

# CROSS Purposes

Coming up...

*op. cit....*

*in service...*

*through a glass darkly*

**Bruce Barber**

*on Areopagus hill*

**Mark Zirnsak**

*Human Rights vs. Christian Values?*

**letters...responses...editorial**

Issue 3 of *Cross Purposes* will be published October 2005

# CROSS

## Purposes

Issue 2

July 2005

*A forum for theological dialogue*

### Towards Hospitable Conversation

WE ARE VERY HAPPY indeed to present a second edition of *Cross Purposes*. In the dog-eat-dog environment of contemporary consumerism, a second edition can never be taken for granted, especially if the aim of one's publication is to nurture the arts of "thinking slowly" and "listening deliberately"!

Thanks to everyone who wrote letters of support. What we are trying to do with this little magazine is promote a very rare and almost forgotten Christian practice: conversation that is able to take the church beyond its tired and familiar factionalism into a space in which love and truth are no longer seen as opposites. To that end, we are interested to promote a form of *hospitality* in conversation that presses beyond psychological fear or secular-styled tolerance into the regions of trinitarian

reconciliation made available in the Spirit of Christ crucified.

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If you persevere beyond this editorial, you will discover great riches for reconciliation indeed. Alistair Macrae's article reminds the church that it is called to practise not a world-denying or world-affirming "citizenship" but a *world-engaging* "discipleship". To *engage* the world, he says, is to re-marry the *either/or* categories that modernity drove apart: public/private, social justice/evangelism, doctrine/human experience etc. In a response to Garry Deverell's article in Issue 1 of *CP*, Paul Walton argues that, in different ways, we expect both *too much* and *too little* of our Sunday gatherings for worship. Worship, certainly, is the place where our formation as Christians is ritualised and made explicit; yet, precisely be-

cause that is so, we cannot expect that rituals can make us Christians on their own. Barbara Spencer reflects upon the theme of *abundant life* as a formative image and concept for her practice of a diaconal ministry that strives to *make connections*. Finally, Natalie Dixon shares some lessons with us from Mark's gospel about the ministry of stopping to listen to those who are most lost in our community. Stopping to listen, she says, is to initiate a relationship that may, in time, issue in the re-humanisation of the person who has been marginalised, which is a constitutive element of any genuine experience of healing.

I know you will be as stimulated by these reflections as we editors have been. Read, enjoy, live!

# CROSS Purposes

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2. Life is to be creatively and emotionally expressive. Growing up in the affluence of 50s, 60s and 70s, the boomers became very aware of the constricted choices of their parents. "I'm not in this world to live up to your expectations and you're not here to live up to mine; but if we find each other, it's beautiful." Emotional openness, honesty, expression are valued.
3. There developed a "psychology of affluence". It is a right, an entitlement from society. What do you want? More. One has a moral obligation to fulfil oneself.

This is precisely the generation missing from mainline churches. This generation, alienated from major social institutions, simply dropped out of the church. The more one holds an ethic of self-fulfilment the more one is likely to drop out of the church. Why? Churches are filled mainly with people into self-denial.

Why are mainline churches declining and conservative churches growing? Until the baby boomers, mainline churches were able to draw the young educated people. But those who prized expression, freedom, autonomy, self-expression simply left the churches.

The challenge is to hold in creative tension the call to self-

fulfilment and self-denial (another gospel *both/and?*) Self-denial on its own is a joyless, guilt inducing, low energy, unattractive affair. However, a self-fulfilment approach on its own will merely contribute to the rampant self-centredness of our culture.

The challenge for the contemporary church is to demonstrate in word and action that true fulfilment comes through self-giving (freely chosen) in the spirit of Christ.

ALISTAIR MACRAE is Principal of the Synod's Centre for Theology and Ministry, and was Moderator from 2000 to 2003.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>See Garry Deverell, "Uniting in Worship?" in *Cross Purposes*, April 2005.

<sup>2</sup>Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come* (Strand, 2003) 8.

<sup>3</sup>David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991).

<sup>4</sup>Peter Phan, "Proclamation of the reign of God as Mission of the Church".

<sup>5</sup>W. Brueggemann, "Preaching as Re-imagination", 329.

<sup>6</sup>Daniel Benedict, unpublished talk.

<sup>7</sup>See T. Sample, *The US and Mainline Churches*.

## Ministry connections

Barbara Spencer

JOHN 10:10, *I have come that they might have life & have it abundantly*, is the biblical text that has inspired me in diaconal ministry through its different phases and experiences. Abundant life implies wholeness, and to be whole we need to embrace all the diverse parts of ourselves. We need to be connected. In my experience this applies both individually and in community (shared meaning). What does this connection individually and especially corporately mean for ministry in the Australian culture and context in 2005?

Each of the four different experiences of ministry with which I have engaged has left me with a different question about connectedness. These questions are the basis of my constant reflection on ministry.

As a teacher for 20 years (+) I was always drawn to children who did not achieve, were not able to connect to classroom learning and reach the benchmark set for their year's standards. This led to me studying special education, discovering how we learn and what goes wrong with learning. My focus was on specific learning difficulties, incorporating strategies to enable students and teachers to bring about a

learning connection. The question that remained with me from this era was: Why do we focus on content and not on discovering where students are in understanding, opening their learning to the next step?

After ordination my first placement was in a drug agency. I listened to people's stories as individuals and in groups. From those narratives the theme of disconnection emerged strongly. Some of the obvious forms were abuse and neglect—others were more subtle, such as not fulfilling family expectations or a difficult school experience where they did not seem to be on the wavelength of the majority. This disconnectedness led to seeking the "comfort" that drugs of addiction provide in the initial time of "using", but ultimately led to the larger disconnection from family, community and friends that is the product of drug addiction. The question that focused me in this set-



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ting was how people on the margins of society, who long for connection, could transform their lives with spiritual connectedness?

My second placement, as a Regional Development Worker in the western suburbs, raised many questions about connection. Churches were looking for ways to re-connect with society and their local communities as they came to grips with being part of a multi-choice era. To do this they would often seek to create a meaningful mission. This has left me with a complex question. Why create a new mission when the church is so strongly at mission through its agencies and chaplaincy/deacon positions in the community? How do local congregations connect and network with the wider mission of the church? One example of this connection was a network in the western suburbs that linked a hospital chaplain, an aged care chaplain and several congregations. The

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**“ Abundant life implies wholeness, and to be whole we need to embrace all the diverse parts of ourselves. We need to be connected. ”**

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chaplains offered pastoral care training that could be used in congregations. Some of those trained offered volunteer work back to the

outreach sites. Support and a better understanding for both ministries was a positive outcome.

My current placement, Resource & Development Officer – Outreach Ministry, has a dual focus: resourcing those in outreach ministry, chaplains & deacons, and developing new ways for the church to be in the community. Outreach is a difficult word in this context as partnerships, networks, relationships, cooperation and teams are much more the accepted mode of operation in the culture we are part of. I have discovered that being part of these partnerships (be it multi-faith, management or with other professions) in settings such as schools, hospitals, prisons, etc. does not in any way lessen the depths of our beliefs as Christians. In fact, we need to be more sure of what we believe and trust, to be part of this community conversation.

At the end of my first year as Resource & Development Officer, I invited all the chaplains and deacons working in outreach ministry in the Synod to meet. The process of social analysis and theological reflection engaged in on the day enabled the participants to come up with a list of the important themes and issues they faced in their daily ministry.

The main themes that emerged were: making sacred space, liturgy, rituals and memorials in the secular

## **10. Whoever would follow Christ to abundant life must deny themselves**

Many UCA members tend to be “modern” rather than post-modern. Moderns favour order, rationality, institutions. The underlying assumption that the “young will come back” is alive and well, that “what goes around comes around”. But we are in a new landscape and such assumptions are fallacious.

Two key “discipleship” texts, at face value, present very different pictures. Mark 8:34 has overtones of discipleship as self-denial. John 10:10 uses the language of “fulfilment” and “abundance”. These different ways of looking at life, and therefore the Christian faith, are significant in explaining the “cultural struggles” in church communities – and the lack of people under the age of 50 – in churches like ours.

The baby boomers (born between 1946-64) are surely the most self-conscious, researched and analysed generation in the history of humankind! The impact of the baby boomers, and their ethic of self-fulfilment, has been significant in the operative values and norms of our society. The fulfilment ethic has very successfully challenged the dominant ethic that informed western

Christendom over the past 200 years, namely a “self-denial” ethic.

A self-denial ethic has basically 3 parts, shaped significantly by the Great Depression and World War 2:<sup>7</sup>

1. One denies self for the sake of the security and the well-being of the family. An abiding commitment to sacrifice, a conviction that immediate gratification should be postponed for the sake of long-term gain, especially for one’s spouse or children.
2. Luxuries came after necessities.
3. A high value on respectability—a good home, respectable kids.

A self-fulfilment ethic emerged post-war. People had known depression or war for 16 years. Women had been pushed out into jobs. There was an emphasis on making up for lost time. It was a period of unparalleled affluence. Parents committed themselves to providing for their children things they had never had themselves. The emerging ethic taught:

1. Life is intrinsically valuable—it is not to be denied for the sake of something else. Family, country, etc. are to fit into a self-fulfilling lifestyle. Life is to be lived to the full for its own sake.

character. It is a community of witnesses who reach out to make disciples, baptize, teach all that Christ has commanded, in the sure hope that Christ is with us until the end of the age (Matthew 28:18-20).

And so, to use architectural terms, sustained attention must be given to the church “verandah”—that is, the conceptual “space” which connects the inner life of the church (its core rituals, the proclamation of the gospel, the shared disciplines of the Christian life) with the community in which it is set.

Clearly “verandah” here is not a physical structure (although this has implications for church architecture! How many of our buildings communicate a message of welcome, invitation and hospitality?). It is about the mindset of the church – an imaginative orientation on the front side of congregational

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**“The mission of the church is to draw the whole creation into the worship of God. The church at worship is not a means to an end.”**

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life – a stance of lives of Christians open to and facing the world. Verandah hospitality reminds us that Christ comes to us in the stranger.

Counter-culturally, it calls us to move from xenophobia (fear of strangers) to philoxenia (love of strangers). “It is about suspending our privileges as insiders in order to be with others as strangers to the gospel”.<sup>6</sup>

The tension between recovering our sense of being a “called-out” people and being a community which reaches out to all in the name of Christ is worth struggling with.

### 9. Worship as the heart of mission

It has become commonplace to hear of worship as the heart of mission. In worship we gather with the people of God, centre our lives in praise of God, give thanks and confess our sin, attend to God’s Word, are nourished by the sacraments and pray for God’s world before being “sent out in mission” to love and serve the Lord. This approach takes us only so far; and in fact is unhelpful if it draws too hard a distinction between worship and mission. In another sense, the mission of the church is to draw the whole of creation into the worship of God. The church at worship is therefore not a means to an end (worship as the “fuel” of mission) but the very enactment of God’s missionary intent; the world united in love and praise of God.

place (pastoral care in diverse settings); inter-faith dialogue (rituals, space & symbols); word & deed; advocacy; community or government vision & funding; role of the Church and recognition of God’s activity outside the church.

A lot of these issues resonate with disconnection and the struggle

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**“How do those in outreach ministry engage with congregations and presbyteries, to gain common insights on the theological questions of our times?”**

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to connect in a multi-faceted society. People ministering in these areas are engaged with theological reflection on their current role in society, not how to be part of that society, which is more a question heard in the church context. The question that remains with me is: How do those in outreach ministry engage with congregations and presbyteries, to reflect and gain common or community insights on the theological questions that are important for our times?

I have been fortunate in ministry to have been immersed in outreach ministry through an agency and my present role; in congregations and presbytery through my RDW role. It is an interesting mix to reflect from.

I have experienced authentic connection between these ministry areas on occasions but often outreach is considered a “special feature” in a presbytery or congregation agenda, rather than integrated. I have seen and been part of a network of chaplains and congregations that connected strongly, which was extremely life-giving for both of them.

The Pentecost readings we have been reflecting on this month have reminded me once more of the dynamics of authentic connections and life giving relationships. In John 20: 19-23 Jesus appears to the disciples to recall to them what they had experienced in their time together and to fulfil his promise that they would not be left alone. He restores the relationship broken by Good Friday’s events and makes connections.

*“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ... He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”*

Being part of this authentic community of the Trinity is what continually inspires me to find connections and networks that link congregations, presbyteries and outreach ministry positions, connections that will bring wholeness—life abundant.

BARBARA SPENCER is the Synod’s Resource Development Officer for Outreach Ministry.

## A sermon on Mark 5:1-20

*Natalie Dixon*

I AM A MINISTER in the Uniting Church and I work in an outreach position in the Kew-Hawthorn area, supporting people who live in the rooming houses and supported accommodation. Rooming houses are often big old places that house anything from 15 to 50 people. People pay for their room (which is sometimes shared) and receive basic meals. But some don't even provide this. It's not the flashiest of accommodation, but it's better than the streets, which is where some of these people have spent some of their lives.

So who lives in these places? The majority, about 80%, are people who have a mental illness. There are also some with intellectual disabilities, acquired brain injuries, and physical disabilities. Sadly, a significant number also have a substance abuse issue, using the likes of alcohol or marijuana to manage a life that can be pretty tough.

By the time they have ended up in this accommodation most of their family and friendship supports have been eroded by the sheer stress and pressure of trying to care for a loved one with a

mental illness. Unfortunately families are under-resourced to do the caring. This care used to happen in large institutions, asylums, which don't exist anymore. Essentially this shift has meant that people are now left to fend for themselves, with inadequate and limited support afforded by a system that is itself under-resourced and in near crisis. Not that any one seems to take notice of this.

So what is this thing we call a mental illness? It is essentially an illness of our mind and it can take many forms. There are two main groupings. Non-psychotic, which is an experience of overwhelming emotions, i.e., clinical depression and anxiety. Then there are the psychotic forms, like schizophrenia and bi-polar. This is where people lose touch with reality and their perceptions of the world become distorted, i.e., they have delusions, hallucinations—see or hear things that aren't there.

1 in 5 people in Australia at any one time will be experiencing some form of mental illness. This



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he considers it a means by which new truth emerges: "Ours is an awesome opportunity; to see whether this text...can voice and offer reality in a redescribed way that is credible and evocative of a new humanness, rooted in holiness and practiced in neighbourliness".<sup>5</sup>

### 7. Theology of abundance rather than scarcity

Why is the church fixated on scarcity and decline? Scripture makes it patently clear that God does big things with small numbers! Moses in Egypt. David and Goliath. Paul in Ephesus. Church history and contemporary experience furnish abundant examples of this reality. The core gospel narrative in this respect is surely Jesus' parable of the loaves and fishes. When disciples offer all they have, albeit a pathetically small resource, in a situation of overwhelming need, and seek Christ's blessing upon it, they will have more than enough. In fact, of course, in terms of financial and property resources, and personal and spiritual resources the church is by no means impoverished. But this is not the point. The hope of church and world lies in the abundance of the God of pressed-down goodness, overflowing cups, mercies which

never come to an end. The current malaise is being fuelled, if not by

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**"When disciples offer all they have, albeit a pathetically small resource, and seek Christ's blessing upon it, they will have more than enough."**

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faithlessness, then wrong focus—we are responding to declining material and personal resources rather than upon God who can do much with little, who traffics in the world through yeast in leaven, through salt in a tasteless mass, through light in apparently overwhelming darkness.

### 8. Build and occupy the verandah: the architecture of the church's mindset

With all this talk about recovering a sense of the "particularity" of Christian identity it may seem odd to turn now to the imperative of engagement with world and culture. It cannot be stated too clearly that the whole creation is the object of the divine mission. The church is itself a *result* of God's mission, not the end-in-itself. As God reaches out to the world seeking an answering love, so too, the church bears the same

tension that these apparent polarities present and view them as *both-and*s.

The gospel calls us to attend to *both* the public dimension of the gospel (“Jesus is Lord”—social holiness) *and* the personal dimension (“Jesus is Lord”—personal holiness).

It calls forth *both* a commitment to justice and peace in the world (Christian praxis) *and* to development of personal spirituality (relationship with the Triune God).

It calls Christians *both* to social engagement such as justice-seeking, peacemaking, service (praxis) *and* evangelism (word).

We need to recover *both* the transcendence of God *and* the immanence of God (a deep reappropriation of trinitarian worship and theology?).

We must hold together a high value on *both* doctrine (knowing about God) *and* human experience (knowing God).

The church must value *both* order *and* freedom.

We must practice *both* radical holiness (in the spirit of Jesus) *and* radical inclusivity (in the spirit of Jesus).

The church must respond to the gospel imperatives of *both* prophetic ministry *and* pastoral ministry.

### 6. Tell the story: the return of the narrative

Post-modernity at one level eschews the grand narrative—an over-arching story that makes sense of the whole. But rather than abandon the Christian meta-narrative, the current context invites a non-imperialistic telling of the story. Is it possible for the church’s account of life, meaning and redemption to engage critically and robustly with those narratives which produce death; and with other religious communities in respectful dialogue and the common search for truth, justice and peace?

Alert preachers will be aware of a high level of pluralism in any congregation. Any pastor knows that beneath the surface appearance of unity of faith, even though the congregation joins in heartily with the singing, dutifully participates in the responses and creeds, there is significant theological diversity in any congregation. A frank acknowledgment of pluralism, within the church and beyond, calls for respectful conversation rather than authoritarian dicta. Brueggemann puts it this way: “Preaching must be conducted in a context where one makes proposals and advocacies, but not conclusions”. While this sounds a bit like relativism,

means that many of you here will be directly affected by such an illness at some stage, either personally or in those you love. Most people will experience a time of being ill only once and fully recover. Sadly for others though, it will reoccur throughout their lifetime. The people I work with are like this. Their mental illness is chronic and long term.

It’s really important to remember that these people were fully functioning prior to their illness. The grief for a life they once knew and is now gone sits as a

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**“Our response to mental illness involves the discomfort of being faced with people being out of control, for we are a culture of control.”**

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painful constant. Paula was in second year medicine and developed severe schizophrenia. Now she can hardly hold a conversation because the voices in her head are so loud she struggles to hear me. “No peace”, she says, “I get no peace at night, lovely, you see there’s all these people talking. Gosh they make a racket”. Some had traveled the world, worked as lawyers, art teachers, computer technicians, and then became ill. Some were married with children and now have no

one, a consequence of an era where they were put in an asylum and never talked of again. Sadly, at funerals, it’s not uncommon for people’s children to turn up, who haven’t seen them for 25 years.

The consequences of having a chronic mental illness include a very poor quality of life on all levels. People have:

- Poor living conditions.
- Poor health caused by poor diets, smoking, alcohol/drugs, medication, poor personal hygiene.
- Poor quality of life; being on a pension means money is limited. They spend about 60% just on rent which leaves very little for food, let alone any leisure/recreational activities that we all take for granted. Think about what you did last weekend. Movies, cafes, theatre and shopping are all outside the realm of these people
- Very limited support networks, very few friends, family.

All this is hard, but people will tell you that the worst consequence is the stigma they experience from the wider community. Most can just cope with the symptoms. What makes life hard is the stigma/attitude of the wider community.

Stigma is essentially about fear. On the surface we are frightened by people whose behaviour

seems odd, unpredictable. But I believe our response to mental illness is also about the discomfort of being faced with an experience of people being out of control, for we are a culture of control. There is a vulnerability that frightens us.

I CHOSE THE STORY of the Gerasene demoniac to reflect on because I and others believe this is a story about a man with a mental illness. In the ancient world people attributed all illnesses to the spirit world, anything that they did not understand they believed to be caused by spirits, by demons.

We know this not to be true, as medical discoveries have helped us to understand why these illnesses occur. But while there have been great scientific advances in our understanding, there seems to have been little advancement in the way we respond to these people.

The story in fact shows that not much has changed in the way that the community responds to people with mental illness. They, like us, excluded what they didn't understand. They sent a man who had a mental illness to live among the dead, to live in the cemetery, in a place on the fringes of the town, unlit, with wild animals roaming. They sent him to live in

a place they considered unclean and godforsaken.

The man would himself be very aware that this would make him unclean, because death in the Jewish community made people ritually unclean. The consequences of this meant that he could not have contact with anyone. His family would no longer see him; he would be all alone, starved of any physical human contact. Being unclean means that

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**“In the ancient world, they like us excluded what they didn't understand.”**

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he is excluded totally from participating in the life of the community and from any religious activities.

If this isn't bad enough, in an attempt to restrain him he was bound by chains on his hands and feet. Imagine this poor man. He has clearly become very unwell, and quite unstable in his mind. He knows that his community and family are frightened of him, but probably not as frightened as he is about the whole thing. Their response has been to cast him out. To place him outside of the community. To place him among the dead.

I am sure the community attempted to heal him. It's interest-

tion; and if it is true that we are profoundly shaped by the surrounding culture, then formation in “the mind of Christ” and the values of God's Reign will require a degree of intentionality that has been largely absent in our church.

The degree of our cultural complicity is scarcely acknowl-

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**“We must invest more time, prayer and attention to Christian formation if a counter-cultural spirituality is to be nurtured and sustained.”**

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edged. The abyss between the Kingdom values of love, justice and peace – a culture of life – and the dominant narcissism, materialism and violence – a culture of death – is vast. We must invest more time, prayer and attention to Christian formation if a counter-cultural spirituality is to be nurtured and sustained. We will recover and cultivate the ancient spiritual disciplines and practices: biblical literacy, prayer, worship, the disciplines of love. We might expect to see a rise in the ancient Christian praxis of civil disobedience in the face of social injustice.

The new Assembly “Becoming Disciples” schema is a commend-

able attempt to recover the ancient catechumenate. In the current context people need to be “called out” and formed in the weird and wonderful way of Jesus and God's Reign and nurtured in communities with a self-consciously Christian identity.

### **5. Welcome dichotomies: moving from “either/or” to “both/and”**

In the new context we must beware the simplifiers as much as the obscurantists! Life is complex. God is mysterious. Perhaps the greatest protection the church has from reductionist fundamentalism (scriptural, ecclesiastical, liturgical, theological, etc.) is a deep sense of being part of the one holy catholic and apostolic church throughout time and space. This is a diverse family to claim! In the current context, which favours niche churches (as do some church growth pundits), our church should have the courage and the wisdom to be a *both-and* rather than an *either-or* church.

Space permits a naming of only some polarities in faith and church life. In some times and places in the church these have been painted as *either-ors*, ultimately, I believe, at great cost to the fullness of the gospel. Instead we must enter into the creative



sacraments of baptism and holy communion as rituals of separation as well as incorporation; that is, as rituals belonging to an *ecclesia*—a *called-out* people?

The prayer of Jesus was not that his followers would be removed from the world but that they might be a faithful presence within it. For this we need to regain consciousness of being a people apart—to increase consciousness of nonconformity. If the church is to have any integrity in contemporary culture, it might surely bear at least some characteristics of a sect.

The purpose of raising awareness of distinctiveness, however, is not to claim some spurious purity; nor an exercise in self-justification, but rather to maintain this nonconformity as the basis from which to work for change.

Ironically perhaps, what may mark distinctively Christian identity amidst the current cultural pressure to homogeneity is radical inclusivity. In the community shaped around the particular memory and presence of Jesus there can be no distinction between young and old, male and female or any other category which judges people's relative worth. At both the font and the table we are reminded that our core identity lies in who we are "in Christ".

#### **4. Christians are made not born: Christian formation in a world of many gods— everything old is new again.**

In Christendom we assumed that people would be exposed to the gospel through mother's milk, i.e., that by being born and brought up in a Christian society one would imbibe the gospel by association. 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.

Until the '50s we were effective in ensuring that at least enough of our children got the drift and remained in the church. That's all changed but we have not fully acknowledged it. The UCA and its antecedents have largely engaged in recycling the saints rather than proclaiming the good news of the Reign of God to the sick, the blind and oppressed in modern culture.

The previous paradigm of Christianity as "citizenship" must change to a "discipleship" paradigm. If it is true that the culture we inhabit and in which we minister moves around an axis that is fundamentally materialistic, individualistic and nihilistic; and if it is true that the gospel of Christ witnesses to a different dispensa-

ing that in verse 7 we are told that he fell on his knees before Jesus and shouted out "swear to God that you won't torment me". This tells us that he was most likely tormented, being subjected to exorcism after exorcism by all the religious gurus of his time, in an attempt to heal him.

Now he is left alone in the tombs, an outcast, a leper. It's no surprise then that the story tells us that verse 5 "night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones".

This man has now taken to harming himself. Something some people do to try and deal with the pain. The terrible sense of being an outcast at a time when he needed most to be held by his community would be overwhelming.

WE HEAR THIS STORY and can see it as a cruel way to deal with this man, yet I would say that we are still doing the same thing today. Our attitudes and responses have hardly shifted. Just recently there was an uproar in the local newspaper about a house being used for people who have just had a stay in the hospital psychiatric ward. People were concerned that it would devalue their properties and there was concern about it being next to a playground. The

atrocious suggestion that just because someone has a mental illness they are going to molest children is utterly defamatory and unfounded. Let alone the issue of placing more value on property than humans.

The same old stuff was trotted out when a housing project was built next to Kew primary school. Parents said that they didn't "want their children being exposed to those kind of people".

Today we make these people outsiders all the time. And this sort of marginalisation is utterly soul-destroying. The grief for a life that could have been so different and the struggle to hold onto reality sometimes means suicide seems like the better option. And tragically some succeed. A survey done recently found that in a one year period 84% of people who had schizophrenia who died, did so because they killed themselves, as do some sufferers of depression.

There was an article in *The Australian* a couple of years ago which pointed out the failure of the community to care for these vulnerable people. It said "Instead of being cradled by society, the mentally ill are silently filling up our prisons, homeless shelters, hospitals and often our graveyards". So in a sense we are still sending them to live among

the tombs, the only difference now is that we put them in a coffin first.

SO WHAT DO WE DO about all this? As the church we are called to be followers of Christ, to be Christ-like. So let's look at how Jesus responded to this man.

The first thing he did was that he engaged him. He didn't walk on by as many others would, but stopped and took time out on his

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**“Jesus engaged with this unclean man, and in doing so broke all the social and religious barriers that made him ‘other’.”**

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journey to engage with this unclean man. Jesus didn't shy away from him because he would himself now be tainted with the same uncleanness. He engaged with him and in doing so broke all the social and religious barriers that made this man “other”.

When we are called to be Christ-like, then we too are called to break the social barriers of our times that declare these people as outcast. We too are to risk being socially outcast through our engagement with them. I am well aware of being an outcast by association, it has happened too

many times when I arrive at cafes with a group.

The second thing is that Jesus humanised him. He asked him “What is your name”. When we are named we are known. It's interesting, though, that the man gave the name that he was probably known by and given by the community. The compassion and love Jesus showed to the man created the environment for his healing, restoring him to his right mind.

We are, then, challenged to go to the tombs in our communities, to those places to which we have banished the mentally ill, and to engage with them, to help heal them. By *healed* I don't necessarily mean of their illness, but of the deep pain caused by the loneliness, fear and despair they face each day, on their own.

The healing in this story was not so much that his illness was gone, but that this man was now restored back to his community. He would be able to see and touch his family, to participate in community life and to worship his God. Social exclusion is what destroys people's souls. We are called to embrace these people, to bring them back home, to be again a part of our community.

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acterised by two concerns: saving souls and church extension.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, mission was narrowed down to ensuring the individual's eternal destiny, while other elements of the church's mission such as the transformation of economic, social and political structures, respectful dialogue with other faiths, and engagement with local cultures, were set aside as secondary, or neglected.

While there were notable exceptions, in this dominant theology, in which salvation is both individualized and ecclesiasticised, the centre and heart of the missionary project is the church, understood primarily in institutional terms. The other three elements of the Christian faith – proclamation, mission, Reign of God – received inadequate attention. Especially, the Reign of God, in its prophetic and eschatological dimensions, was practically forgotten.

In the 1950s, a “quiet Copernican revolution took place: what was at the periphery now occupied the central position...now, the central pillar sustaining the missionary edifice is the reign of God...the mission of the church flows from the fact that it is a sign and instrument for the reign of God”.<sup>4</sup>

In the words of Thorwald Lorenzen, “the mission of the

church is to create analogies to God's Reign”. The recovery of the heart of Jesus' teaching and mission, the Reign of God, at the heart of the church's life, is fundamental in our context. In the Spirit's power we seek to live out and live into the Lord's Prayer: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven”.

### **3. Church as all-inclusive sect: on being nakedly Christian but not ashamed.**

For liberal, “accommodationist” Christianity, “sect” language provokes deep anxiety. It suggests exclusivism and judgementalism—a cutting off from the world, etc. For this paper I use it in the sense of strong identity and boundaries. The Christian church stands for some things and against others. To be a member of this community means something and not nothing. The new mission context challenges the modernist church to attend to that which is distinctive and particular in its tradition. It specifically challenges the Uniting Church to pay special attention to its core rituals. For example, the church's sacraments are rarely understood to be ritualised reminders of the difference between the reign of Christ and the surrounding world. Can we begin to reappropriate the

This period of dismantling and turmoil presents the church with institutional problems and challenges. At another level, we are being called to interpret the present as a genuine opportunity to fundamentally realign ourselves with God and God's purposes in a changing world.

The following are some non-systematic thoughts about possible implications for Christian discipleship in the new context.

### 1. Jesus is Lord

Scholars have identified that the earliest creed discernible in scripture is "Jesus is Lord". While not an entirely sufficient basis for discipleship (a trinitarian basis would more fully reflect the fullness of our tradition), this creed indicates the appropriate starting and centring point. Positively it is

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**"Today, 'Jesus is Lord' means that Bush is not Lord. Neither is Howard. Neither are money, nor things, nor family, nor job."**

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a call to embrace the way of radical God-centredness, love, peace-making, reconciliation. It is the Christian basis of "you shall have no other gods before me". For early Christians, "Jesus is Lord"

was a direct challenge to the claims of Caesar. It meant then that "Caesar is not Lord". Today "Jesus is Lord" is the claim that dethrones all who would claim our ultimate allegiance. It means that Bush is not Lord. Neither is Howard. Neither are money, nor things, nor family, nor job. When Jesus in the Beatitudes commended "purity of heart" he was not referring to moral purity but to the call to have one centre: God and God's Reign. This call to radical God-centredness is best exemplified in Jesus' famous dialogue with Mary and Martha. Disciples now, as then, are called to radical God-centredness and to dethrone all alternative gods who distract us and claim our hearts.

### 2. Citizens of the Kingdom, members of the church.

The primary focus of Christian mission is to initiate people into the Reign of God and the new creation rather than making them members of denominations and local franchises.

This represents a significant change of emphasis in Christian thinking in the last 40 years ago in both Protestant and Catholic churches. In his major study of Christian mission, David Bosch argued that the understanding of mission from 600-1500 was char-

## Uniting in Worship?

*Paul Walton responds  
to Garry Deverell's article  
in Issue 1 of Cross Purposes*

GARRY DEVERELL begins his paper by taking certain things for granted: "that the Uniting Church is called by God to seek and bear witness to the unity of all Christian people", and that his ecumenically-committed readers "not only understand the biblical, historical and theological manifestations of this calling, but are also thereby motivated to work for its realization". I envy him. I have a presupposition that I suspect not all share: that worship is the primary area in which the formation of Christians takes place.

Let me declare my present situation. Presently, I am a hospital chaplain rather than being in a congregational placement; I also chair the National Working Group on Worship. On Sundays, I attend my local congregation, which would best fit into Garry's "Praise and Worship" grouping, though not quite—it also has some elements of the "Traditional Hymn and Preaching churches". During the week, I am part of an "Ancient-Future" faith community. I have long been convinced of the power of worship to form beliefs and character. I remember in my first placement, a couple of elders made an appoint-

ment to see me. When they arrived, it was to thank me for always having a Declaration of Forgiveness in the services I took; for the first time in their lives, they had both realised they are forgiven! These women were stalwarts of the congregation, active in good works, who had never before *felt* forgiven. To their surprise, they had identified the source of their new-found confidence in the liturgy, regularly repeated.

I cannot assume that those who read this response will share my presupposition that worship is the primary ground for Christian formation. Others may look in different places: in education, fellowship or mission; or in a mixture of some or all of these. Yet when the Church gathers for worship we find the greatest concentration of members, gathered to one end: the praise of God; and this happens week by week. (I realise that some come for other reasons; but the Body itself has one end.) In praise and adoration, confession and intercession, hearing the Word and sharing the sacrament of Christ's body and blood, the Body—and its members—are being formed, built up, in Christ.

**op. cit.**

In the brief space I have, I want to provide a very personal “taster” of some things that hinder this process, and things that help. And a couple of challenges to every part of Deverell’s classification.

### Things that hinder

- *We ask too much of worship.*

Our forebears lived in villages or small towns; their cities were more like collections of smaller communities. They walked to church; they knew each other from school, they shopped at the same place, they

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**“When our culture has lost its moorings, the Church provides a service by remembering.”**

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knew one another’s joys and griefs. Today, we worship God with people we don’t know from anywhere else; often, we want to know them better. Sometimes, we emphasise fellowship over worship in order to achieve this, where small groups and Sunday lunches would be more appropriate vehicles.

- *The individualism of our time.*

I often sense that we come to church as an aggregate of individuals, each to praise God in the presence of others. I have just been at a Pentecost service in which the emphasis was

on each person as an individual bearer of the Spirit, not on the community as Spirit-filled. Rather, when gathered for worship, the whole is much greater than the sum of the parts. Here, as Chauvet says, the community is most clearly itself.

- *The me-centredness of worship.*

I have heard it said that we should not use the singular personal pronoun (“I”, “me”) in congregational song. I don’t agree; the Psalms contain this form, as do much-loved hymns (“When *I* survey the wondrous cross”; “And can it be that *I* should gain”). Yet when *everything* sung is about “me and Jesus”, it contributes to the individualism of worship and a narrowing of focus.

I do strongly question whether any prayer should be in terms of “I pray...”; the leader is praying on behalf of the people. It should always be “*We* pray...”

### Things that help

- *A sense of Tradition.*

“Tradition” seems to be a dirty word in many places; it smacks of fussiness over boring detail, and dead forms. Yet when our culture has lost its moorings, the Church provides a service by remembering. But “tradition” is *not* what worked for us in our younger days! In fact, I have found the most helpful explorations into tradition to be those looking at

the ultimate autonomy of each person. A second feature is *rationalism*, which is characterised by confidence in the power of the mind to explore and understand reality. Modernism taught that the individual, through the use of reason, can arrive at objective truth. Much of the Uniting Church’s reformed and evangelical heritage evolved during the modern era. In post-modernity we are seeing a recovery of mystery and a growing suspicion of the systematic “rationalistic” theologies of the enlightenment.

Today, new revolutions in science, philosophy and communications are shifting us towards new values. These shifts are producing a whole new culture and raise questions about the way Christianity is to be understood, lived and communicated.

### From Christendom to Post-Christendom

Another critical reality impinging directly on the life of the church is the demise of Christendom. This powerful religio-political arrangement has been the prevailing context of church in Europe since the eleventh century, but its roots go back to the fourth century, when Christianity won recognition as the religion of the state with the conversion of Em-

peror Constantine. The church was fundamentally redefined by its new role. It changed from being a minority, prophetic community whose primary allegiance was to Christ and the Kingdom of God to a pastoral presence within the Empire. The emphasis moved from discipleship to citizenship.

“Christianity, with some notable exceptions, moved from being a dynamic, revolutionary, social and spiritual movement to being a religious institution with its attendant structures, priesthood and sacraments”.<sup>2</sup>

Christendom has been in decline for the past 250 years but its condition was identifiably terminal by the 1950s. However, Christendom assumptions remain very strong in the missiology and ecclesiology of the Uniting Church. In many ways, it seems that the church remains in steadfast denial of the collapse of the old frameworks.

Although the UCA stands in the heritage of some of the great reform movements of Christian history (the Reformation, the Wesleyan revival etc.), and our Basis of Union explicitly commits the UCA to on-going reformation of its life, there can be no doubt that the current situation demands a radical examination of archaic assumptions, structures and priorities of the church.

# from Citizenship to Discipleship

## Following Christ in a post-Christian culture

*Alistair Macrae*

IN LAST YEAR'S Blake Prize For Religious Art, one striking painting depicted what at first glance looked like a church but was in fact an old factory built at the height of the industrial revolution. It was in an advanced state of deterioration. Ugly concrete piers sat where the floor once was, supporting great metal buttresses to keep the building from collapse. Clearly the building had once served a vital purpose, but time and technology had moved on—its obsolescence was poignantly clear. That the piece was in a religious art prize was surely no coincidence; nor was the artist's care to render the factory church-like in appearance.

What is there about the life of our church that is based on assumptions no longer accurate; and

which therefore impede the mission of God through the church? Western culture is experiencing tectonic cultural shifts which impact on the life of the church, indeed on Christian faith. Diogenes Allen describes it as a "massive intellectual revolution taking place that is perhaps as great as that which marked off the modern world from the Middle Ages".

Two fundamental shifts are worthy of particular attention here. I'll point to them with scandalous brevity.

First there is the transition from the "modern" world (1750-1980) to a so-called "post-modern" era.<sup>1</sup> And second there is the transition from Christendom to a post-Christendom society.

### From Modernity to Post-Modernity

A key feature of modern thought is *individualism*, which asserts

## On Areopagus Hill



the first few centuries of the Church, when it had a minority status in the culture, and before Christendom was conceived.

- *The embrace of symbols.*

We are rediscovering symbol in many ways: the generous use of bread, wine and water; the colours of the Church year in stoles and banners; oil, candles, movement; even incense and icons in scattered places. All this is necessary for *embodied* worship of the Word-made-flesh.

### Challenges

- *Trinitarian worship.*

We worship the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, worship appears unitarian, whether it is focused on "God", on Christ or the Spirit. However, the absence of classical trinitarian language may only obscure a genuine grappling with trinitarian imagery. The Bible, the Church's tradition, and some of the most exciting theological exploration in recent times all point us to the Trinity as the source and goal of our life in Christ.

- *The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.*

"In this sacrament of his broken body and outpoured blood the risen Lord feeds his baptized people on their way to the final inheritance of the Kingdom." (*Basis of Union*, §8)

I have heard it said many times that it would spoil the sacrament to receive it too often. How often would we say this to friends? ("I don't want to eat at your place too often; it spoils my appreciation.")

When people share Holy Communion regularly, a sense of communion is generated among them; I believe that a renewal of the sacrament in all its dimensions is vital for the life of the Uniting Church today.

I SEE THE THINGS that hinder in every one of Deverell's categories, to a greater or lesser extent; they bedevil us in every part of life, and the Church's worship is no exception. As to things that help, only some are actively engaging with the Tradition (an engagement which brings something new into being), and truly *embracing* the symbolic.

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**"A renewal of the Lord's Supper in all its dimensions is vital for the life of the Uniting Church today."**

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As far as bringing the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper into the centre...

Are we ready to dialogue? Or should we confess our folly?

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# Double Take

by Hilary Howes

