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CROSS Purposes

a forum for theological dialogue

Contents

CROSS Purposes

The present issue marks a sort of silver jubilee for *Cross Purposes*. Thank you to our faithful readership for your continuing support and interest.

For this issue's *In Service*, we invited Peter Bentley of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations to provide a reflection on where the ACC has come to and its continuing place in the Uniting Church. Peter gives an outline of the structure and objects of the ACC and some of the work it is doing to further these objects.

Norman Young's sermon for the anniversary of the Uniting Church's inauguration adopts the race-running imagery of the Letter to the Hebrews, arguing that the church is engaged in a relay race in which no generation is complete without those that go before and come after.

The *credo* series continues with a contribution from Peter Gador-Whyte taking up the statement in the Apostles' Creed that Christ "descended into hell". Peter addresses the place of Holy Saturday in the life and calendar of the church, claiming a distinctive importance for this day in confronting the reality of Christ's death and our own. His piece concludes with a suggested liturgy for the observance of Holy Saturday.

Wes Campbell addresses the question of Christian pacifism through a review of John Howard Yoder's critical essays on Barth, in the context of his own journey in pacifism from the Vietnam War to the present.

Adam McIntosh responds to Joan Wright Howie's reflection in the last *CP* on spirituality and contemporary society. Developing the theme of God's longing for us, Adam emphasizes the importance of this God's *identity*, and argues for a Christian understanding of spirituality grounded in God's nature as triune.

Finally, David Carter reviews Marcus Borg's recent book on redeeming Christian language, *Speaking Christian*.

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in service

Peter Bentley

The Assembly of Confessing Congregations

a renewed community with a rich heritage

The Assembly of Confessing Congregations (ACC) continues the rich heritage of renewal and reform groups within the UCA and its antecedent churches. The main groups that had input into the present formation of the ACC through leadership and their common heritage within the UCA were the Fellowship for Revival, Evangelical Members within the UCA (EMU), and the Reforming Alliance (RA). During the years 2008-10, the state branches of EMU (state based organisation), and the Reforming Alliance (a national association) formally closed, and members were encouraged to join the Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church. The ACC has focussed on congregational membership as the basis for its direction, but it is well supported by a network of individual supporting members. Congregational and group members are listed in the state movement section of our website, confessingcongregations.com.

ACC itself was established following the 2006 UCA Assembly which had failed to affirm the teachings of Jesus Christ as attested in scripture concerning sexual practice. A joint summit of members from EMU and RA on 12 July 2006 agreed to establish an "Assembly of Confessing Congregations". The previous organizations had attempted to make their confession heard within the established councils of the Uniting Church, including proposals at the eleventh Assembly, but it was clear by then that a distinct confession by an Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church was the best way for the whole UCA to again hear the clear word of Jesus Christ.

The motto adopted by the ACC sums up the foundation:

Confessing the Lord Jesus Christ
Proclaiming the Truth
Renewing the Church

Confessing movements have a long and honourable tradition of protest within the churches. Since the sixteenth-century Reformation, confessional churches have affirmed their faith in opposition to what they regarded as false teaching of one kind or another. Today, throughout the Western world, confessing movements have developed within most mainline denominations, especially in North America.

Confessing Christ never takes place in a vacuum. It is made in the midst of a concrete threat to his lordship. As a Confessing movement we call the whole church to reaffirm

the "evangelical substance" of classical Christian faith. The confessing movement within the UCA names and stands against heresy, but also acknowledges the complicity of our own members to the development of the situation in which we are in today. Thus, confessing the lordship of Christ also involves confessing one's own sin.

ACC deliberately chose the word *Assembly* because it is not merely an association of members. ACC believes that the UCA Assembly acted in an apostate manner and violated its own processes of decision making. We hope people understand our use of the term *Assembly* conveys the seriousness of the nature of the confessing movement within the Uniting Church. ACC has however avoided words which are used in the UCA to denote a component part of the other councils of the Uniting Church.

It is instructive to include the *Objects of the ACC* as these clearly outline that the ACC desires to encourage the confession of Christ according to the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, as that faith is described in the UCA's *Basis of Union*. These link the heritage of former renewal groups with the future.

> The objects of the Association shall be:
>
> a) To confess Christ according to the catholic, reformed and evangelical heritage in the Basis of Union, by:
>
> i) upholding the Scriptures' prophetic and apostolic testimony to Christ as the final authority for the Uniting Church's faith and life;
>
> ii) calling the Uniting Church to determine matters of doctrine and ethics according to the teaching of the Scriptures and the faith as understood by the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church;
>
> iii) calling the councils and congregations of the Uniting Church to uphold the Basis of Union and Constitution:
>
> iv) providing biblically grounded leadership in partnership with other confessing movements;
>
> v) developing ecumenical partnerships for the more effective proclamation of the Gospel in our pluralist nation; and
>
> vi) establishing national, state and territory bodies to implement the Charter as approved by the inaugural meeting of the Association, and seeking the renewal of the Uniting Church.
>
> b) To undertake such other religious, educational or other charitable activities that are incidental to the above objects.[1]

During the initial years of foundation, the ACC has prepared a series of statements to highlight its theological stance and position on several issues within the UCA. Several of these documents have been translated into other languages and are available on the ACC website. These include the ACC Charter; a Statement on Vision and Goals; a Cross Cultural Statement; a Social Responsibility Statement and the ACC Theological Declaration. The theological document is a central resource for the ACC and has an accompanying commentary to help people study and understand the foundation of our Assembly.

In response to the charter, which commits the ACC to "bring a vigorous biblical perspective to contemporary

[1] Extract from the Rules (Constitution) of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations, approved 21 May 2007.

public issues in a society that is increasingly ignorant about or hostile to orthodox Christianity", the ACC has also begun to prepare statements on a variety of contemporary topics, including abortion, euthanasia and marriage, to provide ACC members within the UCA with guidance during these challenging times.

A second website, unitingviews.com, was established in 2010 to provide a general space for the publication of papers and responses to specific issues within the Uniting Church. Resources have also been developed, including a series of bible studies prepared by the Discipleship and Evangelism Commission, with accompanying DVD resources.

Our magazine, *ACCatalyst*, commenced in June 2007. Since 2010 it has been published every second month and is now widely read. It received two awards at the 2010 Australasian Religious Press Association Conference. Complimentary copies are sent to the Assembly, UAICC, Synods and Presbyteries and a variety of other UCA agencies.

ACC became an incorporated association in 2007, and meets as a community each year in a different state for the purpose of the AGM, which is held within a conference format. Themes have included "the church", "marriage and family", and this year, "evangelism".

The ACC was established for the long term, and thus has a structure, including a number of specialist commissions, that enables interaction with the variety of bodies within the UCA as needed, and also with the wider Christian community. An active Prayer Network has provided a community of prayer throughout the different state movements. As an incorporated association, the ACC is able to undertake its own ministry initiatives, and ACC officers and members frequently visit ACC congregations and groups to preach and lead seminars.

The ACC has experienced a range of reactions from within the UCA. Initially there was some formal contact with the UCA Assembly, but now there is less formal contact, though the ACC has continued to communicate to the National President by letter, some of which have been published in our magazine. This has helped our members to be kept abreast of continuing issues before the UCA and its direction. Other UCA leaders and groups are contacted, often on matters of concern, but also to encourage those who are upholding the faith "according to the catholic, reformed and evangelical heritage in the *Basis of Union*".

It would appear that some leaders in the UCA would prefer the ACC to disappear; some even experience apoplexy when the name is mentioned, but others seem to genuinely believe it is good for the UCA, especially citing the UCA's promulgation of diversity, or the fact it has enabled many members to continue their membership within the UCA. Whatever views the UCA has, the ACC exists not for its own sake, but for the UCA and also for the wider church during this season of challenge and changing belief and practice.

Peter Bentley is the Executive Consultant (staff person) for the ACC.

through a glass darkly

Norman Young

Running the Relay Race

sermon for the Uniting Church anniversary, East Kew 2011

Deuteronomy 34:1-12
Hebrews 12:1-2, 12-14

Reading the bible is like walking through an Art Gallery, with a whole array of marvellous pictures, painted by many different artists, all shades of colour and conveying a whole spectrum of moods. Among them, none is more striking or more poignant than the one displayed in Deuteronomy 34, which could be entitled, "The view from Mount Nebo". There was Moses, standing there with the Promised Land finally in sight, with all its possibilities laid out before him finally, all the fruit of his labours, yet hearing that he was to taste none of it. The word came from God that his life's pilgrimage would end before the people arrived there.

Now why this graphic and poignant picture from the writer of Deuteronomy? Not just to round out the biography of Moses, for he was writing for the succeeding generations who *had* arrived, reminding Moses' successors of what they owed him. They were reaping what Moses had sown. Even the least in succeeding generations living in the land of Israel and Judah, who had endured none of the desert hardships—the threat of pursuing armies, no provisions beyond a day at a time—all these were now enjoying what their great leader had never known, life lived out in the Promised Land.

So it is with us, of course. There is so much that we owe to those who have gone before us—life itself in this land, the heritage of family, church, community, the experience of love, of being nurtured and supported beyond our deserving. So that is the first thing we say today on the anniversary of the Uniting Church, in gratitude to our forbears who paved the way: *We could not have done without them.*

Although we may be rightly reluctant to call the Uniting Church "the Promised Land", it is the gift to us from those with the vision of a church one step closer to the will of Christ for his followers: "That they may be one, even as the Son and Father-God are one". Among those who had the vision and set out on the journey toward its fulfilment are many who did not live to see the reality, viewing it only from afar. Among them I think of the Methodist Calvert Barber, of the Presbyterian Alan Watson, and the Congregationalist J. D. Northey. *We could not have done without them.*

But Christian faith adds this extra dimension: *they cannot do without us!* The fulfilment of all they dreamed of,

and hoped and worked for, depends upon us who have received their gift and who, together with them, are on the way to the fullness of what God wills for the church:

> The Uniting Church affirms that it belongs to the people of God on the way to the promised end. The Uniting Church prays that, through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life, will bring it into deeper unity with other Churches, and will use its worship, witness and service to God's eternal glory through Jesus Christ the Lord. (*Basis of Union* §18)

So we come to another marvellous biblical picture, this time from the New Testament, in the Letter to the Hebrews and drawn for us earlier—of human beings running the race of life, being cheered from the grandstands by those who have gone before. We are visible to them although they are invisible to us, but they are there, urging us on to complete the race that is set before us.

And remember what precedes that passage in Chapter 11? The writer lists all the great heroes of the faith who have gone before, the sung and the unsung, who have held fast during deprivation and persecution. And how does he conclude, that we cannot do without them? Well, that's true of course, but hear what he does say:

> And all these, though so well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had something better is store, that apart from us they should not be made perfect (i.e. complete.)

Now the essential detail in that picture, the feature that gives meaning to all the rest is that *this is a relay race.* Those in the heavenly stands have run their laps, but the race continues. It is still their race as well as ours, and it will not be over until we, and those who follow us, are safely home.

That is why we can never have an adequate understanding and experience of the whole Church of God of which we are part without the wider context of the communion of saints—the "church triumphant", to use traditional language, along with the "church militant" here on earth. Those on earth still running and those who have gone before are part of that same great company. Those who have gone before us are dependent on our faithfulness now, just as we depend on the heritage they have left us.

One last detail. Who ran the first lap? Jesus, the writer says, the pioneer of our faith. And who will run the last, the one who makes up the lost ground? Jesus again, for he is both Pioneer and Perfector, the one who completes our faith. He made it all possible. He calls us as he called the first disciples to share his work. He guarantees us strength to run the race now, and promises to bring it all to completion.

So the writer concludes with words for all of us to take to heart:

> Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with all and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord, so that none fail to obtain the grace of God.

Norman Young is a retired UC minister and Emeritus Professor of the Theological College.

credo

Peter Gador-Whyte

Holy Saturday

Where in the Uniting Church does Holy Saturday rate a mention? Do many people understand its significance within the Christian tradition and the potential it holds to enrich our faith and our discipleship?

The fact that many, both within the church as well as beyond, speak of Holy Saturday as "Easter Saturday" suggests at least a fair degree of confusion about this day, for on Holy Saturday Easter has not yet arrived. In some more liturgical traditions, weddings are not permitted to be performed on this day before Easter. It is traditionally a day of mourning. Try telling that to any would-be bride who has her heart set on this date, and, what's more, a reception venue already booked.

The fact that it is a "Saturday" or "Shabbat", the day of rest, adds emphasis to Holy Saturday as a day of waiting. That it is called *Holy* Saturday within the Christian community highlights its significance as a day of observance within a larger liturgical drama of salvation. Nonetheless it remains a day where nothing much seems to happen, an in-between day of mourning and loss, sandwiched between the solemn prayers of Good Friday, and the vibrant hymns and alleluias of Easter morning.

As a child growing up in the Presbyterian Church prior to Union, my memory of what happened in Holy Week is that services of worship were kept to a minimum. Generally we celebrated Palm Sunday, though not always with palm fronds, nor with palm crosses, and certainly not with processions. There were no liturgical colours, banners or paraments. While some ministers were influenced by developments in the liturgical movement and began to hold short services throughout the week, this was certainly not the predominant practice. Instead the week was marked by a solemn service on Good Friday with its emphasis on preaching. Easter Sunday was generally though not always a day when Holy Communion was celebrated, and where we sang the great Easter hymns of praise.

At Easter Camps there were studies and prayers as well as hiking and games, and in some congregations there might have been a dawn service. However, generally our celebrations of Holy Week and the Easter season did not reflect the great richness of Christian tradition.

The formation of the Uniting Church gave impetus to many to give expression to new forms of worship, which coincided with an increasingly

active liturgical movement across the whole church. This liturgical revival sought to recover for our day a more complete and far richer celebration of Easter, particularly in the Triduum, the three days from Maundy Thursday to the Easter Vigil.

When Holy Week is already so busy, why add another day? Good question, but perhaps one that needs re-framing. I would like to see Holy Saturday as an invitation and a gift in the midst of the busyness of such a significant week in the Christian calendar.

For more than a decade I have marked Holy Saturday with a simple service of prayer and I would like to share that with you and to reflect upon its significance. Set within the three great days of the Triduum which mark a single liturgical movement from Maundy Thursday to the Great Vigil, Holy Saturday is meant to be an in-between day of watching and prayer. In most instances that has meant that there has been very little if any liturgical prayer on this day. However, it is possible to argue that in Jewish life at the time of Jesus there were a range of rituals and practices surrounding death that were well practiced and observed,[1] and that a service of prayer on Holy Saturday fits well within that context. My contention is that Holy Saturday is a day of grief and loss that helps us honour the horror and loss of Good Friday, as well as preparing us for the shock of Easter.

As a day of waiting Holy Saturday helps to hold us in the tension between Jesus' death and resurrection. It helps us take seriously the reality of Jesus' death and burial, enabling us to face and live with the grief of Good Friday. It helps prevent us from glossing over the horror of Jesus' death as well as its awesome significance. Holy Saturday helps us remember that God identifies with us completely in Jesus, even in our mortality. It's a day of remembering the dead Jesus but also our own dead.

In Christian tradition, All Saints Day is set aside to remember significant leaders through the centuries who have lived exemplary lives or inspired hope and faith, and All Souls Day is set within its shadow to remember those known to us whose faith and love has influenced and inspired us. As a day set aside to mark and mourn Jesus' death and to reflect on its meaning, Holy Saturday naturally acts as a conduit to express our grief over those we love who have died. Though a secondary motif, this is never far from the surface, and gives added emphasis to our belief that in Jesus God has entered into the very depths of our human condition. By dying on the cross and being buried in the tomb Jesus shares our humanity completely, even our death. The theological significance of this is affirmed by Paul's words in Romans 8 that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, not even death. For in our death, in the death of those we love, Jesus is there. As the psalmist says, "even in the grave you are there" (Ps. 139:8).

[1] See Ian Wallis, *Holy Saturday Faith: Rediscovering the Legacy of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2000), ch. 3.

Marking Holy Saturday in a service of corporate prayer serves to focus our attention on what we would prefer to avoid. Alan Lewis writes that on this day, "death is given time and space to be itself, in all its coldness and helplessness".[2]

In the liturgy of Holy Saturday we enter the tradition which Paul received and passed on to the Corinthians: "That Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures, that he was buried and that he was raised the third day…" (1 Cor. 15:3f). Death and burial are what hold our attention, making what we do truly counter-cultural and wholeheartedly human. Instead of doing all we can to avoid death, as our culture attempts to do, the church on Holy Saturday deliberately chooses to sit with the discomfort and void of death with its accompanying grief and emptiness.

On this day we keep company with Mary and the other disciples in the numbness and shock of grief; and as we do, we engage with our own sense of loss in the death of those we love. Here more than All Souls Day do we know that Christ enters the world of the dead, shares our death, embraces the humiliation which we all face in death.

Another aspect of this day places the emphasis on Holy *Saturday*, and reclaiming it as Sabbath. It was precisely because it was a Sabbath that the disciples were forced to "wait", were relegated to doing nothing about embalming Jesus, were constrained by Sabbath observance.[3] Thinking of this day as a Sabbath helps to hold before us another element in the rich traditions that surround this day and one that carries a strong sense of hope. As God rested from the work of creation on the seventh day, so now in Jesus God rests from the work of re-creation, which was finished on Good Friday, the sixth day. As a Sabbath this day reminds us that in the midst of human frailty and helplessness when all we can do is wait, we are waiting with God who holds all things together. We are not alone but gathered into the confident rest of God. This pattern of rest, which is all but shattered in today's world, may also evoke in us the vision of the Jubilee where land itself is rested, where slaves, even working animals are also given rest and where debts are forgiven and people are restored.

> "Just as Jesus healed on the Sabbath, so now Jesus harrows hell, entering into and breaking the bonds of death itself."

Our Orthodox brothers and sisters speak of this day as "Great Saturday" or Great Sabbath, and do in fact have

[2] Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 7.

[3] For those who want to explore the Sabbath and its meaning I highly recommend the book *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man,* by Abraham Joshua Heschel (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951).

a burial, re-enacting the burial of Jesus during Matins on Friday evening. This serves to hammer home the reality of Jesus' death, that it was no illusion; he really died, had a real body and was laid in a tomb. There was no sense in which Jesus simply went into a coma and was merely resuscitated. The Orthodox however have a double focus, firstly on the tomb of Christ, and then their firm confidence that in entering the place of the dead, Hades, Jesus continues to do what he has done on other Sabbaths during his life: the work of the Father. Just as Jesus healed on the Sabbath, so now Jesus harrows hell, entering into and breaking the bonds of death itself. We will see that this aspect of Christian tradition which is also present in the creeds carries us toward the hope of Easter day,[4] but not before we find Jesus as the prodigal son entering that far country of death on our behalf and for our sake.

On Holy Saturday, as we watch and wait at the tomb of Christ, we do so with a distinctive understanding of death given to us through that tomb, and with the knowledge that through our baptism there is a sense in which we too are buried in that tomb with Christ. As Paul says to all who have been baptized:

> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walking in newness of life. (Rom. 6:3f)

That is why the church has included a sprinkling rite in the latest funeral liturgy—not as another sentimental decoration, but in order to hold before us a distinctive understanding of death.

One of the remarkable hymns of the Eastern Church sung on this day enables us to turn and face the grief of Good Friday with the hope given through the Christian faith. In the hymn Christ answers the weeping despair of his mother:

> *Mother, do you not understand,*
> *do all of you not understand,*
> *that I had two friends on earth, Adam and Eve.*
> *And when I came to them I did not find them on the earth*
> *which I had given them.*
> *And loving them, I descended to where they were,*
> *into the darkness and horror and hopelessness of death.*

We know that death strangles the breath out of life, but here, in the death of Christ, death is strangled by life.

The fact that this day is a Sabbath led the early church Fathers to reflect on the themes of creation and re-creation, and how those themes help give meaning to Jesus' death. One of the ways they did that was to see Jesus as the new Adam who undoes the damage done by the first Adam by living a life of perfect obedience and trust.[5] Of course Irenaeus was

[4] That Jesus descended into *hell*. See the Apostles' Creed in particular.

[5] One of the most important exponents of this view is Irenaeus in his doctrine of recapitulation. See Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge & NY: CUP, 2001), especially Part III.

building on the thought of Paul.[6] It was Paul's conviction that Jesus is the new Adam who recovers for us that which the first Adam lost. Building upon these images, the Orthodox liturgy fleshes out the richness of this theme as a way of reflecting on the meaning of Jesus' death and descent into hell:

Adam was afraid when God walked in Paradise
but now he rejoices when God descends to hell.
Then he fell, but now he is raised up.
Adam slept and from his side there came death;
now Thou dost sleep, O Word of God,
and from Thy side there flows a fountain of life for the world.

This is but some of the riches we find in the Christian theology and liturgy of Holy Saturday.

I offer the following service as one attempt to add to the richness of our Holy Week observations.

Peter Gador-Whyte is minister of Highfield Road Uniting Church in Canterbury.

[6] See Rom. 5:14 and 1 Cor. 15:22, 45 .

HOLY SATURDAY

A SERVICE OF PRAYER AND WAITING

Gathering

A large cross dominates the space which is simple, empty and bare. There are no cloths on the table, no paraments, no music.

The icon of the burial of Jesus is placed in the sanctuary with a sand tray, tapers and a single candle before it.

In the centre of the sanctuary is placed a bowl of incense and a bowl of ashes.

We gather in a semicircle of seats around the Lord's Table and begin the service in silence…

The Burial of Jesus

Joseph of Arimathaea with Nicodemus
took the lifeless body of Jesus down
from the Cross
and wrapped him in a clean linen cloth
with spices
and laid him in a new tomb.

Opening Prayer

O Christ, our way, our truth, our life,
falsely accused by lawless men as a
deceiver
buried in a cold stone tomb
and sealed by the hands which had
pierced your side
we praise you.

For our sake you were crucified under
Pontius Pilate;
suffered death and were buried.
You who gave us the breath of Life
were laid lifeless in a tomb.

O Life, how can you die?
How can you dwell in a tomb?
Yet by your death you destroyed death's
kingdom
and empty the tombs of the dead.

Going down to death, O Life eternal
You dazzled hell with the brightness of
your glory
Dispersing all darkness by your light
and truth.

In this awesome time of deathly silence
help us stand with you in your
emptiness
and wait for the rising of the morning
star. **Amen.**

Word

Psalm 130

The chant form in the PCUSA Book of Common Worship (tone 7) is recommended. This prayer follows the psalm:

O God,
you come to us in the depths of our
darkest despair,
in the suffering of Jesus Christ.
By the rising of your Son,
give us new light to guide us,
that we may always praise your holy
name;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Gospel

Matthew 27:57-61 *or* John 19:38-42

followed by silence

Proclamation

followed by silence

Prayers

Response:
TIS 730, "Jesus, remember me"

Come let us bless Joseph who came to
Pilate by night
and begged for the Life of all*:*
*Give me this stranger who has no place to
lay his head.*
*Give me this stranger, whom his mother
saw hanging on the Cross.*
In silence let us offer our prayers for all
who are in despair;
all who find this life a hell, and long for
release.

silence … sung response

Let us pray for those who are dying,
and those who wait with them.

silence … sung response

Let us pray for those who through addiction
have lost their health and freedom.

silence … sung response

Let us pray for ourselves and all whom we love
to be enfolded in the love of God.

silence … sung response

Today a grave holds him
who holds creation in the palm of his hand.
A stone covers him who covers the heavens with glory.
Life is asleep and hell trembles,
and Adam is freed from his chains.
Glory to your saving work,
by which you have done all things!
You have given us eternal rest,
your holy resurrection from the dead.
Amen.

O God, Creator of heaven and earth:
by your mercy grant that as the crucified body of your dear Son
was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath,
so we may await with him the dawning of the third day,
and rise with him to newness of life;
who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Closing Responses

I wait for you, O Lord;
my soul waits for you;
in your word is my hope.
My soul waits for the Lord,
more than sentries for the morning,
more than sentries for the morning.

There is no blessing.

People may want to light a taper before the icon as a symbol of their prayer.

We go in silence to watch and pray.

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continued from page 23

Most of the chapters are not much more than the length of a sermon (or two!). They repay careful and thoughtful reading, even for those of a more conventional Christian bent. It distills much of his previous work, therefore is repetitive in some ways, but this seems to be normal for most prolific writers (both fiction and non-fiction).

Speaking Christian is a book that I recommend for church libraries and personal libraries for ready loan. It could be used for a book discussion, though is a little bitty for that purpose. However, it is engaging, clear and invites the reader into a conversation. A discussion guide is included at the back of the book.

David Carter is minister of Glen Iris Rd UC.

on Areopagus Hill

Wes Campbell

War and Christian Pacifism

I was raised as a Methodist in small town Western Australia, in the 1950s, where the Bible was taken literally and the government was conservative, Country Party. In that environment—post World War II and during the so-called Cold War—the government was to be accepted and obeyed in matters of armed defence. After all, in the 1940s the Japanese had threatened Australia, and now the 1950s the threat from the north came from communists.

In 1968, as an Australian male aged 20 years, I was due to be conscripted to military service to support Australia's military involvement in Vietnam. I had spent a year in Sydney at the Central Methodist Mission under the ministry of Alan Walker and had been exposed to his preaching of pacifism and opposition to the Vietnam War. (As it turned out, with a letter half written to my parents explaining that I was not going to submit to the draft, I took the path of accepting exemption due to my "full-time religious studies".)

As a theologian in the late 1960s I was formed by the work of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer and, to a lesser degree, Reinhold Niebuhr. The prevailing note was that of "Christian Realism". I learnt from these great figures that pacifism was suspect—an adoption of a "principle", and therefore the loss of Christian freedom. In 1968, as I attempted to clarify my own stance with countless cups of late night coffee and conversation, my contemporaries told me that military service was possible for a Christian, on the basis that there is "no greater love" than if one lays down one's life for one's friends!

I have been involved in popular movements which protest and also hold out hope of a different world: the resistance to South African apartheid, support of Aboriginal land rights, opposition to nuclear weapons, action to protect the environment, an appeal to government not to attack Iraq and Afghanistan, and so on.

I have lived in a tension between Christian discipleship, non-violent pacifism and the challenge of whether it is ever justified to go to war. Karl Barth was a leader in the resistance to Nazism through the Barmen Declaration and the Confessing Church—he developed a notion of responsible citizenship. Bonhoeffer's active resistance to the Nazi government

endorsed the role of active discipleship which knows one must act in obedience in a given situation. Niebuhr criticised "irresponsible pacifism", articulating the necessity of opposing force with force, especially against the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

John Howard Yoder, a Mennonite theologian, is an important voice in my continuing attempt to be informed by these theological greats. His work has been mediated by Stanley Hauerwas who describes himself as a "pacifist" and engages in theological dispute with Reinhold Niebuhr. Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus* was an early encouragement. He translated Hendrik Berkhof's *Christ and the Powers* (Herald, 1962), and has pursued the question of just war (*When War is Unjust: Being Honest in Just-War Thinking* (Wipf & Stock, 1996)); he expanded on the classic work of Roland Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*.

The most recent piece I have read, however, is Yoder's work *Karl Barth and the Problem of War and Other Essays on Barth* (ed. Mark Thiessen Nation, Cascade Books, Wipf & Stock, 2003).

Yoder's work on Barth is important because it takes seriously Barth as a church theologian. (Yoder also reports that a draft of his Barth essay was shown to Barth who agreed with it.) Here is not the place to carry out a close report of Yoder's work, however the main lines may be drawn. Yoder takes Barth's *Church Dogmatics* into serious account. He argues that Barth understood ethics to be integral to the task of systematic theology, with regard (among other ethical themes) to abortion, euthanasia and war.

Barth appeals to two categories: a rejection of *casuistry*, and the notion of *Grenzfall* (a limit situation). In exploring Barth's use of these categories in his *Church Dogmatics* volumes II, III and IV, Yoder shows how the questions of life and death in these ethical questions take the Christian to a critical moment which requires the risk of obedience, as a response to the command of God. Barth says he resists *casuistry* because it appeals to principled thinking that tries to sort out the ethical response ahead of time, rather than acting in faith (here and now). In fact, Barth does use "cases" to argue and explore the ethical challenges, engaging in a form of *cas-uistry.*

With regard to war, Yoder observes that Barth reverses the usual order of treatment. Traditionally abortion and euthanasia take the lead and war is dealt with later. Here, Barth treats the question of war first. He admits that in war there is no order, but rather chaos and destruction. Barth rejects the term "necessary evil" (Niebuhr) but does allow for the possibility of the "lesser evil".

However, Barth takes the view that the Christian is called to be a pacifist. The weight of the Christian claim is to make pacifism the norm. But he allows an exception: that in a *Grenzfall a* command of God might require a person to engage in killing. Barth argues that God must be allowed the freedom to command war. Thus, Barth adopts what he describes as "practical pacifism". (He uses as a case study the role of Switzerland's "armed

neutrality" and Christian support of its civil defence. Yoder explores critically the weakness of Barth's approach.) Barth is critical of Bonhoeffer and his co-conspirators as "dreamers"; they were neither serious enough to follow through the planned attack at the cost of their own lives, nor did they plan for the resulting consequences.

Barth's political engagement with the question of war took place in 1930s and 1950s. The latter engagement was in the context of the Cold War and the development of atomic weapons; Barth argued for an "atomic pacifism". Yoder observes that Barth uses a version of "just war" doctrine.

Not surprisingly, Yoder challenges Barth's acceptance of the possible involvement by Christians in war. Yoder exercises a "Barthian critique" of Barth. He shows that Barth leaves major themes relatively untouched: the character of "the State", the history of non-violent resistance, the possibility that the church might, as a body, respond in times of conflict by deciding to declare against governments who are preparing for war. He posits the option that all Christians might become conscientious objectors. Taking up Barth's development of christology (in the humanity of Jesus), Yoder demonstrates that Barth's notion of the "command of God" leading to war does not take seriously the way of Jesus Christ, and ignores the essential wrongness of war as expressed in his description of its destructiveness. (Barth also admitted that in modern warfare there is no distinction between combatant and non-combatant. War is total war. We have witnessed that in the bombing of Bagdad.)

There is much more detail in Yoder's account of Barth's ethical thinking on war but these are the key themes that impress themselves upon me. This work is helpful in our current Australian context with regard to the church's response to war. For example, during the 1980s the Uniting Church in Australia developed a clear and unequivocal stance against nuclear weapons, declaring the Christian vocation of peacemaking and declaring the production and use of nuclear weapons to be "sinful". The church's response to so-called conventional war (which is total war now) is as yet unresolved. Many Australian Christians would still hold to a version of "just war", and allow for Christian involvement in war, including appointing chaplains to the military services, perhaps because they have accepted the role of Christians as *responsible citizens*.

"Yoder demonstrates that Barth's notion of the 'command of God' leading to war does not take seriously the way of Jesus Christ"

Yoder's work presses for a faithful discipleship truly based on following Jesus Christ.

Wes Campbell is UC chaplain at Melbourne University.

op. cit.

Adam McIntosh

Embodied Spirituality

a response to Joan Wright Howie

It's a scene that is repeated in different contexts throughout Australia. A small rural Uniting Church congregation is meeting to discuss their future. The congregation has an average attendance of eight elderly members. Like many rural congregations, their future survival as a congregation is in serious question. As the congregation discusses their context, there are many questions asked. Why aren't young people interested in church? How do we get them to come to church? Isn't there a strong spiritual interest in our society? Why don't people seem interested in the Christian faith? How can we engage the young people of our town? In her paper *Popular Belief in Spirit and Christian Spirituality* (*CP* 24), Joan Wright Howie discusses the challenges facing many congregations like the one described above. This is contrasted with the high interest in spirituality in Australian society. Wright Howie suggests that the church needs to understand the nature of spirituality in order to accompany people on their spiritual journey and engage this wide interest in spirituality.

Spirituality is not an easy term to define, especially its popular meaning in the Australian context. Wright Howie suggests that in its popular usage, "spirituality" refers to a dimension of the inner life, a sense of belonging outside of the individual ego, and a deepening awareness and relationship with the sacred. She then engages the question of what constitutes a theology of Christian spirituality. She begins with God's desire for us and the restlessness that human beings experience in response to this divine longing. From this she argues for a dialogue between human experience and the Christian event, which is about becoming formed in a relationship with God grounded in community and tradition. Finally, Wright Howie discusses the present situation of the church and its mission. She calls into question the depth of spirituality in the church and identifies a lack of confidence in the divine presence encountered in the language, liturgy and stories of the Christian faith. Her solution is for the church to rediscover the ancient practices of attending to the presence of God in our liturgy, sacrament, scripture and common life.

Wright Howie's article raises some very important questions that many congregations are struggling with. She describes well the challenges facing the church as well as the spiritual

hunger in broader Australian society. She also hints at important components of a theology of spirituality. This is an ambitious task for such a short article, and the article would benefit at different stages from more in-depth discussion. I want to add to this important conversation with special attention to what constitutes a theology of spirituality.

A Theology of Spirituality

Where are we to begin a theology of spirituality? Wright Howie suggests that we begin with the simple concept of God's longing for us. Human beings are restless until they respond to God's desiring. She uses the illustration of a Norwegian legend that describes the human desire for God: "Before a soul is put into the body the soul is kissed by God and during all of its life on earth, the soul retains a dim, but powerful, memory of that kiss and relates everything to it." Wright Howie suggests that this legend speaks of the restlessness of human beings that is the basis of our spiritual longing. She goes on to say that a theology of Christian spirituality begins with God's longing for us, with this desire stirring within us a desire for God, a searching for the primordial kiss of God. In Wright Howie's description, there are hints of Augustine's statement in the *Confessions*: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you".

I'm not convinced that this should be the starting point of a theology of spirituality, although it can certainly be an important part of it. It seems to me that there is a prior question that a theology of spirituality needs to answer, and perhaps this is implicit in Wright Howie's paper. This is the question of *who* is the God that desires relationship with human beings. Augustine's pithy statement is instructive on this point. He does not start with the concept of God's desiring or the human desiring, but with the *naming* of God as Creator and Lord. Without starting with the identity of this God, I'm concerned that we will not understand the nature of this desiring and its implication for spirituality. For instance, what type of God desires us and how does this shape our response? What is the nature of this desire? Desire can be sadistic, narcissistic or it can be a longing for a response in love. The nature of the desirer shapes the desire and this shapes the response of the desired. This starting point is not simply a politically correct theology or theological nitpicking. It is, rather, something that is constitutive of all that follows a theology of spirituality. Twentieth-century theology has taught us that theological foundations are critical to the overall trajectory of any given theology. Likewise, a theology of spirituality must have the nature of the divine desirer as constitutive of all that follows that theology.

This leads us to name the God who desires human beings. For Christians, this God is named as the Triune God. The Trinity is an interpretation of God's unfathomable love incarnated in Jesus Christ. It states, quite simply, that as we enter into fellowship with Jesus Christ, we enter into fellowship with the one

Jesus names as Father, through the life-giving energy of the Spirit. This God has her being in communion, a community of love, with relationships expressing and constituting the divine being. To use the traditional Eastern language, God's being exists in the eternal relationships of the persons of the Trinity. A theology of spirituality will reflect on the nature of the triune God and the human longing to respond to God's desiring. The Father longs for the Son, the Son reciprocates this desire, and the Spirit is the bond of love that unites both in the completion of desire. As Jesus prays in his great prayer to God:

> As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one. (John 17:20-23)

The nature of the Triune God's desire is one of self-emptying and gratuitous love. God's trinitarian being is relational and God longs for relationships outside of the life of God. Our hearts are restless until we find relationship with the divine community. This understanding is certainly not opposed to Wright Howie's account and she does hint at the trinitarian dimension to a theology of spirituality. I am only attempting to give a little more flesh to a trinitarian account of spirituality in order to add to the conversation.

From a trinitarian account of the identity of God we can move towards an understanding of what it means to be human. Wright Howie briefly points out that Christian spirituality is about becoming fully human. This, again, I see as a helpful description that I would like to expand on. The question that a theology of spirituality is concerned with is perhaps something like: What does it mean to be human, in light of an account of who God is? The humanity that we are asking about is authentic humanity created in the image of God. We are invited to infer from the nature of triune God the character of humanity. Human existence, as it is understood from a theology of spirituality, is authentically human existence. *Be what thou art* is a summary of the spiritual search. For Christians, this is a possibility grounded within the life of God. God's love incarnated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus establishes us as creatures in relationship with God, with each other and the whole of creation. Christian spirituality is concerned with being shaped by the Spirit into the image of Christ. Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly". We experience this abundant life as the Spirit forms us into the image of Christ, who is the image of the invisible God. Wright Howie points out that spirituality is not simply about the inner life, but is firstly about relationships. We can make such a statement because of the relational nature of the triune God and human beings created and reconciled in the image of this God. Christian spirituality can be understood as the longing of the heart not only to be reconciled to God, but to relationships

with fellow human beings and the whole created order. Life in the Spirit is life taken beyond the individual ego to the horizon of the communion of God, human communities and creation.

All relationships are ethical as they involve living in a way that contributes to or detracts from the nature of the good. From a Christian perspective, to become who we are consists in being formed and shaped into the likeness of Christ, who is the image of the good human creation. This means that a Christian spirituality is fundamentally ethical. We must reject a dualistic account of spirituality that sees it as essentially about fulfilling an inner desire or creating meaning in life. Spirituality is about becoming people who live in relationships of self-giving love with God, other human beings and creation. This is such an important connection to make especially given the environmental challenge facing humanity. Spirituality is about being in relationships with creation in a way that rejects a desire for exploitation and insatiable consumption. The nature of desire is self-giving love in the image of God's self-giving love.

The Church's Response

If the above description is on the right path, then how is the church to respond to the spiritual longing in the Australian context? Wright Howie suggests that the church rediscovers the ancient practices of attending to the presence of God already present in our liturgy, sacraments, scripture and common life. Key to this concern is the nurturing of the faith community. She puts this well in the following:

> The experience of encountering God and discovering a primary identity as loved children of God shapes participation in the world as disciples of Jesus. Practising the presence of God in daily living paves the way for people to participate in the in-breaking of God's promised vision for the world. (14)

I think that this is a good description of the way that the church should respond to the spiritual longing in our society. Quite simply, it requires the church to be the *church;* to be the faithful Christian community gathered, shaped and sent into the world by the Holy Spirit as witnesses to the crucified and risen Christ. To be the church we need to be a people who encounter the triune God in our worship, life and service. We need to be a people who long for and express relationships with God, each other and with creation. We need to be a people who model for the world authentic humanity in the image of Christ. The church is to avoid the temptation of offering an empty spirituality that serves the egocentrism of our contemporary Australian society, rather than a relational and self-emptying spirituality grounded in the trinitarian life of God. The latter understands spirituality as *embodied* in service, suffering, justice, hospitality to strangers, Word and sacrament, while the former understands spirituality as meeting my individual needs.

The world needs a church capable of such witness. We need to be capable of a witness that models an authentic

and holistic spirituality as described above. This is, perhaps, the elephant in the room of this whole discussion. The congregation mentioned at the beginning of the article is discussing issues that don't fundamentally address the above questions. Like many church conversations around this topic, the issue is primarily seen as an issue *outside the church* or one of the relevance of the church. Why aren't *young people* interested in church? How do we get *them* to come to church? Isn't there a strong spiritual interest in *broader society*? Why don't *people in our community* seem interested in the Christian faith? How can we engage the *young people* of our town? The real question is about *us* as the Christian community. What type of church is needed to be capable of such witness? What structures, modes of worship, life and ministry would best enable the church to engage the spiritual longing in Australian culture? I suspect that the answers to these questions are emerging and will continue to emerge. What is clear is that the church must be open to new possibilities and expressions of church that address these questions.

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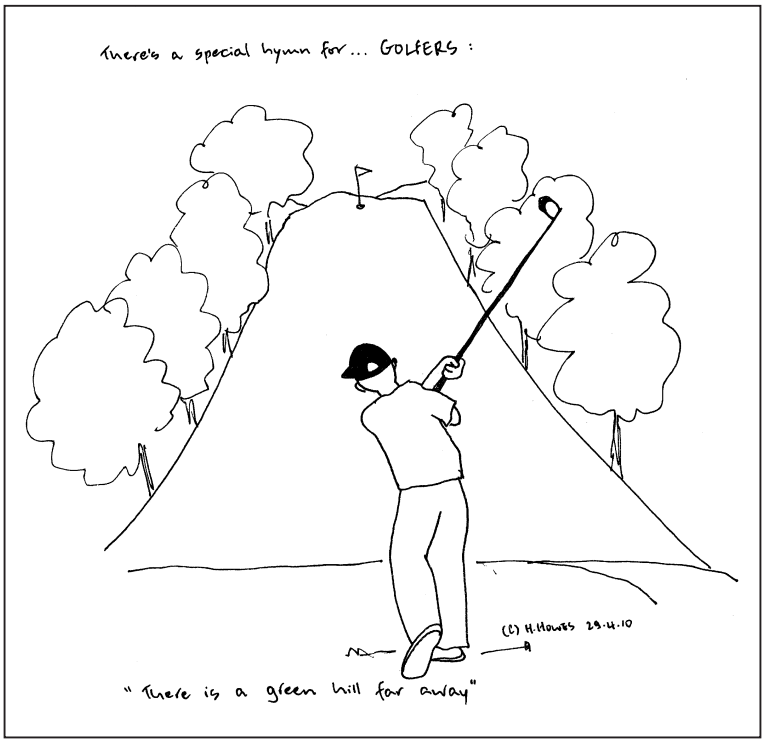
double take

Hilary Howes



what are you reading?

Speaking Christian · by Marcus Borg · Harper One, 2011 · reviewed by David Carter

Increasingly when people step into a church, either for the first time or after many years, they find themselves in an unfamiliar environment. I'm not thinking about buildings or dress code, but language. We Christians have a language—words, phrases, cadences and texts—which are just not part of everyday use. Some of the words have been reinterpreted in for secular use, take *icon* for example, but many haven't. In many ways, Christian language is a foreign language.

Marcus Borg is a leading biblical scholar and theologian associated with progressive Christianity. Over the past couple of decades he has written around ten books exploring aspects of Christian faith. His special focus is christology, but he has also written on God, the bible and Christianity. He seeks to communicate with Christians who have questions, concerns and are alive to contemporary issues, and non- or disenchanted Christians who find the Christian language communicates little.

Recently I led a group of six young adults (all under 35 years) through an introduction to Christianity. Half of them had been participating in any church *for the first time in their lives* for less than a year. The words, phrases and shortcuts expressing Christian belief and faith we take for granted was often opaque to them.

Salvation, believing and faith, God, mercy, born again, Pentecost, the Lord's Supper … are just a few words which point beyond themselves to a deeper reality. Marcus Borg, in this compendium of 238 pages, offers 25 mini-chapters helping his readers grapple with ancient, profound words which barely speak to many secularized people. He seeks to bring them alive, pre-modern words for post-modern people.

The sub-title of his book is *Why Christian Words Have Lost Their Meaning and Power—And How They Can Be Restored.* He offers this work of mind and heart as a primer "to help read, hear and inwardly digest Christian language without preconceived understandings getting in the way."

I don't think there would be much argument that the Christian message and story is seriously misunderstood. Marcus Borg is well aware of this fact, and also that a few progressive leaders are very keen to transform Christian language totally. He notes the ministry and work of United Church of Canada pastor Gretta Vosper, who argues for a radical transformation of language. Borg differs from her project wishing to *redeem* Christian language so that it can be heard anew. In many ways it reflects the subtitles of some his earlier work, e.g. *Reading the Bible Again For the First Time*.

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coming in issue 26...

Colin Honey
credo — I believe in Jesus Christ

Bruce Barber
atheism's faith & theology's reason

Sean Winter
through a glass darkly

Alison Whish
in service