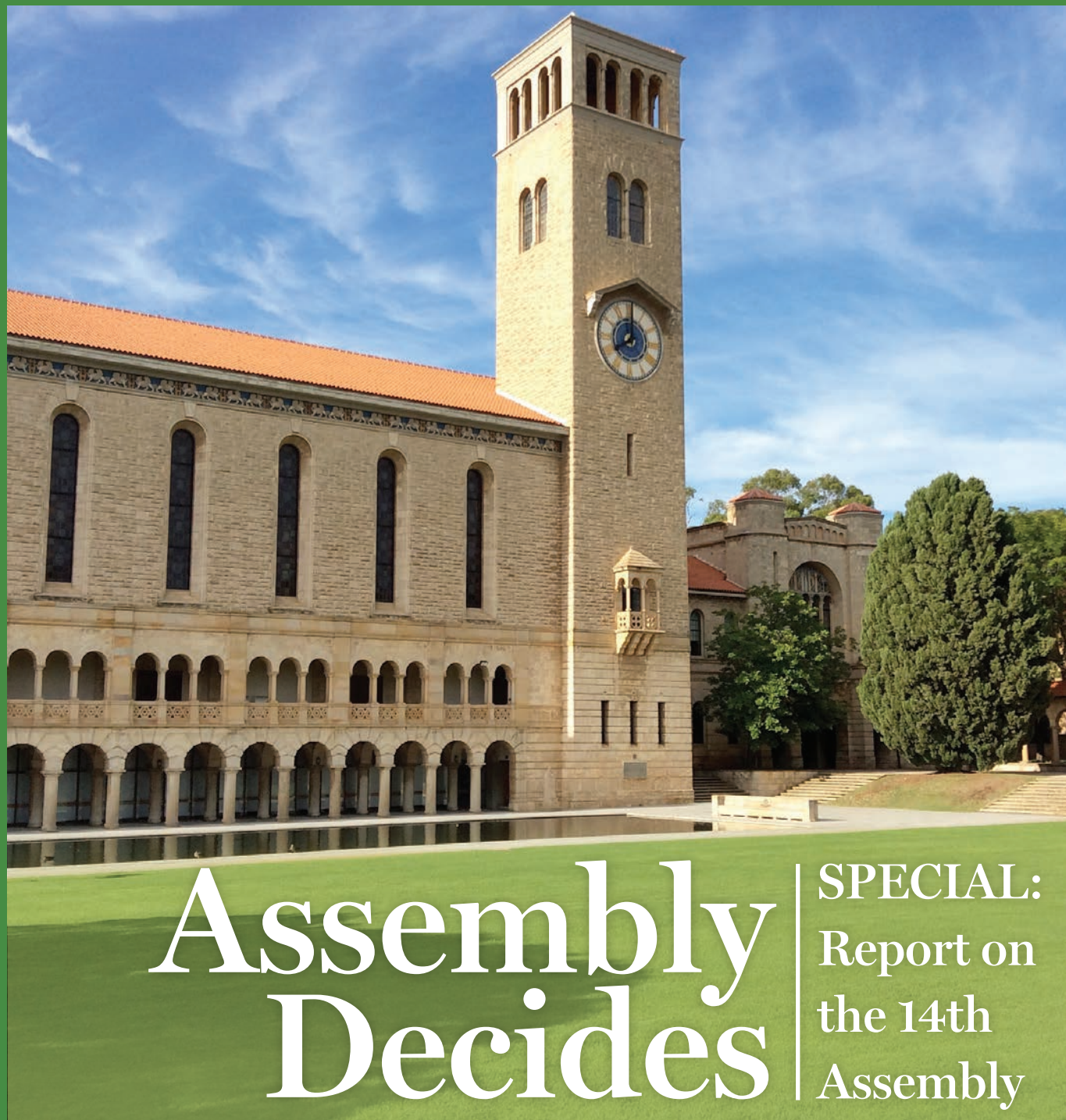


VOLUME 9 NUMBER 3-4 | SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 2015

ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



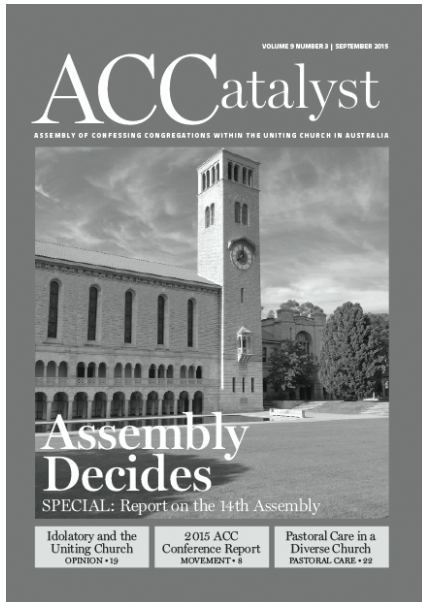
Assembly Decides

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Cover photo - Winthrop Hall UWA Perth, venue for the 14th UCA Assembly (Image Supplied)

EDITORIAL

Take a bow

I am slightly shocked to be able to write the following sentence.

Six years ago Peter Bentley and Max Champion asked me to edit *ACCatalyst*. ACC being a bit of an ideas factory in fact meant that my role was to try and give the magazine the feel of a 'zine rather than an academic journal. One way of doing that was to encourage typical magazine techniques like Max's "public Square", taking advantage of the skills within ACC.

I trust it has been a pleasure to read *ACCatalyst*, because it has

been fun (well, not at midnight) helping put it together.

My other hat is the Bible Society and *Eternity* newspaper. Life is getting busier there. So it's time to hand *ACCatalyst* on to a new team of Peter Bentley and Wes Selwood. Selwood, a layout expert and an old Wesley Mission hand, has forgotten more about the Uniting Church than I ever knew. Thanks for putting up with me. God bless.

John Sandeman

Thank You John

The Assembly of Confessing Congregations would like to acknowledge the timely and thoroughly professional contribution of John Sandeman as editor of *ACCatalyst* over the last five years. John is moving on from this role, though he will kindly remain as a consulting editor. Peter Bentley will undertake the main editorial role for the interim period.

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Petunia the Goose

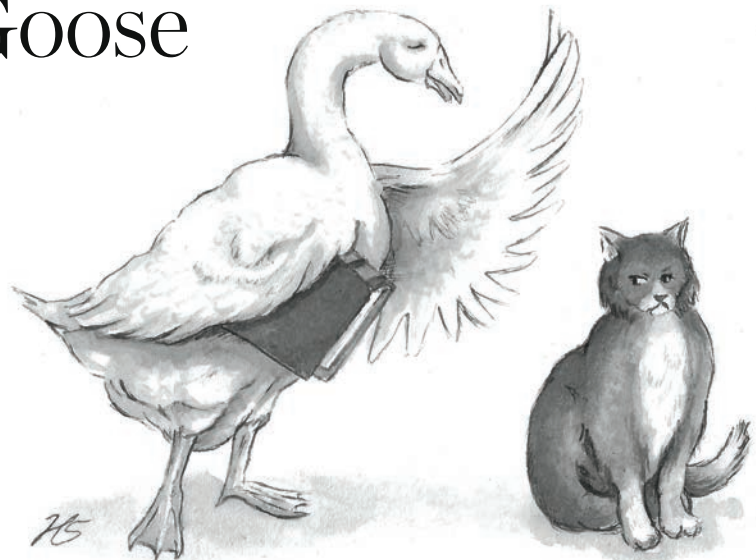
When I was young my sister and I had a book about a goose called Petunia. The story goes: One day Petunia found a book lying on the ground. She wondered what it was and a farmyard friend informed her it was a book and books would make you very wise.

So Petunia picked up the book, tucked it under her wing and thought about how wise she had become. When all the animals heard that Petunia had a book and was wise they came to ask for her wisdom to solve their problems. Petunia gladly gave her advice, but with disastrous effects for the animals, because Petunia wasn't actually as wise as she thought she was.

At the end of the story, Petunia discovers that the book actually opens and has pages inside with writing on them, and she realises that you actually have to read what's written there before you learn and become wise.

As Christians, we can become like Petunia. We have a book, the Bible, given to us by God in order to make

Hilary Sandeman



us wise, and to give us life and understanding about God.

But, just having a Bible sitting on the shelf at home is not enough to teach us what we need to know. We have to get it down and read it!

In God's word we find out what sort of God he is, how he wants us to live, and we learn about the history of how he has interacted with his people. Through God's word he speaks to us and encourages us and

gives us life.

As 2 Timothy 3:16-17 puts it: All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the people of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So don't forget to open those pages and have a read!

Robyn Painter is the Pastor of Peterborough Uniting Church

Q&A: Sign of the Times

Canadian Christian Scholar John Stackhouse was on ABC Q&A discussion on 13th July 2015. Among many questions 'aimed' at him it was illuminating to hear his comments about some of the implications following from marriage revisionism.

TONY JONES: *John, this question about whether to take the Bible literally is often raised in connection with same sex marriage. It's been legal in Canada for a decade now. I guess I'm wondering have Canadian Christians decided it's not actually sinful after all or whether they've just decided to ignore some parts of the Bible which would suggest that it is? ...*

TONY JONES: *Sorry, I guess my point is when the law changed, did Christians change their views of these things?*

JOHN STACKHOUSE: *Well, one of the interesting things, Tony, in Canada is that when the law changed almost a decade ago now, we were promised that the views of those who lost the battle would continue to be respected and their freedom to hold those views would continue to be respected. A decade on, that's not turning out to be the case, I'm sorry to say. And what I find is that often now when I'm engaged in national conversations like this in Canada, I'm not trying to push a particular view for or against same sex marriage. That ship has sailed. That's the law of the land. I'm actually trying to see if we can avoid the typical revolutionary turn, where the people who used to be oppressed now get to turn the screws on the people who used to oppress them and it seems to me that's disappointing. It's understandable. I mean, if I'd been oppressed...*

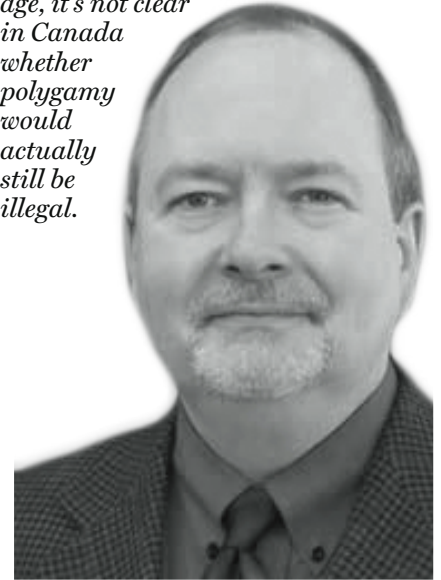
TONY JONES: *In what sense is that happening?*

JOHN STACKHOUSE: *Well, in the sense that we find that those individuals who try to articulate a view that is not correct, are actually shouted down at university campuses, places where they should be able to speak up, and institutions that are trying to say, "We would like to opt out of this consensus," are being refused opportunities to participate in Canadian life, including in some of our universities.*

TONY JONES: *Well, let's just quickly go back to John. Ten years' experience. Are Christians seeing rise in polygamy or bestiality?*

JOHN STACKHOUSE: *Ten years ago I went on Canada's national radio program Sunday Morning, which is as popular in Canada as Q&A here is in Australia, and I talked to Michael Enright and I said, in the pre-show briefing, I said, "You know, Michael, if this goes through," which of course it did, "the next stop will be polygamy," and he said, "Oh, that's just a ridiculous scare tactic." In the province of British Columbia six years later, a fundamentalist Mormon commune practicing polygamy was charged by the attorney general of British Columbia, after two previous attorneys general had refused to even bring charges because he wasn't sure he could make the charges stick in the new regime. What seemed to be fantastical has actually become the reality in Canada and the only reason those people were brought up*

on charges was because they involved underage children, 15 year old girls. If those girls had been of a majority age, it's not clear in Canada whether polygamy would actually still be illegal.



Gospel Coalition launch



Full house at Brisbane Town Hall for TGC Australia launch.

An Australian 'The Gospel Coalition' was officially launched in July 2015 in Brisbane following its development in 2014. The original idea for 'The Gospel Coalition' came about during a meeting in 2001 between the co-founders, theologian Don Carson and NYC Redeemer Presbyterian Founder and Minister Tim Keller. The vision formalised in 2007 that is: 'A biblically grounded and united mission is the only enduring future for the church. We desire to champion the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ with clarity, compassion, courage and joy – gladly linking hearts with fellow believers across denominational, ethnic and class lines. We invite all Christians

to join us in an effort to renew the contemporary church in the ancient gospel of Christ so that we truly speak and live for him in a way which clearly communicates to our age.'

The North American based The Gospel Coalition is supportive of the Australian venture, but it was thought helpful to have a local group and ministry and it will be a distinct Australian entity. Don Carson was the keynote speaker at the Australian launch and an invited group of ministers and lay leaders met before to consider how they can work together for the gospel in Australia.

See their website: <http://australia.thegospelcoalition.org/>

The Joy of Silence at Christmas

'Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for lo, I come and I will dwell in the midst of you, and many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day.' ... 'Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord, because he has roused himself from his holy dwelling. (Zechariah 2:10&13) ... 'Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.' And the shepherds returned glorifying and worshipping God for all they had heard and seen. (Luke 2:19-20)

The prophet Zechariah calls the faithful to await God's coming to Israel and the nations by doing two seemingly contradictory things. They must 'sing and rejoice' and 'be silent.'

He is not alone in linking 'silence' and 'praise' as the proper response to God's coming to 'all flesh.' In the nineteenth century Soren Kierkegaard said 'Be silent, for that is the absolute.' In the fifth, Cyril of Alexandria said 'Let what cannot be spoken be worshipped in silence.' In the 1930s, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said 'teaching about Christ begins in the humble silence of the worshipping community.' Silence and praise go together!

This is consistent with people's reactions to Jesus. There is astonishment, trepidation and delight. At the same time, Jesus orders the crowds to be silent lest they misread his special vocation. An eerie silence surrounds Jesus' crucifixion. The resurrection is met with fear, awe, joy and silence (Mk 16:8).

Luke, too, makes this point. Mary silently 'ponders' the momentous birth (2:19). The shepherds 'glorify and praise God for all they had heard and seen' (v20). Both are awestruck by the mystery of the incarnation.

Mary's silence isn't be confused with 'quiet times' which are not necessarily focused on the incarnation. Her silence protects news of God's incarnate love for 'all flesh' from being cheapened. She isn't distracted by the euphoria surrounding Jesus' birth. Being profoundly moved by events which have taken place in and around her, she knows that their significance cannot be absorbed in an instant. Jesus' birth is unlike any other.

Mary's silence warns us against shallow belief and thoughtless worship. In a world where silence is despised

and communication occurs through snappy visual images and simple repetitive slogans, she reminds us that the event of God's coming in the flesh of Jesus must not be trivialized. ...

How hard it is to get this across in our world! We have all become used to 'chattering' about everything. We now 'twitter' about the most banal details of our lives, making it virtually impossible to distinguish between trifling opinions and great matters and faith.

Christians are not immune. Evangelicals, liberals and charismatics are all tempted to embrace techniques that promise success by communicating what people want to hear, not what they need to hear. What is said is instantly graspable, self-affirming and cheerful. What is profound and disturbing is removed.

How hard it is today, in the community and the church, to encourage curiosity about the splendour of the incarnation which, until now, has had a profound influence in the formation of Western culture. Many church members are now deeply hostile to the central claim of Christianity that, in the flesh of Jesus, God has brought hope to 'all flesh.' Sadly, the story of the incarnation has become too familiar, to non-believers and church-goers. It is too easily brushed aside by apathy or contempt.

How desperately we need to recover a proper sense of 'silence' in order that our 'enthusiasm' about the incarnation of Jesus Christ is neither shallow nor self-centred. Mary and Zechariah teach us to practise a proper silence before God - a silence that breaks into the cacophony of the modern world to create hope. To be silent in this sense means learning to be deaf to the banal voices which clamour for our attention. We must refuse to let God be 'talked down' by ceaseless, trivial, self-centred and pious chatter.

Silence and exuberant praise belong together. At Christmas, therefore, in contrast to our noisy mass-media, we can 'glorify and praise God' (with shepherds and wise-men) out of 'profound silence' (with Mary) for the word of hope that rings out in the flesh of Jesus Christ.

Rev. Dr Max Champion is the Convenor of the ACC Theology and Ecumenical Relationships Commission



On Sunday 20th September 2015, rallies were held across Australia, especially in the capital cities to celebrate and proclaim Marriage as being Between a Man and Woman. Many churches and individuals participated in Marriage Week (13-19th September), and this was a wonderful public time to publicly stand together for marriage. ACC National Director Peter Bentley spoke at the Sydney Rally held in Martin Place in the city, alongside representatives from other organisations and churches.

New devotional resource now on-line and as App



always telling us who we should do. The world is always telling us what we should do and think and what we should believe. There is a great pressure on us to conform to the world's ways.

One of the great problems we have is that our own hearts 'buy the lie'! We love the idea of being accepted

Reverend Derek Schiller has now provided his Word for the Day as an App to download. This was launched at the 2015 ACC Conference. Derek is presently the Minister of the Word at St George Uniting Church in Queensland. He was previously the minister at Waikerie Uniting Church in the Riverland area of South Australia. Derek is also a National Council member and Convenor of the ACC Discipleship and Evangelism Commission and has been instrumental in producing several DVDs for the ACC.

Each morning a new Word for the Day is uploaded and you simply click on the day highlighted.

Download the APP from the Website by following the link.

<http://stgeorge.unitingchurch.org.au/wcms/acc-devotion-app/>

This follows the normal process as you 'bookmark' onto the home screen of your phone or tablet. The words are originally provided by SMS to ACC and other interested members, and also available on the St George Website or through the ACC Devotion App.

A sample devotional is provided below:

1 John 2: 15

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them." (1 John 2:15 NIV).

The world is always telling us what we should be. The world is

and loved by the world and we spend much of our time striving and straining to be like them. And yet, strangely, there is no joy or peace in the world's ways. They do not belong to the Father.

Oh what joy it is to know our Father; to know that Jesus has saved us into the Father's family; to be filled with the pure peace of the Holy Spirit. Here is life in all its fullness. Here is the rest we desire so much. We don't need to strive to do and be because we know who we already are.

People waste their whole lives chasing after the acceptance and glories of this world and it comes to nothing - it is in the end meaningless. But we know the Father!





cisale / istockphoto.com

PUBLIC SQUARE

BY PSEUDO - MAXIMUS

The problem with Q

Reshaping identity

Don't call it narcissism or attention-seeking. Choosing your own sexual identity from a smorgasbord of genders is now regarded as an act of liberation from the 'closed categories' of man and woman. In 'Queer days indeed ...' (*Weekend Australian* 18-19 July, p8), some academics and students applaud deconstruction of male-female sexual relations and normalisation of 'gender fluidity.' Whether the new model marks a serious quest for 'identity' or a desperate attempt to be 'more interesting' is debatable. What is clear is that the rich tradition which regards the 'limit' of man-and-woman as a joyful, procreative good willed by a loving Creator, and which, until recently, has commended itself to society as a whole, is now being undermined by forces hostile to Christian identity.

Q&A

Making the case for marriage in public is fraught. Time-honoured belief in the social importance of marriage between a man and a woman and the raising of their biological children is now widely treated as hateful and bigoted. On Q&A (ABC TV 19 August) Katy Faust, a Christian raised by lesbians, and Brendan O'Neill, an atheist opposed to illiberal responses to supporters of traditional marriage, faced a largely hostile panel and audience.

O'Neill decried the intolerance which treats opposition to 'marriage equality' as hate-speech and bigotry which must be excluded from public

debate. Faust withstood such criticism to say that society should not institutionalise a family structure where children, contrary to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, will always miss out on living with either a father or a mother.

The most telling moment came when the topic turned to what could be done to ensure greater gender equity in politics. Asked her view, Faust said it was fascinating that they all felt that women make a difference. She agreed that it was helpful to have both male and female perspectives to create a more balanced and representative party. She hoped they might also agree that gender balance matters in the life of a child, too. After all, marriage is the only institution that's gotten the gender balance right.

Is it too much to hope that the sensible views of a perceptive atheist and a committed believer will deter the church from pursuing the 'Marriage Equality' agenda? It would be shameful, and deeply hypocritical, if the UCA were to deny 'gender equity' in marriage when she approves of it for all other social relationships!

The President's letter

On 12 August President Stuart McMillan wrote a pastoral letter to the church on decisions on same-gender relationships at the 14th Assembly. He highlighted the need to make 'space for grace' in which to have 'respectful conversations' with those who belong to 'culturally and linguistically diverse communities.'

He stressed the Assembly's commitment to 'seek to be an inclusive

church that celebrates diversity and embraces LGBTIQ people as full members of the church community. For the times we have failed to be this loving community of Christ and caused hurt, we apologise, ask forgiveness and pray for healing and reconciliation for us all.'

Members should be deeply troubled by the President's letter. He doesn't spell out what LGBTIQ stands for. The addition of 'Q' is problematic. 'Queer Theory' is now taught at Universities. It encompasses an extremely wide range of sexual activities far more 'adventurous' than Lesbian and Gay sex.

Moreover, LGBTIQ people are now given the highest status in the UCA. Assembly's decision to designate them as 'full members' by virtue of their gender, not confession of faith, singles them out from 'ordinary members' who belong by virtue of their baptism and confirmation.

Texts used by the President focus on the unity of the Spirit in the body of Christ (Eph 4:2,3). But he ignores the specific relationship which expresses that unity (eg Eph 5:21-33) or disrupt it (egs Rom 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-20). Likewise, appealing to 'Jesus' unconditional love and acceptance,' 'the commandments to love' and 'putting the interests of others ahead of our own' ignores God's judgment and the costliness of grace which demands a better righteousness (Matt. 5:17ff).

Yet again, members are asked to 'embrace' diverse forms of language, culture and sexuality without asking whether 'acceptance' of 'gender

fluidity' is congruent with the unified testimony of Scripture. The fact that, despite wide consultations on marriage since the 2012 Assembly, the church is condemned to yet another round of 'deep listening,' is proof that the substantive issues will continue to be shelved. Small wonder, then, that the one 'culturally and linguistically diverse group' excluded from this process is the ACC.

Flagging the future

'The move to a new national flag is only a matter of time' (Bob Brown, *The Age* 17 August p19). NZ and Canada have beaten us to the symbolic severance of the apron strings of Empire. No doubt a consultation will be held with the kangaroo destined to figure prominently. What does it say about us when an animal with a small head, a tiny brain and large backside is thought to symbolise the Australian people as 'the clever country'?

More seriously, the removal of that part of the flag that connects our history with that of a country deeply influenced by humanism and Christianity, and its displacement with symbols drawn from nature, would mean a radical re-shaping of our national identity. In particular, the removal of the Cross - ambivalently placed at the centre of Empire - would signify what is already the case. The fact that we no longer believe in the corrupting power of sin and the redemptive possibilities of grace in public life, but put our trust in the possibilities inherent in nature, will inevitably damage the social fabric.

IAN CLARKSON

Why the hate?

Why at every opportunity is biblical Christianity mocked, debased and spurned? And across those nations most blessed by this same belief system, the West? Examples are too many and so obvious recounting is superfluous. (Just scan the way the media presented Hastie and Keogh in the Canning by-election)

British retired judge Sir Michael Tugendhat expressed concern over growing lawsuits against Christians in UK and likened it to the vicious Tudor dynasty. Respected British commentator Melanie Phillips probes "As for antisemitism, it was the Jew Karl Marx himself who believed that society's 'new man' would be created only by repudiating Judaism altogether."

Is that it? The new fascism has to destroy the only real obstacle to its state embodiment of humanity - the Bible. The most banned Book in the world and increasingly so at least publicly in the West.

Have we had it too easy to be surprised? It's rampant in Syria and Iraq, Pakistan and Nigeria. It was so in the Sanhedrin and from the lawyers in the Temple courts.

But why? Why is church, Christianity, Bible, Torah so reviled by media, columnists, opinion-makers and politically correct fashionistas? It has to be more than abuse or disappointment with the church.

I believe the cause is deeper. Compton's lauded authoritative volume on 'Civilisation and Homosexuality' gives a clue sheeting the cause of homophobia to Pauline theology. The Bible is sensed at least, to be transcendent. Its teaching rings true and the rebellious know it and hate it.

Reject the Gospel for a 'mess of pottage' and refuse to come back to

the Author of life to receive mercy and the heart hardens beyond ability to change. Deep within registers the dread spectre of judgment to come. Spurning the Father's discipline and 'roots of bitterness' inevitably sprout. Rejecting the glorious Gospel of mercy there is only one option left: destroy the fact of judgment and the existence of the Judge! Futile, fanciful and awfully fatal.

Were such caustic haters once within the sound of Gospel and the shadow of the Son of Righteousness and the sweet law of God? But forgiveness was spurned for conscience-searing lusts.

If your notion of God's justice concerning you is this, then the warped best you can hope for is the annihilation of anything Christian and Biblical. Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism are all OK -because deep down the heart knows they are all fake when it comes to Truth. These are all tolerated, even lauded as the Word of God is savagely rejected.

That portrays the anger of the outwardly nice but the inward seething of some of our media and policy makers who fiercely reject the only escape from the wrath of God.

Persecution mounts because the rebellious must eradicate all resemblance of testimony which stands as judgment against their angry disobedience. Persecute means to pursue driving the haters against the righteous. Christians, brace yourselves by first of all rejecting the idolatry of niceness and needing to be liked and take courage in the Gospel.

You may be useful even yet in not only holding your own faith but snatching one of these 'dry sticks' from the fire. Only God knows.

ACC National Conference

Around 100 people gathered for the conference held at the beautiful and amenable Nunyara Conference Centre in the Adelaide Hills, Monday 14th – Wednesday 16th September.

An ACC conference has three main parts:

- a) Business and formal matters
- b) Keynote addresses and bible studies
- c) Encouragement, especially through the state network meetings, groups and informal gatherings.

The conference started with worship and the first Assembly session with Rev Dr Hedley Fihaki (ACC National Chair and Minister of the Word at Mooloolaba Uniting Church leading the conference opening and Rev Rod James facilitating the business.

After the opening session, members joined state network groups to share about their local ministries and discuss key questions raised as formal business (more later).

At the first keynote session on the opening night Peter Bentley (ACC National Director) presented a brief overview of the issues raised by Dr Keith Suter in his thesis on scenario planning for the future of the Uniting Church (Profiled in the December 2014 ACCatalyst), opening up for Rev Rod James reflection. Rod presented his first PowerPoint address

with a full consideration on *Where are we and where are we headed? Future Directions in the Uniting Church*. Rod particularly explored how the UCA Assembly had moved to a liberal position on sexuality and where the future may lie (See his article in this edition).

Rev Simon Dent (Minister of the Word at Coromandel Valley UC) presented a message for the conference bible study on 1 Timothy 1 on the second day, helping us to focus on God's amazing grace.

Emeritus Professor Pat Noller

The second keynote address was presented by Rev Dr Max Champion (founding ACC National Chair) on the Confessing Movement, helping our members to more fully understand the nature of being a confessing Christian today. A summary of Max's address is provided in this issue.

The third keynote address was held during the worship time and rally. This was an especially significant night as members of the Emerging Leaders Camp events spoke about the significance of the Camp for their Christian experience and growth and their life within their local churches. Information about this

key initiative from the SA ACC Movement has been reported in the ACCatalyst over the last 3 years.

Rev David Kowalick (Minister of the Word at Fishgate Community Uniting Church and a member of the SA ACC Committee) then addressed the Conference on the theme of Confessing Christ from the Basis of Union (in a diverse church), highlighting the

foundation of an orthodox understanding of our faith for the Uniting Church.

Rev Ian Weeks is the ACC NSW Movement Convenor, and Minister of the Word at Belrose Uniting Church and delivered the Sermon at the Conference Communion Service on 16th October. Ian reminded us again of the power of the Gospel with his message *It's a Foolish Church that Forsakes the "Foolish" Message*.

Emeritus Professor Pat Noller, the Convenor of the ACC Board of Communication helpfully concluded the conference with a wonderful overview of Pastoral Care in a Diverse Church.

Her presentation was summed up in the final slide from **Ephesians 4:2-6 (NIV)**

2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

A selection of papers (2 available as a PowerPoint resource) are now available at:

<http://www.confessingcongregations.com/news-views/item/2015-acc-conference/>



Conference 2015

Making Decisions and the ACC future

The minutes of the meeting will be made available to congregations and members in the new year, but it is helpful to provide a brief overview of decisions.

The ACC AGM has the features of a normal AGM, including receiving the financial accounts, and reports from Commission and groups. The AGM is conducted in several sessions spread throughout the conference. Given that this was a conference held after the 14th Assembly, the focus for the business time was on possible future directions and a number of proposals were passed following plenary discussions and also feedback in the state network and group meetings. **The overall context for these proposals was continuing as a confessing movement within the Uniting Church in Australia.**

(Extract from the draft minutes of the 2015 Assembly of Confessing Congregations AGM)

1. That the ACC prepare, in consultation with other evangelical and multicultural partners, a theological statement, building on our existing statements and connecting it

with the Basis of Union, of the Uniting Church's doctrine of marriage, in which it is made clear that Christian marriage is of the substance of the faith.

2. That the National Council begin to explore and trial possibilities, and bring to the next AGM a proposal for further deliberation, for the establishment of an ACC School of Faith taking into consideration the following possibilities:
 - a. identifying local campuses within ACC congregations that have a teaching ministry that clarifies and proclaims the faith of the Uniting Church.
 - b. identifying teachers and preachers who are willing to be listed as a 'faculty' whose resources and gifts would be available to the ACC and to the wider Church as ACC School of Faith teachers and preachers.
 - c. developing an ACC on-line school facility which can be publicised and accessed by ACC and wider Church people.
 - d. exploring the possibility of cross-links with other theological colleges on the ecumenical scene;
3. That the ACC maintain its current identity and status as 'The Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church in Australia'.



ACC National Conference 2015

From previous page

4. That the ACC maintain its motto, 'Confessing the Lord Jesus Christ, proclaiming the truth, renewing the church'.
5. That the ACC undertake the following objectives over the next 3 years:
 - a. reaching out to all other reformed/evangelical /orthodox groups in the UCA to explore ways in which we can 'go forward together in sole loyalty to Christ the living Head of the Church' and bear 'witness to a unity of faith and life in Christ which transcends cultural, economic, national and racial boundaries'.
 - b. working to bring those groups (e.g., UAICC, the Migrant/ethnic Conferences, Hope Mission Network, 3D Network, EL 250, PNEU-MA) to make a common witness under our resolve to unite in Christ.
 - c. seeking to have the proposed biblical & theological statement on marriage held in common witness with the other groups named above.
 - d. communicating to our ecumenical partners our desire 'to live and work within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church'.
 - e. encouraging each congregation and cluster belonging to the ACC to visit the leadership of the other Christian churches in their area and share with them our desire 'to live and work within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church'.
 - f. calling on all ACC congregations, clusters and individual members, and all of the above groups to earnest and persistent prayer, and that we ask the ACC National Prayer Network to prepare resources to assist in this work of prayer.

Memorial Minutes were presented and warmly received for Rev Dr Gordon Moyes AC and Rev Perry (Raymond) Smith. The memorial minute resolutions will be available in the formal minutes.



The ACC National Council was elected for the next term: 2015 – 2016.

Chair: Rev. Dr Hedley Fihaki (Qld)
Deputy Chair: Rev. Ian Weeks (NSW)
Secretary: Rev. Rod James (SA)

The following Council Members were elected (9):

Rev. Walter Abetz (Tasmania)
Rev. Dr Max Champion (Vic)
Bruce Fairhall (NSW)
Rev. Anne Hibbard (NSW)
Rev. Mele Fakahua-Ratcliffe (Vic)
Rev. Lulu Senituli (Qld)
Rev. David Kowalick (SA)
Rev. Derek Schiller (Qld)
Rev. Mike Fawcett (WA)

Appreciations to Council Members

The ACC expressed its deep appreciation to retiring Council members.

- Rev Professor Ian Breward (Ian will continue as a theological consultant for the council);
- Rev Shane Kammermann (past chair); and Dr Colin Adam (former treasurer – continuing as BOM Convenor).

Convenor and Network Appointments (2015-2016)

The AGM made the following appointment.

- Board of Management – Dr Colin Adam
- Board of Communication – Emeritus Professor Patricia Noller
- Cross Cultural Commission – Rev. Lulu Senituli
- Disciple and Evangelism Commission – Rev. Derek Schiller
- Theology and Ecumenical Relations Commission – Rev. Dr Max Champion
- Prayer Network – Rev. Anne Hibbard

Thanks to God for our servant leadership in the organisation of the Conference

The conference was very blessed to have the SA ACC committee and local arrangements committee look after the local logistical arrangements. We were well served by the staff and at Nunyara Conference Centre, especially the catering team. Thank you Nunyara.

At different times up to 120 people gathered in fellowship, hearing from leaders in our movement, sharing wisdom, making decisions and supporting and encouraging each other to confess our Lord Jesus Christ. It is hoped that the 2016 conference will be held in Tasmania (probably later in the year), and it would be wonderful if you could plan to join the gathering. We encourage all ACC member congregations to send a representative and through reporting back more knowledge of the wider work of the ACC will be provided to local members and more understanding of what it means to be a confessing Christian in Australia and indeed in God's world today.

Peter Bentley

Max Champion Encourages the ACC

The Confessing Movement

(an edited version of the paper presented by Rev Dr Max Champion at the ACC Annual Conference, Adelaide, 15 September 2015).

It is generally agreed that Western societies are undergoing seismic shifts in the two traditions, Judeo-Christian and Pagan-Humanist, which until recently largely shaped our beliefs, morality, customs, laws and culture. As public dissent from these traditions has gathered pace, Christians who dissent from the new order, and are said to be on 'the wrong side of history,' are increasingly treated with contempt. The speed with which this has happened has created a severe crisis of hope and provoked the urgent question of what it means to exercise Christian vocation in a society that is *post-modern* whereby all claims to know the truth are treated as 'opinions' or as a grab for power, and in a world that is *post-Christian* in the sense that faith in the transcendent love of God has become inaccessible and *neo-pagan* in the sense that faith is found in the self.

Unless a confessing movement discerns the 'principalities and powers' that underlie popular public issues, it will be side-tracked by less important ecclesial concerns. This is evident in the Theological Declaration of Barmen, which opposed the Third Reich. The reasons for the Barmen Declaration, and the form of its confession, are relevant for us.

On 23 July 1933 a new German Evangelical Church or 'German Christians' as they became known, was formed under the leadership of Bishop Müller and organised around the 'Führer principle' and racial doctrines. In 1935 it advocated the inclusion of the Aryan, anti-Jewish, requirement for church office and the abolition of the Old Testament. In 1934 Prof. Karl Barth refused to open his lectures with the Hitler salute. He outraged other theologians when he opposed any compromise between the Church and the Reich. He insisted that 'We have different beliefs, different spirits and a different God.'

In 1936, amid the clash between the German Christians and the Confessing Church, Dietrich Bonhoeffer reflected on 'The Nature of the True Church.' In words that jar our sensibilities, which are accustomed to diverse forms of spirituality within and beyond Christian denominations, he said 'Outside the church there is no salvation.' 'The question of church membership is the question of salvation. The boundaries of the church are the boundaries of salvation.'

What can we learn from the German Confessing Church struggle against 'principalities and powers'?

The Barmen Declaration is a re-affirmation of faith in the Word of God revealed through the Holy Spirit and a repudiation of idolatry and false doctrine. It rejects the charge of being unpatriotic or schismatic. It calls on congregations to test the spirits according to Scripture and the historic confessions; to resist temptation and fear; and to be encouraged in faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

It is not enough, however, simply to write a confession. A confessing movement cannot remain 'silent' but must speak the truth and expose falsehood. Inevitably, it will divide the Church and the community.

Before trying to discern the relevance of Barmen and the Confessing Church to our situation, *we must face critics* who fiercely reject the comparison of confessing movements which have arisen around sexuality with opposition to political oppression in Nazi Germany (1930s), Civil Rights movement in the USA (1960s), Apartheid in South Africa (1970s) and other liberation movements. Such strident opposition has forced new confessing movements to ask *if there is an affinity* between their concerns and earlier confessing church struggles. Current confessing movements, like the ACC, arise because it is necessary to identify and critique post-modern, post-Christian, neo-pagan, nihilistic ideologies that automatically shape the beliefs, values, opinions and life-style choices of citizens and church members alike. In this regard, their Gnostic underpinnings need to be more fully explored.

Where, then, does this place the ACC as a dissenting movement?

1. Be Steadfast: A Letter to Confessing Christians from the Confessing Theologians Commission (4/9/2003) in which Christians are urged to remain in their churches as long as preaching the Gospel is not explicitly forbidden. Until then, they are encouraged to provide sound theological teaching and work towards reforming their institutions so that society may be humanized.
2. Do not be dismayed by the apparent weakness of the global confessing movement, especially in the 'Western Church'. In church history numbers have never been a good guide to faithfulness.
3. Resist temptation to soft-pedal our critique of the UCA's false theology as expressed in a raft of decisions about sexuality. We must re-affirm the ACC's founding statement that the UCA is 'apostate' in this regard and do so by deepening our positive theology of marriage as of the 'substance' of the faith. "*We have different beliefs, different spirits and a different God.*"
4. We must ask ourselves whether arguing for religious freedom is consistent with confessing Christ.

Conclusion

As Ian Breward says, 'To move from dissent to separation is a very serious step. Here are some of the reasons our forbears found compelling. They included conviction that the Scriptures had been misheard, the mission of the Church weakened, worship corrupted, key doctrines subverted and disregarded, constitutional procedures not honoured and leaders captured by the spirit of the age. Schism led to further schism, and we heed to the Reformers' insistence that the Church can have grave defects, but must be honoured so long as the Word is faithfully preached and the Sacraments rightly administered. They are the marks of the Church.'

“It’s a Foolish Church that Forsakes the “Foolish” Message”

ACC National Conference 2015 - Confessing Christ in a Diverse Church

Message presented by Rev. Ian Weeks at Morning Worship: Wednesday 16th September

Bible Reading 1 Corinthians 1:10 - 25

It’s a Foolish Church that Forsakes the “Foolish” Message

1. The Myth of the Perfect Church – Busted!

I sometimes hear people say that they are looking for the perfect church. I usually respond by saying “Good luck. But you know if you find one and join it, it won’t be perfect anymore!” The reality is that no church here on earth is perfect, simply because every church is made up of sinful fallen people, like you and me.

The Corinthian church was no different. It is very evident from Paul’s letters to the Corinthians that this church experienced a number of problems – it seems the main one being the disease of division.

The *symptoms of this disease* were evident in its :

a) Disconnection from the wider Church – they had lost sight of being part of God’s bigger family – the Church catholic or worldwide. This was manifested in their neglect of the collection for the suffering saints in Jerusalem (Ch 16:1).

b) Disconnection from the world – rather than being light & salt, they were engaging in immorality that even dismayed the non-Christian world around them (Ch 5:1).

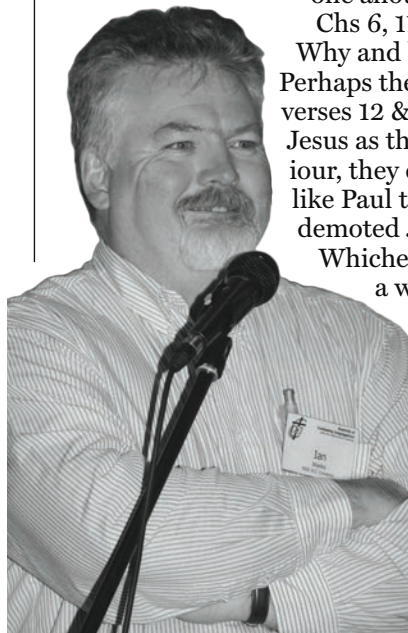
c) Disconnection from one another – manifested in their divisions & cult-like hero worship (of Paul, Peter & Apollos), quarrels, the blurring of the uniqueness of Jesus, spiritual snobbery & one-up-manship, and animosity & selfishness toward one another (Ch 1:10 – 17; & Chs 6, 11, 12).

Why and how did this happen?

Perhaps the answer lies in Chapter 1 verses 12 & 13: taking their eyes off Jesus as the unique crucified Saviour, they either elevated mere men like Paul to the level of Jesus, or demoted Jesus to the level of Paul .

Whichever the case, it resulted in a weakened Gospel – emptied of its meaning and unable to demonstrate the power of God.

And so the church had a disconnected confession, presenting a powerless message, as well as becoming disconnected from Jesus, resulting in a powerless church.



2. The Remedy: Keeping Our Eyes on Christ Crucified

How can we seek to prevent our church (and our denomination) from suffering the same condition?

Keeping our *eyes fixed on Jesus & the cross*, we see that:

i) we are part of the universal Church that God has brought into being and called as saints by the sacrifice of Christ (Ch 1:2).

ii) we are rescued from sin and made holy – called to be different from the world, radiating light, being salt, setting the example before the world of Godly obedience (Ch 6:9-11).

iii) we are one body, each gifted with part to play, ensuring our attitude toward one another is that of humility and loving service, encouraging one another in faith, building up the body (Ch 3 & 12).

3. The Result: The “Foolishness” of God Displayed

Through this painful letter to a sick church, we are reminded that in keeping our eyes on Jesus we will see that God has used what seems foolish to accomplish His plans & purposes (1:18 – 25).

- It is a foolish church (or denomination) that forsakes the “foolish” message of the cross. God used what seemed foolish to the so-called learned and wise to rescue sinful people into the Body of Christ.
- Paul urges us to confess a “foolish” Saviour - Christ crucified, saved only by His death and resurrection.
- Paul urges us to proclaim a “foolish” message – the cross as God’s means of forgiveness and reconciliation.
- Paul urges us to be a “foolish” people – modeling repentance and faith, trusting in a “foolish” God of grace.

When we forsake this “foolish” message for what appears to be worldly wisdom,

- we disconnect ourselves from the teaching of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church;
- we disconnect ourselves from the world, unable to offer them the powerful Gospel of grace, reconciliation and transformation; and,
- we disconnect ourselves from one another, replacing unity with a diversity that divides and weakens the Body.

Only by keeping our eyes fixed of Jesus, the Crucified and Risen Unique Son of God can we hope to inoculate ourselves from the disease of division. That may seem “foolish”, but it’s God’s way of presenting His amazing grace to a fallen world. Let us pray that we don’t become a foolish church that forsakes the “foolish” message.

Rev Ian Weeks is the Chair of the NSWACC Movement and Minister of the Word at Belrose Uniting Church

A brief report on the 14th Assembly

Synod publications will provide a good overview of many of the issues and matters at the Assembly, but I thought it was helpful to highlight a few points.

Stuart Macmillan was installed as the 14th President (2015-2018) at a service on Sunday night 12th July. The Assembly theme was Hearts on Fire. The service was provided to the whole Church and indeed world in a most contemporary manner, namely via YouTube, and I watched the streaming at a local church where I had been invited, though the service was almost unwatchable due to the split screen filming arrangement – trying to have people participate in the singing by showing the words as well as projecting the service meant it was like watching from a tall building and I felt oddly disconnected. The local church group eventually abandoned the experience. I tried the streaming option again on the Friday night for the ordination service of two members of the UAICC – this was an invited service for all Assembly members and was much better with very good projection, close-ups and focus. It provided an example of how good this arrangement can be and it was unfortunate that I was one of one of only 3 people or groups watching on-line according to YouTube.

President-elect for 2018-2021 is Dr Deidre Palmer, the present Moderator of the South Australian Synod, who was elected on the first ballot.

One significant matter was the presentation by the Chair of the **Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse**, the Hon. Justice Peter McClellan AM. He gave a sobering report, outlining that there was no difference in the nature of the allegations of, or between private and public institutions, and affirming that the power of the institution should never be allowed to again silence a child. According to the statistics at that stage about half of the complaints were faith-based with 3% UCA or 399 individual complaints overall, involving 130 different institutions, including 137 at one

school (Knox Grammar School).

News of the financial problems of Frontier Services (\$17 million dollars debt) was reported and this dominated the Assembly agency sessions (where members could choose an agency for further discussion following reports) as members sought to understand what had happened and what would result in terms of necessary change. Needless to say this was a major source of feedback, and it would be best to contact the Assembly to find out what has happened here and what indeed will be the future for Frontier Services.

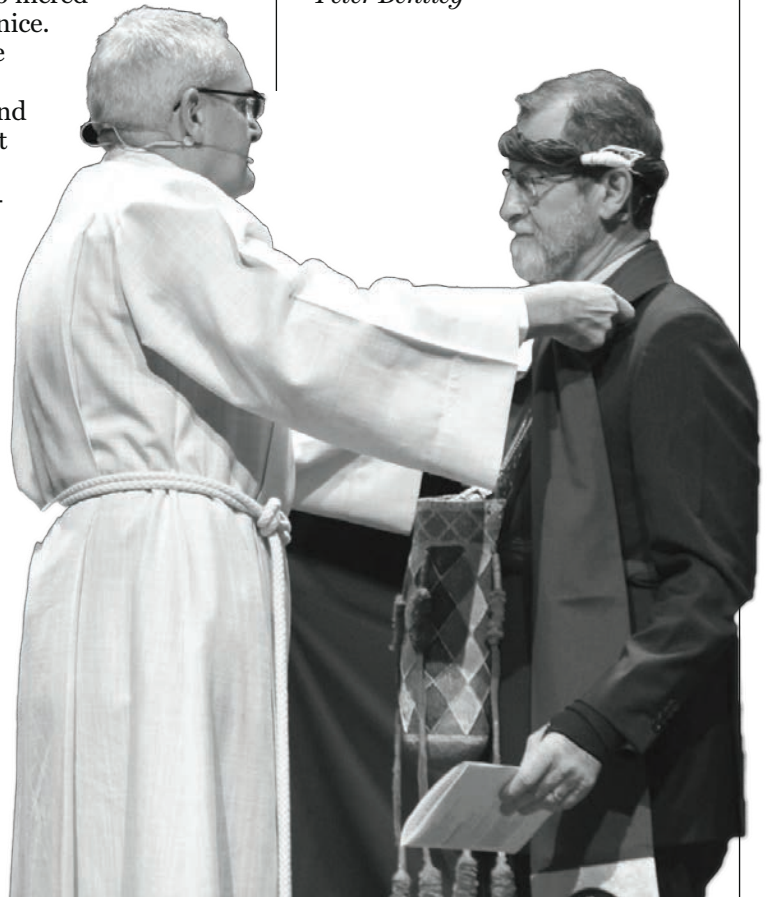
The presence of ecumenical guests was as usual significant with their involvement in many ways throughout the few days, including in the small groups. I did find it odd that most guests seem more enamoured with the UCA and proceedings than many members. It may be they are not aware of the seething amount of politics underneath as usually with guests we are so incredibly polite and nice.

Following the changes to our church polity and questions about the status and nature of eldership, there had been another discussion paper and consultation during this triennium in a seeming attempt to breathe life into the dead and lifeless body known as Eldership and also develop some theological and practical consistency and understanding, but this came to naught after

a good amount of time talking and considering in various ways. For me this symbolised how on some matters everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes and it also showed how on more difficult or nuanced areas it is very difficult to have any decisions now, especially if you want to stick to consensus or agreement.

A key star at this Assembly was Social Media, which was widely used this time, though rarely in the marriage discussions as this appeared to be an area that the church wanted to keep quiet about or perhaps did not know how to report? I did note that at 9.54 am on 18/07/2015 the UCA Twitter feed announced: "Theology of marriage discussion at #14Assembly has finished with consensus on proposal to continue to consult widely across the Church." I thought this was a pretty major issue for the Assembly and thought it would be helpful to provide more comment in our magazine.

Peter Bentley



Marriage remains

Peter Bentley attended the 14th Assembly as an observer, especially to report for the ACC. The following is an account and reflection on the marriage discussions and resolutions at the 14th Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia (12-18 July 2015)

The overall context of the presentation of the discussion about marriage and eventual resolutions is one of continued 'conversation.' This had certainly been the context of the formal proposals arising from the report from the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine.

I perceived that basically the Assembly was not of a mind to make a radical decision that would have created immediate and long-term difficulties within the UCA – that is widespread local church chaos. With all the UCA cultural and linguistically diverse national conferences affirming a traditional understanding of marriage, and the position of the UAICC (Congress) well-understood, most of the more moderate Assembly members would not have been keen to split the church. It was also known that the overwhelming majority of local church members belong to churches that do not affirm or endorse the revisionist approach to marriage in society let alone the church. The Assembly of Confessing Congregations represents a significant part of the vocal body opposed to revision, but the majority of members would be certainly with the ACC on this matter.

There was still a vocal liberal element that argued from their understanding that the UCA should lead the way in terms of endorsement of 'same-gender marriage', rather than reacting to any federal decision. There was also a personal argument that outlined how some ministers already had same-gender couples ready and waiting now to be married by them, and they know they cannot do this unless the church has endorsed an explicit change in its theology of marriage, or endorsed a de-facto change by allowing for example a conscience arrangement for celebrants. A conscience arrangement of course would have opened up a minefield in terms of any beliefs in the church, and also would have promoted the idea that the UCA makes decisions by pragmatism, rather than serious theological consideration.

When it is difficult to easily resolve a matter, and unwise to force a decision, the usual way forward for any denomination is more discussion. Some may say the idea



of more discussion is simply to lead people in one way, but often this type of decision is more simply a reflection of an inability to proceed in one direction and a lack of knowledge about what could be the next step. There would be a hope among a number of Assembly members of a certain eventual outcome, but I believe there is also goodwill among some more moderate and concerned members about the need to genuinely talk and consider all the issues, rather than having one council of the church pre-empt a decision, especially if no recourse was given to other councils to also provide their opinion.

Some members of course, only want to talk so they can lead you in the direction of a more liberal position – always the way for fundamentalist liberals, as they can never conceive of the idea that the Assembly may actually come to understand that the traditional and orthodox position is the right position after all.

A second significant context is one raised by the facilitation group at the Assembly (and other members highlighted); namely that the church should make its own decision and not react or follow the lead of society, especially in terms of a timetable (that is the Assembly should make a decision now in case [or when as some stated] Australia approves a same-sex marriage bill. I believe this was an important context, as it helped to provide an atmosphere that placed the matter back at least on the theological level, rather than a general socio-logical and ethical level that is often the context in the UCA. There was however, still relatively little theological debate, especially given the small amount of time spent on the matter in plenary sessions, and also the fact that the community working groups were not provided with an opportunity to discuss the marriage proposals.

The 15th Assembly will more fully consider marriage and same-gender blessings.

Marriage



The idea to continue to discuss these matters is very much related to the further proposal below that was resolved. This proposal was outlined in general ways that I perceive highlighted the context that it was not an attempt to pre-empt any decisions, so the 15th Assembly in 2018 will have a critical focus on marriage at this time, including probably a large amount of resource material: - *“in consultation with the relevant Assembly working groups, to prepare a report to the Fifteenth Assembly with appropriate recommendations, as well as supporting theological, liturgical, pastoral and educational resources.”*

No change Made to Christian Marriage

Overall, it is important to note that no changes were made to the UCA position and statement on marriage. The UCA has therefore not changed its position on Marriage.

The present understanding and theology of the Uniting Church with regard to marriage still stands. There was no move to revoke or change the 1997 decision that affirms that marriage is between a woman and a man.

It was also confirmed at the Assembly (during the time of questions and discussion), that UCA marriage celebrants do not, and would not have the right to conduct weddings other than on the basis of one man and one woman, as this is the basis for the UCA's understanding of marriage and also the celebration of the conduct of an official marriage

according to the 'rites of the Uniting Church.'

This is the context for the resolution that was eventually approved to: *“request the General Secretary, in the event that the Commonwealth Marriage Act, or other relevant legislation, is changed, to write to all Uniting Church marriage celebrants, advising them of their freedoms and constraints under that legislation and as celebrants authorised by the Uniting Church;”*

Some specific aspects

The continuing work of the Doctrine Working Group in this area will be engaged (this outlined that much more work needed to be done). In one sense it could be argued that their report to the 14th Assembly was really a preliminary report that posited a longer term approach. It had really been about raising some awareness and issues.

The need for continued conversation was highlighted with certain groups.

This was certainly a key as the Assembly agreed to continue cultural and appropriate conversations with:

- CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities) and the
- Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC)

And in a separate resolution passed by formal procedures it was agreed to engage with the LGBTIQ community (this acronym is now used, rather than Uniting Network as previously noted at the 2012 Assembly), and 'the wider Church'.

It is worth noting that the brave raising of the need to specifically include the Assembly of Confessing Congregations in any formal discussions by one Assembly (and ACC member) was not well-received judging by the number of blue cards, and lack of orange cards, so this was never proceeded with as a formal amendment, even though the ACC was included in the 2012 Assembly resolutions. I have often wondered though if the cards were not used, but an electronic based private ballot, whether some of these decisions would be different. The immediate and strategic blue-carding of ideas by a certain grouping can be done in a dominant and perhaps even intimidating manner that unwittingly prevents more moderate people from attempting to express an opinion.

Affirmation in terms of the context of UCA membership of certain identified groups of people, (now termed LGBTIQ) was approved to be undertaken via a pastoral letter to the church by the President.

The context for the resolution for this affirmation was:
a) Personal – reflecting in the first instance the number of lesbian and gay members at the Assembly and the perceived belief by some members of the need for an

ASSEMBLY DECIDES

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affirmation at this Assembly and time;

b) Wider church and society perception. It was clear that some people wanted to at least provide a basic statement and position outline to show that the UCA is an 'inclusive and welcoming church', not only to the wider church, but also Australian society through this arrangement.

Unfortunately there was little opportunity to give consideration to any implications of what this may mean, but I will interpret this as being all sinners are welcome in church, and like the woman caught in adultery we should go and sin no more.

Consideration as to whether the church should be a 'civil marriage celebrant'

The Assembly has resolved to investigate what is sometimes called the European Model, whereby the state conducts the marriage and those couples who wish can come to the church for what is regarded as a church marriage or blessing. This was in the context of the wider church given the ecumenical implications as per the decision to:

"in consultation with our ecumenical partners where appropriate, to investigate the implications of changing the Church's current relationship with the Commonwealth Government with respect to the conduct of marriages."

What the Assembly did not do.

As noted, the Assembly did not change the UCA position on marriage.

Note: The process for decision-making in the UCA is either very easy or incredibly laborious and sometimes confusing, especially if too much focus is on the ideal of consensus when it is evident that this is not a viable arrangement. Other people will comment, but as one observer, I thought the marriage discussion was usually laborious.

While it did not change its position, the Assembly decided not to:

- a) Publicly state the present UCA position on marriage and;
- b) Approve of the rejection of covenants for same – gender unions

The proposal that outlined this (the basis of which is above and was referred to as Number 61) was moved by two Queensland ministers, Hedley Fihaki and Lu Senituli [yes, they are also members of the ACC National Council, but as per the integrity of the Assembly meeting they moved this as members of the Assembly who in good conscience wanted a discussion of the wider issues]. This was a brave move given the overall membership of the Assembly, but even by submitting this proposal, the two members provided a wider witness to the UCA's position, highlighting the need to consider all the theological con-

text mentioned as a critical matter of faith and order.

Why did the Assembly not like this proposal?

No doubt there are many reasons given the large number of members.

Clearly one speaker in the ensuing 'debate' viewed the proposal as hateful and denigrating, and this would have resonated with those members who are affirming of same-gender relationships, especially of the personal relationships they had knowledge about (and some were quite public). Having the two parts of the proposal held together in this way was a direct threat to those who endorse and practice blessings now as well as affirming traditional marriage understandings that they may not believe at all. Also, while some liberal people are quite happy to endorse marriage as being between a man and a woman, they would not want to rule out blessing other relationships.

Some people may not have wanted to simply publicly state the UCA position at a time when the Assembly had decided to have further conversation. This seems to be an increasingly common response among more liberal members. This is however very different from being ashamed of the UCA's position, and perhaps now there are more people who are not deeply ashamed of the UCA understanding of marriage?

In the responses to the Interim Report on Sexuality I can only remember one response that stood out as being more affirming of homosexual relations in place of all other, but it is possible that more ministers and members at Assembly are now quite ashamed of the UCA's orthodox position on marriage and are also now inclined to move to even more extreme understandings. The triennial Assembly to me seems to be in more danger of becoming a very rarefied and exclusive group of UCA members. It would be helped if it was truly more representative of the church, especially among the laity and those who are not actually employed in the councils and organisations of the church.

Certainly the UCA does not stand out as a denomination that has a strong record of issuing public statements or comment about its understanding that marriage is between one woman and one man during any of the wider public debates arising from same-sex marriage bills. I meet a wide variety of people from other denominations each year in visitations, gatherings and conferences, and have lost count of the number of times I have to tell them that the UCA's position is the same as every other mainstream denomination in Australia. The ecumenical context of this debate is surely very important given the ecumenical foundation of the UCA and also the growing ecumenical links and partnerships, especially in rural areas.

The 2015 ACC National conference will explore more of the implications and issues arising from the 14th Assembly. Your prayers for wisdom and discernment are much appreciated.

Peter Bentley is the National Director of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations and attended the 14th Assembly as an observer, providing a blog overview and Facebook posts to update ACC members and interested members readers.

The Significance of ‘Q’

The 14th Assembly resolved to be an inclusive church ‘that celebrates diversity and embraces LGBTIQ people as full members of the church community’. It also apologised for having ‘caused hurt’ to these people.

Over the years the above acronym has grown as new categories of gender and sexual diversity have sought recognition. ‘L’ – Lesbian, ‘G’ – Gay, ‘B’ – bisexual, ‘T’ – transsexual, ‘I’ – intersex, and now ‘Q’. But what does ‘Q’ stand for? ‘Q’ may refer to people who are questioning their sexual or gender identity’ but it refers primarily to ‘Queer theory’ and ‘Queer practice.’

Queer theory rejects the binary view of gender and sexuality—‘male and female created He them’. It posits instead a fluid spectrum of gender identities, and claims autonomy for the individual person to self-identify within the spectrum. One source identifies no less than 58 different gender/sexuality identities. This view of gender is the one being promoted by the Safe Schools Coalition.

The scope of queer sexual practice goes far beyond what is meant by LG-BTI. It includes:

Polygamy: the practice of taking several wives.

Polyamory: The practice of having more than one sexual relationship at the same time, with the full knowledge and consent of all partners involved.

Pederasty: a (usually erotic) homosexual relationship between an adult male and a pubescent or adolescent male.

Paedophilia: the sexual love of and attraction to children.

Paraphilia: an unlimited array of sexual perversions including fetishism, transvestitism, sadism, masochism, bondage, exhibitionism, and voyeurism.

Bestiality: sexual activity with animals.

Those seeking the acceptance of a greater gender and sexual diversity have embraced the term ‘Queer’. What society once disparaged is now being affirmed and celebrated by those who boldly identify as queer.

Doubtless most members of Assembly would deny that being ‘an inclusive church that celebrates diversity and embraces LGBTIQ people’ implies affirming the behaviours listed under ‘Queer practice’. However, it is abundantly clear in the world around us that ‘Q’ stands for ‘Queer’, and ‘Queer’ includes Queer practice. The 14th Assembly has,

therefore, taken the meaning of gender/sexual identity way beyond the biblical binary view and opened up it to an unlimited variation, with permission to explore and embrace every conceivable possibility.

Two metaphors, one biblical and one secular, describe a step or direction that will result in unbridled, negative outcomes. In Hosea 8:7 we read, ‘For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind’. The other is Pandora’s Box, a box which, when opened despite warnings, releases many undesirable things which cannot thereafter be controlled.

Two metaphors, one biblical and one secular, describe a step or direction that will result in unbridled, negative outcomes. In Hosea 8:7 we read, ‘For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind’. The other is Pandora’s Box, a box which, when opened despite warnings, releases many undesirable things which cannot thereafter be controlled.

When society and the church leave the time-honoured path and, contrary to God’s warnings, head down a path that ‘seemed like a good idea at the time’, they reap the whirlwind and open Pandora’s Box. We began with gay and lesbian and have added BTI and now Q - the gateway to every conceivable erotic possibility.

But the story does not end there. The last thing to fly out of Pandora’s Box was something good, Hope. In Hosea’s time God’s judgement was tempered by mercy.

*I will heal their apostasy;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them.
...They shall return and dwell beneath
my shadow;*

*they shall flourish like the grain;
they shall blossom like the vine;
their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.*

As society, with the church tagging along, opens Pandora’s Box and reaps the whirlwind, the fruitage of unrestrained lawlessness will be realised. Then hope can be born and God’s mercy sought and received. Hosea’s plea, for all who will listen, is to ‘understand these things’.

*Whoever is wise, let him understand these things;
whoever is discerning, let him know them;
for the ways of the Lord are right,
and the upright walk in them,
but transgressors stumble in them.
Hosea 14:4-9 (ESV)*

Rev. Rod James is the Secretary of the ACC National Council

NZ has a say

AFFIRM is a like-minded group within the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand. It is illuminating to read their 12 reasons to have their denomination continue to uphold the orthodox understanding of marriage in the context of a country that has now allowed same gender marriage.

The following proposal is presently being considered by their relevant councils of the church. It is hoped that a majority of Church Councils/Sessions and Presbyteries will vote yes to the following and then it will go to their 2016 Assembly, for final consideration.

The Proposal being considered: Ministers and the conduct of marriage:

Following the discussion, debate and decision by Assembly that "in consistency with its Christian doctrine of marriage, General Assembly declares that the ministers of this Church may conduct a marriage service only for the union of a man and a woman" a new clause in the Book of Order is required. "6.8. A minister may solemnize marriage only between a man and a woman".

TWELVE REASONS why Sessions/ Church Councils should vote YES to the General Assembly ruling that ministers may officiate only at marriages involving one man and one woman:

(1) The Presbyterian Church recognises the Word of God as "the supreme rule of faith and life and the supreme standard of the Church". The PCANZ needs to order its life in consistency with that biblical standard. It is therefore entirely appropriate for the General Assembly to rule that ministers of this Church are not authorised to officiate at the wedding of same-sex couples.

(2) The ruling passed down for approval rightly upholds – and is fully consistent with – the teaching on marriage of Jesus, the Word of God, the Subordinate Standards, and the General Assembly. In 2012, by a large majority (75%), the Presbyterian General Assembly clearly stated that this Church upholds the historic Christian understanding that marriage can only be between one man and one woman.

(3) The practice of the PCANZ should be consistent with its teachings. For the Church to say one thing, and then in practice to allow the opposite, seriously undermines the credibility of the PCANZ.

(4) A new regulation has become necessary because in New Zealand we are now in a new situation: in 2013 Parliament amended the secular law to permit same-sex marriages.

(5) A regulation is needed because some ministers – despite the teaching of the Scriptures and the statements of the 2012 General Assembly – have insisted they are at

liberty to conduct same-sex marriages if they wish to, and some have already conducted such "marriages". The majority of ministers may be trusted to uphold the teaching of the church; but, sadly, some ministers have already demonstrated why a regulation is needed.

(6) The Book of Order Advisory Committee legal opinion in 2012 very clearly stated that, unless we enact a specific regulation, PCANZ ministers are legally free to conduct same-sex marriages – and that, without such a regulation, the PCANZ is powerless to stop them, or to do anything if they do conduct such marriages. Those who argue that "we do not need legislation" fail to grasp the significance of the 2012 legal opinion. The reality is, only a regulation will remove all legal doubt as to whether or not PCANZ ministers are permitted to conduct same-sex marriages. Such a regulation implements one of the options suggested by the Book of Order Advisory Committee.

(7) Marriage is not, as some claim, a minor and inconsequential matter, on which freedom of conscience should apply. Gender, marriage, and morality are all biblically important. Gender is basic to how we are made in God's own image (Gen. 1:26). The joining of man and woman in marriage is foundational to God's intentions for human life (Gen. 2:24). Marriage is something on which the position of the Church is very clear: in the teachings of Jesus (Matt. 19:4-5), in the Subordinate Standards, and in the decisions of Assembly.

(8) The Scriptures consistently forbid same-sex relationships (e.g. Rom. 1:26-27, 1 Cor. 6: 9-10). This Church, where the Word of God is the "supreme rule of faith and life", cannot legitimately allow its ministers to offer "same-sex marriage" in the name of the Church.

(9) Ministers are bound (by their ordination formula) to the teachings of the Word of God, the Subordinate Standards, and the decisions of General Assembly. Ministers' consciences, like that of Martin Luther, need to be "captive to the Word of God".

(10) Ministers' right to "liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment" is not about freedom of action, in contravention of the clear teaching of the church. Rather, it is about freedom to hold differences of belief and private opinion in relation to minor, non-fundamental aspects of the doctrines contained in the Westminster Confession.

(11) There is nothing intrinsically wrong with "legislation". In the Book of Order, the PCANZ has many hundreds of regulations, mostly on matters much less significant. Ministers are subject to many other regulations e.g. they must have a supervisor, and must follow a code of ethical pastoral practice. This regulation will bring needed clarity, in another important matter of teaching and practice.

(12) The church of God should not feel intimidated by pressure from society, or be swept along by the spirit of the age. The Church must be faithful to Christ and the Word of God, and must retain the courage to be itself, to be prophetic and to speak and live God's truth.

From Presbyterian AFFIRM Newsletter, August 2015

Idolatry and the Uniting Church

Have you ever been asked - Do you love the Uniting Church? I hope you have been able to respond "That is the wrong question".

I believe that the Uniting Church does not now, and has never required the type of 'love' that this question usually implies, love that demands unquestioning adherence, and cannot address what is wrong. The call for any Uniting Church member is to love God and our neighbour. I perceive when people ask this question they unwittingly begin to generate an image of the Uniting Church that is separate from the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. It could also arise from the seemingly increasingly arrogant view that is sometimes heard in the Uniting Church, that it is the best church ever and should be leading the rest of the backward churches into the Church of the Future.

The Basis of Union is sometimes used in contemporary debates about sexuality, mainly using the 'pilgrim people' reference, but rarely is it deeply considered. In many ways, the Basis actually provides an excellent foundation for any contemporary mission or vision statement of the church, as it is richly grounded in biblical understandings and references to Jesus Christ. The Basis of Union helps us look at the appropriate response to being a member of a denomination.

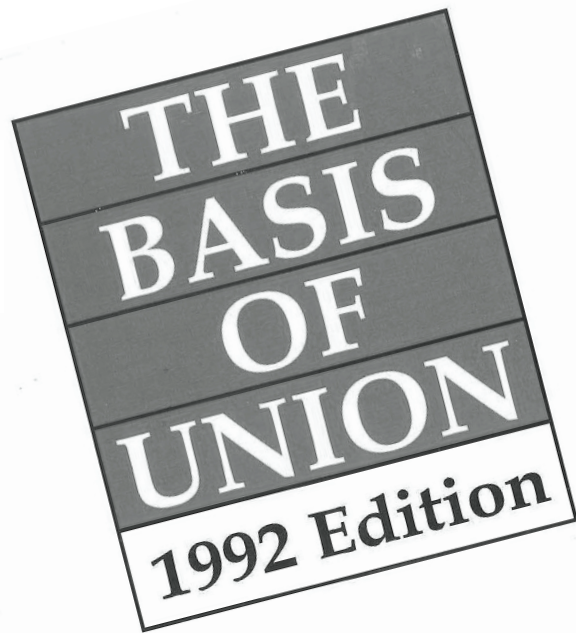
1. The foundation for the church is Jesus Christ and not the institution

Paragraph 3 of The Basis of Union acknowledges that the faith and unity of the one church is built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the foundation. Unfortunately, growing institutionalisation has meant that the foundation for many Christians has become the institution. The head of church becomes 'head office', even though all our councils are supposed to be inter-related.

Our church councils are important, but the framers of the Basis recognised that the faith of the church was more important than its ordering, and that is why discussions started with matters of faith and not matters related to a new institution.

The direction of many parts of the church today is toward a focus on self or individual concerns which can mean the church simply ends up as a self-help group. I have been amused to witness proponents of 'liberal theology' bashing Pentecostal theology for its perceived self-orientation and focus, when they themselves focus on



THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

personal experience and narrative theology, and unwittingly and unfortunately belittle the uniqueness of the biblical stories.

2. We should avoid 'using' Jesus as the basis for maintaining false unity

Like many others in the church I have long been frustrated by the use of Jesus Christ to prop up the idea that we should all remain one in the Uniting Church. "Our unity is in Jesus" is the catchcry. The implication behind using Jesus Christ as the basis of our unity is 'please forget or dismiss our differences', after all, who can argue against Jesus?

The difficulty with this approach is a failure to consider the need for at least some agreement about who this Jesus that is being promoted is. How can a denomination promote unity in Jesus Christ when there are now such different and often completely divergent views (compared to the Basis of Union) about Jesus being promoted by some ministers? If Jesus is just an ignorant peasant who never rose from the dead why are we even bothered about the right liturgical order for worship?

While I have often mused about this point, rather than

From previous page
make more personal observations, I refer readers to a very helpful statement from the Confessing Movement, a reform movement within the United Methodist Church. While this denomination has had different union experiences, the issues are startlingly similar.

“Unity in Christ: That The World May Believe”. A statement from The Confessing Movement Conference: Cincinnati, Ohio, Saturday, Sept 24, 2005

An extract is below:

A number of options for unity are abroad in our church. Contrasted with understandings that focus on polity or apportionments, on pension plans or principles of inclusivism, we believe unity in the truth of Christ is critically dependent on unity in doctrine. Our official United Methodist teaching is more than adequately articulated in our Constitutional Standards. Proposals for unity that ignore, evade, or minimize our historic standards are inadequate.

Genuine unity in the church is not secured by religious sentiment, sincere piety, tight property clauses, or appeals to institutional authority and loyalty. Not all opinions are compatible with our Doctrinal Standards. False understandings of inclusivism demand acceptance apart from repentance and obedience to the good news of God’s grace for all sinners. This ideology has become a substitute gospel that confuses the church and fractures its unity.

Genuine unity, as a precious gift of the Holy Spirit, is rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ, witnessed to in the Holy Scripture, summarized in the ecumenical creeds, celebrated in worship and sacraments, demonstrated in common mission, articulated in our teaching, lived out in love, and contended for by the faithful.

3. Our denomination is a small part of the One Church

An important paper from the Working Group on Doctrine is found on their website (no date): *“Living and Believing within the Unity and Faith of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church - A commentary on section two of The Basis of Union.”*



This paper explores The Basis of Union from a modern perspective, highlighting the perceived special role of the Uniting Church in the present time. While there is much to commend in this approach, I urge caution as some people may be led to focus on the denomination as the One Church. Any special basis or perceived uniqueness does not provide an opportunity for license. The critical factor for the development of the Basis was its ecumenical foundation and theological reference focussed on the ecumenical faith of the church. This clearly illustrated that the Uniting Church was never founded to be the church around which other churches united, but a movement of the people of God as part of the One Church.

4. Don't assume that being 'progressive' means you are a pilgrim.

From Paragraph 3 of The Basis of Union

The Church’s call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself.

“the Church is a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal; here the Church does not have a continuing city but seeks one to come...”

There is significant discussion today about the nature of the ‘emerging church’, or the future of the church. It has intrigued me to see some proponents of liberal theology portray their ideas, or even their congregation, as the foundation for the new or emerging church. Apart from the fact that there is no statistical basis to support ‘liberal theological congregations’ as having a major future, this unfounded hope is also at odds with the development of reform movements in history.

I have had curious discussions with UCA members over the last few years, often listening to them berate conservative churches and groups, implying they are sects, exclusive and not open to change. It is worth considering that left wing groups can be actually more intolerant and exclusive than the congregations or groups they stereotype. They can also unwittingly, or even deliberately, foster humanist philosophy and even pantheist based theology that bears little connection with The Basis of Union.

We should not be complacent and thus acquiescent about these changes, but nor should we be shocked. This is the context in which confessing movements arise. As Confessing Christians we will continue to pray that, “through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life, will bring it into deeper unity with other Churches, and will use its worship, witness and service to God’s eternal glory through Jesus Christ the Lord.” Amen. (From Paragraph 18 of The Basis of Union)

Peter Bentley is the National Director for the ACC.

EVANGELISM



John Wesley street preaching

Evangelism and the Uniting Church

The Uniting Church is not good at evangelism. While mission, or the mission of God to which we are called to participate, has become an emphasis, evangelism continues to be overlooked for the most part. Yet, as Dana Lee Roberts of Boston University says, evangelism is the heart of mission. What she means is that evangelism is the motivating centre of mission. Without a passion for the gospel mission will not have Christian motivation. While compassion for others, social service and social justice are all part of what we should be about as Christians, so too is inviting people to consider Jesus. If we love Jesus then we should want to talk about him, and not just with fellow Christians. If Jesus has made a difference to our lives then we should want others to experience that also. Fear of offending others, consciousness of the failings of Christians, awareness of the mistakes of the church in history, should not mean we never recommend Jesus to others. While we may well need to find some different ways of doing evangelism, the essence is straightforward – it is a matter of pointing people to Jesus. Whether by proclamation or by personal sharing we recommend Jesus. Then we pray that the Holy Spirit will take what is said and use it in people's lives to convict them about who Jesus is – the Son of God, the risen, crucified One. We offer him to others as our Saviour and Lord and suggest that they find out more about him for themselves.

At the recent Assembly in the Cato

lecture, Professor Lin Mahong, Dean of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in China, shared about the rapid growth of the church in recent years. It has come about because ordinary Christians readily share their faith and invite people to their church where they can hear the Christian message proclaimed. After the difficult years of the Cultural Revolution and with Christianity no longer being seen as a foreign faith, Chinese people engage in informal evangelism recommending the difference Christ can make to life. There is a great need for trained leaders because the church is growing so fast as a result of the witness of ordinary Christians.

Who then are the evangelists? While some are specially gifted preachers, most are those who readily and naturally share their faith with others. They may not even think of themselves as evangelists, but they have a heart for Jesus and for wanting others to come to know him also. In the New Testament the one person named as an evangelist is Philip, one of the seven, originally set aside to do administrative work to enable the apostles to concentrate on preaching and prayer! (Acts 6). In our churches we would do well to seek to identify those in our midst who have the gift of evangelism and find ways to affirm and encourage and make use of their gift. Church councils, elders and leaders could give this some attention in order to mentor, foster and see how such evangelists can assist in building up the body of Christ.

The task of evangelism is some-

thing all of us should be engaged in, even if we are not specially gifted in it. Paul in writing to Timothy tells him to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5). All of us are called to be witnesses in word and deed to Jesus. When opportunities arise we should be able to share our faith. Peter tells us always to be ready to explain the hope we have to anyone who asks but to do this with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15-16). It is not a matter of imposing our views or denigrating others' positions, but of briefly sharing our hope that comes from faith in Jesus Christ. We may not be the person to actually lead a person to Christ. But we can be used by the Holy Spirit to encourage people to consider who Jesus is, and invite them to a group or a gathering where others will share the Christian gospel more fully.

What are needed are churches that are more consciously evangelistic. We are part of the body of Christ, the community of the Spirit, and yet so often we are not sufficiently led by the Spirit or function as a body using all the gifts God provides. In the life of the church what times over the year lend themselves to an evangelistic emphasis? What groups do we conduct that have an evangelistic component? Do we provide some opportunities for people to respond in faith to the good news of Jesus? Do we occasionally have interviews with testimonies of those who came to faith in order to encourage others? Do we train people to know and share their faith? Michael Green in *Evangelism Through the Local Church* has much to say on how a local church can engage in evangelism. Rick Warren provides a comprehensive approach in *The Purpose Driven Church*. A lesser known British author I found helpful is John Clarke, *Evangelism that Really Works*. John Mallison in *Growing Christians in Small Groups* has a helpful chapter on evangelism in small groups.

An evangelistic church is genuinely welcoming, outward looking, proclaims the gospel unashamedly, is Christ centred, has a disciple making emphasis, recognises the role of the Holy Spirit and is a loving community. People can readily invite others to such a congregation for it does seek to be a sign, foretaste and instrument of the reign of God.

Rev Dr Chris Walker is the National Consultant for Christian Unity, Doctrine and Worship at the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia

Pastoral Care In A Diverse Church

Keynote Address by Emeritus Professor Pat Noller at the 2015 ACC National Conference

In discussing pastoral care in a diverse church, we first of all have to be clear about our key terms “pastoral care” and “diverse church”. I have divided my paper roughly into three main sections.

- a. What is meant by pastoral care
- b. What is meant by a diverse church from a UCA perspective
- c. Pastoral care for gay people

In defining what I mean by pastoral care, it was hard to go past Peter’s admonition that uses the shepherd image.

“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” 1Peter 5:2-3

The term “**Pastoral Care**” is also discussed in the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia. Three points are made:

Firstly, that pastoral care is an expression of the fact that God always deals personally with people. There are so many examples in Scripture where God calls someone to a closer relationship with him or to special tasks by speaking to them on a personal basis. Abraham, Noah, Moses, Gideon and the prophets like Jonah are some great OT examples, as are Jesus’ disciples and Paul from the New Testament. Some of them like Jonah must have caused God pain but he persevered with him.

The second point made in the Basis of Union is that pastoral care, exercised personally on behalf of the Church involves making God’s loving care known among people. In other words, the main point of our care for others is to show them the wonderful, unfailing, steadfast love of God. In this light, the quality of our care becomes important, whoever the

people we deal with are. My minister told me of an incident where he took some furniture to a Muslim man who had recently arrived in Australia, and the man commented “Muslims help their own people, but you Christians are willing to help everyone.” A young woman I was meeting with recently, and who has been part of a church her whole life, said to me “I don’t understand you, you love everybody.” I asked myself, Isn’t that what God calls us to do?

Thirdly, the servant image is employed in the statement that pastoral care involves individual members taking on the form of a servant in working with those under their care. A servant is just someone who is willing to serve others. Of course, our example of servanthood is Jesus washing the disciples’ feet. No task is too lowly for the servant, if it helps someone else to understand the love of God.

Max Lucado also emphasizes the way that God deals with us individually and personally when he says

“Jesus tends to his people individually. He personally sees to our needs. We all receive Jesus’ touch. We experience his care.” (*Experiencing the Heart of Jesus Workbook: Knowing His Heart, Feeling His Love*. London, UK: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 2009).

Going back to the shepherd image, Harold Rowdon in a “**Church Leaders Handbook**” (2009) for the Brethren church focuses on some of the points made in the Book of Psalms (Specifically, 78; 52; and 23) and also comes up with a list of the kinds of behaviours involved in shepherding. His list includes:

- Protecting
- Tending to needs
- Strengthening the weak
- Encouraging
- Making provision for
- Refreshing
- Restoring
- Comforting
- Guiding

Jesus, of course, also uses the shepherd image, calling himself the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd knows the sheep and they know him, and thus he is able to call them by name. He leads them out and goes before

them. He also shows them deep compassion, and is willing even to die for those sheep. I was shocked recently to hear from a woman who was in her previous church for five years, and was involved in service, that the minister never knew her name.

The pastoral carer may also be involved in encouraging, guiding, bringing about reconciliation between individuals, sustaining and healing. For example, with the people I care for, I am likely to be involved in encouraging a woman whose husband has a degenerative disease and who can find the pressures overwhelming, especially if she hasn’t been talking with someone who is prepared to listen and take her struggles seriously. On another occasion, I am likely to be helping a wife to find a better way to get her husband to communicate with her, or talking with a woman who has a real struggle forgiving her stepfather for his behavior in the family, particularly towards her mother. These are just three recent pastoral care situations I was involved in.

What if contentious social/theological issues arise?

Kevin de Young in his book ‘*What does the Bible really teach about homosexuality*’ (Nottingham, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015) suggests three building blocks for the Church’s response to the issue of gay marriage, one of the most contentious issues on which Christians (including in the Uniting Church) hold diverse views at this point in time. He argues that any response needs to be biblically faithful, pastorally sensitive and culturally conversant.

Being biblically faithful

In discussing the need to be biblically faithful, he argues that if sexual desire manifests itself in lustful intent then that desire is sinful, for both gays and heterosexuals, based on Jesus’ statement in Matthew 5: 28.

“But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Jesus seems to be saying here that it’s not enough to be pure in our actions, we must also be pure in our

thoughts as well, perhaps seeking to confront the self-righteous person who can say that they have never touched a woman inappropriately but whose thought life is full of such desires. We need to be aware of the way Jesus dealt with the Pharisees who complained about his disciples having unclean hands. Jesus is very clear as is James in Chapter 1 of his letter, that evil comes from within, from our own hearts and its desires.

Kevin de Young also argues that desires can be good or bad, based on whether the object of the desire is appropriate or not. It is important to acknowledge that an inappropriate person might include someone of the same sex, someone else's wife or even a very young person.

The Presbyterian Church of Ireland (2006) in a pronouncement on Christians and sexuality makes three important points that are related to being biblically faithful:

1. That in God's plan sexual intimacy is only to be exercised in the marriage relationship. Ideally, sexual intimacy bonds us to one another so that we are then committed to each other and to caring for the children that are produced in that relationship.
2. That our identity should be defined primarily in terms of our identity before God, not our

sexuality. (I guess that they are reacting to the emphasis by the Gay Lobby that comments about the rightness or wrongness of homosexuality deny their identities).

3. We are all sinners and tempted to sin sexually – e.g. adultery, sex before marriage, and focusing on sexual thoughts. It is important that as heterosexuals we acknowledge that we are also sinners in this area.

On the other hand, the UCA with its controversial report on sexuality in the early 2000s has sought to make most of those behaviours O.K. as long as we "are in right relationships". To be more specific, as my late husband Charles and I noted at the time in our response, the Sexuality Report condoned shifts in regard to the acceptance of homosexual behaviours, a weaker view on premarital and extramarital sexual relations, focusing on 'safe sex' rather than chastity, and the support of de facto relationships, again within the context of 'right relationships', although the report does hint that the Church should take the consequences of divorce more seriously.

As someone who has spent more than 30 years researching and teaching about relationships and working with couples in Marriage Enrichment, I understand the importance of right relationships, but for the Christian at

least, the context of those relationships is also important, for the sake of both the adults and the children. As we noted during the discussions of the Sexuality Report, relationships for Christians need to be "right" but also obedient to God.

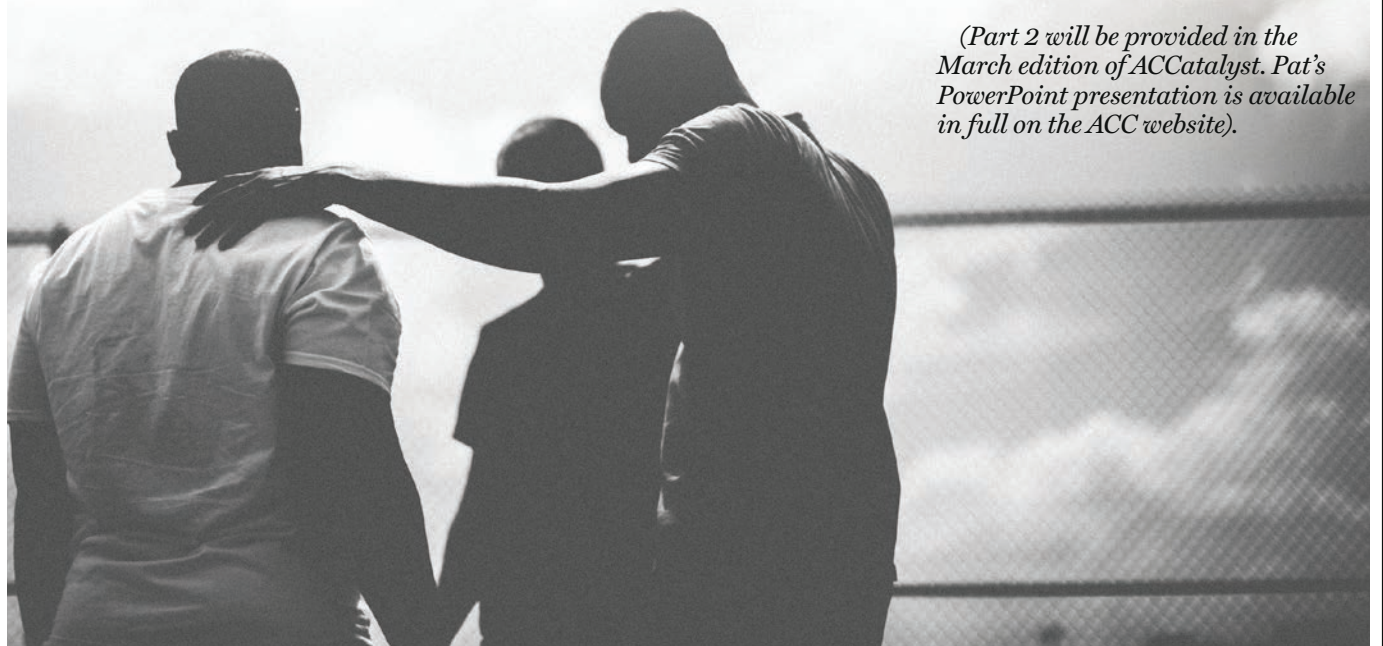
Being pastorally sensitive

As I said earlier it is also important to acknowledge that every Christian wrestles with unwanted thoughts and desires. Such thoughts and desires are not a homosexual problem but a human problem. If a person wants to walk in holiness, finding those thoughts a problem can be evidence of the Holy Spirit working in his or her life.

We also need to recognize that Jesus is a sympathetic High Priest. As the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews tells us, "*We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin*" (Heb. 4:15).

It is also true that God can use our struggles to bring us closer to himself, because it is at those times that we are most likely to cry out to him. It may also be helpful to emphasise the fact that Jesus was also tempted "in all points as we are yet without sin".

(Part 2 will be provided in the March edition of ACCatalyst. Pat's PowerPoint presentation is available in full on the ACC website).



Perry Smith

As a tribute to Reverend Perry Smith who died on 7th August 2015 *ACCatalyst* publishes one of Perry's poems. Readers and many members in NSW and ACT would have appreciated Perry's contributions and reflections over many years and an archive of his material will be kept on the ACC website in our devotions section. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife and partner in ministry Doreen and his family. A wonderful service of thanksgiving was held at St. Luke's Belmont on 15th August 2015.

Lord of my years: A Personal Reflection

Lord of the years, I'm so aware
that time is ever passing by.
As age increases, time indeed
does more than pass - it seems to fly!
We move a year on calendars
and month by month it races on.
Our birthdays pass and Christmas comes,
and then we find the year has gone.
For some, it's years since they retired
and still their life is very full.
But maybe we should say 'fulfilled'
for otherwise it would be dull.
Some folk there are who fill their days
in fruitless, meaningless pursuit.
But better far to use their days
in ways that really bear some fruit.
Remember those who 'still bear fruit
in old age'- see Psalm ninety-two.
They 'flourish in the courts of God'
and prove his promises are true.
Then read of other older saints.
Psalm seventy-one has much to say
about their life and influence
upon the young - though 'old and grey'.

We realise that aches and pains
and weariness may come our way.
But having walked with God for years
we still can trust him for each day.
The wealth of grace that we have known
through all the changes we have seen,
enable us to share his love
and show how faithful he has been.
Let not our gathered wisdom fail
to find some outlet in this phase
of life; nor let our special gifts
be wasted in retirement days.
We're family within his church:
in childhood, youth and middle-years,
and older ones, with faith matured
in changing scenes, in doubts and fears.
The Lord still wants to use our gifts,
so never say that you're too old.
Such opportunities abound
to make a difference in his world.
Keep prayerful; read God's Word each day;
and in warm fellowship, inspire
each other to keep serving him.
Remember, Christians don't retire!

Alan Stewart Crawford

The ACC National Council and the officers would like to record the Confessing Movement's appreciation for the life, ministry and service of Reverend Dr Alan Crawford (23 May 1933 - 1 October 2015). Alan's funeral was held at Frankston Uniting Church on October 9.

Alan was a servant of the whole Uniting Church, having been a Moderator of the Victorian Synod. He was also the inaugural Chair of the ACC's Ecumenical Commission and faithfully led the Commission during

the first 5 years of the ACC. Alan was well-known in ecumenical circles and provided the ACC with good links to other churches. He presented wise and humorous based reports on Ecumenical matters to the ACC council and the annual conference that will be well-remembered. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family. We give thanks to God for the leadership he provided that enhanced true ecumenical theology within the Australian Church.

Drawing a line

Phil Cooke asks ‘When It Comes to Engaging Culture, When Do Christians Draw a Line?’

The American Supreme Court’s same-sex marriage decision has brought Christian cultural engagement back into the limelight in a big way. There has been the predicted wide range of responses in light of the announcement. But as public policy grows more dismissive of religious faith, and a growing number of groups show outright hostility, here are some thoughts to consider as the culture continues to shift:

First – I think it’s time to stop apologising for the past and move forward. There’s no question that some prominent (and some not so prominent) Christian leaders said and did unfortunate things in the past when it came to engaging the culture. Nearly every magazine article, blog post, or news story by a Christian ends up acknowledging past mistakes and some even wallow in it. OK, we get it. Most of those past leaders were well intentioned, a few were totally off-base, and some were outright boneheads. But name an organization without their share of screw-ups. Republicans, Democrats, atheists, reporters, PTA members, whatever. Everybody has



Dietrich Bonhoeffer

a “crazy Uncle Bob” in their family, but that doesn’t undermine the credibility or authority of our principles. So let’s move past apologizing for poorly executed strategies of yesterday, and focus more on what matters now.

Second – A comprehensive Christian response to the culture includes every issue. We hear a lot about the next generation being concerned about more than just abortion and sexual orientation. That’s great, but so what? Don’t abortion and sexual orientation still matter? They won’t go away just by diverting your energy into other subjects. I’m thrilled that we’re also fighting sex trafficking, poverty, and other important issues. But shifting our priorities doesn’t distract us from the fact that it all matters, and we still need to engage on those issues as well.

Third – What’s really at stake here? Whenever I read these articles or online posts, they spend most of the time talking about how gracious and humble we should be in our approach (with which I completely agree.) But they never get around to the big question: “What happens if the hostility grows?” Civility is important, but if my house is on fire, I don’t care if the firemen are nice – just get me out.

Finally – Is there a place where we finally draw a line in the sand? Sure, let’s be humble and gracious. Absolutely, let’s engage in a spirit of love and respect. But is there a point where we say enough is enough? At some point, the early church decided further cultural accommodation wasn’t possible. They felt so strongly about it, they were willing to be thrown in with lions, tortured, or crucified. German Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer drew the line in Germany during World War II and paid for it with his life. Christians around the world today suffer because of their principles. Obviously, the Church in America hasn’t faced that challenge. But if history is any teacher,



we will one day be forced to ask the question, where is that point? At what place do we decide that Biblical principles can no longer be compromised?

Martin Luther fearfully, but courageously told the leaders of his day:

“Here I stand. I can do no other.” I certainly haven’t given up on changing this culture, and this isn’t time to be hysterical, but as I continue to engage on these issues, there’s a question that keeps nagging inside me:

Should our society continue to grow less accommodating to religious freedom and free speech, at what point should we stop all the “conversation” and – with love, respect, and humility – simply say no? What do you think?

First posted on the Phil Cooke blog on Sunday, June 28, 2015 <http://www.philcooke.com/>

Phil Cooke is an internationally known writer and speaker, who has produced media programming for some of the largest non-profit organisations and leaders in the world in nearly 50 countries through his company Cooke Pictures in Burbank, California. He has a passion for using the media to tell stories in a changing, disrupted culture. He has been a keynote speaker at the Christian Media Australia conference in Australia.

What price freedom?

A Review of Kirsten Powers *The Silencing* by Nick Pitts

(This review is reprinted courtesy of the Denison Forum and *is included as continuation of responses to the questions raised at our 2014 conference and recently considered by Pat Noller and other members in terms of freedom of speech and religion. The move against marriage is now increasingly raising these issues for Christians in the USA*)

French writer and philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville said, “Nothing is more wonderful than the art of being free, but nothing is harder to learn how to use than freedom.” Commenting on the great experiment known as the United States, Tocqueville was expounding upon the inherent freedoms that the country was built upon. These freedoms yielded great power to a young country, but with great power comes great responsibility.

George Washington, elaborating upon one of these freedoms, said, “If freedom of speech is taken away, then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter.” For better or for worse, the ability to speak freely has the capacity to enlighten us so that our footsteps may move towards better and brighter days, or it may be used to silence voices that could sound as voices of reason and wisdom to redirect our paths. In Kirsten Powers’ newest book, *The Silencing: How the Left is Killing Free Speech*, this self-identified proud liberal argues that the “illiberal left” is trying to dominate the discussion on-campus, online and in the media through intimidation.

Termed the illiberal left due to its departure from true liberal principles, Powers writes: “The people who purport to believe in tolerance, diversity, and free speech in fact act like intolerant fundamentalists projecting their own narrow-mindedness onto Christian groups who want merely to be left alone to practice their faith and serve their campus communities.” In a march towards conformity, the illiberal left preaches tolerance but delegitimises opponents of both ideology and political party. Powers

writes that it is no longer sufficient to defeat the enemy, but the illiberal left must stifle speech that deviates from their ideology.

Substantiating her points throughout the book with detailed accounts, Powers shows how the illiberal left is obsessed with delegitimising Fox News and reveals the increasingly hostile atmosphere of the college campus, among other things. They do all of this with a distorted understanding of truth. Their understanding is not one where truth is congruent to reality, but contingent upon their ideology. With ideology as king, inconvenient truths are ushered out of the king’s presence to be replaced with jesters of opinions that substantiate their points and progress their narrative.

Powers pulls no punches as she pummels upon what she terms a type of Orwellian “big brother.” Citing George Orwell’s seminal work 1984, she claims that the illiberal left polices what they deem as acceptable speech. It is not enough to win the argument, but they must demonize their opposition. “It’s easier for the illiberal left to demonise their opponents and sanctify themselves as higher moral beings that treat differences of opinions respectfully.”

This behaviour is most evident on the college campus. No longer a place of higher education, where ideas are pitted against each other and refined through dialogue. Powers contends that the entire enterprise has been short-circuited. The Orwellian chill of intimidation and fear has frozen students in the zeitgeist, paralysing students from testing the bounds and challenging the status quo.



“They don’t want to defend their views, nor do they want to allow forums for other people to present views that are at odds with the conclusions they have drawn on an array of issues. Sometimes, the mere suggestion of holding a debate is cast as an offense.”

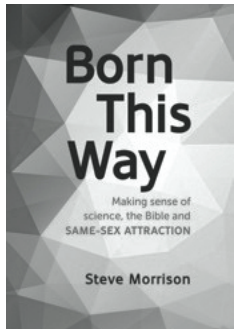
Kirsten Powers’ *The Silencing* is a refreshing self-reflective read. A liberal writing about the errors of those on her side, Powers demonstrates poise as she acknowledges the ideological discrepancies and contradictory behaviour of her fellow liberals. Taking the log out of her side’s eye, the question is now posed to the other side: do you see the speck in your own (Matthew 7:3-5)?

America is great not because it is perfect, but because it is good. Part of that goodness is the ability to have conversations so that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. As Alexis de Tocqueville noted, “The greatness of America lies not in being more enlightened than any other nation, but rather in her ability to repair her faults.”

Nick Pitts is Special Assistant to the President of Denison Forum on Truth and Culture, a non-sectarian “think tank” designed to engage contemporary issues with biblical truth. Join over 100,000 who read Dr. Jim Denison’s daily Cultural Commentary: denisonforum.org/subscribe. For more information on the Denison Forum, visit denisonforum.org.

“Born This Way, Making sense of science, the Bible and same-sex attraction.” Steve Morrison, Matthias Media 2015.

This is an important readable book for Christians who respect the Biblical text and who face public pressure to compromise their view on this sensitive issue. It is also helpful for those struggling to understand their sexuality. What God says is more important



and always best practice when placed alongside our inclinations, or prevailing culture.

Current Culture

The opening chapters explain the cultural context of our day. Over a short

period there has been an extreme social reversal from a social control that mistreated people and suppressed homosexual practice to a mainstream endorsement of all aspects of homosexuality. Today public opinion marginalises those who oppose free sexual expression.

Where churches have been pastorally slow to explain this dramatic change and full-circle turn around to their congregations, Morrison begins by pointing out that today our culture recognises no objective truth as its guide. He explains how a subtle evolution has taken place when it comes to the changing meaning of words like ‘tolerance’ and ‘homophobia’.

The author makes no bones about the Christian mistreatment of homosexuals. This is something that must be openly confessed and fully recognised at the beginning of any meaningful discussion. At this point in reviewing Morrison’s description I personally note a tendency for the church in some places to correct the past by moving towards the other extreme of becoming champions of a kind of ‘inclusiveness’, that excludes those who hold a Biblical view that is different from that of today’s mainstream public opinion.

Looking at best Science

After considering the important cultural context Morrison moves on to what science says. He stresses that we should seek scientific truth with great care and humility rather than an arrogance that assumes it has all the answers. The topic of same-sex attraction is a very emotional issue. The American Psychological Association defines sexuality as attraction in three stages, **desire, excitement and orgasm**. This makes an important

distinction between attraction and action. By being precise the author goes on to examine these stages. The tricky thing about science is that often evidence is embellished or ignored.

Again Morrison is honest and transparent about these difficulties. (a) Science is about observation, not moral decisions, (b) People are never purely objective. The topic of climate change is an example of this.

Early studies about a so-called “gay-gene” were deeply flawed but the idea a person is born gay is the most influential claim driving “gay rights.” This asserts that homosexuality is good and normal. Morrison looks at various theories for biological and genetic sources including epigenetic studies that space prevents us from detailing here. “So is homosexuality biologically determined at birth? To date science’s best answer is that someone who experiences same-sex attraction may well have some biological or hereditary factors that play a role in causing this attraction --but to a much smaller extent than is often claimed.” Unlike unchangeable things like skin or eye colour that are 100% determined from birth the hereditary component of same-sex attraction is like a person’s desire to eat, smoke or watch TV. This is so low that there must be many other factors involved as well. Most would agree “*there are times that some desires (whether they arise because of genetic predisposition or not) should be resisted.*” Society and the media are outspoken about the need to resist tendencies to over-eat, drink or smoke but it points to genetics to justify the morality of same-sex attraction. In short genetics don’t determine ethics.

The problem of Bisexuality.

The current public **same-sex attraction and redefinition of marriage debate** is likely to move on to **cross-gender and bisexuality issues** so what Morrison says here is of vital importance. He points out that the assumption that people are born either gay or straight is strongly challenged by bisexuality. Morrison notes that for every male with a same sex-attraction there are three who experience bisexual attraction. For every same-sex attracted female there are sixteen who are bisexually attracted. This means our way of thinking needs to change from the model of thinking that people are either gay or straight to a new bipolar model. We need to start thinking of a scale with varied degrees. “*One helpful way of understanding sexual attraction is to think of it as a spectrum upon which every person appears. And when it comes to same - sex attraction,*

the genetic influence upon a person’s position on that spectrum is minor, at best. Put simply, if we use the terminology in the way in which it is normally used, a person is not born gay”.

A person may be born with a same-sex attraction but a person may choose not to act on that minor tendency or any other unwanted attractions. This is true of any sexual attraction. A person may not have control over their tendency but they can change their homosexual behaviour. Society condemns rape and child abuse because any sexual activity is a decision of the individual.

How to read the Bible

Only at this point does Morrison introduce the Bible. God is pro-sex. God made a humanity gendered with two complementary sexes. Morrison outlines the purpose of sex and says for Christians sexual sin creates conflict between our selfish desires and the new identity we have in Christ. Morrison uses 1 Cor.6: 9-20 to show that our sexual nature is somehow connected to our bodies that are members of Christ. While Jesus does not specifically draw attention to homosexuality, He quotes Genesis 1 and 2 and affirms God’s purpose for sex. He uses “*pornia*” that refers to the perversions of Leviticus 20.

Feelings and Temptation.

God and science complement each other but experience tells us that people feel like they were made “being gay.” It is my opinion that every Christian should read this part of Morrison’s book about subtle sub-conscious temptation. Lack of self-control, desires of the flesh and desires from the world are a problem. A Christian will recognise a same-sex temptation in order to avoid sin, the world recognises it in order to justify sin. Some people are prone to the temptation of violence, while others are prone to homosexual activity. Morrison touches the real world when he shares the powerful story of a Christian leader who struggles with same-sex temptation. The Christian life is a work in progress and transformation and we all face the reality of various temptations.

The book concludes by addressing three different types of people. “You don’t yet follow Jesus.” “You do follow Jesus and are tempted by homosexuality in some way.” “You follow Jesus and are not currently tempted by homosexuality.”

Reviewed by Rev EA (Ted) Curnow. More of Ted’s articles can be viewed on the ACC website.

When is the news not the news?

As many members would know the representation of religion in the media has long been an interest for me, and while there are many issues of concern, one matter now, namely same-sex marriage is clearly illustrating a media focus on one side that is sometimes bizarre but is also contributing to the general detriment of good public debate and the ability to have reasoned discussion on the very issue that people say is so important today.

I believe it is becoming a concern for avid readers of some of our newspapers and on-line services and viewers of certain programs like Q & A on the ABC. The general view promoted in the media now is almost an implicit rightness of same-sex marriage and if one opposes marriage revisionism you are more likely to be spoken of in derogatory and inflammatory tones and in our theological context labelled Christian clowns and spouters of 'evangelical claptrap'.

In an article "A media stampede on same-sex marriage can only harm society" by Dr Andy Mullins published

on-line on July 4, 2015 in a dedicated section from mercatornet.com: Conjugality (true nature of marriage and the challenges it faces today), Dr Mullins observed: "In yesterday's issue of *The Age* [3rd July 2015], in Melbourne, three of the first five pages, including the lead article on the front page, were devoted to the same sex marriage issue. The content was almost totally in favour of same-sex marriage. The previous day, all day, the mobile version lead item on the ABC news website, which normally changes several times in the course of a day, was a piece about "conservatives" in the Liberal Party blocking the same-sex marriage lobby. In fact 82 of 123 Liberal members are publically opposed to gay marriage. Such inflammatory journalism is not in the interests of our society. An obvious rule of life is that one does not make important decisions when emotions are inflamed. It appears that news services are seeking to emotionalize this issue either by dint of policy or by a lack of editorial leadership, or both."

One article supporting marriage

that was allowed to 'balance' the dominance of one view during that week was written by Eric Abetz and while it was not a specifically religious piece, it provoked considerable reaction on-line in this context, again sadly illustrating the general intolerance of people toward a current view, even when a religious viewpoint was not the original focus. The aspect that few seemed to understand was that the article was attempting to provide an outline of news and information that as Dr Mullins notes, is normally not provided in the mainstream media. It raised the question for me as to where can Australians and Australian Christians find a wider source of information and news in this debate? Perhaps hopefully in our Christian press? The following article is reproduced within this context. It is important to note that the US Supreme Court decision so proudly announced in the Western world was actually 5-4. What would have been the reaction if the decision had not gone the revisionist way?

Peter Bentley



The media seeks to normalise same sex relationships, while portraying the Christian viewpoint as out of date.

The fight for same sex marriage is far from over

It is disappointingly predictable that the media in Australia is obsessed by a slim majority activist US Supreme Court decision. At the same time there have been no reports of an elected representative vote in another country of 110-26 against same-sex marriage.

While we have heard much about the US Supreme Court's extraordinary ruling that a right to marry someone of the same sex has – somehow – always been constitutional, there's been hardly any mention about last week's overwhelming vote against gay marriage in the Austrian legislature.

Most people in a democracy believe social policy should be determined by the people, not by dubious interpretation by an activist judiciary.

The US Supreme Court majority has set a dangerous precedent for the US by asserting that the American people have, since inception, somehow misunderstood their own constitution.

As dissenting Justice Antonin Scalia put it: "And to allow the policy question of same-sex marriage to be considered and resolved by a select, patrician, highly unrepresentative panel of nine is to violate a principle even more fundamental than no taxation without representation: no social transformation without representation."

Scalia's deep concern is sound.

Chief Justice John Roberts also put it succinctly: "But for those who believe in a government of laws, not of men, the majority's approach is deeply disheartening."

Roberts aptly said that the majority of judges "seizes for itself a question the Constitution leaves for the people, at a time when the people are engaged in a vibrant debate on that question".

He went on: "Understand well what this dissent is about: It is not about whether, in my judgment, the institution of marriage should be changed to include same-sex couples. It is instead about whether, in our democratic republic, that decision should rest with the people acting through their elected representatives, or with five lawyers."

Prior to *Obergefell v Hodges*, 31 US states had amended their constitutions to define marriage between a man and a woman. This came about through referendums.

Of the 31 states, 28 subsequently had their democratically determined amendments overturned by activist courts.

Such decisions should not be made by unelected judges, but by the people. Why should the people be completely sidelined by a ruling that has the power to drastically transform society?

Elsewhere around the globe, in Rome last week more than 300,000 people took to the San Giovanni square to express their opposition to a proposed civil union bill, which was being considered by the Italian senate.

In February, Italy's Supreme Court of Cassation ruled same-sex marriage was not constitutional. But why didn't we see these events similarly reported?

Because it simply doesn't fit the media agenda.

The Italian mass movement demonstrations follow the huge public reaction by the French people against such a move in their country. This also went virtually unreported.

However, one prominent Australian news website rejoiced that tiny Pitcairn Island, with a population of 48, recently legalised gay marriage. The headline even screaming that Australia "sits on its hands".

It's regrettable that the media has lost its objectivity on this issue.

With the recent one-sided reporting of the Supreme Court ruling in the US, same-sex propaganda is hitting new heights.

But I would advise caution. The debate here isn't over.

The undeniable truth is that the nature of marriage is exclusionary by design. It has always existed for just one man and one woman.

Even the petitioners in the US case conceded they were not aware of any society that permitted same-sex marriage before 2001. Just 14 years ago.

So what we have here is a wrong-headed decision by a bare majority that an institution that is acknowledged to have existed in a union between one man and one woman for "millennia and across civilisations" (to use the Supreme Court majority's own words) is actually something quite different.

Study after study, time and time again, shows that children benefit from having a father and mother.

That is the foundation that marriage provides, and has provided for millennia.

The institution of marriage has stood the test of time.

For our children's sake it needs to continue to do so.

And that is why I have no hesitation in supporting the long-established Liberal Party policy to preserve and protect the institution of marriage, just as we did at the last election.

The Hon. Eric Abetz is government leader in the Senate and this article is provided with his permission and originally published at: <http://www.theage.com.au/comment/the-fight-for-samesex-marriage-in-australia-is-far-from-over-20150701-gi26gi.html>

Study after study, time and time again, shows that children benefit from having a father and mother.

Spread love not hate, mate

With a column that comes out quarterly, many current affairs that pique my interest slip back into obscurity before I have the chance to write. However, with the legalisation of gay marriage in Ireland and the USA, and the strong political push in our own country, the Christian response to homosexuality has only grown more relevant since the first seed was planted in my mind several months ago. I can only guess what has happened in the time between writing and publication.

I believe that God's original intention for marriage was between a man and a woman. Contrary to popular opinion, I do not see gay marriage as an equally valid alternative. But the pull of society is strong. I am confronted with the world's views through television, music, social media and the people around me; at times it's difficult to stand firm in my Biblical convictions. I see the intolerance directed towards anyone who expresses an opinion different from that of secular society. Christians are met with condescension, seen as well-meaning but old-fashioned; or aggression, labelled as 'homophobic'



and 'bigoted' simply because we believe homosexual practice is against Biblical teaching. I don't want to be accused of intolerance and hatred, I don't want to be opposed to equality and human rights. In the weakness of my human nature, sometimes I struggle and wonder if the world's view is really so wrong.

Yet, as Christians we are at times called to stand and be different to the world. In this small way, we join with Christians throughout time and space who have been marginalised

for their faith. How we respond to those who disagree with us can also serve as a point of difference. Rather than falling into worldly patterns of condescension or aggression, or simply ignoring the issue, the Bible calls us to speak the truth in love. This indeed means holding strongly to a Biblical stance on marriage, and accepting the various degrees of suffering that may follow. But, speaking in love means that anything we say is filtered through the truth of the gospel. The love of Jesus is extended also to people in homosexual lifestyles and those who avidly support marriage equality. The gospel calls all of us to repent, receive forgiveness and come under the Lordship of Jesus. God is still in control, providing continual strength to those who stand for him now and drawing those who will yet come to him. As people come to truly know the love, grace and salvation found in the gospel, even in the midst of a society that grows increasingly hostile to the Christian world view, God's design for life will still be proclaimed.

*Bella Hibbard
(ACC member at Liverpool UC)*

REFLECTION

My grace is sufficient

2 Corinthians 12:9

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness."

Here is unlimited "power" supplied by "My grace".

These words will not make sense to the worldly-minded people through self-achievement.

The words of Paul, "I would rather boast about my weakness," would not make sense to them.

Here, Paul is talking about humility.

Twice in this passage he has mentioned not "exalting" himself.

But he isn't saying in the words of

the old hymn,

"none of self and all for thee". That would be out of balance.

He is just saying,

God's grace must always come before our self-worth.

Always in his mind are the Lord's words,

"My grace is sufficient for you."

How important are these words for those who have been called

to proclaim the Word

and those who have become His "witnesses to the remotest part of the earth".

We must always carry in our hearts and minds

the picture of the Son of God hanging on a criminal's cross for us.

Here is "power perfected in weakness".

Our congregational mission statements

should always acknowledge the Lord's assurance

"My grace is sufficient for you".

Jesus said, "Apart from Me you can do nothing".

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than gain worldly riches.

*Reverend Bob Imms
(Member of ACC Southern
Tasmanian Cluster)*

THIS IS THE ACC

Who we are

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

Our goals include

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

What does ACC do to help you?

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

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

What we want to do

The objects of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations are:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How to join us

Please consider joining the ACC.

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

Membership rates for supporting members: Concession (single or couple): \$20.00 pa. (financial year basis) Full (single or couples): \$40.00 p.a

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

What happens next

- 31 October:
NSW ACC Meeting
Sutherland Uniting Church
- 16 November:
ACC National Council
- 6-8 March 2016:
ACC National Council
in Newtown, Sydney

ACC Resources List

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

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

Founding Documents

The Charter (2006)

Statement on Sexuality (2006)

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

ACC Brochures and Statements

ACC Vision and Goals 2007-2017 (2008)

Cross Cultural Commission Statement (2008)

The Church's Social Responsibility (2008)

Theological Declaration (2008)

Theological Declaration: Commentary and Study Guide (2009)

Abortion in the Australian Community (2010)

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

Marriage: An ACC Statement (2011)

Bible Studies

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

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

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

DVD Resources

Conversations Series

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

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

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

Devotional Booklets

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

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



Michael Caton in *Last Cab to Darwin* (2015)

Where is God in life?

War Room (2015, PG)

I have heard Rod James outline in several presentations about research that demonstrates “that the best way for a father to love his children is to love their mother, and the best way for a mother to love her children is to love their father. What is happening in the family is reactive to what is happening in the marriage relationship.”

The new Kendrick Brothers film *War Room* has a focus on prayer but it is about relationships, faith and love, centred on coming closer to God through prayer. This is a film that will connect with many busy and actually disconnected ‘successful’ families. The scenes with the young daughter are often touching as you know she loves her parents who have drifted apart, but is confused as she does not really know if they love her as they seemingly no longer love each other or spend time as a family and simply being with her and helping her with her own life. They do not even know the name of her skipping rope team (I had no idea that skipping was such a professional and amazingly athletic sport in the USA).

This movie shows a foundation for prayer – it is not our will, but God’s will be done. We need to know what is the good and proper will and much is recorded in the Bible especially in terms of the general will of God in relationships, especially marriage. Miss Clara asks God to help her help someone – someone like she had been and Elizabeth is brought into her life

to help her save her marriage and family.

As I mentioned, prayer is a real practical focus here, but it is integrated prayer as a part of life. The central character Miss Clara is indeed a real character. She embodies that perhaps stereotype of the Southern USA person of faith who will shout out ‘Praise the Lord’ and leap to her feet and dance when she gets excited to learn of an answer to prayer. She loves to spend time in her closet – her War Room, to pray and seek God.

There are good messages about possessions, money and needs, but this is in a context of middle-class America as this audience is the prime focus for the film. It could be a film that may connect with a wider range of people as certainly today many are considering how to be a family in the 21st century. As Elizabeth and Tony learn to really forgive and love each other, they are united as a family again.

Last Cab To Darwin (2015, M)

Any film with Michael Caton as the star has an instant connection. His role in *The Castle* (1997) probably means that an unusually large number of people will see this film, especially on DVD or TV eventually. The film is based on the popular 2003 Australian stage play written by Reg Cribb and he co-writes the screen play with director Jeremy Sims. Its foundations are from a true story arising from the 1995 Northern Territory euthanasia laws (they operated for a brief time before being ef-

fectively rendered void by the Federal Government). The film takes up the story of a taxi driver with terminal stomach cancer who decides to drive from his home town of Broken Hill to Darwin to seek out the doctor who is at the centre of the new push for euthanasia and has a machine to help people end their life. It is not difficult to work out who the doctor was based upon.

Michael Caton is very good in the role as Rex the cabbie, and also most of the people he meets along the way are portrayed very well and link in with the whole story. The odd figure is Jacki Weaver as the doctor, who does not play the role convincingly. The film is interestingly not essentially an apologetic message for euthanasia, although various standard ideas come out. It is a however a little bit of the stereotype of the quintessential rough Australian town full of loud and swearing outback characters who of course all have a heart of gold and worship together in the local pub. The other part of the story, the place and connections with the two main Aboriginal characters and with society is also fascinating, especially Rex’s relationship with his Aboriginal neighbour Polly.

There is little overt Christian or religious consideration, and interestingly I found the film in a way more of a consideration of the nature of community and how essential it is to have people who support you at times like this, and who will look after you and say ‘you don’t have to do this.’

Peter Bentley