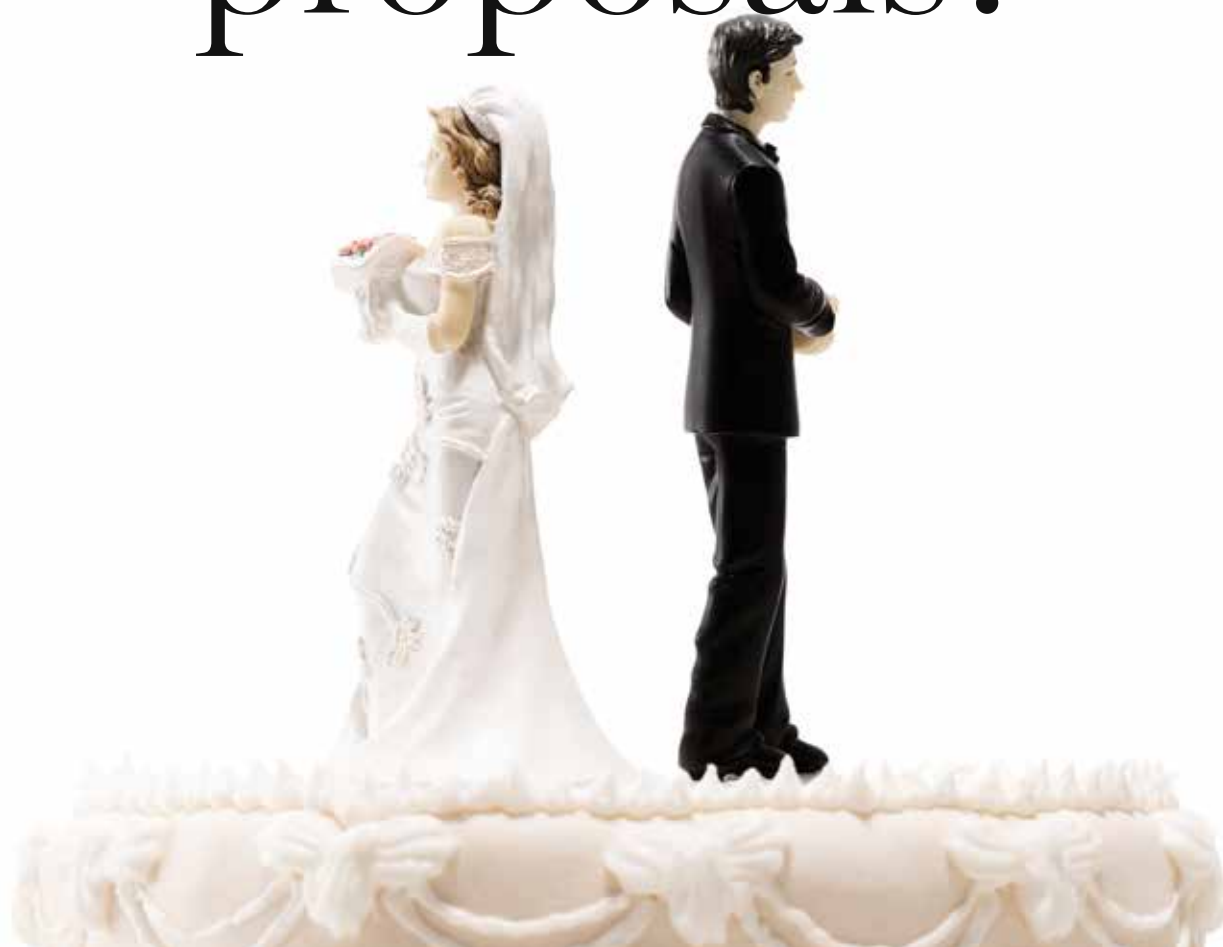


ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

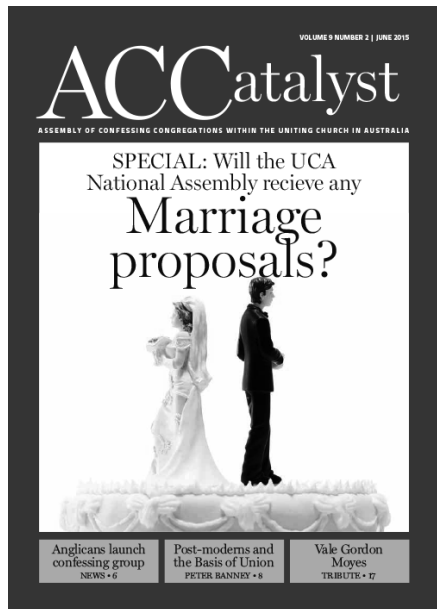
SPECIAL: Will the UCA
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proposals?**



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Cover photo Clarkandcomany/istockphoto.com

EDITORIAL

Taking a long view

I write this as the Assembly of Confessing Congregations waits for material about the UCA National Assembly, which is in a four-page special section in this magazine. How well the ACC fits into the Unit- ing Church may well be determined by the UCA assembly this July.

In the Confessing Movement part of this *ACCatalyst* we carry news of Anglicans building a lifeboat,

and US Presbyterians faced with a church that has accepted gay marriage. It seems to me that this could be a very longterm debate in the wider church.

Athanasius contra mundum (Athanasius against the world) comes to mind. Five times exiled, Athanasius, won the battle for orthodoxy. Eventually.

John Sandeman

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Tanglewood and Internet friends

Last night I was on the internet and got onto a favourite website of mine from a few years ago. Back then I was into internet Tanglewood. Tanglewood is a word game. It's like Boggle and you play against people from all over the world. In between games you chat with the other players.

There was a group of us who often used to be on at the same time, so we got to chat fairly often. We would discuss each other's personal problems and we became friends - sort of. Of course when you are chatting to people on the internet, they can't see you, you can remain anonymous. You can lie about who you are and no one will find out. It's a very safe way to make friends, because you don't have to open up and make yourself vulnerable.

But it does not really compare to true friendship, because in true friendship, people know all of your weaknesses and the things you would prefer to hide, and they love you anyway. With internet friendships, people only find out what you want them to find out.

As humans, what we desire are real friendships, where we can be ourselves and feel safe and loved

Hilary Sandeman



without having to pretend to be something we are not, and without having to hide our faults. The reason we desire friendships like that is because that is how God made us - to relate to one another and to him.

But we can treat God as if he's on a distant computer at the other end of a long phone line. We tell him what we think he wants to hear and we only let him into the parts of our lives that we think he will approve of. But that kind of relationship will never quite satisfy us. That's not a true relationship with God. God wants to be a part of all of our lives. He wants us to make ourselves vulnerable to him. He wants to love

us despite all of our weaknesses and shortcomings.

He wants to be a part of our most painful memories, and our greatest shame. He wants to be a part of the good times as well. That's true friendship, and God's friendship is the best there is. Whether we know him from a distance or know him up close is our choice to make.

But once we know God as a close and intimate friend, we will never want to go back to knowing him at a distance, because that will only ever be a poor substitute for the real thing.

Robyn Painter is the Pastor of Peterborough Uniting Church

Dr Dan: from Islam to Jesus

It was my third experience of the ministry of Dr Daniel Shayesteh. By chance (?), I had walked into the Adelaide Crusade Centre in 1996. In 2013 the Hope network (60 evangelical UCA congregations across SA, most also connected to the ACC) decided to invite Daniel to Adelaide as a part of his Australian tour. At the time I was based in Bordertown, and local churches hired a bus to travel to Adelaide to hear Daniel.

Daniel (pictured) was born into a Muslim family in Northern Iran. He was a radical Muslim leader in the Free Islamic Movement which helped the Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Fundamentalist government come to power. When he fell out of favour with the government he fled to Turkey and began an amazing journey to faith in Jesus Christ..

Daniel established the organisation "Exodus From Darkness" in 2000.

His mission is to lovingly respond

to those who do not know Jesus. His call to all is that they begin to "search for truth together". When we learned of his intention to return to Australia Hope Network decided to invite him again to Adelaide. The local ACC branch co-sponsored him.

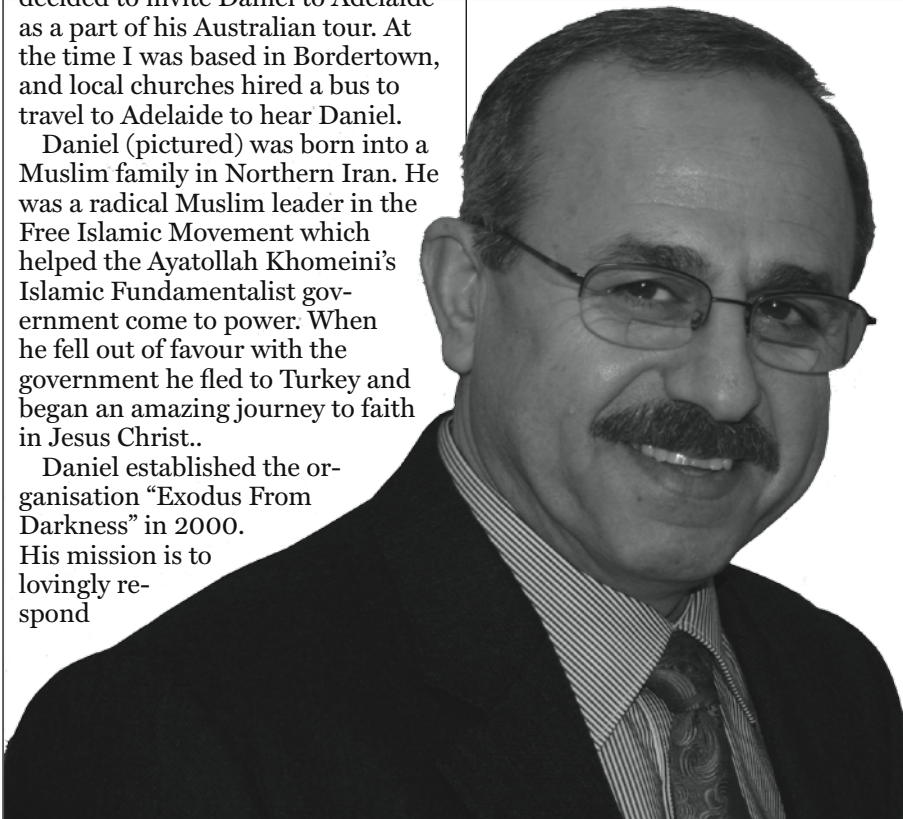
Lin and I had the privilege of again having Daniel stay with us. These days he resides in the USA and has a large satellite TV ministry.

This time there were three meetings. Balaklava, 90 kms North of Adelaide, drew many from surrounding Hope Net churches. Tea Tree Gully, a suburban UC featured the topic "Is it possible to deradicalise". At Coromandel Valley UC 340 gathered to hear the message of Daniel's personal journey. Daniel has, over the years had a few threats, and many warnings. Nevertheless he is both passionate and fearless about the faith.

For me the most telling part of the message is the emphasis on the personal nature of our relationship with our God through Jesus. For Daniel his discovery that the Christian God is Father, rather than master, was a real turning point. Again and again, he emphasises the personal nature of God in Christ.

He concludes his message with a photo of his wife, now called Mary, and three daughters, Janet, Cindy, and Debbie. A before shot with all in the traditional Hijab, and an after in jeans and T-shirt. Many were blessed by his ministry, as was I for the third time!!

Pastor Grant Jewell (ACC SA)



More leaders emerge

A highlight for SA ACC and the whole ACC was the Third Emerging Leaders Award Camp held over 4 days 29th Jan to 1st Feb. The planning team for the 3rd of these events included the instigator Rev Don Purdey (until his death in July), Pastor Mark Schultz (picked up the admin), Jill Schunke (prayer), Anneke van de Loo (bookstall), 5 former Awardees Malcolm Purdey and Dylan Agnew (2011), Kevin Marriot, Ellen Burford and Isaac Moore (2013) with Rod James as Convenor. Coming from rural congregations Clare, Balaklava and Minlaton and urban churches Burnside, Glenunga, Croydon United and Coro Valley they did a wonderful job!!

The event had 14 Awardees with one from St George (Qld), plus Glenunga, Golden Grove, Kangarilla,



Table group at the 2015 Emerging Leaders Award camp

Kangaroo Island, Minlaton, Port Augusta, Prospect Hill and Waikerie in SA. Speakers were Derek and Jodi Schiller, Simon Dent, Rod James and Mark Schultz. ACC SA is grateful to Rod James for his leadership of ELA

and he is pleased to know that Mark Schultz and Dylan Agnew will be responsible for ELA 2017 with other 2015 team members staying on Rod will continue to act as a resource to the group.



ci/sale /istockphoto.com

PUBLIC SQUARE

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

Responding to terrorism

“God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am ... the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’” (Ex 3:14-15)

Atrocities perpetrated by Islamic extremists have shaken our confidence that disputes can be resolved by reason. Conditioned to think that Australian values are universal, we try to blame their actions on religion, social isolation, economic hardship, Western imperialism or mental instability.

But the causes of this murderous evil lie much deeper. In our society, where belief in God is treated as a private matter, we cannot understand the dismay of Muslims at the failure of Christians to honour God’s name in every area of life. If we miss the fact that Islam believes that God is the Reality whose will is to be obeyed, we will be impotent to respond to this reign of terror.

We may set out to destroy this ‘extremist ideology,’ as world leaders promise, and trumpet the right to freedom of expression (as *Je suis Charlie* rallies call for). But, if we continue to believe that ‘God’ is not the One with whom we have to reckon in all things, but is the projection of our private needs, we will be blind to the challenges being posed to secular values and Christian faith.

Nothing that is said excuses the barbarity of the terrorists! They must be vigorously opposed. But their fanatical desire to restore the ancient Caliphate and honour Allah and his prophet Mohammed, must be understood theologically. If you believe that Islam is the completion and purification of Judaism and Christianity, it

makes ‘sense’ to wage war on those faiths.

We need to examine what it means for Muslims, Jews, Christians and secularists to believe in God. The three Abrahamic religions all believe in ‘One God’ who reveals himself as being unlike any other being. For Jews, the name of God, ‘I am who I am,’ is so holy that it can scarcely be said. For Christians God’s holiness is embodied in Christ, who said “I am the way, the truth and the life.” For Muslims Allah is the holiest name of all. All of them regard blasphemy as the greatest of sins!

In the secularist West this doesn’t make ‘sense’. Religions that originate with Abraham are treated with scorn. God is widely thought of, not as the awesome Creator and merciful Redeemer who calls us to new life, but as an ‘imaginary friend’ or a crutch for weak minds and timid wills. When Descartes said ‘I think, therefore I am’ he opened the way to think that ‘who I am’ is not determined by God (‘I am who I am’) but by what ‘I’ think about God.

In a multi-faith society that is tolerant of diverse beliefs about God, we are mystified and horrified by laws in some Islamic nations that set the death penalty for blasphemy against Allah and Mohammed.

The usual Western reaction against blasphemy laws and Jihadi violence is to argue for laws to uphold the right to ‘freedom of expression’ no matter how offensive. The catchcry ‘*Je suis Charlie*’ (‘I am Charlie’), that followed the brutal slaying of journalists at *Charlie Hebdo* newspaper in Paris, is typical.

This is a necessary but inadequate response. The freedom to express un-

popular views without fear of retribution is a vital part of a vibrant, open community. Sadly, Western societies, too, pass laws and create conditions that intimidate free speech. No-one is free to ‘blaspheme’ against ‘sacred values’ that pander to self-indulgent life-styles or self-righteous causes. Such people are ‘extremists’. The hypocrisy of shouting ‘I am Charlie’ to defend the right to mock Islam, and other monotheistic faiths, shouldn’t be missed. Those who offend believers in One God don’t usually extend the same right to them!

It’s not that the monotheistic faiths are united on God and faith. But it would be a huge mistake if we were to treat the evil perpetrated by ISIS, Boko Haram and others as irrational and totally foreign to Islam. While not all terrorists are committed Muslims, and many Muslims are appalled, the commitment to honour Allah and Mohammed and shape the whole of life by the teachings of the Qur’an is shared by all devout Muslims. All are aghast at the flippant attitude to blasphemy in Western nations.

Until Western societies understand the absolute priority of God’s will for Islamic faith and practice, we won’t get to the heart of the problem that has surfaced in these barbaric attacks. A society that thinks it can mock the Christian faith, which has profoundly shaped public life and institutions, must ask whether, like *Charlie Hebdo*, freedom to mock God is a sufficient basis for a flourishing society that will endure.

A Christian Church that has let its faith and life be marginalised, privatised and trivialised, must ask whether it still believes that ‘the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof’

(Ps 24:1). Do we have a vision of the Kingdom of God that has transformed the world through Christ's crucified-and-risen love? Are we so convinced that Jesus is 'the way, the truth and the life' (Jn 14:6) that we are prepared to promote a 'culture of life' for all?

Perhaps these atrocities are being used by God to awaken the Western Church? In the Bible, terrible events, in which God's goodness is violated, are sometimes the means by which the faithful have their eyes opened, their wills strengthened, and their hearts warmed. Certainly, we are being prodded to ask, not how can we survive in a society that treats Christianity as a private religion, but how can we live-out the Christian vision of a world where God is honoured and human dignity upheld.

Although Islam and Christianity have fought terrible battles, we share a deep dismay at how Western societies 'devalue' God's holy and gracious will. At the same time, the differences between us are great.

Blasphemy is condemned in Scripture. But in Christ the One accused of blasphemy embodies God's mercy. 'Father forgive them' (Lk 23:34); 'Love your enemies' (Mt 5:43-48); 'Do not repay evil for evil but overcome evil with good; Don't avenge yourselves but leave judgment to God (Rom 12:14ff).

In Christianity, the Kingdom of God is not identical with any earthly kingdom. The relation between Church and State, which involves separate functions and mutual criticism, is different from Islamic States where religion and politics are one and obedience to Allah is enforced. Christians are not called to make the State the Church but to witness to God's love before the power-brokers of the day. They are to speak the truth, resist evil, pray for enemies, and look forward to the new heaven and new earth.

Ultimately, the crucifixion of Jesus separates the two visions! In Islam it is blasphemous to believe that a holy prophet, or God himself, should be humiliated. Christ's power is displayed in triumphant suffering love. In him there is no ground for Holy Jihad to kill the infidel; simply a call to costly love. The political zealot Judas betrayed Jesus; Peter was told to put away his sword!

It follows that Christian teaching recognises that the pursuit of holiness, like unholiness, can stand in the way of honouring God. Jesus accused the Pharisees of hypocrisy because

they refused to welcome sinners. And he poked fun at religious pretension. Thus we are reminded that we are flawed creatures called to believe in God and not take ourselves too seriously, always remembering that there is a chasm between humour that is soul-searching and affectionate and satire that is vicious, demeaning and hedonistic!

There is a vision of reality not found

in the pursuit of Holy Jihad, as in extreme forms of Islam, or in the right to freedom of expression, as in the extreme secularism of Charlie Hebdo. This vision can be seen when we draw a cartoon that removes the self-righteous 'I' from 'Je Suis Charlie' so that it read 'Jesus, Charlie.' The vision of a truly human life willed by God is to be found in the One who laid down his life for all!

IAN CLARKSON

Did Jesus mention 'homosexuality'?

Responding to the disciples' shock at his strong statement on marriage faithfulness, Jesus replied that some men, by birth, don't have a desire for women and marriage. No problem, that is natural, if unusual and the word He used occurs many times¹ in early church (Patristic) literature.

It is a pity there isn't an acceptable English word for such men and their female counterpart. The Greek word in the Bible has lost its meaning. But most of us know men like this. They are often noted for their sensitivity and artistic qualities. As a father said to me recently of his son, "he is the one most likely to remember birthdays and sense what is most appreciated in a gift." I know of a church where two men living together non-sexually contribute much to their fellowship, but they are frequently pigeon-holed as homosexuals.

It is grossly unfair to attack these people for their celibacy whether it be natural or disciplined or both. This is a sacred thing and to sexualise such people and force the term homosexual upon them is abusive and wrong.

Our hope-starved culture terminates its interests in food and sex and when that fails, drugs. Little wonder suicide is skyrocketing and sexual connotations forced on young people to define their beings.

Some either struggle or as Rosaria Butterfield² suggests just continue in their homosexualising. But there comes a time of judgment for all of us who sin and when that time comes, grateful indeed are those who are found by the ever-loving Saviour.

Then comes what the Bible calls "sanctifying" the most real and significant work ever done

on planet earth whereby the Holy Spirit begins the work of character transformation in us sinners, even drawing our own cooperation into his work enabling us to say "such were some of us".

All sexual perversions and inversions are forgivable and changeable in this AD(year of our Lord) epoch. Notice the list of the fruit of the flesh in Colossians. The first is impurity and its counter, surprisingly, is compassion. So the promise of abundant life for us sexually impure, once obsessed and possessed with our own gratification, is a new extroversion - a holy outgoing of energy, a genuine feeling for others!

However, those who in unrepentance arrogantly and self-righteously pursue lawless living and force a re-defined law of marriage on society cut themselves off from what Scripture calls the Kingdom of God- the domain of peace, righteousness and joy.

This was glaring in the recent SBS coverage of the Mardi Gras. All who questioned the rightness of homosexual marriage were raged against with depictions of brain dead zombies, soon to be overwhelmed by the dance routine of the 'beautiful ones' with the commentator lauding "good has overcome evil".

Only Christ's transforming holy love turning lust into compassion can do that.

¹ The word Jesus uses in Matthew 19.12 is eunuchos. It occurs for the Ethiopian official in Acts and over 300 times in ante and post Nicene writings, mostly for castrates but in other cases for those who simply do not desire sexual relations with the opposite gender. Here Jesus implies something quite different from the word Paul uses in 1Corinthians 6.9 meaning 'male intercourse' But it was this distinction which turned the Greco Roman world on its ear and introduced a hitherto unknown possibility, the liberty of celibacy.
² <http://barbwire.com/2015/04/09/1100-the-dead-end-of-sexual-sin/>

'Break glass in case of emergency' Aussie Anglicans launch lifeboat

The Anglican Church of Australia now has a confessing movement, that resembles the assembly of Confessing Congregations. Just before Easter, the "Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans" (FCA) was launched at the "Anglican Future" conference in Melbourne.

In recent years, the issue of homosexuality has been tearing the Anglican Church apart, dividing members into conservative and liberal camps.

This issue has seen a split in the Episcopal Church in the US with the launch of the conservative Anglican Church in North America, and division in the worldwide Anglican Communion.

The official policy of the Anglican Church of Australia supports traditional marriage but the evangelicals and other conservatives see the need for an organisation that will stand against redefinition of marriage, and provide shelter if a local diocese acts in a way that causes people to leave Anglicanism.

The Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (FCA) is a fellowship that recognises Anglicans according to their doctrine, rather than by their historical practices.

"It's a fellowship of Anglicans who particularly subscribe to, who confess a particular statement of faith: the Jerusalem Declaration (a 16-point declaration of contemporary orthodox Anglicanism that tries to touch on some of the key issues in our world today)," says Richard Condie, Archdeacon of Melbourne and the chairman of FCA Australia's board.

Condie says the aim of the FCA is to "promote orthodox Anglican theology and practice in the Anglican Church of Australia and to bring life and vitality into churches".

In England, New Zealand and the United States, "we have seen an accommodation of the gospel message, especially around issues of sexuality" says Condie.

"There is an erosion of confidence in the truth of the Bible that has led to an erosion of teaching about sexuality, the uniqueness of Christ, the resurrection, about abortion, euthanasia, and all kinds of things, such that this is not recognisable as historic biblical Christianity.

"And there have been faithful people, faithful Anglicans, still sticking to the scriptures," says Condie. "What happens to people who still hold to the Bible's teaching? They suddenly become out of fellowship with their leaders. Who are they then in fellowship with?"

We are not at the same point in Australia, says Condie, but "many of us fear that a crisis is coming in the Australian Anglican Church, where one of our leaders – one of our Bishops – will step outside the bounds of orthodoxy".

Sexuality and the role of homosexual people in the leadership of the church is the presenting issue in the modern day. "That is probably the area we're going to fall over on, and at that moment it's going to be very hard for an orthodox Anglican who believes the Bible to accept the authority of their bishop when they teach that something that the Bible calls sin is not sin," says Condie.

"I would much rather go to the wall over the resurrection or over the uniqueness of Christ than I would over sexuality, but that happens to be the issue of our day."

"We have lost confidence in the authority of the Bible to let us know how we should live," says Condie. "The symptom is what we decide about human sexuality, but the cause is what we decide about the Bible, and the authority of the Bible. And Anglicans have always been Bible people.

"It is about being in fellowship with those people who are out of fellowship, it is about proactively creating discussion around orthodoxy, and then it is there as an emergency

organisation to swing into action to try and help people if and when something happens that is contrary to God's word."

FCA differs from ACC in that if necessary it will contain both conservatives within the Anglican Church and those who might wish to distance themselves from it in the future. This might reflect the fact that Australian Anglicans are in a very loose federation – any change passed at the national General Synod needs to be ratified by a local synod before it applies to that region. This means that conservative bulwarks like Sydney will remain conservative.

However the Anglican Futures conference was set up by local evangelicals in Melbourne – it was not a Sydney-controlled event.

Unlike the Uniting Church, the Anglican Church in this country appears to be moving in a conservative direction as a whole.

Tess Holgate and John Sandeman, Eternity News

US Presbyterians vote for gay marriage

Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) presbyteries have voted in favor of changing the denomination's definition of marriage so that same-sex weddings may be conducted by PCUSA pastors and in PCUSA churches.

The matter was decided on March 17, when the 86th vote – a majority of the PCUSA's 171 presbyteries – was cast and "Amendment 14F" was approved.

The vote officially changed the definition of marriage found in the PCUSA's constitution from being between "a man and a woman" to marriage being "a unique relationship between two people, traditionally a man and a woman."

LETTERS

Daily in your prayers

The PCUSA is the largest of a number of Presbyterian churches in the US, which has had a complicated history of Presbyterian splits and mergers. The Presbyterian Church of America (similar to Australia's Presbyterians), the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (which ordains women) are among a number of Presbyterian churches with a traditional view of marriage.

Some of the PCUSA's larger churches have voted to leave the denomination in recent years.

While change does not go into effect until June 21, 2015, the General Assembly approved an Authoritative Interpretation in June, 2014, that allows PCUSA pastors to conduct same-sex weddings in states where it is legal, until that date. So same-sex marriages can and are being legally conducted now in the PCUSA.

Voting will continue until all of the PCUSA presbyteries weigh in on the matter. Some presbyteries who voted one way in 2010-2011 on the issue of ordaining lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) as deacons, elders and pastors in the PCUSA (called Amendment 10A), have reversed their vote on same-sex marriage (Amendment 14F). In some cases this reflects the impact of conservative churches leaving the PCUSA-the voting balance in "Swing" presbyteries has shifted.

layman.org

Greetings in Christ's wonderful Name. I have been reading the latest edition of *ACC Catalyst*, how refreshing, what a blessing! Much of the literature we are now receiving from the UCA has the name Jesus replaced with God, and Salvation/Blood of Christ replaced with Social Justice. Social Justice is and should be part of the Church's mission, but Christ comes first.

However at Advent 2014 I received a booklet titled "We Have Seen a Great Light". Then last month a Lenten Study booklet came to me from an ACC member titled "Our Friend the Son of God" with daily readings from 18th February to 5th April 2015. Both publications are excellent and uplifting of Jesus' name and His love for us.

Be assured that every member of the Executive is daily in my prayers. May God bless you as you strive to bring about reform within the UCA, which will be a difficult task.

Graham Weatherhead, Victoria)

Too Radical

Since my last comment it has come to mind that the suggestions I made to defeat liberalism are too late to be effective next Assembly.

Desperate times require desperate action. My present thoughts are to have every Evangelical, who has a mind to resign from UCA as I have, should Assembly approve blessing same-gender unions, to send an email to Assembly advising so. To ensure the protest is noted, 'the emails be sent on the same day'. Too Radical?

Jack Waddell.

"Je Suis Charlie" and all that

When the siege in Paris occurred, I wanted to go around saying "Je suis Charlie", because I saw the incident as a violent attack on free speech. I have been concerned for some time about free speech in Australia, particularly the unreasonableness of our "hate speech" legislation. You don't need to be a psychologist to recognise that some people can be "insulted" or "offended" very easily. If a person were accused of insulting or offending by a very sensitive or unreasonable other, they could then find themselves in a lot of trouble. I must admit that I was in favour of George Brandis' changes to that legislation, but unfortunately they weren't passed.

But the issue is more complicated than just about free speech. As Christians, we are also concerned about the blasphemy issue, adding another level of complexity. I have to admit that I don't like blasphemy. I hate the way that no-one in TV shows can get angry without taking the name of Jesus Christ in vain. I stopped watching Woody Allen movies a long time ago for the same reason. And I get upset by the way that blasphemy seems to be OK in western society as long as it is directed at the Christian God and his son, Jesus Christ, but not at Muhammad or Buddha or Hindu gods. What's going on here?

Pat Noller



Uniting Church

The Basis of Union, managers, post-moderns, and what went wrong: Rev Peter Banney a retired UCA minister responds to *ACCatalyst* discussions on the Future of the UCA. Katherine Abetz joins in on page 15.

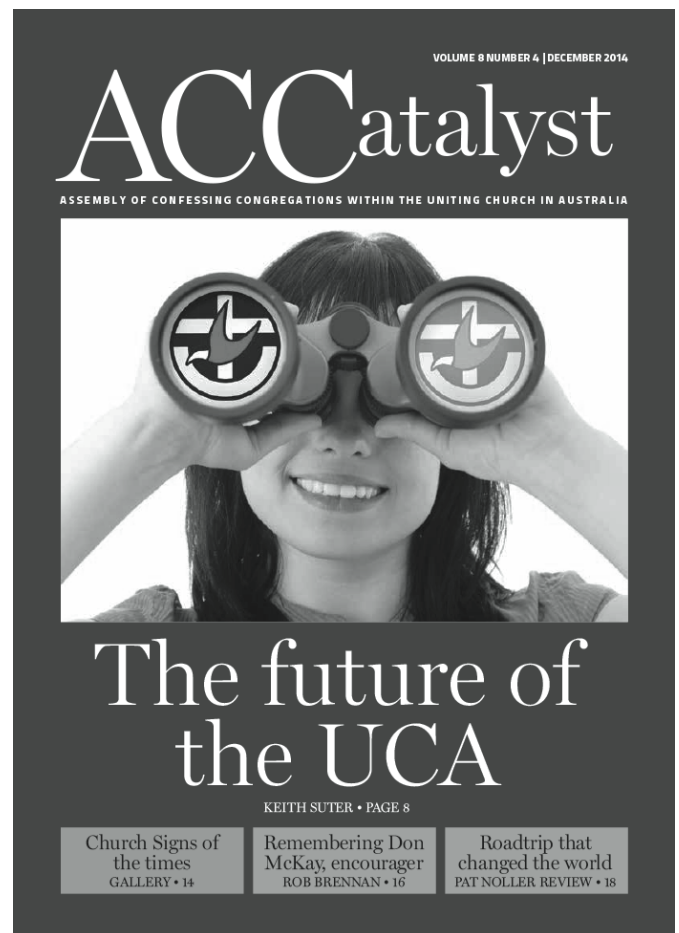
The Uniting Church in Australia is very pleased to announce the arrival of thorough-bred triplets and welcomes them warmly into the fold: Flexibility, Diversity and Permission-Giving, sired by Management Theory out of Incompetent Theology. Mother is blooming; father is incredibly proud but the God-parent, the UCA, is in intensive care in shock with multiple organ failure.

Obviously this troublesome trio did not appear at a single stroke as triplets should but they come with the specific blessing of Assemblies about a decade ago. It is no wonder that the UCA now finds itself in what I have dubbed the condition of 'amorphous congregationalism' where congregations, by and large, have given up on what the 'higher' councils have to say and are busy about their own local agenda which, in many cases, is simply survival. We have legislated for disorder and thus compromised our unique calling.

The Raison d'Etre of the UCA

The clear statement of the aim of the exercise is basic to any such analysis. At the outset, I should declare my idea of the purpose for which the UCA came into existence and I think that it squares with what is stated in the Basis of Union. It was my understanding that this was a prophetic declaration in ecclesiology, one that had very serious evangelical intention on the broadest canvas. We were called to stand in the midst of the increasing denominational chaos to bear witness to that unity which is both Christ's will and his gift to the Church (Para.1, B.of U.) and we were to seek, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, further unions to the glory of God (Para.18), *all of this so that the world might believe ...* (John 17:23). Therein is the evangelical outcome of the unity of the Church.

In 1981 and in the course of a fairly intense debate in which I was engaged, I wrote a letter in which I said to the recipient, "The UCA lives to die in the cause of that (i.e. Christian) unity". I was quite wrong. The rumours of that death have been greatly exaggerated, to quote Mark



Cover illustration nullplus/istockphoto.com

Twain approximately. We decided to live for ourselves (we are an enthusiastically self-congratulatory church, perhaps like the architects at Babel!) and in such a way that we have alienated the rest of the Christian world to the point that no one now really wants to talk to us. We have become a 'vocation-less pseudo-denomination' marked by what I have dubbed an amorphous congregationalism.

The Basis of Union

It is my view that the key to the problem is the failure to recognize the fundamental significance of the Basis of Union. Clearly, the 'legalist' position is very problematical but not nearly as dangerous as the 'inverse legalism' (the progeny of Diversity, Flexibility and Permission-Giving) that emasculates the Basis of Union, killing it softly by maintaining that it is 'only a guideline'. But surely a document that was the result of so much intense and prayerful effort over decades prior to the union should be seen in another light entirely, in fact, as the letter of the Spirit to the UCA for its continuing life. It is a document

or just local

that, under the guidance of the Spirit and in the light of the Scriptures, should have provided stability, order and, most significantly, direction in its vocation for the long haul - as all of the early Presidents agreed.

So what went wrong?

The Rise of the 'Post-Modernists': from 'Pastocracy' to Bureaucracy

Because of the suggestion in the "Proposed Basis of Union" that an episcopate would be a key element in the polity of the UCA, the paragraph on governance was studied as intensely as those on scripture and baptism in this document and, again, in the final, revised version (from which, sadly, the office of Bishop-in-Presbytery had been eliminated).

Nevertheless, it was this paragraph that proved to be the focal point of the attack on this foundational instrument with the creation of the one Church Council, a hybrid without a theological leg for support.

Apart from that key failure, there were several things wrong with this incredibly bad decision of the Assembly. In the first place, in a non-hierarchical system of much-vaunted inter-related councils, by what authority does one or a combination of other councils determine to eliminate another?

Secondly, this was the greatest insult that could be offered to that order of ministry that established the place of the laity in the pastoral leadership and care of the flock.

Thirdly, this was basically a breach of covenant with those Presbyterians who had entered the UCA on the polity described in the Basis of Union, members who would not have voted for the union had the one Church Council model (instead of the Council of Elders) been written into the contract.

This was a triumph of management theory over sound theology and there are two clear implications of this decision. First, the whole of the Basis of Union is thereby compromised. If this thoroughly rehearsed paragraph is not beyond revision, what else in it might be seen as in need of modernizing? (After all, as one of our Presidents said some years ago, the Basis of Union is thirty years old and really only speaks to Melbourne and Sydney situations!!) And, most significantly, the creation of the Church Council moved the UCA from a 'pastocracy' (i.e. pastorally informed leadership) to a bureaucracy. Some congregations even took the ultimate management step and essentially replaced the Church Council with a small executive. Wonderfully efficient but completely, absolutely, missing the point - as does the Church Council itself.

The Catalogue of our Sins

There have been several points at which we have shown our determination to play the game our UCA way without sisterly ecumenical consultation and the result has

I suspect that if the UCA does not seek to recover the vocational vision that fired our patriarchs and the first generation of members - this broad-canvas, Kingdom-oriented, prophetic role - and recover it in a spirit of penitence, confessing, particularly, its hubris, it will become the 'silly salt' of Matthew 5:13.

been that we find ourselves without serious partners in dialogue that might lead to further unions.

- Filioque: The first faux pas was the elimination of 'filioque' ('and the Son') from the Nicene Creed. For no real benefit, whether theological or evangelical, this took us out of the sphere of the Western Church (where there is the possibility, slim as it appears to be, of productive ecumenical dialogue) into the world of Orthodox/Eastern Christianity where there is virtually no chance of useful exchange. (The Orthodox never accepted filioque.)

- Polity: Then there was the issue of polity (above) which puts us in a kind of no-man's land in discussions with the historic traditions and with those who might want to know what we currently claim to be the theological basis of the governance of our church.

- The Sexuality Debate, pursued largely on our own terms and yet to be brought to any conclusion, has frightened conservative traditions and disappointed others.

- The Preamble: The recently adopted 'Preamble' (notably Para.3) to the Constitution is so patently a confession of guilt-ridden sociology/anthropology dressed up as theology that it, too, must be quite off-putting to those who are wanting to engage in dialogue with a church committed to serious theology. While this certainly does not mean that long generations of native peoples are eternally lost, the Australian aborigines along with the aborigines of every nation except Israel were strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world (Ephes. 2:12). There can be no special pleading for the Australian aborigine, nor for the rest of us.

FUTURE OF THE UCA 1



I write as one of a disappearing race. ... I was one of the delegates to the Inaugural Assembly.

Together, we depend on the mercy of God who, in Jesus Christ, has 'gone back to the beginning of things' in order to unite all things in him. Ephesians 1: 9,10)

• **Worship:** As David Gill said many years ago, we are at our very worst on Sunday mornings, not at morning tea after church but in the liturgical enterprise, the act of corporate worship. It hasn't improved over the decades! Karl Barth and Pope Benedict (they can't both be wrong!) recognized ordered, Triune-God-centred, corporate worship as that event in which the true nature of Church and Gospel can properly be discerned. We need to do a lot of work on what is becoming a horizontal exercise in the congregation's celebration of itself, an activity that, as Cardinal Ratzinger observed, is utterly fruitless. We need urgently to recover the combination of sound, informed evangelical preaching with weekly 'real presence' sacramental celebration and halt the slide into personality-centred 'entertainment', the horizontal exercise.

So we have shot ourselves in the feet and in the knees and a few other places so that, specifically as the Unit-ing Church in Australia, regarding our unique vocation in God and its prosecution, we have no future. We are just another confused exercise in survival in the midst of denominational chaos.

Critique of Recent Articles

I write as one of a disappearing race. As a fairly recently ordained Presbyterian minister, I was one of the delegates to the Inaugural Assembly nearly forty years ago so these issues are close to my heart. I remember the great struggle prior to union and the joy with which the promise that the UCA held was celebrated around the nation at its inauguration. I am grieved to contemplate its present state. So these articles by Keith Suter and Walter Abetz should be received with gratitude because, potentially, they will provide the opportunity for serious reflection on solutions to the very complex situation that we have created.

Keith Suter does us a great service by writing clearly as a sociologist and giving us some serious food for thought from 'outside', options that that discipline suggests. That comes as a wake-up call! Naturally, we want to approach the problem from a different perspective and I am sure that he understands that very clearly. But even from the Christian perspective, we may well borrow some ideas from him and 'baptize' them into the faith.

And all power to Walter Abetz for going in to bat for

the Basis of Union and for recognising that someone, or half-dozen, in the Assembly suddenly stumbled across management theory a couple of decades back. In 1999, I made reference to the dangers posed by the Assembly's discovery of management theory and in 2002, in a formal response to the Assembly's 'Discussion Paper' about Elders and the Church Council, I made the point that the Church Council suggestion gave "undue emphasis to principles derived from management theory at the expense of pastorally based theories". Consistently, since that time, I have been complaining, in letters to the President and General Secretary of the secularisation of our polity with the clear and quite inappropriate application of management concepts to theological/pastoral issues in the life of the church.

But I am uneasy about Walter Abetz's view that good governance is simply about ensuring that things are done 'decently and in order'. John Calvin would disagree vehemently (Institutes: IV iii 2) as I do. Also, the incipient congregationalism in his article is problematical and requires further comment.

However, most significantly, I really don't think that he has 'lined up the ducks' (to use his words) as they appear in the Basis of Union, a failure especially apparent in his enthusiasm for 'faith communities'. Again I say, the Basis is essentially an ecclesiological statement but one with a serious evangelical purpose. The problem is that we have been so unhappily led and have degenerated into such a disordered condition (of which faith communities are a clear symptom) that, right now, we have no serious future as a *Uniting* church.

At this moment, one minute to midnight for the UCA, I keep recalling some words from the First Report of the JCCU. Considering the broken nature of the Body of Christ and the contribution to that fragmentation made by the three denominations negotiating the union, nor for the rest of us. our patriarchs offered this warning. We come, the Report said, "confessing to God and to one another the partial character of our vision, the confusion of our preaching, the poverty of our worship and the weakness of our fellowship. If we cannot come confessing our sins *we had better not come at all*". (p.31, my emphasis). The terms of that confession, each one, remain painfully relevant to our present condition.

Quo Vadis, UCA?

So where does the UCA go from here?

If it wants to go anywhere as a *Unit-ing* Church, the answer lies, in my view, in a far more fundamental struggle than has been suggested in the previous articles.

I suspect that if the UCA does not seek to recover the vocational vision that fired our patriarchs and the first generation of members - this broad-canvas, Kingdom-oriented, prophetic role - and recover it in a spirit of penitence, confessing, particularly, its hubris, it will become the 'silly salt' of Matthew 5:13. If we cannot come confessing our waywardness, we had better not come at all

That, I believe, is the starting point for the renewal we seek: a reclaiming of our specific vocation in God with the very serious penitential acknowledgement that we are a broken instrument. In that spirit, we may know the truth that it is God who has torn that he may heal.

Marriage at the crossroads

A Letter provided to ACC Individual Supporting Members and Members in ACC Members congregations, groups and clusters.

Greetings to you all,

I am writing on behalf of the ACC National Council to advise you that the final report and recommendations from the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) on 'The Theology of marriage and Public covenants for Same-Gender relationships within the Uniting Church' has now been released.

On a positive note, there is no proposal arising from the report asking the Church to endorse 'public covenants' for people in same-gender relationships, or, for the church to redefine marriage. It simply points to the need for more work to be done on 'The Bible and Marriage' and 'Theological discernment in the Uniting Church'. There is a further proposal to consider establishing a 'Task group' to begin investigations (possibly in an ecumenical context) 'into the implications of changing the church's current relationship with the Commonwealth Government with respect to the conduct of marriages'. The report highlights the situation in some European countries "in which Ministers do not act as agents of the state in performing marriages. In such arrangements all marriages are civic rites, and couples may subsequently request a service of Christian blessing if they wish" p. 5). This would be a very significant change
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Reports to the Fourteenth Assembly - The Uniting Church in Australia

The report from the Task Group on the Theology of marriage and Public Covenants for Same-Gender Relationships within the Uniting Church (B23) can be downloaded along with the other Assembly papers from the 14th Assembly website: <http://assembly2015.uca.org.au/proposals-and-reports/>

The Proposals on Marriage and Same gender relationships are included below for the information of ACC members.

Proposals: That the Assembly

1. receive the report on 'The theology of marriage and same gender relationships within the Uniting Church';
2. affirm that Ministers continue to be free to accept or refuse requests to celebrate marriages within the constraints of the Marriage Act 1961 (CTH);
3. request the Standing Committee to explore how the UAICC and CALD communities can engage in further discussions about marriage and same-gender issues in culturally appropriate ways; and
4. request the Standing Committee to:
 - (a) establish a Task Group to investigate the implications of changing the Church's current relationship with the Commonwealth Government with respect to the conduct of marriages;
 - (b) set appropriate Terms of Reference for this work, allowing for an exploration of the possibilities that this work may be undertaken in consultation with our ecumenical partners; and
 - (c) report, with appropriate recommendations, to the Fifteenth Assembly.



Vigilant and Prayerful

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within our society and clearly needs further theological consideration.

Part (a) then of the decision of the 13th Assembly to affirm the statement of marriage by the 8th Assembly remains in the fore. In affirming our 1997 position on marriage, the Assembly does not simply 'note' a past – and implicitly outdated – state of affairs. It 'acknowledges the current position on marriage.' That is to say, it affirms marriage between a man and a woman as a fundamental Christian belief akin to 'acknowledging' or 'confessing' the Lordship of Christ' (as in the Basis of Union).

I ask that all members and congregations of ACC ... remain calm, prayerful and not to make any hasty decisions

The negative side is that other proposals of a more radical nature could still be submitted from other parts of the Church or the Assembly to be considered by the National Assembly. We therefore still need to be vigilant and prayerful at all times.

It is disappointing that in report to the 14th Assembly, the ACC's response to the debate is inadequately summarised as being "largely devoted to the critique of the UiW2 service, arguing that it is a weakening of the theol-

ogy of marriage in Uniting in Worship 1" (p.4). This again fails to "represent the serious theological concerns raised by the Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the UCA and other orthodox groups, especially in relation to the misinterpretation of Scripture and the Gnostic presuppositions of Sacred Union Ceremonies that bless same-sex unions" (2014 ACC response to Assembly p. 8).

As we approach the 14th Assembly 12-18 July 2015, I ask that all members and congregations of ACC including other UCA congregations who share our convictions on this matter remain calm, prayerful and not to make any hasty decisions should the National Assembly act contrary to the clear witness of Scripture by endorsing the blessing or the solemnising of same-gender relationships.

Be assured that the ACC continues to be committed to upholding the faith of the Uniting Church outlined in its Basis of Union, and that maintaining the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church is of utmost concern.

I invite you to attend our National ACC Conference 14-16 September 2015 at Nunyara Conference Centre: Adelaide - "Confessing Christ in a diverse Church", where we will continue to prayerfully reflect on our situation within the UCA. Please join us for this important meeting during what is a significant time in our history as a Church.

Grace and peace.

Hedley Fihaki

ACC Chair and on behalf of the ACC National Council

Christ, Marriage and the Un

Rod James

For Christians, human marriage is grounded in Christ. He is the great bridegroom who laid down his life for his bride. The church, then, is the bride of the Lamb, and these two are in a love union as husband and wife. Husbands and wives are therefore to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church, and wives are to honour their husbands.

Since all things have been created in, through and for Christ, this understanding is held to be true of all human marriages. Marriage is thus ontologically heterosexual, involving one man and one woman in life-long union. Such union is the ontologically ideal environment in which children can grow up in familial relationship with both their mother and their father, both

of whom are fundamentally important for their child's development as a man/husband/father or a woman/wife/mother.

To move away from this basic understanding of marriage is to move away from Christ. If a Christian denomination were to separate itself from this understanding of marriage it would be separating itself from Christ. By abiding in Christ the church bears much fruit, but if a denominational church does not abide in Christ it will be 'thrown away like a branch and will wither'.

Within the breadth of the Uniting Church there are a number of groupings of congregations which hold to the reformed/evangelical faith confessed in the Basis of Union. For these groupings the above understanding of marriage is so integral to their faith in Christ that the two are inseparable. Were the Uniting Church to move away from its current biblical understanding of marriage these groupings of congregations would be led by

Making sense of Scripture's 'Inconsistency'

Tim Keller

I find it frustrating when I read or hear columnists, pundits, or journalists dismiss Christians as inconsistent because “they pick and choose which of the rules in the Bible to obey.” Most of ten I hear, “Christians ignore lots of Old Testament texts---about not eating raw meat or pork or shellfish, not executing people for breaking the Sabbath, not wearing garments woven with two kinds of material and so on. Then they condemn homosexuality. Aren't you just picking and choosing what you want to believe from the Bible?”

I don't expect everyone to understand that the whole Bible is about Jesus and God's plan to redeem his people, but I vainly hope that one day someone will access their common sense (or at least talk to an informed theolog-

ical adviser) before leveling the charge of inconsistency.

First, it's not only the Old Testament that has prescriptions about homosexuality. The New Testament has plenty to say about it as well. Even Jesus says, in his discussion of divorce in Matthew 19:3-12, that the original design of God was for one man and one woman to be united as one flesh, and failing that (v. 12), persons should abstain from marriage and sex.

However, let's get back to considering the larger issue of inconsistency regarding things mentioned in the Old Testament no longer practiced by the New Testament people of God. Most Christians don't know what to say when confronted about this issue. Here's a short course on the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament.

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Uniting Church

the Holy Spirit to hold fast to Christ rather than to the Uniting Church as an organisation.

These groupings include EL250 congregations (i.e. congregations over 250 attenders), ACC congregations, PNEUMA congregations (Pastoral Network of Evangelicals Uniting in Mission Action, Western Australia), 3D Network congregations (South Australia), Hope Network congregations (South Australia), Migrant Ethnic Conferences of congregations (e.g. in the Chinese, Tongan, Samoan, Fijian, Korean, Sudanese, etc.), and Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress congregations. Beyond these groupings there are many reformed/evangelical congregations who hold to Christ with similar convictions. I estimated that 90% of UCA people under the age of 50 belong to congregations in one of the above groupings.

In the last decade the Uniting Church has lost many members and congregations and downsized itself as a

result of its ongoing controversies over sexuality. In all of this, though, the above congregations have found significant assurance in the Church's doctrine of marriage (stated by the 1997 Assembly in Perth) that “Marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life”. However, should the Uniting Church decide to depart from this biblical doctrine the above congregations would almost certainly hold fast to Christ and distance themselves from the Uniting Church.

In summary, it is Jesus Christ who defines marriage. If the Uniting Church were to depart from his definition it would separate itself from Christ and, sadly, consign itself to the dustbin of church history.

Rod James is Secretary of the ACC

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MARRIAGE SPECIAL

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The Old Testament devotes a good amount of space to describing the various sacrifices offered in the tabernacle (and later temple) to atone for sin so that worshipers could approach a holy God. There was also a complex set of rules for ceremonial purity and cleanness. You could only approach God in worship if you ate certain foods and not others, wore certain forms of dress, refrained from touching a variety of objects, and so on. This vividly conveyed, over and over, that human beings are spiritually unclean and can't go into God's presence without purification.

Because of Christ, the ceremonial law is repealed. Because of Christ, the church is no longer a nation-state imposing civil penalties. It all falls into place.

But even in the Old Testament, many writers hinted that the sacrifices and the temple worship regulations pointed forward to something beyond them (cf. 1 Sam. 15:21-22; Ps. 50:12-15; 51:17; Hos. 6:6). When Christ appeared he declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19), and he ignored the Old Testament cleanliness laws in other ways, touching lepers and dead bodies.

The reason is clear. When he died on the cross the veil in the temple tore, showing that he had done away with the need for the entire sacrificial system with all its cleanliness laws. Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice for sin, and now Jesus makes us clean.

The entire book of Hebrews explains that the Old Testament ceremonial laws were not so much abolished as fulfilled by Christ. Whenever we pray "in Jesus name" we "have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus" (Heb. 10:19). It would, therefore, be deeply inconsistent with the teaching of the Bible as a whole if we continued to follow the ceremonial laws.

Law Still Binding

The New Testament gives us further guidance about how to read the Old Testament. Paul makes it clear in places like Romans 13:8ff that the apostles understood the Old Testament moral law to still be binding on us. In short, the coming of Christ changed how we worship, but not how we live. The moral law outlines God's own character---his integrity, love, and faithfulness. And so everything the Old Testament says about loving our neighbor, caring for the poor, generosity with our possessions, social relationships, and commitment to our family is still in force. The New Testament continues to forbid killing or committing adultery, and all the sex ethic of the Old Testament is re-stated throughout the New Testament (Matt. 5:27-30; 1 Cor. 6:9-20; 1 Tim. 1:8-11). If the New Testament has reaffirmed a commandment, then it is still in force for us today.

The New Testament explains another change between the testaments. Sins continue to be sins---but the penalties change. In the Old Testament sins like adultery or incest were punishable with civil sanctions like execu-



tion. This is because at that time God's people constituted a nation-state, and so all sins had civil penalties.

But in the New Testament the people of God are an assembly of churches all over the world, living under many different governments. The church is not a civil government, and so sins are dealt with by exhortation and, at worst, exclusion from membership. This is how Paul deals with a case of incest in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 5:1ff. and 2 Cor. 2:7-11). Why this change? Under Christ, the gospel is not confined to a single nation---it has been released to go into all cultures and peoples.

Once you grant the main premise of the Bible---about the surpassing significance of Christ and his salvation---then all the various parts of the Bible make sense. Because of Christ, the ceremonial law is repealed. Because of Christ, the church is no longer a nation-state imposing civil penalties. It all falls into place. However, if you reject the idea of Christ as Son of God and Savior, then, of course, the Bible is at best a mishmash containing some inspiration and wisdom, but most of it would have to be rejected as foolish or erroneous.

So where does this leave us? There are only two possibilities. If Christ is God, then this way of reading the Bible makes sense. The other possibility is that you reject Christianity's basic thesis---you don't believe Jesus is the resurrected Son of God---and then the Bible is no sure guide for you about much of anything. But you can't say in fairness that Christians are being inconsistent with their beliefs to follow the moral statements in the Old Testament while not practicing the other ones.

One way to respond to the charge of inconsistency may be to ask a counter-question: "Are you asking me to deny the very heart of my Christian beliefs?" If you are asked, "Why do you say that?" you could respond, "If I believe Jesus is the resurrected Son of God, I can't follow all the 'clean laws' of diet and practice, and I can't offer animal sacrifices. All that would be to deny the power of Christ's death on the cross. And so those who really believe in Christ must follow some Old Testament texts and not others."

This article is provided with permission and links are on the ACC website. It originally appeared in Redeemer Presbyterian Church's monthly Redeemer Report. (June 2012) and is available on-line at <http://www.timothykeller.com/blog/2012/6/12/old-testament-law-and-the-charge-of-inconsistency>

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Faith, order and two glass slippers

Katherine Abetz on the UCA's disregard for its *Basis of Union*

A vivid image appears in Michael Griffiths' recent book *Cinderella with Amnesia*. He sees the church huddling and forgetful of her destiny, like Cinderella dressed in the borrowed rags of the world, warming herself before the dying embers of our culture. Will she turn and recognise the invitation to take her rightful place at the side of her prince? Will she remember to what and to whom she has been called? Will she receive again her identity from the king and the kingdom that awaits her?¹

Humanly speaking, it wouldn't take much to make a church. You might need a fairy godmother or two to whip up a coach (read Constitution), horses with plumes (trendy regulations), footmen to stand behind the coach (that's what Standing Committees are for, isn't it?) and some reliable boffins to drive the thing (what were they in another life?) But of course there's a sunset clause to the whole scenario. Or a midnight clause to be exact.

This kind of thinking rests on the assumption that the members of the Joint Commission on Church Union were a bunch of fairy godmothers, waving a wand to make a church. If the *Basis of Union* is just a human document, it's no wonder some people think it's out of date and time for a replacement. (The Best of British to getting consensus to anything else!) But what if it isn't just a human document? What if there is a real prince who really wants the Uniting Church at his side and the Basis bears witness to that? That's a different story.

Or perhaps it's the same story read carefully. It was the glass slipper that survived the charade at the ball. Two glass slippers in fact. When the two were reunited, the prince found Cinderella. The two go together, as faith and order go together in the *Basis*. But do they go together in the polity of the Uniting Church? Recently, the Assembly General Secretary, Terence Corkin wrote to the Presbytery of Tasmania that Clause 2 of the Constitution which states that the Uniting Church is guided by the *Basis of Union* "should not be read to mean that the Constitution requires that the Assembly Legal Reference Committee use the *Basis of Union* as a superior document"². The Constitution is not to be read in this way? Who is reading what and how? Are the Constitution, regulations, Standing Committees, coachmen and all their retinue (including the Legal Reference Committee) detached from the witness of the *Basis*? What does this say about how faith and order go together?³

Let's be clear about this. The Assembly and other councils are authorized to make regulations and rules that are "not inconsistent" with the Constitution.⁴ But apparently there is no requirement in church law that the Constitu-

tion is 'not inconsistent' with the Basis. Having outlined this lack of obligation, the General Secretary's letter attributes an unspecified supervisory role to the Assembly. He continues, 'Rather, Clause 2 has in mind a much wider range of circumstances where the church is influenced by its *Basis of Union*, as it should be'. (Influenced perhaps, but not required to be guided under church law. This is to sever the link between faith and order; one wonders then about the fate of the much wider range of circumstances, given the regulations that govern them.) But all, apparently, is not lost. The General Secretary writes: 'If the church is concerned that the Constitution does not satisfactorily reflect the values, preferred processes and commitments of the *Basis of Union* then it may change the Constitution and Regulations to resolve that concern'. (The church may change its order to reflect the *Basis* but it is not obliged to do so.)

In the story of the Uniting Church, the lack of obligation to be guided by the *Basis* was the technical finding of a past president. But Clause 2 was inserted into the Constitution by the Assembly in 1997, as we thought, to rectify a technical anomaly. According to the General Secretary, we were wrong. The anomaly remains. Where his finding stands in church law and what further anomalies it entails are another matter. This kind of interpretation (and let us remember that it is an interpretation) is not conducive to a church worthy of the name. (But if it is a technical glitch the solution would seem simple. No need to change the Constitution or regulations. The Assembly could reflect the values, preferred processes and commitments of the *Basis of Union* by inserting the Basis as a source document in the mandate of the Assembly Legal Reference Committee.)

Meanwhile Cinderella has dropped her glass slipper on the stairs of the palace. Beware midnight, Uniting Church!

Katherine Abetz (ACC member in Tasmania)

1. See Clive Skews "Have we lost the vision?" in ed. W. & K. Abetz, *Swimming between the Flags: Reflections on the Basis of Union* (Bendigo: Middle Earth Press, 2002), 194-195.

2. The letter is dated 3rd December 2014. As the General Secretary explains, the letter is a response to my contention that there is a difference of intent between the amendment to the Constitution, Clause 39 and the Basis § 15 (e) [Cf. "Assemblies like all other councils can err; and on important matters it is therefore necessary that the Assembly should be prevented from acting without correction or concurrence of the wider body of the faithful." J. Davis McCaughey, *Commentary on the Basis of Union* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1980), 93].

3. Clause 2 impinges on the ecumenical standing of the Uniting Church: 'The Church ... lives and works within the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic church, guided by its Basis of Union'.

4. The Constitution, Clauses 62-64.

5. Does the wider Uniting Church have the power to do so? Are we not looking here at an infallible Assembly? Cf. note 2 above and the letter to the ACC of 3rd November 2011 from the Assembly Legal Reference Committee that states that the Constitution, Clause 39 (b) 'was not intended to, nor does it, give power to other councils to designate, independently of the Assembly, that certain matters are "a matter vital to the life of the church"'.
6. Presidential Ruling 13, 1992. Cf. however statement by Norman Young, Convenor of the Methodist members of the Joint Commission on Church Union: 'Had I not been certain that the constitution would have to continue to be in accord with the *Basis*, not only in fact but as a legal requirement, I would not have given the assurance [at the point of Union] ... that the *Basis* would be the charter for the ongoing life of the Uniting Church.' (from 'What was the intention of those people who framed the Basis of Union', *The status, authority and role of the Basis of Union within the Uniting Church in Australia*, published by the Assembly, October, 1995.)

7. The General Secretary's letter states that the Legal Reference Committee 'has a quite specific and narrow role in assisting the Assembly and President to interpret the Constitution and Regulations as law'. What then is the status of the Preamble in church law? Unless it is argued to form part of the Constitution, it stands outside the alleged narrow role of the Committee. If so, how does the Committee assist in Presidential Rulings in which the President must note the Preamble (Clause 71)?

EMERGING LEADERS



2015's Emerging leaders, with their leaders

A legacy of love for the church

I had the privilege of being invited to the ACC Emerging Leaders Award Camp earlier this year. The camp, conceived by the late Rev. Don Purdey, brings together young leaders nominated by ACC churches for three days of fellowship, teaching and training. The experiences I had over those three days have changed the way I view God, myself and our collective role as Christians on earth, and I'm hoping that these words are one way I can pass my experience on to others.

From beginning to finish, barely a moment was wasted; the program was packed with talks, small group discussions, worship, activities and other events. That was not to mention mealtimes and breaks, which were no less important because of the conversations had and relationships forged. We probably packed weeks of experiences into every day, and came out of it feeling as if we'd known each other all our lives.

Keynote sessions were held throughout the camp with a series of church and ACC leaders speaking: Rod James, Mark Schultz, Simon Dent, and Derek and Jodi Schiller. The central focus of the camp was leadership in the church, and the speakers unpacked that topic considerably from different angles. We learned about our commission to leadership as Christians, how we can develop and grow as leaders and help others to do the same, and about Jesus' own approach to ministry.

Being an avid note-taker, I was kept very busy by the insights, experiences and advice offered by the speakers. One thing emphasised from the very first talk and reinforced by the rest, was that all leadership and ministry belongs to Christ: without him, we can do nothing, and so we should take care to always trust and depend on him, not on ourselves. Another point that stuck with me was that every Christian is called to be a leader: it is not for some chosen few (such as preachers, pastors and worship leaders) but for all.

Helpfully, the sessions were usually followed almost immediately by small group discussions. Due to numbers there was only one men's small group compared to two for the girls, so we all got to know each other fairly well. The small groups provided a great forum to ask questions and discuss challenging issues raised by the talk; we had a great mix of personalities and backgrounds in

our group and it was very interesting to hear and take on board others' perspectives and experiences. Derek Schiller joined us from time to time and had invaluable wisdom to offer on growing in ministry and dealing with tough theological issues like the problem of sin (Romans 7:14-25) and how we are to treat women in light of some of the more difficult passages in the New Testament.

Aside from the keynote sessions and small group times, there were plenty of other opportunities for teaching and for connecting with God. Worship services were held every morning in the chapel on site. Between songs of praise and times of prayer, a leader would share a devotion or personal testimony about God. Thus far I have only really spoken about the teaching, but that really is only half the story.

Outdoor activities like soccer and water balloon throwing were taken to with great enthusiasm, which nearly compensated for the lack of skill on display. Saturday night's formal dinner was a memorable occasion highlighted by an address from Lynn Arnold, an ex-Premier of South Australia and now an Anglican priest. Finally, the camp concert was memorable in a different way, featuring some impressive talent and some side-splittingly hilarious routines.

Above all, the attitudes of the camp leaders spoke loudest to me. From start to finish, in all aspects of the camp, they would jump in whenever they saw a need, often in ways one might not normally associate with leadership; from engaging people in conversation and ensuring everyone was involved, to gathering up used cutlery after dinner. They demonstrated, simply and very clearly, that Christian leadership – true leadership – is about service. I had known that intellectually, and Jesus Himself has said it (Matthew 20:25-27), but to see it lived out was something quite different, like nothing I'd ever experienced. Moreover, as the camp went on, all of us awardees began to imitate the leaders as they imitated Christ. There was no divide between leaders and everyone else; everyone led, everyone served. The community was a place you wanted to be, and perhaps a glimpse of God's kingdom to come.

James Ross-Naylor (Member of ACC Congregation Golden Grove, SA)

Gordon Moyes AC

ACC would particularly like to acknowledge the role Rev Dr Gordon Moyes AC played in encouraging reform movements within the Uniting Church, especially by providing advice and support to EMU and strategic encouragement in the early days of the Reforming Alliance. Through Wesley Mission, Dr Moyes provided a prominent point of leadership and service to reform movements and the wider Uniting Church. ACC is pleased to include the notice provided by his family.

*Rev Dr Gordon Keith Moyes AC,
MLC, B.A., LL.D., Litt.D., D.D., F.R.G.S., F.A.I.M.,
F.A.I.C.D., M.A.C.E..*

17th November, 1938 – 5th April, 2015

It is with deep sadness we inform you that after a brief illness Rev Dr Gordon Moyes AC, died peacefully on Sunday 5th April 2015.

Rev Dr Gordon Moyes AC was one of Australia's most respected Christian leaders.

Ordained in 1959 as a minister of the Churches of Christ with ministries at Newmarket, Ascot Vale, Ararat and Cheltenham, he later was ordained in the Uniting Church in Australia serving for 27 years as the Superintendent of Wesley Mission Sydney.

Gordon led this church to become one of Australia's largest non-government welfare providers and a uniquely shaped multi-cultural, city-based church, passionate about sharing God's love in both Word and Deed.

This extraordinary ministry was extensive in its breadth, significant in its range and innovative in its scope. Financial counselling, refugee support, property redevelopment in the central business district, financial sustainability, employment services, child and family support, disability and mental health services, media presence, retail and conference centres – where there was a need and opportunity, Gordon saw a vision to serve.

Following Gordon's appointment at Wesley Mission, his television work gained momentum through *Turn Round Australia*, a weekly half hour program, broadcast on many television stations around the country, consistently running for over 20 years.

During Gordon Moyes' years as Superintendent there were several ground-nor for the rest of us. breaking documentary series produced including *The Discovery* series, and specials, television series and radio programs produced such as: *An Australian Christmas at Darling Harbour* television across Australia for 10 years, the music video show *Swordfish* and *Sunday Night Live* hosted by Gordon which ran for nearly 18 years.

The 'Discovering' series was recognised around the world for its innovation. The series looked at the life of Jesus and then the growth of the early Christian church and was based on three books written by Gordon. This unique video series set a new standard in Australian Christian television.

Gordon has been awarded many honours over the years including Australia's highest honours, includ-



Gordon Moyes 1938 – 2015

ing the Companion of The Order of Australia in 2002, 2014 Christian Media Australia's Lifetime Achievement, Rotary International's Paul Harris Fellow (1978), and the New South Wales Father of the Year (1986).

In 2003 he was recognised with the Commonwealth Government's

Centenary Medal for Distinguished Service to Australia following service as a member of the Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership Board and membership of the Prime Minister's National Task Force on Youth Homelessness.

He was described by former Australian Prime Minister John Howard as "the epitome of effective Christian leadership" when describing the way he had grown Wesley Mission into one of the most dynamic and socially responsive church-based charities in the world. "And what I particularly salute is the way in which Dr Moyes has led the Wesley Mission to an understanding of the need for the church, in its various outreaches to the community to change and adapt whilst retaining a deep connection with the fundamentals of the Christian religion."

Gordon was appointed by the Christian Democratic Party to the New South Wales Legislative Council in 2002 and went on to have a career in politics serving both the CDP and Family First for the next 9 years. As a cross-bench member of the New South Wales Legislative council, Gordon Moyes pursued an agenda of social justice, while drawing attention to what he saw as the moral erosion of Australian society. As one of the few members of the New South Wales Parliament with a background in social work, he was a passionate advocate for disadvantaged indigenous populations, the homeless, the disabled, and the unemployed.

In his time as a parliamentarian he also spearheaded reform agendas for the juvenile justice system and fairer personal injury compensation.

As a Christian Member of Parliament, his informed judgements were drawn from a foundation in the inalienable values of justice, compassion, free will, and morality as explained in the Word of God.

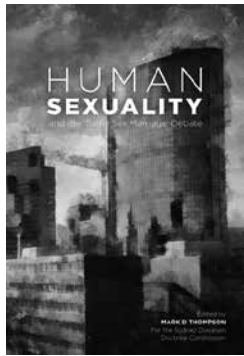
Evangelism remained Gordon Moyes' great passion through his life. "Essentially I am an evangelist: I just want to tell people about Jesus Christ".

Gordon died peacefully surrounded by what he described as the greatest joy of his life, his loving family: his wife of 55 years, Beverley and his children Jenny and Ron Schepis, Peter and Trina, David and Leisl, and Andrew and Kylie; grandchildren and great-grandchildren Michael, Georgina, Adelaide, Rachel, Ethan, Cassie, Jack, Brianna, Emma, Chelsea, Tom, Indiana, Scarlett and Piper. *David Moyes*

A short, readable, accessible guide to issues of human sexuality

A Review of Human Sexuality and the 'Same Sex Marriage' Debate, compiled for the Sydney Diocesan Commission, edited by Mark D. Thompson, published by Anglican Press Australia, March 2015 (Rrp \$16.95)

This short book offers a readable approach to a difficult topic in a language and style that is accessible to the not so theologically trained. The five chapters are divided into bite-sized sub-sections, beginning with 'Where are we?' and 'How did we



get here?' These leading questions set the scene for the first chapter: 'Human Sexuality in Contemporary Context'. The four remaining chapters cover the topics of 'How can we begin to apply the Bible's teaching to today's context and questions?', 'What does the Bible actually say about marriage and human sexuality and so about homosexual practice?', 'How do we speak about the Bible's teaching in such a highly charged public debate?' and 'How do we care

for those who experience same-sex attraction'. Chapter Three includes a postscript for those who are not married.

As might be expected from the Sydney Anglican Diocese, the book argues from the framework of orthodox Christianity rather than present-day attitudes in our church communities as seems to be the tenor of the current Uniting Church enquiry.

To my mind, this Anglican publication is closer to the spirit of the Basis of Union § 11 in terms of 'literary, historical and scientific enquiry', ecumenical engagement and the kind of 'fresh words and deeds' which may now be expected of those who act 'trustingly, in obedience to, God's living Word'. The last chapter exhorts Christians to offer compassion to those who experience same-sex attraction and to demonstrate courage in the face of likely incremental persecution.

I found the first chapter the most useful in telling me what I didn't know already. It offers dates and details in a history, commencing in 1966, of long-term activism by the 'gay rights movement'. This process includes persuading the American Psychological Association that homosexuality should be removed from the list of psychological disorders,

causing some debate about whether paedophilia should also be removed from the list. The Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders (2013) is reported to list 'paraphilias' as disorders in cases 'whose satisfaction has entailed personal harm, or risk of harm, to others'. [1]

The book is a compilation by eight authors. The preface disclaims the attempt to remove slight differences of emphasis between the chapters and admits that much more could be said and done in the area. For me, key topics for further exploration would be:

- the possibility of homosexual disorder in relation to the current search for identity
- use of language by the 'gay rights movement', e.g. 'homophobia' and 'equality' [2]
- the gendered and non-gendered imago Dei [3]
- the rationale for 'gay rights' and emphases of the feminist movement [4]

I would class this publication as recommended reading for those inside and outside ACC, and the first chapter in particular for decision-makers e.g. Federal Parliamentarians.

Katherine Abetz (BA, DTheol, Dip. Nursing, ACC Member in Tasmania and member of the Northern Cluster)

An extract from chapter one of *A Review of Human Sexuality and the 'Same Sex Marriage'*

How is it that in less than 20 years since homosexuality was discriminated in the last Australian state (Tasmania), it has now become not only tolerated in Australian Society, but fashionable, even promoted for its goodness?

For millenia, monogamous life-long marriage between a man and a woman has been recognised and celebrated as the stable basis for building society and raising

children, and in the West in particular this has been sustained by the influence of biblical teaching on the subject. How do we explain the fact that, as one journalist has put it, "in a decade, gay marriage has gone from joke to dogma"?...

As one might expect, there is a complex range of reasons for this remarkable transformation of communal attitudes and broad social acceptance, if not enthusiastic promotion, of that which was once obliquely referred to as "the love that dare not speak its name".

Ultimately the confusion can be

traced back to the original decision to pursue autonomy rather than God's good will for our lives. However, the modern philosophical roots lie in the Enlightenment period of the 17th and 18th centuries and the birth of the conviction that personal, individual choice (and not unthinking acceptance of biblical or traditional values) is the true basis for morality.

Philosophically, the view of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) that all knowledge is a mixture of what is given to us in sense experience and what is contributed by the human

Generosity and giving to God's work

[1] See pp. 22-25 and especially footnote 25.

[2] *Human Sexuality and the 'Same Sex Marriage' Debate* states that 'Wainwright Churchill of *Homosexual Behaviour Among Males* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1967) ... introduced the term 'homoeroto-phobia', a likely precursor to the term 'homophobia'. Last time I checked Wikipedia, it stated: 'Homophobia has never been listed as part of a clinical taxonomy of phobias'. Unlike 'marriage equality' which means the definition of marriage has to change, an equal right to vote doesn't mean the definition of voting has to change.

[3] Compare 'it is only with the woman that the man can be God's image and it is only with the man that the woman can be God's image' in Chapter Three with Chapter Five: 'God has created every human being - those struggling with same-sex attraction and those in the LGBTI community no less than any other - in his image.'

[4] Broadly speaking, I would say that feminism has moved from an emphasis on equality and, for this purpose, unisex to an emphasis on identity and embodiment as a woman. The 'gay rights' agenda seems to try to combine equality and identity.

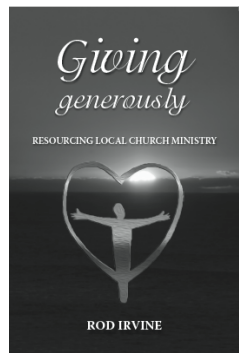
mind, also opened the door to the possibility that "something previously thought to be ontological (like gender), was actually merely linguistic or a category of thought.

On the literary front, with texts like *Justine* and *Juliette*, the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) pioneered a new standard for any and all subsequent attempts at sexual emancipation.

In fact, according to one social historian "If anyone can make the claim that he fired the first shot in the sexual revolution, it is the Marquis de Sade".

Giving Generously: Resourcing Local Church Ministry, published by Barton Books, has been written to help ministers and church leaders raise the financial resources needed to fund the ministry of the local church.

The author Rod Irvine was the senior minister at Figtree Anglican Church in Wollongong, Australia for twenty years and to further his leadership and help address the increasing organisational complexity of



the church, he completed an MBA at the University of Wollongong.

While the book certainly lays biblical and theological foundations, it clearly explains the practicalities of how leaders can ask their congregations to give to God's work in a gracious, positive and acceptable way. When this is done well it brings spiritual growth, joy and unity, not division or disruption.

The book can also be used as a leadership/board/parish council/elders/staff study resource, with summaries and discussion questions. It is very helpful when the church leadership team studies the principles together and has the opportunity to discuss their opinions or concerns.

In his review of the book, author Ray Galea, who is the senior minister at St Albans Multicultural Bible Ministry in Rooty Hill, Sydney, writes:

"When it comes to this book review I'm unapologetically biased. I had Rod Irvine as a mentor for three years and it transformed my thinking and my church on a wide range of issues including giving and generosity. Rod was 'on the money' (apologies for the pun) on every issue I raised and the only time I didn't follow his wisdom I paid for it. Last

year I finally conceded and adopted his remaining suggestion and we now enjoy a much healthier budget and a more generous congregation.

"I saw the fruit of this book in my own church before it was written. I gave the unpublished manuscript to my wardens to read and we decided to play it by the numbers when it came to the chapter on the commitment series and pledge-shaped budgets. I was scared, but the congregation responded far better than I or my leadership could have imagined. There was a gap in my knowledge that needed filling, between the gospel of grace, biblical principles and wise application to a church, and this book fills that gap.

"You may think I'm appealing to the worst part of your nature by offering raw pragmatism and the silver bullet on how to avert or manage a church budget crisis. However, Rod's book has thoughtful theological reflections, especially his chapter on whether tithing is a biblical principle for new covenant saints.

"My suggestion is read it and get copies for your deacons, wardens and parish council to start helpful conversations and while you may not agree with everything, I will be surprised if you're not significantly impacted by its conclusions. For in the end it's a powerful story of how one man and one church wanted to 'excel in the grace of giving'."

Giving Generously: Resourcing Local Church Ministry: \$30 plus postage and can be obtained from the author: roddirvine@gmail.com or phone 0412 777 833.

The meaning of Christian Unity: Thinking of our roots

A Canadian, David Brattson, reflects on Christian Unity and gives some timely reminders from considering the early church.

What is Christian unity in the Biblical sense? Jesus called for unity among Christians, but did not say what Christian unity is, or how we can know when it exists.

Is Christian unity merely two neighbouring congregations of the same denomination sponsoring a joint meal? Or two congregations of different denominations doing so? Intercommunion agreements? Co-operation in the World Council of Churches, and similar national and local organizations? Or did Jesus and his first followers mean nothing less than the thoroughgoing structural union of two previously independent denominations? Does it matter whether they were both of Presbyterian heritage, or does Christian unity require a complete structural merger from different denominational families, such as Presbyterian with Methodist?

The contexts, of both Biblical and non-Biblical first-century letters, envisage a single local church in a single city or town, and do not speak of relations between the addressees and Christians in other congregations, let alone other denominations, such as the Gnostics.

The earliest Christian writings help us to understand what “unity” means and how to work towards it. This article looks at Christian literature before AD 250, when memories were still fresh with the unwritten teachings and Bible interpretations of Christ, and Christians could recall what he and the apostles did in practice.

In John 17 Jesus prayed that Christians be united in the same way that he and the Father are united. Not knowing the way heaven is organized, we are little assisted by this in determining what “united” means, except to observe that the Father and Son are two persons in constant contact with each other.

The essence of Christian unity later in the first century AD was the considerate treatment and mutual forbearance among Christ’s followers on a frequent basis:

Romans 12:4f, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 4:3 and Philippians 1:27 and 2:2.

Also in the first century, the congregation at Rome wrote a letter to Christians at Corinth urging them to heal a rift in the congregation, and to re-establish peace, love, and unity among Christians who were in at least weekly contact with each other. The contexts, of both Biblical and non-Biblical first-century letters, envisage a single local church in a single city or town, and do not speak of relations between the addressees and Christians in other congregations, let alone other denominations, such as the Gnostics.

About AD 107, Bishop Ignatius of Antioch encouraged Christians in three congregations to be united to their local clergy. An early-third-century church manual stressed unity of clerics within a congregation. Both Ignatius and the manual pressed for greater consolidation within the local community to improve relations between Christians who had daily or weekly interactions with each other. In AD 197 the church father Tertullian saw Christian unity as being the gathering together of Christians in local public worship.

About AD 249, Origen identified unity in Christians agreeing to pray for the same request (Matthew 18:19), and in the apostles praying together in Acts 1:14. These are persons in each other’s presence co-operating towards a common spiritual goal. Origen was the foremost Bible scholar and teacher of his time.

The above authors classified unity with such other interpersonal traits as peace, love, gentleness, courtesy, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, hospitality, and recognition of the spiritual gifts of others. The same authors believed that unity is incompatible with strife, jealousy, arrogance, repaying evil for evil, and snobbishness. All these are attitudes or modes of relating to people with whom one is in personal contact.

In the Biblical sense, unity is thus a pattern of mind and behaviour, a mode of conducting one-to-one interpersonal relations, among Christians in frequent contact, and the fostering of peace, love, and harmony at the neighbourhood level with Christians we encounter frequently, regardless of their denomination.

Not mentioned in the Bible, although Christianity had divided into different sects during the first century, official interdenominational mergers contribute to Christian unity only to the extent that they promote these local objectives. The original meaning of “Christian unity” meant constant—at least weekly—interaction, not just formal quarterly or annual meetings. The sum of the ancient teaching is that Christian unity is interpersonal, not inter-bureaucratic.

David W. T. Brattston Nova Scotia, Canada

In the beginning (of the debate)

A special series in the lead up to Assembly 2015.

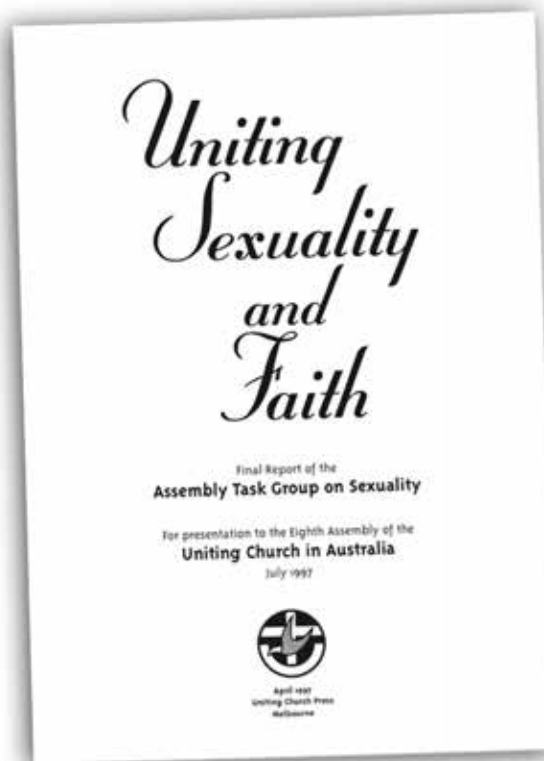
A long, long time ago

It is sometimes difficult to fathom that the Interim Report on Sexuality (IRS) was released in 1996. It is poignant to reflect on this time as I was asked to provide the report on the responses to the IRS.

My Report was provided to the Assembly Standing Committee in early 1997 as an 'Analysis of the Responses to the Interim Report on Sexuality'. It was not quite the report that some in the Assembly Standing Committee thought should go as the final report to the Assembly and was partly used by the then Assembly Media Officer to write a new report and that version was provided as the official report on the responses to the Assembly in 1997 (though due to questions being raised at the Assembly, some copies of my original report were provided to Assembly members as well). I don't want to go over the statistics again as they are well-known and no-one can contradict the base of the responses that was simply overwhelmingly opposed to the revision of the Church's theology of sexuality and marriage that was the 'paradigm shift' that the Chairperson of the Assembly Task Group on Sexuality Rev Alistair Macrae had argued for.

I want to make one comment as I have often been asked what stood out, or what was memorable. Of course much was memorable, including the amazing amount of theological reflection and biblical material. Never has so much been provided by the wider church in response and it never will be again. Two responses in particular remain with me. Both of these told of a situation in which one partner in the marriage had become an invalid and could no longer engage in physical sexual intimacy. In a fallen world, where our own sexual needs take priority, one could expect people to 'move on', but these were powerful testimonies to the unity of marriage and to God's grace and love as people affirmed all their vows together.

The last two decades have been a



virtual and sometimes increasingly subtle battleground with liberal theological opinion given more overt preference in the UCA in an attempt to 'help' members change or at least waver from their convictions. If you would like to read more about the wider debate about sexuality in the UCA and how the UCA developed an overt liberal theological orientation and public presence, when its membership has been largely theologically conservative, see my overview articles: *Liberalism, Sexuality and the Future of the Uniting Church* (parts 1 and 2): Available on the ACC resources website: unitingviews.com

Marriage in Focus

Thank you to all groups, congregations and members who responded to the UCA *Discussion Paper on Marriage*. It was helpful to receive copies of the responses and these were provided to our own Task Group for their information.

I know it is sometimes wearying to continue to respond, and certainly there has been an attrition factor,

but by responding we serve each other and the wider church - continuing to be a confessing movement as we together confess our Lord Jesus and proclaim the truth.

We value your prayers and support for the 14th Assembly (12-18 July) as it considers the UCA doctrine of marriage. If you are in Perth during the Assembly come and join together with other ACC members and PNEUMA members (evangelicals in WA) at Nedlands Uniting Church on Wednesday night 15th July.

From the near past

Peter Bentley continues his series (slightly revised) originally published in the Reforming Alliance

newsletter Reforming March 2006, No. 12. There is nothing new under the sun.

Political Speak No. 10. "The church is a safe place."

Everyone wants a safe place, and many churches have worked to make their meetings a safer place. Unfortunately, a 'safe place' can also be abused in ways that are seemingly innocuous to most people, simply because they are not aware of the politics within the church. Factors that can actually contribute to an un-safe environment, especially for evangelical members include careful or subtle use of didactic 'liberal' devotions, and heavily dominated chairing of meetings and business arrangements. It is an irony that I have often heard people within the UCA criticise certain denominations or evangelical groups for their perceived 'dominated' meeting practices and style and yet some Uniting Church meetings are very similar. Why are some practices more acceptable in some contexts, but not in others?

Peter Bentley

Theology and trepidation

With new years come new beginnings. This year sees me commencing a Masters of Arts in Theology at SMBC. After finishing my B.Th in 2013, I knew that I eventually wanted to return to theological study and, halfway through last year, I started to feel the call in a more urgent, tangible way. The time was right, God was telling me, to take the next step in my theological journey.

In November 2014, I received the news that I'd been officially accepted into SMBC's postgraduate program. The expected feelings of excitement and gratitude to God were also mixed with feelings of apprehension as I counted the cost of this study. First, there was the financial cost; a very real concern for someone supporting herself. Then, there was the cost of giving up the possibility of full-time work over these next few years. Explaining this to my colleagues has met with varied responses – some people can't understand why I would willingly forgo that



elusive full-time teaching position for something unrelated to the field.

I started my course, therefore, with some trepidation. However, when I opened up my first commentary and began to read, I was filled with such a strong sense of peace, of joy and exhilaration. The conviction that this is what I love, this is where I'm supposed to be. As I started preparing my first essay I was struck by what a privilege it is to be able to devote

my time and my thoughts to what Spurgeon describes as 'the highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy', that is the study of God and his word.

When people at work ask me why I would want to study theology, I sometimes respond with some vague description of ministry. Sometimes I tell them honestly that I don't know what I'm going to do with it but I trust God has something for me.

And more now, I'm realising that my first answer to this question, as to why I'm going back to study more theology, is that I love it. Even in the midst of the endless reading, the long word counts and the struggling to get it all finished in time, I love having the opportunity to thoughtfully explore the depths of God's word and to know him more. I pray now that my studies will be used to give glory back to him in whatever he has for me.

Bella Hibbard (ACC members at Liverpool UC)

REFLECTION

Where are we heading?

In recent years, my experiences in Queensland and Victoria-Tasmania Synod meetings echoed the cries of the congregations. Where are we heading? What is the future for us? As congregations shrink gradually in quantity and size, we try to fix the slippery slope in every possible way. Our progressive theological thinking and understanding are getting stronger and deeper inside of the church, but missionally, outside it does not make any difference in the life and mission of the congregations. We research, study, talk and publish our findings of the health of the congregations, but it does not stop the closure of the congregations.

What is missing in our church? We have rare visitors coming to our Sunday services and also we have no plan to retain the next generations to stay in the congregations. As

the church deeply rooted in revival history of Methodism, we miss the fundamental lifestyle of evangelism and discipleship. As we are polarized in defining the gospel and evangelism, we don't know what the gospel is and how to share the gospel with the community and make disciples to fulfill the Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:18-20. Making disciples and nurturing them to grow in discipleship become theme and theory of our gatherings, but not the lifestyle of congregations. Going back to the basics is a good way to reinforce our life and mission. I am not against growing in theological thinking, but going back to the basics is not barbaric or fundamentalism. When we share the gospel with the community and communicate our faith with the community in word and deed, the community will

understand what God has done in Christ crucified and risen.

Evangelism is not manipulating or forcing people into Christian faith, but inviting them to get to know Christ through the gospel manifested in our lives. Unless our church is deeply committed to go back to evangelism and discipleship, our cries may become lamentations and we will feel that we are gone. Let us share our Christ with others in gentle Spirit and inspire them to follow Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord. It is the time to start evangelism and touch the community through our lips, lives and love. It is the lifestyle of Pentecost day.

Rev. Devadosan Sugirtharaj is an ACC member and has ministered recently in Tasmania and is now back in Queensland.

THIS IS THE ACC

Who we are

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

Our goals include

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

What does ACC do to help you?

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

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

What we want to do

The objects of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations are:

- 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;

- calling the councils and congregations of the Uniting Church to uphold the Basis of Union and Constitution;

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

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

- 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.

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

How to join us

Please consider joining the ACC.

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

Membership rates for supporting members: Concession (single or couple): \$40.00 pa. (financial year basis) Full (single or couples): \$70.00 p.a

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

PO Box 968 Newtown NSW 2042

What happens next

- July 12 – 18, 2015: Uniting Church 14th Assembly – Perth.

- September 14 – 16, 2015: ACC Annual Conference and Meeting to be held at Nunyara Conference Centre, Adelaide. Theme: Confessing Christ in a Diverse Church

ACC Resources List

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

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

Founding Documents

The Charter (2006)

Statement on Sexuality (2006)

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

ACC Brochures and Statements

ACC Vision and Goals 2007-2017 (2008)

Cross Cultural Commission Statement (2008)

The Church's Social Responsibility (2008)

Theological Declaration (2008)

Theological Declaration: Commentary and Study Guide (2009)

Abortion in the Australian Community (2010)

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

Marriage: An ACC Statement (2011)

Bible Studies

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

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

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

DVD Resources

Conversations Series

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

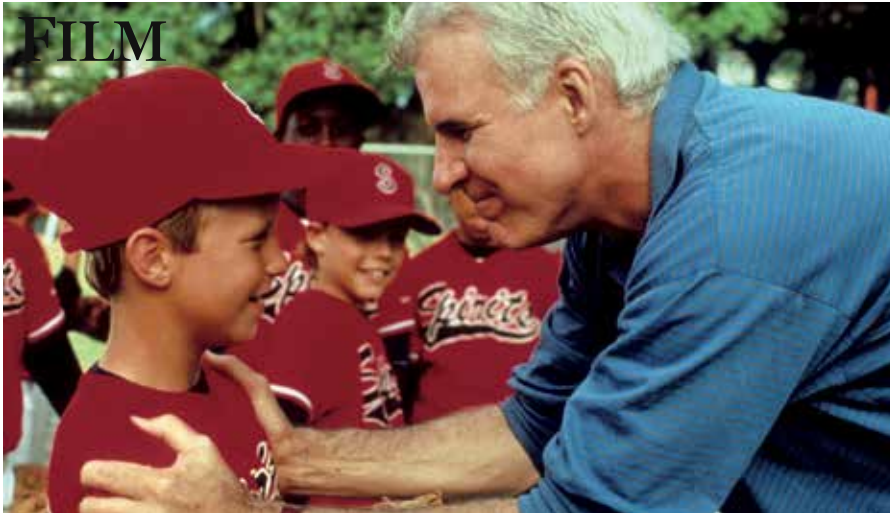
No. 2 The Hope of a New Heaven and New Earth: A Study Guide with DVD (2011) ISBN 978-0-9804493-6-5

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

Devotional Booklets

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

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



Steve Martin in *Parenthood*

Hollywood gets wed

I commented in the March 2015 *ACCatalyst* about Hollywood movies about marriage and asked for comments and suggestions. Thank you to members who responded with suggestions for comment. I have chosen a few, mainly more recent 'classic films' that may be more well-known.

Parenthood (M, 1989)

As a director, Ron Howard has made many fine and enjoyable films. One of those significant films focused on relationships and especially families. While many films look mainly at the marriage, this one has an integral consideration of the family and has many amusing, and sometimes very reflective scenes that will help people think more deeply about the love that should be found within the married couple as they care for and nurture their children.

Four Weddings and a Funeral (M, 1994).

The film that launched Hugh Grant's somewhat intriguing career has had more re-runs on TV than most films, and touches on many aspects of marriage. The search for love that is lasting is the central theme, and this is encapsulated in the film's hit song *Love is All Around*. This film also includes an early consideration of the relationship of a homosexual couple and the issues that develop in terms of the marriage culture around them, which in hindsight now could be seen as a prominent shot across the bow in terms of the move toward marriage revisionism.

Religion features prominently, with clergy officiating and also many comments peppered throughout, but few have a personal connection with faith. The film is almost infamous

for Rowan Atkinson's role as Father Gerald and his bumbling and mostly excruciating attempt at officiating at his first wedding.

The overall orientation of most of the characters is toward their own enjoyment, but every now and then love hits home, but the spectre of commitment is the challenge, and for the central character Charles, an almost impossible undertaking.

I see this film as really the ultimate story for a contemporary de facto world as the central 'couple' want to have the commitment of marriage without the public recognition, and indeed without the blessing of God. As Charles puts his 'proposal' to Carrie when they are standing in the rain: *Let me ask you one thing. Do you think - after we've dried off, after we've spent lots more time together - you might agree *not* to marry me? And do you think not being married to me might maybe be something you could consider doing for the rest of your life?*

And her response is: *I do.*

The Wedding Singer (M, 1998)

One of the fascinating aspects of this film is the overall promotion of monogamy and marriage being for life as the basis for marriage. This is especially highlighted as faithfulness of 'older' couples is highlighted in cameo parts that often reveal the common understanding of grace and love that is extended to all couples. This is a somewhat chaotic comedy with a real bite as 'the wedding singer' pines for his true love, while she is about to be wed by a man who will never be faithful to her.

License to Wed (M, 2007)

I reviewed this in the second year of

our magazine and wanted to extract a comment again, especially as it highlighted the work of the late Robin Williams as Episcopalian minister Father Frank, a somewhat blatantly offensive and confrontational man, but with the necessary heart of gold. While this is certainly not a great film, I wish to acknowledge the helpful focus on pre-marital counselling. This is a solid consideration of the need to examine relationship issues and some of the sessions and role plays they have to undertake certainly raise critical relationship issues. He even has a contract that stipulates that the couple must refrain from having sexual intercourse until their wedding. Given that the majority of couples marrying cohabit today, I wonder how this would be received by an intended couple?

Lastly two intriguing Comments?

I was doing a search on marriage and movies, and on one site that had a list for the top ten movies about marriage and romance was an advertisement for a private investigation firm that specialised in finding cheating husbands. What does this tell us about our conflicted society?

Secondly, I came across a very interesting study from the University of Rochester that was published in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. The researchers worked with couples on movie-based counselling and found that couples who watched relationship-centred movies (colloquially termed 'chick flicks'), and discussed them afterwards were more likely to still be together after three years.

Selma

While not a movie primarily about marriage, this story of the Civil Rights (voting rights context) march from Selma led by Dr Martin Luther King in 1965, also provides an ongoing consideration of his relationship with his wife Coretta, and while it does not dwell on some of King's purported failings, it also does not seek to rationalise them, instead focusing on the ideals of marriage. The involvement of people from different churches is prominent, highlighting the growing and broad support the civil rights movement had begun to receive. The film certainly captures a period and also relates to the contemporary era when racial tensions in the USA have developed again in several areas of the south. It is very suitable for viewing on the small screen (TV and DVD), and may well provide the base for a good conversation.

Peter Bentley