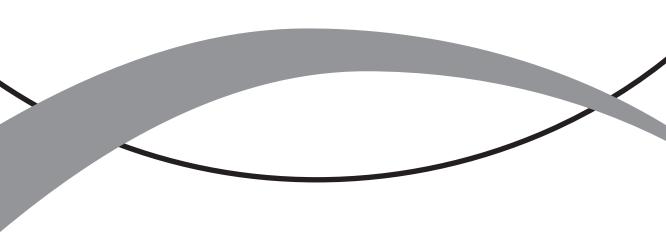
UNITING CHURCH STUDIES UNITING CHURCH STUDIES UNITING CHURCH STUDIES



EXTRACT

SALVATION, DISCIPLESHIP AND EVANGELISM



On What the People Do in Worship

Robert Gribben

Abstract

This paper is a response to, and a further refection on, an article by Professor Stephen Burns in the June 2024 issue *Uniting Church Studies* entitled "Manual Acts: Mass Confusion?" Burns argues that while the expression "manual acts" is not readily known among Uniting Church congregations and ministers, their unconscious variety of use leads to confusion in our celebration of Holy Communion. A consequential focus on what is done with the hands at the Lord's Table may lead to an over emphasis on the role of the presider (clericalism) and a diminution of the central role of the baptized people of God in the sacrament. As *Uniting in Worship 2* (2000) says, "the congregation is not an audience." In response, this paper explores the complementary charisms of both congregation and presider in Uniting and ecumenical contexts. The author offers his own critique of worship in the Uniting Church at the present time and offers some ways forward.

Introduction

"Let us receive what we are; let us become what we receive: the Body of Christ." 1

These words from St Augustine have been turned into a responsive prayer at the breaking of the bread, a genuinely fresh suggestion in *Uniting in Worship 2* (hereafter, UiW2). It has captured the imagination and has sparked church members' questions. Provoking such thought is one purpose of liturgical language.² So here we are reminded that "Body of Christ" is not one thing only, but like all symbols, is multivalent, always with a further level of meaning. So, there is St Luke's "This is my Body" in his account of Jesus at the last supper (22:19-20), St Paul's Body as an image of the church, created by the Spirit in baptism (1 Cor. 12:12-14), and there is the bread on our hands. Augustine brings them together.³

This article is a response to the paper, published in a recent issue of this Journal, by my colleague, the Rev. Professor Stephen Burns, and titled with its cautionary pun, "Manual Acts; Mass Confusion?" I suspect that few UCA ministers would know what the term "manual acts" signified (that is, directions as to what presiders do with their hands during the remembrance of the Lord's Supper), but they do happen. Dr Burns is quite right to suggest that their meaning and purpose needs further clarity, and that is the bulk of his argument.

¹ Words at the breaking of the Bread, from St Augustine the final words said by all. See *Uniting in Worship 2*, The Service of the Lord's Day: Second Service (Sydney: UC Press, 2005) 219.

² Another example was the modern post-communion prayer which began "Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home", an unexpected use of the parable. See A Prayer Book for Australia (Broughton Books 1995, 143d.)

³ It is further elaborated in 1 Cor 15: 35f, Ephesians 1:13, 2:22 and 4:16.

⁴ Stephen Burns, "Manual Acts, Mass Confusion?" Uniting Church Studies, vol. 26, No. 1, June 2024, 61-72.

These acts are not mentioned in the *Short Guide to the Service of the Lord's Day* (UiW2, 131f); where it speaks of bread and wine (135) it does not elaborate on them, nor when the different traditions within the UCA regarding the Institution of the sacrament are explained (136). Nor do they appear in the important Notes on the Service (138f); Note 17 comments on the placing of the Table "in such a way that the people have an uninterrupted view of the liturgical action" but it does not describe them. Alas, it appears that I am the problem, for in my chapter in *Uniting in Thanksgiving*, 5 my "practical commentary" on presiding at the Table, I discuss the options for manual acts, bodily posture and gesture, for the presider, but the result is confusion and, even worse, I may have added to the confusion. 6 I confess to it. I failed to make up my mind before I published. I hope what follows clarifies some matters. One grows.

I added this practical section to the book, which was mostly a commentary of two Great Prayers, simply because there has never been anything like it written for the Uniting Church (and then only from overseas authors from its previous denominations) and it was clear to me that presiders needed to know their options. I may have expressed preferences; it was not my purpose to lay down new rules.

In his very first sentence, Dr Burns summarizes his purpose: "This essay is at heart a proposal about how presiders at holy communion might enact their role." His charge that the UCA preserves in practice some "mediaeval or 17th century Anglican ... style" and his warning about "clericalism" are dramatic but pose important questions. Would that the Assembly had an authoritative body to advise it on liturgical renewal, but it hasn't.⁷

The "manual acts"

I fear that the multiplicity and status of our various reports and debates in the Uniting Church may also have misled Dr Burns. He quotes (63) "a paragraph tucked away in the Notes of the Service of the Lord's Day... in Uniting in Worship 2." ⁸ The reason is that it belongs in the *pre-union* legislation for the guidance of those making decisions for the church in process of becoming, a formal summary of what the yet-to-be-created Liturgical Commission was to take care to follow. Manual acts existed in the worship books of all three uniting denominations and should be part of the United Church's celebration. The "words of institution" regularly appear. The "actions" mentioned in the quotation were the "breaking of the bread and the taking of the cup and participation in both kinds by minister and people." Interestingly, the directions to pick up or touch never appeared in 1988 or 2005, but they were so much the norm that perhaps they did not need to be inserted.

There are at least two serious issues raised by the unthinking use of the manual acts. The first, Dr Burns takes up in two ways: "the congregation is not an audience" and "Presiders don't play Jesus."

⁵ Robert Gribben, *Uniting in Thanksgiving: the Great Prayers of Thanksgiving of the Uniting Church in Australia* (Melbourne: Uniting Academic Press, 2008), Part 3: The Great Prayers: a practical commentary. I had attempted something similar in *A Guide to Uniting in Worship* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1990) ("You are free – if" is mentioned in its Preface, 9, a phrase I owe to the American Methodist liturgiologist James F. White.)

⁶ Burns, "Manual Acts, Mass Confusion?" 64 and footnote 12.

⁷ The finest book I know about presiding is by the late American Catholic Robert W. Hovda, *Strong, Loving and Wise, Presiding in Liturgy* (Washington:The Liturgical Conference 1976). For his title, see 2Tim. 1: 6-7 (his own translation).

⁸ He notes that it also appears in UiW (1988), see his footnote 8.

"The congregation is not an audience"

Burns quotes UiW2 where it adds *a Short Guide to the Service of the Lord's Day* 9; it may be short, but it is substantial. It represents one attempt by the then Working Group on Worship to *teach*, to draw attention to changes and to explain; it would make a good text for group study. It states that "a guiding principle" in worship is that "*the congregation is not an audience*," and a few sentences earlier it makes some suggestions for the involvement of the people: such ideas, it says, "*should be well-prepared and thought through, being a vehicle for the worship of the people, rather than a performance*" 10 Dr Burns has given us a glimpse of possibilities in his own commentary, *Pilgrim People: an invitation to worship in the Uniting Church*. 11 He then turns to the ministry of the "presider" and *en route* reflects on some of the debate in the Uniting Church about the meaning of ordination. 12

He traces the sources which inform the UCA's understanding that (a) *all* the baptized represent Christ, not just the ordained and (b) that the presider stands among them and speaks with them and for them before God. He draws attention to the possibility that, given the manual acts whereby bread and a cup are touched or lifted, those "acts" may suggest that we are replaying the Last Supper or other eucharistic appearances of the Risen Lord, and that the presider has the role of Christ. To take the discussion a little deeper, Roman Catholic teaching speaks of the priest being *in persona Christi* and *in persona ecclesiae*, acting in the person of Christ and of the Church but holds in addition, that at the "consecration" (see more below) is acting as a priest *in a different degree* from the way the laity are members of a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2: 9).¹³ The Uniting Church has specifically refused that distinction. Mostly our presiders speak as members of the Church before God; sometimes he or she is addressing the people as if God were speaking – such as in preaching, affirming forgiveness or praying a blessing – but that is because the Church cedes the tasks at that point to its authorized minister. Great care is taken in *UiW* at these points. Vatican II – it may surprise us – says of the vocation of the lay people:

The laity derive the right and duty to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head; incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body through Baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord Himself. They are consecrated for the royal priesthood and the holy people, not only that they may offer

⁹ UiW2,131-37 and the Notes, 138-143 (emphasis added).

¹⁰ UiW2, 131.

[&]quot; Stephen Burns, Pilgrim People: an invitation to worship in the Uniting Church (Adelaide, Mediacom, 2012).

Burns cites some of the ordination debates in the Assembly (63-4) and is accurate in what he discovers. However, the understanding of the ordained ministry is far from resolved in our church. The evolution since, producing changes in the Regulations, reflect the inherent suspicion of hierarchy and a peculiar sense of democracy or egalitarianism which means that no vocation can be confined to one set of designated persons. The first fatality was our much delayed but unique attempt to reform the diaconate; it ended with no distinction from the presbyterate and a serious bifurcation of church and world as spheres of ministry. The expansion of lay presidency was guarded by some well-judged criteria which are not universally applied. Not widening the presbyterate to all who are given the administration of the sacraments in our congregations and ordaining them (of the Church of England's "local pastor") was a missed opportunity. The hesitation came from those who think that the "learned ministry" is defined by academic qualifications alone. The 2024 Assembly's new Commission for a national provision of theological education may provide some clarification.

A Prayer Book for Australia (Anglican 1995) has a fine eucharistic prayer, Thanksgiving 3, 133f., whose preface runs "For he [Christ] is the true high priest, who has freed us from our sins, and made us a royal priesthood/ to serve you...". It also has the phrase, "We thank you that by your grace alone you have accepted us in Christ".

spiritual sacrifices in everything they do but also that they may witness to Christ throughout the world [emphasis added].¹⁴

We sometimes hear the assertion "baptism is the ordination of the laity" but out of that "laity" the Church calls women and men to maintain the place of Word and sacrament in the Church: the baptized may exercise ministry, but the ordained *must*, as representatives of what the whole Church does. It invites a new use of the old expression of "the priesthood of all believers." It will not set ordained and lay at loggerheads (as it often was in times past) but make it clear that ordination arises from the baptised in Christ, as Luther taught.

That said, I am left with the difficulty of understanding whether there is a role *at all* for a presider, so fraught it becomes in Dr Burn's desire to escape clericalism. I think he doth protest too much. A congregation at prayer, an elders' or a church council meeting *need* a presider. The Uniting Church hinted at what that leadership role might mean when it continued from Presbyterian practice the use of the title 'Moderator' for the presider at Synods. It is not the moderator's or the presider's job to do everything at a service of worship, but rather to facilitate its order, to arbitrate as required, and encourage full participation by those attending. If that is not how those who chair our assemblies behave, the answer is not to remove the role but enhancing their understanding of it. The alternative is chaos or mob rule. However, the lesson may need re-learning in some cases.

I am left uncertain as to how much a congregation's participation is required to be verbal or by some bodily sign. We are already a royal priesthood; that is our God-given call and nature, our presence, in all our variety of age, linguistic abilities, manners of self-expression, musical awareness; certainly there needs to be greater recognition of that. Some will remain silent, having no musical ability. I have known many an older member sit and meditate rather than getting up and sitting down and making the responses. It takes a certain presence of mind to do this, but it is not a separation of someone from the corporate worship. One worshipping community I know constitutes itself by a prayer of invocation led by one of the baptized and then hands a liturgical stole (symbolic of that ministry) the stole to the authorized presider. It is part of the presider's charism to know the gifts in the congregation and to call people with the appropriate gifts to exercise it; this can be ministerial "control," but it may be a proper use of their own vocation.

"Playing Jesus"

The second misinterpretation which may arise from the use of the manual acts is given the subtitle, "Holy Communion is not a tableau of the last Supper." In a simplistic way, with the thought that Jesus said, "Do this for my remembrance," it may seem that we are acting it out on his behalf. That would be naïve (but no less real), but it would leave behind the profound spiritual meaning of the sacrament. It arises from a confusion between "imitating Jesus" and "remembering him in this way". Mid last century, research into biblical and liturgical texts focussed the Greek word placed on Jesus's lips in the Gospels, *anamnesis*. It has often been translated as "in memory of" but the eucharist is not a funeral service, quite the opposite. The

¹⁴ cf. 1 Peter 2:4-10, see the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, Apostolicam actuositatem, November 18, 1965, par. 3. at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html. The special charism of a Catholic priest or bishop is dealt with elsewhere.

¹⁵ Burns, "Manual Acts, Mass Confusion?", 68.

full meaning is a gift from our Jewish forebears in the faith. At Passover, the *anamnesis* of the Exodus is made at the meal table, the story is told over again with words and symbolic foods. A cup of wine is raised and all present say, "Not only our ancestors were redeemed by God from slavery; all of us are now redeemed in spirit and example. Each of us, each generation, is a beneficiary of God's power of salvation." The past is recalled in the present for its blessings now and in the future; time collapses like a telescope; salvation is now and always. In recent times, Christian liturgies have reclaimed this as a gift, not to be exploited but to enrich our prayer as we "do this in remembrance" of Jesus, at the holy Table, set with bread and wine as the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving begins. The Great Prayer is indeed a "sweeping thanksgiving for the whole of the Father's benevolence towards the world and this people in Christ and the Holy Spirit." It is the presider's job with the congregation is to make it be so.

A moment of consecration?

But there is a third possible misleading impression which may arise from the manual acts. Picking up a loaf of bread or a cup of wine which have not otherwise been acknowledged since they were placed on the Table may suggest that something is about to happen which is different from the purpose of the rest of the Great Prayer. It is the old argument about "consecration." It makes the *elements* the central part of the eucharist, when that title belongs to the whole celebration, from the Peace to the final Blessing. ¹⁸ It is often connected with the calling on the Spirit, an invocation or *epiclesis*, which is new to some in our church. It is an ancient and beautiful, if contentious prayer. It is not an ordering of the Holy Spirit to act at this moment, as if it had not been active from the moment we gathered for worship. Our need at this point is made clear: "Pour out the Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and wine that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ". ¹⁹ The elements *and we* are consecrated by the Spirit. That is the holy communion we seek.

The two-tracks in the Great Prayer

Burns has also set out the reasons for and the problems with the choice in 1988 in our first UiW to provide for two different "tracks" through the eucharistic part of the liturgy. The reason was that we were (and are) still uniting, committed to respect for our different traditions of Presbyterians and Congregationalists as Nonconformists on one side and Methodists, with their Anglican heritage, on the other. We debated this choice at length. In the debates before UiW2, the possibility of dropping the "warrant tradition" was raised again, and was retained, but there were many alternatives which were based on the "ecumenical tradition" of the Words of Institution included in the Prayer. The late Professor George Yule used to comment that "the Bible is not a book of precedents" to be followed to the letter. I confess I find the Warrant too close to that misunderstanding and prefer the accent on thanksgiving.

¹⁶ Rabbi Leon Klenicki (ed.), The Passover Celebration, A Haggadah for the Seder [a text for the celebration] (The Anti-defamation League of B'nai B'rith and the Liturgical Training Program of the Archdiocese of Chicago (Roman Catholic), 1980.

¹⁷ Burns, "Manual Acts, Mass Confusion?", 59

¹⁸ And certainly, the four constituent parts of the sacrament itself: The Taking of the bread and wine (Setting the Table), the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving, the breaking of the bread (fraction) and the giving and receiving holy communion. See the headings in the services in UiW2.

¹⁹ UiW2, The Service of the Lord's Day, First Service, 179.

The chief task for our original Assembly Commission on Liturgy was to provide words for a "uniting church" of three traditions, from within the faith as we have received it, which any of our congregations could pray and say together because they could recognize in them their own faith. Use of the participle "Uniting" recognized an ongoing process of unity, but in fact there has been a slow decline in the oversight of worship. That Commission, which was widely representative in age, gender and theology and had members with both experience and scholarship, was reduced to a "Working Group" (the title downgraded its authority), and then to one of the "Circles" with an accompanying panel which are basically voluntary. We have lost our catholicity.

I say this because there is almost nothing in Professor Burns' analysis and discussion with which I, or any other informed liturgiologist, would disagree, but the frustration is: the UCA can now do little about it. So, a constructively critical essay by an ecumenical colleague is very welcome, though this response is merely my own. It is unclear how the Uniting Church, with its present structure, could address his challenge.

Of the making of books

Let me place Dr Burns' challenges in a wider context which Uniting Church readers may appreciate. Above, I said the task of the Liturgical Commission was "to provide words, from within the faith as we have received it, which any of our congregations could pray and say together because they could recognize their faith in them". The writer of Ecclesiastes has some modern advocates: "of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh" (12:12) and St John echoes him (1:25), both, at the end of their books! Our three churches inherited books, and they served as standards, easily accessible to both ordained and lay users.

But one of the darkest memories buried deep in the psyche, especially of our Dissenting ancestors, is of a book of worship imposed on an entire nation by law. There lies the root of many of our contemporary difficulties. Although the Methodist memory of the *Book of Common Prayer* (edited by Wesley) is different, its consistent use meant that it was possible to pray it by heart. Even the smaller *People's Book*, which was published with the 1988 UiW, looked heavy and official, and we clearly failed to convince our people to use it even when purchased. UiW2 is a book largely for presiders. It is also a book already well out of date. I am not advocating a UiW 3, though something like it is necessary, I believe. Stephen Burns adds an epigram "no-one seems quite certain what to do any more," quoting an Anglican source. The impressive research behind the Act2 report at the recent Assembly records similar confusion in the Uniting Church.

One reason for the confusion is our own cleverness. With a book, one could look up the answer in UiW, but penetrating the complexities of our Assembly website is a Herculean task and one is left unsure of the

²⁰ It is a strange irony that the title of the Book of Common Prayer, "common" being intended to unite a Christian nation, should have produced such radical division. "Common" has an edge to it – according to the 1662 Act of Conformity it meant literally every word was to be used. The Church in England was truly broken in these decades, and English Christianity still is. Australian churches received its legacy.

²¹ It did not help that our publishers chose a book design for UiW 1988 which was formal and formidable, especially the editions with metal corners. But it also followed a period when the experimental booklets were paperbacks! The "little Blue Book" (1980) was much loved.

²² Burns, "Manual Acts, Mass Confusion?" 61.

authority of what is there. When it became possible to produce liturgies from internet sources, we also lost the guidance of the carefully written Notes and rubrics (and blubrics!) of UiW2.

What do the people do in worship?

Stephen Burns asks the critical question: "Does your local eucharistic celebration look like the whole congregation celebrates it, rather than the minister alone celebrates?"²³

I take Dr Burn's rhetorical point. If this is how Uniting Church worship looks, then it is a terrible indictment indeed. But is what he is driving at possible or even desirable? Monastic Communities manage it. For instance, in the development of Taizé's Council of Youth in the 1970s, much effort went into finding accessible music which could be introduced to a new congregation in a few minutes; simple, repeated phrases, like mantras, sung by the whole congregation seated on the floor. It called on musicians of high ability to achieve this and to watch over it happening. But at the eucharist, with this communal song, an ordained brother presides over the Community's usual liturgy. Charismatic "singing in the Spirit" is another example but is not the only thing that happens in the service.²⁴ And indeed, hymns and other songs are a vital part of community togetherness in celebration. However, I also wonder if this democratic (not a biblical word) aim is indeed biblical? St Paul gives us his image of the body: "For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of each other. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us..." (Romans 12: 4-6). It has been suggested that the gift referred to in 1 Cor 12: 28, kuberneseis, is associated with steering a boat, or as the Revised English Bible has it, "power to guide them". Is that not the spiritual gift of presiding?²⁵ It includes the gift of so leading a prayer than the listeners are drawn into it themselves. That's how extempore prayer works. It's a *charism*, and not all have each of them.

UiW took major steps in that active congregational direction, compared with our inherited customs, in its doomed *People's Book* (1988) with its return to us of the use of the psalms. The congregational silence was broken by regular responses, reminders of the link between presider and people. ²⁶ Learning other texts by heart is made next to impossible by our UCA desire for variety; other churches know the creeds, and communion responses through regular use. Uniting congregations appear to be reluctant to sing these, despite music being an aid to memorizing the words. Is this a conservatism of presiders or of congregations, and how can it be overcome? ²⁷ I can only say, after more than fifty years of ministry, that

²³ Burns, "Manual Acts, Mass Confusion?", 63. I vividly remember a Communion service in my mother's Church of Scotland parish outside Edinburgh, where the Minister, faithful to the *Book of Common Order* in his hands, also made all the responses including "and also with you." Certainly, the congregation of my relatives did not think they should say anything!

The Quakers (Society of Friends) get close to it but have no clergy, and all remain silent unless the Spirit moves someone to speak; though someone has the responsibility to discern when the silence should end! Curiously (you may think) Eastern Orthodox worship also exemplifies "common prayer" because the liturgy almost never changes, so the prayers and hymns are known through repetition and familiarity by the congregation. The choir is seen as the leader of the people's worship.

²⁵ I believe that suggestion was associated with Anglican theologian Colin Buchanan, but I have not been able to confirm that.

²⁶ I summarised all of them on a single page (13, "All the responses you will ever need to learn"), many of them the same, in my *A Guide to Uniting in Worship* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press 1990).

²⁷ The Assembly Circle "Transforming Worship" provides many new resources for words and worship. It is accessible also on Face Book.

it is possible, with perseverance and consistency. Our congregations are rarely taught about how to pray, either personally or corporately.

Burns notes recent developments since Vatican II which are worth our study. Our mission, however, pales into insignificance against what the Roman Catholic Church took up under Pope John XXIII in 1962 and his wise and determined successor, Paul VI, who saw through the work of the Vatican Council to its completion. Here is perhaps the most critical paragraph of all, from the Decree on Liturgy: ²⁸

14. Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people' (1 Pet.2:9; cf. 2: 4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.

I cannot think of a more important summary of the question. It continues,

[This participation by all the people] is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful derive the true Christian spirit. Therefore, through the needed program of instruction, pastors of souls must zealously strive to achieve it in all their pastoral work.

A footnote at this point comments that "this emphasis on full, conscious and active participation by the whole Church is thus not a clerical preserve", though that is not to treat the pastor's role as unimportant. The Constitution calls the clergy to begin with themselves, becoming "thoroughly penetrated with the spirit and the power of the liturgy, and become masters of it."

Elsewhere, Burns quotes Don Saliers, where he calls the Second Vatican Council "the most important thing to affect the Protestant traditions in the twentieth century." ²⁹ "Full, conscious and active participation" in liturgical celebrations needs translating into UCA language and practice.

So, the UCA Liturgical Commission produced books. In its first, it provided a variety of choices, partly to represent the three traditions and also to provide some examples from others. There was a new Australian Great Prayer of Thanksgiving³⁰ but it offered eight 'Alternative Prayers', A-H (UiW 1988, 91ff) and ten more general thanksgivings capable of adaption to eucharistic use (609-622).³¹ In the second, UiW2 (2000) revised and reused the prayer from its predecessor ("in time beyond our dreaming") and added a new prayer in a

²⁸ Sacrosanctum Concilium, the first Council document to be published, was promulgated on 4 December 1973. My italics. My source is Walter M. Abbott SJ, (ed.), The Documents of Vatican II (London, 1967), 133ff, but it can be found in any such collection at Part II, paragraph 14 "The Promotion of Liturgical Instruction and Active Participation."

²⁹ Dr Burns and I both contributed to a volume of essays on the Decree on Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium) fifty years after its promulgation: Carmel Pilcher, David Orr and Elizabeth Hamilton (eds), *Vatican Council II Reforming Liturgy* (Adelaide: AFTTheology, 2013), the Saliers quotation is on 253.

³⁰ It provided for a number of "prefaces" over the Christian Year or for special occasions.

³¹ The origins of each prayer could be found in my *A Guide to Uniting in Worship* (1990). One (Alt. A) was drawn from a prayer drafted by our own Dr Harold Leatherland, now shared in both UiW2 and *A Prayer Book for Australia* (Anglican, 1995. Others came from our paperback "little blue book", *Holy Communion* (1980), Presbyterian Church USA (two), United Church of Canada (two), British Methodist (1975) and a slight adaptation of Prayer IV in the Roman *Sacramentary* (1971), based on a prayer of the eastern Saint Basil (4th C.).

Second Service (209ff) which was addressed to the Trinity with a preface with thanks for the creation ("for this wide, red land, for its rugged beauty, its changing seasons, its diverse peoples, and for all that lives on this fragile earth"). Pressed by those who wanted more congregational participation in the Great Prayer itself, it provided a response used three times throughout the prayer ("Holy God/we offer our thanks and praise") with Australian-composed music provided.

My sense is that the response did not meet that need, and the prayer, if used, was usually offered as a single text by the presider. So, does this mean that more verbal involvement by the congregation does *not* in fact promote a sense of their being participants rather an audience? My suspicion is that if the Great Prayer were offered by everyone in unison that too would not improve the experience; the communal saying of the Lord's Prayer needs more care than it receives. I believe a congregation "participates" in liturgical prayer in a variety of ways and at several levels. They hear, they see, they taste, they stand, they sit (only the sense of smell is not normally engaged!) and they ponder. Worship is not destroyed by a mind that wanders. How one presides is a main factor in enhancing this, by gesture, by use of voice, by inviting. Silence plays its part and so does communal singing. The frequent practice in Uniting congregations of my acquaintance, being smaller, is to come forward at the Peace and stand around the Table until after they have received. That certainly speaks of all the baptized as celebrants.

Of course, all that I say depends on the culture in which we worship, our own or one overlaid on us. I write as an overeducated white male (and old). I write chiefly for my own Anglo-Celts who, for the moment, are a majority in our ageing congregations and still deserve to be addressed. But there is a huge challenge for the generations to come, and I see no pathway for them to negotiate the changes. If there are intergenerational roads to traverse, there are also intercultural, Christian and anti-Christian ones. Our efforts to imagine these ways have been minimal and not far from colonialist adaptations for the sake of peace (or practicality).³³ The cultures of modern Australia pose even greater questions, especially since they are a major cause of the supplanting of Christian faith in the western world. The liturgical movement has gained much from study of the growing years of the Church before Constantine brought them out of their obscurity and the next few centuries. We need to remember that in contemporary use "modern" is an Enlightenment word.

We are also prisoners of our buildings.³⁴ Many of ours were designed not for a congregation but precisely for an audience. After Vatican II, the Catholic Church experimented with some high success with congregational seating in a half-circle or a hollow U. I wrote a book on "Theological Guidelines for Uniting Church Worship Buildings," which proved useful but has been allowed to go out of print.³⁵ There are more recent and more

³² UiW2 was also accompanied by CD-ROM material with even more possibilities and more have been provided since. Discussion of these is beyond the scope of this essay.

Some start has been made by working with Indigenous Peoples. The Basis has made our commitment to our immediate external neighbours, Pasifika and Southeast Asia clear (see Basis, # 2). Printing texts in other languages (see UiW2 334-344) cannot possibly address the issues. It was a well-meaning gesture, but it ignored the relationship of language to meaning and symbol. The Roman Catholic Church in particular has applied the implications of enculturation for liturgy. We have a way to go.

³⁴ See my two articles, one on the Methodist Church Worship Society, and a second on the Presbyterian Church Service Society, made up of clergy and laity, and the Congregational parallel, in *Proceedings of the Uniting Church Historical Society (Vic. & Tas.)*, vol. 31, No. 1, June 2024, 1-26, 27-53. Many issues in worship arose from the inherited architecture.

³⁵ Living Stones, Theological Guide-lines for Uniting Church Worship Buildings (UC Synod of Victoria, 1997), written at the request of the Synod body responsible for them.

detailed ecumenical sources.³⁶ In the ancient Church, the building's design was intended to teach the worshippers – and the catechumens – about the meaning of the worship which happened there: baptistery, place for preaching, table for eucharist, all facing east. A building is a canopy over the church's worship. We seem to have provided for one form of communication: to an audience. But worse: seeing this, we seem incapable of radical change ("radical" meaning according to the issues at the root).

Mass confusion?

These are some of the issues which arise from Stephen Burns' gentle nudge at the Uniting Church's theology and practice of ministry. I have recognized the connections with other factors like ecumenical sharing, language and culture.

We are surely aware that the issues facing faith and belief in the 21st century affect *all* the churches. Our Church should certainly have found ways by now of working with other Churches, not least those most different from us, in discerning the issues and finding ways forward. But the ecumenical movement has lost its way too: for some it became irrelevant when we stopped planning organic unions. The very threats to our existence have forced us back behind our denominational walls to protect us from marauders.

I believe we must now create or recreate ecumenical forums where common issues can be discussed by decision-makers as well as neighbouring congregations. Let inter-church councils have these on their agenda. We cooperate readily on social justice issues, but what of faith and order? The ecumenical pioneer Lesslie Newbigin, addressing a dialogue between Anglican and Reformed churches more than forty years ago made the sobering observation that they needed to face together "a missionary situation in which the Church is a small evangelizing movement in a pagan society." ³⁷

The fact of the matter is that the Uniting Church does not have sufficient liturgical scholars to lead us in the preparation of contemporary forms of liturgy. Our inherited fears have meant that our best students have been supported in fields like biblical studies and theology and some sociological and psychological areas, but not in liturgy or music and the arts. Frequently, theology and biblical studies have been taught without considering their application in congregations. The teaching of liturgical practice was never strong among us; even the teaching of preaching has often been neglected. It is not enough to be "interested" in such things: we need people with breadth and depth of study and experience to keep them before us. So let us really do everything with our Christian companions on the road, sharing our resources.

The work of Act2 was received by the 17th Assembly (July 2024) and put into action via a new Commission. Unfortunately (and this is not to downplay the significance of what they did decide), the accent is almost entirely on refreshing the administrative structures of the Church. The mission of the Church in general is promised for the next Assembly – three years away, plus time for consideration and decision making. By then we will be even more fragile. In this essay I have called for a recovery of the skilled commissions

³⁶ Burns suggests one in his first footnote, Richard Giles, Creating Uncommon Worship: Transforming the Liturgy of the Eucharist (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2004).

³⁷ Quoted in Geofrey Wainwright, Lesslie Newbigin: A Theological Life (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 292.

and working groups in the field of liturgy, and I would add: doctrine and ecumenical relationships. And some things can be done at other council levels, even at that highest of all equal councils, the congregation.

Let the *Basis* supply us with a goal to be made real in every congregation: "On the way Christ feeds the Church with Word and Sacraments, and it has the gift of the Spirit in order that it may not lose the way" (#3). Do we believe this? Do we exemplify it in our life and worship?

Robert Gribben studied liturgy at Wesley House, Cambridge, UK under the Methodist scholar, Raymond George. He succeeded the Rev. Dr Harold Leatherland as Director of the Ecumenical Liturgical Centre at Kew, served on the Council of the international scholarly body, Societas Liturgica, and was a President of the Australian Academy of Liturgy and Editor of its Journal. He served on the Liturgical Commission which produced *Uniting in Worship* and its successor. He is Emeritus Professor of Worship and Mission of the former United Faculty of Theology

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

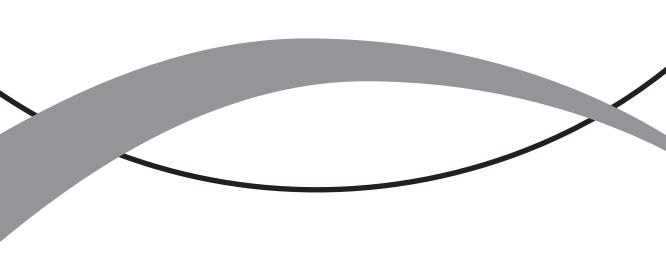
Rev. Dr. Ji Zhang

Prof. Sue Beeton

Uniting Church Studies is a fully-refereed, multidisciplinary, 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