

ACC Catalyst

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POWER

and how it's changing in the Uniting Church

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Jaw-jaw better than war-war

Barack Obama scored a few good points with his speech in Cairo earlier this month. Some criticized the American President for gracing the home stage of a notoriously undemocratic ruler like Egypt's Hosni Mubarak. But to be fair, which Islamic country anywhere in the Middle East isn't undemocratic?

If the US President wanted to make a landmark speech to capture the attention of people throughout Middle Eastern Islam, he was always going to have to do so from a fairly shady pulpit. The real question, then, is whether Obama was right to make such a speech. To that, the answer's totally clear: you bet he was.

The June 4 speech at Cairo University in which President Obama emphasized the inherent compatibility of Islam and the United States was a magisterial work of political propaganda. The cause of civilization has long demanded such a speech, and the President delivered. The address was liberally sprinkled with quotations from the Koran, and emphasized the concept of mutual respect between Islam and Christianity. It was of a piece with Obama's earlier forays into the Islamic nations' media, such as his recent video message greeting the Iranian people on the occasion of the Persian new year, and his interview with Al Arabiya television in January. All three suggest a US President keen to speak warmly and directly with Muslim people around the world, regardless of how bad their governments might be.

This is important because, as the saying goes, there's a war on. Leaving aside the encyclopedia of national,

factional, theological and ideological conflicts which work themselves back and forth constantly within the Islamic nations, one particular conflict has been threatening for six years to seriously overshadow all the rest. This is the rise of Al Qaeda and its attempts to force radical change within Islam. Al Qaeda represents a supranational threat. Like the totalitarian variants of Marxism in the 20th century, its ambitions do not confine themselves to one country or one continent. Combating the growth of Al Qaeda within the Islamic nations is of prime importance. But the task has been incompetently carried through under President George W Bush, whose invasion of Iraq in March 2003, supported by Australia's then Prime Minister John Howard, gave Al Qaeda its biggest shot of adrenaline since the Twin Towers collapsed two years earlier.

In Cairo, President Obama quoted the words of American Founding Father Thomas Jefferson: "I hope that our wisdom will grow with our power and teach us that the less we use our power, the greater it will be." That neatly sums up the main lesson to be learned from American foreign policy in the past six years.

The headline above this article is a quotation from Winston Churchill. ■

Changes proposed to the Preamble and Constitution of the Uniting Church in Australia at the 12th Assembly of the Uniting Church presage a fundamental change to the balance of power within the Church. If accepted they will effectively remove power from the church's full Assembly, and transfer it to a smaller group — the Assembly Standing Committee. In the interest of shedding light on this important issue, we devote the next three pages to documentation and commentary on the proposed changes.

Proposed amendments to the Preamble and Constitution of the Uniting Church In Australia

Preamble

The Uniting Church in Australia was formed on 22 June, 1977 by the union of the Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia after the approval of the Councils and Courts by those three churches of 'The Basis of Union'

In the Basis of Union it is acknowledged that the demand of the Gospel, the response of the Church to the Gospel and the discipline which it requires are partly expressed in the formulation by the Church of its law, the aim of which is to confess God's will for the life of Christ's Church.

AND THUS the Uniting Church in Australia pledges to keep its law under constant review so that its life may increasingly be directed to the service of God and humanity, and its worship to a true and faithful setting forth of and response to the Gospel of Christ.

AND SO IT IS RECOGNISED

1. That when the three churches that make up the Uniting Church arrived in Australia as part of the process of colonisation they found a land that had been created and sustained by the God who is revealed in creation.
2. This land had nurtured and sustained the First Peoples and Clan Nations of this country, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who in the eyes of God are the sovereign peoples of these lands and waters.
3. The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonizers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony.
4. Tragically, many in the three churches were so deeply connected to the values and relationships of the emerging colonial society that they shared the paternalism and racism towards the First Peoples

which resulted in the First Peoples being dispossessed from their land, denied their language, culture and spirituality, becoming strangers in their own land.

5. The three uniting churches remained largely silent as the dominant culture of Australia constructed and propagated a version of history that denied this land was occupied, farmed and harvested by these First Peoples, and as a result theology became distorted and the very integrity and identity of the three churches who came into union was diminished.
6. The First Peoples in time challenged their dispossession and denial of their proper place in this land; in the community, in the courts, in the parliaments, in the way history was recorded and told, and in the Uniting Church in Australia.

In 1985 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Uniting Church formed the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, and in 1988 this body invited the other members of the Church to join in a solemn act of covenanting before God.

AND SO in 1994 the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia entered into an ever deepening covenantal relationship so that all may see a destiny together, praying and working together for a fuller expression of our reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

THEREFORE pursuant to clause 72 of the Interim Constitution passed at the first Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia meeting at Sydney in June 1977 and as subsequently amended, the Interim Constitution is repealed and replaced so that the following, together with this Preamble, becomes THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA.

Editor's comment: *Other important issues are flagged under the heading 'Foundational Matters'. These include sections on the 'foundational*

relationships' of the Church, the faith of the Church and the Basis of Union, the Church and God's mission, and 'the Church embodied in one place' (the last includes the significance of Congregations in the ordering of the Church's life.) The full text of the proposed changes may be obtained from the Uniting Church Assembly. The following is included:

The Church and its relationship with the First Peoples of Australia

- 2 (a) The Uniting Church seeks a renewal of its relationship with the First Peoples of Australia so that God's purposes and the purposes of the Church may be fulfilled in the land of Australia.
- (b) The Uniting Church will so order its life that there is a covenantal relationship recognizing the unique place of the First Peoples of Australia, between the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, and other parts of the Church.
- (c) Notwithstanding this Constitution and its provisions, the Church shall remain open to the possibility that the covenantal relationship may through the guidance of the Holy Spirit call the Church into new ways of ordering its life, provided that the Assembly and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress agree and that the concurrence of Synods and/or Presbyteries and/or Congregations is obtained in such manner as the Assembly and the Congress together may determine.
- (d) Where there is any ambiguity in the plain meaning of the provisions of this Constitution or any regulations made under it, the maintenance of the Covenantal relationship, as the expression of one of the Church's foundational relationships, shall be of particular importance in the interpretation of the ambiguity. ■

Hasty plan to re-shape the UCA

A proposal to dramatically change the Preamble to the Uniting Church Constitution will be presented to the 12th Assembly in July. It is an extremely important matter as the Preamble is the link between the Constitution and the Basis of Union, the Uniting Church's foundational document.

On 8 December 2008 the General Secretary of the UCA, the Rev Terence Corkin, sent a letter to Secretaries of Presbyteries and Synods advising them of proposals coming to the Twelfth Assembly to alter the Preamble to the Constitution.

Although it claims to be a response to the disappointment of UAICC at Presidential Ruling 25 in 2007, which determined “where the limits to Congress’ authority were in regard to the oversight and discipline of Ministers serving in placements with the Congress,” the new proposal goes far beyond any attempt to resolve the particular matters in dispute.

The General Secretary and the Convenor of the Constitution Task Group, the Rev Chris Budden, who have invited comments on the proposal, argue that the Constitution should be focused more on ‘our most important relationships’ than on inflexible ‘structural arrangements.’

The framers of the Basis of Union and Constitution would be astonished to hear that the present Preamble is thought to be more structural than relational. They believed that the three churches were called into relationship with each other by the triune God

on the basis of commitments agreed to and set down in their common confession and law.

The original Preamble provides for the Constitution to be amended, repealed or replaced ‘in accordance with the relevant decisions of the Assembly.’ A critical question is whether this hastily prepared proposal, which has not been widely circulated and considered in the Councils of the church, is consistent with the faith and doctrine affirmed in the BU. Another is whether commendable goodwill and enthusiasm is going to cloud judgment on the serious, if unintended, long term consequences of passing the proposal.

It is surprising that such an important matter is being rushed, given the Church’s professed high standards of governance and open and transparent processes.

The following responses, some of which have been submitted to Synod newspapers, seek to alert Church members and Assembly representatives to potential dangers for the theological, historical and legal integrity of the UCA, and our ecumenical relationships, of approving the

proposed new Preamble at the Twelfth Assembly:

- “The proposed changes to the Constitution and the approval of a new Preamble raise critical issues for the UC. The process of drafting the proposed Preamble is gravely defective. It has not included congregations. The contrast with the process before union in 1977 is stunning. Regardless of the changes proposed and their merit, this is another example of the top-down decision-making which is undermining the conciliar decision-making envisaged by the Basis of Union (Cl 15).

Dr Budden is quoted as saying that there has been “an exhaustive consultative process.” It may have seemed so to the small group he chaired, but to those excluded it appears to have been very limited. Congregations, after all, are one of the councils of the Uniting Church.

Conferring a veto right on Congress may have some justification. No attempt, however, has been made to list the pros and cons of that, or the consequences of deleting the existing Preamble, with its historical, theological and legal importance. Its emphasis on The Basis of Union and commitment to the faith and unity of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church is erased.

For those who believe that the founders of the Uniting church intended the Constitution to be interpreted in the light of the *Basis*, this is a very serious attack on our heritage. It demands the widest possible discussion, in *all* the councils of the Uniting Church.”

Ian Breward, Garden City (Victoria)

- “The proposed preamble deletes the words that describe the faith and prayerfulness of the people that led us into union from the three churches. Phrases such as “the belief that they have been called by God into an organic union” are being deleted along with other phrases such as “earnestly and prayerfully.”

Secondly, the proposed preamble deletes God’s action in the formation of union and focuses instead on the structures and what people have done. Phrases like “called by God” and “seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the Basis upon which they were being led into union” are being deleted and shortened to simply “formed ... after the approval of the Councils and Courts ...” These changes challenge our very identity as Uniting Church. They challenge the faith of the Basis of Union!”

Anne Hibbard, Liverpool (NSW)

- “The proposal emasculates the existing Preamble. It provides no justification for such a drastic change nor indicates what the legal ramifications will be.

It is concerning that the Church has not been provided with the opportunity for a full and open discussion about the proposed change. Synods had limited opportunities for consideration in the latter part of 2008. Presbyteries across the country only received a draft for consideration a fortnight before Christmas, with comments due by 1st May.

For so important an issue, it is also difficult to understand why congregations and members have not been informed of the proposal and invited to comment.

There appears an undue rush to push this matter through. Members would be surprised to learn that there are problems with the current Preamble, given that there has been no such indication at recent Assemblies or concerns expressed to Members.

It is surprising, too, that the Preamble proposal is coming forward at this time as the Assembly will be considering a separate proposal for a major revision of the Constitution and Regulations over the course of the next two Assemblies. The two should be done together so that there can be consistency and certainty between them.”

Owen Davis, Rosslyn Park (SA)

- “It is curious that this new Preamble is being proposed when the covenanting relationship between ‘non aboriginal’ and ‘aboriginal’ members of the UCA has been sealed already in a service of Holy Communion at the Seventh Assembly in 1994, acknowledged in the Constitution (article 49) and strengthened and developed throughout the Church in the Covenanting Process.”

Max Champion, Mt Waverley (Victoria)

- “I’m sure that the proposed Preamble to the UCA Constitution is an attempt to establish a sufficiently appropriate location for the undeniably important place that Australia’s Indigenous people have within the Uniting Church. It also cannot be denied, that they have suffered at the hands of 18th Century colonialism and Ecclesiastical imperialism.

However, I see signs of a 21st Century form of European colonialism and theological imperialism, implicit in the very words of the Preamble. I refer particularly to the apparent attempt to link Indigenous Spirituality with Trinitarian Faith.

To preserve the integrity of past Indigenous Culture and Spirituality that existed prior to European settlement, it should be affirmed that their “Law, Custom and Ceremony”, can stand in its own right as a unique and authentic expression of Aboriginal life. This would then free the Preamble to affirm the integrity of the Trinitarian Faith which is the foundation of the UCA’s Constitution and Basis of Union.

It is true that all cultures can lay claim to a God or gods that initiated and sustained the Creation as they have authentically experienced it. However, it is the Trinitarian God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that the Church witnesses to in every culture, among every people, in every generation, doing the work of creating, redeeming and sanctifying. It is the unique particularity of God’s name and work, made known in Jesus Christ that brings about the reconciliation we all seek. It’s difficult to say this without seeming to childishly say “my God is better than your God” or, “anyway, we all believe in the same God”, but it must be said. The fact that the UAICC exists to do its evangelical work in the name of Jesus Christ, testifies that the indigenous Christian church believes in the integrity of its own culture whilst witnessing to the uniqueness of the Christian faith. It is through our common calling in Christ that we are reconciled to God and one another.

John Hudson, Thornbury (Victoria)

- My concern is twofold:

1) Process: There is no detailed statement and explanation of the history giving rise to the proposed change. Not only that, but the statement contains no discussion

Hasty plan to re-shape the UCA continued

and explanation of the benefits and disadvantages of making such a change and the impact of making or not making such an important amendment to the constitution of the church. More time is required to discuss this vital matter across the whole Church.

2) Theology: Secondly, and perhaps more importantly is the theological issue. It is stated in the report to the Assembly by Congress, that the significance of the proposed preamble is:

“The realization that God might have been speaking directly to Indigenous Australians for many millennia, well before the days of Noah or Abraham, was hardly a consideration. But this is the view of Congress . . . this is the historical truth as we see it and which we are now asking non-Indigenous members of UCA to acknowledge through the proposed Preamble”.

Though it is true that God may have been speaking to Indigenous Australians for many millennia, this knowledge or revelation is only a ‘partial’ revelation and it is only in Jesus Christ that we can come to a fuller revelation of who God is (Hebrews 1). The preamble, therefore, must point to this reality as Christ and Christ alone is at the centre of the church’s identity, not our own particular experience of God. The Basis of Union does this well as it is the theological preamble to the Constitution. It is why Congress and the wider church can therefore say, that we seek “to unite in one fellowship all Aboriginal and Islander Christians who have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord, accept the authority of the Scriptures and desire to follow and serve Christ as his disciples (Congress website)”.

Hedley Fihaki, Cairns (Queensland)

• Whether by intention or not, the proposed changes to the Constitution have the effect of removing power from the full Assembly and granting it to the Assembly Standing Committee.

The current preamble states that the Uniting Church is governed by a series of inter-related councils. The proposed new preamble omits this while the proposed change to the Constitution (new 2A) will allow the Assembly Standing Committee the power of veto over Assembly and the rest of the church. (‘Where any interpretation [of the Constitution] does not in the opinion of the UAICC

and the Assembly Standing Committee reflect [the covenantal relationship] then that interpretation cannot be used as the basis for further action by the church [including the full Assembly?]. If the proposed clause 2A means that the current clause 2 becomes clause 2B, then ASC will also have determining power of what it means to be ‘guided by the Basis of Union’.

It is now up to the Twelfth Assembly to decide if government by *inter-related* councils in *adherence* to the Basis of Union is going to be a thing of the past in the Uniting Church.

Walter Abetz, Scottsdale (Tasmania)

A Rights blanket to warm our gripes

UnitingJustice, a unit of the Uniting Church in Victoria, suggests that systemic official violence is rife in Australia.

In the May issue of the synod journal *Crosslight* the unit invited ‘those who feel they have been a victim of human rights abuse — or have witnessed it — to report the abuse to the federal government’ through UnitingJustice. The unit says it ‘needs information about abuse.’

This is a curious message from an arm of the church dedicated to resisting a social scourge. Requesting information about abuse sounds like drumming up evidence for an uncertain hypothesis, namely, that Australians are being stripped of their rights and dignity.

Abuse covers everything from personal irritation to assault and murder. Public perceptions of rights, accordingly, do not clarify the nature of rights abuse. The national human rights consultation, set up to hear the views of the community, could be expected to. But its website does not define rights; it describes them in the following unarguable terms — “Human rights are about equality and fairness for everyone”.

Commitment to human rights enshrines the values of “freedom, respect, fairness, justice, democracy and equality”. Town meetings, which



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the committee calls roundtables, have been held in regional areas. Participants discuss three key questions:

1. which human rights (and corresponding responsibilities) should be protected and promoted?
2. Are these human rights currently promoted and protected?
3. How could Australia better protect and promote human rights?

The questions avoid any reference to the complex philosophical problems raised by human rights, and give no indication that personal integrity and honesty are the only guarantors of respect for others. Town meetings reflect a degree of self-interest usually associated with the annual post-budgetary introspection.

According to the committee's own reporting, inadequate health services stand at the top of every town's complaint list. Broken Hill residents

say their rights are eroded because the nearest hospitals are in other states. Equally vexatious is the difficulty of filling methadone prescriptions from pharmacists across state boundaries.

At Broken Hill an anti-charter group said that a written charter of rights would create greater restrictions on rights than under the present system of unwritten law. It also stated that a charter of rights cannot take the place of a change of culture. But how? Through educating every age group about responsibilities as well as rights.

Any future charter of rights will need clearer definitions than emerged in the roundtable discussions. From health care the spectrum ran to rights of cyclists not to wear helmets, with fair treatment by police and removal of poverty somewhere in between.

The committee's findings show that 'rights' are a blanket covering every gripe and source of dismay. Disparity

between city and country services, access to health care, lack of state support services for migrants and lack of work for indigenous Australians are not human rights issues. The machinery to fix such issues already exists. Well-meaning intentions will not remedy any problem. But they may well raise the temperature of discontent and the frequency of litigation. ■

Some questions for this magazine

To Editor;

There are a number of articles in the March 2009 edition of ACCatalyst which have no name given to indicate authorship, and I have wondered why?

One article concerns me greatly, probably as much as the previous issue's editorial on the death penalty. It concerns the article following Dorothy Bushnell's letter titled "Obama and Gaza: Trust no one". Beginning with a quote from a journalist quoted in another Christian magazine as 'cynical' and having written very critically of the Christian faith, the point is made that "under democracy all public officials are frauds and do not deserve respect." Is this true? Having been pleased that recent State elections in Australia have seen keen Christian people elected to 'public office', do these not deserve our respect?

On the contrary, I find it hard to respect a writer who claims Israel has 'bellicose intentions' in regard to the recent offensive in Gaza. I do not agree with all the actions and decisions of the nation of Israel, but

News and views

Some questions for this magazine continued

stand in solidarity with them against the clear intentions of all those who wage unceasing war against them, and whose only desire is to leave no Jew alive. Most of these, incidentally, would leave no Christian alive either. Unlike their enemies, the IDF made concerted efforts to avoid civilian casualties, and are sad that any took place. In contrast, Hamas places civilians in the areas of danger, and makes great media use, when their own people are killed.

By the grace of God, I am part of the branch 'grafted in' to the root which is Israel, and look forward to the fulfillment of Romans chs. 10-11 when we and they share in the glorious mercy of God!

The article is overtly in criticism of President Obama, and there are some decisions made already by his administration, with which I disagree, and I too, pray for better things to come. But it is to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah, to whom I look in faith and hope. ■

Mervyn Jay, Western Australia

Editor's reply:

All articles in ACCatalyst are by contributors who have satisfied the Editor as to their identity and ability to reason.

In relation to signed articles, the current policy of the magazine is to avoid signed articles in 'News and Views' where possible.

This policy fulfills two purposes. As well as allowing anonymity where a writer desires anonymity, it helps ACCatalyst — uniquely in the Australian media, we believe — to avoid the tragic epidemic of 'byline-itis' which currently afflicts the online and print publishing world.

Rights and the withering of parliament

More momentous than last month's budget session is the surreptitious process leading, apparently, to a national charter of rights.

Surreptitious may be unfair; the federal government's human rights committee isn't in hiding. It's been holding community meetings right across the country. But the media don't report them, and the rights lobby is keeping mum.

Soon this will change. A four-person human rights committee headed by Fr. Frank Brennan is expected to report its findings in June. Any debate will be desultory at best, because the matter is so complex that most people will leave it to the experts. And no group is more expert in the lore of rights than the legal profession.

The late Sir Harry Gibbs, former chief justice of the High Court, claimed as long ago as 1995 that "a bill of rights requires the judges to decide questions of policy which in a democracy should be decided by the Parliament." The same applies to a charter of rights.

Why is the government moving towards a charter, not a bill of rights? Because a charter can be introduced without a referendum. Then, rights will be determined not by parliament but by the courts. And courts are just as flawed as unpredictable as parliaments. The difference is that MPs face the ballot box; unelected judges do not.

The human rights industry, made up of activists, lawyers and aggrieved individuals with a gleam of compensation in their eyes, boasts an endless litany of rights abuses. Anecdotes abound of real and imagined slights. 'Rights' are hard enough to define without individuals manufacturing subjective claims.

Official bodies and individuals do sometimes infringe the rights of others. But civil liberties flourish nevertheless in Australia. We are not an authoritarian state. When abuse occurs it is due to the misuse of power, not the absence of laws and safeguards. When the present legal system fails, the fault lies less with the laws we have, than with the people who administer them.

Tragically no institution designed to deliver justice and liberty is without blame. Courts, parliaments, municipal councils, employer bodies, unions, police forces, universities, churches and bureaucracies have more power than they can be trusted with, and they exert it unrighteously. Abuse is inevitable. A charter of rights will not remedy this deficiency, because what we need are not new legal safeguards but men and women of integrity and goodness. ■

Neuhaus' law of 'optional orthodoxy': a lesson for the churches

The founding Editor of 'First Things' journal, Richard John Neuhaus, died on January 8, 2009, at the age of 72. A prolific writer, a committed pastor and a man headlined by Time as one of America's most influential evangelicals, Fr Neuhaus made a singular contribution to the idea that Christians should be leaders in "the public square"—promoting the insights of classical Christianity, with determination, humour, intelligence and grace, to all who will read or listen, regardless of their beliefs.

With the permission of 'First Things,' we here reprint one of Fr Neuhaus's countless memorable articles, in tribute to his life's work. Further writings can be read in the Archives section of the First Things website (see back page.) This article first appeared in 'The Public Square' column in 1997.

I'll presume to call it Neuhaus' Law, or at least one of his several laws: Where orthodoxy is optional, orthodoxy will sooner or later be proscribed. Some otherwise bright people have indicated their puzzlement with that axiom but it seems to me, well, axiomatic. Orthodoxy, no matter how politely expressed, suggests that there is a right and a wrong, a true and a false, about things. When orthodoxy is optional, it is admitted under a rule of liberal tolerance that cannot help but be intolerant of talk about right and wrong, true and false. It is therefore a conditional admission, depending upon orthodoxy's good behavior. The orthodox may be permitted to believe this or that and to do this or that as a matter of sufferance, allowing them to indulge their inclination, preference, or personal taste. But it is an intolerable violation of the etiquette by which one is tolerated if one has the effrontery to propose that this or that is normative for others.

A well-mannered church can put up with a few orthodox eccentrics, and can even take pride in being so very inclusive. "Oh, poor Johnson thinks we're all heretics," says the bishop, chuckling between sips of his sherry. The bishop is manifestly pleased that there is somebody, even if it is only

poor old Johnson, who thinks he is so adventuresome as to be a heretic. And he is pleased with himself for keeping Johnson around to make him pleased with himself. If, however, Johnson's views had the slightest chance of prevailing and thereby threatening the bishop's general sense of security and well-being, well, then it would be an entirely different matter.

So it was that some church bodies muddled through for a long time with leaderships that trimmed doctrine to the dictates of academic fashion and popular prejudice (the two, more often than not, being the same) while permitting the orthodox option as a kindness to those so inclined, and as testimony to the "balance" so cherished by placeholders radically devoted to the middle way. It was not always an entirely unattractive accommodation. In religion, too, sensible people prefer to be neither fanatic nor wimp. Considering the alternatives, and if one has the choice, it is nice to try to be nice.

Non-Optional Orthodoxy

But then what used to be called orthodoxy came up against a new orthodoxy. The new liberal orthodoxy of recent decades is hard and nasty; compared to it, the old orthodoxy was merely quaint. The old orthodoxy was like a dotty old uncle in the

front parlor; the new orthodoxy is a rampaging harridan in the family room. The old orthodoxy claimed to speak for the past, which seemed harmless enough. The new orthodoxy claims to speak for the future and is therefore the bearer of imperatives that brook no opposition. The choice of a few to live in the past could be indulged when the future was thought to be open and undetermined. Tolerating the orthodox was also a way of playing it safe. You never know: Maybe the ways of the past would come around again. But the old orthodoxy that is optional is proscribed by the new orthodoxy, which is never optional.

The easygoing liberal tolerance that long prevailed was at home with accommodating preferences but uneasy about the question of truth. Not that it denied that there is a truth about this or that, but, then, who was to say what that truth might be? When the question of truth is bracketed — that is, when it is denied in practice — one can choose to be tolerant of a splendid array of "truths." Or one might decide that there really is no truth that makes tolerance necessary, and choose another course. The alternative to the course of tolerance is the course of power. Tolerance suspends judgment; the will to power acknowledges no reason for restraint.

In some churches, the new orthodoxy is most aggressively manifest in feminist and homosexual (or, as it is said, "lesbigay") agitations. These, however, are but the more conspicuous eruptions that follow upon a determined denial of the normative truths espoused by an older orthodoxy. Proponents of the new orthodoxy will protest, with some justice, that they, too, are committed to normative truths. These truths, however, are not embodied in propositions, precedent, ecclesial authority, or, goodness knows, revelation. They are experiential truths expressing the truth of who we truly are—"we" being defined by sex, race, class, tribe, or identifying desire ("orientation").

Identity Is Trumps

With the older orthodoxy it is possible to disagree, as in having an argument. Evidence, reason, and logic count, in principle at least. Not so with the new orthodoxy. Here disagreement is an intolerable personal affront. It is construed as a denial of others, of their experience of who they are. It is a blasphemous assault on that most high god, "My Identity." Truth-as-identity is not appealable beyond the assertion of identity. In this game, identity is trumps. An appeal to what St. Paul or Aquinas or Catherine of Sienna or a Church council said cannot withstand the undeniable retort, "Yes, but they are not me!" People pack their truths into what Peter Berger has called group-identity kits. The chief item in the kit, of course, is the claim to being oppressed.

Nobody denies that there are, for instance, women, blacks, American Indians, and homosexuals beyond number who do not subscribe to the

identities assigned their respective groups. This, however, does not faze those in charge of packing and distributing identity kits. They explain that identity dissidents, people who do not accept the identities assigned them, are doubly victimized — victims of their oppressors and victims of a false consciousness that blinds them to the reality of their being oppressed. Alternatively, identity dissidents are declared to be traitors who have been suborned into collaboration with the deniers of who they are. The proponents of truth-as-identity catch the dissidents coming and going. They say their demand is only for "acceptance," leaving no doubt that acceptance means assent to what they know (as nobody else can know!) is essential to being true to their authentic selves. Not to assent is not to disagree; it is to deny their humanity, which, especially in churches credally committed to being nice, is not a nice thing to do.

This helps explain why questions such as quota-ized representation, women's ordination, and homosexuality are so intractable. There is no common ground outside the experiential circles of identity by which truth is circularly defined. Conservatives huff and puff about the authority of Scripture and tradition, while moderates appeal to the way differences used to be accommodated in the early Church (before c. 1968), but all to no avail. Whatever the issue, the new orthodoxy will not give an inch, demanding acceptance and inclusiveness, which means rejection and exclusion of whatever or whomever questions their identity, meaning their right to believe, speak, and act as they will, for what they will do is what they must do if they are to be who they most truly

are. "So you want me to agree with you in denying who I am?" By such reasoning, so to speak, the spineless are easily intimidated.

An Instructive Tale

Contentions between rival orthodoxies is an old story in the Church, and the battles that have been fought are riddled with ironies. An earlier round of the difficulties encountered by optional orthodoxy is nicely recounted by John Shelton Reed in a new book, *Glorious Battle: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism*. The Oxford Movement associated with John Henry Newman set out to restore to the Church of England an orthodox and catholic substance that it had presumably once possessed. By the middle of the 1840s, Newman and others came to the conclusion that the via media they had championed as an Anglican alternative to both Rome and Protestantism was in fact a "paper church," quite devoid of apostolic reality. After Newman and his companions left, the work of orthodox restoration was continued under the banner of "Ritualism" or "Anglo-Catholicism." It enjoyed the impressive leadership of such as John Keble and Edward Pusey, but in the public mind it was more closely connected with sundry aesthetes and eccentrics for whom Anglo-Catholicism was, says Reed, a "countercultural" assault on the Victorian establishment.

It is a mark of the restorationists' success that they were soon perceived as a serious threat by the bishops at their sherry, and by Englishmen of consequence (their wives tended to be more sympathetic), who resented any departure from the unapologetic Protestantism of the national

religion. In 1874, unhappiness led to parliament passing the Public Worship Regulation Act, which landed a number of Anglo-Catholic clerics in jail for short stays. Checked by this establishment opposition, Reed notes, the ritualists did an about-face.

In their earlier restorationist mode, they had insisted that the entire church should conform to the normative orthodoxy that they claimed was constitutive of the Anglican tradition. By the 1870s, however, it had become evident that any steps toward uniformity would be at the expense of the Anglo-Catholics. Whereupon Anglo-Catholics became the foremost opponents of uniformity and enthusiastically championed ecclesiastical pluralism. All they were asking for, they said, was “tolerance and forbearance” for their way of being Anglican. In 1867, the Reverend Charles Walker was urging upon the Royal Commission on Ritual that peace could be found in the agreement “that the National Establishment embraces in its bosom two separate religions.” Of course that appeal failed to carry the day, as is almost inevitably the case when previously tolerated options threaten the establishment.

Reed, an Episcopalian who teaches at the University of North Carolina, sums up the irony of Anglo-Catholicism: “A movement that originally championed orthodoxy had come to defend freedom; begun in opposition to religious liberalism, the movement now appealed to liberal values for its survival. Cardinal Manning, once an Anglo-Catholic clergyman himself, saw the irony, and maintained that ‘Ritualism is private judgment in gorgeous raiment, wrought about with divers colours.’ He declared that ‘every fringe in an elaborate

cope worn without authority is only a distinct and separate act of private judgment; the more elaborate, the less Catholic; the nearer the imitation, the further from the submission of faith.” Reed adds, “Although some denied it, Manning had a point.”

Defending Enclaves

It took a long time for Anglo-Catholicism to be thoroughly routed, but the job seems now almost complete. Among Anglo-Catholics in this country, many have left for Rome or Constantinople, some have joined up with groups of “continuing Anglicanism,” and a few are determined to make yet another valiant last stand, despite a long and depressing record of failed last stands. In England there is the peculiar spectacle of “flying bishops,” a kind of parallel episcopate ministering to parishes that are no longer in communion with their own bishops. That is generally conceded to be a transient arrangement.

Within the Episcopal and other liberal church bodies, it is still possible, here and there, to defend parochial enclaves of orthodox teaching and catholic sensibility. But those who seek safe haven in such enclaves frequently suspect that Cardinal Manning was right: There is something deeply incoherent about sectarian catholicity. There are numerous groups in this country — Baptist, Missouri Lutheran, Reformed, Pentecostalist — that maintain their version of orthodoxy in a way that is not optional. Setting aside the theological merits of their orthodoxies, such groups are sociologically secure; in their world, they are the establishment, and to that world the new and nasty orthodoxy of truth-as-identity is not admitted. Some of us may think such immunity

comes at too high a price. But for those to whom sectarianism is no vice, and may even be a virtue, such withdrawal and disengagement seems like no price at all.

The circumstance is very different for those Christians to whom it matters to be part of the Great Tradition. One thinks especially of Lutherans, Anglicans, and those Reformed who claim the heritage of John Nevin and Philip Schaff; all think of themselves as “evangelical catholics” in ecclesial bodies temporarily separated from uppercase Catholicism and uppercase Orthodoxy. Anglo-Catholicism was the most impressively institutionalized form of this self-understanding. But, whether in its Reformed, Lutheran, or Anglican expressions, movements of normative restoration were compelled to settle for being tolerated options, and now it seems even that is denied them.

Almost five hundred years after the sixteenth-century divisions, the realization grows that there is no via media. The realization grows that orthodoxy and catholicity can be underwritten only by Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Perhaps more than any other single factor, the influence of Anglo-Catholicism among Protestants obscured this reality for a long time. It is a considerable merit of John Shelton Reed’s *Glorious Battle* that it contributes to our understanding of why movements of catholic restoration, posited against the self-understanding of the communities they would renew, turn into an optional orthodoxy. A century later, an illiberal liberalism, much more unrelenting than the Victorian establishment, will no longer — tolerate the option. It is very much like a law: Where orthodoxy is optional, orthodoxy will sooner or later be proscribed. ■

Samson and Delilah: searching for hope amid despair

Film Review by Peter Bentley

Is there any hope in some communities? One of the unfortunate tasks in some modern film making seems to be taking people with you in despair, and then adding more despair until you are made to identify totally with the hopelessness that is at the centre of the director's life. In *Samson and Delilah* there are strong and confronting scenes, but there is also a theme of hope. It is not a prosperity gospel based hope which is perhaps the bizarre theme in the 2009 Academy Award winner *Slumdog Millionaire*. No winning the big one for Samson or Delilah, their eventual escape is to a simple life, through love.

Sixty years ago Cecil B Demille released *Samson and Delilah* with Hedy Lamarr and Victor Mature showing a rather more traditional portrayal of strength, love, betrayal and revenge.

In 2009 Rowan McNamara is Samson, a 15 year old mainly focussed on petrol sniffing, who takes life as it comes in a marginalised and ill-supported Aboriginal community. Marissa Gibson is Delilah, a 16 year old carer for her 'Nana,' caught in the life she has been given, but one who glimpses the good and possible.

What is the way out of a cycle of hopelessness? There are continuing, but unanswered questions about who or what enslaves people like Samson and Delilah in the 21st century.

Samson and Delilah has garnered public and critical acclaim for director Warwick Thornton, including the best first feature film at Cannes 2009. He had previously been widely involved



in cinematography, and made several short films and documentaries including *Rosalie's Journey* about the star of the Chauvel film *Jedda*. The film is well, though simply, photographed, and the Australian outback and desert are lovingly portrayed, providing a striking contrast to the expensive looking visual depth of the film *Australia*.

It is a film that uses silence and non-visual communication in many subtle ways. The main spoken language is Warlpiri, sub-titled in English.

There are many memorable scenes, from the irony of the opening with Charley Pride's 'Sunshiny Day' beaming forth while Samson awakes and starts his usual day with his head in a tin can, to the juxtaposition of Delilah sitting in Alice Springs, offering a shy smile behind two girls wearing pristine school uniforms, one of them chatting merrily on her mobile phone. She is like them, and yet so unlike them in experience. Mitjili Napanangka Gibson as Nana is



a striking character, but her paintings also play a strong role in the film, and provide a real life context and underlying connection for Delilah. There is a telling scene where Delilah sees one of her Nana's paintings in an art gallery with a \$22,000 price tag. It would appear from this film that Warwick Thornton is also considering how the contemporary Aboriginal experience cannot be understood without reference to Christianity.

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The cross is a central symbol, from the simple cross in the tin shed chapel in the Aboriginal community to which Delilah takes her Nana to worship in silence, to the placing of a cross in the family home at the end of the film, where Delilah reclaims her place in her country. While no answers are given, the elements of Christian symbolism and consideration of Aboriginal art and dreaming must be related to the influential experience that Warwick Thornton had at Salvo

College at the Catholic Monastery in New Norcia in WA. His mother sent him there as a 13 year old, seemingly to have him straightened out, and he learnt to appreciate the regulated and simple lifestyle.

There is also some ambivalence about Christian institutions, as evidenced by the scene where Delilah goes into a modern-style church and is met by a young priest. In an interview with Keith Gallasch, Warwick Thornton says of this scene in the Alice Springs church: "It was interesting, that priest. I'd written this really bad piece of dialogue, you know, "Get out, get out!" It was horrific. I'd always hated it through all the drafts."

By cutting the dialogue totally, the scene is left open-ended. The audience fills in the blanks, perhaps most of us feeling the priest is left not knowing what to say to the young girl who has come in. Could the priest not give adequate answers or comfort to what he perceived was her situation?

Music references abound and these are a key to understanding and appreciating the film. Warwick's brother plays Gonzo, an alcoholic who is one of the few people to provide some basic human friendship to the pair when they meet up with him in his zone underneath the town bridge. He leaves when he is provided with a spot in a rehab centre, and goes off singing 'Jesus gonna be here' by Tom Waits, illustrating again an ambivalence with organised religion, because it is 'the Christians' who provide this service. He will get his three meals a day, but where does this Jesus bit fit in?

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And perhaps most significantly there are the hair-cutting scenes with connections which most critics seem to have missed. Delilah cuts her own lovely hair after the death of her Nana. In the Warlpiri tradition, this shows mourning and humility, a cutting of any vanity. She takes away from herself.

Samson also cuts his hair when he mourns, and progresses into an even lower ebb without any strength or conviction as his addiction takes over his being. It is when he is at his lowest that Delilah is able to help him. She is not the temptress or betrayer of the Bible, but an angel of light, radiating an image of hope and renewal,

helping him out of his physical and mental state. One critic, Sandra Hall (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 May 2009) has written that Thornton “has Delilah helping the spaced-out Samson to bathe himself — a scene filled with intimations of baptism and regeneration.”

There is a welcome innocence about this love and their life that makes one consider the counter cultural message of the Christian gospel. In a way, I can see that Thornton is perhaps providing an understated reflection about his own understanding of unconditional love. He does not articulate this in a

way churchgoers would do in a word-based sermon, but he appears to have an overriding need to show a message of unconditional love to his own community and the wider community today.

At the end Charley Pride’s song — ‘All I have to offer you is me’ — closes out the film and captures what they have to offer to each other. They do not have wealth, success, worldly trappings, and Delilah’s ‘family home’ is certainly no mansion. In the end there is simply a new hope for Samson and Delilah, but we don’t know where this will lead — even though the cross has been put in place. ■

Suicide bombers, ethnic cleansing and monarchy

Anyone who thought the seventh book of the Bible was a mere catalogue of gratuitous violence and deceit would be right, and wrong. At first sight Judges looks like the answer to an anti-religionist’s prayer. It tells what happens when religion gets hold of a people. But it isn’t religion that’s at fault.

Twice in its 21 chapters the book pronounces judgment on lawlessness. “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.” [Ju. 17:6; 21:25] This isn’t a plug for the monarchy, but for a desperately needed binding authority. The editors of the story of Israel between entering Canaan and choosing Saul as king show what leaderless chaos is really like. And what it means for a people to break covenant with their God.

Speaking to the Auburn (Hawthorn) congregation recently Dr. Sandy Yule

brought *Judges* to vivid life and posed three questions that show the book’s contemporary importance. Dr. Yule is secretary of the UCA Assembly’s Christian Unity Working Group.

His questions were :

1. Judges 2: 6 — 3:6. Is God in favour of ethnic cleansing (the extermination of Canaan’s inhabitants)?
2. Judges 16: 23-31. God answered Samson’s prayer for help in his ‘murder-suicide’. What can we say about God’s attitude to suicide bombers?
3. Judges 17:6 and 21:25. (cited above) Is this a pro-monarchic statement? Can we agree with the implied judgment on anarchy here?

These questions prompted the hearers to take a fresh look at the modern scourge of suicide bombers, through the story of Samson. For example, if suicide bombers are no more than evil fanatics, why does God answer Samson’s prayer for revenge on the Philistines? If racial enmity is wrong, is today’s fashionable notion of universal tolerance a better alternative? Are all races and cultures of equal merit?

Monarchy continues to be an issue for Australians. While it may have only symbolic importance today, are the alternatives superior? Will a republic bring anything to Australia that we do not already enjoy?

The overriding motif of *Judges* is Israel’s lawless individuality. Australians also do what is right in their own eyes, despite the mountain of laws, regulations and by-laws they are forced to endure. Possibly the editors of *Judges*, writing with the benefit of hindsight, saw the monarchy as a cure for anarchy.

Another view may be found in Samuel’s bitter disappointment when the people asked him to anoint a king, even after he predicted dire consequences for the people. [1 Sam. 9:10-22] Does this mean monarchy has divine sanction?

Questions like these bring the book of *Judges* out of a primitive past into the present with its many problems of law, order and government. *Judges* declares that these questions cannot be resolved without recourse to the will of God and the divine covenant established with all mankind. ■

Alcohol use and abuse: a tale of our times



Roger Scruton is a well-known English philosopher, commentator and author. In the following article, Scruton takes apart the social trend of alcoholic binge-drinking — a problem which was recently the target of controversy and legislation in the Australian federal parliament.

To Scruton, the rise of binge-drinking is connected with a broader problem in our world — the rise of the cult of the Self, and the decline of the sense of fellowship and neighbourliness in our societies.

*The arguments in this article will be further explored in Scruton's forthcoming book, **I Drink Therefore I Am**, to be published by Continuum Press. This article is reprinted from *Standpoint* magazine, by permission of the author.*

Concerns over binge drinking — the habit of drinking large quantities of alcohol with the intention of getting drunk, usually in company but without the benefit of conversation of any kind — have brought into focus the great difference that exists between virtuous and vicious drinking. Our puritan legacy, which sees pleasure as the doorway to vice, makes it difficult for many people to understand this difference. If alcohol causes drunkenness, they think, then the sole moral question concerns whether you should drink

it at all, and if so how much. The idea that the moral question concerns how you drink it, in what company and in what state of mind, is one that is entirely foreign to their way of understanding the human condition.

This puritan legacy can be seen in many aspects of modern society. And what is most interesting to the anthropologist is the ease with which puritan outrage can be displaced from one topic to another and the equal ease with which the thing formerly disapproved of can be overnight exonerated from all taint of sin.

This has been particularly evident in the case of sex. Our parents and grandparents were concerned — and rightly concerned — that young people should look on sex as a temptation to be resisted. However, they did not see chastity as a preparation for sexual enjoyment: in their eyes it was precisely the enjoyment that was wrong. As a result, they made no real distinction between virtuous and vicious desire. The whole subject was taboo and the only answer to the question of sexual urges was “Don’t!” The old idea of chastity as a form of temperance eluded them. Yet what Aristotle said about anger (by way of elucidating the virtue of “gentleness”) applies equally to sex. For Aristotle it is not right to avoid anger absolutely. It is necessary rather to acquire the right habit — in other words, to school oneself into feeling the right amount of anger towards the right person, on the right occasion and for the right length of time.

In just such a way we should define sexual temperance, not as the avoidance of desire, but as the habit of feeling the right desire towards the right object and on the right occasion. That is what true chastity consists in, and it provides one of the deep arguments in favour of marriage or, at least, in favour of the constraint upon sexual appetite that is offered by love, that it makes sexual enjoyment into a personally fulfilling habit.

Puritans lack this sense of measured and temperate appetite. When sexual taboos were lifted, therefore, they found no further reason to refrain from indulgence. Since no virtue was

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at risk in our sexual transgressions, these ceased overnight to be transgressions. Thereafter, no proof of the damage done to children by premature experiment, no proof of the moral and medical chaos of uninhibited sexuality, could be heard. Puritanism turned an absolute no into an absolute yes. And it looked around for other pleasures that it could forbid, not because God was offended by them but because they offended the thing that had replaced God in the Puritan conscience — namely the Self. Any pleasure harmful to the self must now be subject to the same absolute condemnation as had been directed against the pleasures of sex. Hence the hysterical campaign against smoking, which has not taken the form of advising against something harmful, but the far more alarming form of condemning that thing as a sin. You can portray young people on the screen as engaging in sexual orgies, beating each other up, swearing and exhibiting every kind of nastiness. But you must never show a young person with a cigarette in his

hand, since that will be condoning and encouraging sin. Portraits of famous smokers like Brunel, Churchill and Sartre have been doctored by the Ministry of Truth in order to remove the offensive item from between their fingers, and side by side with the poster on the school notice board that advises 12-year-olds on safe sex and free abortion, is the absolutist edict saying that thou shalt not smoke.

Puritans have had as much reason to target drinking as to target smoking. And here it is somewhat easier to sympathise with them. For there is no doubt that the wrong kind of drinking is not just offensive to the new God of Self, but offensive also to the old God of Others, who is the God of love. Drunkenness does not merely harm the individual. It can destroy his capacity for human relations and turn his world into a sea of bitterness. Now that the puritans have turned their attention to drinking, therefore, they have met with an understandable wave of sympathy from those of us who are otherwise repelled by their vindictive joylessness. It is vital, if we are to save one of the

greatest of human goods from the new Inquisition, that we find another and more humane way to approach the problem of alcohol. And that is why we should take a lesson from Aristotle, and see the question not in terms of thou shalt and thou shalt not, but in terms of the right and the wrong way to drink. And we should try to understand the distinction between virtuous and vicious drinking by reflecting on wine, since it has been, in our civilization, both the vehicle of the real presence of God, and the symbol of our ways of reaching him.

Wine intoxicates; but we should distinguish intoxication from drunkenness. The first is a state of consciousness, whereas the second is a state of unconsciousness — or which tends towards unconsciousness. Although the one leads in time to the other, the connection between them is no more transparent than the connection between the first kiss and the final divorce. Just as the erotic kiss is neither a tame version nor a premonition of the bitter parting to which it finally leads, so is the intoxicating taste of the wine neither a tame version nor a premonition of drunkenness: they are simply not the “same kind of thing”, even if at some level of scientific theory they are discovered to have the same kind of cause.

It is also questionable to speak of the intoxication that we experience through wine as “induced by” the wine. For this implies a separation between the object tasted and the intoxication felt, of the kind that exists between drowsiness and the sleeping pill that causes it. When we speak of an intoxicating line of poetry, we are not referring to an effect in the person who reads or remembers it,

comparable to the effect of an energy pill. We are referring to a quality in the line itself.

Likewise, the intoxicating quality that we taste in wine is a quality that we taste in it and not in ourselves. True, we are raised by it to a higher state of exhilaration, and this is a widely observed and very important fact. But this exhilaration is an effect, not a quality bound into the very taste of the stuff, as the intoxication seems to be. At the same time, there is a connection between the taste and the intoxicating effect, just as there is a connection between the exciting quality of a football game and the excitement that is produced by it.

The intoxication that I feel is not just caused by the wine: it is, to some extent, directed at the wine, and has a quality of “relishing”, which makes it impossible to describe in the abstract, as though some other stuff might have produced it. The wine lives in my intoxication, as the game lives in the excitement of the fan: I have not swallowed the wine as I would a tasteless drug; I have taken it into myself, so that its flavour and my mood are inextricably bound up with each other.

An intoxicating drink, which both slides down easily and warms as it goes, is a symbol of — and also a means to achieve — an inward transformation, in which a person takes something in to himself. Hence you find wine, from the earliest recorded history, allotted a sacred function. It is a means whereby a god or daemon enters the soul of the one who drinks it, and often the drinking occurs at a religious ceremony, with the wine explicitly

identified with the divinity who is being worshipped: witness the cult of Dionysus, the Eleusian mysteries, the Athenian festivals such as the thesmophoria, the mystery cults of Diana and the Egyptian child Horus. For the anthropologist, the Christian Eucharist, in which the blood of the sacrificed lamb is drunk in the form of communion wine, is downstream from the mystery cults of antiquity, which are in turn downstream from those ceremonies that accompanied the vinifying of the grape among the great heroes who first discovered how to do it and believed, with commendable piety, that it was done by a god.

The religious use of wine and its soul-transforming effect reflect the underlying truth that it is only rational beings who can appreciate things like wine. Animals can be drunk. They can be high on drugs and fuggy with cannabis, but they cannot experience the kind of directed intoxication that we experience through wine, since relishing is something that only a rational being can exhibit, and which therefore only a rational being can do. Hence we control our intake, and are acutely aware of the danger that our rational powers, and the human relations that depend on them, can be jeopardised by the wrong kind of drinking. In the normal human case, therefore, we endeavour to remain true to ourselves in our cups, and to display nothing when under the influence that we would wish to hide when not.

Alcohol in general, and wine in particular, has a unique social function, increasing the garrulousness, the social confidence and the goodwill

of those who drink together, provided they drink in moderation. Many of the ways that we have developed of drinking socially are designed to impose a strict regime of moderation. Buying drinks by round in the pub, for example, has an important role in both permitting people to rehearse the sentiments that cause and arise from generosity (yet without bearing the full cost of them), while controlling the rate of intake and the balance between the inflow of drink and the outflow of words. This ritual parallels the ritual of the Greek symposium, and that of the circulation of wine after dinner in country houses and university common rooms.

The practice of buying rounds in the pub is one of the great cultural achievements of the English. It enables people with little money of their own to make generous gestures, without the risk of being ruined by them. It enables each person to distinguish himself from his neighbours and to portray his individuality in his choice of drink, and it causes affection progressively to mount in the circle of drinkers, by giving each in turn the character of a warm and hospitable friend. In a way it is a moral improvement on the Greek symposium, where the host alone appeared in the character of the giver, and also on the common room



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and the country house. The round of drinks enables even the speechless and the downtrodden briefly to receive the thanks, the appreciation and the honour of their neighbours. It is a paradigm case of “social inclusion”, to use the jargon of our rulers, and it is hardly surprising that everything is now being done to ensure that the practice dies out. Our Government’s current campaigns against binge drinking and public smoking are designed to destroy the normal forms of relaxation among simple people, and to cause them to stay at home with a bottle, where they can watch politically correct television in silence, absorbing the images of social decay.

The transformation of the soul under the influence of wine is merely the continuation of another transformation that began maybe fifty years earlier when the grape was first plucked from the vine. (That is one reason why the Greeks described fermentation as the work of a god. Dionysus enters the grape and transforms it; and this process of transformation is then transferred to us as we drink.)

When we raise a glass of wine to our lips, therefore, we are savouring an ongoing process: the wine is a living thing, the last result of other living things, and the progenitor of life in us. It is almost as though it were another human presence in any social gathering, as much a focus of interest and in the same way as the other people there.

The ancient proverb tells us that there is truth in wine. The truth lies not in what the drinker perceives but in what, with loosened tongue and easier manners, he reveals. It is “truth for others”, not “truth for self”. Wine does not deceive you, as cannabis deceives you, with the idea that you enter another and higher realm, that you see through the veil of Maya to the transcendental object or the thing-in-itself. Hence it is quite unlike even the mildest of the mind-altering drugs, all of which convey some vestige, however vulgarised, of the experience associated with mescaline and LSD, and recorded by Aldous Huxley in *The Doors of Perception*. These drugs — cannabis not excepted

— are epistemologically culpable. They tell lies about another world, a transcendental reality beside which the world of ordinary phenomena pales into insignificance or at any rate into less significance than it has. Wine, by contrast, paints the world before us as the true one, and reminds us that if we have failed previously to know it then this is because we have failed in truth to belong to it, a defect that it is the singular virtue of wine to overcome. Something similar might be said of beer and English proverbs testify to the honourable place of ale in popular thinking, as a source of insight into human society.

Hence drinking in company induces an opening out of the self to the other, a conscious step towards asking and offering forgiveness: not for acts or omissions, but for the impertinence of existing. This suggests another reason for the centrality of wine in the communion ceremony, which is that it both illustrates and in a small measure enacts the moral posture that distinguishes Christianity from its early rivals, and which is summarised in the prayer to “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us”. That remarkable prayer, which tells the Christian that he can obtain forgiveness only if he offers it, is one that we all understand in our cups, and this understanding of the critical role of forgiveness in forming durable human societies intrudes too into Islam, in the poetry of Hafiz, Rumi and Omar Khayyam, winos to a man. It is a sign of the extremism of Islam, in the versions that seem so threatening today, that it emphasises the Koranic interdiction of wine, and forgets that the rivers of

paradise, according to the Holy Book, are actually made of the stuff.

This returns me to the point about intoxication. The pronounced mental effects of wine are, so to speak, read back into their cause, so that the wine itself has the taste of them. Just as you savour the intoxicating flavour of the wine, so do you savour its reconciling power: it presents you with the taste of forgiveness. That is one way of understanding the Christian doctrine of trans-substantiation, itself a survival of the Greek belief that Dionysus is actually in the wine and not just the cause of it. The communicant does not taste the wine with a view to experiencing reconciliation and forgiveness as a subsequent effect. He savours forgiveness in the very act of drinking. This is what reconciliation, mercy and forgiveness taste like:

Love is that liquor sweet and most divine, Which my God feels as blood, but I as wine.

So George Herbert expressed the point (in *The Agonie*). And in those great (and alas far too short) periods of Islamic civilization in which the spirit of forgiveness prevailed, their poets would also, in their own way, sing praises to:

*The grape that can with logic absolute
The two-and-seventy jarring sects confute*
as Omar Khayyam puts it, in Fitzgerald's version.

In attempting to describe the knowledge that wine imparts, we look for features of our actual world, features that might be, as it were, epitomised, commemorated and celebrated in its flavours. Hence the traditional perception of fine wine as the taste of a *terroir*: where that means

not merely the soil, but the customs and ceremonies that had sanctified it and put it, so to speak, in communion with the drinker. The use of theological language here is, I believe, no accident. Although wine tells no lies about a transcendental realm, it sanctifies the immanent reality, which is why it is so effective a symbol of the incarnation. In savouring it, we are knowing — by acquaintance, as it were — the history, geography and customs of a community.

Since ancient times, therefore, wines have been associated with definite places and been accepted not so much as the taste of those places, as the flavour imparted to them by the enterprise of settlement. Wine of Byblos was one of the principal exports of the Phoenicians, and old Falernian was made legendary by Horace. Those who conjure with the magic names of Burgundy, Bordeaux and the Rhine and Moselle are not just showing off: they are deploying the best and most reliable description of a cherished taste, which is inseparable from the idea and the history of the settlement that produced it.

And here we should again return to the religious meaning of wine. At the risk of drastically oversimplifying, I suggest that there are two quite distinct strands that compose the religious consciousness, and that our understanding of religion has suffered from too great an emphasis on one of them. The first strand, which we over-emphasise — this, too, being part of our puritan legacy — is that of belief. The second strand, which is slipping away from modern thought (though not from modern reality) is that which might be summarised in

the term “membership”, by which I mean all the customs, ceremonies and practices whereby the sacred is renewed, so as to be a real presence among us, and a living endorsement of the human community. The pagan religions of Greece and Rome were strong on membership but weak on belief. Hence they centred on the cult, as the primary religious phenomenon. It was through the cult, not the creed that the adept proved his religious orthodoxy and his oneness with his fellows. Western civilization has tended in recent centuries to emphasise belief — in particular the belief in a transcendental realm and an omnipotent king who presides over it. This theological emphasis, by representing religion as a matter of theological doctrine, exposes it to refutation. And that means that the real religious need of people seeks other channels for its expression: usually forms of idolatry that do not achieve the refreshing humanity of the cult.

Now, it seems to me that the act of settling, which is the origin of civilization, involves both a radical transition in our relation to the earth — the transition known in other terms as that from hunter-gatherer to farmer — and also a new sense of belonging. The settled people do not belong only to each other: they belong to a place, and out of that sense of



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Feature

Alcohol use and abuse continued



shared roots there grow the farm, the village and the city. Vegetation cults are the oldest and most deeply rooted in the unconscious, since they are the cults that drive out the totemism of the hunter-gatherer and celebrate the earth itself, as the willing accomplice in our bid to stay put.

The new farming economy, and the city that grows from it, generate in us a sense of the holiness of the planted crop, and in particular of the staple food — which is grass, usually in the form of corn or rice — and the vine that wraps the trees above it. The fruit of the vine can be fermented and so stored in a sterilised form. It provides a place and the things that grow there with a memory.

At some level, I venture to suggest, the experience of wine is a recuperation of that original cult whereby the land was settled and the city built. And what we taste in the wine is not just the fruit and its ferment, but also the peculiar flavour of a landscape to which the gods have been invited and where they have found a home. Grain, too, can be fermented, and in

its way will provide a similar tribute to the place and our way of settling it. Aficionados of real ale and malt whisky are aware of this, and know that they are tasting the rains and the soils of the places that they visit in the glass and making contact across the centuries with the people who put down roots there. Such experiences are especially valuable to us, now that the world is accelerating to inhuman speed. The need to sit quietly and be at peace with the dead is one of the greatest requirements of a civilised life. And to do this in company, conversing all evening with a glass in your hand is to be reconciled to life in a way that few people now — in the age of the screen and the scream — achieve.

If you wish to understand “binge drinking”, and the vice that it exemplifies, I think that this is the intellectual domain in which the search should begin. When people sit down together in a public place — a place where none of them is sovereign but each of them at home — and when those people pass the evening together, sipping drinks in which the spirit of

place is stored and amplified, maybe smoking or taking snuff and in any case willingly exchanging the dubious benefits of longevity for the certain joys of friendship, they rehearse in their souls the original act of settlement, the act that set our species on the path of civilization, and which endowed us with the order of neighbourhood and the rule of law. When, however, people swig drinks without interest in their neighbours, except as equal members of the wild host of hunter-gatherers, when their sole concern is the intoxicating effect and when the drink itself is neither savoured nor understood, then are they rehearsing that time before civilization, in which life was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. Understandably, the first and natural effect of this way of drinking is an implacable belligerence towards the surrounding signs of settlement — an urge to smash and destroy, to replace the ordered world of house and street and public buildings, with a ruined wasteland where only the drunk is at home. Binge drinking may look like a communal act. In fact, it is an act of collective solitude, in which the god of modern puritans, the Self, reigns supreme. ■

Roger Scruton's new book, I Drink Therefore I Am, will be published soon by Continuum Press.



Small church evangelism — is it possible?

Rev Don Purdey

Don Purdey had a successful career in the Commonwealth Public Service as secretary to Australia's counter-terrorism response committee before entering the ordained ministry. In over 11 years of ministry, he has served in rural and city churches, and now works on the Assembly of Confessing Congregations South Australia Movement executive.

Our church is walking a tightrope. It has been for some years now. It's the tightrope of trying to be an effective church amid serious challenges to our numbers and our income.

It would be easy to blame past eras, or past ministers or past leadership teams for our situation. But for the most part, that would be grossly unfair. It's not their fault that we live in a society that has turned its back on Christianity so forcefully in a single generation. In our case, those past leaders have remodelled and modernised our facilities, made hard decisions about blended worship styles, tried new forms of youth ministry and all the rest. But still we faced the tightrope.

So our small church — along with yours, I'm sure — needs and wants to grow. As evangelicals we hear the call of Christ to go and make disciples, but the challenges just seem too great. Our church is too small. We're all getting older.

Yet we have chosen to focus on evangelism for the last several years. We've used a lot of the ideas accompanying this article. We were

a church of about 50 people when we started, and we're now a church of around 45. Some growth! But the reality is that our relatively old congregation may well have closed by now without our efforts. We've held funerals for nearly 20 of our

members in that time, and we've lost quite a few others in the normal ebb and flow of life — people moving interstate and overseas with their work, young people marrying and moving away, and so on. And despite those losses, we're holding our own in

The 'Nine Suggestions' for Small Church Evangelism

1. **Pray.** Unless what you do is enveloped in prayer you're wasting your time.
2. **Make it a priority.** That means it will cost you — in time, effort and money.
3. **Take an attitude check.** It's about helping people find Jesus. Your role is as a servant.
4. **Research it.** Find out what your community needs and find out what your church's strengths are.
5. **Make a plan** — in several categories: initial contact, drawing in, enabling attendance, confirming attendance, Christian growth.
6. **Brainstorm for ideas.** Recognise where the ideas fit in your overall plan.
7. **Communicate** both ways — (a) Involve the whole church.
(b) Tell the community.
8. **Give it your best.** Prepare thoroughly, review carefully, refine constantly.
9. **Persevere** — in prayer and in action, thanking God all the way.

Ideas you could try

Don't just pick something from this list — pray, research and brainstorm. But these might help if you add them to your mix.

- Free newspapers, car washes, Easter eggs, sausage sizzles, etc.
- Courses — marriage, parenting, tax and budget management, photography, DPYK etc.
- Garage sales, car boot sales, fetes, community picnics, sports days for kids, etc.
- Alpha, 40 Days of Purpose, etc.
- Café, library, DVD borrowing (family titles),
- Migrant English tuition, craft groups, photography clubs, music clubs etc.
- School holiday programs, church camps
- Kid's clubs, youth events, engaging Sunday School material.

a very difficult environment for growth (upper middle class, overworked professionals with large debts and no time). Also, the age profile of the church has lowered somewhat — although not to the extent we'd like (or need). Still, ever so slowly we believe we're making the transition to a church for a new generation. But we're still on our tightrope.

So out of our small church experience with evangelism let me share with you what we've learned, for whatever help it may bring you.

The first thing we had to recognise was that we had to get into it. Not because our church was aging and shrinking — though they are powerful motivators! — but because we realised that it was what Jesus called us to do. But let me say this: if your church is getting smaller and older by the day, then there will never be a better time than right now to begin. The longer you leave it, the harder it will become.

And the next thing we realised is that there is no “one size fits all” method or program for evangelism. You cannot just run an Alpha course, or just do a letterbox drop, and wait for the growth. You can't even just pray — though if you were only to do one thing, that would be the one to pick! You need to make outreach integrated into the whole package that is your church. You will need to do lots of

things, and reassess lots of current things. And I can't even say, “Do this list of things and you'll succeed”. There are no straightforward “ten commandments of mission” that will guarantee success. But, from our experience, I'll offer you our “Nine Suggestions”. The first three appear below, and the remainder will follow in subsequent issues of ACC Catalyst.

1. Pray.

This is the beginning point, the mid point, the end point and every point in between. Unless what you do is governed by prayer and you seek the guidance of God for what you attempt, you're wasting your time and effort. Our attempts to form prayer groups and hold prayer meetings have been much less successful than I had hoped or planned, and I believe that it has affected our result. Our faithful few pray-ers have done us proud, but the lack of church wide prayer I am sure has held us back from being all that God hoped we would be by now. No amount of planning, talent, energy or money will overcome a deficiency in prayer. Pray before church, and after church, and all through your Council meetings. Have a mid week prayer meeting. Hold special prayer meetings at significant points in the journey. If you don't have gifted pray-ers in your church, then find some elsewhere (we have a prayer team from a Pentecostal church in Wollongong, NSW praying for us). Use the ACC's prayer team in your State. But pray every step of the way — without God's guidance you're wasting your time.

2. Make evangelism a priority.

That means it will cost you — in time, effort and money. It will occupy your Council meetings. It will require a sizable allocation in the church budget. Individuals and groups will have to take on new roles and tasks.

These are not bad things! Far better to spend your Council's time on mission than the replacement of the hall clock! Far better to spend your money on outreach initiatives than a new cantata for the ailing choir. Far better to spend your energy running a community sausage sizzle than yet another fellowship tea.

It will also probably mean that you need to stop doing some things that draw resources but don't add anything to your life or outreach. It's amazing how long some

things stay on the church agenda when their purpose and productive timeframe have long past.

3. Take an attitude check.

Why do you want to increase your evangelism? What is your underlying motive? What is God's motive? Evangelism is not about saving, maintaining or even growing your church. Despite the horror of declining attendances and falling offerings, the point of evangelism is not to rescue your congregation from closure. It's about obeying the commandment of Jesus to tell the world. And it's about helping people find Jesus. If people are finding Jesus through your mission, then the Kingdom of God is growing.

As I said earlier, our numbers are static — but our effectiveness isn't! Over the last eight years we've run 16 Alpha courses, and we estimate that at least a dozen people have come to Christ through that ministry. Only two of them worship with us — and they have now bought a house and are moving away — but the Kingdom has grown. Praise God! We've run the course 'How to Drug Proof Your Kids' half a dozen times, training about 70 parents in the process. None of them became Christians on the course (it's not intended for that), but all of them will be better parents.

Our church library had become so large that we could offer it to the community as a benefit to them — especially when combined with a free café and English conversation classes for new migrants. Now around 25 people are helped each Monday, and quite a number of them — including some Muslims — have come to church! On top of that, we even have volunteer helpers from the community assisting us with the classes — because they saw our church doing something good and wanted to participate.

We've run sausage sizzles at the local hardware store, given away free newspapers on Father's Day, run community coin drives for disaster relief, opened our premises to the local high school for teacher retreats, music tuition and table tennis competitions, held Christmas Carols outside in the garden — all with the aim of telling our community that the church is of value to them and is interested in them. These things — along with our letterboxing and advertising in the local paper — we see as "pre-evangelism".

That is, they are things that raise the profile of the church and encourage people to think positively about it. So it's about attitude — and our attitude is that we want to make the Christian lifestyle that is on show from our church as positive and life-giving as we can, because that's the life that Jesus has given us and that we hope others will find.

There's a related area of attitude that might need attention in your church as well. If you choose to hold events that connect you with outsiders, then be careful of the attitude you display toward them. Remember that your attenders are guests, and your role is as servants. Make them welcome! Greet them on their terms. And don't expect them to behave as Christians if they're not! They may not always use appropriate language or manners, and they certainly will not know all the unwritten rules around your church about not taking hot drinks onto the carpet or whatever! Welcome them, encourage them, and cut them a bit of slack while they're getting to know you.

Watch the next issue of ACCatalyst for further lessons in small church evangelism. ■

Don'ts

Don't assume that one event will turn things around.

Don't assume you know what your community needs — ask them.

Don't expect that non-believers will have church manners — give them a chance.

Don't dismiss an idea until you are sure that God didn't inspire it, or that you really can't do it.

Don't assume that cheap or 'near enough' is good enough. The world is used to better.

Don't try to do it all on your own — get the whole church involved.

Don't allow yoga, reiki, or 'New Age' stuff that draws people away from the Gospel or confuses your message.

Don't raise money through raffles or other dubious fundraisers. Give your church people a chance to give to a new specific mission idea — people respond to genuine mission and needs.

Don't give up!

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The more cynical may say it is a small price to pay for achieving the stature of intellectual celebrity, but Francis Fukuyama took some very hard knocks after the publication of his 1992 book, *The End of History and the Last Man*. Some critics took the "end of history" part of the title altogether too literally and had a field day lampooning Fukuyama's chronological hubris.

The book was an expansion of a 1989 article by Fukuyama, "The End of History?" The question mark should not be overlooked. And the thesis of the book is not without nuance: "What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." Then came, among other things, September 11, and many could not resist the temptation to ridicule what they depicted as Fukuyama's confidence in the world's inevitable conversion to liberal democracy.

Partly in response to Fukuyama, Samuel Huntington published in 1996 *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. That justly influential book argued that cultural and religious identities, rather than liberal ideology or economic-technological

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