

# FAITH DEBATE

## One sided debate

Marilyn Cobain  
St Michael's  
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**O**n behalf of the Council of St. Michael's Committee, I forward this comment to Crosslight.

"The Council of St Michael's acknowledges that some within the Uniting Church community will not agree with the presentation of Dr Macnab's New Faith. Dr Macnab clearly asserts that it is important to have the discussion, the debate and the conversation. Some articles appearing in the February edition of Crosslight do not, in our opinion, encourage discussion.

The Council and members fully support the work of Dr Macnab and would have

hoped that those who may disagree with Dr Macnab would have the courtesy to do so in a more constructive and respectful manner. We note that many in the St Michael's community have benefited from the creative, innovative and inspirational approach that Dr Macnab has articulated over many years as the Executive Minister of St Michael's Uniting Church.

- *In compiling views on the 'faith debate' in February, Crosslight actively sought to include comment from Rev Dr Macnab. He declined our invitation. We welcome any contribution to the debate by members of St Michael's - ed.*

## Heresy not so bad

Rev R D Martin  
Manangatang, Vic 3546

**I**t seems to me that being tried for heresy is the bee's knees. You look at Martin Luther and that chap in New Zealand a few years ago. Always a cause celebre!

Just ask the people concerned as to whether they adhere to the Basis of Union. If not - goodbye! If so, then it is up to their consciences.

Not that the UCA could try anybody for heresy.

We had a theological hall member who preached in the parish I was in a few years ago. He read the New Testament and inserted a bit to suit current church policy. I objected, but was not heard.

We could amend the said Basis of Union as follows: "We believe that the Bible contains

the Word of God and where it fails to do so, we've added the extra parts that were lacking"

And they lived happily ever after.



## Flawed argument

Peter J Fensham  
Phillip Island, Vic 3922

**D**r Lee acknowledges "we need a new faith for our times". However, she then states this new faith will turn out to be none other than the old faith. This is the astonishing non-argument Dorothy Lee puts forward in the 'faith debate' in last month's Crosslight. The editors must have been smiling to themselves when they put her final half page together with

David Pargeter's statement that "the days are long gone when theology could be articulated as if it were insulated from life or other disciplines of thought".

Dorothy Lee clearly still lives in those days. Just two extracts from her piece will suffice to show the closed nature of her thinking. "... the gospels and the Church are inextricably linked ... For Christians there is no other way but through

## Praise for St Michael's

Richard Siegersma  
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**A**fter reading some of the comments about St Michael's and Dr Macnab in the faith debate articles (Crosslight Dec/Feb), as a member of St Michael's I'm disappointed that the debate has failed to recognise the great work being undertaken at St Michael's by its minister and congregation.

In 1517, Martin Luther was alienated, despised and rejected by 'the church' after he suggested a different interpretation of scripture was 'equally' valid. Unfortunately it seems that we have not moved much since the Middle Ages in terms of the manner in which we manage our approach to differences. Interestingly Dr Macnab was asked to speak at Reformation celebrations in Germany in 2008.

One of the objectives of the publicity was to encourage

disaffected 'Christians' to have another look at 'the church' from a new perspective. This has been very successful with more attendees each Sunday including retired clergy from various denominations attending St Michael's. Furthermore, interest in our message has been received from over 44 countries around the world.

Another objective of the awareness campaign was to incite conversation. We believe the conversation has only just begun and must continue so our world becomes a better place.

The themes of 'the new faith', some of which are outlined below, focus on the positive impact we can have in the world.

- Enhancement of the human spirit
- Evolution of a better humanity

- Ethical consciousness in love, work and play
- Expulsion of negative and constrictive mentalisation
- Energies of healing for mind, mood and emotions
- Empowering therapeutic communities
- Enjoyment and exuberance across the life span

"No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open." (Luke 8:16,17)

Jesus may or may not have said these words but the words are none the less instructive. Long may the conversation continue.

## Reflective discussion welcome

Julie Hall  
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**C**rosslight's 'faith debate' (Feb '09) is to be encouraged. However, as a longstanding, active member of the Uniting Church, I found Rev Dr Dorothy Lee's strident assertions regarding the "great truths of the Church" surprising and disappointing.

A strength of the Uniting Church has been its willingness to accept a broad range of theological perspectives within its fold. Such a dogmatic stance from a Biblical scholar whom I would expect to be conversant with the breadth of viewpoint within the Church - and the complexities of Christian theology - seemed inappropriately defensive.

Further, discrediting remarks concerning individual clergy and other organisations are unhelpful to Biblical scholarship and distract from informed, reflective discussion of the issues.

While some may be uncomfortable with the majority vote approach utilised by the Jesus Seminar scholars to discern the authentic words of Jesus, the in-depth textual analysis and insight the seminar brings to our understanding of how the Gospels were written are surely worthy of the Church's respectful consideration.

Perhaps the Uniting Church would do well to ponder the wisdom of the Jewish rabbinical tradition wherein robust debate is readily welcomed, and differing interpretations serve to enrich human understanding and experience of God.

the apostolic Church and its testimony to Jesus."

Again "... these great truths of the Church (1600+ years ago) are not an alien imposition on the New Testament. They derive from biblical faith and make sense of biblical faith. They set out what is at the very least implied, if not stated (my italics), in the Scriptures themselves about God and Jesus."

She seems to completely

ignore the way these ancient contexts and the then prevailing world views influenced the way this "testimony" and the "great truths" were expressed. If they are not to be scrutinised in the light of those contextual influences, how can they possibly be interpreted to make sense in the very changed society and the radically different world views that make up "our times"?

I wonder what is her definition of a theologian? She argues against the contributions of the Jesus Seminar on the specious grounds that "some of its many members are 'not theologians'". Such an argument is no excuse for her unwillingness to seriously engage with the exciting new insights into biblical scholarship that are emerging from the Seminar and many other contemporary biblical scholars.

# FAITH DEBATE

## Kerfuffle over 'faith debate' nothing new

(Rev Dr) Lorraine Parkinson  
DONCASTER

Under the heading 'Faith Debate', February's *Crosslight* presented differing views concerning the 'new faith' espoused by Dr Francis Macnab.

The kerfuffle that has ensued in the UCA since St Michael's advertising campaign hit the media largely assumes that what Dr Macnab is saying is an aberration. It assumes that these are ideas hitherto unknown in the Uniting Church. Most of us know that is simply untrue.

The historicity of Old Testament figures has been questioned by reputable biblical scholars for over two hundred years, a fact known to

all Uniting Church ministers. Most of us also know that our own thoughts and research have led us to rethink the meaning of Jesus and implications of that for understanding God.

Dr Macnab has set out to make his thoughts widely known, not only from the 'safety' of the pulpit but in the public domain. His decision to go public has required a response from the leadership of the Uniting Church. For some, that has been formulated with one eye on UCA founding documents and the other on ecumenical relationships.

One of the inherently

'progressive' characteristics of the Uniting Church is that (in Paragraph 11 of the *Basis of Union*) it professes to encourage scholarly interpreters of the faith: "It prays that it may be ready when occasion demands

non-negotiable and accuse people who take seriously Paragraph 11 of betraying their ordination vows.

The creeds of the church were formulated by people who were doing precisely what all interpreters do – reinterpreting the scriptures for their own time and place. The creeds are also products of Greco-Roman religion and culture, produced with one eye on the requirements of the Roman emperor. The resulting 'new faith' was shaped to function as the triumphal state religion of the triumphal Roman Empire.

When a Uniting Church Minister is ordained, he or she promises to teach the ancient creeds. I did just that, even writing a study series on the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.

The participants learned that these were products of another time and place. They also agreed that the creeds were profoundly inadequate as statements of their own beliefs.

The primary problem was the complete absence of any reference to the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. A 'progressive' reinterpretation of Christian faith puts the ancient creeds and their accompanying doctrines into a historical perspective and goes on to reinterpret the faith for a new age.

The foundation of the new interpretation is profoundly biblical. It is Jesus' reinterpretation of his own faith in his teachings concerning what he called 'the Kingdom of God'.

Dr Macnab and the many ministers engaged in this new interpretation of the faith (or a 'new faith') offer the church its only real hope of making God's eternal Word understood in today's world.



to confess the Lord in fresh words and deeds."

This aspect of the *Basis of Union* is ignored by those who regard the status quo as