The Perth launch of Hugh Mackay’s new book, *Beyond Belief: How we find meaning with or without religion*

The Dark Night of the Soul
The evocative term “dark night of the soul” has come down to us from the 16th century Spanish poet and mystic, St John of the Cross. It is a sombre and perhaps unsettling image that resonates to this day in works of spirituality, especially those within Roman Catholicism. Anglo-Catholics are also drawn to it. Those who want their spirituality to be entirely about comfort tend to draw back from the concept. Those who see a link between inner struggle and spiritual progress are more willing to explore its meaning.

The Probing of Mystery
In his poetry, which probes worlds other than the obvious, St John of the Cross tells of the soul’s journey from its bodily home to union with God. The journey is called “the dark night” in part because darkness suggests that God, the one towards whom the soul is travelling, will always be unknowable. It is not a problem to be analysed. Rather, it is a mystery to be probed through story, symbol, ritual, silence and prayer. ‘Answers’ are not the point.

The Leap of Faith
Some religious people are discomfited by any notion of God’s obscurity. They claim to know in detail the nature and the workings of God and speak with complete confidence about such matters. Others with religious inclinations of a different type do not require the same certitude about a great mystery at the heart of things, which they too call God. They see faith, coming as it does from the Latin ‘fides’, as about trust. Kierkegaard spoke about it terms of a leap. We have been examining this idea in Year 8 and 9 Personal and Spiritual Development as we have watched that very religious film *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*.

The Cloud of Unknowing
St John of the Cross was not the first or the last to acknowledge God’s unknown aspect. In the 14th century, the suitably titled writer, ‘Unknown’, produced *The Cloud of Unknowing*. The author of this work and St John of the Cross were influenced by the wonderfully named Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, the influential Athenian Neoplatonist, who, in the 6th century, had spoken about the path towards God being beyond our knowing. In our own time, a good many people require evidence of a material kind before claiming to know. The influence of Descartes remains strong. But some are quite serene with a different sort of knowledge. A little over a century ago, Francis Thompson wrote.

> O world invisible, we view thee,  
> O world intangible, we touch thee,  
> O world unknowable, we know thee,  
> Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

JRR Tolkien and TS Eliot were impressed by these lines and acknowledged the influence of Thompson’s poetry on their writing. The many who love their work may be grateful for this. However, as the 20th century unfolded, a great skepticism enveloped much of the Western world.

Australians, Religion and the Census
The proportion of Australians identifying Christianity as their religion has been declining over the last century, from 96 per cent in 1911 to 61.1 per cent in the 2011 Census. Between 2001 and 2011, Christianity in Australia fell from 68 per cent to 61.1 per cent. As well, between 1971 and 2011 the number of Australians selecting “no religion” on the Census more than tripled. In that period, the figure went from 6.7 per cent to 22.3 per cent. But the majority selecting this response might be classified as “spiritual not religious” rather than “neither spiritual nor religious”. In the 2011 census, only 2.2 per cent of the “no religion” respondents indicated “atheist”, “agnostic”, “humanist” or “rationalist” as their worldview.
Beyond Belief
Although more than six out of 10 Australians say they are Christians, only one in 10 attends church weekly. This has attracted the attention of Australia’s best-known social researcher, Hugh Mackay. In his latest book, Beyond Belief: How we find meaning with or without religion, Mackay presents this discrepancy as one of the great-unexamined topics of our time. He argues that while our attachment to a traditional idea of God may be waning, our desire for a life of meaning remains as strong as ever.

Unexamined?
It is open to some debate as to whether the topic has been entirely neglected however. In the 1980s, one of Radio National’s most successful programs was ‘The Search for Meaning’ hosted by Caroline Jones. The program ran for eight years. In that time, hundreds of Australian men and women told of their lives and their quest to make sense of their lives. Thousands of letters were received from listeners. Four books were published by ABC books from transcripts of these programs. Tapes of the conversations were widely distributed around Australia. Caroline Jones’ fifth book, An Authentic Life: Finding Meaning and Spirituality in Everyday Life, became a best seller. All this showed that there were people who were prepared to foster a debate about religion and meaning and there was an enthusiastic audience.

Hugh Mackay’s Journey
In his early 20s Hugh Mackay rejected the Christian fundamentalism of his youth. It was to be another 20 years before he stepped into a church again. This time he found a home within Anglicanism at St James, Kings Street, Sydney. He sang in the choir alongside his sons and was a founding member of the St James Ethics Centre. With regard to religion and faith, he now holds a liberal point of view. Reflecting upon the experience, he uses the word ‘darkness’ and recalls the confusion of the process. Writing this book has been not simply an academic exercise. There has been something quite personal about it.

Dozens of Australians
In writing Beyond Belief, Mackay has interviewed dozens of Australians representing many different points on the spectrum of faith, including some who are part of the emerging ‘spiritual but not religious’ movement. He has exposed the deep vein of ambivalence about religion that runs through our society: we may not actively worship, but we still like to see local churches operating in our midst, and we use ‘our’ church to marry, christen our babies, educate our children and commemorate our dead. In the book, he points to the tendency to call on God only in a crisis, and unpacks the human need for ‘answers’, even when science can’t find them. He endorses the Christian ideal of the good life, a life lived for others, but acknowledges that there are many pathways to that same goal, not all of them religious.

An Engrossing Exploration
Written with all the insight and compassionate understanding we have come to expect of our leading chronicler of Australian life, Beyond Belief is an engrossing exploration of the ways we find spiritual fulfilment in an avowedly secular age.

The Reverend Dr John Shepherd, Former Dean of Perth
Hugh Mackay has twice been a speaker for the Centre for Ethics. We were delighted when he asked that we host the Perth launch of his new book. We were equally pleased when he asked that the event take the form of an interview between himself and the former Dean of Perth, The Reverend Dr John Shepherd. Dr Shepherd was Dean of St George’s Cathedral from 1990 until 2014. In that time, he led and nurtured a public conversation about the issues which are discussed in Beyond Belief. This promises to be an entertaining and thought provoking evening between two people for whom religious faith matters in an age when it is so readily and rather too hastily discounted.

Frank Sheehan
School Chaplain
Director of the Centre for Ethics

“This promises to be an entertaining and thought provoking evening between two people for whom religious faith matters in an age when it is so readily and rather too hastily discounted.”
Journeys of the Spirit

Julie Baker

Julie Baker’s 32-year career in travel and tourism has spanned a broad spectrum of roles, from travel agent to Managing Director of Genesis Travel, Genesis Dive Travel and Epicurean Tours. Passionately involved in yoga, meditation and spirituality, her personal journey has guided her on a quest for a more balanced and meaningful life. Aware that certain locations have a heightened spiritual energy, Julie has become more and more aware that ancient, Indigenous wisdoms are linked to healing, joy and vitality. Julie began Journeys of the Spirit as a way of allowing other people to be in touch with their own depths, as they travel to new locations. Her vision in the creation of these very personal experiences is that they may touch the hearts of people in empowering and lasting ways.

Beyond Belief: How We Find Meaning With or Without Religion

Hugh Mackay

Hugh Mackay is a prolific and well-known social researcher, writer and commentator in Australia. Hugh was a newspaper columnist for over 25 years, and is now an honorary professor of social science at the University of Wollongong. He is the author of nine books in the field of social psychology and philosophy, and five novels. Previous books include The Good Life, Why Don’t People Listen?, Reinventing Australia and What Makes Us Tick?

At a time when around two-thirds of us say we believe in God or some ‘higher power’, but fewer than one in 10 Australians attend church weekly, Mackay tackles one of the big questions about contemporary Australia: how do we find our sense of meaning and purpose when religious faith and practice are in such sharp decline?

(And why are enrolments at church schools skyrocketing?)

He draws on research suggesting that our quest for a meaningful life depends on believing in something ‘greater than ourselves’ and explores what that ‘something’ might be for today’s Australians.

Australian Doctors for Africa

Australian Doctors for Africa are holding their Little Feet Walk to raise money to treat Talipes (Club Foot) in children in Africa. All it takes is $25 to correct the condition and to enable a child to walk.

The Little Feet Walk is at 9.00am on Sunday 1 May departing from the North Cottesloe Surf Lifesaving Club. Registration starts at 8.00am with 5km and 10km walks.

Hugh Mackay will speak to the community on Saturday 30 April.

Julie will speak to the community on Thursday 28 April.
Treasures of the Deep
Hugh Edwards

With more than 60 years of diving adventures, including his significant find off the Batavia, Hugh Edwards documents his life through tales of shipwreck, treasure hunting and salvage. Brought up on tales of pirates and great treasure hunters, Hugh Edwards never expected to handle ‘pieces of eight’ himself. But one exciting day off the West Australian coast, he and his team located treasure lost from the Dutch East Indiaman shipwreck the Vergulde Draeck.

It was a moment of astonishment and euphoria, as there in his hand lay a piece of silver with the inscription: PHILIPPUS IIII ... REX HISPANIA ... DG - Philip IV, King of Spain, Dei Gratia. The date on the coin was 1654.

Nearly 50 years later, Hugh Edwards has explored shipwrecks around the world - in the Mediterranean, the Falklands, Cambodia - wherever there is treasure to be found. He has been recognised as ‘primary finder’ of the 1629 wreck of the Batavia and the 1727 wreck - the Zeewyk. He has worked with some of the world’s most daring and most successful divers in some of the most beautiful places on earth.

Treasures of the Deep
Hugh Edwards will speak to students on Thursday 5 May.

Education Under Militarisation
Gillian Kerr-Sheppard

Following a successful career as a school drama teacher and director in Western Australia, which included four years at Christ Church Grammar School, Gillian commenced volunteer work in 2005, offering ESL and drama courses in Palestinian schools and universities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. For the past 12 years she has deepened her commitment to Palestinian education through research for her Master’s degree and current PhD studies, at the same time as continuing a part time involvement in teaching and examining in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In 2015, Gillian returned to the West Bank as a volunteer with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). This program was established in 2002, following an appeal from church leaders in Jerusalem. Co-ordinated by the World Council of Churches, and in Australia the NCCA, EAPPI supports local and international efforts to bring about a just resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on international law and relevant United Nations resolutions.

As volunteers with this program, Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) from all corners of the world follow an internationally recognised model of ‘accompaniment’, aligned with the story of Jesus and the travellers to Emmaus (Luke 24, 13-35). Based on principled impartiality and non-violence, EAs seek to bring change through the three key principles of protective presence, monitoring of human rights violations and advocacy. The program of talks available for presentation by Gillian form the advocacy component of her contribution to the work of EAPPI.

Education Under Militarisation
Gillian Kerr-Sheppard will speak to students on Thursday 12 May.
Enjoy an hour of chamber music performed by some of Perth’s finest musicians and help fundraise for Anglicare. This romantic piano quartet program will include Schumann, Saint-Saens and Mahler.

Paul Wright: Violin
Sally Boud: Viola
Sacha McCulloch: Cello
Faith Maydwell: Piano

Magellan will perform for the community on Saturday 14 May.

#### Lifting Your Gaze - Exploring Global Opportunities

Varun Ghosh

Christ Church old boy Varun Ghosh (2002) graduated from the University of Western Australia with degrees in Law and Arts in 2008, before beginning work with the law firm Mallesons Stephen Jaques (now King & Wood Mallesons).

In 2010, he won a Commonwealth Scholarship to undertake his Masters in Constitutional Law, Public International Law and Jurisprudence at the University of Cambridge. After spending a summer in barristers’ chambers in London, Varun moved to New York where he worked for two years as an attorney at White & Case LLP, acting for clients on a range of cross-border and domestic finance transactions. In 2014, Varun took up a position as a consultant in the legal vice-presidency of the World Bank in Washington DC, where he assisted in insolvency law reform and in developing policies to improve global financial stability.

Varun is currently a senior associate in the dispute resolution team at King & Wood Mallesons in Perth and teaches Constitutional Law at the University of Western Australia. Varun enjoys writing and the theatre and is an enthusiastic, if amateur, cricketer and hockey player.

Varun Ghosh will speak to students on Thursday 19 May.

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The Bindaring unit of Australian Red Cross is holding their 53rd annual clothing sale at the Claremont Showground on Saturday 14 May.

Help us to help vulnerable people within our community by clearing your wardrobe of unworn and unwanted items. Declutter and recycle any clean, quality, or unused clothing and accessories suitable for our vintage, jumble and boutique sale.

All proceeds go to vital Red Cross community service programs.

Please contact Teresa Scott for more information 9442 1705.
Time & Space for ‘Mothers and Sons’

Bill Jennings

This innovative evening program is part of the special transition events we offer our Year 7 students and their mothers or significant female mentors.

Times of transition can be a major event in our boys’ lives. As their ride on the adolescent roller coaster continues, their teenage years fly by. They are growing up and the opportunity to reflect on the challenges and the joys being faced by you and them is one not to be missed.

This is a great night for the boys as they witness their mothers discussing what it means to them to be a mum (or mentor) and see how they handle the ‘letting go’ process as they start to forge some independence.

In collaboration with the Wynne Centre for Boys’ Health and Wellbeing, we have invited Bill Jennings to the School to facilitate this unique experience. Bill is the creator and founder of ‘Time & Space’ a service he has developed to give people just that – ‘time and space’ for parents and their children to share important moments together in a school community setting. This program has a whole range of memorable moments that include carefully guided interactions with other mothers and their sons.

Mothers will emerge from the night reassured and impressed by the way our students are able to speak up and share insights about their lives and be assured that the night is fun too... full of activities and conversations that will make us smile as well.

Reverend Dr Robin Meyers

Reverend Dr Robin Meyers is an American Christian Minister, peace activist, philosophy professor and author of seven books on Progressive Christianity and Western society. He has been a syndicated columnist and an award-winning commentator for National Public Radio and the Senior Minister of the Mayflower Congregational United Church of Christ in Oklahoma City since 1985. He is Distinguished Professor of Social Justice in the Philosophy Department at Oklahoma City University, where he has taught since 1991.

Reverend Dr Robin Meyers will speak to students and the community on Wednesday 18 May.

Alice Nelson

Alice Nelson was named one of the Sydney Morning Herald’s Best Young Australian Novelists for her first novel, The Last Sky, which also won the TAG Hungerford Award and was shortlisted for The Australian/Vogel Literary Award and the Barbara Jefferis Award. She is also the author of the recently released, After This: Survivors of the Holocaust Speak. Alice is currently completing her Doctorate of Philosophy at the University of Western Australia and is working on a second novel.

Alice Nelson will speak to students on Wednesday 1 June.

Bill Jennings

Bill Jennings will speak at the Year 7 Mother and Son event on Wednesday 8 June.
Mental Health – Positive Strategies
Ashlee Harrison

After losing her step-father to suicide when she was 20, Ashlee Harrison set up the West Australian charity zero2hero Inc., which aims to ensure that every young person is educated and empowered to deal with mental health issues effectively.

Initially zero2hero tackled this issue through awareness raising events and fundraising. During this time Ashlee identified that there was a significant gap in school education that needed to be addressed to prevent this issue at its core.

Recently recognised by the Australian Financial Review as one of Australia’s 100 Woman of Influence, Ashlee and her team of staff and volunteers speak to over 80 000 young people across 70 schools in West Australia every year. Ashlee was awarded a Pride of Australia Medal in 2015, won the WA Youth Award for Education in 2013, and in the same year was a Young Australian of the year finalist.

During her seven years working in mental health, she has partnered with many organisations including Lifeline, Suicide Prevention Australia and Foundation for Young Australians. Ashlee is a highly skilled communicator and facilitator. She has a Bachelor of Commerce degree from Curtin University.

This event is in collaboration with the Wynne Centre for Boys’ Health and Wellbeing.

Ashlee Harrison will speak to students on Wednesday 15 and Thursday 16 June.

Empty Bowls

The Empty Bowls Project is a grassroots movement with the objective of helping to end world hunger. The project, which started in the United States of America in 1990, supports food related charities around the world and has raised millions of dollars to aid the fight against hunger.

Perth potters and other craftspeople have come together to help hungry West Australians by donating bowls, which will be made available to the public at Empty Bowls Perth.

The public choose a bowl to purchase for $20, which they use to collect their soup and bread. They keep the bowl as a reminder about others who do not have sufficient food for their survival.

Local organisations donate the bread and restaurants donate the soup.

Last year 400 people came to the event, which enabled Foodbank to support the firefighters and residents of Yarloop.

This year there will be a display and sale of exhibition quality handmade pottery from the contributing potters. The proceeds of Empty Bowls Perth will be given to Foodbank – the largest hunger relief organisation in Australia.

For more information please see emptybowlsperth.com.

The event will be held on Sunday 19 June.
The Centre For Ethics
Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event and topic</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every Thursday</td>
<td>Christ Church Credo</td>
<td>Matt Smith</td>
<td>1.00pm</td>
<td>Q1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesdays</td>
<td>Embracing Fatherhood</td>
<td>Miles Protter</td>
<td>7.30pm</td>
<td>RSVP to <a href="mailto:tscott@ccgs.wa.edu.au">tscott@ccgs.wa.edu.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 28 April</td>
<td>Embracing 400 years of Shakespeare</td>
<td>Neil Walker</td>
<td>9.00am</td>
<td>Chapel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 28 April</td>
<td>Journeys of the Spirit</td>
<td>Julie Baker</td>
<td>7.30pm</td>
<td>RSVP 9442 1705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 30 April</td>
<td>Book launch event Beyond Belief</td>
<td>Hugh Mackay</td>
<td>5.00pm</td>
<td>RSVP to 9442 1705 or <a href="mailto:tscott@ccgs.wa.edu.au">tscott@ccgs.wa.edu.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday 1 May</td>
<td>Little Feet Walk</td>
<td>Hugh Edwards</td>
<td>9.00am</td>
<td>RSVP 9442 1705</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday 5 May</td>
<td>Treasures of the Deep</td>
<td>Neil Saggers</td>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday 10 and Wednesday 11 May</td>
<td>Education under militarisation: stories from Accompaniment in Israel and Palestine</td>
<td>Gillian Kerr - Sheppard</td>
<td>All day</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 12 May</td>
<td>Amnesty International</td>
<td>Gillian Kerr - Sheppard</td>
<td>12.30pm</td>
<td>Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 14 May</td>
<td>Ensemble Magellan Schumann, Saint-Saens and Mahler</td>
<td>Paul Wright Sally Boud Sacha McCulloch Faith Maydwell</td>
<td>4.30pm</td>
<td>Tickets: trybooking.com/KGVA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday 14 May</td>
<td>Red Cross Bindaring Unit</td>
<td></td>
<td>All day</td>
<td>RSVP to 9442 1705 or <a href="mailto:tscott@ccgs.wa.edu.au">tscott@ccgs.wa.edu.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday 18 May</td>
<td>The relationship between evolution and religion</td>
<td>Rev Dr Robin Meyers</td>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday 18 May</td>
<td>God-Talk: How Quantum Physics is Redefining the Almighty</td>
<td>Rev Dr Robin Meyers</td>
<td>7.30pm</td>
<td>RSVP to Dr Richard Smith: 9384 3308 or <a href="mailto:richbert@it.net.au">richbert@it.net.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 19 May</td>
<td>Lifting Your Gaze – Exploring Global Opportunities</td>
<td>Varun Ghosh</td>
<td>9.00am</td>
<td>Chapel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday 30 May</td>
<td>Understanding Ourselves</td>
<td>Claire Eaton</td>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Classrooms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday 30 May</td>
<td>Team Building</td>
<td>Greg Mitchell</td>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday 1 June</td>
<td>Ethics Book Club</td>
<td>Frank Sheehan</td>
<td>7.30pm</td>
<td>RSVP 9442 1705</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday 1 June</td>
<td>After This</td>
<td>Alice Nelson</td>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday 8 June</td>
<td>Time &amp; Space for Mothers and Sons</td>
<td>Bill Jennings</td>
<td>6.45pm for 7.00pm start</td>
<td>RSVP here</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday 15 June</td>
<td>Mental Health - Positive Strategies – Year 11</td>
<td>Ashlee Harrison</td>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Chapel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday 16 June</td>
<td>Mental Health - Positive Strategies – Year 12</td>
<td>Ashlee Harrison</td>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Chapel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday 19 June</td>
<td>Empty Bowls</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.00am to 2.00pm</td>
<td>RSVP emptybowlsperth.com</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday 22 June</td>
<td>Boy on a Wire</td>
<td>Jon Doust</td>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday 4 to Friday 8 July</td>
<td>Zero2Hero Leadership camp</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>RSVP 9442 1705</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please contact Teresa Scott on 9442 1705 beforehand, in case there is a change to the program.
A map of Christ Church Grammar School is available on our website www.ccgswa.edu.au/about-us/our-location/campus-map