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ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



How Gnostics mimic marriage

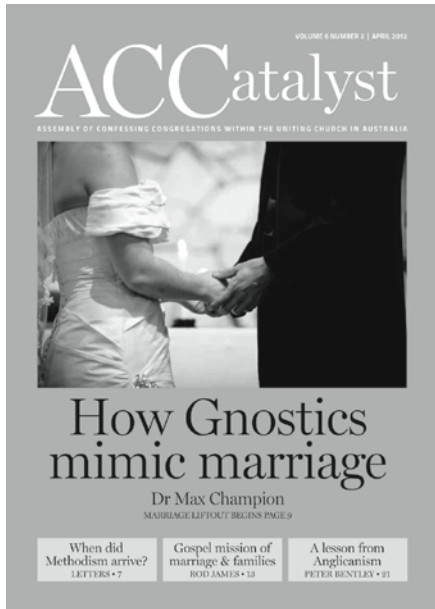
Dr Max Champion

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EDITORIAL

We are not alone

You should not miss a short book review of Stephen Syke's *the Integrity of Anglicanism* by Peter Bentley in this ACCatalyst.

Sykes, the former Bishop of Ely paints a picture of a Church finding it hard to contain its increasingly diverse factions. Bentley quotes Sykes in discussing community "that liberal writers and leaders in many ways demonstrate,... 'how substantially dependent that community is upon groups that with positive convictions on the very matters which liberals find so doubtful.'"

This is a situation that the majority of the readers of *ACCatalyst*

might find familiar. One difference is that the Church of England has a growing evangelical wing.

Sykes is keen to draw a distinction between a tolerant and welcoming church and one that has lost its fundamental beliefs.

He sees the Anglican Communion as having more reserves of conservatism than most people think. The news that Australia's Anglican bishops have declared themselves opposed to gay priests brings this close to home. Lets hope that similar reserves of conservative Christianity can be found in the UCA.

John Sandeman

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The widow's mite

This story comes from my Aunty who works in a school in Adelaide which has a lot of children from poor and dysfunctional families. Towards the end of 2006, a class of young children were invited to write letters to Santa.

No doubt the majority would have asked for the usual things - toys and computer games and bikes and so on. But one child wrote a letter that said something like this:

Dear Santa. You don't need to bring me any gifts this year. Our family is too poor to celebrate Christmas. Instead, we have decided to give \$50 to a family in Africa so that they can buy a goat.

When my Aunty spoke to the child's mother, she confirmed that this was true. She said she simply didn't have the money to buy gifts and fancy food for her children and they had sat down and discussed it as a family and decided that they could afford \$50 - which they gave

Hilary Sandeman



to someone in a far country who they did not know and who would never even be able to thank them.

I can't help but think that that family who had nothing somehow had a far better understanding of Christmas than those of us who had the means to celebrate it. I also can't help but think of the story of the widow's mite, a lady who had just two coins as the sum total of her wealth, and she gave them both to God. Bad finance management? Jesus didn't think so. He commended her for her generosity.

We all know that God's word says it's better to give than to receive, but today I find myself wondering, do I really believe it? How much am I willing to sacrifice for God and for others? Dare I risk being generous to the point where I am dependant on God to provide for me? Would I give up my Christmas for the sake of a family in Africa?

Proverbs 22:9 tells us: A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.

Robyn



Jim Pendlebury and the honour board and (inset) Hafren Jones

Hafren Jones is 2011 Pendlebury winner

ACC is pleased to announce that Hafren Jones' name will be added to the new Thelma Pendlebury Honour Board. Hafren shares her wonderful testimony of grace, hope and joy with ACC readers.

Born outside of marriage in a poverty stricken Zambian village, the only world that I knew was one of fear, lies, theft and abuse. The rest of my years growing up in Africa were filled with both wonderfully irreplaceable experiences, and tragic memories. By the time I was eighteen, I decided that this world was full of evil and I never wanted to see it again. God saved me and told me that He had a plan and purpose for me for good, and not for evil.

I have learnt that I am not my own, I was bought at a price so that I could have a relationship with God. All He requires of me is to tell others about Him so that they too can experience His unfailing love, grace, mercy, be delivered, healed and set free.

The reason I study however is that I know that God has given me talents and I am to steward and multiply them and make them grow. These talents are not to draw attention to myself, but are a means by which the nations can be reached with the gospel.

I have written over a hundred and fifty poems which are going to

be grouped into several books and published. I write stories and scripts for both film and theatre. I am in the process of writing an opera and a musical, and I write songs that range from classical to heavy metal.

There is a new Opera House that has just been opened in the Sultanate of Oman which I will be getting involved in and it is my belief that I will see my operas performed there.

I have already met the conductor of the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra who is the Sultan's personal lead violinist.

My entire family are musicians and we have all been called to make music for the glory of God.

My brothers and I will record our first album with songs which we are going to tour the world with. When the world is singing about revenge, drugs and sex, we are going to represent another way.

It gives me great joy to see somebody's eyes light up as they realize just how precious they are. I want the world to take me seriously as a musician as well as a Christian and this is why I want to complete my Bachelor of Music.

Talent doesn't give you power, but it is a powerful tool in getting the world's attention and I am going to get the world's attention by being the most talented, intelligent, Christ-representing artist that I can be.

The hope of a New Heaven and Earth

The Discipleship and Evangelism Commission's DVD 'The Hope of a new Heaven and New Earth' has been very warmly received.

It was launched and previewed at the 2011 ACC conference to an enthusiastic reception.

All ACC Congregations, clusters and groups received a copy. Recently a member wrote to the ACC to report that "We are a bunch of Seniors who really found the studies helpful. One lady said they were "life changing."

To be reminded that the life secured for us in Christ is not just an 'airy fairy' spiritual existence, but involves the "real me" - body and spirit - together with the whole of creation made perfect - gives real substance to our hope and something positive to look forward too."

The DVD consists of 6 DVD 'conversations' with SA UCA Ministers Derek Schiller, Simon Dent, Deane Meatheringham and Jonathon Button.



There is an accompanying booklet of study questions.

Derek Schiller The six conversations are:

1. Christ Is the Firstborn overAll Creation
2. Covenant and Creation
3. Our Resurrection - Our Future.
4. What about Heaven?
5. Dear Death or Dark Devourer?
6. The New Heaven and New Earth

Sample questions from conversation one include:

"God is taking creation with Him into the fulfilment of His great plan". What hope does this bring to you in light of the way that creation seems to be out of control?

Read John 1:14 and Heb 1:3. Jesus the Word became flesh and

He is now at the right hand of God still as a man with flesh! What does this mean for us? These studies are ideal for use in a group study, but also lend themselves to individual use as both the study guide and the DVD may be copied, provided it is not for profit.

The DVD and booklet can also be purchased from the ACC office for \$10.00 (post included). The study booklet can be downloaded from the ACC website.



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PUBLIC SQUARE

B Y P S E U D O - M A X I M U S

Earthian Utopia

On March 23 Senator Bob Brown, leader of the Australian Greens, delivered the third annual Green Oration. Addressed to “fellow earthians”, he proposed a global parliament to maximise our collective human intelligence and save us from destroying the biosphere. It would be an ‘all-of-the-Earth representative democracy’ that would circumvent vested interests.

Founded on “the grand idea of one planet, one person, one vote, one value”, it would put an end to waste, cut spending on armaments, and guarantee education, health and opportunity to all.

“Ecological wellbeing must understrap all outcomes, so as to actively protect the planet’s biodiversity and living ecosystems.”

By adopting these measures the global parliament will enable earthians to play a pivotal role in shaping eternity.

Concern for the environment and disaffection with conflict-based politics, within and between nations, shouldn’t blind us to the foolishness of this utopian vision. Vested interests don’t magically disappear when every vote is equal. Individuals and blocs of individuals will continue to form collectives to achieve power over against the aspirations of others.

Moreover, larger nations with little sympathy for democracy would dominate a global assembly which would not be filled with supporters of the Green (or any other) idealistic agenda. Secularist, nationalist, religious and environmental ideologies

would clash in a far more complex way than already happens within countries.

The earth is safer when we refuse to exaggerate the power of human intelligence to create a better world but recognise the importance of limiting the terrible effects of collective pride. The lesson of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9) should save Christians from such naïve utopianism.

This doesn’t excuse us from seeking to resolve differences between nations in a spirit of greater understanding. But it should save us from false confidence in our own possibilities and the foolish notion that, in such an assembly, our better selves will triumph over our destructive tendencies.

Infanticide is now OK

An article in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* (February 23) advocates the legalisation of infanticide. Melbourne based bio-ethicists, Drs Alberto Giubilini and Francesca Minerva, argue that, because newborn children, like fetuses, do not have the same moral status as persons, after-birth abortion “should be permissible in all cases where abortion is, including cases where the newborn is not disabled”.

That such barbarism should go relatively unreported in the secular press (see Angela Shanahan, *The Weekend Australian, Inquirer* March 17-18, p14 and Bill Muehlenberg, *News Weekly* March 17, p12), is a sign of the level to which progressive ideology has sunk.

When this malignant view is justified by the fact that it is supported by

eminent figures, like Peter Singer, and countries, like the Netherlands, it is clear why the right to life is excluded from Charters of Human Rights in Australia.

When it is thought to be rational and ethical to practice infanticide, it is also clear that the Church and others should express outrage at this flagrant violation of human rights. Silence is not an option.

Why, then, have we heard nothing from the Uniting Church expressing repugnance at such barbarity?

And why doesn’t the secular media expose the editor of the JME, Julian Savulescu, when he criticised opponents of the article as ‘fanatics’ who are engaging in ‘hate speech’ and endangering ‘the values of a liberal society?’

The “I” of the Beholder

In an otherwise withering critique of TV program *2 Broke Girls* (*The Saturday Age* March 3) Ben Pobjie shields himself from criticism with a very post-modern caveat: “I can give you reasons why it’s not funny ... but none of that actually means I’m “right” and anyone else is “wrong.” “All I’m really saying is: I really, really hate it. And when someone else says it’s the funniest show they’ve ever seen, it’s likewise purely a personal preference.”

“Nothing is objectively good or bad, and anyone trying to convince you otherwise is kidding you and themselves.”

Certainly, taste in comedy is variably acquired. Strangely, not every-

one loves *Fawlty Towers*! But to argue that the reasons for disliking the show are “purely personal” because ‘nothing is objectively good or bad’ is a dangerous cop-out.

If truth, beauty and goodness are solely determined by our subjective views, there can be no public debate about art, science, politics, ethics or religion.

Differences of opinion will then be resolved by the loudest voice. When that voice trumpets the right to freely express opinions and life-styles without regard for what is good or bad, society inevitably slides towards nihilism in which no-thing (nihil) is held to be true, everything is relative and only the will of the unfettered individual is sacrosanct.

On Schism

Thomas Oden, author of *Turning around the Mainline* (2006), has written an article in the April issue of *First Things*. In *Do Not Rashly Tear Asunder* he draws on Wesley to “imply the beleaguered faithful to stay and reform their churches.”

Warning about the pitfalls of leaving the church he also exhorts church leaders not to risk schism by departing from the scriptural doctrine of marriage. www.firstthings.com.

A Canterbury Tale

After 10 years as Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams has resigned. *The Guardian* (in *The Sunday Age* March 18, p12) portrays him as a left-wing, Anglo-Catholic ‘progressive’ who disappointed liberals counting on his support on the vexed issues of women’s ordination and same-sex relationships.

Not everyone will agree with his politics or how he handled complex issues in the Anglican communion. It would be foolish, however, to let divided opinion deter Christians from serious reflection on his many theological and devotional writings.

Dr Williams represents orthodoxy at its best – perceptive, articulate, vibrant, engaging. In *On Christian Theology*, for example, the issues facing the church today are discussed in relation to the centrality of the Incarnation.

Dawkins Vs Pell

On April 9 Q&A (ABC TV) featured a debate of sorts between Cardinal George Pell and Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*. Spoiled



by partisan clapping and pre-occupation with polling viewers on the merits of religion, it illustrated the gulf between their world-views.

There were some predictable, though mainly civil, exchanges on creation and evolution, suffering, heaven and hell, reason and faith.

The sharpest moment came with Pell’s claim that the brutality of Nazism and Communism were testimony to the malignancy of atheism. No doubt a reaction to Dawkins’ published assertion that religion is the cause of human misery, it was a

stretch too far for liberal-minded atheists.

The debate would have been enhanced by careful attention to the meaning of “atheism”. Why, for example, were the early Christians called atheists? Which forms of atheism

might be conducive to further discussion about faith and human wellbeing and which should be resisted?

One issue exposed the chasm between the speakers. Dawkins said that the question of purpose was meaningless; Pell saw God’s purpose in the creation of the universe and his love for every human being.

At a time when meaninglessness afflicts many in society, the debate showed that Christians must think more deeply about the good purposes for which God has created and redeemed the world.

IAN CLARKSON

Is God a perfectionist?

Yes and No!

Our God dwells in unapproachable unchanging light. His eyes are too holy to look upon sin. He is working to restore all things in Christ, to overflowing perfectness of holy love.

But, what about His relationships with humanity, with you and me? How rigorous is He? How does He feel in looking upon us and dealing with in our reality of ambiguous motivation and imperfection, even blameworthiness? Is He like a perfectionist?

Being a perfectionist, or living with a perfectionist can be painful. They never let up. There’s no easy way. Some things are frowned on and never softened (the hell of perfectionism in a person is that they are not perfect in everything!).

There is a word Paul uses to describe a particular facet of our Lord Jesus Christ’s way of holy love (2Corinthians 10.1). He speaks of the gentleness of Christ. Some translate kindness, some leniency

or clemency. Tyndale in his famous foundational translation had ‘softness’, but in today’s language gentleness is good because it means strength limited or restrained. Thus only one who is strong can be gentle. Only One who is without sin can be truly gentle.

Here God is not burdened with perfectionism. Neither should we.

In tracing the word’s history, Archbishop Trench shows how it described the way love is more concerned with the spirit of right than the letter of right, with what is truly just than strict justice.

This grace which flows from God describes his way of grace in going back from the strictness of his rights as against us and allowing for our imperfections, a willingness to give value to that which rigorously counted would have none. His refusal to exact extreme penalty.

This is Peter being restored, now strengthening his brethren. The greatly forgiven servant expected to forgive his debtor. To keep ourselves in this way of being loved, and thus to grow in this love, to overflow with this character of grace love is to become perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Daily Bread



uterior epicure

ROSS CARTER continues an *ACCatalyst* series on the Lord's Prayer

Give us this day our daily bread

This request is at the centre of the Lord's Prayer. The first three requests refer to God; his name as Father, the Father's kingdom, and the Father's will. The last three requests refer to the need for God to work in our lives in relation to our sins, our discipleship, and our testing, so that our separateness from God and one another may be overcome in Christ.

We can now see that the six petitions on either side of 'give us this day our daily bread' basically ask God to take us up into his Trinitarian life through the work of the Holy Spirit in such a way that our humanity will find the fulfillment which is God's purpose for us in a peaceable and reconciled community. But because we are only available to each other bodily, and because God has made himself available to us bodily in his Son, bread is pivotal for the fulfillment of God's purpose.

Bread is crucial in the first place because we are dependent on it for life. Without bread to fuel our bodies we simply do not exist and cannot work, we cannot relate to anyone, and we cannot worship God. We cannot pray, we cannot hope to have our lives conformed to the way of Christ, or scale 'spiritual heights' without bread to sustain life. Yet the supply of our bread is never certain. This is radically the case for peoples in various parts of the world who are subject to famine and starvation. So we are always in need of bread to live and we have no security without the bread that sustains life. To ask the Father for bread, then, emphasizes that we literally live only by his grace in his creation.

To know that we are dependent on bread for life is also to know that

we are dependent on one another. This is to say that the need for bread shows us that we are by nature communal beings. One aspect of the communal nature of bread is the fact that we cannot through our own efforts satisfy our hunger. We must cooperate with others to get the variety of food we need. Another aspect of the communal nature of bread is that eating and conversing with one another go together; thus fellowship and friendship come about as we share our food with one another. The gospels contain numerous references to communal meals whereby the meals Jesus ate with outcasts and sinners embodies the new order he called God's Kingdom.

It is important to also note that because bread is communal that this petition for food to sustain life does not say 'give me my daily bread', but rather 'give us our daily bread'. One cannot be part of the community of which Christ is the head without knowing that it is the will of God for all humanity to be in communion with him. And so it would be a complete misunderstanding of God's will for humanity for someone to pray 'give me my daily bread' as if it were his purpose that we should live as isolated atoms that are concerned only for our own survival. So in praying for 'our daily bread' we pray that food shall be given to all humanity and, by implication, that our societies may be just communities in that they ensure that the weak and dispossessed have access to bread.

The meaning of 'give us this day our daily bread' is not exhausted by seeing bread as the satisfaction of physical hunger. The petition has a wider significance than this. In the Old Testament we read that God fed Israel on manna in the wilderness

(Exodus 16:4ff). This was not given only to satisfy the hunger of the people, but so that they could reach the Promised Land. In the New Testament we read that Jesus said, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:51). What this means is that in this petition we are asking for 'tomorrow's bread today'.

What I mean by this is that the church only prays this prayer because it knows Jesus is the resurrected one who is crucified and incarnate. The church knows him as the one who, by the will of the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit, has triumphed over everything which would prevent the realization of those things for which the first three petitions of the prayer have asked. Furthermore the risen Christ Jesus who lives the future that is God's purpose for humanity, makes our participation in that future possible now by making himself available bodily in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. The church then, when it communes at table with its Lord, is having its life shaped today by God's future for us in Christ. The church is indeed participating in the bread that is the life of the world!

We can perhaps now see why this petition, "give us this day our daily bread" is at the centre of the Lord's Prayer. It is only the gift of bread, in all the aspects mentioned, that makes it possible for the way of Christ in the world to become our way in the world. Bread is necessary, therefore, for the sake of God's mission to the world and we pray this petition because we yearn for the fulfillment of that purpose.

The birth of Australian Methodism

I am confident that Professor Malcolm Prentis was not suggesting an uncritical reliance on Colwell's *History of Methodism* (an extract of which was published in our February edition - see note below).

In his Preface, Colwell himself admits to inadequacies in his research and the difficulty of having to balance the writing of his History with his primary responsibilities as a country circuit Superintendent.

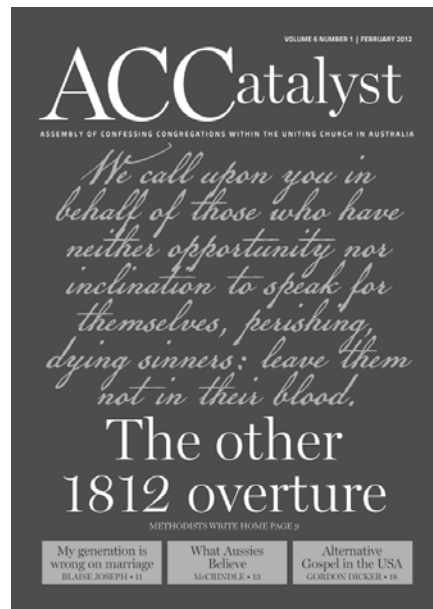
Colwell's History was researched in the early 20th century, and published shortly after the unions leading to the formation of the Methodist Church of Australasia in 1902, at which time the polity of the clergy-dominated former Wesleyan Methodist Church in large part displaced that of the smaller Methodist bodies with particular reference to the role of the laity.

His coverage of early colonial Methodism deals with events at a time when there existed vast gaps between the convict population (including emancipists) and others in every aspect of their lives, and during which 'respectability' was a critical factor. Colwell's History was also written at a time when the 'convict cringe' was still alive and well in Australia.

A failure to take account of these several realities has resulted in a significant distortion of the historical facts surrounding Methodist beginnings in the Colony in my view.

I would with respect suggest that if Methodism is identified by its two classical characteristics of an itinerant ministry and the 'class meeting', then Australian Methodism in fact began in the Windsor / Richmond area following the arrival of the converted Irish convict Edward Eagar and his assignment to Colonial Chaplain Rev. Richard Cartwright in July 1811.

Evidence for this suggestion is admittedly limited, but that which does exist clearly supports the role of Eagar as the pioneer. Eagar in fact received his 'ticket of leave' three days after his arrival in the Hawkesbury area, and thereafter exercised his freedom of movement to itinerate throughout the district. At some later stage, and again the available evidence points to a date prior to that of



the class meeting held at The Rocks on 6th March 1812, Eagar established a class meeting in the Windsor area.

Writing (somewhat curiously) several months after the event, Thomas Bowden refers to a 'love feast' at The Rocks on 3rd April 1812 attended, *inter alia*, by "the friends at Windsor", less than a month after the class meeting held at The Rocks on 6th March. This can only point to prior organization along traditional Wesleyan lines at Windsor at some time prior to 6th March.

More compelling evidence still is found in a surviving letter by Eagar himself dated 30th April 1812, pre-dating Bowden's 20th July 1812 letter by almost three months, and to which Colwell surprisingly makes no reference whatsoever.

Reference to this letter (which is preserved in the Wesleyan Missionary Society Archives in London), can be found in Gloster Udy's Spark of Grace which provides a more detailed and balanced account of these early events than Colwell.

The particular significance of Eagar's letter of 30th April to his friend George Howe in Cork (Ireland) is its dating, together with his detailed description of his lay ministry in the Windsor / Richmond area over the

months following his arrival. The detailed descriptions in this letter clearly confirm some considerable earlier organization which enabled the people from Windsor to share in the love feast on 3rd April.

In further confirmation of the facts set out in Eagar's letter, a footnote in Colwell's history at page 54 indicates (without citation of the source) that "It is maintained that the Class led by Mr. Eagar at Windsor was in existence some time before that which met at the Rocks".

The writer would be glad to receive any additional evidence which would either support or refute his suggestion that the pioneer colonial Methodist was in fact Edward Eagar, and that the true birthplace of Australian Methodism was the Windsor / Richmond area in 1811, or at the latest, prior to March 1812.

Yours sincerely,
Daryl H. Lightfoot,
Vice President (Oceania Region),
World Methodist Historical Society.

Editorial note

The Bowden letter was merely reproduced as quoted in Colwell, implying nothing about Colwell's quality as a researcher nor his judgement as a historian, nor the differing views of the 'right' date.

It was provided for interest at this time as Wesley Mission and other parts of the church celebrate these particular events.

The September 2012 edition of Church Heritage [the Historical Journal of the Uniting Church in Australia (NSW/ACT)] will celebrate an Australasian Wesleyan bicentenary and coincidentally the issues surrounding dates are commented on in the editorial in the March 2012 edition of Church Heritage.

(Interestingly, the September 2011 issue contained an article for the Eagar bicentenary, 1811-2011.) Members interested in subscribing to the journal can contact the Uniting Church Historical Society, Centre for Ministry, 16 Masons Drive, North Parramatta NSW 2151; phone 02 8838 8974; email: archives@nsw.uca.org.au

‘The secret... God is at the centre’

Eternity news report by Karen Mudge, and ACC material

Rev John Mallison OAM, former Moderator of the New South Wales Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia, passed away on Thursday 29th March while out on his morning walk.

Mallison was an internationally known Christian educator, mentor and author, and equipped Christian leaders to develop personally and spiritually, especially through mentoring, which he was passionate about and practiced for over forty five years. Christian leaders from all sections of the church through Australia and in countries overseas benefited from his ministry.

John Mallison was the speaker at the last NSW ACC Meeting and Ian Weeks remembers John fondly: “I give thanks to God for the life and ministry of John Mallison. John was a faithful teacher of the Bible, a compassionate pastor, a fervent proclaimer of the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a passionate advocate of discipling (mentoring) believers.

“I have appreciated John’s ministry over many years. His insights and wisdom have been invaluable. John’s mentoring expertise has been recognized in many circles. He has written numerous books and articles on mentoring, and has been used by many denominations in many countries to train and mentor Christian leaders. He was the first Director of Mentoring for the Arrow Leadership Program in the early 1990s, in which I was the first UCA participant. A great servant of the Gospel who will be greatly missed.”

Daniel Willis, Lausanne International Deputy Director for the South Pacific says, “John Mallison was a significant evangelical within the Uniting Church movement, always striving for the truth. He has impacted many lives around the world, written many books and his children and grandchildren continue to carry the Christian banner. He contributed to the Lausanne Movement at a number of levels; his paper was used as part of the Cape Town Congress to



John Mallison

Ramon Williams

assist people in making the most of a great learning experience.”

Mallison’s broad parish ministry in Australia spanned 17 years full-time, first with the Methodist Church and then the Uniting Church. Stephen Webb from the Uniting Church in NSW recalls that in an interview for *Uniting* in 1985 Mallison said, “I consider myself to be a parish minister. I really love parish work.”

In another interview, Mallison told *Uniting*, “I am a very ordinary person. As a child I was a very shy little boy and that is something still inside of me. In the early years it was a real struggle with my self-image but I have worked through that and now I feel comfortable living with myself.

“Once you come to accept yourself and really understand the fact that God accepts you then that gives you the ability to accept other people. I think it is very sad, especially in the church, that people are too quick to put other people down.”

Mallison was a full-time Christian educator for the Uniting Church in NSW for 14 years, commencing as State Youth Director for five years and then appointed as Director of Adult Education.

He also directed his own Christian leadership development organisation, John Mallison Ministries Inc. for 22 years, serving all sections of

the Christian Church both nationally and internationally.

Willis told *Eternity*, “I had a conversation with John only a week ago where he was expressing concern for me and decisions I needed to make. He was ever a safe confidante and friend. He will be greatly missed but is at home with His loving Father.”

John Mallison made a major contribution to the Small Group Movement across Australia through his extensive and creative use of small groups, his writings and training of thousands of leaders.

He was a prolific writer, having 23 books published, and wrote numerous articles that aim to make Christian disciples and leaders. Some of his books include *Mentoring to Develop Disciples and Leaders* (revised 2004), *The Small Group Leader* (1996) and *Postcards on a Journey: Reflections of a Christ Follower* (2007).

An honorary Doctorate of Theology from the Australian College of Theology was conferred on Mallison for “a substantial contribution to theological learning and for a notable contribution to the life and work of the church” and he was awarded an Order of Australia Medal in 2003 for his services to the community, including the founding and directing of the Newcastle Youth Service.

“The key to Christian ministry is our relationship with God,” said Mallison. “The secret of my life is that God is at the centre. I really shudder to think what would have become of my life if I hadn’t had a personal experience of Christ. After that my life started to shape up. If it hadn’t happened, I’m sure I would have been a disaster.”

He believed that the secret of his ministry was the amazing grace of God, the health and opportunities God had given him, a godly wife and family and the support of a large number of prayer partners.

A celebration of the life and ministry of John Mallison was held at St Paul’s Anglican Church, Castle Hill NSW on Wednesday April 11.

Eternity publishes daily news at biblesociety.org.au



SPECIAL REPORT ON MARRIAGE

Sacred Union Ceremonies

How Gnostics mimic marriage

Dr Max Champion

The Sacred Union Ceremony

On 12 June 2010 a sacred union ceremony, organised by Uniting Network Australia, was held at Brunswick Uniting Church in Melbourne to bless same-sex couples in committed relationships. Robed clergy officiated, a sermon was preached, vows were exchanged, certificates signed and a wedding cake provided. The following day President Alistair Macrae received a copy of the liturgy used in the ceremony and advised UNA leaders that “if they want clarity in this matter they should consider the usual church processes for introducing it through the Councils of the Church for discussion, discernment and debate.”¹

In the light of decisions at the 2003 and 2006 Assemblies that implicitly accepted same-sex relations among ordained ministers as a legitimate form of diversity in the UCA, it is not surprising that formal recognition of same-sex relationships is now sought. UNA is highly likely to bring a recommendation on this matter to the

Thirteenth Assembly, 15-21 July 2012.

As the UCA has never given theological reasons for these seismic changes to the Reformed doctrine of sexuality and marriage, it is necessary to try to understand why something so recently regarded as inimical to human flourishing is now strongly supported and promoted as a positive good and an inalienable right.

From Christian Orthodoxy to Gnostic Spirituality

The answer is to be found in the shift from Christian patterns of thought to those based on new forms of Gnostic spirituality – an abstract, other worldly philosophy that was parasitic on orthodox Christian belief and focussed on esoteric knowledge (*gnosis*) of the spiritual world that is accessible to people when they look deep within themselves.²

Until recently considered to be a relic of a bygone age, and an escape from a robust secular faith, the resurgence of Gnostic spirituality within and beyond the churches is

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remarkable. Bookshops testify to this explosion of interest. Churches create “sacred spaces” in which to meditate. The simultaneous collapse of Christianity and modernity—which had competed with, and complemented, each other in shaping Western patterns of reality—has led to interest in older spiritual resources found deep within the self.

A new paradigm, centred on spiritual self-knowledge and impatient with Christian and humanist claims to know the truth, began to evolve. The deconstructionists, looking for other sources to provide a framework for meaning, found inspiration in reappraising Gnostic spirituality. There they discovered what they hated in beliefs and practices that they regarded as oppressive, patriarchal, heterosexist, credal and institutionalized—special spiritual knowledge not bound by restrictions, immediately accessible and connected to the ‘divine.’

Although Gnostic systems of belief are not easy to pin down, their key tenets are clear:

1. Belief in the superiority of mind or consciousness over matter. The physical, material, bodily world is inferior to the life of the psyche. To think that God’s creation, as affirmed in Scripture, is essentially good is to live in ignorance. Special knowledge is required to open our eyes to the truth – that the ‘divine spark’ is within us, enabling us to realise who we are without reality being mediated by events, physical realities, customs, Scripture, commandments, creeds or institutions.

2. Rejection of the Judeo-Christian duality between God and world. “God” and humanity are not separate but part of each other. Therefore, we don’t have to look outside ourselves for healing, enlightenment or redemption. Salvation comes when ignorance about the true nature of reality is overcome by recognising that divinity is within us or that we are divine. Gnostic belief that “All is One” (i.e. monism) replaces faith in God’s redemptive love mediated through Christ to those who, unlike God, are neither righteous nor divine.

Naturally, therefore, Gnostics rejected the Christian affirmation that, in order to redeem sinful humanity to God, “*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth*”. The incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, and the created bodiliness of human beings, are treated as fictions from Christianity’s mythic past and constitute barriers to spiritual insight and personal liberation.

3. Non-literal interpretation of Scripture. Gnostics ignore the fact that biblical texts must be read in their particular historical context within the totality of covenantal history. Instead, they interpret all texts through the prism of the divinely indwelt psyche. The meaning of events is to be found in what they say about “the god within”. Thus Gnostics claim a superior wisdom that entitles them to judge Scripture from the standpoint of their own historical conditioning. Jesus’ resurrection, for example, is not to be understood as God’s action in defeating the power of sin and death in particular historical events but as the renewal of our personality and the ability to recognise our own capacity for divinity.

4. Spiritual elitism. As knowledge of the divine within is not obvious to our senses, and requires special illumination, Gnosticism is elitist. Our ignorant minds must be trained by the enlightened to see the spiritual meaning of things beyond the mere appearances of the material, physical, bodily, sensual world so that we can discover the truth about our own inherent divinity.

Gnostic Sexuality

These characteristics are evident in the Gnostic approach to sexuality. The unambiguous witness of Scripture to God’s purposes for humanity in the complementary humanity of male and female, and their sexual union in marriage, is “transformed” from the “literal” to the deeper spiritual meaning.

No longer is sex to be understood so ignorantly. The enlightened person will see that, in place of the rigid differentiation of male and female, and the restriction of marriage to men and women, we should celebrate the inner spirituality that we share. Sacred psychic unity, a spiritual meeting of minds, is the vital thing in sexual unions!

In *Against Protestant Gnostics* Philip Lee shows how this way of thinking allows Gnostics to be flexible on sex. “Although gnostics were divided in their attitudes toward sexual practice, some being very puritanical, others libertine, all gnostics were united in their ingrained suspicion of procreation.”³ This Gnostic commitment to spiritual, and sexual, androgyny is typical of supporters of *The Jesus Seminar* (1993) and “Progressive Christianity” who regard the *Gospel of Thomas* as the “Fifth Gospel”. If that is true, what is to be made of these texts which contradict the clear testimony of Scripture?

“Jesus said to them, ‘Shall you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and the above like the below, and when you make the male and the female one and the same, so that the male not be male nor the female female, ... then you will enter the kingdom.’”⁴

“Jesus said to Peter, ‘I myself shall lead her (Mary) in order to make her male, so that *she too may become a living spirit resembling you males*. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.’”⁵

However distasteful to us is the sexism of saying 114 quoted above, Gnosticism’s distaste for sexual differentiation is very clear. The distinction between male and female is to be overcome in a spiritual unity found in the depths of our self-consciousness. Our psyches or minds are superior to the body! We must get beyond the bondage of sexual distinctions—and reject the creational sexuality of Genesis 1-2, Romans 1:18-32 and Galatians 3:28 in favour of androgyny, which is ‘the sexual expression of a deeply religious agenda, that of pagan monism.’ In such a schema, human beings do not need to be redeemed from improper sexual or other behaviour. They must simply follow the leading of their own inner spirituality.

Different Gospels

Therefore, despite current attempts by “progressive Christians” to align Gnosticism with biblical Christianity, it is clear that we are dealing with “*different Gospels*”. The “new faith” of Dr Francis Macnab (St Michael’s Uniting Church, Melbourne) treats historic Christian faith in the incarnate, crucified and risen Lord as unbelievable and primitive literalism. The old Gnosticism is refashioned. Spiritual knowledge and psychological well-being are to be found by releasing the divine energies within. As long as we are doing that, our preferred sexual unions will be appropriately “sacred”.

The incompatibility of Gnostic spirituality and orthodox Christianity must be stated unequivocally if we are to engage in a serious theological debate about the merits of same-sex “marriage”, civil unions or blessing services. It is increasingly the case that, in our post-modern age, *a person’s essence* isn’t thought of primarily as a physical, biological and spiritual unity but as the “*consciousness*” that resides in a suit of flesh. What I choose to do in my body—as a chaste, hetero, homo or bi-sexual person isn’t thought to affect my essential identity. Therefore, it is right if, in good faith, I choose to take part in a consensual sexual relationship with a person of the same sex. My essential identity—my mind, psyche or consciousness—is not affected.

One of the effects of locating the essential being of a person in the mind is to treat biological differences as psychological differences! In the new androgynous humanity “each partner in relationships, both hetero- and homosexual, is encouraged to recognize the validity of both masculine and feminine, the yang and the yin, in himself or herself”.⁶ Theological, physiological and social differences between men and women are turned into ‘states of mind’ within all individuals, thus deconstructing the Christian understanding of sex and marriage in line with Gnostic spirituality.⁷

It has been a triumph of the militant homosexual lobby to change the terms of debate from “sex” to “gender”—a move that corresponds to Gnostic fascination with blurring the boundaries between God and the world, men and women, truth and falsehood, Scripture and faith that is typical of our post-modern, post-Christian age. Once this shift was effected, the old “rigidities” could be demonised, clearing the way for the promotion and endorsement of more “flexible” sexual unions.

In the light of these considerations, it would be naïve to think that the push for same-sex “marriage” is actually driven by the desire for equal recognition with marriages between men and women. Gnostic thinking inevitably leads to the refashioning of marriage between a man and a woman *in the image of the androgynous person*. Marriage is being subverted so that the sanctity of sexual unions is determined, not by the complementary physiology and relationality of male and female, but by the compatibility of their inner-spirituality.

Marriage between a man and a woman thus becomes one form of “sacred union”, a term derived from pagan rites and which Christianity opposed on the ground that sex is a “sanctified” or “hallowed” gift of God. There is an unbridgeable gulf between “sacred sex” and “sanctified sex”. The sacred is invested with a power that epitomises the values that shape the lives of whole communities. In earlier pagan societies the “sacred” was re-enacted in liturgies that celebrated the natural rhythms of fertility. Today “sacred sex” is defined by the proliferation of sexual techniques that are permissible and encouraged in many kinds of “sexual union”.⁸ In both forms the goal is to unite our longing for wholeness and connection, yearnings that are naturally sacred and spiritual. It is about pleasuring and being pleased in whatever consensual form that takes.⁹

In opposition to these self-styled forms of “sacred sex”, the old and new covenants affirm that only sex and marriage between a man and a woman is “sanctified” by God. Where committed homosexual unions are declared to be “sacred”, they are not “sanctified” according to the testimony of Scripture and classical theology.



Make no mistake! This is not simply a matter of semantics. The promotion of “Gay Marriage” as sacred unions in the Church and the community is not a call to make marriage more “inclusive”. Marriage between a man and a woman will now become one form—an inferior and rigid form—of androgynous marriage. Homosexual unions, emphasising individuality, equality and consent will be the benchmark for true “marriage”—thus undermining the special relationship created by God for human flourishing.

In remarks that foreshadow the deconstruction of Christian marriage and orthodoxy, M. Fox says that, in some respects, homosexuality is superior to heterosexuality because it is not productive but playful.¹¹ Bishop Spong says that “feminism and homosexuality lie at the heart and soul of what the Gospel is about”.¹²

This is pure Gnosticism! The structured God-given relationships that have been created for human flourishing and fidelity, and the dangers of moving outside these liberating parameters, are dismissed out of hand. In their place a false ‘Gospel’ is proclaimed – promoting a new pagan ethics that is built on recognising the spirituality that dwells within our individual consciousnesses.

Pastoral Liturgy for Sacred Unions

In September 2010, following the ceremony on 12 June 2010, UNA published a pastoral liturgy for a sacred union ceremony on its website.¹³

The stated aims of the SUC are:

“1. To provide a pastoral service of blessing or marriage for people in committed, same-sex relationships.

2. To encourage a re-consideration of the current policy of the UCA on the doctrine of marriage.” (pp 4&5)

While saying that the SUC “is not intended to be and should not be presented as a Marriage Service” (p5), the UNA deliberately “adapts” it “to make it more inclusive by removing references to specific genders” (pp 7&9) The “de-gendering” of the vows (eg in the use of “partner”) is intended to de-construct marriage and transform it into an “institution” based on androgynous egalitarianism.

In fact, the liturgy mimics marriage, while, at the same time, its proponents both deny that it is a marriage service and agitate for the redefinition of marriage. “Heterosexual marriage” as ordained by God is treated as a culturally conditioned arrangement that needs “to evolve as other patterns for human relating” emerge (p8). It would seem, therefore, that between the SUC in June

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and the publicising of a SUC in September a decisive shift in emphasis has taken place. Otherwise, it is puzzling to understand the comments of President Alistair Macrae about the June service that “it will be a matter of personal judgment as to whether the ceremony resembled a marriage ceremon. ... in very obvious ways, by any church definition, it was clearly not a marriage service and did not pretend to be.”¹⁴

Despite the President’s assessment of the liturgy with which he was presented, the implication of the current UNA proposal is plain. The acceptance of same-sex marriage is designed to radically revise marriage so that, henceforth, it must be understood as a relationship between two individuals, regardless of gender.

The failure of the SUC to recognise the fundamental creation of humanity as male and female, and marriage as the personal and physical union of a man and a woman, is evident in the misrepresentation of the biblical-theological understanding of *Covenant, Love and Inclusion*. It is cleverly written to give the impression that its radical revision of marriage is in conformity with the classical Christian tradition. In fact, it is the Gnostic deconstruction of the triune God, as attested in Scripture and confessed by the UCA in the *Basis of Union*.

1. The concept of *covenant* is used misleadingly to imply God’s approval of all kinds of binding declarations of commitment (pp 9&10)—“with family and friends” (p12), as well as God’s relationship with Israel and Jesus’ disciples. In Scripture, however, the covenant with Israel is established by the Holy God who is merciful. In the old covenant, the Hebrews are commanded to behave in a manner that does not imitate the unholy practices of their neighbours, including, among other kinds of misbehaviour, homosexuality (Lev 18:22; 20:13a). This prohibition is not overturned in the new covenant, though, significantly, the guiding principle of Jesus’ followers must be the desire that any sinful person, including the sexually immoral, be reconciled to God (eg Jn 8:1-11; 1 Cor 6:9-20).

Thus, in opposition to self-styled forms of “sacred sex”, the old and new covenants affirm that only sex and marriage between a man and a woman is “sanctified” (i.e. made holy) by God. Where committed homosexual unions are declared to be “sacred”, as they are in the SUC, they are not ‘sanctified’ according to the testimony of Scripture and classical theology.

It is misleading, therefore, to argue that “sacred unions” of the kind being proposed in the SUC are consistent with the twofold covenant established by God with the human family. It is illegitimate, too, to invoke the name of the triune God to bless these “sacred unions”.¹⁵

The proposed marriage vows in the SUC do not conform to the covenantal nature of marriage according to the 1997 Assembly declaration on marriage. They are radically revised to eliminate references to “husband” and “wife” and “a man and a woman”. This is described as “the non-gender” or “de-gendered” approach to the statement of purpose in the UCA marriage service (p 15 inc fn 5, pp 29-30). When the Catholic moral theologian Daniel Maguire’s statement that “Marriage is the highest form of interpersonal commitment and friendship achievable between sexually attracted persons” (p 5 inc fn 1, p29 & fn 5, pp 29-30) is quoted with approval, the reader is left in no doubt about the ultimate goal of the proponents of the SUC—same-sex marriage that is, at

the very least, equivalent to marriage between a man and a woman.

It is false, therefore, to claim or imply that the biblical approach to covenant endorses or validates these close relationships. In God’s covenant with his people, some close relationships are forbidden. The failure of the proposal to discuss the significance of marriage between a man and a woman for a correct understanding of the biblical covenant, and the portrayal of same-sex relationships between David and Jonathan and Ruth and Naomi as typical of loving, faithful covenantal relationships, is striking. The Bible is neither coy nor euphemistic in such matters. The slightest suggestion that these relationships involved genital eroticism would have been sufficient to warrant harsh judgment, given the clear prohibition in the Hebrew covenant.

On this view of covenant, it is unclear on what basis the proponents of SUCs for same-sex couples could preclude SUCs for people in other, now prohibited sexual relationships. Presumably, they, too, will come to be regarded as conditioned by outdated cultural mores. If individuality, consent, sexual fulfilment are sufficient grounds on which to approve of covenantal relationships between same-sex partners, then SUCs must also include people in polyamorous, polygamist and adult incestuous relationships.

2. This brings us to the concept of *love* used throughout the proposed liturgy. Much is said about ‘honouring’ and ‘sharing’ love in a life-long covenantal relationship. “Love” is treated as a generic commitment that has many forms, all of which are created and sustained by God. Although the Bible readings suggested for the SUC rightly focus on the love of God, and our calling to love one another, they do not include texts about false loves that undermine the case for same-sex marriage (pp 16&17). Sexual and other loves can be harmful, even when the attraction is mutual and consensual. It is noteworthy that Gen 1:26ff and Mark 10:6-9 are ignored. References to 1 Jn 4:7-8&16 (p10) conveniently forget the accompanying warnings not to do what is wrong. (1 Jn 3:8; 5:16f; 3 Jn v11)

The assumption that “love” overcomes culturally conditioned limits (like male-female marriage) also leads them to blur the distinction between different forms of love, and to misrepresent what Paul says in Galatians 3:28 (p12). The affirmation that, in Christ, there is “*no male and female*” is a recognition, radical for its day, of the equal dignity of men and women before God. It does not mean that sexual relations between people of the same sex are now to be encouraged and celebrated (eg 1 Cor 6:9ff).

The essential character of God’s love in Scripture is not only accepting but redemptive – love that forgives sinners, reconciles them to God and calls them to follow the crucified and risen Christ in lives of righteousness that exceed, but do not contradict, the tradition of the scribes and Pharisees (Mt 5:20).

3. The appeal to *social inclusion* shows that the SUC is dependent, not on Scripture, but Gnostic ideas of equality. In biblical theology “inclusion” is understood in the light of God’s love for sinners. Through the covenant revealed to Israel and embodied in Christ, the nations are called to repentance. The Holy Spirit enables sinful men and women to delight in the redemptive love of God by living-out the new way of righteousness (Mt 5-7) in rela-

tion to Christ. Unlike Gnostic inclusion, biblical inclusion welcomes all nations while discerning the difference between right and wrong. Thus exclusive attachment to Christ, and his righteousness, is the basis on which all sinners are invited to confess him as Lord of heaven and earth.

In relation to sex and marriage, the new righteousness embodied exclusively in Christ prohibits same-sex sexual relationships, within or outside “committed relationships”. The ideas that underpin the SUC thus privilege the Gnostic form of “inclusion” and reject the biblical distinction between incompatible forms of “inclusion”. Accordingly, it is unclear why the SUC should be restricted to two people, either of the same or opposite sex. Inevitably, in order to uphold the Gnostic principle of equality consistently, the SUC for marriages and/or civil unions and/or blessings will have to be expanded to include vows between multiple partners. To do otherwise would be to exclude people who are committed to other forms of God-given love.

4. *Theological language* in the SUC is used deceptively. The same terms for “God” are used but, taken out of biblical context, they mean something entirely different. Phrases like “whom God has called together”, “faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ”, “God whose name is love”, “one people in Christ”, “may your holy spirit empower them” et al assume compatibility of the SUC with Scripture and the UCA marriage service. In fact, what they claim divine warrant for is incompatible with what is meant by “God”. “Christ” and the “Spirit” in the Bible and the service. The Gnostic “god” trumps God’s self-revelation in Scripture.

Conclusion

In view of the misuse of the Assembly approved Marriage Service in this proposal, ministers, congregations and Councils of the church, including the Thirteenth Assembly in 2012, should totally reject the SUC liturgy. It mimics marriage in an attempt, not to enhance, but to



undermine, radicalise and deconstruct it.

The suggestion that this new service is necessary only for “pastoral” reasons should also be rejected. “Pastoral care”, as the Declaration of Purpose in the UCA Marriage Service clearly shows, does not mean endorsing claims to act contrary to Scripture, but teaching and discipline that are compatible with God’s self-revelation in Christ, as attested in Scripture.

- 1 ACCatalyst August 2010, Vol 4, No 4, Correspondence 20/7/10, p13
- 2 See Philip Lee, *Against Protestant Gnosticism* (1987: Oxford University Press, Oxford); Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (1992: Simon and Schuster, New York); Peter Jones, *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back* (1992: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Phillipsburg, New Jersey); *Pagans in the Pews* (2001: Regal Books, Ventura, California)
- 3 P. Lee, Op cit, p201
- 4 Gospel of Thomas, Saying 22; my italics
- 5 Ibid. Final Saying 114; my italics
- 6 P. Jones, *The Gnostic Empire strikes back*, p60
- 7 In this respect, the influence of C. Jung, whose “archetypes” in the mind, including the integration of male and female “types”, has been instrumental in minimising the significance of our complementary physiology for understanding sexual relationships, thus translating interpersonal relationships into intrapersonal states of mind.
- 8 J Ellul, *The Sacred Today*, Ch 3, esp. pp 73-80 in *The New Demons* (1973/1975: Mowbrays, London & Oxford)
- 9 See, for eg, *Sexuality and Sacred Sex*, www.theinstitute.org/sex
- 10 As they are in the SUC, see below
- 11 Cited in P. Jones, PP p170, fn 52
- 12 Ibid fn 53
- 13 See www.unitingnetworkaustralia.org.au
- 14 ACCatalyst, Vol 4, No 4, August 2010, p13
- 15 Sacred Union Ceremony, p25

The gospel mission to marriages and families

Rod James on why families can share the good news

In our desire to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the people in our own family, neighbourhood and community we look for connecting points between the things of God and the lives of these people. At the same time the evil one works to create and enlarge the gap between us and them.

He therefore promotes all sorts of caricatures of Christians and the Church as being ‘off the planet’. But there is nothing so much on this planet as human families!

God’s promise of blessing for all the families of the earth

God’s love for the human race was revealed to Abraham when He promised to bless all the families of the earth through one of Abraham’s offspring (seed). Peter tells the Jews of his day, “You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’” Acts 3:25, Genesis 28:14

The blessing of the families would come when God would justify them, or put them right with Himself, through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

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And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." Galatians 3:8

The words "Gentiles" and "nations" in this passage are exactly the same word in the Greek text—the word is *ethnos*, from which we get our word 'ethnic'. Thus *ethne* (plural) means the ethnic families, clans or tribes of the earth, rather than nations as political states. The English word, 'Gentiles' comes from the Latin *gentilis*, and means the same.

Paul has been given an amazing revelation by Jesus Christ himself that every family (*patria*) on earth is named from the Father (*pater*) (Ephesians 3:14,15), and that all the families of the earth are heirs together with Israel of the promise of blessing made to Abraham.

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly ... This mystery is that the Gentiles (i.e. the families of the nations) are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Ephesians 3:1-3,6

We need this same revelation if we too are to have "a stewardship of God's grace" for the families around about us. Consequently Paul prays that all Christians may have the same revelation that he had.

"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." Ephesians 3:14-19

Paul prays that through the Holy Spirit within us we may come to understand the "breadth, length, height and depth" of the love of Christ. John Stott puts it this way: "the love of Christ is 'broad' enough to encompass all mankind... 'long' enough to last for eternity, 'deep' enough to reach the most degraded sinner, and 'high' enough to exalt him to heaven".

Marriage, family, and the Triune God

The mystery of marriage and family is grounded in the mystery of the triune God. While we cannot be too direct in stating this grounding, the following truths are clear:

- The triune God is relational, and all the realities of authentic and lasting covenant-relationship issue from the love-communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Having been created in the image of God, loving covenant relationships are the heart-desire of every human being, and only our Creator can reveal them to us and make them possible in our case. Jesus reveals this mystery when he says, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). He prays to the Father: "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." John 17:22-23

When two souls enter into love-communion they participate in the very love-nature of the triune God.

- God is nuptial in His love. Nuptial love is "self-gift to another in covenant union". And so God desires, and proposes, and enters into nuptial or marital covenant with His people: Yahweh with Israel (Hosea), and Jesus with his bride the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33, Revelation 19:6-9).

- God is generational. Self-giving love is fruitful in offspring, and so Jesus is "the only Son of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made" (Nicene Creed).

Marriage is defined by God and reflects the nature of God. It is not defined by human beings to suit their nature and convenience.

The primary desire of God, as our heavenly Father, is to have many children and to bring "many sons (and daughters) to glory" in his eternal family (Hebrews 2:10). This is God's purpose in this present creation, and in His promise of "a new heaven and a new earth". But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 2 Peter 3:13, (Isaiah 65:17, Isaiah 66:22, Revelation 21:1)

Marriage breakdown in Genesis 3

Genesis 3 is the story of what is called "the fall", i.e. the fall of humanity into sin. Our focus may be so much upon the breakdown of the human relationship with God that we may overlook some important realities about the relationship breakdown between the man and the woman. What we need to notice is that the whole conversation that the serpent (Satan) had with Eve took place apart from Adam. Craftily the serpent had lured the woman into a conversation about vital life matters without involving her husband. When Adam did become involved he was "behind the eight-ball"—things had been decided and action taken without him. Instead of redressing this distortion of their covenant union with its disastrous consequences, Adam tries to get back into the scene by weakly going along with his wife's decision and action.

Does all of this sound familiar? The point is not just that the woman went off and took matters into her own hands, but that the communion of husband and wife got separated at a critical moment. (Perhaps Adam was out in his shed, or maybe the serpent said to the woman, "It's no good talking to him about it, you know what he's like!")

Family tragedy in Genesis 4

Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. Well might we ask, "Where did these siblings learn to compete so bitterly with one another?" Obviously, from their parents. Paul lists the things that have come into this family and, through them, into all families: 'enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy' (Galatians 5:20-21). And through the family these destroyers

of communion spread into society. Nothing happens in society that does not have its genesis in family relationships!

The Ten Commandments are for the preservation of the family

If we have a fresh look at the Ten Commandments we will see that they provide the foundation for the family which, in turn, is the primary unit and foundation of society:

Worship God and honour His name, shun all idols, have a family Sabbath-rest, honour you parents, preserve all human life, be sexually faithful in marriage, respect other people's property, speak truthfully about everyone, and be content with what your family has, compared to others.

When the family is ordered and governed by these ten words then society is well ordered and public government needs only to be minimal—less laws and regulations, less police, fewer courts, less welfare payments, less social workers, less taxes—wow!

When the relationship of parents with one another, breaks down, however, they slough off parenting to others and so demand bigger public government. You can't cut big government just by cutting government spending, but rather by cutting family breakdown, divorce, abortion, teenage pregnancy and single parenting.

Action points for the Church's ministry with couples and families

1. Only the Christian church has a true and sacred view of marriage

Only the church of God views marriage as a sacred union in the image of the nuptial and familial God. For Catholics marriage is a sacrament, for Protestants it is called 'a holy estate'. This means that marriage is defined by God and reflects the nature of God. It is not defined by human beings to suit their nature and convenience. No one else has a view of marriage and family as a holy estate established in the image of the nuptial and familial God. This gift of truth is expressed in the Church's participation in what is, for those who marry, the most important occasion of their lives—their wedding. The whole congregation needs to be taught the significance of what is happening 'on their turf'. This is not just something that the Minister and a few helpers do as a cute cultural left-over. The Church of God is herein privileged to be the mid-wife of a new family which, in turn, is a sacred sign upon the earth of the life of God.

2. The five institutions of society

We may say that there are five primary institutions in a nation: family, church, school, workplace, and government. When a couple prepares for marriage there are five important questions they need to address:

- The significance and number of children in the marriage
- The place of worship in family life
- The education of the children (e.g. home, public or private)
- The place of work in the life of husband and wife
- Their understanding of order and governance in the home

It is the Church of God which understands what is being undertaken in marriage, and can assist a couple to engage these integral parts of their family and household.



3. Heal the marriage, heal the family

The sinful instinct is for a mother or father to love their children apart from and even over against the children's other parent. This can easily become a competition for the affection and loyalty of what become "my children". However, it has been established that the best way for a father to love his children is to love their mother, and the best way for a mother to love her children is to love their father. What is happening in the family is reactive to what is happening in the marriage.

Research among children has shown that the most widespread fear among children today is that their parents will split up. Pat Fagan, a well-known marriage and family researcher and counsellor in the USA, says that, when dealing with problem children, in 95% of cases he did not need to work directly with the children, but just with Mum and Dad. He says, "When Mum and Dad love each other the kids are OK. They thrive on the love that Mum and Dad have for each other."

This is the core truth that the Church of God brings to family ministry.

4. Christian ministry with families

The DNA code on the human soul is towards raising a family. To be the parent of one child is to do more than Bill Gates or Julius Caesar. In 1840 the Rev. Robert James left his family to evangelise miners in the Wild West. However his sons Jesse and Frank outdid him in influence. One of the most difficult and courageous things a working parent can do is to leave work and go home to the family.

Our emphasis in working with families should be the same as Pat Fagan's. That is, we should put more thought and effort in assisting parents with their relationship with their children, than we put into working directly with the children. For example, see Ken Canfield's book *They Call Me Dad: The Practical Art of Effective Fathering*

For some reason family ministry is not a priority in churches. Christians are far more likely to work just with the children. However, ministry with children should not aim to do for children what the parents might be able to do with some help. Rather, it should aim to empower parents to do for their children. This has huge implications for our ministry with children—where are we putting the emphasis?

5. Healing the father-wound

Fatherhood and closeness do not go together in our Australian culture. Mum, yes she has always been associated with closeness; she is always there. But fathers have been distant—they are away working, out on the tractor, at the office, out in the shed, leaving early for work and

MARRIAGE

arriving home late. So fatherhood and closeness don't figure.

Modern Western culture has reduced fathers to little more than sperm donors, but recent research is showing the enormous significance of fathers in the maturation and wellbeing of both girls and boys. A Christian understanding of fatherhood can be the basis for encouraging and equipping men in their God-given role as husbands and fathers. Ken Canfield tells the story of a group of fathers and daughters that he took on a camp. On one day they all climbed to the top of a high hill, for something special that he had asked the fathers to prepare for. The weather was unpleasant and the climb hard. Ken tells what happened:

But when we finally reached the top, something extraordinary occurred. The blustery wind suddenly died down, the clouds parted, and rays of sunshine burst through, almost like a spotlight. It was as if we were on holy ground. For the next hour, the air stayed calm and warm.

Then one by one each father introduced his daughter, shared something special about her, and pronounced a blessing on her in front of the rest of us. As each father shared—talking about his pride in his daughter, her unique gifts, and his love for her—he broke down and wept at some point, no exceptions. Next, all the fathers gathered around the dad and daughter and prayed that God would bring the blessing to pass. The daughters, who had been weary and grumbling, all became attentive and bright-eyed. After hearing her father speak blessings to her, each one was relaxed, talking, and laughing. I still hear from dads and daughters who talk about that day and the difference it made.

Emphasizing fathers and fathering almost seems politically incorrect in our Western culture. But lurking in most of this culture's men and women is an unresolved father-relationship which continues to have a significant effect on the well-being and behaviour of the person. (For example, see Ken Canfield's poem *Circles of Pain*)

6. Orphans and widows

Much of what has been said so far applies best to a family of Mum, Dad and the kids. However, as we know only too well, many human beings were not raised, or do not live in such a household. In having a congregation that is strong in family life, and big on family life, there are a number of questions, we need to keep asking:

- Who are the fatherless in our community?
- Who are the single parents in our community?
- Who are the singles (unmarried) in our community?
- Who are the singles-again (separated, divorced or widowed)?

The biblical doctrine of family is not one of domestic introversion and self-interest, but rather of open and inclusive family, for "Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation" (Psalm 68:5). A family among the people of God has an open table.

"...the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do." (Deuteronomy 14:29)

The "open door" in a Christian household is not only for people to come in, but for the members of the household to go out—visiting those who are left on their own.

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."



(James 1:27)

7. Pastoral visiting made easy

The truth is that every family tells a story, and that family's story is part of the salvation story of God. When a Christian visits another home he/she should be ready to hear (some of) the story of that family.

Having listened attentively to the story it will seem natural to say, "May I pray for you and your family". The visitor can then pray for the family in the light of what they have heard. If they have listened well their prayer will be appreciated.

Salvation of families in the family of God

We have seen that the Church of Jesus Christ is especially equipped to bring families to wholeness. Of course, the church can only be the family for healing families if our own families have experienced something of that healing. For that to happen we will need to repent of our individualistic approach to Christian faith which is so prevalent in Western churches.

All of our deepest human feelings are experienced in relation to the members of our own family—feelings of joy, sadness, love, hate, hurt, healing, anger, forgiveness, grief, comfort, lostness and belonging. When something is too sensitive we say, 'Don't go there', and it is easy for Christians to avoid and conceal the deep waters of their own family situation. But we do need to 'go there' if we wish to bring others into the joy of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Without doubt, the greatest ministry gift the Church has is its families. When Christian families are living in the nuptial love, gracious mercy, and intimate communion of God, they and their homes are a beacon of light in the community and a first-aid station to those living around them.

Our mission to families is grounded in and should be carried out with an enormous respect for each family as a sacred community, created in the image of the familial God. In all we do we should resolutely refuse to draw one member of the family away from the others, but rather work to help those we have contact with to better understand their own family as integral to God's purpose on the earth.

Our aim is to assist each member of a family to better understand the inherent dignity, wonder, and goodness of their own family as ordained by their Heavenly Father, who has promised His blessing of grace to all the families of the earth through His beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

Rod James is a UCA Minister and chairs the SA ACC Movement. Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version.



ACC Tonga meeting and worship service 25th March 2012 –one of the Tongan choirs in attendance.

Peter Bentley

ACC Tonga shows support and encouragement for marriage

Under the leadership of Rev Mele Fakahua-Ratcliffe and the Tongan ACC group based in NSW, a clear message of support for our traditional understanding of marriage was given at a meeting and worship service held on Sunday 25th March, 2012 at Rodger Page Auburn Uniting Church.

Members from ACC Tongan congregations and individual members from other congregations participated in the service, which included items from several choirs.

ACC National Council member Rev Rod James was the keynote speaker, and gave an overview of the importance of male and female relationships in our society.

Rev Lulul Senitulu, Convenor of

Thank you for standing firm and confessing Jesus Christ in these times of challenge in the church

the ACC Cross Cultural Commission gave a strong message of encouragement and critiqued some aspects of the Uniting Church, encouraging people to stand firm in the faith, especially during these challenging months ahead [with the 13th UCA National Assembly in July].

Rev Sione Alo Fakahua and the ACC Tonga Public Relations Office Dan Taumoepeau also presented warm and strong messages of support for the ACC.

At the special feast after the service, the number of excellent speeches illustrated the growing understanding of the role of the ACC within the Uniting Church.

On behalf of the NSW ACC Convenor, Rev Ian Weeks and the National Chair, Rev Dr Max Champion, Peter Bentley thanked our Tongan brothers and sisters for standing firm and confessing Jesus Christ in these difficult times of revision and challenge to our common evangelical and reformed understanding of faith in the church.

The God of Hope

Rowan Gill believes we can be sure good things are on their way

Our present age needs hope for primarily it is one of despair. The present is without a meaning that goes beyond present feelings and ideologies. Jean-Paul Sartre erected this into a gloomy and almost impenetrable philosophy.

And so fear is connected to despair, fear for the future, and although Franklin Delano Roosevelt could famously say to the despairing depression 'you have nothing to fear but fear itself' it is doubtful whether this ushered in a complete and positive future.

All this leads to nothingness as the outcome of the age, the complete lack of the positive that is not just human willing by mainforce. Nothingness is found in Sartre's philosophy and Manning Clark's exposition of Australian history.

The Apostle Paul laid the foundation for hope when he wrote 'For I am not ashamed of the Gospel; it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.' (Romans 1:16 NRSV) Jesus Christ will judge all in the eschaton (2:16).

Abraham had hope, 'Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations according to what was said. So numerous shall your descendants be"' (4:18).

Hope in the Christian life is a matter of endurance and resilience looking forward to the last day – 'we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God' (5:3,4).

Our hope is based in our baptism and what it connotes:

'Do you not know that all of us who are baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? Therefore, we have been baptised with him by baptism into his death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we



Nina Matthews Photography

too might walk in newness of life.' (6:3,4,23)

The creation was placed in its present position so that Christians might have hope (8:19-21).

In an actively sinful and limited world Christians bear all things and still hope for God's kingdom in the middle of natural and human evil. (8:31-39) So they 'rejoice in hope' (12:12).

'May the God of hope fill you will all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit' (15:13).

Hope has been a major theme of evangelical theology.

Karl Barth was intensely preoccupied with eschatology (the doctrine of the last things) in the 1920s. Then it features strongly in his unfinished and massive Church Dogmatics. Hope and worship would have featured largely in the completely volume.

For Rudolf Bultmann the individual's hope in the moment is connected with eternity.

Moltmann stresses the connection of repentance with the end.

'The God of Hope is himself the Coming God. (Isaiah 35:4,40:5) When God comes in his glory he will fill the universe with his radi-

ance, everyone will see him and he will swallow up death forever. This future is God's mode of being in history, the power of the future is his power in time' (The Coming of God p.24).

Jungel's careful, scriptural, historical, philosophical, and theological work majoring on the Reformation, with Moltmann swept the Death-of-God theologians from the stage.

Pannenberg's theology is built on an eschatology from creation to the eschaton. The Old Testament reality is a matter of hope that is rolled up like a carpet into the crucified and risen Christ, and from him the future – which includes us – stretches forth to and beyond the end, or the omega point, as Teilhard de Chardin would have put it. Everything is slanted toward the end as God's fulfilment of all things.

'Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the death our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen' (Hebrews 13:20-21)

NRSV = New Revised Standard Version, USA 1989.

Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (1933), *Church Dogmatics*, 13 volumes (1936-1975)

Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 volumes (1952, 1955)

Eberhard Jungel, *Death* (1975), *God as the Mystery of the World* (1986).

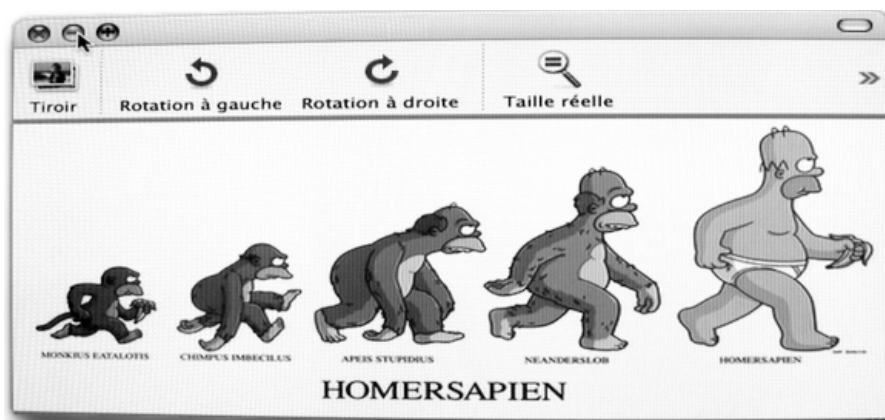
Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (1967), *The Coming of God* (1996), *O Sun of Righteousness Arise* (2010).

Wolfgang Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* 3 volumes (1991, 1994, 1998), *Revelation as History* (1968), *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (1991).

Gerhard Sauter, *What Dare We Hope?* (1999)

Worshipping at the Altar

Peter Bentley's imagination runs riot



PHOTOQUANTIQUE/Flickr.co

I was meditating on the worship which had just finished on United Internet TV. It was the opening service for the annual meeting of another Church and its use of dynamic interactive technology had caught my attention and caused me to reminisce about the recent meeting of my own church, the Church of the Last Web Frontier.

We celebrated our Twentieth Anniversary at that meeting, but it was my belief that we faced more difficult challenges in the future, not the least being our survival as a true church. More than ever before people were leaving us for new and supposedly more exciting faiths, ones which provided a seemingly never-ending range of bonus added-on extras.

I pondered would we survive these challenges, and also would there be moves toward another union? Unions with the Church of the DVD and the Cable Network Church had proved to be very beneficial for all, but we could not be sure of these new groups as some did not even have a manual for meetings.

The annual meeting still had

the same format, but this was the fifth year since we had converged at the same casting location. Now as delegates we could simply sit in comfy chairs and enjoy the debates, groups, discussions, significant rituals and gatherings from our own homes.

There were a couple of surprises at the meeting, mainly due to unforeseen problems with the process for voting. All members now had the ability to communicate directly using their remote controls, which also how delegates indicated their agreement or disagreement with each proposal.

At one stage the meeting was held up because two members had not recorded their position; there seemed not to be any connection at all, and they had not indicated they were on a rest break. Certainly one could disate a position.

The business controllers kept sending messages, and eventually the Most High Meeting Host asked the local station security to visit their homes. Upon personal contact they found that the members were no longer able to participate in the meeting, nor even able to watch TV. Anyway, we were able to have a

moving memorial service, including scenes from that immortal classic 'Weekend at Bernies', culminating in the shutting down of the main Web server for a minutes silence.

Unfortunately, this event prompted a group of rabble rousers to attempt to disrupt our proceedings by introducing a provocative motion to change the name of the church to 'The Web of the Living Dead'. After furious debate and several amendments it was agreed that a shorter version, namely 'The Web Lead', could be used in common practice, but not on official documents.

Suddenly I was brought back to reality as my Internet TV set flickered and then provided a less than stable picture

Another striking change in our practice was the introduction of the new 'closed session', when all the members of the church meeting had to turn off their web connection. Those visitors who were watching our proceedings at the time were then invited to decide a controversial matter for us by submitting a vote without any further discussion. While perhaps slightly unorthodox, it certainly streamlined the proceedings.

Other parts of the meeting proceeded as normal, including the liturgical events which provided beautiful sacred readings from the Holy Guide Book, 'Logies for Ever', as well as some wonderful singing by the choir from an early book, 'Australian TV Themes'.

As usual there were reports from programme areas highlighting new game shows, lifestyle and travel events, and our endearing soap operas. The programme highlight was the anniversary edition of 'This could have been your life'. This received a standing ovation, as members realised what this past member could have achieved if they hadn't been a bloodsucking backstabber.

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The Bible created 'The West'

Must the Sun Set on the West? The Book That Made Your World.

Vishal Mangalwadi.

www.revelationmovement.com

Pasadena

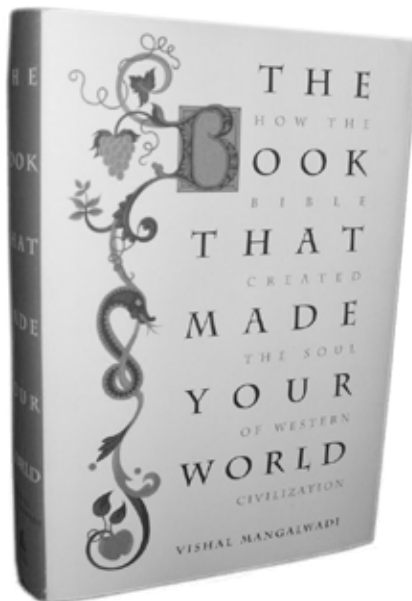
Reviewed by **Anneke van de Loo**

In short: A timely Eastern voice to jolt Western society back to reality.

In casual conversation recently, you may well have been surprised by attitudes and opinions being expressed on topical issues, be these social, religious or political. Or, have you been startled by vicious criticism of Christian values on talk-back radio or in the press?

Vishal Mangalwadi's book opens our eyes to what is happening in Western society today. He bases his findings on extensive research into the history of the Western World and the centuries of influence of God's communication through the Bible.

He describes the development of a free and thinking civilization, following the Word of God becoming available to ordinary people through translation and the inven-



tion of printing in Europe (15th Century). This then underpinned the education and social development of first Europe, then America and any country where their influence was felt. The book makes history come alive and relevant!

Vishal's observations are valuable and unique, seeing that he was born and educated in India and can look at today's world through

Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim eyes. Moreover, his studies in the West have given him insight into western culture.

This access to the thought of east and West has brought him to the conclusion that all true progress, leading to a society where freedom and equality, compassion and education are valued and experienced, must be Bible-based. Vishal proceeds to speak to the crisis of our time with clarity and courage. In the final chapter he poses the question: Must the Sun set on the West?

This timely book is a must-read for all who seek to impact the present culture in countries like Australia. This book encourages and challenges all who are intimidated by loud voices which denounce the very foundation on which the western world was built.

Anneke van de Loo is an ACC member and active in the SAACC Movement. Anneke suggests that members may consider requesting their local library to purchase this book. It can be ordered at www.revelationmovement.com

Worshipping

From page 19

Of course, one of the highlights was the presentation of awards at the end. Many categories were hotly contested, but none more than the one for "Member displaying the most self-righteous indignation" (separate awards for those from the left and the right).

One member scooped the main prize pool, capturing both these awards (he liked to take both sides), as well as "Most emotionally manipulative speech" and "Most incoherent speech". The award for saying the most times "I will stay in this church until I die" was presented posthumously.

We even showed our respect for the official guests by introducing

a new category: "Best Attempt at making a political point by a guest who should have known better". This was indeed a difficult one to judge and so it was given to all the guests as a group.

As usual, the awards ceremony provided the suitable closing note to another year and people disconnected on a brainwave high. I had made a mental note at the time to write a letter to the Most High Meeting Host to express my thanks for another excellent meeting with wonderful programming content, but this may have meant writing more than 160 characters.

Suddenly I was brought back to reality as my Internet TV set flickered and then provided a less than stable picture, with even the beginnings of double lines. How could this happen with new technology?

Anyway, just as I began to re-boot (and I was considering getting new steel-capped boots to do this), the door bell rang. I opened the door cautiously to reveal two representatives of that new sect, the Local Church.

I had heard much about this group, but had never personally experienced the offerings of this church. Was this a sign? I was challenged to speak to them, to learn more about their faith. Where they perhaps the church of the future?

Peter Bentley is the ACC's executive consultant and has a keen interest in media and new technology. Any resemblance to any official church meeting is purely coincidental.

Note: A Version of this was originally written in 1997. It has been revised for a new era.

A book for the whole Church - *The Integrity of Anglicanism*

The Integrity of Anglicanism

Stephen W. Sykes, Mowbray, London and Oxford, 1978,

Reviewed by **Peter Bentley**

I found myself intrigued by this book from the opening quote from the character Coggan in Thomas Hardy's 'Far from the Madding Crowd':

"There's this to be said for the Church [of England], a man can belong to the Church and bide in his cheerful old inn, and never trouble or worry his mind about doctrines at all."

It was written one year after the union of the Uniting Church, and obviously about a different denomination (or Communion), but I found myself caught at most points thinking how poignant and apt for the UCA in the 21st century. It is also illuminating when one considers the present state of the Anglican Communion. Surely anyone who read this book thirty years ago would have seen the writing on the wall – not as dramatically as Daniel, but this is a book that packs an academic thump.

Stephen Sykes was the sixty-seventh bishop of Ely, and lastly before his retirement, Principal of St John's College, Durham. He has published several reflections on the Church of England over his many years of ministry.

This reflection is a solid and dense study. The book covers the main areas of:

- Anglican Comprehensiveness (The Crisis of)
- The Significance of Liberalism
- Anglican Theology, Method and Authority

There is also a Comment by Paul Wignall on Patterns in Theology, and an Appendix with 3 short items including an illuminating Letter to The Times published 1 June 1977 from the Reverend Professor H.E. Root, an Anglican member of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) which deftly looks at the question of

what are fundamentals, and points of necessary interaction in any dialogue.

There are many, almost hilarious quotes in that under-stated English style, which highlight and review the impressions and stereotypes that people have of the Church of England.

For example, Sykes aptly notes that "... it must be said that the Church of England would patently not exist in the form it does exist if all its members were as uncertain and unclear about their beliefs as its most liberal members." (p. 43)

He continually causes the reader to ask about the nature of doctrine and whether a Church can really manage without any doctrinal commitment? Sykes, overall, argues carefully and succinctly argue that his own church has definite convictions and there is thus a basis for a high degree of conformity. He is also clearly at pains to show he is not a narrow conservative wanting to impose a rigid system, but someone who challenges the somewhat then 'post-modern' perception that a Church should have no foundational beliefs. He states "There is thus nothing anomalous in a situation in which a body insists that it has a definite teaching, and also is tolerant of a free discussion of that teaching." (p. 44)

The title itself is indicative of the thesis – what is integrity? It is not only an examination and consideration of honesty and sincerity, but of identity as a whole. Sykes understands Anglican comprehensiveness, because he shows that in order to have this form of comprehensiveness, there must be agreement on fundamentals. Like the Catholic Church today, where for some people the role of the conscience has been reduced to seemingly an almost rampant and unrealistic individualism, Sykes exposes the logical dangers of being all-embracing or to tolerant of everything.

"A Christian church, which is

aware of a wide variety of diverse theological positions and which deliberately decides not to adopt one or other of them, but rather to tolerate diversity, has still to offer a definite reason for doing so and to justify that reason in the face of objection." (p. 6)

He again simply states that the church is not "an open debating society, which would stand solely for the open discussion of any view whatsoever." (p.6) In the chapter on 'The Anglican Standpoint', he also aptly notes in the context of a discussion about the use of the term 'the Christian community', that liberal writers and leaders in many ways demonstrate, "... how substantially dependent that community is upon groups that with positive convictions on the very matters which liberals find so doubtful." (p.44)

The second chapter 'The Significance of Liberalism' is probably the most important and directly relevant for the Uniting Church. The discussion and examination of the historical development of Anglican liberalism is helpful, and reminds the reader of the diverse and somewhat bewildering non-philosophy liberalism actually is.

His conclusion on liberalism is worth considering, and I leave you with this final quote:

"To accept the inevitability of some liberals, does not necessitate the toleration of all. Views are neither right nor wrong by being liberal in character. Only a church which had despaired of the possibility of rational argument about theology altogether could adopt such a stance. And it is my conviction that, tolerant though the Anglican communion has become, it has a standpoint on matters of doctrine which is firmer than seems to be the case on first sight, even if it stands in need of articulation and development." (p. 35)

Peter Bentley is the Executive Consultant for the ACC.



Diamond Wedding Anniversary for Bob and Miriam Imms

The Rev. Bob and Miriam Imms were married at Davey Street Methodist Church, Hobart (now Lutheran Church), on 14th January 1952. The Rev. Vere Heazlewood conducted the wedding. He also became Bob's mentor in ministry. From 1953 to 1956 the Imms worked as teacher-missionaries at the Salamo station on Ferguson Island, in the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. Bob was ordained on 17th October 1963 and served in Methodist and Uniting churches in Tasmania. He is still serving, aged 86, in Woodbridge congregation, which currently has no minister appointed. Bob is well-known to ACC members for his devotional column *Seeds for Harvesting*, and the collected edition of some of the devotions (Vol. 1) produced as a booklet and provided at the 2011 ACC Conference.

PRAYER

Remembering my father

My father's name was Reg to his closer family and friends and George to his brothers and sisters. Born in 1922 and died in 2010 at the age of 87.

To me my father was a quiet man, a very special man to me and to many others, who started life in poor circumstances. At one stage in his early years he lived in a house with no floor, and walking the streets of his town with no shoes. His father had left their mother to bring up a tribe of children on her own.

I am one of 8 children and being born second to last. It has always been rather special to me that Dad chose my name, he had liked the name Mandy and so Mandy it was. I was only given one name, I think Mum and Dad run out by the time they got to me. Mum and Dad nearly reached their 67th wedding anniversary. What a feat!

As I reflect upon my father's life I realize that he was a man of vision. When I was growing up I would love to go to the rubbish tip at Booborowie in South Australia, a small town near a farm where my father worked as a farm hand. At a time when people were still able to take rubbish and also fossick around, taking home treasures that they had found. This is what Dad would do, take some rubbish of his own, only to return home with some special treasures. We would often tease him because we couldn't see these treasures as he saw them and also what he was going to create from them. He seemed to always have ideas in his mind of things to do and saw visions, to build something and saw possibilities for the future. As he looked at something in his hand, it was almost as though he was saying, one day that would come in handy, and the bits and pieces always did.

Throughout his life he did many things to support his large family. My father was a welder and fabricator in his later life, after hurting his back and being unable to farm any longer. Often farmers would bring in their machinery, knowing that Dad would find a solution to their problem, when no part could be bought, or sourced. What did he have, to make something, to bring restoration and renewal, in order that the object could be used again.

Or a totally new functioning object to be created. He would never charge enough to the farmers who came in to his workshop, much to my mother's concern.

My father was also a gardener, particularly in his later life, growing vegies in order to give them away. He was a man whose hands were always open, and not with closed fists but in order to freely give.

I found my father to be a quite man and in bible studies often he would sit their quietly, and all of a sudden had something very profound to say, that would bring understanding and clarification to issues being discussed. Speaking God's heart and understanding into situations.

I asked at his funeral. What can we all learn from my Dad?

Sometimes we don't think we have much to give and to offer but if we are in life, prepared to work hard, see with Godly vision, see the treasures around us and in others when others cannot. Have the courage to live our lives to its fullest Godly potential, planting small seeds of faith in others lives, and have open hands to give. Then we will indeed be rich in blessings.

Mandy Scott

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 *ACC Catalyst* 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:

- To confess Christ according to the catholic, reformed and evangelical heritage in the Basis of Union, by:
 - upholding the Scriptures' prophetic and apostolic testimony to Christ as the final authority for the Uniting Church's faith and life;
 - 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.confessing-congregations.com/assembly/members/individual-members/>

Interested congregational contacts please contact the office or see the website.

Membership rates for supporting members: Concession (single or couple): \$35.00 pa. (financial year basis) Full (single or couples): \$60.00 p.a.

Contact (02) 9550 5358. email: accoffice@confessingcongregations.com mail: PO Box 968 Newtown NSW 2042

ACC DIARY

What happens next

- April 14: NSW ACC Movement AGM 2012 - Sutherland UC
- April 27-28: 'Stir the Fire'. Joint Hope Network and SA ACC Movement Seminar - Tea Tree Gully UC
- May 1: ACC Doctrine and Theology Commission meeting
- May 14: ACC National Council meeting
- 2012 National Conference September 13-15: Nunyara Conference Centre, Adelaide

Ways to support ACC

Some congregations have developed excellent ways of raising their membership contribution or providing an extra donation to the establishment and foundation of the ACC. Some of these are included below.

- A special Sunday offering: where an offering is taken for the work of the ACC
- A donation box: one congregation has a donation box in their church for the ACC. In less than a year they raised over \$1200, as well as giving a \$1000 membership contribution
- Purchasing Individual Supporting Memberships: some individuals and one congregation purchase supporting memberships on behalf of other members who cannot afford membership themselves. This increases the involvement of local members and provides a different way of encouraging members to support the ACC individually as well.
- Fundraising events: several regional groups have organised events to encourage and network and have also had a voluntary or retiring offering for the work of the ACC.



Using our logo

Our logo is a composite of Christian symbols. The cross represents the work of Jesus Christ who died for our sins and rose again for our justification. The image of the Scriptures, in foreground, regulates our witness to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, represented by the Dove, enlightens our understanding and makes effective our witness to Christ. Our commitment to confess Christ, afresh, in our time and place is symbolized by the 'C' in the logo's background. All congregations and groups can use the ACC logo on their notice-boards or letterhead and emails.



Winona Ryder and Barry Pepper in *When Love Is Not Enough*

Conquering abuse

Reviews by Peter Bentley

When Love is Not Enough (2010, TV)

An excellent title! It causes one to pause and think. Hollywood often gives these types of stories a twist to ensure that 'love' will conquer all. How can love not be enough? In a day when people equate love for a panacea for anything, and believe 'all we need is love'; this is indeed a very challenging story.

When Love is Not Enough won best TV Movie at the 2011 PRISM Awards (for accurate depictions of mental health and substance abuse). It is a Hallmark Hall of Fame film and features well-known Hollywood personality Winona Ryder, and character actor Barry Pepper in the lead roles of Lois and Bill Wilson. An earlier Hallmark film, *My Name is Bill W.* explores the life and times of Bill Wilson, the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).

Most people will be very familiar with AA, and would be aware that it has elements of a Christian foundation and history. The film highlights Bill's early pledges on the Bible, his failings and constant requests for forgiveness, and illustrates his early Christian experiences. Many AA meetings are today held on church premises. I regularly meet AA members near the ACC Office as there are three meetings held each week in our host church (Newtown Mission). (Note: I am not intending to discuss or comment on the on-going questions of spirituality and the various issues that have arisen from the early years of AA).

A smaller number of people would

be aware of Al-Anon, a group providing support and counsel for the families of alcoholics. Lois Wilson was the wife of Bill Wilson (known as Bill W.), the co-founder of AA with Dr Bob (Smith).

I was often reminded about Jesus' parables of grace and forgiveness

Lois realised early on that Bill's drinking did not consume only him, and saw how families often exhibited symptoms and developed significant problems arising from their love and support of the alcoholic member. The foundation for this group can be seen in the following exchange from an early meeting time.

Lois Wilson: No it would be no trouble, really. Erm I could make some tea, I, I could actually use someone to talk to tonight.

Anne Bingham: We came all the way from Westchester County. I'm Anne Bingham.

Lois Wilson: Anne, I'm Lois Wilson.

Anne Bingham: If I don't drive him here I can't guarantee that he'll make it so I make the drive.

Lois Wilson: For years I used to hide the keys from my husband. I was afraid he'd kill himself or someone else.

Anne Bingham: Exactly

Informal family support groups started from about 1939 with the wives often meeting while their husbands were at their AA meeting, but it was not until 1951 that Lois and Anne founded Al-Anon. Today Al-Anon has over 24 000 groups in 115 countries and also works with teenagers and drinking. For more information see: <http://www.al-anon.alateen.org/australia/>

It is interesting to consider again the overall context of this film—love. Lois often felt resentment during the development of AA, especially toward the male members of AA, because she felt her strong love and commitment should have solved his problem. This of course does not tell the whole story about change in a person's life, but the film helps one to understand that we cannot change people even if you love unconditionally and give them all your support. I was often reminded about Jesus' parables of grace and forgiveness, and how he taught us to pray: 'Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.'

Available from Heritage HM Film Distribution or your Christian retailer.

License to Kill (1984, TV Movie)

Noting the quote in my review above, I thought it was helpful to highlight this film that tells the story of the death of a teenage girl by a habitual drunken-driver. The film focuses on the reactions of the key figures, including the husband and wife of the daughter killed, and the husband who killed the daughter and his conflicted wife. While matters of faith feature in only a small way, the film provides an opportunity for people to consider how they would react themselves when such a tragedy occurs. It is also an early film for prominent actor Denzel Washington (*The Book of Eli*). He plays the over-worked public prosecutor. The film was inspired by true events in the late 1970s and early 1980s, an era that witnessed the introduction of a range of legislative initiatives in the USA designed to reduce drink-driving, particularly among teenagers.

Peter Bentley is the Executive Consultant for the ACC.