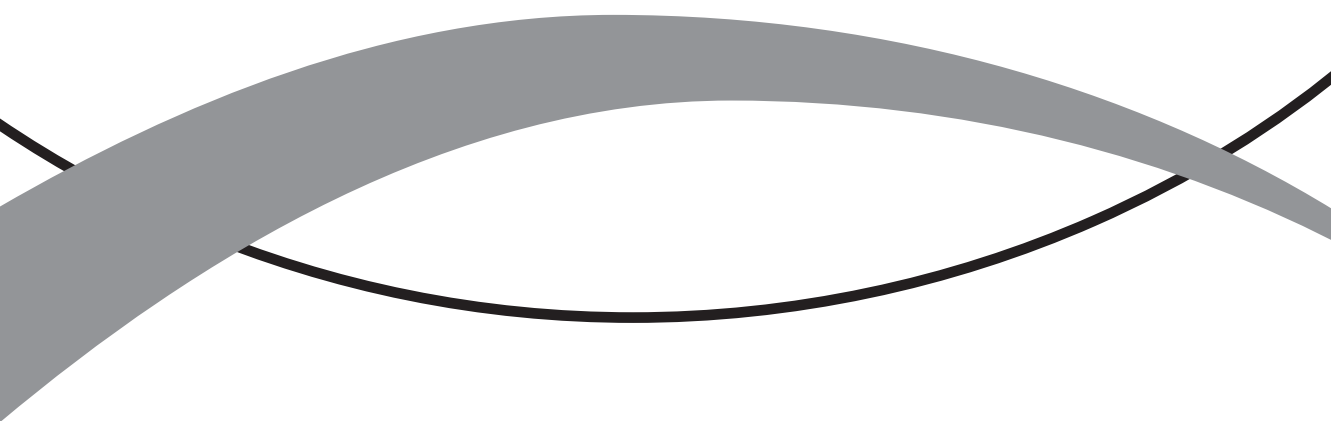


UNITING CHURCH STUDIES

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Editorial

Geoff Thompson

The themed papers included in this issue are revised versions of the keynote addresses presented at the conference, Creeds, Confessions and Contexts in the Uniting Church in Australia, hosted by United Theological College (UTC), North Parramatta, 11-13 September this year. The idea of the conference emerged from the Editorial Advisory Committee of this Journal, and was occasioned by the 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicea. There were, of course, countless conferences across the world noting that anniversary, and not a few others in Australia. The theme of this conference, though, was neither the 4th century Council nor its Creed in isolation, but a more general engagement with the issue of the Uniting Church's reception of and posture towards creeds as well as confessions of faith. The Basis of Union calls the Uniting Church to a particular understanding and use of the Creeds inherited from the church catholic (BOU, #9) and to an equally particular understanding and use of the Reformed Confessions and the Sermons of John Wesley, the literary inheritance from this Church's particular historical traditions (BOU, #10). They do not have the same function or significance in the Uniting Church that they have in other Churches. This conference was an opportunity to explore that particularity but quite deliberately in conversation with the BOU's call to be theologically attentive to context (BOU, #11, although the term used there is "contemporary society"). In addition to the keynote papers published here, there were several other streams of input: an opening talk from Matthew Anslow on his recent visit to Iznik (modern Nicea); a short introductory paper about context from Liam Miller; nine elective papers; a workshop exploring if and how the Uniting Church should develop a fresh confession; and daily theological reflections from Trawlwoolway woman and academic, Naomi Wolfe.

It was clear that, despite the widespread ambivalence towards (if not *de facto* disappearance of) the Creeds and Confessions in the regular life of the Uniting Church, both the quality of the papers and the energy of the accompanying discussions were very high. The enthusiasm generated for the various issues led to the intention that all the papers (and some others) would be presented in book to be published, hopefully, by the end of 2026.

The three keynotes addressing the creedal inheritance each confront the challenges in receiving them as well as the opportunities that engagement with them provides. And it is fair to say that the Nicene Creed has, indeed, been given a high profile in these papers. Chris Budden offers a reminder of the Nicene Creed's silences, the gaps it opened for later justifications of colonialism, and the way its development reflected the church's negotiation of identity, location and relevance. According to Budden, an informed and critical understanding of this Creed in the settler colonial space that Australia is can play a role in helping the contemporary church in the ongoing negotiation of those same realities. Joerg Rieger scrutinises the binary that often places the creedal traditions in opposition to the Christian theology's liberative traditions. He argues that whilst the Creeds' imperial pedigree is as problematic as it is undeniable, the theological conceptuality that emerged had an "anti-imperial potential" which can inform the church's contemporary liberative work. Katalina Tahaafe-Williams directly confronts the issue of the Creed's ecumenical significance in the current ecumenical landscape, one so different from that in which the Uniting Church was formed.

She argues that, notwithstanding the obvious limitations, both of the classical creeds, precisely with their focus on God, provide a challenge to the anthropocentricity of the current era.

Addressing the issue of the Reformed Confessions and Wesley's Sermons, Glen O'Brien directly addresses the question of whether, despite the significance given to them in the Basis, they might actually be redundant. His answer, however, is they are not, but only so long as they are not "left embedded fossil-like in the rock strata laid down in 1977." O'Brien closely attends to the theological themes in both sets of documents, with an extended discussion of the Wesleyan inheritance in the UCA. He argues that a critical engagement with these documents can be fruitful if we listen again for their confidence in the good news and the reality of God's grace – the abiding theological legacies from our antecedent traditions. So, read, says O'Brien, they can help the UCA elucidate what it means to be Evangelical, Reformed and Ecumenical.

The Reflections and Provocations section is an occasional feature of this Journal, providing the opportunity for the publication of articles which, whilst scholarly, are pitched more explicitly to the church rather than the academy. There are two such articles in this issue. In the first, "Transforming Communities: Talanoa and Food as Catalysts", Jione Havea and Faa'imata Havea Hiliau explore how food and talanoa ("a native Pasifika practice and culture around story, telling, and conversing") can be employed to foster an environment for the church to be enabled to fulfill its mission to be a catalyst for transformation. The theme of talanoa has received significant attention in the UCA in recent years, and here in this article it is intentionally used to illuminate the theme ("Transforming Communities") of the 2025 meeting of the NSW/ACT Synod. The article is notable, also, for being co-authored by an academic and a church leader. Such co-operation is exemplary, and other instances would be warmly welcomed in the Journal. The author of the second article in this section, Dean Drayton, has himself been both a church leader and academic. His paper, "Sexuality, UAICC, Polity and the 10th Assembly: a personal statement" takes the form of a personal statement in which Drayton responds to a claim made in an article published in a previous issue of the Journal about his actions, as Assembly President, at the 2003 Assembly.¹ Drayton argues that the particular moment in dispute needs to be understood as located at the intersection, as the paper's title implies, of matters of Covenant, polity, and the topic then at hand, i.e., the ordination of homosexual members. This article, to be read in tandem with the earlier article, is a reminder that the church, no more or less than other communities, is a community which lives amidst the contestation of memories.

This issue's Book Forum engages Julia M. O'Brien's 2024 book, *Prophets Beyond Activism: Rethinking the Prophetic Roots of Social Justice*. O'Brien, Professor Emerita of Biblical Studies at Lancaster Theological Seminary, Pennsylvania, USA, argues that the prophets of Israel were not so straightforwardly concerned with "social justice" in the way that progressive Churches have assumed. Whilst a self-designated "progressive" herself, and actively involved in promoting social justice, O'Brien calls for more exegetically and theologically careful use of the prophets, and of the Bible more generally, in the ministry of activism. O'Brien's arguments invite careful attention from members of the Uniting Church. The responses to the book from the three

¹ Chris Budden, "A Brief History of the Construction of the Preamble," *Uniting Church Studies*, 26. No 1, June 2024: 35-47. Following normal academic protocols, Dr Budden was invited to respond to Dr Drayton's paper, but has chosen not to.

respondents, Elenie Poulos, Brian Fiu Kolia and Matthew Anslow, together with O'Brien's response to them, provides a wonderful resource for that engagement. It is also another example in this series of Book Forums of respectful, robust and intellectually deeply serious theological conversation.

This Journal has since its inception been published by United Theological College, and it is appropriate for the Journal to note the College's 50th anniversary by including a review of the book celebrating that anniversary, *Things that Matter: Essays on Theological Education on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of United Theological College*, edited by William W. Emilsen and Patricia Curthoys.

There is no article in the Uniting and United Churches series in this issue. The series will resume in the June 2026 issue.

There are several administrative matters to report. The Chair of the Editorial Advisory Committee, Mr John Oldmeadow, has completed his term in the role of Chair. The Committee has also farewelled Rev Dr Peter Walker as he moves from the role of Principal of UTC to that of General Secretary of the NSW/ACT Synod. Both John and Peter have been crucial to the life of the Journal over the last several years, not least in encouraging and overseeing the shift to the online format. I extend my warm thanks to both of them for the support they have given me, and, with the rest of the Committee, wish them well for the future. Accompanying these changes in personnel and following a decision of the Editorial Advisory Committee earlier this year, the oversight of the Journal is now moving to a different structure: a Management Committee and an Editorial Panel. Warm thanks are extended to the outgoing Editorial Advisory Committee, some of whom will continue in the new structure. And special thanks to Liam Miller for his work as Review Editor since 2019. Liam has decided to stand aside from this role, but he will be continuing in a different role in the new structure.

Prior to leaving his role as Principal of UTC, Peter Walker confirmed the appointment of Dr Deidre Palmer to that of Chair of the new advisory structure. Many readers will be aware of Deidre's various leadership, academic and other educational roles in the Uniting Church, including serving as President of the Assembly, 2018-2021. Her appointment is wonderful news for the Journal, where her expertise and wisdom will be invaluable.

Readers will note the addition of a list of Abbreviations available to be used in the Journal (see details on p.86). This recognises that there is a small body of literature and a variety of institutions frequently referred to in the articles published in its pages. Prospective authors should consult the "Submissions" page of the Journal's website in order to familiarise themselves with the original sources being abbreviated and with all the details of when and how to use the abbreviations.

Finally, an erratum. The printed edition of Rebecca Lindsay's paper, "Colonising Innocence and the Revised Preamble: between celebration and critique" published in the December 2024 issue (Vol 26, no 2) of the Journal, contained a significant amount of unrelated additional material in the footnotes. Apologies to Dr Lindsay for this error. The digital copy available on the website has had the additional material removed.

About Uniting Church Studies

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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 the 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.

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Abbreviations

Documents

Hyperlinks are embedded in the full name and provide access to the full documents.

<i>AssMin</i>	Assembly Minutes
<i>BOU</i>	Basis of Union
<i>CS</i>	Covenanting Statement
<i>RP</i>	Revised Preamble
<i>UCMC</i>	The Uniting Church is a Multicultural Church
<i>UCAConst</i>	Uniting Church Constitution
<i>UCAREgs2025</i>	Uniting Church Regulations 2025
<i>UIW2</i>	Uniting in Worship 2

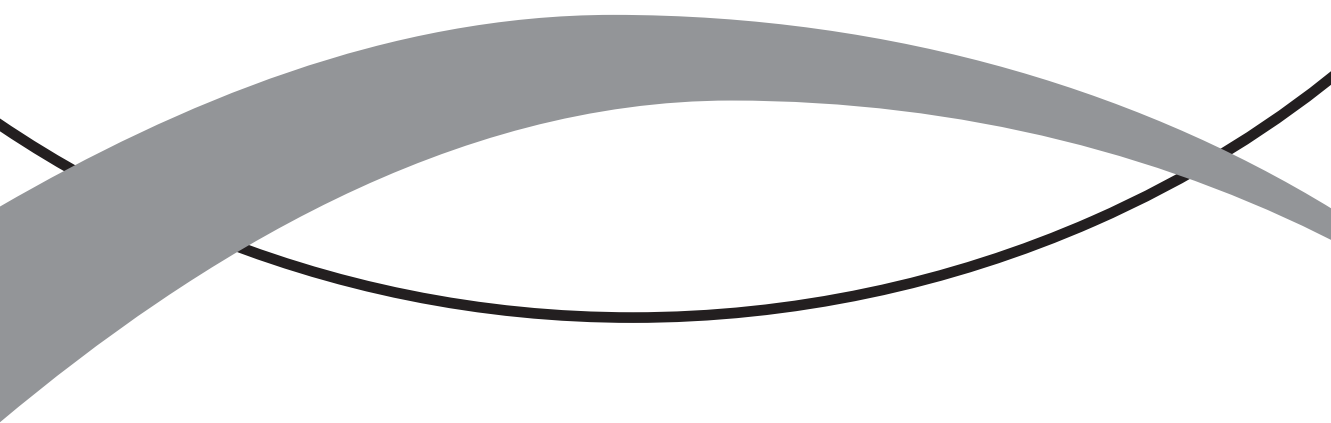
Institutions and Organisations

<i>UCA</i>	Uniting Church in Australia
<i>UAICC</i>	Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress
<i>WCC</i>	World Council of Churches
<i>ASC</i>	Assembly Standing Committee

This journal

This abbreviation can be used in bibliographical references to articles published in this Journal.

<i>UCS</i>	Uniting Church Studies
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