



Alphacrucis University College



Gospel
Conversations

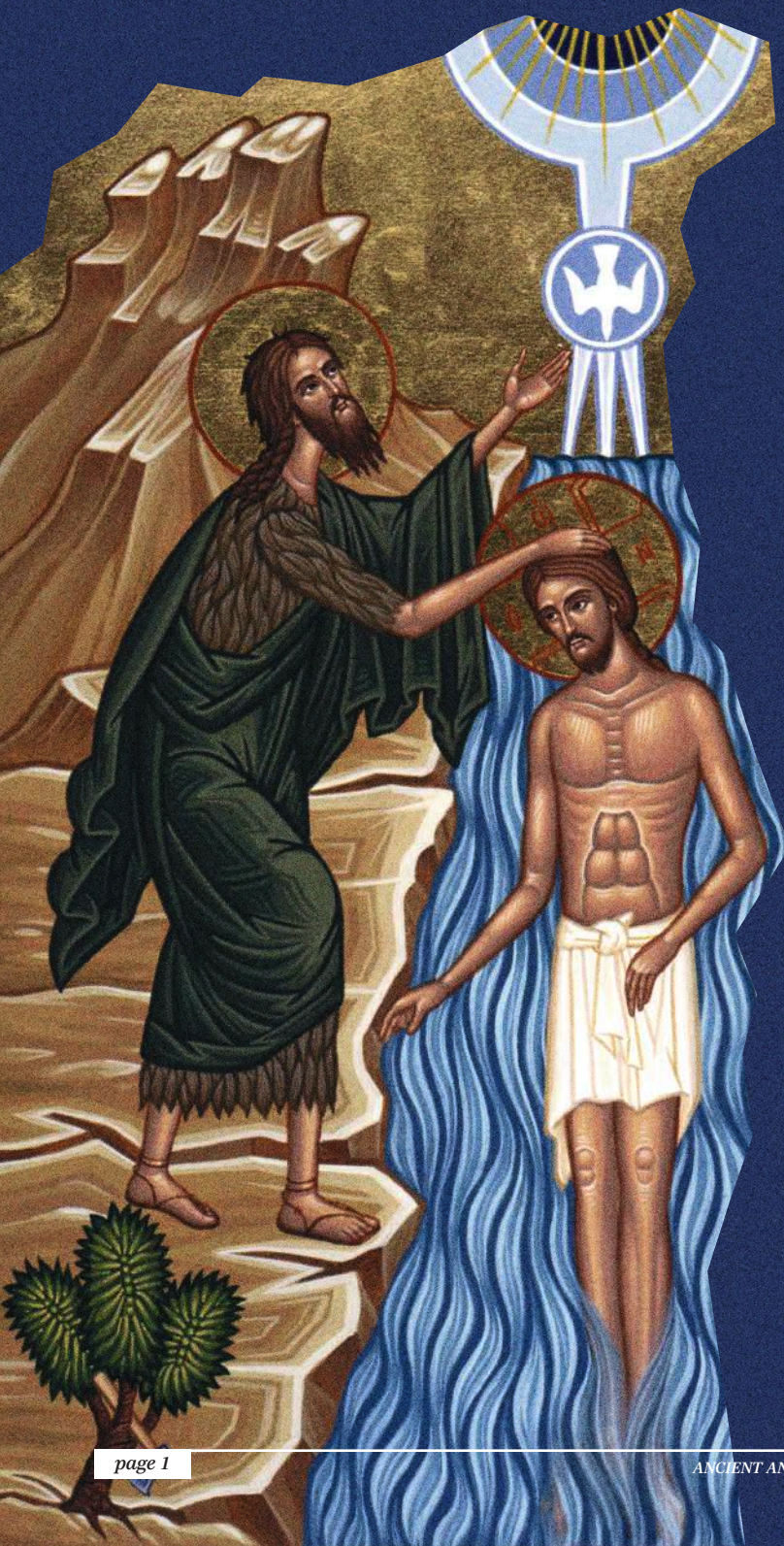
ANCIENT ANSWERS TO MODERN QUESTIONS

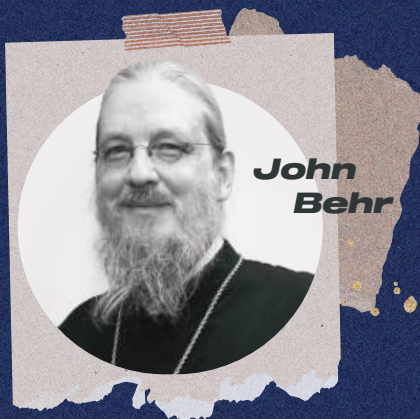
15–16 August 2025

Co-hosted by Gospel Conversations and Alphacrucis

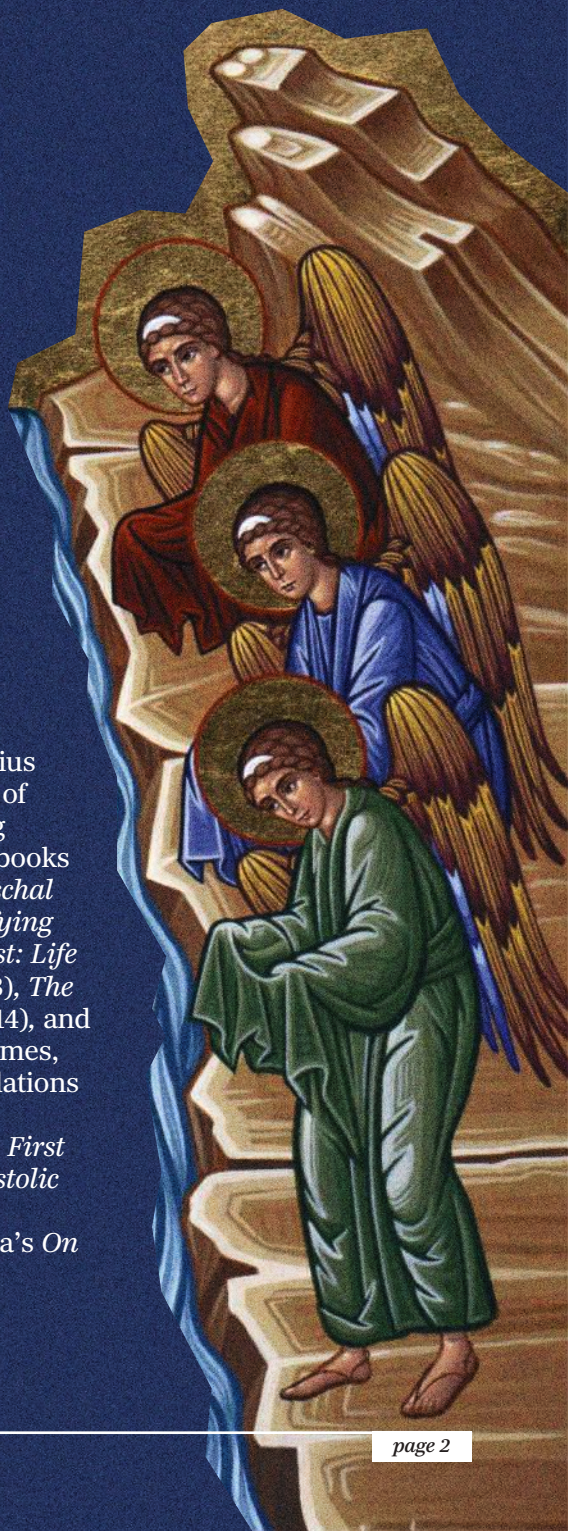
Gospel Conversations and Alphacrucis University College are delighted to be hosting a two-day conference on the continuing relevance of the early Christian tradition. The conference explores the theological, spiritual, and pastoral insights of the early church, and asks how these insights continue to speak to challenges facing the modern world.







The keynote speaker, **John Behr**, is Regius Professor of Humanity at the University of Aberdeen and one of the world's leading scholars of early Christian thought. His books include *John the Theologian and His Paschal Gospel* (2019), *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity* (2013), *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death* (2006), *Becoming Human* (2013), *The Cross Stands While the World Turns* (2014), and *Formation of Christian Theology* (2 volumes, 2001-2004). He has also published translations of some of the most significant works of patristic theology, including Origen's *On First Principles* (2018), Irenaeus's *On the Apostolic Preaching* (1997), Athanasius's *On the Incarnation* (2012), and Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Human Image of God* (2023).



PROGRAM

ANCIENT ANSWERS TO MODERN QUESTIONS

Friday, 15 August

9:30 – 9:45	Introduction and Housekeeping <i>Ben Myers</i>
9:45 – 10:30	OPENING ADDRESS <i>John Behr 'From Death to Life: Lessons from Early Christianity'</i>
10:30 – 11:00	Morning Tea
11:00 – 12:30	HOPE AND HEALING IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE Philip Kariatlis <i>'The Theology of St Isaac the Syrian: A Lasting Answer to "the One Thing Needful"'</i> Leisa Aitken and Ben Myers <i>'Responding to a Crisis of Hope: Gregory of Nyssa in Dialogue with Contemporary Psychology'</i> Layla Nahavandi <i>'Demonisation and Deliverance in the Early Church: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Implications'</i>
12:30 – 1:15	Lunch
1:15 – 2:45	CREATION, NATURE, AND THE HUMAN FUTURE Doru Costache <i>'Science-Engaged Theology in Clement of Alexandria's Nature Contemplation: Lessons for Today'</i> Katherine Chambers <i>'Augustine of Hippo and the Natural Law'</i> David Adams <i>'Irenaeus, Human Enhancement, and Life Extension: How an Ancient Voice Informs Contemporary Moral Debate'</i>

2:45 – 3:00	Afternoon Tea
3:00 – 4:00	TRADITION, PRACTICE, AND IMAGINATION Andrew Dunstan <i>'A Neglected Beauty: Ephrem the Syrian as a Resource for Protestant Theological Aesthetics'</i> Michael Gladwin <i>'Humility, Tradition, and Embodied Practice in Augustine's Confessions: A Ressourcement'</i>
4:00 – 4:10	Conclusion <i>Ben Myers</i>

Saturday, 16 August

Facilitator:
Tony Golsby-Smith

9:30 – 9:45	<i>Introduction and Housekeeping</i> Tony Golsby-Smith
9:45 – 11:00	John Behr <i>Irenaeus: From Adam to Christ – The Stages of Life</i>
11:00 – 11:30	Morning Tea
11:30 – 12:30	John Behr <i>Gregory of Nyssa: The Fullness of the Human Being as the Ascent of Nature</i>
12:30 – 1:30	Lunch
1:30 – 2:30	John Behr <i>Maximus the Confessor: The Human Being and Cosmic Reconciliation</i>
2:30 – 4:00	<i>Time for further questions and discussion, as needed</i>

SPEAKER BIOS



David Adams is a PhD candidate at St Mark's National Theological Centre in Charles Sturt University. He is investigating the way Irenaeus' anthropology could contribute to ethical discourse on human biological enhancement. He holds qualifications in biotechnology and theology, and is experienced in ethical evaluation and commercialising new technology.

Leisa Aitken is a clinical psychologist who has been in clinical practice for nearly 30 years. She is also a regular speaker on the psychology of hope in churches, schools and theological colleges. Her PhD at the University of Sydney developed a new way of conceptualising hope for use in research and therapy. It connects contemporary psychological research with historical interdisciplinary reflections on hope in philosophy, theology and psychiatry. She is co-author of the forthcoming paper, 'The Common Hope Scale: Initial psychometric properties of a new interdisciplinary derived measure of hope,' *European Journal of Applied Positive Psychology*.

John Behr is Regius Professor of Humanity at the University of Aberdeen and one of the world's leading scholars of early Christian thought. His books include *John the Theologian and His Paschal Gospel* (2019), *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity* (2013), *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death* (2006), *Becoming Human* (2013), *The Cross*

Stands While the World Turns (2014), and *Formation of Christian Theology* (2 volumes, 2001-2004). He has also published translations of some of the most significant works of patristic theology, including Origen's *On First Principles* (2018), Irenaeus's *On the Apostolic Preaching* (1997), Athanasius's *On the Incarnation* (2012), and Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Human Image of God* (2023).

Katherine Chambers is a lecturer in History, Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of New England. She completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Sydney and her PhD at the University of Cambridge. Her publications include the recent book *Augustine on the Nature of Virtue and Sin* (Cambridge UP, 2023), and the forthcoming volume *Augustine on the Natural Law*.

Doru Costache is Associate Professor of Theology at the Australian University of Divinity and Academic Dean of Nisibis Assyrian Theological College. His doctoral studies were in Orthodox at theology at the University of Bucharest in Romania. He has published widely on patristic theology and on Orthodox engagements with science. His recent books include *Nature Contemplation in Clement of Alexandria: Elements of the Method* (Routledge, 2025) and *Humankind and the Cosmos: Early Christian Representations* (Brill, 2021).

Andrew Dunstan is Assistant Dean of Bible and Theology, and Lecturer in Christian Thought at Morling College in the Australian University of Theology. He teaches primarily in the fields of systematic theology and Christian social ethics. His doctoral studies were at Oxford University, where he was also a tutor in theology and a Junior Research Associate of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture, before serving as Lecturer in Systematic Theology and Church History at Malyon Theological College in Brisbane. His research interests lie at the intersections of epistemology, the doctrine of God, and theological anthropology.

Michael Gladwin is Senior Lecturer in Church History at St Mark's National Theological Centre in the School of Theology, Charles Sturt University. He studied at the Australian National University and the University of Cambridge, and his research interests include the relationship between religion and war in Australian history. His publications include *Captains of the Soul: A History of Australian Army Chaplains* (2013) and *Anglican Clergy in Australia, 1788–1850: Building a British World* (2015).

Philip Kariatlis is Sub-Dean and Associate Professor of Theology at St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College. His research interest lies in church doctrine, specifically its existential and salvific character. He has translated a number of academic works (including the doctoral dissertation of Archbishop Stylianos (Harkianakis), titled *The Infallibility of the Church in Orthodox Theology*, and has published widely on patristic theology and

contemporary Orthodox thought. He was a member of the Faith and Unity Commission of the National Council of Churches of Australia for over a decade and is now chair of the Orthodox Theological Institutions Group of the International Orthodox Theological Association.

Ben Myers is Professor of Theology and Literature at Alphacrucis University College. He has had previous academic roles at the University of Queensland, Charles Sturt University, and Christian Heritage College. He has published on modern theology and the history of Christian thought, including articles on Origen, Augustine, and Greek patristic soteriology. His books include *Milton's Theology of Freedom*, *Christ the Stranger: The Theology of Rowan Williams*, and *The Apostles' Creed: A Guide to the Ancient Catechism*.

Layla Nahavandi is Founder and Director of the Burning Hearts Movement, a global missions organisation dedicated to preaching the gospel and mobilising the church for mission. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in History and International Studies from the University of Adelaide, a Master of Biblical Studies from Alphacrucis University College, and a Master of Historical Theology from the University of Divinity. She is a PhD candidate at Alphacrucis University College, working on Pentecostal engagement with patristic thought.



GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

Gospel Conversations is an independent and non-denominational initiative led by Tony Golsby-Smith in Sydney. Its mission is to provide a historical, philosophical and practical toolkit for people curious about the teaching of Jesus and how it applies to contemporary life.

Gospel Conversations hosts monthly events, annual lectures, and a regular podcast. Guest speakers hosted by Gospel Conversations have included Leisa Aitken, John Behr, David Bentley Hart, Edwin Judge, Esther Meek, Ilaria Ramelli, Mark Scott, Miroslav Volf, John Walton, and Rikk Watts.

ALPHACRUCIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Alphacrucis University College (AC) is a Christian higher education institution with over 4,000 students, and with programs ranging from vocational certificates to doctoral degrees. Our areas of study include theology, ministry, business, education, leadership, counselling, social sciences, and chaplaincy.

Rooted in Australia's Pentecostal

heritage, AC is committed to a generous and inclusive orthodoxy, welcoming students and faculty from a wide range of Christian traditions. Our vibrant research community—around 60 faculty and 70 doctoral candidates—seeks to produce knowledge that equips Christians to engage their world with wisdom, conviction, and public witness to Christ across all spheres of life.

OTHER SPEAKING EVENTS BY JOHN BEHR

John Behr will also be speaking at the St James' Institute in Sydney on 13 August, on the topic 'The Future of the Cosmos.' This is an ABC Soul Search event where Meredith Lake will interview John Behr before a live audience. The conversation will be held at St James' Church, Sydney, from 4pm to 6pm on Wednesday 13 August.

On 22–23 August, St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College will

feature John Behr as a keynote speaker at the symposium titled 'Nicaea at 1700: A Council for the Ages?' John Behr's lecture will be titled "'God Stands in the Congregation of Gods': Speaking of God Before and After Nicaea.' The symposium will also feature keynote addresses by Peter Bouteneff (St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary) and Lewis Ayres (Durham University).



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