UNITING CHURCH STUDIES

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Vol. 24, No. 2, DECEMBER 2022

CONTENTS

5 EDITORIAL

GENERAL ARTICLES

9 America's Wild West in Kangaroo Flat: Methodist masculinity, heroism and violence
Kerrie Handasyde

21 The Ecclesiology of a Covenanting and Multicultural Church
Michelle Cook

UNITED AND UNITING CHURCHES

33 Toward a Chinese Theology of Unity: the formation and the theological basis of the Chinese Uniting Church since 1950
Wen Ge

REFLECTIONS AND PROVOCATIONS

43 "The Mission Myth" 25 years later
John T. Squires and Elizabeth Raine

51 "Pathfinder and Pioneer": a tribute to Betty Matthews, the Uniting Church's first ordained deacon
Sandy Boyce

59 Preaching as an Exercise in Telling the Time: what stays the same when everything changes
E Craig Thompson

REVIEWS

67 Dianne Rayson, *Bonhoeffer and Climate Change: Theology and Ethics for the Anthropocene,* Lanham MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Press, 2021.
Joe McGarry

69 Jione Havea, *Losing Ground: Reading Ruth in the Pacific*, London: SCM Press, 2021.
Tau'alofa Anga'aelangi

72 CONTRIBUTORS

74 ABOUT UNITING CHURCH STUDIES

Editorial

Geoff Thompson

A claim, widely and frequently repeated in the Uniting Church, is that the Uniting Church was never intended to be a denomination. Rather, it was to be a movement. The claim is usually made with a tone of lament: what began as a movement has, so it said, become a denomination. Of course, the very existence of denominations is a problem, a problem to which the formation of the Uniting Church itself was a response. Historically, denominations are a manifestation of the divisions of the church, divisions that are a scandal to the unity of the body of Christ; divisions that are sustained by mutual suspicion, doctrinal defensiveness, and the alluring but isolating power of confessional identities and loyalties. Serious though these issues are, the charge of *denominationalism* is arguably a more serious one. Denominationalism has come to stand for cultural inertia, missional failure, and institutional self-preservation. Yet, denomination and denominationalism are distinct realities. Denominationalism, as just defined, is something of which to be repented. But is there more to the phenomenon of denominations than the problem of schismatic division?

I ask the question not to in order to deflect attention away from the criticisms of the Uniting Church crystallised in the lament noted above. (Although I do think there is a sociological naivety around the contrast between denomination and movement. After all, effective movements need organization, structure and identity.) Instead, I ask the question prompted by the work of American Presbyterian, Barry Ensign-George, who believes that the phenomenon of denomination lacks sustained theological analysis. Whilst carefully analysed by sociologists and church historians, theologians are more likely, he argues, to automatically denounce it. Ensign-George notes the oddness of this: "we have no significant theological analysis and discussion of the major structure in which large numbers of Christians have lived and do live out their faith."[1] This, he says, has "devastating practical consequences."[2] He continues:

> Unable to provide a compelling account of their own existence to their own members, denominations find they have no meaningful internal coherence and are unable to resist centrifugal forces that arise within....Unable to provide a compelling account of their own existence to a watching world, denominations find they have no way to explain why newcomers might want to join their particular embodiment of the Christian faith.[3]

In his own theological analysis and understanding of denomination, Ensign-George refuses to trade unity off against diversity: they are not in a zero-sum relationship. The church is called to both. To summarise Ensign-George's long and carefully developed argument: Christian diversity is a manifestation of what he terms the "fecundity" of the Christian faith. And it is in that theological framework that he constructively locates denomination. He does this not to defend what is negative about the phenomenon, nor to save the

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1 Barry A. Ensign-George, *Between Congregation and Church: Denomination and Christian Life Together* (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 2.
2 Ensign-George, *Between Congregation and Church*, 4
3 Ensign-George, *Between Congregation and Church*, 5.

word for the sake of it, and not theologically to legitimate any particular denomination. Rather, because denomination is the context in which countless Christians live their lives of discipleship, he seeks to understand it beyond it being merely a symptom of schism.

> Denomination is generated by the fecundity of the Christian faith. The Christian faith can be lived faithfully in more than one way, within more than one pattern of decisions about how faithfully to embody Christian belief and practice. The church must include space in which candidate patterns for faithful Christian living can be proposed, attempted, embodied, and tested. Denomination provides such space.[4]

There is much about Ensign-George's project which warrants the engagement of the Uniting Church, not least because of the way the rhetoric of unity and diversity has emerged as part of the church's self-understanding, superseding the more singular focus on unity at the church's formation. Despite the wide currency of the appeal to unity in diversity, I would argue that it is more often asserted as a self-evident virtue than it is theologically analysed or expounded. Be that as it may, it is Ensign-George's articulation of the church's calling to provide space for proposing and testing "candidate patterns of faithful Christian living" that I find especially suggestive, including as a filter through which to consider the articles in this issue of *Uniting Church Studies*. If we think of the Uniting Church as a "candidate pattern of Christian living," the articles in this issue can be read as exercises in proposing and testing, and I would add, critically retrieving particular ways of Christian living within or adjacent to the Uniting Church.

Kerrie Handasyde *retrieves* an element of the Uniting Church's antecedent Australian Methodist tradition through an examination of the nineteenth century phenomenon of nineteenth-century Methodist adventure novels. Whilst borrowing from the same genre in American Methodism of the same era, Australian Methodist writer, Tom Bluegum (a pseudonym) pushed back against the inclusion of libertarian, nationalist and religiously legitimated violence evident in the American novels and thus promoted a form of Methodism resistant to violent masculinity and religious nationalism. Yet, Handasyde also points out that the fault lines within Methodism evident in this contrast have nevertheless run through Australian Methodism, and into the contemporary life of the Uniting Church. Her act of retrieval is also a way of promoting forms of Christian living characterized by humility and dependence on the compassion of God manifest in the living Word.

Michelle Cook examines a series of documents related, on the one hand, to the Covenant between the Uniting Church and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and, on the other hand, to the commitment to being a multicultural Church. She traces how the implied ecclesiology of these documents – individually and collectively – challenge, deepen and ground the stated ecclesiology of the Basis of Union. She proposes that a particular ecclesiology is emerging along with these documents. But it is an ecclesiology that tests the Uniting Church's commitment, among other things, to the sharing of the resources across the whole denomination.

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[4] Ensign-George, *Between Congregation and Church*, 198.

John Squires and Elizabeth Raine, at the request of the Editorial Advisory Committee, have re-visited an article they contributed to this journal in 1997, "The Mission Myth." It was one of the few articles published in *Uniting Church Studies* which provoked a number of written responses. Tracing some of the developments in the Uniting Church during the intervening twenty-five years, alongside their own diverse experiences of ministry, they argue that the relationship between mission and discipleship is undeveloped in the Uniting Church. Accordingly, they *propose* closer attention be paid to, and greater investment be made in, the training of disciples, especially in the context of the Uniting Church's local missional engagements.

Sandy Boyce pays tribute to the Rev Deacon Betty Matthews (1929–2022), the first person ordained a deacon after the Uniting Church established the renewed diaconate. The tribute both honours Betty's life and marks the 30th anniversary of the renewal of the diaconate. Weaving Betty's own biography into the story of the Uniting Church's development of the diaconate as an ordained ministry, open to men and women, and oriented to leading the church in its service to the world, Boyce *retrieves* two important narratives that implicitly invite the Uniting Church to test its commitment to the ministry of serving the world.

Craig Thompson makes a provocative *proposal* for understanding the role of preaching in a constantly changing context. First presented at a Uniting Church conference on preaching, Thompson challenges some prevailing understandings both of preaching and of context, placing them in an anthropological framework which draws on Jesus' claim that "he knew all people" (John 2:23–25) and Paul's affirmation of the unity and diversity of human being in Christ (Gal 3:28). The result is a proposal that preaching is an exercise in reclaiming the changing times as always God's own time.

From beyond the Uniting Church, Wen Ge writes of the socially and historically complex journey of the Chinese Protestant Church from the decolonising of Chinese Christianity in the mid-twentieth century through to its present understanding of being a uniting church. This article is the first of regular series about other united or uniting churches (see more on this below). Through its account of the historical and theological background of this development within the Chinese church, this article is an invitation to the Uniting Church to test its own contemporary understanding of being a uniting church and its theological justifications for doing so.

In the end, whether the Uniting Church is a denomination or a movement is moot point. Both are vulnerable to critique and whatever ecclesiological merit either possesses is never self-evident and must be theologically analysed and justified. What matters, again to invoke Ensign-George' work, is how it embodies Christian faith and practice as a manifestation of the fecundity of this faith. Through their mix of *retrieval*, *proposing* and *testing*, the contributions to this issue of the journal, including the two book reviews (both of which extend our horizon beyond the Uniting Church) are potential resources for deepening our understanding of the strengths, weaknesses and possibilities of this particular way of living the Christian life which we call the Uniting Church in Australia.

To conclude this Editorial, I draw attention to the three categories in which the articles are presented on the Contents page. The "General Articles" cover articles which present research through the normal genre and length of journal articles. Under "Reflections and Provocations" there are somewhat shorter articles,

less focused on original research *per se* but presenting material which invites more open reflection on some aspect of the Uniting Church's life or which provokes some new discussion or debate. This section of the journal is also offered as an opportunity for later responses to any article in the journal. The category of "United and Uniting Churches," as already noted above, is intended as a regular feature of this journal as a forum for discussing other united and uniting churches around the world. Most such churches are products of the twentieth-century ecumenical movement, but there is little scholarly engagement or interaction about *being* united and uniting. This element of the journal is a small step towards fostering more such engagement. Although not a feature of this issue, the category of "Themed Articles" will also appear form time to time when the journal publishes invited articles on a designated theme. As it happens, the next two issues will each have a designated theme: *Activism* for the June 2023 issue; and *Emerging Understandings of Ecumenism* for the December 2023 issue. And as you wait for those issues, also look out for – and be sure to like and follow – the Uniting Church Studies Facebook page. And, in due course, also look out for a dedicated website.

America's Wild West in Kangaroo Flat: Methodist masculinity, heroism and violence

Kerrie Handasyde

Abstract

American Methodist circuit-riders provided the colonial Australian church with a model for revivalism and ministry to isolated communities. Adventure-romance novels about these heroic evangelists on horseback sold in their thousands. This article compares the well-known novel *The Circuit Rider* (1874) by American Methodist Edward Eggleston with *The Backblocks' Parson*, "The Kangaroo Flat Revival," and other stories by Australian Methodist Tom Bluegum (pseudonym of George Warren Payne). It finds that the Australian Tom Bluegum used the popular literary genre to challenge American Methodist ideas about masculinity and heroism. His frequently funny stories deliberately resisted the gospel's captivity to American values of freedom, nationalism, order and religiously-inspired violence. Bluegum borrowed literary elements from Eggleston's fiction and adapted them in order to make a point about what it was to be a man of God in the Australian context. He encouraged readers to imagine an Australian Methodism that was opposed to violence and individualism – and he provides a reminder that violent masculinity and nationalism can be challenged by humility, wit, and the Word.

Introduction

Methodist adventure novels enabled colonial Australians to write themselves into the landscape, imagining a new way of being. Writers such as Tom Bluegum drew their inspiration from US authors, adapting their plots and characters for this new and ancient land via the addition of kangaroos, bushrangers, and models of ministry that quietly critiqued the American enculturation of the gospel. In Bluegum's *The Backblocks' Parson: A Story of Australian Life* (1899), there are outlaws, guns and violence, preaching and meetings, and chaste romance. It is a lot like the American Edward Eggleston's *The Circuit Rider: A Tale of the Heroic Age* (1874). Both novels follow the story of a probationary preacher on horseback, ministering to simple folk in far-flung places, and falling in love. Both novels emphasise the manliness of Methodist ministers. Bluegum's hero has a "robust manhood," and was "no effeminate weakling, but manly."[1] Eggleston's begins

[1] Tom Bluegum (pseudonym of the Rev. George Warren Payne), *The Backblocks' Parson: A Story of Australian Life* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1899), 15.

as "a young man of force" and ends "more manly."[2] Bluegum's hero has a "sun-browned visage," just like Eggleston's with his "sun-browned cheeks."[3] But there are significant differences. When Bluegum adopted the stereotype of the circuit rider on the western frontier, he left behind much of the preacher's American heroic individualism and violence. By comparing the works of each author in historical context, this article examines how the American enculturation of the gospel was critiqued in colonial Australia. As white Christian nationalism grows around the world, the works of Tom Bluegum provide a reminder that seductive nostalgia for a particular kind of masculinity that imposes order, power and freedom has been challenged before by Australian Methodism – and it can be again.

Methodism grew up alongside the new genre of the novel. Beginning in the eighteenth century and expanding throughout the nineteenth century, the popularity of novels was aided by lower printing costs and the innovation of linotype, and the growth of literacy.[4] Many denominations, Methodism included, were concerned that novels were "worldly" and "pernicious" influences that diverted the attention of the young from the work of the gospel.[5] But Methodists developed the practice of visual imagination in private meditation and corporate worship, especially revival meetings. Sermons, songs and camp meeting testimonies of the 1800s and 1900s shared a common rhetorical pattern in which listeners were asked to visualise a sacred scene, to imagine themselves in Gethsemane or Galilee or by a sacred fountain. They were invited to participate in the scene through their senses – to smell the breeze, hear the cries of the crowd, see the Saviour beckoning to them – and to respond wholeheartedly.[6] This spiritual practice, designed to move the heart and revive faith, gave Methodism a "distinctively pictorial cast of mind."[7] It also predisposed Methodists to embrace religious, and especially Methodist, novels as a means of deepening faith through pious imaginative experience. Through novels, Methodists could see themselves travelling to distant places to fulfil the mission of the Church.

Circuit riders, real and imagined

Tom Bluegum, whose real name was the Reverend George Warren Payne (1859-1952), brought into being a life of faithful adventure in his novels. He published at least four books and more than a dozen serialized novels and short-stories in Sydney's denominational periodical, *The Methodist*, between the late 1890s and 1926. His titles reflect the sense of place and belonging that he sought to cultivate, for example: "In the Far Bush" (1902), "Out Back" (1902), "The Stolen Bullock" (1898), "On the Diamantina" (1899), "Middle Ridge Appointment" (1899), his best-known work *The Backblocks' Parson* and "The Kangaroo Flat Revival" (both published 1899), and, further afield, *Three Boys in Antarctica* (1912). Many stories include a statement about

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2 Edward Eggleston, *The Circuit Rider: A Tale of the Heroic Age* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1911 [1874]), 79, 330.

3 Bluegum, *Backblocks' Parson*, 14; Eggleston, Circuit Rider, 184.

4 Martin Wellings, "'Pulp Methodism' Revisited: The Literature and Significance of Silas and Joseph Hocking," in *The Church and Literature*, ed. Peter Clarke and Charlotte Methuen, Studies in Church History 48 (Woodbridge, Rochester, NY: Published for The Ecclesiastical History Society by The Boydell Press, 2012), 364; Robert Dixon, *Writing the Colonial Adventure: Race, Gender and Nation in Anglo-Australian Popular Fiction*, 1875-1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 31.

5 Matthew T. Herbst, "'The Pernicious Effects of Novel Reading': The Methodist Episcopal Campaign Against American Fiction, 1865-1914," *Journal of Religion and Society* 9 (2007): 1-15; David W. Bebbington, "Methodism and Culture," in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 724.

6 Steven D. Cooley, "Applying the Vagueness of Language: Poetic Strategies and Campmeeting Piety in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Church History* 63, no. 4 (December 1994): 579.

7 Cooley, "Vagueness of Language," 580.

their basis in real events and how names have been changed. Reinforcing the true-to-life nature of his fiction, Payne also wrote an autobiography, this time under his own name, titled *From Bark Hut to Pulpit* (1924).[8]

Payne's autobiography describes his life as a circuit minister, travelling between remote communities to pastor a small flock in a large landscape.[9] Circuit riders in the back-blocks rode vast distances in the mid-nineteenth century – the earliest circuits in Bathurst, Maitland and Goulburn had no boundaries; the Grafton circuit initially had no roads.[10] Their schedules were frequently exhausting. The minister on the Coonamble Circuit reported one week in which he provided "7 services, 2 lectures, 11 baptisms, 1 marriage, [and] 37 pastoral calls," all in temperatures above 110 degrees Fahrenheit.[11] In this way, small outposts were claimed for the cause, and an intermittent Methodist presence was maintained until chapels could be built and permanent ministries established. Payne describes how he kept "two pairs of ponies" so that he could travel "twenty miles, hold service, and return by midnight," change mounts and ride as far in the other direction the next morning."[12] His real-life stories are a reflection of his life in ministry, and the hero of *The Backblocks' Parson* is clearly modeled on Payne. The fictional young preacher is George Watkins, a character who shares the author's first name and initial (George W.), physique and horse-riding skill. Like Payne, Watkin's hair is "frizzled rather than curled" and he has "keen grey eyes."[13] Like Payne who "had 'grown up on horse-back,'" Watkins had "equestrian accomplishments" and "By Jove, the beggar can ride."[14] Like Payne, Watkins rode an Arab horse named Abdallah.[15] Both Payne and Watkins seek to become engaged before finishing probation as a preacher.[16] Both describe engagement with First Nations people that are pointedly humane yet irretrievably captive to the racism of the times.[17]

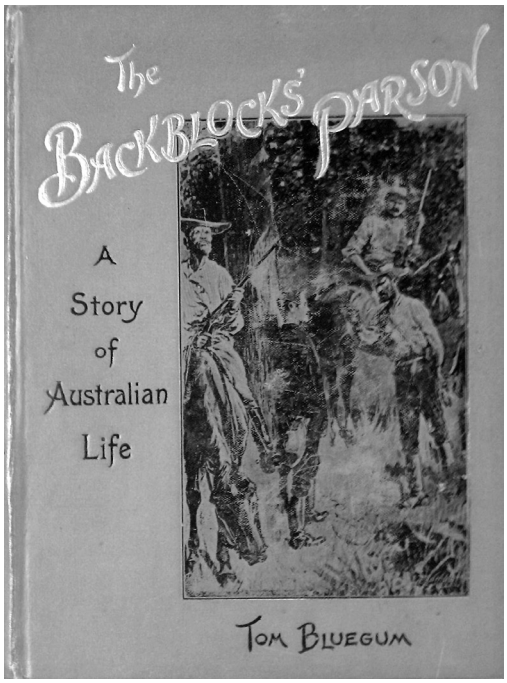


Figure 1. The hero is accosted by armed bushrangers.
Image source: Tom Bluegum,* The Backblocks' Parson *(1899), cover image

[8] George Warren Payne, *From Bark Hut to Pulpit* (London: Epworth Press, 1924).
[9] See also, Eric G. Clancy, "Ecclesiastical Stock Riders: Wesleyan Methodist Ministers in Nineteenth-Century Rural New South Wales," *Church Heritage: A Historical Journal of the Uniting Church in Australia* 9, no. 3 (March 1996): 151.
[10] Clancy, "Ecclesiastical Stock Riders," 143, 151.
[11] *The Methodist* (Sydney), February 3, 1900, quoted in Clancy, "Ecclesiastical Stock Riders," 156.
[12] Payne, *From Bark Hut to Pulpit*, 177–78.
[13] Bluegum, *Backblocks' Parson*, 15; Payne, *From Bark Hut to Pulpit*, cover image.
[14] George Warren Payne, *From Bark Hut to Pulpit* (London: Epworth Press, 1924), 30; Bluegum, *Backblocks' Parson*, 15, 47.
[15] Payne, *From Bark Hut to Pulpit*, 169; Bluegum, *Backblocks' Parson*, 43.
[16] Payne, *From Bark Hut to Pulpit*, 24–29; Bluegum, *Backblocks' Parson*, 212.
[17] Payne, *From Bark Hut to Pulpit*, 61, 69–75, 78–79; Bluegum, *Backblocks' Parson*, 30–35.

When *The Backblocks' Parson* was published, it was described as "thoroughly Australian."[18] This was high praise for religious writing. In the decades either side of Federation, influential colonial writers had often portrayed clergy as un-Australian and out of place. In "My Religion" and "A Bush Christening" by Andrew "Banjo" Paterson and in "The Parson and the Prelate" by Victor Daley, the clergy are sanctimonious, selfish and inept.[19] Other examples such as "Holy Dan" by an unknown writer and "The Shearers" by Henry Lawson portrayed clergy and religious faith as having no place in the Australian bush.[20] Australian Methodist novelists including Tom Bluegum, Joseph Bowes and George Sargant, addressed this popular mischaracterisation with fictional bush clergy who were authentic, selfless and immeasurably capable on horseback in the forest and on the farm. In a land without a shared religious origin story, they actively created Australian religious heroes.

The reviewer for *The Methodist* welcomed the corrective offered by the heroic Australian *Backblocks' Parson*. The same reviewer also noted the novel was "an evident attempt to do for Australian Methodism out west what that excellent story *The Circuit Rider* did for the early Backwoods Methodism of America."[21] Despite some striking autobiographical elements, the framing of *The Backblocks' Parson* as an adventure-romance novel is deeply influenced by Methodist minister Edward Eggleston's 1874 novel *The Circuit Rider*. The comparison is unmissable. Eggleston's *Circuit Rider* had a significant readership in and beyond the US,[22] and its storylines and characters provided Bluegum with a model for the representation of frontier Methodism in fiction. But Bluegum was writing for an Australian readership, one raised with suspicion of clergy and of Americans on the goldfields, and his representation of Methodism would need to be different.

The Circuit Rider was not the only story of the American wild west in circulation in colonial Australia. While the religious novels of Corra Harris and the Canadian Ralph Connor were yet to arrive on Australian shores, American fiction was syndicated on a large scale in Australian newspapers, gaining popularity in the 1880s and 90s.partly because it was not covered by international copyright agreements so it was copied without attribution (while the presses had to pay for British fiction), but also partly because stories of the American frontier resonated with people especially in provincial outback New South Wales and Queensland.[23] In a market saturated with weekly serialised fiction from abroad, Australian fiction struggled to find a distinctive voice and so its storylines, like those of Bluegum, were often derivative. For Bluegum, the living Word was ever-present in the Australian landscape but so were the words of *The Circuit Rider* and countless writers of the wild west. Differentiating your voice as Australian and Methodist in the wild west of the Backblocks or Kangaroo Flat required conscious effort.

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[18] "Criticisms Grave and Gay," *The Methodist* (Sydney), September 1, 1900, 1.

[19] Hilary M. Carey, "Bushmen and Bush Parsons: The Shaping of A Rural Myth," *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 14 (2011): 1–26; A. B. Paterson, "My Religion," accessed October 11, 2022, allpoetry.com/14373884-My-Religion-by-A-B-Paterson; Victor J. Daley, "The Parson and the Prelate," in *The Penguin Book of Australian Ballads*, ed. Russel Ward (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1964), 217–19. While Methodist newspapers occasionally analysed the reading of Australian poetry, they omitted mention of these poems, for example: "Australian Verse," *Watchman*, June 21, 1902; "Australian Rhyme," *Methodist*, July 28, 1917.

[20] For example: Anon., "Holy Dan," in *Australian Ballads*, 133–34; Henry Lawson, "The Shearers," in *Australian Ballads*, 140–41. See also, Veronica Brady, *A Crucible of Prophets* (Sydney: Australian and New Zealand Studies in Theology and Religion, 1981), 7; Chris Wallace-Crabbe, *Melbourne or the Bush: Essays on Australian Literature and Society* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1974), 10–11.

[21] "Criticisms Grave and Gay," *Methodist*, September 1, 1900, 1.

[22] Bebbington, "Methodism and Culture," 724.

[23] Katherine Bode, *A World of Fiction: Digital Collection and the Future of Literary History* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 133, 152.

The lonely hero on horseback

Edward Eggleston's 1874 book was about a heroic individual circuit rider; it is subtitled, nostalgically, *A Tale of the Heroic Age*. In the story an itinerant Methodist preacher travelled on horse-back from one small frontier church to another, visiting each worship service and the homes of the faithful over the course of several weeks. It was lonely and physically demanding. And it was the pattern for ministry in the US and Australia where there were great distances between small population centres. In the story, the heroic Morton Goodwin turns from his drinking and gambling to become a great evangelist. He gets married in the final chapter to a relentlessly good and sensible woman who converts to Methodism, after he narrowly avoided marriage to another woman who had wrongly hoped that God's forgiveness extended to a woman's past sexual indiscretions. In this story, women's shame is eternal, but men can be forgiven and made heroes. Individual men can effect change.

Nineteenth-century American serialized fiction typically begins with a lone figure in the landscape, a hero with whom the reader might identify. They begin with the time, the day and the place. They situate themselves in the particular, even when writing of the universal. It is a pattern so predictable that scholars use it as one of the tools to identify the nationality of authorship for unattributed serialized fiction in newspapers. With time, day, place and lone individual in mind, the opening of Tom Bluegum's "Kangaroo Flat Revival" sounds very American.

> It was 9 o'clock and the Tuesday night class meeting had closed. Yet the members lingered after the benediction to prolong their hallowed hour of fellowship. It had been a good meeting. The leader, a ripe old Christian of venerable aspect, stood with shining face silently surveying his little flock. James Nash…had washed for gold among the neighbouring gullies early in the sixties…The main western road passed the church front. The railway ran just below the western edge of the range.[24]

If it were not for the place name – Kangaroo Flat – this could be the wild west.

The American literary tradition constructs heroes who are able to change their circumstances, unlike British fiction where people are often constrained by class and the past. It was an idea that made sense to Methodists with their Arminian understanding of salvation as something you could choose.[25] So how will James Nash, who once "washed for gold" effect change? How will Bluegum's hero bring revival? In Eggleston's *The Circuit Rider*, there was always preaching "with vehemence," heckling and excited scenes, and fights would break out before hearts were won "by contagious excitements."[26] Faith was achieved aggressively, coercively. However, in Kangaroo Flat, James Nash waits and prays. He quietly encourages others not to give up on the wayward, to persist despite the chance that their charity might be abused. A

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[24] Tom Bluegum, "The Kangaroo Flat Revival," chapter 1, *Methodist*, February 4, 1899, 3, chapter 1. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/155451581

[25] For an overview of revivals in the Holiness Movement in colonial Australia, see Stuart Piggin, *Spirit of a Nation: The Story of Australia's Christian Heritage* (Sydney: Strand Publishing, 2004), 57–64.

[26] Edward Eggleston, *The Circuit Rider: A Tale of the Heroic Age* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1911 [1874]), 104–105.

sceptical young man warns against such persistence but Nash "looked calmly into the shrewd, sunburnt face. 'Maybe, lad, maybe,' he sighed. 'Still, I think again it may be the Spirit of God moving in the dark old soul.'"[27] Bluegum's hero does very little. He is physically frail; he speaks "brokenly" of his failings and he leans on his staff or on his daughter's shoulder.[28] He does nothing without the help of his small community of faith.

Bluegum's patient, community-minded leader disrupts the idea of (lay)preacher as heroic individual and supports Katherine Bode's observation that Australian fiction is, despite the myth, "more likely to feature families in the bush than the archetypal solitary 'noble frontiersman' and to be driven by bonds between men, women, and children."[29] At Kangaroo Flat, Methodist revival would not come about through the solo efforts of Nash or the visiting Conference President (with the unlikely name of Peter Winsoul), but through patient presence. Bluegum subverts the model of the forceful hero who alone effects change. At Kangaroo Flat, conversion is within community: the visiting preacher speaks with "solemn warning and loving appeal" and the church folk gather the community and support the work of the Spirit. In this way, sceptics come to slow realisations of truth, people embittered and disfigured by their own past deeds seek forgiveness, and timber-cutters cease their violent abuse of their wives.[30]

In contrast to Bluegum's stories, there is a strand in Australian Methodism that fetes the strong individual, the entrepreneurial leader. The American Eggleston wrote that "To be a preacher was to be canonized during one's lifetime"[31] and, while this was too much to ask in the Australian egalitarian context, there are some who might have wished it so. In colonial New South Wales, William George Taylor (1845–1934) was a high-profile "red-hot" open-air preacher, celebrated by the Conference for his evangelistic work and, humbly, by himself, in his autobiography.[32] Among many of Taylor's converts, he recalled a Californian living in Sydney who wrote a letter to him, stating "The fight has been much harder than the fights in the rings of America, but, thank God, I still have the armour on, and am fighting for Jesus."[33] This is the same aggressive masculinity that Eggleston used to describe his heroic Morton Goodwin: "the knight was in the saddle… He was ready to fight."[34] It implies that faith would come through force.

In the twentieth century, Australian Methodism produced a number of high-profile entrepreneurial leaders who considered preaching the most forceful means of conversion. The Rev. John Mavor, President of the Uniting Church from 1997–2000, affirmed the work of visiting American evangelists and the "need to celebrate those within the life of the Church whose gift of the Spirit is 'to do the work of an evangelist.'"[35] Alan Walker (1911–2003) also favoured mass evangelism, running a revival called Mission to the Nation in the 1950s, and promoting "preaching without the aid of worship, out in the open-air."[36] This style of evangelism is not

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27 Bluegum, "Kangaroo Flat Revival," *Methodist*, February 4, 1899, 3, chapter 1.
28 Bluegum, "Kangaroo Flat Revival," *Methodist*, February 11, 1899, 2.
29 Bode, World of Fiction, 176, referencing Richard Nile, *The Australian Legend and its Discontents* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 2000), 2–3.
30 Bluegum, "Kangaroo Flat Revival," *Methodist*, April 15, 1899. On the woman who seeks forgiveness, see the real-life version of the same story in Payne, From Bark Hut to Pulpit, 40–42.
31 Eggleston, *Circuit Rider*, 122.
32 William George Taylor, *The Life-story of an Australian Evangelist* (London: Epworth Press, 1920), 281.
33 Taylor, *Life-story of an Australian Evangelist*, 253–54.
34 Eggleston, *Circuit Rider*, 166.
35 John Mavor, "Evangelism in the Uniting Church," in *Marking Twenty Years: The Uniting Church in Australia 1977-1997*, ed. William W. Emilsen and Susan Emilsen (North Parramatta, NSW: United Theological College Publications, 1997), 205–206.
36 Alan Walker, *A Vision for the World: Alan Walker Tells His Story* (Wantirna, Vic.: New Melbourne Press, 1999), 65.

just without worship but, arguably, without community. Indeed, large parts of the Methodist community were not convinced by this approach to evangelism, and Walker noted that "the deepest disappointment of my life is how few preachers I have persuaded to preach for conversion."[37] Australian skepticism toward mass evangelism reflected an egalitarian tradition in which relationships among equals were valued over the performance of an individual preacher.

Researching Methodist resistance to the ministry of Alan Walker, the American historian of Evangelicalism Robert Linder found that "jealousy…prevailed over action for the common good for the Kingdom of God,"[38] that Walker was "a great man," "a tall poppy among the daffodils," and that "he should be a Uniting Church and national icon."[39] The Rev. Dr James Udy likewise lamented the Uniting Church's dilution of "the Wesleyan emphasis on the proclamation of the Gospel" and was "disturbed by the democratization of the Church and the blurring of the roles of the laity and the clergy."[40] It is often ordained writers who lament the lack of regard toward Australian clergy. Payne was an evangelist too but, in his autobiography and in Bluegum's idealized vision of the Methodist past, he suggests that proclamation was not the only means of grace even in the days of red-hot revivalism. His fictional heroes remind readers that Christian and Australian humility is always keenly aware of the movement of the Spirit in community.

Bluegum challenges the heroic individualism of Eggleston's *Circuit Rider* in stories that parallel the American narrative, then parody and undermine. Out in the snow, Eggleston's hero Morton Goodwin fords a "stream so swollen that he must needs swim [his horse] across." Dangerously, "the rapid current swept horse and rider down the stream" but they *save themselves* and push on through the snow and into the night.[41] In Bluegum's serialized novella "The Middle Ridge Appointment," William Collins tries to ford a swollen river on the way to his preaching appointment and, although an experienced rider, finds himself swept into "hissing roaring waters." He is pulled unconscious from the river by two "bush reared lads" who "suspend the body of the preacher" to drain the water from his lungs, then pray "in strange bush phrases." For Bluegum's preacher, these are undignified scenes. The hero of the story is not the preacher but the boys, and the story concludes that the preacher "kept his Middle Ridge appointment; though in a different fashion to what he had expected."[42] The preacher's salvation in the arms of a "larrikin" was a "work of grace" in the community of Middle Ridge.[43]

Numerous other heroes require rescue in Bluegum's stories. A young man soon to become a preacher is knocked unconscious while out backburning to prevent a bushfire reaching the town of Kangaroo Flat. He is rescued by a "bush bred lad [who] studying the surroundings, remarked the extinguished line of fire…[and] began to search the locality."[44] When the hero of *The Backblocks' Parson* is captured by bushrangers, a young

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37 Walker, *Vision for the World*, 64.
38 Robert D. Linder, "Alan Walker Among the Sharks: Why the Most Important Christian in Australia in the Latter Half of the Twentieth Century was Not Also a Beloved National Figure," *Church Heritage: Historical Journal of the Uniting Church in Australia* 17, no. 1 (March 2011): 4.
39 Linder, "Alan Walker Among the Sharks," 12, 19.
40 James S. Udy, "After Ten Years – Reflections by a Former Methodist," in *The Uniting Church in Australia: Reflections after Ten Years*, ed. G. S. Udy (North Parramatta: Upper Room, 1987), 35.
41 Eggleston, *Circuit Rider*, 143–44.
42 Tom Bluegum, "The Middle Ridge Appointment," *Methodist*, August 12, 1899, 10–11.
43 Bluegum, "Middle Ridge Appointment," *Methodist*, August 12, 1899, 11.
44 Bluegum, "Kangaroo Flat Revival," *Methodist*, March 4, 1899, chapter 5.

woman called Jess jumps her horse over a fence and is shot at as she rides for help.[45] In Bluegum's "Love is of God" (1899), a lonely horseman shoots himself only to be rescued by a "strong minded resolute young woman" named Maudie Brooks who lifts his limp body on to her pony.[46] As he recovers, Maudie's mother speaks to him of "a new gospel" and envelops him in kindness that leads him to Methodist conversion.[47] This too is part of a pattern in Bluegum's commentary on the individualism of American heroic ministers. Lone horsemen and heroes need saving in Bluegum's stories, and they are almost always saved by the women and the poor uneducated young men they were meant to convert.

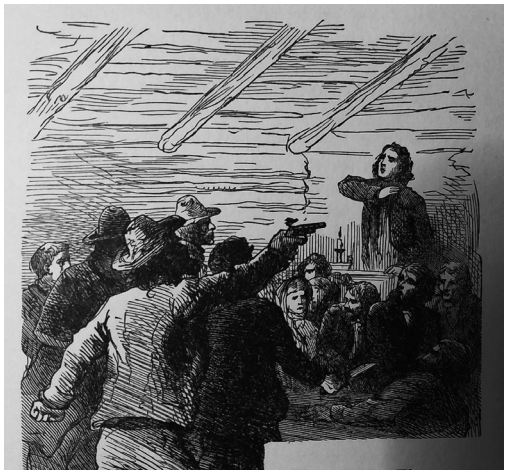
"Each man was armed"[48]

Eggleston's story is not only heroic, but violent and nationalist. Riding his Methodist circuit in early-1800s Ohio, the hero Morton Goodwin defends himself from outlaws on several occasions. Accosted in a forest by two ruffians, Goodwin tells them, "As an American citizen, I have a right to go where I please. My father was a revolutionary soldier, and I mean to fight for my rights."[49] The preacher's resort to violence is explicitly grounded in nationalist sentiment. In the passage that follows, "the preacher had a chance to give Bill a most polemical blow on the nose; then turning [on the other man], fractured two of his ribs and felled him to the earth."[50] The young Methodist preacher throws the first punch,[51] carries a flint-lock gun[52] (although he says he would rather not shoot anyone),[53] and he prepares for an evening service "knowing perfectly well that he would have to fight before the night was over."[54] As some "rowdies" approach the revival camp-meeting, Morton adopts the ambush "strategy learned of the Indians" (sic) and "felled his man" in one blow.[55] Morton is depicted here like the fictional Natty Bumppo (a.k.a. Hawkeye), a white man raised in the fighting strategies of Native Americans in James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* (1827–1841). Eggleston appeals to American legendary tales of heroic individualism.[56] As Philip Gorski and Samuel Perry note, that appeal is now "at the heart of white Christian nationalism" with its emphases of "freedom, order and violence."[57]

Eggleston further evokes Christian nationalist sentiment when Goodwin organises a violent militia to protect the revival meeting and drive the outlaws from the area: "Morton soon had the brethren organized into a police. Every man was to carry a heavy club; some were armed with pistols to be used in an emergency."[58] The local townsfolk are "so much heartened by this boldness and severity" on behalf of the minister "that they take the work into their own hands."[59] In effect, Goodwin inspires a militia for the purposes of preserving the

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45 Bluegum, *Backblocks' Parson*, 149–53.
46 Tom Bluegum, "Love is of God," *Methodist*, November 18, 1899, 9.
47 Bluegum, "Love is of God," *Methodist*, December 2, 1899, 4, and December 16, 1899, 4.
48 Bluegum, *Backblocks' Parson*, 145.
49 Eggleston, *Circuit Rider*, 119.
50 Eggleston, *Circuit Rider*, 119.
51 Eggleston, *Circuit Rider*, 119.
52 Eggleston, *Circuit Rider*, 52, see also 136, 146, 157, 174, 316.
53 Eggleston, *Circuit Rider*, 135, 263.
54 Eggleston, *Circuit Rider*, 261.
55 Eggleston, *Circuit Rider*, 257.
56 Philip S. Gorski and Samuel L. Perry, *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 59.
57 Gorski and Perry, The Flag and the Cross, 59.
58 Eggleston, *Circuit Rider*, 255.
59 Eggleston, *Circuit Rider*, 265.



freedom of Christians in a lawless nation. As fiction, the violence of Eggleston's revival meeting scenes have some basis in the wilder events of the Second Great Awakening, but "freedom, order and violence" are celebrated without reflection in Eggleston's writing six decades later. Violence and masculinity go together in Eggleston's frontier Methodism.

Figure 2. Morton said, "The law will yet be put in force whether you kill me or not." Soon after "Half-a-dozen pistols were cocked in quick succession and he caught the glitter of knives."[60] Image source: Edward Eggleston,* The Circuit Rider*, 244–45.

Eggleston's *Circuit Rider* reflected nineteenth-century Methodist practice but it also reacted against what Kristin Kobes Du Mez, in *Jesus and John Wayne*, calls the "feminization of Victorian Christianity, which privileged gentility, restraint, and an emotive; response to the gospel message". Methodism *is* emotive heartfelt conversion is core to the holiness tradition so the Victorian-era Eggleston in the US and Bluegum in Australia had quite the task to construct a manly Methodism that stayed true to John Wesley's "heart strangely warmed." Eggleston emphasized the repentant heart of the individual; this resonates with what Du Mez calls the "righteous authority" of "a quintessentially American notion of frontier freedom."[61] She notes that cowboy stories evoke "an earlier era of American manhood, a time when heroic (white) men enforced order, protected the vulnerable, and wielded their power without apology."[62] Eggleston's circuit rider story did much the same. Nostalgia for what is no longer, and probably never truly was, is essential to the work of imagining an idealised Christian manhood in which guns are an empowering necessity and a right under the Second Amendment to the US Constitution: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms." The kind of mythology in which Eggleston's Methodist frontier preacher organises a militia for God and nation has fed into white Christian nationalist beliefs about manhood, freedom, and "the Christian God's perceived blessing of the right to bear arms."[63]

In Bluegum's *The Backblocks' Parson*, the approach to men and guns is remarkably different. It reflects both Bluegum's beliefs about God and nation, and the Australian context in which he wrote. By the time of publication in the 1890s, Australia already had a long history of gun control addressing community concern *for* religion and *against* American lawlessness. In June 1841, New South Wales Governor George Gipps introduced "An Act to prohibit shooting for sport, pleasure, or profit, on Sunday." It was an acknowledgement of the sacredness of the Sabbath made in response to injuries sustained and to disturbance of the peace

[60] Eggleston, *Circuit Rider*, 244–45.
[61] Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright, 2020), 28.
[62] Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 28.
[63] Andrew L. Whitehead, Landon Schnabel and Samuel L. Perry, "Gun Control in the Crosshairs: Christian Nationalism and Opposition to Stricter Gun Laws," *Socius* 4 (2018): 10.

during limited leisure time.[64] Exemptions to the Act provided for the defense of persons and property, but "shooting on the Lord's Day…for pleasure or profit…[was] to the manifest dishonor of religion."[65] It does not rule out the right to bear arms, but it does draw a line between Christian faith and firearms.

Fear of American lawlessness was also addressed in Australian colonial government action. In May 1852, as the goldrush took off and people deserted their employment for the diggings, the *Sydney Morning Herald* praised the government for raising wages of constables and civil servants so that "the whole fabric of government" did not collapse: "I need scarcely dwell on the picture which in imagination rises before me; a renewal of Californian lawlessness, and Californian murders; Vigilance Committees and Lynch law; Colt's revolvers and bowie knives;…might, may, *must* have been reproduced, had the Government shown signs of weakness or hesitation."[66] By December that year the Goldfields Management Bill was introduced with amendments to charge non-British citizens double the rate for prospecting licenses. Reporting on William Charles Wentworth's address to parliament, the *Sydney Morning Herald* notes that the amendment was aimed at deterring American migration: "The use of the bowie knife and revolver was greater in Victoria than here, and why? Because a great influx of Californians had taken place there; and he had no desire to see these people here – they would neither improve our breed or our morals, and would very greatly increase the disturbance of the industrial pursuits of the country."[67] Australia would not be like America in respect to guns and violence.

In *The Backblocks' Parson*, there are plenty of guns. The horse thieves carry pistols, bushrangers carry a "sporting rifle" and "muzzle-loading shot-guns in their hands,"[68] the troopers are armed, and in the home of the old Methodist layman Tom Wilson, "A heavy rifle and a double-barrelled shot-gun with accompanying impedimenta, occupied the centre of a homemade table."[69] The world that Bluegum describes is the one that NSW legislators tried to moderate with gun control and prospecting license fees. However, Bluegum's manly hero, modelled after himself, does not carry arms. When George Watkins is accosted by outlaws in the forest, in a scene that is remarkably similar to Eggleston's scene in which Goodwin throws the first punch and argues his rights won in revolution, Bluegum's hero takes a very different course of action.

Unarmed, when captured and tied to a tree by bushrangers, Watkins tells them that his "hands are bound more tightly by his profession than by your strips of greenhide."[70] The leader interrogated Watkins and the gang "expected to see a bullet lodged in the preacher's brain." But he did not shoot: "As the ruffian met the quiet look of unflinching courage on the preacher's face, something of the superiority of moral grandeur expressed in the open brow and fearless eye subdues his murderous disposition."[71] When the bushrangers depart, Watkins' "feeling of compassion obliterated the memory of wrongs inflicted" and he reminds the gang leader of God's pity and mercy.[72] Months later, Watkins came across the gang leader as he died from a bullet wound, staying

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64 Nick Brodie, *Under Fire: How Australia's Violent History Led to Gun Control* (Melbourne: Hardie Grant, 2020), 16–20.
65 *Sydney Monitor and Commercial Advertiser*, October 1, 1841, 4. The Act was passed on September 8, 1841.
66 "Retrospect of the Australian Gold Discovery," *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 8, 1852, 2. Original emphasis.
67 "Legislative Council, Wednesday," *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 23, 1852, 2.
68 Bluegum, *Backblocks' Parson*, 145.
69 Bluegum, *Backblocks' Parson*, 21, 90, 143, 207.
70 Bluegum, *Backblocks' Parson*, 148.
71 Bluegum, *Backblocks' Parson*, 154.
72 Bluegum, *Backblocks' Parson*, 156.

with him in his final hours and praying over him at his burial in a shallow bush grave.[73] A Methodist preacher cannot carry arms, nor resort to violence. He must instead, rely on words – and the compassionate Word.[74] Out in the bush, shortly prior to the bushranger's death, Watkins finds himself "being stalked by a party of troopers in mistake for a bushranger." Fearing he might be shot, he "called out, rising to his feet. 'I carry no weapons, save this,' holding up his pocket Testament as he spoke."[75] Bluegum's depiction of non-violent Methodist manliness could not be more different from Eggleston's militia-organizing hero. The manhood of Australian Methodist preachers did not rely on violence.

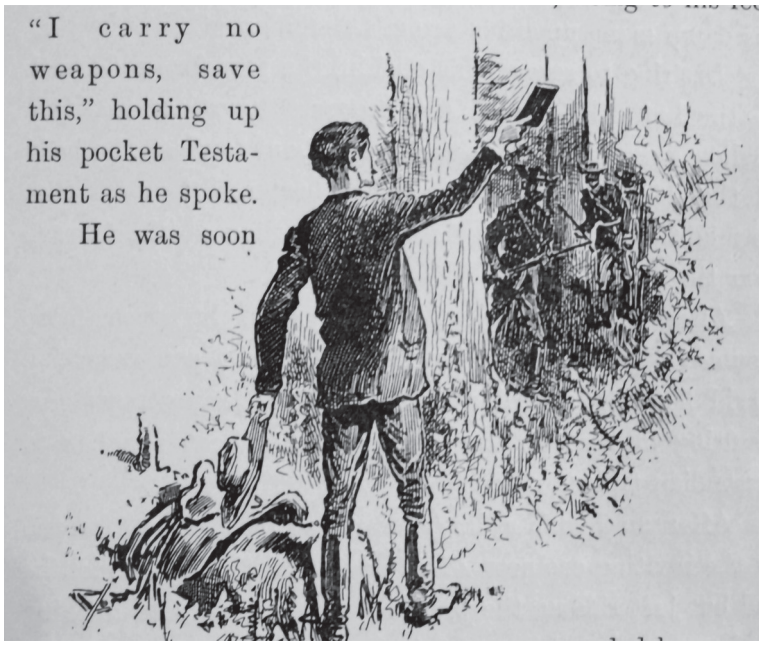


Figure 3. Watkins "perceived an armed man gliding from tree to tree cautiously approaching…. He was being stalked." Image source: Tom Bluegum,* The Backblocks' Parson*, 206–207

Conclusion

Tom Bluegum, or the Reverend George Warren Payne, was undoubtedly aware of the American literary tradition and clearly attempted to construct an Australian alternative that preserved the oft-maligned manliness of ministers. In so doing, he critiqued the individualism of American Methodist evangelicalism and the religious right to bear arms. His work represents a strand in Australian Methodism and Uniting Church tradition that refuses to be drawn into an American enculturation of the gospel that has led from the kind of nostalgia for power and freedom of which Eggleston writes to contemporary white Christian nationalism. Bluegum's heroes do not wield "power without apology," they do not master their womenfolk, they do not throw the first punch, or carry a gun. This is manhood, but a different kind. Bluegum portrays clergy as exceptional horsemen, and truly belonging to the Australian outback, but he insists that the community physically and spiritually aids the work of salvation and that a man of God is not violent but instead patient, observant, and humbly reliant on the Word.

[73] Bluegum, *Backblocks' Parson*, 204, 208.
[74] Bluegum, *Backblocks' Parson*, 147–56.
[75] Bluegum, *Backblocks' Parson*, 207.

The Ecclesiology of a Covenanting and Multicultural Church

Michelle Cook

Abstract

This article explores how the ecclesiological identity of the Uniting Church presented in the *Basis of Union* has been challenged, deepened and grounded as the Church addressed its relationship with First Peoples on the one hand and the Church's multicultural existence on the other hand. This is done through an analysis of the background and content of six key statements made by the UCA National Assembly on these issues since 1985. Although driven by distinct concerns, and produced over a period of time, the ecclesiological vision emerging from these documents is summarized, and its implications for the sharing of resources within the one church are explored.

Introduction

At its inauguration in 1977 through until the 16th Assembly (2021/22),[1] the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) has made strong public statements on what it means to be a ***Church*** living on the land of First Peoples and seeking right relationship with the First Peoples. At the same time, the UCA has attempted to address the distinct issue of what it means to be a Church that has members and communities of faith from many different cultural groups.[2] A number of factors led to these statements. These include the Land Rights movement and the 1967 referendum on First Peoples' membership of the commonwealth confronting the uniting Churches' complicity in "smoothing the pillow of a dying race."[3] The official revoking of the "White Australia" policy in 1972 along with commitments to Asia-Pacific Church partnerships and increasing numbers of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) congregations also encouraged the UCA to explore how to be a multicultural Church in multicultural Australia. It is important to interrogate such public declarations as they provide identity markers for the members of the UCA and for the wider community. This article explores how the ecclesiological identity of the Uniting Church presented in the *Basis of Union* has been challenged, deepened and grounded as it has addressed the Church's relationship

[1] Because of COVID restrictions, the meeting of the 16th Assembly was split between an online meeting in 2021 and a face-to-face meeting in 2022.

[2] The Inaugural Statement to the Nation 1977 states "We pledge ourselves to correct injustices wherever they occur" and at the 2nd Assembly in 1979 it was resolved to recognize Aboriginal Land Rights (79.45) while work on being a multicultural church was tabled for more discussion (79.26) (https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au Accessed September 8, 2022). Subsequent developments along these lines are detailed later in this paper.

[3] The phrase "smoothing the pillow of a dying race" or "smooth the dying pillow" was common racist rhetoric used in the later 19th and early 20th centuries to describe the efforts of the missions and the government to ensure that Indigenous peoples were looked after appropriately, with the assumption that they would "die out". See Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*. (Sydney, NSW: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997) https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/bringing-them-home-chapter-2#Heading20 Accessed July 31, 2019.

with First Peoples on the one hand, and the Church's multicultural existence on the other hand. This will be done through an analysis of six key statements made by the UCA National Assembly on these issues since 1985. Before engaging with these statements, we will briefly explore the ecclesiology of the Basis of Union, the founding confession of faith of the Uniting Church.

The Basis of Union and its Ecclesiology[4]

The three main ecclesiological themes of the *Basis* proclaim that Christ calls for the unity of the church, Christ calls the church to be a fellowship of reconciliation, and Christ calls the church to be a pilgrim people on the way.

The Unity of the Church

It is evident in the first sentence of the *Basis of Union* that the uniting Churches understood their union to "bear witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and will for the Church" (*BoU* 1). The first paragraph continues in a similar vein, calling all members of the uniting Churches and the Uniting Church itself to "seek wider unity". Such oneness is an imperative of Christ; indeed, the call of Christ to the church is to be one. Read together, paragraphs one and two of the *Basis* present denominational boundaries as the most significant barrier to unity. Consequently, the *Basis* emphasises the Uniting Church's commitment to various ecumenical bodies as a response to Christ's call on the Uniting Church. It also calls the Uniting Church to "[transcend] cultural and economic, national and racial boundaries…" particularly through "special relationships with Churches in Asia and the Pacific" (*BoU* 2). These paragraphs locate the Uniting Church and the call to be one within the global ecumenical movement, the Australian Christian context and the local geography of Asia and the Pacific.

A fellowship of reconciliation

The Christological focus of the *Basis* is epitomised in the following four paragraphs (*BoU* 3.1, 3.2 3.3 and 4). Notably, the church universal is presented as both a part of Christ's work of reconciliation and a participant in that work in the world.[5] The church is described as "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit", which is called to be "a fellowship of reconciliation" serving Christ's work of reconciliation and renewal; it is "an instrument through which Christ bears witness to himself" (*BoU* 3.3). This fellowship of reconciliation is also a "body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole" *(BoU* 3.3). The Spirit has bestowed gifts on each member and "each gift has its corresponding service" (*BoU* 13). The polity of the Uniting Church is to work in a similar manner. Each council has its own area of responsibility and through working together, and paying heed to each other, they enable the Uniting Church to fulfill its calling. The church itself is portrayed as integral to the work of Christ. It is a fallible, spirit-breathed fellowship that receives the Scriptures and the Sacraments as nourishment to be who Christ, through the Spirit, calls it to be.

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[4] Uniting Church in Australia, *Constitution and Regulations* (Sydney: Uniting Church in Australia, March, 2012; *The Basis of Union*, (1992). For ease of reference the *Basis of Union* will be referred to by paragraph numbers.

[5] Michelle Cook, "The Atonement and the Work of Christ: a conversation between contemporary atonement theologies and the Basis of Union" Unpublished Master's Thesis, Brisbane College of Theology, October, 2009.

A pilgrim people

The church is also "a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal" (*BoU* 3.3). In other words, the church is a community of believers, renewed, ruled, and constituted by Christ in the Spirit, that looks to the past, the present and the future for God's wisdom. It is also to be open to the transformation that the Spirit brings, knowing that it lives "between the time of Christ's death and resurrection and the final consummation of all things which Christ will bring" (*BoU* 3.3). The Scriptures and the Sacraments nourish the church in this journey. Signposts of God's work along the way are acknowledged in paragraphs nine through eleven. In these paragraphs, the Uniting Church commits itself to careful study of the traditions of the church, including the creeds and the Reformation witnesses, as well as its "inheritance of literary, historical and scientific inquiry…and gives thanks for the knowledge of God's ways with humanity which are open to an informed faith" (*BoU* 11). In this way each location on the journey is upheld as a partial insight into the call of God. The pilgrim church always carries with it the geography of where it has been and anticipates the "city" which is to come. Subsequently, the Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church's response to the gospel or journey with Christ, partially seen in its law, must always be under review (*BoU* 17). Furthermore, the Church must be ready and eager for transformation to more fully express the gospel in "fresh words and deeds" (*BoU* 11).

Being a Covenanting and Multicultural Church

Since 1977 there have been six key statements made by the National Assembly that address what it means to be a Church living in the legacy of the displacement and cultural genocide of First Peoples within an increasingly multicultural context. The first two statements were made in 1985: *The Congress Charter* and *The Uniting Church is a multicultural Church*.

First, at the 1985 National Assembly, the UCA recognised the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) as the body responsible for ministry with Aboriginal and Islander peoples. First Peoples[6] initiated this recommendation, developing the vision of Rev Charles Harris and others. Delphin-Stanford and Brown summarise the vision of the 1982 Crystal Creek in *Committed to Change:*

> It was a vision of black Christians in Australia united, in control of their own organisation, setting the agenda for mission among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It would be a body that was concerned with people's lives in a holistic way, committed to minister to them in their daily experience of racial discrimination, dispossession of the land, oppression by structures imposed upon them by the Australian Government and church institutions, poverty and despair. It was a vision of a church preaching a gospel of hope and liberation, and living in solidarity with their people as they struggled for justice.[7]

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[6] The term "First Peoples" is not used in official statements of the UCA until 2009. For consistency, it will be used when reflecting on previous statements.

[7] Delphine Delphin-Stanford and John Brown, *Committed to Change: Covenanting in the Uniting Church in Australia* (Melbourne: Joint Board of Christian Education, 1994), 8.

As Delphin-Stanford and Brown report, the original vision did not explicitly include being part of the UCA, although Harris desired to maintain connection without ceding control. The Congress Charter, presented as part of the Commission on World Mission Report, was the attempt to recognise such a body in partnership with the Uniting Church.[8] It is important to note that since union mission with First Peoples was part of "world mission", an indication of the "other" location, that is, "not Australia", allocated to First Peoples.

The second statement, *The Uniting Church is a multicultural church*, was made in response to the increasing number of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) churches becoming part of the Uniting Church, mainly through partner churches in the Pacific and Asia.[9] Within the broader Australian context, the statement reflected the growing awareness of multiculturalism as government policy after the official repeal of the "White Australia Policy". The statement was also a national Church response to the "experiences of exclusion and alienation felt by those members of the Uniting Church from backgrounds other than Anglo-Saxon."[10]

Third, in 1988 the UAICC invited the UCA into a discussion about their relationship. This was framed as an invitation to covenant with each other, to be bound together. The request occurred within the context of the 1988 Bicentenary of the First Fleet arrival, the growing Land Rights movement, and the distress of the UAICC at the UCA taking part in Bicentennial celebrations against Congress's wishes.[11] Clear frustration was also expressed by the UAICC around the issue of resource sharing including relevant training of suitable Aboriginal and Islander leaders. There was also a "deeper concern" surrounding the lack of acknowledgement of colonial dispossession and the survival of First Peoples in the UCA and in the wider community. In 1994, six years after the initial invitation, the Covenant between the UAICC and UCA was entered into at the 7th Assembly. The declaration itself has two parts. The first is a statement from the UCA to the UAICC read on behalf of the UCA by Jill Tabart, the then President of the UCA (*Covenant* 1-19). The second is a statement and response from the UAICC to the UCA. This was read by Rev Bill Hollingsworth, chair of UAICC (*Covenant* A1-A18).[12]

Fourth, the 11th Assembly (2006) renewed its commitment to being a multicultural and cross-cultural community stating, "as God's diverse people, united in Christ, we embrace the vision of being a Church for all God's People" (Introduction).[13] This statement has two main ideas. The first points to the biblical underpinnings that warrant being a multicultural church. The second outlines criteria for measuring the progress towards being a multicultural church.

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[8] Uniting Church in Australia *Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress Charter, Appendix II of Commission for World Mission Report*, Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly, 1985.

[9] Uniting Church in Australia, *The Uniting Church (UCA) is a multicultural church* (Fourth Assembly) (//),UCA Assembly, Accessed September 12, 2022 https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/162.

[10] Robert Bos and Geoff Thompson (eds), "Introduction to *The Uniting Church is a Multicultural Church*" in Theology *for Pilgrims: Selected Theological Documents of the Uniting Church in Australia* (Sydney: Uniting Church Press, 2008), 619 see also Seongja Yoo, "Towards a Multicultural Church – the Multicultural Forum in the Uniting Church (NSW Synod)" In *The Cultured Pearl: Australian Readings in Cross-cultural Theology and Mission*. ed Jim Houston. (Melbourne: Joint Board of Christian Education, 1986).

[11] Delphin-Stanford and Brown, *Committed to Change*, 8.

[12] Uniting Church in Australia, *Covenanting Statement* (10/07/1994), UCA Assembly, accessed September 12, 2022. https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/310.

[13] Uniting Church in Australia *11th Assembly MINUTES Appendix C A Church for All Gods People* (05/07/2006–11/07/2006), UCA Assembly, accessed September 12, 2022. https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/634.

Fifth, in 2009 the National Assembly resolved to amend the *Preamble to the Constitution* of the UCA.[14] Previously, there was an interim preamble rehearsing the story of union between the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches. However, neither the interim preamble nor the *Basis of Union* mentioned the First Peoples or acknowledged the associated mission history of the uniting churches. The new Preamble was constructed by a Task Group consisting of leaders from Congress and leaders from the Assembly. It recounts the history of union as well as acknowledges the broken colonial history of Australia and the consequent relationship between First Peoples and Second Peoples and the uniting Churches. It declares that the First Peoples had a pre-existing relationship with God through "law, custom and ceremony" that was denied by the colonial authorities and the Churches. Moreover, it proclaims that the identity of the Uniting Church **in** Australia is bound up in the *Covenant* with the UAICC.

Sixth, the 2012 statement *One Body, Many Members* encourages the UCA to make "living life and faith cross-culturally" the Church's response to a multicultural reality.[15] Therefore, being a multicultural church requires the church to intentionally listen and learn from those of different cultural backgrounds and be open to the new ways of being that these conversations in the Spirit may reveal. The statement outlines criteria by which the Uniting Church can assess its progress in "cross-cultural" living.

In 2022 the Assembly restated the Covenant at the opening worship of its reconvened meeting. Rev Sharon Hollis, President of the Assembly, knelt before Rev Mark Kickett, Interim Chair of UAICC, in an act of repentance. In this posture, Rev Hollis offered Jill Tabart's original words from the 1994 *Covenant*. Rev Kickett responded with the late Uncle Rev Bill Hollingsworth's statement. The 2022 Assembly also affirmed an Intercultural Neighbouring Sunday. It also encouraged the councils and committees of the UCA to revisit *One body, many members*, regarding the reception of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Churches and ministers.

The ecclesiology of these six statements challenge, deepen and ground the three themes identified above originally shaping the ecclesiology of the Uniting Church, i.e., unity, reconciliation, and pilgrim people.

The Call to be One – a different interpretation

Each of the six statements contains a strong emphasis on the unity or "oneness" of the church being possible only through the reconciling work of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit. However, the denominational boundaries that were uppermost in the minds of the Joint Commission on Church Union are no longer pre-eminent. Instead, it is the different cultures and traditions of the people within the Uniting Church that are being brought into unity, not uniformity, through Christ. Indeed, how else could such a diversity of people be brought together? The work to find a "confession of faith" to proclaim unity that was key to the project of union, has been augmented with diversity, rather than uniformity, being the platform on which to build. For example, the 1985 multicultural church statement claims that God's

[14] Uniting Church in Australia. Constitution and Regulations.
[15] Uniting Church in Australia, *One body, many members: living faith and life cross-culturally* (//), UCA Assembly, accessed September 12, 2022, https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/416

gift of unity is made concrete in the Uniting Church with the uniting of "Christians of many cultures and ethnic origins" (MC 2). The statement notes that there will be a desire to maintain language and cultural traditions, particularly from first-generation migrants, which will result in ethnically based congregations (MC 7 and 8). However, the lack of a uniform language and the diversity of traditions is not a barrier to unity but a witness to the greater unity that is achieved through Christ. The 2006 and 2012 Multicultural statements further elaborate on this theme of diversity in unity. The 2006 statement focuses on "provid[ing] space" (*All God's People* 3.ii) for the maintenance of language and culture within the unity of the church. The 2012 statement affirms cultural and linguistic diversity as a reality to be celebrated and rejoiced in, rather than a challenge to be overcome (*One Body* 2). Such celebration is done in the context of "affirming Christian unity" (*One Body* 4).

Perhaps the strongest challenge to the Uniting Church's self-understanding of "uniting" is the recognition of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, a body in partnership with, but separate from, the UCA. Similar to the multicultural church statements, the emphasis in the *Congress Charter* is on the church embodying a unity of cultures and denominations that honours diversity. In the charter, the ecumenical momentum that inspired the formation of the Uniting Church is also an inspiration for the creation of the Congress. Interpreting a quote from the *Basis of Union*, the charter says:

> [T]hat the Uniting Church "believes that Christians in Australia are called to bear witness to a unity of faith and life in Christ which transcends cultural and economic, national and racial boundaries, and to this end she commits herself to seek special relationships with churches in Asia and the Pacific." [*BoU* 2]. The Uniting Church accepts the same challenge to witness within the Australian community with those who have different cultural economic and racial identities (*Congress Charter* 1).

For some, recognising a separate body to have a particular calling for, and with, Aboriginal and Islander peoples appears to be at odds with the calling to be a "uniting" church. Such an argument is countered in paragraph two of the *Charter*.

> By settling and appointing personnel to work amongst the Aboriginal and Islander people of Australia, the Congress will assist the Uniting Church to ensure that Aboriginal and Islander people have an opportunity to hear the Gospel in the context of their own culture and in their own language. It will establish congregational life which holds before Aboriginal and Islander people the hope of the kingdom and will struggle with them to bring forth justice for Aboriginal and Islander people within our Australian community. It will break the long history of dependence upon others, and begin the process whereby all members of the Uniting Church belong together with one Lord, in a diverse, unified church which lives out its one mission to Australia and the world (*Congress Charter* 2).

The first sentence of the first extract quoted above, "[i]n order to bear witness to this unity of faith and life…," makes it evident that each ministry context in which the church finds itself will require different approaches to ministry, yet the church remains one. This nuances the original notion of transcending

boundaries expressed in the *BoU*. A diverse and unified church does not transcend boundaries by ignoring them. Instead, diversity of context and experience is now a reality of the unified church; indeed, there would be no need to seek unity if there was no diversity. Moreover, as the second extract points out, the claim to unity is hollow if injustice is not addressed.

More than this, though, the Uniting Church is called by God to be a body that acknowledges and repents of its colonial history. The recital of the injustices faced by First Peoples at the direction and complicity of the Church made in the 1994/2022 *Covenant Statement* further underlines the need for the reconciling work of Christ to unite peoples, especially for those who have wielded power and control, and those who have felt the consequences of this power. The second paragraph of the *Covenant* reads: "We meet in the presence of God who through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has reconciled us to God and to one another in the power of the Holy Spirit" (*Covenant* 2). It is God's call and God's presence that makes such a uniting possible. This does not happen passively; the Church is called to address that which hinders unity in following God's call to justice, repentance and partnership.

The 2009 *Preamble to the Constitution* brings together God's call to denominational union, and the union between First Peoples of this land and Second Peoples from many lands as a community called into being by God (*Preamble* 1 and 4). The understanding is that God calls the Uniting Church to express unity across denominations *and* across cultures. These cultures are now generally defined as the First Peoples and the Second Peoples from many lands. Note the use of plurals for "people": First Peoples and Second Peoples are comprised of various cultures. This emphatic statement elevates the desire to be a multicultural church and a covenanting church to the same priority and significance as the call to union across denominations that provided the impetus to establish the Uniting Church.

A fellowship of reconciliation – the Body of Christ

In the six statements, the call of God to unity cannot be separated from the work of Christ in the reconciliation and renewal of the whole creation (*BoU* 3.3). The richness of diversity in unity, made possible through Christ and the Spirit, requires the Uniting Church to examine what such a "fellowship of reconciliation" looks like. The different statements all proclaim that a fellowship of reconciliation is a more vital witness when it is made up of people from different cultures and of those who have once been enemies. A fellowship of reconciliation is also truly the body of Christ when the gifts of each part are properly recognised, celebrated, and honoured. Moreover, the church is the body of Christ when the gifts of each part are shared across the whole body, and the whole body shares the sufferings of different parts. These statements challenge the Uniting Church to see that its identity as a fellowship of reconciliation is compromised by its lack of recognition of gifts, poor sharing of resources, and lack of solidarity in suffering.

Through the honouring of First Peoples' faith and designating the UAICC as the body responsible for ministry with First Peoples, "a new order of righteousness and love" can be manifest. The *Congress Charter* details a church with and for First Peoples that is marked by a sharing of material resources with First Peoples and a sharing from First Peoples of their theological and liturgical life. As paragraph 7 states:

> Through the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress the Uniting Church seeks to *share in, and to feel, all the despair and anguish of Aboriginal and Islander societies and rejoice in their joys and achievements*. [The Uniting Church] looks to the Congress through its members and agencies, its work within and with the synods, to think and plan and agonise so that within the Uniting Church we will all understand more clearly what God would have us do (Congress Charter 7, my emphasis).

Through this paying heed to First Peoples, the charter empowers the UAICC to "help the whole church to discover how to serve and be servant to one another across the hurts of our common history" (*Congress Charter* 6).

The *Covenant* statement further elaborates this call to be a fellowship of reconciliation – the body of Christ. A covenant community is both bound to God and bound one to another to "love one another as I have loved you" (*Covenant* 16). Such a community exists to "anticipate the joyful celebration of the fulfilment of God's rule of love and justice" (*Covenant* 2). The last two paragraphs of the President's statement acknowledge the hope of having a "multi-racial bond of fellowship" while simultaneously recognising that such a bond is not possible without Christ's work of reconciliation. These ways of describing the church are used to develop the markers of a covenanting church: a church that confronts difficult truths, seeks and gives forgiveness, and demonstrates repentance through practical actions. The *Covenant* itself is, therefore, a witness to God's reconciliation, requiring the establishment of a new relationship based upon real recognition, justice and equality (*Covenant* A15).

Similarly, in the Multicultural Church statements, the Uniting Church understands itself to be a witness to God's work of reconciliation in the world. Paragraph 3 provides a list of criteria of what such a multicultural church would look like: "to achieve justice, affirm one another's cultures, and care for any who are the victims of racial discrimination, fear and economic exploitation" (MC 3). On a more pragmatic note, a multicultural church will have a mixed economy of congregations; there will be some monoethnic and some bilingual and multicultural congregations. Cultural traditions can, therefore, be maintained without fear of assimilation or domination. Reconciliation is again a primary theological justification for being a multicultural church, yet it is a reconciliation that does not require sameness or the wholesale adoption of other traditions.

The 2006 statement expands on this idea of the church being a fellowship of reconciliation and a sign of the "reconciling power of the living Christ" (*All God's People* 3.iv). Such a fellowship is able to inspire and facilitate learning across all cultures and be transformed into the community that God desires (*All God's People* 2, 3.iv). The example of the Pentecost community in Acts 2 is used as a biblical warrant for having a multicultural church with the implication that the church must be multicultural to fulfil its divine calling. As a cross-cultural community that shares life together, the church is to allow people groups to maintain and develop their own cultures as well as learn from one another (*All God's People* 3). In addition, this multicultural church is also a family, a family where all participate in the heavenly banquet (*All God's People* 2) implying that uniformity of culture is contrary to the reconciliation and renewal of the whole creation.

Part of this working for justice and reconciliation is acknowledging the pain of learning and journeying with one another (*All God's People* 2). As such, a multicultural church will recognise the pain of journeying with one another but will focus on affirming culture and its relationship to the *imago Dei*. Affirmation of culture needs to be matched with full participation or inclusiveness that allows for "space" to maintain culture and "meet the needs of "diverse membership" (*All God's People* 4.iii). Practical examples of recognising the gifts of people from many different cultural backgrounds and building up the whole of the church include intentional ministry training for cross-cultural settings and sharing resources. In these examples, the statement implies a redistribution of resources from the more established congregations (usually Anglo) to the more culturally diverse congregations (*All God's People* 4.iv).

The theme of recognising the value of the gifts of the members is extended in the 2012 document *One Body, Many Members*. The church is the body of Christ, and its "shape and purpose" are derived from Christian conviction (*One Body* Intro). The nature of this shape and purpose, however, also depends on the "settings" of the church. The church, in each context, is understood to have a responsibility to be a "true multicultural church living its faith and life cross-culturally" (*One Body* Commitment). These contexts include "education and formation for discipleship" that forms and equips, in a variety of culturally sensitive ways, "disciples within the church and to 21st century multicultural, multiracial and multifaith Australia" (*One Body* 11).

Pilgrim People on the way – open to correcting that which is erroneous

The emphasis on being one fellowship of reconciliation in these statements also confronts the Uniting Church's understanding of what it means to be pilgrim people. While the *Basis* pays attention to contemporary movements in literature, the arts and science, as well as the creeds and reformation witnesses, the statements on being a Covenanting and Multicultural church call for attention elsewhere. Moreover, explicit in these statements is a call to the Uniting Church to allow God to correct that which is erroneous in its life by listening to the experience and faith of those from different cultural backgrounds. For example, the Congress is to direct ministry that breaks injustice and the dependence that injustice creates (*Congress Charter* 2). In this way, the UAICC is to lead the church in addressing the needs of First Peoples. Further, the UAICC, in its role as advisor to the UCA on issues of justice, is "to advise the Assembly on those issues which directly affect Aboriginal and Islander people, and draw all members of the Uniting Church into their struggle for justice as fellow Australian people" (*Congress Charter* 6). Moreover, the notion of pilgrim people carrying the geography of the past and present with them is expanded to include different worldviews thereby upholding hermeneutical gifts in the richness of diverse cultures.

Additionally, the Church cannot journey as an instrument through which Christ can bear witness to himself unless the Church tells the truth about itself through confession and repentance. A significant part of the *Covenant* statement is such an acknowledgement of the failure of the church and the whole of Australia in the attitude towards and treatment of First Peoples. In the statement, there is an explicit confession of failure by Second Peoples to hear First Peoples' knowledge of the land, and of preventing them from caring for it. The first part of the *Covenant* also references "racist and paternalistic policies" implemented by the Churches. The response to such failure is to ask for forgiveness from the UAICC (*Covenant* 11).

The UAICC's response to this question of forgiveness is honest about the difficulty of giving forgiveness in such circumstances, especially to an organisation still holding enormous power (*Covenant* A11). Dispossession, massacres, rape, stealing of land, and destruction of culture are explicitly named (*Covenant* A4). The "church is held accountable" by the UAICC for the "injustices/atrocities inflicted on our people" (*Covenant* A8). Only through appropriate actions will Congress see that the UCA is truly repentant. These actions include advocating for land rights and representation in political processes (*Covenant* 12) and supporting policy changes in the wider Australian society (*Covenant* 17). Within the church, actions include the transfer of property (*Covenant* 15) and building relationships "which respect the rights of your people [First Peoples] to self-determination in the church and in the wider society" (*Covenant* 17). The *Covenant* statement acknowledges that building such a relationship is not easy and is only possible through reliance on God. It is this reliance on God that the Church can "correct that which is erroneous in its life" (*BoU* 18).

The 2009 Preamble further cements this understanding of the church being a pilgrim people into the Uniting Church's law.[16] It is only after restating First Peoples' relationship to God, land, and churches that new ways of living together as the people of God are explored. The establishment of Congress and the invitation to a "covenantal relationship" (*Preamble* 4.10) rehearses the steps to this new type of union, a parallel to the union of the uniting Churches. Both the union of the uniting Churches and the union of First and Second Peoples have the same aim, namely, "a fuller expression of our reconciliation in Jesus Christ" (*Preamble* 4.10) and a foretaste of the "coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation" (*Preamble* 5)[17]. Like the Covenant statement, the Preamble affirms that restoration of broken relationships requires truth-telling and repentance. It is only on this basis that right relationships can be forged and sustained in the journey toward the "reconciliation and renewal that is the end in view for the whole creation" (*Preamble* 10)[18].

The multicultural church statements also recognise the church's imperfections in living out its calling and the need for the church to be ready for change to witness signs of the new kingdom. The 1985 statement expresses a desire to be "open to the changes that the Holy Spirit will bring to the Church" (*MC* 6). There is also a recognition that fully welcoming the contributions of different cultural groups will require change for the established church groups and those who are newer migrants. In reviewing its life, the Church will be confronted with its own failures to truly celebrate and embrace the God-given cultural diversity of the people of God. As the 2012 statement noted, the expectation of such changes in the 1985 statement "have not yet been taken up." (*One Body* Intro).:

[16] In the presentation to the 2009 Assembly, Rev Rronang Gurrawurra, speaking in Yolŋu Matha, spoke of the importance of First Peoples being recognised in the "rom" or "law of the church". Law, or rom, in Yolŋu culture is more akin to a way of life and worldview than a codified system of abstract legislation. Personal Diary, 2009.

[17] Citing *BoU* 3.

[18] Citing *BoU* 3.

Conclusion

While these statements on being a Covenanting and Multicultural Church address concerns at particular moments in time, principal threads in their ecclesiology challenge, deepen and ground the three ecclesiological themes identified in the Basis. How they do so will be summarised below.

First, the call to be one is not only a call to bridge denominational barriers. The statements challenge the default understanding of oneness as uniformity and highlight the richness that comes from the unity that is truly from Christ alone. In fact, the very nature of God's creation and the narratives of the Scriptures, require the church to celebrate and honour cultural diversity rather than ignore or suppress it. By starting with diversity, the statements can also better address issues of injustice that are part of the life of the Church. The power dynamics between oppressor and oppressed cannot disappear when diversity is acknowledged and celebrated for the richness it brings to the life of the church. The Australian church is thus grounded in the reality of the Australian context. The church does not exist outside of the realities of colonialism, systematic injustice, racism and immigration. Consequently, the establishment of the UAICC is a tribute to this unity rather than an indication of a failure.

Second, the church, as a fellowship of reconciliation, the body of Christ, has a responsibility to recognise the unique God-given gifts each culture brings to the whole. This requires an affirmation of non-Anglo cultures where there may have been disdain or outright hostility. It also requires a willingness by the dominant culture to provide and maintain space for the minority. As a consequence of this responsibility to use the gifts of all people, the church is called to be intentional about ensuring the full participation of all people in its life. In this way, the church can prioritise listening. to the experience of those on the edges of the body. Listening also includes a willingness to the reshaping of the life of the church, not just the formation of people on the margins to conform to the dominant culture. Furthermore, recognising diversity also requires the acknowledgement of injustice and failure so that God's reign of justice and righteousness may be made real in the life of God's people. Moreover, a fellowship of reconciliation requires ongoing work of truth-telling, repentance and forgiveness. The later statements draw to the UCA's attention our failure to live up to Christ's calling to be a fellowship of reconciliation and grounds the phrase in the messy and contested reality of the injustice experienced by and inflicted upon First Peoples.

As a pilgrim people, then, the statements emphasise that the church should be ready for a transformation. This includes reviewing and revising assumptions about what a 'faithful" church looks like in practice. Each statement calls for the UCA to be open to the transformation of its attitudes, behaviours and practices towards First Peoples and towards Second Peoples from many lands and to allow the Spirit to form and shape us as we journey together. From the multicultural church statements, this is primarily about the failure of the church to follow through on the commitments made in the 1985 church statement. This failure is explicitly stated in the 2012 statement; a failure to live cross-culturally. In the covenanting statements, the Churches' failure to live out the gospel is about the mission movement's failure and the churches' ongoing complicity in the dispossession of land and the destruction of First Peoples' cultures. It is also a call for the church to fulfil the commitments it makes in its law. Therefore, the church as a pilgrim people focused on the "city to come" must serve the world for which Christ died. A pilgrim people will always be formed

and be thankful for the lands they have walked through. The pilgrim people will not remain static but will change with the welcoming of new pilgrims into the journey. These new pilgrims will bring insights from their own journey creating a true fellowship of reconciliation through Christ.

The challenge for the Uniting Church now, as it has been since 1977, is to live up to these statements, not just in words, but in the attitudes, behaviours and practices of local congregations, decision-making bodies and Church leaders. There has been some progress on such matters.[19] Nevertheless, the current Uniting Church polity and culture do not easily allow for redistribution of material wealth across the national Church. The Regulations make it very difficult to address wealth gaps across presbyteries and synods. The Property Trust model vested in synods makes it challenging to spread wealth nationally. The structural and cultural reluctance to nationally share resources point to a larger theological weakness in the identity of the Uniting Church. Although the ecclesiology of the UCA is one of unity, fellowship and pilgrimage, there appears to be an inability to view the Uniting Church as a ***national*** Covenanting and Multicultural Church that requires the Church to live as a commonwealth holding resources in common and shared with those in the greatest need. To be a commonwealth requires us to apply our ecclesiological identity of unity, reconciliation and pilgrimage to more than our aspirational doctrinal and ecclesiological statements. To fully live out our call as a church in Australia we need to interrogate our failure to address the unequal distribution of material wealth, along with our desire to live as a Covenanting and Multicultural Church.

[19] For example, Qld Synod, the Assembly, Vic/Tas Synod and WA synod have Covenant Action Plans. UnitingCare has created a First Peoples' Network to bring together Congress Leaders and Indigenous UnitingCare Staff. Some resources are being allocated to translation. Across theological colleges and lay education, however, there is patchy, although improving, engagement in cultural diversity and First Peoples' theology (Report of Sovereignty affirmation Task Group to Assembly Standing Committee 2021, personal archive).

Toward a Chinese Theology of Unity: the formation and the theological basis of the Chinese Uniting Church since 1950

Wen Ge

Abstract

This article summarises some of the historical, political, cultural and theological background to the move of the Chinese Protestant Church towards its recently articulated self-understanding as a *uniting* church. Various features of the historical background to the post-colonial and post-denominational calling of the Chinese church are identified. Four foundations of church unity are highlighted and described: Sinicization; the doctrine of the Cosmic Christ; the trinitarian theme of perichoresis; and a newly revised Church Order which provides definitions of faith, worship and unity.

Introduction

Protestant denominations were introduced into Mainland China in the nineteenth century, and western missionaries naturally tried to build churches as duplicates of their own denominational churches. Generally speaking, denominationalism is both non-biblical and exotic to the Chinese mindsets that are more used to the Chinese cultural temperament of great unity. Despite Chinese Christians' efforts to unite churches in China and transform them into Chinese churches in the first half of the twentieth century,[1] there were still about seventy denominations before 1949 when the People's Republic of China was founded.[2]

Today's Chinese Protestant Church in the Mainland has over 38 million members and about 60,000 churches and meeting points with over 14,000 ordained clergy. It has become a uniting church with all former denominational structures ceasing to exist since the end of 1970s when churches started to be reopened. The union process of the Chinese church has been through different stages. A thorough retrieval of the modern union history of the Chinese Protestant churches is beyond the scope of this essay. I will briefly mention five historical markers of the union, and then I will bring forward four key theological loci as the theological bases of the union.

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[1] 参段琦：“中国基督教合一的历史进程”，载于《金陵神学志》，2019年第二期：第43-57页。[Cf. Duan Qi, "The Historical Unification Process of the Chinese Protestant Churches, in *Jinling Theological Review,* No.2 (2019):43-57.]

[2] 曹圣洁：“《中国基督教教会规章》的制订、修订过程及走向联合教会的思考，”载于《金陵神学志》，2022年第二期：第6页。[Cao Shengjie, "On the Formulation and Revision of the Church Order of the Chinese Protestant Churches: With Reflections on the Churches' Moving Towards a Uniting Church," in *Jinling Theological Review*, N0.2 (2022):7]

The Five Historical Markers of the Chinese Uniting Church since 1950

The first marker is the Three-Self Patriotic Movement launched in 1950. This movement aimed to solve the problem of the confusion of colonialism and mission when western Protestant missionaries embarked on their mission projects in Mainland China in 1807. This confusion of mission and colonialism did result in strong anti-Christian national consciousness in China in the first half of the twentieth century. In this light, the launch of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement among Chinese Christians in 1950 sought to decolonize churches in China under the principle of self-administration, self-support and self-propagation. China had become an independent country and, consequently, the churches in China were to cut off the relationship with western ruling mission agencies, and were to be run by Chinese Christians independent of foreign control in terms of finance, personnel and organization. Only when Chinese Christians reclaimed the sovereignty of the churches could real space be provided for the shaping of the national identity of the Church and for the construction of Chinese contextual theology. In hindsight, The late Bishop K.H.Ting (1915–2012) understood the significance of the Three-Self for the Chinese Church as follows:

> We think of Three-Self, with all the laicization and the post-denominationalism and the kind of theological reorientation that have come in its train, is an ecclesiological necessity, a pre-requisite for evangelistic communication in such a country as China to be possible as already being borne out by facts. It is a process through which the church in China ceases to be a dot on the missionary map of other churches but comes to be itself.[3]

The movement served to promote the postcolonial consciousness of Chinese Christians who eventually made the political decision to identify with the Chinese people and contribute to the up building of a new and better China for all when feudalism, colonialism and imperialism were completely defeated. As Prof. Zhuo Xinping says, the kind of Christianity that reflected the old Chinese society must be transformed politically via the Three-Self movement so as to adapt itself to the new social structure and keep abreast with the progress of the Chinese nation.[4] In short, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement among Chinese Christians was conducive for Christianity to find its new social niche and laid the socio-political foundation for the churches' unity in China.

The second marker is the foundation of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (NJUTS) in 1952. As noted above, foreign missionaries had to leave China in early 1950s. Financial support from the West was no longer available. As a result, seminaries with different denominational backgrounds in China had to merge together and formed union theological seminaries. NJUTS brought together 11 former seminaries and Bible colleges of different denominations in East China. At the opening ceremony held in November 1, 1952, leaders of different church organizations, such as Baptist Federation, Methodist

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[3] K.H.Ting, "Address at Worship: Ecumenical Center, Geneva," in K.H.Ting, *Love Never Ends: Papers by K. H.Ting* ed. Janice Wickeri (Nanjing: Yilin, 2000), 119. All the other quotations of Ting's words in this essay are taken from this book and will be indicated by chapter title and page number.

[4] 卓新平，"纪念中国基督教发起三自爱国运动70周年之思"，载于《基督教中国化研讨会论文集（四）》，上海：中国基督教两会，2002年），106, 111-113页。[Zhuo Xinping, "Reflections on the 70th Anniversary of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China," in *Selected Writings of Conferences on the Sinicization of Christianity* (IV), (Shanghai:CCC&TSPM, 2022), 116]

Church, Disciples of Christ, Church of Christ in China, all came to celebrate this great union event. Rev. Zang Antang originally from Shanghai Baptist seminary noted that the "union (协和) seminary is precisely a harmonious (和谐) seminary" without "enforced uniformity".[5] This was a great achievement when professors and seminarians with denominationally different doctrinal emphases and theological orientations, fundamentalist or liberal, could come and study together in the spirit of mutual respect. To be concrete, courses were arranged in a parallel pattern, taught by both a conservative and liberal professor at the same time, and students could freely choose according to their own understandings of faith. The seminary worship life was also diverse. In addition to the common worship, students with different spiritual traditions could also organize their own prayer gatherings. So the establishment of the NJUTS became an important and successful experiment, which not only demonstrates the possibility of unity in China, but also started to train a new-generation of pastors to work for the unity of the Chinese churches. It symbolizes the birth of Chinese theological education.

The third marker is "union worship" that took place in 1958. Due to both the limited church resources as well as the political situation at that time, Chinese Christians of various former denominational backgrounds finally came to worship together in a common church in different parts of China. Chinese Christians, both clergy and the laity who were used to different denominational liturgies and customs, were able to respect each other while accepting their differences at the same time. The union worship tried to include the rich diversities of different traditions. In the first half of 1958, Christians in Zhejiang province first started union worship They were followed by churches in Jiangxi, Heilongjiang, Yunnan and other provinces.[6] Yet due to the ultra-leftist political influence in the following years, the opportunities for worship were very limited. Despite the interruption of the great cultural revolution (1966-76), union worship was resumed when the churches were reopened at the end of 1970s. Even today, Chinese Christians continue adjusting to each other in aspects of liturgy, sacraments and other customs by seeking the common ground.

The fourth marker is the foundation of China Christian Council (CCC) in 1980. The National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) founded in 1954 and the TSPM at various administrative levels aimed to deal with the church – state relationship, ensuring the development of Chinese churches along the Three-Self principle and Chinese Christians' patriotism. But this did not enable Chinese Christians to cope with the intra-ecclesial issues or promote union worship when former denominational structures of protestant churches no longer existed. The CCC came into being in order to strengthen the unity of the church. As Rev. Cao Shengjie, former president of CCC (2002-2008), noted:

> We establish an ecclesial organization in order to reconstruct Christianity with Chinese characteristics. It takes not western Christianity but the Bible as our canon. Spiritually it is

[5] 参徐如雷：《金陵协和神学院四十年》，《金陵神学志》1993年第一期：第9页。[Cf. Xu Rulei, "The Four Decades of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary," in *Jinling Theological Review,* No.1 (1993):9]

[6] 参张化："联合礼拜：中国基督教会两次抉择的成果"，载于《金陵神学志》，2019年第2期：第68页。[Cf Zhang Hua, "Union Worship: The Result of the Two Choices Made by the Protestant Churches in China," in *Jinling Theological Review,* No.2 (2019):68].

> Christ's body. From its earthly dimension, it grows on Chinese soil, is combined with Chinese culture and is rooted in the Chinese people.[7]

This was further consolidated in 1982 through Bishop Zheng Jianye's proposal of seven rules for fostering the unity of the Chinese churches. These rules focused on the continued surrendering of former denominational identities, structures and overseas activities and on the promotion of active cooperation between churches within the CCC and TSPM as well as the maintenance of the independence of the Chinese churches. [8] These allowed for practical reconciliation of diversity and also for the building of a postdenominational church.

At the beginning of the 1980s, when churches were continuously reopened, two urgent tasks for the Chinese churches were the drafting of a common catechism and the compilation of a common hymnal. As a result, 要道问道 (The Basic Catechism of the Chinese churches, 1983) and 赞美诗·新 (The New Hymnal, 1983) made their appearances, and both inherit the best parts of different denominational traditions and take the post-denominational, uniting ecclesial reality into consideration.[9]They are the two typical exemplary products out of the union process. To be brief, since the foundation of the China Christian Council, the Chinese churches have been in the post-denominational stage.

The last marker of the unity process of the Chinese churches is the drafting and revision of the Chinese Protestant Church Order during the last four decades, especially the last revised version of 2018. The fourth assembly of the national Christian churches in 1986 requested that a Chinese church order should be drafted in order to set up rules for the sacraments, ministry and rituals.[10] After a series of consultations and with reference to the convergence texts of WCC, such as *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, a trial version of Church Order for churches in various places of China was issued by the CCC and TSPM in 1991. It was further revised by TSPM and CCC in 1996. Then the church order was officially implemented for all Protestant churches in China. Later, there were discussions within the churches to enhance the ecclesiality of the CCC and TSPM. One of the results is that a doctrinal statement or common confession of faith was added to the church order and approved in 2008. This was not an easy step. Consensus on it was eventually reached after careful consultations with representatives of different and diverse Chinese Protestant churches. Finally, a newly revised version of the church order was approved and then issued in 2018 shortly before the opening of the 10th national assembly of Chinese Protestant church. The settled rule of faith and updated church polity demonstrate that the Chinese Protestant Church is now a *uniting* church.

After summarising the five markers in the union history of the contemporary Chinese churches since 1950, I will now describe the theological basis of the union. What kind of theology of unity undergirds today's

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[7] 曹圣洁：“坚持三自爱国的方向，把教会办得更好——1980年10月在基督教第三次全国会议上的发言，”载于罗冠宗主编：《中国基督教三自爱国运动文选（1950-1992）》，上海：中国基督教三自爱国运动委员会，1993年，第111页。[Cao Shengjie, “Sticking to the Three-Self Patriotic Direction and Constructing a Better Church: Speech at the Third National Christian Assembly in October 1980,” in *Selected Writings of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Chinese Churches* (1950-1992),ed. Luo Guanzong (Shanghai:TSPM,1993), 111]

[8] For the details, see 郑建业：“竭力保守圣灵所赐合而为一的心”，载于罗冠宗主编：《中国基督教三自爱国运动文选（1950-1992）》，上海：中国基督教三自爱国运动委员会，1993年，第153-154页。[Zheng Jianye, “Making Every Effort to Keep the Unity of the Spirit,” in *Selected Writings of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Chinese Churches* (1950-1992), ed. Luo Guanzong (Shanghai:TSPM,1993), 153-54.]

[9] 顾梦飞：“宗派后时期：中国教会迈向合一”，载于《金陵神学文选（二）》，南京：金陵协和神学院，2017年，第305页。[Gu Mengfei, “The Postdenominational Period: the Chinese churches Moves Toward Unity,” in *Selected Writings of Jinling Theology*, Vol. II (Nanjing:NJUTS,2017), 305]

[10] 张化，“联合礼拜”，第74页。[Zhang Hua, “Union Worship,” 74].

Chinese uniting church? Actually a thoroughgoing contextual ecclesiology of Chinese Protestant Church is still in the making. In the following, therefore I will introduce four main theological loci that shape today's Chinese uniting church.

The Four Main Loci of Chinese Theology of Unity

The Common Vision of Building a Sinicized Church

The church is both ecumenical and national, both catholic and local. Since 2013, the CCC and TSPM at the 9th general assembly decided to explore the common vision of building a Sinicized Church. According to "The Outline of Chinese Christianity's Five-Year Plan to Promote Sinicization":

> Sinicization refers to the ecclesial movement that is based on the Bible, sticks to the basic Christian beliefs and inherits the Catholic and Reformation traditions in order to make Christian faith and practices rooted in the rich Chinese cultural soil, to practice the core socialist values as well as to preach the gospel, bear witness to Christ and build up the church well in the Chinese context.

This definition of the Sinicization describes both the Chinese churches' faithfulness to the apostolic faith and the necessity to contextualize the gospel by the Chinese Church. Furthermore, the document also points out that

> the purpose of Sinicization of Christianity is to construct the Chinese Church that lifts up Christ and keeps the unity. She is faithful to biblical truth and rooted in Chinese soil with her own contextual ecclesiology. She will take the initiative to shoulder social responsibilities and bear witness to Christian life through her ministries; she will be in full communion with churches in different parts of China, and make her own contribution to the ecumenical movement. The Sinicization of Christianity intends to change churches in China into the Chinese Church.[11]

To build a Sinicized Church entails not only the unity and full communion of churches in different parts of China but also its inseparability from the church universal. The Sinicized uniting Church is still part of the ecumenical family. The Sinicization of Christianity does not intend a kind of religious nationalism, but it is committed to a legitimate contextualization of Christianity in contemporary China. It has developed the insight of Bishop K.H.Ting when he claims:

> Genuine catholicity is a process of development. The firmer a national church roots itself among its people, the stronger its individuality and the more it contributes to the catholicity of the universal church.[12]

[11] 推进我国基督教中国化五年工作规划纲要（2018-2022）。 https://www.ccctspm.org/cppccinfo/10283 (accessed October 14, 2022). ["The Outline of Chinese Christianity's Five-Year Plan to Promote Sinicization, 2018-2022".]

[12] K.H.Ting, "Another Look at Three-Self," 104.

For Ting, without the local church, the catholicity of the church would remain an abstract ideal. Here, Ting prioritises the establishment of the selfhood of the local church. This selfhood surely points to the collective or the communal identity of the local church. It is also in accordance with the emphasis on local unity proposed by the New Delhi assembly of the WCC in 1961, which highlights "all in each place".[13] In this light, it is theologically and ecclesiologically legitimate to build a Sinicized Church, and it is this common vision that keeps Chinese churches united and moving forward.

The belief in a Cosmic Christ

In recent years, especially after the Theological Thinking Reconstruction (神学思想建设) movement launched in 1998, Chinese Christians have gradually accepted the belief in a Cosmic Christ as first introduced and promoted by Bishop Ting. Ting learned of this concept from the Catholic theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) and found biblical support from the Gospel of John, and the books of Ephesians, Hebrews and Colossians in the New Testament.

By "Cosmic Christ," Ting refers to the belief that Christ extends his providence to the whole universe, and the nature of his providence is love.[14] Ting believes that the pre-existent and the incarnate Logos not only creates everything, but also continues working with the Father to redeem and sanctify all things, and eventually makes all things reconciled with the Father through Him (Col.1:19-20) in the Holy Spirit. The Chinese translation of cosmos is *yu zhou* ("宇宙") . 宇 (yu) means "what comprises the four points of the compass together with what is above and below" while 宙 (zhou) refers to "[w]hat comprises past, present, and future"; thus *yu zhou* (宇宙) is the "Great One" in the Chinese philosophy "which is defined as 'that which has nothing beyond.'"[15] Christ is the Lord of this *yu zhou*. In the light of Christ's continuous creation, providence and redemption, all things will finally coninhere in Christ for a cosmic shalom.

Ting proposes that the concept of a Cosmic Christ serves as a theological foundation for the Chinese uniting church.[16] This Cosmic Christ continues with his creative ministry. Influenced by process theology, Ting believes that human beings created in the *imago Dei* are but "half-finished products" that need further growing in the cosmos to become fully Christlike. [17] They all have the seeds of the Logos (*logos spermatikos*) and are all in the process of growth by God's education and sanctification. Christians of different denominational traditions are also "half-finished products" and need further growing as they have not grasped the ultimate truth of Christ. Thus it is in the Cosmic Christ that Christians of different theological orientations and opinions are deeply connected with each other and continue to grow Christlike. In this light, the Chinese conservative Christians' narrow redemption-centered Christology is enlarged, while the simplified ethical Christology of the liberals or social gospelers focusing on Christ's moral example and charity work is also enriched and deepened.[18] Furthermore, non-Christians are also creatures of Christ who are also in the process

[13] "New Delhi Statement on Unity," I.2, World Council of Churches, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/new-delhi-statement-on-unity#:~:text=The%20love%20of%20the%20Father,whom%20all%20things%20hold%20together. (accessed December 9, 2022,)
[14] Ting, "The Cosmic Christ," 411.
[15] Fung Yu-Lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, bilingual edition (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe. 2012), 334.
[16] Ting, "Chinese Christians' Approach to the Bible," 385.
[17] Ting, "Creation and Redemption," 480; see also Ting, "On Ultimate Questions," 243.
[18] Ting, "Inspirations from Liberation Theology, Process Theology and Teilhard de Chardin," 204-05; see also Ting, "The Cosmic Christ," 409-10.

of physical and spiritual growth under the tutelage of the triune God. So for Ting, it is very important for the Christocentric exclusivism to be balanced by the universality of the Cosmic Christ.

Thus the cosmic nature of Christ provides room wide enough to include and unite Christians of diverse traditions who all have been in the process of seeking the truth in love. It can also engage various Christians and even humanitarian or philanthropic atheists in dialogue for the common good of the whole society in China. In short, the belief in a cosmic Christ enables Chinese Christians to strive for the vision of both the unity of church and the unity of humankind. The wider salvation that the Chinese Church hold is as described in Ephesians 4:10 that Christ will "gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."

The Perichoretic Love of the Trinity and the Wisdom of Harmony in Chinese Philosophy

The common relational understanding of the three divine Persons in the Trinity enables Chinse Christians to believe that the triune God is a communion (koinonia) of love. Despite their differences, the Father, and the Son and the Spirit mutually indwell each other (perichoresis); they give space to each other; they are hospitable to each other; they dance gracefully in the cosmos and invite all the creation to join the intra-Trinitarian communion of love. They are three different persons but cooperate together in their common divine economy (appropriation). The church as Christ's body is also in the image of the Trinity.[19] Thus the church on earth should also bear witness to the divine communion of love that best demonstrates the relationship between diversity and unity.[20] In China, we try to build up a harmonious communion of churches and maintain the positive diversity within unity. For the Chinese churches, our uniting experience is to cooperate first and then dialogue. Because China is vast in territory with multi-ethnical and multi-cultural and multi-religious traditions, the Chinese church also manifests significant diversity in terms of spiritual expressions and worship life etc. Yet we try to organize all the churches within the overarching church structure of CCC and TSPM. Unity does not mean uniformity. Difference and diversity does exist, but according to the Chinese phronesis, we always try to seek the common ground for a holistic harmony. We do this with faith in the all-embracing love of the Trinity, for no one shall be excluded from the radical inclusiveness of God's love. The Chinese ancient philosopher Shi Bo (史伯) who lived almost two hundreds of years earlier than Confucius and Lao Tze already teaches us that harmony keeps things productive while uniformity prevents things from further development (和实生物，同则不继).The well-known Chinese contemporary sociologist Fei Xiaotong (费孝通) highlights this theme:

> Every form of beauty has its uniqueness
> Precious is to appreciate other forms of beauty with openness
> If beauty represents itself with diversity and integrity
> The world will be blessed with harmony and unity
> (各美其美，美人之美，美美与共，天下大同) [21]

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[19] Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids:Eerdmanns, 2000), 483.

[20] 参文革：“团契教会论的理念及其在教会中国化建设方面的可能贡献”，载于《金陵神学志》，2018年第一期：第5-37页。[Cf WEN Ge, "The Concept of Koinonia Ecclesiology and its Possible Contribution to the Building of a Sinicized Church," in *Jinling Theological Review,* No.1 (2018):5-37.]

[21] 费孝通著，费宗惠、张荣华编：《费孝通论文化自觉》。（呼和浩特：内蒙古人民出版社，2009年），第6页。[Fei Xiaotong, *Fei Xiaotong on Cultural Self-Consciousness,* ed. Fei Zonghui and Zhang Ronghua (Hohhot:Inner Mongolia People's Publishing, 2009), 6.]

The Chinese philosophy of harmony also informs the Chinese church with a master vision to keep all things united. The Chinese Church is now striving for the full visible and organic unity in the spirit of mutual respect while maintaining the rich and creative diversity. We learn to keep the positive tension within the churches and cooperate for the common good, national and international.

The Ecclesiality of Our Protestant Church Order

It has already been mentioned that since the late 1980s, CCC and TSPM have tried to draft a national church order so as to strengthen the unity of the Chinese post-denominational churches. But the latest revised version, developed in 2018, is of great importance for the unity of the Chinese Protestant churches. It not only takes into consideration the close relationship between the Church and China's cultural features and her socialist context, but also offers a relatively comprehensive definition of the church's faith, worship life and unity.

The new version of the Church Order altogether has 11 chapters, including general principles, common confession of faith, the church, believers, ministry, theological schools, charity work, church discipline and supplementary provisions.[22] This essay cannot present a thorough introduction of the church order, but I will highlight what is important for the construction of a Chinese contextual ecclesiology and for the maintenance of the church unity. The Church Order clearly stipulates that CCC and TSPM together form the government structure of the Chinese uniting church (1:3; 3:10) in different parts of China. The churches' consensus on our basic Christian beliefs is in full agreement with the apostolic faith (Chapter 2). Furthermore, the Chinese uniting church continues with the practice of union worship. "Churches in each place shall seek the common ground, respect and accept each other in terms of faith traditions and rituals; there should be no divisions among Christians who also shall not attack and exclude each other"(3:11). Furthermore, "the churches should follow the biblical teaching, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit, and try to realize the 'complete unity'" (3:11). It also warns that "any division of the church is against the Lord's own teaching"(3:11). Division is regarded as an offense against Christ's own body. We all know that Christians are united with Christ as well as with each other through baptism, Eucharist and common worship, and through the common worship the Chinese uniting Church also becomes one with Church Universal (4:14, 17). Besides, the Church Order also provides concrete instructions on ministry and church discipline (9 &10). Yet it is a pity that the Church Order has not been through a sufficient theological unpacking and that its ecclesiological incompleteness still needs Chinese Christians' further deliberations.

In short, the consensus on basic church beliefs and church polity together become the basis of union. They demonstrate the very ecclesiality of the Christian councils and TSPM committees at various administrative levels. Based on all this, the Chinese Protestant Church is now a uniting church.

[22] "中国基督教教会规章（2018年11月）" *https://www.ccctspm.org/cppccinfo/50* (accessed October 16, 2022). ["Church Order of the Chinese Protestant Church (November 2018)"].

Conclusion

Unity is the salient feature of traditional Chinese culture in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic country of over 5000-year history. Protestant denominationalism introduced by foreign missionaries into China in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century does not fit in with Chinese culture and hinders the process of building up a Sinicized uniting Church. In the past 70 years, the unity of the Chinese Protestant churches have been through different inner and external challenges after the People's Republic of China was founded. Even today, the unity of the Chinese church is still confronted with some significant challenges. as Rev. Cao Shengjie points out:

> At present, although denominational organizations no longer exist in China, denominational consciousness does not fade away together with them. Denominations still exist in the world, some of which supported the rise of some of China's former denominations when China is open to the world. A few denominational representatives intensify their inculcation of denominational theories to Christians, and they even take in denominational textbooks published abroad directly and use them without discrimination; some churches that maintain their denominational identity have not changed their names, some of which have an unclear relationship with the church councils and TSPM at different levels. There are also a few places where denominational activities are strengthened. Though not mainstream, they still draw our attention.[23]

The 2018 revision of the Church Order has strengthened the church to address these challenges. It serves as the theological basis for the church union. Theoretically, the construction of a Chinese ecclesiology still behoves further efforts. Here I have delineated only four theological loci in order to sketch the ecclesiological framework of the Chinese Church. Yet the practical unity of the Chinese Protestant church contributes not only to social harmony of China but also to the ecumenical movement in terms of an enrichment of Church's catholicity. I hope that more theological probing on the practical union process and the Church Order in the future will make the unity of the Chinese Protestant Church more organic.

[23] 曹圣洁：“《中国基督教教会规章》的制订、修订过程及走向联合教会的思考，”载于《金陵神学志》，2022年第二期：第27页。[Cao Shengjie, "On the Formulation and Revision of the Church Order of the Chinese Protestant Churches: With Reflections on the Churches' Moving Towards a Uniting Church," in *Jinling Theological Review,* N0.2 (2022):27]

"The Mission Myth" 25 years later

John T. Squires and Elizabeth Raine

Abstract

The August 1997 issue of this journal included an article "The Mission Myth." The article provoked several responses in the subsequent issue. At the invitation of the current Editorial Advisory Committee, the authors of the original article here reflect on how their own thinking on the topic has changed and developed in response to various influences during the intervening quarter of a century.

Background

In 1997, this journal included our article entitled "The Mission Myth."[1] In the article, we used the question posed by David Bosch, "is everything mission?", to explore the ways in which the developing theology of the Uniting Church was grappling with this question.[2] The article provoked a number of responses in the next issue.[3] Twenty-five years on, the editor of the journal has invited a reflection on how our thinking has changed and developed since that late- twentieth century discussion.

First, it is important to say that we have had quite a journey in ministry since this article was written. We remember that we were across the other side of the world, living for a year in the UK, when the article was published – and when the responses followed in the next issue. At the time, Elizabeth was undertaking doctoral studies in the Gospel of Matthew (unfortunately interrupted by medical matters) and John was on a sabbatical year which provided opportunity for sustained research into the book of Acts.

Since that time, we have had opportunity to continue in teaching roles, both within a theological college, and with lay people in congregational leadership roles. We have experienced ministry in a rural context, job-sharing in a Presbytery role which had a focus on resourcing small lay-led rural churches as well as substantial regional congregations. At the same time, we served as ministers to a small, ageing Congregation in a rural township. We spent some years as members of the Board of Uniting Mission and Education, with oversight of the educational areas in which we had previously worked.

We experienced life in another Synod (WA), where the tyranny of distance dwarfed the issues of distance felt in NSW. John undertook an educational leadership role, whilst Elizabeth ministered as an *Intentional Interim Minister* in a Congregation and as resource person for the Pastoral Relations Committee. Just over

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1 John T. Squires and Elizabeth Raine, "The Mission Myth," *Uniting Church Studies* 3, no.2 (1997): 30–47.

2 For the background in Bosch, see David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 511.

3 Helen Richmond, "Mission Recovered: A Response to "The Mission Myth"," *Uniting Church Studies* 4, no.1 (1998): 56–61; Andrew Williams, "On Mission and Ministry," *Uniting Church Studies* 4, no.1 (1998): 62–65; and Gordon Dicker, "Cat Among the Pigeons," *Uniting Church Studies* 4, no.1 (1998): 67–69.

a decade ago, we had both trained to become *Intentional Interim Ministers* (IIMs)[4]; Elizabeth has served in three IIM roles (in Sydney, Perth, and Canberra) and John in one (in Queanbeyan).

We are currently serving in placements in Canberra, as minister to the Tuggeranong Congregation (Elizabeth) and Presbytery Minister – Wellbeing (John). We have continued to provide education and training for lay people in many Congregations; as well as teaching week-long courses in person in various Presbyteries, we have developed our skills in online teaching the last two years, spurred by the demands of the pandemic.

All of these situations and opportunities over the past 25 years have informed how we think about mission and have encouraged us to think further about mission and its place in the life of the church. The irony is that, over those 25 years, our focus has gradually, incrementally, shifted: from a focus on teaching people to understand and interpret the Bible, to working with Congregations and their leaders in understanding the nature of a community of faith, and the central importance of strengthening discipleship and engaging in mission, for the ongoing health of those communities.

This has come through our learnings in the *Intentional Interim Ministry* training course we each, separately, undertook; through Elizabeth's completion of a Master of Education in Social Ecology; through our participation in, and then leading of sessions in, the *Mission Shaped Ministry* course[5]; and through Elizabeth's creative development of a mission-planning process that she has successfully offered to Congregations in three different Presbyteries over the past decade.

So, this article emerges from that combined set of experiences; not simply from "reading more books" about mission, but rather, from on-the-ground engagement with mission, and discipleship, in and through the churches where we have served. After all of these experiences, what do we now say, as we reflect on the place of mission within the life of the church? Here are our thoughts, presented under four headings, as we approach the end of the first quarter of the twenty-first century.

What we say now

Mission is vital to the health and wellbeing of the church

There can be no doubting the truth of Emil Brunner's much-quoted claim that, "the church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning."[6] That does not mean, however, that everything can be, or must be, contained within the category of "mission". The life of the church is broader and more diverse than this. And the way that we read and interpret scripture also needs to be broader and open to new insights (as we argued at length in the "Mission Myth" article itself).

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[4] *Intentional Interim Ministry* describes an intentional period of ministry leadership, usually after an extended ministry has ended, which focusses on five developmental tasks within the Congregation. It was developed in the 1960s by a group led by Loren Mead, associated with the Alban Institute in the USA; many fine resources for such a style of ministry have since been published by the Alban Institute. The Uniting Church in Australia has been affiliated with the IIM Network and provided local training in IIM for the past four decades.

[5] *Mission Shaped Ministry* originated in the United Kingdom about 15 years ago, as a way to stimulate renewal and growth within the institutional church. It is taught in a one-year, part-time course "which takes people on a learning journey as part of a supportive community, training them for ministry in fresh expressions of church" (see https://fxresourcing.org/msm/)

[6] Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World* (London: SCM Press, 1931), 108.

Mission is local

Second: Mission is not just (or, indeed, not now at all) about overseas ventures, and especially not about "raising money" or "collecting goods" to be sent to communities of people in other countries, especially countries of the Third World. That was a clear expression of the old Christendom model, which we ought to have left behind decades ago. Indeed, there was a concerted effort some years ago, in the NSW.ACT Synod of the Uniting Church, to reorient the focus of our missionary efforts, under the title, "Mission Comes Home".

The emphasis in that project was to call church members to be missional agents in our own communities, in and amongst the people we encounter each day, each week, rather than seeing others elsewhere, far away, be subjected to evangelistic preaching. Indeed, within the Uniting Church, the preferred model of active partnership with faith communities in various overseas countries has been developed and implemented by *UnitingWorld*[7] in ways that are deeply faithful to the Gospel call to be partners in God's mission.

A further spur to this way of viewing mission must surely come from the latest national census in Australia, where for the first time a figure under 50% identifies as Christian. We can no longer claim that we are "a Christian country" (not that we ever really were?). The *National Church Life Survey* tracks church attendance alongside the national census, and the 2021 survey shows an even lower percentage of people are active in attending church worship services in a regular basis; one in five attends monthly, while 13% attend weekly. (NCLS Research, "Australians attending church", 2021). The mission field is now very much in view for us all, in Australia, as soon as we step outside our doors. The McCrindle Report tells us that just short of one half of people in Australian society (46%) are open to having "a spiritual conversation about that may involve different views to their own" (McCrindle Research, "The changing faith landscape of Australia", 2022).

Indeed, in the last two and a half years, the impact of COVID has led to significant changes in the churches about how we worship, how we offer fellowship, how we meet to make decisions, and how we study and pray together. The pandemic has changed how we view society and how we interact with others, and that has a clear impact on how we undertake mission. In our own Congregation of Tuggeranong, we now worship both in person and online each Sunday; we offer short times of Daily Prayers online each weekday during Lent and Advent; and we have two online sessions each week of Bible Study with participants coming, not only from our Congregation, but from others in our Presbytery as well as people from more distant places, right across the Australian continent (and some from overseas places). The community of faith itself has been reconfigured – in the same way as the mission field is now perceived differently.

Not everything is mission

We need to insist that not everything in the life of the church is mission. A programme is not a mission. An activity is not a mission. A soup kitchen or a craft group or a coffee drop-in service (each of which is a good thing to be doing) is not mission, not by itself, not unless there is some element of sharing the good news, declaring a faith commitment, that is integrally involved. The tendency to claim such activities as "our mission" is strong; it needs to be resisted. That has been a strong learning from our interaction

[7] UnitingWorld is an agency of the Uniting Church which is responsible for fostering relationships with partner churches in Asia, the Pacific and Africa. See https://unitingworld.org.au/

with many congregations in the various presbyteries where we have served over the past 25 years. Not everything we do is mission.

Indeed, we would go so far as to say that, sadly, most things that many congregations do, are not mission – especially if they are simply replicating "what we have always done" and also if they have just a Sunday worship service with one or two other activities throughout the month for those who attend that service of worship. Even the offering of a set of programmes throughout the month, without a clear focus on foregrounding Christian commitment and sharing the Gospel story, is not mission.

It follows, then, that simply because a Congregation has a Mission Statement, we cannot therefore deduce that this is a Congregation that is actively on mission. The statement by itself is useless unless it is supported by activity, engagement, interaction, and conversation with people who are not part of the regular in-group of the Congregation (what we used to call "members").

Mission requires training

We believe that mission is something that anyone can do, but it is not something that comes easily and naturally to most people. Training in mission is essential. Being prepared to step outside the familiar and comfortable "box" of church is an essential element – so the right mindset is the first step. After that, training can inspire, encourage, refine, and develop missional sensitivities and lead to strong missional practices. But without that commitment to do something different, to reach out of the predictable, to experiment and explore, no mission will occur. Business as usual is a big temptation to many church people; and business as usual can quickly stifle mission (unless mission itself is the "business as usual").

So, training in the "how-to" of *Messy Church*, *Godly Play*, *Fresh Expressions*, *GodSend*, and *Mission Shaped Ministry*, can indeed inspire and equip people to become missional in their orientation. These courses don't provide any guarantee, but they do each offer a set of stimuli, challenges, and resources for people to consider how to "do church differently" and hopefully also "engage in mission".

There is a clear principle that is often articulated, with which we agree, and which we feel should be stated again and again: Mission is about the world, not the church. Mission means knowing the community we live in, the society of which we are a part, the culture(s) that shape(s) us, the expectations and patterns and customs of people.

Mission means shaping and reshaping the way we "do church" in the light of these matters. The Mission of God is God doing things in the world, and we, as the people of God, joining in with that activity. It means going out to others, not expecting others to come in to us. A missional church is not simply a church that opens the doors and expects people to flock in to the wonderful programmes on offer. A missional church is one that is always oriented outwards, a church whose people are dispersed, engaged in communities, actively involved in the various needs of people across those communities.

However, we feel that using the fancy Latin technical term *missio dei*, when a perfectly good English equivalent is at hand (the mission of God), is both elitist and also a tip of the hat to the old era of Christendom,

when Latin was the *lingua franca* (so to speak) and ecclesiastical authority held political and social power. Those days are going, going, gone.

The way that mission relates to discipleship is an important factor. Fear of undertaking anything missional is probably grounded in the lack of capacity to understand and operate as a Christian disciple. The first disciples were called into a community, with Jesus, in order to learn: to hear his parables, observe his healing and exorcisms, consider his ethical instructions, and witness his passionate debates with other interpreters of Torah.

The first disciples were learners; indeed, that is the root meaning of the Greek word translated as disciple (*mathetes* comes from *manthano*, to learn). So, Mission is inherently relational. Mission is not "believe this, and we welcome you"; Mission is "let me get to know you, be alongside and with you, relate to you with honesty and integrity, see what possibilities emerge in our common activities together".

The paradigm that has been widely articulated in recent years is very helpful here. The pattern is not "believe—belong—behave", which may well have been dominant during the centuries of Christendom; rather, what we need today is the pattern "belong—behave—believe"[8]. A welcoming engagement with people such that they feel they belong opens up pathways for joining in shared behaviours, which itself inculcates a set of beliefs that are owned and lived by each person who belongs.

But at a certain point, those learners spending time with Jesus were impelled to become leaders. The key indicator of this comes at that point in the Synoptic Gospels, when Jesus sends out "the twelve" to replicate his activity amongst the people of Galilee: "they went out and proclaimed that all should repent; they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them" (Mark 6:12–13); "he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal" (Luke 9:2); "as you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near'; cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons" (Matt 10:7–8). The twelve go out as preachers, teachers, healers, advocates – as leaders.

So important is this transition, from learners to leaders, that Luke tells of a second sending – this time, of seventy-two (or seventy in some manuscripts). The instructions here are clear: "whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'" (Luke 10:8–9). A larger group is propelled to take the steps, from learners, to leaders; the same tasks are evident: to be preachers, teachers, healers, and advocates. The deepening of discipleship that occurs from this practical exercise cannot be underestimated.

Do we offer the same learning community which takes the next step in discipleship of moving from learners to leaders, in the church today? Recently, our colleague Craig Mitchell wrote: "When the 'missional turn' began to take hold in the UCA, we somehow made an either/or choice to resource mission instead of

[8] This pattern was articulated with clarity by Diana Butler Bass in *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (HarperOne, 2013). She has provided a short discussion of how this book has shaped her subsequent writings at https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/p/after-christianity-after-religion.

discipleship. We stopped resourcing local faith formation and education. Today most churches lack a plan for these, yet discipleship is one of the key aims of most councils. It's like bemoaning the quality of preaching while cutting homiletics or biblical scholarship."

He continued: "Interestingly, most of our larger, usually 'conservative evangelical' churches have a strong Christian education ethos – small groups, Bible study, age group classes, mentoring, action learning in mission, daily prayer and journalling, leadership development, themed preaching/teaching. How do we 'disciple' without learning from ancient and recent wisdom about how to do that? At the core of being the church is being a learning community of disciples." (Facebook post, 7 May 2022)

Those are provocative words; they encapsulate very well one of the problems with the church at this time. Paradoxically, grasping hold of mission has led to the weakening of discipleship. Failing to encourage people to grapple with how they live out faith in all of their life (not just in the Sunday worship and the once-a-month fellowship group) has failed to build a real missional movement.

Our Local Engagements

Much of our own ministry in the years since the *Mission Myth* was published has been devoted to deepening the discipleship of people amongst whom we ministered: courses designed to equip people with a better understanding of the Bible, or a better understanding of Uniting Church theology, or a grasp of the fundamental principles of being a church on mission; opportunities for lay leaders to share together with a focus on ethical issues, or modes of governance, or ways of sharing faith.

These have not been things that we have done simply for the sake of imparting knowledge, or encouraging learning; rather, our deep sense is that the more we engage with our faith and reflect on its meaning, the better equipped we are to engage in the mission of God in meaningful and effective ways. Our hope, and intention, is always that training in discipleship will (indeed, should) spill over into an enthusiastic missional undertaking.

Over the past two decades, we have had personal involvement in a number of enterprises that have offered us opportunities to "be on mission" in an individual way. But what has been particularly energising has been the communal missional engagement, involving a larger group of people, in two current activities. For the last six years, the *Rainbow Christian Alliance* at Tuggeranong Uniting Church has provided a safe space for LGBTIQA+ people of faith who felt (or were told) that they did not belong in a "traditional" church setting; a space to gather, share a meal, tell their stories, read scripture, and discuss matters of faith and life together. It has developed both as a safe community for people to enter, but also as a sign to the Canberra society that "rainbow people are welcome here" (as the colourful banner at the entrance to the church building proclaims).

A second such enterprise has been the regular partnering of the Congregation with *See Change Tuggeranong* in specific events with a focus on "caring for people – caring for the planet", as another bright banner proclaims. *See Change* and the Tuggeranong Uniting Congregation have shared values and common goals,

working to educate the community on ways to live sustainably and tread lightly on the earth, so such joint activities are a natural expression of those values and a fine way to share with others our belief on the goodness of creation and the centrality of sustainability in our discipleship.

Readers of this article will surely have their own examples of local engagement that demonstrates how participation in the mission of God in their local community is flourishing. We wish them well as they engage, learn, and flourish in those enterprises.

"Pathfinder and Pioneer": a tribute to Betty Matthews, the Uniting Church's first ordained deacon[1]

Sandy Boyce

Christina Mary Elizabeth Matthews, or Betty as she was always known, was the first Deacon ordained after the Sixth Uniting Church Assembly (1991) agreed to the renewal of the diaconate. Betty passed away on 19th July, 2022. Including her ministry as a Deaconess prior to her ordination as a Deacon, she served in diaconal ministry for 68 years. The history, commitments and themes of her diaconal vocation paralleled and overlapped with the Uniting Church's broader history of introducing a renewed diaconate. This tribute marks not only the 30th anniversary of her ordination as a Deacon, but also the 30th anniversary of the Uniting Church's renewal of the diaconate.

A diaconal calling

> Betty's life calling was to proclaim in word and deed the presence of Christ in a broken world, and to this she was faithful. She took the cue from Jesus, welcoming and caring for those in need, standing by those who suffered, praying and acting for justice and reconciliation especially among Aboriginal people and refugees. She was a pathfinder and a pioneer who wore her stole as a sign of joyful obedience to God, to build up Christ's body among others, recovering an ancient order of ministry, and serving as an example to those following in her footsteps.[2]

Betty was born on 14th June 1929. The family moved from New South Wales to Western Australia in 1944 due to her father's work. Betty was part of the Subiaco Presbyterian Church where she was active in Presbyterian Fellowship of Australia (PFA) for young people. She taught in Sunday School, led the Girls Club, and was a member of the tennis club. She was elected to the State Council of the PFA and helped run Easter camps. Through her involvement in the PFA, she became aware of the wider work of the church, overseas missionaries and Patrol Padres from the Australian Inland Mission (A.I.M.) which had been established, by Presbyterian minister, Rev John Flynn in 1912, to minister to the spiritual, social and medical needs of people in the Outback, ''without preference for nationality or creed." Betty became involved with the A.I.M. team in Perth, supporting Patrol Padres and nurses working in remote areas of the inland of Australia. (A.I.M. would later be known as Frontier Services.)

[1] Some of the source material used in this tribute is drawn from information prepared by Rev Deacon Bev Fabb based on her conversations with Rev Deacon Betty Matthews. Remarks in this paper attributed to Betty are drawn from these conversations conducted by Bev.

[2] Rev Sophia Lizares, speaking at Betty's funeral. Quoted with permission.

Betty initially found work as a typist at the "West Australian" newspaper, but her life took a new direction after she heard a Deaconess from Victoria speak at a PFA gathering. Betty learned that Deaconesses had the opportunity to go with a nursing sister to hospitals in the outback. Some of the first nurses ever seen in the Australian outback were Deaconesses. In fact, Deaconesses were important leaders in the establishment of Flynn's A.I.M.[3]. Trained as they were, Deaconesses could also conduct services where there was no minister. Above all, however, the ministry of Deaconess was recognised as a ministry to the less privileged and to persons in need. Those who completed the training were able to continue their calling both within the gathered church and beyond. Inspired by this work, Betty heard a call to diaconal ministry. In 1951, aged 22 years, Betty moved from Perth to Melbourne to begin training as a Deaconess. This involved attending Rolland House Deaconess and Missionary Training College, in Carlton. A residential college for deaconess students and missionary workers, it was also a home for the Deaconess Association of the Presbyterian Church. Established as the Deaconess Training Institute in 1898, it took its new name in 1936 to honour Rev William Strothert Rolland who had helped found the original institute.

Betty very much enjoyed the diversity of women in the community at Rolland House. She also studied theology at Ormond College. During that time, Betty met her future husband Alan Matthews, a candidate for ordination as a Minister of the Word who was also studying at Ormond College. After completing her three years formation for the ministry of Deaconess, Betty returned to Western Australia in 1954 and was "set apart" as a Presbyterian Deaconess on 3 February 1954 in Scots Church, Fremantle. Her ministry was to establish a church in the newly developing industrial suburb of Kwinana, 25 kilometres south of Fremantle. She was an early pioneer in church planting.

Kwinana had been developed as an industrial hub in the early 1950s after the Western Australian Government had entered into an agreement with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (now known as BP) to build an oil refinery. The Government guaranteed it would provide infrastructure and construct state homes to house the refinery workers. Residents in Kwinana came from all over the world. In this context, Betty's role included visiting migrant families as they moved into their new homes. She regularly visited the Migrant Hostel at Naval Base, a nearby suburb

Along with other deaconesses, Betty wore the blue Presbyterian Deaconess uniform with white collar and cuffs, an attire which paralleled Deaconess movements in Germany, England and the United States. The way a Deaconess dressed was seen to play a role in how others saw her moral and spiritual standing before God. The Presbyterian Deaconess uniform was intended to be a simple but distinctive costume, for protection and for recognition. The blue-and-white colours, the colours of Scotland, recalled the heritage of Presbyterianism. The aim was to be simply clothed in respectability – inconspicuous, yet 'set apart' for work that was lowly[4].

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[3] Rev John Flynn's vision for AIM would extend to the development of the Royal Flying Doctor Service, and School of the Air.

[4] Pamela E Klassen, "The Robes of Womanhood: Dress and Authenticity Among African American Methodist Women in the Nineteenth Century," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, 14, no. 1 (2004), 40-42. See also Kerrie Handasyde, "Religious Dress and the Making of Women Preachers in Australia, 1880–1934," *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal* 26 (2020): 103–119.

Betty and Alan were married in 1956. It was common for new Ministers to be encouraged to gain experience overseas. So, only a few days after their wedding, Betty and Alan set sail for the UK where they served in an inner-city church in Birmingham for a year. When they returned to Australia in 1957, they served in Morwell, a coal-mining town in Victoria. Betty served in children's and youth ministry in church and in the community, establishing an Infant Welfare centre and pre-school in Morwell.

In 1966, Betty and Alan moved to a joint Methodist/Presbyterian Church in Ringwood East, Victoria. Betty became very involved in the Church and Life Movement which encouraged church members to get actively involved in their local communities. Betty set up a Community Referral Centre in Ringwood which provided information to residents on local community services. She also began to make contact with Indigenous people in Victoria, anticipating relationships that would flourish in other contexts in later years. Betty was elected to the Council of the State Presbyterian Women's Association of Victoria and later became its President.

During these formative years of Betty's ministry, the movement towards the formation of the Uniting Church in Australia was taking shape. Begun in 1957, the Joint Commission on Church Union worked towards a *Basis of Union*, the final form of which was presented to the three uniting churches in 1971. The final form of the Basis affirmed the ministry of deaconess and also included a mandate to develop a "renewed diaconate."

> The Uniting Church recognises at the time of union many seek a renewal of the diaconate in which women and men offer this time and talents, representatively and on behalf of God's people, in the service of humanity in the face of changing needs.[5]

This "renewal" would take many years. One of the challenges in moving in this direction, however, was that each of the three churches that came into union had different understandings of the ministry of deaconess.

> In some churches, the deaconess was involved in a serving ministry among the poor and disadvantaged. In other churches, she was a pastoral assistant to the minister of the Word, often preaching and in some cases celebrating the sacraments. Diaconal ministry (the ministry of service) was generally seen as secondary to the ministry of the Word and sacraments[6].

The move north

Just as the wider church was beginning to anticipate union, Betty and Alan moved to the Northern Territory where they joined the United Church in North Australia, an already existing local union of churches which predated the formation of the Uniting Church . They had been approached by Rev Fred McKay (who had succeeded Rev John Flynn as head of A.I.M.) and Deaconess Frances McKechnie, a leader of the Victorian Deaconesses, to see if they would consider going to Nhulunbuy in the Northern Territory where a new

[5] Uniting Church in Australia, "Basis of Union Revised 1992 /Edition, paragraph 14c," Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, accessed December 2, 2022, https://assembly.uca.org.au/basis-of-union.

[6] "Ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia: Report of the Task Group on Ministry of the Church to the Sixth Assembly, Uniting Church in Australia 1991," 39.

mining town was being established. Betty remarked that when she and Alan arrived "there was no town, no house, no church, no land – we worked from our car." They established a congregation there, with services held at first in a marquee, then the recreation hall, before the church was built. Betty skilfully accompanied the hymns with her piano accordion in church services, and later on piano when the church was built. Initially the family lived in the Aboriginal community of Yirrkala, 18 kilometres from Nhulunbuy on the Gove Peninsula. There they learned much about Aboriginal culture and formed strong friendships with Yolŋu leaders. Betty worked in the office of the Yirrkala Aboriginal School.

Famously, Yirrkala was the centre of the first land rights movement in Australia.[7] Representatives of the tribal groups who lived on the Gove Peninsula brought a petition, written on a length of stringy bark, to Federal Parliament on 15th August 1963. This petition asserted the rights of the Yolŋu people over land to which mining rights had been granted to the mining company, Nabalco. In 1971, the year after Betty and Alan had arrived, the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory, in a decision known as the Milirrpum decision, or the Gove land rights case, validated the mining leases and refused the Yolŋu people any common law claim to native title. The Gove bauxite mine commenced production in the same year. Subsequently, when the family eventually moved to Nhulunbuy, a town created for the bauxite mine, a focus of Betty's ministry was the building of bridges between the Aboriginal and mining communities, helping the newcomers to understand and respect Aboriginal culture. This led Betty later to be an enthusiastic supporter of the formation, in 1985, of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC).

Additionally whilst in Nhulunbuy, Betty worked to establish a community kindergarten. She also established the Good Neighbour Council which helped migrants settle into the Australian community, thus echoing her earlier ministry in Kwinana. When Cyclone Tracy devastated Darwin at Christmas, 1974 Betty served on the Red Cross Cyclone Emergency Committee where she helped to coordinate responses to the cyclone damage and to plan disaster management

Betty and Alan were held in such high regard for their pastoral work and personal characteristics that the Yolŋu people bestowed the honorary terms of *nandi* (mother) and *bapa* (father) on them. Betty described the years in Yirrkala and Nhulunbuy as a highlight in her life and ministry.

The return to Perth

They returned to Perth in 1977 and Alan was appointed to a placement in the area where Betty had begun her ministry as a young Deaconess. In one of the congregations, Coolbellup, Betty and Alan built relations with the Noongar community and later this church became home for the UAICC congregation. Betty and Alan also built close relationships with the Tongan community and were instrumental in the founding of the Beth Shalom Tongan speaking congregation.

The return to Perth coincided with the inauguration of the Uniting Church. The newly formed Uniting Church welcomed men and women as ordained ministers of the Word, but the opportunity to be ordained

[7] For the background, see National Native Title Tribunal, *25 Years of Native Title Recognition* (Canberra: National Native Title Tribunal, 2017), 4.

in the Uniting Church as a Minister of the Word was not compelling for Betty in her own journey as a Deaconess: 'I felt my calling was still to be of service, but in serving not as a minister of the Word, because of my interests which related to those on the edges of the church and society'. Accordingly, and along with others, Betty continued to advocate for the renewal of the diaconate which had been embedded in the Basis of Union. Betty attended the first national Deaconess Conference in 1978, which called upon the Assembly to take up this call to renewal.

During this period, Betty joined the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in 1977 as a Community Worker whose role was to establish and create new groups that would enable connection for women living in the various suburbs. Betty was in her element as a 'people person'. She pioneered many services to benefit young women – the Big Sister/Big Brother programme, Emergency Housing for single women, Step Family support program, residential weekends and various seminars.

In 1980, Betty was appointed as YWCA Executive Director in Western Australia. Over the years she represented the YWCA sitting on many committees including Youth Affairs Council, WA Council of Social Security (WACOSS), Austcare, WA Council of Voluntary Youth Organisations, the establishment of Perth Inner City Youth Service and various other community committees. When, in 1980, she retired from the YWCA Executive (although not from being an active volunteer), her service was acknowledged by the then Premier, Peter Dowding, who presented Betty with the first Seniors Card to be issued in WA. Betty's contribution to the YWCA was also recognized with a special service award in 1993. A life membership was presented in 2004. That year also marked Betty's 50th year of service since being 'set apart' for service as a Deaconess.

Alongside these YWCA involvements, Betty remained actively involved in her local congregation and the wider church. This included involvement in the Frontier Services support group, membership of the ecumenical World Day of Prayer committee, Australian Church Women and the Council of Churches in WA.

Meanwhile, the Uniting Church was still labouring on the details for the renewal of the diaconate. In 1979, the 2nd Assembly of the Uniting Church declared its intention to "renew the ministry of the Diaconate in terms of section 14c of the Basis of Union" [8]. Subsequently, reports from the Assembly Doctrine Commission which gave a theological rationale for this ministry were presented to the 1979, 1982 and 1985 Assemblies. As a result of the 1985 report, the Assembly resolved "to establish a renewed Diaconate, to be known as the ministry of Deacon (as defined in the Doctrine Commission's report of 1985)."[9]

In 1988, however, at the meeting of the Fifth Assembly, after the Assembly received a report on the implementation of the 1985 decision it resolved 'that the work of the committee on the responsibilities and functioning of a renewed diaconate has exposed considerations that render its implementation inappropriate at this stage'[10]. Yet, in response to the report of the Standing Committee on the Diaconate, the Assembly passed the following resolution

[8] Minutes of the 2nd Assembly 79:22:3a
[9] Minutes of the 4th Assembly 85:54:1
[10] Minutes of the 5th Assembly 88:27:3

> To direct the Standing Committee to arrange for a study of the changing patterns of ministry and what is and will be required to equip the whole people of God for their ministry and mission in a changing world, in the light of the gospel, and in the light of that study to bring a proposal on the diaconate to the 1991 Assembly.[11]

Betty shared the hurt experienced by many deaconesses at the inability of the Assembly to reach agreement on a reshaping of their ministry, especially given that other churches in Australia and overseas were implementing a renewal of diaconal ministry.

Towards the renewed diaconate

In 1991, Betty attended the Sixth Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia which was held in Brisbane. The Assembly received a report from the Task Group on the Ministry of the Church set up at the previous Assembly which, among other things, highlighted that the importance of Deacons lies in who they are as well as what they do.

> The deacon is present in the places where people of all sorts live their everyday lives, as a sign of the presence of God there. Particularly among people who are marginalised, oppressed, suffering, the forgotten, the unlovely, the deacon is a sign of the justice and mercy, judgement and forgiveness, compassion and saving grace, the suffering and victory of God. Moreover, because the deacon works for the most part outside the institutions of the church, the deacon is a sign for the congregation, scattered as they go about their daily work and ordinary lives, of the presence of God in the world.
>
> ...Ordained deacons hold before the church the model of service among those who suffer, and call the members to engage in such service. In their ministry, they model Christ the servant. The distinctive function of the deacon is to hold up service as central to all Christian ministry'[12].
>
> The service to which Christians are called, which the deacon models and of which the deacon is a sign, is itself a sign of the kingdom – present, anticipated and looked-for. It is witness to the inbreaking kingdom of peace and justice... the kingdom which is already and not-yet'[13].

The report also identified a significant question, *What is the distinction between deacons and ministers of the Word?* The answer was that whilst "their unity in diversity is a sign of the organic nature of the church" the distinction lies in the respective focus of their ministries.

> The ministry of the minister of the Word is launched from the presence of God in the gathered congregation where people worship, know themselves loved and forgiven, are nourished in

[11] Minutes of the 5th Assembly 88:27.5
[12] "Ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia," 40
[13] "Ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia," 41

> the faith, share in the fellowship of God's people, cry out to God for themselves and others and are sent out in mission together with their minister of the Word. In preaching, sacraments and pastoral care God's reconciling work in Christ is declared and celebrated. In these powerful evangelising acts people are called to faith and sustained in it as they go out to share it and live it. *The minister of the Word shares in this rhythm of coming and going from the gathered congregation but beginning in the gathered congregation*.
>
> The ministry of the deacon is launched from the presence of God in the community among disadvantaged people. This ministry both challenges and empowers the church for service. In the community the deacon encounters not only the powerlessness and despair, the joy and resilience of the people, but the great loving and saving acts of God through the Holy Spirit, healing, restoring, renewing, giving hope and life. The deacon recognises, names, embodies and mediates the reconciling and saving power of God. The deacon meets the people of God in their work and life in the everyday world as well as being in places and among people where the people of God rarely go. *The deacon shares the rhythm of Christian life coming and going from the gathered congregation but beginning in the community* (emphasis added).[14]

After lengthy and robust discussions on what some saw as a contentious proposal, the Uniting Church formally – and finally – renewed the diaconate in these terms.

In many ways it was fitting that Betty was the first person to be ordained as a Deacon in the Uniting Church. She was not new to diaconal ministry as she had served in many different roles as a Deaconess for 38 years. The renewal of the diaconate enabled Betty to continue that journey as a Deacon in the Uniting Church in Australia. Whilst the Uniting Church has continued to develop this ministry, with some continuing resistance to it, Betty's life and ministry offers its own illustration of why and in what directions this ministry was renewed. Indeed, Betty continued to shape this renewed ministry, and those who shared her vocation, by regularly attending the national Deacon conferences. She loved to connect with those who shared her focus on diaconal ministry. She was a great mentor and encourager of Deacon candidates.

Betty knew that diaconal ministry must be rooted in a strong spirituality and she maintained a strong prayer life. She was actively involved in Wellspring, founded in 1992 as an Australia wide ecumenical community which promoted the spirituality of the Iona Community. The Wellspring Community aims to create a space where spirituality and justice meet to deepen one's relationship with God, to care for the earth, to foster the growth of an Australian spirituality and to practise peace including working for a just relationship between First Nations communities and the later comers.

In retirement, Betty and Alan remained committed to seeking justice, building bridges, and seeking the truth. They were passionate about ministry with refugees. Betty was an active volunteer at CARAD (Centre for Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Detainees). They bought a house with a self-contained flat so they could house refugees. Over the years they hosted families from Bosnia, Ethiopia and Iraq, over 50 people in total.

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[14] "Ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia," 45

Alan would welcome them at the airport and bring them home where Betty was ready to welcome them with a cuppa. Betty helped them to learn English, enrol their children in school, open bank accounts and settle into Australian life. The new arrivals were supported to find work, and encouraged to find something of value in their new world. Many of the refugees hosted by Betty and Alan consider them to be family. On February 9, 2014, Betty celebrated 60 years of service as a Presbyterian Deaconess and then a Deacon in the Uniting Church. Instead of gifts on the day, a collection was taken to support asylum seekers, refugees and detainees. At the celebration, the hymn 'Community of Christ' was sung, which had also been sung at Betty's ordination as a Uniting Church Deacon. It aptly summed up Betty's ministry over the 60 years, with "one foot in the Church, and one foot in the community.[15]"

As their health declined Betty and Alan moved into a retirement village. Betty continued to be a regular attender at many UCA events – ordinations, inductions, special services, Presbytery and Synod meetings. When she could no longer drive, she gave her car away to a family who had lost their car in the Yarloop bushfires. In 2022, Betty and Alan moved into a nursing home, and only a few weeks later Betty died on 19th July, 2022. Her health had been deteriorating for many years, but she never lost her spirit, nor her Deacon's heart. She knew the essence of what it meant to be in diaconal ministry and lived out her call to be of service to the outsider, the disadvantaged, the stranger, the isolated, victims of violence and injustice, and those on the edges of church and society.

Betty is survived by her husband Alan, her children Ian and Tina, six grandchildren and an extended network of people who named her 'mother'. Deacons around Australia honour her as a pioneer in diaconal ministry. She will be deeply missed. 'Always of service to our Lord, now in his care'.

[15] "Engagement with Betty Matthews," *Pipeline* June 2014, 8

Preaching as an Exercise in Telling the Time: what stays the same when everything changes

E. Craig Thompson

Abstract

Contemporary awareness of the speed of historical change raises the question of how preaching might change in response. This paper acknowledges the importance of context but argues that, across changing historical contexts, faith identifies a constancy of human being which derives from God's own constancy. Two important texts for theological anthropology are scrutinised to demonstrate Scripture's attention to change and stability in the human being. Attention to changing times needs also consideration of the kind of time within which God moves, and the relationship between God's time and created time. Preaching, working as it does to inter-relate our experience of time with God's timeliness, becomes a matter of time-telling: reclaiming the changing times as always God's own.

Vivaldi and the one great sermon

The music of classical composer Antonio Vivaldi enjoyed a remarkable rise in popularity in the 1950s. Somewhat irritated by this, the modern composer Igor Stravinsky is said to have declared, "Vivaldi did not write 400 concertos; he wrote one concerto 400 times" (others attribute the remark to Luigi Dallapiccola). Stravinsky knew more about such things than most of us and so he might be granted his thesis. At the same time, many would agree with the rejoinder, "Well, yes. But it was a *really good* concerto." The argument in what follows is that, as it was for Vivaldi, so it is for sermons.

This article is adapted from my presentation to the 2021 Uniting Church "Preachfest" conference (NSW/ACT Synod – Sydney/Canberra). The conference organisers invited contributors to reflect on preaching "through the lens of COVID, political changes, environmental concerns, culture changes, local needs and the many other contextual realities of our time and place." As important as attention to our particular time and place is to a sermon worth preaching, my offering here focusses on what stays the same in preaching across changing times. Key to this is thinking will be theological anthropology, with particular reference to the human being's double existence in created time (including changing times) and *coram Deo*, within God's peculiar time.

It is undeniable that the world is in a stage of great social and political flux. Our sense of "normal" is under assault from such experiences as the COVID-19 pandemic, the anticipated changes in our climate over the next few generations, the social and political ramifications of #MeToo and similar gender- and

identity-related movements, and the resurgence of right-wing extremism and many other social and political developments. It is also undeniable such developments have made or will yet make many changes to what we do and what we can expect in the future. In that respect, what greets us each new day will be different and will demand of us new things, constituting for us a "new normal." The question for the preacher to consider is whether human beings themselves are fundamentally changed by such shifts in the conditions under which we live. This question matters because there is a risk that, in our preaching, we allow the context too much sway in what is proclaimed. The apparently universal significance of the shifts around us has the capacity to challenge and displace other universalities at play in proclamation. Certainly, we are what we are, in part, because of our environment, so that when our environment changes, something about us changes. To the extent that we change, so too do our expectations and what might be expected of us. So too, then, might preaching be expected to change. Yet there are aspects of preaching which do not change with the changing of the times. One indication of this is that proclamation begins with the biblical text, despite its great antiquity and thus also its historical and cultural distance from our present times. The preacher presumes a connection, across a great expanse of time and space, between the scriptural text and our own present lives. In the following, my interest will be in what stays the same for preaching when everything changes. While many things are shifting around us, it will be argued that there have not been, and will not be, any *evangelically* significant changes to the norms of life together and so to what must be preached. Whatever is changing around us, nothing fundamental has changed or can be expected to change, so far as the substantial work of the sermon is concerned. Like Vivaldi, the preacher's work is that of singing the same song 400, or 1000, or 2000, different ways. This being the case, what finally matters is not the changing of the tempo and key in which our particular times are set but that, across those changing features, the preacher sings One Really Good Song, preaches One Really Good Sermon.

It will be clear that this thesis is to be argued from the core of Christian confession rather than from headlines or other accounts of the world isolated from Christian experience. I will need to touch upon the interplay of categories of change, time, history, Christian anthropology and the doctrine of creation, and these informed by the experience of salvation in Jesus. The argument in all this will be that, despite the differences we see in each other on account of historical change – to which we must respond – preaching presumes a fundamental sameness about each of us which is pertinent to the question of the relationship between preaching and changes in our social and political context. This sameness across historical difference is recognised in the Uniting Church's own *Basis of Union*, which acknowledges that "the Church is able to endure through the changes of history only because its Lord comes, addresses, and deals with people in and through the news of his completed work." [1] In this gracious approach and address – not least through preaching – we experience God's living Word in "fresh" words and deeds which changing "occasion" demands.[2]

[1] Uniting Church in Australia, "Basis of Union Revised 1992 /Edition, paragraph 4," Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, accessed December 2, 2022, https://assembly.uca.org.au/basis-of-union.

[2] *Basis of Union*, paragraph 11.

Preaching and the changing changeless human being

When we ask about what we should be preaching "now", we flag our sensitivity to the changes occurring around us. It matters, however, whether the difference between a new context and a previous context – the difference itself – is fundamentally different from any other historical change we have seen. Is this historical period differently different from every other historical difference? Is there something fundamentally new in the changes we are experiencing – so new that we are fundamentally changed on account of them? Historical study has led some to conclude that history's first lesson is that no one learns history's lessons.[3] This might be enough evidence that the human being does not change through history – at least that the human is given to repeating history's mistakes – drawn from historical observation itself. However, the concern here is preaching and its underlying sense for the human, and so attention must be given to theological anthropology. Such anthropology considers not only historical observation but also the light of the gospel. I turn, then, to an account of one part of Christian anthropology pertinent to a theology of preaching.[4] While this will necessarily be brief, its purpose is to illustrate, as core to Christian confession, that the human being is most fundamentally a being *coram Deo* – a life deriving from, and ultimately destined for, God.[5]

What is "in" the human being (John 2:23–25)

I will sketch this Christian anthropology from two scriptural texts which treat the human being in universal terms.[6] The first comes from John's gospel:

> When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about [humanity]; for he himself knew what was in [humanity]. (John 2:23–25 NRSV.)
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> [NB: the Greek *anthropos* is rendered here "humanity" to capture the collective sense of the word rather than the individualised reading – "what was in each person" – possible from the "everyone" in the NRSV].

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3 Cf. Aldous Huxley, *Collected Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 308.

4 On the general importance of a theological anthropology for preaching, with particular reference to the situation of the human being in the midst of law and gospel, see David J. Lose, "Luther & Calvin on Preaching to the Human Condition," *Lutheran Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1996): 281–318

5 Though brief, what follows is mindful of the breadth of work on Christian anthropology available in many more substantial biblical and dogmatic treatments. Among these could be named Jason Maston and Benjamin E. Reynolds, *Anthropology and New Testament Theology, Library of New Testament Studies* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2018), Udo Schnelle, *The Human Condition: Anthropology in the Teachings of Jesus, Paul, and John* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1974) and many comprehensive systematic theologies.

6 While it might seem too easy to propose a theology of the human being on the basis of just two texts, the intention here is not to develop an anthropology from proof texts but to illustrate the applicability of the coram Deo understanding of human being to a reading of these texts, which understanding prevenes the texts. This prevening anthropology is ultimately Christocentric and, so, is not simply historically prior to the texts but controlled by the Christological heart of the church's understanding of God and the world. Any sameness at the heart of preaching echoes Christ's enduring identity as the defining place of the human and the divine. Cf. Marc Cortez, *Christological Anthropology in Historical Perspective: Ancient and Contemporary Approaches to Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan), 16–22 on the centrality of Christology to Christian anthropology; Cortez' study illustrates different ways in which this centrality has been developed in theological anthropology according to particular historical concerns and needs.

My interest here is in the meaning of what Jesus "knows". It is important that John does not give us here Jesus' "opinion" about people. As commentary on the action, John's statement identifies something which the gospel holds we all have in common: we are "known" by Jesus. Precisely what John's Jesus knows to be "in" us is not explicit. Curiously, this question does not get much attention in the critical commentaries, which tend to focus on the simple asymmetry that Jesus does not trust those who have – at this point, at least, and on the basis of "the signs" – trusted him. From this observation, exegetes then wonder whether a point is made here about the adequacy of faith which (as it must at this point of the narrative) rests only on signs.[7] It remains, however, that v.25 concerns itself not with the adequacy of faith based on signs but on Jesus' own knowing "what was in humanity"; the passage allows a distinction between these believers – whatever the quality of their faith – and *anthropos* in general. This is to say that, for John, Jesus' "knowing" has to do with his identity itself – over against the identity of all others – and is not reflexive on opinions about him.[8] The human being, then, is defined as a whole in relation to the Jesus-who-knows. While this defining knowledge is somewhat negative at this point, the negativity is less important than its universality: human being is treated as a whole, independently of everything about the particular times and spaces, bodies and personalities, or belief and unbelief which differentiate us from each other. Standing as it does within the same covers as the affirmation that all human beings are created after the image of God (Genesis 1.26f), John's declaration has the same kind of status. What Jesus knows about us and what Genesis knows about us participate in each other and are together part of a theologically-informed anthropology which is a basic assumption of the work of preaching: this is the kind of creature towards which preaching is directed. John's point in telling us what Jesus "knew" is to locate Jesus in relation to us all in the same way. The implication here is that there is a "human nature", within and across our personal and historical differences, to which the proclaimed Jesus is oriented. This human nature, stretching across our many historical particularities, is crucial for any assessment of the task of preaching in changing times. The sermon must "know" its hearers in a way that resonates with what John says about Jesus' knowledge of us.[9]

Human difference and sameness (Galatians 3:28)

Of course, however convenient John's implied universal anthropology might be in its reduction of all human particularity to a common core, we *are* historically particular. This is not denied by Christian confession. John's universalism can be complemented by a statement from Paul – Galatians 3.28. Paul wrestles here with the significance of historical particularity for that oneness of human being he also sees to be central to the work of God in Jesus. The pressing particularities for the letter itself are those which distinguish Jews from Gentiles. Paul generalises in the middle of the letter by invoking other recognised human differences:

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[7] It is difficult to demonstrate briefly what the commentaries to not say about a text. For a survey of treatments of v.25, see Zane Clark Hodges, "Untrustworthy Believers: John 2:2325," *Bibliotheca sacra* 135, no. 538 (1978): 139–52 and Nicolas Farelly, "John 2:23-25: What Kind of Faith Is This?" *Presbyterion* 30, no. 1 (2004): 37–45. Yet, while these analyses dismiss the possibility that John considers a belief on the basis of Jesus' signs to be inadequate, they still consider the meaning of v.25 to be commentary on the various qualities of faith – that there is saving faith based on signs which is as yet immature and so untrustworthy.

[8] Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), 1.127

[9] For a more positive – but no less universal – reading of Jesus' anthropology, cf. Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, "Jesus' 'Conception of Man' as an Expression of His 'Ethics'," in *Moral Language in the New Testament: The Interrelatedness of Language and Ethics in Early Christian Writings* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010). Niebuhr's analysis identifies, as indicators of a universal anthropology in Jesus' teaching, themes of creation, covenant and eschatology in the synoptic accounts of his proclamation of the kingdom of God. For an account of Jesus' apparent sense for the human, complementary to Niebuhr's but in different categories, cf. also Schnelle, *The Human Condition*, 11-36. It is important that Christian anthropology begins with the positive experience and affirmation that God has acted in Jesus Christ for the salvation of all humankind (cf. Schnelle, *The Human Condition*, 5). This is to say that, whatever negative connotation the concept of a "human condition" might have, this condition is only fully revealed in the light of a saving work which has already overcome the problematic condition.

not only Jew and Gentile but male and female, slave and free – and his point could be extended by adding other similar couplets. While Paul prefaces these dualities with "there is *no longer*…Jew or Gentile, male and female, slave or free" (Galatians 3.28), his point is not to dissolve those differentiating aspects of our identity but to place them in a common orientation: in our differences, we are all aligned to the one Christ.[10] Christ spans and incorporates our difference from each other, and this common incorporation has meaning for our actions and relationships. In this way, Paul respects both the plurality and the unity of human being.

We might call the differences between each other – here and now in a shared time – "synchronic" differences. Paul argues that Christ binds us here and now in one community with its shared time, synchronically: you Gentiles there in Galatia and those Jews in Jerusalem. Paul also operates, however, with the assumption that Christ binds us diachronically – across time, or historically. As we in our difference here and now are all properly oriented towards each other in Christ, so also does this happen between us in our time and others in their times. Paul's appeal to the experience of Abraham only serves his argument to the extent that Paul's contemporaries are *like* Abraham in some essential way, even 1500 years later: it worked for Abraham and so also will it work for you, because *God's* being and way are constant across that historical difference.[11] In the same way, Paul's argument is only useful to *us* another 2000 years later on the same assumption: Abraham believed and God reckoned it as righteousness, and God does the same for us today when we believe. The stability across this historical difference is Godself, and we human beings living *coram Deo*, before God.

To summarise what I have drawn from these texts: while the scriptural witness recognises real differences between us and between our times, it also identifies a fundamental sameness across those times and individual personal identities. Paul connects our diachronic and synchronic histories to the Jesus who, in John's terms, knows what is "in" us, for all of our individuality and difference in and through history. Paul and John make the same kind of statement about what we are, Paul making the point positively and John making it negatively – at least in the texts I have just examined. This characterisation of human being, of course, can be rejected for whatever reason.[12] The argument here is not that this is a broadly acceptable assessment of what we are, but only that it is the scriptural assessment with which wider Christian doctrine about human being resonates.[13] As previously noted, the very fact that preachers continue to read and expound the Scriptures is the clearest evidence that they and their congregations expect to be addressed by the same God in ways resonant with God's address to those whose stories appear in the Bible, despite its obvious historical particularity and foreignness to our present particulars. Something stays the same across all that is different between them and us.

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[10] Dunn, for example, concurs with this this broadly accepted reading (cf. James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black's New Testament Commentaries ([Peabody, Ma.]: Hendrickson, 2002), 205-208).

[11] Cf. Galatians 3.6-14 and Romans 4.

[12] Postmodern accounts of the human being tend towards a radicalizing of human difference, such that a common being human – or human condition – is denied. From a Christian anthropological point of view, however, this is just to assert particularity over universality – a dualism faith holds to have been overcome in the human particularity of the theologically (universally) determinative Jesus. Cf. O. Wesley Allen, Jr., "Preaching and the Human Condition," *Encounter* 75, no. 3 (2015): 57f.

[13] This point could be made in more dogmatic terms. Hauerwas' assertion that "the subject of every sermon is the Triune God", for example, similarly makes all sermons "the same" in their orientation of the human towards the God who is "the same" yesterday, today and forever (Stanley Hauerwas, *Without Apology: Sermons for Christ's Church* (New York, New York: Seabury Books, 2013), xxiii). Walter Brueggemann makes a similar point in characterizing the preaching of the prophets, who address the people's "enduring and resilient" temptation to turn from their humanizing vocation (Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Fortress, 1978), 13).

Preaching as telling the time

Our interest in this discussion is the human being within historical change, and this in relation to the task of preaching. It (almost) goes with saying that change is a temporal category. To recognise historical change is to feel ourselves now to be in a different time, not in the quantitative sense that more time has passed since last we thought to consider it but in the qualitative sense that this is a new experience of time, a new experience of ourselves. The change which constitutes this new experience could be anything: the birth of a child, getting married, falling ill, changing jobs or finding ourselves bereaved. It could also be life post-COVID-19, life post-icecap, or life in the midst of post-colonial, post-patriarchal or post-Christian sensitivities. It follows from the temporal nature of change that "normal" is also a temporal category. "Normal" is an experienced steadiness in the quality of our time – in our experience of our time – an absence of change, for whatever reason, in our relationships, expectations, hopes and fears. To speak of a "new normal" is to recognise our having entered a new steadiness in temporal experience. The notions of change and normality are, then, concerned with *telling the time*.

When we experience a change in our times, the temptation is strong to ask the changeable world what time it now is and then to proclaim accordingly: It was a time of unchallenged colonial domination, now it is not. What shall I preach? It was a time of peace, and now it is not. What shall I preach? It was a time of large congregations, and now it is not. What shall I preach? On this understanding, our experienced normal is the measure of the times until the normal changes. Yet, to allow the changing world to tell us the time is to risk building our understanding of preaching on the assumption that our experience of time's stability and changeability is time itself. To recall the brief sketch of Christian anthropology above, this would be to focus solely on the varying shape of human being, overlooking what is constant; it would be to know that we are historically fluid but not to know whether there is a stability across all human forms and shapes.

Central to preaching's work as time-telling is the very timeliness (temporality) of God, and a sideways glance towards the doctrine of creation will assist here. Pertinent in this doctrine is that the time we know is itself created. God does not create *in* time – within a neutral temporal matrix containing God and to which God adds all the stuff that we are. God creates "with" time. This somewhat clumsy locution ("with") is intended to capture that our created time is properly a participation in divine time, a sharing in God's own divine time: God times the world out of (or within) God's own timeliness. We might even imagine God's own timeliness as being instrumental ("with") in creation, the possibility of created timeliness. The act of creation *temporises* the deep, void nothing upon which God acts in creation. Our time, then, has its fundamental temporal character not in itself but within God's own timeliness, with the corollary that God is not bound by our time or our experience of it.

Preaching calls us back to this temporal dynamic of creation. This is to say that what I've just claimed about the temporalising effect of the creative act – that creation times us in accord with God's own timeliness – applies also to *re*-creation, which is the business of preaching. For the doctrine of creation is not only (or even properly) about the first things, any more than eschatology is only (or even properly) about the last things. Re-creation – variously manifesting as resurrection, conversion or salvation – is a temporalising event within which the world is re-timed by a return (however passing) to our share in God's own timeliness.

In this way, re-creation participates in the "primal" creative moment and, just so, re-times us and our experience of the world. It might seem better to say that re-creation brings a *new* time into being or *renews* (the old) time, and this would be permissible.[14] Yet, it is crucial that we do not force too hard a distinction between the renewal of hearts and minds in time (now) and the creation of time we associate with the "first" creation.[15] To the extent that an experience of salvation is a return to an appropriate timing of ourselves and God, creation and salvation are the "same" thing. Preaching is oriented toward this *creat*ive renewal of time.

To put this as succinctly as possible, the evangelical answer to the changing-times-induced question, "What time is it?", is, "It is God's time." To declare this is to challenge any other time-tellings. Preaching is such an exercise in telling the time, which brings us back to the judgement on Vivaldi. In whatever time or space, whatever key or tempo, this is the preacher's one Really Good Song, or Sermon: "God is the time of our lives."[16]

Preaching God as the time of our lives

The changes we see or long to see around us – our needs and desires, our joys and celebrations, our grief and guilt, our fears and hopes – are what we bring to the *hearing* of a sermon. These are our shape and form, our particular embodiment. The question a good sermon invites us to entertain is whether an embodiment – any embodiment – can bear the divine and so goes deeper that its changeable surface. As it happens, the church's confession bears witness to one such God-bearing embodiment in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In Jesus' uslike form – in his particular set of historical, temporal relations – the church recognises a way of being which *changed* those relations, while remaining in its own form. The sermon should open to us the possibility that our particular personal shape, our historical form, might bear God in the same kind of way. The sermon claims us and our time as God's own and, in this way seeks to re-temporalise the world by changing what passes between persons and, in this, by changing history. The sermon seeks this effect by relating our different historical particulars and our common human being *coram Deo* in a process similar to what a poet does in re-grammaring mundane language towards a revelation. The poet takes familiar words and subjects them to a surprising but enlivening new grammar and, so, reveals more than we had previously seen. The art of preaching is one is taking our familiar times and subjecting them to the illuminating grammar of the gospel in such a way as to renew our experience of our time, by changing the quality of our relationships and so changing our experience of change. To tell the time with a sermon is to characterise what is presently passing between us and to propose what, by the grace of God, could be passing between us. The sermon, then, does not merely preach into a new normal arising out of shifting historical circumstances. If we who preach are paying attention to the world around us, preaching "into" happens as a matter of course. More importantly, the sermon preaches *a* new normal – a new time – which meets our varying normals and transforms them. To tell the time in the preaching sense is, then, to change the

[14] Cf. William H. Willimon, "Time Made Strange: Preaching in Ordinary Time," *Interpretation* 67 (2013): "our ordinary is made extraordinary when God shows up", 268.

[15] This linking of preaching and creation could be read as an exegesis of the activity of God summarised in Romans 4.17: God is the one "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist", a curious inversion of the creation-resurrection order.

[16] It should be clear that the "one" of the sermon is not a rhetorical unity for communication's sake – that any sermon have *a* single point to keep it simple for the listener (as expounded and challenged, for example, in Abraham Kuruvilla, "Time to Kill the Big Idea?: A Fresh Look at Preaching," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61[2018]: 825-846) The point here is a dogmatic one and not the (helpful) rhetorical one.

time. Preaching changes the time by reorienting the temporal human agents in the congregation towards the gift of God's peculiar timeliness.

More concretely, preaching seeks to liberate us from the overlords and fears which are part of our Godless experience of time – history as mere capricious changeability. I invoke Paul again here, once more from the letter to the Galatians (4.1-11). In his description of the fundamental shift into free responsibility before God which takes place through the gospel, Paul casts "law" as a kind of nanny or tutor for minors yet to enter into their majority and inheritance as truly free people. To begin with the changeable times as they are generally experienced is to risk subjecting ourselves to just this kind of limiting oversight – to Paul's elemental spirits, *stoicheia* – in which the times tell us what we should be doing. Against this, Paul declares that life in Christ is life sharing in Jesus' own inheritance, his freedom, his open relationship to God and to those around him: Jesus is given as our fundamental temporal reality. To begin here is not to ignore the pressing issues of our time or the needs of our neighbour. It is simply to engage with such ever-shifting historical realities in a particular way – out of the freedom and responsibility of the children of God and their norm and timeliness, and not out of the constraints the changeable world seems to impose on us. This is what stays the same when everything changes, the One Really Good Sermon of the Christian preacher at any time: *God* is the time of our lives and, in this, ours is the freedom of the children of God, whatever time it seems to be.

Reviews

DIANNE RAYSON, *Bonhoeffer and Climate Change: Theology and Ethics for the Anthropocene*, Lexington Books/Fortress Academic (ISBN: 978-1-9787-0183-0)

Dianne Rayson's book, *Bonhoeffer and Climate Change: Theology and Ethics for the Anthropocene*, is a fine academic work. The text is a carefully researched and clear articulation of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology. Beyond that, it is an excellent resource to guide Christian ethical responses to the most complex and important issue facing the 21st century.

The work is structured along three primary movements. First, Rayson provides a clear articulation of Bonhoeffer's Christology, highlighting his portrayal of Christ as the centre of all existence (Chapters 1–3). She then illumines the significance of Christ's existence at the centre of reality. She does so by considering Bonhoeffer's account of the interconnected relationships between God, creaturekind, and the Earth and their reconciliation in Christ (Chapters 4–6). The text concludes as she develops the ethical implications for humanity's responsible, burden-bearing relationship with the rest of (living and non-living) creation (Chapters 7–8). The text's flow of argument is sound and intuitive, meticulously researched, and compelling. As such, *Bonhoeffer and Climate Change* is an important intellectual contribution for three primary reasons.

In the first instance, Rayson provides a careful reading of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology and helps her readers navigate one of the more difficult dynamics within Bonhoeffer studies – namely demonstrating a fundamental continuity within Bonhoeffer's thought from the early works through to the prison correspondence. Scholars are increasingly portraying Bonhoeffer's theological corpus as a unified whole which developed along a continuous trajectory, and *Bonhoeffer and Climate Change* is a fine example of such work.

Rayson uses the lenses of Christology and relationship to make her case, drawing upon Clifford Green's concept of sociality within Bonhoeffer's theology. Careful readings of Bonhoeffer's wider corpus, including close readings of both *Creation and Fall* and his 1932 essay "Thy Kingdom Come!", helpfully illustrate how Bonhoeffer understood this web of reconciled relationships to extend to all living and non-living creation. This allows her to illuminate the significance of Jesus of Nazareth's mediating presence within creation and thereby realign how humanity might consider itself in embedded relationship with God, all earthlings, and creation (thus overtly including all flora, fauna, and the Earth herself). From the very beginning through to his final words, Bonhoeffer consistently spoke of Christ's reconciling work for *all creation*; Rayson shows herself to be a careful Bonhoeffer reader as she draws our attention to this truth.

This careful reading allows Rayson's work to expand its significance for wider engagement within Bonhoeffer studies, pointing to the second reason this is an important work. The text brings Bonhoeffer's theological lens to bear upon a contemporary issue without co-opting his voice as if he addressed the topic himself. This is very difficult. Put another way, Rayson never attempts to paint Dietrich Bonhoeffer to be an environmentalist (he was not) whilst demonstrating his theological paradigm (what Clifford Green has called *"Christus in Mundo, Christus pro Mundo"*) to be remarkably helpful in guiding ecotheological work.

She demonstrates the salutary effects of Bonhoefferian ecotheological work by highlighting his Christology's significance for understanding interconnected relationships within creation. Specifically, Rayson highlights how Bonhoeffer's theological paradigm sidesteps traditional roadblocks within ecotheology, such as Genesis 1–3's problematic dominion language and how it often *necessarily* privileges humanity amongst all earthlings. This paradigm also provides a helpful lens to develop what she calls "Earthly Christianity" (itself a development on Bonhoeffer's concept of "worldly Christianity"). "Earthly Christianity" is a concept through which she helpfully redirects the church's attention toward responsible relationships with the Earth's entire bio-community, for their sake alone, despite costs which humanity might bear for the sake of the non-human Other. Consequently, *Bonhoeffer and Climate Change* is a fine example of what has been called "Third Generation" work in Bonhoeffer studies. Careful exegesis of his work and a deep grasp of his paradigm allows an emerging third generation of scholars to navigate to 21st century issues he could not have anticipated. Rayson indirectly speaks to this dynamic when she says, "The framework that Bonhoeffer provides to establish ethics is no less applicable to the problems of the Anthropocene than it was to his context of the problem of National Socialism" (224).

This points to the most significant contribution of Bonhoeffer and Climate Change. It is an excellent work of ecotheology in its own right. Beyond the fact that it is a fine interpretation and application of a very nuanced and complex theologian's work, Rayson's articulation of humanity as *Homo cosmicos* (both *belonging* to the world whilst being *citizens* of the world) is an important contribution to Christian engagement with the most significant crisis facing our shared Earth. Climate change is real, and the Anthropocene era is witnessing the destruction of land, sea, and creaturely existence at a catastrophic speed and scale. Christians have historically lacked an urgent and cohesive ethical impulse to compel the scale of sacrificial action required to address the impending climate crisis. We lack this impulse no longer. Dianne Rayson's work *Bonhoeffer and Climate Change: Theology and Ethics for the Anthropocene* is more than a Bonhoeffer book. This is a Christian ethic for the Anthropocene and has not arrived a moment too soon.

Joe McGarry

JIONE HAVEA, *Losing Ground: Reading Ruth in the Pacific*, SCM Press, 2021 (ISBN: 9780334059837)

Introduction – Fakahoha'a[1]

Losing Ground: Reading Ruth in the Pacific is a harvest of ripened fruits, honouring and celebrating the wisdom and insights of the people of Oceania. As the author notes:

> This work privileges the insights and wisdoms of Pasifika natives rather than (re)presents those insights as illustrations for foreign and western ideas and concepts, and the overall work affirms that Pasifika is collective. We are together small, but we are many…[R]eadings and theologies that claim to be of or from Pasifika need to be in collaboration and to embody communitarianism (238).

One of the vital subheadings which consistently occurs in every chapter is titled *Pasifikation*. The author and the Pasifika bible studies (PBS) create this space to highlight the vastness in collective thinking in Oceania and the complexities, and implication of such issues as climate change, colonisation, home and belongingness, sexual representations, toxic male masculinity and gender gaps. All these subjects matter and they are interwoven in talanoa with Ruth.[2] Collectivism here is a source of life which is strengthened, and passed down through story, telling and conversation. It is not about the individuals owning their talanoa, but rather, the community's contribution gives birth to shared wisdom. The editor and the PBS are advocates for the voices of "normal readers" to be taken seriously.[3] Nevertheless, normal people are far from simple. This reading of Ruth calls into account the visible and invisible colonial projects that are still functioning. The invitation here is not to tie a knot to the talanoa but to extend, thereby surpassing the so-called ends.

This paper offers a "reception" of *Losing Ground: Reading Ruth in the Pacific*, by the Rev. Dr Jione Havea. I offer a "reception" instead of a conventional book review for this collective piece is sacred, its contents flowing substances which extends beyond this limited textual space. On numerous occasions reception, in and outside Pasifika, presupposes there's an absence of push back and rejection, yet we are resistant to politics of the foreigner dumped and rooted in the moana. While sacredness is often assumed to be connected to the book of Ruth and the Canons (the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible, 4–10), in my reception i suggest, talanoa,[4] is sacred because of the bodies involved in the telling, re-telling and the invitation for further dialogue and pushing back on easy resolutions. Further, i imagine in the doing and being of the talanoa, with the Pasifika bible studies group. There would have been a richness of services, relationality, reciprocity and hospitality, shared wisdom, and a generosity of giftings in the event. Lastly, i am a kau'italanoa[5] to the fluidity of the talanoa mat laid out by those who have gone before me and within the talanoa of the Pasifika bible studies group. Nevertheless, the relationality, advocacy, persistence in this

[1] Fakahoha'a is often used in someone introductory speech to soften their greeting, hoha'a can mean worrying, disrupt or disturb. It is fitting in this paper because the PBS disrupts and pushes back on the non-natives.

[2] These studies were conducted by Havea at Pasifika communities in 2019-2020 (x) in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Nauru, Mā'ohi Nui, Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, and Tonga (22).

[3] The "normal people" in these studies, Havea notes, "were not trained in in theology or biblical studies, nor ventured beyond the shores of their home (is)lands. But their insights are creative and critical and, in my humble opinion, better than normal." (22). These "normal readers" are critical thinkers who open up interpretive limits." (xi).

[4] Talanoa is a word used in several (but not all) Pasifika islands to name three orali(zing) events-story, telling (of stories), and conversation (or weaving of stories and tellings).See (28-29).

[5] *Kau'i-talanoa* (literally, 'to join in the conversation') means to interrupt or break up a conversation. This is characteristically intrusive and is considered inappropriate because the one breaking the *talanoa* is not expected to speak, and often times deviated from the point of the conversation. On this see Nāsil Vaka'uta, "tālanga:theorizing a Tongan mode of interpretation," Talanoa Oceania, October 10, 2008, https://sites.google.com/a/nomoa.com/talanoa/Home/papers-presentations/nasili-talanga

work, invites and accommodates the voyages who participate in talanoa within and beyond the reefs!

Summary – Fakamā'opo'opo

The publication is a pioneering gift from the natives of Pasifika/Oceania for the normal readers of the Bible to share, inform and prioritise how islander criticism unfolds. The book consists of three main clusters: Welcoming Ruth, Pasifika Bible Studies, and the Interpretation Prolongs.

Welcoming Ruth provides two important elements on *Locating Ruth*, which highlight the book in the context of the Canons. Ruth interrupts and transitions the Judges (and those who "did what was right in their own eyes") to 1 Samuel. According to Havea, Ruth's place of reference in the Tanakh provokes: "the poetic and erotic terms in the Song of Songs which express delight with the body and sexuality" (5). Havea is thus "incited to sex up my reading…[T]his excitement is more about flirting (with rhetoric) than permeating (with force)" (5). The wailing and grief of Lamentations flows in with the author's own activism, particularly on the historical and the current dispossessions of land and inheritance in many parts of Pasifika and the rest of the world. Situating Ruth enables readers to pull apart the subjective agendas of the Judges and the descendants of 1 Samuel. This stretches the forced borderlines of biblical exegesis, to recognise readings "that are both right and left, top and bottom, for and against, side and side" (10). It incisively offers creative resistance, indicating that context is not limited to geography and location, rather we all bear several fluid contexts. In addition, the talanoa event reflects the consciences of advocacy and calls attention to the breadth of works achieved by other contextual leaders from motherlands that are habitually ignored by the dominant biblical scholarships.

The heart of the book launches in part 2 with the *Pasifika Bible Studies*, weaving orality and the oratory tradition together with Ruth. This gathering incarnates the many layers of fe'unu[6] which shapes the text and affirms the wisdom of the native participants who then bring the story, telling and the event to life. Ruth is divided into seven chapters: Migration and asylum 1:1–5, Remigration, and rejection 1:6–19a, Resettlement and (re)connecting 1:19b–2.7, Food and comfort 2:8–23, Home and belonging 3:1–15, Resolutions, and inheritance 3:16–4:11a, Roots and lineage 4:11b–22. I will focus on two, *Remigration and Rejection: Widows leave Moab and Resettlement and (Re)connecting*.

Ruth 1:6-19a Remigration and Rejection: Widows leave Moab.

One of the strengths of this event is the push back on the forceful nuisance of the narrator which often sedates us to overlook the important elements in the text. Readers are then exposed to the characters' "motivation for departure and feel the emotions that come with departure" (74). Nevertheless, the narrator's agenda is challenged by the PBS, using similar stories based on journey, migration, and remigration to continue without refraining. In this approach, they present a compelling case to slow down and be attentive to the subjectivity of the narrator's interest. The PBS confronts our blind spots and reconsiders the narrator's point of view.

Resettlement and (re)connecting: City buzzes over marred Naomi Ruth 1:19b-22

In the discussion of resettlement and (re) connecting, the PBS group calls to attention the lack of enthusiasm from Naomi on arrival. In spite of that, there is a double standard and a selectiveness on who receives empathy from the PBS. We don't know enough about the lifestyle and situation for Naomi and Elimelek when they lived in Moab, and

[6] Fe'unu is Tongan for the dried material made from pandanus leaves for mat weaving. It is the individual strand woven together with other fe'unu and together they form and shape the mat or fala. Every fe'unu is to be carefully parted (tohi) so that it is equally aligned with all the other fe'unu for weaving.

it is common to be in grief and to show anger after losing a husband and two sons! The PBS view of Naomi demonstrates insensitivity to her grief and anger. In my opinion, as a Tongan woman, our kainga (community and family) and fonua (land, people, womb and home) is where we claim our space and have the freedom to release our anger and grief! This insensitivity also contradicts the PBS's interest in recognising the forgotten subjects and characters, as they ignore the context Naomi carries with her on arrival.

Oceania is commonly perceived as embracing, relational, peaceful, reciprocal. This is strongly emphasised in the PBS gathering. The point needs to be made that our Pasifika-Oceania values should never be undervalued nor should it preclude one's grief and anger. In Tonga, some of the women of the city are classed as displaying a high level of self-importance compared to women from outside of town. There is history and agendas behind the lay and weaving of a lei[7] on one's homecoming, meaning there is nothing innocent about a group of women of the city welcoming one of their own! An invitation for talanoa is to honour and normalise the emotions of anger and grief, so often undervalued and demonised, as essential parts of someone's migration, settlement, and homecoming experience. i suggest, a thorough exploration and talanoa on what the homecoming carries in their bodies, luggage, perceptions, gender, age etc. What are the expectations of the ones at home on the arrivals?

Interpretation Prolongs

The last section is a companion to the PBS titled *Interpretation Prolongs*. By not grounding Ruth, the editor and the PBS extends the talanoa with reading humilities! This section weaves together themes of humility, invitation, obligation, release, and earth. These readings describe the rationales of the PBS's emphasis on subjects and characters such as Ruth and Orpah. Despite the fact that the PBS bible studies has been written in an easy-to read style stressing the inter-disciplinary approach to the characters and subjects, this is an invitation to (re)commit and (re)oblige, to other characters and subjects. In doing so, we refuse to conclude Ruth's talanoa with a euphemism in focusing on just the subjects and characters who have been ignored by the narrator. Rather, talanoa here is calling out that there is always room for more and we need to be mindful of that fluid space!

I applaud the persistency and efforts in this pioneering work because the setting has always been ripe to participate in talanoa. Whether we are grounded or ready to be enriched and renewed in losing ground!

Tau'alofa Anga'aelangi

[7] A garland or special necklace presented or lay upon guest, foreigners or a family member on any special occasion.

Contributors

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Sandy Boyce is an ordained minister, serving as a Deacon, in the Uniting Church in Australia. She offers leadership in Diakonia in the UCA (DUCA), the national group for Deacons and Deacon candidates in the Uniting Church. Since 2013 She has been President, DIAKONIA World Federation, a community of diaconal associations around the world. Sandy has served in a number of ministry roles in the UCA. Most recently, she served in a ministry placement at Pilgrim Uniting Church in Adelaide (Tarndanya) for 12 years. She currently lives in Melbourne (Naarm) where she is working as the Executive Officer, Victorian Council of Churches.

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CONTENTS

5 **EDITORIAL**

GENERAL ARTICLES

9 America's Wild West in Kangaroo Flat: Methodist masculinity, heroism and violence
Kerrie Handasyde

21 The Ecclesiology of a Covenanting and Multicultural Church
Michelle Cook

UNITED AND UNITING CHURCHES

33 Toward a Chinese Theology of Unity: the formation and the theological basis of the Chinese Uniting Church since 1950
Wen Ge

REFLECTIONS AND PROVOCATIONS

43 "The Mission Myth" 25 years later
John T. Squires and Elizabeth Raine

51 "Pathfinder and Pioneer": a tribute to Betty Matthews, the Uniting Church's first ordained deacon
Sandy Boyce

59 Preaching as an Exercise in Telling the Time: what stays the same when everything changes
E Craig Thompson

REVIEWS

67 Dianne Rayson, Bonhoeffer and Climate Change: Theology and Ethics for the Anthropocene, Lanham MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Press, 2021.
Joe McGarry

69 Jione Havea, Losing Ground: Reading Ruth in the Pacific, London: SCM Press, 2021.
Tau'alofa Anga'aelangi

72 CONTRIBUTORS

74 ABOUT UNITING CHURCH STUDIES