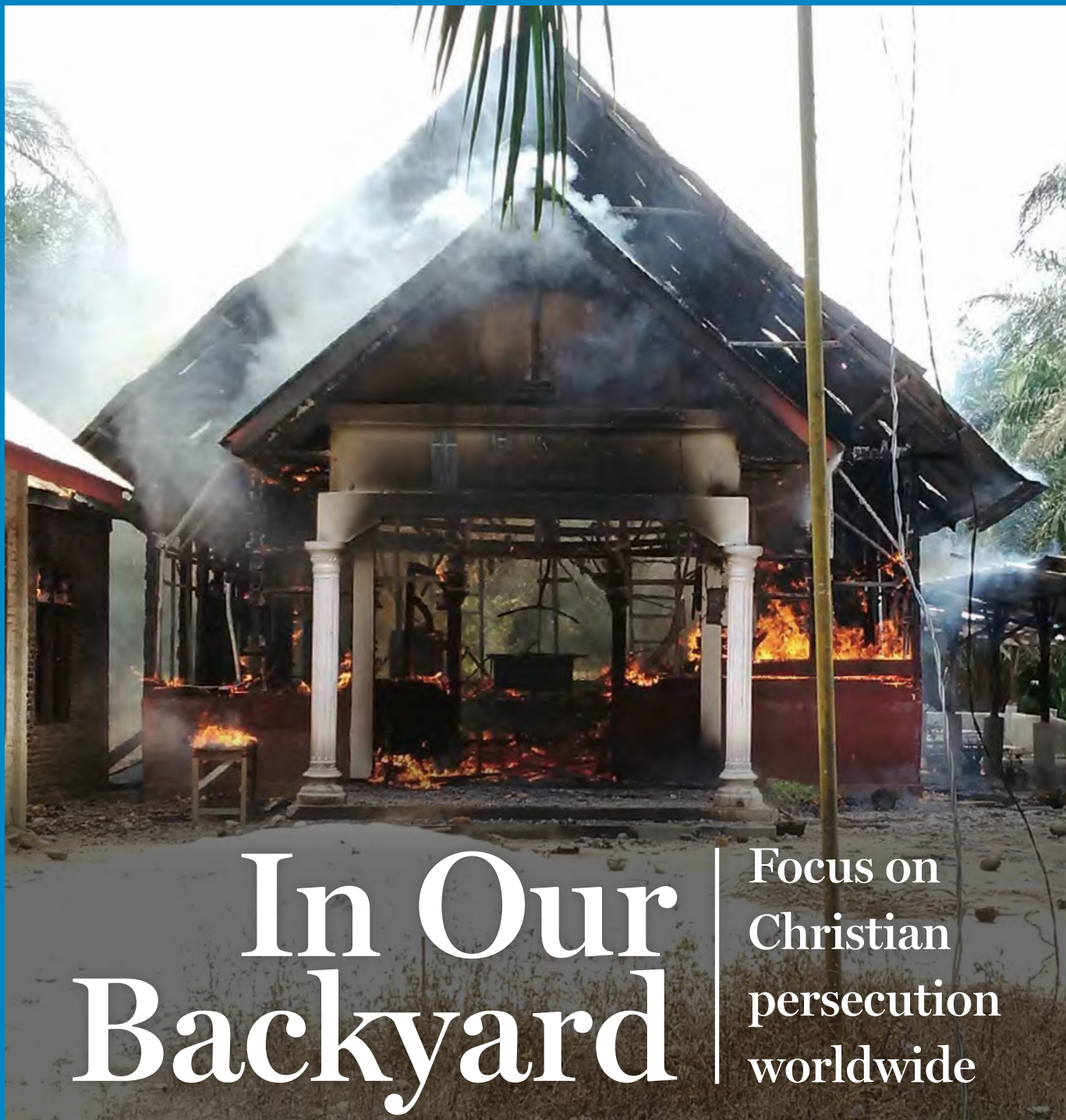


ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



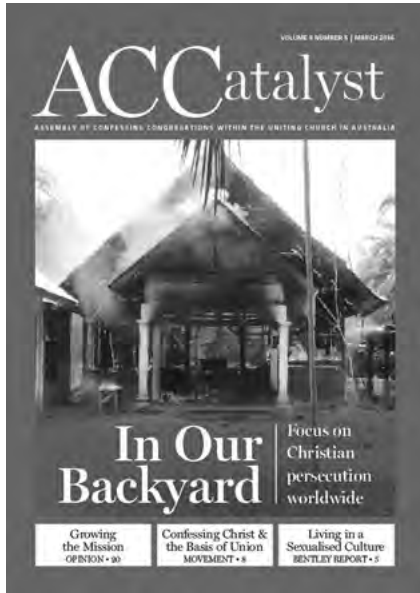
In Our Backyard

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Cover photo - An Indonesian church on fire following an attack in October 2015 (Image: Open Doors)

EDITORIAL

New start

Greetings. It was wonderful to receive encouraging and supportive feedback about our last edition (September–December 2015). We tried to provide a comprehensive overview of a full and dynamic six months in the life of the church. Some members have requested extra copies to give out in their church. This is a very helpful initiative as many UCA members are not aware of the issues arising from the UCA 14th Assembly. Please contact the ACC office if you would like copies to distribute.

In my first editorial I would like to thank John Sandeman for all his work over the last six years. We were blessed with John's wide and nuanced church understanding. His advice has proved invaluable at times in our production. I have learnt many practical aspects about a magazine, but am also relieved that we will have Wes Selwood on board to guide as well.

I welcome your comments and especially letters to the editor. I want to highlight Ted Curnow's letter in this edition and ask for your prayers as together we serve the confessing movement in the Uniting Church.

Peter Bentley

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The Gift

by Robyn Painter

Pastor, Peterborough Uniting Church

Guess what? I have just been given a special gift. God has given me this gift and it's up to me to make the most of it. This gift is a bit of a mystery, because I don't know everything about it, yet. But I do know that this gift is precious.

Guess what else? You have been given this gift too. No, God hasn't given you a sports car or a winning lottery ticket or anything like that. He's given you something even better, and he's also given you a choice in how you use it.

Do you want to know what it is? I thought you would! The gift we have been given is a year. 2016. God could have chosen to end the world or take us away from it, but he has graciously given us more time here, and that's not something anyone can take for granted.

So, bearing that in mind, how can we get the most out of this gift? How can we ensure that we use it to the fullest, and enrich our lives the most? Should we all take up bungy jumping? I think not!

It's a funny thing with Christianity that things work out opposite to what you expect. When we become servants of Christ's rule, we find true freedom. When we die to ourselves, we are given life in Jesus. When we give, we receive, and all of this is not surprising, because we have a Saviour who showed his leadership through being a servant and who defeated his enemy through dying.



So it follows then that the way to get the most for ourselves from 2016 is to give it away and offer it back to God. God will direct our paths and rule our lives if we ask him. Some people might think it is a waste of a year to live it for God. But on the contrary, it is a waste if we live for ourselves, because that road does not lead to happiness and satisfaction.

True life comes from a relationship with God, and the new year will be most meaningful if we live it for God and others.

So enjoy the gift! And even more importantly, enjoy the One who gives it to you.

News | Tasmania

Support for Catholic Archbishop

In November a Pastoral letter from the ACC National Council was provided to ACC members and also a letter of support was sent to the Catholic Archbishop



and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. This letter arose from the growing level of concern among members about the quite extraordinary news that following a complaint, the Tasmanian Anti Discrimination Commissioner has decided the Catholic Archbishop for Hobart, the Most Rev Julian Porteous DD, and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference have a case to answer concerning the Church's Pastoral Letter that was provided as a booklet entitled *Don't Mess With Marriage (DMWM)* and distributed in Catholic Schools in Tasmania.

For more information see: <http://hobart.catholic.org.au/media/news/complaint-lodged-anti-discrimination-commissioner-be-investigated>

The National Council stands with and commends the Catholic Bishops for affirming the importance of marriage being between a woman and a man. The National Council believes that in the lead-up to the National Plebiscite it is essential for Churches and Christian organisations to be able to freely articulate the truth about marriage in a loving and charitable manner (see the booklet DMWM: Time to act, p. 15).

We encourage members to read the booklet: <https://www.catholic.org.au/acbc-media/media-centre/media-releases-new/1687-same-sex-marriage-pastoral-letter-web-version>, and to pray for all those involved in this matter, especially the Catholic Archbishop.



We also draw your attention to the ACC statement on marriage (available from the ACC office or via the web link: <http://www.confessingcongregations.com/resources/item/marriage-a-statement-from-the-acc/>).

New Anglican Bishop of Tasmania

In November 2015, the election board of the Diocese of Tasmania elected the Ven. Dr. Richard Condie, currently vicar of one of the largest Anglican Churches in Australia, St Jude's Carlton as its next bishop. Dr Condie is also the chair of the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (Australia).



This is an encouraging appointment for the world-wide confessing movement.

In his letter to the churches in the Diocese he writes: *"I am now looking forward to coming among you to bring all these experiences, and to use the gifts and skills that God has given me, to encourage and help equip you in this great gospel task of winning Tasmania for Christ through our words and work, in the power of his Spirit."* (2 December 2015)

Event

ACC 2016 National Conference and AGM Poatina, Tasmania (near Launceston)

7-9 November 2016

Poatina Village is a beautiful setting and provides a variety of accommodation styles. The conference will start with lunch on Monday 7th November and conclude with lunch on Wednesday 9th November. Note the dates now and plan to attend and encourage other people from your local church or group to attend and join in our common fellowship in Christ at this significant time.

ACC has 6 member congregations and 2 clusters covering the whole state. Rev Walter Abetz has provided pastoral support and contact over

several years for the ACC, along with local members, particularly from the Southern and Northern ACC Clusters. In November 2015, Rev Ian and Anne Weeks visited Tasmania and Ian spoke or preached at several ACC events and church gatherings. It was a helpful contact and an encouragement to the local members. ACC members visiting Tasmania are encouraged to check the listing of ACC member churches for Sunday services on the ACC website (or details from the ACC office). We encourage each other when we visit.

<http://www.poatina.com/>



Clarity needed on marriage

The following letter was published in the November 2015 edition of Crosslight, the Victorian and Tasmanian Synod publication. It is re-printed here as an example of one of the many good letters submitted by ACC members to raise matters in our Synod publications.

Sometimes our church finds it hard to know what it believes or to say anything that puts it at odds with popular culture or values. I note that the Catholic Church of Australia, the Anglican Primate of Australia, the Presbyterian Church, the Anglican Diocese of Sydney and many other Christian groups are not slow to publicly support

traditional marriage. In fact 38 religious leaders sent a letter to the Prime Minister to that effect. Then there are Aboriginal, Muslim, Jewish and Sikh communities. What a pity that the Uniting Church 2015 Assembly was not prepared to publicly confirm the definition of marriage it clearly adopted in 1997 and 2012. The perception now is that the Uniting Church is not as ecumenical as it says it is and it is uncertain about what it really teaches and believes.

Rev Ted (EA) Curnow

Talks to continue despite boycott motion

An interesting news and opinion article from The Australian Jewish News arising from a resolution at the Uniting Church 14th Assembly.

The UCA reference for further links and information is found at: <http://assembly2015.uca.org.au/66-palestine-andrew-dutney-felicity-amery/> and the Assembly Relations with other Faiths web page: <https://assembly.uca.org.au/rof/>

A MOTION passed by the national assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia's (UCA) supporting a boycott of Israeli goods has been met with a mixed response from Jewish community leaders.

Proposal 66 calls upon the assembly to "establish an awareness-raising campaign throughout the church on the plight of Palestinian Christians and the Palestinian people, including promotion of the boycott of goods from the illegal settlements in the West Bank as part of the campaign".

However, it stops short of endorsing the formal Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel, with the church's Reverend Dr Matthew Wilson telling The AJN, "We do know that there are significant anti-Semitic problems with the full BDS movement. Therefore, we worded things very carefully and we were certainly to a degree supportive of boycotts of goods produced in the settlements and occupied territories, but not of BDS as an organisation and as a policy."

Nonetheless, B'nai B'rith Anti-Def-

amation Commission chairman Dvir Abramovich slammed the church, insisting, "It is morally reprehensible for the UCA to single out Israel for censure while turning a blind eye to the killing of Jews by Hamas, a terrorist organisation whose openly declared goal is the destruction of Israel."

He added, "This vote sends a very hurtful message to Australian Jews and foments an atmosphere of hostility."

It is morally reprehensible for the UCA to single out Israel for censure while turning a blind eye to the killing of Jews by Hamas

However, Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) executive director Peter Wertheim was more measured, cautioning against exaggerating the impact of the motion. "A handful of activists infiltrate the organisation and bombard its members with a dishonest, one-sided view of the conflict, demanding that the organisation support the activists' position and proposals," Wertheim told The AJN.

"Very few of the other members are equipped with the knowledge or the courage to contradict them. But

there are signs that this is starting to change, and that ordinary members of the UCA are becoming tired of being steamrollered by the activists."

He added that continuing formal meetings of the UCA-ECAJ Dialogue is imperative.

"That dialogue is a constant reminder that there is much more to the truth than they are being told by the BDS activists, another side to the story that the BDS movement does not want them to hear," Wertheim said.

This series of meetings has taken place biannually since 1992, covering topics including differing readings of messianic passages, Christian and social anti-Semitism, and the theology of land as it relates to Israel.

Reverend Wilson, UCA convenor for the dialogue, concurred. "The UCA remains committed to dialogue with the Jewish community."

The importance of interfaith talks with the UCA was also stressed by Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council director of international and community affairs Jeremy Jones.

"We bring to them perspectives they would otherwise not hear, encounter or consider," he said.

The next UCA-ECAJ Dialogue meeting will take place in May on the topic of religion and the state.

Elenore Levi

This article is reprinted with permission of The Australian Jewish News and was originally published on 8 January 2016 at: <http://www.jewishnews.net.au>

Living in a Sexualised Culture

Peter
Bentley

ACC National Director



In an illuminating article 'The new Era of Infidelity' (Kidspot.com.au: 4 October 10, 2015), psychotherapist Paul Reid commented on the idea of the internal compass. "In the past people found a certain stability in the sanctity of marriage in the nuclear family model, ... These days society is much more permissive so it becomes harder for people to know where the limits are. There has to be an orienting principle - people want others to give them answers as to how they should live their lives, but you have to take responsibility for your own desires. You can't blame sites like Ashley Madison. It is up to you to be self-responsible."

Where is our moral compass today for people and particularly young people? Quite a few years back now I interviewed a number of school age children for a project on beliefs and values, and the question I have often reflected on from that time is, 'how do people make ethical decisions', especially in the moral vacuum that thrives in the sexualised international culture we live in today.

While, there has always been sexual temptation, the simple fact is that we live in a heightened age of sexual awareness. Today visual stimulation is far more of an issue, especially for men, because the proliferation of pornography through the internet means that it has become easier and easier to present sex as a never ending package of desires to be filled, and to increasingly make what were once bizarre sexual acts seem common place. The World Wide Web is well named; a web it can be, not only fraught with visual but also aural and text stimulation. The pace of change due to technology has meant that pornography is now more available than ever before and thus available to people younger than ever before.

Fantine sings in Les Miserables –

*There was a time when men
were kind
When their voices were soft
And their words inviting
There was a time when love
was blind
And the world was a song
And the song was exciting
There was a time
Then it all went wrong*

Author and Commentator Steve Biddulph has written about this theme of a lost time for children in terms of developmental sexual understanding, highlighting especially the implications for girls.

"Many boys learn their sexuality from porn, and fixate not on deep connection, or tender passion, but instead on treating girls like sacks of meat. Distressed girls tell counsellors of gentle boys suddenly becoming callous and hurting them because they think that's how sex is done. There is something special being lost here. For many young people, sex has become a performance, overlaid with worry about "How do I look? What tricks do they expect me to perform? How do I compare with others?" Separating sex from personhood is what sexualisation does. It's robbing us of closeness. Little wonder we have one of the most depressed and lonely generations of young people ever." ('Sexualisation of the young is becoming society's cancer', Sydney Morning Herald, February 26, 2013)

Of course, these issues are not new, there is nothing new to visual temptation and no-one is immune. One of the significant examples in the bible is King David. He watched Bathsheba and continued to watch, and as we know, his initial visual fascination led to a web of sin, including what would now be regarded as conspiracy to commit murder, resulting in the Lord sending the prophet Nathan to denounce him.

I can simply say that the solution is just avoid the internet, but in an interconnected virtual world that is probably nearly impossible today, especially for the generations growing up who have complete access through their mobile phones. If the internet is a problem you may need to seek professional help and perhaps sadly but also helpfully, there are more Christian counsellors



around today specialising in helping people with internet pornography addiction. One counsellor I know has now mostly pastors as clients.

The psalmist asked this question "How can a young person stay on the path of purity?" (Psalm 119: 9a) and also provided a helpful answer. "By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."

It may sound very basic, but recalling the words of Scripture at times of temptation has amazing power. Dwelling in the word generates the fruit of the Spirit, and this is what we want to see more in our young people and in our selves today. Yes we can say we have the "right to do anything", but surely even the most basic moral compass says "but not everything is beneficial." We need a new appreciation of how important our bodies really are and also how important the bodies of others are.

"The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body... Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies." (1 Corinthians 6: 13b, 18-20, NIV)



PUBLIC SQUARE

BY PSEUDO-MAXIMUS

Minding Mindfulness

Ever been asked to focus your thoughts by colouring a picture? Ever been led in prayer by a minister asking you to be mindful of nothing in particular? If so, you are on the way to mindfulness, a form of meditation popular in business, sport, education and churches that promotes simple tools for personal wellbeing. What's not to like about learning to accept yourself as you are, being open to new challenges, becoming stress-free? All the better for not being theoretical, religious, dogmatic!

Ellen Langer, founder of mindfulness research, says: 'I believe it fully: Life consists only of moments, nothing more than that. So if you make the moment matter, it all matters. ... So when you're doing anything be mindful, notice new things, make it meaningful to you, and you'll prosper.'

Grist to the mill for newspapers and magazines, a few sensible suggestions for coping have morphed into yet another full-blown self-help religion spruiking dogmatic illusions. Live in the moment. Forget the past. Don't worry about the future. Adapt to reality. Trust your own experience!

Scripture has a grander, more believable vision. The self-centred mind shrinks from reality. The Christ-shaped mind exposes our illusions and makes us mindful of the eternal mercy of God. The past, present and future of God's grace is remembered with gratitude and joy. Bear this in mind next time self-appointed gurus of mindfulness hand out crayons or bow in silence.

Gender Reassignment

Moves are afoot in State and Federal Government to ban gay conversion therapies. The Victorian Health Minister, Jill Hennessy says that groups 'found to be making false claims and to be acting in a manner that puts

people's physical, mental or psychological health, safety or welfare at risk' will be banned. 'Any attempt to make people feel uncomfortable with their own sexuality is completely unacceptable.' (The Sunday Age, 24 January 2016, p7)

Thankfully, shock treatment and other blunt methods will be outlawed, as they have been elsewhere. But the attempt to ban all forms of pastoral care for homosexual and transgender people is ill-advised.

First, it ignores the fact that many people unhappy with their LGBTQ sexual orientation have found healing, encouragement and strength from thoughtful pastoral carers and group support.

Second, it is hypocritical of those who believe gender is malleable, to argue that homosexuality alone is 'fixed' and cannot be changed. The incongruity is exposed by the evangelistic zeal of influential thinkers, like Michel Foucault, who insist that they have chosen their own sexuality and strongly encourage others to escape from the binary straightjacket of hetero-sexism. In short, it's OK to support those who want to convert from heterosexuality to homosexuality, but not vice-versa!

Third, it is silent about the equally invasive shock treatment involved in transgender reassignment, a point lost in the hype surrounding the conversions of Caitlin Jenner and Catherine McGregor.

Venus and Mars

The mystery of the sexes, male and female, was famously explored by John Gray in *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (1993). Nowadays maligned by those who think gender differences are socially constructed, he identifies some distinguishing features in the complex interaction between men and women in relation to conversation, love, decision making etc.

Certainly there are dangers in

stereotyping the behaviour and abilities of men and women according to sex. Some men are more sympathetic than some women. Some women are greater bullies than some men. However, the clamour for greater gender equality in positions of authority is based on the assumption that men and women bring different and complementary strengths to the table.

This perspective is borne out by concern that there should be a greater balance of the sexes among Primary School teachers. Some Early Childhood Learning Centres appoint equal numbers of male and female teachers. While this is unfair to some highly qualified women, the greater concern is to provide young children with strong role models of both men and women. This concern is also uppermost in Child Welfare services where children often miss out because a sole parent cannot double for the other parent and children do not experience daily interaction with their own father and mother.

All reasons to worry that, in the most basic unit of social cohesion, radical social change is being proposed to ensure that, from the outset, children will be denied the possibility of living with both of their biological parents. Instead, they will experience the daily interaction with individuals who, regardless of their affections, cannot model the interrelation between the sexes that is rightly demanded in every other area of social life.

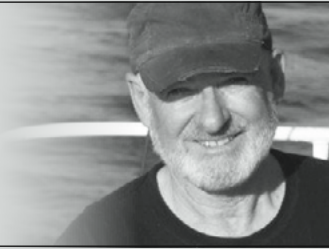
The mystery of the relation between men and women cannot be fully quantified intellectually, psychologically etc. It can only be experienced as it is lived out in far-from-perfect families from which far-from-perfect communities are formed to reflect the balance between men and women.

Australia Day

In contrast to much jingoism and breast-beating, John Carroll hits the right note: 'Patriotism means healthy self-confidence. Its opposite in caricature was the Victorian government banning the singing of Christmas carols in state schools from 2016 - on the grounds that they might offend multicultural sensibilities. This brand of grovelling, driven by a kind of masochistic bad conscience, and in homage to some illusory universal human consciousness, acts to willingly repress a main part of the home culture. So, an Orwellian Big Brother interdicts six-year-old children from singing "Once in Royal David's City ..." (The Inquirer, The Weekend Australian, January 23-24, p 20)

The Age of Accusation

Ian
Clarkson



Accusation, blame and fault-finding increasingly blotch our social relationships.

A Christian leader recently shared with me the devastation of being falsely accused before the public. In his country well-known men of integrity and influence have been falsely accused or 'alleged' by media and police to have 'possible links' to scandals. It takes strong intellectual discipline to disassociate the innocent accused from the accusations.

The law in the UK has been changed to embolden accusers. A person can accuse without corroboration and a citizen arrested. Worse, the police can issue a public request for any-one to come forward to substantiate accusations often with promise of compensation. I know of several cases of false accusation devastating the lives of innocent people. Sadly, most of these heinous accusations have been from women.

A serious judicial deficiency is that false accusers are not punished. They should suffer the same punishment the falsely accused would have received.

Senator Xenophon's naming an innocent priest under

parliamentary privilege ought to have brought his resignation from parliament. He got away with it. The priest, after an enquiry which totally exonerated him, was devastated and numbed for a long time.

Unhappily we can expect more of this as the love of many grows cold, wickedness increases and with it the persecution of the righteous who are warned and blessed with the promise "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me".

What should we do? Number one, let us work for high levels of discipline in daily speech refusing to agree with anything in conversation about another who is absent. Hard but necessary. Accusation is the opposite of unity.

Second, in legal cases we should prefer the good integrity of the accused above the accuser, the police investigation and even the judicial outcome if there are flaws of process.

Finally, recognise that Satan is The Accuser with his finger prints over all false accusation, denigration, slander and simple gossip. Jesus is our interceder. Satan is our indicter. Ascended Lord Jesus full of grace and truth only speaks well of us of us before the Father glorying in those deeds and words that flow from our faith. He exalts in his saints, speaking of us in love. We shall do likewise, injecting unity and joy into our community.

Rev Ian Clarkson is the Minister for Hope Network in the SA Uniting Church.



Confessing Christ

David
Kowalick

Walkerville Uniting Church



I recently found a volume in a second-hand bookstore called “Back to Basics” by Michael Owen – one of the chief authors behind the writing of the Basis of Union (BoU).

“Bet you weren’t expecting to sell this book in a hurry” I said to the vendor.

“In this game you soon learn that there is a lid for every pot” she replied.

However, for me the real question is “Does the UCA lid fit on the BoU pot?”

So let’s have a look at what the BoU actually says, what its authors wanted to convey and what its implications are for the UCA.

1. The Basis of Union demands orthodox faith and practice

It is clear from the BoU that the Uniting Church was intended to be an orthodox Christian church rooted in the unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and the Apostolic and Nicene Creeds (parts 5 and 9 BoU, 1992). Further to this the BoU directs its adherents to learn from the witness of the reformers and preaching of John Wesley

(Part 10). Specifically it identifies the Uniting Church as a church that “lives and works within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church” (part 2) and as such is “built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ” (part 3) and “acknowledges that the Church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which it hears the Word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated. Furthermore when the Church preaches Jesus Christ, its message is controlled by the Biblical witnesses” (part 5).

All these words are purposefully and carefully chosen and are therefore full of consequence. As Michael Owen emphatically points out:

“The Scriptures reflect and record the witness of prophets and apostles to Jesus Christ in a way that has no parallel in the later witness of the Church. As testimony to Christ they are unmatched and unequalled, for they preserve for us the prior witness of Israel to the Word of God, which is then fulfilled in the existence of Jesus, and subsequent witness of those eye-witnesses of his resurrection who were commissioned by him to proclaim the news of it. If Jesus now speaks to people and deals with them “in and through the news of his completed work”, then it is necessary for the Church’s preaching to stick to the substance of what is recorded here. The testimony of those historic witnesses who were involved in the story of Jesus, either before, or during, or immediately after, the event, thus comes to represent both a continuing source and an abiding standard for all later witness borne by the church”.

By identifying the UCA as an ‘Apostolic and Catholic’ church the BoU is therefore charging the church to adhere to what is historically referred to as the ‘cardinal truths.’ As such the church is uniquely and singularly ‘hinged’ upon the “prophetic and apostolic testimony” (part 5). This is the very thing that authorises the church to identify itself as ‘orthodox.’ Any other theology or ideology that is not rooted in this particular theological pedigree must be considered, at best, ancillary to the orthodox cardinal truths. Indeed it was on these very bedrock truths that Calvin asserted that all subsequent episcopates (i.e. Assemblies, Synods, presbyteries) must be ultimately submitted.

Recently I participated in a Uniting Church meeting over two days. In that time, through all the prayers and worship sessions, God the Father was not mentioned once and Jesus as the Son only a handful of times. In the place of archetypal Trinitarian language God was referred to as ‘creator’, or ‘almighty.’ Instead of address-

& the Basis of Union*

*First presented at the 2015 ACC Conference

ing God by his relational identity as 'Father' as revealed by Jesus the Son, the language merely addressed God by some of his other roles. Knowing God as creator is one thing, but to know God as Father in the Son by the Holy Spirit is entirely another. Here there was conflict between two different voices. On the one hand there is the voice of Christ who instructed his followers to address

God as Father when we pray (Luke 11: 2), and on the

other hand there is the voice of contemporary culture and political correctness which instructs its followers to address God without any gender designations.

Which of the voices are we to listen to? According to the

BoU we must first listen to the voice of Christ as testified to by scripture. As the early church theologian Athanasius put it, "It is more devout and more precise to know God as Father through Jesus the Son than to know God as creator through the things he has made."

The reason the BoU so emphatically calls for the church to have its message ruled by the Biblical witnesses is simply the fact that knowledge of God must be controlled from a centre in God and not in ourselves. Rationalism, psychological insight, existential spirituality, cultural contextualisation and any other form of essentially human philosophy must not be weighted more heavily than scripture and creed, according to the BoU.

2. The Basis of Union demands 'faithful' interpretation

The single sentence concerning faithful scholarship and interpretation has, in the eyes of some, left the door open for the insertion of opinions which can appeal

to speculative interpretation and contextualisation over and against orthodox belief. However the BoU leaves no room for unorthodox theology arising from human logic, culture or philosophy.

Even a cursory glance at the BoU reveals a document evidently influenced by the great 20th Century neo-orthodox theologian, Karl Barth (in his classical era), and others of his ilk, and as such by the logic of their particular theological hermeneutic which rigorously adhered to an interpretive science based in the revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. As Owen has it,

"Barth's doctrine of the three-fold form of the one Word of God resourced the Church in the formation of a new confession of the faith and rejection of error. He also played a significant part in the renewed attention paid to classical creeds and confessions"

The BoU follows a particular science and logic of interpretation that relies entirely on a graceful and extrinsic revelation from God primarily through the incarnation of the Son of God. All our thoughts about God are relative to the unique rationality inherent in the very being of Jesus Christ who acts as the 'Rosetta Stone' for all interpretation of scripture and theology. As T.F. Torrance has it: "Jesus Christ is the ground and grammar of all authentic Christian theology." By 'ground' he is meaning the basis, the origin, the very possibility of human thought about God, and by 'grammar,' that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ sets the rules of language that governs how we think and speak about God.

Therefore human rationalism, profound as it may be, must not and cannot set the agenda for our thoughts about God. As one theologian put it:

"It is not what makes sense to us or seems right to our natural minds which should guide our theologising. It is not mere statements, with their dictionary definitions of words, which should shape our thinking about God; nor should the spirit of the age or the political correctness of our value system or the implicit axioms of our world-view determine what must or must not be true about God. Authentic Christian thinking about God follows the logic, the order, the rationality implicit in the very name and being and presence of Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God incarnate."

All this is implicit in the words and construction of the BoU.

Furthermore, as Scott McKnight points out, there is an observable lineage from Paul's articulation of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15: 1-3 to the creeds saying

Confessing Christ & the Basis of Union

From previous page

that this passage is the “genesis of the great Christian creeds... One can say with accuracy that the Nicene Creed is an exegesis or exposition of the gospel tradition of Paul’s in 1 Corinthians 15.” The BoU is arguably the latest in a long and proud lineage of received truth that began with the Old Testament foreshadowing the ultimate revelation of God in the incarnation of the Son of God, - Jesus Christ - followed by the cardinal testimony of the Apostles in the scriptures of the New Testament, underscored by the Creeds. The BoU demands that any future theologising must have continuity with the lineage already established by scripture and creed and that it must be advanced only by “faithful and scholarly interpreters of Scripture... who have reflected deeply upon, and acted trustingly in obedience to, God’s living Word.”(part II). The creeds are not the result of speculative theologising. They are an articulation of truth received. The gospel, as far as the scriptures and the early church are concerned, is all about who Jesus is and what he did rather than a theological or philosophical determination. It is a received gift. “I pass on to you

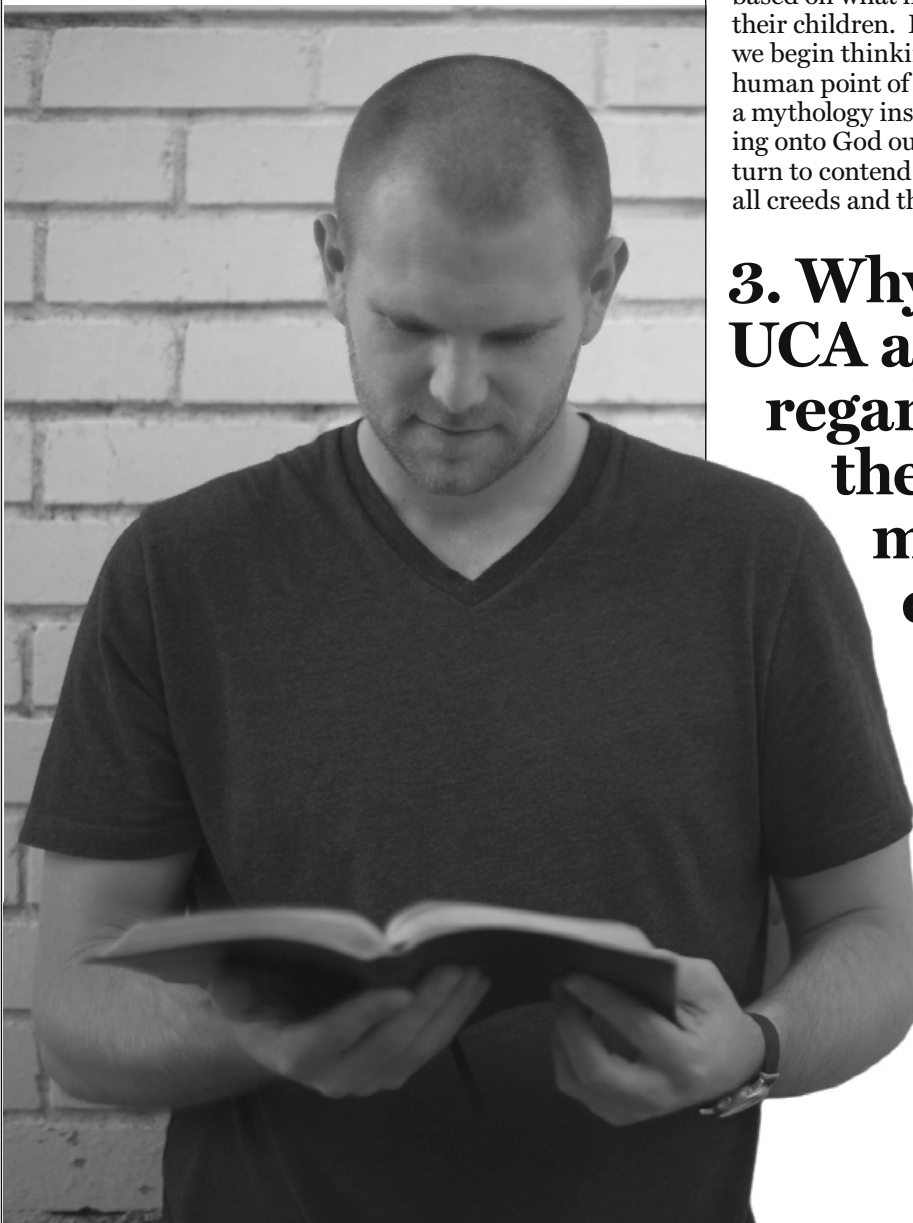
what I received...” (1 Corinthians 15:3) and “according to the Scriptures...” (v3).

Even here the rule of interpretation, according to the BoU, must be ‘faithful’ to the received apostolic witness and ‘obedient’ to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ over and against natural or rationalistic theologies. Faithful interpretation must follow the same trajectory and lineage as those that have gone before. This is not to forbid natural or rationalistic insights, but rather to rank them as a distant second to the cardinal truths. Clearly any hermeneutic unfaithful to ‘God’s living Word’ has no ultimate validity in the UCA’s ongoing theological discernment as far as the BoU is concerned.

This is a problem which has dogged the church all along. Athanasius, the great third century theologian and one of the principal architects of the Nicene Creed, had exactly the same kind of dispute with Arius, a popular but misguided leader in the early church. Arius believed God the Father was superior to the Son and contended the Son had not always existed but was ‘created’ by the Father at some point. His reasoning was based on what he observed with earthly parents and their children. But Athanasius argued the moment we begin thinking about God starting with our own human point of view we are bound to end up creating a mythology instead of a theology. We end up projecting onto God our own fallen human ideas. Now it is our turn to contend for the faith in a similar fashion, for not all creeds and theologies are equal.

3. Why then does the UCA apparently disregard the BoU in its theological determinations concerning marriage?

The short answer to the above question is that there has been a significant shift in the basis of belief and knowledge in Western culture. This shift can be traced back to the enlightenment era when Western thought began to embrace human rationalism and the ‘right of private judgement’ over and against received wisdom and most especially divine or biblical revelation. As Wikipedia has it: “The Age of Enlightenment (or simply the Enlightenment or Age of Reason) is an era from the 1620s to the 1780s in which cultural and intellectual



forces in Western Europe emphasised reason, analysis, and individualism rather than traditional lines of authority.”

This shift toward “individualism rather than traditional lines of authority” seems to be the reason that many contemporary Western theologians have diverged from the received texts and confessions of the church. Ravi Zacharias argues that there are three main grounds of belief and practice which can be generally categorised as:

- 1) **Theonomy** – Divine Law, essential ontological truth normative and authentic across all cultures and time. These are dictates of life that are above and beyond human rule.
- 2) **Heteronomy** – Law that dictates behaviour from a higher human authority –such as parents, government or a ruling class.
- 3) **Autonomy** – Law unto self, self-governing, the right of private judgment. Autonomy dictates behaviour from within self.

All three of these possibilities are always at work on any given person or group of people. What changes is the relative proportion and balance between these options depending on group norms and philosophy of life.

Since the enlightenment Western culture has been moving inexorably toward an increasingly autonomous position, most especially since WWI/ WWII and the subsequent ‘post-Christian/post-modern’ world view we now commonly encounter. Throughout this shift the influence of natural law/theonomy has all but disappeared along with an escalating rejection of heteronomy, while the sway of autonomous and existential ideologies has intensified.

One of the offspring of the enlightenment was the Romantic Era, which could be crudely identified as post-enlightenment-humanism so impressed with its own achievements that it fell in love with itself. During this era the cultural elites took the opportunity to revel in humanity’s ‘coming of age’ with self-indulgent luxury and narcissistic elevation of ‘romantic love’ over and against the demands of church, family and ‘king.’ All this of course is grist in the mill of the modern romantic-comedy or pop song that casually detaches the branch of romantic love from the tree of authentic humanity and any demands of moral absolutes.

Before the enlightenment the order of sexual coupling was - marriage, then sex and finally romantic love; the enlightenment heralded a new order of love-marriage-sex; and now the post-Christian West has settled on sex-love-marriage as the norm. Marriage is now the optional servant to the demands of autonomy and its need of self-fulfilment through romantic/sexual love. Marriage is no longer regarded as sacred or as something delimited by natural or divine law. Sexuality detached from natural law or moral demands becomes a law unto itself. This is hardly new news given the ongoing protection of ‘autonomous rights’ to have romantic/sexual love in any way it can be had over and against the rights of anybody else (unborn babies for instance).

From an autonomous point of view it makes perfect sense that the argument for same sex marriage is comparable with racial equality and gender equality.

As Dr. Mark Thompson explains the argument for SSM is “presented as the great civil liberty issue of our time... This is of course why they cannot tolerate any dissent. They will not allow the arguments against them to be put without challenge or without interruption. To them, all such arguments are simply immoral. Those who oppose the modification of the legal definition of marriage to include same-sex intimate unions are decried as ignorant, intolerant, or both, the last vestige of traditional bigotry and religious oppression.” Interestingly, whenever ‘autonomous rights’ are challenged by those with a more theonomous world-view the autonomous person suddenly switches to become heteronomous in order to dictate what others ‘should’ think. I hardly need to point out the ironic bigotry of those calling believers ‘bigots.’

The reason the BoU so emphatically calls for the church to have its message ruled by the Biblical witnesses is simply the fact that knowledge of God must be controlled from a centre in God and not in ourselves.

Clearly the way an orthodox Christian sees that world is seriously at odds with the new fascism of autonomous culture. For the orthodox believer marriage cannot be reduced to an arbitrary human construct that can be indiscriminately tinkered with. Marriage is an expression of ontological reality derived from natural law and divinely instituted between a man and a woman inherently connected to all arenas of society and spirituality.

Clearly the debate concerning ‘same-sex marriage’ within the Uniting Church reveals an even more concerning departure from the BoU, the historic creeds and ultimately the scriptures upon which the church’s theological discernment purportedly rests.

A conclusion

The BoU leaves no room for the Uniting Church to depart from the biblical and cardinal truths upon which it is founded. Whatever feelings or theological preferences any person may personally hold must be submitted to something bigger and grander if the Uniting Church is to remain faithful to its original course and purpose. I believe it is well overdue for the Uniting Church to review its position in relation to the BoU before we can have a useful discussion about the theology and the practice of marriage. Otherwise I fear the Uniting Church may stumble into practices and language that could be classed as unconstitutional. Surely it is time to insist that the Assembly of the Uniting Church reiterates its position in regard to the BoU and exercise its executive authority to ensure that the church, in all its councils, also adheres to the BoU.

Rev. David Kowalick is the Minister at Walkerville Uniting Church and a member of the SA ACC Committee.

Features of Bible Christian

An edited paper arising from research for Ted's recent book: "*Bible Christian Methodists in South Australia 1850 - 1900 A Biography of Chapels and their People*".

The Bible Christian movement arose within the historical context and circumstances that enveloped the life of the Wesleyan local preacher William O'Bryan. As time progresses and circumstances change so the original context, the distinct features of a movement fade with loss of memory. Rev. Dr. Arnold Hunt rightly points out that the polity and piety of the Bible Christians was substantially Wesleyan and that this was understandable seeing that O'Bryan was an active Wesleyan. Similar to the Primitive Methodists, the way the Bible Christians organised themselves with Local Preachers, Class Meetings, Quarterly meetings, District Meetings, Prayer meetings and Sunday Schools was typical of the much larger Wesleyan Church. The theologies of the various branches of Methodism were also similar so from the 1870's onward the clear distinctions of earlier years were becoming less obvious. By the time of church union in 1900 differences were hardly recognisable.

Rev. W T Shapley, in a lecture presented in 1952 concluded that there were three distinctive marks to the Bible Christian movement. (1) The rightful place of the laity, (2) The ministry of women, (3) The priesthood of all believers. Here I concur with Shapley and highlight some other aspects.

The Compelling Vision

It has been said "*that a vision begins with indignation over the status quo, and it grows into the earnest quest for an alternative.*" Bible Christian ministers and their families left everything they held dear in order to respond to the need of the day and to journey to a new world as missionaries.

In 1844 George Fife Angas, the visionary said, "*South Australia will become the headquarters for the diffusion of Christianity in the Southern Hemisphere.*" Then there was Samuel Keen who was a type of Joshua intent on conquering the "*Promised Land.*" He died in 1871 at the young age of 53 years after virtually burning himself out in the cause of the gospel.

Rev. James Rowe made contact with settlers on the route taken by the bullock wagons hauling copper to Port Wakefield and house meetings were quickly planted as new districts emerged. The sacred and the secular went hand in hand. Local people built Chapels for Sunday that were used as schools on Monday. Most Chapels met a desire of

settlers to see their children educated. Future generations would prosper if they had access to the Christian faith and the virtues of modern education. These were days when the Church was less concerned about itself and more concerned with fulfilling the purpose for which it existed.

Thriving on Evangelical Passion

Our forefathers respected the Biblical account and were of the conviction that without Christ, a person's soul was lost eternally. They were single-minded about the stewardship of being entrusted with a Gospel that could transform people and the world. Sadly today it seems that in an attempt to be relevant, tolerant and inclusive, the Church of our time appears to have retreated to a position of uncertainty that compromises the message of the gospel so that now the world transforms the Gospel.

Our forefathers were less concerned with bureaucratic meetings and committees than they were with helping people to reach a verdict. They were practical, down to earth people who counted the numbers and offerings carefully. If people were interested they would be present, if a life was changed it would be observable, if the church was alive it would be growing.

The Church Today

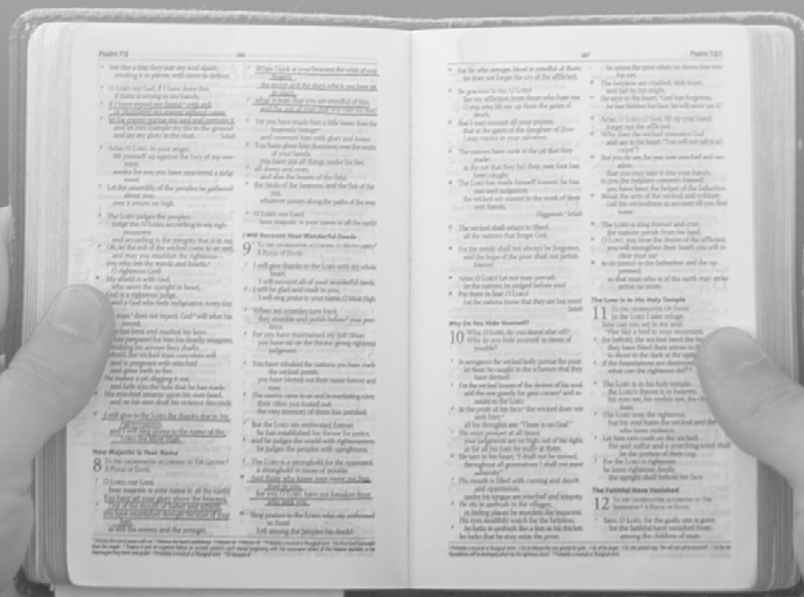
Instead of being reactive, (responding to issues after they emerge) the Church of earlier days was proactive providing a lead in the development of social and moral well being. You can't read our history without realising that beyond the primary task of calling people to Christ, the Church was at the forefront of helping settlers to subdue the alien environment by often providing important social occasions and institutions, a bonding cohesion for isolated people and families.

Today we encounter rapid change. People are no longer taming rugged virgin scrub, but the spiritual perception, message, motivation and courage of the church has been tamed. Instead of being the creative agents and gatekeepers of culture, different values and voices have become dominant in our time. We cannot control change or our world but neither can we forget our heritage. These Bible Christians responded to the challenge of their day to grow the Church alongside the growth of the Colony, to move with the settlers into new areas for the sake of Christ. They made an indelible mark upon the early life of this country, that while eroded and distorted by time, can never be erased. Their vision asks us to identify the frontiers of our time and to grasp the present moment for God with equal enthusiasm.

Rev. E. A. Curnow's articles and resource papers can be accessed on the ACC website: <http://www.confessingcongregations.com/resources/devotional/practical-pastoral-ted-curnow/>

Methodism

To escape into the past
would be tragic:
to revisit the past without
learning for the future
would be just as tragic



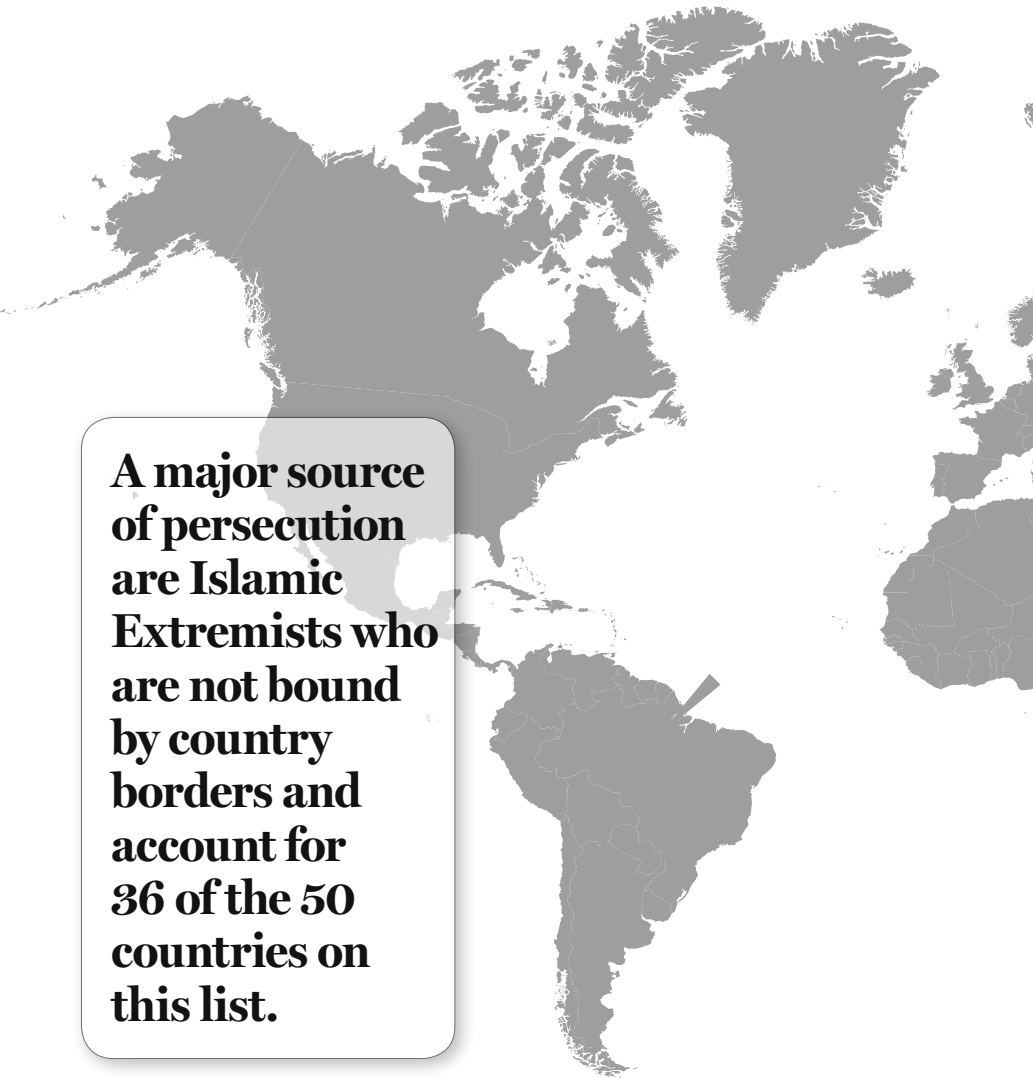
Persecution of Christian

- **North Korea** ranked at number one
- **Islamic Extremism** the major cause of Persecution
- Persecution increased the most in **Eritrea**
- Religious intolerance in **India** continues to increase
- **Indonesia** the closest country to Australia in the list appears at 43

North Korea ranks number one for the 14th consecutive year in the Open Doors World Watch List, ranking the top 50 countries that persecute Christians. The Hermit Kingdom has ranked number one again as leader Kim Jong Un continues to try and stamp out organised religion in what he views as a challenge to his power.

Although North Korea tops the list, the major source of persecution identified in 36 of the 50 countries on the list, is Islamic Extremism. For this reason Iraq has been ranked second in the World Watch List. Since the late 1990's the Christian population in Iraq has shrunk from over 1.5 million to less than 220,000. Of the Christians who remain most are displaced in the north east of the country, as a result of the self-proclaimed Islamic State. The group has executed many for refusing to convert to their brand of Islam and forced many others to flee. The group still hold large swathes of territory in both Iraq and neighbouring Syria, also appearing in the list and ranked at number five.

While much attention has been given to the self-styled caliphate of the Islamic State, the world's most dangerous terrorist organisation, Boko Haram, has also impacted rankings. Gaining notoriety after the kidnapping of over



A major source of persecution are Islamic Extremists who are not bound by country borders and account for 36 of the 50 countries on this list.

200 school girls in Chibok, the group is responsible for more murders over the last 12 months than the Islamic State. Boko Haram's insurgency has resulted in a rank at number 12 for Nigeria, where the group is based and a rank of 49 in Niger due to cross-border attacks.

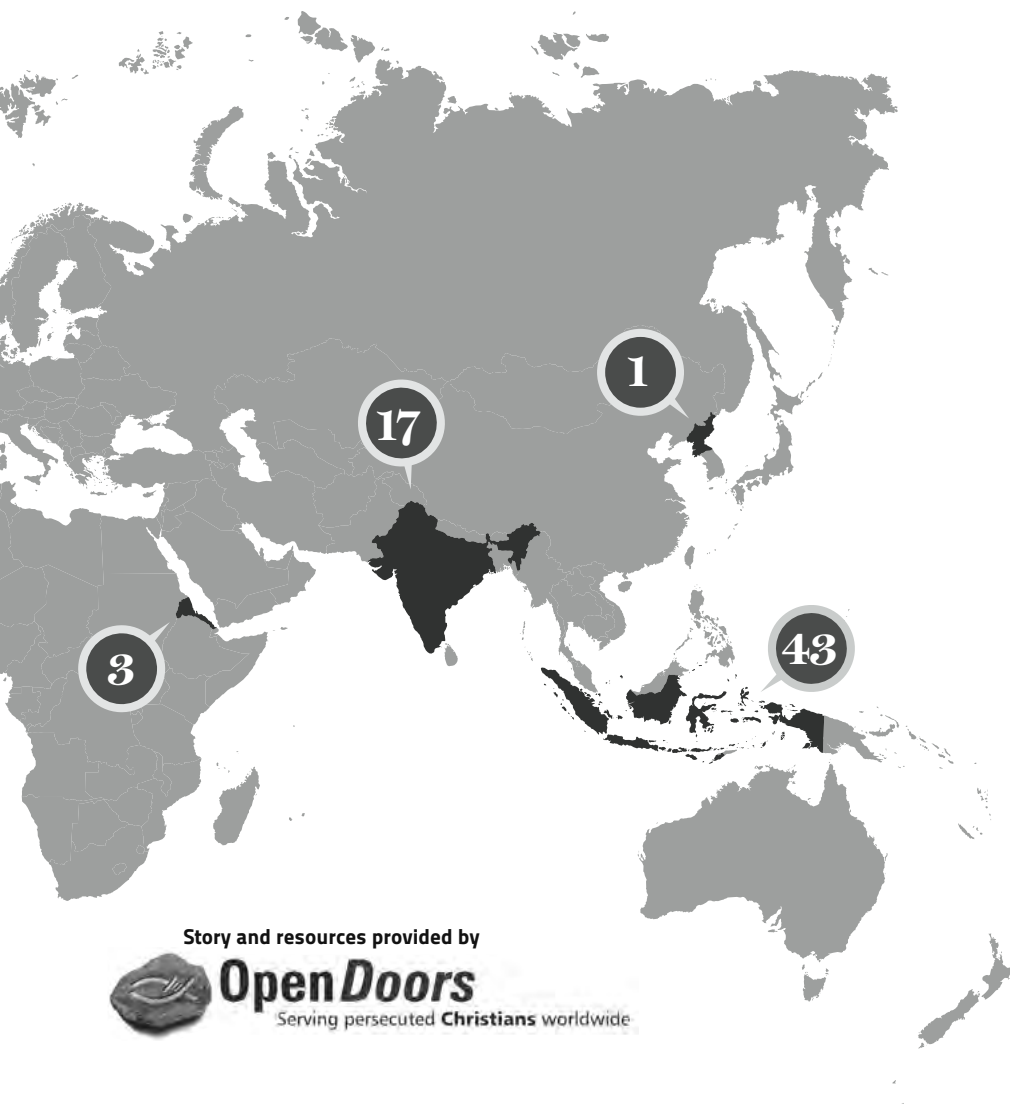
Number three on the World Watch List is Eritrea, labelled by many as 'the North Korea of Africa' the small nation broke away from Ethiopia in 1991 in a bloody civil war. Since this time president Afewerki has maintained a brutal and oppressive reign imprisoning anyone considered to be a dissenter, Eritrea saw the largest score increase in this year's list. Afghanistan appears at number four and has been battling a continued insurgency from the Taliban. Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan,

Iran and Libya round out the top ten.

While much attention is given to Islamic Extremism in the media, other forms of persecution such as Hindu extremism in India, have also risen sharply. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been criticised for largely ignoring violence towards religious minorities. Christians have suffered particularly through forced conversion ceremonies. Reportedly in some circumstances these ceremonies were on a scale of up to 400 people at a time, occurring in areas near the city of Varanasi. India this year ranks at number 17.

Also of notable inclusion in the list is one of Australia's closest neighbours, Indonesia. Rising in the list this year to 43, up from 47 last year, Indonesia

s Worldwide Intensifies



Story and resources provided by



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted Christians worldwide

1. North Korea

25 million people
300,000 Christians

2. Iraq
3. Eritrea
4. Afghanistan
5. Syria
6. Pakistan
7. Somalia
8. Sudan
9. Iran
10. Libya
11. Yemen
12. Nigeria
13. Maldives
14. Saudi Arabia
15. Uzbekistan
16. Kenya
17. India
18. Ethiopia
19. Turkmenistan
20. Vietnam
21. Qatar
22. Egypt
23. Myanmar
24. Palestinian Territories
25. Brunei
26. Central African Republic
27. Jordan
28. Djibouti
29. Laos
30. Malaysia
31. Tajikistan
32. Tunisia
33. China
34. Azerbaijan
35. Bangladesh
36. Tanzania
37. Algeria
38. Bhutan
39. Comoros
40. Mexico
41. Kuwait
42. Kazakhstan
43. Indonesia
44. Mali
45. Turkey
46. Colombia
47. United Arab Emirates
48. Bahrain
49. Niger
50. Oman

saw a spate of attacks on churches in October. One church was burned down while several others were closed due to a lack of proper registration. This registration can often be held up by local authorities in an attempt to curb the growing number of Christians in the country.

The 2016 World Watch List has also revealed a continued escalation of hostility towards Christians worldwide. Analysts working for Open Doors who compile the list have said that scores have increased on average by two and a half points while the entry score for the list has increased by three points.

They have also pointed out that while the top of the list is dominated by North African and Middle Eastern countries, persecution is rising

rapidly in Central Asia. Many former communist countries who now have issues with extremists fighting abroad in countries like Syria and Iraq, have started aggressively monitoring all religious activity. This has meant increased scrutiny of Christian gatherings and a crackdown of freedom of religious expression.



The full World Watch List of 50 countries is available for free on the Open Doors website www.opendoors.org.au. Open Doors is a charity that provides support to Christians facing persecution in over 60 countries worldwide. It was started over 60 years ago when organisations founder, Brother Andrew author of *God's Smuggler*, smuggled bibles into the then Soviet Union.

Confessing Christ in a diverse Church

Simon
Dent

Coromandel Valley Uniting Church



Bible Study presentation at the Conference of the 2015 Assembly of Confessing Congregations: 15th September 2015.

My Bible Study this morning will be based on Paul's first letter to Timothy, who was charged with overseeing the diverse church in Ephesus.

Apostasy in the church is nothing new. We read the New Testament epistles and hear sound theological reflection in the face of division and apostasy in the church.

It's good for us to remember this in our current situation, lest we long for the good old days, which while being old may not have been good. They really just had a different kind of apostasy. If we find ourselves disillusioned by the Uniting Church we need to ask ourselves if we have had an illusion about the place of sin in the lives of Christians in the first place. If so, it's a good thing to be freed from an illusion.

The Spirit is always exercising His ministry in leading the church into the truth of Christ in the face of unbelief. Indeed Paul's message to Timothy, as it is to us in the ACC, is make sure it's not you!

Let's hear what Paul says to Timothy as he leads a diverse church in Ephesus.

"Timothy, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain people not to teach any different doctrine. Nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies which promote speculation rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons by swerving from the truth, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be the teachers of the law, without understanding what they are saying, or things about which they make confident assertions." 1 Timothy 1:3-7

What was the false teaching? It is not explicit but there are indications in the text.

In the church at Ephesus there was a doctrine based on speculation rather than revelation; fables and genealogies, and aimless ideas. In verse 20 we read about Hymeneas and Phineas who blaspheme by saying the resurrection has

already happened and are destroying the faith of some. They promoted a dualism that emphasised a spiritual over the physical and called for the renunciation of marriage and abstaining from certain foods.

Paul called Timothy to charge certain people like them not to teach a different gospel (v 3) other than what he had received. In other words, refrain from speculations, inventiveness, cultural adaptations that swerve from the gospel of Jesus Christ. A good warning for us today as we seek to bring a living gospel to the world.

And it seems there was some progress in this matter at the church at Ephesus. In the book of Revelation the Spirit of Jesus commands *"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:*

"I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place". Revelation 2:2-5

This passage gives us a lens through which to read Paul's letter. It seems that the main concern of the 1 Timothy letter was not defending the faith against the false teachers after all even though it begins that way. The defence of the gospel is a part of the wider work of being a true community of Christ in the grace of God. This includes upholding true doctrine but is not its essence.

"First of all" he says in Chapter 2, that prayers, intercession and thanksgiving should be made for everyone. This is the first action. Praying for everyone in the church, especially those doing the false teaching. Paul is saying, know your enemy. It's not the humans in the church but the spiritual forces of darkness that oppose the free gospel of grace. So pray and lift up holy hands without anger or disputing (v 8).

The rest of the letter encourages the church in Ephesus to keep its own house in order rather than pointing out the faults of others. Watch your own doctrine and live it out. Care for the flock well and call them to account in the light of the finished work of Jesus. Set godly leaders in place who conduct themselves according to their hope and doctrine. And don't be surprised when some depart from the faith for the Spirit tells us this will happen. (4:1) (There we told you! Don't be shocked that we have some false teachers in the church!)

In other words, in your confession of Christ in a diverse church don't get distracted from the main task of looking to Jesus, of worship and love and proclamation of the gospel. In your commanding the false teachers, do not end up preaching a different gospel that comes from an anxious and troubled conscience. Get on with the mission and with

prayer. Don't swerve from the goal which is Christ.

It was good to be at Assembly and see that this was the case with Hedley and Lulu as they presented their proposal on marriage. They did so with such gentleness and boldness, responding to questions that clearly sought to attack rather than understand.

The primary way to defend the truth of the gospel is to receive Jesus in your own heart, to let the risen Christ in you bring you contentment; and love for the church and the world. Love and truth reside together in Christ and must also in the confessing church.

"I thank him who gives me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service. Though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and an insolent opponent." 1 Timothy 1:12

This is Paul's testimony. Here we have the story of a man who was fundamentally made new from the heart by the love of Christ and in his vicarious death on the cross. It has liberated him in such a way that he can work hard with a clear conscience even in the face of his violent history against the Lord and his people. Here there is no attempt to 'save face' because He knows that he is without defence. God the Father has judged and condemned him as a sinner in the cross of Christ. However, he can now see the judgement of his past and present sin in the past tense, completed in the work of Christ who has judged and justified him. He is silenced by the law because he is a sinner but is given a renewed voice back as a justified man.

"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst." 1 Timothy 1: 15

Note the present tense of his confession. Paul has freedom to be bold, humble and content in the gospel in the presence of Christ, even in the face of his present weakness and lingering sin. Do you know that freedom? It is what Jesus has done for you and why the true gospel is so important to proclaim, to ourselves as much as it is to others. Paul knows the danger fuelled by an anxious, hidden, self-righteous ego that seeks to defend itself rather than acknowledge its death in Christ. He now has a new identity which is in Christ and therefore has peace even in the diverse church. He is willing to work and wait for that day when he will fully see his resurrection in Christ when Jesus returns to establish a new heaven and new earth. He is not trying to rebuild what was destroyed but waits for his future. Paul is not in the resuscitation game; he is in the substitution game and he has the freedom to be wonderfully real about his present holiness and his hope.

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and

gave himself for me." Galatians 2: 20

So the conversion of hearts is the goal, even our own, in the defence of the gospel. A pure heart, a clean conscience, a sincere faith. The conversion from a need to win to a peace and contentment as we look to Jesus, the Living Lord of the church.

One temptation of being in a confessing movement is that in practice if not in intent, we may move away from this goal. Like the false teacher, we may swerve away from the centre which is the living Christ. We find ourselves with an unhealthy craving for controversy, and quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. (1 Timothy 6). Such a spirit is actually a denial of the grace of God and ironically exposes the false doctrine within the heart - the very thing he was trying to denounce!

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness." James 3:13-18

The truth of God is not a doctrine but a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is he who calls us to himself, to fix our eyes on his life, his Lordship as head and defender of the church. It is the risen Christ who now strengthens Paul in humility for the task of living the true doctrine of grace that he proclaims. And because he knows this he has amazing freedom to be honest about who he is.

So the question is for us. Do we know what and who Paul knew?

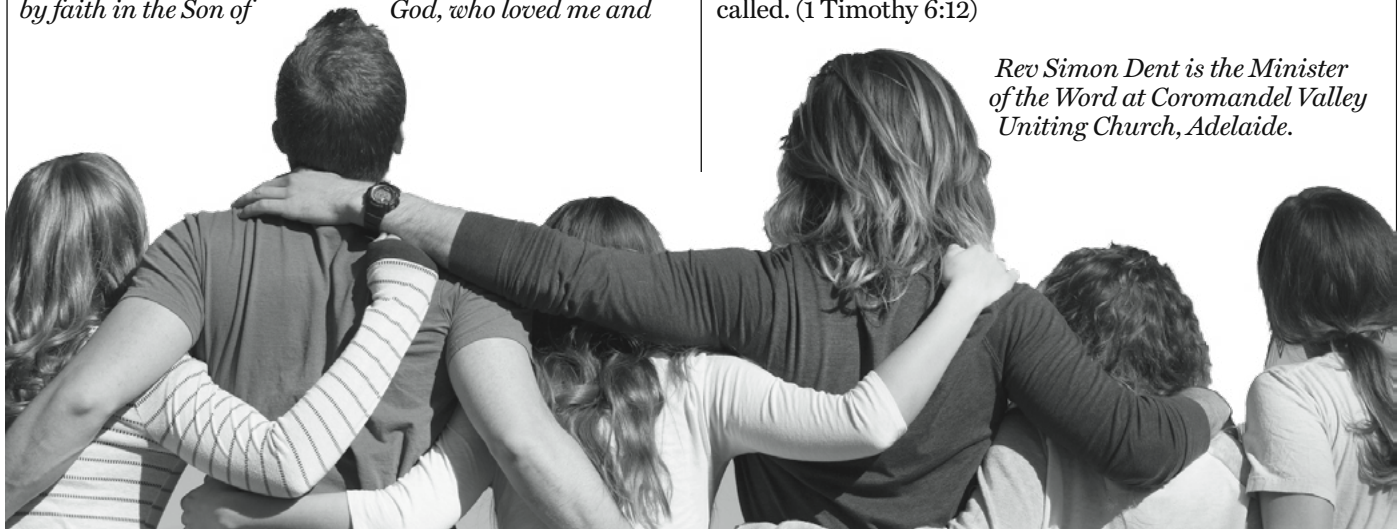
"For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I laboured even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me." 1 Corinthians 15: 9-10

Such hope, humility and love is the hallmark of a truly confessing church.

This is how the man with a clear conscience calls upon Timothy to lead the church in a theologically diverse church.

Don't spend all your time arguing but fight the good life of faith and take hold of the eternal life to which you were called. (1 Timothy 6:12)

Rev Simon Dent is the Minister of the Word at Coromandel Valley Uniting Church, Adelaide.



Great Sexpectations

Augustine, Ashley Madison and the

Justine
Toh

Centre for Public Christianity



The Ashley Madison hack may have faded from the headlines but one of its key revelations lingers on in our cultural conversations about sex.

It's present in more recent offerings like Rachel Hills' book *The Sex Myth: The Gap Between Our Fantasies and Reality* and the romantic comedy *Sleeping with Other People*.

That this theme should crop up so repeatedly suggests that we need to be constantly reminded of it - no great surprise, really, since sex is often something that can (if you pardon the phrase) screw with our thinking, feeling, and desiring.

What each of these sex stories reinforces, again and again, is that all of us have great sexpectations that remain, frequently, unfulfilled.

This is a cruel irony in an age otherwise saturated with sex and its possibilities. Few today dare to insist there's one way to conduct affairs of the heart or lead a satisfying sexual existence. Aside from matters of consent and legality you can have whatever sex you want when you want, with whom you want, and how you want - sex today is a veritable garden of earthly delights.

Or is it? In *The Sex Myth*, millennial journalist Rachel Hills charges that this familiar narrative of sexual liberation keeps us firmly in the grip of the "sex myth" - found equally in media panics over the sexual anarchy of [hook up culture](#) and in our tendency to overinvest in sex as the supreme pleasure, as revelatory of the "barbaric truth of human nature" and "a window into who each of us 'really' is."

Of particular interest to Hills is the way sex becomes tethered to our worth and value, and is the means by which individuals lay claim to an attractive, empowered and liberated identity. Sex, in these terms, is not just about sex but also about the self: how we regard ourselves, and how we are seen by others. As one college student interviewed by Hills says, "You're only as attractive as the girl you're going out with."

In the wake of the Ashley Madison affair, you can spot the sex myth in [this user's reasons](#) for joining the site: "I was ready to act on my long-repressed desires and impulses, to broaden my horizons, even if it meant risking [my marriage] in search of what it meant to actually live."

The sex myth, then, concerns the ways we imbue sex

with, in Hills's terms, "an excess of significance" - making it the bearer of ultimate truth as well as the route to personal fulfilment, self-transformation and a kind of existential recognition. Hills' account of the way sex is used as a tool of self-realisation is resolutely secular, but her recognition of the "almost otherworldly importance" we ascribe to sex suggests a spiritual dimension to the expectations we place upon it.

In his Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker argued that the void left by the "death of God" had been (inadequately) filled by the "apocalyptic romance" that now sought in the lover the significance and solace formerly found in the divine. "Sexuality," he writes, "is now understood for what it really is: another twisting and turning, a groping for the meaning of one's life." Becker wagers, then, that in an age stripped of the transcendent, we transcendentalise other earthly goods like love and sex. He suggests, basically, that there is fundamentally a theological problem - the absence of God - at the heart of our sexual (mis)adventures today.

The fourth-century theologian Augustine would agree. The Bishop of Hippo seems an unlikely conversation partner to consult on modern sex and love, but his infamous struggles with his own sexual appetites mark him out as our contemporary. Augustine's convictions are worth attending to - especially his belief that the fundamental human problem was one of disordered love.

For Augustine, loving things rightly, and in the right order, was the key that would unlock the secret to the fulfilled life. The man who lives a "just and holy life," he writes in *On Christian Doctrine*, "keeps his affections ... under strict control, so that he neither loves what he ought not to love, nor fails to love what he ought to love, nor loves that equally which ought to be loved either less or more, nor loves less or more which ought to be loved equally."

You need look no further than *Sleeping with Other People* to find a modern rundown of Augustine's account of the ways in which love can go awry. The movie is about disordered love framed through the contemporary therapeutic category of addiction. In the film, Jake and Laney reconnect at a support-group for sex-addicts twelve years after losing their virginity to each other in college. They both insist that they don't have an issue with sex, but Laney cheats on her boyfriend while still pining after Matthew, the sleaze she obsessed over in college, and the womanising Jake can't stay faithful to any of his girlfriends.

It turns out that Jake and Laney's problem, however, is more to do with love and less to do with sex. Laney is basically addicted to Matthew - in Augustinian terms, she "loves what she ought not to love" - and so lost is she in him that it just about sinks her chances of happiness with someone else. As for Jake, you could argue that he is

Problem of Disordered Love

similarly addicted to Laney. His fatal attraction to her was prompted by his disappointment at her disappearance the morning after their college encounter, which resulted in his resolve to never again sleep with someone he could stand to lose - hence his chronic pursuit of women and avoidance of emotional commitment.

Laney and Jake's disordered loves, then, see them compulsively return to something, or someone, that won't ultimately satisfy. Realistically, the last thing these two messed up individuals should do is fall in love with each other, but this is a romantic comedy so Jake and Laney are fated to be together - after being eventually (if unconvincingly) "cured" of their addictions. Yet the film's passing references to Stephen King's *Misery* and Puccini's *Madam Butterfly* - both stories of obsessive and unrequited love - reinforce the varied ways in which people pin their hopes on those doomed to disappoint them. As such, it's hard to imagine Jake and Laney will prove the exception.

How to avoid, then, the perils of inordinate love?

Augustine, if you'll recall, counselled the "strict control" of the affections - perhaps in recognition of the chronic waywardness of human love. Some may be put off by such talk, regarding it as code for repressing one's desires. However, there is a significant payoff to mastering the art of loving the right things in the right way: you don't seek in anything anything more than what it is. You can simply appreciate it as itself, and not as a distorted reflection of your own wants, needs, or desires for fulfilment.

There is a catch, however. Augustine also said that the supreme love object was God, and that loving God rightly would, on balance, rightly order all other loves, and keep us from seeking in earthly things what they cannot possibly hope to deliver. Modern sceptics may find such a solution unbelievable. Yet even harder to swallow is the fanciful resolution of most romantic comedies (including *Sleeping with Other People*), and Hills' utopian belief that it is possible to liberate ourselves from the sex myth so that sex is not seen as a basis for individual meaning and significance.

Given the contemporary trials of love and sex and the mess that we keep making of ourselves when it comes to love, it seems clear that more than ever, we need help from outside - a transcendent source beyond human will and desire.



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For more content on Christianity and contemporary life, see www.publicchristianity.org

Let us continue to grow the mission in

At the beginning of 2014 Fran and I set up a mobile ministry to assist congregations without ministers. We have been doing this ministry for 2 years now and it has been most rewarding both for those we serve and for Fran and me. There is a great need out there for ministers who will give of their time to smaller congregations. In 2014 we were invited to Western Australia and for 8 months of 2015 we spent with churches in Tasmania. This has been due to the lack of acceptance for this style of ministry by the Presbyteries and Synod of NSW. We were able to launch this ministry with the assistance of the ACC through Peter Bentley.

In setting up this ministry one of the things that has really been impressed onto my mind is the sense of “call.” When I was going for ordination, many on the interview panels thought that although I had been in full time ministry for 20 years that I wasn’t called to be ordained. (I was finally ordained in 2010) I have given a great deal of thought to this topic, particularly since I felt the call of God to set up this Mobile Ministry to reach out to smaller congregations who are struggling on their own to keep their church doors open. I have found more faith and a sense of call in some of these smaller churches than I have found in bigger more financial churches. They don’t have ministers, and never in the foreseeable future are likely to be able to, but they have the faith to struggle to find good resources and rely on Lay Preachers to keep some life within their church community. They are some of the finest Christian people I have had the privilege to work with. I have finished this year with a deep admiration for these small congregations.

This year I wanted to get a picture of how this ministry was being accepted by Congregations so I printed survey forms to give me feedback as to how this mobile style ministry is being received and how it can be improved. I have received back almost 30 responses from congregations and congregational members. There has not been one negative comment, these communities need love and care; they need to know they have not been cut off and forgotten. To the contrary several have said in the comments they believe this is the type of ministry Presbyteries should be looking at.

Congregations need outside stimulation and teaching that casts a different light onto what they have most weeks. It is not that our ministry is better than what they do, it is just different and it stimulates and challenges them to go on. These groups need encouragement; mostly they only see Presbytery Reps when the Presbytery comes in to do what is called resource ministry or a review. The comment by several people has been, “They come in and tell us what we should do, then leave and we are none the wiser, so we

go back to doing what we know how to do best.” It has been interesting in the churches that were a little divided about the value of short term ministry, before we arrived; they were the ones who wanted us to stay longer.

We have received a great deal of resistance from Presbytery and Synods. I could not convince one section of the Vic/Tas Synod that we weren’t Baptist. (It was like the UCA do not do things like this.) We were in Tasmania for 8 months and worked with 7 different churches. We were able to help them stop and take a look at their future and encourage them to build a future that was missional based.

My experience in the Illawarra Presbytery has been that the PRC (who were pro active) would have invited someone like me along to talk about what they were doing and what benefits there was in the ministry they were doing. In the Tasmanian and the Western Australian Presbyteries this year and last year not once did either Presbytery stop to talk to us about the ministry we were offering. Even when attending a Presbytery meeting there was no opportunity to speak about the mobile ministry concept. It seems the Church only embraces new styles of ministry if they think of it; if it comes from the grass roots they tend shun it. The comment from one senior Presbytery person was that the congregations were divided and it was no point in us going. This proved to be untrue.

This brings me back to where I started, in talking about what is “CALL.” It would appear to me that God is only calling ministers who want to advance themselves in the church, sit in places on Synods and Presbyteries, study for doctorates etc. Is God only calling people to bigger and more financial congregations or bigger and better roles? **Where is the call to go and grow churches?** All over the country, in areas where I have travelled, the smaller churches are being left to die, whatever assistance they get is like gathering crumbs from under the master’s table.

In my travels I have attended Presbytery meetings where it has been boasted that we close churches with great sensitivity and love. Where is the weeping at these closures? Churches all over the nations are being turned into restaurants, dance studios, museums, martial arts studios and most of all houses. It is true some need to be closed, as the population isn’t in those areas anymore. The question is how many new churches are growing up to take their places? Surely call is about growing churches, not moving on to bigger and more financial congregations? Surely God is calling ministers and Christians to be missionaries to go into all the world! To grow the kingdom of God! Not how well we do social welfare and education.

I say to all the churches I go to “*there no reason a church cannot double in size in one year, all it takes is for everyone to look and search for one more person to invite along.*” When Jesus talks about the shepherd, it is not the

the UCA



shepherd that gives birth to sheep, sheep are the ones who multiple the flock! I was reading an article recently which cuts across much of church understanding about Jesus being the good shepherd, the article said the sheep are not there to profit the sheep; the sheep are there to profit the shepherd. My brother in law has a farm that runs sheep and cattle. Any animal that will not profit him is sent to the sale yards. One man said, (who was visiting one of the congregations I was ministering to), that he would be too embarrassed to invite anyone to his congregation due to the quality of the gospel message preached at his church. What is this telling the UCA?

The thing I have learnt in 25 years of ministry is that **we need to be missional people not institutional people.** We are called to profit the Great Shepherd, when we fail to do this the church will no longer be blessed, the church will die and buildings and property will be sold.

While in Tasmania the Presbytery had dreaming days. I tried to ask them a serious question, 'that unless they are willing to see why the church is in such severe decline, then all the dreaming is pointless.' Only a handful out of the 80 present stopped to listen; the rest went on dreaming. In a discussion group one lady said she was happy the way the church was going, and if that meant closing more churches, so be it, she said that didn't bother her. Where is the future when we fail to answer the true call of God to be missionary people?

We should be sending our best people to smaller churches to grow congregations, not sticking them in bigger churches or on Synods or Assemblies. That brings me to another question; do people in Assemblies, Synods and on our committees have a proven record of ever growing a church/

*we need to
be missional
people not
institutional
people.*

congregation? It is a serious question, for they are the ones telling us how to do ministry and setting the rules.

This in some ways seems negative, but I believe with a change of attitude we can reclaim and grow the UCA. We have a choice, if what we are doing isn't working then we need to stop doing it. We need to go back to what the bible calls us to be, and that is missionary people who go into all the world with the saving grace and love of Jesus Christ. We need to stop embracing everything the world is embracing, it is why Jesus said. Mat 26:11 NIV *The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.* Yes, Jesus also says give to the poor, but it is so easy to get involved in social justice issues we forget our real calling, honouring Jesus.

Jesus says, John 15:10 *If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.* What is the greatest command, to go and be missional people. **THAT IS WHAT CALL IS, TO GROW THE KINGDOM NOT SUPERVISE ITS CLOSURE.**

Rev Grahame & Fran Abrahams are taking bookings for 2016 if you would like them to spend some time with you in ministry contact Grahame on 0429 995 649 or email gka004@gmail.com

Pastoral Care In A Diverse Church

Part 2 of the Keynote Address by Emeritus Professor Pat Noller at the 2015 ACC National Conference

Developing a pastorally sensitive relationship is not always easy. For example, we may need to deal with our own discomfort and anger toward the person we are talking with. We may see their issue as trivial or self-inflicted, for example. Recently I went with my minister to take communion to a woman I had avoided for a long time. I realised how wrong I had been when she expressed such pleasure at seeing me and really wanted to talk about my late husband. I suspect that my own self-righteousness had created a barrier between us.

Whatever our struggles, we need to respond to any problem with love and compassion, just as God does. We need to acknowledge others' pain and the difficult situation they are in and respond appropriately. Developing trust is another important task, because if you are not trusted, people will not open up to you about their concerns.

In the article 'How to talk to your gay friends' in the August 2015 issue of *Eternity*, David Sandifer makes some suggestions concerning how to talk to gay friends with sensitivity, and these ideas would also apply to pastoral carers speaking with gay people or with anyone for that matter. The first point he emphasises is the importance of listening. He argues that we should spend more time listening than talking and I have no doubt that you only earn the right to be listened to if you first listen to the other person and particularly to their pain. As Sandifer points out,

"Most people can accept disagreement, even on a topic they feel passionately about, if they believe they've generally been listened to".

In *Frontier News* (August 2015), I noticed a statement that "If talking is silver, listening is gold". James 1 also makes a similar point, suggesting that we should be quick to listen and

slow to speak.

The second point Sandifer makes is that, although it can be tempting to water down the Christian approach to sex, it is important to remember that that same message about God's design for marriage is part of the Good News of the Gospel. It is also intended as a blessing for individuals and for the society as a whole. In other words, we do not need to apologise for the Christian position on sex and marriage, although that position may often be denigrated and seen as narrow and inappropriate in today's world and completely out of touch with the current situation.

The third point Sandifer makes in this short article is that although we currently find ourselves in a situation where we are focusing on the issue of marriage, we really want to point people to Jesus Christ and his saving grace. Sandifer suggests that we should bring the conversation around to the brokenness that we all share in this area, and to the love and grace that are available to each one of us through Christ.

Being culturally conversant

In focusing on the issue of being culturally conversant, Kevin de Young (in *What does the Bible really teach about homosexuality?*) is mainly concerned that we are clear about what we are talking about, using terms that are familiar to those we are addressing. We need to be quick to listen and slow to speak, always speaking the truth in love and showing true grace that is humble, gentle and caring.

What pastoral care does not involve

I also want to talk about what pastoral care does not involve. We should avoid judging or condemning the other person. As Joel Osteen has said (*June 2014 Facebook post*),

"Your job isn't to judge. Your job isn't to figure out if someone DE-SERVES something. Your job is to LIFT the fallen, to RESTORE the broken and to HEAL the hurting."

Our job, in the strength and power

of the Holy Spirit is to elevate rather than dominate others.

I recognise that those who hold a different point of view from us can be extremely sensitive (such as some responses when Hedley Fihaki and Lulu Senituli put forward Proposal 61 at the latest Assembly, asking for the Assembly to publicly state the UCA's 1997 position on marriage). But I still cannot understand the strength of the negative reaction of the Assembly members. At such times we need to remember that it's God's work that we are doing and have courage.

It's also not our job to punish or threaten another person. We need to leave them in God's hands. I think Eugene Peterson puts it beautifully when he says in *The Gift*:

"Pastoral care involves holding in one hand the person with love and care and affirmation, and holding in the other hand the Word of God and bringing the two together."

What is meant by diversity in the Uniting Church?

I found several comments about what diversity meant to the founding fathers of the Uniting Church.

1. Being careful not to develop a terminology suggesting distinctive doctrines. I find myself asking distinctive from what? The Scriptures? The Founding denominations that already had some distinctive doctrines? It's a bit like the cereal package that tells you that it has 20% less sugar – 20% less than what?
2. The only identity we need to focus on is that of "the church, catholic, reformed and evangelical". We seem to have moved away from reformed and evangelical.
3. Being so inclusive as to be subservive of any impulse to denominationalise Christian fellowship (Davis McCaughey). Is there no limit to our inclusiveness? And here

we seem to be talking about being inclusive, not of people but of doctrine. I suspect, however, that our inclusiveness has gone way beyond what our founding churches would have been happy with.

In the Basis of Union, I also found three very different references to diversity.

1. An emphasis on the Pauline concept of diverse gifts among members that can be used for the building up of the whole, a widely accepted concept across the church.
2. An admonition specifically addressed to lay preachers that they should adhere to the Basis of Union, with such adherence allowing for “differences of opinion in matters that do not enter into the substance of the faith”. Of course, the crucial issue then and now concerns which differences of opinion do or do not enter into the substance of the faith. I guess I would expect that sex and marriage would be included here, especially given the focus in the creation story (Genesis 1: 27) on marriage being a symbol of the image of God as both male and female. The hierarchy of the Uniting Church, however, has tended to assume that these issues do not enter into the substance of the faith.
3. The third point concerned the working of congregations and suggested that there should be a diversity of agencies for the better ordering of its life – education, administration and finance. That is only common sense.

I also discovered that the 9th Assembly in 2000 set up a Uniting Church Charter to operate in this “Community of Difference”. (This would be post the Sexuality Report but before the Homosexual Leadership issue that would have been dealt with at the following (2003) Assembly.) Were they getting ready for the coming controversy and training people not to object, a strategy that obviously failed when it came to those who founded the ACC in 2006?

The 8 principles outlined in the charter:



1. Respect personhood of others and their full membership in Christ.
2. Practise strenuous tolerance in the Spirit of Christ. I'm not sure what strenuous tolerance is?
3. Listen to the person first and then seek to understand his or her doctrinal position.
4. Carefully respect views and sensitivities of those with whom we are in disagreement.
5. Avoid all inflammatory or demeaning words and never resort to vilification or harassment. I'm afraid that some of the words used against Hedley and Lulu, such as judgmental and hateful would be included in my list of demeaning words!!!
6. Avoid comparisons, especial-

ly those that contrast your own 'best case' with other's 'worst case'.

7. Be open to mutual conversion to the 'more excellent way' of Christ.
8. Let uniting be the expression of our process, direction, and Godly hope as a 'pilgrim people'.

Many of these principles are based on basic principles of communication that are taught around the western world. What puzzles me is the way that they are used by members of the Assembly in a discriminatory way. Or maybe the way that they are not used at all!!

(Part 3 will be included in the June 2016 ACCatalyst. Pat's PowerPoint presentation is available in full on the ACC website).

How religion fell off the radar in *and what might be done to get it back on.*

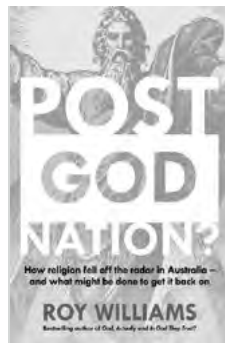
Roy Williams has now written an extremely valuable trilogy refuting currently fashionable secularist notions in Australia. *God, Actually* (2008) was an effective and popular work of out-and-out apologetics. In *God they trust?* (2013) shed light on the religious commitments (or not) of our Prime Ministers.

Now this book – in some ways the most ambitious yet – attempts to do three things. First, to show that the influence of religion on Australian life has been “vital and largely favourable”; secondly, to explain that secularisation “has been partly the Churches’ own fault, and partly the result of forces beyond their control”; and, finally, to assert that religion “is worth saving” and to show how “this might be done”. In the appendices there are forty pages of potted “spiritual biographies” of important figures in Australian history, a useful brief summary of the main differences between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism and 57 pages of endnotes.

All three of the author’s objectives here involve historical work and the first thing this historian wants to say is: bravo, I wish I’d written it. The second is that Williams’ research is prodigious in its breadth and depth (see the reference above to endnotes). He is also generally judicious in his selection of sources and admirable in the balance and lucidity of his analysis.

The strength of the first, historical section is to go beyond Christian individuals to show the pervasive and thoroughly Christian foundations of the colonisation project. He deals not just with contemporary developments like evangelical humanitarianism but with the whole Judeo-Christian foundations of western culture and particularly of British development (chapters 2 and 3).

Williams recognises strong religious impulses and beliefs where secularist historians have often been wilfully blind, e.g., with PMs Deakin and Curtin. Education is important in Williams’ analysis of where the



Post-God Nation?

by Roy Williams

ABC Books [HarperCollins], 2015.

Protestant churches “got it wrong” in the nineteenth century and also to his strategy to put Christianity “back on the radar”.

To his credit, Williams spots the strange confusion in Marian Mad-dox’s attitude to church schools, when she lumps low-fee Christian schools in with her condemnation of élite church schools for fostering inequality and ignores the genuine motivation of Christian parents who want their children to avoid the increasingly toxic secular nature of many state schools.

Williams’ treatment of racial issues is strong. He makes it clear that Christianity and missionaries have been wrongly accused over what has happened to the Indigenous people since 1788. He demonstrates the churches’ longstanding support for the preservation and welfare of Aboriginal people. The emergence of an Aboriginal theology is not as recent as he seems to suggest, though. As early as the 19th century, Baiame was seen as an expression of God the creator. On the other hand, many Aboriginal Christians won’t have a bar of syncretistic tendencies. Williams also notes that otherwise socially conservative Christians have been consistently more “progressive” on racial issues in general.

In Part 2, “The Secular Jugger-naut”, Williams comes up with five “belief-killers” to explain secularisation, ignorance, war and nationalism, sex and gender issues, scientism and prosperity. The case Williams makes is strong and is enlivened with personal anecdotes and reflections. This is in many ways a very personal – and

personable – book.

Sometimes, especially in some passages of this part and in his political reflections, one senses the author looking over his shoulder at secular progressives. Now, it is important that Christians speak to this rising politico-moral élite and, as most apologists fail to speak their language and are pigeonholed as reactionary fans of the 1950s, so this is a distinct strength of this book. But there is a difficult balance between rejecting the agenda of the secular progressives out of hand and being sucked into it to appease them. Sometimes, I fear Williams is being sucked in. Oddly, though, he doesn’t buy same-sex marriage but he wants the church to accept homosexual behaviour. He’s a bit tentative here, but his leanings will endear him to neither his fellow progressives nor to his fellow Presbyterians.

Chapter 10, “What is at Stake?” starts with the very important (but neglected) task of imagining our society when the Judeo-Christian moral capital on which non-believers are still (perhaps unwittingly) living at last runs out. It’s not a pretty prospect. Just ask yourself if you’d prefer to live in a world designed by Peter Singer or one shaped by the gospel. The trite unbelieving response is “you don’t have to believe in God to be good”. This is falsified by history, but there are none so blind. In any case, without God, what does “good” mean?

The rest of the chapter discusses strategies to slow down or reverse the secularisation trend. An important part of this would be to educate school

Australia

True Unity

“...there is a difficult balance between rejecting the agenda of the secular progressives out of hand and being sucked into it to appease them”

children and University students about religion. Williams is right that, in retrospect, a secular school system turned out to be a Protestant mistake, although he seems a tad optimistic about how good a job of imparting religious knowledge Roman Catholic schools have done in recent years. He argues that more effective evangelism entails being forthright about orthodox theism and abjuring the super-liberal apologetic of Spong and his ilk.

Other prescriptions may be more controversial, especially championing various political causes. Some will appeal to traditional Christians, such as speaking up stoutly “in defence of old-fashioned decency and decorum”. He dares to suggest that abortion is too common, that pornography, drug and alcohol abuse, obscenity, prostitution, divorce and gambling must be challenged. There would surely be wide agreement on more foreign aid and restitution to victims of child abuse but some of Williams’s causes will divide them: the treatment of asylum-seekers, approaches to climate change, the reduction of defence spending and opposition to war.

We should be grateful to Roy Williams for putting such a penetrating and inspiring book into the public arena. More need to follow his example.

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He is editor of Church Heritage, historical journal of the UCA in NSW/ACT and Secretary of the Church Council of The Forest Kirk (French’s Forest). He is a member of the ACC.

“No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval.” (1 Corinthians 11:19).

Often within the church, people do not express what they think in an effort to maintain unity. Peace in the form of a lack of differences becomes the highest ideal.

When someone boldly speaks the truth, immediately there is division! And yet this proclamation of truth causes people’s ears to open from the pacification of ‘peaceful unity’ and they then must hear or reject the word of the Spirit. The divisive truth awakens some to life and angers others towards death. The differences within the church help us to know what we really believe.

Paul said that if he went along with the preaching that we can earn God’s favour by works then ‘the offence of the cross would be abolished’ (Gal 5:11). So he had to preach the divi-

sive truth, but this truth has a good and right action in the power of the Spirit. He preached Christ “among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?” (2 Corinthians 2:15-16).

We must not hold back from preaching the truth of the cross. Divisions are painful but if we must have them, let them be from the life-giving Gospel which brings eternal life.

Devotionals are provided by Rev. Derek Schiller and are available via an APP for iPhone or Android. Each day a new devotion is provided. You can download the APP from the Website by following the link: <http://stgeorge.unitingchurch.org.au/wcms/acc-devotion-app/>



Every life is precious

One of my favourite things about this magazine is turning to the second page and reading about Rubey the cat, reflecting on faith and life from her stories. Today, I present you with a feline reflection of my own.

To this day unsure exactly how he got out there, I saw my kitten Henry on the balcony. At eight months old, Henry was the feline equivalent of a rebellious teenager, so as I went to bring him back inside he ran away. On my tiny balcony, running away involved a few quick leaps that ultimately resulted in him jumping off my fourth storey balcony. With a scream so loud that it brought people onto their own balconies, I ran down-stairs, fearing the worst. I found my little Henry crouched underneath a parked car, scared but alive. We took him to the first of what would turn out to be many vet visits. As I left him in the care of the emergency vet, my mind turned to the eternal refuge of those facing hopeless causes – prayer. So often, my prayer is polite and ordered, at set times each day praying a list of requests and intercessions, one after the other. My prayers on that

day were urgent, persistent, pleading. “Please Lord, save my Henry!”

I returned to the vet to hear the results of his x-ray. The words filled my thoughts like a stream of relief. Henry had broken one leg, but had no internal organ damage – an amazing prognosis for such a dramatic fall. I took him home that day, still with the financial burden of his inevitable leg surgery but with a heart filled with gratitude. That night, as I read the Bible, I turned to Psalm 36:6 – ‘you, O Lord, preserve both people and animals’. That became not only my prayer, but my song of praise as I continued to see God working in our situation.

The surgery was going to be expensive. Initially I had been told that it could be done only by a specialist, with a price tag of nearly \$3000 – a rather significant portion of my life savings. But the God who had watched over Henry was sovereign over this also. I found myself once again in prayer and once again I felt the hand of God’s provision. Upon a second inspection of the x-rays, our regular vet was able to do the surgery for less than half the cost, with our



weekly check-ups offered to us free of charge. The vet continues to be amazed at Henry’s recovery. As I finish writing this article, he is running crazy around my apartment, just as he used to. For me, this little cat that shares my home is a living testimony of God’s power to protect, to heal and to provide.

Bella Hibbard

REFLECTION

Follow Him

Luke 5:11

“When they had brought their boats to land they left everything and followed Him.”

These words should leave us in no doubt about the captivating power of Jesus’ word and personality. There never has been, nor will there ever be, on this earth, one like Jesus.

These words should make us thirsty for his Word. It is important that we meditate upon this Word.

When *“They had brought their boats to land.”*

These men of the lake were still fishermen and their catch was beyond measure or price.

Even though their custom was only to fish at night, and in the shallows, yet Peter obeyed Jesus’ words and the miracle of fishes happened.

These fishermen would never have seen

so many fish in their nets ever before. Jesus challenged them to leave it all behind, and they obeyed.

“And they left everything and followed Him.”

Did they obey because of the miracle of fish or because of the captivating power of Jesus’ personality?

The look on his face, the love in his eyes, his body language, and the power of his Word: all they saw indicated that standing before them was the Son of God.

Because of that, they left everything: the wealth of Jesus’ miracle harvest from the sea, their boats and livelihoods, their families.

The Gospel has the final say, “Never has man spoken like this man”.

Reverend Bob Imms

(Member of ACC Southern Tasmanian Cluster)

THIS IS THE ACC

Who we are

Within the Uniting Church context of a very broad range of theology and practice, the Assembly of Confessing Congregations is a nationwide body of congregations and individuals whose vision is confessing the Lord Jesus Christ, proclaiming the truth, renewing the church.

Our goals include

- Encouraging the confession of Christ according to the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, as that faith is described in the UCA's Basis of Union.
- Providing resources, seminars and conferences to build up believers, develop their gifts, and equip them for life, mission and works of service.
- Encouraging Christian believers in earnest prayer through our Prayer Network.
- Encouraging younger members of the Uniting Church in their faith and participation.
- Communicating about current events and issues through our website, our national magazine *ACCatalyst* and local newsletters.

What does ACC do to help you?

The ACC conducts meetings, events and seminars to assist believers to

- grow in their faith and be active in prayer, worship and fellowship
- share their faith and respond to current issues in the church and the world
- develop their congregations as vibrant expressions of the Good News.
- experience God's Word in action through healing broken lives and reconciling relationships.

What we want to do

The objects of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations are:

- a) To confess Christ according to the catholic, reformed and evangelical heritage in the Basis of Union, by:
 - i) upholding the Scriptures' prophetic and apostolic testimony to Christ as the final authority for the Uniting Church's faith and life;
 - ii) calling the Uniting Church to

determine matters of doctrine and ethics according to the teaching of the Scriptures and the faith as understood by the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church;

- iii) calling the councils and congregations of the Uniting Church to uphold the Basis of Union and Constitution:

- iv) providing biblically-grounded leadership in partnership with other confessing movements;

- v) developing ecumenical partnerships for the more effective proclamation of the Gospel in our pluralist nation; and

- vi) establishing national, state and territory bodies to implement the Charter as approved by the inaugural meeting of the Association, and seeking the renewal of the Uniting Church.

- b) To undertake such religious, educational or other charitable activities which are incidental to the above objectives.

How to join us

Please consider joining the ACC.

Supporting Membership forms are available at: <http://www.confessingcongregations.com/assembly/members/individual-members/>

Membership rates for supporting members: Concession (single or couple): \$20.00 pa. (financial year basis) Full (single or couples): \$40.00 p.a

Contact (02) 9550 5358. email: accoffice@confessingcongregations.com mail:

PO Box 968 Newtown NSW 2042

What happens next

- ACC National Council 6-8 March 2016:
ACC National Council in Newtown, Sydney

- 7-9 November 2016:
ACC AGM and National Conference: Poatina, Tasmania.

ACC Resources List

All ACC resources (except the DVD resources) are available on the ACC Website: www.confessingcongregations.com

A selection of ACC DVD and video resources including the 2012 Conference presentations are available on vimeo; eg., Max Champion introducing the ACC: <http://vimeo.com/53983980> A limited range of earlier material is still published in Disc form, and all ACC Congregations have received ACC DVD resource material for their use.

Founding Documents

The Charter (2006)

Statement on Sexuality (2006)

Confessing Statement from the Executives of the Reforming Alliance and Evangelical Members within the Uniting Church (EMU) (2006)

ACC Brochures and Statements

ACC Vision and Goals 2007-2017 (2008)

Cross Cultural Commission Statement (2008)

The Church's Social Responsibility (2008)

Theological Declaration (2008)

Theological Declaration: Commentary and Study Guide (2009)

Abortion in the Australian Community (2010)

A Christian Response to Euthanasia and Medically Assisted Suicide (2011)

Marriage: An ACC Statement (2011)

Bible Studies

Bible Study: Mark ISBN 978-0-9804493-0-3

Bible Study: Galatians ISBN 978-0-9804493-1-0

Faith That Works: Studies in the Letter of James ACC Bible Study No. 3. Brian Edgar (2008) ISBN 978-0-9804493-2-7

DVD Resources

Conversations Series

No. 1 Conversations in Discipleship and Evangelism: A Study Guide with DVD (2010) ISBN 978-0-9804493-3-4

No. 2 The Hope of a New Heaven and New Earth: A Study Guide with DVD (2011) ISBN 978-0-9804493-6-5

No. 3 This is Love: A Study Guide with DVD (2012) ISBN 978-0-9804493-8-9

Devotional Booklets

Seeds For Harvesting Vol. 1 (2011) – Rev Robert Imms ISBN 978-0-9804493-5-8

Seeds For Harvesting Vol. 2 (2012) – Rev Robert Imms ISBN 978-0-9804493-7-2



Zachary Knighton (left), one of the stars of *Believe Me* (2014)

Who do you believe?



Believe Me
(2014) M

Starring: Alex Russell, Zachary Knighton, Johanna Braddy
Written by: Will Bakke
Directed by: Will Bakke

This is a very interesting 'Christian' film from the people who brought us the USA based documentaries: *One Nation Under God* and the intriguingly titled *Beware of Christians*. It is their first venture into feature film territory, but the themes of what does it mean to be a 'real Christian' and how should we live in God's world today are still at the centre.

Like secular films *Leap of Faith* (reviewed in ACCatalyst December 2013) and *Pray TV* this examines the question of sincerity and belief in Christian organisations especially those that raise money for causes. I well remember a scene in

one film about televangelists in the USA. The preacher looked straight into the camera and exclaimed – "I don't need your money – God needs your money", and then the number for the donation line comes up.

There are a number of lesser-known but professional actors playing the major parts, with Australian actor Alex Russell playing Sam, who needs to raise money urgently to pay his student fees so he can graduate. He enlists the help of three friends and together they learn the ways of the 'Christian preacher' and found a charity and then basically con their audiences as they travel around the USA and also meet 'real Christians and groups'. This film actually draws you in as you watch them debate and internally struggle with what they are doing. As a viewer I wanted to see how it would all end.

Along the way, there is ongoing satire, as Christian behaviour and perhaps idiosyncrasies are considered, perhaps in a way like a visual version of Christian satirical magazine and website *The Wittenberg Door*. It is helpful to have the

spotlight on our perceived behaviour in this day and age of visual connection and instant judgement to help us reflect.

I found this a sobering comment in a simple and yet dramatic way. It left me wondering if for many people, there is really that fine a line between a charlatan and a charismatic leader?

Peter Bentley is the National Director of the ACC.

Would you like a copy of Believe Me on DVD? ACC has copies available for the first 2 readers who post a comment on the ACC website about this review or provide a letter to the editor.