

Discerning Faith, Fatal Fractures and the Uniting Church.

Introduction:

This article contains a collection of statement and quotations from various sources related to the 'long march' within the Uniting Church to theologially, and culturally modify the historic Christian understanding of the central institution of marriage.

♣ The Big Picture:

“Fears of democracy failing demands an explanation.-The dismantling of long-held shared beliefs is the biggest change in the post-Christian 21st century world.-There is no common belief that binds us together.-Interestingly, we have not seen a wholesale abandonment of the truths of the past. Even the most progressive politicians claim a central belief in the dignity of human beings as the basis for human rights. This claim to maintain human rights while simultaneously jettisoning so many Christian beliefs about what it means to be human will likely be the cause of much future conflict. The marriage debate is but one example of that –marriage was reformed in the name of freedom, equality and individual choice. Political conflict over gender identity, euthanasia and abortion are symptomatic of this deeper conflict about what it means to be human and have human rights.”

Daniel Strange gives a great picture of change: ‘Our fallen fractured world resembles a whole plane of ice floes, floating close to each other with big cracks between...where the ice floes keep drifting in different directions. Without the word of God making sense of the world, I am stuck on my drifting ice flow without certainty. I might have opinions, but they are ungrounded outside my subjective point of view. Without objective truth or a shared belief, we fracture into tribes.—Dissent becomes harder and toleration of different views becomes a vice.’

“Doing Life together is getting Harder,” Southern Cross, February 2019. Michael Kellahan.

♣ The Long March: and the continuing threat to Christian orthodoxy.

A theological summary of the disturbing outcome of the 11th Assembly of the Uniting Church July 5-11 in Brisbane 2006 was sent to Hope Network.

“, we believe that Resolution 84 is apostate because it departs from the Biblical understanding of human beings as created in the image of God, male and female (Genesis1:26,27). This image of God in creation is also present in redemption, as Christ, the Lamb of God, gives himself up to redeem the church as his body and his bride (Ephesians 5:22-23), Revelation 19:6-9). It is the male/female nature of humanity which fundamentally reflects the personal and interpersonal nature of the Triune God. The vital fundamentals of the human family flow from this image of God in humanity, and so departure from this doctrine leads both to a loss of the true knowledge of God and a loss of the true relational nature of mankind. The implications of the latter are serious for children and for society. Furthermore, the Assembly is apostate in that by allowing homosexual activity among its leadership it is calling good what the Scripture says is sin. This will lead inevitably to people being encouraged into sin.

'Though they know God's decrees that those who practise such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.' Romans 1:32 (ESV)

For these reasons it is important for us to remain implacably opposed to Resolution 84 and its implications for the Uniting Church and the church in universal.”

Rev Rod James, SA Synod.

♣ **A Pastoral Explanation and Appeal:**

Since the 2003 National Assembly decision Resolution 84—each State has responded in different ways. The SA Synod has restructured itself by withdrawing the Council of Presbytery from regional geographical areas **to allow Congregations of common conviction to work together in Networks**. Although some ministers and members have left the Uniting church this has allowed many to uphold their convictions in the midst of the Church's diversity.

Some people have decided that the issue of same gender sexual practise is similar to our different views about other things (eg. baptism) and that it should not distract us from getting on with mission. For many it has become 'politically correct' and a sign of loyalty to preserve the unity of the church at all costs and to simply get on with the future. Those who are biblically and theologically aware, while being marginalised are conscious that the church's current position is serious because it effects the 'substance of the faith', and so compromises the Church's mission. This historically places the UC outside of the main Christian beliefs held for centuries and the traditional understanding and fellowship of the Universal Church.

Those of this conviction believe the UC in attempting to relate to cultural trends has 'lost the way' and departed from the common principles of the faith. While sadly for some this may result in schism, others are aware that God chastens those that He loves and that in accordance with the Basis of Union, the Uniting Church still prays that God will, *'constantly correct that which is erroneous in her life'*. Para 18. It is also obligated to remain open to constant reform and recognises an ongoing need for a constant appeal to Holy Scripture. Para 10.

Rev E.A. (Ted) Curnow, SA Synod.

♣ **The 2018 Change to Marriage: Uniting Church National Assembly**

The moved beyond the doctrine and teaching of the universal church to represent Christian marriage as a changeable, secondary and cultural issue, rather than a primary Christian revelation, a creational institution between a man and woman.

In encompassing a sexual union of people sharing the same gender as a normality and regarding it as the equivalent of Christian marriage,--('two integrities') the Uniting Church has violated and stepped outside of the unique historic insights entrusted to the universal Christian Church.

+ An official tweet emerged from the UCA Friday 13 July 2018.

"The 15th Assembly meeting of the Uniting Church in Australia has resolved to allow its ministers the freedom to conduct or refuse to conduct same-gender marriages"

+ An Official response from the ACC. Saturday 14 July 2018.

“The Uniting Church in Australia exercised its determining authority on matters of doctrine to ‘vary its policy on marriage’ to include same-gender relationships. This decision is grounded neither in Scripture, nor The Basis of Union, but on a secular understanding of ‘diversity; a diversity that has now gone beyond the acceptance of a diversity of theologies to include a ‘diversity of religious beliefs and ethical understandings. –In our view , the Uniting Church Assembly has removed itself from the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church”
Rev. Dr. Hedaki Fihaki on behalf of the ACC National Council.

♣ **Resolution of Assembly**

(1) Doctrine: To vary its policy on marriage by recognising two statements of belief. The belief expressed in the 1997 statement on marriage follows:

“Marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life. It is intended to be the faithful lifelong union of a woman and a man expressed in every part of their life together. In marriage, the man and the woman seek to encourage and enrich each other through love and companionship.”

(2) Doctrine: The Belief expressed in the following statement on marriage:

*“Marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of **two people** to live together for life. It is intended to be the faithful lifelong union of **two people** expressed in every part of their life together. In marriage, the two people seek to encourage and enrich each other through love and companionship.”*

♣ “While some may say nothing has changed, clearly the change is substantial and confirms the direction of the Uniting Church since the last time it said nothing had changed. (2003, following Resolution 84) The ACC is blessed to be in fellowship with many networks and groups throughout the Church that oppose the decision to revise the church’s biblical and ecumenical understanding of marriage and together we look for a new way forward under the guidance of God.

We call on all members and Congregations to make a stand and say, **“We are not permitted to do this. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. So help me God”.**

Peter Bentley, Managing Editor, ACC Catalyst, September 2018.

♣ **The Fiction of “two valid doctrines”**

“The 15th Assembly has used the language of ‘two valid doctrines of marriage’ to create the illusion that people in the church can hold either exclusive male-female marriage, or same-sex marriage, with integrity. However, these two doctrines are mutually exclusive: exclusive male-female marriage rejects the validity of same-sex marriage, and vice versa. Officially adopting same-sex marriage means that this has replaced the doctrine of exclusive male-female marriage. In other words, the essential doctrine adopted by the 15th Assembly is ‘same-sex-marriage.’

The most that could be said is that the UCA has changed the Church’s doctrine of marriage to that of two people regardless of gender (which may also include the marriage of a man and a woman).

Moving away from Biblical and Christian orthodoxy in this way has profound implications for the church's relationship with the entirety of the Revelation and Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Rev Jonathon Button, SA Synod. ACC Magazine September 2018

♣ **Two contrasting and irreconcilable views of Humanity.** *A response by Rev Rod James. ACC Catalyst Sept. 2018.*

"In proposing to allow same gender marriages to be conducted by UC ministers Rev Dr Andrew Dutney has said, ***"Holding together two doctrines and practices of marriage within the one diverse Church is the kind of thing that the UCA was built for."***

Dr Dutney equates this 'diversity' of theology and biblical interpretation with the kinds of differences that existed between the prior denominations coming into union. But is that true? – These two views are not two 'integrities' that can be happily held as an expression of 'unity in diversity'. They are in fact, contrasting and irreconcilable doctrines of humanity which lead to vastly different outcomes."

Irreconcilable Contrasts (eg. Biblical view, Humanist view follow)

Human beings are created by God, male and female. Gender is part of the imago dei (image of God) and is given to each person. .

A human is what each person says they are, Gender is fluid and gender identity is self-defined.

Humanity is binary (male-Female), therefore a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two become one flesh.

Humanity is individualistic, and the individual can have whatever associations or relationships they may choose.

Sexual intercourse with another person is reserved for married couples as the expression of their union as husband and wife,

Sexual intercourse with other people is at the discretion of the individual as an expression of their feelings at the time.

Marriage between a man and a woman is ordained by God. "Those whom God has joined together let not man separate."

Marriage is a human and societal construct which has taken many forms in different times and cultures.

The glory of the man-woman union in marriage is revealed in, and is a reflection of, the marriage of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, and his bride, the Church. As such it reflects God's relational nature, and His familial purpose to bring many sons and daughters to share in His eternal glory.

The good in marriage is simply that it expresses the desire of two people who love each other to be committed to each other for as long as they choose to be.

♣ **Why did we get where we are in terms of marriage?**

“For this 15th Assembly, the immediate catalyst was the change in the Marriage Act in Australia. If this change has not been made the focus at the 15th Assembly may have been on a service of blessing. Another critical reason for a focus on revising marriage is the elevation of personal experience within the Uniting Church, culminating in the enshrinement of personal story as the contemporary story on which decisions are based.—Bearing in mind it was only seven months after the (national) marriage plebiscite, and no other major denomination in Australia was moving towards a change.---the specific issue of marriage and a recommendation to change has only been within the wider church for a comparatively short time. The specific report that outlined change (Report on Marriage and same-gender relationships) had only been out since the end of April 2018.

Why did the 15th Assembly not refer the decision for concurrence?

The 15th Assembly can make up its own mind as to what is vital to the life of the church. There is no automatic referral for concurrence so essentially the power is in the hands of the 15th Assembly. Other members on the ACC website have commented about how this matter is vital, and certainly I think most liberal members thought it was a vital matter otherwise it would not have been acted upon with such passion and urgency. —As a long observer of church meetings, one theme is prominent. *Never make a major decision unless you know the outcome, and once you have made the decision, don't unmake it at the same meeting.*

Winter may have come but evangelical and orthodox congregations will not simply live with the decision to revise marriage. The 15th Assembly will however have to live with the practical consequences of not declaring marriage to be a matter vital to the life of the church, as they were the ones that initiated the divorce.

Peter Bentley ACC National Director. ACC Catalyst Sep 2018.

♣ **The Emperor is Naked.**

“In the wake of the 1960s and 70s sexual revolution we have witnessed the introduction of no-fault-divorce, the legalisation of abortion on demand, the normalisation of pre-marriage sex, the endorsement of same-sex marriage and the deconstruction of gender. All these serve to expedite the ‘inalienable right’ for each individual to pursue whatever libidinous predilection happens to take their fancy. Even now there is serious discussion around the normalisation and acceptance into law of polygamy, polyamory and even paedophilia. Yet those who have the temerity to speak against this new ‘morality’ are instantly labelled as bigots, bullies and haters. Astonishingly, this new morality is not only being championed by the self-interested secular culture; it is also being supported by significant sectors of the Western church. I find it inconceivable that same-sex-marriage is being touted as a virtue and pursued as a matter of justice, even though the overwhelming majority of the church-culturally, geographically and chronologically—has never once begun to even entertain the notion of SSM as a plausible possibility. The fact that SSM is a uniquely Western phenomenon ought to at least make us a little suspicious that SSM has more to do with our Western values systems than it does with any kind of biblical or serious-minded Christological reflection.”

Rev David Kowalick. Walkerville, September 2018.

♣ Religious Freedom and Neighbourly Love.

“We are not now suddenly facing just one piecemeal objection to one aspect of our sexual ethic. It is part of something bigger: a secular philosophy that views traditional or Christian sexual norms as part of a system of oppression and as the enemy of sexual self-determination and expression---Most of those who voted ‘Yes’ were only thinking about affirming the love between our same sex-attracted friends. But the main driving force behind the twenty or thirty years-long campaigns for same-sex-marriage is arguably something more sinister. If my hypothesis is correct, it would also explain the fervour with which the state has been used to silence religious organisations in the wake of the legalisation of same-sex marriage.--If the worldwide marriage equality movement is a symptom of the liberal ethic of the sexual revolution—then there is no reason not to expect such restrictions of religious freedom here.

In the early years of our history, Christians had to work hard against Gnosticism’s negative view of the body and denial of the Incarnation. In the 19th centuries, we had to work hard against philosophical naturalism. In the 21st century., we have to work hard to promote our sexual ethic--our world’s ignorance of its goodness is arguably the greatest barrier to faith that people now face.”

Emma Wood PhD in ethics, Presbyterian Ladies College. ACC September 2018

♣ The Gospel in the Uniting Church.

In his inflammatory address to the 1979 Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia Rev Davis McCaughey issued a passionate warning against what he identified as a tendency to adopt a form of incestuous Church patriotism, which would obscure and ultimately destroy the Church’s only vocation, which is to carry on the mission of Christ. Look carefully at what our first President and the architect of much of the Basis of Union declared only two years after union.

“At all events the cry for a sense of identity in the Uniting Church cannot be answered by the offer of a new kind of Church patriotism. In an important sense, we in the Uniting Church in Australia have no identity, no distinctive marks--other than belonging with the people of God brought into being by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on their way to the consummation of all things in Him. We have embarked on a course in which we ask men and women to forget who they are , and chiefly to remember Whose they are.”

Throughout this prophetic address, McCaughey pleaded for a return to the Basis of Union as a source of correction and renewal of the already deteriorating Church—a renewal, he emphasized, that must begin the congregations themselves. Hence, for McCaughey, any suggestion that the basis of Union is merely an inspirational document or some transitional text that brought the Uniting churches together, just be rejected out of hand.---In so many ways I believe we have traded our sacred birthright for a sloppy mixture of quasi-pagan sentimentality, soft-left political correctness and social acceptability.---Of course, the greatest battles we will face in our journey back to our roots will occur within our own ranks. I am afraid we have taken ‘diversity’ and ‘tolerance’ to such an extreme now that even the most basic of Christian truths have become negotiable or have already been replaced by a new ‘gospel’ which is really no gospel at all (Gal. 1:6-8).

Was it God's plan to bring about this miracle in 1977, only to see it diminish and implode? that doesn't sound like the God I worship and will continue to do all I can to see the Church –brought back to life as the presence—of the living Christ once again explodes within our congregations and communities.

Rev Robert Griffith, NSW. ACC Catalyst, September 2018

♣ **Our Declaration: Korean Presbytery**

Among the eight proposals on marriage at the Assembly the declaration from the Korean Presbytery (number 53) most strikingly illustrated the profound distance of our different communities from the liberal path of the Assembly. The Korean Presbytery made known its intention and position:

“The Korean Presbytery hereby resolves and declares that:

The same-gender marriage , and the blessing and marriage rites thereof, is to stand against the providence and will of God, who created man and woman and The same-gender marriage, and the blessing and marriage rites thereof, is to oppose the spirit and intention of the old and new testaments, which are the absolutely truthful words of God. The Korean Presbytery strongly request that the definition of marriage (Uniting Sexuality and Faith 1997) as has been respected and maintained up until today's date, be kept as it is and adhered to.”

Korean Presbytery, Sept. 2018.

♣ **Uniting Church Sin and Farce**

“The Uniting Church did not change its existing marriage liturgy to, for same-sex marriage, but agreed to add a second liturgy that did so. There was good intention in this.---Each local church community would thereby have the liberty to follow its own conscience. It sounds good at one level, but it is actually quite farcical--.

It does not follow that because the faith does not enjoin something for all, what we believe about that thing cannot be of critical importance—It has not only failed to stand for clear biblical standards, it has also entered into farce. But despite the double-talk (Contra Matthew 5:37), the plain fact is this: The National Assembly has decided that it will modify the moral position of the part of Christ's church over which it has care and responsibility such that it reflects the post-Christian culture's values as much as the Bible.

Our views on marriage reflect our convictions about the authority and clarity of the Bible, about the necessity of faithful obedience, about what is healthy for human flourishing and about what brings glory to Jesus, and these are all core issues for Christians.

And of course marriage is an especially significant institution for Christians because, theologically speaking, we know that the ultimate marriage is between Christ and the church; the coming together of Creator and the creation in the union of same-but-different is the great story of the Bible. Human marriages are meant to image and point to this meta-truth as two people who are male-and-female-different, yet flesh-of-my-flesh-same, come together in life-long union (eg Gen 1:27; 2:23; Eph 5 31-32; Rev. 2 9-14)When we change our view of marriage to allow for the union of same-and same, it not only affects marriage, it also pulls at one of the golden threads that so neatly binds our--- Christology, our soteriology, our ecclesiology our biblical theology and our eschatology---

The Uniting Church could turn back to its historic doctrine and thus abandon the sinful and absurd outcome of the recent Assembly.”

Rev Tim Patrick, Principal Bible College, South Australia.

♣ **Questions and Answers** appearing ACC Magazine Catalyst December 2018.

(Decisions in relation to the Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc (8 October 2018. Also, the document ‘Standing Aside and Moving Forward’ outline the decisions taken at the AGM of the ACC Inc. 21 Sept. 2018.)

Assembly and Synod leaders maintained that concerns about 15th Assembly were unfounded, and that the Assembly is right in the decisions it has made, and that everyone should calm down and accept what the Assembly had decided. Furthermore, Assembly and Synod leaders asserted that the recent decisions of the ACC place that organisation **outside the polity of the Uniting Church.**

The ACC had said in their statement. “We simply cannot allow ourselves to be forced, against our faith, integrity and freedom, to live and work within a state of contradiction whereby orthodoxy, as outlined in the Basis of Union, has now simply become a part of the ‘diversity of religious views and ethical practices’ within the Uniting Church. To have two contrasting doctrines and practises (which is sometimes called the ‘two integrities’ solution) is acceptable to those with a liberal theology in which diversity is a higher value than biblical truth. But to those who take the plain reading of Scripture as authoritative, that is unacceptable. We also believe that having freedom of choice at the individual and local level (as the 15 Assembly decision allow) is unworkable, will create countless local and personal difficulties, and ultimately will lead to freedom of choice and belief being restricted.”

“With its ‘two integrities,’ which define Christian marriage in contradictory ways, the 15th Assembly of the Uniting Church is speaking the Word of God with a divided tongue. The ACC has spoken up and called this duplicity and heresy. It has further declared that henceforth the Assembly of the Uniting Church will be unable to lead its people in the right path, but will, in future, lead them further and deeper into error. The ACC, therefore. ‘humbly, and in dependence upon God alone, offers to Congregations the role of a replacement Assembly in matters vital to the life of its Confessing Congregations.”

♣ **Doctrine Unity in Diversity.** Pseudo –Maximus December 2018

The Report to the Assembly by the Working Group on Doctrine (WGD) said *‘that definitions of marriage do nor belong to the substance, or heart, of the Christian faith’ (4.2 & 5.6.3)*

Afterwards, former President Rev Dr Andrew Dutney said that *‘holding together two doctrines and practices of marriage within the one diverse Church is the kind of thing that the UCA was built for.’* Clearly, therefore, marriage is a matter of doctrine. And doctrine is meant to articulate the ‘substance of the faith. However, because ‘unity in diversity’ has become the UCA’s over-arching dogma, individuals are free to determine all doctrines according to their ‘conscience.’

This both misrepresents what the Basis of Union says about diverse gifts of ministry being exercised through our 'unity in Christ' and explains the UCA's failure to discipline those who flagrantly flout orthodox Christ-centred teaching.

In **1997**, the Assembly Standing Committee's Bentley Report on Sexuality found that more than 82% of an estimated 30,000 people associated with the over 8,000 responses opposed the recommendations. The IRS promoted more response than any other report in the history of the UCA and yet the report on the responses was sidelined at the 1997 Assembly. After Resolution 84, over 27,000 members and adherents from 1459 Congregations responded to a Reforming Alliance survey sent to all Ministers and church Secretaries in October **2003**. This represented nearly a quarter of adult UC attenders spread over 58% of Congregations. Over 87% of responders held to an orthodox biblical view in relation to the three primary questions asked. Evangelical Members within the Uniting Church (EMU), Reforming Alliance(RA), ACC and other concerned groups, like EL250, the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) and all migrant-ethnic conferences (CALD) have faithfully attended consultations, Assemblies. Synods and Presbyteries presented papers to the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine (WGD), and spoken at length with Presidents, General Secretaries and Presbytery ministers.

At the Eleventh Assembly in **2006** an RA sponsored statement on Sexuality and Leadership, which was forwarded to Assembly by 7 Presbyteries and the Queensland Synod, was neatly side-stepped. In 25 years, things have become much worse.

The theme of the Global Anglican Futures Conference (GAFCON) **2018** reminds the Confessing Movement that it exists, not to adapt for survival in a hostile church, but to forge ways of speaking to a broken world. In Australia this involves exposing ideologies that mock God and dehumanise citizens and compliant churches desperate to be 'on the right side of history'. –The situation requires members of the Confessing Movement to speak plainly, act boldly and pray fervently, unafraid to confess Christ crucified and risen by speaking boldly to ecclesiastical and civil authorities.

♣ **Facing the Challenges.**

“ An understanding of the Assembly decisions, as presented in the reports from the Assembly after it was held, appears to give the impression that the Assembly was attempting to satisfy the human understandings of marriage. It thus appears that an aim of the Assembly in this matter was to attempt to honour the varied human understandings of marriage perceived within the membership of the Uniting Church in Australia. that aim may be totally legitimate for a parliament in a liberal democracy, as, for example, for the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, to seek to do.

However, such a methodology would seem to me to be questionable within the church. This is so for several reasons. The primary purpose of an Assembly, in whatever it discusses, is to seek to fulfil the will of God, as far as it can understand the will of God. For that it will always need to be very humble, as the possibility of a human institution misunderstanding the will of God can be very high.

—Moreover, it would seem to me that any church, particularly one formally committed to the ecumenical movement, would need constantly to check with other parts of the church catholic that it is going in the correct direction, as it may be mistaken, and the perception of other parts of the church catholic may be the clearest and most helpful way to check on the wisdom of any significant proposals.

We are to look at the hermeneutics of the Basis of Union, that is, at how we are to use and interpret the Basis. On this the issue of the nature of the authority of scripture also depends. During the same-gender marriage discussions, the view has been presented that we are not able to look at what appears to be the plain meaning of the text of the Basis of Union.—This is of great importance for this issue, as on it depends the matter of how we are to understand and use scripture, and therefore the matter on where authority lies for Christian faith and life. This also relates to the counter-cultural nature of much in the New Testament. In a significant part of the Greek world of the first century AD homosexuality, in outlook and in practice, was honoured and was at times seen as culturally superior. Nevertheless, from the beginning, Christianity, following Jewish traditions, stood out against such an outlook and such practice. Thus, the resolution of the hermeneutical questions raised *here* is of considerable significance to the Uniting Church.”

Rev James Haire AC, Ninth President of Assembly of the U C. Catalyst Dec. 2018.

♣ *It Always was going to be YES!*

“From the inception, the Church’s leaders were seduced by the promise of public applause for its ecclesial support of the prevailing appetite for change. Accordingly, they surrendered Christianity’s rigorous understanding of sexuality to join the seismic shift in sexual ethics across the western world.—

By endorsing the State’s redefinition of marriage, the Uniting Church has surrendered the right to contradict whatever secular conventions might emerge in the future. The Assembly argues that marriage is ‘*not of the substance of faith*’ because marriage is not defined in scripture. Ergo, Christians may create their own definitions.—

An unasked question is why? Why has the Uniting Church been steered into policies that owe more to secularist idealism than biblical realism, making it difficult to disagree that the Uniting Church has squandered its right to claim descent from the Reformed tradition.—The Uniting Church no longer presents itself as an authentic Australian Church. A welfare movement perhaps, but not a church. A church addicted to fantasies of diversity, tolerance and non-discrimination can admit whoever may come without compulsion or accountability.”

Rev Warren Clarnette, Past editor of Church and Nation. ACC Catalyst Dec 2018.

♣ *In Christ Alone.*

“So, what now is the doctrine of the Assembly? It is now primarily extreme ‘diversity’ or radical religious pluralism. There is a healthy diversity, but when it becomes central to faith with Jesus on the margins it kills the church. Without understanding this dynamic, even evangelical and reformed congregations may accept the Assembly’s decision of two integrities on marriage without understanding that in effect they are choosing a different gospel and a different Lord than what is expressed in scripture and the Basis of Union.—In effect by requiring congregations to accept the diversity of something vital to the Christian faith, the Assembly is expecting conversion to pluralism as now necessary to being part of the Uniting Church.”

Rev Ann Hibbard. ACC Prayer Co-ordinator, Council Member. Catalyst Dec 2018

Contesting the Assembly Decision

In a pastoral letter from the ACC to ACC members, Congregations, Groups and Clusters people were informed that the Presbytery of South Australia voted not to invoke clause 39b (1) of the constitution in its January 5th 2019 meeting which would have suspended the UCA 15th Assembly's decision on same-sex marriage until further consultation.

The Assembly has formalised a 'diversity of religious beliefs and ethical understandings' (R64) as the new 'ruling authority' within the Uniting Church and will therefore become instituted and enshrined into every aspect of the life of the church.—Those who will be unjustly judged as unwilling to live and work within this new diversity will (as is already happening) be threatened with discipline and discriminated against in terms of candidature processes for ministry, placements and presbytery support.

♣ Summary

Up until the 2003 Assembly there were enough evangelicals and moderates at the Assembly meeting to ensure no major radical sexual agenda crept in at least by defined resolution. The agenda was not forgotten though and by 2003, the sexual agenda pushed again and the start in terms of resolutions , R 84, opened the door for the future liberal pattern. The Three areas in which the UCA has traditionally been identified:

***Ecumenical Relationships**

*** Relationships with Aboriginal and Islander members.**

*** Multicultural and cross-cultural relationships**

had slowed the adoption of the sexual agenda, but they had become more sidelined in favour of a focus on the place of gay and lesbian people in the church.

In the 1997 Assembly, it was the Church's broad commitment to these three areas that helped to affirm the church's traditional understanding on marriage. Since 2003, the increasing focus on the need to make a more defined commitment to gay and lesbian ministers and members in the church eventually produced the outcome at the 2018 Assembly. Once the Australian parliament had changed marriage, it was clear what was the next step for the dominant liberal theological group, even though the majority of UCA members were not supportive of same-gender marriage. For the liberal members at the Assembly they had already moved with the direction of Australia and it would have been more unusual to have not gone down that path.

Bentley Report. ACC Catalyst March 2019.

Rev E. A. Curnow trained in the Adelaide Bible College before entering ordained ministry. His creative gifts have had a rural focus spanning South Australia, Victoria and two years in Cornwall with the Methodist Church. He has documented the pioneer church in 'Bible Christian Methodism in South Australia 1850-1900' and in retirement continues to preach and services a website with an Evangelical focus.

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