

# ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



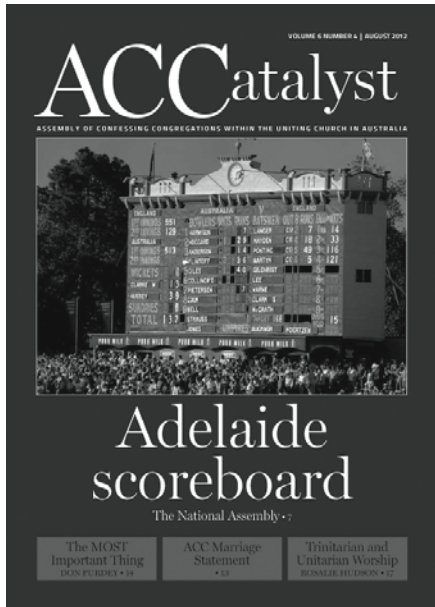
# Adelaide scoreboard

The National Assembly • 7

The MOST Important Thing  
DON PURDEY • 14

ACC Marriage Statement  
• 13

Trinitarian and Unitarian Worship  
ROSALIE HUDSON • 17



Cover Photo Ngarkat/istockphoto.com

## EDITORIAL

# Making waves

This issue of *ACCatalyst* covers two important events: a celebration of 200 years of Methodism by Sydney's Wesley Mission and the National Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia. Both events involved the sending of important messages.

The Wesley celebration re-enacted a gathering of colonial Methodists who sent a plea to London for a preacher "lest we die in our sins". The result of that message is known. Samuel Leigh the first Methodist missionary arrives in 1815. Leigh's hard work broke his health, but he laid the foundation for Methodism in this country. The more recent mes-

sage is from the new President of the National Assembly. Andrew Dutney comments that Liberalism is dying, but a new way of reading the Bible is emerging. "People who might formerly have been liberal are discovering that there are other ways of reading the Bible that are not liberal."

It is not the first time that the suggestion that Liberalism is dying has been made of course. Yet Dutney is to be commended for his frankness. Readers of *ACCatalyst* and other members of the Uniting Church will be eager to see how this more recent message plays out in the story of the church. *John Sandeman*

*ACCatalyst* is published by the Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc.  
 ABN 73 794 518 715 ARBN 128 001 785.  
 Incorporated in NSW. INC 9887628.  
 Liability of members is limited. Opinions expressed in *ACCatalyst* do not necessarily reflect the official views of the assembly.

Executive Editor: Max Champion  
 Managing Editor: Peter Bentley  
 Editor: John Sandeman  
 Office: 2 Erskineville Rd, Newtown NSW  
 02 9550 5358  
 Website: [confessingcongregations.com](http://confessingcongregations.com)  
[accoffice@confessingcongregations.com](mailto:accoffice@confessingcongregations.com)

Email for *ACCatalyst*:  
[catalysteditor@confessingcongregations.com](mailto:catalysteditor@confessingcongregations.com)  
*ACCatalyst* is available as a subscription only (\$35pa) or by becoming an ACC Supporting Member (\$35pa concession or \$60pa full)  
 Printed by Brougham Press, Scoresby Rd, Bay-swater Vic. ISSN 1835 2073

# The Storm

I love thunderstorms. Even my cat doesn't mind them, and often if there's a storm at night you will find us side by side watching it out the window.

Of course, they're always better when they bring rain, but there's nothing quite like a decent storm, especially when you are watching them through a window, and you're safe and sound inside.

When I worked in a vineyard, we had to go home if ever there was a thunderstorm, even if it seemed a long way away. A vineyard is not a good place to be in a storm because of all of the metal wires. A lightning strike can fry a whole row of grape vines. I used to grumble about this rule, but off I'd go to somewhere where I couldn't get struck.

I haven't always liked storms. I remember as a little kid, being at Melrose show during a thunderstorm. I was terrified. I was curled up on the floor of someone's car, wishing the



Hilary Sandeman

noise would go away. My sister told me it was God playing drums, but I was not convinced.

Recently I was praying. I was feeling apprehensive about something and wanted to find out God's

perspective. I started to think about thunderstorms, and I realised that a lot of the things I was worried about were like storms.

They can seem scary and make me afraid, but while I was walking close to God, he was my shelter. While I was in God, these things could only rumble at me and not do any more.

But if I stepped outside - away from God's love and care, then I would be asking for trouble, and I would have real reason to be afraid.

Psalm 27 reminds us that, "The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?"

In many places through the Bible this idea of God's protection for his people is stated.

It isn't that God takes the storm away, but he does take care of us and shelter us in the midst of it. And that is something I am very glad about!

*Robyn*

# Methodists celebrate 200 years

*John Sandeman for Eternity*

As the street march to celebrate 200 years of Methodist Christianity in Australia set off from Sydney's Martin Place, a man in ragged clothes, long hair and an unkempt beard joined in. Someone handed him one of the Wesley Mission blue pennant flags the marchers were carrying.

A *Sydney Morning Herald* photographer seized the opportunity to snap the street guy marching with the neatly attired churchgoers as the march passed through Pitt Street. I hope the flag got him into the State Theatre where the march ended.

(After this story appeared online, a facebooker told me he got inside the theatre, and a follow up comment told me his name is Willie, a sometimes attendee at Wesley Mission).

The street guy was not out of place at Wesley Mission's celebration of 200 years of Methodism in Australia: "Some people say what you need is some multi-millionaires to get behind Wesley", the Mission's Superintendent, Keith Garner, told the crowd inside the State Theatre. "But it has been the artisans who support us... people who are one step away from falling into a place where it hurts."

Two hundred years ago, three colonists — a convict forger and bible study leader named Edward Eager, and Thomas Bowden and John Hosking who ran the male and female orphanages in Sydney town — sent a plea to the still-young Methodist movement in London. "Send a faithful servant of the Lord to us; surely there are many willing, yea, desirous to succour the disciples of our common Lord, to proclaim His salvation to perishing sinners even in this distant land."

The early Methodists were looking for something different from the official religion of the early colony, in which chaplain Samuel Marsden was handicapped in promoting the gospel by being the magistrate who handed out sentences of flogging.

"The thrust of the Methodist influence in Australia was very different from the chaplaincy model with



**The SMH photographs Willie in the Wesley celebration march**

which many were familiar," Garner told *Eternity*.

"From meetings around 1812 in Sydney and the Windsor area, Methodism took root and Wesley Mission is proud to trace its origins from such early gatherings.

"What marked Methodism then—and always has—was a whole gospel. They were not interested in becoming part of the divisive Catholic/Protestant atmosphere of the day, but sought to offer saving faith in Jesus Christ, an emphasis on the preaching of the gospel alongside a compassion for people. The two should always be together, but the genius of Methodism was to actually demonstrate this."

The ABC's Managing Director, Mark Scott, an "Officer" (senior lay person) of Wesley Mission, compered the celebration, "200 years of faith and pioneering care".

"We celebrate how we serve the Lord Jesus Christ in thought, word and deed," Scott told the theatre audience. He explained why the ornate gilt interior of a picture palace was an appropriate location. "In 1964, the Lyceum theatre in which our church met was burned down and it is wonderful to be here again."

The theatre was filled easily with the hymns of the Wesley brothers who founded Methodism: "Oh for

a thousand tongues to sing" and "Love Divine all loves excelling", sung by a gathering obviously used to singing them. In my part of the hall they drew the loudest singing of the various hymns sung during the afternoon.

The celebration featured Wesley's work in advocating for the poor and in practical service for them.

"Homelessness has been at the centre of my work," Tanya Plibersek, the Federal Minister of Health, told the crowd. "Tonight around 600 people will be accommodated by Wesley. Edward Eager Lodge has a place in my heart. Its not flash: anyone who has been there knows it is not flash. But it has a warm heart."

Keith Garner told the State Theatre audience as a follower of Jesus, John Wesley set up employment services and cooperatives, local health services, and schools for the poor.

"It was on the 8th of January 1887 that John Wesley went out begging for the poor," Garner said. "It was not unusual except he was in his eighties and it was snowing. I hope Wesley Mission never gets so flash that we cease to go out and beg for the poor."

Garner described the most real moments of his job as when he breaks bread and pours wine. "We offer the broken bread of Christ as the answer to brokenness."



ctsale/istockphoto.com

## PUBLIC SQUARE

BY PSEUDO-MAXIMUS

### Digitally enhanced?

In the *Inquirer, The Weekend Australian* (28-29 July), educationalist Kevin Donnelly warns of the dangers of unprecedented changes in technology affecting our ability to think. A supporter of the internet to encourage student curiosity and research, he is alarmed that, when used as a substitute for reading books, it develops habits that do not require 'concentration, weighing each word or sentence and using your imagination to enter the world created by the author or poet'.

Thus we learn that relevancy is determined by what is 'immediately entertaining.' "These technologies," as Prof Susan Greenfield puts it, "are infantilising the brain into the state of small children who are attracted by buzzing noises and bright lights, who have a small attention span and who live for the moment".

The effects of this new mindset are disturbing. The study of history, literature, science, philosophy, ethics, theology, etc risks being watered down and their significance assessed by what instantly appeals to us.

The consequences for the church in our post-Christian age are far-reaching. Already suffering a bad case of biblical and theological amnesia, but eager to spread the Gospel to the next generation and regain public influence, the church must resist the temptation to 'infantilise' the faith.

News that some mega-churches are now using apps to connect with young people may be a sign of hope. But will the benefits of the new technologies be outweighed by portraying Christianity as a shallow faith that can be grasped in an instant?

### Don't worry, be happy!

Magazines and newspapers are full of stories of people who are committed to getting us to think positively, cast off the shackles of repression, and enjoy life to the full. Improve your sex life. Feed your soul. Escape drudgery. Loosen up. Embrace the pleasure principle. Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die!

Christians usually recoil from this hedonistic advice. Conscious of the pitfalls of uninhibited pleasure, they opt for Stoic responsibility in all things. Earnestness and a stiff upper lip often triumph—eclipsing a sense of humour and the sensual enjoyment of sex, food, wine and convivial company.

Criticism of modern hedonism is necessary. Self-indulgence does wreck lives and destroy hope. But we ought not, on that account, condemn pleasure as such. After all, it is "good and fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment in the few days that God has given us under the sun" (Eccles 5:18). Jesus was no kill-joy. He ate and drank with the rich and poor, tax collectors and sinners (Lk 15:2). The present and future kingdom is portrayed as a splendid banquet (Mt 22:1-10). Nature is to be enjoyed, relationships cherished. It is an absolute joy to be in the company of those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Mt 5:10).

The rediscovery of Christian hedonism is vital in an age that is content with shallow, unfulfilling pleasures. A truly evangelical theology rejoices in God's grace and invites all to find deepest contentment in the company of the One in whom that grace has been so wondrously embodied.

### Managing debate

In 'Stupidity is on the rise in our age of enlightenment' (*The Age* 9 August), an edited version of his recent Daniel Mannix address, Barry Jones highlights a contradiction in our public life. He bemoans the fact that the 'information revolution', that purports to expand personal freedom, has been accompanied by the 'cult of management' that suppresses freedom of speech.

Public debate is now marked, not by robust arguments, but by banality, sloganeering and stereotyping. The dumbing-down of critical issues, and the replacement of reason by rage, ignorance or ideology, has led to a serious decline in the level of curiosity, discernment and courage in public discourse. The media, politicians, public servants and businesses conspire in the demise of rigorous analysis and long-term planning for the public good. They strive to manage the public's tendency to treat politics as a form of entertainment that elicits instant emotional responses.

In such a scenario, opinion supplants knowledge as the standard of relevancy and managerial control stifles independence of thought and action. On the surface, all seems well. Dispute is managed. Strident views are silenced. Harmony is achieved. Beneath the surface, however, competing world-views struggle for air. Questions of truth, goodness and integrity cannot forever be subverted by the demands of the moment or the desire for control.

A church that resists the dumbing down of critical issues and is committed to advocating for integrity in public life and justice for the oppressed must also ask whether, on matters of vital importance, debates within

the church will be free and frank or controlled by managerial spin.

The way in which the debate and resolution on marriage was conducted at Assembly is cause for hope. It is to be hoped, too, that the doctrine of 'unity in diversity,' implicit in the resolution, is not used to dissuade church members from engaging in robust debate free of ecclesiastical manipulation.

## Olympic ideals

The London Olympics are in full swing as I write. Sacrifice invoked, hero faxes sent. Medals won and lost. Ecstasy and despair mingled. Athletic prowess glorified. National pride pumped. Humanity acclaimed the winner.

The buoyant mood is punctured by Chris Berg (*The Sunday Age*, 27 July) and Michael Leunig (*The Saturday Age*, 28 July). In "Let the cult begin", Berg traces the origins of the modern Olympics, the claims made by key figures and the rituals performed. Pierre de Coubertin, the founder, aimed to convert athletics into "a religion, a cult (and) an impassioned soaring". Today, says Berg, the cultic element has morphed into a celebration of "peace and global harmony" symbolised by the sacred flame of purity. This naïve idealism is, in fact, nothing more than self-serving affirmation of moral goodness and humanitarianism that ignores terrible conflicts that destroy lives, create long-standing hatreds and embitter nations.

The nonsense 'spouted by Olympic ideologists' is parodied by Leunig. On one side, the 'world' is represented by five perfect interconnected circles above a sign that reads: FASTER HIGHER STRONGER. Beside it is the 'other world', represented by five imperfect free-floating shapes above a sign that reads: slower deeper wiser.

The Olympic Games can be a source of great enjoyment and inspiration. But the claim to be the bearer of moral purity must be resisted.

Its ideals are no substitute for the sacrifices required of those who are trained to be "a pilgrim people who acknowledge Christ as the crucified and risen One along the way towards the promised goal".

## Rethinking Social Justice

Typical of debates on social justice is the portrayal of advocates as children of light and opponents as children

of darkness. The kerfuffle caused by the Uniting Justice submission to the Federal Inquiry into Marriage Equality is a case in point. At Assembly, respectful questions of the wisdom of its action, when the matter has never been discussed in any council of the church, were greeted with angry silence.

In a church committed to social justice the request to follow due process seemed churlish, at best. The right of same-gender couples to marry must take priority.

This highlights the need to think more theologically, less ideologically, about justice. The lens through which justice is currently viewed will not enable us to see the issues clearly. It relies on the Marxian framework of oppressor and victim. Because all social inequalities are explained by the clash between the powerful and the weak, the church must advocate for marginalised aborigines, migrants and homosexuals.

There is wisdom in this approach.

The church must protest mistreatment of vulnerable people. The strong must not oppress the weak. But what happened at Assembly demonstrates the inadequacy of this model for a Christian understanding of justice.

Not for the first time, indigenous and migrant-ethnic members opposed moves to endorse same-gender relationships. They do not accept the prevailing wisdom that sees a parallel between their marginalisation and the situation of LGBTI people. They do not believe that homosexual practice is right.

It would be a pity if their reaction is interpreted, somewhat patronisingly and albeit silently, as primitive. In fact, they remind us that social justice must flow from the righteousness of Christ who justifies sinners – that we need to develop the relationship between justification and justice. Otherwise, we will continue to be led away from thinking that does not do justice to a fully Christian concept of justice.

## IAN CLARKSON

### Make use of your Departing

The popular wartime poet Studert Kennedy urged his fellow army chaplains to leave their parishes and go to the front lines with the troops. "You will likely be killed", he said but "you will accomplish more for the kingdom by dying with them than by living". Stout words yet Kennedy did just that.

Scripture teaches that there is more wisdom in looking at the end of things than the beginning. Jesus frequently spoke of his end and its purpose. At the appropriate moment he also pushed Peter's attention to the disciples' death to help him understand his life.

Doubtless some of you have had similar 'shake-ups'. I call them 'ontic-shocks'—when your mortality comes home with a jolt. It happened to me as a young minister with three young children when I thought because of a particular symptom that I was finished. It did me the world of good—I cried out in desperation to my refuge and strength! No direct answer came to comfort except the words "don't you believe I am raised from the dead?" Later I realised that for any sort of effective ministry I had to

be grounded in the experienced truth of the bodily resurrection of Christ—the complete and full basis of all hope!

And so, interestingly, the Apostles don't speak of their deaths, but of their exodus (Peter) or their release (Paul). The Gospel introduces the finality of life. Knowing we are walking in mortal (death-ling) bodies can teach us to give up things we can never keep and help us gain those things we will never lose.

Our day of death can be recognised as a great gift from God who won't let death separate us from his known and felt embrace of grace. So let us use this unique opportunity. If time permits our loved ones and others may observe, learn and though saddened be greatly encouraged. Let's use our mortality the best we can—a severe mercy stamped with our fathers smile-blessed in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. Fear not little flock!

The morning my mother-in-law left her mortality behind, with a decision not to continue on the painful total parenteral nourishment life support, she said cheekily her Bible by the bedside, "I've heard a lot about this-it better be good!" The joy of the first taste must be breathtaking!

# Save us in the time of trial

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

**T**he words of this petition, which are best translated from the original Greek as “do not pass us through the trial”, has replaced the old translation of “lead us not into temptation”. It is helpful that this change has occurred in the English because it directs our attention away from a moralistic interpretation that had been associated with the word ‘temptation’.

In contemporary society temptation conjures up images of seductive or forbidden things, like gluttony, self-importance or lust, that don't really have power over us. We know that they are bad for us and don't need to ask God to ramp up our will-power in order to resist them.

Because temptation is understood as an incitement to moral lapses it is difficult to pray “lead us not into temptation” with complete sincerity. Indeed, we might want to be led into temptation in order to add some spice to life or to show the rest of us how superior we are compared to others.

The word ‘trial’ can also be given a meaning opposite to that given it in the scriptures. A ‘trial’ can be seen as a way of testing our strength, as something to be endured to develop our character and self-discipline. On this understanding we would welcome a trial rather than praying that we should be saved from it. However, because Jesus tells us to pray that we will be saved from the time of trial, it must be something terrible. To what reality, then, is Jesus referring when he teaches us to pray “do not pass us through the time of trial”?

In scripture there is one event of immense significance where Jesus speaks of the ‘trial’. In Matthew and

Mark we find the account of Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus is deeply agitated and grieved to death. In his agitation he throws himself on the ground and prays to God to “let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” He then finds the three disciples who accompanied him to the garden asleep and says to them “stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial. (Matthew 26:36-41).

---

**We are to pray this petition not only for ourselves but also for all those men and women who, tragically, have a much greater chance of experiencing such a trial than we ever will.**

---

When Jesus is undergoing his trial, an event that begins in the garden and includes his torture, trial and crucifixion, the scriptures make clear that he has no strength of his own to resist what is being done to him. In the garden he is weak and terrified. He is abandoned to his ordeal by his friends but, even worse, by the One he prayed to by the name of Father, the Father whose coming kingdom he proclaimed, and in whose name he has said and done everything. Even this ‘Father’ deserts him. In his trial then Jesus is caught up in a maelstrom of evil in which he is nothing and the power of chaos, destruction, and nothingness are

everything, in which the truth about who is Jesus is called the Lie, and the Liar is applauded as the speaker of truth. This is the terror of the trial.

There is a deep mystery in this terrible event because, from the resurrection side of the cross, we know that Jesus remains loved and treasured by the Father throughout his ordeal. But we should not let this knowledge seduce us into thinking that Jesus' trial was in any way made bearable because he really knew, deep down that he was not abandoned. Nothing in the scriptures allows us to draw this conclusion. A similar attempt to soften the terror of the trial can be seen in the story of Job from whom God allows the power of evil to take absolutely everything. That the terror of such a trial is something we naturally resist hearing about is indicated by the pious inanities of Job's friends and the happy ending which some biblical scholars regard as a later addition written to soften a story of unrelenting sorrow.

Jesus tells us to pray, then, that we may not have to undergo such a time of trial so that we may not be captured in a maelstrom of evil and chaos, in which we are powerless and nihilism engulfs us and isolates us in a terrifying emptiness.

We are to pray this petition not only for ourselves but also for all those men and women who, tragically, have a much greater chance of experiencing such a trial than we ever will. And we can pray this petition with confidence because the trial that Jesus bore was ultimately for our sakes. In the mystery of his relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit, Christ was resurrected. This event assures us that, whatever trials assail us, they will be borne in solidarity with our broken and victorious Lord.



# THE ASSEMBLY

meaningful relations with another denomination.

The marriage proposals were considered in numerical order based on receipt, with the arrangements being an introduction of the proposal, then questions and comments. The President clearly outlined that no decisions were to be made at this session and the facilitation group was 'charged' with collecting comments in order to bring a report to the next session.

The proposal from the Presbytery of Port Phillip West Presbytery (No. 31 -Developing a UCA position on same-gender marriage) was presented by Rev Dr Avril Hannah-Jones who argued (along with other points) that while there was ecumenical concern about this matter, it was less because the key debate in the area of ordination and same-gender relationships had already been held in our church. The ordering of the church was highlighted above marriage.

An amendment was proposed by another member to add 'and Uniting Network', to the groups who would consult on the matter. The rationale read "We could not, nor should we, make theological decisions about our indigenous, multicultural, female, ministry candidates and others without specific reference to others. We must ensure such consultation is made with our gay and lesbian members."

For the Presbytery of South Moreton (Proposal 43), Rev Lulu Senituli presented a brief message of faith first, outlining the need for compassion in a struggle we all shared, and highlighted the need to have clarity with regard to what we believe as a church, saying that it was important our pastoral response is consistent with truth. The seconder said it was necessary to reaffirm our understanding of marriage because the UnitingJustice submission on same-sex marriage had raised some doubts about what the UCA believed.

The General Secretary Rev Terence Corkin defended the church's public position on marriage arguing that statements had been made, but that the media had not highlighted them in a public way. Debate on this aspect did not continue.

Proposal 46 from the Presbytery of Tasmania which focussed on the role that the Basis of Union should have in preparation of a discussion paper

ENGLAND		AUSTRALIA		ENGLAND	
LE	WICKETS	BOWLERS	WICKETS	OUT	WICKETS
551	129	HARMON	7	LANGER	7
513	513	HOGGARD	2	HAYDEN	18
20	20	ANDERSON	1	FOXTON	49
1	1	FLINTOFF	3	MARTIN	5
13	13	GILES	4	GILCHRIST	5
38	38	COLLINGS	1	LEE	8
1	1	PETERSEN	7	MARNE	9
1	1	COOK	1	CLARK	8
1	1	BELL	1	MCGRATH	9
1	1	STRAUSS	1	TRICKET	158
1	1	JONES	1	ROBERTSEN	15

**Avril Hannah-Jones indicated she would have withdrawn the proposal she had introduced (Proposal 31), if she still could have done so.**

on same-sex relationships raised a few questions about its intent and focus, and during discussion also perhaps unwittingly revisited a previous debate about the nature and authority of the Basis of Union.

In general discussion Past-President and General Secretary Gregor Henderson commented that all of the proposals had issues or concerns, but all had elements that could be helpful if worked into a single proposal. It was clear to me from the response of cards shown that this approach had sympathy.

The next day (Friday 20th July), the facilitation group brought a proposal to the Assembly based on the proposals already received. Proposal 71 was entitled: Discussion Paper on Marriage. The wording spoke to a change of emphasis and the President's 'summing up' of where the Assembly was at, outlined his belief that there were two main points:

- Acknowledging the UCA position on marriage
- The importance of having a conversation

Debate started again after 4 pm on Friday 20th July, and continued until the dinner break, and then resumed at about 7.45 pm. The line-up to speak was considerable at times and the debate went back and forth, initially on the meaning or helpfulness of certain words proposed to highlight the current UCA position on marriage (e.g., reaffirm – which had been used in the new proposal 71, affirm, remind, acknowledge).

It was clear that the Assembly was going to make a decision that night as the proceedings moved past the normal closing time for the night session and other business was not considered at the session.

Avril Hannah-Jones indicated she

would have withdrawn the proposal she had introduced (Proposal 31), if she still could have done so. She also seemed to indicate that she had underestimated the present mood of the church, or at least the Assembly, and put the view that the church was not at the place to have the consultation she had envisaged. My reading of the direction of Proposal 31 was to lead the church toward same-gender marriage, or to introduce another way of blessing and celebrating life-long faithful same-gender relationships.

The Past-President in speaking to the discussion and agreeing with the proposal to acknowledge and begin a discussion, suggested that the Holy Spirit may be leading us to a third way - a new place we do not know yet.

Agreement (not consensus) was eventually reached, though it was almost unanimous.

The full text of the proposal is printed on the next page, but it was very helpful to have the Assembly acknowledge the current position of the UCA on marriage. In the mention of specific bodies, councils and groups to specifically receive the paper from the Doctrine Working Group, the ACC was introduced into the mix of groups to be part of the process. This was not included at the instigation of the ACC (obviously as ACC was not part of the Assembly), though one ACC member did also comment on ACC involvement at one stage. The Doctrine Working group will receive and summarise responses and bring recommendations to the November 2014 Standing Committee for an eventual report to the 14th Assembly, which will be held in WA in 2015.

## The Retiring President's address

In his retiring address, the Past-President, Rev Alistair Macrae



# THE ASSEMBLY

delivered a very wide-ranging and substantial reflection on his time as President highlighting some of the significant areas of ministry that have developed, and issues that the church has faced and is facing and signs of hope. It is worth reading his full address. Alistair was thanked for his Presidency and committed to the continuing care of the Presbytery of Port Phillip West. I found it interesting that Alistair did not address marriage or sexuality issues in his report. It is worth noting that Rev Alistair Macrae will be the new chair of the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine, taking on the role past-President.

## Agency reports

There were not as many proposals from agencies as in previous Assemblies. Among proposals approved, was a resolution to engage Uniting Church congregations and faith communities in a shared season of teaching and learning about the Christian faith and discipleship during 2014. A paper from Relations with Other Faiths, *Friendship in the Presence of Difference: Christian Witness in Multifaith Australia* was received and will be drawn upon for further

use in developing resources. There were some questions about the meaning and use of 'common spiritual language' at some points, but for most people, its status as a paper being received and not adopted was enough for the resolution to proceed. The statement, *One Body, Many Members - Living faith and life cross-culturally* (from the Multicultural and Cross-Cultural Ministry) aims to help UCA members to actively live in a healthy cross-cultural church community.

## Indigenous relationships

There was a significant focus on indigenous matters and relationship with the UAICC, with the Assembly establishing a working party to evaluate and continue the covenanting process. Assembly agreed to take further action supporting opposition to the Stronger Futures legislation. Assembly members held a lunchtime prayer vigil on the steps of the South Australian Parliament following a resolution that called for a week of prayer and fasting, culminating in a vigil at Parliament House, Canberra. Presbyteries are encouraged to send at least two representatives and other Christian churches will be invited.

## Special Events, the Cato Lecture

There were also special sessions or events at night focusing on the UCA and its relationship to the congress (Monday night), and the Korean church (Tuesday), with the Uniting Church in Australia and the Presbyterian Church of Korea celebrating 120 years of partnership and mission. The Cato Lecture was presented by Dr Kirsteen Kim who provided an overview of the changing philosophy and nature of world mission since Edinburgh 1910, though I thought an opportunity was missed to directly evaluate and critique the different theological underpinnings that have developed.

## Appointments

The 13th Assembly reappointed Rev. Terence Corkin as General Secretary of the Assembly until 31 December 2015.

President-elect: Stuart McMillan was elected President-elect of the Assembly [term: 2015-2018], following the second ballot. Pastor McMillan and former moderator Victorian-Tasmanian Moderator Rev Jason Kioa were the two nominees to go through to the second round.

Stuart McMillan is the 17th Moderator of the Northern Synod. He and his wife Ros (11th Moderator of the Northern Synod) are the only husband and wife to have both held the position of Moderator.

Pastor McMillan will be the 14th President when installed, the first President from the Northern Synod, the third lay person (the others being Sir Ronald Wilson - WA and Dr Jill Tabart - Tasmania), and the 13th male President.

It was difficult to see a clear candidate from the initial five nominees, as they all 'represented' different areas in the life of the church, and different Synods. From my previous study of Presidents (*The Magnificent Seven*, Church Heritage, March 1996), there were certainly key elements that people looked for in voting (such as being a Moderator), but there are many other factors, and it is difficult to know the mind of Assembly members.

I see Stuart's election as an affirmation of the Covenant and highlighting the relationship Congress as his relationship with Aboriginal and Islander people was a centrepiece in his presentation.

*Peter Bentley*

# The Marriage resolution

The Assembly resolved:

1. To acknowledge that the current position on marriage is set out in Assembly Minute 97.31.12
2. 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.

*Note that this is an interim draft.*

## Reference

*(extract from)* 97.31.12 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.

# Marriage proposals: Correction

The June ACC magazine had a report about the Assembly and the proposals about marriage.

Please note: There were only three proposals from presbyteries about marriage in the proposals listing for the 13th Assembly.

The Presbyteries were: Port Phillip West (Victoria), South Moreton (Queensland) and Tasmania.

The resolution from the Presbytery of North Queensland included in the June *ACCatalyst* was not a proposal to the Assembly. It was meant to affirm the present UCA understanding of marriage and to form the basis for a press release.

Apologies for this error have been presented to the Presbytery of North Queensland and to the UCA National Assembly.

The version of the Presbytery of South Moreton proposal and the rationale published in the June *ACCatalyst* were those used at the Presbytery meeting and the proposal was the one accepted at the meeting.

The rationale used at the meeting was of course never part of a formal decision and was included in good faith and provided context and information for the proposal as presented at that meeting and included the names of the proposer and seconder which highlighted that it was their submission to the presbytery.

The Presbytery of South Moreton has indicated that "The rationale was totally re-written before submission to the Assembly". The final version of the proposal submitted and the revised rationale can be found on the 13th Assembly website (Proposal 43): <http://www.assembly2012.uca.org.au/proposals-and-reports/proposals>

In the light of the importance of the issue, the full media statement arising from the Presbytery of North Queensland resolution is included below. ACC commends the Presbytery of North Queensland and the Presbytery of South Moreton for taking a stand and supporting the Uniting Church understanding of marriage in Australia.

*Peter Bentley*



**The resolution from the Presbytery of North Queensland included in the June *ACCatalyst* was not a proposal to the Assembly.**

## Uniting Church North Queensland upholds traditional marriage

*Media Release*

*Statement from Rev Bruce Cornish, Chairperson and Presbytery Minister Uniting Church in Australia, Presbytery of North Queensland*

A meeting of the Uniting Church in North Queensland on 14th April, attended by 50 representatives from almost every congregation, unanimously affirmed the Church's received teaching on marriage as contained in the Church's marriage service and confirmed at the 1997 National Assembly meeting.

The basic teaching is that marriage is the freely given consent and commitment in public, and before God, of a man and a woman to live together for life.

In some sections of the media and society in general there is a strong push for 'marriage equality'. This is not simply an issue of justice but a theological one which we believe is foundational to societal order.

As a church we speak strongly on matters of justice in Australia and overseas, sometimes against popular opinion. The Uniting Church continues to speak out on justice issues

including refugees and asylum seekers, the Northern Territory intervention, the situation in Fiji, a just and sustainable economy, and others.

In addition, we in North Queensland through our congregations and agencies continue to offer practical care and support in the gospel of Jesus Christ to the broken and hurting in our local communities.

Australian law currently provides protection for those in relationships other than being legally married both for heterosexual and homosexual couples.

We do not believe that the unique understanding of marriage should be changed, or that the church should bless such unions.

We are concerned that the church's definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman is being labelled, by some, as homophobic and bigoted.

Our Christian beliefs reflect that marriage thus defined is a blessed gift from God for the nurturing and strengthening of families and society and is to be celebrated.

As the Uniting Church in North Queensland, with representatives from Bowen to Thursday Island, the coastal cities to Mt Isa, we reaffirm our belief that marriage, as stated in the Uniting Church's teaching and currently defined in the Marriage Act in Australia must continue to be defined that way.

*Date: 26th June 2012*

# Liberal theology in decline, says new UCA president

John Sandeman  
*Eternity Newspaper*  
([biblesociety.org.au](http://biblesociety.org.au))

The new President of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA), Reverend Professor Andrew Dutney says that liberal theology is in decline.

"There is no question that the liberalism with which the Uniting Church and its predecessors were associated with in the past is very much in decline," Dutney told the ABC's Andrew West.

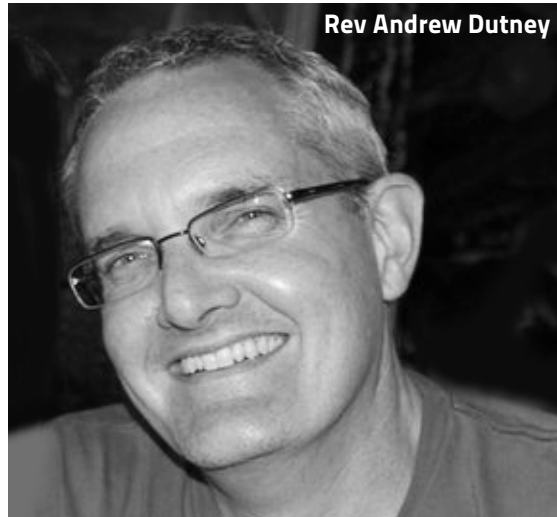
"As horizons have been broadened by the contact that different kinds of Christians are having with each other, people who might formerly have been liberal are discovering that there are other ways of reading the Bible that are not liberal. That you don't try to explain away all the difficult stuff, but you can sit with some of the paradoxes and read the Bible more directly into your own life and your own situation."

Dutney became President of the UCA at a meeting of its national assembly in Adelaide last month.

*Eternity* asked Dutney whether the term "post-Liberal" described the UCA approach. He responded "Post-liberal' is too narrow a category to describe the Uniting Church's approach to the Bible. There is certainly room for that approach, but it doesn't completely capture how we work with Scripture."

"The Uniting Church is guided by its 'Basis of Union' as it deals with the various questions and issues that come up from time to time - including questions about the Bible. The Basis of Union affirms the Bible as 'unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which [the Uniting Church] hears the Word of God and by which its faith and obedience is nourished and regulated'.

"It says that the Uniting Church's message is to be 'controlled by the Biblical witnesses', and that the Church 'lays upon its members the



Rev Andrew Dutney

serious duty of reading the Scriptures".

Dutney however included Liberal scholarship as part of the formation of the UCA approach.

"The Basis of Union also says that 'God has never left his Church without faithful and scholarly interpreters of Scripture ... In particular [the Uniting Church] enters into the inheritance of literary, historical and scientific enquiry which has characterised recent centuries, and gives thanks for the knowledge of God's ways with humanity which are open to an informed faith'".

A proposal (motion) to ask the national assembly to commit to develop "a UCA position on same gender marriage" failed to be adopted. Instead the assembly "has acknowledged the Church's existing understanding of marriage and has decided to continue a respectful conversation on marriage within the Church" according to a statement made by the organisation.

"The 265 members of the Uniting Church's national assembly have tasked the Church's Doctrine Working Group with preparing a discussion paper on the theology of marriage within the Uniting Church. This process will involve wide consultation within the Church."

UCA observers, conservative and liberal, at the Adelaide assembly meeting have noted that the Church seemed to have little appetite to make a move on same sex marriage.

The UCA's aboriginal and ethnic church bodies remain opposed to same sex marriage in general, although some leaders of these groups may be in favour.

Andrew Dutney told *Eternity* he does not see the UCA moving towards an authorised service of same

sex blessings and/or marriage during his presidency. "No, it won't. The recent assembly agreed to acknowledge our existing understanding of marriage and to continue a respectful conversation about marriage within the church. Questions about same-gender unions are likely to come up in that conversation but the focus is more on deepening our understanding of marriage, sharing insights from the many different cultural and linguistic communities that form the UCA. The Doctrine Working Group was asked to prepare a discussion paper on the theology of marriage - involving consultation across the breadth of our diverse church. A report on this work will come to the next assembly."

*Peter Bentley adds* The full interview of Assembly President Rev Professor Andrew Dutney by Andrew West on the ABC *Religion and Ethics* programme on 18th July 2012 refers to the ACC several times in the context of questions related to the marriage debate.

The audio can be downloaded from the ABC website and is well worth listening to (about 11 minutes).

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/religionandethics-report/the-uniting-church-assembly-tries-to-manage-difference/4138980>

# Diversity: how big a circle?

“Does inclusion in the UCA have limits?” asks Marg Macmillan of the ACC Social Responsibility Commission

In 1913 the American poet, Edwin Markham wrote the epigram *Outwitted*:

He drew a circle that shut me out  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout  
But love and I had the wit to win:  
We drew a circle that took him in.

If we can we apply this image to any or our church (UCA) some would say, “Yes, let’s include everyone and in doing so show the power of love.”

I would like to ask how big the circle can be and how much diversity it is possible to have and still retain our unity centred on our core beliefs about the person and saving work of Jesus Christ. Perhaps the ‘circle’ of the UCA is misshapen or skewed as it has struggled to allow whatever people want to believe and practise. That is, diversity in the sense of differences of sex, ethnicity, age, spiritual experience, personality, culture or giftedness we accept and rejoice in. They can enrich the church as does the diversity of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12 and Eph. 4:11-16). The Basis of Union recognises this: “... every member of the Church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and be his faithful servant ... there is no gift without its corresponding service: all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ.”

However, in recent times within the UCA the idea of inclusiveness has gone hand-in-hand with ‘unity in diversity’. We have, in effect, failed to celebrate Christ and acknowledge our diversity but have celebrated our diversity and tried to ‘find a way forward together’, a difficult quest when Christ is not at the centre. When the three churches came together in 1977 they expressed the conviction that the focus of our unity is our confession of Christ together, according to the Scriptures. We should therefore be speaking about our ‘diversity in unity’ rather than our ‘unity in diversity’. We are celebrating Christ —not our diversity and inclusiveness. Unity in Christ is paramount—diversity is acceptable if this criterion is met.

The Uniting Church began as a pluralist church, with members and ministers of diverse theological convictions: evangelical, charismatic, neo-orthodox, liberal – with a measure of overlap. There was also a variety of worship styles.

However, the Basis of Union was ‘ambiguous’ enough for such a broad range to work within its parameters. It seemed that all within the Uniting Church would affirm a Christological and trinitarian faith. There were also widely divergent attitudes to biblical hermeneutics and criticism but it seemed that all at least accepted that the Scriptures were authoritative for our doctrine, worship,

life and witness. However, with hindsight we can see the seeds of potential division that grew out of that ambiguity. Things began to change very early and by the 1980’s the ‘presenting issue’ was sexuality—specifically the ordination of practising homosexuals.

In an essay, *Diversity in Unity*, on his website, Rev Peter Blackburn writes: “The Eighth Assembly ... stepped back from adding to the Constitution statements which would have committed the church ‘to determine, declare and interpret matters of doctrine, worship, government and discipline in accordance with clause 2 of (its) Constitution in such a way as to maintain consistency with the Basis of Union’.

“Assembly instead opted for the much softer addition of a new clause 2, viz.: ‘The church, affirming that it belongs to the people of God on the way to the promised end, lives and works within the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic church, guided by its Basis of Union’... . The deliberate choice not to give the Basis any authority that could be legally binding on the church ... has in fact diminished what we affirm in common.”

And so we have continued on “the way” but where is the way taking us? Can the Uniting Church continue as a Christian church, “in sole loyalty to Christ the living

Head of the church ... open to constant reform under his Word”? Even if we are only guided by the Scripture and not adhering to it, we are according it some authority.

The issue is not diversity, inclusiveness or tolerance but whether the UCA is still Christian.

No wonder we doubt this when we read statements by church leaders that tend to deny the uniqueness and divinity of Jesus; when the centrality of the way of salvation is compromised; when the Lordship of Christ is denied; when we are

asked by the leadership not to proclaim the Gospel to Jews and Muslims; when the Assembly, which is entrusted with the responsibility of making decisions on matters of doctrine avoids this; when the Church experiments with pagan spirituality and theologically dubious liturgy; when contemporary relativistic ethical thinking replaces biblical morality.

Commenting on an article about the decline in the Church of England, written by Adrian Hamilton in the British paper *The Independent*, Albert Mohler (a leading Southern Baptist theologian) wrote, “When a church forfeits its doctrinal convictions and then embraces ambiguity and tolerates heresy, it undermines its own credibility and embraces its own destruction.”

The Uniting Church seems to be headed this way.



**We should ...  
speak about  
our ‘diversity  
in unity’ rather  
than our ‘unity  
in diversity’.**

# Covenant and splendour: the Marriage statement by the ACC

**M**arriage is not an exclusively Christian concept. As a human experience between a man and a woman it is witnessed in all countries, and in all faiths. Nevertheless, there are many features that are common throughout time and culture.

Here we speak of Christian marriage which is understood as “a gift of God and a means of grace. In the life-long union of marriage we can know the joy of God, in whose image we are made, male and female. ... Husband and wife, in giving themselves to each other in love, reflect the love of Christ for his Church.” ... (‘Declaration of Purpose’, Marriage Order of Service, The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, Sydney, 2005)

This Christian understanding of marriage has several features. These are:

*1. Marriage is a central part of God’s wonderful creation*

Jesus pointed to the foundation of marriage as being in God’s creation of humankind: male and female in his own image (Genesis 1:27, Matthew 19:3-5). As part of God’s creation, marriage was provided then and now for mutual comfort, love and support. It also provides the fundamental basis for society and good order.

*2. Marriage is between a man and a woman.*

In the most basic sense of our be-

## Jesus pointed to the foundation of marriage as being in God’s creation of humankind: male and female in his own image

ing (ontology) a man and a woman provide the only complementary basis for a marriage. Simply put, a woman and a man are made to fit together, and by their union are bonded together and can receive the blessing of children born from their mutual sexual love.

*3. Marriage is a public acknowledgement of the love and commitment of a woman and a man to each other*

Marriage involves a public ceremony. The couple’s mutual decision to marry each other leads to the two being joined together with and before God and witnessed by family and friends. There is a public acknowledgement of the relationship.

*4. Marriage is meant to be life-long*

This life-long covenant is a gift from God, whose love is unending. God has eternally covenanted himself to the people called into a relationship with him, and married

couples are called to model that love and life-giving forgiveness (Hosea, Ephesians 5).

*5. Marriage is monogamous*

Sexual love in marriage is a glorious and holy gift. It is not meant to be devalued by casualness before a marriage, or adultery after the bonds are created. Sexual love strengthens and unites the covenant union of the couple as they express the full complementarity of their man-woman relationship (Genesis 2:23-25, 1 Corinthians 7:3-5).

*6. Marriage involves an openness to children*

Children are a blessing from God, and families provide the basis of our society. As God provides for his children, parents provide for their children and should model the strength, love, generosity and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 7:9-12). Marriage enables children to live and grow up together with their mother and father in a secure covenant family.

In all, the marriage of a man and a woman, together with the family it enables, is a holy expression of the image and glory of God. In the marriage of a man and a woman the Old Testament sees a reflection of the covenant relationship between God and his people, and the New Testament sees the splendour of the union of Christ and his Church.

*Approved at the ACC National Council meeting 16 May 2011*



# The MOST important thing

DON PURDEY has been told by his doctors, that he will soon lose his ability to speak. He's worked out what he needs to say in the time he has left.

*Rev. Don Purdey was a founding member of the ACC National Council with particular interests in strategic planning and youth. Now suffering from Motor Neurone Disease, Don has retired from ministry and assists the ACC SA Movement. He is also the instigator and coordinator of the ACC Emerging Leaders Award.*

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

**I**t's not quite speaking in tongues, but my voice sure doesn't sound the way it used to. People have trouble understanding me on the phone, and even face-to-face. Some of you would know that I used to love to lead worship with my voice and guitar. I can't sing anymore. I was a preacher. I don't preach anymore.

The reality is that I'm dying. Eighteen months ago I was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease. Current medicine has no cure or effective treatment. Unless God intervenes, I will slowly lose control of my voluntary muscle movements—things like arm and leg movement, even breathing—until one day it will all be too much and I will die. The average life expectancy of MND sufferers is 27 months. I'm out to break the record, but the fact is, my clock is ticking.

And in my particular case, the disease has started in my tongue, so the first faculty I am losing is the ability to speak.

What it comes down to is this: I have a very limited capacity to speak into people's lives now. There isn't much time left for me to say the things I want to say. I have to choose my words carefully, and not waste them.

Have you wondered what you might say to someone you love if you thought you would not be able to add something else tomorrow? What would you choose to talk about?

I don't know what yours is, but here's mine. The most important thing I could ever say to anyone. The best

possible use of my failing voice. The thing I want people to hear more than anything else, the thing I would be satisfied to have said if I collapsed and died on the spot at the end of it.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, loves you, personally, so much that he came into the world to teach you about God, to die for your own personal sins on His cross, and to rise from death to open a doorway for you through death into eternal life with him.

That's it. For those of you who know your Bibles it's very like John 3:16, isn't it? But that's what I want you to know. And not just to know it but to embrace it; celebrate it; and live out all that it means.

It's important stuff, so just in case you missed something, let me unpack it a little. There are four key statements.

**1 Jesus Christ is the Son of God.** Did you take that in? Jesus is not just a great human teacher, like a lot of humanists, or followers of Confucius or Buddha would want you to accept. Jesus is not just a prophet in a line of prophets like Muslims or those of the Baha'i faith want you to accept. He is not just one god among hundreds of gods as the Hindus would want you to accept.

Jesus is God incarnate, God come to earth in human form. He proved he was God when he came to earth, fulfilling hundreds of prophecies. He proved it by his wisdom and teaching, by his miracles, by his willingness to die innocently for others, and supremely by his rising from death. Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

**2 Jesus loves you.** We hear that statement so often in the church that it's easy to forget just how important it is. Or maybe you're one of many people in the church who hear that phrase and hear the "you" as plural—that Jesus loves us all, which he does. But I think many of us secretly, in the depths of our hearts, often extract ourselves from that plural "you". Sure Jesus loves everybody else, but not me. The other people at church? Of course Jesus loves them, but I'm different. They don't know what I'm really like.

So let me make it especially clear. Jesus loves you, singular. Even you. Even though you've messed up. Even despite the pain loving you may cause him. Jesus loves you. You, personally. Especially you!



Don Purdey at the 2011 ACC conference

**3** **The death of Jesus paid for your sins.** In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul writes “For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting their sins against them”. It was God bearing the suffering. Some people try to separate Jesus from God, and therefore picture God in heaven callously sitting back and letting an innocent third party named Jesus bear all the pain. But Jesus was and is God. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.

And because God exists as completely beyond and outside time as He does within it, He can deal with your present day sins through that one historical event - once and for all. That one supreme act on a hill outside Jerusalem 2000 years ago can be accessed beyond the limits of normal time and space through Jesus by all people who believe. And because of that, we get a whole new start at life.

We even get to be seen as righteous because of Jesus. Paul put it magnificently in 2 Corinthians 5 when he said in verse 21 “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Jesus is willing to swap his righteousness for our sin. To me it sounds like a terrible deal for him, but that’s the gift of our loving Saviour. He takes our sin and makes us righteous.

No wonder Paul wrote in verse 17 “...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Jesus’ death paid for your sins.

**4** **Jesus’ rising from death opened the door to eternal life.** Jesus rising from the grave proved that He was and is God. He rose on that first Easter Day and he is still alive. No one else can say that. Not Mohammed, not Buddha, not Confucius, not anyone else. After rising from death he was observed by hundreds of people on numerous occasions, and then he was witnessed bodily ascending from earth. He is God, and he is alive. And best of all, the pathway that He pioneered through death and into eternity is there for us all to follow. That was his promise in John 14—“I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am you may be also.”

We can follow Jesus into eternal life. So - are you following? That’s one of the questions I want you to think about. Have you decided that you’re going to join Jesus in the eternal life that is our true and permanent home and destiny?

**Friends, somehow we need to reach our fellow Australians with the good news of the love of Jesus.**

As I said - I’m dying. But the reality is, so are you! The only advantage I have over you is that I have a better idea of how and when I might go than you do. And even that is not certain - Jesus could intervene and heal me or I could still step off the kerb tomorrow and be hit by a car. Indications are that my life will be shorter than what we consider normal, but the truth is I cannot be any more certain of even living past today than you can.

I’ve already lost two brothers. One died of a brain tumour a few years ago—he was 64. But 29 years ago another brother died instantly in a glider crash at the age of 31. None of us can take tomorrow for granted.

As I have confronted the fact of my own mortality, I’ve come to the conclusion that I want to say the most important things I can to as many people as I can before I run out of time. That’s really why I’m writing like this.

You’ve read my important message. I wonder if you were in my shoes what you might do or say? And to whom? That’s the other important question I want you to think about. Because the truth is, you are in my shoes. None of us can make assumptions about what life might hold in store.

In all the stories that emerge from people’s deathbeds, none of them are lying there wishing they had spent more time at the office. Everyone, when it comes to those final hours, wants to spend them among the people they love, and they’re lying there hoping that by their living they have conveyed to those loved ones something lasting; something that will outlive them; something that will resonate and help those people in their own journey through life.

Friends, somehow we need to reach our fellow Australians with the good news of the love of Jesus. Above every other need our fellow Aussies think they have: above the higher wages and the new houses and cars, above the need for clean energy and sustainable environments, above even the need for family and friends, our fellow Australians have a desperate need for release from their

## PURDEY

sin and guilt and shame. They need a new chance at life, they need to understand what their life is about; they need to know that there is a God in heaven who loves and cares for them and will offer them an eternity of joy and peace.

So what I'm suggesting to you is that the single most important thing that you can do with whatever time you have left this side of heaven, is to help those fellow Aussies you know and love to find Christ Jesus.

Paul described us as ambassadors. In 2 Corinthians 5 verses 19 and 20 he wrote, "...he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us."

Isn't "Ambassador" a powerful word? An ambassador has the authority to speak on behalf of his country and its government. Maybe it fills you with awe to be considered as an ambassador for Christ. To speak on his behalf. It's quite a task we're given isn't it? How do you do that?

Well, you tell them your story. Tell them what God means to you.

And do your best to explain the Gospel to them. You might want to use a simple explanation of the Gospel like the Bridge illustration, but be sure to find some way of telling them that Jesus has come and lived and died and risen for them too. Give them as much of the Gospel,

the Good News, as you understand. If they have questions you can't answer, admit it and seek out someone who can answer them.

And don't just invite them—take them to church. Let them feel the love and the fellowship that is the Body of Christ on earth.

Actually, you have a natural advantage with those you know and love. Those people already have a love and respect for you. So when you start to tell them what is important to you, they will assess it against what they know of you. And when they start to grasp what it is you're telling them then they will have to process that in some way. They can't just dismiss it as rubbish, because they know you and you are telling them what is important to you.

Friends, whatever your gifts and skills in life, whatever stage of life you're at, whatever other agendas you have running: the most wonderful, the most beautiful, the most powerful, the most exciting legacy you can leave with your family and friends—and the most urgent and important thing you have to talk to them about - is a love for Jesus Christ.

If I'm right, are you following Jesus? And if you are following him, ask yourself this: Is my life's purpose and priority given to sharing that good news with those I know and love?

## Digging up landmines

With millions of anti-personnel mines scattered around the world, there is need for a faster method of finding and digging them up than the use of sniffer dogs, hand rakes, or probing the ground with wooden sticks.

Such a mechanised project, based in the University of Genoa, Italy, aims to clear mines from small areas using more or less conventional agricultural machines that are common in many of the mined areas.

I am involved as a consultant and co-worker in the agricultural engineering aspects of the project.

The power unit is a small 60kW, 4WD agricultural tractor that will be used to dig up the mines as well as driving associated tools for clearing undergrowth and carrying mine detection devices, etc. The wheels of the tractor are designed to withstand the detonation of 200g TNT without damage that would halt operations.

The work I am undertaking in Australia is the development of a prototype tool for digging under the mines, usually buried about 100 mm, and bringing them to the surface. It is based on a 400mm agricultural cultivator 'sweep' to lift the soil and mines



**Experimental rig to evaluate digging and sieving of anti-personnel mines**

and a vibrating sieve to separate the fine particles and leave the clods and mines on the surface.

The present work on the evaluation of the tool is intended to explore the digging and sieving functions of the tool and not, at this stage, its ability to resist the blast from a mine.

The project also involves co-operation with the Middle East Centre for

Demining at the University of Jordan and various European funding organisations.

Details of the overseas aspects of the project can be seen at <http://www.snailaid.org/locostra>  
*Ross Macmillan Senior Fellow in Agricultural Engineering  
University of Melbourne.  
ACC member*



# Trinitarian and Unitarian worship

ROSALIE HUDSON  
on true worship

Torrance, J. (1996). *Worship, community & the triune God of Grace*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press. *This book is a resource book for the 2012 ACC Conference whose theme is "The Heart of Worship"*

James Torrance<sup>1</sup> contrasts two views which, he says, characterise the church's understanding of worship: Unitarian and Trinitarian. The Unitarian view is that God is one person, and that everything centres on our individual relationship with him. The Trinitarian view of God as three inter-related persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, centres on God's call to us to share his communal life for the sake of the world. While we only pray to one God, in the Nicene Creed and in the New Testament we have a warrant "in the church's worship life to pray to each of the three persons" (p.36).

What follows is an attempt to draw out several distinctions Torrance makes between Unitarian and Trinitarian worship, drawing out some implications that may have benefit for the ACC's discussion of this topic.

*Unitarian:* Worship is something we do before God. Torrance calls this "do-it-yourself-with-the-help-of-the-minister worship" (p.20). What is offered is our priesthood, our offering, our intercessions, our present-day experience, our repentance, our response to our direct relationship with God.

*Trinitarian:* Worship is the gift of God who invites us, through the Holy Spirit, to participate with Christ in his communion with the Father. In this "double movement – a God-humanward movement and a human-Godward movement" (p.60), which is the gift of grace, we respond joyfully in loving, obedient service to our sisters and brothers and the whole of creation.

*Unitarian:* We sit in the pews as observers (or the 'audience') regarding the minister as the main 'actor'. When it's over we all go home.

*Trinitarian:* We are all 'actors' in worship. Prompted by the Spirit we are given what God requires of us – the worship of our hearts and minds. Jesus Christ, the one true worshipper, unites us to himself by the power of the Spirit. So blessed, we share every day in God's mission for the sake of the world.

*Unitarian:* We make our own offering in singing, listening, praying, giving money and celebrating our gifts. We feed on our own experience.

*Trinitarian:* Jesus Christ, the one true Priest, is the mediator through whom we draw near to God the Father. "There is only one offering which is truly acceptable to God, and it is not ours" (p.21). This is not to disparage who we are with our various gifts; but to acknowledge that our human response is always dependent on God's offering of himself to us. We are lifted up, called into God's triune life, to share his ministry. "We feed on Christ, the Bread of Life, not our own subjective experience" (p.34).

*Unitarian:* We look for inspiration or 'a spiritual battery charge' to get us through the week.

*Trinitarian:* Rather than Sunday worship 'prodding' us for the week ahead, worship means participating, through the Spirit, in God's present and continuing action in the world. We share in God's mission – at church on Sunday, in our regular reading of the bible, in prayer and devotion, and in the service of our daily lives wherever they are lived.

*Unitarian:* We measure worship by its 'relevance' to ourselves or 'the person in the street'.

*Trinitarian:* In worship we participate in the self-offering of Jesus Christ to the Father by his death and resurrection. Because "God so loved the world" (John 3:16) this worship is 'relevant' to all. We do not make the worship relevant; through the incarnation Jesus Christ has already reconciled the world to the Father.

*Unitarian:* We compare various 'styles' of worship, judging their effectiveness by whether or not 'it's my kind of thing'.

*Trinitarian:* "It is not our experi-

ence of the world which we translate into worship, but Christ's experience of us which is taken up by him and glorifies the Father."<sup>2</sup> It is not that our experience does not matter; but that in worship all our (broken, inadequate) experience is healed.

*Unitarian:* The Sacraments are not regarded as central, and therefore can be celebrated infrequently. Holy Communion is reduced to an individual's private memorial meal and baptism an expression of the individual's faith rather than incorporation into Christ's body.

*Trinitarian:* The Eucharist (Lord's Supper or Holy Communion) is "the supreme expression of all worship" (p.23). In the power of the Spirit we are drawn into the presence of the risen and ascended Lord, to share his communion with the Father. Through baptism we enter the fellowship of the Trinity, not for our own sake, but for the sake of the world.

*Unitarian:* This individualistic view of worship (where our confidence is in ourselves) is divisive, with every church 'doing its own thing'. It is neither catholic nor evangelical. It leads to apostasy, apathy, unbelief and despair (p.119).

*Trinitarian:* Trinitarian worship unites. By grace we enter into the joyful fellowship of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our response is possible only because Jesus Christ has already made and continues to make the one true and worthy response on our behalf.

Torrance presses the question: Do our forms of worship "help people to apprehend the worship and ministry of Christ as he draws us by the Spirit into a life of shared communion" (p.15)?

"The doctrine of the Trinity is the grammar of the church's faith and worship" (p.98).

<sup>1</sup> The late James B Torrance was professor emeritus of systematic theology at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland.

<sup>2</sup> Watson, G. *The fatal divorce: theology's estrangement from the church's life*. Church & Nation, June 24, 1987.

*Dr Hudson is Chair of the ACC Doctrine and Theology Commission*

## News helps people connect

To emphasise its “Helping People Connect” theme, Camden Uniting Church, in Sydney’s expanding South-West, recently launched “Camden Connect News”, a full-colour quarterly A3 newsletter in the style of a regional newspaper.

Although the church uses email, email newsletters, Facebook, and a variety of Internet-based resources, the newspaper format met the particular needs of strengthening the church’s “Connect culture”.

“In our first issue, we showed how our departments are all working towards the same goal,” Pastor Terry Cunningham said. “It has challenged

**OUR FAITH: JUST HOT AIR?**  
CHRISTIANITY accounted for 96.1 per cent of Australia's population at Federation in 1901. By the 2006 Census, this had dropped to 63.9 pc.  
In 2006, the largest denominations were Roman Catholic (23.5pc), Anglican (18.7pc), and Uniting Church (5.7pc). The only local churches that are growing are those that emphasise discipleship training and Gospel-sharing as essential to their church culture. It's time to turn the tide!

**Camden Uniting reaches out to touch, heal lives**  
CAMPDEN Uniting Church is leading the way in Sydney's South-West as it reaches out to people moving into new housing areas including Ovas Park Town, Gregory Hill, Harrington Grove, Meridan, and The Meritings.  
The Synod Mission Resource Fund (SMRF) says it is "1000 per cent happy" with the way we are meeting the challenge.  
Camden pastor Terry Cunningham and Eric McDaniel are funded by SMRF and employed by Camden Uniting Church to outreach work in the Camden region.  
Pastor Eric leads Momentum, a ministry for the 18-30s. Against the national trend Momentum has successfully reached and...  
Pastor Terry leads outreach in new areas, coordinates our small groups network, pastors and mentors group leaders, and provides group with a variety of study resources.  
He has developed a discipling course unique to our church. Group numbers have doubled in two years, and we are very active in new areas with an office in Ovas Park.  
He also leads general development courses aimed for community members, with the...  
LEFT: A developer's model shows multi-storey buildings at the Ovas Park Town. A new Civic Centre is proposed along with a major regional shopping centre.

**Popular Pastor Peter appointed**  
REVEREND Peter Wilson has been appointed Senior Pastor of Camden Uniting Church and will begin work later this year.  
Pastor Peter brings a wealth of experience to his new role at...  
Team thank  
IN THESE times our church has been blessed with a new senior pastor, our Ministry Team on many extra tasks.  
All of the team say they have given their best.

groups, and individuals, to connect more solidly to the ministry team and to one another. We've had a very positive response." Camden Uniting

Church is offering the A3 Microsoft Publisher newsletter template free to any church wanting to do the same. Contact Terry: [terry.c@tpg.com.au](mailto:terry.c@tpg.com.au)

## NSW churches support marriage

Two NSW ACC congregations are among many congregations around Australia supporting and encouraging marriages during this year and also linking into Marriage Week (September 9–15 2012). <http://marriageweek.org.au/> The NSW ACC Movement paid for an advertisement in the July *Insights Magazine* (NSW&ACT Synod) highlighting the Christian and Uniting Church position on marriage.

### Marriage a priority at Andy's

Through May–July, St Andrew's Uniting Church at Richmond NSW set Marriage as a priority topic, raising it locally and within our congregation. Our Pastoral Leaders Team (Elders) made the decision late last year to put marriage on our agenda for 2012, and under the leadership of PLT member Lester Vincent, a public licence was purchased for the blockbuster movie FIREPROOF and a program devised. This movie was shown four times on our big screen, with over 60 people attending from the district. It is possible that we may screen the movie again later in

the year, as our licence is for a twelve month period.

Through that period, our Minister, Rev. Je-Kon Oh, preached six excellent sermons on Marriage. We publicised our registration to view ACL's live “Defining Marriage” webcast with a large article and photograph in the *Hawkesbury Gazette*, and were joined by two other local churches. It has been proposed that St Andrew's hold an event or celebration during Marriage Week. We are exploring ways to include single people in whatever we decide to do.

*Bruce Fairhall Congregational Chairman*

### Belrose Celebrates Marriage

Throughout August, Rev'd. Ian Weeks, Pastor of Belrose Uniting Church (Sydney) and Chair of ACC NSW, will be preaching a sermon series on Real Relationships: in Singleness and Marriage through the Old Testament book of Song of Songs.

In a Biblical twist on a chick-flick, Song of Songs tells the story of a young peasant girl who is wooed by a lover who celebrates her God-given

beauty, and together they find the joy of sexual intimacy expressed in their identities as husband and wife, created in the image of a loving God.

Some helpful resources for the series:

1. *Real Marriage: the truth about sex, friendship & life together* By Mark & Grace Driscoll. (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2012.)
2. *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the complexities of commitment with the Wisdom of God* By Timothy Keller. (Hodder & Stoughton 2011)
3. *God's Good Design: What the Bible says about men and women* By Claire Smith. (Matthias Media 2012)
4. Commentaries:  
*The Message of Song of Songs* by Tom Gledhill. (BST Series 1994)  
*A Lord worth loving* by Stuart Olyott. (Welwyn series 1983)  
*Heavenly Love* by Gary Brady. (Welwyn series 2006)  
*Song of Songs* by Duane Garrett (Word series 2004)  
*Rev. Ian Weeks*

# THIS IS THE ACC

## Who we are

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

*Our goals include*

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

## What does ACC do to help you?

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

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

## What we want to do

The objects of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations are:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## How to join us

Please consider joining the ACC. Supporting Membership forms are available at: <http://www.confessing-congregations.com/assembly/members/individual-members/>

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

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

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

# ACC DIARY

## What happens next

- September 13-15: ACC AGM and National Conference - Nunyara Conference Centre: Belair, Adelaide: Come and consider "The Heart of Worship".
- October 13: ACC NSW General Meeting. Speaker: Rev Dr Max Champion
- October 14: ACC Hunter Cluster Meeting: Booragul UC. Speaker: Rev Robert Hincks

## Ways to support ACC

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

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



## Using our logo

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



Malcolm McDowell in *Suing the Devil*

## Homage to silence

*Suing the Devil* (PG, 2011)

Well this is a very interesting concept, and I liked the casting of Malcolm McDowell as Satan. This was a bit like having Morgan Freeman play God in *Bruce Almighty*. While probably aimed at the US Christian market, the film was filmed in Australia around Darlinghurst and parts of Sydney (and also some filming in LA), and clearly has significant Australian involvement, especially with Wesley Institute students.

The premise is simple. A down-on-his-luck law student decides to sue Satan for 8 trillion dollars because he argues Satan is the cause of all the world's problems. Satan appears at the trial in the nick of time to defend himself, and a courtroom drama unfolds. Satan is assisted by some of the world's best lawyers, all of whom could easily feature as characters in the usual jokes about lawyers. During times in the witness box many different ethical and philosophical questions are raised including the nature of evil and the problem of pain. Who is responsible for evil in the world? All good questions and the film may help some younger groups in particular to think about God's world.

There are cameos from Christian leaders and writers, including Christian singer Rebecca St James, and a Sydney-based well-known Pentecostal pastor. Malcolm McDowell has such a strong screen presence in nearly anything he appears in that he can easily dominate. It was certainly amusing seeing him take the oath and learning that Satan sees his role as "just the trash collector." There are a number of other Hollywood actors involved as well, including Corbin

Bernsen (see the review of *Rust* below) and Tom Sizemore, and perhaps it is the professional involvement that illustrates the difficulties with some of the other roles, especially the lead role.

The film-work often reminded me of a play, and illustrated the difference between directing a film and directing a play. Using a relatively unknown actor Brad Bronson in the lead role of Luke O'Brien has limitations. While we know God uses all people including the weak, there are times when Luke's portrayal is too understated. This is especially illustrated by his use of the voice-over, a notoriously difficult technique to use well. The approach comes across as text being read rather than speaking with passion. Overall, the theme is about finding out who you are in relation to God: What do you truly believe in, love and therefore follow?

*The Grace Card* (M, 2010)

Another Christian film developed with the assistance of a church in the USA, *The Grace Card* has been received well, and can be compared to *Courageous*, though it was released before-hand. There are similar themes related to the law enforcement characters and issues about fatherhood and relations within the family unit. The acting is usually well-done with a good role from Louis Gosset Jr (who received an Academy Award for his role in *An Officer and a Gentleman*).

The director of the film is David Evans, a graduate from Southwest Baptist University who established Graceworks Pictures. This is another example of a film developed within a

church community, being the Calvary Church in Cordova, Tennessee. David has a long history of directing the church's Passion Play. The screenplay was written by Howard Klausner who wrote *Space Cowboys* (2000). Ephesians 2:8 is the bible verse chosen to highlight the message of "the power of forgiveness": "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God".

The film has some good elements, but has a didactic preaching style that is occasionally repetitious and does not allow some issues to develop by themselves. This is a helpful film for its consideration of racial issues that are rarely raised in 'Christian films' and no doubt arising from the local church's emphasis on reconciliation. Watching this film, I was reminded of another aspect of grace: "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." (Colossians 4:6). Let grace abound.

*Rust* (PG, 2010)

This is definitely a Corbin Bernsen movie. He wrote the script, directed the film and also plays the main character James Moore. This is an understated and somewhat subtle film about doubt. The main character, a preacher (the denomination is deliberately left ambiguous) goes back to his hometown while suffering a crisis of faith. Rather than having his lowering expectations realised, he is renewed as his gifts and abilities come to the fore through a specific situation of tragedy and injustice that has arisen in the town.

The film was written for and thus set in the real town of Kipling in Saskatchewan Canada, and the town 'bankrolled' the movie—another interesting way of making a picture. While slow at times, this is deliberate as it parallels the preacher working through issues.

The film could enable some significant discussion, including Bernsen's involvement because he is not known for 'Christian films' and seems to like long philosophical discussions himself about religion and meaning. Bernsen is well-known for playing Arnie Becker in *L.A. Law*. From interviews Bernsen makes it clear he was more focussed initially on the human elements of the film and the wider appeal the story has in terms of helping people think about redemption and love.

*Peter Bentley Peter is the Executive Consultant for the ACC*