

N E X U S

*The Australian University of Theology
Research & Scholarship Magazine*



Issue focus:

Ethical research

The NEXUS Bookshelf

New Books by AUT Staff & Faculty

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June 2025





June 2025

From the Editor Ethical Research

Welcome to the June issue of NEXUS, the Australian University of Theology's bi-annual research magazine - and the first issue since we officially became a University!

When we think of research ethics, we might easily reflect on the need for ethical approvals in medical trials or scientific experiments. Yet ethical issues are not only the domain of medicine and science. For those of us researching in theological and ministry contexts, we too are faced with ethical challenges in research. As much as any other field of study, theological research with human participants must adhere to the standards outlined in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2025 and the four principles of ethical research (these are outlined in the current issue).

This issue explores these crucial questions, recognizing that ethical research in ministry contexts aren't simply about following institutional or government protocols but about embodying the love and care for others we preach.

My hope is that this issue not only provides some guidance on how to go about having your ethical protocol approved but also celebrates the insights that can come from undertaking such research. I also hope it encourages you to pursue human participant research that not only advances theological understanding and practice but also honours the image of God in every participant.

Louise Gosbell

Editor, NEXUS

AUT Research Manager

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The NEXUS Bookshelf

New books by AUT Consortium Faculty and beyond

AUT Consortium Staff, Faculty & Fellows

Authored volumes

Kirk J. Franklin (MST), *Collaborative Missional Leadership: The Art of Working Together in God's Mission*. Wycliffe Global Alliance. Regnum Books, 2025.

Seung-Joo (John) Lee (PTCV), *The Orders of Nature and Grace: Thomistic Concepts in the Moral Thought of Franciscus Junius (1545–1602)*. Brill, 2024.

Alan Mugridge (SMBC), *Scribes, Theology, and Apologetics: Assessing Scribal Interference in New Testament Manuscripts*. Wipf & Stock, 2024.

Donald Smith (Malyon graduate), *Growing Young Leaders: Faith, Freedom, Failure, & Flourishing*. ACT Monograph Series. Wipf & Stock, 2025.

Ruth Sutcliffe (Christ College Fellow), *Blessed Victors: Theology of Persecution in the Third Century Church*. T&T Clark, 2025.

Robert Turnbull (Ridley graduate), *Codex Sinaiticus Arabicus and Its Family: A Bayesian Approach*. New Testament Tools, Studies and Documents 66. Brill, 2025.

Translators

Volker Leppin, *Francis of Assisi: The Life of a Restless Saint*. Translated by Rhys Bezzant (Ridley College). Yale University Press, 2025.

Have a new book coming out in the second half of 2025 and want it included in NEXUS? Let us know at research@aut.edu.au.

Beyond the AUT

Elizabeth Boase, *Trauma Theories: Refractions in the Book of Jeremiah*. Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2024.

James R. Harrison and Bradley J. Bitner (eds.), *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity 11A: Texts from Ephesus*. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2024.

James R. Harrison and E. Randolph Richards (eds.), *Inscriptions, Papyri, and Other Artifacts*. Vol 10. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024.

Sarah Irving-Stonebraker, *Priests of History: Stewarding the Past in an Ahistoric Age*. Zondervan Academic, 2024.

Brian Kolia, *Carrying Qoheleth's Maota (House): An Australian-Samoan Diasporic Reading*. SBL Press, 2024.

Catherine Lambert, *Dissident Women, Beguines, and the Quest for Spiritual Authority*. Routledge, 2024.

Jacqueline Service, *Triune Well Being: The Kenotic-Enrichment of the Eternal Trinity*. Fortress Academic Press, 2024.

James R. Unwin, *Paul and Seneca Among the Condemned: The Use of Spectacle in the Early Empire*. Lexington/Fortress Academic, 2024.



AUSTRALIAN
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Attending the ANZATS conference in Melbourne?

The AUT will be hosting a free **women scholars' breakfast** on Wednesday 2nd July, 2025 at 7:30am. RSVPs required by 26th June, 2025. Register using the following [form](#). Breakfast will be held at Dr. Dax which is located in the Kenneth Myer Building, 30 Royal Parade, Parkville.

Loving your neighbour as yourself: How being well-intentioned in research doesn't make research innately ethical

Dr Mark Seton, BA, Grad Dip Arts by Research, PhD
AUT HREC Chair and Lecturer in the School of Creative and
Performing Arts at Excelsia University College

As the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the Australian University of Theology, I have always advocated that 'good' research i.e. research that brings about benefits to those whose lives, beliefs and values are under exploration, should always be 'ethical' research.

The journey of research is something that engages the whole person, whether it's the researcher (who may often also be a practitioner of ministry) or the research participants. Furthermore, the research process can also impact families and communities. So, we need to ask, when does good research cease to be ethical research? Firstly, if the research provides human value, it is good research. Secondly, it must also protect research participants' and the researcher's wellbeing in the process of research. And, thirdly, it should minimise potential harm (which is helpfully defined in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research 2025. See pages 13-16).

None of us ever set out to hurt people, and none of us want the value of research falling into disrepute. Having said that, in my decades of serving on HRECs, and working in ethical research (primarily in the field of actor wellbeing in training and in the workplace), I have been surprised and intrigued to encounter experienced ministry practitioners who do not seem to have thought through the ethical implications of their research as well as they may have. For example, what are the precise questions they wish to ask, why and of

whom? What are the observations they It is essential to recognise that the values and beliefs we may impose on potential research participants, while well-intended, may do harm to the very people we want to help or support.

It may also be surprising to know that the core values (respect, justice, research merit and integrity, and beneficence) of the Australian ethical research body, the National Health and Medical Research Council, were shaped and premised on Judaeo-Christian values and beliefs. So, such values are not at odds with broadly Christian values and beliefs. This is something that we can be extremely appreciative of, as those who treasure these values ourselves. However, what is more challenging is to uphold such values in practice when it can be tempting to rush through an ethics application, unintentionally neglecting human care, while in the good and noble pursuit of new knowledge.

I believe that ethical research practice is, indeed, a spiritual discipline in grace and humility. Ethical practice is not about always getting it right or perfect. We are not God and we are not all-knowing or all-powerful. It is rather about recognising how we can get it wrong sometimes, that we can have limited vision and experience of both human joy and suffering, but we can also have the courage to review our research approach and take steps to minimise any injury or harm.

That's why I like the combined images of a

tightrope AND a safety net to describe the ethics approval process. The tightrope represents how we seek to balance the rights and autonomy of individuals alongside the risks and benefits of human research. And the safety net represents the ethical guidelines in the design and implementation of research that may either prevent or minimise harm. The challenge is in identifying potential benefits and potential risks and their likely degrees of harm.

Loving one's neighbour, hopefully, is informed appropriately by the way we would always like to be treated—with justice, with value, with preferably life-affirming over life-threatening experiences, and above all, with respect for the freedom to be ourselves. What often confuses many research applicants, and even supervisors, is that there are subtle but important differences between exercising ethical practices and upholding moral values as they are both ways by which we as human beings seek to live our lives and experience care through meaningful and respectful relationships.

An example may be fostering caution among researchers in how they conduct direct interviews with vulnerable people, especially where personal information is being sought, who may fear being judged, shamed or expelled from their community. And, in rare cases, that could even be an unintended consequence of simply declining to participate in the research project. Of course, researchers do not intend these outcomes. Of course, researchers do not intend to harm their research participants. It may be that the researcher is seeking to improve the effectiveness and unity of that same community in broader evangelistic outreach. But such a good intention does not automatically ensure ethical research.

Such a researcher likely has the moral values of truth, patience, humility, kindness, self-control, and so on. But ethical research values are specifically acquired through

training and careful design, in accordance with historical precedence, often learning about what, in the past, has appeared to be justifiable enquiry for some, but has in fact violated others. So, any training or spiritual formation in what may be described as godly virtues does not equate with the specific ethical research values and subsequent practices that ensure the wellbeing of both participants and researchers, as well as the final recipients who should gain value from the findings of research.

To love our neighbour to the best of our ability, as potentially morally-motivated researchers, is a call to invest our time, our care and both our critical and creative thinking and planning about what research questions and ethical practices will best serve the wellbeing and flourishing of us all.

Dr Mark Seton is the Chair of the AUT's Human Research and Ethics Committee (HREC) and a Lecturer in the School of Creative and Performing Arts at Excelsia University College



Ethical research as a participant observer

Dr Clement Fryer, AUT Graduate, Morling College

Having recently completed my PhD which investigates Pentecostal social engagement in South East Queensland (SEQ) and reflecting on aspects of my study that were most impactful, the human participant research was without question a highlight. Decades of pastoring and working with people on the social fringes was familiar territory, however, the change from a leader/care practitioner to researcher introduced a new range of ethical dynamics and responsibilities.

These included ethics to do with the framing of the project, through to the assembly of data and its analysis, synthesis and exposition. All needed to be consistently managed in the light of the sacredness of the lives and communities involved. Ethical issues around confidentiality and transparency required that all information gathered from congregations had a green light from each church's senior leadership. Additionally, it was important to see that transparency, in the absence of evidence and the admission of contradictory views, had greater potential to build the credibility of a case and authenticity of the process. This helped set the ethical tone.

My adaption and use of Richard Osmer's Practical Theological Methodology,¹ beginning with critical-historical research, provided the opportunity to glean from the insights and experiences of a cross-section of leaders, some of whom experienced Pentecostal changes following World War Two. Accordingly, it was important that perspectives from elderly leaders were given special consideration and respect. Historical congruity of sources set the stage for theological discussion related to "what should be happening" in church social engagement, opening the way for human participant research in my social science chapter.

The qualitative case study research intended to draw information from three exemplar Pentecostal congregations working in highly disadvantaged local government areas of SEQ, had potential to backfire and produce unhelpful distortion. Firstly, the possibility of individuals and churches being unwilling to participate was real. Then the choice of cases may have been problematic due to limited inside knowledge, and in a bounded system, deciding the boundaries of cases could have been difficult.²

Image by New Matilda on Flickr





This was partially mitigated by knowledge gathered from prior research focussed on related issues and being clear on what was outside the scope of the case.³

Further limitations of the case study methodology included murky limits on time and data gathering⁴ and biases to do with participant observer engagement with a case. As an outsider, my observer assumptions could influence meaning and outcomes and introduce ethical implications in research, so systematic self-reflection and cross checking were essential.⁵

Another factor to overcome was Pentecostalism's wariness of harsh criticism from public media and exposure to outside scrutiny. To deal with this, a research stance was taken which was celebratory of congregation/community achievements. The result was church leaders being at ease and this opened the way for remarkable candidness in leader and team interviews, focus groups and surveys.

Secondly, I assumed the role of participant observer, both in historical and in social science-based case study interviews. This entailed my engagement of participants as fellow community-focused Pentecostals and also as a researcher, with pastoral experience in the community. As a participant observer, my stance was "observer as participant,"

regarded by many as the most ethical approach to observation in interviews and group sessions. This is due to participant awareness of the researcher's activities while the researcher is focused on data collection rather than participation.⁶ Previous experience in community engagement and church relationships therefore enabled a peer observer as participant stance, in which trust, and openness was evident. As Barbara Kawulich concludes, "In this stance, the researcher is an observer who is not a member of the group and who is interested in participating as a means for conducting better observation and, hence, generating a more complete understanding of the group's activities."⁷

A third advantage of human participant research with leaders and workers among the socially disadvantaged was that they themselves have been on the margins of Pentecostal church focus. Participant permission-giving through interviews, focus groups and surveys therefore provided opportunity for disclosure of hopes and challenges to do with community engagement. This was particularly noticeable in some focus group discussions where there was high participation, transparency and insight. It was inspiring to witness their phenomenal, unified, "servant song" of purpose being expressed openly together in the Spirit of Isaiah 61: 1-4.

In conclusion, the contribution of human participant research after qualitative analysis became an invaluable catalyst in identifying and generating key themes. These formed a grounded basis for synthesizing Osmer's practical theological components of inquiry and helped facilitate a suggested strategy for more effective congregational social engagement. My personal transition from pastor to researcher within formal ethical boundaries consequently became an inspiring and satisfying shared experience.

Dr Clement Fryer is a recent graduate of Malyon/Morling College. His Doctor of Philosophy thesis was entitled "How can Pentecostals engage with the socially disadvantaged in South-East Queensland?"

Footnotes:

1. Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008),
2. Pranee Liamputtong, *Qualitative Research Methods* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2009), 203.
3. Robert E. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (SAGE Publications, 1995), 91-104.
4. Daniel Schipani, "Case Study Method," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. B.J. Miller-McLemore (Wiley, 2011), 99.
5. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, 91-104.
6. Barbara B. Kawulich, "Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method" *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 6, no.2 (2005), 22.
7. Ibid. 21.



Photo by Clement Fryer

Respecting People While Producing Ethical, Meaningful Research

Dr Lyn Worsley, Director and Senior Clinical Psychologist
The Resilience Centre

It's easy to think of ethics approvals as a bureaucratic hurdle, with long forms, delayed timelines, and unpredictable hoops. But each of these steps exists for a reason. When we conduct human research, we are being invited into someone's life, however briefly. Our participants are not data points, they are people with agency, with dignity, and with the right to be treated ethically and respectfully.

Good research comes from good relationships, and good relationships come from trust. Taking ethics seriously right from the planning stages helps ensure that our projects are not just methodologically sound, but morally grounded. Thus, ethical research isn't just "nicer" research, it's better research. When participants feel safe, respected, and genuinely valued, they share more openly, stay more engaged, and help generate findings that are richer, deeper, and more meaningful. Ultimately, the time we invest in doing human research well pays off in the quality of our insights and the integrity of our work. And those are the kinds of projects that can go on to make real-world impact.

Over the past 14 years, I've had the pleasure and the challenge of submitting more than seven studies for ethics approval through five universities and institutions. Each application brought a new set of forms, procedures, and protocols. Submitting in Norway introduced the added complexity of navigating cultural differences and ensuring my application was understood through a different ethical lens.

Working with children added further layers:

consent, guardian permission, and the important question of whether participants might want to receive feedback in years to come. The process was, at times, brutal on my patience. Waiting four to eight months for approval can feel like a death knell to research momentum.

So why did I keep going? Because I wanted my research to be replicable in years to come. I wanted it to be remembered warmly by future generations. I hoped it would stand as a contribution to knowledge that could genuinely better society.

The danger of seeing ethics as just a hurdle misses the point of good research. Truly meaningful research must be significant, original, and of genuine value to others. And to achieve that, we must honour the people at the heart of it. Ethics processes remind us that our participants are not just data sources, they are people with stories, dignity, and lives worth respecting. If research is to contribute anything of value, it must begin by seeing the human being in front of us. It must aspire to build a more civil, kind, grace-filled, and merciful society. In that sense, ethics is not an obstacle, it's a compass.

In 2020, as the world abruptly shuttered its doors, churches, like so many other institutions, were forced to pivot online. Our research explored how people engaged with church services during the COVID lockdowns: what they missed, what they discovered, and how community and spirituality were reshaped in a season of isolation. This was a study about human experience in real time, in the thick of change.

But doing human participant research during a pandemic brought its own unique challenges, particularly when it came to ethics. Seeking ethics approval while the world was still trying to make sense of Zoom funerals and elbow bumps felt almost absurd at times. The ground was shifting under all our feet, and here we were trying to tick boxes, anticipate risks, and write protocols for a reality we barely understood yet. But that process, though painstaking, was essential. Because in the midst of fear, grief, and disconnection, people still chose to share their stories with me. That trust is not something to take lightly.

For me the ethics process ensured I approached that trust with care. It forced me to slow down, consider the vulnerability of participants, and be intentional about how I asked questions and protected privacy, even (and especially) in a digital context. One participant shared that attending church online from their couch while holding a cup of tea gave them “permission to be a mess in God’s presence” in a way they hadn’t felt in a traditional pew. Another described how logging in weekly was a vital anchor “a rhythm in the chaos” that kept them connected to their faith and to others, even when physically alone. These deeply human moments weren’t just answers to survey questions, they were glimpses of resilience, adaptation, and meaning-making during global upheaval.

Finally, an unexpected benefit emerged, one I hadn’t realised at the time. Because I had consistently sought ethics approval for each study, and had these studies peer-reviewed and published, I was able to collate six of them into a PhD by Prior Publication with Charles Darwin University.

However, that added yet another university and another set of procedures to navigate. The final hurdle was submitting evidence of ethical approval for each study. It sounded simple, but over the decade-long span of this

research, we had moved house, transitioned from paper to digital storage, and replaced letters with emails. Tracking down original approval letters became a challenge. I contacted each institution, hoping someone might still have my paperwork. Remarkably, ethics officers at every university were able to dive into archives, locate the reports, and provide digital copies. Had I skipped any step or failed to follow proper procedures, I would have had to withdraw from the PhD—at the final hour. I’m deeply grateful that the ethics process has become more standardised and universally guided. It ensures not only solid, ethical studies but also protects the long-term integrity and legacy of our work.

Lyn Worsley is Director and Senior Clinical Psychologist at [The Resilience Centre](#)



Navigating Ethics Approval: A Guide to Getting the Green Light on your Ethics Protocol

Dr Louise Gosbell, NEXUS editor and AUT Ethics Committee Member

So you've identified a pressing issue about ministry you are keen to research. You've spent weeks, perhaps months, refining your research question. Your supervisor is excited. You are excited! But the next step is getting ethics approval. You've heard from other students that this can be the most challenging part of the research process. Where do you start to understand the requirements? What forms do you need to fill in? Who do you ask for guidance?

Ethics approval is often regarded as an intimidating hurdle for a project containing human participant research – especially for new researchers! For students in theological colleges, the process of gaining ethics approval can seem unnecessary—after all, isn't ministry inherently ethical? If I have good intentions with my research, isn't that enough? This brief article will help you understand some of the important aspects of gaining ethics approval through the Australian University of Theology with the hope of making this process clearer and easier to navigate.

Do You Need Ethics Approval?

The golden rule: If your research involves living people you will likely need ethics approval. In theological contexts, this might include:

- Surveys about worship practices or spiritual experiences;
- Interviews about faith formation or church involvement;
- Ethnographic studies of congregational life;
- Studies of online faith communities or religious social media;

- Research about cross-cultural ministry programs & training;
- Observation and comparison of different approaches to youth ministry; and so on.

Even though a project might *seem* ethically straightforward to you, it still needs the approval of an appropriate ethics committee to ensure it meets the standards of ethical research. You want to do a survey about the effectiveness of small group ministry in your church? That still needs ethics approval. What about an anonymous online survey about the experiences of women in theological education? That too requires ethics approval.

The reality is that any form of human participant research undertaken in Australia is governed by the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2025). While you might have good and ethical intentions in your research, you are still required to ensure your project meets the requirements of the National Statement and have your research project approved by an appropriate Ethics Committee *before* you can commence researching. While there are different levels of ethical approval in the Australian University of Theology (AUT), for any HDR or staff project, that approval needs to come from the AUT's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

Before You Write: Essential Preparation

Start your ethics application at least two months *before* you hope to begin researching. Remember that the approval process itself can take a few weeks depending on your experience as a researcher, the complexity of the project you

are proposing, and the quality of the paperwork the HREC receive.

First, before you do anything else, read over the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and note any issues that may be pertinent to your particular project. You also need to assess your risk level. Any project that is no greater than low risk research will, in general, take less time to get approval. Higher risk studies—such as those involving spiritual trauma, church conflict, or vulnerable populations within faith communities—will likely take longer to gain approval and may require some back and forth between the HREC and the researcher. You should ensure you give yourself enough time for this in your research plan. If you aren't sure whether your project will be considered low risk, you can look at the chart on pages 15–16 of the current NEXUS issue.

Secondly, go to the **Ethics and Research Integrity** section of the AUT's Graduate School of Research website and download the ethics application forms including the templates for the Participant Information Sheet and the Consent Form and study all these carefully. If you aren't sure exactly what is being asked of you in a particular question, speak to your supervisor, or contact the HREC by emailing us at ethics@aut.edu.au. We are also happy to provide you with a sample protocol to help you complete your own. Look out for some sample protocols that will soon be going up on the AUT website!

Thirdly, consider what experience and training you have and whether you have enough to undertake your proposed project. Part of the role of the HREC is to measure not just the merit of the project but whether you are the right person with the right skills to undertake this research. If you or your supervisor feel you could benefit from additional research training, ask your home institution about training options. We will also have some new short training videos that

will be available through the AUT in the coming months that will help walk you through completing your application, the four principles of human research, and some of the pinch points in completing an application so keep an eye out for those!

Crafting Your Application: What Committees Want to See

Your method section should be crystal clear. Instead of statements like “Participants will share their faith stories,” be specific: “Participants will engage in 60-minute semi-structured interviews in a neutral location easily accessed by participants. Questions will explore conversion experiences, spiritual practices, and community involvement. Interviews will be audio-recorded only and will be transcribed using Otter.ai. Participants can decline any question or end the interview at any time.”

For informed consent in ministry contexts, transparency is crucial. To help with this, the AUT provide a template you can use as the basis of your Participant Information Sheet and your Consent Form. We also provide a template for use as an introduction to online surveys.

Common Mistakes That Delay Approval

There are some common mistakes we see in ethics applications that can delay the approval process. Here are some examples and how to avoid them.

- **Underestimating potential risks of discomfort/harm** – Perhaps the most serious mistake theological researchers make is minimising potential harm/ discomfort because “it's just talking about faith or church experiences.” It is easy to forget that not everyone's experience of church or faith is positive or that churches have not always provided safe spaces for congregants. While the presence of discomfort is not reason itself to deny ethical approval, there are

important guidelines regarding discomfort and/or risk according to the National Statement. This means that researchers need to ensure they are doing all they can to minimise and mitigate risk, know how to respond if someone does become distressed during the interviews and have resources ready on hand to offer support.

- **Power dynamics** - It is important to reflect on the nature of your relationship with your interviewees. Is there a power differential that could impact the research in any way? If you're researching your congregation, for example, you need to acknowledge how your role might influence participation. Will people feel compelled to participate if you are a ministry leader in this congregation? Explain safeguards - for example, you will recruit through a third party who aren't connected to the congregation. Power dynamics can also be an issue in other contexts, especially if you are planning to invite participants from groups who may be more vulnerable such as those who have experienced trauma, are from Indigenous backgrounds, have a disability or chronic illness and so on. Remember, while you may not feel you have power over someone else, they may perceive the relationship differently. Power dynamics are also about real and perceived power differences.
- **Feeling obligated to participate** - often researchers want to offer participants some kind of thanks for their willingness to participate such as a free coffee or lunch. While this is thoughtful, it must be clear to participants that accepting the coffee or lunch does not obligate them to participate. Participants have to feel they are genuinely free to decline or withdraw during the interview if they so desire. Participants can also feel obligated to participate when researchers are drawing from their existing friendship/collegial networks. Again, you might consider using a third party or ensuring you make

it as clear as possible that no one is obligated to participate in the research.

- **Assuming theological literacy** - Don't assume participants share your theological vocabulary. "Participants will reflect on their understandings of pneumatology" might confuse laypeople. Try to ensure your research and research questions are as clear as possible: "Participants will be asked about their experiences and understanding of the Holy Spirit's work in their lives."
- **Promising what you can't deliver** - "This research will improve our church's ministry" overpromises and can be seen to coerce participation. Be realistic in the benefits of participation: "This research aims to understand current practices. While findings will be shared with leadership, specific changes depend on many factors beyond this study."
- **"You can withdraw at any time"** - We often see researchers make statements like this in their paperwork. It sounds great and seems to be a statement that respects the agency of participants, however, the reality is that participants can't withdraw *at any time*. They can't, for example, withdraw once the data has been de-identified or once the research has been published. It's important to be as specific as you can be for the sake of potential participants, for example: "I will send you a copy of the transcription of your interview. Once you receive the transcription, you will have two weeks in which to notify me if you would like anything changed or omitted from the interview or to withdraw from the research. After this two-week period, your data will be de-identified and it will not be possible to withdraw from the project."

Final Thoughts

Ethics approval isn't about bureaucracy—it's about practicing the care we preach. The process challenges us to think deeply about



power, vulnerability, and faithful responses to and representation of others' spiritual experiences.

The ethics review process helps ensure your scholarship honours both academic integrity and the trust placed in you by faith communities. As shared by the researchers in the current issue, when done thoughtfully, research in theological and ministry contexts can yield important and valuable research. However, it's not just as simple as sitting down with people to ask them questions. We have to ensure we are following the requirements of the National Statement and adhering to the Four Principles of Ethical Research (outlined right).

Remember: start your preparation early, pray through the process and familiarise yourself with the National Statement and the AUT's paperwork. The AUT HREC are also happy to answer your enquiries about your research and ensure you are participating in ethical and fruitful research!



Four Principles of Ethical Research

Research Merit
& Integrity

Justice

Beneficence

Respect

Navigating Research Ethics: A Guide for AUT Students and Researchers

Professor James Dalziel, AUT Vice-Chancellor

The Australian University of Theology has a mature system for assessing ethical issues in proposed research projects in accordance with government requirements. I am grateful to all the members of the Ethics Committee for their diligence and time, notably the Chair Mark Seton, who has been a member of the committee since it was established in 2002. I am also grateful to the work of all the supervisors who assist research students with preparing their applications, together with the work of my colleagues in the AUT Research Department – particularly Louise Gosbell and Edwina Murphy.

My own research background is in psychology, and I remember well the process of submitting ethics applications for honours and PhD research projects at my university earlier in my career, which among other things included surveying taxi drivers about their driving! Putting in an ethics application was a challenging and time-consuming process, and it can be difficult to know quite what is expected when you haven't done it before. On the other hand, it is exciting to conduct research in real-world contexts, and there is something special about making discoveries based on data you have collected yourself.

My advice is to carefully read all the material related to submitting an application, and where relevant, to talk through any issues with a supervisor. It can be helpful to talk to others who have been through the process before to get a sense of the task, and of the kinds of research that are more or less likely to raise concerns. It may be that you have several ideas you would be interested to research, but some would be challenging to

conduct in an ethical way, whereas others are unlikely to pose a challenge, so the ethics process can sometimes help refine your focus. And where your research interests involve more challenging contexts, then it is good to get advice on how best to manage any concerns with your proposed approach in order to ensure the best outcome for everyone involved.

The AUT Ethics Committee is always looking for ways to improve its processes, and recent discussions have focussed on ways to balance the need for beneficial research while considering potential ethical concerns. In the future there will be some new case studies illustrating typical research scenarios with advice on how common ethical issues are handled in these situations. If you have any feedback for the AUT on its ethics processes, either positive or negative, you are welcome to email me at jdalziel@aut.edu.au. My best wishes to all those seeking to do effective and ethical research to serve society and God's Kingdom.





If you answer **NO** to all questions, your protocol qualifies as low risk and can be approved by your college LREC. However, all HDR projects and projects undertaken by an affiliated staff member of the AUT must be reviewed by HREC irrespective of whether they qualify as low risk.

If you answer **YES** to any questions in **Section A**, your protocol does not qualify as Low Risk and must be submitted to the University's HREC for approval. Alternatively, the contents of the protocol can be modified so that none of the questions in Section A receive a 'yes' response. For example, if a protocol requested permission to undertake research with participants aged 16 and over, the protocol could be modified to limit research from participants 18 and over, therefore avoiding research with children or young people (Q 39).

If you answer **YES** to any questions in **Section B**, you must contact the University to request guidance on whether the protocol can be submitted to your college LREC or must go to the University's HREC. Please email a copy of your completed protocol to ethics@aut.edu.au.

Section A

Q39. Does the research involve children and/or young people? (NS 4.2)

*If YES, provide evidence that appropriate training and screening to work with children and/or young people has been obtained (upload with submission as **Appendix 7**)*

Q40. Does the research involve people highly dependent on medical care who may be unable to give consent? (NS 4.4)

Q41. Does the research involve people with a cognitive impairment, an intellectual disability, or a mental illness? (NS 4.5)

Q42. Does the research involve participation of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or Maori people who have been selected as research participants because they are indigenous Australians/New Zealanders? (NS 4.7)

Q43. Does the research involve any artifacts that are of cultural, spiritual or religious significance to Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or Maori people? (NS 4.7)

Q44. Could the research place the intended or likely participants at risk of experiencing more than discomfort, i.e., harm (including psychological harm, devaluation of personal worth, cultural harm, and social harm)? (NS 2.1)

Q45. Is there any potential risk to the researcher's safety, beyond that normally encountered in everyday life, as a result of their involvement in the research?

Q46. Do you plan to vary the usual written consent processes? (NS 2.2.1-2.2.7; NS3.1 Element 3: Consent)

*If YES, provide justification here for your reason for the changes and detail how oral and/or community consent will be obtained and recorded (upload with submission as **Appendices 4 and 5**).*

Q47. Does the study have potential legal implications for the researcher, the researcher's college or the University? (NS 4.6)

Q48. Is data collection to take place outside Australia/New Zealand? (NS 4.8)



Section B

Q49. Does the research involve a dependent or unequal relationship between the researcher and any of the research participants? (For example, minister and parishioners.) (NS 4.3; NS 2.2.9)

If YES, please indicate your role within the group or organisation (if applicable), and how long you have been in that role. Please indicate how you intend to minimise any potential detrimental effects.

Q50. Does the research involve people in countries other than Australia? (NS 4.8)

Q51. Is approval required to access personnel, clients or records from any institution or organisation?

*If YES, have you provided written evidence of the approval (upload with submission as **Appendix 8**)*

If NO, please state why not

Upcoming Events 2025

Have an event coming up you'd like promoted in the AUT newsletter?
Let us know by emailing the details and links to research@aut.edu.au

JUNE

24-25 June: Ridley College (Melbourne) - Annual Preachers' Conference 2025: "Let's talk about sex...Preaching from the Song of Songs" with Rev Ian Powell and Dr Kamina Wüst. In-person & online | \$60 for in-person, \$35 online.

30 June: University of Notre Dame & the Great Synagogue Sydney: The John & Anna Belfer Oration in the History of Jewish Philosophy inaugural lecture with Rabbi Dr Benjamin Elton: "The First Rabbinic Philosopher: Saadia Gaon (882-942)." In-person | 6-7:30pm.

JULY

1-3 July: ANZATS (Australian and New Zealand Theological Schools) - "Remembering Nicea: A Contested Legacy?" In-person (Pilgrim College, Melbourne) | \$285.

14 July: Christ College (Sydney) - Julius Kim Day Conference with Dr Julius Kim. 10am-3pm | In-person | \$80 general admission, \$40 CC students.

16-17 July: Reformed Theological College (Melbourne) - Preaching Conference 2025 "Preaching the Whole Counsel of God." 9:30am-4pm | In-person | \$200.





JULY (continued)

21 July: Ridley College (Melbourne) - Leon Morris Lecture in New Testament Studies 2025 "Paul and Papyri" with Dr Gillian Asquith (Melbourne School of Theology). 5:30-7:30pm | In-person & online.

23 July: Christ College (Sydney) - "Priests of History: Stewarding the Past in an Ahistoric Age" with Dr Sarah Irving-Stonebraker. 7-9pm | In-person | \$20 general admission, \$10 students

AUGUST

1-2 August: Ridley College (Melbourne) - Evangelical Women in Academia Conference "Raising her Voice" with guest speakers Rev Dr Jill Firth and Naomi Wolf. In-person | \$200 for full conference, student/alumni \$160.

3 August: St James' Institute (Sydney) - "Revisiting Adam and Eve: Understanding Ourselves, each other, and God, through a relational lens" with guest speaker Dr Helen Blake (St Marks National Theological Centre). In-person | 2-4pm.

14-15 August: Alphacrucis University College (Sydney) - "Faith & Mission in Higher Education" with A/Prof Stuart Piggin. More details to come.

15-16 August: Alphacrucis University College (Sydney) and Gospel Conversations - "How does the teaching of the early church speak to the modern world and its dilemmas?" with Rev Prof John Behr (University of Aberdeen). In-person (Alphacrucis University College, Sydney) | Fri only \$120, Sat only \$100, both days \$200.

22-23 August: St Andrew's Greek Orthodox College (Sydney) - "Nicea at 1700: A Council for the Ages?" with Prof Peter Bouteneff, Prof Lewis Ayres, and Rev Prof John Behr. In-person | 2 days \$200, student/pensioner \$160.



Dear HDR student,

Remember the hours you spent trying to find the perfect journal article for your essay? Did you ever wonder how those articles got published? Or what it takes to make a journal happen? Behind almost every journal is a society of people who get together and encourage one another in their latest research. Peers and friends who test out their work together before it goes to print.

We want to offer you the chance to be a part of one – for FREE!

ANZATS is a uniquely Aussie and Kiwi Association that draws together theologically trained colleagues and friends to share their research in Christian mission, cultural engagement, archaeology, linguistics, pastoral, systematic and biblical studies. We even produce a journal Colloquium twice a year (which hopefully you've used in assignments!) If you would like to learn more about ANZATS you can visit our website at www.anzats.edu.au.

If you want to keep theologically fresh and thoughtful long past your graduation, this is the place for you!

We are offering students of Australian Bible and theological colleges one year's free membership to ANZATS. That means:

- 2 free copies of our journal Colloquium packed with the latest thinking and research.
- Reduced rates to our annual conference, where you can hear fantastic scholars, connect with like-minded peers, and refresh your toolkit for everyday ministry.
- (You will be sent a code for \$25 off the student price of the full conference for 2025 on signing up)

All you have to do is sign up your email address and we will get you started with awesome content delivered directly to your inbox. You can do that by emailing us at: secretary@anzats.edu.au

You're not signing up for a forever spam program – we promise not to spam you, and at the end of the 12 months, we will follow up with you and happily let you go if you decide membership is not for you.

All the best for your future study and ministries,

Christy Capper,
ANZATS President

Calls for Papers

Sydney College of Divinity: Rebuilding the Fallen Tent? Re-discovering Ancient Tools for Hearing the Gospels and Acts

The SCD invites scholars, doctoral candidates, and others working in the theological and wider academic community to propose a paper related to Gospels and Acts research for the 2025 Centre for Gospels & Acts Research Conference by Proposals should be submitted with an abstract of 250–300 words.

The Call for Papers has been extended to 31 July, 2025 via the following link [here](#). Further enquiries should be directed to PeterB@scd.edu.au. Conference to be held 18–19 September, 2025.

Sydney College of Divinity: Paul and Human Flourishing

The SCD invites scholars, doctoral candidates, and others working in the theological and wider academic community to propose a paper on the apostle Paul and human flourishing. Papers are to be submitted by 1 June, 2025. Proposals should be submitted with an abstract of 250–300 words.

The Call for Papers has been extended to 1 August, 2025 via the following link [here](#). Further enquiries should be directed to ConstantineC@scd.edu.au. Conference to be held 30–31 October, 2025.

Theology & Culture Conference - Gendered Violence 2026

To better understand the dynamic relationship between theology, culture and gendered violence, this interdisciplinary conference, hosted by The Wesley Centre, will consider a range of questions, such as:

- How is theology implicated in maintaining sexism, gendered inequality, and violence?
- Which religious resources support or undermine patterns of thinking that lead to gendered violence? What does our Australian context contribute to these theological and cultural questions?
- How do gendered violence, colonial violence and theology intersect?
- What are the challenges and opportunities presented by doing theology on Aboriginal land and in multicultural settings?
- What do terms such as ‘gender’, ‘violence’, and ‘theology’ actually encompass?
- How might new practices emerge within religious settings to counter sexism, critique exclusive theologies, or support survivors?

The Call of Papers and Workshops are due Monday 25th August 2025. Proposals of 200 words are required for the call for papers – for 20 minute presentations. Workshops, presentations, interactive sessions (45 or 90 minutes) – 100 – 200-word pitch for your workshop.

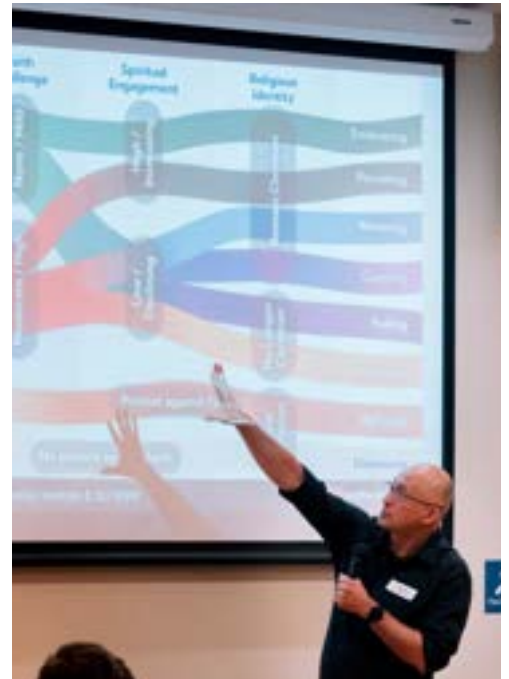
For more information and to submit a call for papers, go to [The Wesley Centre](#).

Recent Events 2025



Photos from the recent **David Bebbington** lecture series which included lectures at Ridley College, SMBC, and at the Evangelical History Association Conference. Bebbington is the Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Stirling in Scotland. Photos: Top left: David Bebbington & Ridley Principal Rhys Bezzant at the EHA conference; Top right: Bebbington at Ridley College; Bottom left: Bebbington & SMBC Principal Derek Brotherson at SMBC lecture; Bottom right: Ruth Lukabyo (Youthworks), Nicole Starling (Morling College), Rachel Ciano (SMBC), Bebbington, Rhys Bezzant (Ridley College), & Mark Earngey (Moore College) at the EHA Conference.

Recent Events 2025



Top row: Photos from SMBC's Preaching Conference: Top left: Kirk Patston (SMBC); Top right: Laurel Moffatt (Mary Andrews College) & Karl Deenick (SMBC). Bottom row: Photos from Graham Stanton's presentation at Youthworks College presenting on his research project "Your Story" on the faith of Australian children and young people. Bottom row: Mike Dicker (Youthworks College), Andy Stevenson (Youthworks), Al James (Youthworks), Ruth Lukabyo (Youthworks College), Graham Stanton (Ridley College), David Krebs (Scripture Union), Lauren Iuiker (Scripture Union), Mamie Long (Youthworks College); Bottom right: Graham Stanton.

AUT HDR Conferrals

November 2024 - May 2025

Doctor of Philosophy

Co-supervisor: Dr. Jon Newton

Ross Carruthers
Christ College

"The Warning Passage in Hebrews 5:11-6:8: A Paradigm Shift in Interpretation and its Ramifications"

Principal Supervisor: Dr. Ian Smith
Co-supervisor: Dr. Gregory Goswell

This thesis explores a neglected interpretation of the warning passage in Hebrews 5:11-6:8, focusing on Dr. Noel Weeks' 1976 proposal. While R.C. Sauer identified fifteen traditional interpretations centered on Hebrews 6:4-6 as addressing Christian apostasy, Weeks argued the passage instead refers to the final apostasy of Israel. This approach shifts the passage away from debates about individual salvation, presenting it as a collective eschatological warning. The thesis analyzes Weeks' view in depth, highlighting its consistency with the structure of the other four warning passages, its coherence with the Greek text, and its role within the broader argument of Hebrews rather than as a mere digression. A key implication is that this reading emphasizes collective eschatology and supports a connection between Hebrews and the Stephen narrative in Acts 6-7. This link may offer insight into the nature of the "Hebrews heresy" the letter seeks to confront.

Clement Fryer
Malyon/Morling College

"How can Pentecostals engage with the socially disadvantaged in South-East Queensland?"

Principal Supervisor: Dr. Ian Hussey

This research examines the evolution of the Pentecostal Movement in South East Queensland (SEQ), highlighting its shift from a marginalized renewal movement to a mainstream expression of the Australian church. As Pentecostals have integrated into middle-class society, their connection with the socially disadvantaged has weakened, creating tension with their biblical and missional roots. Using Osmer's Practical Theological methodology, the study conducts a historical analysis, biblical and theological inquiry, social-scientific case studies, and a praxis-focused synthesis. Findings show that while most SEQ Pentecostals have strayed from their Wesleyan roots of social engagement, some churches and individuals exemplify a holistic ministry model. The study proposes a renewed Pentecostal theology centered on diakonia—Christocentric and Spirit-led service—emphasizing servant leadership, incarnational proximity to the disadvantaged, and collaborative, authentic ministry. By adopting Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) and Osmer's framework, SEQ Pentecostals can reengage more effectively with marginalized communities, fostering meaningful socio-spiritual transformation.

Erin Martine Hutton
Morling College

"Let me hear your voice: How the Song of Songs contributes to the primary prevention of Domestic and Family Violence."

Principal Supervisor: Dr. Andrew Sloane
Co-supervisor: Dr. Grenville Kent

Song of Songs, using stunningly beautiful poetry of the highest craft, shows us two young

lovers who are God's given example—celebration, even—of love, sex, sexuality, embodiment and a mutually respectful relationship characterised by equality, intimacy, and delight. I contend that this scriptural example can help men and women understand love, sexuality and relationship as they were intended to be. My thesis explores how learning from the poetic portrayals of the lover and the beloved—the woman and the man, the main characters in the Song—contribute to the primary prevention of domestic abuse. Namely, the way they model and exemplify gender equality, including: consent, initiating and pursuing a respectful relationship, embodiment (rather than the objectification of women's bodies), the eschewing of rigid and hierarchical gender roles and stereotypes, and mutual sexual desire (addressing misconceptions about female anatomy and sexuality). The Song, then, gives us both resources for and contributes to the primary prevention of domestic abuse.

Doctor of Ministry

Owen Hoskin
Melbourne School of Theology

"An Exploration of the Influence of the Christian Professional Mediator's Spirituality in a New Zealand Cross-cultural, Community-level Mediation Context"

Principal Supervisor: Dr Thomas Kimber
Co-Supervisor: Dr David Crawley

This study explores how Christian professional mediators' spirituality influences cross-cultural community mediation in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. Recent discourse acknowledges that a mediator's character, values, and spirituality impact mediation, with many recognizing that conflict may include a spiritual dimension. While most research draws from diverse spiritualities—Christian, non-Christian, New Age, pantheistic, and secular—this study focuses specifically on Christian spirituality.

This study explores how Christian professional mediators' spirituality influences cross-cultural community mediation in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. Recent discourse acknowledges that a mediator's character, values, and spirituality impact mediation, with many recognizing that conflict may include a spiritual dimension. While most research draws from diverse spiritualities—Christian, non-Christian, New Age, pantheistic, and secular—this study focuses specifically on Christian spirituality. Through non-directive interviews with eleven Christian mediators (seven in New Zealand and four in Australia), the research uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to understand their lived experiences. Findings highlight contrasts, similarities, and new insights into how Christian spirituality shapes discernment, ethics, and practice in mediation. The study also questions assumptions about spiritual sources and calls for further research into the spiritual dimension of alternative dispute resolution. It addresses gaps in global literature by focusing on the local context and contributes a faith-based perspective to mediation scholarship in the Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

Master of Theology (Research)

Tim Omrod
Queensland Theological College

"Personality and Christian Ministry: Soundings in Paul's Co-workers"

Principal Supervisor: Dr Gary Millar
Co-Supervisor: Dr Andrew Bain

This study addresses the tension Christian workers face regarding personality in ministry. While personality seems important, the Bible appears largely silent on the subject, causing ministry practices to rely heavily on psychology or to dismiss personality as a modern, unbiblical concern. Both approaches are unsatisfactory and hinder effective ministry. Using a modified practice-theory-

model, the study examines how the book of Acts depicts the personalities of Paul's co-workers—Barnabas, Apollos, and Timothy—and what this reveals for ministry. It explores their unique traits and how these shaped their roles and relationships. The study concludes that, although not a central biblical focus, personality matters in ministry. Christian workers' temperaments, relational styles, gifts,

and backgrounds are God-given and affect leadership, teamwork, conflict resolution, and preaching. Therefore, Christian workers should understand and embrace their personalities, not for self-fulfillment, but to serve Christ and advance his kingdom more effectively through their distinct God-given design.



AUSTRALIAN
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MISSIOLOGY AND PRACTICAL THEOLOGY CONFERENCE

Keynote:

"Demonstrating Validity in Qualitative Research"
- Rev Prof Philip Hughes

A conference for human subject research
students, candidates and researchers

Via Zoom

Friday, 15 August 2025, 9am-4pm

Program: See the QR Code

Cost: Free!

To register and see the program use the QR
Code ->



We welcome attendees from outside the
Australian University of Theology



Calling all AUT HDR candidates and college researchers!



Sit Down and Write!

Join us for our semester 2, 2025 writing sessions!

Who are the writing sessions for:

- AUT HDR students
- AUT and affiliated college researchers

The writing sessions will give you an opportunity to:

- Dedicate a scheduled time for writing in a supportive environment alongside other HDR students and researchers
- Share the focus of your research with other researchers in the university
- Provide updates on your research with fellow researchers
- Learn new tips and tricks for writing and researcher from experienced AUT researchers.

The program for each month will be the same:

- 15 mins of general chat and updates on researching and writing
- 10 mins of writing tips from a researcher in the AUT
- 60 mins of dedicated writing
- 15 min break
- 10 mins of reflection on the research/writing
- 60 mins of dedicated writing
- 10 mins of final reflection

Sit Down and Write Sessions for Semester 2, 2025

These monthly sessions will run on different days and times each month to give opportunities for students in different regions to participate.

- Tuesday 8th July, 2025 – 3-6pm AEST
- Thursday 7th August, 2025 – 1-4pm AEST
- Monday 1st September, 2025 – 4-7pm AEST
- Wednesday 8th October, 2025 – 2-5pm AEDST (daylight saving time)
- Tuesday 4th November, 2025 – 12-3pm AEDST (daylight saving time)

To sign up:

Email: research@aut.edu.au

Our Team

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- Professor James Dalziel

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Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)

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Quality Manager

- Lissa Philip

Academic Quality Officer

- Stephen Sarkoezy

AUT Office News

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Dr Edwina Murphy is currently on study leave until October 2025. For any matters related to research in the AUT, please contact Louise Gosbell at research@aut.edu.au.

NEXUS Communications

For any communications regarding the AUT’s NEXUS magazine, please contact us at:

research@aut.edu.au