

CROSS
Purposes

Areopagus
Hill

through a glass

in service

op. cit.

Issue 11
November 2007

Grant Finlay

Martin Wright

John Rickard

Raoul Spackman-
Williams

...and more!

CROSS

Purposes

Issue 10
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A forum for theological dialogue

HAVING OFFERED some retrospective views on the first thirty years of the Uniting Church in our last issue, we now turn to consider the future.

There exist a great variety of opinions about what the future might hold for the Uniting Church. Whatever optimism and clarity about the church's character and mission may have been in the minds of those who worked to see the UCA come into being, such clarity and hopeful outlook is largely lacking today.

"Change" is the theme of the age, and a constant mantra in the church. This theme is often cast in terms of a contrast between the institution and the Spirit. Just as often this translates further into the contrast of old and the new, the elderly and the young, tradition and reform, orthodox and liberal, even male and female, presbyter and deacon, law and grace, mono-cultural

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and multicultural. These are the types of pressure points of change we see in the culture which envelops the church, and so it should not surprise us that they should also be felt in the church.

The contributors to this issue of *Cross Purposes* offer a range of opinions about the nature of the task which faces the church, and the theme of change is not far from the heart of each of their reflections. It is perhaps most explicit in the offering of Andrew Dutney. He notes that the emphasis which was placed on theological education and the theological scholarship of ministers in the UCA's Reformed heritage still predominates in thinking about preparation for ministry in the UCA today. Drawing on contemporary sociological work, Dutney proposes that the church and

the world to which such training for ministry was most suited has been dead and gone for a generation. New times need new forms of ministry.

Alistair Macrae begins with a question in which change is implied: is the church still of any use? Whatever once may have been the work and role of the church, does that still apply? He goes on to propose a renewed commitment to connectedness in the life of the church: connection to the world in evangelism, to other spheres of discourse through dialogue, to other Christian denominations through ecumenism, to creation through a re-construal of the whole earth as being within God's concern and not simply being the sphere of human salvation.

Rob Gotch reflects on the challenge of making disciples in the

...the Uniting Church needs its educational institutions to shift their emphasis from forming scholars to forming practitioners; pro-active, mission oriented ministers and leaders.

The Standing Committee sent to the faculty of Parkin-Wesley College a report that proposed some specific measures that could be taken to effect this shift and it set in train a process that will, over the next eighteen months or so, produce a quite different approach to theological education in the South Australian UCA.

ANDREW DUTNEY is the Principal of Parkin-Wesley College in Adelaide.

Notes

¹I have discussed these two traditions and their relevance to the Uniting Church in my recent book, *"A Genuinely Educated Ministry": Three Studies on Theological Education in the Uniting Church in Australia* (Adelaide: MediaCom, 2007).

²J. Davis McCaughey, "The Uniting

Church in Australia: Hopes and Fears", *St. Mark's Review* 89, 19.

³Gary Bouma, *Australian Soul: Religion and Spirituality in the Twenty-First Century* (Melbourne: CUP, 2006).

⁴Ibid, 96-98.

⁵Ibid, 100.

⁶Ibid, 99.

⁷Ibid, xiv.

⁸Ibid, 85.

⁹Ibid, 105 & 128.

¹⁰*Minutes and Reports of the Fifth Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia* (Melbourne: UC, 1988) 66-7.

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? *Is the "Reformed" model of ministry indeed "partial and exhausted"? What might be a faithful and constructive model of theological education for our current context?* ?

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ministry “suited to a society and culture that has now passed for more than a quarter-century”.

One of the most clear and concise definitions of ordained ministry was provided in a report to the UCA’s fifth Assembly, in 1988:

In order to be faithful to Jesus Christ...the Church recognizes and appoints certain people as called by God to give leadership in the Church. Such leadership involves a commitment to life-long study and reflection on the scriptures, on the faith of the Church, and on the implications of that faith for the Church today. They are to see that the Church continues within the apostolic tradition of proclamation and service, and to find ways in which this tradition can be expressed in our own age. Such recognition of a call for a lifetime is called ordination.¹⁰

The lack of fit between this model of ministry and the religious and spiritual trends that Bouma describes is very clear. The ordained ministry is defined here in essentially scholarly, intellectual terms. It is entered into in the expectation that the commitment is life-long. It gives responsibility for the maintenance of the church in the apostolic tradition with the ordained, professional minister. It describes a model of ministry suited to a society, culture *and church* that has now passed for more than a quarter-century.

We still approach theological education with that exhausted model

of ministry in view. But we do not have to in the Uniting Church. We ought to be able to draw equally from Reformed and Evangelical traditions. And at this time in Australia the Evangelical tradition of theological education offers the more promising possibilities. It would not be a return to training an order of itinerant, prophetic preachers (a model which has also gone the way of all flesh). Most basically it would ensure that theological education is not an end in itself, but is entirely instrumental to the formation of effective leaders of healthy congregations oriented to mission and evangelism. But we’re so out of practice with that part of our inheritance. It will take a little while for us to revisit that Evangelical tradition to discover what it offers for today. So it was that in February of this year the Standing Committee of the Presbytery and Synod of South Australia agreed:

To require Parkin-Wesley College to undergo the organizational and cultural change necessary to maximize its contribution to ensuring that the church has the ministers and lay leaders that it needs.

It said that:

The educational model applied with excellence by Parkin-Wesley College is one that worked well for a previous era but needs to be changed for the present era.

In particular, it explained:

21st century: surely it is the right time to ask a question like this, and whether what is required now might be different from what once we sought or settled for.

David Pitman calls for dreams and visions, and a trusting in God to equip his church for the future.

Jenny Tymms calls not simply for a response to the changing world but an active seeking of change—not a seeking of change for its own sake but for the sake of our own rediscovery of the strange and counter-cultural ways of Jesus. This involves choosing to learn new contextual theologies and praxes which bring liberating words to bear on our own captive lives and the lives of those around us.

Whatever the future will be like, the only thing we might be confident about is that it will not be like the past. And that God waits for us there. A God who calls into being things which are not and raises the dead is a God of change. But this is an eminently corruptible idea. We must be wary that it is the God who is over and through change who is loved and worshiped, and not the change itself. That is the trick: neither fearing change nor worshipping it, but in all things seeking God. To this end, while we might well pray for new dreams and visions, for new models and structures, for new words and deeds, we might also continue to pray for the gift of the Spirit, that we may not lose the way.

Serving the Body

Rob Gotch

I’M IN MY FOURTH year at Surrey Hills, and past experience suggests that it’s usually about now that I ask myself if I’m happy where I am or whether I should seek another placement. I’ll come back to that question at the end of this piece (don’t be tempted to read ahead—you’ll miss the important stuff).

From time to time I read my ministry profile as a way of checking how my thinking is evolving or staying the same. I wrote the following three paragraphs over four years ago and I reckon they still sum up what I believe:

The apostle Paul’s image of church as the “body of Christ” provides a significant foundation for the ministry in which I share. I believe this image richly articulates the



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basis of Christian faith—that the Crucified One is risen and alive in his church; that the body once stretched out on a cross is now incarnate in his church through Word and Sacrament; and that the church is gifted by the Holy Spirit to love and serve the Lord and share his life in the world.

Journeying with people in times of sickness or grief is a great privilege; in their vulnerability and trust they tend to be very receptive to whatever ministry is offered, therefore such ministry must be of the very highest quality. I try to respond to news of illness or hardship with an immediate visit, especially if the person is in hospital. I also believe that pastoral care is much more than visiting the sick. Pastoral care is care for a whole person within the context of that person's life. Primarily, it's care that's focussed on helping the person grow in grace—in faith, hope and love. Accordingly, I try to be "pastoral" in all of my encounters with people, responding as if to Christ.

My vision for ministry is to build up the church through worship and service. I have a passion for discipleship—to journey with people who want to engage and grow in the mission of Christ. I wish to help people understand that what we do here and now has the capacity to make an eternal difference; that our efforts to do justice, love kindness, and humbly seek our God brings the reign of God close to those for whom Christ died.

From my earliest recollection, my sense of call has connected deeply with Christ's command to "make disciples". This mandate was with me through years of lay ministry at Glen Waverley UC in the 1980s, and it continued to sustain me when I applied to become a candidate for the Ministry of the Word in 1990. It's embarrassing to recall that this mandate took shape for me in the rather self-righteous expectation that others ought to share my experience of God. During my search for a distinctive experience of discipleship it was suggested to me (by one of the Glen Waverley ministers) that I consider the Ministry of the Word. I had no idea of the broader implications of ordained ministry but it did occur to me that, in the very least, I should be able to make disciples. Of course, ordained ministry is not for everyone. In recent years my involvement in the Presbytery's oversight of the Period of Discernment and ministry application processes has afforded me the privilege of companionship on their journey of discipleship. I'm painfully aware of the difficult path that some travel on this journey, especially when the church does not receive them as candidates and encourages them to continue in lay ministry.

I would think that many of us, whether ordained or lay, wonder about the meaning and shape of discipleship in the church today.

tradition, "The central feature of worship is the sermon... The posture of... approach to God is sitting and hearing. The chief duty of the believer is to receive and believe correct theology and avoid heresy."⁴ Nearly half a millennium later the culture is shifting again—not back to tradition, but now towards experience/emotion as the touchstone of authority. Bouma made the observation, "Few Protestant clergy are respected for their ability to make real a sense of the presence of God".⁵ That's what it's all about now—a real sense of the presence of God—and while our ministers may have that sense personally, they have not been specifically trained and formed to communicate it, to make it real.

Further, Bouma argues, "We live in post-professional times".⁶ He describes the professions as "the high priestly cadres of the Age of Reason", in which the rational rules of medicine, learning, law and even faith, and how they pertain to people's lives, are known and interpreted only by those qualified and approved for that role (doctors, teachers, lawyers and the clergy). But now there is a burgeoning do-it-yourself movement that reflects a fundamental shift in the character of society. It is evident in the spectacular growth of, for example, alternative medicine and other non-regulated therapies, home schooling, inexpensive guides to writing a will or buying a property,

individually created ceremonies for naming a child or scattering a loved-one's ashes. Twenty-first century secularity is no longer the intellectual rejection of the claims of religion, nor even a mood of opposition to religion and spirituality. Rather, secularity today "is best seen as a social condition in which the religious and spiritual have moved out from the control of both the state and such formal organizations as the church".⁷ He concludes that "Australia's religious and spiritual life is alive and well" but it is changing. "It is becoming more diverse, less tied to formal organizations. There are new players in the field."⁸ And this has clear implications for the Uniting Church's understanding of ministry and their education.

[Ministers] trained in the 1960s and 1970s have had to reinvent themselves to engage a much different world, use different technology to engage people and appeal to a different form of authority if they are to engage at all. Many institutions that train clergy still produce graduates suited to a society and culture that has now passed for more than a quarter-century.⁹

If this is a generally fair picture it is hardly surprising that fewer church members respond to God's call to ministry by applying to become candidates for ordained ministry. It would be odd of God to call young men and women in 2007 to a form of

Union's requirement that Uniting Church Congregations be served by what Davis McCaughey once called:

...a genuinely educated ministry: men and women who lovingly and reverently care for what the Christian faith has meant at various periods in its history, and for what it might yet mean in the intellectual, imaginative and cultural context of their own day.²

The church could not ask this of ministers without also making adequate provision for their theological education—building and maintaining a system of theological education designed to produce *this* kind of minister in particular, the scholarly Reformed pastor.

The Uniting Church is committed to a model of ministry that is partial in the sense that it transmits the Reformed tradition of the scholarly, teaching pastor at the expense of the Evangelical tradition of an order of itinerant, prophetic preachers. At union it renewed the franchise of the former, disenfranchising the latter. Our system of theological education has been tooled accordingly. This presents a quite specific problem: that model of ministry is exhausted. Its time is up.

The sociologist Gary Bouma has recently drawn attention to a cultural shift that has great significance for Australian churches.³ At the heart of his argument is the recognition that there has been a fundamental shift in

the locus of authority in western culture that has been reshaping the ways that Australians express their spirituality. It is a shift from the dominance of reason to the dominance of experience and emotion, and it has been increasingly evident since the mid-1970s. It applies in all areas

“ Our model of ministry is exhausted. Its time is up. ”

of western culture, including religion and spirituality. The charismatic renewal in the mainstream churches and the rise of Pentecostalism in Australia are signs of this cultural change—as are the popularity of Taizé patterns of worship and the use of contemplative prayer by Protestants.

Bouma says that there are three forms of authority: tradition, reason and experience/emotion. Each is evident in any period of history but one is always more dominant than the others. So it's not that there is no longer a role for reason or tradition in religion and spirituality, but that they are now overshadowed by experience/emotion.

Bouma correctly points out that Protestantism was founded in a shift of emphasis from the authority of tradition to the authority of reason. The dictates of the Pope and the past were subordinated to the reasoned translation, interpretation and applica-

Surely, as we celebrate our first 30 years and look to the future, the time is right to ask—How shall we make disciples in the 21st Century? This issue continues to be something of a preoccupation for me, although I'd like to think that my perspective and motivation is a bit more mature these days. Several years ago the advent of the “Becoming Disciples” process provided for me a sense of hope that the Uniting Church was at last recognizing a long neglected discipline. I was encouraged to re-engage in this aspect of ministry and to seek resources that would support it. It's good to see that the Discipleship Unit of our own Synod is currently providing opportunities for ministers to develop their understanding and practice of intentional adult Christian education.

Over the past few years I've deliberately engaged with conversation partners who represent fairly orthodox theological perspectives. I've made this decision because I'm persuaded that we are called to do more than “live the questions”. Ironically, the DVD-based resources I've been using recently (see notes 1 and 2 below) are not so much at odds with the more liberal alternatives as some might believe (being orthodox does not mean embracing fundamentalism or creationism). Of course, in the final analysis, it's usually the resurrection of Jesus that distinguishes one tradition from another,

i.e., did it happen and what does it mean?

In Surrey Hills the practice of occasional faith education opportunities has given birth this year to a more intentional and regular program. “Faith Talk” comprises four sessions in each term: term one focuses on theology and doctrine, term two on the bible, term three on worship, and term four on Christian living (I'm indebted to Randall Prior for a conversation that planted the seed for this program). It's my hope that we're setting a pattern that will help establish and sustain a culture of learning and discipleship in the congregation. I've been trying to develop a similar culture in the life of the Church Council—to build a sense of what it means to be a fellowship of church leaders; a fellowship of discernment, encouragement and grace. I've often reminded councillors of that wonderful paragraph from the UCA Regulations:

The Church Council shall give priority in its life to building up the Congregation in faith and love, sustaining members in hope, and leading the Congregation to a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world. (§3.1.13a)

I've enjoyed the resources that we've used in Faith Talk and have been energized by the robust dialogue, but I can't pretend that I have no doubts about the whole enterprise and, like many colleagues, I'm not immune to

the anxieties of falling membership statistics (I am, after all, a “glass half empty” sort of guy).

So...what is the purpose of discipleship education? To what degree is discipleship dependent on doctrine (orthodox or otherwise)? Am I helping people grow in grace, or am I seeking (still) to impose my experience and perspective on them? It would be convenient to cite Scripture —“Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). However, an even more basic motivation is the integration of faith and life; to be able to reflect theologically on the way one behaves in one’s family, community and world.

The longer I practise ministry the more I realize my limitations and my strengths. There are numerous things that my vocation invites from me, many of which I am unqualified to do. I’m not a psychologist or a counsellor or a social worker. But I am a Minister of the Word and I am qualified to make disciples. God’s first call continues to sustain me.

Things are going well at Surrey Hills, and there is much to do.

“As for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part... but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.”

“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”

ROB GOTCH is minister of Surrey Hills UC.

Notes

1. *Serious Answers to Hard Questions* (Wesley Ministry Network, 2006). Comprising ten 30-minute video sessions. Reproduced in Australia by Adult Faith Education, Faith & Life, Brisbane, (07) 3336 9163.

2. *Living Faith: Exploring the Essentials of Christianity* (SPCK, 2005). Comprising ten 30-minute video sessions. Available through Unichurch Books.

? *How might a renewed emphasis on “making disciples” take shape in your congregation or ministry?* ?

to give the people of his or her congregation access to the ancient Christian faith which is their heritage.

Paragraph 10 of the *Basis of Union* deals with the authority of Protestant confessions of faith in the same way (the Scots Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Savoy Declaration and John Wesley’s Forty-Four Sermons). It is understood from the outset that these texts speak with different, sometimes conflicting voices. The divisions between the denominations have not been over nothing. It is also understood, therefore, that appeals to the authority of these confessions cannot consist in any kind of thoughtless proof-texting. Their authority is of a different kind. So paragraph 10 commits the Uniting Church to use these documents to “learn...from the witness of reformation fathers” and to “listen to the preaching of John Wesley”. “Listening” and “learning” express a relationship to inherited doctrinal traditions that is quite different to the more familiar relationship of simply conforming or agreeing to the requirements of past generations; a more adult, sophisticated relationship. And again, paragraph 10 requires the Uniting Church to “commit her ministers and instructors to study these statements” in order that they can continually offer “the congregation of Christ’s people” access to their Protestant heritage in informed,

creative and effective ways.

The scholarly ministry of the Reformed pastor was deliberately embedded in the *Basis of Union* and so it was only appropriate that this would be reflected in the questions put to ordinands in the service of ordination. From the time of union the ordinand was asked, “Do you receive for use in instruction and worship the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds?” And in a question even more evocative of the life of the scholarly pastor: “Will you continue to allow your mind to be illuminated, your conscience quickened, and your prayers deepened by study of the confessional documents specified in the *Basis of Union*?”

This sense of what constituted the essential nature of ministry persisted even during the 1990s when the Uniting Church went through a major process of renewing and restructuring its forms of ministry. At his or her ordination, the deacon or the minister of the Word is now asked: “Learning from the Confessional Documents of the Uniting Church in Australia, will you diligently teach Christ’s people, reminding them of the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ and the grace which justifies them through faith?” The call to the disciplined piety of the scholarly pastor may have been muted, but only to accommodate an even more direct commissioning of ordinands to the work of the teaching elder.

There is no eluding the *Basis of*

Partial and Exhausted

The UCA Model of Ministry

Andrew Dutney

THE UNITING CHURCH is committed to a model of ministry that is partial and exhausted. It is partial in the sense that it transmits the Reformed tradition of the scholarly, teaching pastor at the expense of the Evangelical tradition of an order of itinerant, prophetic preachers.¹ This is made clear in the *Basis of Union*.

In paragraph 5 the *Basis of Union* addresses the authority of the bible, requiring that “When the Church preaches Jesus Christ, her message is controlled by the Biblical witnesses.” That use of the plural reflected a recognition that the biblical testimony to God’s self-revelation is provided by numerous human voices. The implication of this is that the different voices needed to be distinguished from each other, evaluated in the light of major Biblical themes and values, and interpreted for the contemporary context. The church’s proclamation of Jesus Christ can only be “controlled by the Biblical witnesses”, that is, when the hermeneutical sciences are applied to the task. So, when paragraph 5 goes on to commit Uniting Church

[Biblical witnesses] and to administer the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper as effective signs of the Gospel set forth in the Scriptures”, there can be no doubt that it intends that these ministers need to be educated for that task. They could not preach or administer the sacraments in the way envisaged by the *Basis* without theological education.

And the need for this kind of theological education is made even clearer in paragraph 9. Here the Uniting Church receives the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds “as authoritative statements of the Catholic Faith, framed in the language of their day and used by Christians in many days”. That is, even as the authority of the creeds is being affirmed, it is with the caveat that the creeds do not speak our language. It’s not just that they are written in Latin or Greek, but that they use concepts and make assumptions that are culturally foreign to us. So paragraph 9 goes on to say that the Uniting Church “commits her ministers and instructors to careful study of these creeds and to the discipline of interpreting their teaching in a later age”, commending the creeds to ministers for use in “instruction in the faith...and in worship”. The *Basis of Union* thus envisages the study and interpretation of the creeds as an ongoing task of the minister; the scholarly Reformed pastor, engaged in the lifelong ministry of finding informed, creative and effective ways

Still a Pilgrim People

an address to the church in McKay

David Pitman

THIS IS A VERY significant year for a number of reasons. 300 years ago, Charles Wesley, brother of John and hymn writer *par excellence* was born. 200 years ago, due in large part to the courageous efforts of William Wilberforce, a deeply committed Christian, the English Parliament finally abolished the slave trade throughout the British Empire. 100 years ago, the Methodist Conference of Queensland formally endorsed the establishment of the Methodist Central Mission, now Wesley Mission Brisbane. It was my privilege to be Superintendent Minister of the Mission for six years prior to taking up the role of Moderator for the second time. AND ... thirty years ago, the Uniting Church in Australia was inaugurated.

During the recent meeting of our Queensland Synod we took the opportunity on the Saturday night to celebrate those 30 years. It has been good to hear about the way in which so many of our congregations are marking this special milestone in our life as the Uniting Church—positive, joyful occasions that help people affirm the story and the vision of the Uniting Church, and give expression

to the unity and fellowship we share in Christ.

We must never forget the faith and vision of those who worked to bring the Uniting Church into being. That faith and vision is encapsulated in the first paragraph of the *Basis of Union*:

The Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia, in fellowship with the whole Church Catholic, and seeking to bear witness to that unity which is both Christ’s gift and will for the Church, hereby enter into union under the name of the Uniting Church in Australia. They pray that this act may be to the glory of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

They give praise for God’s gifts of grace to each of them in years past; they acknowledge that none of them has responded to God’s love with full obedience; they look for a continuing renewal in which God will use their common worship, witness and service to set forth the word of salvation for all people. To this end they declare their readiness to go forward together in sole loyalty to Christ the living Head of the Church.



through
a glass
darkly

It is a grand and exciting vision to which we need to commit ourselves again and again, both to remind ourselves of the vision that brought our church into being, and to provide a means of evaluating our contemporary plans and strategies.

The original vision also serves another purpose. It helps us to interpret our experience as a church in the light of our understanding of the kingdom of God, and so reminds us that we are but one part of God's greater plan and purpose for the whole world. Whenever we become too preoccupied with our own concerns, overly distracted by immediate issues that seem so pressing, it is tremendously reassuring to look again at the bigger picture of what God is doing in our world. We all need opportunities to engage with the truth about the kingdom of God in a manner which helps us transcend our own limited experience and move beyond the boundaries that our own experiences can impose on our thinking and our faith.

In his book *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, Eugene Peterson says:

Religion in our time has been captured by the tourist mindset. Religion is understood as a visit to an attractive site to be made when we have adequate leisure. For some it is a weekly jaunt to church; for others, occasional visits to special services. Some, with a bent for

religious entertainment and sacred diversion, plan their lives around special events like retreats, rallies and conferences. We go to see a new personality, to hear a new truth, to get a new experience and so, somehow, expand our otherwise humdrum lives. The religious life is defined as the latest and the newest ... We'll try anything—until something else comes along ... The Christian life cannot mature under such conditions and in such ways.

He quotes the words of Friedrich Nietzsche:

The essential thing "in heaven and earth" is ... that there should be long obedience in the same direction; there thereby results, and has always resulted in the long run, something which has made life worth living. (From *Beyond Good and Evil*.)

Peterson continues:

It is this "long obedience in the same direction" which the mood of the world does so much to discourage. In going against the stream of the world's ways there are two biblical designations for people of faith that are extremely useful: DISCIPLE and PILGRIM. "Disciple" says we are people who spend our lives apprenticed to our master, Jesus Christ. We are in a growing-learning relationship, always. "Pilgrim" tells us we are people who spend our lives going someplace, going to God, and whose path for getting there is the way, Jesus Christ.

and the practices of praise and thanksgiving, confession and forgiveness, prayer and bearing one another's suffering, hospitality, discernment—these are all practices that challenge our best thinking, our truest responses.

We need to bring all that we are to the contemplation and study of the scriptures, going beyond the blind alleys of both fundamentalism and liberalism, exploring together what participation in Christ means for us, rather than what facts we believe. We should also be actively retrieving and poring over the Christian traditions of the whole Christian family seeking to discern how to respond to the current realities that we face. Not out of a sense of panic, but in the freedom and thanksgiving that is ours in Christ. We could even use our conciliar councils to practice corporate spiritual discernment—learning how to attend to the Spirit at work within the Body—rather than slipping into decision-making habits of secular democratic institutions.

After several years now of working at the centre of the "institutional"

church I have a deeper appreciation of the organizational complexities that are required of us in our society and the importance of corporate strategic planning. At the same time, however, I have become more and more convinced that it is the very quality of our journey together, and not only the successful achievement of planned outcomes, that will reveal who we are and to Whom we belong. In this lies our purpose and our future.

JENNY TYMMS is General Secretary of the UCA Synod of Queensland.

¹Frederick Beuchner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (NY: Harper & Row, 1973) 95.

? *How can the UCA be "more than just another denomination"? Are we preoccupied with the "institutional church", and can this be avoided?* ?

are signals that the Spirit is continuing to work within us—pushing and pulling us into participation in God’s reality. Unless our communities of faith, and the church as a whole, provide us with ongoing opportunities to consciously learn about and practise the ways of Jesus, we will lose our way. And if we lose our way, how will we be bearers of the gospel, of God’s healing and reconciliation and peace in the world?

I think we need to rediscover over and over again that it’s the saltiness of the salt that gives salt its purpose. It’s the aliveness of the yeast that makes the bread rise. It is our identity and pilgrimage as disciples of Christ that matters more than any thing else. Together with the worship of God, it is our purpose as the people of God to practice the love for one another and of the world that Christ and the Christian scriptures show forth. And as more generations are born who have no exposure to the stories, parables, metaphors, values and practices of Jesus, the more pressing this becomes.

As the body of Christ, both together and scattered, we are invited to express and become a foretaste of the reconciliation that is God’s gift to the world and to do so within the particularities of people’s ordinary lives. We need to learn how to become practical, local, contextual theologians so that we

can give voice to and enact the Good News for this couple trapped in the cycle of domestic violence, or for this well-to-do family exhausted by long hours of work, or for this young gang of school-age lads hanging out on the city streets after 2.00a.m. We need to learn how to name our hope in a way that makes sense for this young girl hooked on being thin, or for this family who in three generations have not known what it’s like to have a wage earner in the household. Perhaps we will encounter this farmer up to his neck in debt and another drought forecast, or this indigenous community reeling from the third funeral of a young person this month.

As we rediscover our place on the edges of our society and are forced to relinquish our hopes of being popular, successful and trendy, we may begin to attend more closely to the strange and counter-cultural ways of Jesus. At the same time, we might begin to recognize with a more generous spirit the evidence of the presence of God in the wider world around us. With nothing to lose, and becoming more practiced in the discipline of letting go, we might form all kinds of new alliances with others, without losing sight of the particularity of the commitment that motivates us.

A focus on preaching and teaching, on theological reflection

What God calls us to is “a long obedience in the same direction.”

You are most likely familiar with the story of Australian climber, Lincoln Hall, who was left for dead on the upper slopes of Mt. Everest, but discovered by other mountaineers the next day to be still alive. He’s safely back in Australia now, with an amazing story to tell. Many others have not been so lucky. There are dozens of dead bodies on Mt. Everest. They’re still there because it’s virtually impossible to get them down. George Mallory was one of them, a famous mountain climber who may have been the first person ever to reach the top of Mt. Everest. In the early 1920s he led a number of attempts to scale the mountain, eventually being killed during the third attempt in 1924. His body was not found until 1999, well preserved by the snow and ice, 27,000 feet up on the mountain, just 2000 feet from the peak. We do not know whether he died ascending or descending the mountain.

Mallory was once asked why he wanted to climb Mt. Everest. This is what he said:

The first question which you will ask and which I will try to answer is this, “What is the use of climbing Mt. Everest?” and my answer must at once be, “it is no use!” There is not the slightest prospect of any gain whatsoever. We may learn a little about the behaviour of the

human body at high altitudes, but otherwise nothing will come of it. We shall not bring back a single bit of gold or silver, not a gem, nor any coal or iron. We shall not find a single foot of earth that can be planted with crops to raise food. It’s no use. So, if you cannot understand that there is something in us that responds to the challenge of this mountain and goes out to meet it, that the struggle is the struggle of life itself, upward and forever upward, then you won’t see why we go. What we get from this adventure is just sheer joy. And joy is, after all, the end of life. That is what life means and what life is for.

Take a moment to reflect on Mallory’s response. Life for him was an adventure. He found meaning and joy in the challenges that confronted him and in the struggle to achieve the goals and objectives that those challenges represented. How would you respond if someone asked you: what gives meaning to your life, or what is the purpose of your life?

Fifty years ago, Lewis Sherrill wrote a book entitled *The Struggle of the Soul*. In the book he described three different attitudes to life. He called them: Treadmill, Saga and Pilgrimage.

Treadmill people are those for whom life is monotonous and routine. They are locked into a lifestyle that is safe and predictable. They live their lives within the parameters they have established. They do not look for new

experiences and do not expect anything new or different to happen, and so, of course, it usually doesn't. Treadmill people are not necessarily unhappy, but their lives are largely devoid of meaning or any real sense of excitement and achievement.

Saga people are those who live for challenge and adventure. Saga people are excited by challenge and actively seek new experiences and opportunities to test their skills and achieve new goals. George Mallory was a saga person. He once said, "One must conquer, achieve, get to the top; one must know the end to be convinced that one can win, the end, to know there's no dream that mustn't be dared". Saga people often accomplish amazing things while their minds and bodies have the capacity to keep up with their dreams. But as their physical and mental ability diminishes they can easily lapse into disillusionment and even despair.

Pilgrimage people are those who understand that life is a journey, a journey characterized by experience, learning, personal growth, opportunity, challenge, success and failure, joy and sadness. Pilgrimage people know that the journey is ongoing. They appreciate the opportunity from time to time to rest and renew their energy and strength, but they always move on to embrace the next phase of their life, whatever it may bring. Pilgrimage is the lifestyle identified in the bible. It is the lifestyle of the

people of God. It is a lifestyle grounded in faith. Jesus was a pilgrimage person, and he said that the fundamental purpose of his life was to know and to do the will of God and to work out what that meant on a daily basis. His pilgrimage of the spirit was translated into an actual journey that took him to Jerusalem and the cross on which he died.

Our journey begins from the moment of our conception, for that is when life begins. But our life in the world begins the moment we are born. The first description of birth is found in the creation story of Genesis 2, with its focus on the birth of the human race:

Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)

Within the context of the story, this dramatic image declares that we are created as spiritual beings. God's very Spirit has been breathed into us. Our life is first and foremost a spiritual existence. At the core of our being we are spiritual persons. It is in this sense that we are created in the image of God. Being made in God's image has nothing to do with our physical appearance. It has everything to do with our capacity to function as spiritual beings in relationship with the God who has made us, and to grow as the people God intended us to be.

(denominational) unions at this time may be a distraction. Such pursuits may reinforce our preoccupation with our formal structures at a time when we should be looking toward other expressions of Christian unity and an even more radical future expressed by our "Uniting" name and our characterization as a "pilgrim" people. The call to be "something more than just another mere denomination" still rings powerfully true. We have some important foundational work to do.

Frederick Beuchner, writing about the Christian vocation, said, "Neither the hair shirt, nor the soft berth will do. The place God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meets."¹

I love this understanding of call because it recognizes that the Spirit works with the deepest energies of each person, rather than through guilt or imposed obligation. At the same time it is neither self-indulgent nor individualistic. It also means that the ways in which people and communities embody God's call in the world will differ because gifts, skills, personalities, contexts, cultures, and opportunities vary. So together we must be prepared to assist in the discernment of call and then encourage and nurture the wide range of expressions of Christian commitment that may emerge.

Individuals and groups may embody God's call in particular ways (for example, in their employment,

community involvement, family commitments, congregational leadership and ministry) but the central Christian call is the same for all Christians. Our call is to become disciples of Jesus, to grow in maturity in Christ, and to show forth what it means to be the household of God. It is here that

" It is our identity and pilgrimage as disciples of Christ that matters more than anything else. "

as a whole church we should be prepared to focus our energies.

In her thirtieth anniversary sermon, "Blessings and Curses" (CP 9), Pam Kerr expressed dismay that so few elders and church councillors were provided with ongoing opportunities within their local churches to talk about their faith—to practice listening respectfully, rather than judgementally, to one another's faith stories.

I suspect that over time we can become so caught up in the busyness of "church" that our language, our prayer lives, our worship, our meetings, our daily work, and our family activities become emptied of meaning. Our words become clichés. Our behaviours solidify into habits. We forget the longing or the pain that first led us to welcome Christ into our lives. We cover over our restlessness, boredom or

A Future with Heart and Soul

Jenny Tymms

I LEFT the Presbyterian Church when I finished secondary school and moved out of home at the age of seventeen. When I crept through the doors again seventeen years later it was into a Uniting Church that I had only vaguely heard about. Union had taken place over ten years earlier, and I had taken no part in it. When I turned up on the doorstep of a Uniting Church all those years later I was a person in deep spiritual crisis.

I wasn't looking for a friendly fellowship group, or an impressive building or even exciting worship. I was thirsting for a Word that would cut through to the heart of things; that would name my captivity and would speak out loud the release and hope for which I longed. I was a typical baby-boomer who thought she could explore her "spirituality" on her own and ended up longing to participate in "something" and "Someone" that was bigger than my isolated self.

Nor would it be enough to become part of a local congregation—I needed to know that this Church was bold enough, wide enough, deep enough and secure enough to engage the tough questions that I had been

time and geography; a church with a history as well as a church in communion with other Christian churches across the globe. The *Basis of Union* wasn't a dry, irrelevant document to me—it was a litmus test of whether I had found a community of faith in and through which I could commit myself to Christian discipleship for the rest of my life.

Now, about seventeen years further along the path, I find myself shoulder to shoulder with others in church leadership asking questions about the future of the Uniting Church. What really matters and what can be jettisoned along the way? What should be set down and what should be taken up? How best to marshal our resources, our efforts? How do we even begin to discern God's path for us through the complexities that face us?

In his personal reflections in the previous issue of *Cross Purposes*, David Beswick reminded us that the founders of the Uniting Church never intended to establish "a liberal protestant church, nor another mere denomination". They "looked for a real life embodiment of the ecumenical hope, a step along the way to organic union of all Christian fellowships".

I suspect that the ongoing disillusionment with formal church institutions generally and the decline in denominational loyalty means that the quest for further full organic

Having created us for relationship, God spends the rest of our lives reminding us of that truth. We may hear and experience that message in many different ways, but Paul says that every time we hear it or experience it the Holy Spirit is at work, "bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16).

We understand that Jesus was the perfect living, breathing example of a human being made in the image of God. Humanly speaking, Jesus represents the kind of person we are meant to be. The more we become like him, the more we are conformed to the image of God. This is a spiritual reality made apparent through the quality of our life and relationships.

We have been made for a life in the Spirit. Such a life can never be "treadmill", monotonous, devoid of meaning and purpose, the repetition of the same routine day after day. Nor can it be only saga, dependent for meaning on the excitement and adventure of new challenges. Life in the Spirit is always pilgrimage. We are on a journey, a journey with God. It is a journey of life and it is life-long. As our *Basis of Union* says,

long. As our *Basis of Union* says, "We are a pilgrim people, always on the way to the promised end".

This means that we can dare to dream and to vision for the future! This means that we can trust God to go on equipping each of us, and all his people, with the gifts of the Spirit! This means that we can confidently commit ourselves afresh to that pilgrimage of the spirit to which Christ calls us!

Let us pray that the journey will be truly significant and life-changing for us all, and commit ourselves to that journey and to that purpose in the name and the spirit of Jesus, who is the Head of the church!

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? *What are the strengths and weaknesses of "pilgrimage people" as an image for the church? Are there other alternatives than "treadmill, saga and pilgrimage"?* ?

Quo Vadis Ecclesia?

Church, where are you going?

Alistair Macrae

AS CONTRIBUTORS to the July *Cross Purposes* noted, thirty years ago when the Uniting Church was launched there remained a sense of optimism and clarity about the church's character and mission. With the benefit of hindsight it is clear that with the dismantling of Christendom (in which our church traditions had, if not flourished, then at least maintained a certain position in culture), the mainstream churches were on wobbly legs by the mid 1960s. Perhaps the advent of the UCA obscured for a time fundamental shifts in culture which by the 1980s could only be sustained by steadfast denial. Such denial is tenacious and by no means absent in the Church today.

As previous contributors also pointed out, in some ways the UCA, wittingly or unwittingly, capitulated uncritically to the dominant culture. The strong liberal theological tradition in the UCA, while having many strengths, has not always served us well in discerning critical points in our life where clear counter-cultural position on issues may have served as more faithful witness to the gospel.

The liberal tradition in its worst expressions pays too much attention

to the world, lets "the world set the agenda", but can be very light on in terms of having scripture, prayer and worship at the heart of its mission. It can be too worried about what the world thinks of us. The pietist tradition, on the other hand, in its worst expressions, gets caught up adoring God while paying scant attention to the needs of God's creation. It can retreat into a sectarian mentality that treats the created world as a passing thing rather than the arena of God's saving and redeeming work in Jesus Christ. The next thirty years will see our church continue its search for an alternative "third way" beyond the dead ends of theological liberalism and fundamentalism.

Some in the church think that the word "relevance" should have no place in our vocabulary. The word in itself, however, is unexceptionable. The critical question in the church concerns our criteria for assessing relevance. In the 1930s Dietrich

On Areopagus



reconciliation and peace-making.

Jesus counselled Christians to be peacemakers, to show mercy to those who have wronged us and to seek justice, especially those disenfranchised by the arrangement, distribution and exercise of power. Not least in Australia is the imperative for reconciliation with the indigenous people of this land. For so many reasons, from our deepest theology, to our historical complicity in oppression and dispossession, the church of Jesus should be in the vanguard of reconciliation. The ministry of reconciliation between God and us, and humans with each other, is at the heart of the faith; and at the very core of our key symbols and rituals.

6. Develop a creation-centred approach rather than perpetuating a human-centred approach.

Can we start interpreting love of neighbour as extending to those who come after us, and to our non-human neighbours? Bonhoeffer: "The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world that it leaves to its children." The Christian church has in some ways been complicit in the exploitation of nature. A text like Gen. 1:28, where God gave humans "dominion" over the earth, has been interpreted as "domination" and thus became a proof text of the industrial revolution. We are learning so much more now about the profound interconnectedness of all life forms. While human beings occupy a special and exalted place they are stewards in God's garden, respectful of all the life

in God's garden.

7. We need new clarity about forms of ministry in the church.

Without going into details about particular forms of ordering of the church's life, there is a pressing need to reclaim the particularity of the ordained ministries, without suggesting any hierarchical superiority. In effectively clericizing the laity we have not only disheartened some who have been called to ordained ministry, but have withdrawn many of our lay people from their ministries in the heart of their local communities. I predict that this conversation will occupy a central place in our debates over the next few years.

Is the church of any use? I share Bonhoeffer's conviction that the church, as much as ever, is of critical importance to God and the world as we seek to model the way of Jesus, the way of life, in the midst of our community. The Uniting Church will surely be a smaller church numerically in the foreseeable future. This will present institutional challenges. But I am confident that, God willing, we will be an effective and humble instrument of God's peace.

? *How do we judge whether the church is of any use?* ?
? *What are the most important "uses" of the church?* ?

bid, but as a sign of hope! With God's help, and the support of others in the church, an alternative can be lived.

Mainstream churches need to be reminded that conversion is still fundamentally important. In churches like ours, so comfortable in Christendom, the religious life has sounded more like a bit of lifestyle tinkering. To move from our immersion in what Pope John Paul called "a culture of death" into the kingdom reality described in the beatitudes requires a fundamental shift in our heart and our head, which the bible calls conversion.

2. Intentionality about discipleship formation.

In Christendom we assumed that people would absorb the gospel by being born and brought up in a Christian society. It is hard to understand how any biblically-shaped person could believe that the gospel could make any sense at all apart from a deep conversion of the heart, mind and will. The previous paradigm of Christianity as 'citizenship' must change to one of 'discipleship'. We must invest more time and attention to Christian formation in congregations if a counter-cultural spirituality is to be nurtured and sustained.

3. Renewed commitment to ecumenism.

I entirely agree with David Beswick's lament that the ecumenical vision that infuses the *Basis of Union* has been seriously weakened by a *de*

facto retreat into denominationalism. We need to recover first the vision of ecumenism as witness to the power of Christ to transcend the many forces which threaten to divide the Christian church. And only then develop ecumenical "tactics" to pragmatically assist the mission of the church.

4. Renewed commitment to interfaith dialogue without "bracketing" our own beliefs.

This is bound up with Christ's blessing of humility and poverty of spirit. It is a cruel irony that followers of Christ have historically fuelled hatred towards neighbours of different religions. Why would not the call to humility extend to people of other faiths? This does not imply any dilution of our Christian beliefs and commitments. (In our tradition we need to work hard on maintaining a christocentric focus without degenerating into christomonism—or "christofascism" to use Dorothy Soelle's confronting term.) My sense is that in the so-called post-modern context, in which absolute truth claims are regarded with suspicion, there is, ironically, a new opportunity to reclaim the particularity of Christianity—to proclaim Christ, albeit in a non-imperialistic fashion. To commend the faith and at the same time be open to truth from those of other faiths and none. What is there to be afraid of? God is truth. Might we be of use to God and our neighbour if we reached out hands of friendship to our neighbour who is different?

5. Renewed commitment to

relevance. In the 1930s Dietrich Bonhoeffer, reflecting on the state of his church in Germany in the 1930s, famously asked, "Are we still of any use?" Is the Uniting Church in Australia still of any use? Are we of any use to God? Are we of any use to the world?

The next thirty years will be a "time of trial" for the Christian church in this country and we must pray that God will indeed "save us". But the call to the church today is no different from every other time the people of God have found themselves in "exile", wondering how to sing the Lord's song in a strange land. Our particular land is at times hostile to religion, but more often supremely indifferent. As with our forebears in faith such times afford an opportunity to rebuild our life around the core concerns of the gospel, to reorient ourselves as church in relation to the Reign of God and to reassess the Church's mission accordingly.

What might be some markers, signposts for a faithful expression of the gospel in the Australian context in the coming decades?

Bonhoeffer's *Cost of Discipleship* displays the profound importance of the beatitudes for his theology, spirituality and ethics. If the beatitudes represent a distillation of the teaching of Christ about the nature of the Reign of God, if they describe "kingdom dispositions", then surely they must serve as pointers to a

faithful Christian life in various times and contexts. They describe, to use a provocative term, the fundamental Christian orientation.

Jesus' beatitudes indicate that blessing comes at life's edges. God's access requires vulnerability. If this is true we begin to see why these are difficult words for us. Surely the primary value of our middle class culture is security, safety. The experience of our church in the era of Christendom has more often located us at the centre of empire rather than the periphery. Our current context forces us into a posture of vulnerability and humility. This cruciform posture is one we should carefully and prayerfully cultivate.

So first, some beatitudinal pointers. And then some possible directions for the church into the future.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. In blessing the poor in spirit Jesus blesses the spiritually inept, empty, failures. Jesus blesses those who know their need. If the Christian church is undergoing a period of humiliation we might hope that, whether it has been caused by God's hand or through our own faithlessness, we might find ourselves more vulnerable to the flow of God's grace.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Not the militarists. Not those who wield power over others. The bible means by "meek" those who first seek to do God's will. It is that inner strength that produces

true gentleness. It is that elusive equilibrium that comes from knowing who we are, to whom we belong in life and death, and where we are going. It is the opposite of triumphalism.

Blessed are the merciful. Our default setting seems to be to withhold mercy and forgiveness when we have been hurt. But Christians know we have received the divine mercy. And Jesus says, show that mercy to others. "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. This refers to the way we view the world—a mourning for the state of things. Whatever hinders the realization of God's reign of justice and love on earth will be a cause of sorrow for those who identify with God's purposes. It lies behind Jesus' prayer, "Your will be done on earth as in heaven". It is the heartfelt longing for that blessed day when God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. We need to learn to weep for our world and seek the hope that God alone can offer.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; they shall be satisfied. This refers to living in right relationships with God and with others. They will be blessed who hunger and thirst for that time when God and the creation will be reconciled. When we long for something better. The whole purpose of the Sermon on the Mount is to lift our vision to God's

grand purpose and to align us with it.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. In the bible the heart is a figurative expression for what shapes us. Until we allow our hearts, our centre, to be occupied by the one who fashioned us and loves us, our hearts will be divided. Jesus here refers to a heart given to God; a centre from which we can live coherently and compassionately; from which we can journey forth with vision, strength and courage; and to which we can retreat for healing, reassurance. God, scripture tells us, is a jealous God. If money dictates our lives, God will seek to dethrone it. Nor will the pure in heart hesitate to dethrone racism, militarism, sexism, egoism; those demonic gods that offer life but which yield death. Purity of heart is therefore about centredness. From this perspective maybe one of the greatest dangers in the contemporary church is not apostasy but distraction.

Blessed are the peacemakers. A precondition for understanding Jesus' blessing of peacemakers is to recognize how enmeshed we are in a culture of violence. So when Jesus blesses peacemakers, he is encouraging an active turning from violence and domination; and instead looking at ways of living that bring reconciliation without violence. Not passivists but peace makers.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness.

The early church knew what this meant. Our faith owes much to the blood of the martyrs. The early Christians expected to be assaulted by the Powers that Be. Not once do they seem puzzled by it. It would have been unthinkable for them to ask, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Douglas Hall (*The Cross in our Context*) lists suffering as one of the marks of the church.

Let me conclude with some non-systematic, non-comprehensive musings about how the Church might be of some use to God and God's world in the next decades:

1. Renewed commitment to evangelism, but in a non-imperialistic

evangelism, but in a non-imperialistic way.

The gap between the way of life described in the beatitudes and the mainstream values of consumerist, capitalist individualism is vast! Why in our prosperous society do so many people suffer from debilitating depression? Why, when it is patently clear that the impact of *homo sapiens* on the fragile environment is heading us towards collapse, is the last thing we will consider is lowering our standard of living? Our community desperately needs to hear the gospel call to repentance, not in a negative judgemental sense, God forbid, but as a sign of hope! With God's

Double Take

by Hilary Howes

