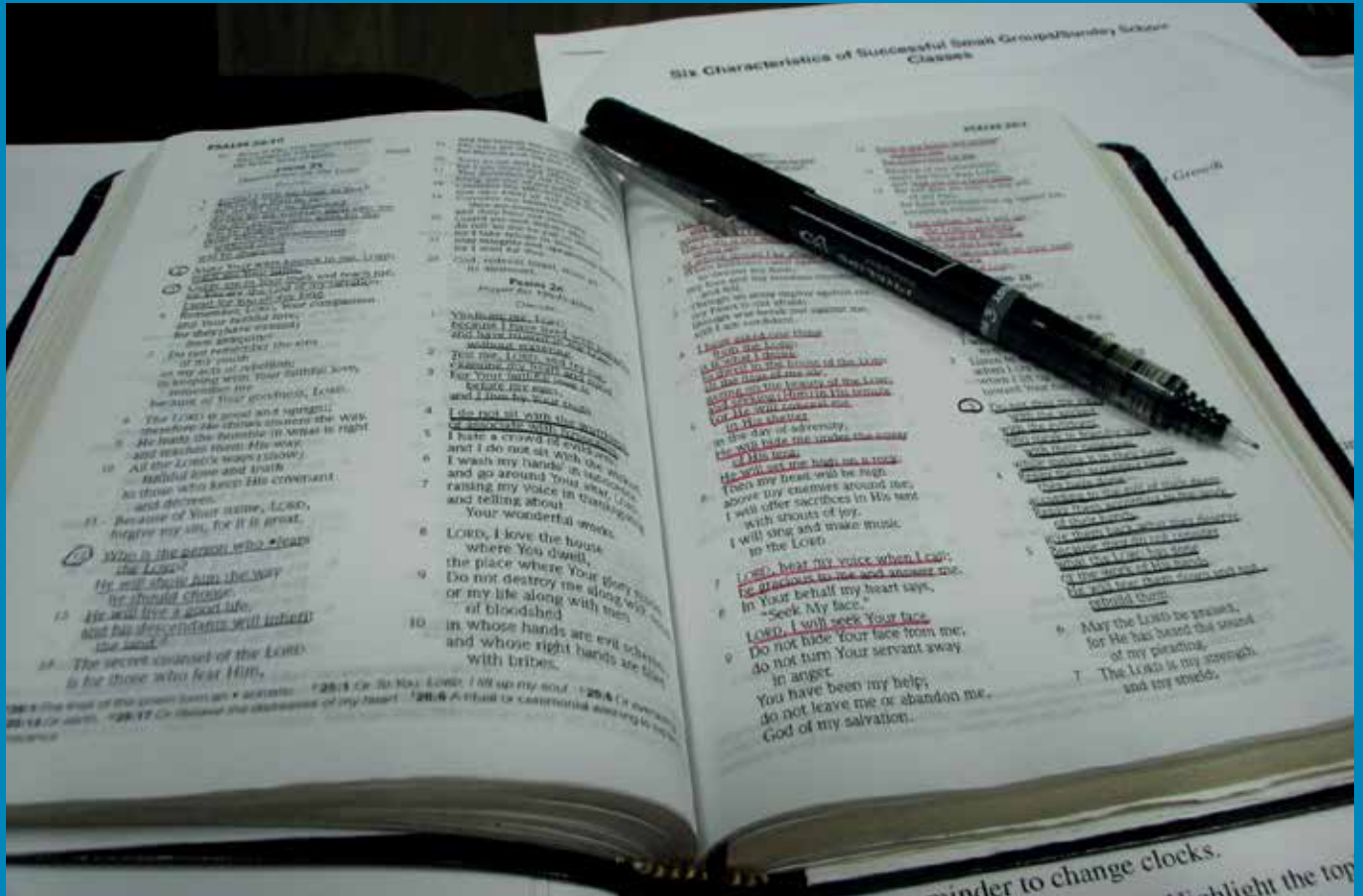


ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



Scripture under Suspicion

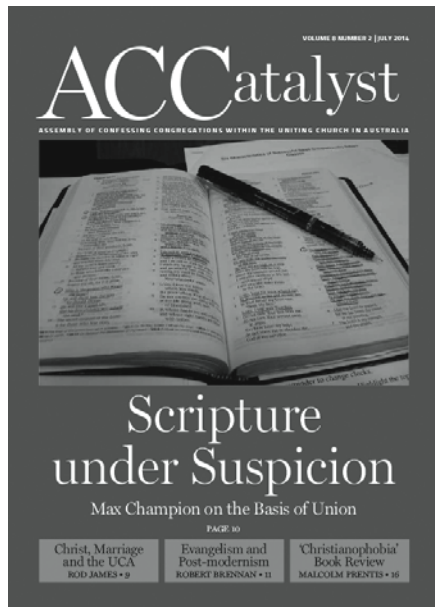
Max Champion on the Basis of Union

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Cover George Bannister/flickr

EDITORIAL

A numbers game

Perhaps the most interesting statistic in this magazine comes from Rod James on page 9 where he estimates the percentage of UCA members in the broadly evangelical networks in the church. I won't steal his thunder here. Now as you race off to read his piece remember to come back, because I have another equally important number for you.

40. That's the percentage of UCA members reading the Bible daily or a few times a week according to the National Church Life Survey or Church "census" in 2011.

Pentecostals reported 73 per cent reading the Bible daily/a few times a week; Baptists and Churches of Christ 64 per cent, Sydney's evangelical Anglicans also 64 per cent. The overall Anglican figure was 49 per cent.

Congratulations to our Pentecostal brothers and sisters. Well done. The rest of us need to catch up.

John Sandeman

A reminder: Letters to the Editor should be kept to about 300 words, and are liable to be edited for length.

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A Church history lesson

I have just finished reading a Church history book. In England there was a time when the church bishops did not think it was appropriate for the common person to have access to the Bible, because it might make them rebel against the church leadership. The Bible the bishops used was in Latin not English, and they thought it was their job to tell the people what it said - well, at least the bits they wanted the people to know about.

However, when the printing press was invented it was much harder to keep information away from people, because now writings could be produced in large quantities relatively quickly.

A priest named William Tyndale secretly translated the Bible into English, and then took it to Switzerland to get printed and sent back to England to be sold by merchants to the people. However, it was an expensive project and his resources were limited.

One merchant who had a load of Bibles to sell was approached by



Hilary Sandeman

the Archbishop of Canterbury who wanted to buy all of his copies so that he could destroy them. The merchant agreed and sold him the Bibles for a profit, and then offered to get hold of as many Bibles as he could to

sell to the Archbishop to destroy.

It sounds like a terrible end to the story doesn't it? All of Tyndale's work going down the drain and many of the Bibles getting burned by an Archbishop scared of losing power.

But what the Archbishop didn't know is that the merchant was a friend of William Tyndale, and all the profit he made he gave back to Tyndale to enable him to print even more Bibles and smuggle them to the people in England.

So the Archbishop in his efforts to stop God's word getting out actually helped the cause.

When people try to work against God, he has an amazing way of turning things around. We can become discouraged because despite our best efforts for God, we can't see any results of our work, or we feel like others are opposing us.

But God's word tells us that he works everything for good for those who love him (Romans 8:28). Who knows what God is doing with our efforts, beyond what we can see!

Robyn



Emerging Leaders Award (ELA) is on again! Preparations for the next ELA camp which will be held January 29th-February 1st 2015 have begun. Five previous awardees attended a planning meeting for the next camp. It was encouraging to hear their appreciation of ELA and their enthusiasm for it to be held again. The word is going out to leaders of congregations to see if there are young Christians who may benefit from a three-day event designed to encourage and resource them as young Christian leaders. The age group is 17-30. Young people who would like to go can ask their leaders if they would be willing to nominate them. While run by ACC in South Australia ELA is not restricted to young people from ACC congregations, and interstateers are very welcome. Info is available from Rev. Don Purdey, rev.don.purdey@gmail.com

Restored indeed

In June 2013 ACCatalyst reported that ACC member congregation Coonabarabran UC had sparked an international mercy ministry. Jane Nelson-Hauer reports on how this continuing ministry is now supported by the whole community.

Restore International Inc. was formed in 2006 for the purpose of giving hope to children without hope. In March 2007 Shion Free School in Dhaka opened its doors to 60 children (kindergarten, years 1 and 2) from the slums whose parents could not afford to send their children to school.

There are now 75 children in 5 classes, year 8 down to year 4. Children in year 4 are the last group to receive tuition at Shion. Restore International pays all expenses for students in the other 4 classes to attend local public schools.

President of Restore International Inc. Jane Nelson-Hauer has just returned from her third visit to Bangladesh. "I was accompanied this time by Priya Kirubakaran (from Brisbane) who originally joined us in 2011 and raised funds to set up a

computer lab consisting of 5 computers and all the paraphernalia that goes with it. Priya spent 6 months at the school in 2011 writing the computer curriculum.

It is wonderful to return and be welcomed by the same faces, to remember the children who came to us so undernourished, many of whom couldn't make it through the day without a sleep, and to see them today as teenagers looking so strong and healthy from receiving two nourishing meals a day.

To see them succeeding in a very competitive school environment and being so proud to have 3 boys qualify to attend the selective boys High School. Unfortunately our funds have not enabled us to continue to add new classes at the bottom and we have decided that it is more important that we see this group of 75 children through their schooling.

We will want to take them just as far as they can go. This is a Coonabarabran-based project and it is just amazing what the people of one small town have been able to achieve."

Meet the winner of the Pendlebury prize

An insight into the life, ministry and witness of our latest Thelma Pendlebury Prize winner: Elizabeth Cole

From Elizabeth: I've just started my third year of vocal studies at Wesley Institute and I feel very blessed to have received the Thelma Pendlebury Prize.

I was born and raised in Rockhampton, Central Queensland; the eldest child of Colin and Ruth Cole. One of the most valuable things my parents instilled in me was the understanding that I needed to own my faith. They taught me to read the Bible as my foundation and to have the courage to stand up for what I believe in an uncompromising and yet loving way.

After graduating from school in 2005, I worked as a medical secretary, at the same time tutoring violin, theory, piano and voice at a local music studio while continuing to focus on my major instrument (violin).

At 19 years of age, I developed a chronic wrist condition. To one day complete a Bachelor of Music, I chose to shift my focus from violin to voice. God opened many doors when it came to accepting the Wesley Institute place.

In 2013, I began a second degree by distance education, Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Writing at the University of New England. I am hoping to pursue a Masters in Speech Pathology after my Bachelor of Music (Voice) and this additional degree helps to fulfil pre-requisite requirements.

Currently I work two casual jobs; one as a secretary at a psychology clinic and the other doing administration work for a private business.

In Sydney I have been involved in teaching School "Scripture" as well as church worship. I am also part of the Senior Resident team at Flo Harris Lodge (student boarding house run by the Petersham Baptist Church). 2014 is my second year in this role and I am enjoying it immensely! The transition from high school to university is a time of change and growth for many young people and it is a privilege serve them during this time. There are many opportunities for talking about God and it is a blessing to be able to 'do life' with others.



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PUBLIC SQUARE

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

Easter offensive

In "Easterside Story" (*The Sunday Age Sunday Life*, 20 April p8) Tracey Spicer paints a humorous but disturbing picture of the confusing images swirling around Easter. Through the experiences of her young children she accurately identifies the syncretistic beliefs that now largely define our cultural sense of being.

Her son thinks Jesus is "awesome" – a "superhero: fighting the bad guys, being nailed to a cross, and rising from the dead." But her daughter is confused: "Is Jesus the one who brings the chocolate eggs?" "Did the poor bunny die for his sins?" "Maybe Jesus had Peter Rabbit as his pet?" The picture becomes fuzzier when she introduces popular films in which Jesus is cast as a zombie.

Tracing the origins of the Easter bunny to a German Lutheran tradition where the hare played the role of a judge of children's behaviour, she makes the unremarkable observation that Easter began in pagan religion.

Describing the charge of sacrilege she says that "putting religion, paganism and commercialism in a blender is bound to be messy." ... So why not all come together – believers and non-believers – and have a good laugh about it? Picture this: "The all-new chocolate Zombie Jesus Easter Bunny. Coming to a store near you!" Having "apologised to any Christians, or zombies, who are offended by this article," she ends with "Happy Easter/Zombie Jesus Day!"

Christians will find her article offensive. However, she has identified the dramatic cultural shift that has taken place, and is advancing apace, in our midst. The worldview that has underpinned Western societies like ours for many centuries is being radically overhauled.

We must not let outrage prevent us seeing the depth of the problem articulated by Spicer.

Offending the Spirit

In the shadow of Pentecost, spirituality is on the rise and religious commitment is in decline. Mind-Body-Spirit festivals are well patronised in contrast to most church attendances. In "Less religion, more spirituality" (*The Weekend Australian*, *Weekend A Plus* 12-13 April p.16), Ruth Ostrow bemoans the fact that some people are offended by her promotion of wide-ranging spirituality and implicit criticism of orthodox Judeo-Christian beliefs and institutional affiliation.

Her critique of 'religious laws and rules' and embrace of a philosophy of life based on 'doing no harm' now finds wide acceptance in the church and the community in our increasingly 'neo-pagan' culture. The god within nature and within each of us is now revered in opposition to God's revelation in Christ.

This movement is active within the church. In "Religion and Spirituality: Finding God Within," (*Revive*, WA Synod publication, Issue 35 April, pp. 2&3), Dr Val Webb is quoted as being in favour of believing in the God within that enables us to develop our own 'spiritualities' to better connect with other people and the world. Obstacles to connecting with humanity on the basis of shared inner spirituality are found in doctrines, liturgies and forms of organisation that don't "move with the times."

While the call for a more questioning faith is admirable and necessary to encourage Christians to give an account of their faith in a sceptical age, her embrace of diffuse spirituality is a counsel of despair. Seemingly a way to connect the diverse beliefs of

adherents of all religions and none, she regards the self as the repository of spirituality awareness, thus dangerously equating pagan spirits with the embodied love of the Spirit who is 'the Lord and giver of life' supremely embodied in Christ.

It is to be hoped that Pentecostal preachers will reject these popular, shallow and self-centred Gnostic beliefs.

Sorry!

In "Sorry, but you've offended me" (*The Weekend Australian*, *Weekend A Plus*, 17-18 May p16) Bernard Salt identifies a disturbing new social trend – 'apology averse syndrome'. Instead of apologising for having wronged others and seeking forgiveness, many people now say: 'I'm sorry if I offended you'.

Salt attributes this to 'apology creep', where 'inferior, lightweight apologies' are commonly made to defuse conflict and 'move on' without the need to admit full responsibility, even where guilt is publicly unmasked. He attributes this growing tendency to "our fixation with self-esteem" that persuades us that we can do no wrong. More deeply, it is the result of thinking that treats feelings as more indicative of reality than actions.

This 'syndrome' actually reverses the onus of guilt. In effect, the 'offended' person is thought to have done the wrong thing by making the offender uncomfortable. In order to rectify the situation, a partial apology is in order. Because such apologies are "more offensive than the initial transgression", Salt calls for the government to set up an "Apology Regulator to adjudicate on the worrying decline in the quality of modern apologies". He is, of course, sorry that it has come to this!

As Federal and State inquiries into child abuse demonstrate, the Church's record is mixed when it comes to apologising for grievous wrongs done to others. Salt reminds us that genuine sorrow for wrongs done involves heartfelt apologies and the desire for forgiveness and reconciliation. As followers of the 'Man of Sorrows' who offended many, called his disciples to love their enemies, and forgave those who knew not what they did, we are heirs to the deepest form of apology – the mutual confession of our offences against God and the joy and freedom of being reconciled to him and one another in Christ.

Redefining vilification

Debate over the Federal Government's proposal to amend a section of the Racial Vilification Act centres on the clash between two prized Western values: freedom of speech and protection of human dignity. Should 'offensive language' that denigrates a person because of their ethnicity be not only strongly discouraged in a civil society but forbidden by law?

Whatever is the outcome of this often fierce controversy, it highlights the common, but selective, practice of claiming to be 'offended' in order to stifle unpopular opinions and gain public acceptance of once fringe beliefs and practices. As former High Court judge Dyson Heydon recently said, mainstream thought takes delight in offending the Catholic Church and the religious beliefs of Christians in general. ("Catholics 'victims of new racism,'" *The Weekend Australian* 12-13 April p.4).

Indeed, it has become an undeniable offence against the canon of sexual, cultural and ethnic diversity to reaffirm the binary nature of our creation as male and female and the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman or question aspects of non-Western beliefs and practices.

Norrie's successful application to the High Court of Australia to be registered as neither male nor female but 'non specific' (see "Fighting for all the sexes," *The Age* 5 April p.33), and the victory of transgender singer Conchita Wurst at Eurovision, reveals the extent to which what it means to offend others has been radically redefined. Will we get to the point when, as cartoonist Bill Leak suggests (*Weekend Australian* 5-6 April p.23), it is offensive to address people as "Ladies and Gentlemen"?

Insulting God

Although freedom of religion is a right enshrined in Sudan's 2005 constitution, a judge in a Khartoum court has sentenced a pregnant Christian woman to hang for refusing to return to Islam. Raised as an Orthodox Christian by her mother, because her Muslim father was absent, and married to a Christian, Meriam Yahia Ibrahim Ishag was convicted under a 1983 law that forbids conversions from Islam on pain of death. The decision is being appealed ("Pregnant Christian to hang for apostasy," *The Age*, 17 May p.22).

The importance of interfaith dialogue in a free society should not

blind us to persecution often suffered by Christians in Muslim countries. Nor should Western churches be naïve to think that open-ended tolerance is a substitute for deep theological engagement with Muslim friends about fundamental beliefs.

We cannot afford to be smug, either, about religious freedom in Australia. That we are not a theocracy does not guarantee that the non-religious State will encourage participation in faith communities. It is still to be determined whether proposed laws will focus on freedom for or from religion. Perhaps, in future, orthodox Christians here will also be called on to account for their faith before the courts.

IAN CLARKSON

Humiliation

The recent D-Day remembrances together with ANZAC and the publicity anticipating next years events at ANZAC Cove have produced some side focus on a deep and dark aspect of human fragility and anguish. Humiliation.

Old soldiers generally are loathe to speak about their war experiences especially if they were prisoners or spent long periods in combat. Most times we accept this reluctance as 'he cant talk about it now: just too awful to recount. The horrors of it all are just too much to freshen with recall and retelling. I have often wondered about this reluctance going back to my boyhood, listening to an intimate conversation between my uncle who was wounded at the Somme and my father.

Curiously I was absorbed with the description of the wounding but never really got to the point of what happened except a jocular "I was running like hell". It wasn't until State school experiences of an abusive teacher who picked on disadvantaged boys and then later the physical rigours of boarding school that I began to perceive touches of the psychology of the reluctance to "talk about these things".

Eva Slonim, 82, a Jew, survived Auschwitz. Her parents had both passed away without breaking their silence. "No one spoke a word". Eva then throws the torch beam on it. "This inability to talk about the Holocaust is something that afflicts survivors. *Maybe the fact that*

we were humiliated affects us, she says. Our tongues were bound in a shameful silence. ... It was unutterable. To speak was to confirm that it was over—and perhaps it wasn't."

How much of this resonates with other sufferers of violence? Women in domestic violence, grown men now remembering their boyhood in institutions, are still scarred senior citizens. *Humiliation. The inability to protect ones being. Frozen fear.*

Secret horrors sometimes projecting onto parts of our bodies with attendant shame. Powerlessness—the cold steel of humiliation thrust deep into the soul can be horrific. Do men find these circumstances harder than women?

So its not just the theatre of war. This humiliation pains in other authority structures—staff relations in corporations, hospitals, schools, and yes, prisons. Any place where egos are carelessly bumped and bruised. Families sometimes. How healing is true gentleness here! Yet oh how rare.

Sure our old Adamic ego needs to be severely jarred, as Tozer put it. Yet that can be the beginning of the poverty of spirit which as the first Beatitude, lays the foundation of a Redeemer-treated ego which in time is restored with godly resilience to be so healed as to rejoice in the suffering and ego-bashing to be borne with standing for truth. This is all beyond modern medicine.

What is required here is rich and strong pastoral care with patience, insight, and yes, deep gentleness.

Pearls before Swine at Moore

In response to Gordon's review of the book celebrating Robert Doyle's ministry, may I offer a memory?

In 1983 I was in Robert's class at Moore. He would often say "Pearls before swine!" because we were ignorant First Years, many of whom (including me) had no clue about much of what he was trying to teach us. One day we decided to get organised.

Each student brought in a toy pig and one string of pearls. Before his class, we draped the pearls over Robert's lectern and a pig on each desk. Then we all went outside and observed through the windows.

Robert came in, picked up the necklace and gently bit a pearl. "Humph," he said, "true pearls before false swine."

Anne Weeks—Minister's Wife at Belrose Uniting

Death's arrival

I wish to respectfully take issue with Trevor C. Carter (Letters, March 2014) who, in his legitimate attempt to discredit the theory of evolution and defend the gospel, takes, as the basis of his defence, the assertion that "the Bible clearly teaches death only came about because of man's sin". Yes, the apostle Paul unequivocally states that death entered the world through sin (Rom 5:12), but an honest reading of Genesis and the gospels presents some challenges to Mr Carter's implied assumption that Paul's reference equates to physical death.

The existence of physical death before the Fall is inferred in God's

instruction to the man and woman to "increase in number" and "fill the earth" (Gen 1:28) (a catastrophic prospect if not for death's intervention), and in his allocation of seed-bearing plants for their food (Gen 1:29) (a finite food source were it not for plants' death at the point of consumption and re-production).

Ken Ham, the creation scientist referred to by Mr Carter, attempts to resolve the food issue by differentiating between the "death" of plant life and death as experienced by blooded creatures. Jesus Christ, however, the one by whom and for whom all things were created (Col 1:16), makes no such distinction. In acknowledging the necessity of a seed to die in order to produce fruit, Jesus uses the same term for the death of a seed as he does for the death of a human being (Jn 12:24, cf. Jn 11:14).

There is also linguistic evidence for the existence of death in the world prior to the Fall. That there existed a term "to die", which both God and the serpent knew would be understood by the man and the woman, presupposes an antecedent (cf. Gen 2:17, 3:4). If death did not already exist, God's warning to Adam and Eve about the consequences of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would have been meaningless, and the serpent would have had nothing to refute so vehemently.

This being the case, Mr. Carter can be reassured that the gospel is in no way undermined. Adam did indeed usher in death through his disobedience; a severing of that intimate relationship with God which he and his

wife had freely enjoyed up to the that point – an excommunication which rendered them dead to God. Christ's death on the cross was the great act of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:19), bringing us back from death to life. The resurrection was God's final stamp of authority on a complete victory.

Alison Clark, Hurstville Grove NSW.

Artificial construct

Since Trevor C Carter (*ACCatalyst* March 2014) finds my letter published in September 2013 'confusing', I feel compelled to state my position more clearly.

I see the conflict between science and Christianity as being an artificial construct created by those hostile to the Gospel. Thus I am alarmed when Christians uncritically submit to the science vs. religion paradigm, and seek to howl down the huge body of evidence supporting the Theory of Evolution, much of which has been accumulated by scientists who were also Christians.

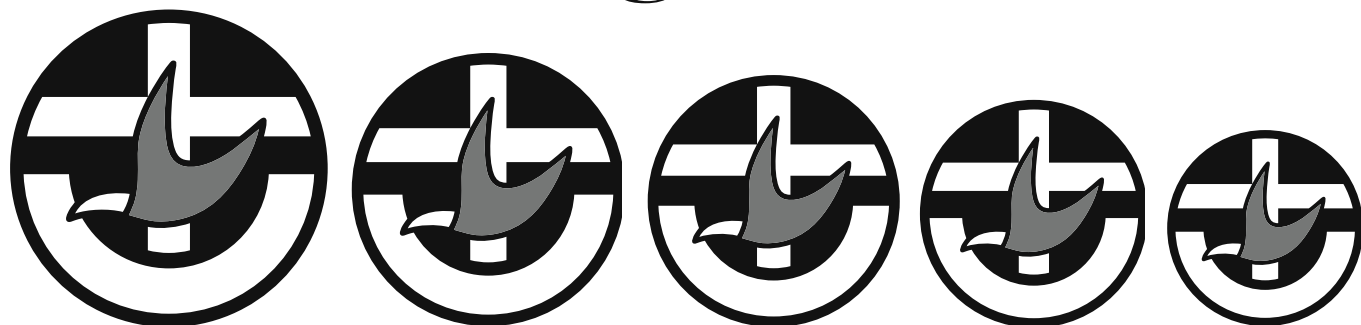
It has two evil effects. The first and most important is that it makes people less willing to consider the truth about the Lord Jesus and his death and resurrection which we proclaim, because they perceive themselves as being asked to throw reason out of the window and ascribe to myth and superstition.

The second is that it makes many Christians less willing to accept scientific research on other matters, climate change being an obvious case in point.

Gary Ireland



Christ, Marriage and the Uniting Church



Rod James on denominational downsizing

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

Since all things have been created in, through and for Christ, this understanding is held to be true of all human marriages. Marriage is thus ontologically heterosexual, involving one man and one woman in life-long union. Such union is the ontologically ideal environment in which children can grow up in familial relationship with both their mother and their father, both of whom are fundamentally important for their child's development as a man/husband/father or a woman/wife/mother.

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

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

These groupings include EL250 congregations (i.e. congregations over 250 attenders), ACC congregations,

PNEUMA congregations (Pastoral Network of Evangelicals Uniting in Mission Action, Western Australia), 3D Network congregations (South Australia), Hope Network congregations (South Australia), Migrant Ethnic Conferences of congregations (e.g. in the Chinese, Tongan, Samoan, Fijian, Korean, Sudanese, etc.), and Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress

If a Christian denomination were to separate itself from this understanding of marriage it would be separating itself from Christ.

congregations. Beyond these groupings there are many reformed/evangelical congregations who hold to Christ with similar convictions. I estimated that 90% of UCA people under the age of 50 belong to congregations in one of the above groupings.

In the last decade the Uniting Church has lost many members and congregations and downsized itself as a result of its ongoing controversies

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

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

Scripture under Suspicion

Max Champion on the Basis of Union

Some members of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations (ACC) assume that the problems currently besetting the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) are the direct result of a defective doctrine of Biblical authority in the Basis of Union (Basis). This is hardly surprising. In debates on controversial issues it is often claimed that paragraph 5 (Biblical Witnesses) must be interpreted in the light of paragraph 11 (Scholarly Interpreters) — the implication being that many beliefs and practices in Scripture should be rejected by contemporary Christians.

Evangelical, Liberal, Charismatic

Surprisingly, perhaps, evangelicals, liberals and charismatics are all prone to be suspicious of the authority of Scripture in para 5. Evangelicals worry that it isn't strong enough to withstand post-modern attacks. Liberals worry that it is too strong to accommodate progressive thought. Charismatics worry that dry theories ignore the heart-warming work of the Holy Spirit. Evangelicals accuse liberals of watering down the truth. Liberals accuse evangelicals of a narrow interpretation of faith. Charismatics accuse both of being coldly rationalistic.

Evangelicals are prone to reject modern methods of studying the Bible, treating it as the 'verbally inspired,' 'infallible' and 'inerrant' Word of God in every detail. While liberals accept scientific methods of inquiry, they are prone to regard it as a series of time-conditioned writings and refuse to call it the 'Word of God.' Charismatics are prone to give ultimate authority to their personal experiences untested by Scripture.

In shedding light on what the Basis says about the authority of Scripture, we must examine paras 5 and 11 in the context of the Basis as a whole. Otherwise, texts will be used selectively to justify favoured views on personal salvation, social justice and spirituality.

Pre-Union Controversy over Scripture

The Joint Consultation on Church Union prepared a credal statement on which the three churches would have to agree if unity were to be achieved. The 1970 edition was revised at the request of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. The agreed revisions were incorporated in The Basis of Union 1971 upon which the churches voted.¹

As the status of Scripture was a major cause of dis-

agreement leading up to union, para 5 underwent three significant changes:

- The word "unique" was placed before the words "prophetic and apostolic testimony" to 'make doubly clear the authoritative character of the canon of Holy Scripture.'

- The general phrase "The Word of God addressed to men (sic)" was changed to "the Word of God on whom man's (sic) salvation depends ..." This strengthened the connection to para 4, where Christ is referred to as the "Word of God who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into being what otherwise would not exist", thereby making it clear that "what is found as the centre of Scripture is not random information on a number of subjects, but the Word of God on whom man's (sic) salvation depends".

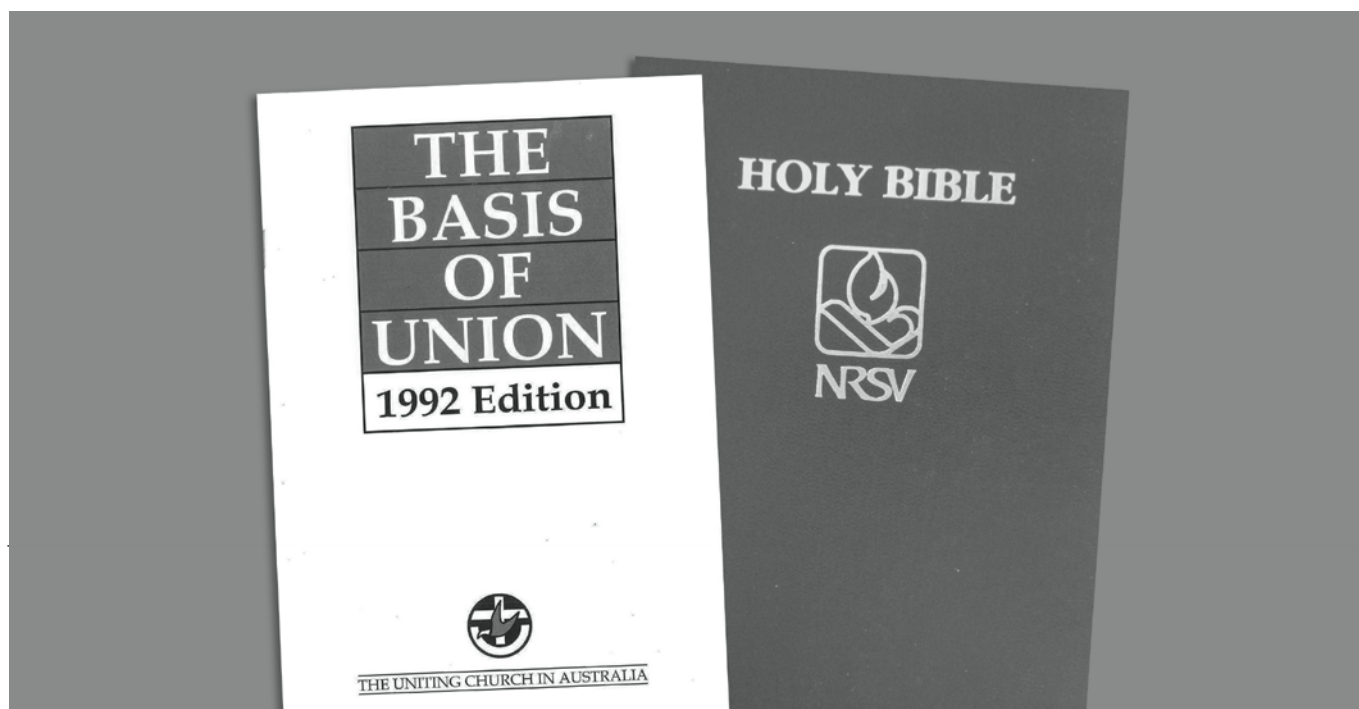
- The 1970 ed. had said that "The Uniting Church lays upon its members the serious duty of reading the Scriptures, (and) commits her ministers to preach from these texts." The 1971 ed. omits 'texts' to remove any ambiguity that might lead preachers to think that, instead of studying the whole text of Scripture, they could select a few 'favourite texts' to suit their evangelical, liberal or charismatic faith. Thus, 'texts' must be read in 'context' to safeguard the unity of Scripture and the integrity of the church's faith.

The Threefold form of the Word of God in the Basis

- The Basis intentionally does not say that the Bible is the verbally-inspired, infallible and inerrant Word of God. Unlike the first article of faith in the Youth for Christ creed (and similar confessions of faith), which says: "We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible authoritative Word of God", the Basis does not put a theory about Scripture before the UCA's confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Thus it follows the pattern of the Nicene Creed which affirms the resurrection of Jesus Christ "in accordance with the Scriptures".

- The 'Word of God' in the Basis is not a unique written document but a unique person. The phrase 'Word of God' must be understood in relation to para 4 where "Christ who is present when he is preached among people is (described as) the Word of God who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into being what otherwise could not exist".

As expressed throughout the Basis, the Word of God is the incarnate, crucified and risen Lord in whose "com-



As Scripture witnesses to this revelation of the Word of God it is not identical with him. Yet, insofar as the Bible mediates the revelation of God's Word to us, it is the written recollection and deposit of the proclamation of the Word of God.

pleted work" (para 3) God was reconciling the world to himself (para 4). The Word of God is not a sacred book, but a unique person—the fully human Son of God. Jesus Christ is the Word of God who is to be listened to because he embodies the sovereign saving grace of God.

• The influence of the great twentieth century Swiss theologian Karl Barth is evident in this formulation. He shows the close connection and mutual interaction between the Word of God who is Christ, the written Word of God in Scripture and the Word of God proclaimed.² He says that, because the revelation of God's Word is an event, not a theory, these three forms must be understood together. While the first form of revelation establishes the other two, it never meets us in abstract form—that is, apart from Scripture and preaching.

a. The Revealed Word of God

"A church dogmatics must, of course, be Christologically determined as a whole and in all its parts as surely as the revealed Word of God, attested by Holy Scripture and proclaimed by the Church, is its one and only criterion, and as surely as this revealed Word is identical with JC".³

The primary form of the Word of God is Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, true God and true man who became flesh to reconcile sinful humanity to God. However,

"The revealed Word of God we know only from Scripture adopted by Church proclamation, or from Church proclamation made possible by revelation."⁴

b. The Written Word of God

"The written Word of God we know only through the revelation which makes proclamation possible, or through the proclamation made possible by revelation."⁵ As Scripture witnesses to this revelation of the Word of God it is not identical with him. Yet, insofar as the Bible mediates the revelation of God's Word to us, it is the written recollection and deposit of the proclamation of the Word of God. The 'written word of the prophets and apostles' is fundamentally distinct from and superior to 'all other words spoken later in the church and needing to be spoken today.'⁶ The statement that the "The Bible is God's Word," is a confession of faith, a statement made by faith that hears God Himself speak in the human word of the Bible."⁷

c. The Proclaimed Word of God

Proclamation of the Word of God is the Word of God. It is human language through which God speaks his Word of divine judgment and acquittal and we hear in faith. "The proclaimed Word of God we know only by knowing the revelation attested through Scripture, or by knowing the Scripture which attests revelation".⁸

The unity and particularity of these three forms of the Word of God are expressed in para 5 of the Basis. The Word of God is an event in which the primary form is the Incarnate Son of God who is attested in Scripture and made known in preaching (and the sacraments).

The Authority of Scripture in the Basis:

• Scripture is a unity of the Old and New Testaments. The Bible, like the 'script' of a play, must be understood in its entirety. A person who leaves after the first act or arrives for the finale will miss the complexity, ambiguity and intrigue of the whole story.

- As part of the “One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church” (para 2) the UCA “acknowledges” that the Church “has received” the books of Scripture so that the ‘Word of God’ continues to be “heard and known” through her preaching, worship and study.

a. The choice of “acknowledge” is consistent with what the Basis says in paras 1-8 and 11. At the Thirteenth Assembly of the UCA (2012) there was lively debate about how best to describe the UCA’s doctrine of marriage. Eventually, ‘noting’, ‘reaffirming’ and ‘recognising’ were set-aside in favour of the much stronger ‘acknowledging’ which means ‘recognising the truth of what is disclosed to us, rather than us determining its validity according to our views’.⁹

b. In 1 Cor 11:23 and 15:3, Paul speaks of “handing on” the tradition of faith that he had “received” from the Lord, as a matter of the highest importance. By using this language, the UCA affirms her participation in a living communal tradition that has been formed by, and is grounded in, events and beliefs from which she is not free to pick and choose according to individual taste.

c. Scripture is “unique prophetic and apostolic testimony”. In its various historical and cultural contexts and theological expressions, Scripture as a whole presents a singular, incomparable witness to Jesus Christ, the Word of God.

d. As such, it “nourishes, regulates and controls” the church’s faith, preaching and theology. The Bible is to be ‘received’ as we might enjoy a nourishing meal. In order not to receive unhealthy food, quality control and health regulations are essential. Big Mac theology is no substitute for the bread of life!

- By referring to “the Biblical witnesses”, the Basis encourages us to take account of the diverse voices that constitute its united “testimony” in pointing to Jesus Christ as “the Word of God on whom man’s (sic) salvation depends”. The use of “Scripture” (singular) and “Biblical witnesses” (plural) in para 5 aptly expresses the Reformed principle that Scripture must interpret Scripture.

“The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly”.¹⁰

It would be a pity, therefore, if the choice of “The Biblical Witnesses” for the heading of para 5 (there being none in the original) gave the impression that the diversity of “books, ...” “witnesses” and “Scriptures” is the most important thing about Scripture. A more apt heading would have been “The Biblical Testimony”.

- The authority of the Bible can’t be determined in isolation from participation in the life of the church. What Scripture (as a whole) says about salvation will only be known when it is “appropriated in the worshipping and witnessing life of the Church”. That is why the Basis says that the Uniting Church “commits her ministers to preach from these Scriptures” and “lays upon members the serious duty of reading the Scriptures”.

- The section on Scholarly Interpreters (para 11) mustn’t be read in isolation from para 5. Properly understood, para 11 expands on what para 5 means by “appropriating Scripture”.

a. The Basis encourages serious and faithful study of Scripture in the context of contemporary thought so that “God’s living Word” may be confessed in “fresh words and deeds”. The church is reminded that the Word is not a dusty old book but the living presence of Christ whose reality must be expressed anew. It is misguided, however, to not only listen to contemporary voices, but to reject the living tradition that has been “received” by the UCA and confessed in paras 2-5 of the Basis. This “newness” is not to be understood as superseding Scripture as being “unique testimony” that has a decisive role in ‘nourishing,’ “regulating” and “controlling” the church’s life, teaching and preaching of Jesus Christ.

b. Para 11 rightly focuses on the importance of ecumenical engagement with “literary, historical and scientific enquiry” in order to have an “informed faith”. Scholars, like evangelists, prophets and martyrs, are to reflect deeply upon “God’s living Word” in order to be faithful to the sovereign purposes of God, as attested in the whole of Scripture. The importance of reading the Basis (as well as Scripture) as a whole is highlighted by the tendency of evangelicals, liberals and charismatics to appeal to “God’s living Word” without reference to what it says about the incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended Jesus.

The Basis highlights the unique, indispensable place of Scripture in the life of the Church, without falling victim to narrow evangelicalism, dogmatic liberalism or free-floating spirituality. It is made clear that we are not called to ‘believe in the Bible’ or to dismiss the overarching unity of its diverse histories, cultures and theologies or to judge its message of salvation by our personal experience. We are to rejoice in the salvation that has been revealed to, and received by, us in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, as uniquely attested in Scripture and made known by the Holy Spirit in the proclamation of the church.

It is a pity, then, that, despite what is said in the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice (2000) about ministers having “a responsibility to represent accurately the teachings of the Scriptures and of the Church” and “to live out the vision of the Basis” (3.2), little has been done to ensure that the preaching, teaching and pastoral care of evangelicals, liberals and charismatics in the UCA is “nourished, regulated and controlled” by the Word of God.

1 Unless otherwise indicated, references to the changes are from Preface to the 1971 edition by W.F. Hambly.

2 In Church Dogmatics, Vol I/1, The Doctrine of the Word of God (T&T Clark 1936) Barth sets forth the doctrine of the Word of God in its threefold form – Revealed, Written and Proclaimed (pp 98ff).

3 (CD I/2, p 123)

4 (CD I/1, The Unity of the Word of God p 136)

5 Ibid

6 (CD I/1, p 115)

7 (CD I/1 p 123)

8 (CD I/1 p 136)

9 See G. Watson, “The Basis of Union – A Confessional Statement?” in *Forward Together: On What Basis? Essays on the Basis of Union in the Uniting Church 1994*, ed. M. Champion, pp 25-27

10 Article IX of the Westminster Confession of Faith here refers to interpretation, not textual inerrancy. The biblical texts which are referred to – 2 Peter 1:20-21 and Acts 15:15&16 – counsel against private interpretations of Scripture

What does evangelism mean in a post-modern society?



Rev Dr Robert Brennan

Evangeliism still means sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. What has changed is how to make good news sound like good news to the listeners. Older or more traditional styles of evangelism are rapidly becoming incomprehensible to Post-moderns who have never learnt the concepts associated with Christianity. At worst they hear something that is unfair, unjust, judgemental and unconnect-

ed with what they believe spirituality is supposed to be about.

Evangelism today and in particular with post-moderns requires prayer, listening, building trust, genuineness, real change and real action, openness and honesty. The gospel needs constant translation into their terminology and equipping those in developing post-modern cultures and sub-cultures with the tools to help them to translate the good news into terms that make sense for themselves. This translation process may also need to consider pre-evangelism

and other bridge-building exercises.

Evangelism still has to make the invitation to people to come to the Jesus Christ who is;

- Compellingly attractive
- Challengingly confrontational
- Lovingly gracious
- Powerfully transformational

Gobbledygook meets ignorance

But over two thirds of people have no idea what we are on about!

This first chart (page 12) is actually quite frightening. It represents the relative number and ages of people

REACHING OUT

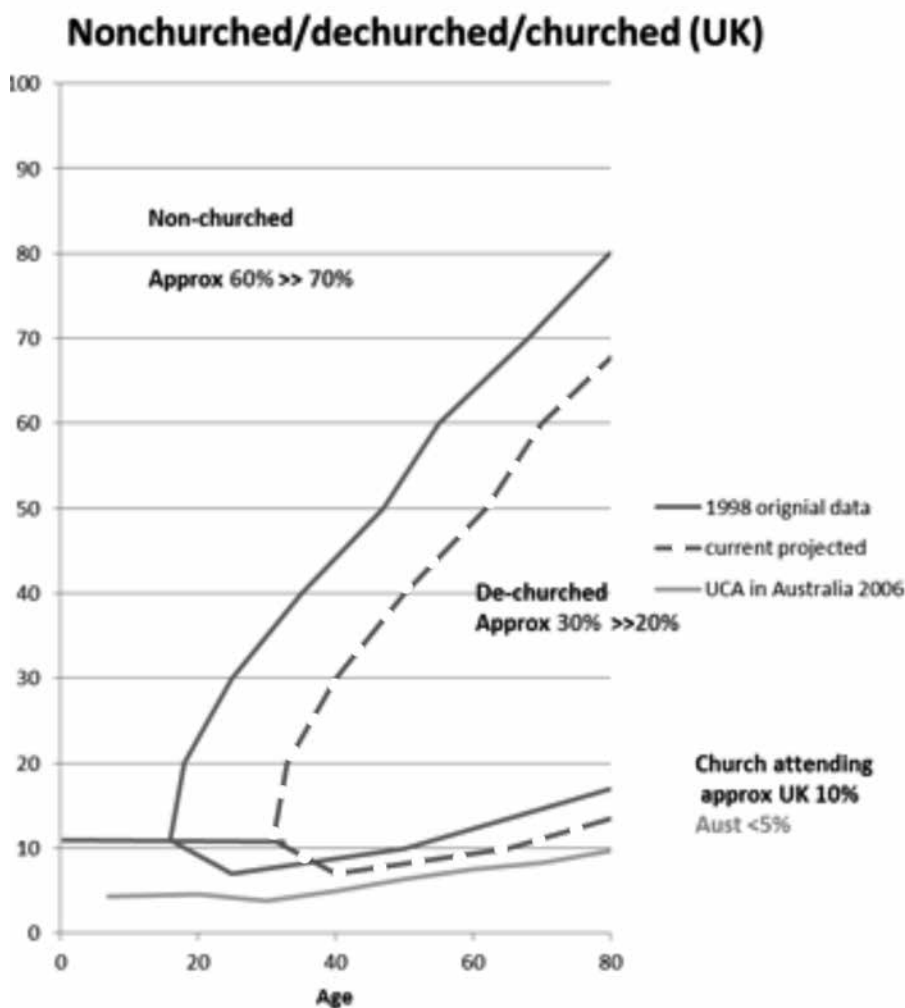
in church in the United Kingdom in 1998. It also shows the number of people who used to go to church or Sunday school (de-churched) and those who have never been. In 1998 three fifths of people had never been to church. Unfortunately, most of the most effective tools that the church was using at the time to share the gospel assumed that people had some degree of understanding about Christianity. Eg; Alpha, Christianity Explained, Emmaus.

If little has changed and if as seems likely, the situation in Australia is similar, then we are looking at probably three quarters of people in the general population who know nothing about what Christianity is actually about. The key difference is that Australia's proportion of people attending church is far lower than the UK. To be generous, it is more like 5% than the UK's 10%. A good example is that recently I taught 800 school children "Jesus Loves Me" as a new song to all of them, as well as to the music teacher!

The short and sharp lesson is to assume nothing and listen very carefully.

If we are to truly clear away the deadwood then we need to acknowledge what Christians have usually said and ask how that would be heard by post-moderns. George Lings in the United Kingdom has suggested some of the more usual problems.

Translation needs to be into their terms and should help them to be able to translate for themselves. On mission fields there are two types of bible translation. The first type of translation is done for the people with long explanations of unusual



terms that the locals have not yet encountered. In contrast the second type of translation is done using the terms that the locals come up with themselves. Type 1 Bibles tend to gather dust on the book shelf whereas type 2 Bibles get dog-eared and worn out with use.

In dealing with post-moderns the church is faced daily with the same issues of translation. We need to listen and find the type2 links because

simply put in our information rich society the average post-modern is not going sit around while we hammer out a long complicated explanation for a cherished theological term.

David Kinnaman in *UnChristian* (Barna Associates) explores why his large test group claim they are not Christian. These reasons make up the headings of the book that Christianity is; Hypocritical, Get Saved!, Anti-homosexual, Sheltered, Too Political and Judgemental. Given that post-moderns are on about genuineness, fairness and exploring experiences their external assessment of Christianity (particularly in its North American guise) is unsurprising. For those of us committed to the presentation of an authentic biblical faith these are serious preconceptions to address with the reality of the genuine love Christ calls us to express to all people.

Laurence Singlehurst (writing in the UK with Australian experience) suggests that traditionally the gospel has been over simplified and its ben-

Pagans/ P-Ms think Christianity is unspiritual and immoral (after Lings 2004)

We do /say	They see/hear
▪ Go to church to meet God	▪ Your God is not in creation
▪ Resist the flesh	▪ You believe bodies are evil
▪ God found only in Jesus	▪ You reject my experience
▪ Keep religious education Christian	▪ Christians are power mad
▪ Resist the World	▪ You are anti-ecological
▪ Repent or face Hell	▪ You want to blackmail me
▪ Preach the Gospel	▪ You won't listen to me
How big is the credibility Gap?	

REACHING OUT

efits oversold without including costs of discipleship. Instead he proposes a four-step explanation which includes

1. Pointing to compelling hope
2. Outlining Humanity's overwhelming problem
3. The fabulous answer shown in Jesus
4. How that answer is to be lived out.

Singlehurst, Lings, Murray, Everts, Schaupp and Kinnaman all agree that the traditional manner of presenting the gospel sells it short. To summarise, if evangelism is presented merely as ideas about Jesus to which some form of intellectual or emotional response is implied, then it misses the very elements of the gospel story and the life of God which appeal to post-moderns. These typically include assumed values of fairness, genuineness, having their interest piqued, and having freedom of choice, whilst being open to being challenged about lifestyle and service.

Along with translation the church needs to gain a wider and actually richer understanding of evangelism when working with post-moderns. We need to remember that three quarters of P-M people don't even know how to begin to understand what "conversion" means let alone other details about who Jesus is.

Eric Metaxas in *Socrates in the City* has observed "Postmodernity is a necessary answer to the Enlightenment, but it too leaves us deeply unsatisfied. The Christian's task is always to go through the other side, to take the best that there has been, to thank God for it and celebrate it and build on it, but to do so constantly looking, constantly vigilant. There is no one answer I can give you that we can then put in our pockets for the next generation."

There are a number of starting points that might become bridges to talking about the faith with post-moderns. Most people have had some form of spiritual experience, but they are so far removed from the church and the story of Jesus that they do not see that they could interpret the experience in Christian terms or come to church to develop a frame of reference.

Spirituality can be good as a starting point, noting that more than 70% of people pray even if they are not sure about God's existence. We can build on this because we already should be appealing to the

post-modern's sense of fairness and justice, care for the future/environment and to genuine self-sacrifice of time and safety.

The question is how to get the authority to share and to be heard? Patrick Regan of XLP a post-modern charity started in London in his book *No Ceiling to Hope* repeats Campolo's assertion, "I contend that Christians will only have authority if they first serve the needs of others in sacrificial ways, especially the poor and the oppressed". Regan's experience has been that their actions in helping the 'at risk' community in London poorer regions and in other communities has given them this authority with individuals, community leaders and politicians.

While nothing replaces the need for listening to people and praying for them, some researchers have tried to map where we might find people as we share faith with them. The Engel's scale is one attempt that is often used. It places people along a scale from some awareness of God at one end through conversion to active ministry at the other. There are problems with this model. I find it a bit too linear and one dimensional. If we take into account how I think that Apologetic works, then where we find people is far more complex than this scale suggests. I am not alone. Paul Griffiths during a recent visit from the UK added another dimension "modern to post-modern" on the Engels scale. He noted that most people are far more post-modern in outlook than modern.

He observed that most courses offering an introduction to the faith are no longer aimed at where most people are. There is a need to build bridges and even to do more activities in Pre-evangelism. This is an area in which the tools have yet to be developed and for which there is no silver bullet. There are however signs of hope.

There is some research regarding what has actually works in enabling post-moderns to find faith. Everts and Schaupp in *I once was lost or Pathways to Jesus* (IVP) trace what have been paths to faith for 2000 post-moderns. They identify five thresholds that people may arrive at in any manner. The process they have observed isn't linear or merely logical. It is relational and they underscore the need for prayer.

These thresholds resonated with

the things that post-moderns find important. Trust is built on genuineness and honesty. Their curiosity needs to be piqued. They also need to be invited to consider change and to somehow commit to it.

- Trusting a Christian: distrust -> trust
- Wondering about Jesus: apathetic -> curious
- Opening up to Change: closed -> open
- Seeking after God: meandering -> seeking
- Entering the Kingdom (making a decision/ surrendering to God): lost -> saved

After earning the opportunity to share about the faith, they offer an approach to apologetics that offers the sceptic new signposts. They (AT-TIC)

- Affirm—Bless their curiosity
- Translate—Express the abstract in relationship to your own life
- Transparent—Be confessional about your own struggle
- Insert yourself as a case study—Personalize the question to yourself
- Challenge—So what about you?

We still have a lot to learn and the research needs to be translated across culture into Australian understandings. The *Finding Faith Today* report in UK (1992) indicated that over time women come to faith (in order of importance) through a Christian friend, a minister, less than 10% of time through children. Men come to faith through their spouse, a minister, Christian friends. Even so, up to 20% still have a Damascus road type of sudden conversion experience.

There continues to be a need to identify what is actually effective evangelism. We need to engage with those who are actually good at faith sharing as we train our church. There are some good models but we need to be able to identify more as well as discovering effective means to equip people to share the good news of Jesus Christ with a range of people in our community. This includes helping members of the church to be able address issues and apply in their own circumstances tools that will help them to share that good news.

We need to celebrate genuine life changing faith not forgetting the place of love and beauty. Two recent converts should have the last word. "I didn't know worship could be such a celebration of love."

Dilemmas of healing

By M Browne

The issue of suffering has been very difficult and largely unresolved by many philosophers, religions and individuals, whether Christian or not, throughout history. In some ways, Christians can have more angst over this than many non-Christians, since we simultaneously believe in a God who has the power and compassion to heal individuals miraculously, and yet who appears to choose to do so in only a small minority of situations. *ACCatalyst* has featured some correspondence and an article on healing over the past 15 months, which raise some perplexing and painful issues for many Christians, especially those of us who suffer from chronic or terminal illnesses. So, as I have struggled with these issues myself, both professionally (as a doctor) and personally (with many years of chronic, painful illnesses), I felt prompted to share some thoughts I have had on this complex yet common area which we will all face.

Firstly, thank you to Rev Don Purdey for his thorough, honest and sincere article: "Healing, Faith and the Will of God" published in the *ACCatalyst* of July, 2013. The fact that Don is writing from a very personal and vulnerable perspective makes his statements even more profound, as he has clearly had to wrestle with the conflicting views and theologies of other Christians, an understanding of Scriptural perspectives on healing, and his own desire to be healed of a progressive terminal illness.

I was therefore dismayed to read the letter from Godfrey Williams in *ACCatalyst* December, 2013 entitled: "My desire is to help Don". Mr Williams writes as a 90 year old who has apparently been graciously blessed with a long and possibly healthy life. However, I feel that his views are very unlikely to "help Don" or anyone else who is struggling with ongoing illness, impending/actual early death, or the loved ones of those dealing with these issues.

Mr Williams states that: "In the NT Jesus always testified that healing was received by the faith of the recipient". However, when scrutinising the healing events of Jesus in the gospels, this is definitely not the case. There are many examples of people being healed in response to the faith or actions of others¹, or where there is no mention of faith at all². There are also occasions where failure of healing to occur was due to a lack of faith in those praying for healing, not in the recipient³. There are occasions where sickness is spoken of as present to bring glory to God⁴. In the epistles, there are records of ongoing illnesses among the apostles themselves⁵ and no mention of faith being involved there either. All these examples contradict Mr Williams' unequivocal statement.

Further, Mr Williams also states that: "When Jesus initiated healing, he always gave the person needing healing

something to do to demonstrate their faith." Many of the previously mentioned scriptures do not support this statement either.

Secondly, Mr Williams quotes Psalm 103:1-5, stating that: "[God] sent his son to save, heal and redeem us from all our distresses". Notably, however, there is no time-frame given in the psalm for the fulfilment of these promises⁶. Psalm 103:6 goes on to say: "God works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed." Jesus himself was not vindicated in his human form, but prophesied that this would happen much later⁷. It is clear to many of us that persecuted and martyred Christians do not receive justice and vindication in this life.

Yet Christians suffer illness and death at exactly the same rate as non-Christians. It is God's will which determines whether or not he will intervene in this process.

Revelation 6:9-11 makes it clear that this may not occur until after the return of Christ. If this is the case for one Scriptural promise, it is quite conceivable that other promises may not be fulfilled in this earthly life. Hence, complete physical healing (as described in Ps 103:1-5) may not occur until the next life, as Don already points out in his article. (See also 2 Cor 4:16-18, and 2 Cor 5:1-5 which also indicate that complete physical healing ultimately occurs with

our new eternal body.)

Thirdly, Don handles the issue of "what is the will of God" very humbly, in marked contrast to Mr Williams, who boldly states: "We need healing in the here and now, and God wants us healed. He wants us to live here as long as we can and bring glory to his name by being healed". There are no specific Scriptures that state that this quote is true for all Christians on all occasions. So despite writing about "believing the Word of God" and having "faith without wavering or doubting", Mr Williams' assertions are not Scripturally based. Conversely, the Bible praises those who surrender to God's will with humble obedience⁸. Hebrews 11: 39-40 clearly states that: "All these [servants of God], though well-attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better..." Our faith needs to be in the character of God, his love for us, and his purpose to set all to rights – in the fullness of his timing. Since supernatural and natural healing is God's job, it is absurd and unjust to blame Christians for not being healed, despite their prayers and commitment to God and his divine will. We cannot claim to always know the

Will of God⁹, or demand that God act in a specific way in a set time-frame without “putting God to the test”, and thereby committing the sin of presumption¹⁰.

Too often those of us who suffer from chronic or terminal physical illness receive condemnation by the words of those like Mr Williams, who cherry-pick Bible verses and come up with a formula of:

Prayer + “The Right Kind of Faith” = Divine Healing.

Another variation on the formulaic approach is:

Prayer + “The Right Kind of Faith” – “Hidden sin(s)” = Divine Healing.

The conclusion inevitably drawn, if miraculous healing does not occur, is that the sick person does not exhibit “the right kind of faith”, and/or has “hidden unconfessed sin” in their lives¹¹. This assumption leaves countless people in a no-win situation of distress, a damaged relationship with God (Who appears to be withholding from them an understanding of how to exercise “the right kind of faith” or what their “hidden sin” actually is), and a desperate search for the formula which will give them the outcome they long for. Far from being “helped” (as Mr Williams claims to be doing), we are further burdened by heavy loads that such “helpers” do not lift a finger to assist with¹². I have written about some of these issues in a previous letter to *ACCatalyst* (Sept 2013), responding to an article in April, 2013 by Ian Clarkson entitled: “Health to You”.

Those who have a formulaic approach to healing tend to quote only their success stories, omitting to mention the many examples of where they have prayed for healing, and the miraculous has not occurred. Far from taking any personal responsibility for the “failure” of their prayers¹³, these people self-righteously accuse their fellow Christians of inadequate faith or unconfessed sin. This, of course, is fairly safe ground, since who of us can claim to have “perfect faith” or a completely sinless life? And how does one deal with the conundrum of “having Christ’s faith and Christ’s righteousness”, as we dwell in Him? Surely the formula-approach would therefore mean that all Christians should then be healed!

Yet Christians suffer illness and death at exactly the same rate as non-Christians. It is God’s will which determines whether or not he will intervene in this process. Certainly, we can pray and ask, be anointed with oil and have others pray with and for us—but ultimately, it is up to God whether miraculous interventions occur. Either way, we are required to glorify God *in* every situation—whether we live or die¹⁴, and to trust him to be working all things together in a way which glorifies him, and brings grace, peace and comfort to us.

Further, many of us know Christians who have fervently believed and prayed for healing (either for themselves or a loved one), rejecting any evidence of, or preparation for, imminent death. When the sick one dies, they are still stating to their last breath that God will raise them/their loved one from death. When healing/raising from death does not occur, the experience leads to profound mental and emotional distress for those left behind, who were never permitted to share their honest feelings with their loved ones, or to make preparations for life beyond their loss.

Many have a shattered relationship with God, who appears to have failed them, and they also feel condemned by the prayer-warriors who stood with them prophesying healing. These outcomes do not help anyone, and can

indeed be deeply damaging.

In conclusion, I am very cautious of those who make unequivocal, all-inclusive theological statements about issues such as physical healing, and who ignore many Scriptural and human examples which don’t fit their stance.

I also question formulae which bring condemnation to fellow Christians, especially those who are already dealing with complex difficulties and intimate suffering, remembering 1 Corinthians 13: 1-3, especially verse 2b: “If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing”¹⁵.

I have difficulty trusting those who claim to know the will of God for others. Isaiah 55: 8-9 makes it clear that the mind of man cannot easily perceive the mind of God and his will for us. God does not command us to get healed, and thereby “glorify him”, but rather to love Him, love others and live a life which glorifies and pleases him, regardless of whether we have miraculous interventions or not¹⁶.

In 2 Corinthians chapters 4 and 5, Paul even argues that it is preferable to die than to live in this human form because of the “weight of glory” being prepared for us beyond death. Either way, God’s purposes will prevail. What we need most is to co-operate with the transformation of our minds (Romans 12:2) and the intercessions of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (Romans 8: 27, 34), showing humble obedience¹⁷ to even begin to understand God’s will for each of us personally. Even then, much of life will remain a mystery until we stand before our Heavenly Father, engulfed in his love, healing and revelation, when we will understand all things¹⁸.

Earthly suffering of all kinds directs our attention and hearts’ desires towards our eternal home with Jesus, where all will be revealed, restored, and put to right. Meanwhile, may we encourage and uphold with our love and prayers those who suffer, avoiding judgment and condemnation of them, declining unscriptural “formulae”, and treating our brothers and sisters with Christ-like love, commitment and compassion. After all, “Love does no harm to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilment of the law”¹⁹.

1 Matt 8:5-13; 9:1-7; 9:18-25; 9:32-33; 12:22-23; 15:22-28. Mark 2:3-12; 6:55-56; 7:25-30; 7:32-35; 8:22-26; 9:17-27. Luke 8:40-42; 49-56.

2 Matt 8:14-16; 8:28-33; 12:9-13; 14:14; 15:30-31; 19:2; 21:14. Mark 1:22-26; 1:30-34; 1:39; 3:1-5; 3:10; 5:2-13; 5:22-42; 6:5. Luke 4:38-39; 4:40-41; 5:12-15; 6:6-10; 6:17-19; 5:18-25; 7:1-10; 7:11-15; 8:26-33; 11:14; 14:1-2; 17:12-16; 22:50-51. John 5:2-9; 9:1-7; 11:39-44.

3 Matt 17:14-21; Mark 9:19; Mark 9:28-29; Luke 9:38-43.

4 Job 1:9-12; 2:3-10; John 9:3; 11:4; 2 Cor 1: 3-6, 8-9.

5 Gal 4:13-14; 1 Tim 5:23; 2 Tim 4:20.

6 See also 2 Peter 3:8-9 and Psalm 90:4 regarding time frames.

7 1 Peter 2:23; Luke 19:41-44

8 Daniel 3: 16-18; Micah 6: 8; Luke 1: 28, 38; John 15: 10-14;

Phil 2:5-11; Heb 11: 26, 35-39; 1 Pet 2: 21 - 25.

9 Isaiah 55: 8-9; 1 Cor 1: 25; 1 Cor 2: 10-11, 16.

10 Deut 6:16; Matt 4:7; Luke 4:12.

11 Apparently based on Psalm 38:3, 66:18 and 1 Cor 11:30.

12 See also Luke 11: 46

13 Matt 17:14-21; Mark 9:19; Mark 9:28-29; Luke 9:38-43.

14 2 Cor 5:9; 1 Cor 6: 19-20

15 Note also Romans 8:1, 8: 31-34; and 14: 4-13.

16 Matt 22: 37 - 40; 2 Corinthians 1: 8-9; 2 Cor 4: 8 - 11, 16 - 18; 2 Cor 5: 6-9, 14 - 15.

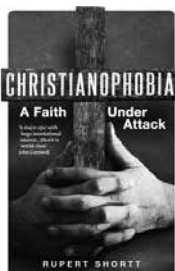
17 Proverbs 3: 34; 1 Peter 4:19; 1 Peter 5:5-10.

18 1 Corinthians 13: 8 - 12

19 Romans 13: 10.

Christianophobia

Rupert Shortt, *Christianophobia: A Faith Under Attack*, London: Rider [a Random House imprint], 2013, paperback, xxii+298 pp., ISBN 9781846042775, RRP AUD\$19.99.



I had just taken this book off the shelf to decide whether to review it in this number of the journal when the following story popped into my email in-box and decided the

issue for me. It was from *The Washington Post* on 10 February 2014 and was written by reporter Sudarsan Raghavan.

Polin Pumandele was killed about 9:30 a.m. He was a Christian walking in a Muslim enclave, carrying wood to sell. In these tense days, that is enough reason to die in the Central African Republic. A Muslim mob confronted Pumandele, 23, on a side street and pushed him around. Then, they threw him into a ditch. At least one man stabbed him before his throat was slit. As the slaughter unfolded, some of his killers ordered a *Washington Post* journalist witnessing the attack Sunday to leave. "Allez, allez—go, go," one yelled, wagging his arms menacingly. Stationed nearby was a group of Burundian peacekeepers, ordered by the United Nations to protect civilians. But they didn't know about the killing until some men—perhaps his killers—brought Pumandele's mutilated body past them in a wheelbarrow.

It has long annoyed many of us that our media, especially since 11 September 2001, has been so full of concern about persecution of and discrimination against Muslims but so mute on the far, far greater extent of the persecution of Christians. Thousands of Christians have fled Iraq, Syria and other middle-eastern countries in recent years because of vicious persecution. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt had burned dozens of Coptic churches and attacked hundreds of Christians. One of the ironies is that western countries effectively support some

of the Islamist rebels and terrorists responsible.

Rupert Shortt is Religion Editor of *The Times Literary Supplement* and a Visiting Fellow of Blackfriars Hall, University of Oxford. He has written for a number of UK newspapers and his books include biographies of ex-Archbishop, Rowan Williams and ex-Pope, Benedict XVI. In this book Shortt aims to do two things. One is to redress the huge imbalance in the coverage of perceived and actual persecution in the world, wrongly tilted towards Islam. The second is to give voice to Christians to counter the noisy bunch of "New Atheists" who tend to blame Christianity for the world's ills. Shortt provides in thorough and meticulous detail the evidence that Christians are persecuted to a far greater extent than any other global religious body, and that this fact is hugely under-recognised.

Murder, oppression and persecution have been visited on Christians around the world from the time of the apostles. It is not just in Muslim countries today. Certainly, Shortt covers in detail Muslim countries—Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia and Turkey—but he also examines the situation in communist countries (China, Vietnam, Cuba and North Korea) and in Burma, a military dictatorship, as well as in India (where Christians are attacked by Hindu extremists) and Nigeria, where Boko Haram kills people involved in "western education" and in giving un-Islamic rights to women. Shortt argues that the reasons we don't hear much about the persecution of Christians are the fear of giving offence and the fact that Christians tend not to respond with violence. He shows the continued persecution in forgotten corners of the world, e.g., Turkey did not cease persecuting Christians after the Armenian genocide and the founding of the secular state. Chapter 13 outlines persecution in Venezuela, Belarus, Sri Lanka, Laos and Sudan. There is an instructive appendix charting religious freedom, ranking countries from 1 (very free) to 7 (very unfree), cross-referenced against

the religious background. Needless to say, the Christian-background countries do best and the Buddhist, Communist and Muslim countries worst (but it is not always straightforward). The index is terrific. The documentation is impressive.

The imbalance in reporting may also have something to do, in this country, with the secularist bias of Australian journalists, especially on the ABC and in Fairfax media. When the rebel attack on Homs in Syria was reported, no mention was made of the fact that Homs had a large Christian population and the rebels included many Islamists opposed to the toleration of non-Muslims. Our media often seem ignorant or unable to make simple connections. In fairness, much of the discrimination and oppression of Christians is less obvious than arson or murder, as in the case mentioned by Shortt (pp 20-21) of the forcible culling of pigs in Egypt in 2009. But it is still persecution.

The term "Christianophobia" first came to my notice through a report on the adjournment debate in the British House of Commons on 5 December 2007. Conservative MP Mark Pritchard led off, introducing the term in his first paragraph. Speakers on all sides of politics and all faiths and none spoke in the debate but none contested the proposition that the phenomenon existed in the UK and was harmful to Britain's social fabric. Clearly, however, Christianophobia is a world-wide phenomenon and even more dangerous in form to Christians outside the west. You need to know about this and reading Shortt's book is a great start.

Reprinted by kind permission of the reviewer Dr Malcolm Prentis, editor of Church Heritage (Vol. 18, No. 3, March 2014).

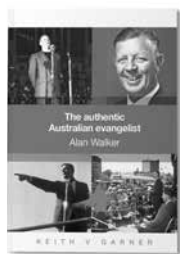
Remembering Alan Walker

Keith Garner, *The authentic Australian evangelist: Alan Walker*

Rev Dr Keith Garner, Superintendent /CEO of Wesley Mission has

BOOK REVIEWS

chosen a provocative title for his book on Rev Dr Sir Alan Walker, former Superintendent of the Central Methodist Mission/Wesley Mission. Professor Robert Linder in his article, "Alan Walker amongst the Sharks"¹ states his strongly



held view that Alan Walker "was arguably Australia's best known and most important Christian in the latter half of the twentieth century". However the thrust of his article was

to examine the criticism, jealousy and lack of co-operation shown to Alan Walker by a large minority in the Methodist church and the poor treatment of him by historians, both secular and religious. Professor Linder states there were those who downplayed his role as an evangelist partly because "he believed in preaching the whole gospel by which he meant that Jesus can save from both personal and social sin. Therefore he proclaimed that Jesus saves the individual but also that he can redeem humanity's corporate life too".

Rev Garner's booklet is timely and very readable, written by one who had a personal and eye-opening experience of Alan Walker as the guest evangelist in the 'Mission to Plymouth' in 1982. It is no coincidence, that he was called to be the Superintendent of Wesley Mission 23 years later, well fitted to continue the Mission's long established 'Word and Deed' ministry.

It is more than a decade since Alan Walker died and we needed to be reminded of the great ambassador for Jesus Christ that Alan Walker was. We need to be grateful for all that lies behind the final words of his autobiography, "Always, always I want to be able to say: 'Oh that my Saviour were your Saviour too'".

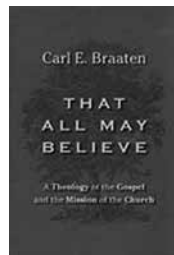
As one who committed himself to Jesus Christ and becoming a member of the Methodist Church as a young teenager, under Alan Walker's ministry at Cessnock; as one who was later invited by him to be closely involved with him at the Central Methodist Mission; and then in the formation and continuation of the Pacific College of Evangelism, I encourage you to read Keith's book. Through its honesty and clarity I believe you will discover the appro-

priateness of the title "The authentic Australian evangelist" and will experience Alan igniting or strengthening your faith and reminding you that we are called to mission.

1. Robert D. Linder, *Church Heritage, Volume 17, Number 1, March 2011, 1*
Reviewed by Dr Jim Pendlebury OAM.
Member of Bexley Uniting Church

Read this book!

Carl E. Braaten's *That All May Believe: A Theology of the Gospel and the Mission of the Church* (Eerdmans, 2008) is one of the best books I have read recently. He is an



American Lutheran theologian who taught at a Lutheran seminary in Chicago for thirty years. He is one of the most balanced theologians I have read. He begins by affirming that

theology is for the sake of the church universal and not just for one's own denomination. He makes reference to the historic agreement between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church, "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification." Showing his orthodox stance he affirms, "the revelation in Jesus Christ is the gospel of the triune God". He rejects those who call for the end of christocentricity in favour of theocentricity. He says this is a move that runs smack into apostasy. He also affirms the normative nature of Scripture in conveying the Word of God but it communicates the power of the Spirit and awakens faith "only within the context of the preaching of the church".

Part one is Theology and he makes use of his Lutheran perspective in dealing with the interpretation of the Bible pointing out that Catholics and Lutherans are coming together. He says that the retrieval of dogma in the church today is an ecumenical problem. In the desire to overcome past divisions, he notes that some Lutherans and Reformed now see themselves as "evangelical catholics". As a student of Paul Tillich he affirms Tillich's "Protestant Principle" and "Catholic Substance". The prophetic word must always presuppose the priestly symbols and sacraments.

Part two focuses on the Gospel and here he really comes into his own. He analyses eight paradigms of

theology that have been prominent in the last hundred years from Albert Schweitzer to Liberation theology and draws lessons to be learned from each. He then covers the resurrection debate and is scathing in his criticism of the Jesus Seminar. He appreciates the theology of Pannenberg in particular. The essential elements of a full theology of the resurrection are clearly outlined. Next he discusses the reality of evil which is not to be underestimated. He points out that we need to recover an apocalyptic imagination, like that of Jesus. He refers to the slogan "What would Jesus do?" saying it is the wrong question. The right question is "What did Jesus do?" We need to look to the real Jesus of the Gospels "in search of a word, a model, a promise, or a sign, to challenge us, to direct us, to clue us in to where to stand, when to march, how to act". He rightly says the call of the kingdom of God is not to become a little better, but for a radical turning away from old ways to a new life.

This leads into Part three, Mission. Like others, he points to the reclaiming of the missionary nature of the church following the legacy of Christendom. In the West that means re-evangelizing in the post-modern situation. He looks to an ecumenical missiology as the task is too large for denominations acting alone. He bluntly says "theologies that do not stem from the high Christology of the Nicene Creed are contrary to the Christian faith, and have no good news to tell." The church at many points will need to be countercultural, especially in relation to life and death issues confronting creatures and the creation. In an age of unparalleled violence, peace-making needs to be a fundamental part of our response to the good news of the gospel. I enjoyed the quote he gave from G.K. Chesterton, "At least five times the faith has to all appearances gone to the dogs. In each of these five cases, it was the dog that died."

In relation to religious pluralism, he refers to the standard models: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, noting that these categories have significant limitations. Instead he affirms the exclusivity of Christ and the inclusivity of the Gospel. I commend the book.

Rev Dr Chris Walker, National Consultant for Christian Unity, Doctrine and Worship for the UCA



"Golden Grove" the Healing Centre in Sydney's Newtown was the venue for the National Council

ACC National Council report

The National Council of ACC held their annual face to face meeting in Sydney on 4th March and 5th March. Rev Shane Kammermann, our new National Chair presided over the meeting.

Assembly Consultation on Marriage

Rev Dr Max Champion gave a report detailing the UC Assembly's process for re-examining the Uniting Church's theology of marriage. In May the Assembly's Working Group on Doctrine released a Discussion Paper on marriage inviting responses from across the Church. The Council resolved to circulate the Discussion Paper to our ACC congregations, clusters and individual members, and to indicate that our Marriage Task Group (MTG) is working on a response. Congregations may wish to give feed back to the MTG. ACC will make its response known and then seek to arrange a meeting with the other concerned UC groups.

Planning for the 2014 ACC AGM and Conference

Planning for the conference is well advanced. The theme is 'Truth, Faith and Freedom in a Hostile World'. The location is Naamaroo Conference Centre, Chatswood.

New treasurer elected

Our current Treasurer, Dr Colin Adam, has indicated his desire to conclude as Treasurer. It was resolved to appoint Mr Bruce Fairhall

as ACC Treasurer commencing in July 2014. Our grateful thanks go to Colin who will continue as Chair of the ACC Board of Management.

National Council Co-options

Following his election as Treasurer it was resolved to co-opt Bruce Fairhall onto the National Council. Ms Lupe Tapueluelu was also co-opted onto the Council, recognising that she can represent to us the issues and activities of ACC Youth.

National Prayer Network

It was resolved to appoint Rev. Anne Hibbard as Convenor of the Prayer Network. Rev Dr Hedley Fihaki, the previous convenor, will continue to collate and circulate the Monthly Prayer Diary. The need was seen to broaden the Prayer Network and Anne was asked as Convenor to give consideration to this. Our thanks go to Hedley for his leadership and continuing involvement.

Board of Communication

It was resolved to appoint Emeritus Professor Pat Noller as Convenor of the BOC. The Council discussed our magazine *ACCatalyst* at length with a view to making it as accessible and relevant as possible.

Review of ACC's goals and direction

The Council had an extended discussion on the ACC's future, given that it has been in existence for 8 years. It was recognised that a

significant number of congregations and UCA members look to the ACC for reformed/evangelical leadership and expression, for the provision of gospel-based resources, and for pastoral encouragement and support in a sometimes hostile environment. It was thought that it may not be the right time to do a full review of the Visions and Goals of ACC because of the uncertainty caused by current processes in the UCA in relation to marriage.

Consideration of ACC's attitude helping people leave homosexuality

It was recognised that ministries that help people leave the homosexual lifestyle are under huge pressure to desist these ministries. Discussion was held as to ACC's attitude to such ministries, and also to the situation of the person suffering same sex attraction?

It was agreed that it is homosexual behaviour that Scripture proscribes, and that we need to make the distinction between abstinence and cure. Many testimonies are given by people who experience same sex attraction but who believe that it is right to abstain from same sex activity. The Council resolved to create a statement on what ACC is advocating for people experiencing SSA.

Overall, the Council was encouraged with the value of the meeting, its outcomes, and what will be another vital and active year for ACC.

Rod James, Secretary

Marriage discussion paper released

ACC members would be aware of the decision of the 13th Assembly of the Uniting Church to begin a consultation on the theology of marriage. The full resolution is provided below for your reference.

As one of the groups included in the Assembly resolution, the major focus for ACC over the next 4 months is the consultation on marriage within the UCA. The discussion paper from the UCA Assembly was released in the middle of May and ACC received its official notice as part of the Assembly consultation on 14th May. The following week ACC posted copies of the discussion paper and the accompanying support documents including the response form to ACC Member congregations and groups, requesting our congregations and groups to join in the discussion process.

If you are a presbytery member or church officer you would most likely have received copies through your presbytery (perhaps emailed).

Our ACC Doctrine and Theology Commission is working on the official ACC response under the guidance of Rev Dr Max Champion, and this will be made available to our members as soon as possible.

There is a very tight schedule now (responses are due by October 10 so a report can be provided to the November meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee). All our congregations, clusters and groups are encouraged to work on their response, and also we encourage you as individual members to help, especially if you are not in an ACC congregation, please consider forming a group and preparing a response.

ACC has already provided substantial resources on marriage over the last three years, including the recent DVD on marriage. All material is also available on the main website Confessing Congregations and there is also a dedicated section of material on the ACC resources website: <http://www.unitingviews.com/issues/marriage/>

Our ACC magazine has also included regular material on marriage and these are all available on the

website or in hard copy.

We ask that you pray for the ACC Doctrine and Theology Commission, and its chair Rev Dr Max Champion, and for the Uniting Church and all those involved in the stages of the consultation process.

Peter Bentley
ACCC National Director

The Official resolution from the Uniting Church 13th Assembly held in July 2012.

12.31 DISCUSSION PAPER ON MARRIAGE

(a) acknowledge that the current position on marriage is provided in the 8th Assembly Minute 97.31.12:

97.31.12 The Assembly resolved to approve the following policy Statement on Marriage:

“The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia declares that

1. Marriage

Marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life. It is intended to be the mutually faithful lifelong union of a woman and man expressed in every part of their life together.

In marriage the man and the woman seek to encourage and enrich each other through love and companionship.

In the marriage service

- the woman and man make a public covenant with each other and with God, in the company of family and friends;

- the couple affirm their trust in each other and in God;

- the Church affirms the sanctity of marriage and nurtures those who pledge themselves to each other in marriage and calls upon all people to support, uphold and nurture those who pledge themselves to each other in marriage.

Where sexual union takes place the partners seek to express mutual delight, pleasure and tenderness, thus strengthening the union of their lives together.

In marriage, children may be born and are to be brought up in love and security, thus providing a firm founda-

tion for society.

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.” (b) noting the desire for respectful conversation within the diverse community of the church and the current public debate about same-gender marriage to ask the Doctrine Working Group, after appropriate consultation across the Church and with ongoing liaison with the Standing Committee:

- to prepare a discussion paper on the theology of marriage within the Uniting Church, and explore its implications for public covenants for same-gender relationships;

- to circulate the paper widely, and specifically to UAICC National Committee, synods, Chairpersons of National Conferences, presbyteries, UAICC Regions, Uniting Network, the Assembly of Confessing Congregations, congregations, agencies and institutions of the Uniting Church, requesting responses to the Working Group by a date to be determined by the Standing Committee; and

- to summarise responses and bring recommendations to the Standing Committee by November 2014, to enable the Standing Committee to bring a report to the 14th Assembly in 2015. (Agreement)



Diogo Morgado playing Jesus

A son and a slave

Son of God (2014, M)

Producers Roma Downey and Mark Burnett brought the epic miniseries *The Bible* to life last year and created a significant amount of media and general public interest in the bible. I have no doubt that many readers viewed all of the ten episodes. Following on from the miniseries is a feature film about the life of Jesus which uses material from the mini-series as well as some scenes not featured. While the publicity refers to this as the first film about the entire life of Jesus since *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), I think the 1979 *Jesus* film could reasonably be referenced. *Jesus* is the 1979 docudrama that is available in many languages and has been widely used as an outreach tool. There are some similarities in the approach and the desire for outreach, though I see *Son of God* as being a more visually contemporary film, utilising the digital age's stunning film capabilities.

Mark Burnett was always going to prepare a film focusing on Jesus as the material was there for a separate feature. The film could also be fashioned in a more contemporary film style, and Burnett has pointed to it partly as political thriller, and the elements of intrigue and the politics of the day certainly stand out. It is good background and provides the overall context to enable a secular audience to understand that Jesus will die, and given the level of knowledge today, perhaps to be genuinely surprised that he appears after death—he is risen indeed!

Originally the film was to be about 3 hours, but the final version is 2

hours and 15 minutes. Many secular critics have commented that it is a bit ponderous or laborious, and I can understand that they say it is one for the faithful. I think to capture the full attention of many (and younger) secular people today one would need to edit down to the standard 90 minutes, but personally I found many of the well-known stories moving and well-done. Some were wonderfully illustrative of the amazing answers that Jesus provided, especially to the Pharisees. Intriguingly at times I caught myself thinking that the portrayal of Jesus by Portuguese actor Diogo Morgado was so genuine that he captured the spirit of the person, but then (and as he has intimated) who can really portray Jesus? When I reflected, I realised it was his words that are of course so stunning (and yes they are handled with grace and care) and they are (mostly) the words from the Bible. There is some historical 'development' but the aim, as in *The Bible* mini-series is to be faithful to, and affirming of, an orthodox understanding of Jesus Christ.

There are extensive resources to use to promote or study the film. I believe it would be helpful for churches to show the trailer on a Sunday, and also encourage people to see and take people to see 'at the movies' as this visual picture is meant for the big screen.

OFFICIAL WEBSITE:

<http://www.sonofgodmovie.com>

RESOURCES:

<http://sonofgodresources.com/>

12 Years A Slave (2013, MA)

It is difficult to pen a critical review of the winner of the 2014 Oscar for Best

Picture, but I believe it is necessary to do, as the film's reception has been illustrative of the sometimes uncritical approach to films that focus on important issues. The issue of 'historical' slavery in the USA is clearly one that people thought worthy to highlight for the issue itself, rather than the quality of the film.

The film tells the true story of Solomon Northup, a New York state born free African-American who is kidnapped and sold into slavery and forced to work in a Louisiana plantation. When freed in 1853 he wrote an account of his time and this memoir was rediscovered in the 1960s.

While there are some reasonable portrayals, the acting is woefully uneven with some parts amateurish and ungainly. The director's seeming attempt to provide an art-house film as well as mainstream picture conflict, causing at times an odd and sometimes jarring collection of music, dramatic scenes and visual camera techniques that I believe detract from the central elements of the story. A warning to potential viewers; there are some concentrated torture and beating scenes, which ironically could have the adverse effect of turning people off from the central story. The film is also at times boringly didactic, and yet there are quite moving parts as well. It is worth noting that the director, British born Steve McQueen did not receive the Oscar for Best Director.

While it is certainly worth considering for the story itself, it continues the history of Oscar winning films which were worth nominating to raise awareness of an issue, and ended up winning the main prize. Mind you, I could be quite mistaken; as most critics have been so effusive in praise one would think they had directed the film. Certainly I was the only one in the audience laughing at some of the pretentiousness and acting – a rarity for me, as I am usually so socially conformist I wouldn't dare to do so during a preview screening.

You will already know from the title that Solomon did not remain a slave, and thank God for that, but I hope that does not soothe our consciences. Let us reflect that slavery still continues today and the sexual slave industry is estimated alone to include about 21 million people.

Peter Bentley