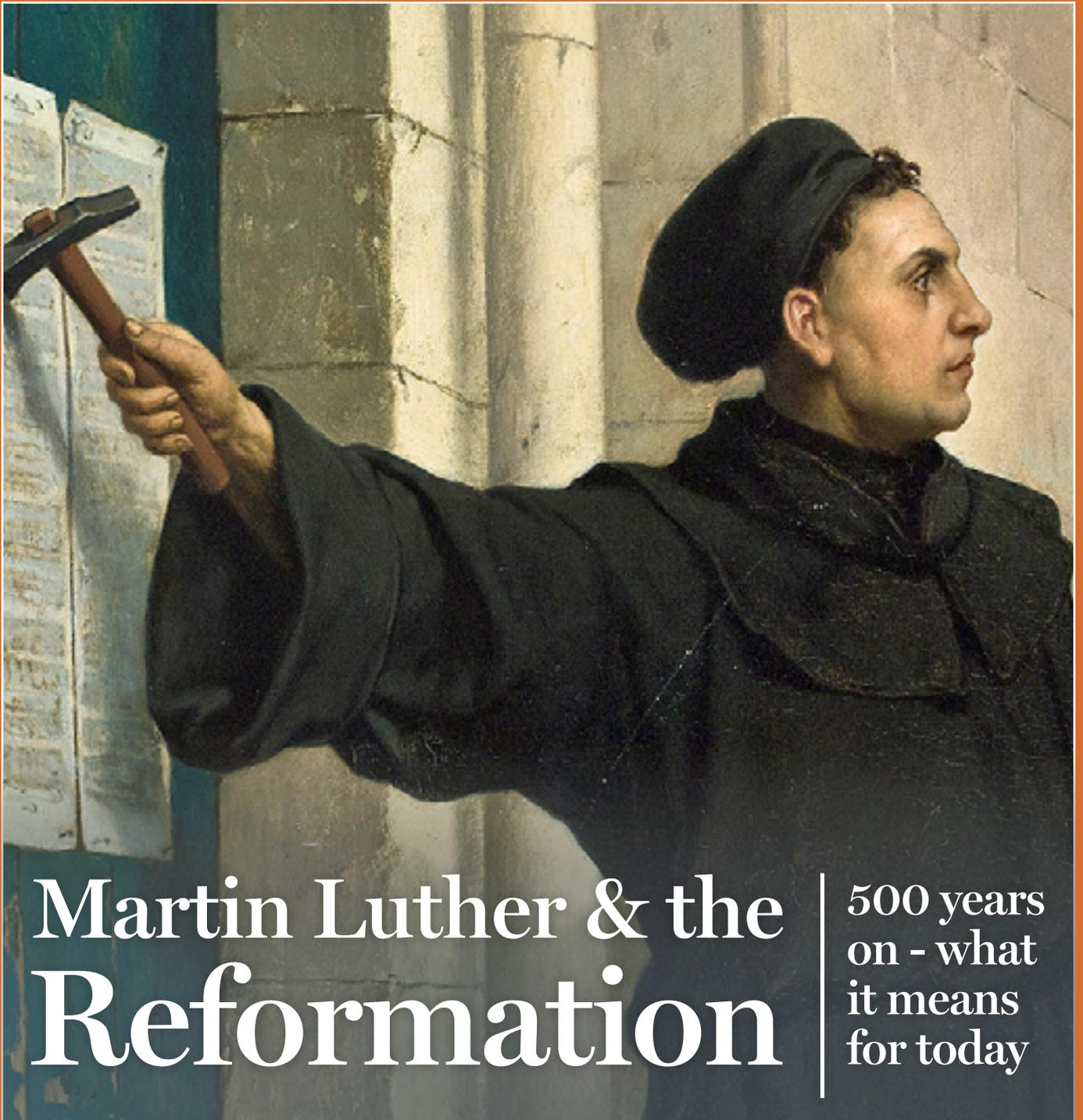


ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



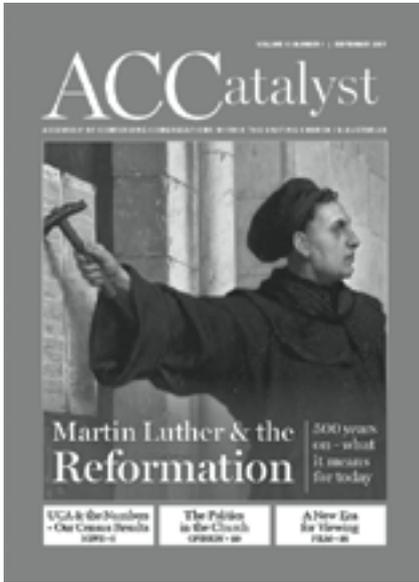
Martin Luther & the Reformation

500 years on - what it means for today

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EDITORIAL

We continue in this magazine to consider our heritage and faith, and it is a pleasure to publish two of the papers from the seminar organised by the SA ACC Movement *The Radical Gospel: Listening to the Reformation Witnesses*, acknowledging that

“The Uniting Church continues to learn of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures in the obedience and freedom of faith, and in the power of the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, from the witness of reformation fathers as expressed in various ways in the Scots Confession of Faith (1560), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), and the Savoy Declaration (1658). In like manner she will listen to the preaching of John Wesley in his Forty-Four Sermons (1793). She will commit her ministers and instructors to study these statements, so that the congregation of Christ’s people may again and again be reminded of the grace which justifies them through faith, of the centrality of the person and work of Christ the justifier, and of the need for a constant appeal to Holy Scripture.” (*The Basis of Union*, Paragraph 10)

Peace and grace,
Peter Bentley



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Stick to the Path

by Robyn Painter

Pastor, Peterborough Uniting Church

My little nephew Riley has mastered the art of walking. He has become very mobile but still has a limited understanding of danger. He likes to climb onto the couch and dive head first off the end. The closest adult has to move quickly to catch him round the ankles before his head hits the floor. If you tell him something is hot, he has to reach out and feel it for himself.

Last time I was visiting them, I watched Riley walk off down the passage with a cot sheet covering his face. Instead of stopping to take it off, he kept walking blind until he crashed into something and fell over. It looked really funny. Fortunately, he was quite unhurt and untroubled by the incident. He removed the sheet and continued on his way.

But as I thought about Riley walking along blind, it struck me that many Christians tend to do the same thing in their walk with God. How do we determine God’s direction and his path for us? Well, often we tend to grope our way along until we crash. Then, we realise we’ve gone the wrong way and we change course.

There has to be a better way than that! The Bible has lots to say about sticking to God’s path. Consider these verses:

Psalm 119:105 says “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”.

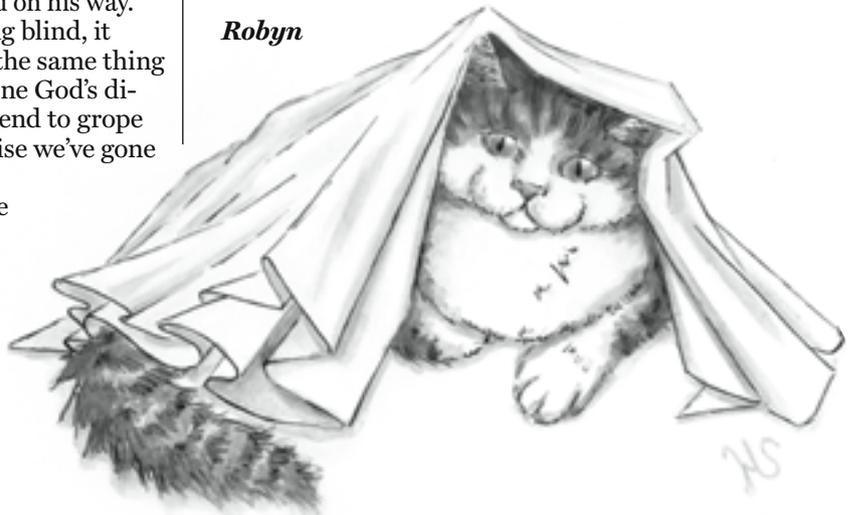
Proverbs 3:5 tells us to “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Psalm 23:4 *He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.*

How do we know God’s direction for us? These two verses tell us to read God’s Word - the Bible, and applying it’s teaching to our lives, to trust the Lord fully, and live in a way that brings glory to him. Then not only will he show us the way, but will lay the path before us. There is no substitute for knowing God and walking with him!

It is wise for us to pray as David did in Psalm 25: *Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long.*

Robyn



Hilary Sandeman

Hope

You can imagine my surprise when I'd just arrived in the ACC Office one Thursday, and I received a phone call on my mobile from Hope 103.2FM - the Sydney Christian radio station.

I had entered a competition they were running to nominate a friend to win a family holiday in Fiji. With the encouragement of a mutual friend, I had nominated a family who had recently returned from missionary work in Tanzania. Laura & Duncan are the Breakfast Presenters for Hope.

At first I assumed they wanted me to talk about the family as a promo for the competition. They asked me why Amy and her family needed this holiday. I explained how they are Missionaries-In-Residence this year at Sydney Missionary & Bible College (SMBC). I added that Amy had overcome breast cancer during their time in Tanzania, but that this year it had returned and spread. Then Laura said, "I have good news for you. Amy has won!"

"That's fantastic!" I exclaimed and burst into tears of joy. Then they put me on hold while they rang Amy and told her. "That sounds amazing!" she said, feeling speechless and staggered.

This phone conversation was recorded and replayed (as if it were live) early the following Monday morning. Then the Hope team had arranged for me and two friends, Janine and Roe who had also nominated Amy, to be at her home when they presented the prize later that morning.

It was such fun! Amy and Jono home-school their 4 children, so they were all home to share in the excitement. As you can see from the photo, they presented them with a giant cheque. The Hope team of 6 were dressed in colourful grass skirts, and they had leis around their necks and

plastic coconut drinks and ukuleles. They gave the family leis to wear and coconut drinks as well.

It was extra special for my two friends as well. Janine had encouraged many of her friends to nominate Amy. Roe & her husband had moved in with Roe's father-in-law for a year to give the family a home while Amy had her first cancer treatments.

How was Amy chosen? Did the multiple entries help? Well the Hope team said they prayed before they randomly drew the winning entry out of their barrel, believing that God would decide. He knew how much my friends needed this holiday - and how it gave free publicity to SMBC as well!

Amy, Jono and their four children took the holiday to Fiji at the end of July. Because the prize only included two children, friends and local churches raised the extra money for flights, food, accommodation and spending money so the whole family could go.

Afterwards, Amy said: "Hearing earlier this year that the cancer had returned and spread to my bones was an incredible shock and as a mum of 4 dependent children one of my overriding thoughts was - 'but I want more time with them'. What an incredible gift winning the trip to Fiji was for our family, time to relax and laugh and chat while being pampered in a 4-star resort, surrounded by the beauty of God's creation. We are so thankful for all our friends who nominated it us and of course thankful to God for his lavish and abundant care."

Anne Weeks is a member of the ACC Congregation Belrose UC, where her husband Ian (ACC Council Secretary) is the minister.

The Good Book

The Bible in Australian Culture Today was the title for a panel session at the Sydney Writers Festival in May this year. The Festival has become a major event on the Sydney public scene, and it is not usually the case that religion features, but it was a sponsored event by the Bible Society in Australia for their 200th anniversary and in the context of 'a major book', easily connected with the festival themes.

Of course there had been controversy with the Bible Society 'Light' promotional event earlier in the year, but this one was free of activism and full of helpful and illuminating comments about the role and influence of the Bible in Australian culture.

Among the panellists, historian and Bible Society researcher Dr Meredith Lake highlighted cultural links and the use of Scripture even when people do not realise, for example, the Maroubra group Bra Boysnot Bra Brothers name is connected to 'brother's keeper' as some members of the gang tattoo "My Brother's Keeper" across the front of their chest.

Writer and commentator Roy Williams (most well-known for God, Actually) outlined how he had discovered the Bible late in life and became intellectually interested, before personally connected. Now he has an interest in explaining to people that you need to understand the Bible in order to understand Australian culture and ethics today. Roy paid homage to Ben Chifley, and his love for the bible. Chifley read the whole Bible 11 times in the last 12 months of his life.)

The unique role of memorising Scripture and reflecting on images and themes from the Bible were highlighted as important, and influential in younger lives; including learning songs that help people to remember.

BIBLE SOCIETY
1817-2017

Peter Bentley



Thoughts on Unity

Dr Riley B. Case in his column 'Happenings Around the Church', written for the Confessing Movement within the United Methodist Church provides an insightful reflection on the nature of church unity and 'diversity': a timely consideration for all 'uniting denominations', and especially for the UCA in our 40th anniversary year.

Several General Conferences ago (I don't remember for sure which one it was but it could have been any of them) I noted that at every single morning worship service at which bishops preached there was some appeal or some reference to church unity. Church unity is on our minds these days, as well it might be. United Methodism is in danger of dividing over the issue of Scriptural authority as it relates to sexual ethics and marriage. A quick checking of just a few of the blogs related to United Methodism reveals the concern: "Church Hanging on to Unity Despite Cracks In the Wall;" "A Plea for Unity in the United Methodist Church;" "United Methodist Young People Urge Denomination to Promote Unity;" "Prayer and Fasting Urged for the Unity of the Church."

Christians should by no means discount the importance of "Unity." It is, after all, a theme of the New Testament. Especially in Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17 that believers "might all be one, even as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee..."

However:

1 The Unity referred to in Scripture is much more than the institutional and structural unity that appears to be the focus of most United Methodist discussions. Spiritual unity is a linking of Spirit growing out of common life together. All of us long for those times of oneness that come when we are united in prayer, or as we together witness mighty acts of God in our midst, or as we commit ourselves to common goals and mission. I associate these times with growing up in my Methodist Sunday school and youth group, at our Methodist church camp, and with fellowship with other believers in my Christian (Methodist background) college. I have experienced wonderful times of spiritual

refreshing in churches I have served, with the people I have worked with, and in fellowship meetings. These times of spiritual refreshing I also associate with cluster, district and annual conference meetings.

I draw the line there. I have not personally sensed this unity at general board and agency meetings or at General and Jurisdictional Conferences I have attended (I have attended eleven General Conferences). At these occasions, despite planned worship experiences, we appear absorbed not with the convictions and practices we share in common but with institutional matters of who gets money and who doesn't or who is included and who isn't. When we are called to repentance it is not because of how we have failed to reach persons for Christ but because we need to address sins of our forbearers. Sometimes I have returned home not rejoicing because I am part of a great spiritual force in the world but saddened because we have become so adversarial.

I believe that in the obsession with Christian unity we protest too much. Continual harping on unity suggests that we are sensing disunity.

2 Unity in the Bible is based on shared values, beliefs and practices and these, it seems, presently are in short supply within United Methodism. Connectionalism in the United Methodist Church (para. 132) is defined as a sharing of a common tradition of faith including Our Doctrinal Standards and General Rules. But what if these doctrinal standards are openly scorned? What if a small but vociferous minority in the church wishes to reinterpret the Scriptures, discard our Christian (and United Methodist) tradition in regard to matters of sexual morality, defy our church's Discipline and call it "hateful," impose an agenda that has more in common with secular

sociology than Christian faith, and threaten to bring the church to its knees if the church does not change to comply to new understandings of rights and inclusiveness?

At the annual conference I just attended the first question on our evaluation form was: "Please rate on a scale of 1-5 where you experienced diversity during our Annual Conference Session" with the following areas to be rated: worship, hospitality, volunteers, plenary, accessibility, communications. The second question was: "How would you like to see more diversity during our Annual Conference Session?"

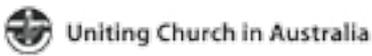
No wonder we have problems. Continual obsession with themes of diversity and inclusiveness make us more aware of our differences rather than what it is we have in common. In times of unity I am less aware of differences in regard to age, race, gender, ethnicity, theological perspectives, and educational disparities. In times of disunity I am aware of all our differences, and more.

Whatever happened to rating our excitement for the cause of Christ, or whether the conference challenged new (or old) forms of ministry? I read in one blog that our diversity is a celebration of our unity. This makes no sense at all. Diversity, if anything, is today a cause for disunity rather than unity when it means we keep track of whatever groups or interests or perspectives or races or genders or ages or standing in the conference have been properly included in planning, speaking, and decision-making. It matters not to me who leads as long as we are indeed being led in the task of building up the body of Christ.

3 What is needed if "unity" is to have a chance in the United Methodist Church? We need serious discussion, not so much about human sexuality on



All of this is us



sociological and psychological levels, but about the theological bases that lie behind how we decide issues around human sexuality. Do we have any agreement at all on the Biblical and theological bases for our decisions? What are the irreducible essentials which we supposedly share? While the blogs and public statements of some individuals and groups are not official, and probably do not represent the thinking of the Commission on the Way Forward, it is discouraging to read of people who believe that our unity consists of “the words of Jesus,” or “our diversity,” or “love,” or even “our baptism.” We are not baptized United Methodists but Christians. Thus baptism may be a mark of unity, but it is the mark of unity with all believers, not just with United Methodists. Appeals to qualities like “love” or “grace” as the basis for unity make no sense since there is no special United Methodist understanding of what is uniquely United Methodist about “love” and “grace.” Appeals to “diversity” are as confusing as the reference in the 1972 doctrinal statement about “pluralism” as the identifying mark of our United Methodist theology. Words like pluralism and diversity have more to do with relativism and confusion than with the gospel.

There is currently unrest in the trenches of United Methodism. Someone has said it will take a miracle for the Commission to come up with a proposal for a way forward that can satisfy a majority of United Methodists. That is true. However, miracles have been known to happen!

*By Dr. Riley B. Case
Happenings: 27 June 2017*

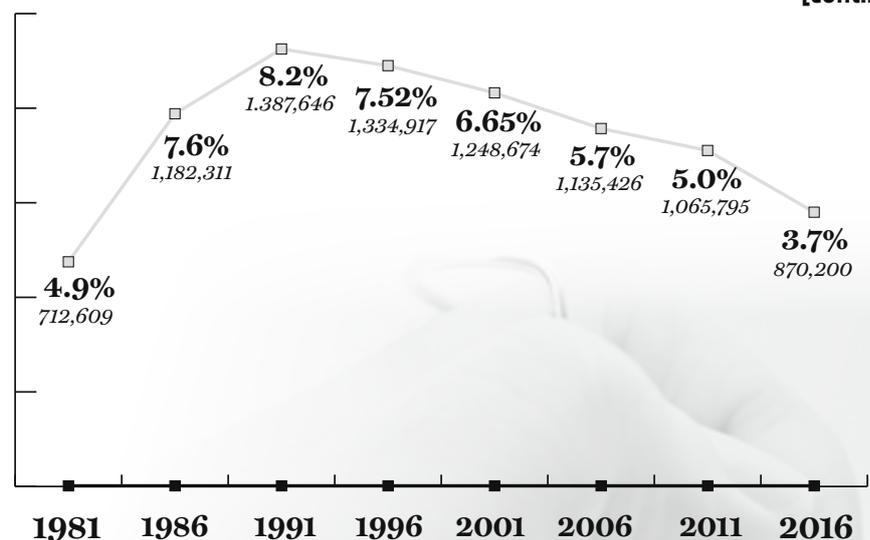
The National Census and the Uniting Church: A basic overview

In the year before union the Census recorded for the three uniting churches an affiliation rate of 14.3%. Forty years later this rate had decreased to approximately 6%. The Uniting Church still remains the third largest Christian grouping (3.7%), after Catholic (22.6%) and Anglican (13.3%). The decrease for the UCA between 2011 and 2016 was the largest to date - 26%. Comparing attendance and affiliation, my estimate is that less than 10% of the affiliates could be counted as regular attenders.

The Census has always asked basic questions on religion in terms of affiliation or basic identification, though in 2016, it controversially placed the No Religion box, first introduced in the 1991 Census, at the top of the religion listing, perhaps confirming that even those who say they do not have a religion are not religiously neutral. The No religion category increased from 22.3% in 2011 to 30.1%, a nearly 35% increase. **Christian is still the majority affiliate religion with 52.1%.**

For the Uniting Church, apart from 1986 and 1991, the percentage of UCA affiliates has decreased each census. Some Uniting Church leaders have mistakenly argued that 1986 and 1991 were proof that the public were connecting to the UCA, but apart from the fact that attendance records were going in the other direction, the numerical increase had nothing to do with an interest in the Uniting Church. Firstly all those who were still recording themselves as ‘Methodist’ were now rigorously coded to the Uniting Church (from 1986), and secondly, some non-members had finally caught up with the fact that there was a Uniting Church and had enough knowledge to tick the box they had worked out was closest to their antecedent church, though it could be argued that many of these could have been included in continuing Presbyterian affiliation or continuing Congregational affiliation.

[cont...]



Source: ABS National Census 1981-2016

Image: Freepik

Hearing the Word of God Set Free

Romans 1:2

“Through Jesus Christ the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”

We who have committed our lives to Jesus Christ should see that Paul’s teaching about the law has a double meaning.

Either as God’s power in the spiritual world or as sin operating in human nature. The first frees us and the second binds us.

Paul makes this message personal for us all when he says *“the Spirit of life sets ME free.”* Our freedom is from sin and ultimate death. We experience overwhelming joy to realise that He sent His only Son into this world for that very purpose, to free us.

We have two alternatives, either to respond to the sin in our lives or for God to create in us His Spiritual nature. As Paul says *“If you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law.”*

The more I travel this earthly journey, seeking to understand the will of God, the more I am convinced that He expects us to make decisions and not to leave it all to Him. He has equipped us with minds, feelings and receptive hearts for that very purpose.

But it is far more important that we listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit when He says “no” or “be careful” or “follow Me.” Above all we should never seek the guidance of God concerning an act that is forbidden in the Living Word of God

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

***The National Census and the Uniting Church:
A basic overview (cont...)***

What are some factors influencing the real affiliation decline?

1 Apart from the main factor of the general ageing of UC affiliates, there have been a large number of worshipping members who have left since 1997 and joined other denominations. The continuing debate may also have affected non-members who did not want to identify.

2 Continuing worshipping members of the Uniting Church who decided not to tick the Uniting Church box on the census form, and instead wrote in Christian or another description. The general Christian category has continued to grow, and is now the 4th largest Christian group.

3 The ‘departing’ group of older nominal affiliates and the increased number of descendants with little Uniting heritage. Basically, if one’s grandparents were Uniting, one may have had a small but still nominal link, but once the initial nominal generations depart there is less likelihood of even nominal awareness among the new generations

What is significant is that the number of affiliates in 2017 is a much smaller overall group in comparison to that of 1977. If the Uniting Church affiliation had simply kept pace with the population increase, it would have recorded about three times the number of affiliates.

Peter Bentley is the National Director for the ACC



PUBLIC SQUARE

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

Civility no Match for Nihilism

Despite the fact that, according to the 2016 Census, only 1% of households are headed by same-sex couples, debate on 'Marriage Equality' continues to rage.

As Uniting Church bodies prepare to debate the issue at the Assembly in July 2018, they would benefit from close study of a recent book, **Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible and the Church (2016)**. Published by an evangelical Christian publisher in the USA, it features contributions by Drs Bill Loader (Uniting Church minister) and Megan DeFranza, who support the 'affirming' view 'that consensual, monogamous, same-sex relations can be blessed by God and fully included in the life of the church,' and Drs Wesley Hill and Stephen Holmes, who support the 'traditional' view 'that all forms of same-sex sexual behaviour are prohibited by Scripture and Christian theology' (p15).

Unlike much current debate, their scholarly convictions and disagreements are firmly and respectfully argued in a spirit of deep pastoral concern and without recourse to demeaning slogans.



Sexual Orientation

Loader, Hill and Holmes basically agree that Scripture opposes all forms of same-sex sexual intimacy, in contrast to DeFranza who argues that it mainly refers to exploitative relationships. However, where Hill and Holmes claim that prohibitions apply to behaviour resulting from a prior disposition, Loader locates them in 'sexual orientation' itself.

As a celibate man with same-sex orientation, Hill rejects this distinction on the ground that predisposition does not necessitate practice. Indeed, his experience of same-sex attraction, commitment to celibate ministry, and support of marriage between a man and a woman is at odds with the popular view that, as a matter of justice and compassion, people with a same-sex sexual orientation must not be denied the right to find sexual intimacy in 'marriage'. His testimony should cause the church to think before making decisions which falsely assume that same-sex orientation and practice are fixed and invariably directed towards sexual union and/or same-sex 'marriage'.

The book does not explore the complex biological, psychological, personal and social causes of same-sex attraction. The contributors agree that 'sexual orientation' is a strong physiological drive that provides a deep sense of personal

identity. They differ about whether same-sex (and other-sex) attracted people are right to express themselves in consensual relationships, including marriage, which involve sexual union. DeFranza and Loader regard the imposition of restraint as a denial of human rights; Hill and Holmes regard restraint as a tough virtue.

Scripture

Central to the debate is how Scripture is used. The 'affirming' writers interpret texts on sex and marriage in the light of Jesus' command to love thy neighbour, to show compassion, and to act justly. This position enables them to modify what is said in Genesis 1-2, Matthew 19:3-12; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 7:1ff; 11:1ff; Ephesians 5:21-33 etc. in order to correspond more closely to contemporary views about equality, companionship, sexual diversity, and divorce. By separating love from law, however, they misrepresent 'traditionalists' as being tacit accomplices of the legalists who opposed Jesus and Paul (p66).

Strangely, neither side focuses on the Biblical-theological significance of the body, an approach that would have opened up fruitful discussion about the ethical implications of docetic and Gnostic understandings of sexuality, both ancient and modern.

[cont...]



PUBLIC SQUARE

BY PSEUDO-MAXIMUS

St. Augustine: 'On the Goods of Marriage'

With the help of Augustine's seminal work, the Christological and present significance of marriage is discussed at length. According to him, the three goods of marriage are: **Procreation, Fidelity and Sacrament.** That is to say, 'Marriage is a bond of male and female, ordered to procreation, sealed in faithful union, and signifying Christ's love for the church. (p131).

The different emphases in the Old and New Testaments on **procreation** are acknowledged by all. But the implications are debated, particularly in relation to the marriage of infertile or elderly couples. Loader and DeFranza argue that this position creates space for same-sex couples who cannot bear children. Holmes and Hill argue that such marriages still model the only form of complementarity that is open to procreation.

All agree that **fidelity and companionship** are vital aspects of marriage and deep same-sex friendships. But they strongly disagree about whether genital intimacy is appropriate to same-sex relationships and, thus, to same-sex unions in marriage.

There is also basic agreement about the place of marriage as a **sacramental sign of God's love for Israel and the church.** What is at issue, and is a major point of contention among Christians, is whether the Biblical metaphor of husband-wife / male-female can be used exclusively of marriage in a post-patriarchal, egalitarian Western society. Might not the otherness that exists between same-sex couples also serve as a metaphor for the Otherness of God who unites Godself to the church?

Gender complementarity

The issue here is what counts

as gender complementarity. In this context, Ephesians 5:21-33 is pivotal. Fearing that this is another attempt to smuggle in male superiority, DeFranza argues that all of us, in different ways, exhibit 'male' and 'female' attributes. Therefore, because the marriage metaphor that runs throughout Scripture expresses a past cultural form which no longer applies, it must be replaced by a more egalitarian form of otherness. Implicitly, for her and Loader, the otherness of male and female bodies and their function in procreation, become 'a', not 'the' defining, metaphor of God's union with us. When applied to sexual relations within marriage, the psychological, affective and companionable aspects of otherness are held to be paramount.

Although the mystery of male-female otherness isn't easy to characterise, attention should have been paid to the incompatibility between the Judeo-Christian concept of persons, as male-and-female, and the androgynous concept which is individualistic.

None of the contributors considers the possibility that, rather than promote equality between the genders, 'same-sex marriage' devalues both genders. Widely regarded as necessary for the public good in business, politics, education etc., it is ironic, if not hypocritical, to argue that gender complementarity is not necessary in this most basic social unit.

Pastoral Care

A major strength of the book is its pastoral concern for same-sex attracted Christians. Contributors

agree that the starting point for discussing sexuality is to acknowledge that the church is a community of sinners whose desires are less than perfect and who seek to be loving, compassionate and just.

But they disagree about what this view means for accepting monogamous same-sex sexual relationships as marriages. Loader and DeFranza believe that love and justice demand their acceptance; Holmes and Hill believe that marriage is between a man and a woman, but that space must be made for recognition of spiritual, non-sexualised friendships.

What is not acknowledged by any of the writers is that unwanted same-sex attraction may, with great difficulty, patience and pastoral sensitivity, be reoriented towards other-sex relationships. The effect of this omission, which is typical of mainstream discussion, is to erase from public memory the experience of large numbers of same-sex attracted people.

Nothing on Nihilism

The major defect of the volume is also its strength - Pastoral Civility. Ecclesial politeness hides the fact that the cause of a small group is so prominent in the public mind due to the persistence, misrepresentation, aggression, and media savvy of its most vocal advocates.

The contributors do not confront the nihilistic alternative to the Christian doctrine of humanity that underpins demands for change. While Holmes and Hill see the need to uphold the 'tradition', they are silent about the dire social and ecclesial consequences of failing to do so. On the other hand, DeFranza and Loader, while disagreeing with each other on the status of Biblical norms, undermine the tradition by 'affirming' forms of love, equality and human rights that are at odds with the goodness and splendour of marriage attested throughout Scripture.

Unfortunately, all authors fail to discuss the ramifications of changes to marriage law. If, in order to satisfy the desires of no more than 1% of households, marriage is to be defined by the State as the life-long consensual union of two persons regardless of sex, the church will be discouraged from teaching that humanity's God-given glory is uniquely embodied in our male-female complementarity, and forbidden from shaping her educational, hospital and welfare agencies accordingly.

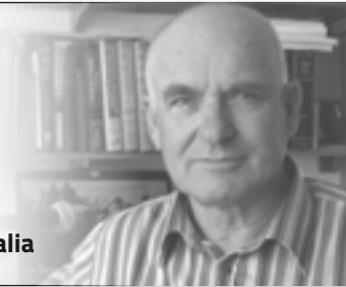


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Reformation: & Revelation & Reason

Ian
Clarkson

UCA Minister - South Australia



If the Reformation had influenced countries like France as strongly as England and Scotland it may have averted the Reign of Terror where the exaltation of reason was divorced from Biblical revelation. Today the exaltation of reason claims that society can be 'good' without God and that cerebral rationality alone will bring utopia. It can't. Why?

First, the basic rational response is self-preservation. Is it rational for a person to risk their life for the sake of another? Dennis Prager comments, "In all the studies I have read of non-Jewish rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust, I have never read of any rescuers who said that they did what they did because it was the reasonable or rational thing to do. Not one." Moral nobility betters rational self-preservation

Second, historic evidence yields little for goodness apart from Godliness. All atheistic or purely secular social experiments have introverted down into pernicious egotism and extroverted out into horrendous violence. Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, Kim Jong-Un. Neither has rationalistic atheism generated altruism, art, and human well-being. Believers invented hospitals, universities, led great social movements like fairness for labourers and founded societies which have been the most humane the world has seen.

Third, evolutionary rationalism is not trustworthy. CS Lewis challenged the logic of trusting his mind, which

is governed by randomness, to direct him ultimately towards a rational goal. On this basis reason is really a pretend thing which mocks the attempt to have any confidence about meaning, purpose and substantial good.

Fourth, cultures like the Dani in PNG before the missionaries of Christ arrived, 'rationally' held to the virtue of treachery as the highest way of expressing nobility. The first Biblical accounts they heard saw them exalting Judas. The 'rational' atheist forgets how much his value system is Christian-influenced.

The Reformers did not argue the case for the Bible, they assumed it. Upon it they expounded theology which laid the foundations for demonstrable and attainable advances in society, politics and family. Reason was used as the servant of and the primary premise of all useful argument and human advance, which for the Reformers was revelation discovered in Holy Writ. That is why the great mantra of the Reformation was Sola Scriptura: human reason trusting the revelation of God in the Word en-fleshed and en-scriptured.

Today with the accelerating advance of blasphemy and hubris against this holy grace of revelation there is nothing either to restrain its spiral towards social death or quench its lust for brutality. Graceless reason is powerless to sustain let alone create common good.



The Scots

Images: Public Domain

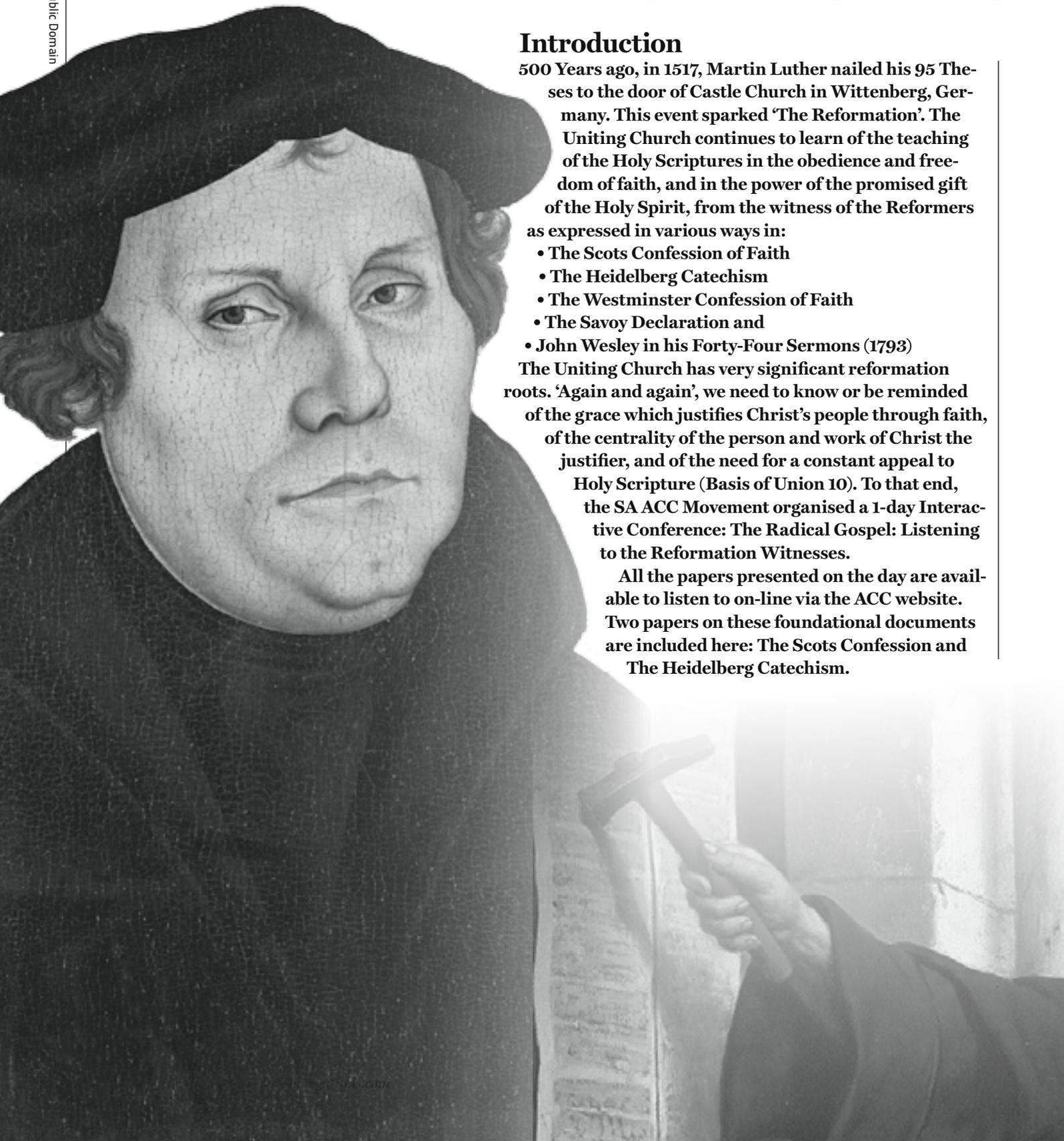
Introduction

500 Years ago, in 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. This event sparked 'The Reformation'. The Uniting Church continues to learn of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures in the obedience and freedom of faith, and in the power of the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, from the witness of the Reformers as expressed in various ways in:

- The Scots Confession of Faith
- The Heidelberg Catechism
- The Westminster Confession of Faith
- The Savoy Declaration and
- John Wesley in his Forty-Four Sermons (1793)

The Uniting Church has very significant reformation roots. 'Again and again', we need to know or be reminded of the grace which justifies Christ's people through faith, of the centrality of the person and work of Christ the justifier, and of the need for a constant appeal to Holy Scripture (Basis of Union 10). To that end, the SA ACC Movement organised a 1-day Interactive Conference: *The Radical Gospel: Listening to the Reformation Witnesses*.

All the papers presented on the day are available to listen to on-line via the ACC website. Two papers on these foundational documents are included here: *The Scots Confession and The Heidelberg Catechism*.



Confession of Faith

David
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*Rev David Kowalick explores
The Scots Confession of Faith (1560)*

The guiding document of the Scottish reformed Church, was written and published in August 1560, and authorised by the Parliament of Scotland for the defining of the reformation of the Church of Scotland. This task was accomplished, amazingly, in four days under the superintendence of John Knox and his team of five 'Johns' - John Winram, John Spottiswoode, John Willock, John Douglas, and John Row.

Obviously the confession was not written in a vacuum

as it shares much in common with some of its predecessors, such as the reformed confessions of the Dutch and French churches, which were contributed to by Knox. It has many features from which we may still learn, and which may help us to appreciate our reformed pedigree.

It is clear from the preface that the confession was written in the context of a church pressured and persecuted. To the south the English protestants were being systematically persecuted and the leaders executed by Roman Catholic Queen Mary, 'Bloody Mary.' Meanwhile in the first half of the sixteenth century, Scottish Reformers were being suppressed by the politically powerful and corrupt Roman Catholic Church led by the Queen Regent, Mary of Guise. Through her the Roman Catholic Church exerted its domination over the growing Protestant Reformation. She was ultimately succeeded by her daughter - Mary Queen of Scots. In 1557 the Scottish Protestants urged John Knox, then in exile, to return to Scotland to aid the reformation.

Upon his return in 1558, John Knox launched scathing attacks on the papacy, the Catholic mass, and on what he viewed as common idolatry within the Roman Catholic Church. By this time Queen Mary of England was replaced by Protestant Elizabeth I. Mary of Guise





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died in 1560 and with Mary Queen of Scots, then in France, the Roman Catholic Church was steadily losing persuasion and power to suppress the Reformation.

The Scots' Confession was written in this context to make a clear distinction between the supporters of the Roman Catholic Church and those who counted themselves as part of the Reformation. When Mary of Guise died, Protestant leaders petitioned the Scottish parliament to take action, ultimately appointing the then famous John Knox to head up the task. This decision was to be the beginning of the ascendancy of the Scottish Reformed Church and would clear the way for the political unification of Britain.

The Confession

The confession is prefaced and in 25 parts and 14 chapters.

Chapter 1 - God

We confess and acknowledge one God alone, to whom alone we must cleave, whom alone we must serve, whom only we must worship, and in whom alone we put our trust.

More to this sentence than meets the eye. To say "one God alone" reflects the scriptures Deuteronomy 6: 4, and 1 Corinthians 8: 4. Here we see the confession places everything else relative and limited in relation to God, the one and only. No other thing can be called God. In reference to this first statement of the confession Barth said, "Now the knowledge of the one and only God means the limiting of this human self-assertion". 'We acknowledge one and only God' means simply, we men are not gods or merely gods so-called or make believe gods. We are forced to retire within the bounds of our own creatureliness and our own human nature." True knowledge of God cannot be centred in humanity, or be subject to human philosophy and speculation. Knowledge of God can only be revealed and received, not discovered and acquired. Science and philosophy cannot be the measure of truth; they must be subject to the truth of the 'one God' as he reveals himself.

This is 'faith knowledge,' based on a logic submitted to revelation. In this we are not the subject of knowledge, but the object of revelation. Faith knowledge is not merely blind acceptance; on the contrary it is opened-eyed submission to divine logic (like seeing beauty). If we were to try, as Barth would have it, "... to conceive God in our own strength according to



Forgiveness from Christ outweighs indulgences from the Pope (1525)

our conception of personality, we would make an idol out of God. We will avoid this, if in dealing with the question 'Who is God?' we keep to the answer given by God Himself and therefore to God's revelation and thus to the knowledge of faith."

The centre of this faith knowledge is the 'one and only God' who reveals himself as one "in substance and yet distinct in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, by whom we confess and believe all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible to have been created." The significance of God as Trinity of course has implications for how we understand the nature of creation – most particularly the nature of humanity created in the image of God (see chapter 2).

Therefore, it is this one God "we must serve, whom alone we must worship, and in whom alone we must put our trust". This is the only proper outcome to a revelation that places everything in relation to the one and only God.

Chapter 2 - The Creation of Man

We confess and acknowledge that our God has created man, to wit our first father, Adam, after his own image and likeness.

Here we discover afresh the glory of humanity is entirely contingent upon and correlative with God. All of humanity requires all of God. As Irenaeus once wrote, "The glory of God is a man fully alive, and the life of man is to behold God." This statement distinguishes Christian faith from Platonic or Oriental philosophy or religion. Platonic concepts of radical dualism and disengagement from creation are countered by the Christian faith which sees God as distinct from his creation but directly relating to it and most particularly to humanity. An oriental concept of pantheism that collapses the distinction between creation and creator is contradicted with the truth that humanity is given authentic distinct personhood with "wisdom, lordship, justice, free will, and self-consciousness".

The Confession goes on to say, logically, that when men and women chose to live independent of God that they fell into death. Death is more than merely the demise of our physical being of course – it goes to the breakdown in relations between God and humanity, human to human and human to creation. It is a corruption of authentic humanity.

Chapter 3 - Original Sin

By which transgression, generally known as original sin, the image of God was utterly defaced in man, and he and his children became by nature hostile to God, slaves to Satan, and servants to sin.

Again it must be stressed that even in regard to sin, a man or woman cannot define or recognise it without the eye of faith (see John 16:8-12). As Barth says, "The very ordinance, under which he as a man was justified in his human nature, now becomes his judgement". If a just life can only be maintained with utter reliance on and in relation to God, then man is unable to self-justify.

Now humanity is literally at the mercy of God. As the confession has it, "This rebirth is wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit creating in the hearts of God's chosen ones an assured faith in the promise of God revealed to us in his word; by this faith we grasp Christ Jesus with the graces and blessings promised in him". Here we have it clearly put that we must submit to the work of God in Christ. Again in Barth's words, "God's revela-

tion in Jesus Christ tells us this unambiguously – for it consists of God himself undoing and making amends for our being against him and for our sin. If we believe this, it discloses to us the final horror of sin and with it the impossibility of setting ourselves free from it."

Chapters 4 - 7:

4 - The Revelation of the Promise, 5 - The Continuance, Increase, and Preservation of the Kirk, 6 - The Incarnation of Jesus Christ, 7- Why the Mediator Had to Be True God and True Man

We constantly believe that God, after the fearful and horrible departure of man from his obedience, did seek Adam again, call upon him, rebuke and convict him of his sin, and in the end made unto him a most joyful promise.

Chapters 4-7 centre around salvation history and the "promise" ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ. All this history is wrought and sustained by God through the chosen people of the Old Covenant - Israel, and now onward in the chosen people of the New Covenant – the 'Kirk' (i.e. - The Church).

There is in the mind of the authors of the Scots Confession one sustained and predetermined plan of salvation that God would make himself known in Jesus Christ. The history of Israel is the history of the Church.

The ultimate conclusion is carried beautifully in the words of the Seventh Chapter: "We acknowledge and confess that this wonderful union between the God-head and the humanity in Christ Jesus did proceed from the eternal and immutable decree of God from which all our salvation springs and depends".

Chapter 9- Christ's Death, Passion, and Burial and Chapter 10 - The Resurrection

From this we confess and avow that there remains no other sacrifice for sin; if any affirm so, we do not hesitate to say that they are blasphemers against Christ's



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death and the everlasting atonement thereby purchased for us.

The above quote is doubtless informed by Hebrews 10: 26-29. Again we are met with the act of God being the complete work of salvation. God made a decision for us; Christ laid down his life for us, and has served us, loved us, dedicated himself for us and renewed us. Faith does not make these things so, but it does enable us to see and participate in it. This salvation is not merely the forgiveness of sin but the making of a whole new humanity in Christ, more glorious in redemption than innocence.

Chapter 11 - The Ascension

(in reference to the lordship of Christ) To which honors and offices, if man or angel presume to intrude themselves, we utterly detest and abhor them, as blasphemous to our sovereign and supreme Governor, Christ Jesus.

There can be little doubt that the context of strife with the Roman Catholic Church inspired this line and the relatively intricate and detailed treatment of the significance of the ascension – probably well overdue for our current context as well (see 1 Corinthians 3: 11).

Chapter 12 - Faith in the Holy Spirit

This our faith and its assurance do not proceed from flesh and blood, that is to say, from natural powers within us, but are the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; whom we confess to be God, equal with the Father and with his Son, who sanctifies us, and brings us into all truth by his own working, without whom we should remain forever enemies to God and ignorant of his Son, Christ Jesus.

Again, the initiative and the execution of faith are in God. By the Spirit, faith is generated and engendered in the heart of humanity.

Chapter 13 - The Cause of Good Works

The cause of good works, we confess, is not our free will, but the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, who dwells in our hearts by true faith, brings forth such works as God has prepared for us to walk in.

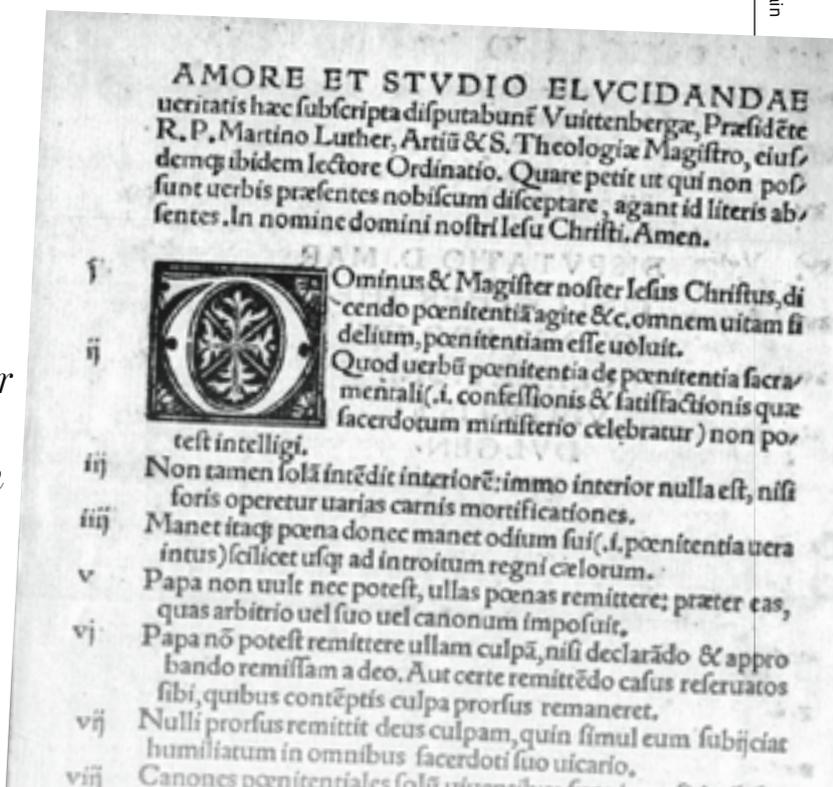
At the risk of becoming repetitive the cause of good works is also the work of God. Goodness on the part of humanity is not the result of self-actualisation nor does it cause sanctification. On the contrary sanctification is the cause of good works. Good works mark the work of the Spirit, but are not the cause of the Spirit's working.

Chapter 14 - The Works Which Are Counted Good Before God

It is not for humanity to describe what is good. Only God has the capacity to say what is good.

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40 Years in Retrospect



There are several possible verdicts on the Uniting Church in Australia as it marks its first forty years. One is that another forty years is unlikely; numbers are falling steadily and worshipers are growing older. But institutions like churches do not slip easily into obscurity. Thankfully, the UCA will not soon disappear.

Another verdict is to celebrate, to take pride in our ecumenical ties, our cultural diversity, indigenous credentials and social justice record, our helping agencies that extend nationwide, though new marketing labels conceal their Christian derivation. But celebration suggests a lack of candour.

Preliminary census figures for 2016, published in June, show that 3.7 per cent of respondents listed the Uniting Church as their religious affiliation. The number of individuals, 870,000, is 195,611 fewer than at the 2011 census and for the first time since 1977 stands below one million. The facts suggest our joy should not be unconfined.

South Australian Moderator, Rev. Sue Ellis, rightly explained that the census reflects ongoing general decline in church attendance by Australians, but this does not “take into account the breadth of spirituality still present in Australia.” She noted that “within the Uniting Church there are growing faith communities and alternative styles of worship emerging”.

True, numbers are not the whole story. The UCA’s purpose is not to be bigger but to embody a message. Strangely, the celebratory guidelines said little on that subject. More honestly, the 40th birthday should have included a lamentation; a form of confession. The church born on June 22, 1977 died the next day, because it assumed an identity unrelated to the promise of pre-union rhetoric.

At the risk of simplification, the theologians steered the ship of union into harbour and handed it over to the politicians, who exchanged the Bible for the secular society’s manual of management. Is it better to build a new church by enlisting bureaucrats versed in the disciplines of management, than depend on Scripture and Christianity’s historic ethos?

So the new church embraced winds of social change that stirred in the 60s and brought the moral revolution of the 70s. Nothing that has happened since has troubled its conscience.

In the 70s, the uniting denominations offered no response to the new era of easy divorce, which had deep and lasting consequences for the nation. Three decades later the UCA had surrendered any defence against the tsunami of sexual anarchy, and all credibility in the face of gender fluidity and the state-condoned child abuse of compulsory Safe Schools programs.

Remorselessly the church defends abortion but treats marriage as a quirk of personal opinion. With boundless compassion it embraces the canard of ‘equal marriage’ and the sovereignty of self-directed romanticised love.

If a Christian denomination had set out to conduct an experiment in theological sophistry, to test the credulity of the public and the patient gullibility of the faithful, it could have done no better than create the Uniting Church.

Leaders are neither perverse nor ignorant. But many bureaucrats and parish clergy have lost both their nerve and their faith in the Biblical Word; they huddle out of public sight or applaud the insane illusions of ‘new world order’ theorists hailing the hegemony of Humanity.

The UCA lost its faith in a desperate early struggle for relevance, which moved its solemn assemblies to endorse the stratagems of progressive activists bent on ruining historic traditions in favour of lethal programs of social fairness and equality.

The UCA’s biggest error was to appeal to disaffected religion-less secularists, who might warm to a gospel of indiscriminating divine love, easy conscience, ready forgiveness, moral relativity, and the dubious distinction of being all-inclusive. They did not. Yet we brandish non-discrimination as a badge of honour to become a church that, like so many others, stands increasingly for less and less.

Of all the UCA’s errors, though, the worst is its redefinition of the gospel. Without any message of judgment or personal responsibility (except to the poor and marginalised; society; not individuals, is to be blamed for every ill) the Uniting Church is an exemplar of value-free religiosity where “every man does what is right in his own eyes” and the house of faith, vacated of holiness, echoes with spiritual pride and moral vanity.

Forty years on there is no cause for celebration. Only a chorus of *mea culpa* will do.

Rev. Warren Clarnette was the editor of Church and Nation (Victorian Synod) from the start of the Uniting Church to 1987, and helped establish ACCatalyst in 2007.

The Heidelberg Catechism

The Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 is one of the documents that the Uniting Church's Basis of Union nominates as part of the legacy the Church inherits from the Reformers. This Catechism and the other documents it nominates, serve to help us "to know or be reminded of the grace which justifies Christ's people through faith, of the centrality of the person and work of Christ the justifier, and of the need for a constant appeal to Holy Scripture."

Three truths particularly are focused on:

- 1 *God in grace justifies Christ's people through faith;*
- 2 *The person and work of Jesus as justifier, in his incarnation, suffering, death and resurrection, is central to grace; and*
- 3 *These teachings must be grounded in Holy Scripture—they cannot simply be the creation of our own thinking, imagination or feeling.*

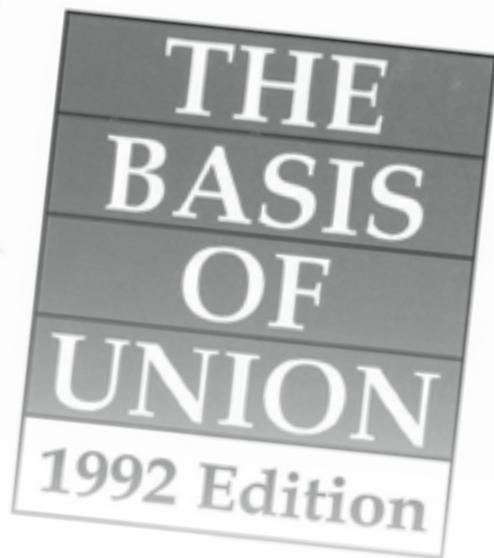
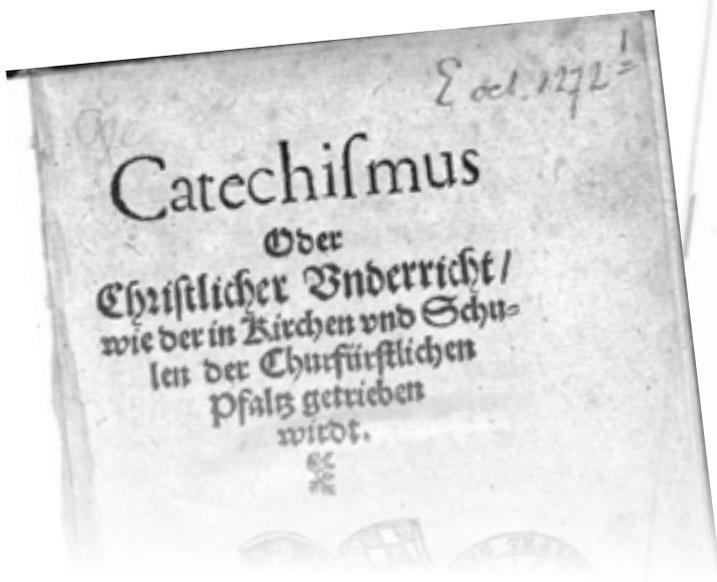
A catechism is a form of teaching intended to ground new believers in the essentials of Christian faith. J. I. Packer describes its purpose as: **"...the growing of God's people in the gospel, and its implications for doctrine, devotion, duty and delight".**

Catechisms were used extensively in the early church, from about the 2nd to the 5th centuries AD. Many people were becoming Christians out of radically different world-views, and *catechesis* was a way of helping them to process this life-revolution carefully, prayerfully, and intentionally with thorough understanding. With the acceptance and absorption of the church into the social structures of the day, the radicalness of the gospel, the utter *difference* of the kingdom of God was lost in the Church's thinking and the use of catechisms dropped off for about 1000 years... until the time of the Reformation, when the radical gospel of justification by grace, through faith in Christ alone, discovered through a renewal of Biblical studies, shook things up. The need to explain the gospel clearly against the backdrop of a radically different understanding led to the revitalising of the Church's catechetical ministry. Martin Luther wrote two catechisms— a short one and a long one, and instituted the particular ministry of catechist in the church. John Calvin thought catechesis essential to the church; he wrote to the Lord Protector of England, "Believe me, Monseigneur, the Church of God will never be preserved without catechesis."

In our own age, there is a new movement in writing catechisms. Tim Keller has recently published one. This is something for which, I think, we should give thanks to God. We have become aware again that the gospel is *never* at home in the world, and that we, in belonging to Christ, face an environment that is hostile. At times that hostility is covert, but at times it is overt—perhaps we are entering such a time again in the Western world now. Our foolishness has been to mistake covert hostility as harmless. The real danger then is that we start to mistake the surrounding culture and worldview for a Gospel culture and worldview, and forget that the gospel is always alien in our world; "For my thoughts are not your thoughts", says the LORD (Is 55: 8). Perhaps strong catechesis in times of *peace* would be a good measure!

One feature of Reformation churches was catechetical preaching at Sunday afternoon services, over the course of a year. It was this procedure that led to the particular structure of the Heidelberg Catechism. Written by the faculty of the University of Heidelberg in Germany, led by Zacharius Ursinus, under the direction of the Prince Elector, Frederick III, the final form of the catechism is a series of 129 questions and answers, arranged into 52 blocks, called "Lord's Days". The intention was that each of these blocks would provide the content for the Sunday preaching at the afternoon service over the course of a year.

The catechism worked by means of a series of 129 ques-



tions and answers, each with supporting Scripture for the source of the answer. The answers were to be learned by rote by the catechumens, but also to be meditated on and preached on in more depth. “Doctrine, devotion, duty and delight”—these implications of the gospel provide the content of the Heidelberg Catechism. The first Lord’s Day sets out the purpose of the whole project, and then the remaining Lord’s Days were set out in three large blocks. LDs 2-4 deal with the misery of humanity; LDs 5-31 with the deliverance of humanity from our misery; and LDs 32-52 with the gratitude due from humanity for such a gracious deliverance.

The Basis of Union urges us (especially our pastors and ministers) to give attention to the Catechism for three reasons—to be reminded of the truth of justification by grace through faith; to know afresh the centrality of Jesus Christ in his person and work as the Justifier, and to be reminded of the need for a constant appeal to Scripture. The Catechism does all this.

It is solidly grounded in Scripture; no statement is made without an appeal to Scripture to support it. The Catechism is a testament that the gospel and Christian life are not matters for our own devising. God has spoken in His Son, and the Scriptures as a whole are a testimony to that revelation. The Catechism, with its rote learning of answers, really stands against our age, where feelings and personal opinions are seen as ultimately authoritative for a person. Nowhere in the Catechism is an answer prefaced with *I like to think of God as—*.

Reading the Catechism, a reader today may be struck with the very strong tone of the document. Matters of sin, depravity, judgment, and others are spoken of directly and without apology—in the way that the Scriptures do, e.g. Q8: But are we so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined toward all evil? *A. Yes, unless we are born again by the Spirit of God.* The Catechism emphasises very clearly that without an understanding of our *sin and misery*, the greatness of the Gospel will be underestimated. It is not *overly focused* on this truth (it is covered in LDs 2-4), but it understands this truth to be foundational.

The whole thrust of the Catechism is to know the comfort of the gospel in life and in death. This is true comfort, to know (Q1) that I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salva-

tion. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

The second, and largest section of the Catechism deals with the action of God in Jesus Christ to deliver us from our sin and misery. This section focuses firstly on the need for a mediator, one who is both human and divine to deliver us from the judgment of God and to restore us to His favour. This Saviour is Jesus Christ—and his saving work is enjoyed by those who have a true faith in him. A true faith (Q21) is not only a sure knowledge and assent to the Scriptures, but also a wholehearted, personal trust, created by the Holy Spirit through the message of the gospel, that God, for the sake of Jesus Christ, has forgiven my sins, declared me righteous eternally, and saved me.

The Apostles Creed is given as a summary of all that the gospel teaches (Q22-58), all the way through asking repeatedly: *“How does this benefit you? How does this comfort you?”* After setting this all out, Q59 asks, *“What good does it do you, however, to believe all this?”* The answer. *“In Christ I am righteous before God and heir to life everlasting.”* That is, the Apostles Creed is primarily seen as a summary of the radical gospel that brings the righteousness of faith. Against all the accusations of my conscience (Q60) as it remembers my many sins and my still being inclined toward evil, nevertheless, *“without any merit of my own, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect righteousness and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me.”*

There are some today who criticise this kind of thinking as being morbidly introspective, and as being irrelevant in an age which is not so much a *guilt culture* as a *shame culture*. Such a criticism presumes that the need for today is not so much a focus on justification as on acceptance (by self and by others.) Such thinking fails to see the deep connection between guilt and shame that the Scriptures portray. The shame of humanity at the end of Genesis 3 is real, but it issues from the reality of guilt, of a change in the relationship between God and humanity that our disobedience caused. The Scriptures allow no possibility of the end of shame without a person dealing with the deeper problem of sin and guilt. And the glory of it all is that this is what the gospel tells us—what we have no possibility of doing ourselves, God has done freely in grace for us in His Son.

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Genes Re-Uniting

The DNA of the UCA

Peter Bentley was not the only person to consider the 'DNA of the UCA' during this 40th anniversary year. UCA theologian Dr John Squires provided a list of ten characteristics that are highlighted in this edition (his full paper is available by download through the link in the article below).

Emeritus Professor Brian Hill offered the paper Genes Re-Uniting (first posted on the Revive website (WA UCA Synod) on 5 July 2017) as an open response to Dr Squires, but it also provides significant comment and reflection, and ACCatalyst is including to continue the wider discussion that is occurring.

I am grateful to Rev. Dr Squires for his paper on the DNA of the Uniting Church in Australia, which he presented locally and at Assembly level (available at <https://assembly.uca.org.au/news/item/2611-the-dna-of-the-uca>). It helpfully identifies ten characteristics of the UCA which I warmly endorse. They are some

of the reasons why my wife and I, despite many moments of disillusionment with the path taken since 1977 by the UCA, nationally and at state level, have maintained our membership of this faltering denomination throughout the past 40 years.

Dr Squires' paper also invites comment from his readers about his proposed list of key characteristics. I believe that identifying these particular characteristics – or genes, to maintain the metaphor – is a necessary, but not sufficient, clarification of the denomination's DNA.

Despite a few unexpanded mentions of 'God', 'the Spirit', and 'Christ crucified' in the paper, it would be hard to deduce from this evidence alone that our denomination stands for much more than an ethical humanism shakily sustained by the unbounded slogan of 'inclusion'. The list doesn't yet identify as part of our DNA those ultimate beliefs about God which empower the ethic: his nature and his self-revelation in Jesus as reliably reported in the Bible; and his expectations of the species he has made in his image.

I'm not trying to be a nit-picker. But the key reality test for the UCA is: what ultimate truth-claims constitute its DNA? What distinguishes the UCA from organisations in the

secular domain? What bonds the ten (or more) strands together, to create the UCA genome? Assuming that the Basis of Union is still the definer of the UCA's foundation beliefs, more genes need to be identified.

Though the word 'Bible' does not appear in Dr Squires' paper, it would be wrong to assume that he does not respect its significance would be unwarranted. After all, he appeals to the Basis of Union for validation of four of his ten characteristics, and that Basis emphasises that the UCA hears the Word of God through the Scriptures, and validates other beliefs by them (see <https://assembly.uca.org.au/basis-of-union#witness>).

On the other hand, in characteristic 7, Dr Squires quotes the need identified in the Basis to learn from 'contemporary scientific and historical studies' in dealing with contentious issues. Yes indeed, but the problem is that often many people appeal to such sources precisely to override the core testimony of Scripture.

Biblically and historically, what bonds the genes of the Christian DNA together is the central affirmation of 'Christ crucified and risen' – primary proof of a God who acts within as well as outside his creation.

Some theologians have bowed to

Saving Oneself for Oneself?

You may have prayed about it, but have you really thought about The Kingdom of God? The Kingdom of God is mentioned (mostly in the context of parables), in all three synoptic Gospels, although it's referred to as the Kingdom of Heaven in the very Jewish Gospel of Matthew.

But what is the Kingdom of God (Heaven)?

1 Some look at the Kingdom simply as a destination - our eternal reward after this life, highlighting for example when Jesus said to his disciples: "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." (Matt 19:23-24). From the context earlier in the chapter, it seems that eternal life and the Kingdom are being equated.

2 Some see the Kingdom as result of Jesus' rescue, citing for example, "For he (Jesus) has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us

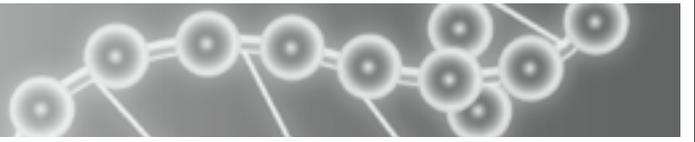
into the kingdom of the Son he loves." (Col 1:13).

These two views kind of add up to 'apple pie, by and by, when we die'.

3 For yet others the Kingdom of God is the Kingly rule of God now, citing the prayer Jesus taught: "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Matt 6:10).

This view kind of says: 'apple pie, on the table, while we're able.'

I understand that the Kingdom of God is both Now and Not Yet. We who are alive now on Planet Earth are living in the 'in-between time'. The paradox is that the Kingdom of God is all three at the same time: a re-



styles of biblical scholarship whose research assumptions discount in advance the historical truth-claim of the physical resurrection of Christ, and all that flows from it. But this key belief is what validates our confidence in the actual existence of the unseen God, and the reality of our personal interactions with his Holy Spirit; and it is also what motivates truly Christian worship and service. A few honorable mentions of 'God' are simply not enough to map the UCA genome.

Meanwhile, over the 40 years there have been some potentially lethal mutations in the genome, resulting in the formation of worldviews even within our ranks which dismiss this key belief on pseudo-scientific grounds, and leave us with purportedly 'progressive' beliefs which deprive faith of power and evangelism of its imperative. I mean no disrespect to those sincere people who have chosen to reshape the New Testament Gospel in this way, but shouldn't they in all honesty relinquish the use of the adjective 'Christian' to describe their revisionist faiths?

Considering the faith traditions of the three denominations that merged in 1977 to become the UCA, it is sad to see the historic biblical faith eroded in this way. Something is not

right. Certainly genes 2 and 3 in Dr Squires' list, for example, rightly celebrate greater recognition of the gifts of the laity, and of women in particular, but such gains cannot disguise the diminishing number of candidates coming forward for ordination, and the general ageing and numerical shrinkage of congregations. Let's have all the facts on the table.

Such factors were among those considered in the research on plausible future scenarios for the UCA undertaken by Dr Keith Suter [see the June 2017 ACCatalyst for an update on the work by Dr Keith Suter]. Several attempts have been made since then to persuade our denominational councils to take his analysis seriously, particularly at this time of review.

But the evidence is that Dr Suter's research has been deliberately ignored or discounted. One church leader said, "We didn't commission it, so we don't need to consider it." But I have supervised and examined enough doctoral theses over the last 40 years to be able to tell that Suter's research is far from lightweight. And some of his findings are very sobering.

A possible response to the misgivings I've expressed above would be to say, "This is not a time to be negative – let's focus on the positives." Yes in-

deed, but not to ignore the negatives – whether statistical, theological, or administrative – which presently threaten to break down the UCA genome. To ignore them would be to undermine the service we all hope our denomination will continue to render to society.

There are, of course, many organisations other than the UCA that exhibit moral responsibility, compassion, and concern for the environment. If the recent Australian census is to be believed, many Australians regard Christian truth-claims merely as heart-warming spiritual myths without scientific support, and have concluded that the good life can be lived without reference to religion.

I pray that the helpful start which Dr Squires and others have made in prompting us to identify the DNA of the UCA, will be followed up by further probing enquiry into who we are and what is the Good News which Christ our Lord has commissioned us to bring to a fractured society and groaning world.

Emeritus Professor Brian V. Hill is an ACC member in Perth and has been actively involved in the UCA network for evangelicals in WA: PNEUMA

warding destination, the result of Christ's salvific act of rescue, and living under the kingly rule of God now and forever. Let us examine each one as motivations to come into the Kingdom:

a) If we desire the Kingdom primarily because of its eternal reward factor, I would humbly suggest that God is not king for us, rather we are the king. Jesus never said, become a Christian, he said 'Follow me', over and over again. Are we prepared to follow Christ truly and say as St Paul said to the Philippian church:

"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (3:10).

b) If our desire is primarily to be saved (rescued), I also wonder if God is king for us. After all, if we are looking to be able to say 'I'm saved (but you're not)' or if we're preoccupied about whether we or others are 'in' or 'out', we are preoccupied with self. In his letter to the Galatians, St Paul lists "selfish ambition" amongst the character traits that mark those for "not inherit(ing) the kingdom of God." (5:21).

c) Am I saying that it is wrong to desire salvation or eternal life? No, not at all. But I am saying that these must not be our primary focus. Our primary focus must be repentance – recognising that God is God and I'm not! Our coming to God must be based chiefly on our removing the crown from our own brow in honour of the King of King's. As C.S. Lewis puts it: "Repentance is not something God demands of you before He will take you back and which He could let you off if He chose; it is simply a description of what going back is like." (Ch 9, Mere Christianity).

It seems to me that those within the 'evangelical' tradition who have been trying to make disciples by enticing people by the promise of an eternal reward (or worse scaring them away from an eternal punishment), may gain consumers for the religious product they are selling, but are unlikely to end up with people who follow Jesus Christ. They may be IN the Kingdom of God, but I'm not sure that they even notice that there is a Kingdom of God.

Dr David Pohlmann is the Pastor of Mount Louisa House of Praise.

Politics in the Churches

Peter
Chapman

ACC NSW Chair



*Did you hear Rev Peter Chapman on **God Forbid**, the new ABC Sunday Night religion program on Sunday 14th May 2017. Peter was interviewed along with Father Rod Bower (from Gosford Anglican Church) and there were several references to the ACC.*

*The context was **'Politics in the churches'** and the program blurb asked: *Should religions be politically engaged? What does it mean to be progressive? Or conservative?**



You can listen on <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/godforbid/2017-05-14/8520580>

*Peter Chapman was introduced to **God Forbid** through providing his opinion on clergy expressing political views on social media on **'Voice in the Wilderness'** (the **God Forbid** version of a soap-box spot) on Sunday 19th February 2017. The transcript for this spot is below:*

Have you noticed how unhinged some clergy get online when it comes to politics? Have you noticed how blatantly biased and partisan some of their comments are? Have you noticed how Facebook has become a giant bully pulpit for sanctimonious religious types?

I'm Peter Chapman. I'm the minister at Gerringong Uniting Church on the New South Wales south coast.

A key part of a gig like mine is being able to efficiently communicate with those peculiar creatures we call human beings. They're a tad strange at times, but more about that another time...

Communicating and generally networking are huge parts of my calling. Trying to pin down time-poor 21st century Aussies in an effort to try to encourage them in their faith, wherever they may be on their journey, can be difficult these days. And frankly, I need all the help I can get!

So, like many ministers these days, I find social media to be a very helpful tool in communicating with both my local flock and the world at large. I find Facebook in particular to be a very powerful medium in helping me to reach large numbers of people both nearby and far away, in a convenient and unobtrusive way.

Like any tool, it can of course be abused, but I've found that if you apply some common sense and Christ-like humility, you can use a social media presence as a force for good both locally and globally.

When you realise that Facebook, if it were a country, would now be the most populous nation on earth, it's easy to understand that Mark Zuckerberg's flirty little dormitory experiment has now become, in effect, the world's greatest pulpit! Everyone, even the little guys, like you and me, now have access to the megaphone that is social media. In fact, it's more like a megaphone in front of a microphone connected to a PA that's plugged into just about every sound system, boom-box, Sony Walkman, iThing, and good-old-fashioned wireless in the Western world!

And that raises some issues, hey?

One of which is an ugly phenomenon that's been around for while, but which has been getting uglier and uglier of late - that of my fellow clergy using the social media megaphone to peddle their partisan political views.

Now don't get me wrong, we are all entitled to our political points of view - ministers are citizens too you know! And the gospel is indeed inherently political (at least when you do it right), but when clergy go from simply speaking into their social and political context, into being blatantly and openly partisan, well, that's a problem. When ministers or priests, or rabbis or imams (or whatever it is you call your local professional God-botherer) start hiding behind their faith in order to prosecute a particular party line, well, I'm afraid they've crossed the line, and I'm calling a shenanigans on it!

Many of these guys aren't just 'Facebook friends' - I'm talking genuine, dinky-di real-life mates! I do life with

these guys, and I know them to be clever and discerning and considerate men and women who were brought up knowing it's not helpful to spend much time and energy talking party politics.

But get them online, and they go off the reservation! They lose their inhibitions and turn into rabid political animals, mercilessly and irrationally bagging public figures not to their liking to whom they clearly feel superior, and whom they clearly feel deserve a darn good dressing-down. And here's the real kicker: all the while they're using their faith to do so!

And I must say I've noticed the lefties being far more vindictive and, ironically, intolerant than the conservatives. They hide behind terms like 'social-justice' as they cynically sink the boot in. They fly the flag of 'Christian compassion' as they form one sanctimonious online lynch-mob after another targeting those whom they perceive to not be as 'caring' or 'tolerant' as themselves.

And if you disagree, well, they'll diagnose you with some sort of phobia!

It's been happening for a while, but ever since it became apparent that Donald Trump wasn't going to go away as they clearly thought he should, the sanctimony has been dialled up to 11! And it's been one giant, extended, un-

hinged, online hissy fit ever since his win. It's a disgrace.

OK, so you think Trump's recent attempted travel ban on people from seven Muslim-majority countries is frightfully evil and discriminatory. That's fine; you're entitled to your opinion. Trouble is, I don't recall seeing your outrage directed at those 16 Muslim nations that have banned Israelis from entering their borders for several years now. Your hypocrisy is, well, breathtaking. It's hard to take such confected outrage seriously.

So c'mon lads, stop tarting up your political preferences as good theology. Stop masquerading your social agenda as an unquestionable pillar of faith. Stop hiding behind your religious convictions to prosecute the latest trendy cause of the day. I know it'll score you some brownie points with your like-minded mates over your next chai latte, but for those of us called to serve the church universal that spans the political spectrum, it's just unbecoming and ultimately unhelpful in the cause of Christ.

Apart from anything else - haven't you got anything better to do than post online comments about another nation's free and open elections? If not, go get a real job!

Rev Peter Chapman is the Chair of the NSWACC Movement



You can listen:

*[www.abc.net.au/
radionational/pro-
grams/godforbid/
2017-05-14/8520580](http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/godforbid/2017-05-14/8520580)*



Images: Pexels

Retrospective

Peter Bentley

ACC National Director



I was able to attend one of the major events for the Uniting Church's 40th Anniversary: the 40th Anniversary History Conference held at Pilgrim Uniting Church in Adelaide in June. While it was not a large gathering, there were many past and present leaders of the Uniting Church, especially for the Q & A Forum 'The Church in the Public Square', and the launch of the National Historical Society.

It was helpful to be there for the major addresses, especially to record the mention that ACC received in the opening keynote address by historian Renate Howe.

In a wide-ranging overview, Renate referred to the 'problem of the growth of the ACC', and commented on the ACC being 'aggressive' in attack, which she then qualified as 'criticism of the UCA'. She contrasted this with the 'other end' - the progressive Christians: a very open and inclusive group who see more value in questioning, though there seemed to be some question about all the questioning as well. Certainly many questions were raised during this time, including concern about the quality of UCA worship today and how the gospel was seen in the church. Renate suggested that there were no prominent theological leaders now, compared to the early period (and especially the period of the union negotiations with leading scholars, Davis McCaughey, George Yule and Colin Williams, among many). There seemed to be an idea that the theological deficit today made it difficult to develop a theological vision. She also reviewed the change in the involvement of women from union to today and commented on the development of the bureaucratic nature of the UCA today and issues of governance, highlighting the 'fire sale' in Victoria that had taken place without local cooperation, and also the development of a bureaucracy base in social and community service that was focussed on administration rather than witness.

In his address, Dr Glen O'Brien reflected on 'What John Wesley might say to the Uniting Church?' Glen

offered many thoughts including the need to 'plunder the Egyptians'; reading and understanding the culture widely and making use of what we can. He also argued that while many have rejected the older models of evangelism (context of hellfire), they have not found a new model, and yet like Wesley we need to offer Christ anew - the words of acceptance and assurance. He also affirmed a love for the church and while there are flaws, encouraged us to continue to minister as Wesley did in his day.

Rev. Dr D'Arcy Wood provided an overview of the Basis of Union and its theological development, commenting on the difficulties with episcopal theology and opposition of some Presbyterians. It would certainly have been a different church if the Anglican connection had been developed. He also considered the different texts leading to the authority of the 1971 Basis of Union.

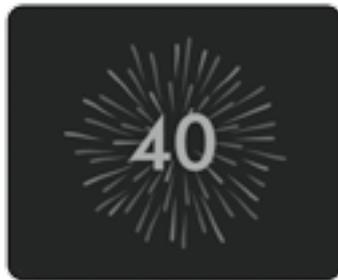
Historian and also a UC minister in Queensland, Rev. Dr Julia Pitman presented a tour de force critique of many aspects of the church, stating we needed to own our own mistakes. Areas highlighted including theological training, the collapse in presbytery care, lowering of standards for committees (often wrong people in positions), mishandling of the sexuality debate, the placement system and the unreality of profiles of congregations and the decreased ecumenical context.

One very apt pointer was provided by Julia as she noted that the denomination as a whole has not set aside historians to provide reflection and help with contemporary debate and suggested that the UCA had survived despite itself. She concluded by stating that we just cannot look back and say it was lovely in 1977, but also we should not simply say we are just going to die.

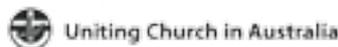
In another seminar, long-standing UC activist Warren Talbot provided another paper on the UC and LGBTIQ members, and in response to a question indicated his view and hope for the future that the position for LGBTIQ members will be a 'gold standard', just like that for women ministers.

Another Uniting time

I attended the Sydney Uniting (formerly UnitingCare) Future Horizons forum on June 24th. This is Uniting's (NSW & the ACT) strategy project designed to "determine, in light of God's Mission, what and where our work should be into the future". Presbyteries, congregation members and other Uniting Church stakeholders were invited to



All of this is us



Burning or Bushed?



**Burning Or Bushed?
The Presbyterian
Church of Australia
40 Years On**
Edited by Paul F. Cooper
& David A. Burke (2017)
Eider Books
PO Box 878
Stanhope Gardens 2768

Two churches were celebrating on 22 June 2017 – the Uniting Church was celebrating its 40th birthday, and the Presbyterian Church was celebrating the 40th anniversary of its rebirth.

Burning Or Bushed, with a nod to the Burning Bush (for long a symbol of Presbyterian Churches worldwide) brings together a number of essays by various ministers and elders involved in overseeing the rebuilding operation, in many cases starting from scratch. Those who were committed to Church Union had been given to declaring that Church Union was the will of God, while those who were continuing at first refuted that assertion. Forty years on, both can agree. Church Union was the will of God for both groups, the one to move on freed from past shackles, the other to go forward backwards – always reforming according to the Word of God.

May God bless us all.

Rev Bob Thomas is a Presbyterian Minister and editor of New Life Christian Magazine (available as on-line publication: <http://www.nlife.com.au/>). This review first appeared in New Life: 15 July 2017 Vol 80 No 2

Retrospective (cont...)

participate through a survey, and also forums. Firstly, I want to commend **Uniting** for organising these times and for the effort of the **Uniting** staff and members. I thought they provided a helpful day for feedback, and it was disappointing that so few people attended the Sydney forum (though there were 5 other regional forums). It was very evident that a key question for **Uniting** is related to the current disconnection of many congregations with **Unit-**



ing. This of course has arisen over the years of increased bureaucratisation and centralisation of church services, and **Uniting** is hoping to develop better connections again.

It was interesting to learn of another significant disconnection, namely that of the placement of resources and areas of contemporary need, especially in Sydney. A question was raised as to whether congregations in more advantaged areas (where

most UC congregations presently are) might support a re-direction of resources to more disadvantaged areas? Would this create new opportunities for the Church?

One intriguing aspect in the 13 minute video introduction (note: *Future Horizons* is available on the Uniting website) was the inclusion of the historical example of a local UC, Gerringong, and their development of a ministry in aged care. This local service and connection is continuing in Gerringong UCA today with a wide range of activities supported by a thriving local congregation under the leadership of ACC NSW Chair, Rev. Peter Chapman.

The DNA of the UCA

*Rev Dr John Squires
(Director of Education and Formation,
WA Synod)*

For reference - his ten strands forming the essential DNA of the UCA distributed to the May 2017 WA Presbytery meeting)

- 
 a church which is committed to working ecumenically with other Christian denominations.
- 
 a church which values the ministry of all the people of God
- 
 a church which is committed to equality and mutuality of women and men in ministry.
- 
 a church in Covenant with the First Peoples of Australia.
- 
 a multicultural church, which rejoices in the diversity of cultures and languages
- 
 a church which is prepared to engage in difficult discussions about contentious issues.
- 
 a strong commitment to advocating for justice for all.
- 
 a church which honours the environment and supports a sustainable lifestyle.
- 
 the importance, when we gather in council, of seeking to discern the will of God.
- 
 a firm commitment to strong professional standards,

The Importance

Sometimes we have thought big is better while in God's economy, small has often been beautiful. The small group could be said to be a primary expression of church. This article will help you reflect on the place of the small group in the life of your church and the priority it is given.

Through various periods, especially the 1970's, the Small Group and House Church movements made their impact and contribution to the overall life of the church. For the Christian community however the existence and importance of meeting in the small group format will never be just another passing phase. Some leaders would venture to say the small group, rather than the large cathedral is church. That is, the small group/ house church is the grass roots community, the primary form of church.

J.V. Taylor has said, "The essential unit in which the church exists must be small enough to enable all its members to find each other in mutual awareness, yet large enough for them to be an embodiment of the life of the Kingdom, which is a life of restored human-ness in action."

From the beginning the early Christians met in homes. In 1 Corinthians 16:19, Philemon 1-2, and Romans 16:3-5 we read of churches in homes that were known by the names of the householder. The New Testament provides an insight into worship and fellowship happening in intimate gatherings in which members knew each other like members of a family. In 1 Corinthians 14:26ff and Ephesians 5: 18-20 we find a style of worship where all were expected to creatively participate. In 1 Corinthians 12:26 the relationships between members suggests that they know each other personally.

It was not until the end of the third century that churches began to meet in specific church buildings.

It was in meeting together to 'break-bread,' Acts 2:46, 20:7 that a continuing sense of what Jesus, the Spirit-filled Messiah, had done when he met with tax collectors and Pharisees was maintained.

Many social indicators today point to a breakdown of community. Today the focus on individual freedom means the glue of society has dissolved. Often the church has become enculturated in a form that lacks vital community. An approach to small groups needs to be incorporated into being an essential part of every church programme.

Rev Deane Meatheringham points to two dangers that may need attention.

1 "Some people who resort to the house church/ small group have a problem with authority. This issue can make the small group an enclave of like-minded rebels. "Wanting to do it my way" is often anti-governing leadership. The matter of authority is

an integral aspect of all human relationships including large and small groups

2 The second danger is that we will view the house church/ small group as the last means (method) to halt the demise of the church. Sadly the church has hoped in means and methods for too long. We are always prone to play the Holy Spirit instead of obeying Him." "Have realistic expectations. Don't make large numbers a priority."

First priority

The small Friendship group needs to be seen as the primary experience of faith, nurture and care by the whole congregation, not separate from it. Every person needs to be invited and expected to join a small group.

Belonging

Rather than just attending a discussion or study group, the real value and sense of 'belonging' is important. This small group is where people are noticed; it's where they belong to one another, fit in and can feel accepted.

Pastoral Care

This process does not eliminate the special oversight of the Minister or Elder. Care and comfort will also be expressed corporately by studying and praying together on a regular basis.

Order and Variety

Groups vary in style but common ingredients are important. Singing, roll call, outreach, testimony, mission projects, (eg Letters to prisoners,) barbeque or pizza meal, video and visiting speaker can all be part of the mix. They can be ways of avoiding stagnation and encouraging an outward, rather than self-focused vision.

Leadership

Each group needs a mature person recognised and authorised by the Congregation to provide direction. This person needs to discern, listen, delegate, offer Biblical insight and lead in prayer. An assistant understudy person may prove helpful.

of Small Groups

Good Questions to discuss:

In what way is your church ministering to people's sense of alienation, helping people feel that they belong? How is it building real community? Would a small group based on a sub-culture in your community be an affective outreach? John Stott has said, "The more mixed the congregation is, especially in class and colour, the greater its opportunity to demonstrate the power of Christ." How can small groups avoid being divisive, homogeneous power groups within a larger church?

Function Well

People come with different personalities. Helping the group to learn how to function is often overlooked. Developing an awareness of the group-dynamic involves educating every participant. Run through the following points with the group once a month as part of an

approach to learning together. This process can help draw-out quiet people and reign in the 'talkers'.

SHY? You are important to this group. Try to participate by saying how you feel.

TALKATIVE? Give attention to others. Encourage them to respond by asking simple questions.

LISTEN! Not just to words. Listen to the feelings behind people's words.

THOUGHTS! Please share yours. Be careful not to ignore God's.

DIRECTION. Help by keeping to the point. Dig into the meaning. Be ready to receive from the leader.

*Rev E.A. (Ted) Curnow is a Victorian ACC member.
www.tedcurnow.wordpress.com*



Really Connecting

Bella Easterbrook

ACC Member



As I walk through Liverpool Station, there's always at least one person trying to hand out a leaflet or entice me to sign up for their cause. Most of the time I don't take whatever they're handing out. But on the occasions when I do, I find them advertising a range of things – new restaurants, beauty salons and spiritual teachers of various persuasions. From time to time, I even come across some Christians handing out gospel tracts or invitations to church.

God can certainly use this method of reaching out. Throughout the years, gospel tracts have proved to be valuable in informing and challenging people on the Christian faith. However, I wonder if the era we live in now requires a slightly different approach. We now have constant access to information, often more than we are able to process. Those leaflets that are handed out at the station add just one more thing to the pile, and are often glanced at once and thrown away. If Christian evangelism stops at this, our message of hope may more often than not end up in the bin.

As a society, we have no shortage of information. It seems, though, that even as we're connected online to more people than ever, many of us are starved for relationship. People are longing for genuine connection with people who care and are committed to sharing life with them. This is where the church can step in to show how Jesus meets this

need. Amidst the mass of leaflets and brochures, I saw two Christians standing in the busiest part of Liverpool. They offered tea, coffee and a chat to anyone who was interested. They were ready to talk about Jesus if the right opportunity arose, but their first goal was to reach out and connect with those around them.

My husband and I have recently started attending a new church, an Anglican Church plant in a newly-developed suburb of south-west Sydney. Leaflets and Facebook ads have played their part in bringing new people (we first heard about it through Facebook). The greatest potential for growth, though, comes from their focus on intentionally developing relationships within the community and strengthening relationships that already exist with non-churched people.

The people handing out leaflets at the station may care about their business or product, or they may simply be doing it for the money. But as Christians, our motivation for outreach, whether it be through gospel tracts or relational evangelism, must be genuine care for the people we encounter. In authentic Christianity, the proclamation of truth has always

been closely connected to relationship. For our busy, disconnected society, this approach seems to be more important than ever.



Images: Lightstock

REFLECTION

Genesis 11:4

Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves."

The most common reason people want to make a name for themselves is that they are insecure. They try to create their identity by building some sort of 'tower' that reaches the sky. To try to stand out from the crowd, to be distinctive, better prettier, closer to God, stronger, smarter, funnier, healthier, or to have that one thing that they can parade before others that will make them feel like they're worth something.

Ultimately, these towers are constructed in vain as the

security of our being - our identity - is not created by us; it is given by the Father.

Our sin is the thing that had confused our identity because, as we have rejected God, we have rejected the one whose image we were created in. So we don't know who we are and therefore we need to build these towers.

What a relief to find that even when we rejected God, He still loved us and sent His Son to deal with our sin and restore us to the image of God. By faith in Jesus, we can now know who we are: sons and daughters of God. He has smashed down our pathetic towers by the cross and restored us to true fullness in Christ.

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



THIS IS THE ACC

Featured resource: More on...

A Christian Response to Euthanasia

Our Theology and Ecumenical Relationships Commission convenor Rev Dr Max Champion is presenting a special update and overview on euthanasia at a seminar at the 2017 ACC Conference on Tuesday 12 September. This will be a timely presentation given the continued focus at state parliamentary levels on bills try to legalise euthanasia, especially in Victoria. If you would like further information download the ACC's information booklet 'A Christian Response to Euthanasia and Medically Assisted Suicide'.

This has been very well-received and provides helpful and accessible material for people to use when discussing with others or writing a letter to your MP.

 <http://www.confessingcongregations.com/national/item/a-christian-response-to-euthanasia/>



What happens next

- September 11-13:
ACC National Conference,
Mount Louisa House of
Praise, Townsville



Mount Louisa House of Praise

For ACC resources see the website: this includes every edition of the **ACCatalyst Magazine**

(available to download as a PDF).



confessingcongregations.com



Who we are

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

Our goals include

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

The objectives of the ACC

The objects of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations are:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How to join us

Membership rates for supporting members:

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

 Contact (02) 9550 5358.

 Email: accoffice@confessingcongregations.com

 Post: PO Box 968 Newtown NSW 2042

FILM

NETFLIX

foxtel now

Stan.



Images: IMDb

Sandra Bullock & Quinton Aaron in *The Blind Side* (2009)

A New Era for Viewing

Christian TV - in a new way

Many Australians have now embraced the new viewing era with comprehension. Gone are the days when most of Australia tuned in at a certain time to watch a certain program and then would discuss, critique or bemoan the program the next day.

Now with all TV stations offering catch-up service (streaming), even the 6 pm or 7 pm nightly news is on the way to becoming a rare event for any family or couple to watch together.

Paid streaming services like Netflix, Stan and Foxtel Now, allow immediate access to a wide variety of material, and increasingly are making their name with their own TV shows.

Netflix is one of the most widely used. It is likely that at least one member of your family has Netflix and now can binge-watch TV series after TV series, let alone movie after movie. One of the intriguing aspects is that like Foxtel, these new services provide a range of films – a type of broadcast smorgasbord, with offerings for everyone. I have listed below some of the Biblical and Christian films, and films with a Christian theme available on Netflix. The US service has many more films on offer, but at least the Australian service has made a start.

Kings' Faith (M): a teenager leaves a gang and is cared for by Christian parents who face some difficult personal choices.

A Matter of Faith: A contemporary evolution v creation debate on a university campus.

David and Goliath: A slightly awkward telling of the traditional story.

The Ark: the building of the ark is told by BBC1.

Born to Win: the title belies the focus as a teacher's faith is challenged in a school for special needs.

The Blind Side: A Christian family support a young African-American in his football career.

The Preacher's Son (M): an illuminating look at a fictional African-American local church dynasty and their failings and past (and present) sins. An eye-opener into the combining of politics in American society and the church. The wife of the Minister has the title 'First Lady' in the church.

The Courageous Heart of Irena Sendler: the story of a Polish social worker who saved Jewish children during WWII.

Soul Surfer: The story of Bethany Hamilton who lost her left arm in a shark attack.

Peter Bentley

Many readers would be aware of the dedicated Christian TV channel, the Australian Christian Channel (Yes, another ACC). As noted above, many people now use a form of pay TV – Fetch is a common one and ACC TV is available on Fetch or Foxtel.

However, the Australian Christian Channel is now more than just a channel, as its website provides live TV and on demand/catch-up. You can also download the ACC TV App and watch when you want to on your tablet or phone, or Apple TV.

For more information see: <https://acc.tv/>

Moving from DVD base to Digital

Heritage Films (marketing through Movies Change People) continues to provide a theatrical release arrangement for churches and groups, and a DVD based service, and has now developed digital on-demand and streaming to meet the needs of a new era.

See their website: www.movieschangepeople.com

During so much change in broadcasting, it is good to see Christian organisations again at the forefront of technology; just like they were at the start of the film industry in the early 20th century.

