Candour

Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

NEWS AND VIEWS FOR MINISTERS

ISSUE 2 // MAY 2012

One holy, catholic and apostolic

www.presbyterian.org.nz

Candour 2012

Candour is now a bi-monthly publication and will include regular columns from the Moderator, the Principal of Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, and Global Mission.

ISSN 1171-1027 (Print)

ISSN 1179-402X (Online)

Contributions

We welcome responses to published articles. If you would like to write a piece replying to any of this month's featured articles, please contact:

The editor on (04) 801-6000 or candour@presbyterian.org.nz

Advertising

One-quarter page: $80 plus gst
One-third page: $95 plus gst
Half page: $130 plus gst

Any artwork must be supplied electronically and in a high-resolution format. Measurements are indicative only and subject to layout requirements.

The next deadline is 30 June 2012.

The next edition is published in July 2012. This edition will have the theme: "The art of welcoming: the journey from visitor to member". Contributions on this topic are welcome and can be sent to the editor candour@presbyterian.org.nz.

Contents

Giving expression to Jesus' prayer for unity

Anne Thomson, First Church of Otago, Southern Presbytery*

A couple of years ago I attended a conference held in Auckland to mark the centenary of the missionary conference of Edinburgh 1910, which is often considered the birth-place of the modern (20th century) ecumenical movement. Being at the conference was an interesting experience. Most of those attending were somewhat older than me and many were people who had been involved in the ecumenical movement all their lives. They had lived through the heady days of the Plan for Union, the heyday of the National Council of Churches, the days when institutional Church union (in some form) seemed to be just around the corner. A number had lived and served and worshiped in union or co-operating parishes ever since. Working towards a closer unity among the churches had been their passion, their mission focus, their vision for much of their lives.

I remember the "fuss" around the Plan for Union when I was in my early teens – I overheard the discussion and debate. I don't remember being greatly excited by it. As a student, I was very involved in Tertiary Students' Christian Fellowship, and found there a form of ecumenism that made more sense to me than institutional and structural change. The ecumenical movement seemed to have missed the point, in my opinion back then – if we were one in Christ and worked together for the Gospel, what did it matter which denominational label we wore, what structure we worked within?

The Auckland 2010 conference reminded me of the passion, the commitment, the vision that had lain behind a movement and a moment in our history that, for me, had seemed rather boring and past it. It was good to hear some of those stories remembered, to re-learn this part of the story that I had been unable to appreciate back then.

But there were two other things that impressed me over those two days. First was the decision of the organisers to return to the original Edinburgh 1910 theme of mission. The name of the conference was "Mission and Unity: Then, Now, and into the Future" and the main focus was on the mission of the Church, both in our history and now in the 21st century. Once more it provided a place where ecumenical endeavour found its practical expression in working together for the gospel.

The other highlight was John Bluck's after-dinner address, in which he asked where the next trigger of passion and vision for ecumenism would come from. His suggestion was that it would be in the art of hospitality:

> "You don't have to look far to see how essential it is to the Gospel and the very nature of God. The essence of ecumenism is the capacity to offer and receive hospitality – to be generous and gracious in the way we care for our neighbour, especially if that neighbour is unlike us, in order that we may better reflect and reveal the Christ in us."[1]

John reminded us of the institutional challenges that continue to exist around the ecumenical celebration of the eucharist, the table that Christ has prepared where all God's people should be welcome together. And John highlighted the often-overlooked practice of hospitality that continues in our parishes, over a cup of tea after the service, in generous post-funeral refreshments, in invitations to visitors to share a meal. But the challenge of hospitality, God's hospitality, remains:

> "To share food with people unlike us, as eucharist requires, even with the unworthy, the unreliable, even the traitors like Judas, requires a very robust faith. It can be uncomfortable, messy, awkward, even dangerous. If you don't believe that Jesus is really present when you break bread in his name, you are taking a big risk by opening up your table. But when you do, exciting things happen. Lonely people make some friends. Withdrawn people break their isolation. Troubled and grieving people find support. People on the edge are drawn into the centre. Broken people find healing. When we prepare and share food together the world looks

1 John Bluck:Conference table to Dinner table, http://www.methodist.org.nz/mission_and_ecumenical/mission_and_unity_conference_2010

like a brighter place to be for a while. Isn't it amazing how the memory of a great meal stays with you, and how it is easier to remember the names of people around a dinner table than lined up in a meeting room." [2]

The challenge to giving expression to Jesus' prayer for unity among his people in John 17 remains with us. The tendency when life is tougher, when resources seem to be thinly stretched, is to turn inwards, to protect what we still have. Hospitality calls us to share generously and to make space for others. We need to cultivate the hospitality of the pot-luck meal, where each brings what they have and sets it down on the table, so that all may be fed from the rich variety of what God has given to each for the good of all.

*Anne is the guest editor for this edition, and is a member of the *Candour* editorial committee.

2 ibid

"Come and see" evangelism

Peter Cheyne, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

In the second article in his series on discipleship, the Right Rev Peter Cheyne explores the concept of "come and see" evangelism and what this might look like today.

In John 1:35-51, John the Baptist points two of his disciples to Jesus. They follow him and when he asks what they want, the disciples ask where he is staying. Jesus says, "Come and see". Then they spend that day with him.

One of those two, Andrew, then finds his brother Peter and says, "We have found the Messiah". The text doesn't tell us that he says, but "Come and see" is clearly implied because he brings Peter to Jesus.

The next day, Philip finds Nathanael and says to him, "We have found the one Moses and the prophets wrote about – Jesus of Nazareth". When Nathanael questions whether anything good could come out of Nazareth, Philip says, "Come and see".

Jesus then reveals surprising knowledge about Nathanael causing Nathanael to respond, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel". In other words, when Nathanael sees the power of God, he is brought to a place of faith. Jesus showed him something that elicited belief.

Jesus then says, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that. Very truly I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man."

Again, Jesus is inviting Nathanael to "come and see". Is this how Jesus went about evangelism? I want to suggest that "come and see" is an evangelistic model we should consider.

Phase one

Jesus' encounter with the fishermen on the lake shore was not the first time they had met. It appears that there was a phase in their relationship with Jesus that was simply about coming and seeing. It was simply "Come and have a look. See what you think." They were under no obligation and possibly went back to their fishing in between times with Jesus.

It is hard to know the sequence of events, but John 2 follows John 1! Maybe the turning of the water into wine was one of the things they were invited to see before they were asked for any greater commitment. Almost certainly they saw Jesus teaching and healing and they had private conversations with him.

Only later, did Jesus approach them and say, "Follow me". That invitation initiated the second phase of their relationship with him. Now, they definitely were being asked to make a commitment – leaving their business in order to follow, and learn from, this rabbi. It is as if Jesus is saying, "On the basis of what you have seen, will you follow me?"

That makes a lot more sense than assuming that this was the first meeting.

Is this a general pattern?

Is this "come and see" model unique to John 1 or is it Jesus' general pattern?

Jesus regularly demonstrated the kingdom of God in some way or another. He used miracles to open up opportunities. People experienced God before being asked to follow him.

In the midst of their theological debate, Jesus revealed that he knew the Samaritan woman had had five husbands and was now with yet another man. It wasn't the debates that convinced her. It was the fact that she saw God at work.

In Acts, likewise, people often experienced God before being challenged to respond to him. In chapter 2 the people saw the miraculous signs of Pentecost. Then Peter preached. And even in the preaching, people experienced God – experienced Holy Spirit conviction. In chapter 3 the lame man was healed at the temple which drew crowds and provided an opportunity to preach. Seeing, then the challenge to respond.

When John the Baptist's emissaries came to Jesus asking if he truly was the Messiah, Jesus' response was "What do you see?" Their decision about Jesus would be on the basis of what they saw – the miracles that Jesus was performing.

Of course, Jesus didn't stay in only one place and simply wait for people to come to him. The other side of this coin was "Go and show". Nevertheless, crowds did flock to him and the principle is the same: people saw God at work before being asked to commit to him.

Seeing did not take away the need for faith. Some people saw and chose not to believe. Others did believe.

I am not suggesting that this is the only model of evangelism but is come and see a method that Jesus modelled? And Andrew, the first evangelist? And the early church?

Evangelism, but not as we know it

The typical image we have of evangelism is that it involves accosting strangers, and telling them some theological truths: God loves you; you are a sinner and therefore separated from God; God sent Jesus to die for your sins so that you might be forgiven and that separation bridged. We must then challenge the stranger to accept Jesus. Yet many of us feel deeply uncomfortable with that model.

Imagine someone says to you: "Tell me about this Christianity of yours". What would happen if, instead of trying to persuade with words, we said, "Come and see"?

It would be very legitimate for an enquiring person to say, "Well, show me. Before I make any sort of commitment, show me Christianity in action". In My Fair Lady, Eliza Doolittle sings:

> Words! Words! Words! I'm so sick of words!
> I get words all day through;
> First from him, now from you!
> Is that all you blighters can do?
>
> Don't talk of stars burning above;
> If you're in love, Show me!
> Tell me no dreams filled with desire.
> If you're on fire, Show me!

A visible gospel

Of course, if the gospel is simply about getting into heaven, that is going to be hard to demonstrate but we would also have to question whether that is consistent with the Bible. What attractive good news did Jesus demonstrate? Love, friendship, forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, truth...

Mark 16:20 reads, "Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it". Jesus believes in letting people see, and letting them make their decisions on that basis.

Faith is then not a leap in the dark, agreeing with some beliefs. Faith is a response to God – a God who has been experienced; who has been seen.

Alpha provides people with time to weigh up the evidence. The evidence that people experience during Alpha includes:

- Hospitality and the friendship of Christians
- Teaching about Jesus
- The opportunity to ask questions and to think
- Experiencing the Holy Spirit on the weekend

Only then are participants prompted to respond. It seems to me that that is come and see evangelism in action.

Come and see what?

Of course, if our approach was to be come and see, this raises the question of what we would show people. Where would we take them? Where would they see God? At our church? In our small group? In our home?

Unfortunately, in many churches people might not see God. Many churches are boring, irrelevant, dull, out-of-touch, cold, old, simply a little club of friends. Jesus surely wasn't saying, "Come and see an institution". He invited people to see God and God's kingdom.

"Come and see" might challenge us to re-think what we could show. On the other hand, we shouldn't beat ourselves up too much. If the Holy Spirit has been at work in our lives and in our churches then there will actually be quite profound things that people might see if we invited them.

What are the characteristics of the kingdom? Because of the work of the Holy Spirit, maybe those characteristics are more present than we realise. If we did invite people to our small groups they might genuinely:

- See people talking about God in their lives
- See people caring for one another
- See people praying for one another
- Hear stories of prayers being answered
- See people (perhaps people they know) whose lives have been changed
- See people enthusiastic about what they are learning from the Bible
- See people who are committed to putting into practice what they learn from the Bible
- See people glowing because God is talking to them

If we invited people to our church they might:

- See a family/a community
- See people in love with God and worshipping God wholeheartedly
- Hear about a God who is relevant
- Be loved by church people who take a genuine interest
- See servant-hearted people.

If we invited people into our homes they might:

- See that, for us, Jesus comes first
- See that we prioritise reading the scriptures
- See how a Christian copes with adversity.

I heard of a family that invited another person to come for a meal once a week. The first time she came, she was blown away because she had never sat at a table for a meal without everyone fighting. Inviting a person for a meal is not very profound, but actually it was very profound.

Maybe Jesus has changed our lives in ways that we forget are profound, but that might speak powerfully if we simply said, "Come and see".

Outposts of the kingdom

We, as Christians and more particularly as churches, are meant to be living demonstrations of the kingdom of God. Jesus said the kingdom of God is among us. Our churches are little outposts of the kingdom that allow people to see a very different type of community than our secular society. We are meant to be demonstrations of something better – distinctive, holy.

The snapshots we have of the very early church in Acts 2 and 4 show a community marked by:

- Fellowship – the sharing of possessions, caring for one another, eating together
- Devotion to the apostles' teaching
- Worship
- Signs and wonders
- Joy
- Praise

In other words, the church demonstrated God's better option in the midst of a broken world. And people were added to it daily. The life of the church was missional.

In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus is recorded as saying, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let you light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven".

What this doesn't mean

I am not saying that we don't need to talk about Jesus. We do. Come and see was just the first phase. Later, Jesus challenged the disciples to the next level of commitment. We still need to bear witness to Jesus and encourage a response to him.

Any time Jesus healed someone it inevitably raised questions about him and that person's response to him (and the observing crowd's response to him.) A healing must raise those questions. The come and see must be followed by the "follow me".

I am not saying, "Come and see our church". Rather, "Come and see God at work". However, one would hope that the church was one context in which people do see God at work.

Conclusion

Did Jesus model come and see evangelism? Did he allow people to "see" God and then make a decision?

What if our approach was, "Come and see. No pressure. Just have a look"? What if we let people experience God before making a decision about trusting and following him?

Would we feel more comfortable with that style of evangelism, rather than the confrontational? Is it more natural?

It starts with our own lives. Is God apparent in our lives? Do we have anything to show?

Is God present in our small group? Should people be able to see God-things happen there and in our church? Is it reasonable that someone could say, "Show me your Christianity"?

I encourage you to consider come and see evangelism – as an individual, as a small group, as a church. What if we emulated Andrew and said, "We have found the Messiah. Come and see". (Andrew was, after all, simply emulating Jesus.)

What if we lived God-filled, Christ-centred, Holy Spirit-empowered lives and then we let people see those lives?

In fact, is that exactly what Jesus has called us to do?

COLUMN

Ecumenism: dormant or dead?

Graham Redding, Principal Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership

The word "ecumenical" comes from the Greek word "oikouménē", which is used 15 times in the New Testament, mostly to refer to the inhabited world (eg Luke 4:5). Insofar as it denotes the unity of creation, it conveys something vitally important about the scope and task of Christian mission, which is about the reconciliation of all things in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19 and Colossians 1:20).

In keeping with this missional mandate, the Church is called to reflect and embody in its own life that which it proclaims in relation to creation as a whole. Ecumenism, therefore, has a particular reference to Church unity. In John 17, Jesus prays that his followers will be completely one, just as the Father and the Son are completely one, so that the world may believe. The unity of the Church is witness to God's power to reconcile. The unity of the Church serves the unity of humankind and the integrity of creation. Accordingly, ecumenism calls for a rich, mutual interdependence of churches, consistent with the image of the mutual interdependence of body parts which we read about in 1 Corinthians 12.

The unity for which our Lord prays is both a declared fact and an eschatological hope. Christ is our peace. Through his life, death and resurrection, the dividing walls of hostility that exist between different categories of people – Jew/Gentile/slave/free/male/female, etc – have been abolished. As Paul declares in 2 Corinthians 5:16, "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view ... If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

However, that which is declared to be a new reality in Christ is not yet complete. We see this in some of Paul's correspondence, which speaks into situations of factional discord (for instance, 1 Corinthians 1:10-17). Sadly too, the history of the Church tells a story of schism and division as much as it does of unity and reconciliation. So for now, the Church lives between the times, between the already and the not yet. It is a time not for passively accepting the myriad forms of division that best the Church, but for prayerfully striving for reconciliation and unity. While we can acknowledge with gratitude the many forms of inter-church co-operation that exist at grassroots level, we should not equate co-operation with reconciliation and unity.

In recent ecumenical discussions the concept of "ecumenical space" has been talked about. According to a paper co-written by New Zealand's church leaders in 2010:

> "This refers to the setting in which, even in a state of division, churches witness to their common allegiance to Jesus Christ and co-operate together to further the visible unity of the church. It is in this space that our common Christian identity is affirmed. It is here we can talk together in a new way, with a greater opportunity to discern together Christ's will for the church, in ways that are not possible in isolation from one another. This is a space where there is commitment to overcome former divisions and search for unity. It uses the process of dialogue to achieve transformation and renewal in the light of our common quest."

So said the church leaders back in 2010. Because I'm no longer privy to those discussions I don't know where things are at now, but the lack of public announcement emanating from that quarter suggests that little progress has been made. Part of the problem, of course, is that the ecclesiastical landscape has changed considerably from what it was at the height of the ecumenical movement in the 1970s.

This is evident in the churches that are represented around the leaders' table. Alongside the traditional denominational churches (Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Churches of Christ, Baptists and Salvation Army) we now have a plethora of independent church movements and networks, including the likes of Elim and the Assemblies of God. Many of these churches have little time for ecumenism and the accompanying vision of church unity. Fellowship, yes; co-operation, maybe; unity, no.

Moreover, even among some of the more traditional churches there is a good deal of suspicion about the word "ecumenism". For some, it has connotations of a failed 1970s liberal theological agenda that alienated the average person in the pew. And there is a suspicion that some of the most

vocal advocates of ecumenism today are in a state of denial, forlornly trying to ride a horse that has long since died.

There is another problem too. As the mainline churches have suffered massive numerical decline in recent decades they have become increasingly preoccupied with their own institutional survival. Denominational distinctiveness and branding have become more important than shared commitments and historic relationships, and the money that used to be available to fund ecumenical ventures has long since dried up. The demise of the Churches' Agency on Social Issues (CASI) is a case in point, as is the demise of *Crosslink*.

Be that as it may, can we really afford to settle for a lowest common denominator approach to inter-church relations? Is that the best that we can expect from being part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church?

My own hope is for a renewed spirit of ecumenism, inspired and informed by the prayer of our Lord in John 17, but not tied to previous institutional forms. What the new forms might look like is not as yet clear to me, but in the meantime I do believe that a firm commitment must be maintained at Council of Assembly and Moderatorial levels to remain in dialogue with other church leaders and to actively inhabit the sort of ecumenical space that was envisaged in the 2010 paper.

Actively inhabiting this space will not mean just going through the motions and receiving an occasional report from the Moderator about his or her latest meeting with other Church leaders. It will involve appointing suitably qualified people to engage in constructive long-term theological dialogue potentially leading to bi and multilateral covenants with other churches, and exploring opportunities for increased collaboration – for example, in regards to ministry formation, leadership development and theological education. Of course some of this collaboration and co-operation already happens at an operational level, but it would be good to have a higher level of official endorsement and intentionality. Demonstrating leadership in this regard would constitute a powerful witness to the unity that we declare and seek in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Editor's Note: We regret that in the last issue of Candour the wrong version of Graham's article "A Hands-on Approach" was printed. If you would like to obtain a copy of the correct version, please email the editor. Our apologies to Graham for this oversight.

COLUMN

What does Christian unity in New Zealand look like?

Peter Cheyne, Moderator Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

This is purely a personal opinion but it has sometimes seemed to me that our Church has something of a North Korean attitude to the outside world. It is as if we close our borders to the Christian community (other than our traditional ecumenical partners). I am not sure if we are a bit threatened by other Christians and churches, or we think we are a little better than they are, or what.

On the other hand, the strategic directions that the Council of Assembly has adopted say: "…as part of the global church we will willingly collaborate with other churches, denominations and other Christian organisations to accomplish the mission of God".

How does Christian unity work in New Zealand in our time?

Over the last few years a group of denominational leaders has met periodically to investigate setting up a new ecumenical body, the Churches Forum for Christian Unity (CFCU). It has produced a paper "Towards A Theology of Christian Unity In Aotearoa New Zealand" and a proposed structure for the CFCU. Those documents were sent to the various churches for an indicative response.

> "So, is there is any body that speaks for the churches in New Zealand? There isn't."

That response was overwhelmingly negative. Only the Anglicans, Methodist and Catholics responded positively. They then expressed some disappointment that the other churches weren't more interested in unity. Others then replied, "We are interested in unity but we are wary of any structure that seems too similar to the old CCANZ". They said, "Christian unity is perhaps at an all-time high. There are numerous vehicles through which the churches work very closely together. The national Church leaders meeting is a key coming together of the leaders of the various denominations. It is widely representative and maybe ought to be the forum for further discussions regarding unity. As well there are local ministers associations, the New Zealand Christian Network, the Churches Education Commission, the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services, UCANZ, etc".

On top of those organisations there are also many mission-focussed organisations that work trans-denominationally or partner with denominations such as Fresh Expressions, Love Your Neighbour, Christian Broadcasting Association, Rhema Broadcasting Group, TEAR Fund, World Vision, Willow Creek Association, Parachute and many more.

At the Council of Assembly meeting that considered the CFCU proposal there were also recommendations that we join the New Zealand Christian Network, Fresh Expressions and Love Your Neighbour. Council didn't say "yes" to any of them, although some are still possibilities.

So, is there is any body that speaks for the churches in New Zealand? There isn't. The closest would be the national Church leaders meeting and the New Zealand Christian Network. The problem with the national Church leaders is that it is a somewhat informal gathering and it hasn't been officially recognised by the denominations to speak on their behalf.

The New Zealand Christian Network is widely representative with board members from the Catholic Church, Pentecostal churches and many in between. It is being approached more and more by the media for Christian comment. Members are involved in government workgroups and the like and it has a wide range of sub-networks working on all sorts of issues: community engagement, cross-cultural mission, prayer, discipleship, arts and music, economics, education, environment, criminal justice, and secularisation to name some. On the other hand, it has grown as a grassroots movement and isn't necessarily "owned" by the churches. It is seen by some as being too right wing (although it describes its own approach as "generous orthodoxy" using Brian McLaren's phrase). It also still needs to work out what denominational membership might mean.

Several denominations, in their responses to the CFCU proposal, expressed a strong desire not to try to resurrect past models of ecumenism. This raises the question of what the new face of ecumenism might be.

One emerging aspect seems to be the partnering of denominations with some missional organisation. For example, Fresh Expressions invites denominations to partner with them. Likewise, Love Your Neighbour. Indeed, it is more than a partnering of denominations as these same organisations bring together other para-church organisations co-ordinating their various strengths around some particular aspect of mission. In other words, various organisations and churches work together on some focussed mission.

Some distinguished this sort of mission-focussed partnering from the CFCU which seemed to be about unity for unity sake.

This mission partnering may be part of the new face of ecumenism, but it raises practical questions. How many different organisations do we partner with, especially when there is perhaps money involved each time?

It is also perhaps a little more chaotic when denominations (rightly or wrongly) like to have clarity and certainty.

Of course, at grassroots, churches are often working together quite happily – and more easily than is possible at a higher level – sometimes in defiance of the higher levels of their church! On the other hand, it is discouraging to see how often there is a territorial protectionism or suspicion (often a result of ignorance). We may also need to ponder how we feel about being part of groupings or organisations that we don't control.

We all know that Jesus put great stress on Christian unity, devoting part of the prayer at the last supper most emphatically to that. Unity is something we should desire and work hard for.

The question is how that is expressed in our context. How is God calling us to work and worship together irrespective of our denominations? How might working together best enhance the mission of the church in this country?

The primary desire of those in favour of the CFCU was that we keep working on it, thinking it through and understanding each other better. The other churches weren't opposed to that but, again, how do we do that?

Yet we shouldn't let the difficulties stop us actually pursuing the unity Jesus prayed for.

It seems to be a time of transition in which we need to seek God and discern how we, as Presbyterians, "willingly collaborate with other churches, denominations and other Christian organisations to accomplish the mission of God". There is little doubt that God calls us to unity. What does that unity look like? What is God's plan for the whole church in New Zealand in 2012 and beyond?

ARTICLE

The practice of catholicity

Kerry Enright, Wellington Presbytery*

A couple of years ago Allen Nafuki, assistant assembly clerk of the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, took me around the main island of Efate. He pointed out how much land is now owned by "white Australians". It's a phrase I often heard in the few days I was there. Fifty-five percent of Efate is "foreign-owned" – most of it coastal land. The result is local people can no longer access traditional fishing grounds and only two beaches near Port Vila are accessible to them. Although the word used is "owned", the land is acquired by lease. Leases are normally for 75 years and provide that leasees must be paid for any improvements if the land is to be claimed back. Naturally, there is unrest among younger people who feel that their elders have forever alienated their land, a part of their identity.

At the end of that day, I sat down to watch the evening news. An early item was the then Australian Foreign Minister, Stephen Smith, criticising the Fiji government for yet another breach of human rights. He said something like "I make no apology for Australia taking a lead in upholding human rights and democracy in the Pacific." If I had been in Australia, those words would have meant one thing. But they sounded different following a day when I had heard about the loss of land, mainly to Australians.

The Church's catholic nature brought Allen and me together. It created the will and ability for us to listen to each other. It confronted me with implications of living in Australia and enabled me to see and act differently.

> God's gift of diversity in the church arises from its catholic nature.

In his book *Exclusion and Embrace*, Miroslav Volf says we need to develop double vision, the capacity to see things from there, not just from here (Volf, p. 250). Ideally, says Volf, we should see things from everywhere, but that is how God sees things and we are not omniscient. Nevertheless, we can in a creaturely way try to emulate God's way of knowing. It at least involves developing the skill of "stepping outside ourselves", allowing the other to be other, seeing ourselves as they might see us and seeing things from the perspective of the other.

It's significant that the catholic nature of the Church is affirmed in a baptismal creed. Baptism is about identity. It tells us who we are. As we plunge into the water the Church confirms we are catholic beings, created for relationships with people different from us. We become more truly ourselves when we reach towards people who are other, whether in language or culture, nationality or faith.

Our belonging to Christ, marked in baptism and reflecting the Church's nature, reminds us of our primal connection and relativises other identities. I saw this dramatically enacted many years ago. One Sunday in 1984 I shared in a baptism in USA. Two weeks later I shared in a baptism in Leningrad, now St Petersburg. This was amid the strident rhetoric of the Cold War and the policy of "mutually assured destruction" in which nuclear weapons were pointed between the Soviet Union and USA. In that context, the church catholic embodied in baptismal ritual that two human beings were fundamentally connected. In the Creed we assert that the Spirit's enabling of that connection is more powerful than other forms of connection (eg nationality) with their resulting divisions.

God's gift of diversity in the church arises from its catholic nature. In his book on the Apostles' Creed, *The Faith We Confess*, Jan Lochman uses the terms "multi-faceted" and "all-inclusive" in relation to holiness and catholicity.

> The two terms relate to the whole of human life sanctified by the triune God: they are aimed at the whole people of God and every aspect of its life. They therefore reject any singling out of certain areas of life as "holy", any selection of certain groups as "elites". (Lochman p. 203)

As Jurgen Moltmann pithily notes, the Church is not "birds of a feather flocking together". When we say we believe in the catholic church, we affirm diversity as a gift and a calling. When the church begins to look mono-cultural, something is amiss. In Presbyterian polity, the council of the Church with particular responsibility for embodying that diversity is the presbytery. One reason the presbytery ordains is because it represents the ecumenical church in a region. When presbyteries become gatherings of the like-minded, they are moving away from their catholic identity.

Ordained by the presbytery, the minister of word and sacrament is an ecumenical officer, called to enable the Church to live out its catholic identity. The minister helps the community be catholic. The minister can help nourish a community in which people are cherished, safely able to engage with different perspectives and connecting in with the wider community of faith. Where people of a particular culture, young people in a predominantly older congregation or children in a predominantly adult congregation represent a minority, the minister can assist them to be heard, enabling different perspectives to emerge and conflict to be facilitated.

In 2004, I undertook study leave at New College in Edinburgh. At the time I had some national responsibilities amid what seemed significant organisational change so I wanted to consider again what we needed to hold on to as a Presbyterian Church. I was surprised to find my reading quickly led me to reflect on truth and catholicity. I recognised that the Presbyterian system of government, with its conciliar decision-making, encouraged people to engage with each other from different perspectives and experiences. The differences were essential to discerning what was true and to what God called us. Convictions people brought arising from diverse contexts, cultures and experiences were important in helping others see a greater God and experiencing a fuller life. It meant that conflict was inherent to our identity and arose from the valuing of difference. The challenge was how to ensure conflict was healthy and how we could provide a safe place to enable diversity to flourish and diverse voices to be heard. It also meant that we needed to keep finding ways of enabling people to hear those diverse voices, not turning in on themselves. Without that continual experience people can begin to imagine their views are normative.

Catholicity also involves actively engaging with churches beyond national borders. The face of Christianity in the world is changing dramatically and the Presbyterian Church is affected by those changes. One hundred years ago, 80 percent of the world's Christians lived in Europe and North

> As Presbyterian congregations become anxious for their future, a lived belief in catholicity is especially important.

America; now 60 percent live in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Pacific. Over time the portrayal of Christ and therefore our understandings and experience of God will change. The growing number of Christians in China alone, given the size of the population and the vitality of church life, will impact us. International Christian leadership will increasingly come from the rest rather the West. These changes challenge the narrative of the 1970s that education and wealth inevitably secularise.

Whereas Europe was seen as religion's future, religiously speaking Europe is increasingly seen as an exception. Religion, especially Christianity and Islam, is more resilient and vibrant than many expected. More than 80 percent of nations are publicly religious. The experience of Australia, New Zealand and Europe including the UK are unusual, not an inevitable future. Connections with

churches beyond New Zealand enable people to see themselves as part of a vibrant, evolving movement. Relating to these partners can help us see Christianity as much more than how popular culture in New Zealand or Australia presents it. But those relationships need to be sufficiently tangible and immediate to confront and change us.

An emphasis on catholicity is a healthy antidote to some Reformed inclinations. Reformed churches, including in New Zealand, have a propensity to divide for cultural, political and doctrinal reasons. I understand there are over 175 Presbyterian denominations in Korea. This inclination to withdraw into like-mindedness can happen in congregations. The catholic dynamic is an antidote where congregations become too comfortable with themselves, too led by internal agendas, too familiar with each other, too self-referencing.

As Presbyterian congregations become anxious for their future, a lived belief in catholicity is especially important. In small communities, the normal can become idiosyncratic, disconnected from the vital movements of God in the world. People can reinforce their own rightness and regard as threats people who are different. This is not the way of truth and freedom promised in Jesus. If truth is what sets us free, freedom is not found in being inwardly turned or diversity averse. Truth arises from seeing how the full diversity of people is embraced by God and from developing the capacity to embrace perspectives in order to understand reality more completely.

It is evident from the comments made above that catholicity and mission are closely related. Their horizon is the reign of God. As Lochman states:

The kingdom of God is not a kingdom of Christians. Christians can and should even now live, act and suffer in hope of this kingdom… But precisely because this is the hope by which they live, they cannot overlook the fact that the kingdom of God is not for them only; the kingdom is the future not just of the church but of the whole world. (Lochman p. 207)

The dynamic of catholicity draws us towards the realm of God. As an important instrument of God's purpose, the church looks to collaborate with all the means God uses to bring God's rule. That includes not just other churches, but people of good will in other faiths and people of good will beyond faith communities. Although this takes us beyond what catholicity means, I believe it is a legitimate extension of the catholic spirit or orientation.

So, how can the local congregation act inter-dependently, avoiding self-sufficiency, self-referencing or self-definition? How can the congregation be safe for diverse communities within it, empowering minority voices to be heard even if conflict results? How can the presbytery enable diversity, giving space for the variety of local mission to flourish, enabling congregations not to turn in on themselves and providing means by which differing perspectives engage each other? And nationally, how can the Church ensure it continues to connect with other churches within the nation and internationally, in vital, tangible, life-changing ways? How can it enable cultures to have enough space and not to be domesticated or tamed, yet engage with others in transforming ways?

**Rev Dr Kerry Enright is a minister in the Wellington Presbytery on secondment as national director of international partnerships in the Uniting Church in Australia.*

We believe in [belong to] the "one, holy, catholic, apostolic church". Yeah right!

Kevin Ward, Southern Presbytery

The church of the 4th century at Nicaea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381) affirmed as the four crucial marks of the church – unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity – a creed we still retain and recite as summarising the core essentials of our faith. It is doubtful if the church of the 21st century could come up with these same marks as the essential identifying markers of its form or life. So what do they mean and what might they mean for how we live out our faith corporately, if we were to seriously wrestle with them and not just express them as beliefs, but let them shape the way we belong?

Some might ask why should we? That was then this is now! However, we should take seriously the point made by Tom Torrance that:

> "They do not denote independent qualities inhering in the church, but are affirmations of the nature of the church as it participates in Jesus Christ…. *They are first of all attributes of Christ himself, but attributes in which the church shares through its union and communion with him.* Therefore in the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the church it is the image and face of Christ himself that comes to view."

In other words, these marks are not peripheral to the Church, they are core to its identity as the body of Christ, and if they are not present then it is difficult for the Church to be the sign, witness and foretaste of what God in Christ is doing in the world through the Spirit, which is its calling.

We are happy to affirm we believe in it provided we don't really have to belong.

One...

Almost everyone affirms the unity or the oneness of the Church, but ever since the schism of 1054 that oneness has been somewhat difficult to locate, and since the splintering of the Reformation even more so. Daniel Migliore helpfully defines it as "a distinctive unity rooted in communion with God through Christ in the Spirit. The unity of the church is a fragmentary and provisional participation in the costly love of the triune God."

Recent trinitarian theology with its focus on a plurality within an essential oneness is helpful for us in understanding how the Christian gospel embraces both diversity and unity. Much of the New Testament is written dealing with this issue. The unity of the Church does not lie in either a controlling doctrinal conformity or a formal institutional structure, and I would resist any endeavours to impose either of those kinds of unity on the Church. Within the diversity of our expressions unity lies within the life we participate in together with the triune God. As Hans Kung expresses it, "It is one and the same God who gathers the scattered from all places and all ages and makes them into one people of God."

However ever since the Reformers placed the focus on seeing the unity of the Church in the invisible Church rather than the visible Church, that understanding has been used as a way of enabling churches and their leaders to do little about working to see unity as a visible mark of the church in its present reality. We are happy to affirm we believe in it provided we don't really have to belong.

We have continued to be happily schismatic, tearing apart the fabric of Church whenever we find something on which we differ. This "creeping congregationalism", which afflicts all varieties of church life in contemporary societies, at both a denominational and interdenominational level, heightens the tendency to focus on the local and the particular, as if that is all there was to being Church. Jesus left behind a visible community not an invisible concept. A community he called to be one, and so it is incumbent on we who are the Church to continually work hard to find ways to express in our increasingly diverse culture that this oneness is a reality, not merely some ethereal and mystical entity we believe in.

... Holy ...

The word holy and the concept of holiness is hardly popular in our contemporary context, either inside or outside the Church. It raises images of a "holier than thou" judgmentalism and an isolationist separatism fearful of contamination by an evil world.

It is suggested that preoccupation with holiness has been a major hindrance to the mission of the Church in the world. Identification and engagement with the world is what the creator God is about. The word holy is, of course, the primary word used to name the essence of the nature of God. It is, if you like, what marks out God as God, as distinctly different from everything else in creation. It is something that belongs essentially to God. For other things or persons to be described as holy, therefore, is to claim that they also are marked by the essence of the character of God, and in this way are to some extent different from the rest of creation.

But how do we know what God is like if we are to share in that character? The central claim of the

Some denominations will have nothing to do with some others, which they regard as unholy alliances, perhaps so unholy they are not true Churches at all.

New Testament and of Christian thought is that the fullest revelation of God is to be found in the human person Jesus Christ. By looking at the life of Jesus we see what it is like to live a human life marked by the character, or holiness, of God.

But more than that the New Testament claims that by his death, resurrection and gift of the Holy Spirit Christ mediates to us the very life of God so we can share in the fellowship of the trinity. Here is the essence of the holiness of the church. It can be identified by the degree to which it lives a life reflecting the glory of God seen in Christ; and this is made possible by the presence of the Spirit in its midst. When we do this we will demonstrate a distinctive quality to our life that will indeed mark us out as different, distinct from others. While this quality of holiness will be demonstrated in the Church in an imperfect way, as Calvin put it, it is the "measure toward which it is daily advancing".

Of course one of the challenges in this is how do we define holiness? Even if we agree that it is defined by how Jesus lived humanly, whereas once upon a time there may have been some consensus of understanding on what this meant, now the Church is widely and deeply divided about it and the issues that raises are often the cause of further division and schism. Just take issues such as abortion, same sex relationships, the place of women, war, and social or economic justice to name a few. These can tear churches apart at a local level, cause denominations to split, and ensure that some denominations will have nothing to do with some other denominations, which they regard as unholy alliances, perhaps so unholy they are not true Churches at all.

This is a challenging question for us all if we are honest. How plural can our understanding of holiness be, so we can embrace people who live markedly different lifestyles as part of the one

Church with us? Of course this raises significant questions as to how much of our understanding of this is in fact merely part of the culture in which we have been raised or live rather than the gospel itself. This in turn feeds back into our denominations, the particularities of which are often a reflection of the cultural context in which they were historically formed. Holiness challenges us not only in how we are to be different or distinct from the world in which we live, but also how do we work together as one with others who understand that distinctiveness differently.

... Catholic ...

We need to guard against catholicity being understood merely as an abstract kind of universalism hovering over the particularities of culture and history.

The affirmation of the catholicity of the Church refers to its universality and inclusivity. It is the Church that has existed everywhere, always, and for all. It guards the Church against parochialism, sectarianism, racism, and chronological conceit. It is clear that both the unity and the catholicity of the church go together; they are two interwoven dimensions of the one Church. However, as with oneness we need to guard against it being understood merely as an abstract kind of universalism hovering over the particularities of culture and history. Again it is a mark that needs to be demonstrated in the life of the visible church as it is lived out in local communities. Avery Dulles claims that catholicity "is not the accomplished fact of having many members or a wide geographical distribution, but rather the dynamic catholicity of a love reaching out to all and excluding no one".

One of the major trends of the post 1960s world of the global village, has been a growing pluralism of our societies. Not just through the coming to societies such as New Zealand of markedly different cultural groups from overseas, but also by the breakup of the dominant white European culture into a multiplicity of subcultures. Not only is this across generations, but also within generations themselves.

This pluralisation has been heightened by the fact that increasingly people do not live their lives in one geographical place where they might mix with people of a wide variety of ages and cultures, but rather are mobile and live their lives with communities of choice, usually consisting of people of the same culture as themselves. Often these subgroups are quite exclusive, having their own distinctive language, symbols, and lifestyles.

At a time in the past when people in a community lived their lives in that particular community, when generations shared many of the activities of life together, the local church embraced within its community members from every walk and stage of life within that community. It was catholic and inclusive in that sense. This fed through into the nature of our denominations. How do we reach people today within all these different cultural subgroups, when the culture of Church as it is, represents that culture of a bygone age?

The answer of many today is that we need separate churches to incarnate the gospel into all those cultural subgroups. And so we have children's, youth church, student church, young adults church, family church, Korean church, Samoan church, breakfast church……. and so on and so on. These churches become quite age, ethnic or culture specific.

However, is this not to ignore the strong theological thrust of much of the New Testament, especially in the writings of Paul, such as in Ephesians 2 where talking about the major cultural divide of his world, that between Jew and Gentile, he writes that "Christ … Has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall … to create in himself one new humanity" and in Galatians 3

that "in Christ there is "no longer Jew or Greek… slave or free… male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." It is only as we live this out as we relate as part of the one catholic Church of Jesus Christ that this fractured, divided, tribalised world, people may see what God is doing in the world in Christ: God is forming one whole new humanity in which the estranged groups are reconciled, that in Christ cultural separation might be transcended and that the new community of God's people is inclusive of people of every race and every tribe and every tongue, even here now on earth.

...Apostolic...

A number of those in the missional church movement define the apostolicity of the church as its essential missional nature. That before it is anything else it is missional. While it is true the word apostle does have in it the idea of one who is sent, and while I agree fully with the sentiment being expressed, I do not believe that particular interpretation of apostolic as a mark of church is how it was understood by those who created the Nicene Creed or historically within the church.

In confessing the apostolicity of the Church we are acknowledging that the true Church is founded on the apostles. The faith and life of the Church must stand in continuity with their enduring witness. This continuity is ensured not by some physical continuity through the sacramental laying on of hands, but by our faithfulness to and reaffirmation of the gospel they gave witness to in the writings of the New Testament. As Jurgen Moltmann puts it: "The apostolic succession is in fact and in truth the evangelical succession, the continuing and unadulterated proclamation of the gospel of the risen Christ."

It is of course one thing to affirm that "our supreme rule of faith is the Word of God" as the Presbyterian Church does or that "the Bible is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice", as a Baptist church might. It is quite another to interpret what those words actually mean for us today.

One of the things contemporary hermeneutics has made us aware of is there is no such thing as an uninterpreted word or act. Being faithful to the apostolic witness is not just mere repetition of those affirmations, or repeating the way in which they might have been interpreted as being appropriate to another place and another time, but that the apostolic word must be interpreted anew for every generation and every context. A failure to recognise this, and realise therefore that "now we see in a mirror dimly" (1 Cor 13.12) so relating to others with a due humility, has led to us all too readily to regard others as dangerous and deceived at best, or heretics at worst.

For some parts of the Church in particular, regarding other Churches, or better parts of the Church, as failing to take the Bible as their authority, has been the major cause for their failure to embrace them, and work with them as part of the "one, holy, catholic, apostolic church" to which we all belong.

So what am I arguing for here? Not for a structural move toward one organisational Church as the church union movement of the 1960 and 70s hoped. The Church from its inception, even in the early years of the New Testament, had a healthy plurality and balance of local freedoms, but committed unity, in "belief, behaviour and belonging" (to use a contemporary trinity). Paul's writings to the churches in Rome and Corinth make this clear. This is evident in the history of the early church as well. What it does mean though is a recognition of, and commitment to, the fact that we are first both individually and corporately members of the one, holy, apostolic and catholic Church.

As a Christian I am a "catholic Christian first". My identity as part of the Reformed tradition and specifically the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and to the local expression of that (in my case the Highgate parish), within that comes as a secondary identity, and needs to be kept that way. The way I act toward others needs to reflect that. They are not my, or our, competitors, let alone enemies, but our sisters and brothers in Christ. In a market-driven consumer world, which always urges us to put ourselves at the centre, to ensure our market identity and share, we need to not just hold this as an attitude or belief, but do tangible actions to express it as a reality in how we belong.

This is the reason that Paul was so insistent in his writings that the wealthier Gentile churches gave to his collection to take to the poorer Jewish churches, and why he insisted that table fellowship be open to all, regardless of what culture issues around food and drink may endeavour to keep them apart.

If what God is doing is to reconcile all things together in Christ (Eph 1.10), then how will our world know that if they do not look and see a Church which acts out its identity as "one, holy, catholic and apostolic"?

Ecumenism through the eyes of a CV

Peter MacKenzie, Wellington Presbytery

One...

I recently had a man approach me with a certain amount of confidence and declare that ecumenism is dead. I agreed, and he was almost visibly deflated by the lack of debate. But... and here came the debate... I added that I was convinced more than ever that co-operative ventures (CVs) were alive and well. The dreams for one church of the mid-20th century have not been realised and it is time to move on, but the quest for a new understanding of ecumenism and what it means to be the body of Christ in the 21st century is ongoing.

CVs were established throughout New Zealand for a variety of reasons – all with an underlying commitment to draw churches closer. Some CVs were formed from a need to consolidate ageing buildings, some in new suburbs where a combined effort was more feasible, and others due to population decline in rural areas. Whatever the reasons for the formation of a CV, the new local church undertook a journey that brought together traditions of various denominations and sought to find a practical unity in the local setting.

History shows that there were hopes of CVs becoming a beacon for church unity; dreams that have been quietly lost in the busyness of denominational activity. There is disappointment within CVs that the dream was not realised and at times a sense of abandonment. But there is also an affirmation for how churches can work together in a practical way and overcome many of the perceived obstacles.

...holy...

For a number of years there has been a growing tendency to see CVs as "something other" than the denominational church. This has been the consequence of a number of factors, including a desire by CVs to create their own identity. In Presbyterian circles the language has been "Presbyterian churches and CVs" as if they were different. The better statement should be "Presbyterian churches including those in CVs".

This otherness has a created a distorted view that is sometimes spoken out loud, which suggests that CVs are somehow less than other churches. The implication is that CVs are in some way tainted by their partner churches to be less than holy in their life and mission. When written in a sentence like this it becomes easy to see how ridiculous this idea is – but logic does not always determine behaviour. The hard truth is that CVs have lived with a certain amount of derision for decades as they have sought to partake in a shared denominational journey.

At the heart of the CV movement is an acknowledgement that the body of Christ is diverse and the expressions of our faith are all holy in the sight of God. To be ecumenical in the practical expression of a CV is to affirm the rightness of the various traditions that participate in the local church. For some local churches this has meant a deliberate celebration of various traditions in their life and worship – for others it has meant a discovery of a unique mixture of the traditions. Successful CVs, however, all share the common feature of accepting the holiness of each of the partner church traditions and respecting their theopraxis.

In general terms this suggests that being ecumenical begins not with a church being holy, but in accepting that other churches might also be holy, albeit in a slightly different way. The story of the Samaritans is an example of how not to be ecumenical, as they were never granted the understanding that their worship and life could be holy to God. To be ecumenical is to accept that the other churches in our community are also consecrated to the work of God, sacred to God's presence and godly in their endeavours.

...catholic...

The catholicity of faith challenges CVs in their journey to find common ground between their partner church traditions. Such a task has both positive and negative outcomes. On the negative side history has shown that CVs do often weaken in their denominational identity and tend to

become more congregational in their outlook and practice. In finding common ground within the CV a local church may lose ground within the denominations, and if they isolate themselves there is a risk of disjunction and poor practice. This highlights the need for partner churches to maintain their links with their CV churches. On the positive side, CVs have shown that there is a catholicity between the denominations and a shared journey is possible.

Perhaps the biggest flaw of the ecumenical movement in the mid-1900s was the desire for a uniformity of belief and practice. It appears (through a post-modernist's eyes) that unity of the churches was based on sharing a common theology and practice. More recent attempts at ecumenical co-operation have often begun with the question "what do we agree on?" This seems to miss the point of catholicity. If we could begin our discussion by saying we have a universally accepted faith that unites us and then begin to describe our diversity, we are more likely to develop an ecumenical spirit.

...and apostolic

There is no doubt that life would be easier for CVs if there was only one church governance, yet there is also an acceptance of the reality in the Church today. CVs continue to proclaim that denominational differences can be set aside and people can work together in a local church. They are witnesses to the ecumenical spirit that engendered their formation. Most people in CVs will affirm the richness that they have gained from experiencing the shared traditions – but they may also complain of the complexities of church governance and the struggle for identity.

The success of CVs in general is hard to measure. They have not succeeded in bringing about the union of churches – but then that is hardly the CVs fault. Statistically the CVs have struggled with ageing and decreasing congregations – but they are not alone in that, and the loss of CV members has been proportionally less than the loss of Presbyterian members over the last 10 years. There are a number of CVs that have grown (or remained stable) over the last decade and that is a joy to see. In a somewhat bitter success, CVs have managed to facilitate the reduction in old church buildings by uniting congregations in fewer properties.

The greatest success of CVs could be counted as the continuing witness of Christ's church in communities – particularly in sparse rural regions. The formation of a co-operative venture has enabled the continuation of ministry and worship in a local community. For many the choice has been simple – either close the church or co-operate with other Christians in the local area. So today, while the imperative to co-operate might be primarily economic, there is still a strong ethos of ecumenism in the churches that seek to find unity in the church – the Body of Christ has many parts, but it is one body.

Editor's Note: Peter MacKenzie is the Executive Officer of Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand and the article reflects his personal view of the CV movement and does not state the position of the UCANZ standing committee or the partner churches.

"Heroes of the church" stories great for young readers

Jason Garoncy, Southern Presbytery

Simonetta Carr, *John Calvin*
(Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008). ISBN: 978-1601780553; 64pp.

Simonetta Carr, *Athanasius*
(Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011). ISBN: 978-1601781512; 64pp.

Simonetta Carr, *Weight of a Flame: The Passion of Olympia Morata* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2011). ISBN: 978-159638-158-2; 220pp.

Stories have always played an indispensable role in human life. Whether via oral tradition or in written form, stories provide a framework for transmitting values, heritage, culture and traditions – even for transmitting the self across spaces and generations, for keeping the self alive, as it were. Stories also enable us to acquire expectations about the world. These expectations then provide a framework for organising other pieces of incoming information. In short, without stories, we cannot process our experiences. Without stories, we do not know who we are. It is certainly true that the people of God have long known this, and even if that knowledge has at times been submerged deep in the common memory, our being and witness is grounded in story, a particular story to be sure – the very story of God – but a story nonetheless.

And here comes a rub; for as Flannery O'Connor once noted:

> "There is a certain embarrassment about being a story teller in these times when stories are considered not quite as satisfying as statements and statements not quite as satisfying as statistics; but in the long run, a people is known, not by its statements or statistics, but by the stories it tells".

So tell stories we must. And, of course, the Church has a long tradition of telling and re-telling its own story. And there are radical implications for so doing, for, as Rowan Williams observes in *Lost Icons*:

> "Every 'telling' of myself is a retelling, and the act of telling changes what can be told next time, because it is, precisely, an *act*, with consequences. The self lives and moves in, and only in, acts of telling – in the time taken to set out and articulate a memory, the time that is a kind of representation (always partial, always skewed) of the time my material and mental life has taken, the time that has brought me here … The process of 'making' a self by constructing a story that is always being told is a prosaic and universal one." (p 144)

Two books by Simonetta Carr seek to contribute to this long tradition of helping the Church to know itself by retelling its own story. As it happens, they are both books which are accessible to children, which is particularly exciting because I'm always on the hunt for ways to tell my children, and others in my community of faith, their own story. Carr has established herself as one with something of a vocation to introduce children and teenagers to some of the heroes of the Church. She has so far penned delightful and informative children's books on Athanasius, Augustine, John Calvin and John Owen (as part of the 'Christian Biographies for Young Readers' series aimed at children from 7 to 10 years of age). These tastefully-illustrated volumes introduce readers (and their imaginations) to the narrative, humanity and rich theological contribution of their subjects, and do so in a clear, readable and attractive way.

And in her latest book, a fictionalised biography titled *Weight of a Flame*, she introduces young readers (read teenagers) to the inspiring Italian heretic Olympia Morata (1526–1555), locating Morata in her social and religious context – a volatile sixteenth-century Europe – and highlighting her passion for Scripture, for Calvin's *Institutes*, for scholarship (she lectured on Cicero, wrote commentaries on Homer, and was one of the most sophisticated Latin stylists of her time), for poetry, and for faith.

Those seeking Morata for grown-ups should read Morata's work first-hand (published as *The Complete Writings of an Italian Heretic* and edited by Holt N. Parker) and the relevant chapter in Roland Bainton's *Women of the Reformation: In Germany and Italy*. (There are also published studies by Jules Bonnet, Amelia Gillespie Smyth, Ottilie Wildermuth, Caroline Bowles Southey, Robert Turnbull.)

But for Carr's target audience, this book is the only one I know of on Morata. It's just a pity that the book's cover (by which all books are judged) is so suggestive of an advertising brochure for some exclusive and now-outdated "college for young, strong and self-reliant ladies".

That small quibble aside, the Church, and its young families, is much in need of the kind of resources that these volumes evidence.

Book on human sexuality unconvincing

Reviewed by Mike Crowl

Stuart Edser, *Being Gay, Being Christian:You can be both*
(Wollombi: Exisle Publishing, 2012); ISBN: 9781921497070; 248pp. $39.99

I read Edser's book with mixed feelings: the word order of the title, the slightly "self-help" feel of the subtitle, and the lack of objectivity throughout the book concerned me. Edser is a gay Catholic psychologist who has journeyed through the difficulties of being gay and managed to find a way through – and remain a Christian.

Early in the book (pp. 30–1), Edser compares two worldviews saying the classical worldview is one based on:

> "Texts written in the ancient world and adhered to today to varying degress, in a literal way, or ascribed as the Word of God and given the status of Holy Scripture. The other is a knowledge based within the modern worldview and on the conceptions of contemporary scholarship undertaken in a modern, post-Enlightenment, techological world where various academic disciplines can be brought to bear on all manner of questions, including that of human sexuality."

He continues a little later:

> "I argue that a modern understanding of knowledge is to be preferred over a blind, uncritical and literal acceptance of ancient texts, even if they are ascribed as God's Word, or over church dogma that was often synthesised and resolved in the medieval period ... I hold to an epistemology based in a modern worldview that deems nothing exempt from rigorous enquiry".

Note the emotive words.

After a biographical introduction, the bulk of his book is taken up with showing how the Church has got it wrong and science has got it right; which might be good, if science always got it right. However, in Stanton L. Jones' lengthy essay on studies about homosexuality, *Sexual Orientation and Reason: on the implications of false beliefs about homosexuality*, (available from the *Centre for Applied Christian Ethics*, http://www.wheaton.edu/CACE/Hot-Topics), many of the studies that Edser endorses in detail throughout the book are shown to be not the last word on the topic and to lack sufficient rigour in their approach. Blind, uncritical (and literal) acceptance of scientific studies is as unwise as maintaining a similar approach to Scripture.

Many readers of Edser's book are unlikely to dig into the background of the studies he discusses. If they read through these sections at all they will accept Edser's opinions on them at face value; he's nothing if not a propagandist for his topic. Equally, they may find reading through his chapter on the Roman Catholic Church's pronouncements on homosexuality to be hard work (as I did): this

chapter is a diatribe against the Church's teaching on homosexuality (by no means unjustified) and appears because of Edser's Roman Catholic background. He doesn't give Protestant viewpoints much room in the book, except the fundamentalist and evangelical ones, which are regarded as part of the ancient or "medieval" worldview, and consequently have no place in the modern world.

Edser presents exegesis on the main contentious texts about homosexuality in the Bible. These are reasonably convincing on the surface, though his source for some of his arguments is *Sex in the Bible*, by J.H. Ellens, a man whose theological views on sexual morality differ somewhat from the mainstream. One offensive example, which doesn't give much credence to the rest of Ellen's book, is in regard to Lot's offer of his daughters to the rapists in Sodom, where Ellen writes: "One must imagine that his doing so incites a general burst of sarcastic laughter among the company of family and friends inside the house, including merriment on the part of his daughters..." (*Sex in the Bible: A New Consideration*. Santa Barbara: Praeger Publishers, 2006, 107). Furthermore, I'm not sure that Edser's arguments later in the book for Jesus being indifferent to homosexuality hold water; nor am I convinced about his theory that the relationship between the centurion and his servant was a gay one.

By the time I got past the studies and exegesis and strong criticism of Roman Catholic "teaching", I wondered if Edser was ever going to get to the point about being gay and Christian. Thankfully he does, but I wonder if readers (especially younger ones) looking for help with living as a gay or lesbian Christian will have managed to plough through all the other material, or given up by this time. The reassuring scientific material is all very well; does it actually assist the homosexual person to deal with the theological issues? His section on how Christians should act towards LGBT people is good: it reminds us about genuine love, justice, compassion and more, and is perhaps the best thing in the book.

Edser has put together a considerable work, but for me it doesn't quite convince, especially on the theological level.

Today's missionaries

By sending money back home, family and friends in New Zealand contributed up to 12.5 percent of Tonga's GDP and 11.5 percent of Samoa's, ranking New Zealand seventh (Tonga) and eighth (Samoa) in the world's remittance corridors. *The Economist*, which published the rankings, recognised that it is likely to be a much higher figure, as this data only records official cash transfers through banks and organisations like Western Union.

I remember a talk I attended last year by Victoria University's Geoffrey Bertram who argued that in fact all Pacific Island nations have dual economies – their local economy and the economy of their disapora community. Without this economic adaptation, and the fact that island-based population increases can be, at least in part, regulated through immigration flows, these nations would almost certainly face economic collapse.

Bertram argues that this relative success, especially of the island nations in Polynesia, supports a view affirming the value of "agency". That is, that individuals and communities, when faced with challenges and changes, are able to make new decisions, and change and adapt to make the most of new opportunities. It is a view which stands in some contrast to the perspective which sees poorer people or people from non-western cultures, as often helpless, powerless victims of western colonialism and cultural hegemony.

Members of our Church are contributing to the preparation of the bicentenary of the coming of the Christian gospel to New Zealand in 2014. At Te Puna, in the Bay of Islands, there is the Marsden Cross which commemorates the site of the first mission settlement and the first Christian service conducted in New Zealand by the Rev Samuel Marsden, on Christmas Day, 1814. Work is being done to purchase land around the cross, to develop this as a site of pilgrimage and education as well as preparing for a number of symposia and celebrations.

I have often heard people who claim some expertise in this area, expressing what appears to me to be somewhat revisionist and inevitably secular views of Christian mission work, identifying it with some of the most destructive forms of colonialism. What those views seem to take little account of is the fact that Maori were engaged with the Christian message, and those who brought it, from the start. Not to credit Maori with some agency, with the ability to consider the gospel message and to make decisions about its significant for their lives and the life of their communities, is a kind of racism in itself.

While we cannot easily separate the Christian message from the cultural vectors along which it is communicated, we can affirm the intelligence and thoughtfulness of the message's recipients. We can remind detractors that much of the missionary work in the Pacific was carried out, often at huge cost, risk and sacrifice, by Pacific and Maori people themselves. We also affirm, from a theological perspective, that the Spirit blows where it wills, and that the proclamation of the gospel is predicated on a yearning for the good news experienced by all people.

Samuel Marsden certainly had his detractors. He was quite likely rather harsh in his treatment of criminals in his role as magistrate in the NSW colony, and open to business opportunities to increase his own wealth. While historical and contemporary critiques will always find reasons to detract from the missionary endeavour, there is no doubt that there is an extraordinary story here of a man driven to support mission in the Pacific and the importance of proclaiming the gospel message. Marsden learns Maori while still in Australia, he uses his wealth to purchase a boat to bring him to New Zealand, and he knowingly places members of his own family at risk as he returns to New Zealand on later voyages to address issues of missionary misconduct. He also uses his influence for bringing about peaceful resolution in inter-tribal conflict.

There is a tension, I think, that we find deeply rooted in our scriptures between a faith that would lead someone to follow a dream – a fiery pillar, a hope for a promised land, a messiah who called people from the routine of their everyday and promised a new heaven and a new earth – and a belief system protecting structures and temples and churches and land and orthodoxy and authority. In modern language this is perhaps spoken of in terms of the tensions between maintenance and mission. But I think it is more than that: it's more a sense of the thing that drove Marsden – a dis-ease with the status quo, a passion for a message which he knew could be proclaimed but never contained, a readiness to be open to possibility, to take risks.

One of the most exciting things about our Church is that in its increasingly diverse membership, there is also an increasingly diverse range of stories about missionary endeavour and the way that the gospel becomes manifest and alive in people from such a range of different backgrounds. This is the richness of our Church today and can provide the base from which we can grow and hear the new stories told of today's missionaries.