

## UCA Where are you? ---- No 5

### Key Statements and Letters

#### May 23 2018 Pastoral Letter from the ACC

The pastoral encouragement arrived soon after the release of the Assembly Standing Committee's report on **'Marriage and same-gender Relationships.'** (*It also followed the Rod James letter referred to in, 'UCA Where are you?' No 4*). In response to announcing the radical proposal to redefine the meaning of marriage the ACC made the following strong, helpful points:

#### **(1) "Implications of redefining marriage as a matter that enters into the substance of the faith!"**

The central thesis that drives the proposal by the Standing Committee to redefine marriage is the view that marriage is **not** a matter that "*enters into the substance of faith*" and therefore a matter that "*allows for difference of opinion*" (BoU para. 14d). This is why there is no mention about the need for Assembly to seek concurrence with the other councils on matters that are "vital to the life of the church" as required by clause 39(a) of the Constitution.

In its "**Declaration on Marriage and the Family**" the ACC had already made clear that in its view marriage is a matter that clearly enters into the "substance of faith."

- (a) because it permeates the whole of Scripture,**
- (b) undergirds other central doctrines of the Church,**
- (c) is necessary for explaining Christ's relationship to the Church,**
- (d) and is central to understanding salvation history as a whole, and so forth. To put it another way, marriage enters into the substance of the faith because it acts as an,**
- (e) Architectural Doctrine or a load-bearing wall.** As such, it cannot be removed without doing significant irreparable damage to the overarching structure of the house. That is, all of the other historic doctrines of the Christian faith cannot be left intact should this doctrine be excised.

This is why the UCA Assembly could not, and must not redefine marriage. To do so would be a departure from the Basis of Union and a withdrawal from our commitment that began in 1977 to be part of a church movement that was not "*its own denomination*", but part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

#### **(2) What does it mean to be the ACC within the UCA?"**

(Some people and congregations were already feeling that they could not remain within the UCA should the Assembly redefine marriage.) The ACC response continued, 'This is understandable particularly in the light of what has been said about our doctrine on marriage acting as an architectural doctrine. If the Assembly does the unthinkable and redefines marriage, can one still remain with integrity within a denomination that has become truly apostate? On what basis could one remain within the UCA?'

What is at stake is providing enough ecclesiastical separation or a ‘hedge of protection’ around us so that we can continue to confess Christ as Lord with integrity, a clear conscience and without compromising the faith. Understanding the specific calling of the ACC is important at this time.’

**Two important points:**

The following points about the specific calling of the ACC were made clear:

**(a) Calling:** Confessing Movements such as the ACC have always felt “called” to remain within the mainline denomination and to ‘*contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints*’ (Jude 1:3). Jesus said, ‘*Now remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love.*’ (John 15:9) Important to note, that the calling to ‘*remain*’ makes sense only in light of the fact that other people have ceased to do so.

**(b) Holiness:** To be called *is* to be ‘set apart,’ i.e. to be holy, so “*that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*” 1 Peter 2: 9) That is the purpose of being set apart, it is so that we may better fulfil the great commission as outlined in Matthew 28: 16-20.

**Drawing the Line in the Sand.**

The evergreen question about our changing world and understanding the ‘big picture’ that I had reflected on in the earlier papers of this series goes like this, ‘*Is the non-conformist line of the ACC just hypo-conservative, a stubborn, poorly informed, obscurantist response to radical change or was it a reasonable response to a real threat to an essential aspect of the gospel entrusted to the church in our time?*’

An ex-Moderator of the Free Church of Scotland, Rev David Robinson visited Australia later in September 2018. Robinson spoke of how, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century within 30 years, his denomination went into a death spiral when it introduced a destructive form of teaching into Scottish society. “*It was called Higher Criticism. Higher Criticism did more than anything else to undermine faith in the Bible.*”

Robertson described the pattern of thinking that deeply influenced Western Christianity. ‘*The church allowed a falsehood to take hold within itself that took until the 1950s to really manifest itself.*’ (I found his words largely recalled my understanding of the state of the church during a large part of my life time.)

*So, in the 1960s when the sexual revolution hit us, the church folded like a pack of cards because it had lost its back-bone which was its faith in Scripture as the Word of God. Since it no longer believed the teaching of the Bible, it was powerless to resist the advance of the new sexual morality.*’ (Australian Presbyterian, AP, Sept. 2018)

Robertson continued that now we are regressing into the ‘*Greco-Roman pagan view of the world that focuses on the worship of the body,--- abortion, infanticide, sexual exploitation and a growing gap between the rich and poor. In fact what is called ‘progressive’ is really ‘regressive’.*

The prophetic stance of the ACC was confrontational. It called for reform but in many ways it was a negative call without clear options for a way ahead through the crisis

facing the church. However, drawing a line in the sand was certainly important and seemed it was coming to a head. The ACC itself continued to ask and respond to the following question.

### **How has the ACC sought to be distinct and to do this practically?**

**(1) Confessional Statements:** The ACC put together explicit and unambiguous statements of faith grounded and rooted in the authority of scripture (BoU para.5) That is, our foundational documents sought to make very clear what we believed God to be saying to us at this time and why we could not compromise these truths, particularly in a post-Christian or post-truth era.

**(2) Incorporation:** To be ‘set apart’ required that we become an incorporated entity. This provided a necessary degree of ‘independence’ or ‘enough ecclesiastical separation’ to make clear to the National UCA Assembly that ‘orthodoxy’ (Basis of Union) **can never be treated or made part of the ‘diversity’ of theologies and sexual practices within the UCA.**

To me this clear differentiation and unwillingness to compromise is the strength of the ACC. As Vaughan Roberts from the Anglican Church puts it, *“There must be such a robust wall built that anyone looking on can see that you are standing for the truth of the gospel and can preach repentance without fear.”*

However, from my stance, the ACC was also **conservative in practise** and a degree of inflexibility had failed to provide a positive, clear way ahead. This inability to dream, I felt had always been a weakness.

### **June 2018 Eternity Paper.**

The article was headed, *‘Decision time for Uniting Church.’* John Sanderman began by saying, *‘Forty years ago this month, a brave experiment and a dream of Christian unity fuelled the launch of the Uniting Church in Australia. Three denominations merged to form the UCA.’* –The hope was that other Christians would join. However the number of churches and attendance levels continue to decline.

Keith Suter, while not claiming to be a prophet, had completed a third doctorate in which he sketched out four scenarios of plausible futures for the Uniting Church.

- 1. Word and Deed;** A church with a small number of large parishes, providing spiritual activities and social welfare.
- 2. Secular Welfare:** Uniting Church Congregations fade away, but a large social welfare movement remains.
- 3. Return to the Early Church:** UCA re-invents itself.
- 4. Recessional:** UCA is wound up and its assets dispersed.

Suter concludes that the two that seem to be coming into play most predominantly are numbers 2 and 4. Andrew Dutney, past President of the Church said, *“The fact is that all four currently exist in the Uniting Church and there is no particular reason to think that is going to change”*. Among Suter’s ‘most likely’ futures for the UCA was the gloomy scenario 4, recession. This means the UC does nothing and just haemorrhages. Suter suggested that the other option is that leaders work with people throughout the system saying *‘we have a crisis on our hands and therefore we must devise an exit*

*strategy so that we don't bleed to death.*' (Rev James Haire also pointed to anxiousness on the part of the church as a reason for its proposal to change the doctrine of marriage) The article concluded by mentioning the large evangelical church on the Gold Coast, New Life Church, the Bankstown Uniting in South Sydney, Seeds and Hope Valley Church in Adelaide, Pittwater Uniting in Sydney and Logan Church. New Life Church in fact was leading a small flotilla of similar largish 'contemporary evangelical' churches in the Uniting Church.

### **June 2018 Catalyst Magazine.**

Maximus, like the prophet of old with a message of doom who stood in the public square, added his name to those predicting the collapse of the Uniting church. Oh it would not be an immediate or always obvious fall. It would be more like a slow implosion rather than an instant explosion. (a frog is boiled slowly). The article said,---  
*"smaller explosions strategically detonated by church leaders over many years have already weakened its structure. The proposal to change the doctrine of marriage would augur its implosion."*

With no discussion of the content of the 63 page Report on Marriage being permitted on the floor of the Assembly and with the church media being selective about what it published, a balanced, open debate on the Official Report had been impossible from the outset. This meant that **Rev Max Champion**, in the ACC June Catalyst was one of the few offering a sound critique of the Official Assembly Report. **Max concluded that not to recognise marriage as belonging to the substance or heart of the faith clearly exposed any pretence of those entrusted with the role of being preservers of God's Christ-embodied truth.** (For Champion's response also see the later paper in this series dealing with doctrinal issues)

**Peter Bentley**, ACC National Director had concluded, *"this report stands in the tradition of the 'new tolerance' where involvement of those opposing the hierarchy's agenda is limited to that of a statue in a silent movie. The report process has been very well-managed much like the general reviews and discussion about sexuality has been for over 20 years. One of the ironies is that even though the idea that the UC is a diverse church has never been officially agreed---diversity is not even taken seriously by the liberal group as they do not take the options and views of evangelicals seriously. In a nut shell, my view is that the adoption of the proposals would make the Uniting Church cease to be the Uniting Church as we know it, even if it still has the legal name. It would be more something like the 'i-Church of a section of liberal-middle-class Australia.'* *The grand experiment of 'Uniting' that was begun in 1977 as a church movement that was not 'its own denomination', but part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church would simply be no more."*

**Rev. Prof. James Haire, AC**, the ninth past President of the church who played an important role of steeling those of evangelical conviction over the time of the Assembly contributed an article, "The Church and Managerialism". This was particularly relevant because it pointed to the style of management and organisational, practise-managerialism infiltrating church and the Assembly decision making.

My thoughts recalled how the Port Phillip East Presbytery, a significant supporter in shaping the marriage proposal had itself recently adopted an independent professional

consultancy to review its life. The first stage report was called, ‘Cultivating a New Future.’ The Review was a perfect example of the managerialism James Hare described. The Presbytery review was more a detailed sociological survey than a Holy Spirit led discernment.

The positive aspects of the Presbytery’s life was over shadowed by a disturbing polarisation between Ministers passionate to introduce a new ‘progressive’ future alongside of multiple examples of mistrust in relationships and a loss of collegiality. James Haire pointed out that cultural traits of economic performance, structure and progressiveness were inappropriate categories when dealing with the worship and service of God. Christianity in the West had so absorbed western culture etc. that it was very hard to see where the gospel actually fitted.

My amazement at the rather impressive, professional way the 2018 Assembly was presented turned more to concern when I realised that behind the national decision-making body that was seeking to be guided by the Holy Spirit there was a select group of very skilful managers. I felt an increased concern. Behind the encouragement for people to listen to one another in openness and humility was the Assembly welcoming, youth-orientation session and a post-Assembly youth camp a tad more than curtesy orientation? There were a number of other concerns;

- (1) The limited time the national church had to consider the Church proposal,
- (2) the lack of final consultation between Church Councils and other churches,
- (3) the lack of transparency and the tight control exercised over any reporting, the media and the pre-Assembly blanket of silence.
- (4) Then there was the exclusion of overseas guests and other visitors during the marriage debate itself.

While change is always inevitable and it is only a good thing to aspire for excellence and efficiency, this new level of tight control was hardly the warm, healthy, Christian hospitality I had experienced over previous years.

James Haire had pointed out that managerialism in western culture often stands over inter-conciliar responsibilities that the Constitution of the UC defines as belonging to (c), Presbyteries, Synods and Assembly. He noted that this happens when executive bodies or officers are created and assume to themselves, however well meaning, responsibilities of a permanent nature. Haire asked the question, ***“How are Christians, to listen to the voice of God?”***

*“It is not their task as Christians primarily to invoke God for their particular view of the world, but rather in humility, to listen as that divine voice comes to them. Therefore, they need to take up this task of listening theologically, while also being very conscious of the need to discriminate between the voice of God on the one hand and their cultural and psychological impulse on the other. Thus the church has stressed the varying roles of scripture, tradition, experience of the Holy Spirit and specifically for the Uniting Church, deliberations and decisions of assemblies, synods, presbyteries and congregations as ways in which the voice of God can be heard and confirmed. This is to guard against the danger of individual or small group projection believing that they alone are able to express the will of God. The Basis of Union and the Constitution seek to protect the church from individuals or small groups projecting on to God their individual aspirations, hopes or even self-interest.*”

*It is intended to protect the church from self-delusion, which is most likely to occur at a time of individual or community anxiety. Thus the Uniting Church's foundational documents are counter-cultural, in that they call for a real wrestling with the managerial culture norms of the dominant western society."*

### **June 2018 A Position Statement.**

The ambivalence of a working environment where theological and ideological differences exist are to some degree reduced when one personally retires from Parish ministry but they are no less important. Faith convictions shape the deepest aspects of life and cannot be easily dismissed or changed for convenience. As a premature baby boomer born in the last days of World War two, when I view the big picture I realise that my life is being lived through the closing days of the Christendom era. My daily devotional aid said it well this morning. *"We live at a time when powerful forces are at work trying to steal the content of our faith, we must ensure we are true to it. It has been said that we are always just one generation away from apostasy.*

In reflecting on my own faith journey and the big picture, I realised again that I had experienced a foundational milestone during three years study and exposure to the biblical foundations of the Christian faith via Adelaide Bible Institute.1967-69. Today that invested period of spiritual formation increasingly stands in stark contrast to a vulnerable, nominal, liberal church culture. The serious consequences of that vulnerability had now become clearly evident in the church's attempt to redefine the ontology of the institution of marriage. **While the bold move of the Assembly Standing Committee came at an opportune time following the Federal Governments national Plebiscite, it is no surprise that rather than being counter-cultural and distinct from secular ideology the church has adopted a multi-choice, super-market option reflecting the cultural pluralism and consumerism of the day. Without rejecting traditional Christian male-female marriage it has added a statement that recognises same-sex marriage as a legitimate, God ordained, Christian doctrine!!**

**Understanding where I personally stood on the broad canvas stretched before me, and where others whose world view and understanding of life is *nourished and regulated* by the scriptures stand, had now come into sharper focus. (BoU para 5)**

Sadly on a personal level and through no choice of our own, it now appears the crisis has resulted in a growing distance from some who have been regarded as long-term old friends. At the same time this grief has led to the galvanising of a fresh resolve to contend for the historic, apostolic faith. In a positive sense it means that in a clearer way *I know who I have believed and who I have put my trust in.* 2 Timothy 1:12.

I felt that the proposition being put to the Assembly, whether approved or not, was now serious enough, and sufficient reason in itself for Beryl and myself to honestly explain our personal position in a pastoral way to those we regarded as personal friends.

**Declaration: 'We Remain; but stand apart.'**

Realising that the time had come to draw a line in the sand, in mid June 2018 I forwarded the following letter to the Secretary of Assembly and then an explanation also to family and friends..

Ms Colleen Geyer  
General Secretary  
Uniting Church in Australia  
PO Box A2266  
Sydney Sth,  
N.S.W. 1235.

*Dear Secretary and Assembly Stranding Committee,*

*I write out of deep concern and in way of disapproval and protest about the proposal to change the 1997 Uniting Church doctrine of Marriage as presented by the Standing Committee and the Doctrine Working group.*

*After a life time of ministry and service within the Uniting Church with all of its promise and potential, I now express sad disappointment in the quality of the church's proposal and scholarly interpreters of Scripture. Instead of being controlled by the Biblical and Reformation Witnesses, instead of living within the fellowship of Churches in Australia by which the Church, 'learns to sharpen her understanding of the will and purposes of God', the current proposal before the Assembly leaves no alternative but to conclude that the Uniting Church has largely lost its way.*

*Rather than a model to be modified, I understand marriage as a clear, divine, creational ordinance and as such it is part of the substance of the faith. From Genesis to Revelation this truth permeates scripture and as such it is central to the doctrine of the Church. It explains Christ's relationship to the Church and is also central to understanding salvation history.*

*While it is essential to reach out with compassion to minority peoples who are genuinely disadvantaged, rather than passing critical judgement, I believe the church denies its unique calling by seeking to modify the substance of the revelation entrusted to it for popular, political or sociological reasons.*

*Although the proposal before the Assembly seeks to be inclusive of diversity, I am disappointed by a trend advocated by some that suggests that those, who in good conscience hold to the biblical 1997 position, should leave their heritage and church in order to allow future 'progress.' This under-cover attitude can only be a sad denial of all that the name 'Uniting' signifies. I humbly implore the Standing Committee and the Assembly to reconsider this proposed direction in light of the biblical witness and the faith of the Church Universal.*

*I will pray for the renewal of Church and its Assembly, that as a redemptive community we will proclaim the good news with boldness, compassion and without compromise in our needy nation.*

*Yours Sincerely in Christ, Rev E.A. Curnow*

## Open Letter to Family and friends. June 2018

*--- 'Most may know that after years of discussion (and following the popular result of the plebiscite vote), the Standing Committee of the Uniting Church and the Doctrinal Working group are officially proposing that the Uniting Church now change the historic Judeo-Christian doctrine of marriage at the forthcoming National Assembly.*

*Regardless of the final decision of the National Assembly (July 8-14), as a minister associated with the church whose 'faith and obedience is nourished and regulated' by the Scriptures and that claims to be, 'guided by the Basis of Union', along with Beryl, I feel the need to write and to clearly distance myself from that proposal. At the same time I seek to clarify our relationship to the Uniting Church.*

*The Uniting Church, as an advocate of compassion and 'progress' claims to be inclusive of all people. In light of this, it is fair to say that those of Evangelical conviction and heritage will probably never officially be asked to leave the church but in practice the church's radical theological plurality and practice increasingly isolates and marginalises those who dare to hold a more evangelical position. Without elaboration here, it means we are under increasing pressure to rethink our continuing place in the Uniting Church. As a way of helping friends to better understand our current position and the struggle within the Church, I set out various options as I see them enveloping many within the church today.*

### *Response and Calling*

- (1) The complex issues of our time appear to overwhelm many of our ageing Congregations so some people choose to respond by not responding. It can be easier to step back and 'let the ball pass to others' without getting too involved or upset over controversy. With respect for those comfortable with this position, I detect that this choice is adding to a growing gap between general attenders and others involved in decision-making directions of the church.*
- (2) Others in good conscience increasingly feel isolated and called to make the painful choice of leaving their church in order to adopt another fellowship that is faithful to the Scriptures and the Christian heritage. This calling-out is important for continuing loyalty to the Lordship of Christ, Christian nourishment and mission.*
- (3) Some feel that things have now reached a point in the UC where a specific call to remain aligned to the Uniting Church is required. Rather than walking away and surrendering their investment in the Church they love, where this call to remain in the UC exists, they realise it can no longer be 'business as usual'.*

*Those in this position live in the tension of often disagreeing with the church they belong to. This means being willing to stand firm as honest advocates of the Christian position and as a prophetic voice within the church. With compassion towards the socially marginalised it means also being called to be humble witnesses to new life in Christ and to following the Uniting Church Basis of Union.*

*Regardless of the outcome of the coming Assembly, Beryl and I at this stage believe that with others and the Assembly of Confessing Congregations we are still called to the 3<sup>rd</sup> response above. We hope this helps you to better understand us. We value our contact with you and assure you of our continuing friendship and prayers."*

Perhaps it was no co-incidence that I had the opportunity to preach on ‘**contending for the faith**’ from the letter of Jude when we visited the Gembrook Congregation in the Dandenong’s on the Sunday before the Assembly and again at Seaford on the following Sunday.

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**Sermon: Contending for the Faith.** John 10:7-14. Jude 3-5, 17-23

**Prayer:** *God of all ages you call the church to keep watch in the world and to discern the signs of the times. Grant us wisdom which your Spirit gives that with courage we may proclaim your prophetic word.*

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, for you are our strength and our redeemer. Amen.*

While the short letter of Jude is best known for its popular benediction, Jude was thought to have been the brother of Jesus. If this was so he could have ‘knocked around’ with Peter and known each other well. They could have thought in a similar way because there are close similarities between the letter of Jude and that of 2 Peter.

Jude was preparing to write about the Christian faith when he was suddenly interrupted. As we take up his story he is alarmed, deeply disturbed by news of manipulation and false teaching taking place, so he quickly writes these words to the church in Asia Minor.

V 3. “I found it necessary and was impelled to write you an urgent appeal and exhort you to contend (earnestly, AV) for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints (the faith which was the sum of Christian belief) which was delivered verbally to the Holy people of God.” (Amplified & Hugh J. Scofield translation, William Barclay)

(1) ‘**to contend / defend**’, suggests strenuous effort. The word in the Greek is *ep-agonise-thai* which contains the root word in English *agony*. The word is used of athletes as they strain and contest.

The writer is saying, contesting/defending the faith may be a costly thing. (a) It may require intellectual effort to understand and teach the Word of God in the right way.

(b) It may require moral effort to choose a consistent lifestyle, to live out the Christian way in everyday life and experience.

(2) We are to contend, for ‘**the Faith**’. What is ‘the Faith’?

The faith is a recognised body of teaching, (revealed truths), known to have emerged from Jesus teaching. So later Paul writes, ‘*for I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you*’. *1 Cor.11:23* and again, *For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received. 1 Cor.15:3*. So, ‘**the faith**’ then is a core message, a body of teaching that was crystallised by the Apostles, by Peter’s preaching, Paul’s letters and the New Testament.

(3) ‘**Once for all delivered (handed down) to the saints**’.

(a) ‘Once for all’,---the emphasis is on the finality of the revelation in Christ. Once for all means it’s not to be added to, or modified to fit our likings.

(b) ‘delivered to the Saints’ Note it is a plural. It is not delivered to one person or cult leader. Not to Mohammad/and the Koran, not to Joseph Smith/and the Book of

Mormon. Not the Anglican or the Uniting Church but the whole church has become the stewards, tenants, agents of a delivered revelation, -- the heart message of the Christian faith.

The Christian faith is not something we have manufactured, an ideology or view of life we have invented or fabricated with our own minds or brilliance.

The Christian revelation has been delivered from outside of ourselves. In the truest sense the Christian gospel has been handed down from generation to generation in an unbroken chain. The gospel has been passed on like the links of a living chain and as part of that chain we have the Christian Creeds.

Para 9 of the Uniting Church basis of Union says, “ *The Uniting Church enters into unity with the church throughout the ages by her use of the confessions known as the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. She receives these,---used by Christians in many days to **declare** and to **guard** the right understanding of that faith.*” Why do we have the Creeds?

(a) Through the New Testament we have fragments of creedal confessions and statements for the purpose of teaching, but,

(b) before the end of the first century the church was plagued with false teachers so the creeds were a defence against the pagan teaching of Gnosticism and Docetism. V 4. For certain intruders have stolen in among you, people who pervert the grace of our God into lawlessness and immorality and deny our sole Master and Lord Jesus Christ. Where in the English we use six words to describe these leaders, the Greek uses one word. That one Greek word means that these leader *sneak in stealthily*, disguised, but not as secret under-cover agents, no, but with credible qualifications parading themselves as leaders.

Jesus spoke of false shepherds infiltrating and destroying the flock. (John 10:10) Jesus spoke of the church living in a hostile environment. Not only was the church fragile and vulnerable because it faced opposition, violence and rejection from the **outside** world but also from **within**. Anyone here who is 40 years of age or over has largely enjoyed the benefits of the period we call Christendom and we are probably not used of needing to seriously think about what we really believe. Christendom –people have been shaped by sharing the impression of the institutional church as being one of the most stable, enduring institutions of society but the scripture and Christian history tells that this is not the way it is.

From the time of Pentecost the church has faced opposition from **outside** by the rulers of the day and from the **inside** from the time of Ananias and Sapphira (See Acts 5) The understanding and view of life entrusted to the church was so important that Paul wrote to the leaders at Ephesus warning them of ‘*wolves not sparing the flock.*’ (Acts 20:9) He wrote to the leaders at Thessalonica, ‘*Hold fast, stand firm to the traditions and truths you were taught.*’ (2 Thess. 2:13-15) Paul wrote to Timothy, ‘Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me.—Guard the good treasure entrusted to you. (2 Tim.1:14)

Friends the New Testament and Paul’s pastoral letters warn, alert and give emphasis to the fact that a straying away, a distortion or opposition to the truth’s entrusted to us is not a passing phenomena. But to avoid the impression that I may be exaggerating or

overstating the real situation, what I'm saying here needs to be placed in a bigger context.

The decline of the church, rapid cultural change and the loss of biblical literacy that has enveloped the Western world reaches well beyond the struggles of the Uniting Church.

Sometime ago Lord Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury declared that, *'Christianity in Britain is just one generation from extinction.'* The alarming thing is that he went on to describe the general public reaction to his statement as simply being that of *'rolled eyes and a yawn of boredom'*. Now this is certainly one response that an overwhelmed aging church, or a church that is hell bent on trying to remain popular can adopt—but we can't duck our heads and hope the storm will pass.

In America a Christian media outlet set up by the late Chuck Colson in 1991 has said, *'Churches do not seem to sense the urgency of teaching on matters of marriage, family and especially religious liberty.'*

Today I need to qualify the way I apply these verses from Jude. It needs to be clear that I'm not interested in preaching bad news or division. I come aligning myself with the good news of gospel as we find it in the Scripture, preserved in the historic Creeds, and the Uniting Church Basis of Union. But there is a bigger picture. Today an International Confessing Movement of concerned Christian around the world has arisen with view to **calling upon the church (universal) to remain faithful to the gospel and to the historic orthodox faith delivered to the Saints.**

In most major Churches around the world where the church is under pressure to modify and compromise its message the Confessing Movement has sprung up. In the Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church USA, United Church of Canada, United Methodist Church USA, Methodist Church of New Zealand. In the Anglican Church the Confessing movement found expression as 2,000 leaders and lay-people met at a Global Anglican Futures Conference (GAFCON) in 2018.

In 1977, three churches came together in the Uniting Church in Australia and the first sentence of its Basis of Union committed it to move forward *"in fellowship with the whole church catholic"* (universal). (BoU, para 1)

In 2003 the Uniting Church stepped outside of that commitment to other churches and the historic faith by providing for the ordination of clergy practising a same sex-lifestyle. In 2018 the Assembly Standing committee in its radical proposal to redefine Christian marriage again stepped outside the orthodox faith and its ecumenical commitment to consult with other churches. Instead of moving ahead in **sole loyalty to Christ** (Para 1), the proposal to change the doctrine of marriage in order to provide for same gender marriage came in *sole loyalty to* promoting diversity and a popular brand of social inclusiveness.

To understand the Scriptures, the Christian heritage and what it means to be loyal to Christ is not a matter of political social engineering that finally ends up passively following public opinion. We face complex times but being loyal to Christ need not be a matter of educating people to think differently over years or constructing a sophisticated rationale for change.

To be loyal to Christ means to be on his mission.

**It certainly means reaching out** to a pluralistic, diverse world, to hurting and marginalised people with genuine heart-felt compassion and acceptance.

**It also means to be wise and discerning of false gospels.** To be loyal to the Christ of the New Testament means to be living and experiencing the power of the truth, a gospel that,

(1) calls us to open our hearts and minds to people who are different, to the hurts and brokenness of LGBTI people who experience feelings of rejection.

(2) That calls us to feel the pain of a desire to be loved and a confused identity, a sexual/gender dysphoria. But,---

(3) ---it also calls us, like a grain of wheat falling into the ground to surrender ourselves and our ‘me-me’ preoccupation.

(4) It calls us not to be afraid to die, to surrender our lives and deepest desires to Christ. All the baggage of our past, all the power of our unfulfilled desires and passions.

To move ahead ‘**in sole loyalty to Christ**’ (BoU, para 1) means we surrender ourselves until there is nothing left to grasp onto, nothing, only Jesus and a cross. Nothing, only the certainty of the love of God, His forgiveness, His healing power, acceptance and reinstatement as a person of infinite worth. Amen.

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### **An Affirming Response**

On July 23 one faithful family cousin replied to my circulated personal position statement directed to relatives and friends. “*I have read your sermon on ‘**Contending for the Faith**’ (twice in fact).*”—He continued,--

*‘The news from Assembly has been quite a shock to me personally. It seems quite absurd that we are being told to have two separate and conflicting views on marriage at the same time.—in short, I believe one part of the church has been given permission by Assembly to disobey God’s will.’*

With sound reason his suggested answer was ‘patience’ along with the words of Joshua 24:25, “*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*” Before concluding, with a care and depth of understanding that Beryl and myself really appreciated, he said,

*‘The Uniting Church, through the Basis of Union, proudly brought three denominations together. The word ‘Uniting’ in the church’s name is a verb, intending that uniting should be an ongoing process. Sadly it seems that the desire to be all things to all people, that is, to be inclusive, has actually weakened the church with ever declining numbers from within and being seen as irrelevant by the wider community. If unity was the objective, then surely we see that the reverse is happening with the denomination now being split in two.*

*Our fervent prayers are for several close relatives and other close friends who have been faithful in full time ministry through the avenue of the Methodist and Uniting Church. For them, this whole thing must be very upsetting and disillusioning. Grace and peace to you and Beryl.’*

**This series will be continued with paper Number 6. View this site or [tedcurnow.wordpress.com](http://tedcurnow.wordpress.com)**

**Further Reference:** *On the above web sites, **The Story of Colliding Worlds**. The Church is caught in a remarkable period of rapid cultural change. Many Christians grieve over the loss of the past, others are passionate about moving ahead. This resource explains two very different world-views and ways of thinking, the colliding of two worlds. It calls the church to face change, to faithfully discern the truth and with courage to be loyal in following Christ.*