

A response to 'Believing in Jesus Christ'

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(Response to Video 2 "Believing in Jesus Christ" in "Our Faith" series on the Assembly vimeo web-site, <https://vimeo.com/440192508>)

If you were asked to explain what the Uniting Church believes about Jesus Christ, what would you say?

Here are some answers from the Basis of Union:

In Jesus Christ "God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19 RSV). In love for the world, God gave the Son to take away the world's sin (Paragraph 3).

The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history only because her Lord comes, addresses and deals with people in and through the news of his completed work (Paragraph 4).

When the Church preaches Jesus Christ, her message is controlled by the Biblical witnesses (Paragraph 5).

The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ incorporates people into his body by Baptism. In this way Christ enables them to participate in his own baptism, which was accomplished once on behalf of all in his death and burial, and which was made available to all when, risen and ascended, he poured out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Paragraph 7).

One could go on. In the series, Professor Andrew Dutney states that the Basis of Union is 'like the vision statement' of the Uniting Church. One would expect to find answers in it about what our church believes.

The six part vimeo series is designed to offer an introduction to Uniting Church beliefs, suitable for example for those preparing for baptism or confirmation. While one would not expect the vimeo 'Believing in Jesus Christ' to say everything that could be said about Christ, one could expect it to say something about the meaning of baptism. (What was accomplished by Jesus in his death and burial? Why is the news of his completed work the sole means through which the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history?) But the vimeo 'Believing in Jesus Christ' does not address these matters.

A distinction is made in the vimeo between the creedal Jesus, the affectionate Jesus and the historical Jesus. Is that an indication that the three sub-paragraphs of Paragraph 3 are to be read with three different pairs of spectacles? Our calling, we are told, is to live 'into the future which is opened to us by God'. On such vague and open-ended terms, how does the Uniting Church know that it has a future?

If the Basis of Union is like the vision statement of the Uniting Church, why don't we know it better and why doesn't it inform our decision-making? If the vimeo series is a first step towards this, something will be gained. But statements from the Assembly, whether in the form of papers or addresses or even vimeos are not the answer. What is needed is genuine dialogue on the Basis of Union in every council of the church as well as at the devotional and theological levels. Let us by all means try to explain

ourselves to ourselves including new members, and to the outside enquirer. Let us ask ourselves the following:

- How do we know that the news of Christ's completed work is actually *news* and not just agreed (or imposed) interpretation? (*What is meant by talking about Christ's resurrection as 'this event that Christians have called the resurrection'?*)
- On what grounds can we call ourselves a 'pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal'? Don't we know that the third sub-paragraph of paragraph 3 of the Basis refers to the whole Church catholic, world-wide and throughout the ages? We of the Uniting Church are part of this pilgrim people in so far as our church 'lives and works within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church' (Paragraph 2).
- What is the connection between God reconciling the world to himself and the Church's function as a fellowship of reconciliation? (*Is the second sub-paragraph of Paragraph 3 thought by some to be about a 'historical Jesus' who has little to do with the 'creedal Jesus' of the first sub-paragraph? How does God 'reassert his claim over the whole of his creation' and what does this have to do with the world's sin?*)
- Why, in the new order, does righteousness come before love (Paragraph 3, second sub-paragraph)? What is meant by righteousness? What is meant by love in this context?
- How do we as the Uniting Church propose to 'go forward together in sole loyalty to Christ the living Head of the Church ... open to constant reform, under his Word' (Paragraph 1)? Don't we know that 'constant reform' in this context is a watchword of the Reformation: *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei*, a Latin phrase meaning 'the church reformed, always in need of being reformed according to the Word of God'?

Dialogue on these matters might help us to actually be 'a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal'. If we do this 'reconciliation' might become a reality in the Uniting Church and not just a buzzword.

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