

The Preamble

Just occasionally the institutional church surprises me! Take the proposed Preamble to the Constitution of the Uniting Church in Australia. It's not something that would normally excite me let alone provoke me to write an *As I See It!* But last week at the Presbytery meeting in Hobart I sat through a presentation on the Uniting Church's proposed preamble and I have to say it made me proud to belong to such a progressive, inclusive church.

Any preamble is essentially a non-legally binding statement that speaks of identity, and of core values and it will often detail the history of the group and how it has come to where it is.

For the Uniting Church in Australia our Preamble is a reinforcement of who we are and what we stand for. Its development and subsequent approval by the 12th Assembly last July was as a result of work done in the area of reconciliation between the First and Second peoples of our land.

At its centre there is an acknowledgement that when the churches that made up the Uniting Church arrived in this land it was already inhabited by people rich in spirituality, and who were "*nurtured and sustained*" by the God we know through Jesus the Christ. The Preamble makes the claim that "*the First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers*" and that "*the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony.*"

And in case you have not worked it out, this is a very brave and radical statement for any Christian church to make, since it implies that God can be experienced apart from the Christian church. This was not the understanding of the colonising churches that lived in an age when it was seen as an imperative to convert the heathen to Christian ways. Instead of looking for the Christ in our First Peoples culture they felt called by God to change them, to Christianise them. Indeed many Christian churches in Australia even today would find the inclusive claims made in the Preamble just as hard to accept.

In many ways such a radical claim is confessional. In fact the Preamble goes on to say that many in our founding churches "*shared the values and relationships of the emerging colonial society, including paternalism and racism to the First Peoples,*" and that they were "*complicit in the injustice that resulted in many of the First Peoples being dispossessed from their land, their language, their culture and spirituality, becoming strangers in their own land.*" **As I See It**, such truth telling is a first prerequisite in bringing about reconciliation, and such a document as the Preamble will go a long way to realizing such a godly aim.

Finally let me say that the Preamble reflects the inclusive nature of the God of Jesus the Christ. This is a God who accepts all regardless of race or creed, for we follow a God who has created us all in God's image. God is there in each of us, it the one characteristic that unites us all – we are all brothers and sisters. Jesus came to show us that truth. We are one in spirit and our Preamble attests to that wonderful fact.

Tony would be more than happy to chat about the above article with anyone who wants to.

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