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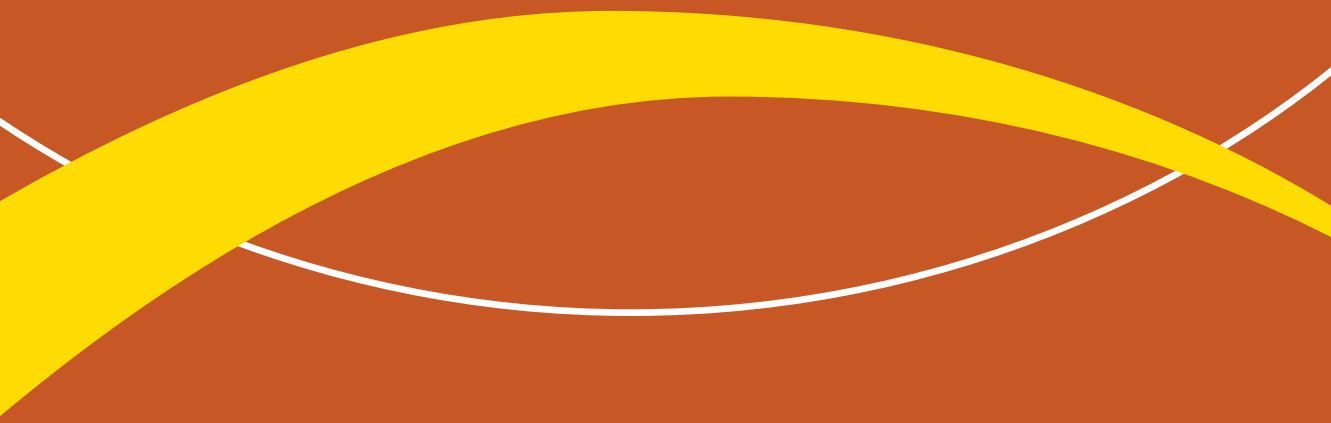

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Editor:

Rev. Dr. Geoff Thompson
geoff.thompson@pilgrim.edu.au

Review Editor:

Rev. Liam Miller
liamandrewmiller@gmail.com

Subscriptions Editor:

utc@nswact.uca.org.au

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Editorial

Geoff Thompson

Paragraph 11 of the *Basis of Union* famously expresses gratitude to God for "the continuing witness and service of evangelist, of scholar, of prophet and of martyr."[1] There may be no explicit reference to activists in that list of witnesses, but there is no reason why the church should not equally give thanks to God for their witness. Indeed, it is arguable that each of the four forms of witness that are mentioned in the Basis could be developed with activist sensibilities and intentions. The Uniting Church inherited strong traditions of activism, especially through the Methodist strand of its roots. Members of the Uniting Church have been and remain prominent as activists in various issues of social protest and change.

But what is the relationship between the Christian faith and activism? This issue of the journal begins with three invited themed articles which provide insight into that and other related questions. Matthew Anslow's article provides an overview of the history, achievements, failures and theology of Love Makes a Way. Emerging as a protest aginst Australian government asylum seeker detention policies, Love Makes a Way became perhaps the most visible form Christian activism in Australia in the previous decade. Anslow draws attention to the fruitfulness of its explicit Christian orientation for relationships with other activist groups. The article concludes by highlighting the ways in which Christian theology, not least eschatology, shaped Love Makes a Way and how it may be relevant to other Christian activist movements. In a second article Mark Zirnsak reflects on the trajectories of social justice in the Uniting Church since the turn of the century. Social justice looms large in both the Uniting Church's self-understanding and in public perceptions of its theology and policies. In both internal and external contexts, this emphasis on social justice is often contested. Zirnsak helpfully draws attention to the reasons (theological and ecclesiastical) why the Uniting Church has adopted the particular social justice issues it has. He includes a survey of the shifts that have occurred during the last 20 years. In the third of the articles, Valentina Satvedi-Leydon, an ordained Anabaptist minister, currently serving in pastoral ministry in the Uniting Church, provides an overview of the roots, theology and style of activism that has been fostered in the Anabaptist tradition. Satvedi-Leydon, drawing on her own formation by the Anabaptist tradition in her native India and later in the USA, points to some of the intersections between that tradition, her current Australian and Uniting Church contexts, and the contemporary calling of the activist.

The activist theme concludes with two brief case studies. Jason John offers a personal reflection (including via poetry) on his own involvement in environmental care. He makes a strong plea that Christian involvement in environmental care must involve more than individual activists, but is something that the church community as whole much engage. He draws attention to the struggles required to engage the church more fully. In the second case study, Margaret Mayman reflects on a liturgy conducted at St. Michaels' Church, Melbourne, during that city's Midsumma Festival in January this year. Placed within the worshipping life of a congregation this activism was a form of welcome to members of the LGBTIQ+ community who

[1] *The Basis of Union* (1992), Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, accessed May 31, 2023, https://uniting.church/basisofunion-2/

had otherwise been rejected by the Christian community. It was also an act of both solidarity with those rejected and resistance to the forces of rejection. Both case studies register a gap between the activist and the wider church and its public face.

The remaining articles commence with Ockert Meyer engaging with Nick Cave's 2022 book, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*. Meyer focuses both on the theme of grief as articulated by Cave and on Cave's insights as an artist. These two issues – grief and creativity – are not easily separated in Cave's thinking according to Meyer. Drawing these into conversation about preaching, he suggests that both Cave's artistic insights and his reflections on grief can instruct contemporary preachers. Meyer stresses that he is not finding "connections" or "parallels" with existing understandings of preaching. He sees Cave's insights as fruitful in unexpected ways for the preacher's reflection on the task of preaching in our current context.

The next article continues the series of articles begun in the previous issue on united and uniting churches. In this issue it is the Church of Pakistan being introduced by a former General Secretary of that church, Anthony Aijaz Lamuel. Compared to the Church of South India and the Church of North India, the Church of Pakistan is much less-well known in the Uniting Church in Australia. Its shares much of its origin with those two Indian churches, notably its roots in the ancient Christian presence in India, the modern missionary and ecumenical movements, and the struggle for independence from Britain's colonial rule. But the histories diverge because of the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan at the time of independence. Lamuel provides an overview of the distinct origins of the Church of Pakistan in a self-declared Islamic republic and addresses some of the challenges the church faces.

In the category of Reflections and Provocations, also commenced in the previous issue, there are two contributions. Elizabeth Lee addresses the Theological Framework of the Uniting Church's National Person of Concern Policy Framework, adopted in 2020. As a reflection she argues that the Theological Framework is insufficiently informed by trauma-sensitive theological scholarship. As a provocation she offers readers and interested parties a re-imagined Theological Framework for the policy. The inclusion of such a piece is a reminder of the critical task that this journal serves at its interface with the life and work of the Uniting Church. In the second article in this section, Brendan E. Byrne argues the mainstream churches have "retreated from the world of work" and despite long traditions of Christian theology of work and their persistence in some corners of contemporary Christianity, mainstream churches lack any operative "theology of work." Pivoting his historical and theological arguments around Luke's account of Jesus' Sabbath healing of a crippled woman (Luke 10: 13-17), Byrne proposes the key components of a contemporary theology of work and argues why this matters. This article has the capacity to provoke the churches with regard to the orientation of their pastoral ministries, their relationships to prevailing economic orders, and their own employment policies.

This issue of the journal introduces the first of what is intended to be a regular feature: a Book Forum on a book deemed to be of relevance and interest to the Uniting Church. This feature is launched with Aunty Denise Champion's *Anaditj* as the book in focus. Rev Dr Champion has emerged as one of the Uniting Church's leading Indigenous theologians. As with her first book, *Yarta Wandatha* (published in 2014), *Anaditj* (published 2021) has been widely read in the Uniting Church. For this forum, five theologians

(Anne Pattel-Gray, Garry Worete Deverell, Seforosa Carroll, Michelle Cook and Amos Leana) were invited to engage with and comment on the book. The five respondents are drawn from various locations within the church and academy. All write with appreciation for the book, some offer various points of critical conversation about the book's relationship to colonisation, and some draw Aunty Denise's reflections into wider reflections about context and culture. Aunty Denise (in collaboration with Rosemary Dewerse) has responded to these readers by opening up yet further conversations about the relationship between Christian faith, Indigenous spirituality, the Christian scriptures, and the presence of Christ.

Three books are reviewed. The authors or editors of all three each have strong connections with the Uniting Church. (That, by the way, is not a requirement for inclusion in this journal's reviews!) Crabbe's book, reviewed by Karl Hand, is an academic monograph exploring the understanding of history In Luke/Acts. Bottomley's book, reviewed by Matthew Anslow, is a set of group studies aimed at assisting Christians to engage with the world of finance. The volume edited by Burns and Gribben, and reviewed by Ockert Meyer, is a collection of papers presented to a 2018 symposium in Melbourne on the future of "common prayer." The differences between the intended audiences of these three books is a reminder of the diverse ways the ministry of scholarship weaves its way through the life of the church.

Finally a brief note to subscribers. The adoption of new editorial processes and the experimenting with some new ideas for the journal has taken much time and energy, and caused a few stumbles. A consequence has been significant delays in the publication of the most recent issues. For that I apologise. As these processes become more streamlined, the journal will find its way to a more regular publication schedule next year.

A Distinctly Christian Activism: Lessons from Love Makes a Way[1]

Matthew Anslow

Abstract

Over the past decade, one of the most distinctive activist groups in Australia has been Love Makes a Way. This paper seeks to discern what can be learned from this movement. It does so by tracing a brief history, identifying some of its key successes, achievements, and failures, and analysing its strategic and theological dimensions. I will show that Love Makes a Way's successes came about because it was well-planned, intentional, and creative, utilising the frameworks of previous movements and social change theorists. Further, its radical Christian ethos and messaging proved to be surprisingly fruitful in the Australian context, a model that could be emulated by future activist campaigns.

Introduction

On March 21, 2014, nine Christians from various backgrounds and traditions entered the southern Sydney electoral office of then-Immigration Minister Scott Morrison. They sat themselves on the waiting room floor and began to pray. A spokesperson for the group informed the office staff of the purpose of their visit: though they would not act violently, the group would not leave until the Minister agreed to release all children and their families from Australia's immigration detention regime – at that stage 1138 children – and made a public statement detailing this commitment.

The group followed through on its promise, sitting in a circle on the floor, peacefully praying, reading Scripture, confessing sins, and singing hymns. Three-and-a-half hours into the "sit-in," New South Wales Police arrived and, after some calm discussion, instructed the group to exit the premises. When the group refused, officers began to remove them. Five of the group – a Uniting Church member, a Catholic, a Churches of Christ pastor, and two Hillsong members – were arrested and taken to Miranda Police Station where, after several hours of detainment, they were charged and released.

Three weeks later, on April 9, the group appeared at Sutherland Local Court where they pled guilty to trespass. The magistrate opined, "If ever there was a peaceful protest, this was it." He then added, "This was the other end of the scale of the Cronulla Riots," referencing the race riots that had occurred in that

[1] I wish to express my gratitude to Justin Whelan for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this article.

part of southern Sydney eight years prior and that still loomed large in the imagination of locals. In the end, the charges against the group were dismissed.

During the course of these events, the group's premeditated hashtag #LoveMakesAWay went viral on social media across the country, with mainstream media outlets also reporting the story. To the activists' surprise, the commentary that ensued was overwhelmingly positive, including from across the church spectrum.

What had initially been intended as a one-off act of civil resistance blossomed, over the next few months, into a national movement with groups in Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, and Canberra taking actions modelled after the original in Sydney. By the end of 2014, there had been twenty-two nonviolent direct actions taken around Australia seeking the end of Australia's mandatory detention policies. Local Love Makes a Way (LMAW) groups eventually formed in most major cities and in some regional towns under the guidance and oversight of a national steering group governed by consensus decision-making. One of the responsibilities of this steering group was the development of a training regimen that all prospective activists were expected to complete before taking any actions. Training events quickly rolled out across the country, with hundreds in attendance.

For the next two-and-a-half years, LMAW actions would continue to garner significant media attention. Among the most notable of LMAW's public actions, which were composed of a mix of arrestable and non-arrestable engagements, were a twin sit-in in the electoral offices of then-Prime Minister Tony Abbott (Sydney) and Opposition Leader Bill Shorten (Melbourne) on May 14, 2014; seven simultaneous sit-in actions in six capital cities on December 10, 2014; an occupation of the foyer of Federal Parliament House on June 5, 2015; and a five-day campaign featuring fifty-six public vigils at politician's offices across the country in mid-August 2016.

Perhaps most significantly, and somewhat unexpectedly, LMAW united Christians from almost all major (and many smaller) denominations around concrete and radical actions focused on justice for refugees. The movement catalysed hundreds of activists, the vast majority of whom had never taken any such actions in their life. By the end of the zenith of LMAW's period of activity (2014–2017), over three hundred Christians had risked arrest, and around two hundred and fifty had been arrested, while advocating for people seeking asylum.

What follows is an examination of Love Makes a Way in which I identify some of its key achievements and failures and analyse some of its strategic and theological dimensions. In a spirit of full disclosure, I should make clear that I was one of the three founders of LMAW. Rather than being an objective account of this movement, this article represents an insider's reflections, with all the intimate knowledge but also biases that such a perspective might bear.

Successes and Achievements

For all its aforementioned efforts, what did LMAW achieve? This is somewhat difficult to quantify. Love Makes a Way acted as part of a broader coalition of organisations and community groups and particular

successes can hardly be attributed to a single entity. There are, however, some markers that speak to the effectiveness of LMAW insofar as it was part of this coalition, particularly during the peak of LMAW's activity.

During this period, for example, there was a measurable shift in Australia's attitude to offshore detention. In April 2014, a Lowy Institute poll revealed that 59% of Australians supported offshore processing of people seeking asylum.[2] A subsequent Lowy poll in June 2016 found the number supporting offshore processing had dropped to 54%.[3] Though this does not seem a significant reduction, it is notable that this latter poll contained softer wording which left open the possibility that those processed might be resettled in Australia.[4] A September 2016 Galaxy Research poll seemed to confirm what was only implied by the 2016 Lowy research, namely, that Australians had shifted significantly. It found that 66% of Australians believed then-Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull should urgently resettle refugees held in offshore detention.[5] This signalled that, by late-2016, support for offshore processing did not necessarily entail support for indefinite offshore detention and that a sizeable majority of Australians no longer agreed with the government's approach.

This was accompanied by increasing pressure for companies involved with offshore detention to withdraw from their government contracts. This happened in 2016 when Spanish infrastructure company Ferrovial, having secured a majority share in Australian detention centre contractor Broadspectrum, agreed not to rebid for offshore detention contracts.[6] Likewise, Australian security company Wilson withdrew from its offshore detention security contracts in October 2017 after a targeted campaign.[7]

The extent to which LMAW contributed to these and other campaign successes is impossible to quantify. After all, LMAW could not have achieved any of this on its own. It acted as part of a coalition, though as I show below, its role was strategically essential. What is clearer is the effect Love Makes a Way had on the Australian Church.

By 2014, only a handful of Australian churches had made any kind of meaningful public statement regarding Australia's offshore detention regime and other issues relating to refugees. The Uniting Church had, through the work of UnitingJustice,[8] released a number of important documents.[9] Likewise, the Catholic Church

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2 Alex Oliver, "Lowy Institute Poll 2014," online at https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/lowy-institute-poll-2014, accessed February 1, 2023.

3 Alex Oliver, "Lowy Institute Poll 2017," online at https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/2017-lowy-institute-poll, accessed February 1, 2023.

4 Asylum seekers should be processed offshore in places such as Nauru and Papua New Guinea, before deciding whether they should be settled in Australia." See "Asylum Seekers (Charts)," online at https://poll.lowyinstitute.org/charts/asylum-seekers/, accessed February 1, 2023.

5 Elle Hunt, "Two-thirds of Australians want Nauru and Manus refugees to be resettled, poll shows," *The Guardian*, 14 September 2016, online at https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/sep/14/two-thirds-believe-australia-should-resettle-refugees-in-detention-by-2017-poll, accessed 1 February 2023.

6 Rachel Ball, "For everyone's sake, Ferrovial must withdraw from Manus Island and Nauru detention contract," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 19, 2016, online at https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/for-everyones-sake-ferrovial-must-withdraw-from-manus-island-and-nauru-detention-contract-20160518-goy4rn.html, accessed February 1, 2023.

7 Jenny Wiggins, "Wilson Security pulls out of detention centres after Nauru, Manus protests," *Australian Financial Review*, September 1, 2016, online at https://www.afr.com/companies/wilson-security-pulls-out-of-detention-centres-after-nauru-manus-protests-20160901-gr6qwd, accessed February 1, 2023.

8 UnitingJustice was, at the time, the justice unit of the National Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, charged with heading advocacy and education on key national matters of social and economic justice, human rights, peace, and the environment.

9 See "Asylum Seeker and Refugee Policy," online at https://www.unitingjustice.org.au/refugees-and-asylum-seekers/uca-statements/item/477-asylum-seeker-and-refugee-policy, accessed February 7, 2023; Siobhan Marren, "UnitingJustice Australia Submission: National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention 2014," online at https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/Submission%20No%20212%20-%20UnitingJustice%20Australia.pdf, accessed February 7, 2023.

had made several high-profile public responses.[10] The 2014 "Protecting the Lonely Children Report" by the Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce,[11] a body of the National Council of Churches in Australia, was another important contribution.

By and large, though, the Australian churches had been remarkably silent. Following LMAW's initial act of civil disobedience, however, there was a significant upswing in Christian engagement on issues relating to refugees. In addition to the approximately three hundred leaders who took part in LMAW's civil disobedience actions over the next few years (not including the hundreds more who took part in non-arrestable ways), there were also countless people who met with their political representatives, organised speaking and teaching engagements, held screenings of documentaries, preached sermons and wrote study group material, visited people detained in mainland processing centres, housed refugees, joined the work of mainstream refugee organisations, and were part of innumerable other efforts. Suddenly, by mid-to-late 2014, refugees were among the highest political concerns for mainstream Australian Christians.

Further, during this period most major denominations made public statements on Australia's treatment of people seeking asylum. Among the most notable was the resolution on immigration policy and child detention made by the Sydney Anglican Diocese during its 2014 Synod.[12] The resolution called for an end to the immigration detention of children and was strongly influenced by LMAW. Even some Pentecostal churches – typically hesitant to rock the boat on such matters – began to pray publicly for refugees.[13]

Some churches went much further, such as in 2016 when over 120 churches joined a renewed sanctuary movement, offering their properties as safe havens for 267 people seeking asylum, including thirty-seven babies, whom the government was threatening to deport to Nauru.[14] Among these churches were multiple Anglican cathedrals and the Salvation Army; their involvement represented major threats of civil disobedience. This campaign, adopting the slogan "Let Them Stay," was a bold act of political defiance. The groundwork for the campaign had been laid by LMAW. It began as a result of conversations between LMAW members and campaigning organisation GetUp! Indeed, many of the key figures had already been involved in LMAW. Moreover, LMAW played a crucial role in making the sanctuary campaign a viable one by doing the background work of recruiting churches. In the end, the Let Them Stay campaign was a major success. By April 2016, over half of the 267 people seeking asylum who were at the centre of the campaign had been granted community detention.[15]

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[10] See Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference, "Refugees and Asylum Seekers," online at https://www.acmro.catholic.org.au/about/church-documents-on-migration/the-teaching-of-the-church-in-australia/229-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-statement-2002-australian-catholic-bishops-conference/file, accessed February 7, 2023; Catholic Social Services Australia, "Submission: National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention 2014," online at https://cssa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/36-CSSA-Submission-National-Inquiry-into-Children-in-Immigration-Detention-2014-30-05-2014-2.pdf, accessed February 7, 2023.

[11] Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce, "Protecting the Lonely Children," online at https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=5f6276b9-313b-46c3-ad89-004f2eeca491&subId=301017, accessed February 7, 2023.

[12] Anglican Diocese of Sydney, "Resolutions of the 2014 session of the 50th Synod," online at https://www.sds.asn.au/sites/default/files/2014%20Synod%20Resolutions%20%281st%20Session%20of%20the%2050th%20Synod%29.pdf?doc_id=NDUyMjg=, accessed March 10, 2023.

[13] See for instance Tanya Riches, "'The Low-Down': Hillsong Conference 2014," online at https://tanyariches.wordpress.com/2014/07/05/the-low-down-hillsong-conference-2014/, accessed March 10, 2023.

[14] Melissa Davey, "'The whole nation is on board': inside the sanctuary movement to protect asylum seekers," *The Guardian*, March 13, 2016, online at https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/mar/13/the-whole-nation-is-on-board-inside-the-sanctuary-movement-to-protect-asylum-seekers, accessed February 7, 2023.

[15] Thomas Oriti, "Let Them Stay Labelled a Success, More than Half of 267 Asylum Seekers in Community Detention," *ABC News*, online at https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-02/let-them-stay-labelled-success-asylum-seeker-community-detention/7294456, accessed March 10, 2023.

The upshot of all this was that Australian governments could no longer rely on the relative quiescence and toleration of the major denominations, even those that were generally socially conservative, to implicitly consent to their refugee policies.

The ecumenical example of LMAW is also worth acknowledging. The hundreds of activists who took part in LMAW actions were from a wide variety of churches and held diverse and often contradictory theological convictions. In many cases, their ecclesial tribes were unfriendly towards one another. And yet, despite the fact that they might rarely interact, they were willing to risk arrest together. It is difficult to think of many issues in this age of increasing division that cause Christians to speak in unity, but LMAW showed that it is possible. Indeed, it was part of the power of LMAW; had the movement been populated by a narrow denominational segment, it is doubtful that LMAW would have been terribly effective.

Finally, I should also mention the effect that LMAW had on individual Christians. Hundreds of Christians took part in activism for the first time, were trained in the use of nonviolent direct action, and were awakened to the power of nonviolent resistance. Love Makes a Way was also a lay-led movement, its founders all being laypeople. Few in later leadership roles were ordained in their traditions; indeed, the movement was largely characterised by clergy following the directions of laypeople. Dozens took on leadership roles involving the development of skills that, as a result, continue to exist within the Church for such a time as they are required.

Such significant shifts in so short a period raise the question as to what can be learned from LMAW for future activist campaigns.

Mistakes and Failures

Perhaps some of the most important lessons that can be learned from LMAW are the result of its mistakes. Because of the speed at which LMAW came to prominence, much of our early work was iterative and, often, improvised. This led to many small mistakes that we could correct as we went about our work. For example, in those early months after the first sit-in, we often appealed to economic arguments in favour of our position, such as the cost of running detention centres. But as we would learn, such economic-focused arguments were not convincing to those who value economic shrewdness. Rather, these arguments appealed to their self-interest "frame," reinforcing other concerns of self-interest such as security, hedonism, and power.[16] In other words, such economic arguments are counter-productive to helping people focus on the inherent value of people seeking asylum, making them focus instead on their economic value. By the end of 2014, we had completely abandoned any arguments or appeals based on economic considerations. There were a number of these kinds of minor mistakes.

[16] This was based on the work of UK-based social change research agency Common Cause. For an overview of their findings related to values-based campaigning, see Tim Holmes, Elena Blackmore, Richard Hawkins, and Tom Wakeford, "The Common Cause Handbook," online at https://publicinterest.org.uk/download/values/Common%20Cause%20Handbook.pdf, accessed March 10, 2023.

We also made more meaningful errors. Perhaps the most egregious was the lack of refugee representation across our work. There were reasons for this, chief among them being the tremendous risk that refugees would take in being associated with us; the prospect of allowing a person seeking asylum to risk their asylum claim seemed immoral. But in retrospect there were a number of leadership roles that people seeking asylum or settled refugees could have played in LMAW, especially in advisory and strategic capacities. We did seek advice from refugees from time-to-time, but such was not built into our day-to-day processes. This meant we were a movement acting on behalf of people who had little say in what we did. If we were to start our movement again today, we would ensure that the voices of people most affected by the issues of concern were at the centre of our work.

The same is true of Indigenous representation. I look back now and realise how problematic it was that we were a movement proclaiming "welcome the stranger" while not considering the voices of the only people who could legitimately welcome strangers to these lands. Again, we sought input from Aboriginal people at times, but it was not a permanent feature of our movement.

One of LMAW's most obvious problems – certainly obvious to us, even at the time – was the lack of diversification in our tactics, particularly early on. The first sit-in in 2014 was incredibly successful in-part due to its novelty. Christians praying, singing, and taking communion in the offices of politicians for the sake of an oppressed group was interesting and unprecedented. The blueprint for that first action was then used repeatedly. It continued to be novel for a while. But, predictably, this would not last. With each action, particularly after 2014, it became harder to tell our story since media showed decreasing interest in the sit-ins.

The dilemma we faced was that, though the sit-in tactic yielded diminishing returns, it was an excellent way to orient new activists. The predictable pattern of actions made for a stable training ground and, with a constant stream of new people wanting to be involved, such predictability had its advantages. Moreover, the replication of the sit-in model was helpful since all our leaders were volunteers laden with work responsibilities; we did not have the capacity to rejuvenate our strategy at each turn. We did eventually pivot away from sit-in actions but, in retrospect, we could have pivoted earlier and potentially been more effective.

Another major lesson pertains to the problem of celebrity. A number of reasonably high-profile Christians took part in LMAW and, for the most part, they were humble and selfless in their involvement. There were also those who used LMAW as a vehicle for their personal profile. We too often abided such people's involvement in the name of more widely communicating our message. Celebrity can, after all, play an important role in social change campaigns.[17] But self-interested celebrity tended to lead to tensions as the work of many was claimed for credit by a few. More importantly, it detracted from a focus of the story we wanted to tell: everyday Christians taking radical action in the name of justice and compassion for people

[17] See, for instance, Paul Engler's article on this subject, published around the time I was writing this article. Paul Engler, "Harnessing the Enormous Untapped Power of Celebrity to Help Social Movements," *Waging Nonviolence*, online at https://wagingnonviolence.org/2023/02/harnessing-the-enormous-untapped-power-of-celebrity-to-help-social-movements/, accessed March 10, 2023.

seeking asylum. If we had our time again, I suspect there would be far less tolerance for such behaviour. Practically speaking, this would mean more substantial reflection and policies relating to how the message and story are shared and who gets to be the face of that sharing. It would also mean more decisive action when people used the movement for their own ends.

Between these and countless other mistakes, Love Makes a Way was far from an ideal movement. And yet, we also achieved much in a few short years. What kinds of factors played a part in such campaign successes?

Movements Are Not Accidents

One would be forgiven for assuming that the first LMAW action in Sydney was hastily assembled. To many, the act of praying and singing songs in an electoral office hardly resembled a calculated campaign plan – a sentiment that was reflected in some social media chatter at that time. Despite this impression, the planning phase of LMAW's first action took well over a year.

In the aftermath of some nonviolence training in late-2012, three Christians – Justin Whelan, Josh Dowton, and myself – began meeting regularly to discuss how we might respond to the government's increasingly problematic shifts on refugee policy. The Australian Labor Party had announced the reintroduction of offshore processing in August 2012, adopting the so-called "no advantage principle."[18] Kevin Rudd's return to the Prime Ministership in mid-2013 soon bore even tougher changes, including a provision that no one who arrived by boat, even if their asylum claims were found to be genuine, would be resettled in Australia, as well as a policy of refouling those whose asylum claims had been denied.[19]

If matters seemed urgent under Labor, they only became more so with the election of the Liberal-National Coalition in September 2013. Among the policy changes that occurred were the reintroduction of Temporary Protection Visas with no family reunion rights, the reduction of Australia's humanitarian intake, and the removal of legal safeguards for people seeking asylum, including the ability to appeal rejected claims. And, of course, the Coalition continued Labor's offshore detention regime, characterised as it was by recurrent instances of serious abuse and harm.

When we began to meet, we did so only with a sense that urgent action was needed and that the missing piece in the refugee movement in Australia was nonviolent direct action. This was not merely an intuitive judgement, but one based on some then-recent scholarship on civil resistance by Erica Chenoweth andMaria J. Stephan, as well as the older works of U.S. American political scientist Gene Sharp and the U.S. American activist-educator Bill Moyer.

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[18] Janet Phillips, "A comparison of Coalition and Labor government asylum policies in Australia since 2001," *Australian Parliamentary Library,* online at https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1617/AsylumPolicies, accessed February 10, 2023.

[19] Janet Phillips, "A comparison of Coalition and Labor government asylum policies in Australia since 2001," accessed February 10, 2023.

Chenoweth and Stephan's book, *Why Civil Resistance Works*, was released in 2011.[20] Using both data and case studies, the authors outline the factors involved in successful civil resistance campaigns. One of their most striking findings was that, of 323 violent and nonviolent resistance campaigns waged between 1900–2006, "nonviolent resistance campaigns were nearly twice as likely to achieve full or partial success as their violent counterparts."[21] While Chenoweth and Stephan's findings could not be directly applied to the use of civil resistance in the refugee movement in Australia – they focused on large-scale antiregime, antioccupation, self-determination, and secession campaigns – their work did provide a philosophical basis for considering the ways in which a nonviolent civil resistance/direct action campaign could be successful.

In important ways, Chenoweth and Stephan's book built on the earlier work of Gene Sharp, a theorist of nonviolent struggle whose ideas have been successfully deployed by numerous antiregime movements around the world. Sharp's three-volume work, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*,[22] has at its core the idea that power, which is pluralistic and fragile, depends on the consent of the ruled; by withdrawing that consent, unjust power can be overcome.[23] In volume one of this series, Sharp lists 198 methods of nonviolent action, including everything from public speeches and strikes to economic shutdowns and parallel government. Most of Sharp's methods were not relevant to our aims. Nonetheless, his exhaustive list cemented in us the idea that nonviolent action was, in part, a matter of creativity in seeking ways to remove people's consent for and cooperation with unjust policies, practices, and power.

Another important influence was Bill Moyer. Moyer's Movement Action Plan (MAP) is a strategic framework for understanding the progress of social movements, outlining eight stages of successful campaigns.[24] Moyer was a lifelong activist who had been staff with Martin Luther King, Jr. on the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's Poor People's Campaign. He had created the MAP in response to the US anti-nuclear energy movement in the late-1970s, though it was designed for use in any national or international social movement. He had also written about "the four roles of political activists" – citizen, rebel, change agent, and reformer – that need to be present and effective within a social movement if it is to succeed.[25]

Moyer's MAP helped us to conceptualise where the refugee movement in Australia was situated in terms of its aims and progress. By late-2013, the situation in Australia had passed through Moyer's Stage One (normal times) and Stage Two (prove the failure of institutions) and well into Stage Three, what Moyer called "ripening conditions." We hoped to play a part in tipping the movement into Stage Four, "social movement take-off." For this to begin, what was required was an inciting event,[26] one that would tragically

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[20] Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

[21] Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*, 6–7.

[22] Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action, Part 1: Power and Struggle* (Manchester: Porter Sargent, 1973); *The Politics of Nonviolent Action, Part 2: The Methods of Nonviolent Action* (Manchester: Porter Sargent, 1973); *The Politics of Nonviolent Action, Part 3: The Dynamics of Nonviolent Action* (Manchester: Porter Sargent, 1973).

[23] Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action, Part 1: Power and Struggle*, 4, 8.

[24] Bill Moyer, *The Movement Action Plan: A Strategic Framework Describing the Eight Stages of Successful Social Movements*, 2nd ed. (unpublished, 1987), online at https://www.indybay.org/olduploads/movement_action_plan.pdf, 4–5, accessed February 14, 2023.

[25] Bill Moyer, "Four Roles of Political Activists," online at https://nonviolence.rutgers.edu/files/original/f199087a4fac384234b208d7702b05a6ff64afeb.pdf, accessed February 14, 2023.

[26] Moyer, *The Movement Action Plan*, 17.

come in February 2014 with the brutal murder of Reza Barati, a twenty-three-year-old Iranian man, in the Manus Island detention centre.

Both the MAP and the four roles of activism clarified what kind of work would be needed to help move the Australian refugee movement into its next phase. It was the role of rebel[27] – with its critical task of dramatically calling attention to problems and putting them on the social and political agenda – that we thought was missing from the current configuration of the movement and that we were well-positioned to inhabit.

Between these and other influences,[28] we were well-prepared in our thinking and training. This training was practical: we had studied the theory of nonviolent change and a diverse range of social movements. It was also spiritual: we had done much inner work to confront our own violence and to rightly see our political opponents as fully human, even while their actions were at times appalling. In this, we were taking a lead from the writings of Martin Luther King, Jr., in particular his "Letter from Birmingham Jail." The letter was a central influence on LMAW and played a prominent role in our training regime. King's notion of self-purification – in which activists would need to ask themselves, "Are you able to accept blows without retaliating?" and "Are you able to endure the ordeal of jail?"[29] – was central to our own understanding of the preparatory work of activism (though of course we, as middle-class activists, experienced an enormously lower risk of harm and imprisonment than activists in the US Civil Rights movement).

What would eventuate in March 2014 was a well-planned action, even if the optics seemed to the contrary. We were clear on our aims. We wanted to see all children and their families released from detention and to see a policy framework based on treating others how we ourselves would like to be treated. In more immediate terms, we set out to change the terms of the debate and to persuade the "persuadable middle"[30] to get off the fence and join our side of the struggle. In particular, we set out to appeal to Australian churches to take action by drawing their attention to their own story.

If we were well-researched, why then did it take over a year to plan and prepare? Because we were insistent on settling, by consensus, on the right plan and, until that was achieved, we could not in good conscience proceed. As it turned out, our plans were upended multiple times by political events, sending us repeatedly back to the drawing board. This was especially true in the case of the Coalition's election victory in September 2013. Suddenly the dynamics of the refugee situation in Australia shifted considerably. There was no longer any political handwringing about the ethical quandary of offshore detention, including of children. Government figures were, at least to the public eye, resolute in their utilitarian commitment to ending unauthorised arrivals, even if this required institutional cruelty towards men, women, and children.

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[27] Moyer talks about the rebel as the one who says "no" to "violations of principles, values, and sensibilities of the society and humanity, at times when the general population is not aware of these problems." They use extra-parliamentary means – such as nonviolent direct action – to call public attention to the problem. Moyer, "Four Roles of Political Activists," 2.

[28] Such as the excellent work of nonviolence organisation Pace e Bene. See https://www.paceebene.org.au/.

[29] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in *Why We Can't Wait* (Boston: Beacon, 2010), 87–88.

[30] A term used by some social change experts to refer to those who are not part of the base of convinced people nor part of the opposition; they are the majority who sit somewhere in the middle and who have as yet taken no firm position. For an example of its usage, see Asylum Seeker Research Centre, "Words that Work: Making the Best Case for People Seeking Asylum," online at https://www.asrc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/ASRC-Words-that-Work-4pp.pdf, accessed March 10, 2023.

With the situation changed, we needed a new angle. It came with the recognition that the man responsible for implementing the new government's immigration policies was also the most outspoken Christian in parliament.

Christian Witness Has Power

Scott Morrison's Pentecostal Christian faith had, by 2014, become somewhat contentious. How, exactly, could such a flag-waving Christian – indeed, one who in his maiden speech to parliament quoted the prophet Jeremiah, William Wilberforce, and Desmond Tutu and named family and faith as his most significant influences[31] – be responsible for the indefinite detention of children and their families, a practice widely condemned as flagrantly immoral? Then-Prime Minister Tony Abbott's Catholicism was also well-known, as was the ferocity of his commitment to "stop the boats." As it turned out, the distance between stated devotion and ethical fidelity provided fertile ground for the kind of creative activism we had been imagining.

Once we had discerned that there was space to dramatise the contrast between Morrison's stated faith and his political policies, the basic ideas fell into place quickly. All we needed to do was to publicly demonstrate the kind of Christian faith we wanted to see Morrison himself embody in our political context. That is, a Christian faith directed in no small part towards the well-being of the vulnerable and marginalised. Such public witness, we hoped, would do the dramatic work of drawing attention to the problem of Australia's unjust refugee policies, especially amongst those who profess to follow Jesus.

We could not have imagined how successful this strategy would be. It played on the popular perception that Australian Christians are overwhelmingly politically conservative, and thus introduced no small amount of cognitive dissonance. The public, including the media, did not know what to make of Christians risking arrest and speaking with almost prophetic conviction about an issue usually reserved for political progressives.

Indeed, LMAW was quickly courted by politically progressive organisations with offers of help, both practical and financial. We saw this as a positive development since forging partnerships across the refugee movement could only strengthen it. But it was clear to us that what gave LMAW its power was its distinctly Christian ethos and perspective and that, if we were to too broadly diversify the pool of activists, this ethos would be lost. This was not only our intuition; a number of high-profile progressive politicians and campaigners privately confided that our Christian identity and narrative – which most did not share – were the heart of what made LMAW compelling and effective.

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of LMAW's ethos was its commitment to love – indeed to love even our opponents. From the beginning, we committed ourselves to steadfastly refusing to dehumanise those on the other side of the debate with our words and actions, even while we were insistent on drawing attention to the injustice of their deeds. Our public actions typically involved a call for our opponents to have a change of heart – to repent, in other words, though we did not use this language. This was not a cynical attempt at

[31] Scott Morrison, "Governor-General's Speech: Address-in-Reply," February 14, 2008, online at https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id:%22chamber/hansardr/2008-02-14/0045%22, accessed February 24, 2023.

manipulation or grandstanding, but rather real commitment to the possibility of transformation, one that some of our partners in the refugee movement did not always understand or appreciate.

Such a commitment derived directly from our Christian faith. Jesus, after all, told us to love our enemies; we intended to heed his command to the best of our ability. Our understanding of Jesus' command was sharpened by the insistence of Martin Luther King, Jr. on seeking to win a "double victory," that is, a victory in which the evil is defeated and the opponent's heart won over.[32]

None of this meant that we went soft on those responsible, in varying degree, for Australia's unjust asylum policies. Our actions were, in-part, designed to disrupt the status quo and to call on Australians to do the same. We publicly denounced politicians and companies that aided in the ongoing detention and abuse of people seeking asylum. We called out hypocrisy, such as the expanse between Morrison's political acts and his declaration that, from his faith, he derived "the values of loving-kindness, justice and righteousness, to act with compassion and kindness, acknowledging our common humanity and to consider the welfare of others."[33] But such denunciations were always accompanied by an invitation to have a change of heart and to work together for a better nation.

This was a tangible expression of a metaphor, imagined by feminist and nonviolent activist Barbara Deming, called "the two hands of nonviolence." One hand is held up as if to say "stop" to an oppressor or unjust system. The other is outstretched as if beckoning the oppressor to give up their evil and be transformed.[34] Both hands are needed if we are to live truly nonviolently, neither in passivity nor mirroring the violence of others. For LMAW, this metaphor expressed not just how we ought to do activism, but also how we ought to live as followers of Jesus.

For me personally, one of the biggest surprises that resulted from LMAW was the power that our Christian convictions still carried within Australian culture. We are regularly told – correctly, I think – that we live in a secular, post-Christian society. For some commentators, this society now more closely resembles "Babylon" than "Athens;" that is, we live in a culture that despises Christians rather than being merely disinterested in them.[35] Leaving aside for now why this latter claim might be a misdiagnosis, it is true to say that this was not the experience of LMAW.

The public messaging of LMAW was overtly Christian. At times it was sickeningly earnest. We spoke constantly about God, particularly God's love, in the context of mainstream media. We waxed lyrical about forgiveness, love for enemies, and genuine hope for transformation. Far from being a turn-off, this all seemed to have

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[32] Martin Luther King, Jr., "To Chester Bowles," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume IV: Symbol of the Movement, January 1957–December 1958*, ed. Clayborne Carson et al. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 304.

[33] Morrison, "Governor-General's Speech: Address-in-Reply."

[34] Barbara Deming, "On Revolution and Equilibrium," in *Revolution and Equilibrium* (New York: Grossman, 1971), 207–208.

[35] See, for instance, Stephen McAlpine, "Stage Two Exile: Are You Ready For It?" *The Gospel Coalition*, online at https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/stage-two-exile-are-you-ready-for-it/, accessed February 28, 2023. See also Stephen McAlpine, *Being the Bad Guys: How To Live for Jesus in a World That Says You Shouldn't* (Epsom: The Good Book Company, 2021), in which this notion of living in Babylon is a foundational concept. This same basic concept (albeit using different language) is found in an increasing number of other writings, perhaps most notably Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017).

been rather compelling to many people. Journalists – many of whom privately shared their own lack of religious fidelity – wanted more from us, often giving us exceptionally positive coverage, including in dedicated feature pieces.[36] Anecdotally, I had more evangelistic conversations connected to LMAW than anything else I have ever done. It may be true that we live in a post-Christian society, but the ghosts of Christendom past still haunt this house. In any case, it is surely true that Christian faith and proclamation carry power, not of their own accord, but because of the object of their devotion and declaration.

Of course, it would be naïve simply to attribute the effectiveness and appeal of LMAW solely to the power of our faith-based messaging. The contrast between the kind of faith on display in LMAW and that of certain government figures was a point of interest for the media, as was the mixed and often surprising demographics of our activists. Then there was the sheer spectacle of citizens being repeatedly arrested en masse. And, of course, we acted at the right moment in time.

All of this was strategically calculated. But it only made sense in the context of the Christian church in which LMAW was embedded. There would have been no contrast between the faith of certain political figures and that of LMAW activists if not for our public acts of Christian witness. Nor would there have been a curious mixed demographic without that which already existed in the church. And the spectacle of arrests was hardly new in Australia in 2014; indeed, during the LMAW years, some other groups sought to employ various of our methods with little interest from the public or the media. Even taking action at the right moment, with all the planning, prayer, and discernment it entailed, was an expression of a Christian faith embedded in the world, attentive to its needs. In other words, even the contingent and contextual aspects of LMAW's success were in some way a by-product of its faith-based foundation.

In short, LMAW's most compelling feature was that it was a genuinely Christian expression of activism. This is not to say that activist efforts based in other religious traditions – or in no such tradition – can have no significant effect. This would be a plainly foolish assertion. But in the case of LMAW we see an expression of Christian faith that evoked inquisitiveness rather than the derision so feared by some segments of the Christian community. It was also remarkably successful in prosecuting its case to the Australian public given its size and resources. This, I contend, should warn us against too-hastily secularising our language and messaging in future activism campaigns lest we jettison those distinctives that might make us surprising, interesting, and persuasive to middle Australia or that might help us nurture and sustain Christian identity and practice.

Eschatologically-Oriented Activism

All of this raises the question as to what was the theological foundation of LMAW. In one sense this is impossible to answer. Love Makes a Way was made up of hundreds of activists, each bringing their individual understanding of Christian life and faith. Some, for instance, acted out of progressive political allegiance,

[36] Conversely, those journalists who were most critical of Love Makes a Way were those often seen as being the friendliest to Christianity – particularly Christianity of a conservative variety. See, for instance, Andrew Bolt, "Stormtroopers of the Left," *Herald Sun*, online at https://www.heraldsun.com.au/blogs/andrew-bolt/stormtroopers-of-the-left/news-story/691885a74f3ce747744e6256ebb99df5, accessed March 10, 2023.

others to more conservative political and theological imperatives. Indeed, there was diversity amongst the leaders of LMAW. Still, there were crucial points of unanimity amongst the leadership. One was an eschatologically-oriented understanding of history.

One of the major theological inspirations for LMAW was Martin Luther King, Jr's declaration that, "the arc of the moral universe, although long, is bending toward justice."[37] This quotation – or one of the many versions of it – has become popular in recent times. It has apparently been a favourite of Barack Obama, so much so that he reportedly had it woven into a rug in the Oval Office.[38] The quote is nowadays typically used in such a way as to assert the inevitability of moral progress; we just need to be patient and continue the struggle of progress. This assimilates King's words into an Hegelian-Marxist conception of history and, though there is overlap in certain ways, it is a fundamental misunderstanding of King's words on account of abstracting them from the ecclesial contexts in which they originated. On the many occasions he uttered these words, King seems to have had in mind something different to the mere inexorability of progressive social change.

For instance, in his "Statement on Ending the Bus Boycott" in December 1956, King links the justice-bound moral arc of the universe to God's struggle alongside the Negro [sic] citizens of Montgomery, Alabama in their nonviolent protest. Having experienced "injustices and indignities" on city buses, they chose the honour of walking with dignity rather than the humiliation of riding segregated buses; they substituted "tired feet for tired souls."[39] King proclaims that in their struggle they had faith that God struggles with them.

It is here that King's remark about the moral arc of the universe appears. This is no mere wish for the eventual success of their cause. It is an appeal to the experience of death and resurrection, that is, to the faithfulness of God in whom they put their faith. The Negro's [*sic*] experience, says King, was as those living "under the agony and darkness of Good Friday with the conviction that one day the heightening glow of Easter would emerge on the horizon."[40]

There is an eschatological vision at the heart of King's insistence upon the arc of the moral universe. It is rooted in hope that radiates from the resurrection. We work in faith now, not because we will inevitably win the day – indeed, King is open to the possibility that the movement will fail – but because of the conviction that even truth crushed to earth in the present will rise again.[41] And, of course, our faith and work may be vindicated in the shorter term as the "heightening glow of Easter" shines forth in the present from time to time.

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[37] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Statement on Ending the Bus Boycott," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume III: Birth of a New Age, December 1955–December 1956*, ed. Clayborne Carson et al. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 486. This quote, or variations of it, can be found in numerous places in King's writings and sermons. It seems to have been inspired by a phrase from an 1853 sermon by abolitionist Theodore Parker. See Theodore Parker, "Justice and The Conscience," in *Theological, Polemical, and Critical Writings, Sermons, Speeches, and Addresses, and Literary Miscellanies*, vol. 2, ed. Frances Power Cobbe (London: Paternoster, 1867), 48.

[38] Mychal Denzel Smith, "The Truth About 'The Arc Of The Moral Universe,'" *HuffPost*, January 18, 2018, online at https://www.huffpost.com/entry/opinion-smith-obama-king_n_5a5903e0e4b04f3c55a252a4, accessed March 10, 2023.

[39] King, "Statement on Ending the Bus Boycott," 486.

[40] King, "Statement on Ending the Bus Boycott," 486.

[41] King, "Statement on Ending the Bus Boycott," 486.

It is this eschatological vision that shaped, in-part, the theological and political vision of LMAW, even if our movement was but a shadow of the US Civil Rights movement. Such an eschatological orientation formed the ethical commitments of LMAW, including those commitments that generated cognitive dissonance in those who watched on. Our commitment to love our political opponents, for instance, was driven by an eschatological hope. In addition, many of our public messages signalled towards the kind of society we wanted Australia to be. Such were expressions of our eschatological hope, often utilising imagery from texts like Third Isaiah to paint a beautiful picture of the future. In other words, we were constantly pointing people, particularly Christians, to the future God will eventually bring about and asking them to behave in harmony with it now, in the present. Without this orientation, we might have been driven by the same cutthroat urgency that typifies many activist and online campaigns today, characterised as they usually are by an immanent and materialist frame.

A common criticism of an eschatologically-oriented vision is that it leads to a lack of resolve in the work for justice – if we trust God will sort things out in the end, is this not detrimental to determined action in the present? This has not been my experience. Firm hope, far from lessening resolve, can sustain it. Indeed, activist burnout has become an increasingly researched subject in recent years. Disillusionment and hopelessness have been named as major factors, as has what Paul Gorski and Cher Chen call "a culture of martyrdom."[42] Eschatological hope both directs our work and, simultaneously, rescues us from the presumption that justice is ultimately reliant on our efforts.[43] This allows us to do the work of justice by means that are themselves just, being patient where necessary and taking risks where necessary, with the confidence of knowing that the God of Justice struggles with us and will eventually work things out for good.

I realise there is much more to be said on this matter; hopefully this gives a sense of an important element of LMAW's theological framework and the way it played out in our practice.

Conclusion

Love Makes a Way came onto the Australian political scene abruptly and was active only for a few years. Yet, it had a noticeable effect on the public debate surrounding people seeking asylum, particularly within the Australian church. There is much to be learned from its mistakes and its achievements. Likewise, its general approach is instructive, whether strategically (especially with regard to its central influences) or in terms of its approach to public ethical and theological engagement. Love Makes a Way exemplified the power of a nonviolent activist ethos and of the importance of inner spiritual work, appropriate training, lay leadership, and patient and rigorous planning. It also experienced problems associated with imperfect messaging, inadequate representation, and celebrity. In all these things, Love Makes a Way's experience is educative for present and future activists. Further, Love Makes a Way demonstrated that Christian witness, in speech and in action, can continue to have meaning – indeed, power – in post-Christian Australia. Indeed,

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[42] Paul C. Gorski and Cher Chen, "'Frayed All Over:' The Causes and Consequences of Activist Burnout Among Social Justice Education Activists," *Educational Studies* 51 (2015): 385–405.

[43] This idea was part of the DNA of LMAW from the beginning. I can remember discussing this very subject the first time I met with fellow LMAW co-founder Justin Whelan in 2012. We had both just read a Stanley Hauerwas article that insisted upon the eschatological character of Christian faith. See Stanley Hauerwas, "The Politics of the Church and The Humanity of God," *ABC Religion and Ethics*, June 19, 2012, online at https://www.abc.net.au/religion/the-politics-of-the-church-and-the-humanity-of-god/10100464, accessed March 10, 2023.

such witness – a potentially costly commitment to the well-being of the most marginalised – can create a desirable disequilibrium amongst those whose vision of Christians in public life has been negative. This witness, rooted in a thoroughgoing eschatological vision, represents a distinctively Christian activism, one that I hope offers guidance for ongoing generations of Christian activists who wish to embody the distinctive way of Jesus in their work.

Social Justice in the Uniting Church in Australia 1999 to 2022

Mark Zirnsak

Abstract

This paper examines the development and adaption of the social justice mission of the Uniting Church from 1999 to 2022. There is not one theological underpinning to social justice within the Uniting Church. There is also not an agreed position on the church's role in pursuing social justice. Consideration of social justice resolutions of the Councils of the church has varied substantially across various parts of the Uniting Church. While there have been shifts in the social justice focus of the Uniting Church, there have been some long-standing issues of concern across the church, including the treatment of people seeking asylum in Australia and refugees in Australia and justice for First Nations people. The article considers the trends in the focus of the social justice mission of the Uniting Church in response to societal trends in Australia and globally.

Introduction

From its foundation in 1977, the Uniting Church in Australia embraced, on theological grounds, social justice as part of its mission. Andrew Dutney has pointed out that:

> In a literal sense, the *Basis of Union* does not call us to do justice through the specific use of the word "justice". What it does do is call the church to be constantly renewed in faith and mission. It is this that provides the theological impetus for the Uniting Church's commitment to social justice.[1]

Dutney pointed out that when the *Basis of Union* was written, Protestant Churches did not use the term "social justice." Social Justice was the language used by the Catholic Church. Instead, Protestant Churches tended to use the language of "responsibility." "Responsibility" meant that the individual believer had a responsibility to lead a life in a way that reflected the Gospel, including the pursuit of a responsible society. So the churches that went into union to form the Uniting Church in Australia were used to calling bodies that dealt with issues that would now be regarded as social justice with names such as "The Board of Social Responsibility" or "The Social Responsibility Committee." It was only during the late 1980s that the language shifted to terms such as "Social Responsibility and Justice," "Social Justice," or even "Solidarity and Justice."[2]

[1] Andrew Dutney, "Does the Basis of Union call us to do justice?" in *Doing Justice. Stories of hope from everyday believers,* ed. Rosemary Hudson Miller and Nancy Victorin-Vangerud (Sydney: Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, 2003), 16.

[2] Andrew Dutney, "Does the Basis of Union call us to do justice?", 16.

Thus, in 1977 the Uniting Church established its national social justice body with the name "Assembly Commission on Social Responsibility" (ACSR). The ACSR selected three issues to pursue between 1982 and 1985: peace-building at the global level, opposition to uranium mining and economic justice.[3] (Notably, the selection of these issues resulted in the right-wing magazine *The Bulletin* labelling the Uniting Church as one of "the radical left's new power bases.").[4] Nevertheless, for all the talk and commitment to social justice within the Uniting Church, there has never been an agreed definition of "social justice" within the church. In its use in different parts of the Uniting Church, it can include: changes in social structure to make society more just and fair; promotion of the well-being of people and the natural environment; advocacy in individual cases of injustice, exploitation and oppression; and community service and charitable works.

In recent years, as congregations have responded to social expectation to be involved in social justice, there has been a broadening of activities defined as "social justice."

Social Justice Positions and their Theological Underpinnings

Just as there is no one definition of social justice within the Uniting Church, there is not one theological underpinning to social justice. The Statement to the Nation from the 1977 Inaugural National Assembly meeting set broad social justice principles for the Uniting Church to pursue its mission. The following sections of the Statement point to the range of principles and commitments that were embraced. These included human dignity, public integrity, eradication of poverty and racism, freedom of speech, the right to employment, and protection of the environment.

> A Christian responsibility to society has always been regarded as fundamental to the mission of the Church. In the Uniting Church our response to the Christian gospel will continue to involve us in social and national affairs…
>
> 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 affirm the rights of all people to equal educational opportunities, adequate health care, freedom of speech, employment or dignity in unemployment if work is not available. We will oppose all forms of discrimination which infringe basic rights and freedoms…

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[3] Keith Suter, "Social Responsibility: A Critical Review", in *Marking Twenty Years. The Uniting Church in Australia 1977 – 1997* ed. William W. Emilsen and Susan Emilsen (Sydney: UTC Publications, 1997), 162.

[4] "The Radical Left's New Power Bases", *The Bulletin*, January 25, 1983.

> We are concerned with the basic human rights of future generations and will urge the wise use of energy, the protection of the environment and the replenishment of the earth's resources for their use and enjoyment. [5]

However, the Statement did not provide a detailed theological explanation for its adopted principles. Similarly, resolutions of the National Assembly and Synod meetings often take positions on particular social justice issues. At the same time, they rarely prescribe the theological pathway which has led to the position adopted. There are usually several theological pathways to arrive at each position.

For example, the Uniting Church has committed itself to support actions to address climate change and called on governments to take meaningful action. While most Uniting Church members (and many of the people who engage with the Uniting Church) would agree to the position adopted, my experience is that they hold various theological beliefs to derive their support. A belief that God made humanity stewards of the planet would still be a dominant theological position for many in the Uniting Church. Such people would typically argue that God requires us to be wise stewards and thus care for the planet to preserve the natural environment for the benefit of future generations and non-human life. In contrast, there appears to be a growing number of Uniting Church members who have embraced an eco-theology position. Such a position rejects that human beings are called to be stewards over the planet. Instead, we are called to live in harmony *with* the rest of God's creation. A third group are motivated to see action on climate change out of "love of neighbour" being tied to love for God. They are concerned for the hundreds of millions of people whose lives have already been adversely impacted by climate change, especially those living in financial poverty. These positions do not exhaust the views articulated in the Uniting Church and nor are they mutually exclusive. In any case, all three theological positions result in these people agreeing on the need for meaningful action to curb human-induced climate change. The point of these observations is that the Uniting Church in Australia allows for a wide range of theological beliefs and positions. Fortunately, the diversity in such positions usually still allows for the Councils of the Uniting Church to reach agreed positions on important issues of social justice. Even more impressively, such positions on social justice issues are often adopted by consensus.

On the other hand, whilst rare, different Synods occasionally take different stands on the same social justice issue. A current example is voluntary assisted dying, which is the language used by its supporters, or voluntary euthanasia, in the language of its opponents. The 2019 Meeting of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania adopted a resolution that allowed for Synod institutions:

> to make voluntary assisted dying allowable within the context of their facilities and services for their patients, clients and residents under the conditions described in the Victorian *Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017.* [6]

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[5] See "Statement to the Nation: Inaugural Assembly", Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, June 1977, accessed on April 25, 2023, https://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/introduction/item/134-statement-to-the-nation-inaugural-assembly-june-1977

[6] Minutes of the Fourteenth Meeting of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania (Melbourne: Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, 2019, M21.

The resolution also acknowledged that Uniting Church members hold "a range of faithful Christian responses to voluntary assisted dying."[7] By contrast, the Synod of Queensland has publicly opposed voluntary assisted dying legislation.[8] To make matters even more complex, UnitingCare Queensland has stated its position in response to voluntary assisted dying legislation within that state as follows:

> UnitingCare Queensland respects people's rights regarding Voluntary Assisted Dying and will continue to provide compassion and care to those exploring the available options.
>
> While UnitingCare does not directly provide Voluntary Assisted Dying as a service at our hospitals or facilities, we uphold the rights of people to access different stages of Voluntary Assisted Dying and will connect those wanting further information to an authorised provider of Voluntary Assisted Dying. [9]

Of course, these positions do not need to be viewed as inconsistent. For example, it is possible to oppose a law while respecting people's right to use it. However, the example points to the complexity that can arise in social justice positions taken by different parts of the Uniting Church.

It is also the case that the status of the various social justice resolutions of the Councils of the church varies substantially across various parts of the Uniting Church. Some parts of the Uniting Church require their staff to respect and comply with resolutions of relevant Councils of the church. Others regard them as guidelines to be treated flexibly.

At the outset of this section, I noted that alongside the absence of single vision of a social justice in the UCA there was also no single theological underpinning of it. In respect to this I would point out that it is how we understand God and the nature of God that is far more important than the ability to quote or exegete scripture for the purposes of self-justification. If the underlying theological position is flawed, then any scripture justification, no matter how robust, is just papering over the foundational weakness of the position. As an extreme example to make the point, Catholic bishops in the Second World War argued that the nation they were resident in was waging a just war. Most German bishops took that position, seeing God as supporting the efforts of Hilter's armies. For example, the pastoral letter of Bishop Kaller of Ermland, issued in January 1941, stated:[10]

> In this staunchly Christian spirit we also now participate wholeheartedly in the great struggle of our people for the protection of their life and importance in the world. With admiration we look upon our army, which in courageous fighting under extraordinary leadership has achieved and continues to achieve unparalleled success. We thank God for his support. Especially as Christians, we are determined to rally all our strength so that the final victory will be secured

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7 Minutes of the Fourteenth Meeting, M21.

8 Andrew Gunton, "Voluntary Assisted Dying statement – May 2021", Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Queensland, accessed April 10, 2023, https://ucaqld.com.au/statements/voluntary-assisted-dying-statement-may-2021/

9 "Voluntary Assisted Dying", UnitingCare Queensland, accessed April 10, 2023, https://www.unitingcareqld.com.au/about-us/governance/voluntary-assisted-dying#:~:text=UnitingCare%20Queensland%20respects%20people's%20rights,those%20exploring%20the%20available%20options.

10 Guenter Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany* (USA: Da Capo Press, 2000), 230.

> for our fatherland. Especially as believing Christians, inspired by God's love, we faithfully stand behind our Führer, who, with firm hands, guides the fortunes of our people.

I doubt few people would now accept there is any valid theological argument, let alone scriptural justification, that would justify seeing the love of God as requiring the faithful support of Adolf Hitler!

Selection of social justice issues to be engaged with

Different parts of the Uniting Church have applied different methods in selecting which social justice issues they will tackle. For some Synods, the selection of social justice issues to be tackled has been left to the Synod leadership. In others, the staff employed by the Synod to work on social justice issues made the selection. Others have set up reference groups made up of people associated with the Uniting Church. The social justice staff has often selected who is on the reference group. The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has used a survey of its active social justice supporters to guide which social justice issues are resourced by the social justice staff employed by the Synod. The Synod of NSW.ACT has its social justice staff employed through Uniting NSW.ACT, so the issues tackled often have a stronger reflection of the priorities of the Uniting NSW.ACT agencies. In 2018, with the formation of Uniting Vic.Tas it was decided that Uniting Vic. Tas would have its own social justice section that would focus on social justice issues of concern to the customers of its agencies.[11]

Despite the very different methods used by different parts of the Uniting Church to select the issues to be engaged, most issues of concern are held in common. Some of these are long-standing and include the treatment of people seeking asylum in Australia, the welfare of refugees in Australia, and justice for First Nations people. In addition, climate justice has emerged in the last decade as a social justice issue of significant concern across the Uniting Church in Australia. More recently, there has been concern about family violence.

Interest in issues related to international social justice, peace-building and global poverty have, however, declined over the last 20 years.[12] In the late 1990s, the Uniting Church was actively engaged in disarmament issues, including banning landmines and cluster munitions and seeking nuclear weapon disarmament. These issues are almost never mentioned in Uniting Church discussions about social justice now. There has, however, been a low level of concern over Australia's plan to acquire nuclear submarines. The Uniting Church and its members were very active in the Make Poverty History campaign and the Micah Challenge campaign to address global poverty in the late 1990s and 2000s. There is nothing like that level of interest in addressing the issue of global poverty and issues that keep financially impoverished countries financially impoverished. Concerns around issues to do with gambling reform and alcohol reform have also declined across the church in the last 20 years.

[11] Uniting Vic.Tas surveyed the people who use their services and found that such people prefer to be referred to as "customers."
[12] Although, concerns about homelessness as a manifestation of poverty remain part of UCA social justice discussions.

Views on the Role of the Church in Social Justice

There is no agreed position on the church's role in pursuing social justice across the Uniting Church. The two more established positions are:

- a prophetic role, aimed at publicly shaming government and decision makers into making reforms; and
- a persuasive role, aimed at persuading decision-makers.

The prophetic pathway

The idea of prophetic tradition fits well with those with a sceptical view of government and elected representatives. If a view is taken that all politicians and public servants are only interested in governing based on what they can get out of it, then it follows that only coercion and shaming will work to force their hand to pursue reforms that serve the common good and social justice. In the prophetic pursuit of social justice, the focus is on maximising exposure in mainstream media outlets and on social media. It assumes that such public exposure will help shift "public opinion" and politicians in turn will act in response to public opinion out of self-interest, fearing they will not be re-elected if they do yield to public opinion. A further assumption here is that public opinion operates as a means of social concern over democratically elected governments.[13]

The prophetic role can also draw on the example of the Old Testament prophets that take symbolic actions to shame those in authority. Those pursuing such a course also draw inspiration from the acts of public civil disobedience used by the US civil rights movement of the 1960s. Thus, the program of sit-ins of the offices of Members of Parliament organised by Love Makes a Way to protest the treatment of people seeking asylum by the Australian Government proved very popular among Uniting Church ministers and their congregations that were concerned with the issue. There are, however, many problems with adopting a prophetic role concerning social justice issues, where it is the only strategy pursued. Firstly, the assumption that all politicians and public servants only operate out of material self-interest is untrue. A further problem is the misplaced confidence that churches speaking through mainstream media will be effective at shaping public opinion. Most mainstream media is owned by billionaires whose interests do not align with many of the social justice values that churches would seek to pursue. It is hard to see how such owners would allow churches, or other civil society organisations, to use their platforms to successfully pursue reforms that would not be in the interests of the billionaire owners. In addition, data from the 2021 Australian Community Survey run by the National Church Life Survey found that only 28% of Australians believed that churches had a role in challenging injustice in society.[14] Further, only 11% believed that churches should give public comment on political issues.[15] These pitifully low figures mean that churches that manage to speak through mainstream media are already starting at a disadvantage in trying to influence public opinion. What churches say, therefore needs to be persuasive on its own terms, as churches need to overcome a perceived lack of legitimacy in commenting on social justice issues.

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[13] Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, "Public Opinion and Social Control," in *The Spiral of Silence. New Perspectives on Communication and Public Opinion*, ed. Wolfgang Donsbach, Charles T. Salmon and Yariv Tsfati (New York: Routledge, 2014), 19-31

[14] "Roles for religious organisations," National Church Life Survey, accessed 10 April 2023, https://www.ncls.org.au/media/najhtc43/roles-for-religious-organisations.pdf

[15] "Roles for religious organisations."

Increasingly media outlets look for comments from those that hold positions at the extremes of an issue. There is a view from many media outlets that extreme views will attract more viewers and readers than nuanced views that express the complexities of issues. I have had the experience of being excluded from media stories because I was not willing to provide comments at one extreme of an issue. I have held to the view that the role of the churches is to acknowledge the complex realities of many situations while maintaining our theological vision.

It must be acknowledged that many journalists would like to be able to explore issues thoroughly. Unfortunately, however, there is a decreasing number of journalists that are given the time to do thorough investigative journalism, with media outlets increasingly responding to the immediate 24/7 news cycle that drowns out nuance and complexity. Churches also find it hard to gain mainstream media space on issues that are seen as being outside their field of expertise or relevance. So, for example, it is utterly reasonable for a journalist to feel it is more appropriate to seek comment on climate change from the head of a dedicated environmental organisation than from the head of a church. There is also a problem that many social justice issues the Uniting Church is concerned about are not issues that mainstream media would be willing to give a run to. Or it might be possible to get an occasional story up but not the sustained pressure necessary to force change. Media can be instrumental in highlighting a situation of injustice and bringing it to public attention. It can help build public support for reform, although its role in doing so can often be overestimated.

The use of public shaming of a decision maker through mainstream media also carries a higher risk that the decision maker will dig in with their existing position if the public shaming fails to persuade them. As organisational psychologist Professor Adam Grant has pointed out:

> This is a common problem in persuasion: what doesn't sway us can make our beliefs stronger. Much like a vaccine inoculates our physical immune system against a virus, the act of resistance fortifies our psychological immune system. Refuting a point of view produces antibodies against future influence attempts. We become more certain of our opinions and less curious about alternative views. Counterarguments no longer surprise or stump us – we have our rebuttals ready. [16]

Of course, there are decision makers who are unlikely ever to be swayed in private dialogue or by letter-writing campaigns, where public critique is the only option to try and change their actions.

Finally, even if public prophetic criticism were to be successful, forcing a government to implement a reform it would rather not do, the problem is that the outcome is only likely to last for as long as the coercion can be maintained. As soon as media and public attention have moved on, the government in question can reverse the reform or find ways to undermine its implementation. A reform is less durable if the people responsible for implementing it remain opposed to it and only act under duress.

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[16] Adam Grant, *Think Again* (London, WH Allen, 2021), 145.

The persuasive pathway

The pathway of persuasion of people in government will often lead to more durable reforms, where the decision maker is persuaded to own the reform. In such an approach, the decision maker or decision makers are approached for dialogue. If the decision maker agrees to work towards the just outcome, the work becomes that of supporting them in the implementation. Suppose, on the other hand, that the decision maker refuses to support the outcome. In that case, the social justice outcome is re-evaluated against the reasons for the decision makers' opposition. The outcome may be modified, or the original intention may be pursued. Unlike the prophetic pathway, the persuasion pathway does not deny that the church's position on the social justice issue is beyond adaption.

Suppose, still further, that the decision maker refuses to agree to implement the desired reform. In that case, a plan is then established based on what actions are likely to persuade the decision maker to agree to implement the just solution. Contextual consideration is also given to what is most likely to ensure the solution will have durability. There would be one type of plan if a decision maker would like to implement the solution but needs a show of support from the community. There is a very different plan that is more likely to include public critique if the decision maker is ideologically committed to inflicting harm and suffering on people.

For churches to be effective with persuasion, they need to be able to provide evidence to back their position or show insights that others lack. Churches cannot speak with government decision makers and expect those decision makers to be persuaded simply because it is representatives of a church speaking. Effective persuasion often means a process of dialogue with the decision makers. For that dialogue to be meaningful, trust needs to be built so that honest conversations can be had. For example, a decision maker will not disclose what they are really thinking or wrestling with if they think the conversation may end up on a media outlet's website straight after a meeting.

Of course, the risk with the persuasion pathway is that a reform secured behind closed doors can be vulnerable to being overturned if there is no general community support for the reform. A future minister of the same government or a newly elected government could repeal the reform.

Clearly, the prophetic and the persuasive pathways are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to use both in a campaign for social justice reform. If, however, the prophetic pathway has been applied first and the decision maker has been publicly criticised, it is usually harder to build a relationship of trust. The lack of trust then makes using the persuasive pathway more difficult.

Involvement of Uniting Church Members in the Social Justice Mission

The other area of diversity in the pursuit of social justice by the Uniting Church is the degree to which congregational and faith community members are provided with opportunities to participate by the church leadership. The Synods of WA and Victoria and Tasmania have maintained mailing lists of active social justice supporters to whom they send resources for the supporters to participate in the social justice mission

of the Uniting Church.[17] All Synod staff involved in social justice have direct forms of engagement with congregations. For example, Uniting NSW.ACT staff in the Synod of NSW.ACT have provided training to members of congregations on how to engage with local Members of Parliament.

The involvement of congregations and faith community members also says something about the culture of different parts of the church. In bringing about social justice change, there are now concepts of "old power" and "new power" organisations.[18] "Old power" organisations are hierarchical, and the leadership speaks on behalf of its members. Most corporations work on an "old power" model. "New power" organisations have more democratic structures and seek to maximise opportunities for meaningful participation, such as movements like #MeToo or #BlackLivesMatter. The Uniting Church is more of a hybrid between the two, with some parts more "old power" and other parts more "new power".

Shifts in the last 20 years

In this final section, I will consider some of the trends that have impacted the social justice mission, as I have observed them in the Synod of Victoria Tasmania in the last 20 years. I will focus on five such trends.

Suspicion of Experts

In the last 20 years, there has been a decline in the trust in "experts" and scientific evidence.[19] People have become more suspicious of experts and their biases, with some justification.[20] This has allowed many community members to assert the value of their opinion on any issue over evidence and independent analysis, which can have negative impacts for society. For example, it means people who do deny the reality of human-induced climate change will dismiss all scientific evidence that does not match their opinion.

More positively, the decline in reliance on experts has meant a rise in the importance of lived experience in the development of government policy and practices. People who are impacted by government decisions are given more opportunities to participate in making those decisions.[21] Governments are also increasing their willingness to engage in "co-design", where people impacted by a decision get a seat at the table where the decision will be made.[22] The emphasis on lived experience has created opportunities for congregations and church members to have a more significant say in government policies where they have relevant lived experience. At the same time, where UnitingCare or Uniting have taken over providing community services that congregations used to be involved with, many congregations have less lived experience they can draw from to engage in government policy decisions.

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[17] Although, at the time of writing the WA Synod has discontinued the staff position linked to this activity.

[18] Jeremy Heimans and Henry Timms, *New Power. How Power Works in Our Hyperconnected World – and How to Make it Work For You* (Australia: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2018).

[19] William Davies, *Nervous States. How Feeling Took Over the World* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2018), 26 – 27, 60 -61.

[20] Davies, *Nervous States*, 63-66.

[21] See, for example, "Human-centred design playbook," Victorian Government, accessed April 15, 2023, https://www.vic.gov.au/human-centred-design-playbook

[22] See, for example, "Prevention toolkit for local government. Run a co-design process with your community," *OurWatch*, accessed April 15, 2023, https://localgov.ourwatch.org.au/localgovtoolkit/3-take-action/run-a-co-design-process-with-your-community/

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism continues to be the dominant global economic paradigm. Neoliberalism seeks to replace political judgement, including those of democratically elected governments, with economic evaluation, including the evaluation offered by markets.[23] Despite the 2007 and 2008 global financial crisis that demonstrated the failure of poorly regulated markets, neoliberalism survived and continues. Neoliberalism stands in contrast to a Christian focus on the well-being of all people. Neoliberal advocates hold that the market should be left to decide who becomes excessively wealthy and who is left in destitution. The role of government in neoliberal ideology is free the use of capital from constraints and the market can take root as the central organising mechanism of social and political order.[24] Under neoliberalism, governments, institutions and state agencies need to be remoulded to make them compatible with the market ethos.[25] Neoliberal philosopher Friedrich Hayek successfully helped reshape the concept of the 'rule of law' towards the view that courts should restrain democratically elected governments from enacting the popular will with laws that redistribute wealth within society for the common good.[26] In the neoliberal frame the "social" and "public" frames are abandoned and there is nothing of value beyond the limits of commercial exchange.[27] Trade unions, churches, families and democratic procedures pose a threat to the neoliberal vision for the world. Visions of "social justice", "fairness" and "right" must be calculated and evaluated in terms of the quantitative language of efficiency, price and preference in a neoliberal frame.[28] While constantly critiquing government, neoliberalism rests heavily on authoritarian forms of government to impose its reinvention of society.[29]

The federal government of John Howard and Peter Costello Government (1996–2007) was an earlier leader in neoliberal economic and political thinking in Australia. Their government slashed funding on public health, education and support for people on low incomes in the late 1990s. When the mining boom hit in the early 2000s they gave away the extra government revenue from the boom mainly to wealthy Australians through enormous cuts to income tax, corporate tax and capital gains tax. They also spent vast sums of money on the military, which is a common trait of neoliberal governments.[30]

Inside the Uniting Church, most congregation members appear concerned about the impact neoliberalism has had on our society and the world. At the same time, there is some support for the neoliberal agenda of marketising human services among some parts of the Uniting Church.[31] Uniting NSW.ACT developed social impact bonds to allow private investors to fund human services in a market based mechanism where government then pays a return to the investor if the program delivers a community outcome.[32]

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[23] William Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism. Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2014), 3.
[24] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 11; and Kristen Rundle, Revisiting the *Rule of Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 19.
[25] Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, 5-6.
[26] Rundle, *Revisiting the Rule of Law*, 38.
[27] Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, 21.
[28] Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, 21-22.
[29] Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, 24.
[30] Richard Denniss, *Big: The role of the state in the modern economy* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2022), 36.
[31] Peter McDonald, "Market-driven welfare successes: The contribution of neoliberalism to social cohesion and care for the poor of the earth," *Uniting Church Studies* 22, no 1 (2019): 51-60.
[32] Doug Taylor, "Here's the secret sauce for making Social Impact Bonds work", Uniting NSW.ACT, accessed April 26, 2023, https://www.uniting.org/blog-newsroom/newsroom/opeds/here-s-the-secret-sauce-for-making-social-impact-bonds-work; and "Uniting Newpin Social Benefit Bond", Uniting NSW.ACT, accessed April 26, 2023, https://www.uniting.org/services/family-services/facility/uniting-newpin-social-benefit-bond#:~:text=The%20Newpin%20Social%20Benefit%20Bond,direct%20benefit%20to%20the%20community.

Decline in ecumenical solidarity

There continues to be a decline in global solidarity, ecumenism and interfaith collaboration amongst churches. The Uniting Church has remained a strong supporter of ecumenism and interfaith engagement. It continues active involvement with bodies such as the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches. At the same time, engagement and financial support from member churches of such bodies continue to decline. The decline in ecumenical collaboration has further weakened the ability of churches to influence social justice reforms when such reforms require a demonstration of broad support.

Ethics of Church-Business Co-operation

The complexity of the corporate and business world has continued to increase. As a result, churches end up doing business with and investing in corporations that are profiting from human rights abuses, environmental destruction and serious criminal activities. Churches and their agencies have made some efforts to invest ethically and purchase goods and services from businesses with higher ethical standards. However, the churches still face the integrity problem in that some of their good works are built on business transactions with corporations that have inflicted serious harm on people and the planet. Positively on the other hand, there are growing efforts by governments and civil society organisations to address cross-border human rights abuses and environmental destruction. Examples of such efforts are the implementation of the *Illegal Logging Prohibition Act and the Modern Slavery Act*. The Uniting Church was actively involved in the shaping and passage of both these laws. The *Illegal Logging Prohibition Act* curbs importing illegally sourced timber and wood products. The *Modern Slavery Act* requires businesses and organisations with more than $100 million in revenue to report what they are doing to address modern slavery risks in their supply chains.

Church Investment in Social Justice Personnel

From 1977 into the 2000s, there was an increase in staff across the Uniting Church National Assembly and Synods dedicated to the church's social justice mission. The last decade has seen a steady reduction in resources allocated to the social justice mission of the Uniting Church, with an increased allocation of resources to regulatory compliance and risk management. The primary reason for the shift seems to be a response to increased government regulation. It must be noted that the increased government regulation has, in turn, been a response to poor governance and abuses that have occurred across the not-for-profit sector, including in some churches.

At its peak, the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania had 5.5 staff dedicated to social justice work. That number now stands at two. The Synod of WA had three staff dedicated to the social justice mission at their peak. They now have no one. However, a positive outcome of the reduction in collective resources directed to social justice appears to have been greater collaboration across Synods and the Assembly in the social justice area. Scarcity has driven greater collaboration.

The Gap between Social Justice Personnel and Theological Faculties

There is still an ongoing engagement gap between the theological faculties and the social justice staff within the Uniting Church. The gap appears to be primarily due to workload than a lack of goodwill. There would be a benefit to the theological underpinnings of the Uniting Church's social justice mission engagement if such relationships could be strengthened. Staff at the theological faculties could benefit in their teaching and writing by those in the church most deeply engaged in the social justice activities of the church. Social justice staff could benefit with a deepening of their theological understanding and how to enhance its application in the social justice mission. However, on both sides such engagement has been limited due to other demands on their time for other priorities.

Conclusion

The Uniting Church has maintained a strong commitment to social justice as it has lived out its mission in the last 20 years. The approach to social justice engagement has varied across the Uniting Church, often driven by the world views and beliefs of the individual staff employed to resource the social justice work. The social justice efforts of the Uniting Church have helped to bring about meaningful reforms in Australia for the benefit of the socially vulnerable and of the natural environment.

Across the Uniting Church, there is no clear agreed position about the role members of congregations and faith communities should have in being involved in the church's social justice mission. For the social justice mission of the Uniting Church to remain effective, it must adapt to changes in the society so that its voice is heard by those who will make important decisions that impact our society and the world. There is also a need to adapt to changing social trends if the Uniting Church wishes to involve its people and members of the broader community in its social justice mission.

There remains an internal struggle within the Uniting Church to its response to neoliberal economics. The integrity issue of dealing with businesses involved in human rights abuses, environmental destruction and serious criminal activity in pursuing the church's activities still requires a more dedicated response.

Finally, if the Uniting Church wishes to maintain some influence on measures that ensure the well-being of the wider society and the environment through its social justice engagement, it needs to find a better balance between maintaining resources for its social justice mission while under pressure to meet risk and compliance obligations.

Making Some Noise in the Sanctuary and on the Streets: an Anabaptist reflection on activism from within the Uniting Church

Valentina Satvedi Leydon[1]

Introduction: the Anabaptist inheritance

We hear a lot in activist circles these days about the importance of making an impact. There are multiple articles online and published books that speak of activism and what it means to be an activist with impact. There are instructions provided on how to be an activist with an impact. And there are details given as to how one might integrate activism into everyday life, thus making our lives have more impact.

Activism within the Anabaptist Christian faith tradition attempts to go beyond making an impact. The tradition is confessional and has its sources in two key biblical texts. One comes from the laws in the First Testament, for example those from Deuteronomy 24 which safeguard the poor, the outsider, the widow and the orphan. The other text emerges from the Second Testament within Luke 4, from where many within the Anabaptist Christian tradition take direction. This text speaks of proclaiming good news to the poor and setting the oppressed free. Alongside this, Anabaptists take direction from Matthew 5 known to many as the Beatitudes or the Sermon on the Mount. This article will speak to my understanding of activism grounded in this liberationist Anabaptist Christian tradition,[2] shaped especially by developments in American Anabaptist life, and will speak of living as an activist.

Within the Christian tradition the term "social justice" has a certain prominence and is often identified as activism. Nevertheless, it is important that I stress that social justice – while it focuses on a multiplicity of things such as providing and assisting with food, clothing and shelter – may not name the acts of addressing the powers, the institutions and the structures that create oppressions in the first place. In other words, much social justice in Church circles avoids asking what leads to people not having clean water to drink, a safe home to reside in and a community to live in, displacement and loss of land, being racialized and marginalised, among other injustices. Activism in this context, and within the content of this essay, will refer to the basics of social justice, but with an intent to dismantle structures of inequality and injustice.

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[1] I acknowledge that this essay has been written whilst I live on the unceded lands of the Litarimirina people of the Palawa nation.

[2] By which I mean the Anabaptists who have settled on Turtle Island, the Indigenous name for what is now known as the United States of America.

In the following paragraphs, through my Anabaptist activist lens, I share how I frame my understanding of activism. I am a Minister of the Word and I am an activist. My activist identity arises firstly out of my lived experiences of colonialism and neo-colonialism and its internalisation. These experiences include the racism that I continue to experience and the racism experienced by my relatives; and the biases and prejudices that come my way and in the direction of all those on the various margins, in waves. So, I offer some thoughts on what the work of an activist should be rooted in.

Historically, Anabaptists have not always been in the activist space. They were usually identified as the "quiet in the land" observing separatism and quietism.[3] However, movements arising from World Wars I and II coerced them to go against their lifestyle of being the "quiet of the land". Anabaptists always believed in peace and nonviolence, but these principles were lived meekly within their own communities, and seen as a literal application of the Sermon on the Mount.

The post-war era brought them out of their so-called "quietness" into a way of being where they created alternative spaces. Hartshorn writes, "only since the 1960s has the Anabaptist peace tradition included more actively and socially engaged acts beyond its own community – through nonviolent direct action, nonviolent resistance, political protests, government petitioning and global peacemaking."[4] The military draft in the United States saw Anabaptist men registering for alternative service through their churches, in lieu of military service.[5] Today, Anabaptists are known for their commitment to peacemaking in conflict situations; advocating for peace; engaging in accompaniment and advocacy; as well as observing, reporting and networking to bring about change.

Anabaptist activism is *intentional* in engaging with the struggles of dismantling injustice. In other words, the goal is not only to love and serve, but also to be *intentional* in engaging with undoing oppressions, decolonising, liberating and nonviolent ways of living and being, There are multiple ways and forms in which all of us can accomplish this goal. For this article, however, I offer four principles of and for embodiment of how to be an activist in today's world (whether you identify as an Anabaptist or you identify as a member of the UCA). I offer them as a result of my lived reality: as a person of colour, as one who has and continues to take direction from the people with whom I have worked alongside in activist communities and activist

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[3] See the respective definitions of "separatism" and "quietism" in Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist* (Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 2010): "Separatism: Although the first Anabaptists had little opportunity to participate actively and constructively in a society that rejected their convictions and excluded them, when Anabaptists have found themselves in less oppressive contexts they have often struggled to embrace a different perspective on social engagement… Anabaptist separatism has conveyed disregard for wider society and concern only for the maintenance and survival of their own families and church communities" (164); Quietism: The early Anabaptists were enthusiastic and vocal in sharing their faith with any who would listen to them, urging people to repent and become followers of Jesus. Their testimony, even as they were led to the stake, was so worrying to the authorities that tongue screws were used to silence them. But the pressure of persecution gradually convinced Anabaptists that keeping quiet about their faith was the only way to survive and most adopted this stance… They became known as "the quiet in the land"" (165).

[4] Leo Hartshorn, "April 2017: Love Is Justice," Mennonite Church USA, 3 Apr. 2017, accessed March 17, 2023, www.mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/april-2017-love-justice. Accessed March 17, 2023.

[5] Joseph S. Miller, "A History of the Mennonite Conciliation Service, International Conciliation Service, and Christian Peacemaker Teams," in *From the ground up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peacekeeping*, ed. Cynthia Sampson and John Paul Lederach, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4.

spaces. To paraphrase Sr. Alison McCrary, this is about getting uncomfortable for God to bring about the *kindom* of God. [6]

Confessional activism

This is where we always begin. To be confessional in the context of activism is to confess our humanness, our frailty, and most importantly our history. We acknowledge who we are, where we come from, including our ancestors and where we reside. As practitioners of justice we acknowledge the land, the treaties (or lack thereof). We acknowledge our presence on the land that never belonged to settlers. Our work begins with a confession. We are acknowledging our place in the colonial pasts and present of the lands we live on. While I am from a nation once colonised, as a settler on the land now known as Australia, I confess that I am privileged not simply by my nationality, but also by the policies set by those in power (the government of the country). While I am not the most privileged within the hierarchy of privileges on this land, I am significantly more advantaged than the First Nations people to whom this land belongs.[7]

It follows that we need, in the words of Audre Lorde, in her book *Sister Outsider*, to "do our homework":[8] to work on our internalisations and socialisations before engaging in "walking with" others. To do so without working on our own "stuff" would cause more harm and trauma to those we engage with. Not doing the work before we begin makes room for ongoing oppressions such as racism, sexism, misogyny, patriarchy. If we are not willing to do the internal work on each of these, we will continue to perpetuate these oppressions, even in our activism itself.

But what does it mean to do the "homework"? Taking direction from Lorde, Elaine Enns and Ched Myers in their book *Healing Haunted Histories*, offer suggestions for doing our own work in the here and now. They suggest that "there are many ways, and levels at which, to decolonise internalised and externalised white settler colonialism."[9] Key to this is emphasising "how socialisations and historical forces shape us each and all."[10] Enns and Myers offer a model for decolonisation work that aims to "pull on the root" of these forces within each of our identities and stories.[11] Such acknowledgements are necessary before we offer our hand in fellowship, with the intent of activism on behalf of others.

Doing the work, however hard it may be, is the work of being confessional. This work allows us to acknowledge our flaws and enter into the activist space with humility, so that we may be incarnational in our work.

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[6] Sr. Alison McCrary is a tribal citizen of the Ani-Yun-Wiya United Cherokee Nation, a social justice movement lawyer, Catholic activist, restorative justice practitioner based in New Orleans. For the ideas referred to here see Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries, "Incarnational Engagement with Restorative Solidarity: Contemplative Activism, Community Justice Work, and Holy Resistance in and between Red, Black, and Brown Communities," Bartcast 57: Alison McCrary. Recorded live at the 2021 Bartimaeus Kinsler Institute, Feb 13, 2021. https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/bartcast-57-alison-mccrary-incarnational-engagement/id1317479632?i=1000548170875. While Sr McCrary uses the word kingdom. I choose to use the word kindom. This word was heard by Ada María Isasi-Díaz a Cuban-American theologian, when visiting her friend, a Franciscan nun name Georgene Wilson. The word "kin-dom" was used to describe the liberation of God offered for all who are oppressed by those in power (Empire and Kings). The use of this word allows for a recognition of kinship of and for all who gather around the table of hope. Also see Florer-Bixler, Melissa, Florer-Bixler, "The Kin-dom of Christ." Sojourners, 10 Mar. 2020, sojo.net/articles/kin-dom-christ.

[7] My privilege here resides in the fact that I can easily walk away from this land if I choose, for example back to the US or to India. Indigenous people do not have that same choice to walk away from oppressive systems or situations.

[8] "Because I am a woman, because I am Black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself – A Black woman warrior poet doing my work – come to ask you, are you doing yours?" See Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 41-42.

[9] Elaine Enns and Ched Myers, *Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization,* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2021), 18.

[10] Enns and Myers, *Healing Haunted Histories,* 18.

[11] Enns and Myers, *Healing Haunted Histories,* 18.

Incarnational activism

As followers of Jesus, we look to his teaching and the ethic which it offers: the ethic of *Gelassenheit*, yieldedness, an emptying of the self.[12] This choice of living symbolises Jesus, who lived among the oppressed, the marginalised and welcomed the *asylum* seeker (people in the Gospel stories whom Jesus encounters, seeking asylum from the claws of the empire). This is being incarnational. What we *believe* (orthodoxy) is not the goal; rather, the focus is how we are *to live* (orthopraxis). Mennonite author John D Roth articulates it as "existential faith". In other words, "it is faith that is understood only as it is actually lived."[13]

Anabaptist faith is inseparable and indivisible from our incarnational way of being. The goal of this incarnational living is not conversion, nor focused on Sunday as the central point of our "community" and week. Our every moment of being and doing in the world is linked to Jesus' own ethic of solidarity with a broken world.[14]

What, however, does "incarnational" imply about the ends of our activism? Incarnational Anabaptism means identifying a "theology of the powers",[15] acknowledging the powers, exposing the powers that perpetuate oppression, exclusion and poverty. This implies thinking critically about what our role is in all this, as incarnational people and disciples.

Such faith is what Anabaptists, Tommy and Lindsey Airey, live and embody. Detroit is where they have recently made their home. The city's water and sewerage department has been shutting off water to thousands of households in the city. The Aireys' move to Detroit, Michigan, was with the simple intent of accompanying a community in crisis, to live within and alongside the community as it seeks water justice. Their activism is incarnational in the sense being discussed here.[16] They embody Jesus, by giving voice and support to the oppressed and marginalised. They partner with local communities and equip those on the journey to seek justice.[17]

Therefore, living an incarnational life means living the way Jesus did. It is also what it means to be people of the Resurrection, to follow through Jesus' incarnational invitation. It follows that incarnational activism is not merely about loving God and loving neighbour. It is about critically engaging the powers and the structures that seek to oppress. It is about organising and supporting the community and addressing the root causes of oppression and the structures maintaining them.

An incarnational activism focuses on Jesus' life and example before he was crucified on the cross; the Resurrection is lived in our efforts, beyond simply talk of an external Jesus being risen. In practice, incarnating

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[12] *Gelassenheit* is understood as a self-emptying, a self-surrender to God. There are multiple ways of translating this word or term. For further information see Global Mennonite Anabaptist Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Gelassenheit.

[13] John D. Roth, *Beliefs: Mennonite Faith and Practice* (Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 2005), 30.

[14] Rob Davis, "MCC's Development Paradigm(s)," in *A Table of sharing,* ed. Alain Epp (Weaver: Cascadia 2011), 347.

[15] Davis, "MCC's Developing Paradigm(s)," 349

[16] Tommy Airey is the pastor at *Kardia Kaiomenē* practising *soul accompaniment*. You can read more about his insights at https://kardiakaiomene.blogspot.com.

[17] For information about the water crisis in Detroit see "The Detroit Water Crisis," Zocalo Public Square, accessed April 17, 2023, https://www.zocalopublicsquare.org/feature/the-detroit-water-crisis/.

Jesus' life, death and resurrection, then, is about dismantling old structures and creating spaces for new ways of being. We do so in relationship with others, where we search and discern together what is right and just.

Relational Activism

Relationships are key to the work of activist discipleship. If we are going to incarnate discipleship grounded in activism, we need to make space to listen to our neighbour's story. It is not only about us telling our stories. We are called to acknowledge where they are and upon invitation, we walk alongside them. If we are a people of faith who confess that we are disciples of Jesus, then that faith leads us to being incarnational in our living and my being in daily life. Incarnational activism is manifested in *relationships*: beyond merely living with and advocating for one's community. In order to live incarnationally, to be advocates on someone's behalf, we need to integrally build relationships with the people who are in similar situations. Genuine horizontal community–building in the Anabaptist tradition goes beyond mere mutual aid

As Linda Quiquivx reminds us, embodying the language of relationships, embodying true "walking together", is critical.[18] We must apply critical thinking about what that means. Often, we express "solidarity" with those who are struggling against injustice, but this will be empty if we do not ourselves struggle in our own contexts. Solidarity can be mere charity if it fails to recognise that the struggles of those with whom we profess solidarity with. In turn, our struggles can help make each other stronger.[19] Incarnational daily living involves being in this spiritual accompaniment with others as they face oppressions.

A localised example in the Australian context concerns reconciliation between First and Second peoples. The Acknowledgement of Country that we perform in community serves this purpose, but how much do we take it to heart and apply it? Are we literally accompanying people? Is the solidarity real or shallow? An activist faith geared towards dismantling the structures which perpetuate superiority and inferiority means celebrating our differences through relationships. We share the world and struggle for its transformation as equals, rather than merely tolerating these differences, as applies to charity.[20]

Building relationships and living in community based on shared struggle extends beyond local and national contexts and interconnects with global struggles for peace and justice. Community Peacemaker Teams (CPT)[21] focus on building relationships to transform violence and oppression. Accompaniment with the oppressed and the journey of decolonising constitutes part of their central mission. This incarnational work emerges from the Anabaptist tradition. For thirty-five years, CPT has based its transformative activism on what can be termed restorative accompaniment.[22] Their processes take place in areas where violence and oppression intersect. At the heart of this restorative accompaniment is CPT's mission to apply an

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[18] Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries, "Activists of Color and Indigenous Solidarity," Bartcast 58: panel conversation between Rev. Sue Park Hur, Dr. Jimi Valiente-Neighbours, and Linda QuiQuivx. Recorded live at the 2020 Bartimaeus Kinsler Institute, Sat Feb 14, 2021, https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/bartcast-58-activists-of-color-and-indigenous-solidarity/id1317479632?i=1000550346774 .

[19] Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries, "Activists of Color and Indigenous Solidarity."

[20] Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries, "Activists of Color and Indigenous Solidarity."

[21] As of January 2022, Christian Peacemaker Teams changed their name to Community Peacemaker Teams to reflect the evolution of their community and also their partners

[22] Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries, "Incarnational Engagement with Restorative Solidarity: Contemplative Activism, Community Justice Work, and Holy Resistance in and between Red, Black, and Brown Communities," Bartcast 57: Alison McCrary. Recorded live at the 2021 Bartimaeus Kinsler Institute, Sat Feb 13, 2021. https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/bartcast-57-alison-mccrary-incarnational-engagement/id1317479632?i=1000548170875 .

"unwavering commitment in challenging and dismantling the systems of power, violence and oppression that prey upon the most vulnerable among us."[23]

Relationships are forged through long-term partnerships with *communities* facing these injustices. CPT is rooted in a spirituality of liberation theology, while emphasising the *community* aspect of their mission of partnership-building. The values of peace and justice, equality and human dignity are embedded in community relationships, while the organisation retains the integrity of its transformative spirituality as it seeks to support localised peacemakers to resist oppression through creative nonviolence.[24]

The fruits of this relationship-based transformative partnership can be seen in Colombia, where CPT walks alongside thousands of people from local farming communities displaced by decades of land dispossession. At the invitation of those communities CPT workers observe, highlight, engage with, and express solidarity on behalf of, restoring humanitarian conditions.[25] Incarnational accompaniment, whether with local First Nations communities, globally displaced communities such as those in Colombia, or among Palestinians, is intentional and transparent. CPT takes direction from the communities it walks alongside at every step.

In relationality lies accountability. How do we allow ourselves to be accompaniers walking alongside, *while* also allowing ourselves to be humbly held accountable? We need to sit with the people that we work with. Checking in with, listening to their response and taking direction – is part of continuing to live incarnational faith. To be confessional, true to our first above mentioned principle, is to acknowledge that we are flawed and that we will make mistakes.[26] So, walking with and accompanying implies incarnational community which leads onto accountability. Without communities grounded in these relationships, there is absence of accountability.

Accountable activism

What does accountability look like? Elder, Professor Anne Pattel-Gray, in calling out the Church in Australia to live up to what it means to being one in Christ, is holding the Church accountable.[27] We who name ourselves followers of Christ, if we are unable to hear the call or choose not to allow ourselves to be held accountable, then our calling and our activism will be life-taking and not life-giving. If we as the Church are about reconciliation and justice and wish to live and act in that space, then being held accountable to our call is appropriate and essential.

Whether we are part of the UCA or of any Anabaptist denomination, we are not perfect. However, perfectionism is not our call. Our call, instead, is to be incarnational and to be in just relationships with

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[23] Community Peacemaker Teams, "We're Now Community Peacemaker Teams | CPT," Community Peacemaker Teams, 19 Jan. 2022, cpt.org/about/cpt https://cpt.org/about/cpt-name-change

[24] Community Peacemaker Teams, "About CPT | Community Peacemaker Teams," Community Peacemaker Teams, 6 Feb. 2023, cpt.org/about. https://cpt.org/about

[25] Colombia, CPT, "Exiled and Stigmatized: Statement on the Displacement of Mining Communities in the Southern Bolívar Region," Community Peacemaker Teams, Jan. 2022, https://cpt.org/2021/08/17/exiled-and-stigmatized-statement-displacement-mining-communities-southern-bolivar.

[26] Make no mistake, Anabaptists around the world have and continue to make mistakes, but choose to unlearn and relearn from their engagements and experiences.

[27] "Q+A: Faith, Politics and Humanity," ABC iView, iview.abc.net.au/video/NC2304H011S00. Broadcast on April 10, 2023.

the people of the land. The First Nations of this land and all the lands we reside on have been crying out for justice and our stepping up has been slow and in some cases perhaps absent. Beyond this, and rather broadly, people of colour in settler communities continue to experience much injustice and traumatisation. Without critically asking ourselves, however, what it means to be activists on their behalf, we risk perpetuating ongoing oppressions.

Accountability is acknowledging how our living, our engagement with others, our relationships, and the choices we make, affect the lives of those who are our relatives (plants and animals as well as humans). We as people of this creation are all related to each other and as we walk with each other, we take direction from those we walk alongside and with. We listen to their call; we listen to where we may have failed and, having done our "homework", proceed in humility to do the work of justice for God's participatory *kindom*. In this *kindom*, we are accountable for our motives and the reasons for our actions – the *way* we participate – and the way we hold each other accountable in turn, all of this built on the foundation of our relationships.

Conclusion

What then? Against the background of this Anabaptist wisdom, what does it mean for me to live, and work within and on the land now known as Australia and as I immerse myself within the UCA?

The call for me is constant and consistent. I confess that I do not have all answers or the knowledge or wisdom to live and walk along with the First Nations, the UAICC, the marginalised and the communities of colour who reside here. I live in this space with humility and grace knowing that as a follower Jesus, I do the work of activism in and through my incarnational lens. The work is tremendous and the journey long. The work is not be done alone and I am no saviour. My call is first to sit with the people I seek to walk with, to listen, to build relationships and to take direction. It is in this that I can and will be held accountable when what I do is life-taking or perpetuating ongoing oppression and trauma. I have no idea what the impact of my Anabaptist activist incarnational living will be on these sacred lands. What I am aware of and intentional about, and committed to is doing my "homework" on an ongoing basis. My learning, unlearning and relearning is about the work of the kindom. This will be uncomfortable. My options are to either be "the quiet of the land" like some of the Anabaptist ancestors or to live my incarnational faith boldly. If I choose a life of quietism, the land that has been crying out will continue to cry out. My choice is to make some noise in the sanctuary and on the streets, with the Word in our world.

Activism Case Study
"I am too bloody tired"

Jason John

I am too bloody tired to write a case-study, and maybe too sad.

I have just finished the 40th hour of my 28 hour a week job with Landcare,[1] doing good deeds and achieving great things with "fellow Australians of goodwill."[2] Being active, in yet another underfunded environmental NGO.

I am doing this, I think, because God called me to, and because Uniting in NSW made half of their advocacy team redundant in 2020. The people who supported activism. The end of the "Uniting Earth Advocate" role which I shared with a brilliant woman now living in Victoria, was the end of all environment focussed advocacy/activism support positions in the Uniting Church in Australia at the time.

As Clive Ayre put it at a Uniting Church Green Church meeting in 2012, "With our words we say this is important, with our budgets we say this is not important enough."[3]

I am writing this in one take, because I'm exhausted. On top of Landcare I volunteer for the community, and make my small contribution to protecting the forests where I live, decimated by the 2019 fires and now threatened with more logging than you could imagine, I assume in a rush to make as much money as possible before sense or morality or God prevails.

There is so much to do, and a small number of people are doing it at great financial and emotional cost to themselves.

So much so that nearly two years ago I wrote a short proposal for a church-funded forest ministry, adding the church's voice to this urgent issue, supporting activists and helping other Christians to do likewise. I sent it to some friends and colleagues for comment, and they ran with it. At the time, it seemed like the fate of the forests would be sealed in a couple of years. That was true, given the current logging maps, and the fate of the Great Koala National Park being subject to the vagaries of NSW state politics.

I pulled back so as not to look like I was writing a placement for myself, and my friends and colleagues shaped the proposal into something even better, focussing on direct advocacy, and joining and supporting activists to save the forests.[4] It addressed every single criteria in the Synod's vision for the future. Church

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1 I will eventually claim it back as TOIL

2 Uniting Church in Australia,"Statement to the Nation," in *Theology for Pilgrims: Selected Theological Documents of the Uniting Church in Australia,* ed. Rob Bos and Geoff Thompson (Sydney: Uniting Church Press, 2008), 629.

3 As quoted in Miriam Pepper and Jason John, "Ecological Engagement," in *An Informed Faith: the Uniting Church at the beginning of the 21st century,* ed. William W. Emilsen (Preston: Mosaic Press, 2014), 212.

4 "Forest Advocacy Ministry," Uniting Earth, accessed February 16, 2023, https://www.unitingearthweb.org.au/forests/

leaders lauded it. None would fund it. We were advised to tone down the activism and put the possibility of new faith communities centre stage.

We have been invited to submit an "expression of interest." Then we might get to make an actual submission. Then in 2024 we might get some support. But only 80%. Then in 2025 it will reduce to 60% and so on down to 20%. How the hell will trees compensate for the ever eroding funding? They are too busy producing billions of dollars' worth of oxygen and removing billions of dollars' worth of carbon dioxide every year.

The process clearly assumes that we have property to draw on, or savings, or perhaps that our new faith community will miraculously attract a bunch of rich philanthropists. Or perhaps we could take money from the coal industry. Perhaps they could buy us a BBQ so we can have heat for our sausage sizzle fundraiser while they heat the planet. We tried crowd funding. I know, how problematic would it be to fund a ministry with crowd funding!? Don't worry, we only raised $5000.

And I don't just want money from the church because I want money. I want to be able to say this it's not me, it's not our tiny little group, it's the church who is supporting forest activists, who is defending the forests.

The written word is such a terrible medium for communicating something like this. I am sure I sound angry.

I am not at all.

I am exhausted and sad. And guilty and ashamed because tonight people who are even more exhausted are up in the forest at a vital headwater keeping vigil because Forestry Corp is coming. And I haven't been there for a month.

And because my friends and colleagues and I were going to organise a pilgrimage to the headwaters to draw attention to the impending devastation, and invite church head honchos to come, but we have realised we are all too exhausted. And we all feel guilty and ashamed.[5]

When I want to turn guilt and shame and exhaustion into hope and action these days, I write poems. And so I leave you with this so that you can do something. For the forests in NSW, or anywhere.

If you kept reading this far, then thank you. And if you are up to your eyeballs doing other good works in the world, or you have nothing to spare because you are helping the poor, or you are the poor, then be at peace. If you have some resources to spare, then this poem is for you.

[5] Between writing this and publishing, we did find the energy to gather with those others who have participated in the vigil to go on a pilgrimage of hope to the headwater peak.

I can't find the courage of my convictions
Just the fear of a conviction
And worse- confrontation!
Here in the forest on Gumbaynggirr nation.
We three, far from civilization

Waiting to stop Forestry Corporation
With little hope of satisfaction

Alone
Just the trill of owlet nightjar and
Grunt of male koala

11,12,1
feels like sleep will never come
Scared
Personally, ill prepared.

I've already said I'll be back next week.
But where's the blessing of the meek?
I'll be looking for excuses
Three of us... feels useless

I confess
My distress
to Tim
who responds graciously
liturgically,
"your fears are forgiven. Be at peace."

Maybe it was the koala, maybe it was Tim
Maybe it was capital H Her or capital H Him.
That brought me to the place of feeling eighty percent calm
and one hundred percent right
eventually, that night.

Then the call
We don't need to be here after all! The logging plan has been recalled!

But that was 2021
The plan is back again, somehow
With works due to begin right now.
FOKH!
F. O. K. H
Friends of Kalang Headwaters
Google it, write, share, call.
Because all are needed for these forests, because these forests are for us all

And there's not three now, there's thirty
Not one camp, but two

There's hundreds more in our Shire getting ready
While I'm sitting here
Writing this to you

Because we all write the future of the forest
Of every bough in every tree
Of every bird in every hollow
We determine their tomorrow

Activism Case Study
Midsumma at St Michael's: Liturgical Activism by and on behalf of the LGBTIQ+ community

Margaret Mayman

In January 2023 the congregation of St Michael's Uniting Church in Melbourne offered its Sunday service as part of the Midsumma Festival. Midsumma is an annual celebration of LGBTIQ+ arts and culture. The theme of the service was "Celebrating Queer Spirit: Justice and Joy."

This brief case study cannot give a full account of a theological basis for activism but simply locates it at the heart of Christian faith lived out in the world God loves. Embracing Jesus' vision of the reign, basileia, of God, is central to what it means to follow Christ. This vision of God's justice and peace has to do with the web of creation and the integrity of human life within it. It extends far beyond the political objectives of even the most progressive person or political organisation. Jesus' statement, in John 18:36, that the basilea is not of this world is a claim for its source in the Divine and a rejection of the violence of the world. Jesus announces God's reign as not of this world but definitely in it.

"Celebrating Queer Spirit" was offered in a spirit of solidarity and resistance: solidarity with the broad LGBTIQ+ community, people of any faith or none, and resistance to the powers that seek to exclude queer people from full participation in social and spiritual communities.

Three contextual considerations shaped this activism: the intersection of religion and politics in Australia, the UCA's lack of a public prophetic voice in support of queer people, and St Michael's journey as a progressive church.

Discourse about religion in Australia is dominated by well-resourced conservative churches and organisations which exercise disproportionate influence on public life. While inaccurately claiming to represent the views of the majority of Christians, they have advocated for policies that are detrimental to the progress Australia has made toward equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people. Their influence, which was at its height during the campaign for civil marriage equality, is now focused on discriminatory religious freedom legislation, defence of harmful conversion practices, and anti-transgender activism.[6]

[6] The "No" campaign was fronted and financed by the Australian Christian Lobby, Marriage Alliance, the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney and the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, however, the majority of Christians supported the law change. See "Catholics defy church leadership to become biggest backers of same-sex marriage: poll," *Sydney Morning Herald,* August 26, 2017, https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/catholics-defy-church-leadership-to-become-biggest-backers-of-samesex-marriage-poll-20170825-gy49ea.html

In recent years the Uniting Church has not been visible in public life in support of the full equality and inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people.[7] Leading up to and following the decision of the 2018 Assembly that recognised a second statement of belief about marriage that included LGBTIQ+ couples,[8] the UCA internal debate about doctrine and polity was given priority over advocacy for civil marriage equality and protection of LGBTIQ people from discriminatory religious freedom legislation.[9] The 2018 decision attracted media attention which the Church managed carefully, not to affirm the worth and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ people in the eyes of God, but to avoid exacerbating internal division.[10] It is into this silence that congregations like St Michael's speak, understanding that visible affirmation matters to queer people (and their families and friends) seeking to belong to a spiritual community.

St Michael's Midsumma service was developed and led by queer people as part of the process of becoming an Open and Affirming congregation.[11] In 2022 St Michael's attracted and welcomed many newcomers, including a number of queer people who were baptised or became members. With the support of Church Council, the Open and Affirming task group offered education on the impact of religious discrimination and why it is crucial for churches to do more than say "everyone is welcome."

The liturgy, sermon, hymns and music were not focused on responding to Christian rejection of LGBTIQ people but on affirmation of queer bodies and relationships as sacred, and celebration of the gifts that we bring to the church. It concluded with a deeply moving ritual as queer people and allies came forward as individuals, couples or families to receive a blessing. One young man said through his tears: "This is the first time I've been in a church and not been judged." The service, and interviews of queer people afterwards, were sensitively reported by The Guardian.[12]

The Midsumma service demonstrated the power of liturgy as activism. Its intent was not to influence politics but to convey that queer people do not have to choose between identity and spirituality. It was evangelical, bearing good news for approximately 50 visitors. A number have become part of the congregation and several more have returned occasionally. Participating in the midsumma liturgy also shaped the congregation, providing assurance to those who were unsure that an explicit welcome of LGBTIQ+ people was necessary, and equipping them for evangelism, hospitality, and future expressions of solidarity and resistance.

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7 Recently there have been strong public expressions of support for LGBTIQ+ people by UCA leaders. See President Sharon Hollis "Celebrating Trans Day of Visibility," Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, accessed May 2, 2023, https://uniting.church/tdov-2023/. See Rev David Fotheringham, Moderator of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, "Response to the anti-trans rally at in front of the Victorian State Parliament on 18 March, Uniting Church," Uniting Church in Australia: Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, accessed May 2, 2023, https://victas.uca.org.au/statement-from-the-moderator/

8 Minutes of the Fifteenth Assembly – 18.07.03 (b)

9 In 2015, Uniting Justice Australia made a submission strongly opposing the proposed plebiscite on civil marriage equality on the grounds of harm to LGBTIQ people. After that the Assembly made no further comment on marriage equality. The submission was removed from the Assembly website. See Uniting Justice Australia, "The matter of a popular vote, in the form of a plebiscite or referendum, on the matter of marriage in Australia," Submission 64 to the Senate Standing Committees on Legal and Constitutional Affairs accessible at https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/Marriage_Plebiscite/Submissions.

10 While individual members of the Church spoke out in response to attempts to overturn the 2018 Marriage decision, the Assembly did not engage. See "Uniting Church Threatens to Split over Liberal Same-sex Marriage Debate" *ABC News* May 26, 2019, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-05-26/tensions-within-the-uniting-church-over-same-sex-marriage-stance/11082926.

11 Uniting Network, the LGBTIQ+ network within the Uniting Church, has developed the Open and Affirming Project as an invitation to live out the mission of the Church as a welcoming community with specific recognition of the gifts brought by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) people, same-sex relationships and rainbow families. The Project is a step-by-step process developed in local congregations to demonstrate how Churches can intentionally live out their welcome, in all areas of their life and mission.

12 Sian Cain, "Spirituality and Sexuality – people shouldn't have to choose: the Australian church celebrating queer joy," *The Guardian*, January 30, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/jan/30/spirituality-and-sexuality-people-shouldnt-have-to-choose-the-australian-church-celebrating-queer-joy.

Proclamation from Grief and Carnage: a homiletical conversation with Nick Cave

Ockert Meyer

Abstract

In 2015 Australian singer and songwriter, Nick Cave lost his 15-year-old son Arthur in a tragic accident. Last year, together with Irish journalist, Seán O'Hagan, he published *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, in which this journey of pain and grief is explored in a series of conversations. In this paper, I will use this book and Nick Cave's insights as a starting point for a homiletical conversation about both the revelatory and transformative power of grief. The aim is to interrogate Nick Cave's insights as an artist and how this artistic or creative disposition could help the preacher in understanding grief at a time when the dark presence of death and sorrow is again shaping the concerns of many in the pews.

Introduction

"No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear." These are the first words of CS Lewis' well-known reflection on the death of his wife.[1] By this, he does not mean that grief makes one feel anxious, but that grief is a visceral experience, much like fear. Grief is not simply a heartache or emotional turmoil; it is something that causes a bodily reaction, carnage in the flesh.[2] But grief is also something that affects the individual's experience in community. In this sense, grief has an all-encompassing effect on a person, often leading to a re-assessing of priorities and personal transformation.

This becomes a recurring theme in Nick Cave's interviews with Irish journalist, Seán O'Hagan. These conversations started during the first weeks of the COVID lockdowns in March 2020 in the UK and finally resulted in the publication of their transcripts in *Faith, Hope and Carnage*.[3] Even though the grief and sorrow of the COVID pandemic inform some of the conversations, the event that shapes the entire book is the death of Nick Cave's 15-year-old son, Arthur. One of a pair of twins with his wife, Suzie Bick, Arthur died following a fall from the cliffs near Brighton in East Sussex. During the time that these conversations took place, Nick Cave's mother (Dawn Cave) and a former partner and close friend, Anita Lane also died.

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1 C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1961), 5.

2 "Carnage" is the title of one of Cave's songs. It has a wide range of meanings for Cave, but primarily hints at the destruction of the Pandemic, what he also refers to as a "collective catastrophe" However, according to him, the big 'carnage' is also echoed by small carnages. See Nick Cave & Sean O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage* (Melbourne: Textpublishing, 2022), 162-163.

3 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 275.

After the conclusion of the conversations, but before the book was published, Nick Cave announced the passing of his oldest son, Jethro (Lazenby).[4]

Cave recorded his last two albums, *Skeleton Tree* and *Ghosteen* following Arthur's death. Even though almost all the songs (apart from the title track) on *Skeleton Tree* were written before Arthur's accident,[5] the studio recordings of the songs took place after his death. Listening to some of the songs on *Skeleton Tree* ('Jesus Alone' in particular),[6] it is hard to believe that these were written after his death and not before it. But this means that it is not so much the lyrics of these songs that reveal Cave's deepest emotions and grief, but the music itself becomes the communication of his sorrow.

This essay is not a study of Nick Cave or his music. The primary focus here is to engage with Nick Cave's experience of grief as he articulates it in *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, and to use this as a starting point for a homiletical conversation. By "homiletical conversation" I mean to listen attentively to the ways that Cave speaks about grief and sorrow, not only as a personal and pervasive reality, but also as something that has a revelatory, even transformative power and to utilise these insights in preaching. The aim is to interrogate Nick Cave's insights as an *artist* and how this artistic or creative disposition could help the preacher in understanding both the creative process of preaching as well as the creative structure of grief. It is important to understand that these two things – creativity and grief – are not easily separated in Cave's thinking. It is often the experience of grief that triggers and guides the creative process. Nevertheless, the point of this dialogue is not simply to find "connections," parallels or similarities between Cave's insights and preaching but to allow his unique artistic understanding and expression to speak into, and enrich the art of preaching.

The essay will proceed, therefore, with a brief overview of Cave's posture towards faith and then build the conversation under these four themes: preaching as the art of waiting for the Jesus-idea; not the quest for relevance but truth; grief as the revelation of truth; and preaching as the art of naming and re-figuring grief

Nick Cave, Faith and Christ

Nick Cave is not a preacher in any traditional sense of the word, even though he has been compared to a kind of Gothic or a tent preacher.[7] Cave's 2022 Sydney Opera House concert felt to Stan Grant, like "an old time Pentecostal tent show revival."[8] What Grant suggests is that Cave's presence and stories can create a connection, a dialogue with the listener in the same way as preaching invites us to see our words, our world through the lens of God's Word and in and through this, to *see* God, to *hear* God. *New Yorker* correspondent, Emily Flake, describes a Nick Cave concert in a similar way and particularly a song that transforms into a

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4 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 277.
5 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 232.
6 *Jesus Alone* begins like this:
You fell from the sky
Crash landed in a field
Near the river Adur
Flowers spring from the ground
Lambs burst from the wombs of their mothers
In a hole beneath the bridge...
Song Lyrics accessed on 16 January 2023 at https://www.nickcave.com/lyrics/
7 Darcey Steinke, "God is in the house" in Nick Cave, *Stranger than Kindness* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2020), 60, 65.
8 Stan Grant, "Looking for God in all the rock places: Are Australians craving spiritual connection?", accessed on January 17, 2023 at https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-12-25/nick-cave-faith-suffering-aboriginal-australia/101805158

prayer, one that she claimed changed her life, as she watches, mesmerised: "the air coalesced around him immediately and took on a certain charge – oh, I realized suddenly, deliciously, I am at *church*."[9]

This visceral experience of God's presence is also reminiscent of preaching as proclamation, in the sense that preaching is not an attempt to prove the existence of God[10] but proceeds from the assumption that the Word that became flesh can be poured out into words again. As Cave describes his songs: "They behave as though God exists,"[11] and as such they demand a response. In a 1998 lecture he goes even further, saying: "The actualising of God through the medium of the Love Song remains my prime motivation as an artist."[12] Therefore, Cave calls himself, not "spiritual" but "religious" because "religion is spirituality with rigour" and it is herein, in the wrestling with the demands of the divine that the heart of his creativity is to be found.[13]

More than once in the book, he insists that he does not regard himself as a Christian, but he qualifies his answer by saying that there is an ambiguity to his relationship with Christ: "I don't consider myself a Christian – at least 'most of time', as Bob Dylan would say. Spiritual matters for me are always evolving, never static, and are energised by their mystery and uncertainty and attendant struggle."[14]

What seems likely is that he has a *certain kind* of Christianity in mind, a Christianity that is prescriptive, claustrophobic and institutionalised, a Christianity that he doesn't feel comfortable owning as his own. Cave states that he attends church (when he finds the time to do so), regards himself as religious, believes in God and in Christ, does not only read the Bible but seems to know it very intimately, is drawn to traditional Christianity and particularly the life of Christ and wants to be read through a religious frame to be understood. Arguably, his reticence to call himself a Christian stem more from a need to protect the mystery of God (rather than denying it[15]), but also from his deep solidarity with the human condition and predicament, and from his shared fate with the vulnerability and suffering lives of all people.[16]

In this regard he offers important perspectives for preachers in the Uniting Church in Australia. On the one hand there is the need for solidarity with the afflicted in preaching, as well as a prophetic challenge to the temptations of institutionalisation and managerial spread. On the other hand, there is also a warning not to yield too quickly to calls of relevance and contemporary trends. Preaching that is truly contemporary should be close enough to (with) the times to share its predicaments but also far enough to see its truth.

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9 Emily Flake, "The Nick Cave Song that changed my life", *The New Yorker*, 26 December 2018. Accessed on January 17, 2023 at https://www.newyorker.com/culture/personal-history/the-nick-cave-song-that-changed-my-life. Emphasis in the original.

10 See Karl Barth, *Homiletics*, translated by Geoffrey W Bromiley and Donald E Daniels. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 47.

11 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 78.

12 Nick Cave, "Secret Life of the Lovesong", accessed on January 17, 2023 at https://www.scribd.com/document/55366642/Nick-Cave-Secret-life-of-the-Lovesong#

13 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 19.

14 Cave, *The Red Hand Files*, February 2021, Issue # 136. Accessed on 18 January 2023 at https://www.theredhandfiles.com/i-have-been-reading-tolstoys-the-gospel-in-brief-and-wondered-if-you-had-read-this-short-book-what-does-christ-mean-to-you-i-hear-his-name-mentioned-in-many-of-your-songs-but-thematically-the/ *The Red Hand Files* was an internet platform that Nick Cave launched in September 2018, about three years after Arthur's death, where people can ask him any questions they'd like to ask. He says that one of the reasons that he launched the project, was "an attempt to find language to set forth, in words, the travails of grief." (*Faith, Hope and Carnage,* 210).

15 See also in this context Steinke's observation "Only be deconstructing our meta-narratives about God can we get closer to the divine mystery." (Cave, *Stranger than Kindness*, 61). I also concur with Lawrence Qummou's assessment in his Quirosonline essay "Faith, Hope and Carnage//The crucified grief of Nick Cave" that Nick Cave's articulation of God is much closer to orthodox Christianity than Nick Cave himself seems to realise or acknowledge. Accessed on February 15, 2023 at https://quirosonline.com/faith-hope-and-carnage-nick-cave/

16 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage,* 29, 105.

Preaching as the art of waiting for the Jesus-idea

The preacher is an artist in much the same way as the artist is a preacher. All sermons begin with a blank piece of paper. No preacher would be unfamiliar with the sense of emptiness, of staring at a blank screen or piece of paper, needing words to dispel the anxiety of the ever-closer-creeping Sunday. There is some comfort that preachers can take from Suzi Bick's wise observation after Cave complained that nothing is coming: "Well, nothing comes until it does."[17]

It is exactly here that the creative process begins, with waiting rather than rushing. Or in Cave's case, understanding that you don't find the song, the song finds you: "You have to be patient and alert to the little miracles nestled in the ordinary."[18] In this context he uses a striking biblical image from Matthew 27, that of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary who remained standing in front of the open tomb: "That always makes me think of what it's like to experience the birth of a creative idea; it's as if you're waiting for the Christ to appear, to step from the tomb, to reveal himself."[19]

And perhaps even more provocatively:

> What I'm saying is that you can't get to that truly creative place unless you find the dangerous idea. And, once again, that's like standing at the mouth of the tomb, in vigil, waiting for the shock of the risen Christ, the shock of imagination, the astonishing idea.[20]

He comes back to this image a few times in *The Red Hand Files*: the beautiful or life-giving idea as something unrecognisable, just as Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene was hidden and improbable.[21] The creative idea, he says, resonates deeply with this, in that it is both unfamiliar and difficult, but this is the one that the writer must pay attention to, the one "shimmering softly among all the deficient, dead ideas, gently but persistently tugging at your sleeve – the Jesus idea."[22]

Perhaps this is one of the most difficult, challenging and yet most important pieces of advice for the preacher. Leonard Cohen alerts us to the same thing. In a radio interview with Vin Scelsa, in response to the question of why he frequently changes the lyrics of his songs, Cohen replied: "It takes me a long time to figure out what a song is about and all the easy versions come first: the alibis, the slogans, the correct positions…the quick fix comes first…(But) I want to know what's really underneath my opinions."[23]

In other words, in the process of reflecting, exegeting, discerning and listening to the voice of Christ as he speaks through the text, one should be circumspect towards the first ideas because they are so often

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17 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage,* 114.
18 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage,* 7.
19 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage,* 155.
20 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage,* 159.
21 Cave, The Red Hand Files, January 2021, Issue 130. Accessed on January 23, 2023 at https://www.theredhandfiles.com/written-something-worthwhile/
22 Cave, The Red Hand Files, January 2021, Issue # 130. Accessed on January 23, 2023 at https://www.theredhandfiles.com/written-something-worthwhile/
23 Vin Scelsa, "Radio Interview" 13 June 1993, in Jeff Burger (ed), *Leonard Cohen on Leonard Cohen: Interviews and Encounters.* (Omnibus Press: London, 2014), 339.

the religious clichés, the superficial solutions or the easy answers. Nick Cave refers to this initial flurry of words as the "deceiving ideas, the residual ideas…they are like muck in the pipes, and they have to be flushed out to make room for the new idea."[24]

What makes Cave's image of the waiting Mary Magdalene particularly poignant, is that it is equally true for the ones whom Christ appears to first and the ones he appears to after this, it is equally true for the preacher and the congregation: both must stand in front of the empty tomb, waiting for Christ to appear. Herein lies the true imaginative or creative moment of preaching: Christ appearing from the tomb.

Authentic art – and in this sense, preaching as an art – always has a revelatory character. As Sandra Bowden and Marianne Lettieri say: "Authentic art…is a portal to divine conversation, stretching our imagination about who God is and who we can be."[25]

However, what is equally or more important here (and this is what the preacher as an artist shares with the poets, painters and songwriters), is the content of the revelation itself. Ciarán Treacy puts this quite succinctly and in a particularly perceptive way when he says: "For Cave, the creative act is doubly revelatory: it reveals God and is simultaneously a revelation from God…"[26]

Not the Quest for Relevance but Truth

However, there is something that is more important, something deeper than the creative process itself: the revelation of the truth. Artists and preachers are alike seekers of the truth; they are on a quest for truth, their calling is to penetrate ever deeper into reality, to cut through the layers of deception and untruth, through the façade of pretence, pose and polish that we so often construct around ourselves. In preaching, God reveals not only God's presence but also the presence of real value, the jeopardy of life and the reality of life in a world saturated with death.[27] It is in this sense that not only art, but also preaching is *prophetic*, uncovering the things that everyone is looking at, but no one is seeing.

This is exactly what Barth's "emergency homiletic" alerted the church to during the ascent of National-Socialism: an intense concentration on what is at stake, deep listening and to risk the exposure of true conviction and self-questioning.[28]

This process of excavation, mining for something more valuable than contemporary trends or popular beliefs, is something Nick Cave does exceptionally well. As Darcy Steinke observes: "Cave's songs often undermine and negate religious adoration and instead, though we may be too blissed out to realise it, confront us with lush far-reaching *theological questions*."[29]

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[24] Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 156.
[25] Sandra Bowden and Marianne Lettieri, "Artists as witnesses in the Church" in W. David O. Taylor and Taylor Worley (eds), *Contemporary Art and the Church: A Conversation between two worlds* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2017), 51.
[26] Ciarán Treacy, *The Apocalyptic Theology of Nick Cave*. PhD Thesis, University of York, 2019. Accessed on January 19, 2023 at https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/25701/1/Treacy_202032636_Thesis.pdf
[27] Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 199.
[28] Angela Dienhard Hancock, *Karl Barth's Emergency Homiletic, 1932-1933: A Summons to Prophetic Witness at the Dawn of the Third Reich* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 88-89.
[29] Steinke, "God is in the house", 58.

Cave here helps preachers address the common temptations to think that they must provide weekly theological or biblical solutions to worldly problems. The greater and more important challenge for preachers is to uncover the worldly problems and questions, exactly as *theological* questions. It is in this respect that Homiletics is practical theology, not because it is practical rather than theoretical, but because preaching takes seriously the most concrete and practical struggles of people and reveals these struggles as *theological* struggles or questions.[30]

What is undermining contemporary preaching is not irrelevance but the continuous need or craving for relevance. It is not the quest for relevance that leads to the revelation of reality, but it is the other way around: it is the deep engagement with reality that leads to relevance. It is in this regard that preachers should pay close attention to artists. The vocation of artists, just like preachers, is not to inform people of the problems in the world.[31] The call of preachers is not to alert congregations to suffering but to allow the suffering of Christ to speak into the suffering of the world. The duty of preachers is not to prove or show the relevance of God to our daily lives, but to allow the Gospel to speak about the relevance of afflicted people to God.

Nick Cave's pain made him attentive to the realities of sorrow in the world but it was the stories that emerged from *The Red Hand Files* that drove this discovery much deeper, leading him to understand that "suffering is the defining element of the human story."[32] This brings us even closer to what it is in art that preachers can learn from. Often in popular art – and this include film, music or even painting – the appeal seems to lie in the capacity to entertain. And unfortunately, preachers may often be inclined to think that they must compete with this. However, if it is even remotely true that suffering defines the human condition, then the quest for entertainment seems almost banal.

However, it is not only the need to be entertaining but the perceived need – especially in the prosperous, liberal tradition and more specific in the Uniting Church in Australia – to be life-affirming or relevant, that is equally tone-deaf. Thomas Long's comments (in his engagement with Barth Ehrman) are salutary:

> The poverty of such advice becomes clear when we imagine it being spoken to any congregation with the usual quotient of deep wounds and silent sufferings. Even more, its effete elitism hardens into cruelty in the context of the Haitian earthquake or the Indian Ocean tsunami. What kind of moral numbskull would clasp a hand across the shoulder of a man who had lost his family to the surging waters and say, 'I think you should cook a steak on the grill, have a glass of Bordeaux, and take in the ACC basketball tournament. Love life – it's a gift and will not be with us for long. [33]

Even accepting the truth of Kohelet that there is a time for everything (Eccl 3:1–8), the truth of this advice is deeply challenged by those who don't have the means to eat out and drive luxury cars, and it is in the times of grief when the real value of these luxuries are revealed.

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[30] This is exactly the point that Ray Anderson makes about the nature of practical theology in his book, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2001). See especially chapter 3: "A Trinitarian model for Practical Theology." (My emphasis – OM)

[31] Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage,* 189.

[32] Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage,* 209.

[33] Thomas Long, *What Shall We say? Evil, Suffering and the Crisis of Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 69.

Grief as the revelation of Truth

It is in the context of Seán O'Hagan's deeper probing of how the creative process of writing a song works for him, that Nick Cave makes one of the most evocative and helpful observations with implications for preaching. He first describes how a visionary image and its meaning trigger the narrative (of his songs). Illustrating what he means by this, he refers to the *Spinning Song* that says, "You are sitting at the kitchen table listening to the radio." That image in itself is nothing remarkable but it becomes saturated with meaning when one learns that this is the last memory he has of his wife before the phone rang with the news that Arthur had died.

He describes this image as the last unbroken memory of his wife and essentially the image from which the entire album *Ghosteen* grows: "that moment of peace, of calm, of simplicity, before everything shattered."[34] However, what confirms the truthfulness of this is when his body acts accordingly; a physical, bodily response signifies to him the importance of the image, hoping then – having faith – that something even more truthful will be revealed.

Eventually, he says, the image tracks down its meaning; in other words, something that is true or real, expands, while something false or insignificant gradually diminishes: "A dishonest line tends to deteriorate somehow after repeated singing; *a truthful* line collects meaning."[35]

Elsewhere he describes songs as "little dangerous bombs of truth" that can not only tell one a lot about oneself, but that require the future to reveal their meaning.[36] Arthur's death was a revelatory experience, something that made Cave a religious person, someone who felt and experienced the human predicament, who understood perhaps for the first time our profound vulnerability,[37] a discovery confirmed by *The Red Hand Files*, that suffering is the defining element, the most essential truth of the human story.[38]

Later in the conversations, Cave comes back again to this idea of something fundamentally true that continues to grow in significance. Talking about the ceramic figurines that he was making, figurines that present something of this primal struggle of life and death, he calls them "precise meditations on what constitutes a life, insofar as they tell a story of a broken life that *collects meaning through misfortune* and transgression."[39]

Against the background of these reflection by Cave, it is remarkable to see how often Paul speaks about preaching against the horizon of suffering, the cross and foolishness, inverting popular and contemporary

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[34] Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 13.
[35] Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 16. Emphasis added.
[36] Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 36.
[37] Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 105.
[38] Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 209. He also calls suffering "the universal unifying force." (The Red Hand Files, May 2021, Issue # 147. Accessed on January 23, 2023 at https://www.theredhandfiles.com/utility-of-suffering/) We often seems something of this reflected during times of national or international tragedies. It reminds one of Elie Wiesel, who notes that he discovered that what all religions have in common is suffering. But then most pointedly: "I realized that Christianity is almost solely based on suffering." (John S Friedman, "The Art of Fiction LXXIX: Elie Wiesel" in *Elie Wiesel: Conversations*, edited by Robert Franciosi. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002, 73)
[39] Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 251. Emphasis added.

conceptions of power, wisdom and flourishing. He emphasises that he came to the Corinthians in weakness, fear and trembling,[40] to proclaim Christ crucified.[41]

It is perhaps at this point, the proclamation of Christ crucified, where the person of Christ functions differently in preaching than in art. Many artists refer to the person of Christ as an inspiration, something that Nick Cave also does.

However, in preaching the Church doesn't offer Christ as an inspiration as much as a blood transfusion, not as someone whom we can creatively shape for our spiritual well-being and growth, but someone who recreates us, someone who resurrects us from the dead. The proclamation of Christ does not mean that the congregation is simply invited to allow Christ to speak to them, but also *through* them.

The Dutch theologian, K.H Miskotte, insists that preaching in this sense is more than art, it is more than inspiration:

> Preaching means proclaiming that life, the whole life as we know it, is visited, justified, and destined for a new future by God, and that through this it has been completely changed, objectively, gathered up into a different God-relationship, receiving a new value.[42]

Miskotte touches on something that probably offers one of the greatest challenges to the preacher: how to preach this transition, how to proclaim this change in such a way that a congregation hears and experiences this as a change happening to them, *there and then*.

To this challenge, I would like to suggest two responses. The first one is the constant reminder of the observation that a truthful line collects meaning. In other words, the gospel contains an appeal that has a power of its own, a truth that prepares the way for the Lord, even in the wilderness of secularism and the desert of doubt. The Gospel resonates on levels that preachers cannot anticipate. The Gospel speaks where preachers only hear silence. The gospel stirs where preachers only see stillness. The Gospel may allow a congregation to see green grass where preachers can only see a desert landscape. The gospel collects meaning, well beyond the meaning preachers can draw from a text.

My second response is closely linked with the first one, but it is something that is more visibly, palpably and pervasively present in *Faith, Hope and Carnage*. Perhaps the best way to introduce this is by quoting a story that Darcey Steinke recalls in her essay in Cave's book *Stranger than Kindness*:

> In Chekov's story 'The Student', a young seminarian walking home on a cold night comes across a group of peasant women standing around a large bonfire. It is a few days before Easter. The seminarian tells the story of Peter's denial of Jesus, which brings the women to tears. As he leaves and continues walking home, he realises that it's not his storytelling abilities but the old story

[40] 1 Cor 2:3
[41] 1 Cor 1:23
[42] Kornelis H Miskotte, *When the Gods are Silent*, translated by John B Doberstein. (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row Publishers, 1967), 103.

> itself that moved the women. This gives him a jolt, a sensation of eternity. 'He even stopped for a minute to take breath. "The past," he thought, "is linked with the present by an unbroken chain of events flowing one out of another." And it seemed to him that he had just seen both ends of that chain; that when he touched one end the other quivered."[43]

Chekov's seminarian's discovery is a wonderful confirmation of the meaning-giving power of the gospel. But it does something else, it links the past, the "world as we know it" to the "new future by God." (Miskotte) This tells us something about the dynamics of change; that the potential of transformation or metamorphosis is provided by the link between past and future and not in the discontinuation of the past. It is exactly the link between the two that provides, so to speak, the electric current to cause the quivering at the other end.

The more one reads Nick Cave and listens to his music, the more one begins to see the creative potential of grief, what he refers to as the "gift of grief"[44] to provide the jolt that opens the door from the past into the present and future.

There are a few things that he touches on that are particularly helpful for the preacher. Most of these have already been discussed above, but it is worthwhile now naming them together. In the first place, grief brings us close to the fundamental essence of things;[45] it speaks a common language that communicates to all people across cultural and temporal boundaries and as such it needs very little translation. Second, grief permeates every aspect of being: emotions, faith, bodies and social relations.[46] Third, because of its all-encompassing character, it is extremely demanding; it has a presence that you cannot ignore. In addition to all of these, Cave also makes the point that it is exactly in this dark place where the idea of God *feels* essential: "It actually feels like grief and God are somehow intertwined. It feels that, in grief, you draw closer to the veil that separates this world from the next." [47]

In other words, the character of grief sensitises us in such a way that we become present to ourselves and therefore, we become receptive to the presence of both the other and the Totally Other. Hence, grief could become the catalyst for change: "Collective grief can bring extraordinary change, a kind of conversion of the spirit, and with it a great opportunity."[48]

Reading through *Faith, Hope and Carnage* with this perspective in mind, it is almost as if the entire book offers an account of this change in Nick Cave himself. This is quite remarkable, especially when we read this in the context of Roland Boer's article on love, pain and redemption in Cave's songs,[49] where he finds very little or almost no notion of redemption in the songs. However, the songs that Boer discusses all predate the death of Arthur. It seems that the very close experience of grief caused a fundamental change, reminiscent of redemption, something that he often recalls in the book. Not only does he say: "Arthur's

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[43] Steinke, *God is in the House*, 70.
[44] Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 109, 220.
[45] Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 31, 169, 182, 209.
[46] Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 65, 96, 169.
[47] Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 32.
[48] Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 33. We often see further evidence of this in the way that communities or even nations could come together during times of big crises, forging a common purpose with a real sense of empathy for the others sharing their fate.
[49] Roland Boer, *Love, Pain and Redemption in the Music of Nick Cave*, published in open journals of Sydney University Library, Vol 19. No 2 (2009). Accessed on January 24, 2023 at https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/LA/article/view/5007

death literally changed everything for me. Absolutely everything. It made me a religious person,"[50] but also that he "became a person… Not part of a person, a more complete person."[51] However, the best evidence of this change comes in response to a direct question by Seán O'Hagan, who said that Cave told him before that he didn't believe he had any need of redemption in the Christian sense, but now it looked as if he had changed his mind. To this Cave responded: "Yes, I have."[52]

Preaching as the Art of Naming and Refiguring Grief

There has been a growing awareness of the importance of lament in the bible in recent years. Trauma studies have also created awareness of grief in the lives of individuals and communities.[53] Preaching during the pandemic has also highlighted the need to take death and sorrow seriously in proclamation.[54]

Most of these studies emphasise the importance of both the recognition and the articulation of grief. This is also confirmed by Nick Cave's experience. He says that he has often experienced the reticence of people to talk about grief and that he has come to understand that there is little progress until we have learned to articulate it.[55] Also, he discerned among the questions of fellow suffers the need to speak about their own sorrow, as to get other people to acknowledge it.[56] But articulation and acknowledgement are only one aspect of Cave's experience and nor is it the only thing that preaching has to offer. There is more.

In touching on grief in preaching, preachers are often caught between two realities. On the one hand, there is the need for acknowledgement and articulation, the need for the voicing of pain. On the other hand, one also senses a faith-filled embarrassment with it. Did Christ not die to redeem our suffering? In other words, there also is the impulse or penchant to want to solve the problem of pain, if not theologically, then eschatologically.

I would argue that this is where the art of preaching becomes important: not only learning how to dwell with the grieving, knowing when to use minimal words, but also to use words that convey something of a mournful silence. In other words, using words that can translate silence. Words, that is, that can bear with ambiguity and be content with incompleteness while hinting at fulfilment and picking up pieces in anticipation of restoration.

Johan Cilliers and Charles Campbell refer to such preachers as 'preaching fools', those who follow the gospel rhetoric that Paul espoused in his first letter to the Corinthians:

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50 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 105.
51 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 106.
52 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 269.
53 See Kimberly R Wagner, *Fractured Ground: Preaching in the Wake of Mass Trauma* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2023). A further indication of recent awareness of this topic is: Matthew D Kim, *Preaching to People in Pain: How Suffering can shape your sermons and Connect with your Congregation* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2021). An older, very good, anthology of sermons is Barbara Brown Taylor's, *God in Pain: Teaching Sermons on Suffering* in *The Teaching Sermon Series,* edited by Ronald J Allen (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).
54 David H Garcia, *Pandemic Preaching: The Pulpit in a Year like No Other* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2021).
55 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 95.
56 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 208.

> preaching fools remind us that God is found in fragments, not just wholeness; in spaces of powerlessness, not just splendor. And in these spaces fools act as agents of eschatological fluidity, not stabilized identity. They keep alive the dynamic between fragments and wholeness... They melt the solidity of the world – right before our eyes, creating new perspectives on what is, as well as on what could be.[57]

Preaching fools, as the artists of proclamation, "melt the solidity of the world," opening new possibilities, yielding something akin to what Cave refers to as the "gift" of grief. Among others, by this he means to present grief in the fullness of its power, not only something that destabilises and destroys but also something that has the power to restore and reinvigorate, in short: "Grief as a positive force. Grief that can become, if we allow it its full expression, a defiant, sometimes mutinous energy."[58] Or what he describes as Arthur's gift to him: "since Arthur died I have been able to step beyond the full force of the grief and experience a kind of joy that is entirely new to me."[59] This echoes something of Elie Wiesel's constant reminder of the rupture and memorial significance of the Sabbath: "Shabbat interrupts all mourning, being as it is the embodiment of man's hope and his capacity for joy."[60]

Preaching as the proclamation of Christ always speaks from the darkness of Good Friday but never becomes oblivious to the light of Sunday. In this sense the darkness is always "light enough" (to borrow from the beautiful title of a book on the writings of St John of the Cross).[61] There is a sense in which Sunday as the day of the resurrection is perfectly suited to this. Proclamation of this reality always happens against the horizon of the breaking light of the eighth day, even on Good Friday. But it helps us to understand that in the same way as the darkness of Friday already contains speckles of light, the white robes seen by the women on Sunday morning still carry splinters of a cross.

This is articulated very powerfully by English author, Denise Riley, looking back after the death of her son:

> In your new perception of time, there's a fresh kind of 'carrying forward'. Your previous history has been reshaped as your being in time has now become demarcated differently yet again. Its boundaries are extended by and after the death, as they had once been by and after the birth. Half bitten away by the child's disappearance, your time is nevertheless augmented – for the time of the dead is, from now on, contained within your own.[62]

What all of this brings is not redemption in the usual, simple understanding of the word but what Nick Cave calls the "expansion of the self"[63] or in Denise Riley's words "The instant enlargement of human sympathy."[64] Cave links this reordering of the self with the biblical imagery of rebirth.[65] However, this rebirth

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57 Charles L Campbell & John H Cilliers, *Preaching Fools: The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2012), 168.
58 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 220.
59 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 109.
60 Elie Wiesel, *A Jew Today*. Translated by Marion Wiesel (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 193.
61 *Het donker is mij licht genoeg: Bloemlezing uit de werken van Johannes van het Kruis*, compiled by Jan Peters and JA Jacobs (Bilthoven: Amboboeken, 1974).
62 Denise Riley, *Time lived, without its flow* (London: Capsule Editions, 2012), 73.
63 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 107.
64 Denise Riley, *Time lived, without its flow* (London: Capsule Editions, 2012), 15.
65 Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 107.

does not only rebuild the grieving but also expands sympathy in the sense that the griever understands that their sorrow is not only the result of what they have endured but also the result of what they have caused others to endure.

In response to O'Hagan's question about what his songs are saying, Cave responds:

> all my work for the last six years is not saying anything. It is asking for something. Skeleton Tree, Ghosteen, Carnage, The Red Hand Files, the In Conversation Events, the live shows, even this book we are writing – they are all asking for the same thing.
>
> *Which is?*
>
> Absolution.[66]

Grief is not only the bearing of the absence of a loved one but also the bearing of personal culpability. This is one aspect of grief that is not always acknowledged or recognised. Especially in the context of the loss of close family members or friends, there is often a sense among the grieving that they have failed the deceased, irrespective of how rational such a feeling may be. In this context it is worth recalling Miskotte's earlier quote, the importance of proclamation as the news of a new future in God.

Conclusion

Sorrow, suffering and grief are all experiences that deeply shape human self-understanding. In our grief we often see more of ourselves and understand more about our communities than we otherwise would have. Nick Cave's experiences in this regard reveal to us both the paralysing effect it can have but also its redemptive potential.

Nick Cave's honest reflection on his pain following the death of his son alerts the preacher to the following important aspects of grief. In the first place, grief brings us close to the fundamental essence of things;[67] it speaks a common language that communicates to all people across cultural and temporal boundaries and as such, it needs very little translation. Second, grief permeates every aspect of being:[68] emotions, faith, bodies and social relations. Third, because of its all-encompassing character, it is extremely demanding; it has a presence that you cannot ignore.

Nick Cave is right: Grief, guilt and carnage are all in need of redemption. Opening pathways to forgiveness and absolution, of a life visited, justified and destined for a collective new future in Christ, seems one of the most powerful contributions of preaching, a gift not only to the church but to society at large.

And perhaps, finally it is herein that grief offers its greatest gift to the preacher.

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[66] Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 253.
[67] Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 31, 169, 182, 209.
[68] Cave & O'Hagan, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, 65, 96, 169.

The United Church of Pakistan: Origins and Challenges

Anthony Aijaz Lamuel

Abstract

This article introduces the origins of the Church of Pakistan, a 1970 union between Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Lutheran traditions. Various factors shaping this union are noted: Christianity's ancient presence in the subcontinent, the modern missionary movement, the 20th-century ecumenical movement, Indian nationalism, and the creation of Pakistan following the subcontinent's partition at independence. Several post-union and contemporary challenges are discussed.

Introduction

The Church of Pakistan, inaugurated in 1970, is a union of Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran and Methodist churches which were themselves the products of the modern missionary movement. But the roots of the Church of Pakistan reach into the much longer history of Christianity's presence in the Indian subcontinent, a presence which began possibly as early as the first century through the missionary endeavours of Thomas the Apostle. Of course, as a church established in the modern nation-state of Pakistan, its existence also stems from the partition of the subcontinent at independence in 1947 and the simultaneous creation of Pakistan, a self-defined Islamic republic. This paper will briefly describe the immediate twentieth-century back ground to the union, the nature of the union and, via interviews with some recent and current leaders, will present some commentary on the church's current circumstances.

Setting and Background: The Twentieth Century Quest for Christian Unity in the Indian Subcontinent

The movement towards Christian unity in the subcontinent was shaped by several important international and national meetings early in the twentieth century: the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910, the Tranquebar Conference (Tamil Nadu) in 1919 and the Lambeth Conference of 1920.[1]

The 1910 Edinburgh Conference provided the impetus for realization and recognition to the participants that the Conference aims would not be attained if the Protestant Church continued to remain divided.

[1] See Brian Stanley (2009). *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009). The Tranquebar Conference (1-2 May 1919) proved to be the genesis of the Church of South India. See Kenneth Scott Latourette, "Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Council" in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*, 2nd ed., ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, (London: S.P.C.K, 1967), 398.

Therefore, being overwhelmingly influenced by the Conference, the Indian Churches promoted the idea of the reunion of Christendom. The most fruitful outcome was the formation of The National Missionary Council in 1912-13 which later became the National Christian Council of India in 1923.[2] In some ways the Council engendered the desire for the visible unity of the Church. It was then at the National Consultation on Mission and Unity at Tranquebar in 1919 that some elements for the assessment of Church Union were provided in the form of a modification of the then Lambeth Quadrilateral:

(a) The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as "containing all things necessary to salvation", and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.
(b) The Apostle's Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian Faith.
(c) The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with unfailing use of Christ's Words of Institution, and of the elements ordained by Him.
(d) The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and people called of God into the Unity of His Church.

An initial outcome of these moves towards church union in India was the formation of the United Church of Northern India, a union of Congregationalists and Presbyterian Churches, in 1924. Then in 1929 a proposed Basis for Negotiations was formulated at the first Round-Table Conference which explored the possibilities of union between this United Church of Northern India, and the Anglican, the Baptist, and the Methodists churches. At the time, these churches constituted approximately one million members scattered over the vast areas of India and Pakistan northwards from the Deccan.[3]

Meanwhile the Lambeth Conference of 1920 placed before the Anglican Communion a focus on Christian unity. This had significance for India (and subsequently for Pakistan). Through British colonial influence, Anglicanism was a major form of Christianity in the subcontinent. Until 1927, The Anglican Church of India was legally linked to the Church of England. This link was dissolved according to the provisions of the Indian Church Act (1927) and the Indian Church Measure (1927). The Anglican Church in the sub-continent was then officially named as, "The Church of the Province of India, Burma and Ceylon" (CIBC). After partition of India in 1947, Pakistan was added to the name, and the name of the Church became known as, "The Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon" (CIPBC). Already, therefore, two decades prior to union, even though it was part of "The Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon," a province of the Anglican Communion was called, "The Church of Pakistan" in Pakistan. The Lahore Diocese, carved out of the Calcutta (Kolkata) Diocese, had been in existence since 1877 and from its origin was a province of the Anglican Communion. The Church of Pakistan, Lahore Diocese, is historically the mother diocese and was originally called the Church of Pakistan.

The orientation to Christian unity was also fueled by other factors. Building on the legacy of European and North American missionaries, many churches had been sharing in the translation and sale of Bibles and

[2] See Harry, Sawyerr, "The First World Missionary Conference: Edinburgh 1910," *International Review of Mission* 67, no. 267 (July 1978): 273–298.
[3] See J. W. Sadiq, "Assessment of Church Unions in India," *The Indian Journal of Theology,* 25 no. 3–4 (1976): 159–166.

other religious books;[4] however, co-operation in education, medicine, social action, and evangelism was lacking and disputes among denominations were common. To tackle the issue and promote missionary co-operation in India, "rules of comity" were adopted.[5] Formation of The National Christian Council after World War I provided collaboration and a working structure for the churches to work together in different ventures. However, denominationalism was still seen as weakening the effectiveness of missionary activity in India and Jesus Christ's prayer for unity "that all of them may be one…so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17: 21) made it clear that unity was essential for missions.[6] Talks and discussions on Church union in India began with these convictions firmly in mind and the tension between full loyalty to one's own convictions and tradition and the desire for maximum cooperation with others.[7] At the same time, the Nationalistic Movements in India generally fostered and encouraged a sense of nationalism among the people for unity to which Christians responded through their various Christian organizations.[8] In this scenario, a unified church would present a more genuine expression of a native Indian church than one divided into ecclesiastical and/or denominational compartments.[9]

Towards the United Church of Pakistan

Therefore, for forty years, which straddled independence and partition, the talks among the churches in what became Pakistan continued. There were also, however, suspicions and prejudices which hindered the progress of negotiations for union. In Pakistan, the United Presbyterians (USA) did not join or participate in the North India Scheme due to their fundamentalist presuppositions. The Anglicans were most reluctant to go into any scheme if the continuance of their communion with Canterbury was not assured. Some nonconformist bodies feared that union with Anglicans might be the beginning of a return to medievalism. On the other hand, according to the Lambeth Conference Report for 1948, Anglicanism was committed to union; and, notably, it was only in the Indian Province of Anglicanism that the ideal of church union was pursued with any determination.[10]

The agreed basis of minimum theological principles necessary for union was put forth by The North India Scheme. Successive editions of the Plan of Union were issued in 1951, 1954 and 1957. Finally, a fourth edition of the Plan, produced in March 1965, was formally accepted. It had profited from the experience of the Church of South India (formed in 1947) and from the work on schemes of union in Lanka and West

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4 As missionaries of different churches realized their fellowship and interdependence, Baptist, Congregational and Anglican missionaries came together for cooperation and unity. William Carey who was originally of the opinion that each denomination should work separately in the mission field eventually changed his views and reached out to the German missionaries of the Danish Halle Mission to learn from their experience. He went so far as to propose and call for a missionary conference of Christians of all denominations in 1810 to bring together missionary expertise on common problems faced by all missionaries. Apart from distributing Bibles, combined conferences and prayer meetings became common among Christians of different denominations. See Ruth Rouse, "Voluntary Movements and the Changing Ecumenical Climate," in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*, 2nd ed., ed. Ruth Rouse & Stephen Charles Neill (London: S.P.C.K, 1967), p.311-12

5 Sadiq, "An Assessment of Church Unions," 159. Dana Robert asserts that the "rules of the comity" were designed to prevent, as far as possible, catechists trading off one mission against another in negotiations for higher wages. See Dana L Robert, *Converting Colonialism: visions and Realities in Mission History, 1706-1914* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 194

6 See Susan Billington Harper, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma: Bishop V. S. Azariah and the Travails of Christianity in British India* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 238.

7 See R. W. Howard, "Towards a United Church," An abridged version of the Presidential Address at Oxford Conference of Evangelical Churchmen, April 21-23, 1947.

8 Pamphlet of Church of North India and Church of Pakistan, Ramsey Papers, Vol. 186, (1970), pp. 272-344. Lambeth Palace Library.

9 See Atula Imsong, "Christian and the Indian National Movement: A Historical Perspective," *Indian Journal of Theology* 46, no 1–2 (2004): 99-107.

10 See K. C Abraham & T. K. Thomas, "Asia," in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, Vol. 3, 1968-2000, ed. John Briggs, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Georges Tsetsis (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2004), 504.

Africa. The Plan fully safeguarded the Anglican principles, and the recommendations of the Lambeth Conference were adopted. However, the method of unification of ministries was not as easily accepted by the Anglicans. Nevertheless, on January 2, 1970, the General Council of the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon (then a Province of the Anglican Communion) gave the final vote, 79 votes to 3 in favour of entering into a union with Methodists, Lutherans and Scottish Presbyterians to form the United Church of Pakistan. Notably, the Lutheran Church of Pakistan had not participated in the negotiations. However, in August 1970, it decided to join the union. Their participation in the union proved to be encouraging and was unique because no Lutheran Church had joined any other union in Asia. On the basis of its own constitutional provisions each of these churches had to make its decisions.

The relative sizes of these different churches and their geographical distribution also needs to be noted. Numerically the biggest of the denominations was The Church of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon (CIPC-Anglicans) which had three dioceses in Pakistan, namely Lahore and Karachi in West Pakistan and Dacca in East Pakistan and had a community of about 110,000. The United Methodist Church in Pakistan (UMCP), which was constitutionally independent of the United Methodist Church of Southern Asia with its Central Conference, and two subordinate Conferences-the Indus River and Karachi Conferences (both in what was then West Pakistan) was the second with 60,000 members. Three Church Councils of the United Church of Northern India (UCNI) were Lahore and Sialkot in West Pakistan and Rajshahi in East Pakistan collectively had a community of about 50,000. After the plan was approved the General Assembly of the United Church of Northern India sent it to its church Councils for their votes. Sialkot, Lahore and Rajshahi voted in favour, however, later Lahore Church Council (LCC) changed its mind and did not join.[11] The Sialkot council however, joined the union with around 20,000 members.

The visible unity of four denominations was well received both within and outside the country. Like Church of South India (CSI) and Church of North India (CNI), the Church of Pakistan adopted an Episcopal structure, but it does not subscribe to any specific category of episcopacy.[12] It began its life as a united church with a service of unification of the ministries, with mutual laying-on of hands. Both infant and believer's baptism have been accepted as alternative practices.

The journey for this union was a long one which eventually became a reality when an ecumenical union took place on November 1st, 1970 between four churches, i.e., Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans and Scottish Presbyterians and the name Church of Pakistan (COP) was given. Initially there were five dioceses, Lahore, Sialkot, Karachi, Multan and Dhaka which became an autonomous body, the Church of Bangladesh in 1972. Four new dioceses (Faisalabad, Peshawar, Raiwind and Hyderabad) were created in 1980 for better administrative purposes.

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[11] Due to a church merger in America, the missionary partners of the Lahore Church Council now belonged to the same church as that of the United Presbyterian Synod. Therefore, they pulled out of the union

[12] "No particular theological interpretation of episcopacy, as accepted in the united Church, is thereby implied or shall be demanded from any minister or member thereof." See *Plan of Church Union in North India and Pakistan* (Madras: Christian Literature Society for India, 1954).

Problems carried into union

Coming together of these separate service and mission ministries having strong and unique histories raised large questions. The chief challenge among them being: How were they to be claimed by each other in a united church? How would the different ways of ordaining pastors for ministry be reconciled? Was there sufficient trust in the ecclesial culture of the partners to allow visible unity? Some issues were ignored while several problems were overcome, and others were not given cautious consideration.

The suggestion of the 1929 Round Table Conference Scheme was that unification of episcopates of the Anglican and Episcopal Methodist Churches should take place within the general framework of the unification of ministries. The issue of unification was sought to be achieved using certain liturgical forms introduced by a preface explaining the intention of the rite. The historic episcopacy was adopted without insisting on any particular theory or doctrine of episcopacy. As it stood it was unsatisfactory, but the expectation was that acceptance might enable the uniting churches to launch out into union and begin to grow together.

Ministry, worship, the sacraments, the faith itself, and, of course, the structure of the Church were also problems. The answers came in the realization that it was God himself who was the giver, the centre of faith and worship, the source of power and authority.[13] The statement of intention in the Representative Act of the Unification of the Ministry, taken with the Preface in the Service, sufficiently expressed the intention that all the participants shall become ministers in the threefold ministry of bishops, presbyters and deacons. [14] It was also declared that 'all...ministries have been in God's providence manifestly used by the Holy Spirit.' So, in unifying the ministries of different Churches, no earlier ordination would be questioned or belittled, no statement suggest that one form would be more acceptable than another. A single group of ministers, from differing church backgrounds would lead a corporate act of mutual acceptance on behalf of all the rest. The variety in essential elements in worship such as Baptism and the Lord's Supper at the heart of the Church's life would continue.

In the Church of Pakistan there would be room for diversity within one fellowship where all would accept each other as they are and in the belief that the things that separated may indeed be found to be part of the riches of the Church. It was out of their poverty and lack of resources that Pakistani Christians found unity: holding to essentials, letting go the trivial and unimportant. Pakistani Christians were widely scattered, often illiterate, divided by language as well as by denomination. Yet they learnt from and about each other and grew stronger in their conviction that those who loved God, those who shared Jesus Christ's love for them and for the world could, not stay apart.

[13] See E. Sambayya, "Growing Together," in *The Living Church*, Vol.127 (1953): 91
[14] See "Pamphlet of Church of North India and Church of Pakistan," Ramsey Papers, Vol. 186, (1970): 272-344. Lambeth Palace Library.

Continuing Challenges

Indigeneity

The founders planned the union very wisely with space and allowance for considerable flexibility and freedom in adapting the organisation and traditions of the Church to the changing needs. There was provision for an indigenous and homegrown theology in agreement with the Holy Scriptures. It was envisaged that the Church of Pakistan would "endeavour to adopt, accept and develop new forms of worship adapted to the needs and experience of the country." However, it has been unable to develop an entirely indigenous Pakistani church, with much of it still bearing western resonance. The majority Islamic community considers Christianity a product of the western world and affiliation with the West adds to the alienation which Pakistani Christians already face as a minority community.

Inter-church relations

It was decided to have continuing relations, and to seek to remain in full communion, with each other and inform each other on matters of: (a) formulation of doctrine; (b) liturgical developments and regulations concerning the ministry and membership of the Church; (c) development on constitutional structure and interpretation of constitutional provisions; and (d) negotiations for other unions, communion, or intercommunion with other churches. As per the constitution of the Church of Pakistan each Synod of the Church of India Pakistan Burma and Ceylon was to set up a Liaison committee to supply to the synods of other the other Churches copies of the proceedings, liturgical forms, and other documents for study. It was also the declared intention of the Church of Pakistan that it would maintain full intercommunion and fellowship with each of the uniting Churches. Each of the uniting churches were free to maintain relations with their respective mother churches and denominations. [23] In the 53 years of the union of the Church of Pakistan we have been lacking in this area which is of respecting and sharing with other Churches.

Accountability

Ever since its creation in 1970, the Church of Pakistan has moved from one crisis to another, both constitutional and otherwise, starting immediately after the first Synod in 1973. Due to vested interests, there were times in our Church when conflicts and disagreements escalated to such an extent that the survival and existence of the union seemed bleak. In addition to internal divisions and disputes amongst dioceses and their bishops, the Church of Pakistan experiences all the pressures of living in the global south: high population, poor economy, religious intolerance, political instability, and high rates of corruption. In this context there should be an element of accountability, and this is very much lacking in the constitution of the Church of Pakistan.

For instance, it is worth noting that the constitution of the Church of Pakistan Section B, titled 'The Diocesan Council', sub section (d) states, "...The Bishop of the Diocese shall not, as bishop or President of the Diocesan Council, have any controlling authority over the finance of the Diocese," [23] but in some cases there are no bank accounts in the name of the diocese. Another contributing factor is the tightening of government regulations to which all religious organizations and non-profit organizations must be compliant. We thank

God that there are Dioceses and Christian Organizations which are compliant and function smoothly. Concluding this segment of the paper I contend that more thought should have been given to matters of property, accountability and administration. This is a lesson to learn.

Planning

The Church of Pakistan has many other Gospel mandates to which no focus is being given by our leadership, e.g., poverty, injustice, religious discrimination, evangelism in its fullest sense etc. To date, the Synod has not tabled a comprehensive plan for 5 or 10 years for the development of the Church of Pakistan. My point is not to paint a sorry picture of the Church of Pakistan, but to learn from it. In my opinion there is a need to have a transparent procedures for the election of bishops. After due diligence and scrutiny, candidates for bishops should be nominated and after prayer and fasting bishops should be chosen by casting lots. The officers of the Synod should be appointed in turn so that all the Dioceses have a chance to provide leadership. The moderator should be a figurehead with restricted powers and, above all, there should be an accountability procedure.

The Insights of Current and Recent Leaders

These insights are drawn from a series of interviews. The interviewees were two bishops, Rt. Rev. Samuel Robert Azariah, former bishop of Raiwind and who has served as Moderator for three terms and Rt. Rev. Kaleem John, Bishop of Hyderabad and currently the elected Deputy Moderator. Additional interviewees were Ms Shamila Ruth who served as the Women Synodical Coordinator for many years; Ms Evelyn Bhajan who has served as women's worker in the Raiwind Diocese and is presently serving as presbyter in Wales; Mehtab Gill, a young pastor of Lahore Diocese who is now doing further studies in Holland.

1. Why was the need for union felt?
2. In your opinion, what were the main objectives of the church union?
3. Now after fifty years of the church union in your opinion do you think the objectives have been met?
4. What do you think is still lacking?
5. What would you like to suggest for the future of the church union?
6. Where would you like to see the Church union in the next five years?

Their answers give voice to the memories, lived experience and insights of various established and emerging leaders of the Church of Pakistan.

Why was the need for union felt?

Bishop Kaleem John highlighted that union was due to challenges and problems of the church surviving as a tiny minority among the great majority of Hindus and Muslims. Bishop Samuel Azariah stressed that the union was based on the call of the Gospel, the teaching of the apostles, and the teaching of Jesus Christ, and Jesus' prayer for unity (John 17). Ms Shunila Ruth stressed that the denominational structure was an unhealthy denial that we all share the same faith. Evelyn Bhajan pointed out the three main movements: (a) the missionary movement; (b) ecumenical drive; and (c) Indian nationalism in the latter half of the

nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. These all compelled the native churches to consider church union. Mehtab Gill commented that the basis of union was the high priestly prayer of John 17. He stated that since church history is littered with disunity and hatred of one another, the unity of the Church of Pakistan is a miracle in such a situation but stresses that the present church lacks the spirit and practice of unity.

What were the main objectives of the Church union?

For Mehtab Gill the main objective of the union is to live as a witness to the message of Christ in a culture where there is a constant battle between religions and therefore our message of hope and reconciliation has to be of one body, one church. Rev. Evelyn Bhajan proposes that: (a) duplication of resources among the missionary bodies should be stopped and the proclamation of the gospel be prioritized; (b) confusion of new converts regarding different Christian denominations should be reduced; and (c) evangelization be promoted. But this is not possible if the churches remained divided. Ms Shunila Ruth, pointed out that as Christianity was perceived as a foreign religion of the West, the founders realized the importance of being known as Pakistani church with locally developed indigenous terminology, prayer books and devotional books. Bishop Samuel Azariah is of the view that the most important objective was to give Glory and Honor to our Lord, and to make our witness effective and meaningful in a non-Christian context. Rt. Rev. Kaleem John (basing his observations on the book," Small but Significant," by the Rev. Dr Perviaz Sultan) pointed out that the uniting partners had diverse traditions, but commonly-held major doctrines. Therefore the objectives for him: are service to God in humility and sacrifice; to be effective instruments of God and be a source of strength to each other; and to maintain the bond and stand firm in faith and witness.

Have the objectives been met?

All the interviewees were of the opinion that after 53 years of the Church union certain objectives and goals to some extent have been met, such as our acceptance as a national church, and our recognizing and accepting the ministries of other denominations while, on the other hand, a lot is lacking and the intended objectives of this union have not been met. Nevertheless, the union between episcopal and non-episcopal churches in the Indo-Pak Subcontinent was monumental: we were able to overcome, at least on paper, some of the ecclesiological stumbling blocks which are still prevalent on the international ecumenical level. On the other hand, practical implementation of some of the accomplishments has proved to be problematic. For example, while episcopacy – both Anglican and Methodist – was accepted as both historical and constitutional, they represent two understandings of episcopacy: the former focusing on the bishop's authority; the latter focusing on episcopacy as managerial. The Church of Pakistan leadership has tended to exhibit the former. Moreover, the question of the authority of the synod has remained undecided. Additionally, since the bishop is the ex-officio member of all committees on the diocesan level, it gives rise to the tension between autocracy and freedom of choice. While women are accepted in other ministries in the church, with Pakistan being a conservative society, theologically trained women are not accepted in ordained ministry although at the time of union, the question of admitting women to ordained ministry was left for the consideration of the Synod of Church of Pakistan.

What is still lacking?

Bishop Samuel Azariah is of the opinion that the church is lacking these elements: a unified liturgy; a willingness to share resources; trust in inter-denominational property issues; a proper arrangement of theological education; and equal participation of women in the life of the church. MS Shunila Ruth is concerned that Women's ministry, children's ministry, youth ministry and social services and prisoner ministries are lacking. Rev. Evelyn Bhajan suggests an indigenous theology in harmony with the Holy Scriptures is needed but that the Church of Pakistan's conservative theological convictions prohibits developing a holistic approach to, and involvement in, the social issues facing the Pakistani Christian community. The blasphemy laws and discrimination are a constant threat to the Church of Pakistan's existence and have rendered the church and faith community weak, and life unbearable for common people. Mehtab Gill suggests that the hope of interdependence especially in material, administrative and physical terms has been very slow, especially in terms of sharing our resources. He is personally convinced that if sharing of material resources begins a huge change can begin. He is convinced that the union has not reached the depth of this reality.

Suggestions for the future

It is hoped that the bishops would focus on their respective dioceses and work together for the strengthening of unity to achieve the objectives of this union. In the coming years, the interviewees propose that education and training, encouragement to the other denominations to join the union plan, a commitment to the mission, an engagement in contextual theological reflection on how the faith community can live wisely and hopefully between the challenges of assimilation and resistance, and the admission of women to the ordained ministry (as stated in the Constitution) must be a priorities for the church. They would also hope to see the church collectively endeavouring to contribute to changing the economic viability of the Christian community in Pakistan and working for the protection of our environment.

The next five years

Bishop Kaleem and Bishop Azariah would also like to see capacity building and education so that church works hard to deliver and earn respect both within and outside the country, given that the partner churches have grown tired of our internal conflicts and our lack of seriousness. Ms Shunila Ruth would like to see an in-depth evaluation and a well thought out strategic plan which the Church of Pakistan should adopt and make every effort to achieve. Evelyn Bhajan and Mehtab Gill would like to see that the Church of Pakistan move ahead in this journey of union with mutual trust and interdependency, making every effort to bring the message of Jesus and to make our mark with hope and purpose.

Conclusion and the Way Forward

A brief historical review of the Church of Pakistan's past and present affirms and re-affirms that we are humans who are in a constant need of God's Grace. As the Church of Pakistan we can witness with confidence and authority that the Lord of our Church has never forsaken us despite all our mistakes (large or small), our arrogance, and stubbornness. However, this does not give us an excuse to continue like this and we need to move forward by revisiting our vision and mission and seeking God's forgiveness. The Lord of our Church will never leave us, but will lead us out of every crisis provided we humble ourselves and are willing admit our mistakes and adopt correction.

A fellow-member of the Church of Pakistan once gave me a good example of the church union in Pakistan. He called it an "Orange Union" which on the outside looks united and one, but when you peel the orange, you find each individual, separate and distinct segments inside, and typically about ten in an orange, each delimited, bordered and enclosed by a membrane, and containing many juice-filled vesicles. So, the Orange Union of the Church of Pakistan at present has eight segments which are the eight dioceses, namely, Lahore, Karachi, Sialkot, Peshawar, Hyderabad, Multan, Faisalabad and Raiwind. Each is wrapped and enclosed in its membrane. We need to revisit the covenant of the union and carefully study the parable of the Talents (Matthew 25: 14–30) and move forward with a clear mind removing the thin membrane engulfing us and put our act together and addressing the real needs of the church.

God help us. Amen!

A Trauma Sensitive Reimagining of "A Theological Statement" for the *National Person of Concern Policy Framework, 2020*

Elizabeth Lee

Abstract

Five years since the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse is an opportune time to look again at the *National Persons of Concern Policy Framework, 2020* of the Uniting Church in Australia. In this paper, I argue that the "Theological Statement" that underpins the Framework is inadequate in light of emerging trauma-sensitive theological scholarship. In the spirit of "Reflections and Provocations," I offer a reimagining of the "Theological Statement" and a preceding Confession and Commitment written through a trauma-sensitive theological lens.

Introduction

It is five years since the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse handed down its Final Report.[1] It is therefore opportune to re-examine the "Theological Statement" that underpins the *Framework* in the light of emerging trauma-sensitive theological scholarship. In this paper, I argue that the "Theological Statement" that underpins the *National Persons of Concern Policy Framework, 2020*, is inadequate in light of emerging trauma-sensitive theological scholarship. I then go on to offer a reimagining of the "Theological Statement" and a preceding Confession and Commitment written through a trauma-sensitive theological lens.

Faith communities frequently aspire to "welcome all" proclaiming to be inclusive, compassionate and respectful of all. However, this hospitable desire is legally and pastorally problematic when welcoming a person who has engaged in criminal sexual behaviour – a Person of Concern.[2] This is particularly challenging when the community includes people with lived experiences of sexual abuse or other trauma histories.

[1] The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Childhood Sexual Abuse, a 5-year inquiry commissioned by the Australian Government, was conducted 13 January 2013 – 15 December 2017. Henceforth referred to as The Royal Commission.

[2] Safe Church Unit, National Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, *National Person of Concern Policy Framework 2020*, 5. Henceforth referred to as *Framework.*

One of the recommendations from The Royal Commission was:

> Where a religious institution becomes aware that any person attending any of its religious services or activities is the subject of a substantiated complaint of child sexual abuse, or has been convicted of an offence relating to child sexual abuse, the religious institution should:
> a. assess the level of risk posed to children by that perpetrator's ongoing involvement in the religious community
> b. take appropriate steps to manage that risk.[3]

Consequently, churches of all denominations are committing significant resources to safeguard children and vulnerable adults. Commendably, some churches including the Uniting Church, are also addressing issues relating to the "safe" inclusion of people who have engaged in behaviour that violates sexual boundaries.[4] Since 2016, the Uniting Church Assembly, together with Synods, has developed policies related to Persons of Concern. The *National Person of Concern Policy Framework 2020* is a foundational document informing other Assembly and Synod statements, policies, and procedures. Hence, my focus is on the Framework, particularly its "Theological Statement."

Trauma-Informed Practice

In recent decades health and social services have moved towards a trauma-informed approach, attuned to the possibility of trauma in the lives of those seeking support. Core principles of safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment are honoured. Respect, dignity, and hope are cultivated. With a focus on healing, the risk of re-traumatisation is minimised, and physical and emotional safety is prioritised.[5] Such approaches are yet to be adopted more widely including in congregational ministry. Consequently, churches may not be places of safety, healing and flourishing for those with lived experience of trauma.

While humankind universally, and theologians in particular, have wrestled with the problem of suffering, it is only in the last three decades that theologians have begun to engage with trauma theologically.[6] This rapidly evolving field draws on scholarship from a broad range of disciplines, including neuroscience, psychology, sociology, anthropology, literary, biblical and cultural studies. Informed by those with lived experience of trauma and this interdisciplinary scholarship, trauma theologians are collectively reimagining how the Christian tradition speaks to our evolving understanding of trauma and are "transforming the discourse about suffering, God, redemption, and theological anthropology in significant ways."[7] Prominent among them are the feminist theologians Jennifer Baldwin, Serene Jones, Karen O'Donnell, and Shelly Rambo.[8]

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[3] Recommendation 16.57, "Final Report Recommendations," The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Childhood Sexual Abuse, accessed August 27, 2022, https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_-_recommendations.pdf,

[4] Safe Church Unit, *Framework*, 3.

[5] The Blue Knot Foundation, "Building a Trauma-Informed World: The Trauma-Informed Framework," Blue Knot, accessed 16 May, 2022. https://blueknot.org.au/resources/building-a-trauma-informed-world/.

[6] Karen O'Donnell, "The Voices of the Marys" Towards a Method in Feminist Theology" in *Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture & Church in Critical Perspectives* ed. Karen O'Donnell and Katie Cross, 3-22, (London: SCM Press, 2010). However, Jennifer Baldwin argues "theological scholarship has not kept pace with the predominant need of our time." Jennifer Baldwin, *Trauma-Sensitive Theology: Thinking Theologically in the Era of Trauma*, (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018), 13.

[7] Shelly Rambo, Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining, 1st ed (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 5.

[8] Baldwin, *Trauma-Sensitive*, Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*. 2nd Ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2019); Karen O'Donnell, Broken Bodies: The Eucharist, Mary and the Body in Trauma Theology (London: SCM, 2018), Karen O'Donnell and Katie Cross, eds., Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture and Church in Critical Perspective (London, England: SCM Press, 2020); Shelly Rambo, Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), Rambo, Spirit.

Jennifer Baldwin in *Trauma-sensitive Theology* contends, how "we think about and articulate our understanding of God or the Divine is consequential in how we relate to others, our world, and our self."[9] The explicit and implicit theologies in the Framework inform and shape how we live our lives, individually, communally and corporately.

Drawing on the scholarship of these feminist trauma theologians I propose the following foundational interconnected elements for a "trauma-sensitive theological lens."[10]

- Establishing trust, cultivating safety and protection
- Witnessing truth through the full acceptance of survivors' trauma narratives be they spoken or unspoken, speakable or unspeakable
- Fostering love by prioritising relationality, connection and community
- Nurturing hope through meaning-making, leading to flourishing.

As such, trauma-sensitive theology is embedded in trust, truth, love and hope.

National Persons of Concern Policy Framework 2020

The purpose the *Framework* is "to continue to ensure that the Uniting Church in Australia … is a safe place, of at all times, for all people."[11] The document includes a "Purpose" statement, "Scope", "Theological Statement", statement of belief, list of values, "Persons of Concern Policy Statement", "National Person of Concern Procedure", risk assessment criteria for a Person of Concern, and an overview of the "Safety Agreement" along with a sample agreement and a glossary of terms.

The *Framework* affirms that all are made in the image and likeness of God, and values relationality while prioritising the need to protect vulnerable people. It acknowledges the necessity to develop, implement, monitor and review measures for those who have violated sexual boundaries to safeguard children and vulnerable people.

The one-page "Theological Statement" addresses multiple themes, including safety for all, inclusion, evil, forgiveness, grace, transformation, solidarity and truth-telling. It reaffirms the Church's commitment to ensure the safety of all, particularly for children and vulnerable people. It holds this commitment to safety in tension with the challenges of inclusion of a Person of Concern accepting that the Church has a responsibility to provide worshipping communities "where *any person* can express their faith and explore their relationship with God." The document maintains that safety is cultivated through boundaries and accountability placed upon the Person of Concern. Accordingly, "it is within this safe environment that Christ reaches out to command our attention as he rules and renews all people as his Church."

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[9] Baldwin, *Trauma-Sensitive*, 92

[10] This Trauma-sensitive Theological lens was developed in the course of writing my Minor Thesis for the Graduate Certificate in Research Methodology. Elizabeth Lee, "Looking Deeply: A Trauma-sensitive Evaluation of the *National Person of Concern Policy Framework, 2020* of the Uniting Church in Australia." Unpublished November, 2022.

[11] Quotes in this section are from the *Framework*, 3-4.

The "Theological Statement" distinguishes between God's forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness. While affirming God's unconditional grace, God's forgiveness is seen as conditional upon repentance, accountability and a "willingness to be transformed." Interpersonal forgiveness, while explicitly affirmed, "can never be expected or demanded from those who have suffered abuse." The "Theological Statement" also recognises the need to challenge previous conceptions of "cheap grace and simplistic forgiveness," warning that such understandings jeopardise the safety of all. The document calls for a broader ongoing conversation within the Church around forgiveness.

Evil and grace are held in tension. The evil of child sexual abuse was clearly revealed through the Royal Commission. However, the "Theological Statement" affirms that God's grace is redemptive, such that "evil does not have the final say." At this point, it turns to the survivors of abuse. "God's grace is also in the cross – calling us to transform the suffering of the survivor into the compassion for change." Taking Jesus as its model, the document assumes a "'survivor-centred' approach [that] stands in solidarity with the survivors."

On behalf of the Church, the "Theological Statement" commits to truth-telling to "unveil some harmful aspects of cultural and historical, as well as theological assumptions." This reflects the spirit of the opening paragraph of the "Theological Statement" which quotes the *Basis of Union* – "to constantly correct that which is erroneous" and "not hide from the truth, however painful that may be." Finally, the "Theological Statement" affirms that the Spirit will renew the Church "on this journey, equipping us to build communities of safety, belonging and compassion."

The values enumerated in the *Framework* include compassion, respect, justice, working together and leading through learning. Maintaining a child-safe focus, the vulnerability of children is highlighted. Consequently, the necessity of professional boundaries, justice for those harmed, collaboration and collective responsibility for the safety, wellbeing, welcome of children and a continuous improvement approach to protecting children is advocated. The *Framework* describes safeguards and restrictions needed for a Person of Concern to attend and participate in the life of the faith community. These are then stipulated in Safety Agreements, established by Synod and consented to by the General Secretary. The Safety Agreements include a disclosure clause to provide confidentiality to the Person of Concern. In keeping with the commitment to working together, stakeholders are identified. These are Synod, Presbytery, Church Council, General Secretary or nominee/delegate and Ministry Agent of congregation/faith community.

The *Framework* through a Trauma-sensitive Lens

The *Framework* and its "Theological Statement" are congruent with trauma-sensitive theology in several respects. It places significant emphasis on the safety of children and is focused on the containment of a Person of Concern in order to reduce the risk of future harm while enabling them to "be in relationship with God and God's people through God's Church."[12] It is also humble and courageous in its approach to truth-telling to unveil harmful aspects of the Church's history, culture and theology and prophetic in its desire to reimagine its understanding of forgiveness. The Uniting Church is to be commended for addressing the challenging issue of including known Persons of Concern within the life of the Church. It is

[12] Safe Church Unit, *Framework,* 3.

challenging to do so safely while endeavouring to ensure that they will not cause further harm to children and vulnerable people.

However, the *Framework* could be seen to ignore the needs of congregants harmed by sexual and other traumatising violence and inattentive to the impact of the collective trauma experience of the whole congregational community. Lack of transparency and collusion with a culture of secrecy through confidentiality agreements may result in the presence of a Person of Concern inadvertently re-traumatising those who believe they are in a safe and welcoming environment, thus jeopardising trust. The *Framework* provides little opportunity for witnessing truth through the acceptance of trauma narratives, it neglects the fostering of relationality and pays no attention to nurturing hope for either those who have caused harm or those who have been harmed. Overall, inadequate attention is given to the pastoral needs of vulnerable people, the community, and the Person of Concern.

If the Uniting Church is "to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body, within which the diverse gifts of its member are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself,"[13] a prophetic re-imagining of the *Framework* is desperately needed. Our understanding of trauma-sensitive theology compels us to look again, to reimagine theology, liturgy and pastoral practice, to offer life and hope to individuals, communities and society. It is imperative that frameworks, policies and practices are informed by current understandings of trauma.

Reimagining A Theological Statement

In the spirit of "Reflections and Provocations" I offer this reimagining of the "Theological Statement" and a preceding "Confession and Commitment." I do so with several caveats.

A trauma-sensitive "Theological Statement" should draw upon scripture, tradition and current theological scholarship, in ways that forefront trust, truth, relationality and flourishing of all. It is beyond the scope of this brief "Reflections and Provocations" article to delve into the myriad of theological themes that necessarily impinge on any theological statement – themes such as suffering, the redemptive power of listening and the theological contested area of forgiveness in Christianity.

I am cognisant that a theological statement such as this should be the work of discerning community, not of an individual. I also acknowledge and affirm that the UCA values theological diversity. I do not intend to offer this reimagined perspective as a prescriptive and static "Theological Statement," but rather as a contribution that "make(s) use of the best knowledge of our time for the benefit, growth and health of individuals, communities and society."[14] Yet, like all constructivist theology, it is limited, incomplete and provisional. However, I do reimagine through a trauma-sensitive theological lens of trust, truth, relationality and flourishing, outlined earlier in this article. In doing so I invite others to join this reimagining.

In an endeavour to establish trust, speak truth and focus on relationality, it is important that all church documents addressing sexual abuse acknowledge, apologise and repent "past failures to provide a

[13] Uniting Church in Australia, *Basis of Union* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1992), para. 3.
[14] Baldwin, Trauma-Sensitive, 1.

safe haven for violated children and women, a sanctuary in which justice and healing could have been sought."[15] Consequently, I propose the insertion of a statement of "Confession and Commitment" prior to the "Theological Statement." There are many well-articulated apologies that have been offered to victims and survivors of institutional childhood sexual abuse. This Confession and Commitment is informed by two very relevant documents. The first is the Australian Government's "National Apology to Victims and Survivors" offered on 22nd October 2018, some 10 months after the conclusion of the Royal Commission. [16] The second is the Uniting Church's "Anniversary of the National Apology to Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse" statement, offered 12 months later, in 2018. [17]

A Proposed Confession and Commitment

> The Uniting Church believes that God has given us the gift of the Spirit to 'constantly correct that which is erroneous' in our life (*Basis of Union*, Para 18). Therefore, we will not hide from the truth, however painful that may be, and we will seek, with compassion and humility, to address whatever issues and challenges may emerge for us.[18]

The Uniting Church is deeply sorry for its failure to protect children and vulnerable people in its care. We deeply regret the pain, suffering and trauma inflicted upon victims and survivors and the profound and ongoing impact on individuals, families, communities and society. We apologise for the appalling physical, mental, emotional, psychological and spiritual suffering endured because of the horrific sexual crimes. We unreservedly apologise for neglecting the social, emotional, spiritual and physical needs of those in our care. We are sorry for the betrayal of trust, the failure to listen, and the harm caused by the abuse of relational power. We openly and transparently face up to our failings. We are truly sorry.

We commit to seeking amends and ensuring that others do not suffer in the same way. We pledge to address our past failures and commit to making the Church a safe and courageous place, at all times, for all people, particularly for children, vulnerable people and those who carry traumatic wounds.

We seek to be a Church that listens; listens to children and adults, to those who have been harmed and those who have caused harm, listens to those who are voiceless and unheard. We seek to listen for the prophetic voice that is calling us to courageous and honest pastoral and theological imaginings.

We also affirm our desire to be inclusive, compassionate and respectful of all. We commit to the principle of subsidiarity, ensuring that decision-making happens at the most appropriate level so those affected can contribute. While not abandoning our responsibilities for faithful stewardship and good governance, we commit to working alongside local congregations and communities.

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[15] Jennifer Beste, "Recovery from Sexual Violence and Socially Mediated Dimensions of God's Grace: Implications for Christian Communities," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 18, no. 2 (August 2005): 98.

[16] Australian Government, "National Apology to Victims and Survivors," Australian Government Response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, September 22, 2018, accessed October 10, 2022, https://www.childabuseroyalcommissionresponse.gov.au/national-apology/html.

[17] Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, "Anniversary of the National Apology to Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse," September 22, 2019, accessed October 19, 2022, https://assembly.uca.org.au/news/item/3082-anniversary-of-the-national-apology-to-survivors-of-institutional-child-sexual-abuse

[18] Safe Church Unit, *Framework,* 4.

We prioritise the pastoral care of individuals and communities affected by the trauma of sexual abuse. We commit to reaching out and offering a healing, guiding, supporting, reconciling, liberating, and empowering presence to all,[19] those who have been harmed and those who have caused harm.

We pledge that any known Person of Concern wishing to participate in congregational life will be assessed regarding the risk they may pose to children or others, including those who have been harmed. We will take appropriate steps to manage that risk and do so respectfully and compassionately.

We commit to ongoing review and evaluation of our practice to inform future ministry and the formation of leaders. The Uniting Church is firmly committed to learning from the past, restoring relationships and working to make our Church a place of hospitality for all into the future.

A Reimagined Theological Statement

> God said, "Let us make humankind in our image. To be like us. Let them
> be stewards of the fish in the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, the wild animals,
> and everything that crawls on the ground.
> Humankind was created as God's reflection:
> in the divine image God created them;
> female and male, God made them. Genesis 1:26-27 [20]

All are made in God's image, female and male, trans-gender and non-binary, children and adults, those who have been harmed and those who have caused harm – all are the divine image of God, created as God's reflection.

As Christians, we profess the Triune God, a God of mutual indwelling and relationality, a God of one and many.[21] As human beings, created in God's reflection we mirror this multiplicity, an interdependent and diverse community.[22] As a community, we aspire to manifest this divine relationality.[23] Persons are necessarily in relationship with others, living in community, bonded through agape love.[24] It is incumbent upon faith communities to actively foster this love such that the Triune God manifests here on earth.

Sin diminishes and ruptures trinitarian-grounded, communitarian relationships. To tend to these wounds requires setting relations right. People need to be accountable for their actions and acknowledge complicity

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[19] Spiritual Care Australia. "Standards of Practice" Spiritual Care Australia, 2013, 5. Accessed 30 August 2022, https://www.spiritualcareaustralia.org.au/public/103/files/SCA_Standards_of_Practice_Document-1.pdf.

[20] Priests for Equality, eds., *The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation*, (Lanhan, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

[21] Beatrice Bruteau, *God's Ecstasy: The Creation of a Self-Creating World*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997/2020), 9. Bruteau goes on to point out that "the prefix 'tri' in many languages means not specifically three, as 2+1, but more vaguely 'more than two, several, many.' … The Trinity, with this understanding, is a representation of God, fundamental Being, as both One and Many. The many are not reduced to the one, and the one is not scattered or separated into the many. Both have to be held," 18.

[22] Katharine Zappone notes it is important to distinguish interdependence from passive dependency which has been encouraged of women. We need to relate to each other with mutuality, with a willingness "to allow the other a significant, equal agency within the relationship." She then suggests neither elements of autonomy nor relationality need be sacrificed. Zappone, Katharine. *The Hope for Wholeness: A Spirituality for Feminists*. (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991) cited by Lindy Hogan "Relationality" *A to Z of Feminist Theology*, ed. Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 203.

[23] Carter Heyward (1982) suggests conceiving of the Christian God as power-in-relation, a model which ought then to be mirrored in egalitarian and just relationships. Carter Heyward, *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982) cited by Hogan "Relationality," 203.

[24] Bruteau, *God's Ecstasy*, 29-30. She defines agape love as love that seeks the good of the other.

at a personal and communal level.[25] Truth-telling and witnessing are encouraged for "the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).[26] This requires active and compassionate participation. The one who is heard gains agency and hope. The one who hears is opened to possibilities, challenged and even changed.[27] Space opens for a new story to be told amidst these challenging and courageous conversations.

The Uniting Church affirms the unconditional saving grace of God in Christ Jesus. We acknowledge God's forgiveness requires accountability, repentance and restitution – *metanoia*, such that relationships are restored. Through a covenant of accountability and support, a Person of Concern may more safely participate in the faith community.[28]

While forgiveness and reconciliation may be graces given as relations are set right, such outcomes must not be expected or demanded, for to do so would be an abuse of relational power. Even when forgiveness is offered it does not require reconciliation nor a return to any former relationship.[29] It may, however, offer the opportunity for either the release from the relationship or a new form of relationship.[30]

The Kin-dom of God that Jesus offers is the abundance of life. "I came that you may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10, NRSV). This prophetic vision of flourishing invites us to be a healing, guiding, supporting, and liberating community, through our worship, witness and service. As such, Christian communities are called to lovingly attend to the pastoral concerns of individuals and communities touched by the consequences of sexual abuse. In this way we open our eyes to discover unexpected paths towards God, in faith, truth, love and hope.

Conclusion

We live in a traumatised world affecting all aspects of our lives including congregational life. In this paper, I have begun to imagine a trauma-sensitive "Theological Statement" to underpin the *National Persons of Concern Policy Framework, 2020*. With such a trauma-informed approach Uniting Church congregations may be in a better position to aspire to "welcome all." To welcome and minister to both Persons of Concern and those with horrific lived experiences of sexual abuse and other trauma histories, within our faith communities. Through establishing trust, witnessing truth, prioritising relationality and enabling flourishing, suffering can be met wit[31]h faith, hope, love and Divine grace.

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[25] Lucy Tatman, "Sin" in *An A-Z of Feminist Theology, e*d. Isherwood and McEwan, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press., 1996), 218.
[26] Inclusive Bible.
[27] Al Barrett and Ruth Harley, Being Interrupted: Re-imagining the Church's Mission from the Outside, In. (London: SCM Press, 2020), 137.
[28] I have intentionally chosen to speak in terms of Judeo-Christian covenant rather than "Safety Agreement" as used in the *Framework*.
[29] Muriel Porter, "Sexual abuse: sin, guilt and shame in the context of pastoral care in the parish" accessed 6 September, 2022, https://anglican.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Pastoral-Responses-to-Sexual-Abuse-Muriel-Porter.pdf
[30] Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu. The Book of Forgiving: The Fourfold Path for Healing Ourselves and Our World. (London: William Collins, 2014), 46.
[31] Spiritual Care Australia. "Standards of Practice" Spiritual Care Australia, 2013, 5. Accessed 30 August 2022. https://www.spiritualcareaustralia.org.au/public/103/files/SCA_Standards_of_Practice_Document-1.pdf.

The World of Work and the Theology of Work: mainstream Christianity's abandoned mission field

Brendan E Byrne

Abstract

Despite a rich history of engagement with, and theological thinking about, the world of work, recent decades have witnessed mainstream Christianity's retreat from the world of work, and its failure to implement an operative theology of work. Drawing on Jesus' encounter with the woman bent double, this paper surveys the relevant historical context; outlines the implications arising from mainstream Christianity's retreat from the world of work; argues that the liberating message of the gospel cuts across the assumptions of economic ideology; and suggests how a theology of work might articulate God's healing presence in the heart of a dehumanising reality.

Introduction

Over the course of recent decades, various theologians have attempted to articulate a framework upon which a theology of work might be constructed.[1] Despite their efforts, however, no Christian denomination or tradition, nor the wider Church in any of its ecumenical fora, have constructed an operative theology of work:[2] i.e. a systematic and critical analysis of the reality of work in human life viewed from the standpoint of Christian faith.[3]

This failure by the Christian churches is critical given the place which work – especially waged labour – has attained in modernity. While historians of work have shown that the experience of *labouring* has always been present in human life,[4] from the time of the Industrial Revolution onward, through the dominance of waged labour, work has metamorphosed into a parasitic system that feeds upon the very *bios* of humankind.[5]

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1 Miroslav Volf, *Work In The Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001); David H. Jensen, *Responsive Labor: A Theology of Work* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Armand Larive, *After Sunday: A Theology of Work*. New York: Continuum, 2004; Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004).

2 Miroslav Volf (*Work In The* Spirit,4-6) contends that Pope John Paul II's 1981 encyclical *Laborum exercens* was primarily "a philosophy and theology of work", and notes World Council of Churches documents on the subject of work – especially those produced during the interwar years - that applied broad theological perspectives to specific issues of work.

3 Volf, *Work In The Spirit*, 25.

4 Lucassen, Jan *The Story of Work: A New History of Humankind*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2021), 39, 47-50 (Kindle edition)

5 Peter, Fleming, *Resisting Work: The Corporatisation of Life and its Discontents*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014), 2.

This paradigm, known variously as *biopower, biopolitics, or biocapitalism*,[6] transcends and ultimately eradicates the boundaries between work and non-work by co-opting humanity's capacity for self-organisation, intuitive resourcefulness and social ingenuity in order to reduce human existence to a process of endless production and consumption.[7] Instead of attending to our human needs and articulating what it means to be human, work has instead become a lexicon of formal and informal arrangements in which the human person is yoked, as an act of self-exploitation, to the imperatives of the corporation and the market.[8] The net result is that instead of being able to utilise our vested abilities and public imagination creatively and meaningfully, we are locked into a life-sterilizing process of agonized competition, anxiety, dependence, exhaustion, and purposelessness.[9]

The dehumanising outcomes of modernity's construction of work stand in stark contrast to the Christian understanding of human flourishing, which is grounded in God's invitation into a relational co-existence that in turn informs humanity's relationships with itself and with the non-human ecology.[10] The failure by mainstream Christian churches to develop and articulate an operative theology of work accordingly leaves both human society and the church vulnerable to ongoing co-option by the prerogatives of economic ideology. Ultimately, it represents a significant abrogation of the Church's responsibility to speak the gospel into all the realities of human existence, and to embody a model of human flourishing that recognises humanity as an end in itself, rather than human beings existing – per economic ideology – as nothing more than a means to an end.

This is not to say that the Church has always been silent so far as the world of work is concerned, nor that the Church has always been theologically absent from work as a reality in human life. The Church has a rich historical tradition of engagement with work – both theological and missional – that it needs to recover if it is to correct its present abrogation.

Some First Principles

Before proceeding, I will identify some key terms and phrases that will be used in this paper and establish the principles governing their use: world of work, realm of work, working class, work, and waged labour

World of work and realm of work

These terms are used interchangeably throughout this paper. Both phrases refer, not to *theories* of work, but to the *reality* of work in human life. In other words, it refers to work and working as a lived experience that is inseparable from what it means to be human and live a human life. This covers both work generally and waged labour specifically.

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6 Fleming, *Resisting Work,* 2-5.
7 Fleming, *Resisting Work,* 2.
8 Fleming, *Resisting Work,* 2.
9 Fleming, *Resisting Work,* 3.
10 Neil G. Messer, "Human Flourishing: A Christian Theological Perspective," in Matthew T. Lee, Laura D. Kubzansky, and Tyler J. VanderWeele (eds), *Measuring Well-Being: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from the Social Sciences and the Humanities* (New York: Oxford Academic, 2021) (online edition) https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197512531.003.0011

Working class

As a socio-economic descriptor, it is recognised that this term is becoming increasingly problematic – not least because the depiction of the working class in the popular media continues to foster unhelpful stereotypes about the work they perform, their alleged lack of cultural and identity diversity, and their relationship with, and attitudes toward, wider society.[11] For the purposes of this paper, therefore, *working class* shall refer to that sector of society which essentially has nothing to sell except its labour.[12] This is necessarily a broad definition with a significant amount of gradation within and across its terms; but this only makes the very point that the working class are not a bland homogeneity, despite the stereotypes utilised in the popular media.

Work

The difficulty with defining work is discussed elsewhere in this paper. For present purposes, however, *work* may be defined as any activity which has, as its purpose, the maintenance of human existence, or which facilitates some aspect of personal, familial, or communal need through the manufacture or provision of goods and services. Again, this definition is broad and takes in a wide range of activities. The core aspect of this definition, however, is that work *adds value* to humanity's *as is* condition. More, however, will be said below.

Waged labour

Waged labour is obviously a category of work; but within the present discussion, *waged labour* will refer specifically to those systems of labour organisation involving the exchange of labour for payment in cash or kind. Again, this is a necessarily broad definition; however, the chief feature of waged labour is its commoditisation of both work and the human worker. That is, labour and the labourer become a means of exchange rather than an expression of social or political organisation. Thus, unlike the mutual reciprocation of hunter-gatherer societies,[13] waged labour in modernity exists within a "free" labour "market" in which "free" individuals compete to sell their labour to entities seeking to make use of that labour for their own purposes. That this "freedom" is largely theoretical and is constrained by both the wage-dependence of workers as well as the expressions of sexist, racist, and classist prejudices within the structures of remuneration,[14] is also a feature of waged labour. Moreover, and notwithstanding some scholarly claims about the historical emergence and disappearance of "market economies"[15], waged labour in this paper will refer specifically to this phenomenon as it has emerged during and after the Industrial Revolution in Europe, and its subsequent spread across the world through the 20th and 21st centuries.

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[11] See, for example: Joshi, "Why The Term 'White Working Class' Is So Problematic," Eunmin Na "Report finds British TV portrays working class 'negatively and fuelled by stereotypes,'" The Tab 22/12/2020, located at https://thetab.com/uk/2020/12/22/all-these-tv-series-show-the-working-class-negatively-and-fuelled-by-stereotypes-186984; and Nick Haslam, "Class stereotypes: chavs, white trash, bogans and other animals," The Conversation February 26, 2014. Located at https://theconversation.com/class-stereotypes-chavs-white-trash-bogans-and-other-animals-22952

[12] Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 164.

[13] Lucassen, *The Story of Work*, 18.

[14] Fleming, *Resisting Work*, 7.

[15] Lucassen, *The Story of Work*,15-18.

Context: Historical and Current

As noted above, despite the efforts of numerous theologians to articulate a framework for a theology of work, mainstream Christian churches have failed to establish an operative theology of work. This is not to say, however, that the Church in its various forms and traditions have not been engaged with the world of work. This history needs to be recovered in order for mainstream Christianity to re-establish work as mission priority.

This history takes the form of *ad hoc* encounters between different Christian traditions and the realm of work – especially and particularly the realm of waged labour. In the 19th century, Methodism's commitment to the principle that all people were loved and cherished by God gave rise to both a Sunday school program that educated the first generation of trade union leaders, as well as a grass-roots militancy that supported agitation for political, social and economic reform – often in direct defiance of prohibitions on such activities by the Methodist leadership.[16]

In the late 19th century, in part concerned about the rise of socialism among the working class, but also motivated by a horror of the dehumanising conditions which industrialisation imposed upon working people, Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical *Rerum novarum ("On Revolutionary Change")* which was significantly sub-titled *On the Condition of Labour*. This encyclical condemned the notion of unconstrained and unlimited capitalism, endorsed the right of workers to collectively organise and bargain, and argued that imposition of harsh and inhumane working conditions constituted a grave offence against the inherent dignity with which every person was created.[17]

In the early 20th century, Christian Socialism attempted to merge the social justice consciousness of Methodism with the collectivist perspective of Marx and Engels,[18] while a few decades later, the Catholic Workers Movement sought to synthesise the organisational structures and advocacy imperative of the trade union movement with the perspective of Catholic social teaching inspired by *Rerum novarum* and its successors.[19] In the immediate post-World War Two period up until the early 1970s, within both the Anglican and Catholic traditions, the "worker priests" attempted to embody the presence of Christ in the struggles of the working class, while at the same time informing the church leadership of the harsh realities imposed upon the working people by the prerogatives of economic theory and class assumption.[20]

In the decades of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, emergent voices from feminist, black, liberation and other theological perspectives have also contributed to theological considerations of work.[21] These voices have drawn attention to the fact that discussion of work is often framed from a Europe/North America

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[16] Nigel Scotland, "Methodism and the English Labour Movement 1800-1906," *ANVIL* Volume 14 No 1 1997, 40-41; 47-48.

[17] Jensen, R*esponsive Labor*, 29-30.

[18] Scotland, "Methodism and the English Labour Movement 1800-1906," 44-45.

[19] Kimball Baker, *Go To The Worker: America's Labor Apostles* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press), 31-32; 58-59; 191-192; etc.

[20] John Petrie (trans.), *The Worker-Priests: A Collective Documentation*.(London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956); Henri Perrin, (trans. Bernard Wall) *Priest And Worker: the Autobiography of Henri Perrin*. (London: MacMillan & Co, 1965).

[21] See, for example: Soon-Hwa Sun, "Women, Work and Theology in Korea." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 3, no. 2 (1987): 125–34. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25000054; Christine Firer Hinze,. "Just Work? Catholic and Feminist Perspectives on Labour and Livelihood." *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 108, no. 432 (2019): 377–88. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.35939/studiesirishrev.108.432.0377; Hopkins, "A Black Theology of Liberation". *Black Theology*. 3 (2005). 11-31. 10.1558/blth.3.1.11.65461; Boitumelo Ben Senokoane, "A Black Reading of "The Parable of the Talents," " *Black Theology: An International Journal*. 18 (2020). 288-298. 10.1080/14769948.2020.1841910;.

centric perspective that often ignores indigenous understandings of work, and which also overlooks the role of work and economic ideology in the history of colonialism, patriarchy and exploitation. [22]

In Australia, perhaps one of the earliest – and most explicit – expressions of Christian engagement with the realm of work occurred in 1909, when the then Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Australia, Rev John Ferguson, gave an address entitled *The Economic Value of the Gospel*[23]. In this address, Ferguson vests in the gospel a radical call to oppose any system of social, political, and economic organisation that destroys human dignity for the sake of financial return. Moreover, Ferguson charged Christians with the task of leading the fight against the dehumanising impulses of capitalism, identifying as one of the primary tasks of Christian discipleship the upholding of the sanctity and integrity of human life over against the prerogatives of economic ideology's construction of work and economy.[24]

The net result of this historical encounter between the Church and the realm of waged labour has been a kind of *de facto* theology of work which has emphasised the dignity of working people and the necessity for just working arrangements.[25] However, this encounter was at least in part motivated by a concern within some parts of the Church to ward off the influence of secular – and especially socialist – modes of analysis and critique among working people; and the eventual suppression of the "worker priest" movement[26] – as well as the attempt in Australia to gain control of the union movement via the so-called "industrial groups" – reflects the mixed motives with which the Church has always approached the world of work.[27]

Despite this history, the church in recent decades has been involved in a wholesale retreat from the world of work. Different Christian traditions have withdrawn from ecumenical or civil society partnerships geared toward issues of industrial justice, have withdrawn accreditation from clergy who have sought to live out their vocation in the workplace,[28] or else have maintained an ambivalent attitude to the world of work grounded in a "pragmatic" calculation about the potential costs or benefits of activism in this area.[29] This withdrawal has in part been driven by the global dominance of neoliberal economic ideology from the late 1970s onwards, which has, among other things, emphasised the primacy of technocratic "experts" in public discourse about work and economy.[30] In part, however, the church's withdrawal from the world of work has also been driven by its own increasing corporatisation, integration within, and co-option by, the economic structures of modernity and their underlying assumptions. As it has more and more taken on the forms, structures, cultures, and imperatives of the organisational world around it, so the church has become increasingly less visible and less active within that world.

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[22] Lucassen, *The Story of Work,* 16, 27.
[23] Ferguson, John *The Economic Value Of The Gospel* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1910).
[24] Ferguson, *The Economic Value Of The Gospel*, 8.
[25] See, for example: Catholic Social Services Australia, "Media Release: Church groups, Unions take job reform concerns to Parliament", 19th February 2021. https://cssa.org.au/news/church-groups-unions-take-job-reform-concerns-to-parliament/
[26] Robert F Byrnes, "The French Priest-Workers." *Foreign Affairs* 33, no. 2 (1955): 327–31. https://doi.org/10.2307/20031098.
[27] F. G. Clarke, "Labour and the Catholic Social Studies Movement." *Labour History*, no. 20 (1971): 46–59. https://doi.org/10.2307/27508010.
[28] John Bottomley, *Hard Work Never Killed Anybody: How the Idolisation of Work Sustains this Deadly Lie.* (Northcote: Morning Star Publishing), 2015, 13-14.
[29] Kirstin Vander Giessen-reitsma, "Christianity and Labour: Addressing Current Crises Through Founding, Partnering, and Supporting," *Comment*, June 1, 2003. Located at https://comment.org/christianity-and-labour-addressing-current-crises-through-founding-partnering-and-supporting/
[30] Stephen Metcalf, "Neoliberalism: the idea that swallowed the world". *The Guardian*, 18th August 2017. Located at https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/aug/18/neoliberalism-the-idea-that-changed-the-world

Correspondingly, the Church has, in its liturgical, worship, pastoral and prayer life, failed to inculcate within its membership any sense that the Church is, among other things, a community of people who work.[31] In doing so, the Church has thoroughly participated in modernity's bifurcation of human life into the realms of private and public, in which religious faith and its implications for the whole of human life have been relegated to the sphere of private belief, while the world of work has been assigned to the separate and distinct realm of "public life."[32] This bifurcation mirrors the experience of working people, who are expected to shrug off their humanity at work and become an automaton called a "professional," committed to the capitalist ethic of profit maximisation and market growth, irrespective of their own views about the ethics and purpose of work.[33] Thus, the Church's separation from its members' identity as people who work mirrors the violence which working people experience daily through the imposition of ideological expectations and prerogatives. It also destroys the Church's capacity to speak prophetically and pastorally into that experience, exacerbating the privatisation of faith and its alienation from the public realm of work.

This retreat, and its corresponding failures, have created a vacuum into which has stepped the capitalist ethic of production and consumption as the primary measure of human flourishing. This is exacerbated by the emergence of a so-called "theology of work" movement within US evangelical churches which, articulated from the standpoint of the managerial and entrepreneurial classes and the owners of capital, seeks to align the spirit of neoliberal capitalism with the spirit of Christianity.[34]

Moreover, the pursuit by some sections of the Church for justice for communities who have been historically victimised on the grounds of race, gender, and identity, has been significantly hampered by sections of the working class reacting against the wounds that have been inflicted upon them by more than four decades of ascendent neoliberal ideology. This wounding, which has resulted in many sections of the working class feeling abandoned by both the political class and religious institutions,[35] has been adroitly exploited by populist demagogues seeking to take advantage of the fracture lines caused by ongoing social and economic inequality.[36]

Having abandoned the world of work, however, the Church is now unable to speak into these realities precisely because it has divorced itself from the daily lived experience of the working class. Consequently, working class people, whose own experience of injustice ought to make them the natural allies of the justice claims of others, have in many cases been turned against those claims precisely because they no longer feel they belong to a transformative religious community that speaks into their own experience of suffering.[37]

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[31] Bottomley, *Hard Work* 10.

[32] Bottomley, *Hard Work,* p.21-23.

[33] John Flett, Brendan Byrne and John Bottomley, *I Held A Knife Against My Wrist: Ethical conflict and work harm in Australian financial services*. (Melbourne: Religion and Social Policy Network, University of Divinity, 2020), 25-27.

[34] Brendan Byrne, "Work and faith: the prophetic imperative". *Engage Mail*, 10th April 2019. Located at: http://www.ethos.org.au/online-resources/Engage-Mail/work-and-faith-the-prophetic-imperative. This movement, which has spread around the world through global evangelical networks, posits that Christian theology must accept the fundamental "rightness" of corporatist capitalism; that the task of Christian theology is thus to "humanise" work by smoothing out the "rough edges" of neoliberal ideology; and that pastoral care is a matter of enabling people to "succeed" within the prevailing economic order, regardless of whether or not that have been victimised by that order. Thus shorn of its prophetic imperative, this "theology of work" acts as a theologised justification for the dehumanising potentials of capitalism's construction of waged labour

[35] Karen L. Bloomquist, *The Dream Betrayed: Religious Challenge of the Working Class*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990, 12.

[36] Joshi, Priyankaa "Why The Term 'White Working Class' Is So Problematic," See also: Sean Collins "Trump made gains with Black voters in some states. Here's why," *Vox*, 4th November 2020. Located at https://www.vox.com/2020/11/4/21537966/trump-black-voters-exit-polls; and M. Setzler & A. Yanus, "Why Did Women Vote for Donald Trump?" *Political Science & Politics*, 51(3), 2018, 523-527. doi:10.1017/S1049096518000355

[37] Bloomquist, Karen L *The Dream Betrayed*, 14; .45-46.

Lured by the blandishments of populist politics, and increasingly alienated from both mainstream political and religious institutions, the working class has become increasingly fractured and ghettoised, even as it continues to endure economic, political, and social disenfranchisement under the bi-partisan dominance of neoliberal economic ideology. The Church, however, neither speaks prophetically into this reality, nor offers the gospel hope of liberation from the suffering embedded within it.

Defining the Problems

Given the urgency of the Church's need to develop an operative theology of work, what are the impediments to developing that theology?

Surprisingly, one of the biggest stumbling blocks revolves around the definition of work.[38] A theology of work axiomatically requires a definition of the subject into which it purports to speak, without which definition it cannot either develop or proceed from first principles. And yet it is the very familiarity of work that makes it almost impossible to define. Most people have an instinctive answer to the question: "What is work?" But translating that instinctive knowledge into an articulate formulation is a frustratingly elusive task. Work is, but isn't *only*, waged labour. There are, afterall, many forms of work that do not result in the generation of income, such as community volunteering. Moreover, there are forms of work that are typically overlooked or underappreciated, such as domestic labour or care-giving. Work, despite its familiarity, encompasses such a broad range of activities across such a wide variety of contexts as to make defining what it is a confusingly difficult task.

Moreover, when we use the word "work", we must be conscious of the value-loading it contains: of the positive attributes which it ascribes both to work and to those who work; and of the social prejudices and unequal power relationships which use of the word "work" often disguises. This is especially the case when we consider terms like "unemployed" or "underemployed": in the context of modernity, wherein waged labour has assumed a central place in human self-understanding, to be unemployed or underemployed is to also be the subject of considerable social odium, one that assigns negative personal and moral characteristics to those who are so described.[39]

In a similar vein, we must be careful that our definition of work does not confuse culturally or historically specific realities with the inherent nature of work itself.[40] Additionally, it needs to be remembered that words like "work" and "employment" are not necessarily synonymous – one may be "employed" by an activity that is not necessarily "work". Likewise, the ongoing transformation of work, especially due to technological change, means that what work "looks like" to modern generations is radically different to what it was for our grandparents – and for what it will be (assuming a phenomenon called "work" still exists) for our grandchildren.[41]

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[38] Bloomquist, *The Dream Betrayed*, 23-25; Volf, *Work In The Spirit*, 7-14; Jensen, *Responsive Labor*, 2-4, etc

[39] Volf, *Work In The Spirit*, 8-10.

[40] Volf, Work in the Spirit, 9.

[41] See, for example: Tim Dunlop, *Why The Future Is Workless* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2016) for arguments about why "work" as this has been understood from the time of the Industrial Revolution will disappear in the future, and the pathways by which this "workless" future might be realised.

However, from the standpoint of Christian faith, the biggest stumbling block has been the very fact that a theology of work demands a specifically Christian understanding of what work is, which in turn cautions us that we cannot associate our definition of work with any prevailing political or economic ideology, nor with cultural standards that assign normative values to work. And yet this necessity has proved practically impossible to realise for the very simple reason that all Christian traditions are embedded within – and to varying degrees, co-opted by – their surrounding cultural and ideological climates. Without this separation, however, the project of articulating a specifically *Christian* theology of work remains significantly compromised and impeded.[42]

Jesus and the Woman Bent Double: Countering Economic Ideology

Assuming these barriers can be overcome, what, then, might a Christian theology of work look like?

An answer to this question can be approached via an episode in *The Gospel According to Luke*, which records an occasion when Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath, and a woman who was crippled to the extent of being bent double appeared.[43] Jesus called her to him, then healed her of her affliction; whereupon she immediately began to rejoice. When the leaders of the synagogue remonstrated with Jesus for having performed a healing act on the Sabbath, Jesus rebuked them, reminding them that even on the Sabbath they perform tasks such as watering their farm animals. How much therefore, should the Sabbath be a day in which humankind is liberated from the forces by which human life is deformed and enslaved?

Now, the point of this story is not, as some might argue, to justify the 24-hour economy and the idea of endless productivity, given it depicts Jesus working on what is supposed to be a day of rest. Rather, it is to highlight the quality of *liberating solidarity* which is embodied in Jesus' work, and which facilitates the woman's release from her bondage and its dehumanising consequences. For the reality of her crippling illness, which forces her to spend her days looking at the ground, is that it alienates her from the rest of society; it pushes her to the margins and excludes her from relationship with others. But Jesus' response is to once again draw her into the centre of community and relationship; to overcome her exclusion and set her free from the bonds of dehumanising alienation.

And this issue of alienation must lie at the heart of the Church's response to the reality of work in human life, precisely because the two pre-eminent architects of modern economic theory – Adam Smith and Karl Marx – regarded alienation as an inevitable consequence of waged labour in an industrialised economy. Both Smith and Marx understood alienation to be the dehumanisation of work and of the human worker; that is to say, the reduction of work and those who work to the status of a tradable commodity, so that work becomes, not an end in itself, but a means to ends that have nothing to do with the working person's own humanity. Moreover, not only did Smith and Marx regarded alienation as inevitable, they both believed it was essentially inescapable.[44]

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[42] Volf, *Work In The Spirit*, 79-81.
[43] Luke 13: 10-17.
[44] Volf, *Work In The Spirit*, 53-55; 58-61.

Smith and Marx's gloomy viewpoint appears vindicated by numerous studies indicating most people find their experience of work to be profoundly dissatisfying and dehumanising – sometimes traumatic and even lethal[45]. So prevalent is this experience that many people regard it not merely as something to be endured, but as a normative fact in human life. But this is precisely where this passage from *Luke* cuts across both Smith and Marx, and the experience of work in modernity. In his encounter with the woman bent double, Jesus' response to her is a strident declaration that alienation is not normative; that it is, in fact, an aberration, the deforming operation of evil forces that distort human life. And this very declaration opens the woman to a new reality; a reality of dignity and liberation. Moreover, it is the direct result of the loving solidarity of God, embodied in Christ, which enters into the heart of her blighted existence, bringing reconciliation, restoration, and relationship.

The upshot of all this is that any theology of work, in order to be an authentic proclamation of the gospel, and thus a genuinely Christian critique and ethic of work, must seek to orient the reality of work within human life toward reconciliation, restoration, and relationship. Such a theology of work will make clear the Christian understanding that the healing and restoration which Jesus embodies in the gospel witness are not pie-in-the-sky compensations for miseries suffered on earth. Such healing and restoration are the work of the here-and-now, the labour of embodying and making real in the present that foreshadowing of the Kingdom to come.

And it is the Church that is tasked with this labour. But the Church can only proclaim the gospel into the reality of work from the basis of a genuine theology of work, and on the basis of a liturgical and worship life whose prayer and preaching embodies a comprehensive critical reflection on the nature of work and its consequences for the relation of humanity to God, to itself, and to the whole of creation. Moreover, such a reflection cannot be limited to describing the role of work within creation: it must articulate the meaning of work within God's *purpose* for creation. A genuinely Christian theology of work must be both vocational as well as eschatological, locating work within the divine scheme of salvation which, from the standpoint of Christian faith, forms the directive purpose of creation itself.[46]

Additionally, a genuinely Christian theology of work will not just enable the Church to meaningfully engage the world of work, it will also prompt the Church to reflect upon its own status as an employer, and its own complicity in the dehumanising potentials of work. Such reflection can only occur through a theological framework that holds the Church accountable to the same prophetic and redemptive Word which God speaks to the secular world of work. For example, mainstream Christian churches, through their agencies and allied institutions, are among the largest employers in the aged care sector, an industry that contributes upwards of 10% of Australia's annual GDP, yet which is also notorious for its exploitation of industrially weak and economically marginalised workers.[47] Moreover, these same church agencies and institutions are among the biggest recipients of government financial support.[48] In the reading from *Luke*,

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[45] Fleming, *Resisting Work,* 3-4.

[46] Volf, *Work In The Spirit*, 89-98; Cosden, *A Theology Of Work,* 81-92.

[47] Jean Murray and Valerie Adams, "Counting the cost of Australia's care economy," *The Conversation* October 22, 2012. Located at https://theconversation.com/counting-the-cost-of-australias-care-economy-9946

[48] Michael Bachelard, "Non-profit aged care homes are making big money, but crying poor: report," *The Sydney Morning Herald,* August 13, 2020. Located at https://www.smh.com.au/national/non-profit-aged-care-homes-are-making-big-money-but-crying-poor-report-20200812-p55kwg.html

Jesus attacks the hypocrisy of religious leaders who, even on the Sabbath, liberate their animals so they might be fed and watered, but who object to Jesus liberating a "daughter of Abraham" so that she might be freed from oppression and humiliation. A genuinely Christian theology of work will likewise critique any Church participation in the perpetuation of employment conditions that prevent employees from maintaining a dignified standard of living, whilst at the same time professing care for, and advocacy on behalf of, vulnerable groups such as those requiring aged care.

This necessarily represents uncomfortable territory for the Church community, and for those who benefit from the Church's present structures and cultures. If however, the Church fails to develop a theology of work from which it can reflect upon and critique its own conduct as an employer, as well as its participation within wider economic and social realities, the world will rightly dismiss the Church's critiques of work, economic policy, and industrial relations as hypocritical and self-serving. Such a theology of work will therefore demand of the Church a significant commitment to truth-telling, up to and including a recognition of the ways in which it has participated in corporatist capitalism's dehumanising potentials.

The Theology of Work: Key Components and Why It Matters

Ultimately, any operative theology of work must have the following features if it is to be a genuinely Christian theology of work:

Common ground

A recognition that Christian theology and economic ideology share some basic common ground inasmuch as they are both "therapies of desire" that seek to harness human longing toward particular – albeit radically different – teleological ends.[49] This will liberate Christians from the dilemma of having to either justify Christian faith in terms acceptable to economic ideology or defend it as an oppositional force to that ideology; likewise, it will enable Christians to speak to a world encultured within the assumptions of economic ideology by beginning at the same starting point and proceeding from there toward a specifically Christian theology of work.[50]

A theology of the economic relations

A recovery of the theological meaning of economy and work in order to articulate a specifically Christian, non-technocratic understanding of economic relations in theory and practice.

Acknowledgement and lament

An acknowledgement of and lament for the harm experienced by individuals, communities and the environment through modernity's construction of work and economy, in order to name and confront the sin of systemic injustice that lies at the heart of work-related harm.

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[49] Danile M. Bell, *Liberation Theology After The End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering.* (London: Routledge, 2001), 144.
[50] Byrne, Brendan "A Tale of Two Crises: Reflections on Bushfires and COVID-19," *Zadok Perspectives,* No. 147, Winter 2020, 3-4.

Challenge to business and church

A challenge to business and church leaders to align their labour practices with the covenantal flourishing envisaged by the gospel, thereby breaking the hold which the ideological ethic of profit maximisation exerts upon modernity, and reorienting work and economy toward a relational understanding of human flourishing that is itself expressive of God's eschatological purpose.[51]

However, even if an operative theology of work were to be developed and implemented as above, one might fairly ask: why does it matter?

It matters because the Church cannot offer a coherent critique and ethic of work in a vacuum. The absence of a comprehensive and systematic theology of work represents just such a vacuum. This is in turn critical because the Church *must* take seriously the reality of work in human life, including everything which that reality implies, both for the universal human dignity proclaimed by the gospel, as well as the Church's ministry to the world. The point being that the world to which the modern Church is called to minister is a world in which work – dominated by waged labour – has come to occupy a powerful – and powerfully destructive – place. In the world of industrialised and internationalised economy, work is not merely a means for ensuring our physical survival, financial security, or consumer satisfaction. Rather, work has come to occupy *the* central position in human self-understanding and validation. Work has almost entirely colonized humanity's daily existence;[52] moreover, in a world which is becoming increasingly fragmented and isolated, the workplace has, for many, become the primary social space within which they encounter and interact with other human beings. In a world in which waged labour has become the dominating paradigm of human self-assessment, those who lack work, or who emphasise other forms and ways of being that do not give priority to waged labour, are often demonised as "parasites" feeding off the rest of society. Thus, modernity has come to assume the form of a landscape in which waged labour is viewed as the only valid employment with which human time can be occupied.

This reality represents the successful colonisation of human life by neoliberal ideology, the enforcement of its imperatives through the mechanism of surveillance capitalism, and the co-option of the liberating spirit of the gospel by the false prophets of modernity's construction of work and economy.[53] Moreover, the increasing corporatisation of the church draws attention to the church's role as an employer. And yet, in the absence of a systematic theology of work to guide its understanding of the relationship between employer and employee, the church has found itself increasingly adopting the ideological and organisational imperatives of modernity. The absence of a systematic theology of work arguably places the church at risk of becoming progressively *less* Christian in its thinking about work and in its treatment of its own employees.[54]

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[51] Byrne, "Work and faith: the prophetic imperative."

[52] Carl Cederstrom and Peter Fleming, *Dead Man Working* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2012), 12-18.

[53] Brendan Byrne, "The Israel Folau 'Controversy': A Study in Corporate Censorship and Capitalist Hypocrisy," *Zadok Perspectives*, No. 149, Summer 2020, 17-21.

[54] It also has implications for the "work of the Church" and the Church's relationship with its own ministry agents, especially ordained ministers, whom all the mainstream churches currently maintain are not employees but either "office holders" or "spiritual servants", and who are thus not entitled to the considerations applicable to employees. Case law – in Australia, at least – appears to be moving toward the opposite conclusion.

Conclusion

Modernity's narrative of autonomous individuality encourages us to correct by our own power the ailments that afflict our essential selves. The extent to which the Church itself has succumbed to this narrative may be reflected in the many acts of power by which the Church attempts to correct the ailments of its inner spirit. But the reading from Luke calls us to present ourselves before the compassion of Christ, who sees our crippled spirit and who invites us into healing and redemption. The identification of the deforming impact of work is embodied in the woman bent double; God's prophetic judgement upon that deforming impact is represented both by Jesus' healing act and his rebuke of the religious leaders; and the reconciling work of that judgement is rendered in the joyful solidarity which the healed woman shares with the rest of the people in their praise of God.

If the world of work is to experience the fruits of healing, justice, and liberation which are proclaimed in this reading from *Luke*, then the development of a theology of work is one of the Church's most critically important tasks. A theology of work will enable the Church to not only speak into the reality of work, but to understand its own identity as *a community of people who work*. Thus the need for healing which we understand to be present within human work will come to be understood as our need also; and this shared understanding will enable the kind of truth-telling that discloses the way work causes and perpetuates harm, and which encourages the Christian community to bear witness to Christ's healing grace.[55] For ours is surely a world that desperately longs for a liberation that can only come to it from a Church that has for too long neglected the prophetic task of developing and implementing an operative theology of work.

[55] Bottomley, *Hard Work,* 17-18.

Book Forum: Rev Dr Aunty Denise Champion's *Anaditj*[1]

Reading *Anaditj* and Paying Attention to Colonisation

Anne Pattel-Gray

In this book, Aunty Denise has captured her people's essence of her Adnyamathanha Nation and the importance of retaining the ancient knowledge, Ancestral Narratives, and stories of her people. These stories could be likened to that of the parables of the New Testament where Jesus uses them as a teaching tool. These Adnyamathanha narratives are used to teach us about life, integrity, hope, caring, love, not to be selfish, mean or nasty, and their purpose is to build character and ethical practices within each of us both collectively and individually. Books like *Anaditj* are critically important to the development of an Aboriginal theology as it forms the foundation of the Aboriginal belief systems that hold deep spiritual significance for Aboriginal people because of the cultural authority in which they are spoken from as Aboriginal leaders. *Anaditj* enables non-Indigenous peoples to gain an insight into Adnyamathanha's Ancestral Narratives that speak of their relationship with the Creator Spirit that has been nurtured over 110,000 years. This comes with the great wisdom of the Adnyamathanha Nation. This spirituality has been born out of our land and is connected to the life source of our Earth Mother. It is the heart and soul of our people founded on Aboriginal Law which dictates every aspect of our interaction and connection to our Creator and creation.

For Aboriginal people, our Ancestral Narratives are the embodiment of "truth" They are like the Old Testament as our cosmology and epistemology are central to our ontological quest and fundamental to what we know and embrace. The basis of our theological research is that we are the oldest living culture in the world. Aboriginal Christian leaders and theologians tell of our Ancestral Narratives that speaks about our knowledge and belief the Creator Spirit who through our Spirit Ancestors formed and bestowed our world and forged our identity, culture, and law. This process highlighted the relationship between Aboriginal peoples to the land, creation, the environment and the spiritual world of our Spirit Ancestors and the Creator Spirit, and how they were all linked to each other and dependent upon this interconnection. Our Faith and the spiritual world were, and still are, the life force and foundation of our life existence and survival. The Creator Spirit is the source of life for us, and we cannot survive without our connection to the life source as we are born in the image of the Creator Spirit, and we are who we are because of the Creator Spirit. We have an intuitive sense of God as Creator Spirit, as a wisdom teacher on country, and as Spirit. The Creator Spirit bestowed upon us our land and entrusted this world to us, and we are to protect, care for and to rejuvenate our Earth Mother.

[1] Denise Champion *Anaditj,* ed. Rosemary Derwerse (Port Augusta: Denise Champion, 2021). All references to the book in the following responses are indicated by page numbers in the text.

The Colonial Impact on Aboriginal Peoples Spiritual Life

Anaditj provides an insight into this ancient wisdom. It is essential, however, for non-Indigenous peoples to read it whilst also paying attention to how colonisation has denied and suppressed it.

In 1788 the British invaded our lands and so began the forced indoctrination of western Christendom which would be the beginning of our nightmare. The Colonisers dominated every aspect of the Bible from biblical interpretation to the point where the text was used to justify racist views, colonial theft and dispossession, subjugation and oppression, massacres and cultural genocide, and the rape of women and children. This also formed the basis on which we were cursed, deemed demonic and a racially inferior race of people. The Colonial invaders with their racist views believed their "whiteness" made them superior[2] and they considered Aboriginal people as being inferior and morally bankrupt. What the Colonisers failed to see was the rich spiritual life in which Aboriginal people lived and the presence of Creator Spirit in us.

These days, Aboriginal people continue to experience racial discrimination where the Federal government suspends the Racial Discrimination Act that protect the Human Rights of Aboriginal people which see the continuing removal of our children from their families and community, which include governments taking control our peoples income, high incarceration rates of Aboriginal children and young people, high suicide rates of our young people and the denial of cultural rights and heritage, and successive governments' failure to formalise a treaty with Aboriginal people. The horrific acts that have been inflicted upon Aboriginal peoples have had a deep psychological impact on the lives of my people which has left them traumatised and the effect of this trauma is still being felt today.

Sadly, the most frightening aspect of the Church's complicity in the subjugation of Aboriginal peoples is the heartfelt sentiment usually expressed that it was done "with the best of intentions." This, however, does not alleviate the enormous trauma inflicted upon my people. The forced imposition of the Christian missionaries and, in fact, those churches that worked among Aboriginal communities, were partners with the government in the genocide.

Today, we Aboriginal Christian leaders and theologians challenge the Church who are the colonial inheritors who continue to benefit from the colonial structure, laws, and systems as the descendants of the Colonisers – they have inherited great power, wealth and privilege, resulting from the barbaric acts of their forbearers upon Aboriginal people; that saw the theft of Aboriginal lands through legal fiction, massacres of literally thousands of Aboriginal people, and the multiple generations of stolen children and the 235 years of oppression and subjugation.

The Australian church's racism is evident in its abysmal failure to stand united against racism in this country.[3] Recognizing the existence of racism *in general* is the easy part, and so, many churches decry this "evil" in the widest possible terms. Some churches even go the next step and recognize the existence

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[2] On this see Anne Pattel-Gray, *The Great White Flood: Racism in Australia critically appraised from an Aboriginal historico-theological viewpoint* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).

[3] For further on this see, Pattel-Gray, *The Great White Flood*, 159.

of racism *in the church* itself. Yet overall, the church's silence is deafening – its lack of action is shocking. By keeping quiet, the Australian churches are accepting the situation of racism against Aboriginal People, and implicitly espousing the cause of the privileged white majority. The churches are reinforcing their own racism, as well as that of society in general. They are endorsing inequality and injustice.[4]

As an Aboriginal theologian the these are the challenges that we must wrestle with if we are to have any hope of reconciliation and restoring wholeness in creation: we must first begin by challenging the Church (colonial inheritors) as to how they do theology on stolen land, and what does it mean for the Church to be seen as colonial inheritors? Because it is time for "Truth Telling" and exposing the lies, brutality and the power, privilege and wealth colonial inheritors have gained at the injustices committed against Aboriginal people.

A Botanical Typology of Indigenous Receptions of Colonial Theology

Garry Worete Deverell

A Pauline analogy

In the 11th chapter of the epistle to the Romans, St Paul offers this analogy concerning the relationship between the Hebrew people and Gentile Christians:

> If some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. (Romans 11.17–18)

It is a botanical analogy, in which the root of the olive tree is the Hebrew people and the grafted branches are Gentile Christians. The apostle uses this image to argue that the Gentiles to whom he is writing have no grounds for considering themselves superior to Jews. For Gentile faith grows from Hebrew faith and can only continue to live and thrive insofar as it remains grafted to its Hebrew roots.

I want to adapt this metaphor for our own context here in the colony of "Australia," as a way of unpacking the complex relationship between colonial Christianity and Indigenous Christianity. My contention is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theologians engage with colonial forms of Christianity in a variety of ways, and that these ways might be rendered according to a spectrum or typology of analogical relations between two different plants. Having described that typology, I will then seek to locate Aunty Denise Champion's contribution in the book *Anaditj* within the spectrum.

[4] For further on this see, Pattel-Gray, *The Great White Flood,* 159.

A simple typology of Indigenous theologies

Aboriginal and Torres Street Islander people are, as you would expect, diverse in our beliefs, spiritual practices, and experiences with coloniality. Some of us were given a choice about whether, or how, we received the colonial gospel. Most of us did not, because Christianity was part and parcel of the control colonial authorities sought to exert over our country, our bodies, and our imaginations. In addition, the churches who were given effective carriage of the colonial gospel into our communities did so in a variety of ways. Some were less draconian and more respectful than others. Most were brutally disrespectful. This messy history issues, today, in four broad types of Indigenous Christian theology.

Type 1: One colonial plant. Eradicate and replace Indigenous plants.

This type of Indigenous theology emerged in communities where the missionaries successfully eradicated the local plant and replaced it with an imported one. The view, here, was that the local plant was evil and Indigenous "souls" could only be saved by suppressing local culture and spirituality entirely. Once the ground was cleared and the plants poisoned, missionaries could then introduce their own beliefs and spiritual practices from the only seed bank in town. This approach survives into the present day in the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship (AEF) and related bodies. Such theology is entirely consistent with, and coextensive with, the dominant forms of white theology in the colony.

Type 2: Two plants. An Indigenous stump with colonial grafts.

This kind of stump and graft theology is explicitly inspired by the relationship between Hebrew religion and Gentile Christian faith in St Paul's olive tree analogy. Here, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theologians retain the stump of Indigenous belief and spirituality but graft the colonial gospel onto it in such a way that traditional knowledge is reinterpreted or reframed within colonial categories. Indigenous spirituality becomes a kind of "old testament" to which colonial Christianity is the "new testament." The more ancient spiritual forms are absorbed into the cultural-linguistic framework of the newer, colonial, religion which is seen as a fulfilment of the former. Ancestor creators become a "Creator Spirit," for example, and country becomes "Christ." This approach would accord, broadly, with that of the Preamble to the Constitution of the Uniting Church in Australia[5] and the work of the Rainbow Spirit Elders.[6]

Type 3: Two plants. A colonial stump with Indigenous grafts.

This, too, is a form of stump-and-graft theology, but explicitly reversing the Pauline hierarchy. Here the newer, euro-Christian gospel, is reframed or reinterpreted in the light of more ancient Indigenous categories. The older cultural-linguistic framework, in other words, seeks to absorb the newer. "God" becomes creator ancestors, and "Sacred text" becomes country, for example. Arguably, this is what I was trying to do in my 2018 book *Gondwana Theology*,[7] though I don't believe I was fully conscious of the fact at the time, and there are moments in the book when I apparently slip into a more type 2 framework.

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[5] Uniting Church in Australia, "Revised Preamble to the Constitution," Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, accessed December 5th 2022, https://assembly.uca.org.au/hef/item/668-the-revised-preamble .

[6] *The Rainbow Spirit Elders, Rainbow Spirit Theology: towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology*, 2nd ed. (Hindmarsh: ATF Press, 2007).

[7] Garry Worete Deverell, *Gondwana Theology: a Trawloolway man reflects on Christian faith* (Reservoir: Morning Star, 2018).

Type 4: Two plants. An Indigenous tree and a colonial tree, growing side by side.
This kind of theology neither seeks the eradication of any plant nor the integration of one plant into another by way of a graft. Instead, it seeks to imagine a world in which a local plant and colonial plants may live side by side without either of them becoming the strongest or the most important in some kind of hierarchy.

In some ways, this is the kind of theology which is operant amongst the vast majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, regardless of our conscious or personal commitments. For each of us must walk in two worlds, whether we want to or not. When I am with my Aboriginal cousins, for example, I invoke the "ancestors" and "country" and the "dreaming" as primary spiritual categories. And this is the case whether those cousins are Christians or not. But when I am with my settler Christian friends I talk about "Christ" and "Scripture" and the "Holy Spirit." There is little other option, because very few settler Christians seem able to step outside of their assumptions about the world and about truth. That is their coloniality. At a pragmatic level, in other words, we Indigenous people assume that there are two cultural-linguistic frameworks which have their own integrity, and which cannot be readily transformed or even translated into the other. In this fourth type, Indigenous spirituality and colonial theology are therefore able to talk with each other, and even to influence each other by virtue of the communicative genius of analogy and metaphor, but never to the point where they morph into an entirely unified, somehow hybrid, religious tradition.

I am currently playing with the idea that types 2 and 3 are actually versions of this fourth, without necessarily being conscious of the fact. It all comes down to one's philosophy of language, I suspect. But I have a lifetime of contemplation ahead of me on that one!

Denise Champion's *Anaditj*

So where does Aunty's Denise's book *Anaditj* fit into this typology of Aboriginal theologies? Well, that is not entirely clear, I think, because the book plays with a number of possible positions without ever getting to the point of an explicit resolution in one way or another. Still, if I had to make a call, I would suggest that *Anaditj*, more often than not, gravitates toward a type 2 theology.

One the one hand, Aunty Denise want to make a clear distinction between what she calls "the Western faith tradition of Christianity" and her "Adnyamathanha understanding of *Anaditj*, the way things are". *Anaditj*, her ancient Aboriginal cultural-linguistic framework, is entirely capable of explaining and making sense of the world. *Anaditj* possesses its own "deep theological" concepts (7) about the relationship between human beings and country (20). A universal ethic of sharing and reciprocity pertains and is passed on in dreaming stories like that of the Arraru-Mathari cycle. Country, or "Creation" as Aunt often calls it, is compared to the Christian bible. It is a sacred text in which wisdom can be read (20). She also expresses a dislike for the English word "God" (33), preferring "Arrawatanha," an Adnyamathanha creator-ancestor (34).

On the other hand, Aunty Denise has clearly absorbed a great deal of colonial Christianity and made it her own. She renames the multiple creator-ancestors of Aboriginal dreamings "the Creator,", or "God" (12–13) in spite of her stated preference for "Arrawatanha". Aboriginal dreaming stories are themselves renamed as "the much older story" of a "universal Christ" and a "universal church" (13). Here, it would seem, Aunty

Denise absorbs Aboriginal stories and spiritualities into the newer language of the colonial gospel. She speaks of the contemporary Australian church being "incomplete" until it takes Indigenous knowledge seriously (15), yet that same church is clearly the fulfillment of everything that was intimated in the long history of Aboriginal knowledge. It is a bigger story that contains the very important, but nevertheless smaller, story of Aboriginal wisdom.

It is clear, however, that Aunty Denise does not feel compelled to "do" Christianity in the way that most settler Christians would expect her to. She reads the Christian Scriptures, for example, in her own way (8), a way that supports her contention that Aboriginal knowledge is both older than colonial Christian knowledge and has its own, continuing, legitimacy and sovereignty (10). But she is a Christian, nonetheless, and accepts the authority of the Christian Scriptures even as she applies her own kind of interpretation to them and seeks to translate them into her own language.

The mediation Aunty Denise seeks to model between these two religious traditions is around the concept of narrative or story. She notes that "when the missionaries came to the Kimberley to share the Bible with the people, the old people responded that they already knew these stories" (11). For her, religion of any kind can be understood as "Ngalakanha Muda," "Big Wisdom" stories about a Creator (12). Indigenous people have our stories. Christians have their stories. Aunty Denise looks at both and concludes that "God" has been talking to people through both. She recognises the story that's told in the bible because "I've heard it somewhere before. It's the echo of a much older story, of the universal Christ and the birth of the universal church" (p. 13). For her, the story of creator-ancestors in Adnyamathanha is the *same* story that is told about God in the bible. The "God" is the same in either case, they just have different names (p.40). There was even a "Christ" here, in Aboriginal dreamings, before there was a Christ in Galilee: "Christ was Creator present in our stories" (43). "We don't have to struggle to get people into our churches because Christ is everywhere and in everything and in our story and always has been and always will be!" (46).

Aunty Denise's theology, as expressed here in *Anaditj*, is very similar to that of the revised Preamble to the Uniting Church's constitution, which wants to locate a universal witness to the "Triune God" within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures but, by virtue of that very same move, actually displaces traditional Aboriginal renderings of the spiritual or divine through its preference for the explanatory language of colonial Christian tradition. Here there is a desire to view Aboriginal spirituality and cultural story-telling positively. But what *makes* it positive is its capacity for translation into middle-eastern, biblical, stories. This makes both the Preamble and *Anaditj* examples of the stump-and-graft theology of type 2 in which the Indigenous – for all its inherent, sovereign, dignity – is ultimately absorbed into the Christianity brought to this country by colonists.

Ultimately, I feel that we Aboriginal theologians need to work towards a theology that is more like type three or four, which is less inclined to accede towards the colonisation of our own traditions, however subtly. I'd rather work towards the recovery of our traditions for their own sake, and restart the conversation with colonial religion in ways which take seriously our sovereignty in these lands, and therefore the ontological and epistemological priority of our dreamings for a "Gondwanan" theology.

Identity, Story-telling and Interweaving

Seforosa Carroll

Within the ecumenical Indigenous peoples' movement there are two interrelated recurring concerns. The first is that of identity and it centres on the question: can I be both Christian and Indigenous? Flowing out of this is the second concern: the ongoing tension between Christian theology and Indigenous spiritualities. Are Indigenous wisdoms or epistemologies valid sources for theological reflection and Christian identity? Denise Champion's *Anaditj* offers refreshing insight into these two concerns. In particular, *Anaditj* posits an alternative methodology for thinking, doing and living theology that privileges (Indigenous) story and storytelling and is unashamedly unapologetic. The book is a wonderful, skilful, contrapuntal reading, which interweaves three different, distinct, yet interrelated stories: the personal, Indigenous (Adnyamathana) wisdom and the Christian story. In Champion's work, as is the case with other Indigenous theologians, identity is intrinsically interwoven in story and continually revealed and discovered through storytelling that is grounded in an interdependent cosmovision. In Indigenous cosmovision epistemology, spirituality and identity are an integrated whole and interdependently connected. Champion describes this relationship as "living peacefully together with each other, the environment and the spiritual world" (30). Furthermore, Champion explains: "Our stories are a lens through which we can clearly see" (48). Stories are a way of "speaking truth, connecting the seen world with the unseen world, the visible with the invisible" (22). "Story-telling ensures we never forget" (61). "As we tell our stories…there is an echo and a connection to memory – to the biblical stories, yet beyond them to the ancient Creation story" (31). Of critical importance to Champion is the need to know and hear the "Good News in our language, in the biblical story and in our story" (74). The story, storytelling and storyteller are intimately bound in one identity, and separating one from the other has had devastating effects on and for First Peoples. As Champion puts it "For us that searching for identity is real. We're still struggling and fighting to recapture and reclaim who we are" (73).

Story and storytelling hold layers of multiple meanings. The stories can appear to be deceptively simple yet they hold deep, profound truth. One needs to listen attentively to discern what is being conveyed. In Champion's book there is a correlation between story, story-telling, revelation and ongoing discernment. Meanings are fluid and contexts are constantly changing. Meanings vary according to the time and context. I find the concept of "*Anaditj*" particularly helpful as it holds together certainty and yet remains open ended – "always was, always will be" (46). Revelation is manifested through ongoing discernment that is for Champion intimately tied to identity because, she argues, "when we know who we are, we know whose we are, who we belong to, and where we belong" (31). The challenge she puts to the western church is the need for them to learn that belonging comes before believing and not the other way around as has been characteristic of colonising Christian missions.

With regard to identity and revelation, discernment is not a closed process but ongoing. Champion describes the process using the metaphor of putting together a jigsaw puzzle.

> It's like a jigsaw puzzle that's never finished. It's not immediately obvious where the pieces go. You have to look hard at it and ask, where does this piece go? We're having to sit and mediate and think about it. Sometimes we put the piece in the wrong place and find it doesn't go there" (30).

In making the connection more broadly to theology and church, Champion rightfully asserts "Our voices need to be heard, including by our own peoples (15).

In addition, she understands that hers is not the only voice in this unfolding puzzle. "The Rainbow Spirit elders began to speak, but their work is not a finished work. They always acknowledged it to be something that was ongoing, which other voices need to join. So here I am adding my piece to the conversation" (15).

Champion's book is invitational, bold and challenging. She names the issues of displacement, colonisation and racism and the role of the Church and theology in perpetuating the injustices. The book calls forth ongoing deep reflection and action on several theological themes such as reconciliation, salvation, creation and revelation.

In terms of the Champion's contribution to theology, the book offers an alternative way of thinking and living theology, a method of analysis and reflection of how Indigenous spiritual or religious understandings can deepen and transform our understanding of God, Christian doctrine and faith. But intentionality is key to creating spaces for conversations and dialogue such as these in our churches, theological curriculum and formation. The gift, however, is that we will certainly be enriched and transformed but we must adopt a spirit of openness and curiosity. Champion's *Anaditj* is a rich resource for thinking, living and writing theology and as such should be on every lecturer's booklist.

Gospel, Worldviews and Ways of Life

Michelle Cook and Amos Leana

We have spent the last two months reflecting together on *Anaditj* and different approaches in understanding the interaction between the Gospel, worldviews and ways of living. While we have been reflecting on this we have also been facilitating Indigenous Christian leaders to explore their own understandings of Worship and Sacraments (Michelle and Marlene (Ngukurr)) and Indigenous Expressions of Faith (Amos, James Woods (Urapunga) and Rev (Deacon) Maratja Dhamarrandji (Galiwin'ku)).

We have different experiences which influence the way we receive this important work from Aunty Denise. Amos is from Papua New Guinea and has worked extensively in ministry in his homeland and with First Peoples throughout remote Australia. Michelle is from Australia; her family is originally from Scotland emigrating in the late 19th Century.

Amos' reflection:

Aunty Denise's work helps outsiders like me to recognise God's fingerprints and where connections can be made for positive conversations. My impression is that Rev (Deacon) Dr Champion's work reflects the ongoing battle of the dominant culture that has intruded into her world and imposed its way as the only way to enquire and deal with life and spiritual matters. Hence, her cultural ways become subservient to the powers and control of the dominating culture's influence. This suppressed the Indigenous spiritual beliefs or in the author's words: "...kept doing it in secret." As a reaction to this, the author argues for the authenticity of her cultural ways, including beliefs that have survived since time immemorial. Using "*Anaditj*" i.e. "The way things are" or explained as, "Always was, always will be" the author presents her worldview that everything is intricately connected.

Finally, I concur with the author that the churches need to listen if they are to identify the finger of God in First Peoples' cultures. The churches' failure to listen in the past misrepresented the gospel and imposed their (Western) cultural authority at the expense of the gospel. Hence, the recipients of the gospel saw the dominant culture's way instead of the gospel. Similarly, the recipients, too, need to be cautious that their experience of the Colonisers does not deny them the opportunity to unwrap the original audience's culture and the Western culture to find the Jewel (specific revelation) and make it relevant contextually (to their general revelation).

Michelle's Reflection:

When I read Aunty Denise's work I hear her voice, sharing stories of love, loss, ways of living and thinking, that are both alien to and resonant with my experience of the gospel. Her understanding of the universal Christ and the stories of creation and the Creator, challenge those of us who have been formed in Western theological traditions to look beyond our own cultural understandings and grapple with the tension between what Jürgen Moltmann describes as identity and relevance.[8] The significance of place and land in First Peoples' spirituality reminds us of the literally grounded way we live on the earth. The smells, the sights, the seasons and the undulations of this land were alien to the first Colonisers and to most of the missionaries. As Second Peoples from many lands we need to uncover our own cultural assumptions of Eden; Aunty Denise's writing gives us a doorway into such stripping away. Finally, I would love Aunty Denise to record the stories in this book and in 'Yarta Wandatha'. To hear her stories in her voice is a profound experience. It would be amazing to be able to share this to a wider audience.

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Aunty Denise read over the reviews and was offered a right of reply. Here is what the responses occasioned in her thinking…

The New Thing that Happens When I Tell a Story

Aunty Denise Champion with Rosemary Dewerse

For anyone to embrace Indigenous theology through anything that I've written would be a gift – for them to see God in their culture – because to recognise that it was God who has spoken to us through our ancestors, our stories, our lore, our songs and our ceremonies is really important for us as First Nations peoples to understand. Creation is God's oldest voice in this land. We have stories of how country was made, stories in the sea and the sky. The names of Creator Spirit might be different but that's the way our Aboriginal people made sense of how things came to be. All of this is our means for self-determination, telling us how we can be who we are, who God made us to be.

Indigenous theology is pre-Christian. Like all Aboriginal teaching we already have a framework that we work to. It's our stories, our kinship terminology. You can't try and fit Indigenous theology into Western theology. They're two different things. But you can find similarities. Sometimes you'll hear an echo. I ask

[8] See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (London:SCM, 1974), 7–31.

myself if I've heard that before. Where did I hear that concept before? The language, occasion or event might be different but what I've heard before affirms its validity. It is critical that Indigenous theology gets honoured as part of the same conversation as any other theologising.

The way that I explain Indigenous theology is 'Finding God in our story' or asking, 'Where is God in our story?' It's the incarnation really, Christ coming into our Adnyamathanha world just the way he did with the Jewish world. Of course, with the Jewish world he did come in human form, but into every other cultural group Christ also comes in. The incarnation happens, maybe not quite in the same form, but somewhere, somehow people hear about Christ and that's the birthing of Jesus in our culture, in our Christianity [Christianity meaning 'adhering to Christ'], and it allows that story to permeate.

I really do try and resist images to explain what I am doing. The Congress had an image of a plant in a clay pot, which represented the gospel as the plant in a British Christian pot, and we need to break the clay pot to allow the plant to take root in Indigenous soil. That's the image Congress always refers to, but I don't agree that the gospel came in a clay pot in the first place. I believe that there was already knowledge of God and Creator and Christ here before the missionaries came. I always base my understanding of that on the timeline. The church is only very young in this land – it's only two hundred years whereas our knowledge of Creator and Maker goes back thousands and thousands of years. The oral stories have been kept to teach people right from wrong, which I think is a very Christian thing! That's what the law, the Old Testament, was given for, to teach people to keep doing the right thing and what would happen if they broke the law.

Arrawatanha is an ancient title of the God of this land we now call Australia. In Adnyamathanha country that's the title. God has many titles right across Australia. You'll hear the reference being made to Creator Spirit. In Adnyamathanha the Damper Hill story speaks of Nguthunanga Mai Ambatanha. Nguthunanga is the word for 'Maker,' so I now use that word as well for Creator Spirit, Maker of all things. I always refer to Arrawatanha God so that people will know the name Arrawatanha is the name for God. So Arrawatanha God, Nguthunanga Maker of all things.

As an Adnyamathanha woman I recognise that our old stories are similar to the Old Testament stories of the giving of the law, but the coming of Christ was that something new. My uncle Ken, who has passed away now, he was a person that I would sit and listen to. He always talked about Arrawatanha, the Most High, and he always talked about Undakarranha, this Centre person, the one who came back from the dead. Meanwhile, we have, for example, a story of the Tower of Babel, and it is similar to other Indigenous stories of the Tower of Babel about how languages came to be. From what I can see in our Adnyamathanha culture there are bits and pieces of teaching that are also included in the Christian Bible, matching some stories in the Old Testament as well as parts of the New Testament story. I love in scripture, however, how it talks about how the full knowledge of God came in Jesus Christ (John 1:14, 18; Col 1:19). So that's the new thing that has happened.

In *Anaditj* we did a lot of work on Ngalakanha Muda, Big Wisdom, Big Story, which is above human understanding. There's Godly wisdom. We had to find a way to present it that would recognise it is above human wisdom. When you think of Adnyamathanha knowledge, it's human wisdom. It is what we have

carried along on the traditions of our fathers and forefathers, mothers and foremothers. They have passed down stories and wisdom and we then become the keepers of that wisdom. We find ways to pass it on. That's what I do. With *Anaditj* I pass on my knowledge – and the same with *Yarta Wandatha* – passing on what was handed down to me from my parents and grandparents.

Anaditj and *Yarta Wandatha* both speak to the impact of colonisation, but in different ways. I model my own way of dealing with colonisation, which is by looking at myself. Instead of arguing about what they did to us, I do what I do. In *Yarta Wandatha* it is seeing God in my story. This is very important for me, because it's a new thing that happens when I tell a story; it's the honouring of Christ. Christ comes into my story and there's a transformation that takes place. There is also a transcending – Ngalakanha Muda happens, the Big Story.

I am in an exploration stage looking at Christ in our stories.

With the stories there's this understanding that Christ was always, from the beginning, here. The Murrakurli story tells us this. It has two creation stories in it, the first telling about light coming into the world and the second about the coming of the sun. That coming of light story I always say is like the grand theme of the Bible – it runs from one end to the other. Christ himself came as the light of the world. Light was created in the beginning and affirms that part of the scriptures that says Christ was in the beginning. When I think of our stories, I feel they are a right revelation because they talk about how Christ was in the beginning but also about the incarnation story when Christ came in human form.

In the story of Nguthunanga Mai Ambatanha you can see God, the Old Woman who nurtures and cares for her children. When the children go off and get lost her understanding is that she is waiting at the camp and preparing it for their return. But when they do get lost the caring heart is to go and look for the children, and she tries to do a number of things to help them return. She cooks damper. She puts a step in the side of the hill. She sits and grieves for her lost ones and as she does that her spirit, what I call in the story the bellbird, pursues with song her lost children until they are found. The little girl is found up at Lake Letty where she has already transformed into a pillar of salt – she'd returned back to earth. The little boy is found not alive at the foot of Mt McKinlay. The bodies of the two children are brought back.

Aboriginal people all across Australia will say the quickest way to see an Aboriginal person die is to take them out of their country. Take them out of their country and they lose their spirit. Eventually there's a death of some kind or another – emotionally, spiritually, physically. When I read Christian stories, they affirm wisdom and knowledge in our old stories, of Creator, God our Maker, of Spirit, and of Undakaranha, the one who makes it possible to be renewed, made new. In all my Adnyamathanha stories, they are thin places where God and humans meet. Funnily enough though, a lot of our stories are not about humans, but the rest of creation. Our stories are of animals, birds, lizards and other parts of creation, not human, and speak in the third person. The only reason I can think as to why we do this is so as to not offend or judge directly.

To my critics the way I would answer them is *Anaditj*. Always was, always will be.' It's just the way it is.

Reviews

Kylie Crabbe, *Luke/Acts and the End of History*, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2020 (ISBN: 9783110615197)

What immediately excited me about Kylie Crabbe's *Luke/Acts and the End of History* was the promise of bringing together very diverse methods of reading Luke, and perhaps disrupting the stalemate between exegetical, Biblical-Theological study and more literary readings of Luke. These differing methods are a microcosm of the broader disconnect between Historical-Critical scholarship and post-structural projects like deconstruction, and so a rapprochement between the methods has potential as an example of what can be achieved beyond Lukan scholarship.

The opening observation of this book remains as true today as it was when I entered theological education twenty years ago (perhaps a sign of how stale these shibboleths have become). Crabbe's analysis is that Lukan scholarship has two main streams: Biblical-Theology following Conzelmann, and focussing on Luke's allegedly downgraded eschatology, (which led to a less radical, institutionalised church) is the first stream. The second is literary criticism, focussing on Luke's genre and historiography.

To achieve something of this scale would require a study that incorporates the insights and data gathered by both sides of the divide, and then to say something which answers the key concerns of both sides. This study's proposal is a creative attempt at just that. It expands the scope of genre study by going beyond the New Testament canon and Greco-Roman texts, and systematically compares Luke's concept of history to a wide range of texts, and notes how diverse concepts of the goal of history, divine guidance, and human agency, and the present moment, are found across various genres. This, claims Crabbe, necessitates cross-genre comparative study to answer the very questions that Conzelmann and others were asking in the mid- 20th century. Luke's concept, she claims, has important connections with texts from a range of genres.

In chapters 3- 6, Crabbe presents these comparisons between Luke-Acts' view of history with various case study texts. So, in Chapter 3, she considers schemas of history. She notes that many texts including Greco-Roman history and second temple apocalyptic create periodised schemas of history, and, in contrast to Conzelmann's view, they do sometimes unify these periods in a teleological framework.

Crabbe analyses texts without a sense of an endpoint to history, such as the historiography of Polybius and Diodorus Siculus which show steady progress through rising and falling empires. Valerius Maximus is an example of history with no progress, decline, or end. Tacitus' view of history is one of decline and moral decay from a golden age, with no vision of a way forward.

She then discusses teleological accounts, which show similar diversity. These may be optimistic and, as in Virgil's epic poetry, slowly rise to the endpoint of Roman dominance. They may suggest a steady state of history anticipating an end, including 2 Maccabees, The Qumran War Scroll and Josephus. Other texts narrate historical decline, necessitating ultimate divine intervention, including 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch.

So, rejecting Conzelmann's interpretation of Luke 16:16 as a periodisation of history, Crabbe interprets it in the context of Luke 16 as being rather a statement of eschatological urgency. According to Crabbe, Luke's periodisation which is seen in Jesus' preaching, and speeches in Acts (particularly Stephen's historical review in Acts 7) draws on this second temple teleological framework, and especially the periodisation of Daniel 2, to give a view of history which is less pessimistic than 4 Ezra and 2nd Baruch, but portrays the present time as a nadir requiring divine intervention and the abolition of all oppression in a final transition to divine reign.

Chapter 4 is an analysis of divine guidance and determinism. Certainly, Luke-Acts portrays a divine guidance which foresees future events, and offers certainty of God's plan ultimately triumphing. This does not, in her view, imply any form of rigid determinism. Crabbe disagrees with the view of Conzelmann, based on comparisons with Greco-Roman texts, that divine guidance through history is an alternative to a teleological view. Instead, she places Luke-Acts with Jewish texts that see divine guidance working in history towards an endpoint.

Chapter 5 again shows Luke-Acts' strong connections to Jewish texts in its understanding of human responsibility, as Luke attributes the blame for great evil to poor human choices, and occasionally to Satanic intervention, and not fate or fortune which in Greco-Roman mythology, even determined the actions of the gods. Though incorporated into God's plan, Luke sees such evil as the basis for God's intervention, not the means through which God's plan is achieved.

While this is an academic work, I think the pastoral and homiletic implications it offers us are equally exciting, and the author alludes to some of these in chapter 6, which considers Luke's theology of the present moment in relation to the end of history. Crabbe notes Mannheim's distinction between ideology and utopia. Ideology, a discourse of the powerful, refers to the belief that present social structures represent the fulfilment of hopes. Utopia on the other hand, a discourse of the disempowered, hopes for fulfilment beyond present structures. Crabbe notes that, in Acts 17:31, Jesus' resurrection and ascension change the present, but hope is found in his future eschatological judgment.

My final note is that by articulating this theology of the present moment, Crabbe has helped rescue Luke-Acts for many contemporary readers. Luke is often valued by preachers, especially in Liberal and Mainstream churches, as a warm and inclusive gospel, focussing on women and the poor. And yet, the Historical-Critical tendency to treat Luke-Acts as Mannheimian *ideology* for the early institutionalised church makes Luke-Acts suspect to postmodern readers. Not only was faith in "history" shattered by the world wars and cold War of the twentieth century, but we now preach and minister to people aware of climate change, global pandemics, and economic decline. The present moment cannot be credibly preached as the fulfilment of hope to contemporary people. Crabbe, however, has shown us that eschatology is not only present in Luke, but is essential to its theology, and that it portrays Jesus' coming as intensifying eschatological urgency in the present.

Karl Hand

John Bottomley, *Money Talks: Capitalist Ethics, Colonialism and Divine Governance*, Bayswater: Coventry Press, 2022 (ISBN: 9781922589156)

I find the phrase "money talks" rather evocative. For me, it conjures images of smartly besuited people – specifically men – shaking chubby, orange-tinged hands on some dubious business deal involving property, a merger, or some shady aspect of our political life. It induces thoughts of eliteness, of

exclusivity, perhaps even of secrecy, thoughts of an arena of wheelings and dealings unknown and inaccessible to the *hoi polloi*. "Money talks" gives voice to the prodding feeling many of us experience that numerous of the decisions made in our society are the result not of democratic voices but of economic ones. If money talks, what it says seems profoundly consequential, though many of us are not conversant in its language. It seems fitting, then, that *Money Talks* is the title of John Bottomley's excellent series of studies on capitalist ethics and colonialism. Bottomley's studies invite us to consider what money might be saying and to listen to its conversation with other important and interested voices.

The book is composed of a series of small group studies. It is not an academic treatise, but a group activity for laypeople, featuring readings, questions for reflection and discussion, and prayers. As such, *Money Talks* is not an attempt to break new theological or economic ground, but rather to aid the task of Christian discipleship as it pertains to the world of finance.

Indeed, in *Money Talks*, Bottomley does not offer much in the way of new insights in terms of biblical interpretation. Four out of five of the key passages explored come from Luke's Gospel which has been a focal point of biblical scholars' reflections on economic matters for some decades now. For those who have read, say, Ched Myers, William Herzog, or Jonathan Cornford, there is little here from an exegetical perspective that would count as new insight. But, then again, most Australian Christians have not read these authors and, as noted, Bottomley is not seeking to revolutionise biblical scholarship on economics. *Money Talks* is, to repeat myself, a set of studies aimed at laypeople. Bottomley makes some sharp economic-focused readings of Scripture available to the layperson and in doing so provides an important service to the church.

Where Bottomley does provide innovation is in his use of observations about our contemporary economic context, in particular those relating to the financial services industry. Each study oscillates between biblical reflection and testimonies from those working in the financial sector (taken from the University of Divinity's Religion and Social Policy Network for Australia's Finance Sector Union). These testimonies emphasise the ethical dilemmas faced by such workers and paint a disquieting picture of the state of the financial sector, even in the aftermath of the 2018 Royal Commission into banking.

By knitting together biblical reflection and testimony from within the financial sector in this way, Bottomley brings the economic wisdom and judgement revealed in Scripture to bear on a realm of life that affects us all but that almost none of us understands.

Study One of *Money Talks* explores the connections between ethics and vocation within the context of capitalism, using Luke 4's story of Jesus' temptation as a starting point for considering our own ethical framework in contrast to the market ethics inherent within capitalism.

The second study focuses on Jesus' rebuke of Herod's corruption in Luke 13:31-35, asking readers to contemplate the corruption and oppression they see and experience in their work, as well as the roles of lament and whistleblowing in the struggle for justice.

Study Three uses Jesus' words on coming judgement in Luke 13:1-9 to encourage reflection on imagination and repentance. Bottomley suggests that repentance is a kind of conversion of the imagination, such that we begin to see things as they really are. He goes on to explore, using the work of Trawloolway theologian Garry Deverell, the way in which acknowledgement of colonial idolatry

and listening to Indigenous voices are crucial to "liberation from falsehood and lies" (p. 45).

Study Four uses Luke's Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15) to explore covetousness (qua sin against God and neighbour) and restorative justice. Bottomley considers the way in which the covetousness inherent in colonial capitalism's approach to the world has led to environmental ruin and economic inequality. He suggests "The Uluru Statement from the Heart" might represent a voice yearning and hoping for a change of heart, much like the father in the parable.

The fifth and final study in *Money Talks* uses the story of Mary's anointing of Jesus in John 12:1-8 to reflect on love and solidarity in the shadow of death. Here, the testimonies from workers in the financial sector, outlining instances of attempted suicide on account of the pressures, alienation, and abuses of power within the industry, are particularly poignant. Bottomley looks to the unconditional love between Mary and Jesus as an alternative to the soul-destroying work detailed by the aforementioned testimonies.

Overall, the biblical reflections here are solid and well-articulated. There is the occasional questionable assertion – for example, the Pharisees being accused of "legalism" (p. 59), which is increasingly regarded as an outdated and somewhat anti-Jewish claim in contemporary New Testament studies. Further, depending on the education level of the group using the material, some points could be challenging, but generally it would suit most churchgoing audiences. At times the studies move quickly from one focus to another and, as a result, they can feel erratic. This necessitates that the group leader(s) have read through the material prior to using it with a group.

Talking about money is, as Bottomley's introduction notes, a social taboo. Indeed, I suspect most Christians would prefer to discuss pornography than their money. But the questions asked by Bottomley's book are important and these studies are well worth a look, particularly for those in the Australian context.

Matthew Anslow

Stephen Burns and Robert Gribben (eds), *When We Pray: The Future of Common Prayer*, Bayswater: Coventry Press, 2020, ISBN: 9780648725107

Reading through the essays assembled by editors Stephen Burns and Robert Gribben in *When We Pray: The Future of Common Worship*, perhaps the most common concern among all the contributors is the deeper question underpinning many of the contributions in the book: to which extent is common worship still common?

The book arose out of a symposium day held at Trinity College Theological School in Melbourne on May 4, 2018. Beyond the presentations of the day, others were later approached to contribute to this publication of about 15 essays. As could be expected of a publication like this, the different essays cover quite a wide range of topics, loosely held together by the focus on common worship.

The contributors come from the broad Anglican tradition (the majority), the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the four of the Uniting Church in Australia (Peter Campbell, Robert Gribben, Amelia Koh-Butler and Glen O'Brien.) The book is divided into two parts: the first part groups essays together that focus on specific prayer book traditions or certain elements of those traditions; the second part focusses on general themes around the liturgy and often on issues relating to liturgical renewal.

I found all the essays interesting in their own way although not everyone in the Uniting Church may be equally interested in historical issues around the

Book of Common Prayer or the debates and issues relating to liturgical developments in the Roman Catholic Church. However, what struck me most reading through this very diverse set of essays, written by equally diverse people, not only from Australia and New Zealand but also from Europe and North America, is the deep impression of the *common* concerns around common worship. Even if our answers are often not the same, many of our questions are.

There is a general undercurrent of awareness among the essays of the need for an authentic local expression of prayer. There is also a deep recognition of the importance of ongoing liturgical renewal in order to take contemporary challenges seriously. I think Jason McFarland is undoubtedly correct when he says that vital communities and vital worship are inseparable (362). But the global liturgical revolution of the twentieth century, as Stephen Platten points out, had both a sense of innovation and renaissance. Some of the most interesting and exciting rediscoveries pertains to the tradition of mystagogical catechesis where the rites of initiation and the paschal mysteries are linked. This holds an enormous amount of promise for the future.

However, the church in the twenty-first century is also confronted by a general and wide-spread ignorance among congregations regarding the theological meaning and significance of what happens in worship. Many liturgies in the Uniting Church are regularly sourced in an indiscriminate way from any internet sources. Robert Gribben asks truly important questions, mostly directed at the Uniting Church: "What now provides the link between the churches' tradition of faith, and their local liturgy?" (105) "What will indicate the doctrinal integrity of a prayer?" And especially: "What makes our liturgies (still) *Christian*?" (105)

Integral to what "common worship" is, is the assumption that worship is the work of the people, not simply of the clergy. This is the understanding that has guided the church for most of its existence. The irony, as Bosco Peters suggests, seems to be that many of the contemporary liturgical innovations which are done in the name of democratising worship, often do exactly the opposite. Rather than being the work of the people (that is, common worship), the responsibility and power in many of the liturgical innovations have shifted to the clergy (150). And even if the clergy in these cases are not the sole creative agents behind the liturgy, they act as the masters of ceremony: initiating and directing all liturgical actions.

Especially in the Uniting Church, where we often like to think about ourselves as willing or even eager to be liturgically creative, Peters' warning should be heeded: "Yes, our attention at worship is being held by the ever-changing words, but our attention is not being drawn to God or each other. Our attention is on the screen or the sheet. There is very little encouragement to worship 'by heart'" (150).

I would also argue that liturgies that change on a weekly basis, often drawn from disparate internet sources, and driven by nothing else but the need for change, have no ability to surprise anymore. If everything changes all the time, nothing changes. If everything is meant to be new and surprising, then nothing is new or surprising.

This means the crucial question is how to navigate between innovation and continuity, between uniformity and a culture of anything goes. Or to put it in Uniting Church language: How do we assure that there is liberty in the order and order in the liberty? This is often where practical and tangible suggestions are most helpful. In this regard I found the essays by Carmen Pilcher ("Creation is our Prayer Book"), Amelia Koh-Butler ("'Becoming We': Exploring Liminality")

and Stephen Burns ("Confessing more than our sins") particularly insightful.

The three of them explore and offer suggestions on Aboriginal spirituality and the importance of ritual connection to the land or creation as a gift (Pilcher), multiculturalism, inclusion and especially contextual rituals as a form of community and mission (Koh-Butler), and a reflection on the presentation of repentance in the liturgy and prayer books in conversation with Gail Ramshaw's suggestion that the Christian liturgy may "confess more than sin". (Burns)

It is true, as Stephen Burns suggests in the Introduction, that the essays could be read in any order. That would also mean just reading the essays that potentially appeal to the reader's interests. However, I would recommend also reading those that don't come from within one's own denomination. The power of these essays often lies in the things one could learn from our ecumenical friends.

Given the ecumenical breadth of the essays, it would have been interesting to have a voice from the Orthodox Church speaking into the conversation as well. Not only for the sake of ecumenical inclusion, but also because some of the most profound theological thinkers on worship come from the Orthodox tradition.

In conclusion, I recommend this book, not only because it contains very helpful and interesting contributions, but especially because it articulates and responds to the issues that are at the heart of the Christian faith's well-being in the early twenty-first century.

Ockert Meyer

Contributors

Matthew Anslow was a co-founder of Love Makes a Way. He is the Educator for Lay Ministry with the Uniting Church Synod of NSW and the ACT. Matthew's PhD thesis was recently published as *Fulfilling the Law and the Prophets: The Prophetic Vocation of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* (Pickwick, 2022). He has published numerous articles on subjects such as peacemaking, civil disobedience, agriculture, biblical studies, and philosophy. Matthew lives in Blackheath, NSW with his wife, Ashlee, and three children.

Brendan E. Byrne was ordained as Minster of the Word in the Uniting Church in 2011. Prior to that he worked as a securities officer in a major Australian financial institution, as an employee advocate in blue- and white-collar trade unions, and as a convenience store clerk working evening and graveyard shifts on weekends. Brendan is creator and co-host of the podcast *Working the Lectionary* and can be found online at brendanebyrne.com

Seforosa Carroll is an Australian-Rotuman, originally from Fiji. A theologian and an ordained minister of the Uniting Church in Australia, Sef served for several years as Programme Executive for Mission from the Margins/Ecumenical Indigenous Peoples Network, World Council of Churches in Geneva. In January 2023 she took up the position of lecturer in Cross Cultural ministry and theology in the School of Theology/ United Theological College, Charles Sturt University. She researches and publishes on Migration, Home, and Hospitality. Sef is a research fellow with the Center for Public and Contextual Theology, Charles Sturt University, and a member of the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton.

Aunty Denise Champion is an Adnyamathanha daughter, mother, sister, aunty and grandmother from the Flinders Ranges in South Australia. An ordained Uniting Church Minister, she is Theologian in Residence at the Uniting College for Leadership and Theology in Adelaide, part of the University of Divinity. In 2020 she was awarded the Doctor of Divinity by the Adelaide College of Divinity. Not only is she the author of *Anaditj*, but also *Yarta Wandatha* (2014), articles and an upcoming book chapter. Aunty Denise has been a speaker at many events and interviewed locally and nationally on topics such as reconciliation and indigenous theology.

Michelle Cook is a Deacon in the Uniting Church. She is currently a facilitator/teacher at Nungalinya College in Darwin. She has served as a Bush Chaplain for Frontier Services in Cape York, a teacher and minister in Mapoon and across the Western Cape with UAICC, and in the Presbytery of Tasmania as a Mission consultant. Her doctorate, "On Being a Covenanting and Multicultural Church: Ordinary theologians in the Uniting Church reflect on what it means to be church," was completed at the University of Queensland in 2020.

Rosemary Dewerse is a daughter, mother, sister, and aunty from Aotearoa New Zealand. Dr Derwerse is Academic Dean and Research Coordinator at the Uniting College for Leadership and Theology in Adelaide, part of the University of Divinity. She has been collaborating with Aunty Denise Champion for more than ten years to publish her theological work.

Garry Worete Deverell is a trawloolway man from northern lutruwita/Tasmania and an Anglican priest. For the past 27 years he has ministered in parishes, agencies and academic settings with three different

Christian denominations. In 2020 he founded the School of Indigenous Studies within the University of Divinity, where he continues to work as a Lecturer and Research Fellow.

Jason John is a Deacon, spending most of his ministry encouraging the church and wider community to live as better members of the Earth family. Formerly a Uniting Earth Advocate, with colleagues he unsuccessfully sought support for the creation of a forest ministry. He is the Bellinger Landcare Coordinator and author He also leads two small worship gatherings, and writes and performs the kind of poetry only an emotionally repressed priest with science training could create. Visit his http://ecofaith.org

Karl Hand is a pastor, ministering at Crave Church in the Sydney CBD, a congregation of Metropolitan Community Churches.

Anthony Lamuel is the recently retired General Secretary/CEO of the Pakistan Bible Society, He oversaw significant expansion of the Society's work, especially in the development of its publication of theological literature. Internationally, he served the governance work of the United Bible Societies, chairing its Audit and Finance Committee for two terms. He has also held many leadership roles in the Church of Pakistan. These include General Secretary of the Church of Pakistan, Secretary of the Church of Pakistan Diocesan Council, and member of the Lahore Diocesan Executive Committee.

Elizabeth Lee lives on the land of the Bidjigal, Sydney. She is a Spiritual Director, Retreat Facilitator and Professional/Pastoral Supervisor. Currently a PhD candidate at the University of Divinity (Pilgrim College), Liz's area of interest is "Reimagining Hospitality in Faith Communities Through a Trauma-sensitive Lens in a Post-Royal Commission Era." Her 2022 Minor Thesis was "Looking Deeply: A Trauma-Sensitive Evaluation of the National Person of Concern Policy Framework 2020 of the Uniting Church in Australia."

Amos Leana comes from Papua New Guinea. He joined the Nungalinya College in 2018 as a teacher in theology and ministry, and continues to serve in that role. He earlier served in various training roles in theology, missiology, leadership and discipleship in Samoa, Papua New Guinea and with the indigenous communities in the Kimberley, WA and Northwest NSW in Australia. Amos holds a Doctor of Intercultural Studies/Missiology from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, USA.

Valentina Satvedi Leydon is a (diasporic) Anabaptist (Mennonite) and has been in placement at Pilgrim Uniting Church, Launceston, since 2021 as a Minister from another denomination, the Mennonite Church, USA. A product of the Anabaptist Missionary movement in India, she has lived on three different continents and has now been residing in Australia for 10 years. In that time she has intentionally engaged with several different activist communities such as Pax Christi (Australia), Pace e Bene, (Australia), Pacific Fellowship, and Safe Asylum (Tasmania) to name a few.

Margaret Mayman has been minister of St Michael's Uniting Church in Melbourne since 2020. Rev Dr Mayman was born in Aotearoa New Zealand. After completing degrees in political science and theology she was ordained as a Presbyterian minister. Her PhD in Christian Social Ethics from Union Theological Seminary in New York. She has served congregations in Christchurch, Wellington and Sydney, where she was minister at Pitt Street Uniting Church.

Ockert Meyer is a minister of the Word in the Uniting Church in Australia and teaches Theology, Homiletics and Liturgy at United Theological College in Sydney. He studied theology at Stellenbosch University in South Africa, and did postgraduate studies at the Universities of Utrecht and Leiden in the Netherlands. He was ordained in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa.

Anne Pattel-Gray is the Head of the School of Indigenous Studies at the University of Divinity, Melbourne Australia. Professor Pattel-Gray holds a Ph.D. from the University of Sydney awarded in 1995 and later published as *The Great White Flood: Racism in Australia* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998). She is a recognized scholar, theologian, activist and prolific writer with several publications. A descendant of the Bidjara/Kari Kari Nations in Queensland, she is an internationally renowned Aboriginal leader. She has dedicated her life to the struggle of Australia First Nations (AFN).

Mark Zirnsak is Senior Social Justice Advocate, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. He joined the social justice area of the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania in 1999 and became its director in 2004. In 2019, Mark became the Senior Social Justice Advocate. Mark is a member of several advisory bodies to the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments. Mark is the Secretariat for the Tax Justice Network in Australia. He is also active in anticorruption movements, including Transparency International Australia and the UN Convention Against Corruption Coalition.

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