UNITING CHURCH STUDIES

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THEOLOGICAL CULTURE

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REVIEWS

Editorial

Geoff Thompson

This issue of *Uniting Church Studies* is being published at a time when the Uniting Church in Australia, via the Act2 project and its proposals to the 17th Assembly meeting in July 2024, is in the process of making significant decisions oriented towards ordering its life in ways that foster renewal in faith and witness.[1] One of the issues which the Act2 project has brought to the fore is the idea of the Uniting Church's "theological culture." This is not a widely-used term, but the Act2 project offered a working definition: "The theological culture of the Uniting Church is that network of practices, institutions and texts which resource, sustain and extend the Uniting Church's particular conversations, doctrinal decisions and prophetic speech about God, Christ and the world."[2] An open invitation was then extended to Uniting Church members to engage this definition by submitting papers on the topic. This invitation was taken up by a wide range of UCA members and their diverse contributions were published on the Act2 website.[3] Given the fruitfulness of the invitation and the potential the papers to foster further conversations around the topic, an invitation was extended to all the authors to re-work their papers and submit them for inclusion in this journal. A number did, and of those submitted, three have been included in this issue as its Themed Articles. Sally Douglas, Peter Lockhart and David MacGregor have written, respectively, on ways of approaching the bible and theology, the ministry of preaching, and the significance of worship 'song'. Each of them focuses on a particular practice or cluster of practices that are common across the Uniting Church, and each paper provides stimulation for further thinking about how this Church does indeed "extend" its thinking and speaking "about God, Christ and the world." It is likely that the conversation about the Church's theological culture will continue. The journal will welcome further papers on this topic.

Each of the three General Articles directly address a particular issue in the life of the Uniting Church. Chris Budden's "A Brief History of the Construction of the Preamble" offers a first-hand account of the construction of the Revised Preamble to the Church's Constitution in 2009. The paper orients itself to these two questions: Why was a new Preamble needed? and How was that Preamble negotiated and constructed as an alternative narrative of belonging in the Uniting Church? Against the background of the struggles for the Uniting Church to truly live out of the Covenant with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congresss, the production of the Preamble, Budden writes, "was a struggle over the control of knowledge, who determines identity, who can belong and under what conditions, whether God allows multiple stories and knowing, and how land matters to our relationship with God." The paper will be an essential reference point as the Uniting Church continues to engage this seminal and powerful document.

Neil Pembroke's "From Conflict to Community: theological reflection on the Team Confrontation Method" takes a method developed for organisational intervention in "situations of poor communication lack of

[1] See "Act2: Shaping the future Uniting Church," Act2, accessed May 25, 2024, https://act2uca.com/.
[2] See Andrew Johnson, "Unpacking our Theological Culture," Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, accessed May 25, 2024, https://uniting.church/unpacking-theological-culture/
[3] The collection is available at "Reflections on the theological culture of the Uniting Church," Act2, Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, accessed June 6 2024, https://act2uca.com/category/theological-culture/

trust, and factionalism" into a hypothetical Uniting Church context. In his adaptation of the method to this context, Pembroke draws on the covenantal and lament traditions of Israel. The article will be a useful resource for many situations in the Uniting Church where poor communication, lack of trust and factionalism are not unknown.

Stephen Burns' "Manual Acts, Mass Confusion?" addresses the tensions existing in the Uniting Church surrounding manual acts at holy communion. Burns addresses these tensions by calling for the abandonment of "clericalised approaches" to holy communion and by reminding his readers of the statement in *Uniting in Worship 2* that "the congregation is not an audience." The paper is, in short, a "proposal about how presiders at holy communion might enact their role" in such a way that they are "in solidarity with the other presiders present (i.e. the congregation)." Burns' proposals could enrich the participation of all the people of God in holy communion.

The focus of the latest in the series of papers on United and Uniting Churches is the United Church of Canada. Its author is one of that church's influential theologians, Professor Don Schweitzer. After offering a brief history of the UCC's origins, Schweitzer goes on to outline some of the theologies which have emerged post-union. The overlap between those theologies and those which have emerged in the Uniting Church in Australia after its union are striking. Schweitzer's analysis of his own church's theology has much relevance to the task of analysing and understanding the various similar theological developments in the Uniting Church over the last 47 years.

The focus of the Book Forum in this issue is Willie James Jennings' *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*. This book has drawn much attention in the global community of theological education through its challenges to the colonialism and racism built into the structures of theological education. Although drawing heavily on his own experiences in American institutions of theological education, Jennings' book has resonated amongst teachers and students well beyond his context. This resonance is evident in the responses to the book from the three Uniting Church theological teachers and scholars who have responded to the book in this Forum: Monica Jyotsna Melancthon, Sean Winter and Toar Hutagalung. Each has experience of theological education outside Australia and bring the challenges of *After Whiteness*, some of them quite confronting, to bear on the Uniting Church's practices of theological education. I hope to include Professor Jennings own response to the reviewers in the next issue.

Two reviews round off the issue. Michael Earl reviews *For I Was Hungry: Congregations and Church Agencies in Relationship*, edited by John Flett. Emerging from a conference held in Melbourne in 2016, the book is a collection of essays which in Earl's words address "this tension-laden context of the church's life." Liam Miller reviews David Bentley Hart's *Tradition and Apoclaypse: An Essay on the Future of Christian Belief*. Although noting that Hart's rhetorical style can be jarring, Miller commends Hart's argument that "a proper understanding of the life of tradition frees one from the delusion that change is a scandal." Both books warrant careful engagement from within the Uniting Church.

Say What? The Ineffable within the theological culture of the Uniting Church

Sally Douglas

Abstract

After noting some common criticisms and caricatures of the Uniting Church's theology, this paper contributes to the discussion on the UCA's theological culture by proposing that this culture has an "ineffable texture." The origins and gifts of this ineffability – or speechlessness – are located in the central place given to Jesus Christ, the Word, in the *Basis of Union* and how this, in turn, invites particular understandings of and approaches to the bible and theology. In order to attend to both the gifts and the shadows of this aspect of the UCA's theological culture, it is argued that priority needs to be given to cultivating communities of rigorous engagement, contemplation, and testimony.

Introduction

It is not uncommon to hear claims about the Uniting Church that go something like this: "The Uniting Church does not have a theology," or "the Uniting Church does not take the bible seriously," or "the Uniting Church just goes along with the latest trend or social justice agenda." What do such claims say about the theological culture of the Uniting Church? How do such claims relate to that "network of practices, institutions, and texts" that form our DNA as a denomination?[1] For the purposes of this article, I am not interested in the debates in which such assertions have been made by people within the Uniting Church, and in other denominations. Rather I am seeking to step back and notice these recurring claims and wonder why such assertions are made. Does this occur because the Uniting Church has had courage to publicly engage with the implications of the bible, theology, and the human person in relation to various social issues? Does such dismissal of the Uniting Church emerge because our church has come to different conclusions about such issues as the ordination of women, marriage equality, or the Voice to Parliament? Could it be true that the Uniting Church does not take the bible seriously or have a clear theology? Or are there other, deeper, foundational aspects at play? This paper will argue that the Uniting Church's theological culture has an ineffable texture. The origins and gifts of this ineffability will be traced and highlighted, and the shadows and limitations of this speechlessness will be explored. The paper will then propose that if we seek to live into our particular theological charism as a denomination we need to intentionally cultivate communities

[1] "The theological culture of the Uniting Church is that network of practices, institutions, and texts which resource, sustain and extend the Uniting Church's particular conversations, doctrinal decisions and prophetic speech about God, Christ and the world." "Act2: Response to God's Call," The Uniting Church in Australia, accessed June 6, 2024, https://uniting.church/unpacking-theological-culture/.

of rigorous engagement, contemplation and testimony. In doing so we may yet foster authentic words, and spaces between them, in which we may hear and share about the gracious living Word.

The origins and gifts of the Ineffable

One Lord

As we engage with questions about the theological culture of the Uniting Church the *Basis of Union*, the Uniting Church's foundational document, provides excellent resources for orienting ourselves. Here, in the *Basis*, we are pulled back to the centre of our faith: "the Uniting Church acknowledges that the faith and unity of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church are built upon the one *Lord Jesus Christ*" (Para 3).[2] Christ Jesus is at the centre for us. That is, we claim that in this One we encounter the fullest expression of who and how God is. Jesus is the Word – the Wisdom – of God made flesh (John 1:1; 14). To put this another way, just as it was proclaimed in the earliest church, we celebrate that the divine love becomes personal in the living, teaching, nourishing, healing, resisting, non-violent dying, rising and ongoing presence of Jesus. Our denomination rests upon the scandalous conviction that this One from the beginning, who lives in radical mercy, who is murdered by the state, and who is raised to life and is with us, is the face of God among us (Col 1:15, 1 Cor 1:23–25; 2 Cor 4:6). This is our Lord, who through the power of Holy Spirit, seeks our attention and brings us home (Basis, para 4).[3]

To claim, as courageous Thomas does, that Jesus is Lord and God (John 20:28) is political. If Jesus is Lord, this means that no one and no other thing can be. From the granular to the expansive this has profound ramifications for how we understand divine power, how we conceive of institutional power within our church and in society, how we attend to texts (including the bible), how we relate to one another, and how we speak.[4] As our church's foundation is built upon Christ, our understandings of theology, our engagement with the bible and the world, and our practices will begin, proceed from, return to, and be in ceaseless dialogue with this One. For those who crave certainty and rule based living our call to be in organic relationship with Christ – to listen to this One and be changed through this – will be confronting. However, as a Uniting Church this is our path, and we are committed to being a "pilgrim people, always on the way" (*Basis*, para 3).

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[2] Italics added. The language of "Lordship" is viewed with suspicion and disdain by many in the church. This is understandable. Through employing this language, across churches and across time, patriarchal and hierarchical constructions of Christian faith have been justified and maintained, often to the exclusion and abuse of women and other minorities. However, if the language of lordship is heard from within the testimony of the New Testament, it becomes clear that Jesus upends dominant understandings, as he embodies power in vastly different ways to human lords and empires. In Jesus we are confronted with the One who uses power to lift up the marginalised, to challenge the rich and powerful, and to reject violence. Jesus is the disruptive, servant Lord.

[3] As Norman Young states "Paragraph 4 affirms Christ not only as the past founder of the Church but also as her present and enabling Lord." Norman Young "The Theological Convictions of the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church," *Pacifica*, 25 (October 2012), 292.

[4] The *Basis* focuses upon christology, rather than trinitarian theology. Trinitarian convictions, including in relation to divine power, could certainly have been expanded in this document. However, as Young points out, in the *Basis* we see something of the "rhythm of the Gospel" in its, at least initial, emphasis upon the revelation of Christ. Young, "The Theological Convictions," 294.

The Bible

Claiming that "Christ is Lord" may at first glance appear like an obvious declaration for Christians to make. The *Basis*, however, presents this claim in such a way as to call the Uniting Church to frame its understanding of both the bible and human power through this One. As spelled out in the *Basis*, the bible is "unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which it hears the Word of God" (*Basis*, para 5). However, the bible is not, itself, the "word of God". As proclaimed in John's prologue, and prayed and sung in earliest Christian communities, Jesus is the Word (John 1:1).[5] As a consequence we come to the biblical text, seeking to listen for the voice of the living, loving Word, Jesus.

Our understanding of Christ at the centre directly impacts our theological culture, even though we may not always be aware of this. It is because of the primacy of Christ, that we cannot reduce the bible to a lifestyle manual, or rule book resplendent with proof texts that can be quoted out of context in order to assert who is in, or who is wrong, on any particular issue. Similarly, in the Uniting Church we cannot pretend that any one person has the delegated authority to speak for God. Instead, we are called to listen for Christ through the Spirit in sacred text, within the context of worship and in our seeking to be church together.[6] Our embodied conviction echoed across the early church, that Jesus (and no other) is the living Lord of the church, sets us apart from both later and more recent expressions of church in which human power, and the bible, have been constituted very differently.[7]

The shadows of the Ineffable

As a consequence of our christological convictions, the Uniting Church does not have the luxury of a "bumper sticker" faith. Often we will not be able to fit our theology onto a postage stamp (except to say "one Lord Jesus Christ"). Nor will it be easy to summarise the Uniting Church's theological position in concise media-friendly sentences in many situations. This is not because we have nothing to say. Rather this is because our conviction is that the living, loving "bright morning star" Jesus (Rev 22:16; 1 Pet 1:19), continues to meet, challenge, and transform us together through the vivifying energy of Holy Spirit, and we need to continue to listen and respond accordingly. This is important to underscore. Grounded in ongoing relationship with Christ Jesus our theology on some topics will not be fixed. That is, because we continue to be "constituted, ruled, and renewed" by Christ (Basis, para 4) – the One who, according to the testimony of the New Testament, uses power to upend expectations, heal the wounded, gather in the marginalised, nourish the hungry, and resist violence – our theology emerges and evolves within ongoing relationship with this One.

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[5] Geoff Thompson highlights the "*christological* framing" of this paragraph in the *Basis,* stating "the Word of God is Jesus Christ whose work of salvation and continuing presence to the church have already been described in summary form in the preceding paragraphs." Geoff Thompson *Disturbing Much, Disturbing Many: Theology Provoked by the Basis of Union* (Northcote: United Academic Press, 2016), 67. Reflecting on this priority within the *Basis*, Young states "This emphasis on Jesus Christ as normative did not begin, of course, with the crafting of the 1971 *Basis.* It appears again and again in the earlier Reports…" Young, "The Theological Convictions of the Basis," 293.

[6] As the *Basis* states, we hear and know Jesus, the Word of God, "from Scripture appropriated in the worshipping and witnessing life of the Church" (*Basis*, para 5).

[7] For discussion of the ways in which strands of the Protestant tradition elevated the bible to the place of authority in an attempt to "match the Catholic Church's highly developed doctrine of papal authority," see Thompson, *Disturbing Much, Disturbing Many,* 68.

Theology that refuses to take its first and primary identity from second order doctrines, isolated verses in the bible, a set of rules, or a human authority figure, but instead is forged within transformative encounter with the incarnate, executed, and risen Jesus Christ will be nuanced, growing, and at times, complex. It is also risky. As highlighted above, at times people within and beyond the Uniting Church will misconstrue our foundation in Christ as evidence of our disrespect for the bible or tradition, or as proof of an absence of theology. Conversely, there is also the risk that some within our tradition will hear our foundation in Christ as code for condoning relativistic or uncritical theology while claiming, in more, or less, sophisticated language, "Jesus told me so." Despite these shadows, the place of Christ at the centre in our tradition is both faithful and profound.[8]

If the scandalous servant Christ Jesus is our Lord and is the One who continues to remake and refresh us, how are we called to discern the voice of this One? It is perhaps the lack of clarity about responses to this question that has left us open to claims that we lack theology, or the more serious risk that this becomes so. In the pages that follow it will be proposed that there are essential qualities or practices – guard rails if you will – that need to be fostered at this time in the Uniting Church so that we may faithfully hear and respond to our Lord as we seek to walk together.

The invitation into intentionality

In returning to the foundation of the Uniting Church upon the "one Lord Jesus Christ," the ineffable within our theological culture becomes more understandable. However, it is not sufficient simply to conclude that at times we struggle to articulate our theology. There are significant gifts in our wordlessness before the Word. Yet, as I have traced, there are also limitations that need to be addressed. In recognising our foundation in Christ, we are also better able to understand why adopting the stances of other denominations, for example in the appeal to scripture or ecclesial authority, is a misalignment with who and whose we are. It is not by mirroring the practices of other denominations that we will find our centre. Rather it is in acknowledging that our theological centre is in Christ that we will find our way forward.

In the pages that follow it will be argued that if Jesus is Lord of the church, the living Word who continues to speak, there are intentional practices that need to be prioritised at this time, in order to foster a faithful and flourishing theological culture. This is not an exhaustive list. In this article I do not discuss practices of doing justice and mercy. This is not because these are unimportant. On the contrary, seeking to practise justice and mercy are essential if Jesus is Lord. However, these practices are already priorities embedded across the Uniting Church among individuals, congregations, councils, schools, and agencies. In highlighting three more hidden markers of faithfulness, it is hoped that these may become touchstones for reflecting upon how we might foster an authentic and faithful theological culture into the future.

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[8] Within the First Report of the Joint Commission on Church Union, *The Faith of the Church*, composed in the wake of the horrors of two World Wars, and published in 1959, the centrality of Christ is poignantly underscored: "It has been a humbling thing for the churches of the twentieth century to learn that they have no message but Jesus Christ…And so the Church's word is of Jesus Christ, who is God's Word to the Church and to mankind. He is the centre of our worship, the content of our preaching, the beginning and end of all our theology." "The Faith of the Church" in *Theology for Pilgrims: Selected Theological Documents of the Uniting Church in Australia,* edited and introduced Rob Bos and Geoff Thompson (Sydney: Uniting Church Press, 2008), 36.

Cultivating communities of rigorous engagement

Grounded in our foundation in Christ, the *Basis* gives thanks for the priority and gift of ongoing learning (*Basis*, para 11). In careful language, again pointing to Christ as the Word, it is confidently stated that "the Uniting Church acknowledges that God has never left the Church without faithful and scholarly interpreters of Scripture, or without those who have reflected deeply upon, and acted trustingly in obedience to, God's living Word" (*Basis*, para 11). Rigorous engagement with sacred text, with theology, and with the world are all underscored in the Basis and are integral to who we are as a Uniting Church.[9] We are a denomination called to bring our brains to church. We are called to wrestle with the complexities and contradictions of the bible, the realities of the world around us, and the extraordinary and varied ramifications of taking seriously that God walks among us in the self-giving One, Jesus.

Our theological colleges have a rich tradition of encouraging rigorous academic engagement across a range of disciplines. For this we should rejoice. However, often this kind of robust intellectual curiosity has not been cultivated in congregations' worship, faith discussion groups, or in their service.[10] Instead, it appears to have been assumed by clergy and other church leaders that people in the "pews" cannot handle more complex theology or biblical enquiry or are not interested in such things.[11] In my experience, serving parishes in both rural and inner-city contexts, I have not found this to be the case. People from vastly different educational and social backgrounds yearn to explore the challenges and contradictions of faith, life, doubt, and sacred text. Indeed, when given opportunities, people often dive deeply into life-long exploration.

How might we resource and encourage congregations, councils, schools, and agencies to become robust questioners and thinkers about issues of faith, the bible, meaning, purpose, and the divine? How might we support people across the Uniting Church to know that such wrestling is an expression of their theology and faith and not a betrayal of these things? Can we imagine creating brave and kind spaces for those who identify as "progressive" and "conservative" to gather together, not in order to prove one another wrong, but to robustly explore theology together and to listen to one another?

In our post-Christendom context, often people outside the church assume that being a Christian means discarding reason or assenting to fixed ideas without question. What a gift we might offer, not just to the church, but also to the wider community, if we live into our particular charism as a Uniting Church. If we recognise our foundation in Christ as the Word, and the subsequent need for rigorous theological and

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[9] The *Basis* states: "In particular the Uniting Church enters into the inheritance of literary, historical and scientific enquiry which has characterised recent centuries, and gives thanks for the knowledge of God's ways with humanity which are open to an informed faith" (*Basis,* para 11).

[10] The irony of this is that the *Basis* affirms that the integral place for hearing the Word of God in the bible, is within the worshipping and witnessing community (*Basis,* para 5). For further discussion see Thompson, *Disturbing Much, Disturbing Many,* 67–68.

[11] Cathie Lambert also highlights the tendency to silo the field of formal theology in the Uniting Church, stating "Unfortunately, in the past, this voice has been limited to the clergy of the church and lay people in the pews have been 'protected' from the field of formal theology. As more lay people engage with the formal voice of theology, it is not unusual to hear the question, 'Why have I not heard about this before?'" See Cathie Lambert, "Theological Culture: Seeking an Intersection Between the Four Voices," Act2, Uniting Church in Australia, accessed August 3, 2023, https://www.act2uca.com/theological-culture-contributions/theological-culture-seeking-an-intersection-between-the-four-voices-of-theology

biblical wrestling, we might yet offer varied, engaging spaces for people to explore Christian faith maturely, intelligently, and with their own integrity intact. Instead of insisting upon ready-made answers, inviting people into the great feast of questions as we gather together to the bread of life, might be part of how we are called to embody the good tidings.

Cultivating communities of contemplation

Within the Basis claims about the centrality of Christ are not simply doctrinal assertions to be assented to, wrestled with, or rejected. Instead, the Basis makes claims about participating in the life of this One who walks among us. It is proclaimed that in this One we will be changed, because the Anointed one, the Messiah "reaches out to command attention and awaken faith" (*Basis*, para 4). In language that surprises and delights, the Basis quietly asserts that "in *his own strange way* Christ constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church" (*Basis*, para 4).[12] If we take this seriously – that is, if we trust that this actually happens – what does this mean for our posture before Christ? If claims about Jesus' transformative presence are not simply the intellectual outworkings of a christological position, there are implications for us as individuals, congregations, councils, theological colleges, and Uniting Church's agencies (community service, schools, hospitals). Among these, this surely demands of us that we cultivate practices of receptivity – being open – to this one who is present, and strangely restoring and refining us. We do not have to invent everything anew. In practices forged by the desert mothers and fathers in the early church, as well as by others throughout the centuries who have sought to listen first and foremost to Christ, we discover an array of contemplative practices. There are gifts awaiting us.

While some may warm to the invitation to focus our energy on learning to be quiet and open, the negative reactions against prioritising contemplative prayer may be loud and varied. Culturally, being quiet has not been a priority in the Uniting Church. Silence can be awkward, particularly in group settings, and we like to preach. On a personal level contemplative prayer can be deeply confronting because those things we try and avoid within ourselves, can emerge with painful abruptness. In a world saturated with notifications and instant gratification, contemplative prayer can also feel boring, at least initially, until we allow ourselves to sink more deeply into the arms of the Holy One – Sacred Three. Many in the church may insist that now having mastered PowerPoint, if anything we need to get louder in congregations, so that we might "compete" with mega churches. Others might argue that at this time of crisis in the church we must focus on "doing" not listening. Some may misconstrue the invitation to prioritise contemplative prayer, as a call into anti-intellectualism. As underscored in the first marker of faithfulness above, this is clearly not what is being advocated. Rigorous intellectual engagement *and* learning to be quiet and open to the divine are not mutually exclusive. In contrast, abundant fruit can grow when these priorities are held together and reflexively inform one another.

If we do trust that Christ continues to awaken faith, rule and renew us, surely learning how to listen for the voice of this One is crucial. However, in our world that is so noisy, and with our tendency in the Uniting Church to fill silences with words in sermons, song, or liturgy, I wonder if we are brave enough to learn how to be quiet together? At this time of rapid change in the church, and in our global village, learning about,

[12] Italics added.

experiencing, and sharing ways that enable us to slow down and which draw us into deep listening for the divine are surely critical. While the practice of learning how to shut up and be quiet together has been much neglected in congregations and other institutions of the Uniting Church, First Nation leaders have much to teach us in this field.[13] How might we be changed if we cultivate practices and opportunities to engage with various forms of prayer that help us to stop talking at God and instead become present to God, as a key priority in the Uniting Church? Imagine for a moment if we embodied our trust that Christ continues to speak across the church. Imagine if lay and ordained leaders in congregations, in theological colleges, and in Synods modelled this kind of deep listening for the Spirit both in their own lives, in their chairing of meetings, in classes or workshops, and when they preside in worship. Imagine if we supported ordinand candidates and lay preaching students with wide knowledge of, and experimentation with, various Christian contemplative practices. Imagine knowing that as they enter the astonishing demands of ministry, that they have varied and deep spiritual resources to draw from in their own lives, and to share confidently in congregations and other settings. Imagine if we dared to share such transformative practices in our agencies, including schools, in which the yearning for deeper meaning and connection with something "greater" is often palpable but remains unnamed. Reclaiming and prioritising the ancient practice of listening for the divine together may yet vivify our beautiful, broken church.

Cultivating communities of testimony

In the Basis it is audaciously proclaimed that Christ, who is the Word of God, is the One "who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into being what otherwise could not exist" (*Basis*, para 4). This is the One who "comes, addresses, and *deals with people*" (*Basis*, para 4).[14] Through language that resonates with the biblical witness, here we are confronted with a God who gets personal. Three questions unfold from this proclamation. Do we experience this freedom and new life in our journey with Christ in the church? Secondly, if not, why might this be so (what is blocking this)? Finally, if we do experience this awakening verdancy in various ways at different times, do we talk about it? As we reflect on questions about theological culture, I would like to propose that the third practice that the Uniting Church needs to prioritise at this time is the place of testimony.

While at times we struggle to articulate our theology, my sense is that we have an even more difficult time talking about our faith at a personal level in the Uniting Church. We are reticent about sharing with others about our experiences of prayer, spiritual growth or desolation, or about various aspects of our ongoing relationship with Christ. This is often the case in congregations, councils of the church, and in theological colleges, as well as in schools and other agencies. Perhaps the fear of being dismissed as sentimental, or anti-intellectual, contributes to this reticence. Perhaps this widespread hesitancy is fuelled by a more

[13] Deep listening is integral within the culture of many First Nations peoples. Elder and Indigenous leader Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr explains about deep listening, using the word "Dadirri", a word from the Ngan'gikurunggurr and Ngen'giwumirri languages of the Aboriginal peoples of the Daly River region. Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr states "Dadirri recognises the deep spring that is inside us. We call on it and it calls to us. This is the gift that Australia is thirsting for. It is something like what you call 'contemplation'. When I experience dadirri, I am made whole again. I can sit on the riverbank or walk through the trees; even if someone close to me has passed away, I can find my peace in this silent awareness. There is no need of words. A big part of dadirri is listening". Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, "In deep listening and quite still awareness," Miriam Rose Foundation, accessed August 22, 2023, https://www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au/dadirri/

[14] Italics added.

general suspicion of anything overtly religious that permeates non-Indigenous Australian culture. It is also possible that this reticence is galvanised by the fear of being misunderstood or of being perceived as a "religious nut," "bible basher," or alternatively, being accused of losing our faith.

Alongside cultural reticence, a further factor likely contributes to the curbing of authentic testimony in the Uniting Church. In many congregations, Presbyteries and Synods the misguided assumption appears to be that mission activities must emerge from and be managed by the church. This belief implies that lay peoples' lives and experiences of God in their work, studies, volunteering and being, beyond Sundays and official church activities, are not part of the "real" mission of God.[15] Joy Han underscores the consequences of failing to take seriously that lay people are at mission, stating: "We lack the theological language to even inquire after people's entire 'Monday to Saturday lives' that take place in the world, let alone affirm and build up the latent missional capacity of lay people [in their own contexts]."[16] In order to create space for testimony, the surprising movement of the Spirit towards faith, hope, and love within the tricky, mundane, tragic, and exhilarating spheres of (sacred) ordinary life must first be recognised and honoured in the church as part of God's mission.

As we grapple with the idea of reclaiming the place of testimony in the Uniting Church it is important to underscore what I am not saying. I am not suggesting that we shy away from the difficult. It is not being envisioned that we take on the kinds of speaking popular in some Christian traditions, in which versions of one story-arc dominate: "I was forsaken, and now everything is awesome". In the Uniting Church, as in the wider Australian landscape, we have a healthy disrespect for the boastful, and sharp scepticism about those who gild the lily. This demand for humility is part of our giftedness.

Cultivating communities in which we may humbly share a little about our actual experiences of Christ restoring us and setting us free will only be authentic if they also include supportive space for us to share about our experiences of the presence of the absence of God. Can we imagine a church gathering where someone is able to share that God feels entirely absent for them, and the people around them responding with attentive compassion, without trying to "fix" them or tell them to have more faith? Like the witness of the Psalm writers, testimony includes being able to express our joy and delight in the tender presence of the One under whose wings we shelter (see Psalm 61), alongside expressing our grief, fury, and the reality that at times the Source of all seems absent (see Psalms 6; 10; 22; 88).

In seeking to reclaim the importance of bearing witness, I am pointing towards the possibility of speaking honestly, falteringly, and in our own words about our experiences of the Most High reaching out to us personally in the middle of the mess. Could we imagine gently sharing a few sentences with others in a discussion group about how our life is different right now because of Jesus? Could we imagine sharing with a colleague or friend about a new insight that has emerged in prayer? Can we imagine creating spaces – moments in worship – for people to regularly share about their experiences of Christ challenging or

[15] When church leaders speak dismissively of "Sunday Christians" or decry peoples' lack of commitment to church activities or meetings, there is often a failure to take seriously the possibility that people are joining in the mission of God throughout their week in their own day-to-day lives.

[16] Joy Han "Our Missional and Intercultural Natures are to be Found in the World," Act2, Uniting Church in Australia, accessed June 6, 2024, https://act2uca.com/theological-culture/missional-and-intercultural-natures/

renewing them in their daily lives, perhaps as they introduce a favourite song.[17] Could it be possible to create opportunities for talking about spiritual practices, maybe with children and those over eighty sharing with one another about where they like to pray, or how it feels when they pray?

I am aware that talk of testimony will be deeply confronting. Perhaps this will be even more so for different parts of the church. There appears, for example, to be significant concern about imposing faith upon others within many Uniting Church agencies and in its schools. The fear of imposing our faith is valid, particularly as some Christian denominations have used faith as a blunt instrument, even a weapon, in their agencies or schools. However, if we return to Christ, the living Word who is at the foundation of our faith, we discover that imposition can never be valid if we are seeking to be faithful. Across the testimony of the Gospels, we see Jesus awakening faith but not forcing or coercing anyone to follow. What is more, the call to love stranger, neighbour, and even enemy, is (frustratingly) non-negotiable for us if Jesus is our Lord. Under this law of love, coercion can have no place. Despite this, the fear that any form of explicit speaking about faith equates with the imposition of faith persists for many in the Uniting Church. This can often have the effect of leaving those around us, including staff in Uniting Church institutions, with little or no knowledge about what the Uniting Church believes apart from its affirmation of human rights.

If we, across the Uniting Church, actually trust that Jesus, the disruptive, compassionate One, is Lord, who through the Spirit awakens, refreshes, and restores us, openly bearing witness to this restoration is surely integral. However, if we are to testify faithfully and honestly, we need to cease looking over our shoulder at how other traditions speak. We also need to put down the (often ghastly) popular images of testimony in film and television. Instead, we need to find ways to tell our own stories in our own words, and include the heartbreak, anger, and despair, alongside the joy, sustenance, and soul rest. Learning to speak of the personal out loud will not be easy. It will take a great deal of vulnerability, courage, and creativity in congregations, councils, and colleges, as well as careful discernment in settings such as schools or agencies. We will need safe opportunities with trusted people to practice speaking about our experiences, so that we can find our cadence. We will also probably need to be assured, and continue to assure others, that as we are called to bear witness, we do not need to yell on street corners or be bombastic. Instead, simply and profoundly, just as the author of 1 Peter encourages tiny Christian communities to do, we need to be ready to respond to others when they ask about the "hope that is in you" and when we speak, we need to do so with "gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3.15–16).

Conclusion

In this article the ineffable texture of the Uniting Church's theological culture has been traced. The origins of this wordlessness have been found in our commitment to the Word. Here we have celebrated the gift that we find in our theology, our actions, our words, and our silences all in humble dialogue with *the* Word, Jesus the servant Lord, who continues to nourish, steady, and refine us. The shadows of the ineffable within our

[17] The disruptive nature of this proposal is underscored by Han. Speaking about the reality that experiences of racism are not able to be discussed in congregations, Han observes "I believe our worshipping language and liturgies make it difficult even for Anglo people to talk about their lives in the world *as their context for worship* and not as source material for small talk after the worship service is over." Han, "Our Missional and Intercultural Natures." Italics original.

tradition have also been sketched. It has been demonstrated that because our foundation and authority rest upon Christ, and not a book, an institution, a doctrine, or a human authority figure, our theology takes time and often cannot be reduced to a soundbite. This can leave us open to accusations, or risks, of relativism. It has been proposed that three key practices are essential to prioritise at this time, as we seek to maintain our foundation in Christ. There is a need to cultivate intentional communities in which people are encouraged to wrestle with the complexities and contradictions of the bible and theology, are able to (re) engage with practices that enable slowing down, attuning to the Spirit and listening for the Word, and are given ongoing opportunities to share about faith and doubt in their own words. In fostering these practices across the Uniting Church, a humble, flourishing, and faithful theological culture may be nurtured, as we live out our charism as people of the Word. We may also discover fresh freedom and energy as we become the church we are called to be in this land, creating authentic spaces for others to join in the conversation.

Preaching Guided by the *Basis of Union*: a contribution to the Uniting Church's theological culture

Peter Lockhart

Abstract

This paper notes the widespread commitment within the Uniting Church to the practice of preaching and then discusses this in relation to the Act2 reference to "practices" which shape the Church's theological culture. In particular, it explores the role of the theological convictions of the *Basis of Union* as a "hermeneutical key" for preaching as an example in one sphere of the of the Uniting Church's theological culture of what it means to be "guided" by the *Basis of Union*. Six themes are drawn from the *Basis* for this exploration: the identity of the work and person of Jesus Christ, the sovereign grace of God, the unique place of the Biblical narrative, the mission of the church, the unity of the church, and the nature of God as Trinitarian.

Introduction

In its focus on "theological culture," The Act2 Project of the Uniting Church in Australia Assembly provided the following working definition: "The theological culture of the Uniting Church is that network of practices, institutions and texts which resource, sustain and extend the Uniting Church's particular conversations, doctrinal decisions and prophetic speech about God, Christ and the world."[1] Each week across Australia hundreds of Uniting Church preachers spend time in prayer, research, and contemplation as they engage in preparation for one of the primary expressions of any church's theological culture, the sermon. These sermons are prepared by both lay and ordained people who seek to articulate a message in which they faithfully pray that the Word of God might become present. The task of sermon preparation is shaped by a preacher's hermeneutics. This might include but not be limited to their life experience, their understanding of revelation, their approach to the Scriptures, their preaching context, their level of academic study, and their capacity to access appropriate resources as they engage in their task of exegesis. However, in asking the question of the theological culture of the Uniting Church it behoves us to question whether there should be underlying theological principles helping guide this culture of preaching.

Ironically, despite the volume of preaching that occurs and its importance to the Uniting Church's theological culture, there has been very little written about how to approach homiletics from the perspective of the

[1] "Call for papers: our theological culture," Act 2, accessed March 9, 2023, https://www.act2uca.com/theologicalculture

Uniting Church by theologians from the Uniting Church.[2] Moreover, as one Uniting Church theologian, Bruce Barber, declares, "It is rare to find in books about preaching an identification of critical theological presuppositions of the sermon."[3] Whilst it could, and possibly even should, be argued that the primary source document for developing a theology of preaching would be the Bible, such a statement would in all likelihood already be conformed to particular assumptions around those Scriptures. In this paper, I will propose that the hermeneutical key for preachers within the Uniting Church is the *Basis of Union*.[4] Hence, I am seeking to affirm the *Basis* as offering the underlying theological influence on UCA preaching.

The Uniting Church came into being during the ecumenical movements of the mid to late 20th century. As it did so it developed a theological position articulating the place of the Uniting Church in relationship to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. This position is expressed most fully and succinctly within the *Basis*. I have explored the formation, content and commentary around the *Basis* in depth in my contribution to the Act2 Project.[5] Nevertheless it is pertinent to rehearse a few key points about the authority of the *Basis* before engaging with some of key themes that arise from it that might guide our preaching.

The *Basis* is the document that effectively drew three churches together and it was clear that the Joint Commission on Church Union understood that the *Basis* would play an ongoing role in the life of the Uniting Church.[6] Despite this commitment, there has been ongoing debate as to the status and authority of the *Basis*. The *Basis* itself provides an opening for this debate in its commitment to being prepared to listen to contemporary scholars and so being able to confess the faith in "fresh words and deeds" (*Basis*, para 11). In addition, it can be argued that the *Basis* echoes the Reformed tradition's dictum, *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*. It declares an ongoing commitment to be prepared to correct "that which is erroneous in its life" (*Basis*, para 18). One such area of correction has been in the recognition by the Uniting Church of the silence concerning First Nations peoples despite the Australian context in which the Uniting Church arose. This occurred through the adoption by Assembly of a revised Preamble to the Constitution. At *Preachfest* in 2021 Brooke Prentis, a Wakka Wakka woman and Aboriginal Christian Leader, encouraged continued reflection for Uniting Church preachers on how a sermon sounds being preached on stolen lands. And further, how might it sound to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.[7]

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[2] A survey of *Uniting Church Studies* has revealed that there has only been one article specifically written about preaching within this journal: E Craig Thompson, "Preaching as an Exercise in Telling the Time," *Uniting Church Studies* 24, no. 2 (2022): 59-66. Another article related to preaching emerged after this paper was first prepared for the Act2 project: Ockert Myer, "Proclamation from Grief and Carnage: a homiletical conversation with Nick Cave," *Uniting Church Studies* 25, no 1 (2023): 51-62. A number of other Uniting Church theologians have elsewhere addressed the topic of Homiletics: See Bruce Barber, *Lanterns at Dusk: Preaching after Modernity* (Melbourne: Uniting Academic Press, 2013). And Uniting Church practical theologian, Neil Pembroke, has published widely on preaching, including *Divine Therapeia and the Sermon: Theocentric Therapeutic Preaching* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013). In noting the sparse writing on homiletics, I am also acutely aware of the lack of cultural diversity in the voices that have contributed to this issue within the Uniting Church.

[3] Barber in ed. Vivian Boland, *Don't Put Out the Burning Bush: Worship and Preaching in a Complex World* (Hindmarsh: Australian Theological Forum, 2008), 49.

[4] Hereafter *Basis* with paragraph number. All references to the *Basis* are to the 1992 version.

[5] "Developing a theological content for homiletics in the Uniting Church in Australia," – Act2 Project, accessed June 6, 2024, https://act2uca.com/theological-culture/a-theological-content-for-homiletics/

[6] Studies produced after union by two of the framers of the *Basis* attest to this. See, D'Arcy Wood, *Building on a Solid Basis: A guide to the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia* (Uniting Church Press, 1986). And J. Davis McCaughey, *Commentary on the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia* (Melbourne: Joint Board of Christian Education of Australia and New Zealand, 1980).

[7] The presentation was made on June 1st 2021 entitled "What does it mean to preach on Aboriginal land?" This reference is made with the author's permission. Preachfest is a regular event, organized by the Uniting Church Synod of NSW & ACT and various partners, to resource the ministry of preaching in the contemporary context.

With this in mind it is important to give some justification to my conviction that the *Basis* offers Uniting Church preachers with an appropriate hermeneutical key, thereby shaping the theological culture of the Uniting Church. The debates surrounding the authority of the *Basis* led the Eighth Assembly in 1997 to affirm that the life of the Uniting Church would be "guided by" the *Basis*[8]. In taking this stance the Assembly did not elevate the *Basis* to the status of dogma whilst at the same time preserving the notion that the *Basis* was more than a statement locked in the historical moment of union. It was to have ongoing significance in the life of the Uniting Church. James Haire reaffirmed the place of the *Basis* in an editorial of *Uniting Church Studies* in 2002, saying, "At this time, more than ever, we are, I believe, called to relive the vision of the *Basis of Union*, in evangelism, social justice, witness, ecumenism, service and hope, but most of all in living out the new identity given to us in Jesus Christ."[9] The confessional view of the *Basis* developed by Haire has been echoed by Geoff Thompson.[10] "The *Basis of Union* is not simply an irrelevant historical curiosity, or an ancient relic which we have outgrown; it helps the Church to be the Church of which Jesus Christ is the head."[11] These assertions have influenced the view that I have formed that if the Uniting Church is understood as being guided by the *Basis* and the *Basis* is understood as confessional then it follows that the theological and spiritual culture expressed in Uniting Church preaching should be influenced by *Basis*. The consequence of rejecting the *Basis* would be that Uniting Church preachers would be provided a theological blank cheque when it comes to their hermeneutical approach.

I agree with Haire's assertion that "the Uniting Church may not profess its faith, nor act, in any way which is overtly opposed to the contents of its *Basis of Union*."[12] Thus, in the context of the Act2 Project, it is timely to draw together some key themes found within the *Basis* to help develop an approach to preaching within the Uniting Church.

Guided by the *Basis*: theological themes for preaching in the Uniting Church

In exploring what it means to be guided by the *Basis* in preaching, and whilst others might add or prioritise alternative key themes, I will explore the following: the identity of the work and person of Jesus Christ, the sovereign grace of God, the unique place of the Biblical narrative, the mission of the church, the unity of the church and the nature of God as Trinitarian.

Preaching that is Christological

Firstly, and most importantly, the theological content of Uniting Church preaching should revolve around Jesus. In his commentary on the *Basis* Davis McCaughey described the third paragraph of the *Basis* as "the most fundamental Paragraph of the whole *Basis*."[13] This Paragraph is Christological in nature and

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8 Assembly Minute 97.37.01

9 James Haire, "The Uniting Church after Twenty-five Years," Guest Editorial, *Uniting Church Studies* 8, no. 2 (2002), no page no.

10 Geoff Thompson, "Does the Uniting Church have a theological future?," *Uniting Church Studies* 15, no. 2 (2009), 36.

11 Robert Bos, "Revolting Fathers: The 1998 Protest by the Basis of Union's Framers," *Uniting Church Studies* 9, no. 1 (2003): 49–64.

12 W & K Abetz, *Swimming Between the Flags: Reflections on the Basis of Union* (Bendigo: Middle Earth Press, 2002), vii.

13 McCaughey, *Commentary*, 19.

provides a narrative account, based in the Scriptures,[14] of God's action in the world in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[15] It is clear from the *Basis* that the central story of the Christian faith is the story and promise of Jesus and that this story should shape the content of all of our preaching. As Pearson says, "Sooner rather than later Christology must enter this question … Irrespective of how the person and work of Christ is then interpreted this personal focus is formative. It is not an optional extra."[16] The *Basis* is unequivocal about this as the primary task in preaching: "The Church preaches Christ the risen crucified One and confesses him as Lord to the glory of God the Father" (*Basis*, para 3). Pearson points out that this claim is both "universal in scope and yet potentially exclusivist."[17] The disruptive nature of making truth claims is also echoed by Thompson. "The confession of Jesus as Lord of the church and Lord of creation is inevitably a polemical confession. It is a major theme of *The Faith of the Church* that Jesus' lordship was not only not duly acknowledged but that the churches had too easily acknowledged other lords."[18] Further, giving priority to the proclamation of Jesus is accompanied by the responsibility to continue to explore Jesus' identity in fresh ways through contemporary scholarship. For example, another Uniting Church scholar, Sally Douglas, reminds us of Jesus' centrality in her work which explores understandings of Jesus as the female divine.[19] Therefore, placing Jesus and preaching that is Christological as the central hermeneutical key is consistent with the *Basis*.

However, given the twentieth century debates about the person and work of Jesus Christ,[20] there could be questions raised as to what a commitment to preaching Christ might look like. It has been argued by Balabanski, Campbell, Mostert and Thompson amongst others the Christ that the Uniting Church preaches is one which sits within the doctrine of the broader church through history. [21] Thompson provides a helpful reflection on the importance of Jesus' identity as divine in his comments connecting the ancient creeds of the church to the Christ affirmed in the *Basis*. He says:

> The Creed's *homoousios* points us to the real intellectual, ethical, cultural, and spiritual radicalness of the Christian faith. It is a reminder that Christianity has reasons for arguing that the love of enemy, generosity to the poor, a relationship with God based on mercy and grace, the claims about the universal scope of God's love, the summons to resist all dehumanising and unjust

[14] Vicky Balabanski provides a helpful analysis of the relationship between Paragraph 3 and the Scriptures in Vicky Balabanski, "The Biblical Fabric of Paragraph 3 of the Basis of Union: How well does it stand up to scrutiny?" *Uniting Church Studies* 17, no. 2 (2011): 55-66.

[15] Thompson, "Does the Uniting Church have a theological future?", 39.

[16] Clive Pearson, "Ballyhooing in Public," *Uniting Church Studies* 10, no. 2 2004), 73.

[17] Pearson, "Ballyhooing in Public," 74.

[18] Thompson, "Does the Uniting Church have a theological future?", 38.

[19] Sally Douglas, Sally. *Jesus Sophia: Returning to Woman Wisdom in the Bible, Practice, and Prayer.* (Eugune: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2023), 2. The theological leadership of Douglas is of particular importance in a Church in which male hegemony persists despite the theological conviction expressed to the contrary. See also Janet Staines "'To lead the People': resignifying gender in the Queensland Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia" *Uniting Church Studies* 24, no. 1 (2022): 21–32.

[20] See for example Robert Walter Funk, Marcus J Borg, and John Shelby Spong, *The Once and Future Jesus* (Polebridge Pr Westar Inst, 2000).

[21] See: Balabanski, "The Biblical Fabric of Paragraph 3 of the Basis of Union"; Wesley Neil Campbell, "Reconciled Difference," *Uniting Church Studies* 19, no. 1 (2013), 55–74; Geoff Thompson, "'Well, That's Just Your Perspective': Guiding and Declaring the Right Understanding of the Faith in a Relativist Culture," *Uniting Church Studies* 17, no. 2 (2011): 19–32;. Christiaan Mostert, "Christology in the Uniting Church in Australia," *Uniting Church Studies* 16, no. 2 (2010): 33–44.

> ideologies, the realities of freedom and hope, are not just arbitrary convictions developed out of our limited perspective. They have a ground in the one who is Creator and Lord.[22]

In other words, to preach the Christ of the creeds is to respond with a life of faith that is grounded in God's concern for the world expressed in the incarnation. Whereas the *Basis* may be open to highlighting other emphases in the focus on Paragraph 3 there can be little doubt that Jesus is understood in the *Basis* as God's Word who came into the world for the purpose of reconciling the world to God. And, further, that this Jesus who is promised to return is the coming and present Lord of the church. Therefore, to preach in the Uniting Church is to engage the narrative of God's presence and work in the person of Jesus.

Preaching that recognises God's sovereign action of grace

Paragraph 3 of the *Basis,* declares: "The whole work of salvation is effected by the sovereign grace of God alone" (*Basis*, para 3). This expression of God's work of salvation being the work of God alone is consistent with the Reformed tradition in which the Uniting Church finds its roots.[23] It is God who acts, and even the human response to God is God's in Christ. "Jesus himself, in his life and death, made the response of humility, obedience and trust which God had long sought in vain" (*Basis*, para 3). Whilst the *Basis* is clear on the vicarious nature of Christ's action on behalf of the creation, how it is so remains somewhat ambiguous. In her consideration on the issue of the atonement Michelle Cook argues this is deliberate: "By focussing on the purpose of Christ's work, the reconciliation of the whole world to God, rather than on the mechanics of this work the *Basis* sidesteps contemporary atonement debates, instead embracing the breadth and richness of Scripture."[24] In this case, preaching within the Uniting Church might best be described as preaching that declares what "is," in terms of God's grace revealed in Christ, rather than seek to confine how God has achieved those ends and to accept the mystery that lies within the story.

Furthermore, the focus on the sovereignty of God's sovereign action in Jesus has universal implications. This universal claim cuts through the individualism of the present age which is something that is regularly critiqued alongside the focus on personal salvation. As Pearson notes: "The ever present risk of a theology that is bound to ecclesial convention is that [it] can [be] overly concerned with personal salvation."[25] Countering the individualistic approach to faith that is sometimes reflected in the preaching of the church. Mostert asserts: "The doctrine of reconciliation is a doctrine of the church, but its scope includes the whole of humankind. It has in view the future of a humanity reconciled to God through Jesus Christ and thereby reconciled across all barriers and divisions of human history."[26] This does not mean that a personal and communal response to the sovereign action of God is something that can be laid aside. Mostert also says: "Unless a gift offered is also received, the relationship between the giver and the one for whom the gift is intended remains unchanged … Without reciprocity there is no reconciliation."[27] Thus, the *Basis's* focus on the sovereignty of God's action in Jesus provides another focus on preaching but it is a focus which involves an invitation to respond to this good news.

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[22] Geoff Thompson, "'Well That's Just Your Persepctive'," 32.
[23] cf. Andrew F Dutney, "Is there a Uniting Church Theology?," *Uniting Church Studies* 2, no. 1 (1996), 19ff.
[24] Michelle Cook, "The Atonement, the Work of Christ and the Church in the Basis of Union," *Uniting Church Studies* 18, no. 1 (2012), 24.
[25] Pearson, "Ballyhooing in Public," 65.
[26] Christiaan Mostert, "Reconciliation and the Church," *Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies* 23, no. 2 (2010), 205.
[27] Mostert, "Reconciliation and the Church," 198.

Preaching that is Biblical

According to Paragraph 5 of the *Basis*, "When the Church preaches Jesus Christ, its message is controlled by the Biblical witnesses." Despite the debates that have arisen around Scriptural authority, these appear to be more a symptom of the post-Enlightenment questions around literalism and liberalism which have impacted the whole church. Shying away from language which describes the Bible as the "Word of God" the *Basis* rather says, "The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which it hears the Word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated" (*Basis,* para 5). In this approach, the Scriptures are neither dismissed as lacking authority nor restricted as having to be approached literally. Thompson summarises the key theological conviction of Paragraph 5 saying that "Paragraph 5 is thereby stating that the Word is heard not primarily through private devotional reading, nor in academic abstraction, nor for that matter in any abstraction from the life of the Church. Rather, the Bible mediates the Word of God not while the Church's practices and beliefs are held in suspension, but precisely in the midst of the Church's *worshipping and witnessing life*."[28]

The *Basis* suggests that when listened to appropriately the church hears the Word of God, Jesus, speaking in the words of the Scripture. This is most obviously so in the act of preaching as Owen attests. "Central to that witness is the preaching of 'Christ the risen crucified One' by Gospel words and sacraments. Through it, Christ speaks and acts, and is heard and known, as God's Word."[29] However, it could be argued that the wording of the *Basis* concerning the Scriptures leaves an opening for a range of hermeneutical approaches whilst at the same time reminding the church of the unique authority that comes to us in the Bible.[30] Therefore, in suggesting that preaching should be biblical, I am reinforcing the *Basis's* approach to the status and authority of the Scriptures being grounded in the idea that God's Word speaks through them as a unique, prophetic and apostolic witness.

Preaching that is focused on mission: worship, witness and service

Within the *Basis* there is a constant theme of the mission of the church. The liturgical acts of baptism and Eucharist are both strongly linked to mission.[31] The liturgy of the church and its mission are intimately entwined.[32] As Ben Myers points out:

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[28] Geoff Thompson, *Disturbing Much Disturbing Many: Theology Provoked by the Basis of Union* (Northcote: Uniting Academic Press, 2016), 67-68.

[29] Michael Owen, "The Reception of the Basis of Union" in *An Informed Faith: The Uniting Church at the Beginning of the 21st Century,* ed. William W. Emilsen (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), 103.

[30] So Thompson: "The Uniting Church is called to acknowledge the normativity of the biblical texts whilst reading them creatively and with a richly developed theological imagination." See Geoff Thompson, "Theology, the Gospel and Ministerial Formation," *Uniting Church Studies* 9, no. 2 (2003), 29.

[31] "Baptism into Christ's body initiates people into Christ's life and mission in the world" (*Basis,* para 7). And, in the Lord's Supper the people of God "are strengthened for their participation in the mission of Christ in the world" (*Basis,* para 8).

[32] Gordon Watson has explored problems associated with disconnecting mission from liturgy in "The Holy Spirit: Worship and the Mystery of the Trinity" in Gordon Watson, *Faith Matters: Theology for Church and World, Collected Essays* (ATF Press, 2000), 4.

> At the pulpit and the table we see creation made new, and that teaches us to discern Christ's transfiguring activity elsewhere in the world. Because we have heard Christ in the preaching of the Word and seen him in the breaking of the bread, we are also able to hear him and to see him – and to help others to see and hear him – in our local neighbourhoods, in the public library, the local school, the university, the coffee shop or skate park or housing development.[33]

This mission does have an evangelical orientation in the *Basis* as the church hears "anew the commission of the Risen Lord to make disciples of all nations" (*Basis,* para 1).

Alongside the imperative to invite people to discipleship, the *Basis* is also clear that another primary purpose of the church in its mission is service. "In entering into this union the Churches concerned are mindful that the Church of God is committed to serve the world for which Christ died" (*Basis,* para 1). This is often expressed as a commitment in community services and social justice.[34] So it is that on three occasions the *Basis* speaks of the "worship, witness and service" of the church.[35] If this is the case, McCaughey's assertion is a timely reminder, "'Preaching' must not be thought of as limited to what happens in church on Sunday: as in New Testament times the Christian in Australia today is called to go out into the world with Christ's message and the message about Christ."[36] This mission has the consequence of giving the church an entirely outward focus and, as Myers suggests, becomes what it is as it engages with this mission: "The church occupies no special place in the world, since our commitment is to every place … We become the church only as we look beyond ourselves to the work of Christ in the renewal of all things."[37] As the church preaches it inspires followers of Jesus to enter into living out their baptism and so expressing their own participation in Christ's mission in fresh words and deeds. Myers describes this task aptly saying that "Our mission is to ambush the world with glimpses of glory: to show that the real secret of the world is not death but life, not chaos but form, not ugliness but beauty, not inert materiality but transfigured humanity."[38] To assert a theological content for preaching, grounded in the mission of the church, is to have an expanded view of the mission of the church as encompassing the worship, witness and service of the church expressed for the contemporary moment in which the church exists.

Preaching that recognises the unity of the church

In the act of union the three churches coming together declared that they were "seeking to bear witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and will for the Church" (*Basis,* para 1). As indicated at the beginning this was a product of mid-twentieth century ecumenism. In coming together, the churches made the somewhat audacious claim that, "The Uniting Church in Australia lives and works within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church" (*Basis,* para 2). The imperative towards unity was driven

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[33] Benjamin Myers, "The Aesthetics of Christain Mission: New Creation and Mission in *The Basis of Union*: Norman and Mary Millar Lecture 2011," *Uniting Church Studies* 17, no. 2 (2011), 50.
[34] This commitment can be seen from the inception of the Uniting Church in the 1977 "Statement to the Nation," Uniting Church, "Statement to the Nation," A Justice Oriented Church – Uniting Chruch in Australia Assembly, accessed March 9th 2024, https://uniting.church/wpcontent/uploads/2020/02/1_StatementNation1977.pdf
[35] See *Basis,* para 1, para 15, para 18.
[36] McCaughey, *Commentary*, 20.
[37] Myers, "The Aesthetics of Christain Mission," 48.
[38] Myers, "The Aesthetics of Christain Mission," 49.

by a deep conviction of the framers about the unfaithfulness that the division of the church represented.[39] Theologically this has a number of implications, the first of which is that ecclesiologically there could be no retreat from ecumenism. Paragraph 2 of the *Basis* points towards further union with other branches of the Chirstian church beyond 1977. In the commitment to this ideal the framers understood that the Church of God is more than a collection of like-minded people it is "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (*Basis,* para 3). Campbell touches on the possibility of engaging Eastern Orthodox theology in terms of Trinitarian theology and the same could be said of ecclesiology; the church is a way of being and, more importantly, the church is one. The ecumenical project of the mid to late twentieth century, particularly focussed on institutional unions, floundered despite strong calls to continue the journey.[40] Nonetheless, the unity of the church may take a variety of forms. Miroslav Volf, the Free Church theologian, offers helpful insights as to directions for church unity in *After our Likeness,* arguing that, at a local level, "the *openness* of every church toward all other churches ... [is] an indispensable condition of ecclesiality."[41] The division of the church remains problematic.[42] Whilst how the church responds to that division may change, the preaching within the Uniting Church should remain open to the commitment to the theological conviction that unity is "Christ's gift and will" and whilst existing as a discrete ecclesial institution should constantly seek to express a self-understanding which is not bound by the era of denominationalism.

Preaching that is Trinitarian

In his analysis of current homiletic issues F. Gerrit Immink declares "For us as theologians ... the most urgent question is, 'How do we refer to God?'"[43] One aspect of naming God is to name the mystery of the triune nature of God's hidden and revealed life. Paragraph 9 of the *Basis* grounds the Uniting Church in the tradition of the church expressed in the ancient creeds of the church. Further, it calls ministers and congregations to use them as an act of allegiance to the Holy Trinity. During the late twentieth century there was a resurgences of interest in the Trinity and alongside this an engagement with the ancient texts of the church on the revelation of God's revealed life as trinitarian.[44] As already noted above Campbell has raised the possibility of deeper engagement with the Eastern Orthodox Church to understand the life of the Trinity and it can be argued that there are many points of convergence between the *Basis* and the ontological arguments concerning God found in orthodox scholars such as John Zizioulas.[45] The tendency of

[39] "The move toward union did not arise from any perceived weakness in membership but, at least on the part of most, simply from the need to obey God's will that followers of Christ should be one, and that these three churches at least should take the first steps – not the final step, hence the title 'Uniting Church in Australia', rather than 'The United Church of Australia'" (Norman Young, "The Theological Convictions of the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church," *Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies* 25, no. 3 (2012), 290.)

[40] See Carl E Braaten and Robert W Jenson, *In One Body Through the Cross: The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity: A Call to the Churches from an Ecumenical Study Group* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003) and also Anton WJ Houtepen, "Porto Alegre 2006: Called to be the One Church: Ecumenism beyond its Crisis?", *Exchange* 36, no. 1 (2007).

[41] Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The church as the image of the trinity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 156.

[42] Christiaan Mostert, "Implications of an Eschatological View of the Church," *Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies* 13, no. 1 (2000), 18-19.

[43] F Gerrit Immink, "Homiletics: The current debate," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 8, no. 1 (2004), 120.

[44] For example: Colin E Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for us: The Trinity and Christian life* (Harpercollins College Div, 1991); Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2001).

[45] See John Zizioulas and John Meyendorff, *Being as communion: Studies in personhood and the church*, vol. 4 (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press Crestwood,, USA, 1985). See also Gordon Watson's commentary on this in Watson, *Faith Matters: Theology for Church and World, Collected Essays.*, 219ff.

the Western Church has been to speak of God and Trinity as if they were separated concepts. It is pertinent that Immink's concerns around how we speak about God arise out of debates around homiletics. On the one hand, the problem of how we name God may reflect the ongoing division with the Western mind of 'God' and 'Trinity'. On the other, these debates may remind us of the deep mystery of God's existence represented by the language of the Trinity and the apophatic approaches of the Easter church. Given the call for allegiance to the Trinity within the *Basis* speaking of God in the Uniting Church is to speak of God as Trinity precisely because the narrative of Jesus life indicates this reality of God's hidden and revealed life to us shared through inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Preaching is an overt expression of the practices and belief of the church. As an intrinsic element of theological culture, it shapes the church's overall culture. It is certainly arguable that, for many members of the Uniting Church, the sermon is the greatest exposure to theological reflection that they regularly engage in. For preachers in the Uniting Church to understand "fresh words and deeds" (*Basis*, para 11) to permit novel theologies that sit in contradiction or conflict with the faith of the church as expressed in the *Basis* would be incorrect. Whilst open to new insights and corrections in its life, the Uniting Church has affirmed the *Basis* as guiding our life and thought together as we express our faithfulness within the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Hence, these important themes expressed in the *Basis* are not exclusive to the Uniting Church but, rather, have a much broader grounding in the movement of the church in and through history.

Thus, for preachers, this means giving serious consideration to how their preaching reflects and contributes the theological culture of the Uniting Church. Shaped by the *Basis*, I suggest that this would involve acknowledging the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ, the sovereign grace of God, the unique place of the Biblical narrative, the priority and diversity of the mission of the church, the importance of the unity of the church and the nature of God as Trinitarian.

"Tell Me What You Sing, and I'll Tell You Who You Are!" Worship 'song' and the identity of the Uniting Church

David MacGregor

Abstract

This article addresses the question of how well, in its worship musical life across the diversity of the Uniting Church in Australia, our congregational song addresses who we are, and who we are called to be in Christ? From this other questions flow: How honest are we in what we sing – about our relationships with God and neighbour, about our human condition? How open are UCA communities for their song choices to go beyond themes such as praise and adoration of and, commitment to, the living God? Does the "song" we sing too easily "limit" our worship and, by extension, the opportunity to be sent by God through song into mission and discipleship? All of this impacts on our identity and our theological culture(s). Consideration of these questions leads to an invitation to reflect on Christ's command to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind" instantly followed by the command "and your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22: 37, 39) God's worshipping people are called to both echo and advance this reality, including through its song.

Introduction

When presenting a paper at Wesley Uniting Church in Canberra in October 2008, noted North American music-in-worship writer, C. Michael Hawn, referenced Albert van den Heuval's bold claim: "Tell me what you sing, and I'll tell you who you are!"[1] Hawn followed immediately with his own comment: "Perhaps through singing more broadly we may also discover who we may become."[2] In what follows, in the context of the Act2 discussions about identity ("who we may become") and theological culture, I argue for the UCA to indeed be a church which sings "more broadly". The triplet of "worship, witness and service"[3] is deeply entrenched in our Uniting Church ethos. However, is worship listed first for deep theological reasons? Is this something sequential?

I will explore these issues by first asking two questions before turning to highlight 3 constructive themes.

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[1] Albert van den Heuvel, "Risk: New Hymns for a New Day" (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1966), Preface, in C. Michael Hawn, *Streams of Song: An Overview of Congregational Song in the 21st Century*, accessed August 18, 2023, https://www.csu.edu.au/__data/assets/word_doc/0011/789230/michael-hawn-streams-of-song-australian-seminar-pact-paper-oct-09.doc.

[2] van den Heuvel, "Risk: New Hymns for a New Day"

[3] *Basis of Union* para. 15, Uniting Church in Australia, accessed February 2, 2024, https://uniting.church/basisofunion

Two questions:

- How do worship and mission shape each other in relation to our congregational song?
- Do our congregational song choices limit worship and discipleship?

And the three themes:

- Congregational song from the past and present: forming an dinforming faith and discipleship
- Sharing home-grown congregational song
- The soft option of "harmless hymns"

Worship: shaping mission *or* mission shaping worship?

I ask: does the worship we offer God shape our discipleship and mission? Or is it the reverse: that our mission and discipleship shape our worship? Since the early centuries of Christianity the church has affirmed the Latin dictum: *lex orandi, lex credendi* ("the law of what is prayer is the law of what is believed"). Worship and liturgy are not distinct from theology. Some have extended this further as *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi* thus emphasising that what is prayed, believed, and lived are intertwined. These issues take a particular edge in the Act2 discussions about theological culture. how has our worship music helped form Uniting Church identity and with it, theological culture or cultures. My own response will be to argue that we undervalue the role of our worship "song" in shaping our identity, theological culture and mission.

Some years back, browsing through Brisbane's *The Courier Mail*, I stumbled upon an article with a broad "music" focus by Kathleen Noonan who wrote: "Music is our GPS … It works like a global positioning system, helping us find our place in the world and feel at home in a strange world … every tribe on earth has music. It tells other tribes who we are."[4] More specifically, Christianity is a singing and musical faith. Music helps us find our place in the world. Music helps us get in touch with who we are and who we are called to be. It's the melody, form, harmony and rhythm of our tribe. Music helps us get in touch with God.

Therefore, I will reflect on those things that resource, sustain and extend our theological life; on the interface between our worship, witness, service, music and creativity and the UCA's "theological culture."

Do our congregational 'song' choices limit worship and discipleship?

Congregational song choices across the ever-broadening UCA are incredibly diverse. This requires us to ask: how open are we for our congregational song choices to go beyond themes such as praise and adoration of and commitment to the living God, who saves us through Jesus and empowers us by the Spirit? In no way do I seek to denigrate the scripture-validated primacy of praise in a community's worship. Yet does the song we sing too easily "limit" our worship and, by extension, the opportunity to be sent by God through song, yes *song*, into mission as discipleship? All of this impacts on our identity and our theological culture (or cultures).

[4] Kathleen Noonan, *Courier Mail Magazine*, ca.2005

I recall Jesus firstly imploring his disciples: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind".[5] Worship God completely. Christ instantly follows it with the command, "and your neighbour as yourself."[6] God's worshipping people are called to both echo and advance both emphases. Therefore we must ask: in our musical life in worship across the UCA, how well does our congregational song address who we are called to be in Christ? How honest in song are we about our relationships with God and neighbour; our human condition? Do we actually enhance or limit the richness of our theological culture and our identity. Do we enhance or limit our understanding of who and whose we are in Christ?

Offering music also in lament, confession, sacrament, commitment, justice-seeking and in mission – through music's inherent creativity, passion and lyricism – helps orient us beyond only a praise orientation. This is not a comment on any congregation's devotion to God, or its collective discipleship. It is, rather, simply a yearning that congregational song might better engage in forming a more wholistic congregational worship-music culture inspiring, formingand being integral to the sending-out of God's people in mission. the mission of God in Christ who, by God's Spirit, is already present amid a hurting, seeking world.

Thomas Troeger helpfully suggests that our church song is, in itself, an experience of discipleship:

> Our music is a way of praying for the generosity of spirit that brings the abundant life of discipleship ... a way of risking all for Christ. To stand and sing in the community of faith is to begin to find the strength to stand for justice and compassion in the brutal world.[7]

Congregational song from the past and present: forming and informing faith and discipleship

From our denominational forbears we've inherited the rich legacy of Charles Wesley and Isaac Watts, among others. Wesley famously implored congregations to "sing lustily and with good courage"[8]As they did, and continue to do so, the faith is taught and indeed caught. Wesley and Watts helped the church "do theology." Regardless of genre, the best congregational music and singing continues to help us do theology. Not only *do* it, but *live* it!

Through active involvement in the creation of the ecumenical *Australian Hymn Book* and then *Together in Song*, the Uniting Church has connected with a broad range of theological and missional themes and writers. We have been enriched by song from diverse places like Norway, New Zealand and South Africa. We have been impacted by writers well beyond UCA circles, writers such as Elizabeth Smith, John Bell, Shirley Murray, the Taizé community, Robin Mann and Geoff Bullock. The "good courage" of which Wesley implores is core to who we are in Christ. The *Basis of Union*[9] calls us to "fresh words and deeds". As an

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5 Matthew 22:37, NRSV
6 Matthew 22:39, NRSV
7 Thomas H. Troeger, "For God Risk Everything: Reconstructing a Theology of Church Music", in *Reformed Liturgy and Music*, (33:3), 6
8 Charles Wesley, accessed January 31, 2024, https://um-insight.net/in-the-church/local-church/wesley-s-directions-for-singing
9 Uniting Church in Australia, *Basis of Union*, accessed January 26, 2024, https://uniting.church/basisofunion

example, I think of an impromptu lunchtime gathering of folk attending the weeklong National Assembly meeting in Adelaide in July 2012, standing on the steps of South Australia's Parliament House in solidarity with First Nations sisters and brothers, singing local Lutheran writer Robin Mann's *How Long?* in lament. This was a public and courageous expression of our faith. Music helped us do that. This was music sung in community and solidarity.

Decades of UCA-auspiced National Christian Youth Conventions have significantly formed young people in their faith, worship and discipleship, and with that their theology. A succession of memorable wonderful homegrown worship songs have been assimilated into the Uniting Church;s musical repertoire, and have indeed been part of God's ongoing reforming and formative work. Songs such as *Dreams and Visions, We Will Love, Breaking New Ground, Like a Candle* and *Pentecost Prayer* have become almost iconic. Countless regional and Synod-wide children's and youth camps and events have also helped foster age-appropriate worship songs. Various Synods and spheres of our church's life have been impactful in offering new songs for worship, in many cases with theology, "vibe" and lyric consistent with the sort of church and accompanying theological culture(s) the UCA has sought and continues to seek.[10]

This has been a significant feature of our church's life, but with this caveat: I mean those communities of faith courageous and open enough to risk venturing beyond (to name some extremes) either a near-exclusive use of *The Australian Hymn Book* (AHB)/*Together in Song*[11]options or a reliance entirely on the music generated by the likes of Hillsong. Yes, these are extremes on a spectrum, but I invoke them to make a point. Conversations amongst worship- and music-leader colleagues would suggest that it is not unknown for some congregations to rarely, if ever, use worship song that is UCA-specific, i.e. curated and crafted out of an UCA context. I ponder: why is this so?

Sharing home-grown congregational song

The Uniting Church likes to talk about being an Australian church, yet with some exceptions we sing music from the UK and the USA, or perhaps an Australian mega-church, with in many cases theology and ecclesiology often inconsistent with that found in the *Basis of Union*. There are, however, many local resources to draw on. For instance, in South Australia the *Centre for Music, Liturgy & the Arts (CMLA)*[12] have offered fresh home-grown worship songs to the wider church, along with other offerings towards the creative arts and creative, transformative worship. All of this has the potential to shape our identity. Where such songs *have* been sung, identity is undoubtedly being shaped to the glory and mission of our holy God.

In the "online space", *Singing From The Lectionary*,[13] curated by Melbourne's Dr Natalie Sims, offer lectionary song-related options from across the world church and locally. Each suggestion has the potential to shape

[10] Although it is only fair to acknowledge that when worship-song arising out of a UCA context *has* been curated and indeed used impactfully, it has often been hard-won and in the face of traditional theology and musical approaches.
[11] *Together in Song: Australian Hymn Book II*, Harper Collins Religious (East Melbourne, Australia), 1999
[12] Uniting Church in South Australia, Centre for Music, Liturgy & the Arts (CMLA), accessed January 26, 2024, https://www.cmla.org.au
[13] Natalie Sims, *Singing From The Lectionary*, accessed January 26, 2024, http://lectionarysong.blogspot.com

not only our worship culture but our local theological culture. Hopefully my own *Together to Celebrate*[14] site and resources from Dr Craig Mitchell[15] offer us something similar.

In recent years, the NSW/ACT Synod's *Uniting Creative* initiative, with high production values together with enriching – and challenging – cross-cultural influences, has been freely offering new worship songs online for communities of faith; with the aim to:

> mentor and cultivate the gifts of people from all facets of the Uniting Church: across generations, cultural groups, and diverse stylistic frameworks. Our goal is to build capacity and momentum to develop creative leaders as we 'weave a new sound' in and through our Churches.[16]

Movements such as *Songwrite* – beginning in 2013, a series of weekend gatherings successively in Canberra, Adealaide, Brisbane and online – have similary sought to grow local, homegrown UCA-identity-congruent worship songs as an alternative to the choices communities make in their worship music selections. Since the first in Canberra in 2013, with successive events in Adelaide, Brisbane and Victoria online), I have been privileged to share in a weekend of creative, encouraging Christian community with mostly unheralded songwriters from most corners of the country gathering together. Getting the word, i.e. the songs, out there has been a challenge, all of that said. One other attempt, in time needing to close, was the web-based *Songs That Unite* project of the National Assembly in this past decade. Other similar possibilities currently 'bubble' below the surface and warrant greater recognition.

The late 1970s, amid which the Uniting Church in Australia was birthed, coincided with a boom period internationally in the charismatic movement. An important aspect of worship promulgated through this was the introduction of "Scripture in Song"[17]styled music, best led through guitar, keyboard and praise band, in tandem with upfront worship leaders and/or singers. This was important for a new church that could easily have remained "stuck" in using hymnals as the sole source of congregational song. Regrettably, some still do, even all these years on. In a quite different way and with differing theologies and emphases, the Lutheran *All Together*[18] series offered – and continues to offer – fresh song options with a great many from Australian writers.

The Uniting Church is a diverse church, characterised by multiple "theologies", expressions of worship, and understandings of mission in place, much of this diversity reflective of the diversty of cultures present in it.

It is also important to acknowledge that within First People's communities of faith, a distinctive – and diverse – musical styles and theological emphases are in place. By and large, most UCA worshipping communities have no real connection with the song of our First Peoples and as a result we are impoverished.

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[14] David MacGregor, *Together To Celebrate*, accessed January 26, 2024, www.togethertocelebrate.com.au
[15] Craig Mitchell, *Craig Mitchell*, accessed January 26, 2024, https://craigmitchell.com.au
[16] *Uniting Creative*, accessed January 26, 2024, https://www.nswact.uca.org.au/resources/uniting-creative-worship-resources
[17] Scripture *in Song*, accessed February 2, 2024, https://www.scriptureinsong.org
[18] *All Together* series, accessed February 2, 2024, https://www.shopacr.com.au/Music/All-Together-Series/pl.php

With access to such local resources, how has congregational song shaped our identity as a church? How has our theological culture been reflected through all that we sing, and indeed, all that we don't sing? This essay has sought to open up some of these questions.

Long ago the prophet Amos reflected on what he saw as the stark disparity between what belivers preached and what they practised:

> I hate, I despise your religious feasts, I cannot stand your assemblies … away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream![19]

The soft-option of "harmless hymns"

Noted worship-songwriter and theologian John L. Bell from the Iona Community summarises the shortcomings of a church which falls for, as he names it, the soft-option of "harmless hymns." Bell writes:

> for the community of faith, harmless hymns had become a substitute for action on matters of social justice … when the song of the church has become tantamount to sentimentality or deliberately avoids the hard issues of the day or the real issues in people's lives, God has every right to tell us to shut up.[20]

Bell's words remind me of words from 22 June 1977 as the Uniting Church in Australia was born – the landmark "Statement To The Nation". These are words which while bearing no legal imprimatur, nonetheless still act, I argue as a "calling card" for the sort of church in worship, witness and service God continues to call us to be.

> We are conscious of our responsibilities within and beyond this country …We affirm our eagerness to uphold basic Christian values and principles, such as the importance of every human being, the need for integrity in public life, the proclamation of truth and justice, the rights for each citizen to participate in decision-making in the community, religious liberty and personal dignity, and a concern for the welfare of the whole human race.
>
> We pledge ourselves to seek the correction of injustices wherever they occur. We will work for the eradication of poverty and racism within our society and beyond … We will oppose all forms of discrimination which infringe basic rights and freedoms… [21]

To turn around John Bell's words shared earlier: our communities of faith have a particular mandate to sing provocative, convicting hymns which propel us into action on matters of social justice, which avoid sentimentality, which lead us to engage the hard issues of the day, the real issues in people's lives.

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[19] Amos 5:21-24, NRSV
[20] John L. Bell, *The Singing Thing thing*, (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2000), 5
[21] UCA 1977 statement to the nation, accessed February 2, 2024, https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/150

Conclusion

I conclude this reflection with the following hopes for music-in-worship for the Uniting Church in next phase of its life together. tour worship song will be enhanced by:

- incorporating, particularly through Assembly and Synods, of a diversity of song in its gatherings, with a preparedness to use congregational song risky in content and theology, and often provocative.
- upholding the importance of lyrics which are not solely about praise, thanksgiving and personal commitment to God; namely, congregational song connecting with the full human condition; sending us out in mission and discipleship.
- funding, particularly through Assembly and Synods (already happening on a smaller scale in some Synods) to nurture creative arts hubs and movements.
- being intentional about using home-grown congregational song, including song more demonstrably congruent with emphases already noted e.g. in the *Basis of Union*.

Down the centuries, congregational song has been inspiring, forming and being part of the sending-out of God's people in mission, flowing on from a renewed faith-relationship through Jesus Christ. Our congregational song, now more than ever, needs to connect with the mission of God in Jesus. This is the *Basis of Union's* "worship, witness and service" in creative and life-giving dance together.

The call, as always, is for song which celebrates the incarnate Christ – the Christ who, by God's Spirit, is already there amid a hurting, seeking world. As the Act2 Project seeks to best discern the culture and identity God is calling us to, this is also my prayer for every part of the Uniting Church in Australia.

A Brief History of the Construction of the Preamble

Chris Budden

Abstract

In 2009 the UCA adopted a new Preamble to its Constitution. The Preamble was both confessional in terms of the Church's participation in unjust settler-colonial relationships with First Peoples, and acknowledged that First Peoples had prior knowledge of God that was not simply fulfilled in Christ. This article traces the history of the construction of the Preamble as a theological-confessional discourse about belonging. A particular focus is placed on the way the Preamble constructs a narrative that forges space for the just belonging of First Peoples. Attention will also be given to the way opposition to the Preamble supports discourse which continues to justify colonial-settler occupation and the denial of the proper belonging – as custodians and a sovereign peoples – of First Peoples, and the centrality of relationships between First and Second Peoples for the church in Australia.

Introduction

In July 2009 the Uniting Church Assembly meeting adopted a new preamble to its Constitution. This article offers a brief account of the construction of that Preamble as a theological-confessional discourse about belonging in both land and church. It is a discourse negotiated at the intersection of settler-colonialism and its logic of elimination,1 social liberalism's commitment to justice as inclusion but within an established polity,2 and theological claims in which the church alone knows God and whatever knowledge First Peoples have will be fulfilled in Christ.

The Preamble was negotiated across the Church3 in order to construct the foundation for the belonging of First Peoples that does not negate their existence as a peoples, honours their ancient occupation of the land and right to be heard, and offers a negotiated way of belonging and self-determination.

This account of the Preamble's history is drawn from the official records of the Church, and also from my own active engagement in the process – as NSW-ACT Synod General Secretary in the early stages, and then

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1 Colonialism is based on unequal relationships, control of identity, and the exploitation of original populations, largely through labour. Settler-colonialism, on the other hand, means that colonial powers occupy land, and have as their primary goal the taking of land and the elimination of the people. (See, for example, Lorenzo Veracini, "Introducing settler colonial studies," *settler colonial studies*, 1 (2011): 1-12.) Patrick Wolfe speaks of this logic of elimination as the need to deny the right of First Peoples to belong and challenge claims to European sovereignty and ownership of land. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," *Journal of Genocide Research*, Volume 8, Number 4 (December 2006): 387.

2 On various expressions of liberalism and their impact of government policy relating to First Peoples, see Elizabeth Strakosch, *Neoliberal Indigenous Policy: Settler Colonialism and the 'Post-Welfare' State* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

3 I have used "Church" when referring to the Uniting Church, and "church" when referring to the wider church.

as convenor of the task group which was responsible for overseeing the development of the Preamble. It seeks to answer two questions: why was a new Preamble needed, and how was that Preamble negotiated and constructed as an alternative narrative of belonging in the Uniting Church?

The need for the Preamble

The Preamble arose in the conflict between promise and failure. The promise was the establishment of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress in 1985,4 and the Covenant relationship forged in 1994.5 It was a promise that an equal and just relationship between First and Second Peoples would be at the centre of the Uniting Church's life, and self-determination would be supported. The failure lay in the inability to translate that promise into actual structures and practices. The particular issues for the Church, were the failure to listen (which implies people have nothing to say),6 the failure to support proper self-determination, and the failure to honour Indigenous peoples as the sovereign First Peoples who had a meaningful relationship with Divine Life prior to 1788. The production of the Preamble was a struggle over the control of knowledge, who determines identity, who can belong and under what conditions, whether God allows multiple stories and knowing, and how land matters to our relationship with God.

An account of the history of the production of the Preamble

The issues facing the relationship between First and Second Peoples were the subject of two conversations that became the immediate context for the construction of the Preamble. The first was a series of meetings of Congress leadership and General Secretaries (Synods and Assembly) about the authority of Congress and its place in the Church. The second was conversations that arose because of decisions of the 2003 Assembly meeting.

Meetings about Authority and Place

Faced with questions about the actual authority of Congress, particularly in relation to other councils and the way "oversight" could be understood, meetings began in January 2003 between the General Secretaries and Congress leaders. In March the meeting confirmed the principle that Regional Committees are accountable to national Congress, acknowledged that relationships vary across synods, that local self-determination is

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4 On the formation of Congress see William W. Emilsen, "The origins of the Uniting Aboriginal and islander Christian Congress," in *Mapping the Landscape: Essays in Australian and New Zealand Christianity*, edited by Susan Emilsen and William W. Emilsen (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 62-86.

5 The covenant was expressed in two statements, one from the UCA president, Dr. Jill Tabart, and a response from Mr. Bill Hollingsworth, Chairperson of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. See Rob Bos and Geoff Thompson, Edited and Introduced, *Theology for Pilgrims: Selected Theological Documents of the uniting Church in Australia* (Sydney: Uniting Church Press, 2008), 631-640. As I have pointed out elsewhere, the Covenant arose as a way of responding to the failure of the Church to honour its commitment to Congress around land rights and national celebrations. Chris Budden, "Reconciliation and Reparation: Building Just Relationships between First and Second Peoples," *Uniting Church Studies*, Volume 21., Number 1 (June 2017): 39-52.

6 On the traumatic impact of never being listened to see, for example, Megan Davis, "Voice of Reason: On Recognition and Renewal," *Quarterly Essay*, Issue 90 (2023): 47-49. On the church's failure to listen see Chris Budden, "The Reason We Do Not Hear: Theology Struggling with Its Colonial Location," in *Theological and Hermeneutical Explorations from Australia: Horizons of Contextuality*, edited Jione Havea (London: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2021).

crucial, that Congress' structure is hierarchical in a way that the UCA's is not, and Congress would prefer to clarify relationships rather than putting energy into changing structures.7

The 2003 Assembly and covenant

The Melbourne Assembly in 2003 placed a significant strain on relationships between Congress. One of the Assembly's central issues was whether gay and lesbian people could exercise leadership in the church. Congress withdrew from the meeting to discuss its position so that it could offer its wisdom to the Church. Towards the end of the debate Congress returned to the meeting and the Chairperson of Congress joined the line at the microphones to present their position. The Assembly President closed the debate and put the vote before Congress could present its position. Congress members felt that they had been ignored and completely disrespected.[8] They believed there was a breach of the covenant, and of the commitment not to make decisions they disagreed with. Outside the meeting leaders expressed the view that they might have to leave the UCA.[9] Internally Congress had a serious conversation about whether they should continue in the Uniting Church or move towards being an independent church.

Conversations from 2004

Building on the relationship established in the previous six months, and with the encouragement of an Assembly resolution,[10] synod General Secretaries sought a meeting with Congress to talk about ways for them to stay. The ensuing conversations involved the need to renew and deepen the covenant relationship, the need to clarify the authority of Congress to exercise oversight of its ministry, the possibility of Congress being located differently within the structures of the church, and the need for recognition to be included in the Constitution.[11]

Covenant

The next few meetings focussed on renewing the covenant so that Congress could feel confident to stay, and on structural issues. One outcome was a long paper exploring the theological foundations for covenant, and a study booklet based on that work.[12] The 2006 Assembly commended this work for study, and encouraged the various councils to explore with UAICC what practical things might flow from covenant.[13] The renewing the Covenant work, together with the parallel conversations about oversight and structures, shaped the work that led to the Preamble. Indeed, the idea of a Preamble arose in and was nurtured by this group.

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7 "Record of decisions of Task group working on the relationship between the leadership of UAICC and the UCA," Meeting held March 12th 2003. *Assembly Archives*, Box 60, Folder 2, File 17.

8 Thanks to John Rickard for his reminder of the way the debate ended. Personal email 18 September 2023.

9 I went to the Assembly as a long-term ally of the UAICC. I was aware of these conversations because I often shared break times with them.

10 The Assembly reassured Congress that it wished to live within the covenant, asked the President to take steps to work with Congress on ways to respond to Congress' concerns, and asked the ASC to consider ways in which Assembly procedures could be more culturally sensitive. (Minute 03.44 of the Tenth Assembly, July 2003).

11 I have written more fully about these meetings in Chris Budden, "The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress," in *An Informed Faith: The Uniting Church at the Beginning of the 21st Century*, edited by William W. Emilsen (Preston, Vic.: Mosaic Press, 2014), particularly 221-224.

12 *Building Partnerships: A guide to covenant renewal with Indigenous people throughout the Uniting Church in Australia.* Compiled and edited by Mark Hillis (Sydney: The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, 2006).

13 Minute 06.07 of the Nineth Assembly, 2006.

The suggestion for a Preamble

Influenced by Congress' commitment to relationships rather than structures, the General Secretaries-Congress group spent considerable time exploring the principles that should underpin the relationship between Congress and the rest of the Church, the theological affirmations that supported these principles (work that would influence the shape of the Preamble), and how polity could be shaped around relationships rather than functions.

While the group continued to consider structures, authority and covenant, there were occasional comments about what needed to go into the law of the Church to ensure that the Church remembered its commitments. There was discussion of Constitutional change and also changes to the Preamble. The earliest concrete suggestion for a change to the Preamble was offered by the General Secretary of the Assembly, Terence Corkin, in a discussion paper he circulated 31 January 2005. Corkin suggested a new paragraph be added to the existing Constitution that would recognise Congress as a Council of the Church.[14] At this stage the Preamble suggestion was largely about matters of polity and governance, but it did stress relationships.

The next step would come from Congress and would be about placing a much broader story of their life in the Preamble.

Congress' commitment to develop a new Preamble

Congress was convinced of the need for something in the law of the church. In striking parallel to experience in the political realm, promises in the Church had been easily made and just as easily forgotten. Congress wanted something in the Law that was not easily changed. It would be public and relatively stable. They hoped it would shape the way Regulations were made and interpreted.

On 30 October 2007 the National Executive of Congress determined:

1a. That we begin work on a preamble to the UCA Constitution that defines the context of the Australian church and the importance of a relationship with the "first peoples" of this country if any church is to be truly Australian.
1b. The members to be Shayne Blackman [National Administrator], Vince Ross [National Chairperson], Grant Findlay [Resource Worker Tasmania], and John Rickard [support person for the National Chair].

The same minute supported continuing work on the covenant, affirmed the need for Congress to be recognised as a council of the Church, and sought the right of National Congress to give Regional Committees the powers of a presbytery.[15]

[14] Terence Corkin, "Draft – Not for Distribution (January 31 2005)." *Assembly Archives*, Box 60, File 1, Document 8.
[15] Minutes of the National Executive of Congress, 30 October 2007. "Findlay" should be "Finlay".

John Rickard offered an explanation of how the work was done and how a draft preamble emerged. He said that Vince Ross was charged with consulting Congress members about what they wanted in a preamble. Ross asked John Rickard, in consultation with himself, to prepare a working document that could become the basis for discussion. Rickard developed a theological section that drew on the centrality of creation to Indigenous spirituality. He was trying to engage a conversation between Indigenous spirituality and the theology of the Church to which they now belonged. It was decided to draw Djiniyini Gondarra, the foremost theologian in Congress at the time, into the conversation. They met at Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island) in January 2008, together with other leaders that Gondarra had invited. Rickard says: "The theologians up on Galiwin'ku, particularly Djiniyini, were very taken with [the emphasis on creation] and expanded it greatly."[16]

After this meeting a draft was shared with Congress leaders – National Executive, National Elders, and "a law group" from the APY lands. Eventually a draft (the 3rd Congress worked on) was offered to the Task Group that had been established to develop the work for the Church. This draft is included at Appendix A.

Congress took the initiative. They suggested the shape and content of that conversation. They sought to exercise agency and to establish the terms of what they knew would be often difficult future negotiations.

Appointment the Preamble Task Group

Continuous updates from the Secretaries-Congress group ensured that the idea of a changes to the Preamble were kept in front of the ASC. The next step was the appointment of a task group that could take Congress' suggestion, consult with the Church, and bring forward a recommendation for a new preamble.

The 2006 Brisbane Assembly asked the ASC to set up a task group to consider a range of constitutional and regulatory matters: membership of presbyteries, membership of future Assemblies, membership of the Assembly Standing Committee, review of clause 39 of the Constitution, and review of the Constitution. A task group was appointed (November 2006), and reported on its work in November 2007.

As a result of that work the ASC appointed a new task group in November 2007 with the narrower task of reviewing the Constitution in the light of previous work, exploring ways a preamble could impact on the interpretation of the Constitution, and referring their recommendations to the Assembly Legal Reference Committee for drafting. The ASC appointed John Evans, John Rickard, Heidi Stabb, and Chris Budden (convenor) to do this task.[17]

The Task Group began its work in February 2008, exploring the role of preambles in modern constitutions, examining ways to frame the theological assumptions in the polity of a Constitution,[18] considering the contextual stresses and, most significantly for the issue being considered here, starting to think about the

[16] John Rickard, personal email to me, 19 October 2020.
[17] Letter from Assembly General Secretary to me, dated December 20, 2007. *Assembly Archives*, Box 60, File 4, Document 84a.
[18] See *Assembly Archives*, Box 60, File 4, Document 84b.

new preamble. After initial work on the Constitution, which was reported to the July meeting of the ASC,[19] the Task Group attention shifted entirely to the Preamble.

Based on the work provided by Congress, the Task Group offered a draft of a preamble approved by the Congress National Executive to the July 2008 meeting of the ASC.[20] Importantly, the accompanying report also introduced the ASC to work Congress was doing on other constitutional changes. The National Executive had approved words for a new section 49 of the Constitution (the section that recognises the UAICC), names the National Conference of Congress as a Council of the Church, and spells out National Conference's power to make regional committees into presbyteries.[21]

Between the first statement offered, and acceptance of the Preamble by the Assembly there were numerous conversations, consultations, submissions, and drafting work that engaged the Assembly Standing Committee, Synod General Secretaries, various bodies and people who responded to a draft, the Assembly Legal Reference Committee. Congress continued to have a voice through the task group, National Executive, and meetings with the ASC and the General Secretaries.

Consultation with the wider Church

By early 2009 the Task Group had a version which they sent to the Church for comment. The letter that accompanied the draft asked people to consider whether the suggested new Preamble was helpful in supporting relationships with First Peoples and reflected the Church's faith. Which parts could they affirm, which parts do they have difficulty with, and what changes would they suggest?[22]

Reponses to the Draft were received from individuals (6), presbyteries (11) synods (4), and an assembly agency. Many of the responses were supportive of the intention of the Preamble and believed that there needed to be better ways to recognise First Peoples. Opposition was to particular claims about (i) the life of First Peoples prior to European occupation, (ii) the way the Church's relationships were depicted, and (iii) claims that people could know God apart from Christ. I will return to this opposition later in the article.

Following responses from the church, the Task Group continued to work with Congress and the ASC on a final draft for the Assembly. During this time the General Secretaries offered a suggested revision of the draft, and in March 2009 the National Congress Executive responded.[23] One issue that was further clarified was the claim about sovereignty as an expression of owners and custodians.

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[19] "Report of the Task Group on the Constitution July 2008." *Assembly Archives*, Box 60, Folder 4, File 87c.

[20] John Evans made a significant contribution to the structure of the work, inserting the 2008 suggestion from Congress into a Preamble form and picking up the essential points of the 1977 Preamble and the importance of law in the Church. Evans says that part of the purpose was to incorporate the flavour of the *Basis of Union*, by stressing that the Church had entered a covenantal relationship "as a foretaste of the coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation" (drawing on paragraph 3). Personal email to me 18 September 2023.

[21] *Assembly Archives*, Box 60, File 3, Document 87c.

[22] *Assembly Archives*, Box 60, File 3, Document 72.

[23] See *Assembly Archives*, Box 60, File 3, Document 76A for a copy of both documents set out in columns for comparison.

Later in March the Task Group offered its work to the ASC.[24] Among the issues raised in response by the ASC were: the need to include some reference to the Trinity (accepted) and to Jesus who judges all cultures (not accepted). The ASC also expressed opposition to use of the language of "sovereign" (language remained). There were also minor language suggestions that were accepted by the Task Group.[25] The ASC delegated to the task group the responsibility to continue to speak with Congress in the light of responses from the Church.[26]

The Task Group completed the final draft of the Preamble at its meeting on Saturday 2 May 2009, and through subsequent emails.[27] In the week prior to the Assembly, Congress held its National Conference, and a decision was made to support the proposed Preamble and the recommendations about structural changes.[28]

Receiving the work at the 2009 Assembly

The report and recommendations regarding the Preamble were brought to the Assembly by the ASC in what became Proposal 55.[29] The first three sections of the Proposal related to the Preamble. This included a note about the purpose of the Preamble and the limits of its authority, and the proposal to adopt the new Preamble. Proposal 12 required the President to read the Preamble prior to offering any interpretation of the Constitution and Regulations (a power granted to the President in Clause 71 of the Constitution). With minor amendments these proposals were adopted.

Proposals 5 to 7 reminded the ASC of its authority to grant temporary exemption from regulations or make temporary ones (Regulation 3.6.34) if this was needed to ensure Congress could exercise oversight of its ministry. [This was accepted.]

Proposal 8, which was rejected as unnecessary, sought to add a new clause to the Constitution (Section 4) to remind the Church to remain open to the Covenant. Proposal 9 sought to transfer from Synods to the National Executive of Congress the power to grant Regional Committees "specific rights, powers, duties and responsibilities of a presbytery," and also to transfer other powers of Synods to National Executive. These attempts to transfer real power to Congress and to strengthen their self-determination, were rejected.

Proposal 10 requested the UAICC and the General Secretary to identify areas where such changes might be needed to increase self-determination. Section 11 proposed adding definitions to Clause 3 of the Constitution: Covenantal relationship, First Peoples, Second Peoples. [These were accepted]

The Assembly Debate

The National Administrator of Congress, Rev Shane Blackman, and myself introduced the Proposals, and we responded to questions. The next day the Proposals went into small groups. Drawing on responses from

[24] *Assembly Archives*, Box 60, File 3, Document 76d.
[25] See *Assembly Archives*, Box 60, File 3, Document 73r, "Report to Task Group on Preamble Discussion at ASC".
[26] Minute 09.08.02 of the Assembly Standing Committee, March 2009.
[27] *Assembly Archives*, Box 60, File 3, Documents 82a to 82d.
[28] Minutes of 2009 National Conference.
[29] *Assembly Archives*, Box 60, File 2, Document 53.

the groups, the facilitation group recommended three relatively small changes, including an addition to clause 3 so that it read "The same love and grace that was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ."[30]

The next day there was a debate in the full Assembly. At one stage someone asked whether it was really true that First Peoples understood God as Christians understood God. I think this was intended to be a respectful question, an attempt not to absorb Indigenous spirituality into church categories.[31] Congress leaders heard the question differently, as suggesting that they were godless. The Congress Chairperson said that the meeting had become unsafe for them, and they wished to withdraw for some time (as the processes allowed). He said the rest of the Assembly could continue to discuss the issues if it wanted to.

The withdrawal of Congress was a deeply painful moment for members of the Assembly; it spoke of a failure of relationships. The Assembly stopped working. Later that day Congress said they wished to return. The members of the Assembly left the room, and came back in with Congress members, who then led a time of prayer as people knelt all around the meeting space. Decisions were made the next day.[32]

Receiving the work in the wider Church

The requirements of the Constitution are that amendments to the Constitution supported by the Assembly do not have "effect unless the amendment is approved by a majority of the synods and two-thirds of the Presbyteries."[33] To assist this to occur the Assembly General Secretary facilitated an explanatory document about the decisions and their purpose. Members of the Preamble Task Group visited congregations, presbyteries and synods to explain the decision. Councils made their decisions, and the Preamble came into effect.

Changes and criticisms

Changes

The basic structure and claims in the Preamble were those which had been imagined by Congress in its earliest drafts. However, there were a number of significant changes made as the document moved from the hands of Congress to the decisions of the Assembly. First, in the final version, the work of creation is made by the Triune God, rather than one identified as Creator. Second, God is no longer revealed in creation, but by the Spirit in the land through law, custom and ceremony. Third, at some point the language of "nations" was removed, suggesting the denial of an alternative political community. And fourth, reference to Jesus (and the love and grace of God) was inserted in paragraph 3. It was the references to Trinity and Jesus that were particularly significant.

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[30] *Assembly Archives*, Box 60, File 2, Document 55b. The facilitation Groups report is Document 54.
[31] At the time I was, regretfully, not so generous in my response.
[32] This account of events was written by me shortly after the Assembly meeting and formed part of the material I used to lead discussions about the Preamble. Chris Budden, "Preamble Discussion" (Notes for a Post-Assembly presentation on the Preamble), *Assembly Archives*, Box 60, File 2, Document 60a.
[33] The Uniting Church Constitution, paragraph 72.

The change from "Creator God" to "Triune God" was a change requested by the ASC. While Congress agreed, it was not their preferred language. On the surface this is simply an assertion of Christian orthodoxy. And yet the language of "Trinity" is what, in another context, Jacob Torfing called an "empty signifier." That is, it is a word (like "God" or "nation") without a set and particular content, and it is this lack of set content that enables it to offer a point of unity in discourse.[34] People seek to fill these terms of discourse, but they can never be completely filled by one, universal claim.

What this means is that the language of "Trinity" still leaves open different understandings. Some see it as simply a claim to orthodoxy, while others see it as making space for an emphasis on Christology ("the Triune God they [colonisers] knew in Jesus Christ"). As members of the Church, Congress understood that Trinity was an expression of orthodoxy, but that it also allowed for emphasis on the creative work of God and the centrality of relationship and diversity within God. Church language about Trinity could be used as part of the claim to inclusion, while destabilising and extending the way the language was used.

The second major change was the insertion in clause 3 of reference to "the love and grace that was finally (and fully) revealed in Jesus Christ". This very significant change occurred prior to the draft being sent to the Church and was offered in a slightly different form by Geoff Thompson. Congress accepted a slightly revised set of words.[35]

This was clearly an effort to assert the centrality of Christ and revelation in him, an assertion strengthened by the Assembly. And yet, read from another perspective it is also an assertion that First Peoples knew what Christ finally revealed to others. Equally important, the love and grace which they knew "gave them particular insights into God's ways" (#3). The other issue when the Church affirms Christ in this way is: "whose Christ"? The answer which Congress gives about who Christ is, is often different to European scholars and commentators. Again, Church language is used and destabilised to make space for belonging.

Criticism and Opposition

As well as changes to the Preamble during its construction, there were also areas of opposition that sought to oppose the new narrative and the space it made for belonging.

First, there was opposition to claims about sovereignty,[36] and to the claim that First Peoples farmed the land. This opposition was about both the right to define and control these terms, and an undermining of two important foundations for the claim First Peoples to belong in this place and to have custodian rights to land.

Second, there was opposition to the way history was told, and to the confessional tone of that history. Again, the issue was control of the narrative, and an insistence on the benevolence of Second Peoples as the foundation for their right to belong.

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[34] Jacob Torfing, *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Zizek* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 28-29.
[35] Archives, Box 60, File 3, Document 76f.
[36] A working group from New England North-West Presbytery offered a very detailed set of reasons why sovereignty was not an appropriate way to describe the relationship of First Peoples to this country. *Assembly Archives*. Box 60, Folder 3, File 74de.

Third, there was concern the Preamble's purpose was to make the church "a whole church," when the wholeness of the church depends solely on Christ.[37] Yet the issue is not whether the Church is church because of Christ. The issue is how the Church lives to reflect that calling and, in particular, who can belong and under what conditions.

The fourth issue was the struggle many CALD people had with the language of First and Second Peoples.[38] This concern was an important reminder to a Church that prided itself on being multicultural and inclusive. Migrant communities that have come more recently, and particularly those from Asia and the Pacific, had a different relationship to colonial invasion, and also have suffered from racism and unequal treatment in the Church. There was concern that this reality was not well-expressed by their inclusion among "Second Peoples." The issue being grappled with is belonging.[39]

However, whatever the differences among Second Peoples, the issue is whether we will allow our identity and belonging to be forged in relation to First Peoples. "First" and "Second" do not refer to time and history, but to place. It is about our relationship to land, and the people of the land. Our identity is shaped by being guests.

The fifth major point of opposition came from the Assembly Legal Reference Committee. The ALRC argued that preambles had largely dropped out of favour, because they had no role in interpreting Constitutions. To introduce a new preamble would suggest that it could bear more meaning that was possible, and the ASC needed to be very clear what intended to achieve through a preamble.[40] Closer to the Assembly, and in line with this view, they argued that a Preamble should not include theology, and that the best approach was to have a theological Statement affirmed by the Assembly. They offered such a statement.[41]

Again, the issue was not a lack of genuine concern for First Peoples. And they were correct about the legal status of Preambles. What they ignored was the identity-shaping, discursive role of preambles and how that shapes interpretation. Law is not simply a neutral thing, and each reading is an interpretation. The Preamble provides a narrative that it hopes will shape interpretation.

The final and yet, most significant set of issues, had to do with God and revelation. There were two issues. The first was the claim that there is only revelation in Christ. This position was found in a number of

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[37] See, for example, Michael Owen, "A New Israel," *ACCatalyst*, 4:2 (April 2010): 11-13.

[38] The 2009 Assembly added definitions of First and Second Peoples to the Constitution, Section 3 "Definitions". The definition of "Second Peoples" differs slightly from that in the Preamble which reads "Second Peoples from many lands". Tony Floyd, National Director Multicultural Ministry, played an important role in keeping this issue before the Task Group and in developing the definitions.

[39] See the views in Document 84f in *Assembly Archives*, Box 60, File 4. The issue continues to be of concern for some in the CALD community. See, for example, Kamaloni Tui-ono's post-Assembly critique of the language of Second Peoples, in "Reflections Arising Out of Paragraph 1:8 of the Code of Ethics," *Uniting Church Studies*, Volume 23, Number 1 (June 2021): 49.

[40] Assembly Legal Reference Committee, "The Role of Preambles Interpretation of Documents," Assembly Standing Committee, July 25-27, 2008, Document 10A. *Assembly Archives*, Box 60, File 3, Document 83.

[41] See "Views of the Assembly Legal Reference Committee in response to changes proposed to the Preamble and Constitution by the ASC Task Group" (June 4, 2009). *Assembly Archives*, Box 60, File 4, Document 92c.

responses, including that of the Assembly of Confessing Churches,[42] and such scholars as Alex Jensen.[43] This opposition is framed around a concern that truth can only be found in Christ, and an assumption that whatever others know has been fulfilled in Christ. All other knowledge is partial and inadequate.

Claims about the truth of theological positions are important, but my more limited interest in this article is the way they contribute to the construction of discourse around exclusion and belonging. A claim about fulfillment of all knowledge in Christ means that First Peoples simply do not bring anything of value to the Church. What they know is known better by the Church; there is no motive to listen, no reason for respect. And First Peoples cannot claim their relationship with God as the foundation for their belonging in this place and to this land, because that relationship with God has been replaced. Life is newly created and the old has gone.

The second concern, which was carefully expressed by Geoff Thompson was that, in using the language of "revelation," the Preamble pressed First Peoples into the Western Christian construction of what makes a true religion. Using the language of "revelation" may distort the proper nature of religious life among First Peoples. It might also mean that by framing the matter this way First Peoples outside Congress may not recognise the portrayal of their religious life.[44]

This was a sensible and reasonable concern, but it must not be forgotten that Congress chose the language of "revelation". They sought to engage with the Church around the language of the Church, asserting that what they knew was proper knowledge given them by God. This knowledge could be brought into the Church and their journey of discipleship.

Conclusion

The history of the Preamble is a story of a community seeking to negotiate a theological and ecclesial narrative that will better support a belonging that is just and affirming. It is the action of a minority using the language and story of the Church and destabilising and challenging accepted meanings. It is also the story of opposition to any shifts in the identity-narrative of the Church.

The Preamble is an assertion of existence, of the right to be heard and respected as the original occupiers of the land, the right to self-determination, and of the right of First Peoples to enter the church *as First Peoples*. It is an assertion of ancient occupation of the land on which the Church lives, of ongoing sovereignty, and of belief in the One who creates and sustains life.

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[42] Clive Pearson offers a sympathetic account of the concerns of members of the ACC in "Exploring the ACCatalyst's call for a 'careful reading': The UCA and its Preamble," *Uniting Church Studies*. The New Preamble. Volume 16, Number 1 (June 2010): 7-17. On this particular issue see Hedley Fihaki, "News and Views," *ACCatalyst*, 3 (June 2009): 6.

[43] Alex Jensen, "The proposed new Preamble and the Barmen Declaration, and why it matters," *Uniting Church Studies*. The New Preamble. Volume 16, Number 1 (June 2010): 63-70.

[44] Geoff Thompson, "Revelation, providence and openness: Reflections on Paragraph 3 of the Preamble," *Uniting Church Studies*. Volume 16, Number 1 (June 2010): 19-27

Those who framed the Preamble understood that central to the struggle for new life was the discourse – political and theological – that shaped the way people saw and acted. The construction of the Preamble was not simply a contest about ideas. It was a contest about world-views, and the practices that gave expression to those worlds. The theological heart of the conversation was about the way grace and providence are understood, and the assumption in Christian theology that focusses providence on Christ.

The Preamble has meaning beyond Congress. It touches on the theology, identity, and nature of the Uniting Church. The challenge for the Church is to build on the relationships and history embodied in the Preamble to reconsider its own life, and to continue to build right relationships.

APPENDIX A:
PREAMBLE OR IN SOME OTHER PART OF THE CONSTITUTION [January 2008]

1. That when the three churches that make up the Uniting Church arrived in Australia as part of the process of colonisation they found:
   a. A land that had been created and sustained by God who is revealed in creation.
   b. That this land had nurtured and sustained the first peoples or nations of this country, the Aboriginal and Islander peoples, the first Australians, who were the long standing sovereign peoples of this land.
   c. These people had already encountered the Creator God before the rest of us arrived and they had chosen their own way to express and share their experience of this one God through law and ceremony. The Spirit was already in the land speaking to the people. Law and ceremony has infused their consciousness and social structure, and become foundational to their way of life.
   d. Tragically, along with the new migrants, many in our churches failed to recognise the importance of these first peoples, their relationship to the land, or the way God had spoken to them.
2. As a consequence the dominant culture of Australia has constructed and propagated a version of history that progressively denied that this land was cultivated and farmed by these first peoples. Many of these first peoples have resisted this denial and challenged historians to re-write this distorted version of history.
3. That if the Uniting Church in Australia is to be truly Christian and truly located in this place, then it must be in a meaningful relationship with these first peoples. This is not only a matter of identity but of justice and integrity. Together we must see ourselves as God sees us, peoples with a destiny in this country.
4. We acknowledge the further pain that we were complicit in the taking of the children of these first peoples. We could not turn our backs on the evil of the Government policy of the time. In an act of compassion we cared for these children in our homes and institutions, not knowing the pain we exacerbated for so many by denying their reconciliation with their families. As a church we have publicly admitted our shame and have shared our apology.
5. In 1985, in an attempt to act justly within our own life, the UCA responded to a request from it's Aboriginal and Islander members to form an Indigenous part of itself called the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC). In response to this request and in faithful commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the UCA received the UAICC so that it might facilitate Indigenous self-determination within the bounds of the UCA.
6. In 1988 Congress issues an invitation to the UCA to join with them in a solemn act of covenanting before the Lord. In 1994 this offer was taken up by the Assembly of the UCA to formalise the proposed covenant and to invite the rest of the UCA to commit itself into an abiding and ever-deepening Covenant relationship with UAICC.
7. As a consequence the UCA has a desire to accept and continuously improve the covenant relationship offered to us by the Aboriginal and Islander part of the Church.

From Conflict to Community: theological reflection on the Team Confrontation Method

Neil Pembroke

Abstract

The Team Confrontation Method (TCM) for organisational intervention works with Hermans' Self-Confrontation Method (SCM). SCM is most often applied in the fields of psychotherapy and personal coaching to facilitate self-challenge and to promote self-knowledge. Some organisational consultants have modified the method to stimulate team confrontation in situations of poor communication, lack of trust, and factionalism. When it comes to adapting a team confrontation method for use in a Uniting Church workplace or congregation, there are two essential steps to take. The first is showing that the chosen method has an affinity with the Christian heritage. The second move is to demonstrate the method in action in a church community or workplace. It is the first move, theological analysis, that is attempted in this essay. It is argued that the value base of TCM accords well with the partnership model we find in the Hebrew Scriptures – namely, the covenantal relationship between YHWH and Israel. The method used is critical correlation. While acknowledging that there are areas of disconnection, it is suggested that certain key moves in TCM can be meaningfully linked to the relational dynamic in the lament tradition in Israel.

Introduction

In the field of study known as organisational spirituality, sense of community is viewed as a significant factor in spiritualising a workplace. For example, David McMillan advocates for workplaces in which there is a "spirit of belonging together," a "feeling that there is an authority structure that can be trusted," and "a spirit that comes from shared experiences."[1] Most people would agree that a humanised workplace is one in which there is sense of belonging, trust, respect, compassion, and a team orientation. Indeed, they would personally love to work in an organisation with this culture. Sadly, they find themselves in a work environment characterised instead by conflict, mistrust, miscommunication, abuse of power by those in authority, and factionalism.

Uniting Church workplaces and congregations, it goes without saying, are far from immune from such problems and deficiencies. Though we are blessed by the befriending Spirit of Christ and the enabling grace of God, our sinful drives and personal inadequacies too often drag us into destructive behaviour.

[1] D. W. McMillan, "Sense of Community," *Journal of Community Psychology* 24, no. 4, (1996), 315-325, at 315.

It is relatively easy to diagnose the problems in a divided workplace. Much more challenging is putting an effective strategy in place to move past factionalism to a spirit of community. Clearly, this is a difficult task. Fortunately, there are helpful approaches available to us. From the methods on offer, I have selected one that grew out of Hubert Hermans' theory of the dialogical self.[2] The approach has two variants – namely, "the Team Confrontation Method"[3] and "SCM-organisation."[4] This general strategy for organisational intervention works with Hermans' Self-Confrontation Method (SCM). SCM is most often applied in the fields of psychotherapy and personal coaching to facilitate self-challenge and to promote self-knowledge. In the organisational consultancy approaches indicated above, however, SCM is used to stimulate team confrontation in situations of poor communication, lack of trust, and factionalism. I have chosen this particular team confrontation approach for two reasons. First, the use of SCM to promote self-awareness and emotional expression is innovative in the field of team conflict resolution. Second, the approach aligns generally with Christian values.

When it comes to adapting a team confrontation method for use in a Uniting Church workplace or congregation, there are two essential steps to take. The first, alluded to above, is showing that the chosen method has an affinity with the Christian heritage. The second move is to demonstrate the method in action in a church community or workplace. Depending on context, this may involve integrating spiritual interventions such as prayer and confession, meditation on scripture, and Christian ritual (sacramental and non-sacramental). In the space available here, I can only prosecute the first move, *viz*., theological analysis.

I argue that the value base of the Team Confrontation Method accords well with the partnership model we find in the Hebrew Scriptures – namely, the covenantal relationship between YHWH and Israel.[5] In the team confrontation approach, dialogue is promoted in two ways. First, the facilitator insists that each side – the powerful and the weak – be allowed to have its say. Second, they create an environment that supports genuine listening and cognitive empathy. To be sure, there is a theology of the covenant in the Hebrew Scriptures that is contractual, unilateral, and non-dialogical.[6] However, there is also one that is richer and more mature. I am referring to the protest or lament tradition in which the covenantal relationship is construed as dialogical and reciprocal.[7] YHWH has his powerful say, but Israel also insists on having its say. YHWH makes a moral claim on the people, but they also take their moral claim to YHWH.

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[2] See H. J.M. Hermans, H.J.G. Kempen, & R.J.P. van Loon, "The Dialogical Self: Beyond Individualism and Rationalism," *American Psychologist* 47 (1992), 23-33; H.J.M. Hermans, "The Dialogical Self: Toward a Theory of Personal and Cultural Positioning," *Culture and Psychology* 7 (2001), 243-281; H.J. M. Hermans, "The Dialogical Self: A Process of Positioning in Space and Time," in S. Gallagher (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 654-680.

[3] See P. Zomer, "The Team Confrontation Method (TCM)," in H. Hermans (ed), *Assessing and Stimulating a Dialogical Self in Groups, Teams, Cultures, and Organizations* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 133-152.

[4] See R. van de Loo, "SCM-Organization: A Method for Assessing and Facilitating Organization Dialogue and Development," in H. Hermans (ed), *Assessing and Stimulating a Dialogical Self in Groups, Teams, Cultures, and Organizations* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 153-172.

[5] Some may charge that this move constitutes a "divinising" of management. In my analogical theology, I operate on the principle that any hint of similarity between God and humankind is accompanied by any even greater degree of dissimilarity.

[6] See W. Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology I: Structural Legitimation," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985), 28-46.

[7] See W. Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology II: Embrace of Pain," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985), 395-415.

The essay is structured as follows. First, a case study featuring a hypothetical Uniting Church agency, 'Elm Street Uniting Community Services,' is presented.[8] In theory, it is an example of the teamwork, open dialogue, and sense of community mentioned above. In practice, there are cases of abuse of power by management, division, and injustice. A theological reflection on this experience featuring covenantal theology follows. Next, Hermans's Dialogical Self Theory and his Self-Confrontation Method are presented to lay the groundwork for an overview of the Team Confrontation approach.

The Elm Street Story: Wonderful in Theory, Deficient in Practice

As discussed above, there is a stream of organisational spirituality that focuses on sense of community. A workplace community is one characterised by co-worker support, emotional safety, sense of belonging, team orientation, and trust in the authority structure. On paper, the Elm Street approach looks like a shining exemplar of such a community. However, the reality is that some of the teams are experiencing factionalism, abuse of power by team leaders, and stifling of dialogue.

The hypothetical Elm Street Uniting Community Services started many years ago as a Methodist Mission. Over the years its operation has expanded considerably, and it provides a range of social services in various centres throughout the State. The agency aims to empower its workforce through a "de-bureaucratized" work environment. Tasks are organised around teams. The stated aim is implementation of a flexible, participatory organisational structure. In the agency's literature, we find this statement: "Here at Elm Street, we have a vision of unity, cooperation, purpose, and inspiration. We support and empower each other to serve the community with love and integrity, in the name and spirit of Christ."

This is wonderful in theory, but in practice the operation of some of the teams is marked by dishonesty and power plays. The theory is that the teams will function like a sports team, with all the "players" working together to achieve a common goal and each one given a say in how the goal will be attained. In theory, the supervisors (the "team coaches") have the role of facilitating a dialogue in which workers discuss policies and procedures, decisions concerning hiring, dismissal, evaluation, and disciplining other team members. A system that management pitches as participatory, democratic, and team-oriented is experienced in practice by some of the workers as divisive, alienating, unjust and designed to eliminate so-called "counterproductive attitudes and behaviour." What is labelled "counterproductive attitudes and behaviour" by some in a management role is any criticism they don't want to hear, or suggestions concerning practice frameworks or ways of working together that they are uncomfortable with. Some of the team members report leaders who bully, coerce, and fail to take seriously the views and concerns of team members.

[8] The dysfunctional workplace dynamics in this fictional UCA agency have a basis in real life, sadly. I have used the case study research on ethics in the workplace by G.J. Grenier to inform this case study. See G.J. Grenier, *Inhuman Relations* (Philadelphia: Temple Press, 1988).

Theological Reflection: Elm Street and the Covenantal Relationship between YHWH and Israel

The stated Elm Street ideal is partnership between management and the workforce. Management clearly has its own preferred approach and desired outcomes, but rather than impose these from on high, team leaders are assigned the role of facilitating a team conversation. Supervisor and team members are to work together in a spirit of harmony and cooperation to achieve their goals.

There is a parallel, I suggest, between the relational structure in the Elm Street vision statement – the ideal rather than the reality, then – and that which operated in the covenant between God and Israel. That is, it is my contention that the Mosaic covenant can appropriately be construed as a partnership.

A correlational approach such as this is fraught. God is both like and massively unlike human beings. Theologians differ in terms of where they come down on the similarity-dissimilarity continuum. In reacting to the move by 19th century liberal theologians to elevate the status of humanity and to downplay the majesty, glory, and sovereignty of God, Karl Barth adopted Kierkegaard's dictum that there is an infinite qualitative distinction between time and eternity. If we take this proposition literally, however, if God is utterly other, we undermine the theological enterprise.[9] Indeed, Barth recognized the need to modify his earlier statements on divine transcendence, writing of "the humanity of God" manifested in the togetherness between God and humankind that Christ made possible.[10]

There needs to be some point of contact between God and humankind for theology to get off the ground. The doctrine of the imago Dei indicates that the gap between God and humanity is not infinite; there is a degree of similarity between God and humanity. Theologians have adopted different positions on what it is in the human that correlates with the divine. Reason, will, love, and relationality have all been suggested at one time or another.[11] The question of which one is the most adequate need not concern us here. We simply need to note that each one represents a significant point of connection between us and God.

There is a point of connection, but there is also an almost infinite degree of disconnection. God is infinite and transcendent; human thought and language cannot capture in any direct or total way the nature and character of God. That is why there is necessarily a metaphorical element in all theological discourse. Metaphorical language represents an attempt to grasp and express that which is unknown through that which is known. In the Scriptures, we find a number of terms that are very familiar to us – terms such as father, mother, husband, shepherd, ruler, and judge – used to express the nature of God. God is like a father, like a mother, like a ruler. But at the same time God's fatherhood, motherhood, and kingship transcend human expressions.[12] In what follows, yet another metaphor will be introduced – namely, God the partner.

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[9] Cf. D.A. Pailin, *The Anthropological Character of God* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 35.
[10] See K. Barth, *The Humanity of God* (London: Collins, 1961), 46-48.
[11] For a very helpful summary of the history of the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, see S. Grenz, *The Social and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 141-182.
[12] Cf. S. McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 18.

It must also be acknowledged that construing the Mosaic covenant in terms of a partnership is a contentious position in Old Testament scholarship. There are some who argue quite strenuously that the covenant between God and Israel is unilateral in nature.[13] On this view, partnership and reciprocity are ruled out of court. In the berith with Israel God has the sole initiative. God declares God's promises to the people, on the one hand, and lays down the obligations associated with those promises, on the other. Thus, YHWH comes to Israel in a twofold way: through grace and with the law. It is not difficult to think of a theological reason why some scholars would feel disinclined to construe the covenant in terms of partnership. In their minds, if the notion of a bilateral relationship between YHWH and Israel is accepted, God's grace and sovereignty are compromised. While I can readily agree that the initiative in the covenant relationship is clearly with God and that the people do not stand on an equal footing with God, I still want to argue that there is a biblical warrant for the idea of a partnership. I find the approach of scholars such as Ernest Nicholson, Walter Brueggemann, and Susan Haber persuasive.[14] Nicholson argues that the bilateral nature of the covenant is evidenced in what is probably the earliest description of the making of such a covenant, viz., Ex 24:3-8. Here there is certainly an emphasis on Israel's obligation vis-à-vis the commandments, but the pledge of obedience to the commandments is related to a ceremony which effected a solemn consecration of Israel as YHWH's holy people. It is not solely a question of God announcing the divine promises and imposing obligations on the people. Israel needs to choose in relation to the offer of the covenant. There are obligations, but there is also partnership and fellowship. Brueggemann similarly refers to YHWH and Israel as partners who engage in dialogue throughout the history of their relations. This statement is typical of his theology of the covenant:

> Because so much of the faith of Israel is "talking faith" in liturgy, oracle, and narrative we may say that YHWH is a party to a dialogic exchange that never reaches closure. Rather, like any good dialogue, YHWH is engaged in an interaction with YHWH's partners that always pushes to a new possibility, that makes demands upon both parties, and that opens up fresh possibilities for the relationship.[15]

So far in this theological reflection, the focus is on the theory of Elm Street's teams. The ideal that management pitched to the employees was one of teamwork, partnership, a willingness to listen and respond, and participatory decision-making. Indeed, a number of the teams do actually approximate the ideal in the

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[13] The most influential scholar in terms of interpreting the Sinai covenant as unilateral is Ernest Kutsch. See E. Kutsch, Verheissung und Gesetz: Untersuchungen zum sogenannten Bund im Alten Testament (Berlin and New York: W. de Gruyter, 1973). Silvia Linington cites his work often and with appreciation. See S. Linington, "The Term תיִרְב in the Old Testament PART I: An Enquiry into the Meaning and Use of the Word in the Contexts of the Covenants between God and Humans in the Pentateuch," Old Testament Essays 15, no. 3 (2002), 687-714. In his very helpful review of scholarly approaches to the covenant in both Testaments, Scott Hahn summarises Kutsch's position: "Ernst Kutsch (1973) strenuously defended the late, deuteronomic nature of the Hebrew concept of תִּיְרָב as a characterization of Israel's relationship with God, while asserting that the term did not denote a relationship, but a unilateral obligation either imposed or accepted by one party" (S. Hahn, 'Covenant in the Old and New Testaments: Some Current Research (1994-2004)," Currents in Biblical Research 3, no. 2 (2005), 263-292, at 264). See also K.M. Campbell, "Covenant or Testament? Heb. 9:16, 17 Reconsidered," Evangelical Quarterly 44 (1972), 107-111, at 108-109; and S.J. Wellum, "Reading Deuteronomy for God's People Today," Southern Baptist Journal of Theology 18, no. 3 (2014), 3-5.

[14] See E. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 210ff. In his writing on the lament tradition, Brueggemann stresses again and again that the Mosaic covenant is characterised by partnership, dialogue, and reciprocity. See, for example the following works of W. Brueggemann: "A Shape II"; "Prerequisites for Genuine Obedience: Theses and Conclusions," Calvin Theological Journal 36, no. 1 (2001), 34-41; "The Friday Voice of Faith," *Calvin Theological Journal* 36, no. 1 (2001), 12-21. See also S. Haber, "God, Israel, and Covenant: Unity in the Book of Deuteronomy," *European Judaism* 32, no. 1 (1999), 132-141, at 138.

[15] W. Brueggemann, *The Unsettling God: The Heart of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 5.

way they work together. But too often the teams are used as an opportunity to pressure workers into supporting management's vision. There is no serious attempt to listen; minority voices are dismissed and those who mount criticism are sidelined for "failing to be a team player." Members of the team who support management's vision are warmly praised. It seems clear to all that submission is what is truly valued and the way to get on in the agency.

We find also in the Old Testament a school of thought in which the notion of partnership is rejected. For the writers who embrace this view, the correct attitude in relating to YHWH is one of docile submission and keeping the mouth shut. This represents contractual theology. The Sinai covenant is construed as setting the life of Israel and its relationship with YHWH in the framework of a tight system of sanctions. If the People honour their covenant commitments, they can expect to be blessed by their God. But if they fall away from these commitments, they will come under divine curse. Contractual theology establishes personal and communal life as an ordered experience governed by a clearly defined moral rationality. There is a predictable pattern to all of life; the pattern is set by the covenant laws and sanctions.

In the frame of contractual theology, there is a certain approach that one must adopt when things go awry in one's life. Both the reason for the downturn and the remedy are plain for all to see. If life is not filled with good health and prosperity, it is because a person has sinned against God. If they expect deliverance, they must turn to God in repentance and plead for mercy and healing. Job's friends articulate this position forcefully.

The right approach according to the proponents of contractual theology is to acknowledge wrongdoing and repent of one's sins. Such a humble and sorrowful stance will surely move God to activate a redemptive program. It is clearly not helpful to push the correlation too far. It goes without saying that there is a very significant difference between the relationship between YHWH and the people of Israel, on the one hand, and between the supervisor and their team members, on the other. The former is focused on fidelity to Torah, the latter is tasked with monitoring expenditure and ensuring best practice is followed in fulfilling service contracts. It is also the case that there is an infinite gap between the moral character of YHWH and that of the Elm Street supervisors. What contractual theology has in common with the practice in the dysfunctional Elm Street teams is the way in which ideal behaviour is construed. The good team-member/Israelite is docile, submissive, and refuses to challenge management's thinking.

The "problem children" are those who dare to challenge management's vision and approach. Just as some workers are bold enough to speak out, so too pro-bilateral covenant Israelites insisted on having their say before God. The lament tradition is grounded in the sense that God is acting inconsistently. The poets of the lament want some answers. They can no longer understand God and God's ways. The divine modus operandi has become a puzzle. It is not an intellectual exercise that we are talking about here, but rather something that is experienced in the inner depths. The psalmist feels the tension and confusion so acutely that it is tearing him apart. Out of this inner turmoil comes a desperate need to understand. The poet wants to know why God has allowed him to fall into this awful situation.

While there are some scholars of the Hebrew Bible who suggest that the poets of lament pay little attention to the covenants, it is evident that I follow the opposing line: lament is an alternative covenantal theology

to contractual or blessing and curse theology. It is beyond the scope of this essay to engage with the debate in depth. All that can be offered here is a summary of the key issues and points of difference. The line I oppose can be tracked back to the work of Walther Zimmerli. In an influential article written in the early 1960s, Zimmerli argued that the Wisdom tradition does not orient itself to the covenantal history between God and Israel.[16] A series of scholars, including Roland Murphy,[17] James Crenshaw,[18] John Day, Robert Gordon, and Hugh Williamson,[19] subsequently endorsed this view. The starkest assessment comes from John Day et al in their introduction to a collection of essays on Wisdom literature: "[T]he wisdom texts paid little attention to cult and even less to covenant …"[20]

In the opposing interpretation of the relationship between lament and covenant, a distinction is made between the historic covenants and covenant as a theological construct.[21] That is, even though we find almost no direct references to the historic covenants in Wisdom literature, covenant is right at the centre of the lament tradition. For example, Daniel Belnap refers to the communal lament psalms as "covenant-continuing" or "covenant-reminding" texts.[22] Advocates of a strong lament-covenant connection also make the point that the questioning, protesting, moral claim making stance taken in the lament tradition only makes sense against the backdrop of the poets' understanding of the covenantal relationship between YHWH and Israel. The Jewish scholar, David Blumenthal, captures well the nature of the mutual covenantal responsibilities that feature in this theology. It is noteworthy that in so doing Blumenthal embraces the anger associated with the moral claim Israel brings in times of suffering and humiliation:

> As God is a jealous God demanding loyalty from us in covenant, so we, in our searing humiliation, demand. We transform our anger, through the covenant, into our moral claim against God. As God is angry with us in covenant, so we are angry with God in covenant. We experience a true anger, which becomes a true moral claim, rooted in our mutual covenantal debt.[23]

The theology of the covenantal relationship that informs the lament tradition accords a central place, then, to an I-Thou dynamic. YHWH makes his strong claim on Israel, but the people are also entitled to take their moral claim to YHWH. When they are suffering, they want to know why God is slow to act. Why, Lord? This is the question that burns within the hearts of the lament poets. The other question that the psalmists commonly put with some urgency is how long. How long, O God, will you hide your face from us? How long must we endure your absence? How long must we wait to see your justice done?

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[16] W. Zimmerli, "The Place and Limit of Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17 (1964), 146-158.

[17] See R.E. Murphy, "Wisdom in the Old Testament," in D.N. Freedman (ed), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 920-931.

[18] See J. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature: An Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 36.

[19] See J. Day, R.P. Gordon, and H.G.M. Williamson, "Introduction," in J. Day et al (eds), *Wisdom in Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1-13.

[20] Day et al, "Introduction," 1.

[21] On this, see J. Grant, "'When the Friendship of God was upon my Tent': Covenant as Essential Background to Lament," in R. J. Bautch, & G. N. Knoppers (eds), *Covenant in the Persian Period: From Genesis to Chronicles* (University Park PA: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 339-355; W. Brueggemann, "A Shape II" and "The Friday Voice"; D. Belnap, "A Comparison of the Communal Lament Psalms and the Treaty-Covenant Formula," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 1 (2009), 1-34; D. Blumenthal, "Liturgies of Anger," *CrossCurrents* 52, no. 2 (2002), 178-199.

[22] D. Belnap, "A Comparison," 5-6.

[23] D. Blumenthal, "Liturgies," 195.

Job and Jeremiah also risk having their "dangerous say" before God. Jeremiah pushes the boundaries of his relationship to God to the limit of what is acceptable. He boldly challenges God with these feisty words: 'Will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail'? (Jer 15: 18b).

It is clear, then, that there were those amongst the people of Israel who in the face of suffering and distress tested contractual theology and found it wanting. The ones who lament are those who are so fed up with their lot that they can no longer suppress their anger and disappointment with God. They have had enough of being docile and submissive. Brueggemann captures the risky stance of the lament movement:

> The moment when Israel found the nerve and the faith to risk an assault on the throne of God with complaint was a decisive moment ... The lament is a dramatic, rhetorical, liturgical act of speech which is irreversible ... It makes clear that Israel will no longer be submissive, subservient recipients of decrees from the throne. There is a bold movement and voice from Israel's side which does not blindly and docilely accept, but means to have its dangerous say, even in the face of God.[24]

The purpose in having one's "dangerous say" is not simply to ventilate one's anger before God. The aim is to rouse God to action; what is sought is divine redemptive action.

The members of a dysfunctional organisation similarly desire "deliverance." When there is division, misunderstanding, mistrust, and injustice in an organisation, what persons of good will desire is an intervention capable of shifting the culture in the direction of harmony, understanding, trust, and fairness. There are helpful strategies that organisational consultants employ to facilitate such a shift. The one pursued here is variously called "SCM-Organisation" and the "Team Confrontation Method" (TCM). Each method has its own set of strategies; they are not identical protocols. What unites them is their grounding in Hubert Hermans' Dialogical Self Theory (DST) and his Self-Confrontation Method (SCM).[25] SCM was designed to promote self-challenge and heightened self-awareness for clients engaged in psychotherapy and personal coaching. In team confrontation, as the name suggests, SCM is adapted for use in an organisational context. The aims are increased self- and collective knowledge, greater capacity for cognitive empathy, hearing both majority and minority voices, and moving to higher levels of trust and harmony. Since the strategy is based in Hermans' theory of the dialogical self, the first step is getting acquainted with it.

The Dialogical Self

In developing his dialogical self theory (DST), Hermans rejects the view of the self as organised around a centre. He views the structure of the self as "a multiplicity of dialogically interacting selves."[26] The self is expressed through the dialogical interaction of a number of "relatively autonomous *I*-positions."[27] Each *I*-position has a particular voice and these voices interact with each other. "The voices behave like interacting

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[24] W. Brueggemann, "A Shape II," 400.
[25] See H.J.M. Hermans & E. Hermans-Jansen, *Self-narratives: The Construction of Meaning in Psychotherapy* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995).
[26] H. J.M. Hermans, H.J.G. Kempen, & R.J.P. van Loon, "The Dialogical Self: Beyond Individualism and Rationalism," 23.
[27] Hermans et al, "The Dialogical Self," 28.

characters in a story, involved in a process of question and answer, agreement and disagreement, negotiations and integrations."[28] It is out of the dialogical relations between these autonomous, and sometimes opposed, voices that the life of the self emerges. No one voice is dominant. There is no *I*-position that takes control and assumes an integrating function.

Dialogical Self Theory and the Self-Confrontation Method Applied in an Organisational Context

Hermans and Hermans-Jansen used these foundational DST principles in developing the Self-Confrontation Method (SCM). In SCM, a facilitator works with an individual as she or he reflects on significant experiences and attributes meaning to them. The aim is to foster greater self-knowledge as a stepping-stone to self-development. An important tool that is used in this process is assigning feelings to the various experiences. Elements in the assessment tool that are used are as follows: Self-Enhancement or S-motive (e.g. self-esteem, self-confidence, pride); Contact and Union with the Other or O-motive (e.g. caring, solidarity, warmth, collegiality), Positive feelings or P (e.g. joy, trust, inner calm); and Negative feelings or N (e.g. loneliness, powerlessness, anxiety, anger).

A number of organisational consultants have used DST and SCM in formulating a protocol for fostering dialogue, higher levels of self-knowledge and understanding of other perspectives and positions, along with increased trust and harmony.[29] Of particular interest here is the work of Richard van de Loo and Peter Zomer. Though they both have particular strategies that they recommend for use by the facilitator of a SCM consultation with an organizational team, what unites them are these four elements: (a) Attention to heteroglossia (the presence of a number of different voices), (b) recognition of the value of both homogeneity and heterogeneity in an organisation, (c) attention to the feeling aspect of organisational life, and (d) a commitment to making sure minority voices are heard and respected. Each of these elements will now be discussed in turn.

Zomer discusses heteroglossia in terms of "the collective voice" and "the deviant voice."[30] There is usually a perspective that is shared by all, or virtually all, of the members of an organisational team (a "We-position"). "Collective voices tell the collective stories that enjoy full credibility to each member of the team."[31] A deviant voice, as the term suggests, is a voice that cuts across the consensus established in the We-position.

Van de Loo, for his part, recognises that the various agents in an organisation will have different assumptions about their work, different values, and different interests and levels of power.[32] These differences are represented through a plurality of voices. Though ideally the various voices provide a rich tapestry of perspectives that in turn generate creativity and better decision-making, in practice dissonant voices are most often not welcomed. Dialogue fails and a fall into serious conflict is not too far away. The problem is that the dominant voice (what Zomer calls the We-position) suppresses the I-position of the minority

[28] H.J.M. Hermans, "The Dialogical Self: A Process of Positioning," 660.
[29] See J. Wijsbek, *De Dialogische Organisatie* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2009); P. Zomer, "The Team Confrontation Method (TCM)," and R. van de Loo, "SCM-Organization."
[30] See P. Zomer, "The Team Confrontation Method (TCM)," 135.
[31] Zomer, "The Team Confrontation Method," 135.
[32] See R. van de Loo, "SCM-Organization," 157.

voice. However, if a facilitator helps a team to listen to all voices, respect them, and learn from them it is well-positioned to significantly improve its capacity for effective working together and positive team affect. Embrace of the voice of the other is associated with an attitude of togetherness: "[T]he most important indicator of space for multivoicedness is the emergence of a common feeling of WE … this feeling is the result of building new narratives and constructing new common realities together."[33]

Moving to the next common element, both theorists recognise that homogeneity is vitally important in an organisation. If there is a lack of cohesion and sense of shared identity the organisation will fracture and disintegrate over time. On the other hand, when dissonant voices are suppressed the workplace becomes locked into "groupthink." There is little or no capacity for creativity and breaking out of destructive corporate thinking and practice. Zomer takes this insight and makes it a central plank in his consultancy protocol. The first step is to determine the patterns of working together that are counterproductive. The entrenched collaborative pattern is supported and maintained by the collective voice. What is required are "lever deviant voices" that can crack it open.[34]

Thirdly, affectivity is assigned a central place in both approaches. In TCM, participants are asked to use an online questionnaire to assign feelings to a series of statements generated by the team that capture both critical experiences and the various voices in the group. They are instructed to identify both individual and collective affect. In the SCM-Organisation method, the facilitator assists the team members in generating a series of statements that capture the critical issues. Member then go online to register their feelings concerning these statements using the S, O, P, and N categories developed by Hermans.

Lastly, in both the SCM-Organization and TCM approaches there is a stated commitment to helping a team discern and respect minority voices. Van de Loo is aware that if the analytical process around the affective rating exercise were to involve each participant presenting and explaining her or his perspectives to the group, there is a strong possibility that certain voices – namely, the dissonant ones – would be suppressed, ignored, or dismissed. In his method, in contrast, the facilitator asks the group as a whole to reflect on each perspective and to develop cognitive empathy for it. "In this way, participants with a different or even opposing view become more familiar with the perspectives of others. In turn, group members of the "other" or even "dissonant" side feel empowered by all the attention for their view and voice."[35] Zomer, for his part, recognises that deviant voices are rarely registered openly by the team members,[36] but he insists that they be recognised and recorded. The facilitator asks the group to identify not only a dominant or majority-held perspective on its collective experience and the collective voice, but also minority-held perspectives and dissonant voices. Moreover, as we saw above, he informs the group that not only is the minority or dissonant voice to be heard, it is accorded the lofty status of potential destroyer of destructive patterns in group functioning.

At this point, I resume the theological correlation. The first point of connection that I see relates to the psychological method in the TCM – namely, assigning feelings to various statements to increase self-

[33] van der Loo, "SCM-Organization," 158.
[34] P. Zomer, "The Team Confrontation Method (TCM)," 136.
[35] R. van de Loo, "SCM-Organization," 164.
[36] See P. Zomer, "The Team Confrontation Method (TCM)," 136.

awareness. While the technique of assigning an S-motive, positive feelings, and negative feelings to certain statements – along with any number of other modern therapeutic interventions for that matter – is clearly right outside the culture and experience of ancient Israel, feeling language and emotion certainly are not. While Hebrew poetry and prophetic literature reveal a deep awareness of felt emotion and freedom to express it, this is a spontaneous action rather than a methodologically guided one. The British psychiatrist, Robert Hobson, offers a conceptualisation of feeling-language that sheds light on lament poetry. Hobson cuts through some of the overly technical discussions of emotion and feeling in the therapeutic encounter with his notion of feeling-language as "emotional knowing" or "imaginative emotion."[37] He is always on the lookout for the central "feeling-image." For example, clients use metaphors such as "empty," or "a hollow feeling," or feeling like a "wobbly child learning to walk" to capture their pain and disorientation.[38]

The psalms of lament are filled with similarly evocative and expressive feeling-images. Those in distress have reached a point of extremity; the old certainties, along with the feelings of serenity and joy associated with them, have been swept away. In this limit experience, it is impossible to hold on to a restrained, domesticated way of communicating with God. There is now no slippage between the agonies of the heart and the primitive, aggressive articulations before God. The images of distress and anguish coming tumbling out in prayer:

> Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbours;
> I am a dread to my friends – those who see me on the street flee from me.
> I am forgotten by them as though I were dead; I have become like *broken pottery* (Ps. 31: 11-12).
>
> [My enemies] spread a net for my feet--I was *bowed down* in distress. They dug a *pit* in my path – but they have fallen into it themselves (Ps. 57:6).
>
> How long will you assault a man?
> Would all of you throw him down – this *leaning wall*, this *tottering fence*? (Ps. 62:3).
>
> Your wrath has *swept over* me: your terrors have destroyed me.
> All day long they surround me *like a flood*; they have completely *engulfed* me (Ps. 88:16).

These ejaculations of anguish do not simply represent a release of emotion. They are manifestations of an "emotional knowing." Behind the metaphors is an understanding of the dynamics of the distress.

In order to point up a second area of resonance, I return to the notion that the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel can be appropriately construed as a partnership. The particular view of partnership that I am working with is the one expressed in the lament tradition. In this school of thought, the relationship with YHWH is understood to involve dialogue and reciprocity. YHWH makes his legitimate claim on Israel, but the people feel free to take their moral claim to YHWH.

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[37] See R. Hobson, *Forms of Feeling* (London: Tavistock, 1985), 194.
[38] Hobson, *Forms of Feeling*, 23.

I suggest that the spirit of dialogue and reciprocity that the team confrontation method seeks to inculcate is present in the partnership with YHWH envisaged in the lament tradition. Brueggemann captures this nicely: "Complaint and lament subvert the thin claim of obedience by a practice that is genuinely dialogical so that Yahweh's primacy and preeminence in the relationship are provisionally overcome."[39] Two central aspects of the covenant relationship are alluded to in this statement by Brueggemann. First, the covenant is a genuinely dialogical relationship. The God of the covenant is experienced by the People as a "You," and this means that God can be addressed by them in a spirit of reciprocity.[40] That there is reciprocity in the covenant relationship – and this is the second important aspect – means that when YHWH seems to have defaulted on YHWH's commitment, Israel has a right to reverse the roles and forcefully lodge its moral claim. In the context of an organisation, a healthy working relationship is one in which such a spirit of dialogue and reciprocity exists between management and staff. Management asserts its right to speak and be heard. Equally, the staff, and especially the minority or "deviant" voices, have the confidence to have their (potentially) dangerous say.

Conclusion

It is a sad fact that many organisations, including ones sponsored by the Uniting Church, are rent apart by division, miscommunication, mistrust, one-sidedness, and injustice. A healthy organisation, in contrast, is characterised by dialogue, trust, reciprocity, and fairness. Though it is obviously the case that there are very significant differences between the partnership between YHWH and Israel on the one hand, and the one between management and staff in a modern organisation on the other, connecting lines can be meaningfully drawn between the two. These lines consist of the positive elements mentioned immediately above.

It is one thing to identify desirable characteristics in an organisation; it is quite another to help a dysfunctional, divided, and mistrustful one move from sickness to health. Though there are many strategies for positive intervention on offer, those that are based in the psychology of the dialogical self and the self-confrontation method of Hubert Hermans present as particularly helpful. Not only is the employment of SCM innovative, the methods are grounded in principles that accord well with the theology of the covenantal relationship between YHWH and Israel. In the SCM-organisation process, there is an insistence on listening to the minority voice, just as in the lament tradition YHWH's primacy is provisionally overcome as Israel is accorded the right to speak frankly and even to register a complaint. YHWH has YHWH's powerful say, but Israel also claims the right to have her say. A SCM-organisation facilitator refuses to let the powerful voice dominate; both sides are given the right to speak and to be heard. A genuine partnership is built on dialogue, reciprocity, and trust. These are precisely the qualities that characterise the covenantal relationship as construed in the lament tradition.

[39] W. Brueggemann, "Prerequisites for Genuine Obedience," 36.
[40] Cf. D. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 40.

Manual Acts, Mass Confusion?

Stephen Burns

Abstract

Manual acts at holy communion have a controversial history which continues to today. They remain a point of ecumenical difference and in the UCA are caught in tensions between inherited traditions of eucharistic prayer in the uniting churches. This article proposes a simple way to deal in practice with this aspect of eucharistic presidency: abandon clericalised approaches to manual acts and in keeping with *Uniting in Worship 2*, emphasise that "the congregation is not an audience".

"No one seems quite certain what to do anymore".[1]
"Protestants occasionally seem determined to be the last guardians of some medieval practices."[2]

Introduction: the congregation is not an audience

This essay is at heart a proposal about how presiders at holy communion might enact their role. It seeks to outline a way of presiding that reflects two things: i) a contemporary understanding of eucharistic celebration and ii) the expressed theology of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA).

I realise that it might seem quite strange even to suggest such a proposal, given that Uniting Church presiders already preside at holy communion all the time. But the issue I would like to raise is that they might do what they do in ways that better grasp the dual aspiration stated above: contemporary understanding and the theology of the UCA. Implicitly, then, I have a concern about some, maybe much, current practice. In short, the concern is that too much presiding at UCA eucharists is medieval or seventeenth-century Anglican in style, not contemporary enough. As a consequence: a fundamental principle of Uniting Church worship – as *Uniting in Worship 2* (UiW2) states, "the congregation is not an audience" (131) – is not as evident as it could be. I think that these concerns are serious, and they can conspire (in what I do not believe is an overstatement) to suggest a UCA manifestation of clericalism, worship far too much centred on the presiding minister. I hope that my concern can be understood as it is unpacked in what follows, as my aim is not to criticise those who preside for shortcomings but to encourage a contemporary style of presiding that enacts the UCA's expressed theology.[3]

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1 Richard Giles, *Creating Uncommon Worship: Transforming the Liturgy of the Eucharist* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2004), 174.
2 James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 34.
3 I am keen to impress at the outset that criticism of people who do preside is not my intent. I know very well for myself how curricula of theological colleges tilts so much of what candidates for ministry learn towards Bible and theological *thought* at the expense of practical theology and *practice*. And I am all too familiar with the multiple, sometimes overwhelming, demands of parish and sector ministry. There are so many things to learn and do, keep an eye on and keep up with. I am sympathetic to all of that and I admire people for taking it on in the call to ministry.

By 'expressed theology' I mean in part *Uniting in Worship 2*, which like its predecessor *Uniting in Worship* is not "*required* to be used" but does provide a "framework" as well as a "norm" for worship in the Uniting Church. It is a "standard" for testing whether alternatives that are quite permissible within its spirit of "ordered liberty" do indeed "conform to the doctrine of the Uniting Church."[4] In other words, I ascribe to UiW2 the authority granted to it by Assembly; no more – but no less.[5] By 'expressed theology' I also mean the waves of rich reflection on ministry in a succession of other Assembly publications. This has admittedly sometimes moved the church through fraught terrain, including navigating a spat between the 1994 Assembly's report on 'Ordination and Ministry in the Uniting Church' and the 1991 report on 'Ministry in the Uniting Church' (the later report contested the earlier one as 'faulty' in some ways).[6] In my own view, each of these contributions has many excellent things to say even where they do not always agree; there is much to be gained from keeping alive the conversation, even argument, between them.

Still, for the particular purpose of focusing on presiding, I take the following portion of "Ordination and Ministry in the Uniting Church" to be the most salient:

> The new status into which a minister has been placed by ordination means that the Presbyter or Deacon may stand on behalf of the community before others, or before the Congregation itself, as a representative of the wider Church. The minister presiding at the Eucharist represents not only the local Congregation (both those present and those absent) who together celebrate the sacrament, but the universal Church at all times and places which joins us "with choirs of angels and the whole creation in the eternal hymn." In another liturgical sense, the minister may represent Christ, although all Christians share that responsibility. At other times, the presence of a Presbyter or Deacon anywhere may symbolise the presence of the Church catholic in what God is doing the world.[7]

This portion is both dense and deft in its understanding of various aspects of representative ministry, and every word merits close attention. Lest not all presiders think it is speaking about them, it should be noted that while not all presiders at communion in the UCA are deacons or ministers of the word, none are self-appointed and all have at least some of representative responsibilities mentioned in this portion. And especially for their relevance to the proposal that follows later in this article, I highlight three things about this extract. First, it articulates the UCA's theology that it is not the minister who celebrates the sacrament. Crucially, a congregation together with its minister is the celebrant. Secondly, it articulates the UCA's theology that a minister represents more than the local congregation (its mores and preferences). Rather, a minister also represents the wider – even "universal" – church. Thirdly, it articulates the UCA's

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4 *Uniting in Worship 2* (Sydney: Uniting Church Press, 2005), 8, 14.

5 I hope that my own enthusiasm for UiW2 is very evident in Stephen Burns, *Pilgrim People: An Invitation to Worship in the Uniting Church* (Adelaide: MediaCom, 2012). It may be my personal lament that UiW2 languishes as a treasure hiding in plain sight of a lot of the UCA – it is an excellent book with which to *do* liturgy – but I readily concede that it can be as boring as any other liturgical text if it is simply *read* when it is meant to be *communally enacted*.

6 See *Theology for Pilgrims: Selected Theological Documents of the Uniting Church in Australia*, ed. by Rob Bos and Geoff Thompson (Sydney: Uniting Church Press, 2008), and on contested views of ministry in the UCA, Stephen Burns, "Ministry," in *An Informed Faith: The Uniting Church at the Beginning of the 21st Century*, ed. by William Emilsen (Melbourne: Mosaic Press, 2014), 37–64.

7 *Theology for Pilgrims*, 363.

theology that while a minister may represent Christ, the responsibility for such representation is by no means theirs alone. Rather, responsibility for representing Christ belongs to all Christians.

> So I now ask three questions to invite the reader to think about their own local place of celebration – with its ritual pictures, its ceremonial scenes: Does your local eucharistic celebration *look like* the whole congregation celebrates it, rather than the minister alone celebrates? Does your local eucharistic celebration *look like* the whole congregation celebrates it, rather than the minister alone celebrates? Does it *look like* the minister represents more than local mores, even less their own personal preferences?

On towards the proposal.

Some steps on the way

My practical proposal is about how presiders might embody a paragraph tucked away in the "Notes for the Service of the Lord's Day" (SLD) in *Uniting in Worship 2*. It refers to "manual acts," which curiously UiW2 never mentions again:

> In every service of the Lord's Supper, bread and wine shall be set apart with the use of Christ's words of institution as found in the gospels or epistle, and the manual acts described there: by actions such as the breaking of the bread, the taking of the cup, and participation in both kinds by minister and people.[8]

What it might mean to observe this "standard" and "norm" is complicated, however, by the fact that UiW2 provides for different ways of navigating what it calls the "Great Prayer of Thanksgiving,", also commonly called "eucharistic prayer." This is to say that UiW2 allows for two different means of finding a way through paragraphs 18–22 in its Service of the Lord's Day.[9] The difference centres on the place of the institution narrative – that composite of gospel memories and the witness of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26, who "received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread…", and which is mentioned in Note 6 ("in every service… use of Christ's words of institution…").

It is in its deference to the history of the uniting traditions that UiW2 allows different ways of incorporating an institution narrative in ¶18–22 of the SLD. This is an excellent ecumenical gesture, appropriate and indeed gracious in the face of challenges of uniting. In much actual liturgical practice, though, it seems to spark or add to considerable confusion. In brief, what UiW2 envisages is both what are more widely referred to as a "Reformed pattern" and an "ecumenical pattern." (The patterns are visible in UiW2 – where a vertical line runs down the left-hand side of relevant paragraphs – these are meant to prompt users of the book to choose one or the other, but not both options.) This does not seem to be widely understood. So:

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[8] UiW2, 140, note 6. The note repeats exactly one that was in the earlier *Uniting in Worship* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1988).

[9] UiW2, 162–182 (esp. 162–165 & 180–182), 208–221.

A Reformed pattern – with a biblical warrant

One of UiW2's ways through ¶18–22 reflects the church's Reformed heritage, such that an institution narrative is used as a biblical warrant immediately after the setting of the table and before prayer over the gifts of the table.[10] So the prayer does not then later repeat the institution narrative, as it has already taken place. The prayer itself is followed by breaking of the bread. Then the communion follows as the gifts of the table are shared.

This pattern is Reformed in that use of a biblical warrant for the prayer and action that follow was the pattern favoured by some Reformers and it is the pattern found in numerous historic liturgical books in the Reformed tradition. Hence in various Reformed churches when the presiding minister reads the institution narrative to the people, s/he might touch or pick up bread and wine. Indeed, in some Reformed churches' practice the institution narrative may even happen twice, on both sides of prayer over the gifts of the table (that is, neither time as part of the prayer itself). This is the case in some orders of communion in the Church of Scotland's *Book of Common Order*, in which the minister takes bread in her/his hands before prayer, in a section called "The Taking." As s/he does so, s/he says "I take these elements.... Let us draw near...." After that comes the prayer over the gifts (for which the elements are sat on the table, not held in hands), and after the prayer the minister then reads the institution narrative a second time, this time briefly taking/touching bread at its mention, the cup as it is spoken about, and breaking the bread to use in the sharing of communion.

Notably, when Robert Gribben in his "practical commentary" on great prayers of thanksgiving in UiW2 suggests practice for the UCA, he avers that the presider "may" pick up the plate of bread and chalice of wine at the words "we set this bread and this cup apart".[11] That is, Gribben's advice is to take/touch elements *after the institution narrative itself, not as words ascribed to Jesus are being spoken*. Gribben then suggests that during prayer over the gifts of the table "the minister should feel free either to keep hands raised, or to fold them."[12]

An ecumenical pattern

UiW2 also provides another way through ¶18–22 of the SLD, this time reflecting the church's Methodist heritage and a pattern closer to older Anglican practice. In this pattern the institution narrative is not used as a biblical warrant before prayer over the gifts of the table, it appears *as part* of that prayer over the gifts.

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[10] Invaluable and accessible portals into this history include Ronald P. Byars, *Lift Your Hearts on High: Eucharistic Prayer in the Reformed Tradition* (Louisville: WJKP, 2005) and for extant texts for prayer from the Reformations-eras what has become something of a contemporary classic now published in various editions: over time, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, ed. by Ronald Jasper and Geoffrey Cuming (Collegevile: Liturgical Press, third edition 1987).

[11] UiW 164, 211.

[12] Robert Gribben, *Uniting in Thanksgiving: The Prayers of Great Thanksgiving in the Uniting Church in Australia* (Melbourne: Uniting Academic Press, 2008), 210 (on setting apart after warrant), 212 (on hands during prayer after warrant). I confess to being quite puzzled by some of Professor Gribben's later suggestions in this book, for after beginning with real clarity about avoiding anything that smacks of "consecration by manipulation" (207), and likewise "nothing [being] done which suggests [the great prayer of thanksgiving] consists of some parts that are more important, or holier, than others" (211), he then oscillates. He contradicts himself when he discusses picking up bread "while reciting the words of Jesus" (212), considering not only that manual acts "may be appropriate" at the narrative but also gestures "to indicate that the Spirit is being called down" at the Epiclesis (214) and even that the "sign of the cross" be made above bread and wine or table, or "something even more dramatic" (215). I encourage forgetting these later suggestions and holding fast to his earlier emphasis on steady posture.

So after the setting of the table, a prayer *including* an institution narrative happens. Then after the prayer the bread is broken and the gifts of the table are shared.

Through the twentieth century this second pattern has become widely-known as the "ecumenical pattern" of eucharistic prayer and oftentimes Reformed churches have adopted it, so leaving behind their earlier practice of using the institution narrative as a biblical warrant before prayer. Other Reformed churches allow both patterns, which is the decision of the UCA reflected in UiW2.

The differences between these two patterns do not seem to be obvious to all presiders, and enacting one or the other can sometimes seem quite muddled. Then, to complicate matters, space between the two patterns has sometimes been blurry. Moreover, the ecumenical pattern of the institution narrative as part of eucharistic prayer has a particularly complex history. For while churches beyond the Reformed tradition have almost always approached the institution narrative as a part of eucharistic prayer, their practices have not all been alike. Differences include that sometimes they have had presiders take/touch the gifts of the table *during* the prayer, at the point where the institution narrative appears within the prayer. For example, the presiding priest at Roman Catholic mass has long done this, and famously in medieval liturgy lifted bread for people to see at the Latin words "Hoc est corpus meum" – "this is my body." Robert Gribben comments pithily on the medieval understanding that a priest's actions of taking bread

> indicated the theology. This was not only the most sacred moment in the Mass; it was the specific exercise of the ordination of the priest: this is what he was for. By his prayer and action, in the bread in his holy hands, Christ would become present.[13]

In the current Roman rite whatever the vernacular spoken language, while the ritual picture is now less elaborate than it used to be, it still carries a Roman theology of the priest presiding at the "altar"[14] *in persona Christi* – in the person of Christ, in Christ's place. While this Roman theology of priesthood can have various layers and subtleties, none of them are as relevant in the present context as is the point that they involve a theology of representation beyond anything in the Uniting Church's expressed theology of ordination. The only reference to a minister representing Christ in "Ordination and Ministry in the UCA," for example, is the fleeting mention I have already cited, where it is very quickly followed by the caveat that all Christians represent Christ. It is important also to recognise that when the UCA's assembly report "Why the Uniting Church in Australia Ordains Women to the Ministry of the Word" briefly discusses the idea of an ordained minister being an "icon" of Christ, it does not affirm this idea.[15] The point it makes is that in the incarnation the fullness of God became *flesh*, hence arguments about ordination that might emphasise *maleness* (as does Roman theology) meet "profound difficulties" in the UCA's view. The UCA report never advocates an adoption of a notion of ministers as somehow being *in persona Christi*, but mentions the notion only to stress taking hold of a perspective of equality.

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[13] Gribben, *Uniting in Thanksgiving*, 211.
[14] Note that UiW2 never uses this term. Among Protestant churches, some Lutheran traditions use it. The English Anglican tradition does not. Some other Anglican traditions – e.g. in the US – use it at the part of the service known as the offertory, but refer only to a table for celebration of communion.
[15] *Theology for Pilgrims*, 607–9.

Anglican theology of ordained ministry is also quite different from Roman understanding of a priest acting in the person of Christ. Yet even though it reflects a strongly Protestant understanding of ordained ministry, the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (BCP) does direct the minister presiding at holy communion *not only to take* bread and wine during an institution narrative that is part of a "prayer of consecration" *but to break* bread in it too. In a long view of Anglican tradition, manual acts have had a controversial and chequered history; for example, starting with their oscillating in and out of the earliest versions of the BCP (the 1549 version had them, then 1552 did not, 1559 put them back, and so on). In recent decades they have been strongly advised against by the Inter-Anglican Liturgical Consultation (the closest thing to an authoritative body on liturgical matters),[16] but they do stubbornly persist in some Anglican churches.[17] These observations on Anglican diversity are relevant in this context because they provide a background against which to see John Wesley – a lifelong Anglican, and founding figure of Methodism – who himself equivocated over manual acts. While all of his liturgical work always involved eucharistic celebrations with institution narratives as part of prayer rather than as a biblical warrant before prayer – so in that respect, he reflected the BCP – he *sometimes* ditched manual acts in his abridgements of the BCP for American use and he *eventually* got rid of them in his books for Britain.[18] He took his time. Even so, over time not only Methodist but Anglican churches have been slowly coming round to Wesley's mature view.

All of this may be just enough historical background to appreciate Robert Gribben's advice on "when to break the bread" in his *A Guide to Uniting in Worship*, a commentary on the predecessor to UiW2:

> Followers of the Methodist/Anglican forms of former days will be used to breaking the bread while saying the Words of Institution when they appear in the prayer. The Reformed tradition certainly allowed for the bread and cup to be touched or raised as the warrant is read… but the bread was not broken at that point. In [*Uniting in Worship*, the 1988 predecessor of *Uniting in Worship 2*]'s service, there is a separate point for breaking the bread…[19]

Note Gribben's words, 'of former days'. Then also that the 'separate point for breaking the bread' – after the prayer is the one that carries over into UiW2. Regardless of whether Reformed or ecumenical pattern is followed, UiW2 has the breaking of bread take place after prayer over the gifts of the table (SLD ¶20).

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[16] See the nine key points in *Our Thanks and Praise: The Eucharist in Anglicanism Today*, ed. by David Holeton (Toronto: ABC, 1998), 261–262 and e.g. 300: "traditional manual acts which draw attention to the institution narrative or other portions of the prayer serve to locate consecration within a narrow portion of the text and may contradict a more contemporary understanding of eucharistic consecration." Reading Robert Gribben, *A Guide to Uniting in Worship* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1990) it can be noted that manual acts were, at the time of Gribben's writing, still being instructed in *Australian* Anglican books even as they were disappearing from Anglican practice elsewhere (that is, they are found in *An Australian Prayer Book*). But then that they were losing their grip even in Australian Anglicanism by the time of UiW2 (that is, they are not always found in *A Prayer Book for Australia*). *An Australian Prayer Book* (Mulgrave: Broughton Books, 1978) keeps the acts, e.g. 147 but with a clear and separate taking on 145. But the acts go from the Second Order of *A Prayer Book for Australia* (Alexandria: Broughton Books, 1995), e.g. 128–9, although are retained in the Third Order, 177, which like the First Order is more closely related to the BCP – though note also 165, note 14 on "customary" practice of manual acts. The joint Anglican-UCA eucharistic prayer does not have prescribed manual acts: *A Prayer Book for Australia*, 136–8; UiW2, 313–5.

[17] The 1979 BCP of the US-based Episcopal Church is an example where taking is "enacted" in the eucharistic prayer. However, this practice is not reflected in all of the more recent prayers in *Enriching Our Worship* (New York: Church Publishing, 2002).

[18] Gribben, *Uniting in Thanksgiving*, 211, noting note 65.

[19] Robert Gribben, *A Guide to Uniting in Worship* (Melbourne: JBCE, 1990), 67. Note especially his phrase, "of former days." Interestingly, Gribben does not include manual acts in his glossary, 136–8.

"Liturgical direction"

To state what does not always seem obvious to all presiders, when the institution narrative is used as a biblical warrant it is *not* a prayer. Its words are addressed by one person – the presider – to the congregation. A norm of UiW2 has:

> Hear the words of institution of this sacrament
> as recorded by the apostle Paul:
>
> For I received from the Lord
> what I also delivered to you,
> that the Lord Jesus,
> on the night when he was betrayed,
> too bread…[more of Paul's words follow]
>
> And so according to our Saviour's command,
> we set this bread and cup apart
> for the holy supper to which he calls us,
> and we come to God with our prayers of thanksgiving.[20]

But when the ecumenical pattern is used, the institution narrative is a *part of* prayer. Its words are addressed to God, and the presider speaks as a representative of the congregation: so a norm of UiW2 acclaims God with "we praise you…",[21] "we thank you…",[22] and then:

> We bless you, Sovereign God, ruler of the universe,
> through our Lord Jesus Christ,
> who on the night of his betrayal took bread….[23]

The difference between the two patterns can be further illumed by exploring a helpful term of Uniting Church liturgical theologian Graham Hughes: "liturgical direction." When Hughes develops this notion, his basic point is that sometimes a minister or leader of worship represents the people, and sometimes "speaks for God":

> some [human responses] are undertaken by the gathered congregation… But not all of the 'human response' side of the conversation is articulated by the people; some of it at least… is usually voiced aloud by one person in everyone else's stead. All this still leaves God's side of the dialogue needing some expression: someone has to speak in God's place, or in persona Christi as one formulation has it. The fact, then, that leaders – often but not exclusively the presiding minister – must sometimes speak for God and sometimes as the people's spokesperson means

[20] UiW2, 164.
[21] UiW2, 176.
[22] UiW2, 177.
[23] UiW2, 178.

> that their role oscillates. Sometimes, so to say, they speak from God's side into the assembly; and sometimes they are speaking to God from within the congregation.[24]

Although he mentions here the idea of the minister acting *in persona Christi* it is not that he is commending that understanding of the presider's role at the institution narrative. And when he does give some examples of when a presider might "speak for God," "from God's side," his examples do not include the institution narrative.[25] In fact, when he discusses eucharistic prayer he is emphatic about the presider needing to be clear that what they do in prayer at table is spoken to God: "spoken on [the congregation's] behalf by one who is, momentarily, their delegate," and with the presider's representative voice being "reinforced" by the people's "Amen."[26] Moreover, Hughes suggests that clarity about this "utterance *as* prayer" also ought 'deliver … them from the temptations to "theatricality" or "performance."'[27] I return to this point below.

Hughes helps us to recognise that between the two different pathways through ¶18–22 of the Service of the Lord's Day different "liturgical direction" is at work in a presider's ministry. In the ecumenical pattern, the presider is the voice of the congregation in its prayer to God, serving as a representative of the local people. Although s/he may face the people – because standing behind a freestanding table[28] – the fundamental sense is of her/him being one from their circle. In the Reformed pattern, the presider speaks to the people, announcing a reading from Paul and/or Gospels. Perhaps, then, s/he might just be thought of as speaking "from God's side" – even if "fleetingly"? For his part, Hughes does not seem to think so. And recalling the various modes of representation of which "Ordination and Ministry in the UCA" speaks, I suggest it is more helpful to think of the presider in this instance representing the wider church and its "tradition received from the Lord" as s/he reads the institution narrative to the people s/he serves. S/he faces the congregation as a representative of the wider church and its traditions.

All of this is to say that whichever way through the Service of the Lord's Day ¶18–22, there is never any reason to imagine a presiding minister as specially representing Christ. In the expressed theology of the UCA, that responsibility rests upon all Christians.

The Taking

An important point of ecumenical convergence can also be noted about the equivalent of UiW2's ¶18, for which UiW2 uses the heading "Setting of the Table," an action for which UIW2 suggests no particular words. Among examples already cited, the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland, (Anglican) Church of England, and United Reform Church all draw attention to a deliberate "Taking" where UiW2 has the setting of the table, in which the presider is to take bread and wine into her/his hands before replacing them on the table for prayer that follows. The United Reform Church gives words for this taking:

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[24] Graham Hughes, *Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 161 (all emphases in the original).
[25] His example are: words of forgiveness, and preaching. Hughes, *Meaning*, 161.
[26] Hughes, *Meaning*, 164.
[27] Hughes, *Meaning*, 164.
[28] UiW2 142, note 16. This is known as "the basilican tradition", to which Hughes refers.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and following his example,
we take this bread and this cup,
and give thanks to God.[29]

Convergence around "taking" is significant because it casts light on how in ecumenical perspectives manual acts at holy communion tend to be being re-mapped well away from use of the institution narrative (wherever it may fall). That is, considering (for example) the URC and Churches of Scotland and England we can see that taking happens before thanksgiving (and in the URC's choice words, in representative voice, "we take…"). Thanks follows in the form of the prayer over the gifts. Then breaking. Then giving of communion. So the actions of Jesus at the last supper according to scriptural memory – "he took a loaf… bless[ed] it… broke it… gave it…" (Mark 14.23) are *not* as it were being "compressed" into association with the institution narrative but *rather* "dispersed" across the range of actions corresponding to UiW2's ¶18–22. And moreover, there is emphasis on their being done by the celebrating *assembly* ("*we* take…" the presider says in representative voice) rather than this being something for the presider alone. It is concern for communal understanding of eucharistic action that also might encourage use of the orans posture (arms lifted, hands raised) during the prayer over the gifts, not just by the presider but by the whole congregation. As Robert Gribben, for instance, suggests, "solidarity of body language says something important about the relation of minister to people."[30]

Perhaps it is a pity that UiW2 was not more prescriptive about an emphatically representative 'taking', even if realising "solidarity of body language" (to echo Gribben) – everyone standing for the orans – is not widely taken up?

Holy Communion is not a tableau of the last Supper – and presiders don't 'play Jesus'

The last point I cited from Graham Hughes, about theatricality and performance, as well as Gribben's commendation of everyone adopting the same orans posture as the presider, are powerful reminders that at holy communion it is not the presider's role to play Jesus in some "mnemonic tableau."[31] Eucharistic prayer is not an Upper Room pageant, as if re-playing the Last Supper with the presider a mimic of Jesus. Rather, eucharistic prayer is, as evocatively described by Aidan Kavanagh, "a sweeping thanksgiving for the whole of the Father's benevolence toward the world and this people in Christ and the Holy Spirit." This is what the congregation is invited to celebrate together at communion. And the presider's role is to be in solidarity with the other celebrants present (i.e. the congregation), their sometime delegate and voice in this sweeping thanksgiving – and as Kavanagh goes on, "a servant who serves."

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[29] *Worship from the United Reform Church* (London: URC, 2002), 47. The Church of England provides a variety of words that may be used at this point.

[30] Gribben, *Uniting in Thanksgiving*, 217. On commendation of *orans* posture by the whole congregation not just the presider for the whole eucharistic prayer, see also Lorraine Brugh and Gordon Lathrop, *The Sunday Assembly* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2006), 207, Giles, *Creating Uncommon Worship*, a helpful book because replete with pictures of how this might be done.

[31] This phrase is Aidan Kavanagh's, cited by Richard McCarron, *The Communion Rite at Sunday Mass* (Chicago, LTP, 1992), 112. Note that this is a Roman Catholic publication, and that Kavanagh and McCarron are Roman Catholics. Their perspectives are an indication into problems with aspects of official Roman Catholic practice felt within that tradition. I recall one of my own liturgy tutors, himself a Roman Catholic, unforgettably asking the question of a presider who picked up bread and wine at the words of Jesus: "who the hell do you think you are?"!

A proposal

That now brings me to my specific proposal, about how a presider at holy communion might best enact their role according to the standards and norms of UiW2. I suggest:

i If the institution narrative is used as part of a warrant for prayer that comes next (in the pattern of the Reformed tradition): avoid manual acts during the narrative itself, and take/touch the bread and wine only once, at reference to their being "set apart" – not at the words of Jesus.

ii If the institution narrative is used as part of prayer over the gifts of the table rather than as a prior warrant (so in the pattern of the ecumenical tradition): avoid all gestures during the institution narrative as well as at every other point during the prayer, and instead, maintain the same *orans* posture the whole way through, from "The Lord be with you. / **And also with you**" (or equivalent) to the people's "Amen."

Mapped onto SLD ¶18–22 the proposal looks like this:

REFORMED TRADITION	**ECUMENICAL TRADITION / ANGLICAN-METHODIST HERITAGE**
¶18 Setting of the table	**¶18 Setting of the table** *(with a representative taking – perhaps with words emphasising that "**we** take this bread…").*
¶19 Great Prayer of Thanksgiving beginning with the Institution Narrative, which involves manual acts – *(a representative taking – at "**we** set this bread and cup apart," not at the words of Jesus);* the prayer itself following with no manual acts and during which the presider, *the representative voice of the assembly*, stands with raised hands, with the assembly invited to do the same.	**¶19 Great Prayer of Thanksgiving** with no manual acts and during which the presider, *the representative voice of the assembly*, stands with raised hands, with the assembly invited to do the same.
¶20 The breaking of the bread *(the representative breaking: "the bread **we** break…")*[32]	**¶20 The breaking of the bread** *(the representative breaking: "the bread **we** break…")*
¶22 The communion *(the giving of the gifts of Christ's table served among the assembly)*	**¶22 The communion** *(the giving of the gifts of Christ's table served among the assembly)*

[32] UiW2's ¶21, "Lamb of God" is ritually redundant if there are not large amounts of bread to break. However venerable it may be, if not accompanying action it only delays the giving of the gifts of the table and is, in my view, best let go.

So what?

I know that the above discussion, and its specific proposal, might not seem very pressing in some Uniting Church contexts. Some might well ask: Are there not more important things to think about, and do? Or: Does it really matter and if or when presiders pick up things from the communion table? Or even: Who cares if presiders see themselves as performers "playing Jesus"? So what?

However, contrary to perspectives that might minimise concern about care with manual acts, I suggest that quite a lot is at stake in how presiders and the congregations they serve actually *do* holy communion. Contemporary understanding of eucharistic celebration emphasises the whole assembly as celebrant and with that an imperative of wide and active participation in liturgical action.[33] It is, I suggest, regressive to inflict on congregations presiders whom others watch play-act manual acts as if communion is the last supper. Presiders taking/touching the elements at the institution narrative overlays on UCA worship the ritual pictures of Roman Catholic tradition or old-fashioned Anglicanism, yet there is no reason why this should be so. The UCA's theology of ministry does not share with Roman Catholic theology the latter's view that ordained ministers possess a different kind of priesthood from the rest of God's people. And the UCA need never be lumbered with a seventeenth-century Book of Common Prayer. So even if it were possible to imagine an idea of manual acts accompanying institution narrative as some sort of gesture of ecumenical generosity to Roman Catholics or old-fashioned Anglicans, on balance I think it would still not be a smart idea. In any case, there are much better things among Roman Catholics and Anglicans to which the UCA might be open – for starters, the vision of the Roman Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council that people's "full, conscious and active participation" in liturgy is the thing to be considered "above all else."[34] What would that entail in UCA contexts?

Moreover it is, I suggest, clericalizing – over-reaching of their role – for presiders to "play"/act at table as if they are representing Jesus. This bungles the gift of the UCA's clarity that responsibility to represent Christ belongs to all Christians, as well as imposing a practice on UiW2 which it never requires. So, as Richard Giles articulates a contemporary perspective, "If we firmly believe that the theological and spiritual formation of our assembly is at stake, it will be appropriate to drop the manual acts."[35] at least from association with the institution narrative.

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[33] Some contextualization of note ix/6 in UiW/UiW2 can contribute to how the note is interpreted:
First, the UCA has never committed the reading of the gospel to ministers of the word (as Roman Catholicism restricts the gospel reading to the ordained, with speaking words of the gospel understood to be linked to following Jesus' acts at table in the Roman theology of the priest acting in persona Christi).
Second, that while note ix carries over intact as note 6, a declericalizing tweak can be noted in differences between UiW and UiW2. The earlier book has 'The minister receives, then those assisting with the distribution, then the people according to local custom'. (UiW-LB, 128). But the second SLD in UiW2 has 'The minister, those assisting with the distribution, and the people receive according to local custom' (UiW2, 221, albeit as 182 has UiW wording carried over without adjustment).
So: although note 6 stands intact from UiW to UiW2 there is an albeit small clue that the direction of change is towards declericalisation.

[34] *Sacrosanctum conciliumi* ¶14, The Vatican, Documents of the Second Vatican Council, accessed January 13, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html

[35] Giles, *Uncommon Worship*, 176. Note that Giles is an Anglican.

In conclusion

The responsibility to represent Christ is the responsibility of all Christians. The presider's role at eucharist is to be representative, voice, and servant of the people, not a stand in for the Saviour. So the UCA has no need of manual acts that have one minister dress up the words of Jesus, even if these prevailed in some yesteryear and may still operate in some elsewhere. Instead, the UCA does well always to emphasise UiW2 on a strong point about which it is crystal clear: in worship, the congregation is not an audience.

I hope that the above proposal about enacting the SLD's Note 6 might be helpful on the way.

Emergent Theologies in the History of The United Church of Canada

Don Schweitzer

Abstract

This article explores the social, contextual and theological roots of the founding of the United Church of Canada in 1925. It goes on to outline some of the theologies that have emerged in the Church's history in the course of its engagement with its national and global contexts. Those theologies include: the UCC's response to the Great Depression; the prioritisation of dialogue, justice and inclusivity during the 1960s; the production of a contemporary statement of faith in *A New Creed*; the development of a theology of inclusion in recognition of cultural and sexual diversities; and a-rethinking of mission as the link between mission and colonialism became evident. The author presents these developments as the outworking, on the one hand, of the Church's original "triple loyalty" to Scripture, the Canadian context, and the global, ecumenical church. On the other hand they also reflect the evangelical freedom to go beyond inherited practices, traditions and concepts.

Introduction

What follows examines some theologies that have emerged in the history of The United Church of Canada (UCC). We begin with brief overviews of the UCC's Canadian context and history, then examine these emergent theologies. Finally, we will discuss some general characteristics of UCC theologies.

The UCC is "awash in theology."[1] Over the years many theologies originating elsewhere have entered its thought and work. This essay will focus on theologies that developed, sometimes with external help, within the UCC. The UCC has produced four faith statements, known as subordinate standards,[2] and many other forms of theology. This essay will also discuss emergent theologies not formally endorsed by the UCC, but which have been part of its lived theology.

The Canadian Context

The territory Canada occupies began to be colonized with lasting effect by France and England in the 1600s. In 1986 the UCC apologized to First Nations Peoples for its participation in Canadian colonialism.[3]

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1 Michael Bourgeois, "Awash in Theology: Issues in Theology in The United Church of Canada," *The United Church of Canada: A History*, ed. Don Schweitzer (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 260.

2 These are the Twenty Articles of Doctrine in the Basis of Union, the 1940 *A Statement of Faith*, the 1968 *A New Creed* and the 2006 *A Song of Faith*. All four can be found in *The Manual 2023*, The United Church of Canada (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2023), 17-33; available online. These doctrinal standards are subordinate to Scripture.

3 "The Apologies" The United Church of Canada, accessed March 8, 2024 https://united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/reconciliation-and-indigenous-justice/apologies; Tracy Trothen, "1980s: What Does It Mean to Be The United Church of Canada? Emergent Voices, Self-Critique and Dissent," Schweitzer, *The United Church of Canada*, 147.

A central commitment of its theology since then has been seeking right relations with Indigenous peoples, the Inuit and Métis.

Since Canada became a nation in 1867, Canada's small population, large land mass and geographical location have tended to make it a hinterland, a colony of a different sort, to political, financial, cultural, and theological centres located elsewhere. Much of the UCC's theology has been imported from Great Britain, the United States, Germany, or more recently, Latin America. Once imported, these theologies tend to be subtly changed through fusion with influences from the Canadian context and the UCC's social location, and the UCC's inherited and developing theological traditions. These imported theologies have contributed to those emerging within the UCC.

In addition to its status as a hinterland, Canadian society is characterized by class, racial, and cultural/linguistic differences. It tends to be dominated by an anglophone majority, except for the province of Québec, which has a francophone majority, and the northern territory of Nunavut, where the Inuit predominate. Canada has a substantial population of diverse Indigenous, Inuit and Métis peoples. It also has racialized minorities. Some were brought as slaves to Canada. Others, like Canada's anglophone and francophone populations, first immigrated to Canada. These different social groups often exist in degrees of tension or conflict with each other. Their relationships and distinctive cultural and religious traditions have significantly influenced some emergent UCC theologies.

The Formation and History of The United Church of Canada.

The UCC was formed when roughly a dozen factors led many leaders and members of the Congregationalist, Presbyterian and Methodist churches in Canada to seek organic union.[4] An evangelical theological consensus amongst these three denominations made union possible.[5] One purpose of union was to produce a Protestant church that in time might "fittingly be described as national;"[6] that through growth and further unions would become large and influential enough to mould the conscience of Canada as a nation and shape its identity. In its quest to fulfill this hope the UCC sought to assimilate those who were culturally and/or religiously different to its evangelical Christian faith and British ethos.

The union process began in 1899 and was completed in 1925.[7] By 1908 the Joint Union Committee composed of Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Methodists had prepared the Basis of Union for the three denominations to approve. This contained a doctrinal section which was a conservative expression of the evangelical consensus these three denominations shared. Congregations that had already united

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[4] The following provide recent discussions of the causes and history of the formation of the UCC: John Webster Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era*, updated and expanded (Burlington: Welch Publishing Company Inc., 1972/1988), 106-10, 124-8; C.T. McIntire, "Unity Among Many: The Formation of the of The United Church of Canada, 1899-1930," in Schweitzer, *The United Church of Canada*, 3-37; Phyllis Airhart, *A Church With The Soul Of A Nation* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 3-64.

[5] McIntire, "Unity Among Many," 21-22. 'Evangelical' at the time of the UCC's formation simply meant rooted "in the heritage of the Protestant reformation," McIntire, "Unity Among Many," 22. This evangelical consensus underlay the unionists' conviction "that the great truths of Christianity could be framed in terms of a common faith;" Airhart, *A Church With The Soul Of A Nation*, 21.

[6] *The Manual 2023*, 9.

[7] McIntire, "Unity Among Many," 6.

across denominational lines made this document their charter and formed the Local Union Churches, which entered the UCC as a fourth denomination.

The union process produced and was empowered by an emergent theology. When unionists spoke of "the prayer of Jesus," they meant the prayer "That they all may be one," in John 17:11, 21. This phrase became a mantra expressing unionists' belief that it was Jesus' will that Canadian Protestants seek organic union.[8] It is featured on the UCC crest and the stained glass windows, etc. of many United Churches built before the 1960s. Today the UCC remains ecumenical in outlook, but this phrase is rarely referred to.

The union negotiations were marked by an ethos in which organic union with each other was more important than complete doctrinal agreement.[9] This ethos continues in the UCC's approach to its theology. For instance, candidates for ordained ministry are not required to subscribe to a creed, but must be in "essential agreement"[10] with the UCC's doctrinal teachings as expressed in its four subordinate doctrinal standards.

Historically, the vision of becoming a national church figured prominently in the UCC's social imaginary and functioned well for it up until the mid-1960s. From its formation until then, the UCC and other Protestant churches enjoyed a voluntary religious establishment in English-speaking Canada. Then came the "long sixties," 1960-75, during which a period of creative social chaos occurred in many North Atlantic countries.[11] In Canada this dis-established denominations like the UCC. The UCC's membership had grown every year until 1966, when a numerical decrease began that still continues. As a result, the vision of becoming a national church has ceased to be part of the UCC's identity. Yet while the UCC's membership is shrinking numerically, its membership and leadership have become increasingly diverse in terms of gender, sexual orientation, race, and ethnocultural heritage.

Emergent Theologies in The United Church of Canada

The first emergent theology in the UCC after its formation was the socially radical theology of the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order, which was a response to the Great Depression.

The Fellowship for a Christian Social Order

The Fellowship began in 1930 with a small circle of clergy in the UCC's Toronto Conference holding weekly meetings to discuss how the church should respond to the economic crisis.[12] Interest in this grew and the Fellowship was formed in April 1934. At the same time members of what became the Fellowship were active in the United Church, preparing resolutions for the 1933 meetings of Toronto and Montreal/Ottawa conferences

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8 McIntire, "Unity Among Many," 20.

9 Alfred Gandier, *The Doctrinal Basis of Union and Its Relation to the Historic Creeds* (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1926), 35.

10 For the origin and meaning of this term, see John Young, "Introduction," in *The Theology of The United Church of Canada*, eds. by Don Schweitzer, Robert Fennell and Michael Bourgeois (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2019), 2-3.

11 Douglas John Hall, "Christianity and Canadian Contexts: Then and Now," *Intersecting Voices*, eds. by Don Schweitzer and Derek Simon (Ottawa: Novalis, 2004), 18-26.

12 A brief account of the Fellowship's origins is given in Roger Hutchinson, "Introduction," in *Towards The Christian Revolution*, eds. R.B.Y. Scott and Gregory Vlastos (Kingston: Ronald P. Frye & Company, 1936/1989), ix-xvii.

that outlined the clash between Jesus' teachings and capitalism and called for a socialist re-structuring of the economy. Some members also participated in or had links to the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, a socialist political party formed in Calgary in 1932 and the League for Social Reconstruction, a group of socialist intellectuals formed in Toronto and Montreal in 1931-2.

The Fellowship was a non-denominational nation-wide organization in which local groups met for study and discussion. In 1936 it published *Towards the Christian Revolution*,[13] a collectively written book of ten chapters by UCC Biblical scholars, philosophers, theologians and ethicists, offering theological, ethical, cultural and economic analysis of the crisis of capitalism and arguing for democratic socialism as the appropriate Christian response to it. The previous UCC Moderator, Richard Roberts, wrote a cautious "Foreword" to the original edition.

Theologically, the book sought to broaden evangelicalism's vision of God's transforming power to include the social realm. Two chapters articulated what is now called a preferential option for the poor.[14] Affirming the divinity of Jesus meant that God judges society and sides with the poor in the conflicts of history. This theology was more radical than the UCC's official response to the Depression and controversial.[15] Influential UCC leaders like George Pidgeon, adhering to the UCC's vision of becoming a national church, preferred to understand Canadian society as an organic whole rather than in conflictual terms.[16] The Fellowship ended with the onset of World War II. It was never a dominant movement within the UCC. Still its theology was a remarkable achievement. The UCC's theology, from its formation until the 1960s, tended to reflect the world view of Canada's anglophone middle class. It took a reforming approach to existing Canadian social structures and essentially blessed them. The Fellowship's theology tried instead to understand the Christian message in relation to the suffering and needs of the poor and sought a radical restructuring of the Canadian economy.

A Statement of Faith (1940)

A second emergent theology was the 1940 *A Statement of Faith*. By the mid-1930s the UCC had consolidated itself as a denomination. In 1936 the call came for a new faith statement. World War I, the repeal of prohibition, the Great Depression and the renewed threat of war had shattered much of the UCC's previous optimism about the possibility of human progress in history towards the reign of God. Karl Barth's earlier theology, which emphasized that God is in heaven and humanity on earth, had become influential within the UCC. *A Statement of Faith* turned in this direction with an increased emphasis on God's transcendence.[17]

What has had abiding significance for UCC theology from the *Statement* is the affirmation in its "Preamble," that UCC theology must be done contextually and for the Canadian context.

> The Church's faith is the unchanging Gospel of God's holy, redeeming love revealed in Jesus Christ. It is declared in Scripture ... and it is formulated for a specific purpose

[13] Scott and Vlastos, *Towards The Christian Revolution*.
[14] Scott and Vlastos, *Towards the Christian Revolution*, 72, 88.
[15] For the UCC's response, see Airhart, *A Church With The Soul Of A Nation*, 90-4.
[16] John Webster Grant, *George Pidgeon* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1962), 122-6.
[17] The tensions at work in the formulation of *A Statement* and the influence of Barth's theology therein are discussed in Airhart, *A Church With The Soul Of A Nation*, 120-4; Bourgeois, "Awash in Theology," 264-5.

> in our Basis of Union. But Christians of each new generation are called to state it afresh in terms of the thought of their own age and with the emphasis their age needs. This we have attempted to do for the people of The United Church of Canada – seeking always to be faithful to Scripture and to the testimony of the Universal Church, and always aware that no statement of ours can express the whole truth of God.[18]

As intimated here, the idea that theology must be done contextually was already implicit in the formulation of the Basis of Union.[19] It had also surfaced in the 1928 Report on the Ordination of Women, which argued that Paul's injunction that women should be silent in church (1 Corinthians 14:34) "ought not to be held as binding in detail under the vastly altered conditions of modern society."[20] As the "Preamble" states here, doing theology contextually in the UCC implies a triple loyalty: to Scripture, to the Canadian context, and to the global, ecumenical church. This triple loyalty has emerged as characteristic of the UCC's approach to doing theology.[21]

This idea that Christian theology must be contextual found its fullest discussion in the UCC several decades later in Douglas John Hall's theology, who made this a guiding motif of his thought.[22] Underlying this contextual approach to theology is the theme of Christian liberty,[23] or evangelical freedom. As the theological diversity in the New Testament indicates, the gospel binds Christians to the memory of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection, but frees them to understand and live this out in dialogue with the Spirit and the needs and challenges of their context.[24]

A Theology of Dialogue, Justice and Inclusivity

Neo-orthodoxy remained the predominant theology in the UCC after World War II until a tidal wave of liberalism swept over Canada during the years 1965-75.[25] This wave touched the UCC slightly earlier at the 19th General Council in 1960 when the UCC abandoned its long-held teaching of abstinence from alcohol in favour of church members making their own decisions on this matter and accepting the right of each other to do so.[26] Underlying this major change in church teaching was a shift from a predominantly communitarian understanding of the self, which stressed the need of people to be formed into a particular ethos, to a more liberal understanding of the self, which emphasized the dignity of people and their freedom and right to make their own informed personal choice.[27] The relinquishment of this long standing domestic

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[18] "Preamble," *A Statement of Faith, 1940, The Manual 2023,* 21.
[19] S.D. Chown, one of the architects of union, had argued and defended this in 1930; see his Samuel Dwight Chown, *The Story of Church Union in Canada* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1930), 63-4, 69. See also Airhart, *A Church With The Soul Of A Nation*, 22; Young, "Introduction," 3.
[20] UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 3*, 1928, 364.
[21] Don Schweitzer, Robert Fennell and Michael Bourgeois, "Conclusion: … A Work In Progress," Schweitzer et al., *The Theology of The United Church of Canada*, 339.
[22] Douglas John Hall, *Thinking the Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 69-144.
[23] Chown, *The Story of Church Union in Canada*, 65.
[24] James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* 2nd edition (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1977/1990), 381.
[25] Will Kymlicka, "Ethnocultural Diversity in a Liberal State: Making Sense of the Canadian Model(s)," in *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada*, eds. Keith Banting, Thomas Courchene and Leslie Seidle (Montreal: The Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2007), 53-4.
[26] Sandra Beardsall, "'And Whether Pigs Have Wings': The United Church in the 1960s," Schweitzer, *The Theology of The United Church of Canada*, 101.
[27] Beardsall, "'And Whether Pigs Have Wings'," 102.

mission goal was a step towards ending the UCC's quest to shape Canadian society according to its vision of Christian behaviour[28] and a harbinger of how this more liberal understanding of the self would affect UCC theology henceforth. The liberalism that swept across Canada from 1965-75 made religion a matter of private choice rather than public necessity. Yet as this happened, the social ethics of the UCC and some other Canadian denominations became more radical.[29]

A new theology focused on dialogue with other religions, working with others on "shared concerns,"[30] seeking justice, and inclusivity emerged in the UCC's response to the liberalism and social activism of the 1960s. These themes largely replaced the former mission goal of seeking to form people into an evangelical and British ethos. The theme of dialogue emerged in the 1966 report *World Mission*. The theme of seeking justice emerged in the 1968 *A New Creed*. The UCC's shift to a more liberal understanding of the self contributed to both.

World Mission

By the 1950s, many churches that UCC overseas personnel had helped foster in non-Western countries had developed their own leadership and structures and were seeking autonomy in their decision-making. By 1960 many people involved in the UCC's overseas work realized that its paternal relationship to these churches and its overseas mission goals of evangelism and establishing churches, medical work and education, needed re-thinking. The UCC's 1962 General Council established the Commission on World Mission to do this. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, a scholar of comparative religious studies, was on the commission. Some of his views influenced the report, which broke new ground for the UCC in three ways.

First, *World Mission* argued that the UCC's paternal relationship to churches on its overseas mission fields needed to change to one of "partnership in obedience with the younger churches and a policy of joint action for common mission."[31] The report also called for a new emphasis on the church's mission as "a mission to six continents."[32] This new understanding of the UCC's mission became fundamental to its relationships with its overseas partners.

Second, in keeping with Smith's thought, the report recommended that the church "recognize that God is creatively and redemptively at work in the religious life of all mankind,"[33] and that the UCC's relationship to other religions should shift from evangelism to dialogue. This set the direction for the UCC's relationships to other religions henceforth.

Third, *World Mission* introduced an internally directed ideology critique by acknowledging that the UCC's overseas mission work had been complicit with Western imperialism and colonialism. It called the UCC to confess its guilt in this and to "cleanse itself with God's help" from the arrogance and prejudice this complicity expressed.[34]

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[28] Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era*, 217.
[29] Gregory Baum, *Compassion and Solidarity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 51-3.
[30] Hyuk Cho, "'We Are Not Alone': Historical Journey of the United Church of Canada's Response to Become an Intercultural Church," *International Review of Mission* 100/1 (April 2011), 59.
[31] UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 22*, 1966, 436.
[32] UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 22*, 1966, 436.
[33] UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 22*, 1966, 435.
[34] UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 22*, 1966, 434.

The impetus for these changes came from the experiences of UCC overseas personnel. They were also legitimated by the emphasis on "the essential dignity of man, and the right of all men to make their own decisions,"[35] that the more liberal understanding of the self brought into the UCC. The right of people to make their own decisions included the right to practice religions other than Christianity.

A New Creed

The liberalism of the long sixties also helped rupture the relationship of some UCC members to traditional confessions of Christian faith such as the Apostles' Creed. For some, this liberalism combined with the prestige and findings of the natural sciences to create a secularized attitude of "self-sufficient finitude" (to invoke Paul Tillich)[36] which saw Jesus as a moral example and themselves as neither needing nor wanting anything more.[37] This attitude was exemplified in Pierre Berton's bestselling book, *The Comfortable Pew*,[38] which was widely read in the UCC. When Berton's book was published, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers From Prison* was influential in the UCC. Bonhoeffer's status as a martyr and his notion of a "world come of age"[39] were taken by Berton to legitimate this attitude as an expression of intellectual maturity, honesty and moral courage.[40] This was congruent with a self-secularizing trend in the UCC which repudiated Christian affirmations such as Jesus' resurrection.

In 1965 a request came for a new creed that could be used during baptism services as an alternative to the *Apostles' Creed*. The committee charged with developing this saw its task as formulating a faith statement that could "speak to the 'modern' or 'contemporary' world."[41] The committee struggled before producing a text,[42] submitted to the 1968 General Council, which spoke of Jesus as the "True Man," and made no mention of the virgin birth or Jesus' resurrection.

General Council asked the committee to re-draft its text to "give more adequate expression of the Christian gospel for our time."[43] R. C. Chalmers, a UCC theologian from the Maritimes, sent the committee ten criticisms/suggestions. Gregory Baum, a prominent and ecumenically engaged Roman Catholic social ethicist, published an article discussing the submitted text. The committee produced a new text that resisted the self-secularizing trend present in the UCC and followed instead Chalmer's and Baum's suggestions by

[35] UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 22*, 1966, 349.
[36] Paul Tillich, cited in Roger Shinn, "Tillich as Interpreter and Disturber of Contemporary Culture," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 39, No. 4 (January 1986), 23.
[37] For an example of this attitude in the UCC, see John Burbidge, "Likes the new one," *United Church Observer* (1 February1969), 18, 30.
[38] Pierre Berton, *The Comfortable Pew* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart Limited, 1965).
[39] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 8* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 426-7.
[40] Berton, *The Comfortable Pew*, 120-41.
[41] Young, "Introduction," 14.
[42] William Haughton, *The Search For A Symbol: "A New Creed" and The United Church of Canada* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022), 32-52.
[43] UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 23*, 1968, 56.

affirming Jesus' cross and resurrection.[44] This version, known as *A New Creed* (*ANC*), was approved by the General Council Executive in November, 1968.[45]

ANC was a dialectical response to the liberalism Berton represented. Berton had criticized Protestant churches in Canada for being insufficiently concerned with social justice. The description of Jesus as "the true Man" was partly modeled after Bonhoeffer's notion of Jesus as the man for others.[46] According to the committee that produced it, *ANC*'s section on the calling of the church affirmed that following Jesus "entails political-social involvement against evil on behalf of just treatment for all people."[47] This section described the church as being called "to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil." Here a theology of justice emerged that transformed the UCC's traditional emphasis on faith in action. Previously this had focused on evangelism and "friendly service to the nation."[48] *ANC* changed this focus by dropping evangelism and adding "to seek justice and resist evil." All this was a 'yes' to Berton's call for the church to engage in socially transformative action.

However, *ANC*'s affirmation of Jesus, "crucified and risen, our judge and our hope," repudiated the attitude of "human self-sufficiency in human affairs"[49] that Berton endorsed by affirming Jesus Christ as the centre of history.[50] This affirmation was not a retreat from the Enlightenment demand to have the courage to think for oneself, but an exercise of this courage against a rising tide of Western secularism. This dialectical response to the liberalism Berton's book represented was continued in a 1977 report *The Lordship of Jesus*,[51] which sharpened *ANC*'s emphasis on justice by expressing a version of the preferential option for the poor.[52]

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[44] Haughton, *The Search For A Symbol*, 53-61.

[45] The text of *A New Creed* approved in 1968 was as follows:

> Man is not alone, he lives in God's world.
>
> We believe in God:
> who has created and is creating,
> who has come in the true Man, Jesus, to reconcile and make new,
> who works in us and others by his Spirit.
> We trust him.
>
> He calls us to be his church:
> to celebrate his presence,
> to love and serve others,
> to seek justice and resist evil,
> to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.
>
> In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.
> We are not alone.
>
> Thanks be to God.

A New Creed was revised in 1979-80 to make its language more inclusive. The line "to live with respect in creation" was added in 1995. The current text of ANC is available at "A New Creed (1968)" The United Church of Canada, accessed March 8, 2024, https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/faith-statements/new-creed-1968 .

[46] *Creeds: A Report of the Committee on Christian Faith*. The United Church of Canada (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1969), 17.

[47] *Creeds*, The United Church of Canada, 17.

[48] Airhart, *A Church With The Soul Of A Nation*, 5. Sandra Beardsall notes that this change in emphasis happened when longtime secretary of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service J. R. Mutchmor was succeeded by Raymond Hord; Beardsall, "'And Whether Pigs Have Wings'," 100-101.

[49] *Creeds*, The United Church of Canada, 17.

[50] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology Viol. III* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 364-9.

[51] David Lochhead/Committee on Christian Faith, *The Lordship of Jesus* (Toronto: Division of Mission in Canada/UCC, 1978). This report is discussed in Don Schweitzer, "The Christology of The United Church of Canada," *The Theology of The United Church of Canada*, 137-9.

[52] Lochhead/Committee on Christian Faith, *The Lordship of Jesus*, 5.

The *ANC*'s phrase "to seek justice and resist evil" became and remains a central mission goal of the UCC. Micah 6:8 gradually replaced John 17:21 as the key biblical text expressing the UCC's mission.[53] Propelled by this theology, the UCC, along with other denominations, participated in a number of ecumenical social justice coalitions.[54] These churches also "exchanged their former function, in which they defined and legitimated prevailing norms, for a prophetic role, in which they challenge[d] the status quo and call[ed] upon those in authority to be faithful to their avowed principles."[55] Latin American liberation theology, Black theology and feminist theologies helped inspire this radicalizing of UCC social ethics.

Justice as Inclusivity

A theology of inclusion developed in the UCC along with this theology of justice. It also began as a dialectical response to Canada's increasingly liberal social ethos, particularly to the movement in North Atlantic societies away from denominationally defined expressions of the faith and towards understandings defined in an individual's own terms.[56] It first emerged in the committee meetings where *ANC* was drafted. A divide had opened up in the UCC during the 1960s between theological liberals and conservatives. *ANC* was deliberately written so that people from either persuasion could repeat it with integrity.[57] The openness of this theology of inclusion to a spectrum of theological positions represented a "yes" to the new liberal ethos in Canada. This extended one aspect of the ethos created by union, that it is more important to be in organic unity with others than to limit church membership to those with whom one is in complete doctrinal agreement.

However, the extension of this ethos was driven by a new appreciation of "difference" foreign to the ethos motivating union. As Phyllis Airhart observed, for "the founders of the United Church diversity was a challenge to be overcome; differences were to be acknowledged, even respected, but not necessarily preserved."[58] This understanding of cultural and linguistic differences underlay the UCC's original approach to ethnic ministries. Up until the 1980s these were intended to "assist non-Anglo groups to assimilate into Canadian society."[59] Then in the 1960s a notion of difference as something to be prized, recognized and celebrated became widespread in North Atlantic countries.[60] This new evaluation of difference entered into the UCC's notion of justice. Inclusion, meaning an acceptance of and respect for differences, and making room for these in the church, became a justice issue in the UCC during the 1970s in feminist critiques of the church.[61] In the 1980s this demand for recognition and acceptance was extended to gays and lesbians seeking to be commissioned or ordained in the UCC.

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[53] Don Schweitzer, "The Changing Social Imaginary of The United Church of Canada," Schweitzer, *The United Church of Canada*, 290-1.
[54] These ecumenical coalitions are discussed in Christopher Lind and Joe Mihevc (eds), *Coalitions for Justice* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1994).
[55] Terrence Murphy, "Epilogue," in *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada* eds. Terrence Murphy and Roberto Perin (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996), 270.
[56] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 475.
[57] *Creeds*, The United Church of Canada, 18. A similar strategy was followed in the next faith statement, *A Song of Faith*, which was approved in 2006.
[58] Phyllis Airhart, "A 'Review' of the United Church of Canada's 75 Years," *Touchstone* 18/3 (September 2000), 26.
[59] Greer Anne Wenh-In Ng, "The United Church of Canada: A Church Fittingly National," in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, eds. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 208.
[60] Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 233-4.
[61] Joan Wyatt, "The 1970s: Voices from the Margins," Schweitzer, *The United Church of Canada: A History*, 130.

By 1985 question of the eligibility of gays and lesbians for ordination/commissioning had become one of the most divisive debates in UCC history.[62] The "Issue," as it was named in the UCC, was typically framed by those opposed as one of adhering to the authority of Scripture and previous UCC practice. Those in favour argued that there were themes in Scripture and developments in UCC tradition that implicitly supported the eligibility of gays and lesbians for ordination/commissioning and tended to see "the Issue" as primarily one of inclusivity.[63] In 1988, after lengthy and rancorous debate, the UCC's 32nd General Council decided that gay and lesbian members of the church were eligible for commissioning/ordination. This decision "became a line in the ecclesial sands of the UCC";[64] it cemented inclusivity as one of its central mission goals and identity markers. It subsequently came to be referred to as such.[65] At the time, this ground-breaking decision set the UCC apart from most other Canadian denominations. Though the 1988 decision remained contentious within the UCC until the end the 1990s, it paved the way for the UCC to support civil recognition of same-sex partnerships (2000) and approve the celebration of same-sex marriages (2005), and the eligibility of transgendered (2009) and nonbinary (2012) people for paid accountable ministry in the UCC.

The theology of inclusion worked in the opposite direction to the UCC's original attempt to assimilate those who were culturally different to its evangelical Christian faith and British ethos. The theology of inclusion sought instead to transform the UCC and its ethos, so that women and sexual minorities could enter and be at home in it as they were, without having to conform to patriarchal or heterosexual standards. But as this was happening, a critique of this theology of inclusion took shape in the UCC's National Ethnic Committee (NEC).

The notion of inclusivity runs along many different axes: theological differences, gender, sexual orientation, race, culture, language, social class and dis/ability, to name only some. While the theology of inclusion gained space for women and sexual minorities in the UCC, racialized minorities had a different experience. Already in 1982, materials produced by the NEC noted that racialized minorities within the UCC experienced assumptions of white cultural superiority and a dismissal of their theology and ways of worship.[66] Through the 1980s and 90s the NEC and its successors worked to overcome this. An Anti-Racism Task Group was established in 1992. Its work became the basis for "*That All May Be One": Policy Statement on Anti-Racism* which the UCC adopted in 2000.[67]

"*That All May Be One*" rejected the notion of inclusivity and opted instead for a theology of diversity. It argued that inclusion assumes that one party has the power to decide whether or not to include another, and that this power differential leads to marginalization and only token membership for those who are different and less powerful.[68] It described diversity as existing "when all communities partake equitably in decision-making structures and processes that determine their lives and can effectively give voice to

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[62] Trothen, "1980s: What Does It Mean to Be The United Church of Canada?" 150-3.
[63] For example, Harold Wells, "The Making of The United Church Mind – No. II," *Touchstone* 8/1 (January 1990), 29.
[64] Gail Allan and Marilyn Legge, "Ecclesiology: 'Being the United Church of Canada'," in Schweitzer, *The Theology of The United Church of Canada*, 185.
[65] "Inclusivity" is described this way in *A Song of Faith*, Appendix D, The United Church of Canada, 16-17. For a discussion of the UCC's understanding of inclusivity, see The United Church of Canada, *Moving Toward Full Inclusion 2nd edition*, 2014; *Moving Toward Full Inclusion*, 2nd edition (united-church.ca). https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/full-inclusion.pdf
[66] Cho, "'We Are Not Alone'," 53-4.
[67] Cho, "'We Are Not Alone'," 58.
[68] The United Church of Canada, *"That All May Be One": Policy Statement on Anti-Racism*, 9.

their issues."[69] However, while the report rejected the term "inclusivity," it based its theology of diversity in part on Galatians 3:26-28, a locus classicus for theologies of inclusion, and it described its call for the church to become an anti-racist organization as continuing the UCC's "history as a welcoming church."[70] Thus while the term "inclusion" had been critiqued and rejected, key elements of it were retained.

This critique of inclusion as ignoring power imbalances within the church, particularly the power and privilege of "the dominant White ethnic group,"[71] was carried forward in the 2006 proposal that the UCC become an intercultural church.[72] The theology of interculturalism presented here affirmed and continued the theme of inclusivity,[73] but sublated it within an emphasis on racial justice and a vision of the church in which all members and cultural groups would be transformed to create and enable a "mutually respectful diversity and full and equitable participation of all."[74] The UCC was called to transform its structures, practices and operating assumptions through openness to critique from the marginalized and dominated, and appropriate responses of conversion, so that it would become "a space where new paradigms of mutuality, decolonization, polycentric power and cultures, and openness to God's possibilities" were manifest.[75]

The UCC's latest faith statement, *A Song of Faith*, also affirmed at the 2006 General Council, strongly emphasized diversity in clauses such as the following:

> The Spirit challenges us to celebrate the holy
> not only in what is familiar,
> but also in what seems foreign.[76]

It also emphasized the need to critique and confess the oppression of diversity within and outside the church. *A Song* also affirmed inclusivity, both in its text, "we welcome all in the name of Christ,"[77] and in its "Appendix D."[78] Inclusion continued to be invoked as characteristic of the UCC and as a mission goal in UCC documents and statements by UCC leaders of various racial and cultural heritages up until around 2015, when the UCC's Theology and Interchurch Inter-Faith Committee presented a report entitled "Theologies of Disability" to the 42nd General Council.

This report argued that to have a "disability is to experience prejudice and exclusion, called ableism" and argued that disability "is about difference."[79] It continued the critique of inclusion launched in *"That All May Be One"*, arguing that an intercultural church needed to address power dynamics and "relations of domination"[80] between different groups in the church. It argued that the theology of inclusion tended to

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[69] The United Church of Canada, *"That All May Be One": Policy Statement on Anti-Racism*, 8.
[70] The United Church of Canada, *"That All May Be One": Policy Statement on Anti-Racism*, 3.
[71] UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 39*, 2006, 588.
[72] Cho, "'We Are Not Alone'," 60.
[73] UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 39*, 2006, 579-80.
[74] UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 39*, 2006, 580.
[75] UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 39*, 2006, 588.
[76] *A Song of Faith*, UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 39*, 2006, 431. See also "Appendix A: On the Purpose and Status of the Statement of Faith," Ibid., 436.
[77] *A Song of Faith*, UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 39*, 2006, 435.
[78] *A Song of Faith*, "Appendix D: On the Identity of the United Church as Reflected in the Statement of Faith," UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 39*, 2006, 443.
[79] UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 42*, 2015, 605, 606.
[80] UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 42*, 2015, 606.

"assimilate differences to the norms of the dominant social order."[81] It defined an intercultural church as one that "honours differences, works to transform relations that exclude, and is committed to be changed by those who have been seen as 'other'."[82] It described this as "radical inclusiveness."[83]

The theology of inclusion outlined above continued the UCC's tradition of being "reformed and reforming" established at union through the uniting denominations having to die to their previous denominational identities in order to enter into a deeper and broader union.[84] The theology of inclusion reversed the assimilationist impulse that dominated the UCC's first forty years, yet it continued this tradition of undertaking transformational change so that all might become one. In turn, this theology of inclusion became sublated into the theology of an intercultural church, through various critiques of power imbalances and exclusions operative within the church. These critiques were intended to enable the full participation in the church of those marginalized by the dominant ethos of Canada's white, Anglo-Saxon settler society, that still pervades the UCC.[85]

Conclusion

There are other emergent theologies in the UCC besides those discussed here. For example, Harold Wells has traced the emergence of an ecotheology in the UCC, as it moved away from the classical theism affirmed in its Basis of Union towards various ways of understanding God as both internally related to creation and history, but also radically transcendent to them.[86] Still, several conclusions can be drawn from what has been discussed.

The UCC was formed to enable evangelical Protestantism to more effectively engage the Canadian context. These engagements have been learning processes[87] through which distinctive theologies have emerged. The development of these theologies has been typically guided by the triple loyalty discussed earlier. Their emergence has also demonstrated an evangelical freedom to go beyond inherited practices, traditions and concepts as a result of new understandings of the gospel that have arisen through rereading it in light of the witness of the Spirit in the present.[88] These developments thus indicate a fourth characteristic of UCC theology, which helped motivate its formation and which has remained present throughout its history: a critical openness to what the Spirit is saying to the church[89] through movements and developments in its social context.[90]

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[81] UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 42*, 2015, 607.
[82] UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 42*, 2015, 606.
[83] UCC, *Record of Proceedings, General Council 42*, 2015, 607-8.
[84] For the phrase "reformed and reforming," see Allan and Legge, "Ecclesiology" 185.
[85] Allan and Legge, "" 192-3.
[86] Harold Wells, "The Good Creation: From Classical Theism to Ecotheology," Schweitzer, *The Theology of The United Church of Canada*, 77-100.
[87] Schweitzer et al., "Conclusion: ... A Work In Progress," 336.
[88] Schweitzer et al., "Conclusion: ... A Work In Progress," 339-40.
[89] Revelation 3:22.
[90] I thank Rev. Dr. Jennifer Janzen-Ball for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

Book Forum: Willie James Jennings' *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*[1]

After Whiteness: Indian and Australian Resonances

Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon

After Whiteness by Willie Jennings is absorbing and thought-provoking reading. Jennings communicates his reflections on theological formation by analysing his personal experiences within the theological fraternity, via varied genres – poetry, prose, and stories. His thoughts and insights gained through personal experiences, conversations, observations, have led him to identify what he considers are "distortions" in the delivery of theological education, contributing to the decline in enrolments and in theological education in general.[2] The distortions he claims inhibit "belonging" ("a profoundly creaturely belonging that performs the returning of the creature to the creator," 11), especially of minoritized students (racial, cultural, women, disabled and sexually othered), and communion ("deepest sense of God-drenched life attuned to life together," 13-14). Jennings writes: "Belonging must become the hermeneutical starting point for which we think the social, the political, the individual, the ecclesial, and most crucial … the educational," 10).

But Theological education in the USA is, in his estimation, racist in its intent and driven by "the vision of the [white] self-sufficient man" (31). Engendering this "white masculinist self-sufficiency" (18), involves equipping the individual to master his field of study and control how it is approached, understood, and delivered. This educational model, Jennings maintains, is embedded within a pedagogy of the colonial plantation, which was more than "cultivation of crops and preparing goods" for export. It was also for the cultivation of leaders and "a social order necessary for promoting commerce and civilization" (83), and the establishment of a "racial paterfamilias" determined to generate profit and desired influence (88).

Jennings continues to explain that our current models of education – energized by whiteness and justified in the name of scholarship – academic excellence and standards generate competition, and individualism. Students, primarily those of colour, strive hard to keep up, to cope and to stay in the program or live lives of "institutional alienation, always only on the surface of institutions in resistance and abiding suspicion" (104). Evaluations based on racialized standards lend to a sense of shame, reinforce the sense of "not belonging" and kill creativity, resulting in the minoritized student being "caught between isolation and "soul killing performativity aimed at the exhibition of mastery, possession and control with the tacit assumption that this…illumines talent and capacity for leadership" (18).

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[1] Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020).
[2] The decline in enrolments is very much a Western problem. This is so not the case in the global south.

Jennings therefore advocates for an education project with a pedagogical shift, a design, that stresses inclusion, that will equip us "to find our way to the crowd,"- gathering of hungry and hurting people who need God" (13)[3], as the crowd is needed to see "God's overwhelming compassion" (13). It should engender "intellectual affection," that "does not isolate" but opens one up "towards more intense learning from one another" (65-66), and cultivates 'intellectual resistance' – "a seed from which may grow beautiful habitation or from which may grow mind-bending captivity," – a "form of resistance that builds community" (72).

Jennings' book encourages and provokes us to reconsider and evaluate not just the content and delivery of theological education but its purpose. What are we seeking to achieve through the delivery of theological education? More importantly, what kind of individuals are we seeking to form? What kind of ministers, leaders, intellectuals, and educators are we seeking to cultivate? Jennings invites us to evaluate our own histories and discern crucial moments within them, individual and institutional, that would help identify and unravel "fragments" – formational experiences, memories, ideas, practices, intellectual traditions, identities, and experiences of colonization – to create patterns of 'belonging' guided and nourished by faith.

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I write as an Indian woman, theologically trained in India and in the Unites States. For many years now, I have been an educator, working in church affiliated institutions, teaching biblical and gender studies, and forming candidates for ministry in India and in Australia. I was born to parents for whom education was a priority, and key to personal growth. They believed that education was essential for confidence building, independence, resistance, and self-determination, especially for women. Education was, in fact, all they could give their daughters. Upon completion of my first theological degree in India, opportunities arose to go westward and make the West my site of continued formation and training. Such a decision, which was a family decision, is without a doubt overdetermined by Indian low/middle-class aspirations which took the social structure of the West and what it offers as its norm.

The depth of the ideological creation of 'the West' in India's history, to which a Biblical interpreter as myself is an heir can find clear depiction in the discipline of "Biblical studies" which was for a long time taught by Western missionaries alone and during my time by Western and Western trained (read: Harvard, Yale, Cambridge, Oxford, and German Universities) brown men. These men, white and brown, sowed the early seeds of what constituted biblical scholarship and its function within ministry. The West was the norm, and it determined our approaches, perspectives, hermeneutics, methods of biblical interpretation and application. The Indian context was rarely, if ever, a concern in Biblical studies and interpretation. This reinforced the notion that the modern West is not just a geographical or temporal entity. It is everywhere, inside and outside the West, in "structures and in minds," and hence a psychological space, inclusive of social, cultural, and economic space as well.[4] The West is therefore a transnational category, adept at

[3] Much like the crowd that gathered around Jesus (Mark 5:24b or Luke 5:1).
[4] Asish Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), xii.

expanding "beyond geographical determinations and creating new and specific loci of power/knowledge through the manifold processes of Westernization."[5]

Any resistance to Westernization in India was most apparent in the sphere of women's lives. Hence going westward to pursue higher/advanced degrees allowed me and others like me, to discover ourselves outside the confines of the Indian traditions and take advantage of the mobilities that come with education. But what kind of education? My church that sent me for studies stressed that I must leave home, and I must return. And so I went, bringing pride and joy to my family and to myself. My teachers in the West impressed upon me, and categorically so, that their aim was to form me as a "Scholar" which meant expertise in the reading methods advocated by 1960s German scholarship and ability to read and translate both Biblical languages and German. The gifts of my culture were of use mostly in church adult education sessions and international student events, often reduced to clothing, music, dance, and cuisine. My identity as an Indian woman, my culture and context and the insights of my traditions and community were for use upon return. It is at "home" that the writing and the skilled and competent act of translation and interpretation from one culture into the language of the other takes place.

I agree with Jennings that education is, also a process by which we are taught to confirm, make choices, accept, and remember certain types of knowledge, and devalue/forget others leading to the eventual "erasure" of these knowledges (65) We grow up disregarding, marginalizing the local and the personal in favour of what we are told will take us forward, ahead, and away. We thus "come of age within an intellectual field" that, by no means arbitrarily creates disregard and oversight in some areas and directs our desire and intellectual pursuits elsewhere.[6] Our subjectivities are thereby formed within such an intersecting system of knowledge production and "sanctioned ignorances" (Spivak).[7]

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Upon completion of studies, I returned to India to translate the truths of my American learning on Indian soil and to Indian minds. I was not trained to discern what kind of notes or tools I should take back or would need. I was fairly confident that I knew my field and would be able to impart my learnings to my students with some ease and was quite quickly in for a shock. Students groaned as they tried to wrap their minds around issues of Pentateuchal criticism and asked why they had to learn it if it didn't offer any sure answers. But the curriculum prepared by the University was still heavily reliant on what was demanded by the West. The college too emphasized that students should be equipped with this knowledge. But it was also committed to fostering education that was in alignment between one's identity, culture, context, and intellectual pursuits. It was all about enabling students and ministers in formation to put their feet down clearly in a stance that arises from their identities as Dalit, Adivasi, women, and rooted within the faith, and marking that position as different from the majority opinion rooted in the West, and in casteist

[5] Mary E John, *Discrepant Dislocations: Feminism, Theory, and Postcolonial Histories* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 8-9.
[6] Mary E John, *Discrepant Dislocations*, 11.
[7] Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Gary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313

interpretations. This approach to education was based on deep ethical principles that are fundamental to how we engage the Indian context, the world and, in this case, biblical studies for the sake of the world.

This proved challenging for me. To "see from below is neither easily learnt nor unproblematic, even if 'we' 'naturally' inhabit the great underground terrain of subjugated knowledges," writes Haraway.[8] Such a stance is learned, and negotiated. Unlike Jennings, I did not come to enlightenment regarding my own roots in the "small space of a backyard." I grew up within the confines of a large ecumenical seminary, a microcosm of the global church, with access to opportunities for learning, exposure, and growth. My parents and neighbours, like many, saw Western training as a means to emancipation and freedom and status. They shielded me from knowing my Dalit roots, aware that it might bring shame that can be inhibiting. Besides, our identity as Christians has now supposedly erased all caste identities.[9] The demands of my job as an educator and my desire to authenticate my work as an *Indian* biblical interpreter meant that I had to enter a process of discovery and learning about my roots and my culture. I had to find ways to overcome the 'sanctioned ignorance' of my formation thus far. My desire to be a "reader of thoughts" on my own culture, to understand it, led me to books written primarily by Western anthropologists and Western theologians who had worked in India! Escape from the West seemed elusive.

Biblical interpretation was a scholarly project but also a political and pastoral one. To realize this, I had to make the text come alive in our contexts and this continues to be a journey which involves the quest and discovery of texts, stories, myths, historical events – scriptural, cultural, poetic, and more – and to bring them into conversation with the biblical text. This authenticates my work and provides me with a vantage point that brings new questions and insights to the text. In the themes of restlessness, rebellion, and dissent arising from such a conversation, I hear and see freedom, creativity, imagination, and insight.

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As a woman scholar of theology, I experienced double marginalization. I had to struggle against both the historical legacy of a sexual cultural ideology that continues to denigrate and devalue women in subtle but destructive ways and the theological intolerance that is often hostile to women's scholarship and the presence of women in religious and theological studies departments in the academy. I questioned and still do – my sense of isolation – ideological and cultural in my current location. Yet, I am a woman with privilege and position, and I move between the established sources of power and my own experience of being excluded from this power. As educator and mentor, and perhaps because of my vulnerabilities, I soon learned that I am empowered when the learning process is collective, fluid, and dynamic. I had to acknowledge the fact that my students come with distinct knowledges and through their disbelief, insightful questioning, and their resistance, they too contribute to the production of knowledge. This meant instilling a sense of participation in the classroom deliberation and helping them evaluate their own values through the yardsticks of democratic principles and nurturing belonging. Students must feel that their opinions and values are worthy of being heard and have their values and reflections evaluated in return. In a hierarchical

[8] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The science Question in Feminism as a Site of Discourse on the Privilege of Partial Perspective," Feminist Studies, 14/3 (1988): 584.
[9] This is far from the truth!!

society governed by the rules of caste, gender, race, and class, this evaluation involves the deconstruction and reconstruction of dominant values, interpretations and theological positions which had been hitherto presented to them as 'right,' 'normal' or 'natural.' In doing so, some students might change their ideas and participate in progressive politics. For those who have experienced discrimination and oppression these are ideas of resurrection. Engaged teaching-mentoring helps transform the learning outcomes into life outcomes and foster belonging and communion.

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I have not had too many students from the CALD communities share candidly their experiences in theological education here in Australia, other than to state that there were times when their contextual interpretations were not welcomed. Issues of language and critical engagement with their learning do pose challenges and I see many are just coping – keeping their heads above water so to speak and looking forward to finish and get away. The 'sanctioned ignorances' that they have come with from previous learning ventures, and those that are perhaps being instilled in them now, diminish their ability to identify, value and effectively use the gifts and insights of their culture and traditions. This denies opportunity for engagement with those cultures and conversation across cultures. Do they experience institutional alienation? Isolation? Do they experience a sense of belonging? This needs to be discerned. How we might foster belonging and communion continues to be a challenge in the Australian context. What kinds of belonging and what types of communion are needed is to be explored in dialog and conversation with those who feel excluded.

The Wonder and the Work: reflections on reading *After Whiteness*

Sean F. Winter

One sweltering afternoon in 1992, in an African American church in downtown Baltimore, I found myself sitting up front on the platform, behind the pulpit with the other ministers, facing the congregation. A friend of mine was preaching. I still remember the sermon from Romans 8, entitled "On the Winning Side." I also recall, with almost camera-like precision, the *experience* of being there, the sense of wonder that emerged from my full, if slightly awkward, participation in worship in the black church. I was caught up; able to see with my own eyes the wonder, exuberance, faithfulness, struggle, joy, and transformative power of the Spirit written on the faces of those who looked up at us and who swayed, prayed, called, and responded to a preacher whose words flowed with an eloquence I could only dream of. But what struck me with equal force at the time and stayed with me is that from my vantage point, I could also make out the script my friend was preaching from. I could see that every phrase, received by the congregation as a word of joy, hope, affirmation, or invitation, had first been carefully written down; that every change of rhythm, rhetorical flourish, and switch from prose to poetry to song was marked up intentionally on the page. I could see the evidence of the hours of labour that somehow fed into and connected to the weight of the worship experience itself: that hard work was somehow connected to the experience of wonder; they belonged together.

Reading *After Whiteness* brought that afternoon to mind over and over again. It is a book pervaded by a sense of authorial wonder. At the fact that "a black man in America came to be an academic dean of an overwhelmingly white divinity school" and thus came to "know the secrets" (1). At the anthropological reality that because "the world is always too much for us to hold at once…[w]e creatures live in pieces and we come know our redemption in pieces" (34). At the beautiful and life changing truth, that "God works in these fragments, moving in the spaces between them to form communion with us" (34). Above all, it is a book that reminds us that the most wondrous thing about theological education is not the books, the ideas, or the programmes but the people: colleagues and students, those who succeed and those who fail, their gifts and their beauty and their failings. In a compelling fusion of anecdote, dream, poetry, and hard-nosed insider description, Willie James Jennings shows what it means to pay attention to the wonderful realities of the strange world of theological education to which many of us belong (to use one of the book's important words). But every page also leaves a clear impression of the hard work that Jennings has undertaken on the way to those insights and the hard work that we all still need to undergo to heal and re-order our institutions and the kind of education that happens within them. Readers familiar with Jennings' earlier work, *The Christian Imagination*, will recognise the voice of a theologian who, in directing our attention to the truth of their own story, pulls back the veil to show us the uncomfortable truths of our institutions and our work.[10]

In these brief comments, I explore these themes of wonder and work by considering, respectively, one particular motif and the overall architecture of *After Whiteness*. These attempts at exposition of a book – that I think is intended to defy such attempts – connect to my personal experience as an educator and provide a template for thinking about the future of theological education. There is much more to be said than I say here, but in at least these two ways, we and I should take the provocations, diagnoses, and prescriptions of *After Whiteness* seriously.

"The wonder that hosts knowledge"

After Whiteness seeks to identify, describe, and remedy the contours of the "distorted formation" that is central to the Western educational project (5–6). The distortion, Jennings argues, is manifest both in the "image of the educated person" and the related "formational energies" deployed to create, sustain, and replicate that image. The image is of "a white, self-sufficient man, his self-sufficiency defined by possession, control, and mastery." The primary strategies used to support that image are structures of hegemony and homogeneity: "a control that aims for sameness and a sameness that imagines control" (6–7).

As a white man, educated in exactly that Western educational tradition, albeit now heavily chastened by the postmodern turn, the hermeneutics of suspicion, postcolonial critiques, and the experience of living and working in the Australian context, I see myself in Jennings' description. And I wonder whether I have, perhaps inevitably, become "the man in the chair" (47–48), or some version of the "plantation owner" described on pp.78–83. I have heard myself talk about the importance of learning "the scholarly languages" (52–55) and recognise the temptation to step into "the intimate spaces between dream and hope, dedication

[10] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

and wonder, surprise and curiosity" that education can open up, only to turn away and pass judgement in hasty evaluation, "born of colonialism, born of whiteness" (50–51). Yet, I also see that when I have engaged in and enabled genuine attention in a classroom (to texts, voices, ideas), something transformative occurs for all of us who gather (another important word in *After Whiteness*).

> [T]his is one of the main reasons why theological education fails and is failing. It forms an unreal world of petrified attention inside the real world, a real world calling us to attend to the wonders of a God working in a place never released from the rain of divine presence (56–57).

Central to this form of attention is what Jennings calls "not knowing", and it is this that opens the pathway to wonder. "There is a joy in not knowing. Like the ribbon of a bow being opened to a gift, the not-knowing opens curiosity and curiosity enters wonder…This is wonder that hosts knowledge, allowing it to grow within the beauty of mystery" (118).

So, I wonder how to cultivate a form of "wonder that hosts knowledge" in my teaching and in the culture, structures, relationships, and practices that weave together to make up the life of a theological college. *After Whiteness* contains any number of hints, proposals, and invitations to that end. As someone who still thinks that conveying knowledge *can* often be empowering (teaching a class on different understandings of Pauline soteriology, for example), I am deeply challenged by this:

> The question is not what they should know…The question is, what should be the shape of the journey to know? What should be the character of the search? How might there be a shared inwardness that opens the joy of not knowing inside the joy of learning together? (120)

In other words, I put *After Whiteness* down wanting to be a teacher capable of helping students name and navigate their journey and skilful enough to make learning a process not simply of knowledge acquisition but the opening up our lives to each other, to the world, and so to God in ways that enable us all to pay attention. Here is Jennings capturing the critical idea in arresting terms:

> Paying attention requires everything…a commitment to be patient in weaving deep lines of connection between what we teach, whom we teach, and the world we inhabit together with them. It is the promise we make to the world and to God when we say to ourselves that we want to know and we want to understand…We always understand in fragility. Which requires that we hold each other up in our striving…(59).

"Working in the Fragments"

The critiques and proposals of *After Whiteness* are explored with reference to the particularities of the American education system and seminary world. This raises the question of whether the insights of *After Whiteness* translate easily to, say, Australia. There are numerous and obvious points of connection: for example, the truth that our theological schools indeed "exist on stolen lands" (43) or the admission that those who stay in theological education sometimes do so as a form of escape, with harmful consequences (148). Above all, however, it seems to me that the overall architecture of *After Whiteness* provides us – as

in Australian, Uniting Church theological teachers and institutions – with a template that could aid self-analysis and promote appropriate change for a long time to come.

Admitting that theological work is done in *fragments* (chapter 1) might lead us to consider what it means to frame theological education in ways that resist discourses of mastery, totality, system, sufficiency, orthodoxy, or tradition. In *designing* (chapter 2) curricula that facilitate our "precious saving work" (35) with fragments, we might ask searching questions about how units and pathways and awards cultivate genuine attention, eschew forced affection by moving beyond notions of radicalism and orthodoxy, and create the possibility of resistance. As we undertake the necessary work of *building* (chapter 3) and rebuilding our institutions, what difference would it make if we focus less on the questions of survival and sustainability and more on the hidden logics of power, suspicion, and control that prevent us from building "toward life" (104). Could we think more deeply about the ways that we promulgate one-directional forms of assimilation (so that students conform to institutions with no chance of reciprocation), or perpetuate disordered forms of introspection (so that students come to think that to learn is to somehow disconnect in service of knowledge and evaluation), or protect the status-quo (because of anxiety, self-preservation, or money)? Can we *move* (chapter 4) in new spirals up towards life and communion? What would a course, an academic year, a formation programme, or a degree look like if it were oriented towards the importance of gathering, belonging, and desire/eros (chapter 5)?

That asking and answering these questions constitutes the hard work of institutional governance, strategy, leadership, and the day-to-day labour of teaching, learning, prayer, conversation, and conflict should come as no surprise. The many stories in *After Whiteness* reflect back to us something of the truth of our institutions: their remarkable histories, academic excellence, colourful characters as well as their current decline and casual cruelties. By means of his extensive experience, acute analysis, and prophetic imagination, Jennings is able to name our – and that also means my – problems, complicities, and impoverished vision. It is a book to provoke repentance, for all the times we have turned our "schools" into "plantations" or so elevated the importance of rigorous thinking that we have struggled to cultivate right feeling (92–93). It invites us to name and turn from the various forms of "sick wisdom" we inherit and perpetuate in our institutions (101–102).

But all this is not a narrowly paranoid reading of our situation.[11] In the end, the strength of *After Whiteness* lies in its sketching out of an alternative to self-sufficient, white, male hegemony and making that alternative more attractive and a cause for greater wonder. And I cannot help but sense that this has something to do with the joyful, transformative wonder that seems to imbue Jennings' theological work. The hard graft of building, designing, guiding, mentoring, teaching, and researching is not an end in itself. It should be opening us and those who gather with us up to something far more critical, what Jennings names on the final page as a "long[ing] for eternity and the end of death" (157). That will never come from a place of anxiety, or a sense of lack, or a preoccupation with manifold forms of regulatory control. It is the Spirit's

[11] As I was writing this review, I was also reading Eve Sedgwick's famous essay "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, ed. Michèle Aina Barale, et al. (New York: Duke University Press, 2002), 123–152. *After Whiteness* is a good example of what genuine reparative interpretation can look like.

work, gathering a people together in such a way as they can, perhaps only for a time, make a home for each other in the presence of the living God.

Visceral Longing for Redemption: a reflection on *After Whiteness*

Toar Hutagalung

Confessions

Uncovering crises in theological education, Willie James Jennings, in his book *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*, intentionally speaks about his visceral experience of studying and working in institutions with theological settings. His words are powerful but literally painstaking. It is even more painful because those stories cannot be told in open, although there is no stopping Jennings telling the readers the meaning (1). These are Jennings' confessions on what are the formation of his theological education.

Formation is important according to Jennings (4). However, as a Black person, Jennings also reminds the readers that "theological education in the West was born in white hegemony and homogeneity" (6-7). In other words, for people of colour, whiteness is something that pervades and takes a toll on their theological education. Whiteness only focuses on cognitive structure and disregards the affective structure. It distorts the formation itself by disregarding what is the most important element of a person – the particularity of a cultural agency – and assimilating people into whiteness (9). This then creates fatigue and despair which rejects the meaning of belonging (10). Theological education without the cultivation of belonging means nothing. However, a series of misapprehensions ruined this belonging, and a way to express this is through fragments.

Language as Colonial and Racial Fragments

What strikes me is the demand that the trend of theological education places on every teacher. That demand has a certain requirement that screens or filters anyone who wants to be an educator. Therefore, that requirement also shapes the theological quality. While this is important, the way it is conducted tends to follow the style of whiteness. When it comes to a search process for a faculty member, a candidate who would resemble a white man performing a depth of knowledge and showing a self-sufficiency becomes the benchmark for all candidates (29-31). This obscures the reality of how life is made up of fragments, not a kind of "intellectual independence and individualism" that tries to claim a wholeness (32). In Jennings' words, it is a form of a self-sufficient man (126).

The problem with wholeness lies in a luxury that not everyone can have or experience. Therefore, instead of working in wholeness, many underprivileged people are working in fragments. What I learned from Jennings is how these fragments are parts of losses that many people of colour experience (35). For example, a friend

of mine, Ekaputra Tupamahu, tells the story behind the publication of his book, *Contesting Languages*.[12] He mentioned in a podcast on how, as a migrant, a person of colour, he had to struggle in speaking English "perfectly," until he realized that he had no reason to conform with the English world on how to speak English.[13] This language struggle is one fragment that many immigrants have to work within. This loss or inability to speak "without accent" – although everyone is undeniably speaking with a certain accent – is a colonial legacy, which the Western world often tries to embed into the minds of the people. Colonialism lures the mind of the people that local languages are not important, or even considered scholarly languages (52-55).

Social Capital and Commodity Fragment

Jennings highlights a Western logic in his book: "to know a thing is to possess a thing" (42). In another part, he also mentions three kinds of power in academic institutions: intellectual ability, notability, and money (127). I found his reflection similar to Bourdieu's idea on capital. Pierre Bourdieu introduces a powerful theory about capital.[14] His theory on capital shows another fragment from Jennings' reflection, which is commodity fragment (41). Some knowledges are considered a valuable commodity, but not all knowledges. For example, some European languages – such as English, German, and French – were considered "scholarly" languages (and therefore as vehicles of knowledge), but the indigenous language is not – because of a tendency to undervalue the indigenous language. Similarly, when someone accepts a student or a new faculty member, that person should have capital: something that may bring benefit to the institution. For example, with a small percentage of Indonesian students coming to the US, an Indonesian may have little chance to be accepted in schools to teach. There is no social capital that an Indonesian candidate could bring to theological institutions in the US. Another example, knowing that many international students were not permanent residents and may return to their country, why bother accepting them? This benefit-based idea is not only a colonial project, but also making people as commodities that are valued by their capital.

Liminal Spaces

While fragments represent a loss for many people of colour, they are also the strength to carry on (61). These fragments became homes where affection is celebrated. They resist being formed as a whole, because a whole complete structure is a confining normativity. That is why theological education is about locating homes in liminal spaces. They are not confined in classrooms or books. They are located in the intersections of books and people, classes and fields. At those intersections, people can attend to what is currently happening, but attention requires affection. It needs an emotion. Fragmental beings need other fragments who can share the same emotion to nurture theological education. When there are gaps, our fragments come to fill them, not in a sense of forming an unchanging structure, but to keep being fragments of the fragments. This is where collective engagement should take part. The collegiality itself is a liminal space

[12] Ekaputra Tupamahu, *Contesting Languages: Heteroglossia and the Politics of Language in the Early Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).
[13] Pete Enns, "Ekaputra Tupamahu – Speaking in Tongues," *The Bible for Normal People*, podcast audio, December 4, 2023, https://thebiblefornormalpeople.com/episode-261-ekaputra-tupamahu-speaking-in-tongues/
[14] Pierre Bourdieu introduces three forms of capital, which are economic, social, and cultural capital. See Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by J. Richardson (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986), 241–58.

where people come to work together with their own fragments. Often, they share their struggles, and they will fight against the wholeness again – the self-sufficient man.

Exhaustions

Another crucial part of the book is Jennings' attention to exhaustion, or tiredness. He mentions many times how he grew tired of things that happened in theological education. I found that a person of colour would find it difficult to navigate a way to live in a space where white-man normativity tries to control everything. The creativity from different cultures would sound unorthodox and risky – meaning it has no validity to meet the standard of white people's experience. The case of Sheldon in Jennings' book, for example, conjured that racial paterfamilias rule. Any person who would like to breakthrough would then be "haunted by the racial paterfamilias" (88). At this point, the anger from the weariness will soon turn into hatred against this paterfamilias system. This system makes the institution looks like a plantation, where people were enslaved and forced to do something (89). This continual formation of institutions slowly erodes the soul of the people. It tries to master the bodies by colonizing the souls.

This formation of institution or building can even be expanded into relationships with other places. In relationship there is a power play, as argued by Michel Foucault.[15] The power relation added with colonial desire turns into performing mastery (100). I have heard stories about many international teachers are not permitted to bring their own creativity to teaching but are often asked to do more things than they signed up for. Many immigrants struggled to find, get, and secure a teaching position, and they consumed too much time and energy for every preparation stage, whereas white privilege could save some of the troubles. This fact is exhausting. It gives many people limited options: to follow or to experience alienation in resisting the mastery (104). This leads me to the idea of slow death, a term that Jennings mentioned in the book where he related it to slave obedience (81). They are causes of things like racial paterfamilias, mastery, commodification, or the colonization itself.

The Façade of Salvation

The acts of colonial control have been propagated since the invention of the Doctrine of Discovery with the Papal Bulls in 1493. Saving a soul became a vital mission as if all European incomers had that "noble" motivation to save the souls of the indigenous people who did not know Jesus. Interestingly and sadly, as hinted by Jennings, education has been a tool to colonize the bodies in the name of saving a soul. This method is also done in a one-way teaching as an exertion of colonial power by thinking that students have no capability to understand. Not only to students, but a teacher sharing her/his/their arguments to other colleagues can be problematic too when the other colleagues criticized the arguments. This patronizing or the paterfamilias system resembles the way of colonizer claims to save others (116). In the end, tired of being told what they could or should do, many scholars, including students of colour, feel the exhaustion and choose to isolate themselves as a way to protect themselves (122).

[15] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 93.

Many international students in the US, for example, worked their way to receive a theological education with lots of "frugality, discipline, sacrifice, and maturity" (133). In the end, just as Jennings said, the education process becomes a "dehumanizing processes of exchange" (133). They are alienated from one another because they need to gather all their fragments to be whole and self-sufficient. This is the theological formation that many people of colour have experienced – whether as a student or even as a teacher.

Erotic Love

The piece of hope from Jennings' book is perhaps best seen in his last chapter, "Eros." One thing that many people of colour fortunately have is a sense of collective being that is intimately related to eros. We are then back to belonging. The sense of togetherness, when cultivated among the people of colour, is very empowering and uplifting. The erotic love, the desire, to think and feel the others as close friends and family is crucial. It becomes the embodiment of every single thing that people learn in theological setting, which is to practice love and justice. Unfortunately, with colonial mentality, scholars of colour were led to see their own people as obstacles instead of strengths. This fear, ignorance, as well as violence resides in the life of the people. This must be stopped. We need to destroy this colonial form of greed. Centredness must be replaced with friendly relationality and communal hospitality that is shown in the power of the Holy Spirit (143-145).

An Indonesian scholar, Joas Adiprasetya, has also shown the importance of the theme of friendship in his interpretation of John 21: 15-17, when Jesus asked Peter the third time, "Do you love me?". Adiprasetya argued that the first two questions, with the word *agapas,* connotes an unequal relationship, like a master and a slave. Yet, when Jesus asked with the word *phileis,* he changed the nature of relationship to that of friendship, which established Jesus and Peter as good friends.[16] This is the communal value: a filial as well as erotic love, that should be embodied in the community. That desire seeks for gathering all the fragments for a communion, not for the self-sufficiency of a finished or whole man (153). That collected fragments are the home for many people to share their stories, hopes, and dreams together.

Reading *After Whiteness* has truly helped me to describe and rearticulate my thoughts, feelings, and experience about the struggle. It has helped me to design, write, and practice a theological education in real life. I just hope this book is not just read by people of colour. I hope it is not always the task of the people of colour to educate others about the impacts of the racial, colonial, and commodifying fragments. Perhaps it is better to understand the aim of this book and not just aim to finish reading this book.

[16] Here I agree with Joas Adiprasetya in refuting Anders Nygren's arguments in separating love in three different categories (agape, philia, eros). I agree that those three are unseparated in a word of love. Joas Adiprasetya, "Pastor as Friend: Reinterpreting Christian Leadership," *Dialog* 57 (2018):47–52.

Reviews

FLETT, JOHN G (ed), *For I Was Hungry: Congregations & Church Agencies in Relationship* Bayswater: Uniting Academic Press, 2022 (ISBN: 9781922589194)

For I Was Hungry was developed out of a conference jointly arranged between Pilgrim Theological College, the University of Divinity, the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, and the Institute for the Study of Christian Social Services, Heidelberg University, Germany. Edited by Professor John Flett of Pilgrim Theological College, the book provides a sample of what was a wider cohort of papers addressing questions around the relationship between congregations and church welfare agencies. Flett acknowledges that the book is set in 'a more academic register' (10) but hopes it will contribute to a 'fuller and unfolding conversation' (10) around this conflicted ecclesial issue. In a broader sense, *For I Was Hungry* surely achieves Flett's aim. Each chapter wrestles insightfully with contemporary challenges that are emerging at the interface of the church's public presence. A diversity of ecclesial and cultural perspectives is evident as the volume draws on voices from the global church as well as local practitioners. It also incorporates different disciplinary approaches from ecclesiology to theology proper, from history to social analysis, indicative of the complex space within which church agencies operate. *For I Was Hungry* can thus be seen as an exercise in contextual theology, lending a sense of roundedness and depth to its enquiry.

The collection presupposes a theological problem (or set of problems) about the nature of welfare arms as they relate with wider church polities/congregations. Indeed, Flett calls the relationship 'increasingly complex and occasionally fraught' (11). To oversimplify, primarily at issue is the perception (or imposition) of an increasing separation of social service agencies from their congregational/ecclesial (and so confessional) roots, often at the behest of ideological and regulatory pull factors from the wider environment. In Stephen Pickard's terms, the book explores the dynamics at play 'when the various sectors of the Body of Christ lose their connection with each other' (82). The collection is perhaps best understood as a resource, encouraging the church to reflect theologically on the place and function of its agencies with greater intentionality. The book functions like an invitation to dialogue, rather than advocating for specific policy directions or ecclesial manoeuvres. It does not overestimate its mandate nor seek definitive solutions *per se* but looks to open a space for further informed discussion.

The need for this dialogue stems from a two-pronged reality: firstly, church agencies have come under increasing pressure in recent times to accommodate themselves to legal, political, and cultural expectations. As Flett points out, there are positive as well as negative consequences for churches (19). But such expectations frequently call into question certain theological axioms that have inspired the creation of such agencies in the first place, as the title of the book, *For I Was Hungry*, drawn from Matthew 25, suggests. Secondly, congregations have been encouraged more and more to 'leave the [social/welfare] work to the professionals (ie. church agencies with institutional apparatus, expertise, and heft)'. Such advice presupposes a diminished capacity in local churches to operate welfare ministries amid the complexities and regulatory demands of social service provision, even in contexts where congregations have been instrumental in establishing such work. Declining congregational memberships exacerbate the

dilemma. On both accounts, the book acts like a plea to move beyond rigid (and often unhelpful) dichotomies. It seeks more theologically reflexive frameworks for the church's ongoing participation in social service provision.

With this aim, *For I Was Hungry* canvasses the challenges around ecclesial identity, purpose, and practice, with great theological sophistication. It probes insightfully into the apparent breach between institutionalized forms of ecclesial welfare and the church as an enduring community of Word and Sacrament. In doing so, it seeks to resist a kind of parochialism that would, *prima facie*, assert the independence of agencies as an unqualified good or deny out of hand the liminal space they must occupy in today's complex world of hyper-compliance. Such polarities are often represented in church debates where sectional interests regularly lead to unconstructive defensiveness or superficial resentments, neither of which serve the church's ultimate purpose. A pervasive subtext of *For I Was Hungry* is that the church is wise to strengthen and integrate the connection of its various sectors, looking to creative partnerships rather than strictly demarcated boundaries. Thompson and Pickard, especially, promote a theological vision of a unified body made up of various actors with different roles, yet together participating faithfully in the *missio Dei* as one entity. In so doing, they offer a tacit caution around allowing social service infrastructure to develop its own institutional power-base and identity untethered from confessional communities.

The chapters present a wide sample of perspectives. Perhaps one of the book's greatest strengths is the challenge it presents for the church not to accept unthinkingly the wider frameworks within which the work of agencies occurs. This is especially the case with governmental interlocutors. Such frameworks tend to be laced with capitalist (and so market/competitive) assumptions which are often at odds with the church's theo-practical commitments around being a people of Christ in witness to the world. What begins in the Spirit-driven impulse to compassion and love of neighbour can quickly be transposed into posturing of various sorts for market position. There is a temptation for agencies to be 'seduced' by the trappings of access to (particularly) political powerbases, government funding regimes, and the enhanced visibility and influence that results.

If there is a weakness in *For I Was Hungry*, it is reflected in a certain absence of deeper reflection on the *congregational* part of the equation. The chapters mostly lean towards higher order theological or social policy questions, or the place and purpose of welfare agencies themselves, rather than consideration of flesh-and-blood local faith communities. Given the sub-title, a reader might anticipate a little more in this regard, although it may well be that such engagement was present across the wider breadth of conference papers. For those who have worked and ministered at the crossroads of congregational/agency contexts (as I have), certain pressing questions remain un-addressed here.

In the bigger picture, however, this is a small caveat in what is a probing and astute collection, one from which much can be gleaned in this tension-laden context of the church's life. Flett has produced a resource that will be a blessing to everyone with more than a passing interest in the area.

Michael Earl

HART, DAVID BENTLEY, *Tradition and Apocalypse: An Essay on the Future of Christian Belief*
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022 (ISBN: 9780801039386)

"It seems to me that the concept of 'tradition' in the theological sense, however lucid and cogent it might appear to the eyes of faith, is incorrigibly obscure and incoherent" (1). So begins David Bentley Hart's at times precise and polemical treatment on the rather "new idea" of tradition as a specifically theological acceptation (2).

In chapter one ("Tradition and Traditionalism") Hart identifies as the problem facing an account of Christian tradition, and the authority it claims for itself: its own history. The concept is only credible, Hart observes, to the degree it can narrate as one story "both everything in Christian history that has not changed over time as well as for everything that has" (5). This problem is native to the nature of the specifically theological concept of tradition, which "is necessarily the concept of a rational and indivisible unity somehow subsisting within a history that encompasses an incalculable number of large, conspicuous, and substantial transformations" (10-11).

The tension draws to the foreground the context of Hart's intervention. It is those who smooth the transformations by reading the history of everything that has and has not changed as "a ceaseless elucidation," the "overarching narrative conceit that everything that has gradually appeared… over time has been a faithful explication of truths latently present from the very beginning" (12). This is the purview of traditionalism, which has a tendency toward authoritarian integralism, lacks any deep perspective on the past, and "is as often as not motivated by a sickly nostalgia" (13). Hart explicitly condemns the growing traditionalism in American Catholicism and Orthodoxy, which is "nothing more than a form of ecclesial fetishism" seeking to replace material history with myth (16). The result of such efforts to make history a neat myth of organic inevitability, is the "seeming irreconcilability between tradition and history" (19).

Hart devotes chapters two ("Tradition and Causality") and thee ("Tradition and Development") to account for the source of this irreconcilability, offering rigorous critique of John Henry Newman and Maurice Blondel. Their failures depend on their devotion to a "retrospective project" (30) which asserted a "certain continuous advancement and determinative path [belonging] to the history of doctrine" (Newman, *Essay in the Development of Christian Doctrine* 5.4.5). Hart, however, maintains that:

> Trying to prove that historical consequence is also logical consequence will always, in the end, require both some degree of wilful narrative creativity and some degree of selective ignorance regarding those historical data that the preserved narrative cannot assimilate (31).

The decision to validate by looking back compels Newman to a "factitious" argument (44) of organic development, legitimate growth, and conservation an antecedent.

By contrast Hart, in a manner predictable to those familiar with his work, argues the biblical narrative, debates surrounding the early creeds, and history of Christian proclamation defy, dispute, or divert from the unified narrative of development Newman relies upon (33-41, 56, 112-125). Hart summarises,

> no honest and thorough historical reconstruction will ever be sufficient to demonstrate that changes so large and seemingly consequential as those found throughout the history of Christian belief and confession are rationally warranted –

> or even logically plausible – elaborations on an original deposit of revealed truth… Quite the opposite, in fact. To the historian's eye, the irrepressibly fissiparous nature of Christianity's record of confessional unity merely reflect a radical diffuseness and pliancy native to Christian belief from its inception. And so the apologist for tradition must begin again (41).

Hart devotes the rest of the book to this beginning again. In chapter four ("Tradition and History"), Hart explicates faith as the "fidelity to a future disclosure of the full meaning of what little one already knows" (104). Such a move points to, in my mind, the key constructive contribution of the book: a turn from seeking to account or authorise tradition from a historical horizon, to an eschatological one.

It is the unseen that is most vital to the Christian tradition. The "force or substance that sustains it as a continuity amid incessant change" is "a boundless excess of meaning," a "more" that can be gestured toward but "never wholly reduced to words and concepts" (103). Because of this, "coherent dogma does not reduce, but instead greatly enlarges, the area of mystery within the creedal tradition, and ultimately multiplies the questions that faith cannot yet answer" (106-107). Dogma then must exhibit openness as "every doctrinal decision is a decision toward the future never wholly disclosed" (110).

The openness of doctrine is pursued in chapter five ("Tradition and Doctrine"). By way of the Arian controversy, Hart argues the conclusions of the Nicene party were not a foregone conclusion from the faith handed down, but were reached through an openness to discover an unanticipated future. This allowed them to innovate, by observing a "deeper logic" (126) within the tradition, which was only now able to be deciphered, preserving the spiritual force of the past by breaking with it.

Chapter six ("Tradition and Apocalypse") describes what initially guided the faithfulness of the early Christians as an apocalyptic expectation of the Age to Come, rather than the handing on of doctrinal wisdom (134). Thus, for Hart, "official doctrine is… a language of disenchantment… a probationary discourse that tries… to create a stable centre within history from which it might be tolerable to await a Kingdom that has been indefinitely deferred" (134-135). This again stresses tradition's need to be devoted to a hidden end rather than any dim prefiguration already present (139).

All of this leads to the book's apocalyptic promise. The tradition exists not as a secure and stable inheritance to be protected (145). Instead, it is "is essentially apocalyptic: an originating disruption of the historical past remembered in light of God's final disruption of the historical (and cosmic) future" (142).

In chapter seven ("Tradition as Apocalypse") Hart admittedly loosens his tie. At its weakest, the chapter feels an exercise in score-settling as Hart complains that his previous work, That All Shall Be Saved was only poorly reviewed by those who failed to read it closely (176-178). At its best this chapter exemplifies his stated aim for the book as a "certain speculative adventurousness in regards to both the past inheritances and future imperatives of the Christian tradition" (155). This is evidenced especially by his encouragement to draw rigorously from non-Christian traditions as the Christian thinkers of the Fourth Century drew on Platonic thought (182).

Hart's book should resonate with readers from a range of traditions and levels of theological education. While Newman and Blondel do not loom in the foreground of Uniting Church discussions on doctrine, appeals to history as authorising a true development appear regularly on all sides of the theological aisle. Hart's critique and constructive intervention is thus pertinent.

Part of a reader's appreciation or frustration, it must be said, will depend on one's feeling toward Hart's aesthetic choices in language and tone in argument. Regardless, the work serves all who face the apparent conflict between history and tradition, since, as Hart tries admirably to demonstrate: "a proper understanding of the life of the tradition frees one from the delusion that change is a scandal, which the extrinsicist must deny in the tradition's defense and which the historicist must accept as the tradition's defeat" (162).

Liam Miller

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