

CROSSROADS

Conversations with
Anglican Archbishop Philip Freier

Edited by Barney Zwartz

Published in Australia by
Garratt Publishing
32 Glenvale Crescent
Mulgrave VIC 3170

Copyright © 2015 The Anglican Diocese of Melbourne

All rights reserved. Except as provided by Australian copyright law, no part of this publication may be reproduced in any manner without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

9781925009859

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Title: Crossroads : conversations with Anglican Archbishop Philip Freier / Barney Zwartz (editor).

ISBN: 9781925009859 (paperback)

Subjects: Freier, Philip--Interviews.
Australians--Interviews.

Successful people--Australia--Interviews
Twenty-first century--Forecasts.

National characteristics, Australian.
Australia--Social conditions--2001.

Other Creators/Contributors:

Zwartz, Barney, editor.

Dewey Number: 994.07

The author and publisher gratefully acknowledge the permission granted to reproduce the copyright material in this book. Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyright material.

The publisher apologises for any errors or omissions in the above list and would be grateful if notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in future reprints or editions of this book.

Cartoons © Ron Tandberg

Layout by Upside Creative

Printed in Australia by McPhersons Printing Group

CONTENTS

Introduction	Barney Zwartz	iii
1.	Send in the clones: Loane Skene and Gordon Preece	7
2.	The plaintive prophet: Michael Leunig	15
3.	Where have the relationships gone? Hugh Mackay	23
4.	Children in a toxic society: Noni Hazlehurst and Julie Gale	33
5.	Aboriginal pain and the intervention: Clare Martin and Marcia Langton	43
6.	Fighting for our kids: Rob Moody	53
7.	Growing old gracefully: Tamie Fraser, Noeline Brown and Jim Coulter	61
8.	Staying sane: Patrick McGorry and Kerry Graham	69
9.	The politics we deserve: Malcolm Fraser and Robert Manne	79
10.	A vision for Australia: Frank Brennan and Sharif As-Saber	87
11.	Why children turn to crime: Paul Grant and Paul McDonald	97
12.	Strangers at the gate: Julian Burnside and Jo Knight	105
13.	Virtue and vexation: the 2013 election: Barry Jones and Judith Troeth	113
14.	Losing our religion: Janet McCalman and Barney Zwartz	125
15.	Climate of suspicion: Ross Garnaut and Natalie Isaacs	133

SAMPLE

INTRODUCTION

BARNEY ZWARTZ

Philip Freier was installed as Archbishop of Melbourne on December 16, 2006. His career before that was in northern Australia: science graduate, teacher at a remote Indigenous community, ordained priest in Queensland parishes, then Bishop of the Northern Territory. That is a huge diocese in territory but small in numbers, with 15 parishes. As one Anglican lay leader put it colloquially, he was used to running the diocese himself with a laptop.

The Melbourne diocese to which he was elected had 223 parishes, several hundred clergy, three assistant bishops and a sizeable diocesan team. It was also rather fractious, one electoral synod having failed to come to agreement amid divisions over theological priorities and churchmanship. As religion editor for *The Age* newspaper, I turned up at the second synod at Dallas Brooks Hall to find a couple of security guards. This might be a story, I thought. “Are you expecting trouble?” I asked one. “Oh no, we just have to keep out a journalist, that Barney Zwartz,” he replied. This was highly entertaining, not least because I couldn’t go inside the hall in any case, and people inside would tell me what happened. One of the benefits Archbishop Freier brought was a relaxed and intelligent approach to the news media, not marred by either paranoia or ambition.

From the start, he set out to learn and listen to Melbourne Anglicans and the wider community. Within six weeks of his installation, he began a series of conversations with people in shopping centres and public places around Melbourne. He wanted to discover their fears and aspirations, the issues that dominate their lives, to understand the city. Launched in February 2007, this enterprise was known as the Prayer4Melbourne Quest, and its ultimate goal, he said at the time, was to form a “collective prayer and vision” for the community of Melbourne and beyond.

Two months later, in April 2007, Archbishop Freier launched the first of an ongoing series of public conversations about vital issues confronting contemporary society, often issues about which people felt passionately but were not as informed about as

they might like. This initiative flowed from his philosophy that an informed citizenry is vital in a modern democracy, but this needs to be nurtured. It will not occur in a vacuum. And he is also convinced that the church must be part of that nurturing in ethical and social debates, that it often has wisdom and experience to impart but also needs to listen and learn.

So these conversations have been held at the Edge theatre at Federation Square, usually with two guests (but sometimes one or three) before a public audience, which has the chance to ask questions at the end. There have now been more than 40 of these public conversations, from which I have culled 15 of abiding relevance and edited them for this book.

Topics, apart from those that follow, have included making poverty history, the Indigenous intervention, the role of media, community action, challenges of leadership, a sustainable future, alcohol and youth, homelessness, compassion, refugees, mandatory sentencing, and domestic violence. The conversations have asked searching questions: Is a fair go no-go? Is happiness a dream? Has science replaced faith? Is philanthropy dead? Is overseas aid worth it?

The Archbishop brings to the table a broad knowledge and piercing insights. His qualifications include a PhD from James Cook University, Master of Educational Studies from Newcastle University, Bachelor of Divinity from the Melbourne College of Divinity, Bachelor of Applied Science from the Queensland Institute of Technology and a Diploma in Education from the University of Queensland.

Above all, the calibre of guests has been extremely high. I covered many of these conversations for *The Age*. They often produced news stories because of the original yet authoritative points of view. Discursive and well-balanced, these conversations provide an excellent window into the topics they cover.

Barney Zwartz, a senior fellow at the Centre for Public Christianity, is communications adviser to the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne.

CHAPTER 1

LOANE SKENE AND GORDON PREECE: SEND IN THE CLONES? THE ETHICS OF STEM CELL RESEARCH



GUESTS

Professor Loane Skene is a professor at the Melbourne Law School and adjunct professor in the Medical Faculty at the University of Melbourne. Earlier, she was a solicitor in Melbourne and the United Kingdom and a policy adviser in Canada and Melbourne. She is a member of the NHMRC Legislation Review Committee on Human Cloning and Embryo Research (the Heerey Committee) and the Australian Health Ethics Committee, one of the principal Committees of the National Health and Medical Research Council. In 2005, she was Deputy Chair of the Lockhart Committee on Human Cloning and Embryo Research and became spokeswoman after the sudden death of the chairman, Justice Lockhart, in January 2006.

Dr Gordon Preece is director of the ETHOS Centre for Christianity and Society. He has ministered at several Anglican churches in Sydney and is minister at Yarraville Anglican Church, Melbourne. He lectured at Morling College (Sydney) and has served as director of the Centre for Applied Christian Ethics at Ridley College, Macquarie Christian Studies Institute, and Urban Seed—a ministry of hospitality to the homeless. He lectures on ethical risk in finance at Macquarie University School of Applied Finance and has written and edited 11 books.

INTRODUCTION

Biotechnology, more than ever, offers some of the most challenging ethical questions we face today. The possibilities for therapeutic and less benign intervention seem to be increasing almost exponentially. Christians are often automatically identified in the media as opposing much of the research, such as stem cell research, but the reality is much more complicated. Similarly, the relationship between religion and science is often misrepresented and over-simplified. This conversation, the first in my Federation Square series that has now reached several dozen, was held on the eve of an important vote in the Victorian Parliament about the use of therapeutic cloning – that is, stem cells not taken from viable embryos.

Some advocates of stem cell research seem to regard embryos as a source to be mined. Most are aware of broad ethical questions, such as “are we taking a different view of human life as having a transactional value rather than essential?” Once you treat human tissue as a commodity, what are the possible consequences? Often these broad debates are conducted along extremely narrow lines, and important nuances are missed. There is also a danger of society simply delegating the debate to expert committees rather than taking the trouble to be informed. This conversation offered the audience the chance to hear and interact with people who have thought deeply about this highly technical but vitally important issue.

My own concerns included the question of “playing God”, the sanctity of life, the risk of commodifying human tissue, and the possibility of “slippery slope” consequences. I also wanted people to understand that there is no essential conflict between science and religion, and that my concerns and interest are shared by most people, religious or not, who have reflected upon this topic.

This conversation was held on April 17, 2007.

Archbishop Philip Freier: I want to start by briefly explaining the legislation that's due to be debated in the State Parliament today. It's a bill that in the Victorian Parliament will approve the use of somatic cell nuclear transfer – the four letters you sometimes see SCNT – or therapeutic cloning. A similar bill was passed in Federal Parliament last year: it was also passed on a conscience vote, as is happening in the Victorian Parliament, and it follows closely behind the recommendations of the Lockhart Committee.

So you might wonder what Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer involves, and I'll just try to explain it briefly. An egg from a woman has the nucleus removed and the nucleus from another cell inserted into it, so a cell is formed which has the capacity to grow and develop and multiply. That can be done in a laboratory, and after about five days some of the cells within that developing cell mass, that embryo, can be removed and can be used as progenitor cells. So it has the capacity to be used for the modelling of some drug therapies, and scientists believe that these stem cells can be used in the healing process for a number of different life-threatening diseases, although there is no evidence of a medical breakthrough in that respect at this stage. The egg has not been fertilised by a sperm and is not considered to be a human embryo capable of development to a human being. It's unlawful for it to be implanted into a uterus and to develop, and that distinction is made between an embryo that is formed by a sperm and an egg, and an embryo that is formed by renucleation.

So, Professor Skene, is my summary an accurate description of how you and other members of the Lockhart Committee understood the process?

Professor Loane Skene: I think you've done very well in describing it in a few words. It's very important with these very difficult ethical issues that we have these sorts of discussions, and you won't be surprised to know that there was a lot of discussion of these sorts of issues in the Lockhart Committee itself.

Freier: What is your religious background, and has it entered your understanding in your important responsibilities and decisions?

Skene: I'm a church-going Anglican, from Christ Church Hawthorn, and one of the interesting things about the Lockhart Committee was that four of the six of us are practising Christians. This is a higher percentage than your ordinary random city sample. And I think that our religious beliefs were one of the things that guided us through the process.

Freier: What led you to support the creation and use of embryos for therapeutic cloning?

Skene: Obviously the principal issue that we had to grapple with was, is it ethically permissible to use the process of Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer to create an embryo for the purpose of research – knowing that this embryo, in the process of extracting the stem cells from it, will be destroyed? And we took the view that this type of process is different from people trying to have a baby. And if you have an embryo formed in love by an infertile couple trying to have a baby, that's one type of embryo that should not be created for research. But since 2002 it has been possible to use those embryos in research, if the couple don't need the embryo themselves for the purposes of their family.

But we took the view that an embryo that is formed by a person's body cell and a donated egg, that has the DNA almost entirely of that person, and might be formed for the treatment of that person – that's obviously a long way in the future – but we felt that was a bit like a skin graft. So we saw the Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer embryo as being different from the sperm-egg embryo. We thought first of all it's different in its nature, because it doesn't have the DNA from both of the parents: it's not formed by fertilisation of an egg, it's not formed in a way that's envisaged that it will ever be a child, but even more importantly, it can't be implanted – because if anybody tries to do that they go to prison for 15 years, and this is the strongest penalty that the criminal law imposes.

Freier: Gordon, there's obviously a distinction that is being drawn between an embryo formed by the union of an egg and a sperm, and an embryo formed by nuclear replacement or transfer. Do you accept that that there is an ethical distinction between the two?

Dr Gordon Preece: There might be some distinction, but I don't hold to it as strongly as the way the Lockhart Committee described it. I think that it's still essentially human. I appreciate the analogy with a skin graft, but I think we're actually looking at a process that at least goes half the way along the process of reproduction. I don't think that legal barriers are sufficient; I think that legal barriers can come down very quickly, as we've seen in only four years in relationship to the legal barrier to therapeutic cloning that was in place in the earlier federal legislation in 2002. So I think there have to be stronger kinds of moral reasons in order to put up effective barriers, rather than pragmatic or legal reasons in relationship to that.

Freier: The distinction being made seems fairly fundamental. What is the basis of the ethics that leads you to a conclusion that differs from the Lockhart Committee in most respects?

Preece: I think that's a kind of worldview question, and I don't think science is neutral – all of these issues are quite value-laden. I come at these issues as a Christian, also a church-going Anglican and operating out of a Baptist church. I make that point fairly deliberately, because I think the way the issues get framed in the press very regularly is in terms of the Roman Catholics over against science, and it's usually in terms of faith or religious dogma versus scientific reason, or secular reason. And while I understand often in these debates the need for some kind of simplifying, I think that's quite misleading.

For me, speaking biblically, we live with a tension between the dominion over the earth that we've been given, that's been delegated to us as people made in the image of God, and the tower of Babel. Given dominion over the earth, we do play God – I think that God has actually delegated some role to us to play God. The issue is whether we remember that we're actually playing at it, or not – or whether we start to actually take it too seriously and think that we are actually God, according to Genesis 3, or, according to the tower of Babel, choosing to make a name for ourselves, using technologies et cetera to kind of reach up to heaven.

And I think we live between those two poles, and I think you get some people, and some Christians, who simply take a kind of boom view of these technological developments, so it's all good, it's all part of our dominion et cetera et cetera, and other people who see it like the tower of Babel. My view is that we have to recognise that these things are not neutral. We have to ask: who are they designed by, who are they designed for, who will benefit, who will suffer. We have to keep asking those questions quite relentlessly. And, given the gap in government funding and the way bio-ethical research is at the forefront of how universities raise their funds these days, we have to look very carefully at not just the simple scientific issues of the cell, but actually the selling of that.

Freier: If I could just interrupt you there, Gordon, you've canvassed something that in the Lockhart Committee is referred to as the diversity of moral views. There have been many moral perspectives. Do you want to explain that principle of moral diversity?

Skene: I was thinking, as Gordon was speaking, of the way we actually approached the difficult questions that were put to us in the sort of society in which we live. So, if we have a pluralist society, where people have many different views and interests, how

do you decide how to proceed? And one of the things that we did was that we decided that we would not tell each other what we were thinking right until the end, but we would listen with a completely open mind to everybody who came and spoke to us. We received over a thousand written submissions and, in addition to that, we had public meetings in all of the capital cities in the states and territories. And we found that there were many different views; and there were people who expressed to us the sort of views that Gordon's very eloquently put now, as to whether men should "play God", whether we are tampering in territory that is forbidden to us. And then we had people on the other side who have serious medical conditions, who might in time be assisted if this research is allowed to go ahead. And of course we had the scientists and others who want to do this sort of research.

We formed the view that what we should do is first of all look for the area of greatest consensus, and we found that there were some things on which everybody agreed, for example that there should be legislation preventing some types of conduct. So mixing animal and human gametes – sperm and eggs – is something that everybody thinks should not be permitted: to create human-animal hybrids. And reproductive cloning – trying to breed people who are identical to other people: everybody says that shouldn't be allowed. And we found that there was broad agreement that if people are ill or suffering, that we should do what we could to help them. But at the same time there is a strong view of the moral status of the embryo. So how could we proceed through this area and get maximum support for the sort of research that the scientists think might be able to help people who have children with serious disorders or people who develop these sorts of disorders later in life? And so we thought the way to do it is to only do embryo research where it's absolutely essential to do it. This is not a utilitarian argument, I emphasise that, so whatever benefits can be achieved don't necessary justify doing the research. We said that the research should be done only under licence; it should be open, and so the scientists who apply to do research involving embryos are required to justify using embryos, to report to Parliament on the embryos they've used, and to treat the embryos with respect.

Freier: I think that one of things I've observed is that this becomes a very technical argument, which is why I've been keen that we have discussions like this, because it is helpful if more people have an informed understanding rather than delegating their views to legal, political or technological specialists. But the view you just expressed seems different from a "line in the sand" argument, that we're crossing a boundary here. Was there a view in Lockhart that there is a line in the sand that is between the rights and protections of an egg and sperm embryo and a nuclear-replaced transfer?

Skene: That wasn't the view that we reached during the course of our deliberations. It was an open process, we made our minds up slowly, and we were swayed by the people who came and talked to us, particularly the women in the fertility programs.

Freier: I wonder Gordon, does that "line in the sand" model describe your view. Does the legislation being considered in Victoria cross that line?

Preece: Can I just say about pluralism, I'm trying to avoid, say, a stereotype of the Roman Catholic church imposing what's sometimes called sectarian views on a secular society. In my view often what we get is "secularism" as opposed to a secular society – but secularism as an ideology often operating in a sectarian kind of way, in a purely utilitarian kind of way, and not allowing other arguments into the public domain. And I think that the way the Roman Catholic church for instance generally argues is in terms of things like natural law, human dignity – fairly universalistic kind of arguments that are designed quite deliberately to appeal to a pluralistic society. I would want to argue in that kind of way as well.

In relation to the line in the sand, I think of Arnold's 19th century poem about Dover Beach and the sea of faith going out. I think you see various lines in the sand that fade away as the sea of faith goes out, or other faiths come in. Secularism is a kind of faith, scientism is a kind of faith.

Now, that distinction between egg and sperm embryo and nuclear transfer is really a technical and pragmatic distinction of convenience. But we are moving from an objective view about human nature to a more subjective kind of view. The key recommendation of the Lockhart Report and the federal legislation, the proposed Victorian legislation, ends up with the view that some humans are socially or politically significant enough not to be extinguished. And that raises a very fundamental question about where do we draw the line regarding human life? I don't think you have to be an absolutist right-to-lifer to take a position against that. I think fertilisation is a logical starting point of the process of becoming human, but it is arbitrary to put a point of 14 days as the dividing line between when we can experiment and when we can't. If it is a process – and I'm happy to describe it as a process – it has a beginning, at the point of fertilisation; and therefore there is an onus on protection from the beginning of the process, rather than making an arbitrary point later on in the process. So I would say that is a line in the sand where we need to draw a distinction.

Freier: Is it perhaps helpful at this point just to comment that the 14 days seems to be based on two biological facts. One is that beyond 14 days twinning of the embryo is not possible, so before that there is a theoretical possibility that the cell mass, the embryo,

might become two discrete individuals. And the second is the formation of what's called a primitive streak, which is the beginning of the development of differentiation, from being a cell mass to something which at that stage has the characteristics of the later foetal development. That seems to be where 14 days comes in, and the legislation (as Loane said earlier) makes it clear that experimentation beyond 14 days is not permissible and would be punishable by serious criminal penalties. So the legislation seems to put a line in the sand at 14 days. But you would still dispute that as a helpful place for it to be inserted, wouldn't you?

Preece: I think there is a real problem, I think it should be called research cloning rather than therapeutic cloning. Just as I think that in talking about "adult stem cells" we should probably talk about something like "mature stem cells" or something, because they're not actually adult. There are some confusing terminologies ...

Freier: Do you want to react to what Gordon said?

Skene: How should we behave as Christians? When you think of the people who want to know why their baby died, people who have terrible suffering from increasing chronic diseases – we have an aging population, we have people who are developing diseases that will undermine their lives for long periods of time, but not kill them, and it may be possible for us to find out things that are going to help these people. So how should we behave? Shouldn't we try and help these people if we can?

It is true that cures are discovered slowly, but we are making rapid progress in this area. Since 2002 there have been some very great discoveries, and I'm going to mention only one: scientists took a mouse which had spinal injuries, they injected stem cells, and the mouse was able to move. Now if this worked with people, this would be a tremendous step forward.