

THE FLAG VERSUS THE CROSS

An Australian case study on funeral practice

Robert Gribben

1. The case

Dick Vipond served with Australian forces in Papua New Guinea in the Second World War. On his return, he was an active member of the Returned & Services League¹ (RSL, the national veterans' organization), and was involved in voluntary work with veterans and war widows at Melbourne's Repatriation Hospital. He was also a member of St John's Uniting Church² congregation in the suburb of Essendon. He died at the age of 81, and his family approached the Rev. Dr Wes Campbell, the Minister of St John's, to make arrangements for the funeral.

Dr Campbell gives this account of the interview:

[When approached] I agreed immediately [to conduct the funeral at St John's] and offered my full ministry and the support of St John's in the preparation of the service. As is often the case now, the family asked for one service at the church, including the committal. No-one would attend at the crematorium. I also agreed to that request³.

'One service at the church' is by contrast with two services as the inherited pattern for Australian funerals in the Uniting Church traditions. The two services comprise, in this order, a funeral service in a church building, a car procession following a hearse to the cemetery or crematorium, and a graveside (or equivalent by the catafalque) committal. At this second service, there may be added to, or incorporated into the church's liturgy, one or more additional rites conducted by the RSL, or by a Freemasons' Lodge, the Country Fire Authority and occasionally a sporting body or other significant association to the deceased. The first two, however, are the more common.

¹ At the end of World War I, The Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA) was founded (1916). In 1940, the name was the Returned Sailors' Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia (RSSAILA), and finally in 1965, the present name was adopted. It is universally known as the 'RSL'.

² The Uniting Church in Australia is a union of Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists, inaugurated in June 1977.

³ *Insights Magazine* (an online magazine of the Uniting Church, Synod of New South Wales), March 2005, in an article entitled 'Let's consider seriously what the church stands for'.

These rites are led by a member of the relevant association, and in the case of the RSL and the Freemasons, to a set form, which we will explore in a moment. The family's request for a single liturgical occasion is a sign of change in community practice⁴. Whereas the location of these rites away from a church building has allowed the liberty of the clergy to associate themselves closely with, or separate themselves from, such rites, the request implies that these additional rites will now occur within a building established for Christian worship. The shift in community expectations now confuses the Christian and the civic rites.

Dr Campbell continues:

When the family requested an RSL service, I proposed that this could be done with dignity and care in front of the church [sc. outside the building], after the coffin had been carried and placed outside the church [there being a wide footpath between the church and the street where the hearse would be parked], with people gathered for that service – the draping of the flag, the placing of poppies and the Last Post [these elements will be examined below].

I encouraged them to include someone representing Dick's RSL connection to speak in the eulogies in the church, so that his whole life could be remembered in the service. The prayers would also have given thanks for his whole life.

In this, Dr Campbell was following a protocol approved by his congregation's council.

2. The 'RSL Service'

Almost certainly there was a lack of understanding in the family's (and certainly in the public's) mind of what constitutes 'the RSL Service'. It is probable, given what happened, that some thought that the whole service was 'the RSL service' if at some point it included flag, Last Post and the placing of poppies. In fact, it is an insertion into the Christian liturgy by an external organization by permission of the presiding minister.

⁴ An alternative newer pattern is to bury, or more usually cremate the body in a private ceremony – that is, with close members of the family only in attendance – and then to hold a 'memorial service' or 'service of thanksgiving' in the church at a later date or time (this has its secular equivalent, held in some other public building). The significant element is that there is no body present at the funeral. There are other variations.

The RSL itself defines, on its website⁵, exactly what constitutes its rite. 'Wherever possible, RSL commemoration ceremonies should follow a standard order of service.' It is described as a 'drill', and the precise wording and actions are clearly stipulated. It is recognized that it may need to be adapted to particular circumstances⁶.

The drill indicates that the ceremonies begin at the cemetery (or crematorium) entrance, where members assemble (separately from other mourners) and are handed commemorative red poppies⁷ by a local leader. They then march ahead of the hearse for a distance, and form an 'avenue', a guard of honour, on both sides in front of the grave through which the coffin passes. They are instructed to stand to the left of the minister (a detail few ministers have noticed). At the appropriate time (which may be before or after the coffin has been lowered), formal words⁸ of memorial are spoken (not a eulogy), and poppies placed on the coffin, or cast into the grave. This 'Ode' is then recited according to this instruction⁹:

'They shall grow not old, (short pause)
As we that are left grow old, (longer pause)
Age shall not weary them, (short pause)
Nor the years condemn, (longer pause)
At the going down of the sun, (short pause)
And in the morning, (longer pause)
We will remember them. (short pause)

The gathering repeats 'We will remember them.'

⁵ <http://www.rsl.org.au/main.html>, under Funerals/Burials, and also Traditions. The Ode comes from *For the Fallen*, a poem by the English poet and writer Laurence Binyon published in 1914. The verse, which became the League Ode was already used in association with commemoration services in Australia in 1921.

⁶ In a meeting with the President of the RSL in Melbourne, the Uniting Church Moderator and I were assured that the RSL prefers the church to conduct the service; it does not wish generally to organize or oversee the funeral service. Not all RSL leaders are so clear on the issue.

⁷ These replicate the red poppies which grew in the fields of Flanders and on graves during the First World War, and were commemorated in a poem by a Canadian officer (and medico), Col. John McCrae. Later, cloth poppies became a symbol of remembrance for the war dead.

⁸ They include 'As we stand here remembering his [sic] many qualities, we join in a silent pledge to sink whatever differences we may have with each other and to extend the hand of comradeship and to carry on our tradition of unselfish service to the disabled, to the bereaved and to the highest ideals of citizenship'.

⁹ The pauses are part of the instruction on the website.

The Last Post is played by bugle or recording, and a period of silence follows. The RSL leader then says 'Lest we forget' and all repeat it. Rouse or Reveille is then played.

If the minister wishes to separate him or herself from this rite, the Christian service will be concluded and he or she may literally leave the graveside. Many clergy prefer to allow the RSL (or others) their rite, and then end the whole service with a Christian blessing. It is often justified by 'I want the last word to be Christian'.

It should be noted that there is no reference to God in the RSL *Ode*. It purports to be an entirely humanist statement, an acknowledgement of mortality, regret, and hope expressed as greater solidarity in good deeds. I am sure that the bugle calls represent for many Christians the triumph of the resurrection over death, but they could equally be read in pagan terms: the welcome of the bloodied hero in Valhalla¹⁰. The contrast with Bunyan's hero in *Pilgrim's Progress* is subtle but important, not least because the death of Mr Valiant-for-Truth is often read in this context. But Bunyan's victors have 'taken up the cross'; their battles are in Christ, against the principalities and powers; their victory is Christ's, not their own. Therefore Valiant-for-Truth hands his sword to those who continue that cosmic fight; his courage and skill go to those who can get them; his marks and scars he says 'I carry with me to be a witness that I have fought His battles who now will be my rewarder'. The reference point is the crucified One, not himself, not his sword, his courage or his skill.

3. The pastoral outcome

Having thus explained the possibilities to the grieving family, Dr Campbell was aware that the family believed that the 'RSL service' implied that the coffin would be covered by the Australian national flag for the whole of the service (there being only one service, and that in the church, in this instance). Dr Campbell would not permit the RSL rite to be held within the church building, nor would he allow the flag to be on the coffin in the liturgy. He suggested as an alternative that it might be covered by a pall, which he described as a 'white baptismal cloth'. This is not a familiar provision in a Uniting Church, though it

¹⁰ This is underlined in a hymn sometimes quoted in an RSL service: 'O valiant hearts, who to your glory came, through dust of conflict and through the battle flame, tranquil you lie, your knightly virtue proved, your memory hallowed in the land you loved'. The words are by John Stanhope Arkwright in 1919. The image may be the language of the Crusades, but that is a very difficult legacy today.

is mentioned in the commentary on the 1988 *Uniting in Worship*¹¹, the church's liturgical book, it is not mentioned in the liturgy itself¹².

The alternative was not accepted (or understood). The immediate family understood Dr Campbell to be refusing their father's desire to be buried with 'the RSL service' and with the national flag on his coffin. The family then arranged to have the local Anglican priest to conduct the service, with flag on coffin throughout the liturgy.

4. The media outcome

The deceased Digger's son was so outraged that he telephoned the local 'shock jock', the compère of a radio talkback show. He was interviewed and the calls flowed in with increasing outrage. The anger was chiefly focussed on the ingratitude of the church, as expressed by their minister's (increasingly colourfully described) action, both for the service of an old soldier, and for the particular soldier's 'contributions' to St John's Church Essendon. The family's reasonable expectation (however little understood) that their father would have the RSL rite at his funeral became dramatized as 'Dick's dying wish'. The refusal was an 'insult'. One caller, who says her husband was considering 'joining St John's', stated 'the Uniting Church has no Christian ways...if it did, *it would have given Mr Vipond the funeral he wanted*'¹³.

Within hours and days the matter was a national scandal on radio, television and the print media. A Sky News poll to the question 'Should churches be able to ban RSL funerals for old diggers?' Yes, 80% No 20%¹⁴. The (state) Synod office, the national Assembly office, and local ministers were receiving enquiries about their attitudes.

The Melbourne tabloid newspaper took photographs at the funeral at the nearby Anglican Church which showed the coffin covered with an Australian flag, with the vicar and the local RSL representatives both wearing service insignia. A large display of flowers was on top of the flag and a small basket containing poppies.

¹¹ Robert Gribben, *A Guide to Uniting in Worship*, Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1990.

¹² It now appears in the 2005 funeral liturgy.

¹³ My italics. By the end of the day, Dr Campbell had received a death threat on his answer-machine. The family did move to a motel overnight, and then followed a long term plan to visit Dr Campbell's mother in Perth (on the far west of the continent). The *Herald-Sun* headline was 'Priest [sic] runs from threat of violence' (a hint of cowardice?).

¹⁴ The ratio for Yes grew as the day went on; other polls produced similar results.

5. The church's responses

The church authorities were ambushed. Media responses were largely defensive, and in any case, theology (let alone liturgy) is not a natural vocabulary for this kind of press.

The Moderator of the Synod of Victoria, the Rev. Sue Gormann, added an apology to one which Dr Campbell had earlier given, for any distress caused to the family at this difficult time. She also stated that 'the Uniting Church has not introduced a policy to ban the Australian flag from funeral services and would continue RSL services at the conclusion of the Christian liturgy'. A neighbouring Uniting Church put a note in its bulletin 'We welcome Diggers, like nearly all Uniting Churches!'

She appointed a task group, chaired by myself, to produce 'guidelines' for the church's practice, which was to report to her. The membership of the group was seven, involving two theological teachers, five other ministers, including an army chaplain, and a lay (woman) member, representing a wide spectrum of views, and the process took ten weeks to complete its work. There were deep divisions within the task group.

(a) Issues: the meaning of the national flag and of 'sacrifice'

The refusal to place a flag on the coffin during the church's service was clearly the flash-point for the public controversy. Responses from church members included several which noted the fact that the Australian flag includes the 'Union' flag, commonly called the 'Union Jack', the official British flag¹⁵ which has the crosses of St George, Andrew and Patrick on it, as well as the representation of the star constellation, the 'Southern Cross' (which appears over lands other than Australia). 'Are their crosses no longer Christian emblems? Are they not Christian enough for our UCA leaders?' asks one correspondent.

¹⁵ The 'union' was that of Scotland and England (including Wales) after King James VI of Scotland inherited the English throne in 1603 (at that stage a personal union rather than the civic one in 1707). The flag then consisted of the cross of St George – red on white, with the saltire cross of St Andrew (white on blue) combined. St Patrick's cross – saltire, red on white – was laid on the Scottish saltire, and still behind the St George's cross, to form the present design in 1801. A 'jack' is a maritime bow flag, and given the strength of the British navy, was probably the reason for its popularity. The Australian flag was first flown in 1901.

A more measured letter said, 'The national flag was a symbol of their [the armed forces'] struggle, representing those values for which they fought and died. Their sacrifice was enormous, and it is to this sacrifice that we owe the freedom to worship that we currently enjoy¹⁶.' So here is a link: the freedom to worship is owed to the (potential) sacrifice of those who fought in this important war. Mr Vipond fought in Papua New Guinea against invading Japanese forces¹⁷. Many saw the Asian theatre of war as a defence of Christian values mediated through British culture.

Dr Campbell contributed his own reflections in the June edition of *Crosslight* (three months later).

It is true that a sentence from the Fourth Gospel – 'No-one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends' - John 15:13 [usually cited in its masculine form!] – has been taken to speak of war time sacrifice. The contrast is clear, however. Jesus was speaking on the night he was going without defence, non-violently, to his death. His one sacrifice is for every person, regardless of race, colour, culture or nation. The New Testament church makes clear that his death is the means of reconciling enemies (Eph. 2). It expresses the infinite love of God, the gospel of peace and the hope of resurrection.

The task group's report to the Moderator acknowledged that there was a variety of opinions held on the meaning of the flag. It noted that those who fought under the Union flag fought for 'God, King and Country', and the crosses represented a Christian nation. Some saw the flag as 'a reminder and sustainer of their faith in times of great threat and evil. It was seen as a Christian symbol.' However, 'for other Christians who served in World War One and Two, and later in such conflicts as Korea, Vietnam and Iraq, the perceived support of the Church for the war effort represented a failure of the church to be faithful to the Gospel. For them the flag may not be seen as a Christian symbol.' Drawing a further contrast, the report continued, 'for people who have come to Australia

¹⁶ The Australian Government protocol on the use of the flag at a funeral reads, 'The flag can be used to cover the coffin of any Australian citizen at their funeral. The upper left quarter or canton should be draped over the "left shoulder" of the coffin to represent the heart. The flag should be removed before the coffin is lowered into the ground or after the service at a crematorium'. Note that there is a difference between for formally declared 'State Funeral', to which these protocols apply, and a service held at a local church which may involve someone who has served the State. The latter is the church's business. See <http://www.itsanhonour.gov.au/symbols/flag.cfm#funerals>

¹⁷ The northern city of Darwin was bombed by Japanese air forces in 1940, and mini-submarines entered Sydney harbour.

from war or conflict-ravaged parts of the world, the Australian flag may be a sign of peace. For asylum seekers currently in detention, or previously in detention for long periods of time [this striking a raw nerve in current political issues in Australia] our flag may represent oppression and injustice. In addition, for most if not all people, it is doubtful that multicultural Australia would be understood as a Christian nation, or its flag as an unambiguous symbol'.

Thus the task group makes the liturgical point: a flag is a symbol, and symbols are multivalent; symbols may have both a light and a dark side; symbols open up responses to life that may be deeply disturbing, and which are ultimately not controllable. Plain Protestantism has a long history of suspicion of symbols in church. There can hardly be a more forceful illustration of the emotional reaction to a symbol than this particular case, and church members found themselves passionately divided. Much that was unchristian was said.

The Report then draws some conclusions from this ambiguity:

These [above] matters aside, there are strong grounds within the Christian faith for the view that any national flag, or any country – Christian or not – represents something of the world's brokenness and division. In the name of the nation, leaders and rulers have historically acted contrary to God's will, abusing power and using it against their own people, and against people of other nations. Even in Christian democracies, nationalism may be used to exclude people of other nationalities, for more, or less, legitimate purposes.

The Christian faith has a clear position on these matters. For the Christian, nationality does not provide either ultimate identity or hope. Christians believe the identity of all people is God-given. Their identity, in life and in death, is in the merciful and gracious action of God the Holy Trinity in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Further, whereas nationality represents distinction and division of the world's people, the Christian gospel is for all people of all nations; the kingdom of God is for all humankind.

And finally, this ecclesial confession:

The Christian faith is also clear about the matter of allegiance. Christians owe their allegiance first and foremost to God, and only in a secondary and penultimate fashion to anything else, including their nation.

Although Christian teaching is clear on these matters, the church itself has not always been faithful to them. The church has often colluded with those who have held the greatest power, and remained silent and inactive in the face of great injustice.¹⁸

(b) The Church's official responses

The Uniting Church responded at a number of levels. First, the report was largely marginalized. When it was presented to the Synod Standing Committee by myself and a military chaplain in full clerical regimentals, it was clear some members were still angry. The decision, made without the representatives of the task group present, was to reduce the proposed 'guidelines' to a 'discussion paper', and hedge it about with a covering letter which assured the readers that the 'majority of UCA ministers, when conducting the funeral of a Returned Service person, allow the coffin to be covered with the national flag during the funeral service and they can continue to follow this practice'. One wonders what was the purpose of ten hard week's of theological work. The synod's action implied that those who had the theological and conscience problems explored at length in the Report (eight A-4 pages single-spaced) were out of step, and only needed tolerance.

There is no room to explore the basis of this anger – or fear. Certainly members had been shocked by the force of the reaction in wider society and in congregations. There seems to have been very little understanding of the huge media manipulation involved, the truth being an early victim. Perhaps the only public statement of any intelligence was by a journalist in the Melbourne newspaper *The Age* (which had otherwise not reported the matter). It included this observation:

Of course [pastoral care is fundamental to ministry] it is, but the difficulty for the church - and for Campbell - comes in weighing that against a duty to properly represent Christ and to faithfully follow the liturgical requirements of the church, as set out and agreed over hundreds of years.

¹⁸ More graphically, the comment of a Missouri Synod Lutheran pastor: 'As I once explained to a military honour guard accompanying a flag-draped casket, 'At the church door we remove the flag of state and cover the casket with the pall of the Church. You are about to enter a foreign embassy representing Jesus Christ, who is King over all kings and Lord over all lords, at whose Name every knee will one day bow. As you know, no flag of another state is ever displayed inside a foreign embassy.' They understood perfectly'. I am grateful to the Rev. Nathan Nettleton for drawing my attention to this. A writer to *Crosslight* pointed out that at the Queen Mother's funeral, her coffin was covered by her own royal standard until it reached the doors of Westminster Abbey, where it was removed and replaced by a pall.

It must be among the hardest things a minister has to do, to try to weigh up the degree of comfort provided by symbols that mean so much to mourners, and yet to find room for the one symbol the church funeral must have if it is to make any sense - the cross.¹⁹

The question remains: what does 'pastoral care' mean? Does it mean, as the radio caller declared, that we give the grieving what they want? This is a widespread view which applies to baptism and marriage as well. It is based on a weak missiology which thinks that God's only answer to our questions is Yes. One younger minister asked 'Has society come to understand that what matters to us in the Uniting Church is to offer acceptance, and that this was first modelled by Jesus the Giant Sponge, and that if even foundational Christian convictions create discomfort or offence, they must be modified and rethought?'²⁰ This is a critical choice for the Uniting Church (sexuality being its current storm centre of debate) and there is a great deal of resistance (for good and bad reasons) to the church adopting any line which would rule some actions or persons out. There is also a resistance to any unambiguous *liturgical* direction (e.g. on the baptismal formula). Free Churches are free to do what seems best in their own eyes.

So there is a fundamental clash of culture and faith here, a question of Christian identity in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society. But there is also a connected issue of pastoral theology. Sadly, the response in church (and not least in clerical) circles to tough questions like this is to say that one's actions must be 'pastoral' – by presumed contrast with some strict view of 'theological' or 'liturgical'. Of course, a Christian's response is determined by the pastoral, but this has a focus, a defining aspect – which takes us back to theology, our understanding of God. The determinant is the crucified and risen One, not human need – if the response is to be Christian and not sentimental. It is *his* pastoral word which needs to be heard.

This is perhaps best expressed in what we do in, and what we mean by, baptism. In baptism, our particular humanity is buried in Christ's. Our name, when the family to which we belong really counts, is 'Christ', not even the name by which we are called to baptism. Our hope for salvation when we stand before the judgement seat is that when the Judge looks at us in the dock, it is the Beloved's face which is seen, not ours, or rather, ours in Christ. The judgement is not passed on us, but on him. Therefore, in the context of a particular death, the

¹⁹ Steve Waldon, 'The flag versus the cross', *The Age*, 14th March 2005.

²⁰ Rev. Rosemary Broadstock, *Crosslight*, June 2005, Letters, 10.

church does not, indeed *cannot* judge the person: it can only express its enduring hope in Christ for *this* sinner, as well as any other sinner; for *this* hero as well as any other hero - by human standards. Our Gospel is eschatological. It is based on trust, that is, faith. In the Uniting Church's liturgy, the first prayer – before thanks is (rightly) given for the life of the person who has died – is a thanksgiving for the work of Christ.²¹

(c) The Church's liturgical response

By coincidence, the second edition of the Uniting Church's liturgical book, *Uniting in Worship 2*²² was in the final stages of its editorial work. Several of the changes suggested in the Report were thus directly written into the book with the agreement of the national Working Group on Worship. Whatever the Victorian Synod thought, the report to their Moderator was acted on.

First, the Notes to the liturgy suggest that use of RSL and other such rites within the church building *is an exception*. They resist the innovation of a single funeral service.

[6.] Wherever possible, any civic rite should follow the church funeral and be held at the graveside or crematorium. Where there is a single funeral event, it is appropriate to hold the civic rite at an agreed location *outside the church* (e.g. at the hearse), where it can be observed with dignity. Where this is impracticable because of pastoral reasons, or due to inclement weather, *the coffin may be moved to an agreed location*, e.g. adjacent to the table for mementos (see Notes 15 and 16) or at the door of the church (my italics).

In dealing with the increasing habit of loading the coffin with memorabilia, the Note recommends setting up a table in the narthex (where there is room) for this purpose. It concludes,

²¹ In the above two paragraphs, I have been helped by reflections on the controversy by two colleagues, Dr Craig Thompson and Professor Randall Prior, both in unpublished papers.

²² The first book was published in 1988 as *Uniting in Worship*; its successor was published in late 2005. See my chapter [18] in Geoffrey Wainwright & Karen Westerfield Tucker (eds.), *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, Oxford 2006.

[15.] If they [sc. memorabilia] are displayed in the church, it is important that they do not obscure or detract from the primary Christian symbols of cross, Bible, baptismal font, the Lord's Table or the Easter Candle²³.

The Notes then turn to the matter of the flag.

[16.] Occasionally, a request is made for the coffin to be covered with the particular symbol of the national flag, in order to honour a specific part [note – not the defining part!] of the life of the deceased.

The warning about competing with the 'primary symbols' is repeated. However, some 'alternative uses of the flag' apart from placing it over the coffin are suggested:

[16.] These should be discussed with the bereaved family: e.g. the flag being placed amongst the mementos, or being held by an appropriate person during the ceremony and placed over the coffin for additional civic rites before The Committal. The chief concern is that the symbols of the Easter faith be seen as the context for this commemoration of a particular life²⁴.

The Notes clearly draw on the report to the Moderator, but they ignore the caveats she placed on accepting its more critical recommendations.

Sadly, one of the Report's better lines is omitted: 'a simple bare coffin without adornment or flowers is always an option and one worthy of consideration'.

Liturgiologists and pastors know that rubrics may educate but do not necessarily bring about change. One wonders why the Uniting Church's Working Group of Worship decided to establish such strong guidelines. Certainly they provide

²³ The 2005 Funeral liturgy has also added a considerable number of preliminary rites in church whereby the Minister honours (usually with an action and a citation from scripture as he/she moves around the sanctuary) the 'primary symbols' – placing the pall, lighting the Easter Candle, sprinkling with water, placing a cross (on or near the coffin) and a Bible (do.). Only then does the liturgy proper begin.

²⁴ This rubric is not entirely clear. The 'ceremony' referred to is surely the Christian liturgy, and it has the intention of allowing for the respectful holding of the flag – by e.g. an agent of the RSL. There is a particular way of folding the flag for this purpose. The Notes also refer to the use of a pall and gives some explanation of its meaning [see below], but the report had further suggested that a pall could cover the flag for the liturgy and be removed, exposing the flag, for the civic rite. Note 4 says 'A pall is not widely used in the Uniting Church. It is a white cloth large enough to completely cover the coffin and (its) stand. It may be embroidered with a simple cross, and symbolizes baptism. It is a reminder of the resurrection (the liturgical colour is the same as Easter) and of having 'put on Christ' (Gal. 3:27).

those who read them with some authority from the church for their action. The effectiveness of that course depends on how many ministers will either read the fine print of the new liturgical book, or give them any authority in their own ministry: neither is a very secure hope.

Two brief post-scripts.

1. In December 2005, Australians were shocked to witness racist riots at a Sydney beachside suburb, Cronulla. Youths of Anglo-Saxon origin set upon their peers of Lebanese and other Middle-eastern origin (nicknamed 'Lebs' = Lebanese) in violent fashion, something we have never experienced in quite successful multi-cultural Australia. The riot was stirred along by a Sydney talk-back radio host who encouraged the 'Aussies' to take action to clear their beaches of these 'foreign' invaders²⁵. The fact that some were Muslims also became a factor in the rhetoric. Some of the attackers were wearing or waving the Australian flag, and at the height of the event, a young Lebanese Australian tore down the flag flying over (of all places) the local RSL branch office, and burned it. The result can be imagined. There were revenge attacks, and vandalism of mosques. The events caused a profound examination of conscience throughout the nation in the succeeding months, and a TV documentary about the place of the national flag could be aired as late as July 2007²⁶. It included an interview with Dr Wes Campbell.
2. In March 2007, one of the ministers on the task group was asked to conduct the funeral of an old soldier. There was to be a single service, held at the church. He followed the report's main recommendations to the letter. This time the family was delighted, and when the complaint of an RSL member who was present re-ignited the controversy, the family wrote a vehement defence of their minister's action. But it is clear that the theological point has yet to be won in church and society.

Funerals and Flags/Academic/articles

²⁵ The matter started after an incident when three life-savers were attacked. Anonymous emails to the radio station gave the excuse for the vilification which followed. There is plenty of media response on the internet under 'Cronulla riots'.

²⁶ ABC TV 'Compass' on Sunday July 1st, 2007.