories, this paper seeks to reassert the question of class in discussions of religion and the family, specifically the Muslim family in popular discourse in Australia. Using the media circus surrounding the death of Turkish-Australian Muslim millionaire businessmen Mustapha 'Crazy John' Ilhan as a jumping-off point, I will argue that the familiar cultural tropes of the so-called 'Western' bourgeois family are emerging within the discourse of Australia's Muslim communities. As this paper will argue, the construction of 'Crazy John' as a model Muslim, ideal immigrant and, above all, admirable 'family man', in both the liberal and conservative press, had as much to do with his reactionary politics and brutal business practices as it did with his clear devotion to his wife and children. For despite the fact that three quarters of Australian Muslims are working class, and the moral panic of predatory (Arab, male, heterosexual) Muslim sexual violence has been a key ingredient in media depictions of Australian Islam, an emergent retainer class of bourgeois Muslims – 'Crazy John' amongst them – began to shift the grounds of discourse, articulating conservative discourses of family, nation and material ambition in line with the broadly *petit bourgeois* family-focussed political culture cultivated by the Howard and Rudd governments.

Biographical note

Ibrahim Abraham has degrees in religion studies, law and sociology from Monash University where he is a tutor in sociology and a research assistant in the Religion, Finance and Ethics project. He has published articles on Islam and cultural politics in the *Australian Religion Studies Review* and *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, and has an article on Islam and sexuality in Australia forthcoming in *Contemporary Islam*. He has presented numerous conference papers in Australia and the USA on the relationship between religion and culture, gender, sexuality, psychoanalysis, politics, punk and Palestine.



Gwenda Baker

Divine intervention: The disruption of Aboriginal family life in Arnhem Land

In the early 20th century missionaries moved into Arnhem Land as agents of the first major European intervention into Arnhem Land Aboriginal lives. Although Methodist missionaries were regarded as comparatively moderate and accepting of Aboriginal structures and belief systems, there was a general ignorance of Aboriginal social organisational structures and the ties and obligations which held Aboriginal society together. The Church favoured the nuclear family model and the missions became partners with government in imposing western marriage conventions and family organisation. The disruption of family associations and responsibilities through both contact and direct action has had a persistent and disabling effect on Aboriginal families in the artificial communities created by government and mission activity. Aboriginal leaders are now working to return to the patterns of obligations and relationships that serve to keep Aboriginal people strong. This paper will consider the ways in which the presence, teachings and activities of the Methodist missionaries impacted on Aboriginal families and the processes of change. I will consider three issues in this regard: evangelisation as a disruptive force; the pursuit of the individual versus the responsibilities of the Aboriginal family; and marriage and the intervention of church and state.

Biographical note

Gwenda Baker is an Honorary Research Associate at the Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies, Monash University. Her research specialty is Australian Aboriginal contact history: the interactions between Aborigines, governments and missions. Her thesis looked at Methodist missions in Arnhem Land, where she lived in the late 1960s. Her current research involves new ways of examining 'mission time'. In 2005, she was awarded a Northern Territory History Award for further research in Arnhem Land. She is currently working on a book incorporating stories of mission life at Galiwin'ku, Elcho Island.



John Bradley



'The things we dare to presume' Family, identity and country

The intervention into Indigenous communities has drawn Australia's gaze to northern Australia. Indigenous communities have been portrayed as lacking in social capital, human values; they are seen to be violent and dysfunctional places while through silence the rest of Australia is seen to be functional. This presentation seeks to explore some life from within one particular community in the south west Gulf of Carpentaria and present another view of what communities are doing, where despite adversity and the lack of Governmental ears in regard to what may 'needed', issues of identity and what the sacred may be in 2008 are still important issues that are worth constant engagement.

Biographical note

John Bradley is a Senior Lecturer and Deputy Director of the Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies at Monash University. The majority of his research has been undertaken in the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria with particular emphasis on the marine and island environments of the Sir Edward Pellew Group of Islands, the country of the Yanyuwa people. Much of this work has dealt with the value of intangible heritage and how it can be utilised in regard to joint protection of both biological species and heritage sites. My most important contributions to this field has been in regard to ethno-biology, Indigenous language maintenance, land and sea rights and documenting Indigenous knowledge. His recent work has involved working with the Yanyuwa people in the storyboarding of 400 kilometres of song lines and 30 other major texts with a view to animation. He is also a member of a UNESCO panel that is concerned with the future of Indigenous knowledge in the 21st century.



Veronica Brady

The sacred and the social extreme

The evidence suggests that little sense of the sacred, the *'mysterium tremendum et fascinans'* inheres today in the institution of marriage or of social institutions in general in Australia today. This is probably not surprising, given that ours is an essentially pragmatic and utilitarian society, suspicious of the unseen or apparently speculative. I would like to argue, however that a sense of the sacred has migrated to the fringes of social experience and to focus on the specific experience of the people, mostly young people and drop outs at the centre of Tim Winton's two most recent books, *The Turning* and *Breath*, works which seem to me to have the kind of ontological reference Levinas attributes to literature, an ability to describe 'the true life which is absent' from everyday secular society. If there is time I would like to consider what that might have to tell us about the nature and needs of this everyday society.

Biographical note

Veronica Brady is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow in the Department of English and Cultural Studies in the University of Western Australia. She is also a Roman Catholic nun interested in the conjunction – if any – of theology, literature and society. She has published widely both in Australia and overseas and her most recent books are *South of My Days*, a biography of Judith Wright, and a collection of essays, *The God-Shaped Hole*.

- [Download Brady's paper here](#) (PDF)



Rachel Buchanan

Going full circle: Tracing the evolution of the concept of marriage

This paper traces the evolution of the concept of marriage. Within the Judaic Christian tradition marriage originated as a patriarchal economic contract conducted between two men, the bride's father and her husband. The Church adopted marriage as a sacrament, a covenant mirroring the relationship between God and the Church. It is this aspect that gives marriage its sanctity. But with man, like God, as the head of the house, the sacrament of marriage retains its patriarchal underpinnings. Modern, and more secular conceptions of marriage see a return to the notion of marriage as a contract, yet, between husband and wife as opposed to between father and husband. The modern perspective on marriage views the husband and wife as equal and consenting partners in a legal union, a contract that can be understood as a way of freeing marriage from the more patriarchal and paternalistic aspects of previous conceptions. This paper will contrast these varying conceptions of marriage, and discuss the implications of marriage as a contract between consenting parties, a definition which could be opened up to include homosexual relationships. This paper will argue although the changing definitions of marriage take into account the changes in the status of women that have taken place in the past two centuries, marriage retains an economic dimension, affected by societal pressures and governmental policies and is still a site of complex negotiations and territorial disputes.

Biographical note

Rachel Buchanan completed her Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Social Science (Hons) at the University of Newcastle. She is currently working toward her PhD at the University of Newcastle in the field of Educational Philosophy. Her thesis is called 'Towards a New Epistemology of Feminism'.



Melanie Landau



Challenging the sacred with the sacred: An insiders feminist critique of the laws of Jewish marriage

This paper will draw on my current PhD research about the acquisition that forms the basis of traditional Jewish marriage and will explore the challenges of creating new models, within the Jewish legal tradition, for imagining partnership. Social values have always played a major role in the determination of Jewish law. This means that the law is always mediated through the values and responses elicited in particular milieu. This paper will unravel some of the gendered assumptions inherent in the model of marriage – embraced knowingly or unknowingly by many Jews today – and will trace their development through time. It will explore where shifts have been made and in what direction and it will map out the limits and trajectories of future potential change. Is non-reciprocity the defining legal character of Jewish marriage? What is the extent of this non-reciprocity? This paper will adopt an approach based on the Philosophy of Halakha (Jewish Law) that brings together the historical philological mode of analysing Jewish law with the more conceptual analytical mode.

Biographical note

Melanie Landau is currently a PhD candidate in School of Historical Studies at Monash University. She is a lecturer and community educator at the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation where she is also Associate Director. As well as an academic interest in the area, Melanie facilitates learning and ritual in relation to life-cycle events including marriage.



Siobhan McHugh



Marrying out: Catholic/Protestant unions in Australia 1920s-70s

For over 150 years, until post-war migration diluted the mix, Australia was polarised between the majority Anglo Protestant Establishment and a minority Irish Catholic underclass. Religious differences reflected social and political tensions derived from colonial days and exacerbated by organisations like Freemasons, the Orange Lodge and Catholic secret societies. A self-imposed religious apartheid often saw Catholics go to Catholic schools, socialise in Catholic groups and work in traditional Catholic areas like the public service. Protestants likewise mingled mostly with their own, as a 1930s brochure, *The Protestant's Guide to Shopping in Rockhampton*, hilariously demonstrates. Following the 1908 Ne Temere papal decree, religious and family protocols strongly discouraged inter-faith marriages – yet a quarter of Australian Catholics continued to marry 'out' until the late 1960s (Mol 1970). Such 'mixed marriages' often caused deep family divisions, from disinheritance to social exclusion. Children brought up in such marriages sometimes suffered a confused identity, not fully accepted by either 'side'. The sectarian attitudes of the period no longer apply to Catholics and Protestants in Australia, but parallels can be drawn with post 9/11 attitudes towards Muslims – the new 'Other'.

This paper is based on 42 oral histories of participants in a mixed marriage, children reared in one, or Protestant and Catholic clerics. The research will be the basis for a Doctorate in Creative Arts.



Biographical note

Siobhan McHugh is an award-winning author and broadcaster, who lectures in Journalism at the University of Wollongong. She co-wrote the television documentary series, *The Irish Empire* and *Echo of a Distant Drum*, which explore the history of the Irish diaspora. Her book, *The Snowy – The People behind the Power*, won the NSW Premier's Award for non-fiction, while her other social history work has been shortlisted for the NSW Premier's History Prize, a Eureka Science award, the United Nations Media Peace Prize and a Walkley Award for Excellence in Journalism.

Frances Morphy



Invisible to the State: Kinship and the Yolngu moral order

In the Yolngu-matha languages of north-east Arnhem land, the character trait rendered in English as 'self-centred' or 'selfish' is translated by *gurrutu-miriw*, literally 'kin-lacking' – acting as if one had no kin. Kin-based obligations structure the Yolngu moral order: everyone is classified as kin, and how one ought to behave to others is framed in terms of one's kin relationship to them. The complex system of rights and obligations entailed in this kin-based universe transcends the boundaries of the nuclear family – indeed elsewhere I have argued (Morphy 2006) that the nuclear family, which is vested with such moral force in the Anglo-Celtic culture of the Australian mainstream, is not a 'natural' category in Yolngu society.

Yet the state, through mechanisms such as the census, insists on representing Indigenous social formations through the lens of mainstream categories. I will illustrate this briefly from my research on the 2006 Census. Does this matter? I will argue that it does, because, having rendered Indigenous socio-moral systems invisible through a process of mistranslation, the state then proceeds, in policy directed towards Indigenous people, to act as if these systems do not exist. I will illustrate this from the latest thinking on 'increasing Indigenous economic opportunity', outlined in a recent discussion paper produced by the Australian Government. (Morphy, F. 2006. 'Lost in



translation? Remote Indigenous households and definitions of the family',
Family Matters, 73: 23–31.)

Biographical note

Frances Morphy is a Fellow at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University. An anthropologist and linguist, her research since 1974 has been predominantly focused on the Yolngu-speaking people of north east Arnhem Land.

- [Download Morphy's paper here](#) (PDF)
- [Frances Morphy's staff page at ANU](#)

Padmasiri de Silva

The model of the family in a Buddhist community: Responding to change and secularisation

The first part of the paper would describe the traditional model of the Buddhist family as contained in a celebrated sermon, *The Sigalovada Sutta* which outlines a network of six patterns of relationships. The reciprocal relations of duties and responsibilities revolve round parents and children, husband and wife, pupils and teachers, friends and friends, masters and servants, householders and monks. Certain basic values preserve these relationships and emphasize the Buddhist philosophy of interconnectedness. In the world today, with the increasing emphasis on human rights, and the impact of modernization, the ancient logic of reciprocity needs to be restored or re-interpreted. We need a framework that emphasizes not merely the morality of rights but also that of responsibility.

It is of great interest that Carol Gilligan in the West emphasized that we need an ethic of care to supplement the ethic of rights: the morality of rights is predicted on equality and centred on the understanding of fairness, while the ethic of responsibility relies on the concept of equity, the recognition of differences in need and gives rise to compassion and care. In east Asia, Buddhist focus on the family has been influenced by the ethics of Confucius. The Confucian discourse focus on certain moral virtues cementing family links: kindness in the father, filial duty on the son, kindness in the elder brother, obedience in the younger and so on. The Buddhist family network is both similar and yet different but both focus on reciprocity and interconnectedness.

Today, the institution of marriage in particular and other relationships are facing challenges and the Buddhist community in Melbourne has made attempts to preserve the coherence of traditional family values, and this paper



attempts to examine the challenges of secularization, and the potential to develop as well as the obstructions for the role of the family as a spiritual vehicle and an agent of social cohesion.

Biographical note

Padmasiri de Silva (PhD in Comparative Philosophy, University of Hawaii; Advanced Diploma in Counselling, Sophia College, Perth) is currently a Research Associate of the Department of Historical Studies and Centre for Religion at Monash University. He was formerly Professor & Head/Philosophy and Psychology, Peradeniya University, Sri Lanka. He held visiting positions at the University of Pittsburgh, National University of Singapore and University of Waikato. His publications include, *Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*; *Environmental Philosophy and Ethics in Buddhism*; *Buddhism, Ethics & Society*; *and a _Explorers of Inner Space*.

- [Download De Silva's paper here](#) (PDF)

Salih Yucel



The correlation between religion and the Australian Muslim family

According to consensus among Muslim scholars, Islam has five aims. One of these aims is to safeguard the family. The Qur'an lists a righteous spouse who is pleasing as one of the greatest blessings a person can receive from God. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated that marriage is half of the religion. 13th century scholars Shatibi, Imam Ghazzali, and other major scholars, found a strong relationship between religiosity and family life. In order to examine this view, a survey was conducted amongst 350 Australian Muslims aged between 18 and 70. The findings show that 78 percent of respondents hold the conviction that religion protects and strengthens family



ties and family life. Female respondents were slightly more likely to value that relationship. Younger respondents are less likely to hold this view. Respondents born in Australia give the least value to religion in family life. However, religiosity is still one of important factors in choosing a spouse for most respondents and contributes to individual and family happiness. This study can increase awareness of the role and value of religion in the family, which may then aid family and moral well-being.

Biographical note

Salih Yucel is a lecturer in the Centre for Studies in Religion and Theology at Monash University, and a consultant to the Australian Intercultural Society. He holds a Bachelor of Islamic Theology from the Ankara University, a Master of Theology from the University of Sydney, and a Doctor of Ministry from Boston University. He worked in various ecclesiastical roles for ten years for the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Turkey, was the chairman of Boston Dialogue Foundation, and was pastoral care consultant to Muslim patients in the Harvard Medical School's Hospitals.