

VOLUME 10 NUMBER 4 | JUNE 2018

# ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



## Has time run out?

The UCA  
Assembly  
prepares  
to vote

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Cover photo - Supplied

## EDITORIAL

Next month the 15th Assembly of the Uniting Church will be held in Melbourne at the Box Hill Town Hall (8-14 July). During the last few months, ACC has been able to provide members with regular updates, prayer letters and information concerning the major matter of marriage that the 15th Assembly is considering. During the Assembly itself, the ACC will be providing news and commentary through our website, Facebook and by email. Please join the email list or like our Facebook page, and check out the ACC website. You may be able to distribute copies of the ACC magazine and resources to other Uniting Church members and help them to understand what is being proposed and how they can support the Uniting Church to maintain the ecumenical and biblical doctrine of marriage within the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. It has been deeply encouraging to hear of the prayer teams, prayer meetings and individuals interceding for the Uniting Church, centred around the Sacred Season of 40 Days of Prayer and Fasting, and to know our members will continue to join together in prayer in the lead-up to the ACC National Conference in September. May God give you strength and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peace and grace,  
**Peter Bentley**



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## ACC NEWS

### Historic bill passes in NSW Parliament



Rev Ian Weeks (National Council Secretary) represented the ACC on March 5 at a gathering of church leaders held to support the Modern Slavery Bill 2018 (NSW) put forward by the Hon. Paul Green MLC, Member of the Christian Democratic Party. The NSW Premier, the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian MP was the special guest and is pictured centre with the Rev. Hon. Fred Nile MLC and Hon. Paul Green MLC. The Bill has now been passed. Thanks be to God, and as Paul Green MLC comments, "The job is not yet done – we must now continue working with NSW Liberal-National Government to ensure we have a bill that will effectively tackle modern slavery in NSW."

## Googling Earth

by Robyn Painter

Pastor, Peterborough Uniting Church



Have you ever felt as though the world is shrinking? In terms of information, it is. In 1989 I went as an exchange student to a town called Carapeguá in Paraguay for a year. When I first heard I was going there, Mum and I sat down with the atlas, encyclopaedia and every other reference book we had. We were able to find out a little information about Paraguay, but nothing at all about Carapeguá. It was just too far away.

However recently I've been sorting out my Paraguay photos and I felt as though I wanted to see my town again, and the house where I used to live, and my school and the places I used to go.

But how much of Paraguay could I possibly see while sitting here in the manse in Peterborough? A few pictures in some old books? No! Much more than that because now there is Google Earth.

Google Earth is a collection of satellite photographs on the internet that show every part of earth's surface. You can zoom out and see whole continents, or you can zoom in and see cars on the roads. With not much difficulty, I was able to find Carapeguá, and then I spotted my

old school, the house where I lived, our local soccer field, my friend's house and so forth. It was amazing to see it all again, albeit from straight up in the air. At least from that angle, it looks like nothing much has changed in Carapeguá since 1989.

But, of course, looking down from the sky is not the same as actually being there. I could see the houses, but I couldn't hear the sounds, I couldn't talk to old friends. Looking down at Paraguay has made me miss it all the more. From here I can look at life in Paraguay, but I can never live it. I can never participate in it. To do that I would need to get on a plane and go there.

Sometimes, we can make the mistake of thinking God is somewhere else, looking at us from a computer screen, as if he knows what's going on on earth, but is not part of it. But God does not Google from afar! He made this world so he could interact with us, and have friendship with us. Ever since the beginning of earth, he has been present here. He is emotionally involved.

And to help us understand that, Jesus was born with a human body, just like ours, to demonstrate God's love to us. For God and for people, technology is no substitute for relationship!



# The Assembly

*the National Council for the Uniting Church*

*Peter Bentley provides a brief comment about who goes to the UCA Assembly and what happens.*

The 15th Triennial Assembly of the Uniting Church National Assembly will meet in Melbourne at Box Hill Town Hall from 8-14 July. The President-Elect (to be installed as President) is Dr Deidre Palmer (a past Moderator of the SA Synod) and her theme is **Abundant Grace Liberating Hope**. The Assembly is made of members primarily elected or appointed by the Synods and Presbyteries. The number of voting members at an Assembly has varied, but for 2018, it could be about 260. It is a smaller gathering than the larger Synod meetings, though Synods are also changing with decreasing Synod attendance. The base of membership is equal numbers of ordained members and confirmed lay members, so only a small number of ordained members will ever be a member, and proportionally this represents a very small group of lay people. Membership is a serious task and all other members should pray for those attending the Assembly.

There are non-voting members of the Assembly, but for this article the focus will be on voting members. The breakdown for voting membership is outlined in Regulation 3.3.8. Each presbytery technically appoints one ordained member and one lay member, though because some Synods (SA, WA) have adopted a one Presbytery and effectively a one Synod model, compensation has been provided so those Synods maintain their overall numbers. Victoria and Tasmania are now combined as one Synod and thus have a joint membership.

## A comment on the membership

The membership numbers for Assembly bear no relation

to contemporary confirmed membership or even attendance as these figures are difficult to determine in any case.

I believe there needs to be a substantial re-working of the make-up to help the Assembly be truly representative of the church. This is different from the idea that the Assembly should be made up of 'representatives' as it is a distinct council making its own decisions. One of the difficulties for the Assembly is its increasingly distant connection to the local congregation.

Synod numbers should be revised so that the Synods like Victoria (now with Tasmania) that are much smaller now, can be provided an Assembly membership that reflects their actual present attendance/membership of the Uniting Church.

Presbyteries could appoint 2 lay people. This would help to broaden out the church employed/quasi-ordained/professional members that are elected as lay members now. There was never a thought at union that the lay members of the national decision-making body would also be employed by a council or part of the church.

## What does the Assembly do?

There will be worship, contact and greetings from ecumenical guests and many proposals and reports from Assembly agencies, other councils and Assembly members. For its responsibilities, I still believe it is best to quote from the foundational uniting document: Basis of Union Paragraph 15 (e).

*"...It has determining responsibility for matters of doctrine, worship, government and discipline, including the promotion of the Church's mission, the establishment of standards of theological training and reception of ministers from other communions, and the taking of further measures towards the wider union of the Church. It makes*

*the guiding decisions on the tasks and authority to be exercised by other councils. It is obligatory for it to seek the concurrence of other councils, and on occasion of the congregations of the Church, on matters of vital importance to the life of the Church."*

## Decision-Making?

The Assembly will follow the Manual for Meetings. As with any meeting, the co-ordination of the meeting arrangements is connected to smaller groups, and for the UCA Assembly the Facilitation Committee and the Business Committee are the prime committees. The Business Committee will essentially control the agenda and will work with presenters about the timing of presentations, and also with the Facilitation Committee about the re-arrangement and presentation of proposals. Major matters will be introduced in a plenary session and then considered initially in the Assembly groups. Marriage will be one of these matters. A summary of the views of each group on the matter/proposals is provided to the Facilitation Committee and the committee collates material from the groups and reports to an information plenary session at the Assembly. This process provides the bases for consideration of which proposals proceed to formal plenary consideration and/or the possible re-arrangement or amalgamation of proposals or parts of proposals to form one new proposal. Prayer for good governance and wisdom for those involved in the control of the Assembly process would be appreciated.

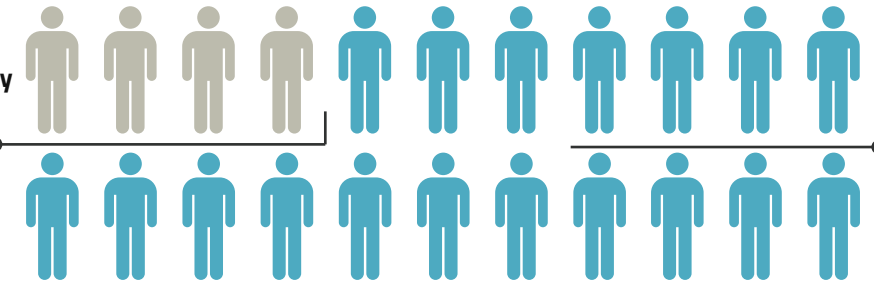
*Peter Bentley was a member of the perhaps now infamous 10th Assembly held in Melbourne in 2003 (remember Resolution 84?), as well as a keen observer at Assembly meetings in 1994 and 1997 (attending as an Assembly staff-person), and 2000, 2006, 2009, 2012 and 2015 (for personal interest or the Reforming Alliance or ACC).*



## Who can vote?

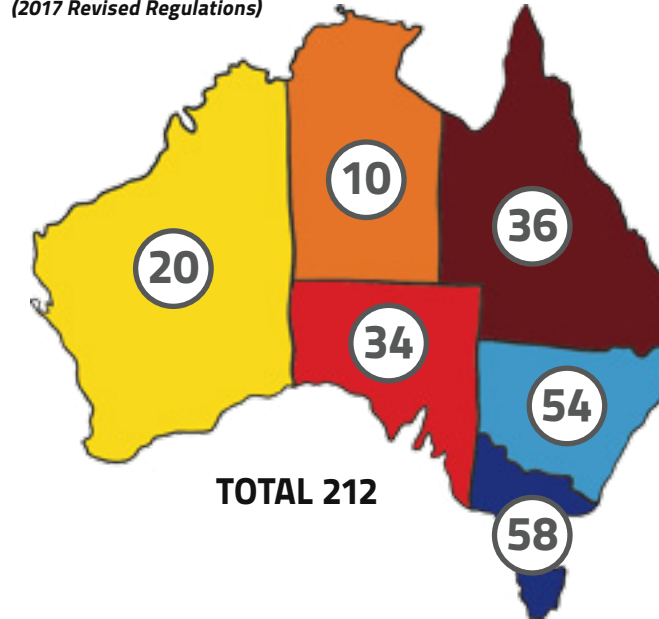
Officers of the Assembly are voting members

- President
- General Secretary
- ex-President
- President-elect

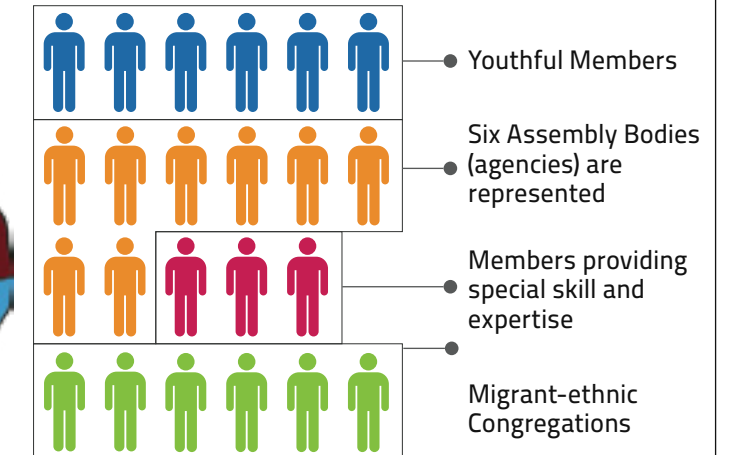


Two officers of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, and 16 UAICC members.

The breakdown for Synod/Presbytery membership is interesting (2017 Revised Regulations)



As well as the Assembly officers and UAICC members, the Assembly Standing Committee appoints the following (Note: numbers are from 14th Assembly 2015)



## What are the Recommendations on Marriage going to the 15th Assembly?

For the full report see the 15th Assembly website:

This extract is from page 61: **FIFTEENTH ASSEMBLY REPORT - B23 MARRIAGE AND SAME-GENDER RELATIONSHIPS 62**

That the Assembly resolve:

(a) To note that the Working Group on Doctrine Report documents a continuing and faithful struggle on matters relating to sexuality and marriage spanning several decades in the Uniting Church; and that the issue of same-gender marriage is one about which many Uniting Church people faithfully hold strong and at times mutually exclusive convictions;

(b) To adopt the following policy statement on marriage:

Marriage is a gift God has given to humankind for the well-being of the whole human family. For Christians, marriage is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of two people to live together for life. It is intended to be the mutually faithful life-long union of two people expressed in every part of their life together. In marriage two people seek to encourage and enrich each other through love and companionship, experience the fruitfulness of family, contribute to the well-being of society and strengthen the mission of the church.

(c) (i) To affirm that Ministers and celebrants authorised by the Uniting Church in Australia may exercise freedom of conscience with regards to accepting requests to celebrate marriages, including same-gender marriages, according to the rites of the Uniting Church in Australia;

(ii) To request the Assembly Officers to direct the appropriate

Assembly body to prepare an authorised Marriage Liturgy suitable for opposite-gender and same-gender couples for approval by the Standing Committee at its August 2018 meeting;

(iii) To note that Church Councils:

- have the authority under Regulation 4.4.1 to permit or refuse the use of any property held for the use of the Congregation for same-gender weddings;
- do not have the authority to require a Minister in placement in their Congregation to, or prevent a Minister in their Congregation from, celebrating same-gender marriages.

(d) To adopt the following affirmation:

### 1. Marriage

Marriage is a gift of God, at the heart of human society and culture. In the life-long union of marriage people can know the joy of God in



## DEVOTION

# Soaring Like Eagles

Isaiah 40:31

*“Those who wait upon the Lord will find new strength,  
they will soar high on wings like eagles.”*

I like to think of these words as very personal.  
*“I will wait on the Lord and will find new strength,”*  
*“I will soar high on wings like eagles.”*

God recognises us as His personal ones.

*“I have called you by name, and you are mine.”*

Every Sunday we address Him with the words *“Our Father”*.

For us this is our personal request, our deliberate action.

We must wait upon the Lord in anticipation  
and we will not be disappointed.

We must believe that He will supply us with  
*“new strength”* day by day.

This is not about sustaining our human bodies.

It is God who supplies us with *“new strength”*.

Then we can expect to *“soar high on wings like eagles”*.

Every day is a new day  
and for that we need *“new strength.”*

The writers of the Old Testament encourage us  
to experience new lives as free as the soaring eagles.

Did you know that the eagle is the only bird  
that can look into the brightness of the sun  
and not be blinded?

The Lord is waiting to supply our weak spiritual needs.

All we have to do is to

*“wait upon the Lord”* just for a few moments each morning.

We forget that we are human beings  
but rather children of God and soar with Him,  
feed on Him and grow in Him.

*Reverend Bob Imms is a member of the  
ACC Southern Cluster in Tasmania.*

## ACC NEWS

### The Assembly

*from pg 5...*

whose image we are made, male  
and female. In giving themselves  
to each other in love, two people  
reflect the love of Christ for his  
Church.

In marriage, two people are  
called to live together faithfully,  
and to love each other with respect,  
tenderness and delight. They  
share the life of a wider family  
and community and may be  
entrusted with the gift and care  
of children. They help to shape a  
society in which human dignity  
and happiness may flourish and  
abound.

Marriage is not to be entered into  
lightly or selfishly, but responsibly  
and in the love of God. It is a gift of  
God and a way of life that all people  
should honour.

#### 2. Separation, Divorce and Re-marriage

An inability to sustain the  
marriage relationship breaks the  
commitment to be together for life  
and may be painful for the couple,  
the children in their care, as well as  
for parents, friends and the Church  
community.

In cases of the irretrievable  
breakdown of marriage, the  
Church acknowledges that divorce  
may be the only creative and life  
giving direction to take.

The Church has a responsibility  
to:

a) care for people, including  
children, through the trauma of the  
ending of a marriage;

b) help people where appropriate  
to grieve, repent, grow in self  
understanding, receive affirmation,  
grace and forgiveness;

c) support them as they hear  
God's call for new life.

The grace and healing of God  
are available to people who are  
divorced, which may free them to  
marry again.

# & Hell how (not) to get there

## Ian Clarkson

UCA Minister - South Australia

What did Israel Folau do or say that was so  
obnoxious? He answered an Instagram question,  
quoting scripture about how God deals with those  
who persist in anti-kingdom behaviours. He later  
claimed he was simply saying, that is how all are  
destined without the saving power of Christ.  
Daily we are confronted with warnings for  
physical health like ‘Smoking causes death  
through cancer, thrombosis, heart attacks, congestion etc - Fine! And we can  
tell people to ‘go to hell’, but start talking seriously about hell and warning  
about the deadly danger to the soul in this culture of secular fundamentalism  
and all hell breaks loose!

Apparently Folau had 1 Corinthians 6: 9-11 in mind. And that opens up a  
vital subject. The revealed power of a gospel delivering abundant grace and  
living hope for every human situation. Can deeply embedded motivations  
be changed or not? Through many repentances and new-starts is holiness  
possible? Is the Holy Spirit capable of dealing with shameful perversions?

That passage claims so. Made clean and made right in one great act of  
mercy. And ongoing help to grow in the likeness of the best we were born to  
be. Justified and sanctified. Our here-after and what we are after-here taken  
care of by Jesus. Taken off our own hands by Him in whose image we are and  
shall be! The gospel not merely of words, but of power.

But how to take this treatment for the hell ahead and the hell within? This  
holistic help for every and all diversions, inversions and perversions tearing at  
our hearts.

There is a glorious promise. I picture Roundup, that often-used weedkiller,  
when I claim this promise. If we ‘confess our sins’- saying the same thing  
about ourselves as the convicting Holy Spirit says into our conscience.  
That's all. No self-help stressing, just go along with His diagnosis. Then  
the promise: ‘He is just and faithful to forgive us and to cleanse us from all  
unrighteousness.’

Confessing lets the Holy Spirit ‘roundup’, going deep into the roots of our  
souls as into the roots of a weed, to the dark internal rebellion, hurt, abuse,  
image defilement and abundant-life blockers in order to create a new person  
from the very meeting of soul and spirit. Going where neither we nor any  
expert can go and doing the very work of heaven.





# Nemo

social media platform has a 500 character limit which prevents an adequate theological response. Later, on the Players' Voice website, Folau wrote an extended, deeply thoughtful, personal and well-informed comment which disproved the slur of Tim Wilson MP that that his views should be ignored as those of someone "employed in a profession that values brawn over brains." The response of Rugby Australia – and even more so that of the NRL – did not bode well for their long-term commitment to freedom of speech. As Jeremy Sammut of the CIS put it, "religious freedom is meaningless without the right to affirm one's religion in the public square". The "inclusion policies" of companies and sporting bodies are also actually or potentially self-contradictory inasmuch as they seek to *exclude* those who do not conform in their opinions to every jot and tittle of their fatuous policies. (Such inconsistency is not new; back in the 1960s, Nemo recalls that there were anti-war demonstrators who came close to saying "support peace or I'll kill you".)

Elizabeth Farrelly in her column in the *Sydney Morning Herald* suggested that it is weird that Folau was attacked for having "failed as a role model" when sporting cheats (and even those who've committed violent crimes, I might add) are forgiven. In fact, of course, Folau remains an altogether better "role model" for youth, both on and off the field, than most other sportsmen, including certain cricketers. He lives and plays clean. Farrelly also pointed out that what Folau said (public hysteria notwithstanding) did not amount to vilification or hate speech, as he was not saying gay people *ought* to go to hell but expressing his belief about what *is*. She was quite right that most of the public outcry showed total misunderstanding not only of Folau's statement but of the nature of belief and of sport as well. One could also

add that the outrage was odd coming from those who probably don't believe in hell anyway.

What did Folau's fellow Christians say? Did the media ask any bishops, moderators, theologians or pastors for their opinions? Not that I noticed. Did any voluntarily come forward to support his opinion, albeit in a more nuanced, balanced or detailed way? Very few. A more challenging question for us ordinary Christians, however, is: "if someone asked you to your face the same question as Folau was asked on Instagram, what would you say?" Are we going to give a short and blunt answer about sin, God's judgement and hell? Does anyone want to hear that we are all sinners who need to repent?

While Nemo was writing this column, it was announced that the Australian Olympic Committee had bestowed its Order of Merit on Olympians Peter Norman, Raelene Boyle, Catherine Freeman, Shane Gould and Ian Thorpe. It has been said that Peter Norman (1942-2006) was the forgotten man of Australian athletics. He won the silver medal in the 200 metre sprint at Mexico City in 1968 in a time which would have won the gold in 2000 and he split two outstanding black American athletes, Tommy Jones and John Carlos. On the podium, Norman wore a badge supporting their "Olympic Project for Human Rights". Some have said that Norman suffered for his support of the clenched-fist salutes of the gold and bronze medallists. Be that as it may, why did he do it? As a reviewer of the 2008 film about Norman put it, "He was a devout Christian, raised in the Salvation Army [who] believed passionately in equality for all, regardless of colour, creed or religion — the Olympic code".

If Peter Norman is now applauded for his stand, and Israel Folau is traduced for his, we need to consider not only what has changed in our society since 1968 but how we as Christians should respond when we are told to keep our beliefs to ourselves.

*A new column from an ACC member with a deep interest in Scottish History.*

## 21 reflections on the Israel Folau controversy

- ① Folau was not expressing hatred, but his belief based on the Bible
- ② For most Christians, obeying the Bible is very important to them, because they see the Bible as the Word of God
- ③ It might have been better if Folau had answered something like "It is God's plan that everyone should turn to God, and be forgiven and find new life through Christ", and had left it at that
- ④ Repentance and hell are part of what the Bible teaches, but are not necessarily the best place to begin a conversation
- ⑤ God does not hate people. The Bible teaches that God loves human beings so much that he sent his only Son to die for us  
1 John 4:9  
Romans 5:8  
John 3:16
- ⑥ With regard to sexuality, the Bible teaches that we are created male and female, in God's own image
- ⑦ The Bible teaches, and Jesus affirms, that God's intention for human sexual relationships is loving faithful marriage between one man and one woman, and that all sexual relations outside of that context fall short of God's intentions
- ⑧ The Bible does not quite say what Folau said, but he was correct in understanding that the Bible does not endorse homosexual relationships
- ⑨ The Bible does not single out homosexual relationships as the only sin, but as one sin among many others – and most sins mentioned in the Bible have nothing to do with sexual behaviour, but include such things as unbelief, blasphemy, idolatry, pride, drunkenness, temper, greed, injustice, and violence  
Mark 7:21-23  
Galatians 5:19-21  
1 Corinthians 6:10  
Romans 1:18-23,28-32  
Ephesians 2:1-3  
2 Timothy 3:2-5
- ⑩ Jesus did not explicitly mention homosexual behaviour, because everyone in Jewish society knew it was strictly forbidden in the Old Testament law. But in working among Gentiles, the apostle Paul addressed the issue several times, because homosexual behaviour was common in Graeco-Roman society  
1 Corinthians 6:9-11  
Romans 1:24-27

- ⑪ The Bible does not say anything about sexual orientation, but only about sexual behaviour, and sexual orientation in itself should not be regarded as sinful
- ⑫ Sexual fulfilment in marriage is one of God's good gifts to humanity, but it is possible – and very common – for people of any age or orientation to live a life of celibate singleness, and some of them likewise see that as a calling and a gift from God
- ⑬ There is no biblical basis for cruelty, name-calling, prejudice, or hating anyone, and Christians who have done such things should repent of it
- ⑭ In general, Christians do not hate people with a gay lifestyle, but simply disagree with them on that
- ⑮ Christians are called to love everyone, but to love people we do not need unconditionally to accept everything they think, say, or do  
Matthew 22:37-39  
Galatians 6:10  
1 John 4:11
- ⑯ To disagree with something as a matter of religious moral conscience is not the same as active discrimination
- ⑰ An ambivalence about same-sex relationships is not some unusual view of a tiny majority, but is held by a great many people and cultures around the world, and until a couple of decades ago it was mainstream in western societies too, and it remains mainstream in some cultural minorities who are very much part of New Zealand society
- ⑱ Some Christians in New Zealand see accepting gay relationships as reflecting biblical imperatives of love and justice, and thus put aside the specific Bible teachings about sexual morality – but that does not appear to be the majority view
- ⑲ Christians need to recognise the reality that the societal moves to normalise gay identity and relationships have become widely accepted, and are pervasively reinforced in public and social discourse, and that various anti-discriminatory measures are now enshrined in law
- ⑳ Christians should express their convictions wisely, sensitively, and respectfully, and with grace, in a way which reflects Christ and the Bible, and which avoids anything that can be misunderstood as "hate"  
James 3:17  
1 Peter 3:15-16  
Colossians 4:6
- ㉑ Our society, media and law-makers need to be very careful that in New Zealand the cause of tolerance does not become dangerously intolerant, that freedom of religion and freedom of speech is not curtailed, and that the wider freedoms of society are not tragically diminished

*Dr Stuart Lange was a keynote speaker at the 2017 ACC Conference. First posted on the NZ Christian Network website: 02 May 2018. Used with permission.*

The Rugby Union star Israel Folau got into strife recently as a result of this exchange on social media platform, Instagram.

"@izzyfolau what was gods [sic] plan for gay people??" user Mike Sephton-Poultney asked.

"@mike\_sephton HELL... Unless they repent of their sins and turn to God," Folau replied.

The predominant responses were summed up by Michael Kellahan of Freedom for Faith: "Some cast Folau as the homophobic bigot whose beliefs should not be spoken publicly. Others saw him as a champion for free speech striking out against political correctness. Politicians, sponsors, commentators — everyone had a view they wanted to share. But few voices were able to speak from a consistent and principled position that took his beliefs seriously."

It wasn't (often) noted was that the statement had actually been invited by a troll who had asked Folau for his opinion. He gave it as honestly and correctly as the brevity required by Instagram permitted. The





# PUBLIC SQUARE

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

## The Implosion of the Church

The collapse of the Uniting Church is looming. Smaller explosives, strategically detonated by church leaders over many years, have already weakened its structure. The proposal to change the doctrine of marriage augurs its implosion.

When a *Working Group on Doctrine* (WGD), entrusted to uphold the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, 'believes that definitions of marriage do not belong to the substance, or heart of the Christian faith,' any pretence to be preservers of God's Christ-embodied truth is exposed.

## Difference

The Report is badly researched, poorly written, and seduced by postmodern ideology.

Its doctrinal centrepiece is not the Christ who affirmed marriage (Mk 10:6-9), but the inclusive, egalitarian Jesus who broke through boundaries and accepted people in their difference. Incompatible beliefs and practices are said to be 'explicable in biblical and theological terms, and can be recognised as a gift and a sign of health in the Body of Christ.' So much for the quest for truth!

The great diversity in understanding of marriage in

indigenous, non-Western, and European-Australian cultures is dealt with at length, the underlying assumption being that sexual diversity is equivalent to cultural identity. It is implied that the existence of such different marriage customs justifies the acceptance of another form of diversity; namely, same-gender marriage. Cultural diversity is misused to gain support for a very different kind of 'marriage', one that, for the first time in history, is not formed by the duality and 'one flesh' union of the two sexes.

## Scripture

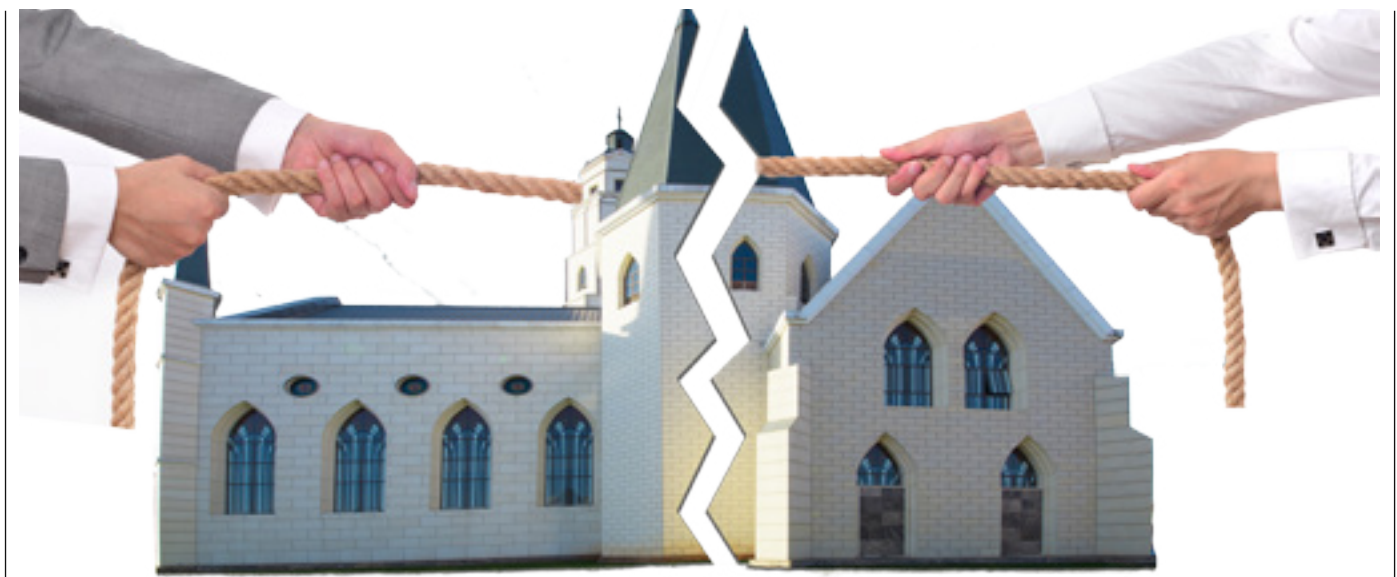
The dismantling of the church's theological framework is clear in the Report's misuse of Scripture. It shows that orthodox plans carefully laid-out in the Basis of Union have been discarded and replaced by an alien design that 're-imagines' Scripture in ways that contradict its plain meaning. We are told that there is another way of reading Scripture that enables us to regard what seems to be 'disordered' in a new light as part of God's good, wise and greater purposes long hidden from human perception. (See 3.2.7)

This would be plausible only if Scripture hinted at such a revelation. It does not. In fact, the human significance and theological symbolism of male-female marriage

is an integral part of the biblical design, from beginning to the end (e.g. Gen 1&2; Song of Songs; Ephesians 5; Revelation). The duality and complementarity of man and woman 'is' the image of God (*Imago Dei*). It is not, as assumed in the Report, reflected in each individual *per se*, as if 'male' and 'female' are interchangeable terms for 'people' in general. Rather, it is reflected in their specific male-female duality and interdependence which is embodied in marriage.

Because the *Imago Dei* is not derived from our ideas about individuality, equality, and social inclusion, it cannot be generalised to include all forms of relationship. It is 'God-given,' not a reality that we construct. Scripture affirms that we have been created in the 'likeness' of God' in the specific duality and union of man and woman.

Perhaps the architects of the Report are oblivious to the chasm between the *Imago Dei* and the images framed by alien postmodern concepts? Perhaps, by claiming that 'Christianity has problematised the "two sexes, two genders" model from the beginning.' (3.3), they want to be dissociated from the doctrine of creation? They certainly treat the God-designed limits on sexual freedom, not as liberating mandates to be enjoyed, but as rigid, outdated commandments unfit for a society that hates boundaries which stifle choice.



## The Body

The Report recognises the importance of the body in marriage but is strangely coy about the nature of same-gender sexual intimacy. Talk of 'procreation,' 'children,' 'sexual union' and 'one flesh' marriage is downplayed. Other attributes of marriage, such as 'companionship,' 'encouragement' and 'fruitfulness' are rightly emphasised. As these qualities are also found among life-long friends, family members, church members etc., it is clear that same-sex sexual intimacy is the underpinning reason for same-gender marriage.

In view of this, the Report should be clear about the complex interaction of pre-natal, psychological, social, relational and volitional sociological factors that shape same-sex attraction. The section on science (3.3, pp 35-36) is a huge disappointment. Instead of carefully weighing the vast body of evidence, and admitting that a 'gay gene' has not been found, the Report assumes that biology is determinative of gender. This is not the case, as N. & B. Whitehead's *My Genes made me do it: A Scientific Look at Sexual Orientation* demonstrates, together with a large number of other reputable scholars.

The case for the acceptance of same-gender marriage rests largely on the assumption that same-sex attraction, like ethnicity, is innate. It is unfortunate that the difficult experiences of the small number of 'intersex' and 'transgender' people are used to reject the biblical doctrine that all people are created as male or female. In view of the decision to speak of 'same gender' not 'same sex' marriage, the Report should have been much more rigorous in setting

out the relation between them.

The effect of blurring the distinction and fudging the factors involved in same-sex attraction is that the scholarly work of many theologians, exegetes, psychologists, biologists etc. has been neglected, thus giving the impression that committed same-sex couples have little or no choice. The fact that, with difficulty, many same-sex attracted people have been able to resist unwanted desires is less newsworthy than the tribulations of 'intersex' and 'transgender' people, and useless for the purpose of bringing about radical social change.

## The Family

It is disgraceful that the Report blames those who uphold the biblical doctrine of marriage for encouraging domestic violence by men! This is a serious misreading of Ephesians 5 where the emphasis is on sacrificial love between husbands and wives. And it ignores the fact that domestic violence is also a serious problem in many same-gender relationships.

There is no mention of the commandment to 'Honour your father and your mother' (Ex 20:12; Lev 19:3; Matt 15:4; Eph 6:1-4). Is it assumed that, in principle, children's wellbeing can best be fostered by living with any two individuals, not necessarily their biological father and mother? If so, it will have ignored the evidence. As President Barak Obama famously said, the absence from the family of a father is a major cause of social breakdown. While circumstances may make it impossible for children to live with their biological father or mother or both, single and divorced parents often struggle to raise their children.

And, as groups like *Tangled Webs* attest, children born with donor sperm or by surrogacy yearn to know and live with their birth parents. For all the talk about the rights of same-gender couples to marry, the inbuilt injustice done to children is ignored.

If Assembly approves same-gender marriage, it will endorse a relationship in which children cannot be raised by their biological mothers and fathers. The terms 'mother' and 'father' will become irrelevant, thus tacitly supporting legislative changes to Birth Certificates which recognise Parent 1 and Parent 2, describe children as Male, Female or Other, and let them change their gender later in life. The consequences for tracing our true identity will be disastrous.

If Assembly re-defines marriage to be between 'two people,' it will have rejected the unambiguous testimony of Scripture to the splendour of our creation as male and female and its consummation in 'one flesh' marriage. It would no longer be a pillar of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church 'built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ' (Basis of Union), but a schismatic church which has redesigned the plan and dismantled the structure so that it conforms to postmodern codes of sexual and gender identity.

## Living in the ruins

If the doctrine of marriage is subverted at Assembly, how might evangelical, reformed and orthodox Christians live in a church whose foundations have long been sabotaged from within? Will there be a 'safe place' to affirm the truth in a church that has already collapsed and is likely to implode?



# The Church & Managerialism

James  
Haire AC

Ninth President of the  
Assembly of the Uniting Church



Although Australia is a multicultural society, it is very heavily dominated by western cultural dynamics and norms, as is seen, for example, in public and private administration, in politics and in commercial activity. Part of this western cultural milieu is an emphasis on particular styles of management and organisational practice, indeed a sustained interest in what might be termed 'managerialism'. Of course, in many non-western cultures there is concern for appropriate management. However, in western societies it seems that the emphasis is on the central and crucial necessity of managerialism to alleviate anxiety, to provide certainty, and to guarantee order, efficiency, equity and transparency. Most of all, managerialism appears to provide purpose and measurable outcomes.

The question then arises as to how the Christian gospel is to interact with this cultural vital concern for managerialism. Western Christianity needs to deal with the question as to what extent this cultural norm is to be at the service of the gospel or is to dominate the expression of the gospel. Here the scriptural witness comes to our aid. In general, for Christianity the issues of the primary and the secondary are central to Christian self-understanding. The primary both in the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament for Christians) and in the New Testament is the worship and service of God, known to us in Jesus Christ. The secondary are all those arts and skills necessary for human life, both individual and communal, that is, the arts and skills of the doctor, the businessperson, the manager, the accountant, the engineer, the builder, the statesman, the artist, and so on. In and of themselves, these arts and skills are important, indeed essential for human life, both individual and communal. However, these secondary abilities can never become primary in human life. Any attempt to make them so is idolatrous. This essential distinction underlies the Christian theological tradition and needs to be constantly borne in mind.

Moreover, in western cultures there is the tendency

to measure the human individual in terms of economic performance. That is, there is the contemporary tendency in such cultures to value the human person in terms of the person's ability, in economic terms, to produce or to consume or both. Again, ultimately in the Christian tradition, this is at best a secondary measure. It can never become primary.

In addition, one of the historical cultural traits of many western cultures has been that of progress. Here the Christian theological distinction between the primary and the secondary is crucial. There may be frequent and sustained progress in the arts and skills of the doctor, the businessperson, the manager, the accountant, and so on. However, progress is an inappropriate category when dealing historically with the worship and service of God. For the ultimately inexplicable will of God to be for, and with, humanity implies that the church's life cannot begin to be understood in terms of the structures and events of the world by itself.

In 1980, while I was completing my PhD dissertation, I worked in the Selly Oak Colleges Library in England at the carrel next to that of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, who at the time was writing his commentary on the Gospel according to John. Occasionally during breaks we would discuss our work. Bishop Newbigin had returned to the United Kingdom after many years overseas, particularly in India, and I was back in Britain on study leave from Indonesia. Newbigin was overwhelmed at the 'pagan Britain' to which he had returned, and at the need to begin a new evangelisation of the country. He went on to be very influential in this area of thought. We both felt that what made it so much easier to work as a missionary either in India or in Indonesia was that one could clearly see in both places where the lines of demarcation between the gospel and the varied cultures lay. Of course, it was not easy always to see where the gospel began and where it ended in a particular Asian culture. One also had the added challenge of trying to see where a legitimate contextualisation of the gospel could take place, on the one hand, and where an inappropriate syncretism had occurred, on the other. In addition, there would always be debate as to an appropriate contextualisation. However, for our experiences, both in India and in Indonesia, the issue between gospel and culture was relatively manageable. However, the issue in the United Kingdom, and in the western world in general, was so much more difficult. During our discussions, Newbigin's insights in this area profoundly impacted me. Christianity in the west had so absorbed western culture that it was very

hard to see where the gospel actually was. Even the churches, with their long history in the British Isles, expressed a Christianity which at times seemed so dependent on the varied British cultural norms that it now seemed almost alien to the gospel. These insights were given sharper focus for us by the thinking of Asian and African contextual theologians, led by John Mbiti, who not only saw the need for contextual expressions of theology in their own societies, but who even more could see the blindness in western Christianity as it seemed to be incapable of wrestling with appropriate and inappropriate forms of contextualisation.

The issue then arises as to where the gospel begins and ends, and where the managerial expressions of western cultures start and finish. In this situation western Christianity needs to engage in what recent Indonesian theologians have termed a 'double-wrestle' between gospel and culture, in order to define Christian existence in contemporary society.

Last year (the Rev Dr John) Michael Owen published an important monograph, *Property and Progress for a Pilgrim People: How much has the Uniting Church now lost the way?* With his customary clarity, precision and incisiveness, Dr Owen dealt with a number of theological issues central to contemporary western Christianity. Although the monograph addresses theological questions particularly within the Uniting Church in Australia, it nevertheless is significant for a readership far wider than that. For its concerns are relevant to all churches in western societies.

The presenting issue in Dr Owen's monograph is the control and use of property in the Uniting Church in Australia. The Uniting Church's Basis of Union and its Constitution define areas of responsibility for church life between congregations, presbyteries, synods and the assembly. However, managerialism in western cultures often stands over against such inter-conciliar responsibilities. This occurs especially when three factors occur. First, when executive bodies are created out of councils (and even more so out of existing executives of councils) and assume to themselves responsibilities of a permanent nature, then the conciliar nature of the responsibility of

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# The 2018 Standing Committee Report on Marriage and Same-Gender Relationships or The Interim Report on Sexuality - Mark II?

Peter Bentley

ACC National Director



It is no surprise to see this Report from the Assembly Standing Committee. It is simply keeping up the liberal agenda and owes a considerable debt to the semi-failed 1996 Interim Report on Sexuality (IRS), that was presented to the 1997 Assembly. It is similar in ethos to the IRS, and like that report, is simply put out for assent and adoption. There is no thought of even paying lip service to a diverse approach. The message is clear – ‘we have been trying to convince you and we will try again and again until you get it’. The liberal agenda is designed to wear people down, and while it must be very disappointing to the liberal proponents who know that most of the church is still opposed, they know they are still in the positions of power and able to continue to promote their agenda.

This Report stands in the tradition of the ‘new tolerance’ where involvement of those opposing the hierarchy’s agenda is limited to that of a statue in a silent movie. If members make too much noise opposing the agenda, then they are regarded as not being able to keep their place, and the only solution is to be excised from the production.

The report process has been very well-managed, much like the general reviews and discussions about sexuality has been for over 20 years. One of the ironies is that even though the idea that ‘the Uniting Church is a diverse church’ has never been officially agreed (it is a defacto understanding from liberals who use the concept for their own agenda), diversity is not even taken seriously by the liberal group as they do not take the opinions and views of evangelicals seriously. This is not a report putting forward different positions and providing equal opportunity for critique and review and recommendation. The analysis and judgements are meant to implicitly condemn those who hold an orthodox and traditional view of sexuality. Twice the ACC Declaration on Marriage and the Family is referenced and dismissed. These are just some aspects that need a fuller critique, but the question remains, why in a supposedly diverse church are there not coherent expressions of other theological views?

I need to say that it should not be expected that there would be an attempt to ground argument in biblical theology, The Basis of Union and the heritage of the Uniting Church. After all, there are no biblical and theological foundations for revising marriage so there is little need to try to make it look like there are such foundations. The one-sided scientific material and especially the method of biblical reflection, for example, the side-stepping, if not dismissal of the foundational Genesis passage is breathtaking, especially when this context was noted as significant in the 2013 Discussion Paper on Marriage: The theology of marriage in the Uniting Church in Australia: a commentary on the marriage service in Uniting in Worship 2.

The report is consistent with a narrative theological approach that links to the two main arguments that have been consistently put forward by speakers at recent Assembly meetings:

- I want to be able to marry my partner
- I want to be able to undertake the marriages of my friends/and or people in society

While the context is marriage, my reading is that the focus is on the individual and this also makes for a confused ecclesiology where there is no distinction between the church and the world, thus negating the gospel and becoming a good works-based religion.

The aim seems to be to make the Uniting Church like the local village church where people can come and get what they want. I think some leaders are not aware that this approach will not even merit many new members as most people can get what they want outside the church, and if it is social justice they are after, there are more than enough groups to join. Other leaders are quite aware that new members will not result, as for them this is irrelevant because everyone is already in the church even if they do not know it.

Ministers of evangelical, orthodox and reformed foundation should be especially alarmed by these proposals as they can only be understood as another step on the way to requiring full involvement in the liberal agenda, or an encouragement to leave. It is not even clear to me whether ministers will need to at least affirm the new (proposed) basis for marriage and not speak against it, even if they do not undertake any marriages using the new affirmation.

May these weeks bring forth many critiques and detailed responses, perhaps even from some liberal theologians. At least in 1996 there were some liberal

theologians brave enough to critique the IRS for its theological failures and worldly context. May there be an abundance of material provided that aboundingly illustrates that not everyone acquiesced, rolled-over and played dead. Hopefully, the voice of the whole church will be truly heard at the Assembly in July and the more moderate members will realise the deep seriousness of the whole situation.

In a nutshell, my view is that the adoption of the proposals would make the Uniting Church cease to be the Uniting Church as we know it, even it still has the legal name. It would be more something like the ‘iChurch of a section of liberal middle-class Australia’. The grand experiment of ‘Uniting’ that was begun in 1977 as a church movement that was not “its own denomination”, but part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church would simply be no more.



[from pg13]

## The Church & Managerialism



councils is seriously imperilled. Second, when councils (presbyteries and synods) are merged, it is almost impossible for the larger of the councils not simply in effect to take over the responsibilities of both. Third, when conciliar responsibilities are taken over by executive officers, however well-meaning, again the conciliar responsibility of councils is diminished. Moreover, this thrust towards managerialism is stimulated by western cultural anxiety that conciliar responsibility is disorderly and uncontrollable.

Here is a real issue of theological existence today. The understanding of the gospel underlying the Uniting Church’s Basis of Union stressed the need to wait upon the will and purpose of God as it comes to the church. How are Christians, then, to listen to the voice of God? It is not their task as Christians primarily to invoke God for their particular view of the world, but rather, in humility, to listen as that divine voice comes to them. Therefore, they need to take up this task of listening theologically, while also being very conscious of the need to discriminate between the voice of God on the one hand and their cultural and psychological impulses on the other. Thus the church has stressed the varying roles of scripture, tradition, experience of the Holy Spirit, and, specifically for the Uniting Church, deliberations and decisions of assemblies, synods, presbyteries and congregations as ways in which the voice of God can be heard and confirmed. This is to guard against the danger of individual or small group projection believing that they alone are able to express the will of God. The Basis of Union and the Constitution seek to protect the church from individuals or small groups projecting on to God their individual aspirations, hopes or even self-interest. It is intended to protect the church from self-delusion, which is most likely to occur at a time of individual or communal anxiety. Thus the Uniting Church’s foundational documents are counter-cultural, in that they call for a real wrestling with the managerial cultural norms of the dominant western society.

The Uniting Church is very aware of this necessity to wrestle. It employs the ‘consensus method’ of decision-making in its councils. There are legitimate reservations about its use. Nevertheless it is true, that if the method is used with sincerity, and not manipulated, this method is strongly counter-cultural. If the Uniting Church is wedded to the counter-cultural consensus methodology, it will also want to be highly dubious of any attempts at centralised managerialism. Primarily the Uniting Church will do so simply ad maiorem Dei gloriam (to the greater glory of God).

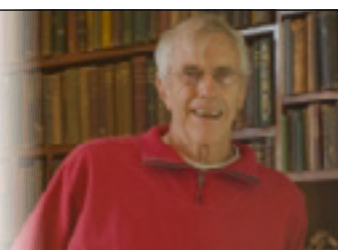
*Note: Permission has been granted from the publisher (Morning Star Publishing, Melbourne), the book author (Rev Dr John Michael Owen) and the Preface author (Rev Professor James Haire AC) to reprint the substance of Professor Haire’s Preface to the book, Property and Progress for a Pilgrim People: How much has the Uniting Church now lost the way?*



# What about an “Takeover”?

## Dr Riley Case

United Methodist (Retired)



Rev. Christy Thomas has an article in United Methodist Insight (March 13 2018) entitled, “NOW is the time, UMC: Will You Stop the Evangelical Takeover?” Among the comments are these: “Those adhering to this far more fundamentalist-type theology have infiltrated themselves into the life and leadership of the UMC.” Groups like Wesleyan Covenant Association, Good News and Confessing Movement are “well-funded, well-organized and have no interest in taking prisoners.” “They want to expel those who don’t adhere to the same tight lines as they do.”

There are a couple of conflicting narratives afloat in the American religious world these days. On the one hand we are being told that the days of evangelical and fundamentalist Christian expression are over: evangelicalism is increasingly irrelevant; millennials are abandoning evangelical churches in droves; the future is with a church that “contextualizes” (be aware of that word—it is a new UM code word) the faith to make it believable in an increasingly secular culture. As part of this narrative there is a claim by a couple of UM “centrists” that evangelicals make up only about 20% of American United Methodists (in other words a small minority) and, therefore, they should not be able to derail the plan supported by the majority “Centrist United Methodists.” The plan supported by “centrists” is that all negative language in the Discipline with regard to practicing homosexuals be dropped so that all UMs can do what is right in their own eyes. Supposedly if we follow this formula peace and unity will prevail and the church will grow. The 20% figure suggests that if 20% are evangelicals (the right-wing) and 20% are progressives (the left wing), the great 60% middle (“centrists”) is the majority.

That is one narrative. The other is that evangelical



groups are being heavily funded by conservative and right-wing interests and that they, with the help of African United Methodists, are exerting undue political power and pressure to seize control of The United Methodist Church and purge the denomination of LGBTQ supporters as well as progressives. This is part of a greater conspiracy theory that right-wing evangelicals wish to seize political power and impose a theocracy in America.

Time for some perspective. Methodism, in large measure, defined the word evangelical in America. In its original European Reformation meaning the word evangelical meant (being simplified) that salvation is by grace through faith (as opposed to through the sacraments or good works). What the American Methodists added to the meaning of evangelical in the Second Great Awakening was the emphasis on experience, as in being Born Again. For years (until the 1960s) American dictionary definitions of “evangelical” were very similar to that of Thorndike Barnhart Comprehensive Desk Dictionary, (1958): Evangelical - Of or having to do with the Protestant churches that

emphasize Christ’s atonement and salvation by faith as the most important parts of Christianity, as the Methodists and Baptists.

For over 100 years Methodists in America were all evangelical. That began to change with the rise of theological modernism, a doctrinal system of the early 1900s which asserted that doctrines like Original Sin and the Atonement and the Authority of Scripture were outdated in the modern scientific world. Human beings were born neither good nor bad and with proper education and through careful social planning could accomplish what the Bible was really about, namely the Kingdom of God on earth.

One reaction to modernism was called fundamentalism, an attempt to shore up classic Christian doctrines and emphasize that acceptance of those doctrines was a necessary part of Christianity. It must be noted that John Wesley had a similar idea only he labelled the doctrines as essentials rather than fundamentals. It didn’t matter. Modernism seemed new and exciting. The message was out with the old, in with the new. Fundamentalism seemed dated and legalistic, as was John Wesley for that matter. By 1924 every single Methodist seminary both north and south had identified its orientation as “modernist” (United Brethren and Evangelical Seminary reported their orientation as “mixed”). In 1926 The Christian Century reported the fundamentalist-modernist controversy was over and fundamentalism had lost and now the church could concentrate on more important things.

But of course, such conclusions were made by academic types and bureaucratic elitists and not by persons who showed up in Methodist churches in most of the cities of America. Incredibly, the conclusions were made at a time when only about 10% of ministers in the M.E. Church South were seminary trained. Evidently no one had bothered to check with them as to whether the whole denomination had swung in behind modernism.

When I entered seminary in the late 1950s I was told that my Methodist school was “broadminded” (back in the days before we discovered the word “inclusive”). It is true that different perspectives were offered: there were extreme modernists, modernists, old-time liberals, new-time liberals, and moderates (neo-orthodox). There were no fundamentalists or

evangelicals or true conservatives or Pentecostals. Much of the seminary community seemed quite oblivious to the real world. When Billy Graham came to town and some students asked the seminary president whether we might invite Billy Graham to the seminary for some conversations, the reply was, “No, because we do not want to be identified with that kind of Christianity.” When I asked the head of the chapel committee whether we might invite some evangelicals to speak in chapel (we had had rabbis, philosophers, and liberal politicians) the reply was to the effect, who did I mean since everyone at the seminary was ‘evangelical.’ When I gave some names his reply was, “I think you are talking about fundamentalists and we will not turn our pulpit over to such types.” Before the presidential election the faculty was polled and 88% declared themselves for the Democratic candidate. The comment was made that we should not assume the other 12% was Republican since there was a Socialist candidate that year. This was at a time when for every Methodist congress person who was Democrat there were two that were Republican.

I would mention in seminary settings that someone needed to pay attention that Youth for Christ rallies were drawing into the tens of thousands at Saturday night rallies; Christian (evangelical) radio was exploding all over the radio waves; there were dramatic stories of revival in overseas places like Korea and Brazil and the Congo; Inter-Varsity campus groups were outdrawing denominational campus ministries. On the horizon were the Jesus People, the charismatic movement, and the rise of mega-churches. The professors (and others) would smile condescendingly. They were not angry or scornful (like some are today). Why should they be? Fundamentalism (what they called evangelicalism) was a dying ideology and was not a threat to their world-view. In a few years we would hear of it no more.

In the light of all of this, some years later, are we now fearful that the UMC is going to be taken over by a “dying ideology?” I was committed during seminary to the Methodist Church because I believed the future was not with what I was hearing in seminary but rather with what I was seeing in the churches I was serving. I was not seeing churches turning from their Methodist evangelicalism to what I called ecumenical

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## What about an evangelical “takeover”?



liberalism. The National Council of Churches was big in those days. Over 70% of all American Protestants were in denominations that belonged to the National Council. Churches of Christ Uniting (COCU) were also big. There was talk of a giant merger that would establish liberal Protestantism as American mainstream culture. Today, in case persons have not noticed, the percent of American Protestants in churches that belong to the National Council is less than 40% and liberal ecumenism is on hospice care.

“Will the UM Church Stop the Evangelical Take-over?” Why talk about a take-over when Methodism is basically as it has always been in the hearts and lives of United Methodists in the pew, evangelical? The idea that only 20% of UMs are “evangelical” is fantasy. The vast majority of UMs still believe, as they always have, that salvation is by grace through faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ; that they stand in the foot-steps of John Wesley, that the historic creeds still speak to the essence of the faith, and that the Bible is authoritative in all matters, including teachings on human sexuality.

But Christy Thomas and others are not speaking about people in the pew. They are referring to UM centres of power and influence: the episcopacy, the seminaries, the boards and agencies, the “leaders.” Will the UM Church stop the evangelical take-over of the centres of power? For one there is no evidence that evangelicals desire to “take-over” the centres of power, or, even if they did, that there would be a brighter future for United Methodism. For two, it is not possible even if desirable, given the present realities. There are almost no bishops (at least Americans) who identify with evangelical renewal groups. There are almost no board and agency staff people who identify with evangelical renewal groups. There is some evidence that several denominational seminaries or professors in those seminaries identify as evangelical (as the word is historically defined), but most seminaries are still hostile to evangelicals.

We don’t need purges today. We don’t need more restrictive legislation. What we need is for the church to be the church. What we need is for that church to be faithful to the Biblical faith as interpreted by the Wesleys and by the Discipline and by the vast majority of Christian churches around the world. What we need is for the obsession with inclusiveness to extend to doctrinal inclusiveness, so that the evangelical voice is represented in church literature and on board and agency pronouncements and in the seminaries. What we need is for those who are in leadership to take our membership vows and our ordination vows with seriousness, to uphold the doctrine and discipline of the church.

*Dr Riley Case is a retired United Methodist minister. He writes Happenings Around the Church for the Confessing Movement within the United Methodist Church in the USA. This article was first posted on 19 December 2017 and is reprinted with permission.*

## CONFESSING MOVEMENT

# Sacred Season Of Prayer And Fasting

5<sup>th</sup> June – 14<sup>th</sup> July 2018

By now you will have heard the concerning news about the proposal the Assembly Standing Committee is bringing to Assembly in July to change the doctrine of marriage and understanding of marriage within the UCA to be for any ‘two people’. Along with many of us, you may be feeling deeply disturbed that the UCA could even talk about, let alone propose such an idea that is so alien and foreign to what we believe is written in God’s Word about the matter. Some of you may already be wanting to leave the church. However, the ACC Prayer network would encourage to you remain steadfast in the faith and to follow the process already outlined in the first ACC pastoral letter regarding what to do before, during and after the National Assembly. The ACC prayer network has put together the 40 Day Sacred Season of Prayer and Fasting to help provide encouragement, strength and direction for the church during this important time in our history.

Once again, as we have since 2009, we are having the Sacred Season of Prayer and Fasting in these 40 days leading up to and during the Assembly. This is in partnership with Uniting Prayer and Fasting. (***This is not to be confused with the 40 days of prayer that the UCA Assembly is coordinating***). There are resources written for the ACC Sacred Season which are available on the School of Faith Website, PDF form, hard copies for those who need them, and by daily email for the 40 days with prayer points. Find the resources and subscribe to receive daily emails during the 40 days of the Sacred Season at:



[confessingschooloffaith.com/subscribe-sacred-season](http://confessingschooloffaith.com/subscribe-sacred-season)  
It is not too late to join in if you haven’t done so already.

## Trumpet sound calling for prayer

There is a trumpet being sounded and our Living Head the Lord Jesus Christ is calling the ACC and our partners, who believe that marriage is between a man and a woman, to be united in prayer. We are still looking for prayer groups of two or more people who will covenant to pray during the Sacred Season hopefully on a weekly basis or more frequently for the following key matters.

- The protection of the Uniting Church’s current status on marriage being between a man and a woman alone
- The Lord Jesus Christ would lead us to repentance and raise us up as the UCA (even as a remnant) to become who we were called to be.
- Strength, wisdom, courage and protection for all ACC connected people who are members at Assembly including Rev Dr Hedley Fihaki (chair of ACC) and Rev Lulu Senituli.



## Truth, humility and love

We ask that that God will help us all come humbly in prayer, not trusting in our righteousness, but by his grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that the Lord would help us not be bitter or proud. May we instead, speak the truth courageously whilst at the same time loving those who think differently in this matter, who come from different and increasingly incompatible worldviews to our own.

*Let us pray for one another that we will not give in to harshness, but let the Lord soften our hearts even as we stand firm. It is God’s peace that can guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus through this difficult time.* (Phil 4:7)

## Roster of ACC prayer groups

Through these 40 days of the Sacred Season there is a roster of prayer so every day is covered. If you are not already on the roster, consider joining. Do you already pray with a regular prayer group that could focus on the prayer points above, or could you form one in your area? The group may be ecumenical or ACC/UCA alone. It only needs two or three people. We would love you to tell us when you are praying so we can cover every day. You may like to also have your group listed on the ACC School of Faith website for praying on that particular day. You would need to be aware before agreeing, that in the long run there may be a long term cost, including discrimination for standing publicly for your faith in such a way. However, there is also a promise of great blessing from the Lord (Matthew 5:10-12). May we all rise to the challenge! It is not too late to join in!

So if you have a prayer group that can pray during the rest of the Sacred Season, for the UCA to keep her traditional view on marriage and would like to commit to certain days please let us know. Email: [accoffice@confessingcongregations.com](mailto:accoffice@confessingcongregations.com) (the ACC office will forward details to the Prayer Convenor). Please include your name or group’s name, where you are from (region, state), what congregation or cluster (if ACC), when you are committed to pray (date and time) and if you are willing to have your name on the public website. We would like as much time covered as possible. If you would like to receive a text when the voting will occur so you can pray, please let us know.

## Zoom prayer groups

The preference would be to pray in person with others, but if you wish, you can join in our state zoom prayer meetings. We are offering weekly ACC prayer zoom groups run by different states during the Sacred Season for ACC members. You can connect by phone or internet. Contact the ACC for more details: [accoffice@confessingcongregations.com](mailto:accoffice@confessingcongregations.com)

## Fasting - humble submission to the Lord’s will

We would also encourage you to fast in some way. We encourage everyone in ACC to eat simply throughout the 40 days. Eat natural foods – vegetables, fruit, grains, protein – lean meat, fish, chicken, dairy, eggs. Do not eat sweets, take away, limit processed food and strong spices, flavours etc and drink mostly water (comparable to a Daniel Fast). Also similar to Wesley’s Friday fasting, you may like to miss a meal or even two each day for the 40 days but check with your doctor if in doubt. This can be tailored down to one, two or three days a week depending on your health. Do not eat more to catch up for the meals you miss. That is not fasting. Some of you who are seasoned fasters, with doctor’s supervision may like to go on a liquid fast or even not eating at all for a few days except for drinking water. You may also consider fasting from something else such as TV, computer games etc to focus on prayer. Fasting is not to think in any way that our effort can change the Lord’s mind on the outcome, but rather to humble ourselves and declare our total submission and dependence on the Lord’s will and purpose in our own lives and the life of the church.

**We believe our Lord Jesus Christ is supreme in the life of the church. Let us together be a people of prayer and fasting so we can discern what he is calling us to do and then be obedient to His will for the glory of God our Father and in the power of the Holy Spirit.**

Yours in Christ’s Service

**Rev Anne Hibbard**

On behalf of the ACC National Prayer Network  
16 May 2018



# Reflections on the Report on Marriage and Same-Gender Relationships

## Rob Brennan

Lecturer at Wontulp-Bi-Buya College, Cairns



### UC conservatives and others made Guilty by Association

The Uniting Church's Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) released its *Report on Marriage and Same-Gender Relationships* including recommendations to change the church's definition of marriage, at the end of April 2018, allowing just over two months of consideration before the 15th Assembly in July. That there is a proposal to change the definition of marriage to recognise same-sex marriage is no surprise. In spite of repeated denials by liberals over three decades, this is the end game that conservative Christians within the church have been expecting all along.

This one-sided report does affirm that there are strongly held opinions. However it always affirms one side as those who can do no wrong while constantly belittling or misrepresenting the other. One belittling example is the simplistically worded section on domestic violence which casts aspersions on conservative members of the Uniting Church implying that they somehow support domestic violence. The implication is so broad that it could be taken to include all conservative Christians in other denominations, many of whom are ecumenical partners.

### Who is Unsafe in the Uniting Church?

What has been missed by this committee of the church is that there has been a fundamental change in Australian society. The Assembly Standing Committee *Report on Marriage and Same-Gender Relationships* makes conservative Christians feel unsafe. Outside the councils of the church, the amended Marriage Act actually makes lay people vulnerable in expressing or attempting to act on conservative beliefs.

We conservative Christians are not made to feel safe in Australia. This is evidenced in the court of public opinion by a recent television news report in Far North

Queensland. The report criticised a young Christian footballer for saying in public media that sinners will go to hell. I do not want to defend his expression of a traditional faith view in a tactless manner. The point is that he was treated with far less grace than two other disgraced high profile footballers mentioned almost in the same breath. The report included blurred images of their violence and obscenity while arguing for their return to grace and the playing field. This is a bizarre situation where a Christian is considered to be the most evil of the three by far.

### The Root of all evil argument

ASC and the Working Group on Doctrine (WGD) use the same style of argument of that well-known opponent of religion Richard Dawkins in *Root of all Evil*. If there are some in a religion who are evil, then the whole religion must be evil because they allowed them to develop. ASC and WGD's version is because some perpetrators of domestic violence misuse a conservative theological argument to justify themselves, then all theologically conservative people are bad. The report attempts to defame conservative Christians (and most churches) by guilt by association by implying that we personally support domestic violence.

This is extremely offensive and verbally, psychologically and spiritually abusive.

There is no doubt that the GLBTIQ community has been terribly abused in the past.

The comments on domestic violence in para 4.3.1.6 of the report are however simplistic, offensive and dangerous. They cheapen the church's official response to this serious and complex issue which involves physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, psychological, financial and spiritual abuse. Domestic violence is a scourge to be eliminated, not a tool to be used to beat up your spiritual partners in the church.

What the report says is so simplistic that it is dangerous. It does not help us to identify the real problems in churches. Domestic violence is real. It is in our churches and it can and does involve church leaders. It is never acceptable or trivial. Latest research shows, ironically, that church life does help victims survive. Sadly the research shows that much domestic violence is not challenged because either victims are not believed, or most significantly for this discussion because church leaders do not recognise it for what it is.

I have been genuinely surprised at the strength of my emotional reaction to this report. Surprised? Certainly not by the recommendation. It has been fully expected.

No, the strength of my emotional reaction has been the realisation that I am no longer safe within my church and that the beliefs that I share with many friends and colleagues have never ever been shown respect or accurately summarised in any official Assembly report in all of the debates over the years.

The ASC's offensive report is however in the public domain, and so requires public comment.

### How to respond?

There has to be an acknowledgement by the ASC in order to move forward.

The manipulating and belittling of conservative beliefs has to cease.

I believe that all discussion on this report should cease until the following happens.

- The report and the recommendations are withdrawn.
- The report is repudiated and conservative Christians (in the Uniting Church and wider) given a substantial public apology.
- The ASC as part of its restitution action must produce a statement clearly articulating one or more conservative understandings of sexuality and marriage without belittling or correction to demonstrate to us as the aggrieved party that they truly understand us.
- The Assembly Standing Committee and the Working Group on Doctrine need to be immediately, seriously and independently reviewed to determine what in their structure, processes or culture could allow them to publically make such egregiously offensive remarks without anyone questioning that decision.

The Church is called to do better. The faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church is worth fighting for, even if this peak body within the church holds the beliefs of many of its members and much of the rest of the church in contempt and seeks to exclude us from it.

### Postscript

At the time of publication no apology or excuse has been offered publically for the offensive comments in the *ASC Report on Marriage and Same-Gender Relationships*.

Rev Dr Robert Brennan, Cairns

## Rod James

Minister of the Word - South Australia



*Rev Rod James sent another open letter (May 2018) - a copy is posted on the ACC website for information, and in this brief comment, Rod reflects on his experience with the first open letters.*

### Is anybody listening?

Earlier this year, I wrote and sent 'An open letter to the leaders of the Uniting Church' concerning marriage in the Uniting Church and the approaching national Assembly meeting in July. (The letter was also printed in the March 2018 *ACCatalyst*, pp 7-8) I sent the letter personally to the Assembly President and Secretary, and to the Moderators and Secretaries of each of the Synods. It was also widely circulated among evangelical folk in the Uniting Church.

Now, three months on, it is useful to ask, 'how did that go?'

The answer can be grouped in two categories. From the above-mentioned UC office holders I received two or three acknowledgements of receipt. But none of them engaged the letter with a response to its contents. I have put this down to two reasons, firstly: office holders are very reluctant to engage personally in controversial topics and to express their views. Secondly: and here I draw a conclusion in the face of silence, no one felt convinced to counter the claim that changing the Church's doctrine of marriage to include same gender couples would be disastrous and the end of the Uniting Church as we know it. In contrast to this silence, the response to my letter from concerned UC members has been overwhelmingly affirmative of its contents and assertions.

At the end of April, the Assembly released the Assembly Standing Committee Report on Marriage and Same-gender Relationships, finally providing a clear indication of what our leaders in the Doctrinal Working Group believe and what the Assembly Standing Committee desires to introduce. Any change to the UCA Doctrine, and tacit acknowledgement and blessing of same-gender marriage has no biblical or theological basis. Resolution 84 pushed the Uniting Church to the edge of a cliff. Another 'back door' resolution of the magnitude suggested above would push it over.

*Rev Rod James has been active in all reform groups within the UCA and ministers in 'retirement' in South Australia.*



## Does the future have a church?



### Red Alert: Does the Future have a Church?

Written by  
Gil Cann  
Reviewed by  
Rev Ian L Clarkson

Here's a massive claim: each chapter of this book is worth the price of the book on its own. What Gil Cann proposes are not just 'good ideas', but practical signposts for kingdom-seeking churches and Christians.

Gil writes and the reader sees 'pictures' - his style is pictorial without the actual drawings! Distilled biblical theology, coupled to practical application, will get ideas rolling in readers' minds, from the smallest rural church to the largest church in suburbia.

Here we have a thoughtful observer with a heart for the church. The ideas here are doctoral stuff, but simply unravelled and accessible to all. Get this book into the hands of young adults to read and discuss. Then, pastor/friend, give them some free rein!

The overview of causes of church disconnection with culture will set you thinking, questioning and applying. Tucked into the flow of the text are some one-line summaries simplifying complex ideas with disarming brevity.

Gil also touches on other related issues, such as: the weakness of a church seeking social approval, and thus failing to stick with its mandate; modern secularism's obsession with the 'fruit', but its rejection of the root of its Judeo-Christian legacy. The chapter on the organic church is a tract for our times:

*'Leaders lead by serving, not serve by leading.'*

*'We change verbs into nouns.'*

*'We miss the vital simplicity of organic church.'*

Here are principles and guidelines for the organic church that are often 'misplaced' by our preoccupation with organisation. At best, organisation is the means, 'the scaffolding', for the building. And 'feeding the soil rather than the plants' is an image you will want to work through carefully with your leadership team.

In the face of society's rising secularism, the fact is that a healthy, authentic church is our community's most necessary resource. In this respect, 'Sunday service or family reunion?' (Chapter 10) is thought-provoking. Pastors and elders who are game to make this their purpose on Sunday morning will reap new, stronger life in their congregations. Whilst reading the pages on the significance of work and its connection to the Sunday

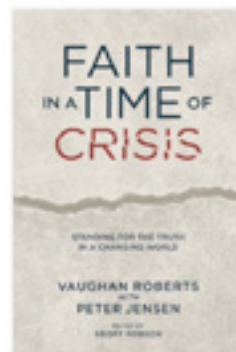
service, I immediately set about writing a sermon on the subject. And I was only half-way through the chapter! There is more, much more. This book is really for everyone who wants to have a meaningful role in their congregation.

Rev. Ian L. Clarkson

Advocate, writer, researcher on the gospel in contemporary culture  
Consulting Minister of HopeNet, a network of sixty evangelical  
Uniting Churches, SA, Australia

Chairman of The Barnabas Fund, Australia

## Standing for the truth



### Faith in a Time of Crisis

*Standing for Truth in a  
Changing World*

Written by  
Vaughan Roberts with Peter Jensen

Matthias Media (2017)  
Reviewed by: Peter Bentley

A growing number of ACC members have read this relatively short book, and while the authors are Anglican, the material is of a broad nature and issues of the wider confessing movement are considered. Four chapters are provided by Vaughan Roberts, who would be well-known to evangelical readers for his books considering contemporary issues often from historical contexts. He has recently provided a helpful short volume *Transgender* (2016).

Vaughan Roberts addresses four key areas:

### True Gospel

- the importance of this chapter cannot be underestimated as the point is that there is simply a different and erroneous gospel being proclaimed in liberal circles today. One that has no good news and while ACC members would understand this, many others in the church are sadly simply unaware.

### True Sex

- the context here of 'isex' - and the critique of sex focussed on the individual is very helpful. We need to understand the present and Roberts here fully presents the true opposite to what the world promotes.

### True Love

- an encouragement to explore again the love that is truly Christian, true friendship and behaviour, all blessing each other together.

## True Unity

- this is an essential chapter and very interesting for non-Anglicans. The whole matter of unity (in diversity) is so woefully promoted by some in the Uniting Church that one could have the impression that Unitarian unity is the gospel.

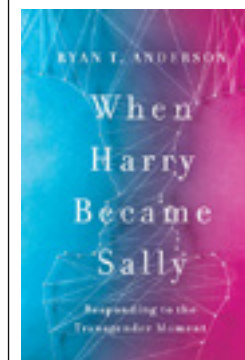
## True Faith

- former Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Dr Peter Jensen provides the final chapter on our faith. This is a sterling and stirring chapter. While the context is GAFCON and the presenting issues are focussed within the Anglican Communion the issues are not isolated and the matter of 'unity' is the essential context and explored well. Parts of the chapter are from Peter Jensen's stimulating address at Westminster Theological Seminary in 2015 (the eighth annual Richard B. Gaffin Lecture on Theology, Culture, and Mission), so if you would like to consider the issues he raises in more detail watch this presentation - available on Vimeo.

If you don't have opportunity to read the whole book, read the small section 'Why it matters to all of us', (especially page 129), as these comments are very apt for ACC in its wider consideration at present.

The Jerusalem Statement from GAFCON 2008 is included to round off this excellent volume. It is a book for our time as it captures the essence of the issues for this time as together confessing Christians stand for the truth in a changing world.

## The Moment



### When Harry became Sally

*Responding to the  
Transgender Moment*

Written by  
Ryan T Anderson

Encounter Books (2018)  
Reviewed by: Peter Bentley

The title is a reference to the popular 1989 film When Harry Met Sally, starring Billy Crystal and Meg Ryan that is about the dynamics of men and women (very much in an era before same-sex marriage), and the key 'Moment' is Bruce Jenner's April 2015 interview on the TV program 20/20. For many Americans, this raised in a popular and prominent way the transgendered context.

American author and social commentator Ryan T Anderson would be known in some church circles in Australia as he had a speaking tour in 2015 on issues related to 'same-sex marriage' and recently returned, speaking again in several capital cities, partly to promote his new book.

This book is a comprehensive overview, examining the development of transgendered ideology (highlighting the influence of popular culture and especially the mainstream media), an exploration of gender and culture issues; the views of activists (featuring many quotes and references); medical matters, including surgery; questions about identity and stories of those who have de-transitioned.

I thought the most interesting chapter is the third chapter 'What Makes Us a Man or a Woman?', but probably the most important chapter is on 'Childhood Dysphoria and Desistance' - the issues here are significant and alarming.

There are substantial philosophical ideas raised, and while there are many technical and philosophical terms used, they are explained and provided in context. It is important that we are able to explore these issues in a solid, pastoral and understanding way today.

The chapters all have full references, so one can follow up and explore in detail the comments and issues raised.

I should note that the book is of course USA - based, and many examples and issues are American. There is one full chapter (Policy in the Common Interest) on very US policies, but there are similar issues in Australia, and clearly other issues not as prominent here at present will arise.

On the overall matter of public policy, this book has some sad illustrations of the unfortunate decline in the true base of public policy, namely the

public, and common sense and the common good. Ideology has a hold in some areas of bureaucracy and government, especially it would seem in the USA, and we need to pray for a refreshment in public policy understanding and for people to challenge the 'i-context' that sets the agenda for much that is promoted today.



Caitlyn Jenner



We Believe



We Believe.  
*The Nicene Creed today*

Written by  
Travis McHarg

In accord with the Basis of Union (Para 9), and in an age when statements of absolute truth and confessions of belief are scorned in the world and even in the Church, Travis McHarg’s short commentary on the Nicene Creed is a helpful reminder of the teaching of the Apostolic faith, and of the blessing it is to understand what we believe: what makes us distinctly “Christian” in a landscape of religious pluralism and confessional relativism.

The Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia states that:

*The Uniting Church enters into unity with the Church throughout the ages by its use of the confessions known as the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed. The Uniting Church receives these as **authoritative statements of the Catholic Faith**, framed in the language of their day and used by Christians in many days, **to declare and to guard the right understanding of that faith**. The Uniting Church commits its ministers and instructors to careful study of these creeds and to the discipline of interpreting their teaching in a later age. It commends to ministers and congregations their use for **instruction in the faith, and their use in worship as acts of allegiance to the Holy Trinity**.*

(Para 9 1992 Edition, emphasis added).

McHarg (an author of several books on Australian church history) presents a readable little book that contains the text of the Nicene Creed, along with a brief

history of its formation, followed by a phrase by phrase exposition of the Creed scattered with quotes from various theologians and Christian thinkers through the centuries and the occasional text of Scripture. Each section ends with a few questions to ponder for reflection.

The book closes with short biographical reflections on Augustine (c 354 – 430) and John Wesley (1703 – 1790), with a final page of prayers from Augustine, Wesley and Richard of Chichester (c 1197 – 1353).

It is somewhat perplexing however that McHarg refers to the Creed as a summary of “personal faith” (page 1 & back cover), when it was formulated by a Council of the Church for the entire Church as a statement of what the Church (collectively) believes. Thus it is really designed as a corporate confession, as the text of the Creed itself declares: “We believe ...”. We do not make this confession alone as independent individuals, but rather we stand as a whole Church in the faith of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic body of believers. We are bound together in our Congregations, and in the world-wide Church, by what we believe in the fellowship of the Spirit.

Likewise, while the reflections on, and prayers of, Augustine and Wesley are informative and encouraging, reference to the later confessions of faith such as the Westminster Confession of 1647 (and subsequent Catechisms) and the Savoy Declaration of 1658, both of which are important parts of the Uniting Church’s heritage (Basis of Union para 10), would seem to this reviewer to be more pertinent and instructive.

Nonetheless, we should be grateful to McHarg for his contribution to understanding our faith to guard against heresy and false teaching.

This book would be a great resource not only for personal edification, but also for group study, and even as a basis for a sermon series.

*Rev Ian Weeks is the Pastor of Belrose Uniting Church and Secretary of the ACC National Council*

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,

who proceeds from the Father [and the Son], who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. *Amen*.

The Man of Galilee

This new study series subtitled Questions about the life and impact of Jesus Christ is a documentary presentation by Rev Keith Garner AM, the Superintendent and CEO of Wesley Mission (Sydney).

The Galilean area was the prime setting for much of the life and ministry of the Man of Galilee Jesus Christ, and this series explores that life and ministry and the implications for today.

It is certainly not a travelogue, though it is beautifully filmed and the settings illustrate areas well including: Nazareth, Capernaum, Bethsaida, Tiberias, Tabgha, Magdala, Mount of Beatitudes and the Jordan River. There are six episodes of 26 minutes each.

1. Who is the Man of Galilee?
2. How does Jesus call people?
3. How does Jesus teach people?
4. How Jesus spoke to others
5. Detractors and Adversaries
6. Life and Religion

This series would suit small group study and the questions are well-designed to not only help people reflect on this Man of Galilee, but become a follower.

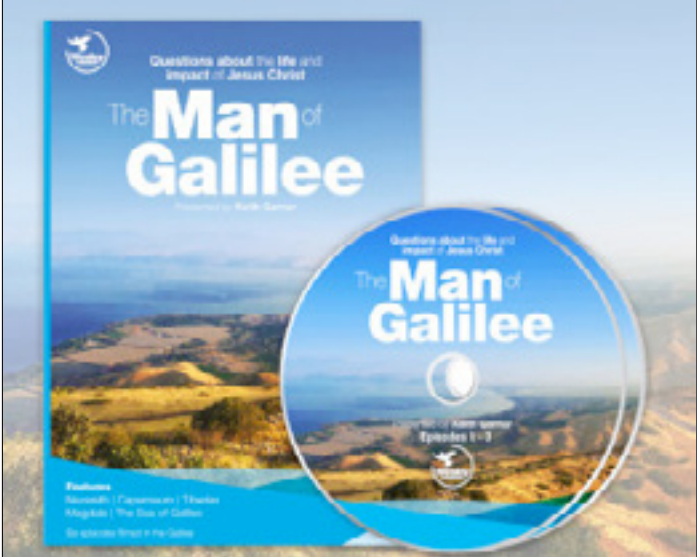
*DVD: \$24.95 (plus postage).*

*Digital download version: \$19.95.*

The Study Guide is included in the DVD or can be downloaded from the Wesley Website.

For further details: [the-man-of-galilee.myshopify.com](http://the-man-of-galilee.myshopify.com) or phone (02) 9263 5326

*Peter Bentley*




The Heart of Man  
(2017) M

**Starring:**  
Robert Fleet, Serena Karnahy,  
Justin Torrence

**Written & Directed by:**  
Eric Esau

I have long had an interest in the idea of modern versions of the parables, and this movie links into this with a stylised re-telling of the parable of the prodigal son. It is a dramatic account, aimed at adults as it is coupled with comments and personal stories all in the context of ‘contemporary’ addictions, sin and shame, and finding the way again to a new life in Christ. The film had a wider promotion in the USA last year and there will be a limited public screening season in Australia in June, along with discussion opportunities with some involved in the project. It certainly highlights the need to be more open in our churches and help people not to hide their shame.

 [heartofmanmovie.com.au](http://heartofmanmovie.com.au)

NOTE: This is an adult film dealing with significant personal issues and some people may find parts confronting.



Paul, Apostle of Christ  
(2018) M

**Starring:**  
Jim Caviezel, James Faulkner,  
Olivier Martinez

**Directed by:**  
Andrew Hyatt

My twitter summary of this would be ‘Biblical epic without the spectacle’. This time Jim Caviezel plays Luke, and the context is the writing of the story of the acts of the apostles, so the film is literally peppered with biblical lines and references. The film is not the long-expected sequel to The Passion of the Christ, but part of a new series and is directed by Andrew Hyatt. There was a limited cinema release in Australia.

English actor James Faulker does an excellent job as the Apostle Paul. Paul is mainly seen in prison during this period, though the wider context is the increasing persecution of the people following Christ. There are several other well-known English actors in supporting roles, playing early (biblically referenced) Christians within this wider context. Yes, there are some Hollywood scenes, including the interaction with the gaoler, but the film is faithful to the Christian context. Overall, the film is certainly worth seeing and will be available later in the year on DVD or to download/stream.

*Peter Bentley*

The Nicene Creed

English Language Liturgical Consultation (1988)

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.



# Bella Easterbrook

ACC Member / Southern Sydney



Australian culture isn't often known for being solemn and reverent. This can be a good thing, but there are times when solemnity and reverence are more appropriate. ANZAC Day is one such example. The legend of the ANZAC soldiers is sacred to Australian culture.

I wonder sometimes, in a culture that has so few sacred things, why is the story of the ANZACs so honoured? I think it's about *sacrifice*. These young men - my great grandfather included, fought in horrific conditions and endured unimaginable suffering, some lost their lives and others returned broken, so that our country could be safe and free. Those



present at the Gallipoli landing and those soldiers who made the same sacrifice in wars since. It's something that I take seriously, something that's very close to my heart.

The sacrifice of the ANZAC soldiers was profound and something worth honouring and remembering. But my remembrance doesn't merely stay there. Their sacrifice reminds me of an even greater sacrifice that won for us an even greater freedom. Jesus willingly entered into a world of suffering and pain to dwell with us and show us glimpses of God's kingdom. Like many of the ANZAC soldiers, Jesus' life on earth was cut short by a violent death. The death of these soldiers in battle was, in many cases, a tragic waste of life. Yet, with Jesus, his death was not a waste. It was his death that won us victory and freedom. For Jesus suffered in a way that the soldiers could not. He not only endured physical pain, he also took upon himself the sins of the world and the Father's righteous displeasure at our sins. He was forsaken by the Father and spiritually desolate. A greater sacrifice for a greater victory.

There's another huge difference between Jesus and the ANZAC soldiers. The legend of the ANZACs has a sense of immortality. We declare that 'age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn'. Jesus, though, doesn't just live on through our memory. He rose from the dead and now reigns in abundant, eternal life.

The freedom won by the ANZACs, while deeply valuable, extends only to this world. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus won freedom from sin and death, extending from this world into eternity.

John 15:13 says *'greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.'* The soldiers who gave their lives in battle offer a glimpse of the greatest sacrifice. This is why I honour the ANZACs but I worship Jesus.

## REFLECTION

# A Word for Today

***For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.***  
(Matthew 6:21).

In the Bible our hearts are the 'control centre of our whole beings'. Proverbs 3:5 tells us: *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart"*. Our hearts are the place where we decide what we're going to trust, where we look for direction and joy, where our treasure is, where we decide what is most important and valuable, and where our hope is found. Our hearts are the place we consciously and subconsciously look to all day long. It is what we dream of when we are alone; the thing we cherish most and ultimately it is what we look to for our salvation.

God our Father was to be the true centre of our heart, but sin means we look to all sorts of things and treasure them

above the glorious God. These new treasures have no true value or power and our hope in them is pointless.

But God gave Ezekiel a great promise: *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."* (Ezekiel 36:26). A new heart! A new centre - restored back to the only true treasure in this world. Jesus did this by crucifying our sinful hearts of stone and purifying us making us fit for new hearts.

Having been purified, God then gave us His Spirit who leads and empowers us to live in the true treasure of a relationship with the Father. How do we receive all this? By turning from our worthless pathetic treasures and trusting in the Lord Jesus. There is true treasure!

*Devotionals are provided by Rev. Derek Schiller (Minister of the Word at St George Uniting Church, Qld), and are available via an APP for iPhone or Android. Each day a new devotion is provided. You can download the APP from the St George or ACC Website.*



## THIS IS THE ACC

Save the date:

# ACC National Conference

Add these dates to your diary now and plan now to join other ACC members as together we encourage one another to maintain the faith today.

Theme: Living and working within the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic church.

Assembly of Confessing Congregations  
within the Uniting Church in Australia

## 2018 ACC National Conference and Annual General Meeting

(1.30 pm) Monday 17 September –  
(12.30 pm) Wednesday 19 September

Venue: Wesley Church | Wesley Mission | Pitt Street, Sydney



## 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.

## The objectives of the ACC

The objects of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations are:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## How to join us

Membership rates for supporting members:

- 👤 Concession (single or couple): \$20.00 pa. (financial year basis)
- 👤 Full (single or couples): \$40.00 p.a. (*see website*)

📞 Contact (02) 9550 5358.

✉ Email: [accoffice@confessingcongregations.com](mailto:accoffice@confessingcongregations.com)

✉ Post: PO Box 968 Newtown NSW 2042



# FILM



CPX film crew on location in Montgomery

## Erring on the side of Better?



### For the Love of God (2018) Unrated

Produced by:  
The Centre for  
Public Christianity

**F**or the Love of God: How the Church is Better and Worse than you Ever Imagined is the new film from the Centre for Public Christianity (CPX). The documentary has been several years in the making and involved considerable travel by members of the CPX team, including Dr John Dickson, Justine Toh and Simon Smart and many interviews with leading scholars and figures throughout the western world. The 'main' film is a 90 minute 'cinema cut' and released for viewing in selected areas through the FanForce arrangement from May, and then there will be extended material available in a series of episodes on-line. For more information search:

 [betterandworse.film](http://betterandworse.film)

For the Love of God is a cerebrally stimulating film, and clearly aimed at a thinking section of society (not just people attending church) and can be seen as a modern form of apologetic. It is quite accessible overall as the presenters are engaging and clear and the questions answered by the range of expert commentators are well-thought out and helpful. The style is non-linear, and ranges over history,

ending in Australia.

Areas of consideration include the crusades (I don't think I have to say which category this fits into): Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church (and the worse - the German church in general), Father Damien of Molokai, Christians caring in Roman times

**"It hasn't always been used on the side of the political or cultural angels - but to think you can understand our idea of right, democracy, human dignity, the scientific revolution, even the welfare state without understanding Christianity ... you're making a big mistake."**

- Nick Spencer

(how different they were from the culture of the day especially in the care of new-born babies), 'the troubles' in Northern Ireland, the treatment of women, including perceptions of witchcraft, and the Myall Creek Massacre in NSW and the treatment and perception of Aboriginal people. There is challenging and sobering material to reflect on, and a film that will stimulate many conversations about God and faith, helping us to reflect again on the centre of our faith Jesus Christ, who we are called to truly follow, rather than our own agendas.

The website has a quote from Nick Spencer that I think sums up the whole idea of the project (Nick Spencer is a Christian writer and commentator based in England with Theos. His recent book is worth reading: *The Evolution of the West: How Christianity Has Shaped Our Values*).

**MORE FILM ON PAGE 25** ➡



CPX presenters: Justine Toh, Simon Smart and John Dickson