

UNITING CHURCH STUDIES
UNITING CHURCH STUDIES
UNITING CHURCH STUDIES

EXTRACT

**SALVATION, DISCIPLESHIP
AND EVANGELISM**

Vol. 27, No.1



Editorial

Geoff Thompson

Welcome to the first online issue of *Uniting Church Studies*. As explained in the previous issue of the Journal, the intention of transitioning to an online and fully open-access publication is to increase access to the scholarship which the Journal publishes, reduce production costs, and decrease the Journals' environmental impact. It will take some time for the full scope of this move to be realised. We will continue to develop the online format, build the online archive, and enhance our online visibility and profile. Many thanks are due to our typesetter, Felix Oppen, for the work he has done in fine-tuning the style and format for online purposes. And, very importantly, many thanks to Adrian Jackson, the eLearning Co-ordinator at Pilgrim Theological College, who has co-ordinated the technological dimensions of setting up the website. Thanks also to Pilgrim Theological College for freeing up Adrian to do this work.

Five of the six themed articles in this issue were first presented at the online seminar, "Salvation, Discipleship and Evangelism," held on October 23rd 2024 and hosted by *Uniting Church Studies*. The authors were invited to address this theme – and the interconnections built into it – from the perspective of their own interests and expertise. The seminar provided an opportunity for them to test their ideas with their fellow presenters and to allow that process to inform the final versions of the papers which appear here. The result is a very rich set of reflections, shaped variously by theological, cultural and practical considerations. As a number of the authors point out, "salvation" and "evangelism" bear heavy burdens in the Uniting Church, often provoking discomfort and/or suspicion.

Sally Douglas offers a mix of exegetical and doctrinal considerations to draw our attention to the variety of understandings of salvation present both in the New Testament and proclamation of the church in its early centuries. Wrestling with and appropriating this variety is, for Douglas, one tool for opening greater engagement with salvation and its link to evangelism. Sathianathan Clarke focuses on "discipleship" in the context of a "multireligious" world. Drawing on the doctrine of the Trinity as a template for a theology of religions, he sketches a vision of discipleship shaped by a non-competitive relationship between the particularity of Christian proclamation and interfaith hospitality. Graham Hill also addresses the theme in the context of wider global concerns by placing some of the relevant theological commitments of the Uniting Church within the framework of the increasingly significant discipline of "world Christianity." Hill argues that there is much within the Uniting Church's theology and practice which offers significant potential to shape evangelism in the contemporary pluralist world.

The next two papers bring some of the concrete realities of local and national cultures to bear on the topic. Karina Kreminski explores the idea of "soft evangelism." Employing a "memoir theology" approach, she draws on her own experiences in of faith sharing the inner Sydney suburb of Surrey Hills to articulate an understanding of mission liberated from some of its negative legacies, whilst also continuing to wrestle with the questions that these experiences have raised. Cyrus Kung invites us to wrestle with the social and cultural marginality that the Uniting Church shares with most mainline Churches of the West. He presents this not as something to be resisted, but as invitation for the Church to be engage with the marginality of Jesus.

Drawing on various statements of the Uniting Church and the work of various contemporary theologians, he sketches ideas of “in between” and “marginal theology” as a framework for contemporary mission.

In various ways, each of these papers acknowledges the way colonisation has shadowed understandings and practices of salvation, discipleship and evangelism in this country. The sixth of the themed papers explicitly brings an Indigenous voice to the conversation. Although invited to present at the seminar, Aunty Denise Champion and Uncle Ken Sumner chose to offer a reflection on the theme which would emerge from their own conversations in their own style. Writing with Rosemary Dewerse, they bring to the fore some of the unhealed wounds which salvation and evangelism, mixed with colonisation and racism, have left in their wake. They also bring their own wisdom to the conversation. It is salutary to read this paper alongside the other five.

In the one General Article in this issue Robert Gribben responds to Stephen Burns’ article, “Manual Acts, Mass Confusion?” published in the June 2024 issue of the Journal. Gribben shares some of Burns’ concern that liturgical practices in the Uniting Church risk rendering congregations confused about what is happening at celebrations of communion and to adopting the posture of an “audience.” Nevertheless Gribben resists Burns analysis of Gribben’s own role in the development of these risks. He proposes a wider history of reasons for the current situation, and constructively proposes complementary roles for presider and congregations. He also articulates his concern that Uniting Church’s capacity for the oversight and development of shared liturgical wisdom is institutionally very limited. He fears that this restricts the kind of attention that is needed fully to address Burns’ legitimate concerns.

The focus of the series on United and Uniting Churches in this issue is the Uniting Church in Sweden. Founded in 2012, it is the one of the most recent Uniting Churches to be formed. Strikingly, not only was its mix of uniting Churches quite distinctive, the theology and cultural forces that brought the Church into being were not dependent on those of the mid-twentieth century unions, shaped as they were by that century’s ecumenical movement. The article has been written by Erik Lennestål who occupies the unique position of being a minister of the Uniting Church in Sweden but working in the Uniting Church in Australia. His knowledge of both Churches has enabled him to clearly explain the distinctiveness of the UCS to a UCA audience, not least in helping the UCA to appreciate reasons for union other than those which generated its own.

The Book Forum in this issue attends to Renie Chow Choy’s 2021 book, *Ancestral Feeling: Postcolonial Thoughts on Western Christian Heritage*. Choy’s book has generated a significant amount of commentary. Employing biographical, historical and postcolonial tools, she critically analyses the reality of the “feeling” that non-Western Christians in colonised contexts have for the Western Christian heritage and how that feeling is often ignored in accounts of the Western heritage, which is in fact, no longer just the property of the West. Although Choy’s own context, and that of the book, is that of Anglicanism, the three Uniting Church respondents – Sunny Chen, Joy Han and John Flett – indicate how the book resonates with realities which shape the life of the Uniting Church and its context. At the same time, sparking off Choy’s book, they identify other issues which are sharpened in and by this particular colonised context. Choy has herself responded, with much appreciation and careful engagement, to her three Australian-based readers.

The issue concludes with two book reviews. Te Aroha Rountree reviews *Pacific Well-being: (Is)lands, Theologies, Worldviews* edited by Jione Havea. Predominantly pitching to a Maori readership, Rountree's observations are a challenge to a Uniting Church readership to better understand the perspective of our near neighbours. My own review of Hanna Reichel's *After Method: Queer Grace, Conceptual Design and the Possibility of Theology* suggests that engagement with this book is important to the ongoing relationship in the Uniting Church between doctrinal/systematic and contextual theologies.



About Uniting Church Studies

Uniting Church Studies

ISSN: 3083-5267

Uniting Church Studies is published twice yearly (June, December) by United Theological College, 16 Masons Drive, North Parramatta, NSW, Australia, 2151.

Phone: 61-2-8838 8927; Facsimile: 61-2-9683 6617.

Uniting Church Studies website:

unitingchurchstudies.org

Digital copies of previous issues of the journal are available via the website of the Camden Theological Library: www.utc.edu.au/library/

Editor:

Rev. Dr. Geoff Thompson

geoff.thompson@pilgrim.edu.au

Review Editor:

Rev. Liam Miller

liamandrewmiller@gmail.com

Editorial Advisory Committee:

Rev. Dr. Sally Douglas

Rev. Dr. Ockert Meyer

Rev. Liam Miller

John Oldmeadow (Chair)

Dr. Damian Palmer

Rev. Dr. Geoff Thompson

Rev. Dr. Peter Walker

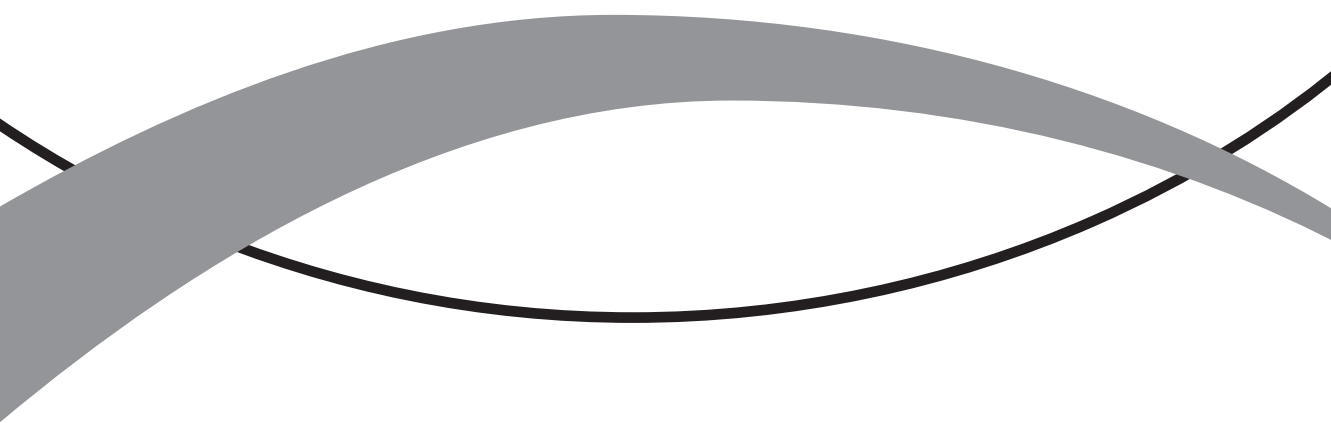
Rev. Dr. Ji Zhang

Prof. Sue Beeton

Uniting Church Studies is a fully-refereed, multi-disciplinary, open access journal focused on a specific subject – the Uniting Church in Australia. The journal aims to promote scholarly reflection and understanding. It does so by means of a dialogue: between the academic and the practitioner; between church and society in Australia, and between the Uniting Church in Australia and other Uniting and United Churches throughout the World.

Contributions and books for review should be sent to the Book Review Editor at the above address. Manuscripts submitted for consideration should normally be of 4,000–6,000 words, typed 1.5-spaced in 12-point font and submitted by email as an attachment. A style sheet for *Uniting Church Studies* is available from the Editor or on our website.

Uniting Church Studies is indexed in the Atla Religion Database® (Atla RDB®), AtlaSerials® (Atlas®), and AtlaSerials PLUS® (Atlas PLUS®), published by the American Theological Library Association, 200 South Wacker Drive, Suite 3100, Chicago, IL 60606-5877 USA, Email: atla@atla.com Web: www.atla.com



UNITING CHURCH STUDIES

UNITING CHURCH STUDIES

UNITING CHURCH STUDIES