

yet this did not diminish their will to reach out over the mire of my ignorance and prejudice.

I am now learning to see, hear and experience spirituality and discipleship in different people and settings, with thanks to God for the multi-cultural society in which we live.

For further reference

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W. J. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith*, (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications).

J. Houston, (ed.), *The Cultured Pearl*, (Melbourne: JBCE)

Rev. Malcolm Bottrill is a Uniting Church minister who trained as a primary school teacher. After four parishes in urban and rural South Australia, he served for five years as a Patrol Padre based at Jabiru in the Northern Territory. In South Australia, Malcolm was very involved with developing the ministry of elders, spiritual development and the Order of St Luke. He and his wife Judy have three married children and three grandchildren. Two of Malcolm Bottrill's interests are oil painting and bird watching, both of which were encouraged by his proximity to Kakadu National Park. He is now a minister in Murray Bridge Parish in South Australia.

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Involvement in the ecumenical movement

Peter Bentley

Though it is probably 'safer' to remain camped in one church environment, guarded by theological and liturgical storm-troopers, I am grateful that God has broken down many fortified premises and allowed ordinary people to cross what once were heavily guarded checkpoints.

I have been able to emerge from a fairly finely spun cocoon to be a participant in a rich and diverse spectrum of church life, one with many different threads. I did not deliberately choose an ecumenical path. The change was a natural process, but the ecumenical ship is now very much one of the means of transport on my Christian journey.

Like many people in the ecumenical movement, my growth began within the various non-denominational groups at university. I mixed with people from a range of denominations and was involved with a variety of groups. While many of the groups talked about Christian unity, I was always acutely aware of a theological wall dividing these groups and also of the large number of groups.

All major churches, and in particular the smaller churches, had managed to start their own group on campus, presumably in the hope that contact would ensure that students retained their citizenship. What probably everyone had in common was a commitment to an ethos which was never really adequately defined, but could be termed 'common Christianity'.

This 'common Christianity' does not necessarily lead to ecumenical understanding. It is worth considering the comments of Frank Engel:

The term 'ecumenical' is used to describe those activities and organisations which exist because of a basic assumption that there is but one Church of God, that the Christian denominations are expressions of that Church fashioned by various historical events and emphases and, that, in loyalty to Christ, as their common Lord, they should work together for the unity of the Church, and work together in unity both in their witness and in their service of the world.

Australian Christians in Conflict and Unity, (Melbourne: JBCE, 1984), p. 15.

Perhaps this is why some Christians run from ecumenical experiences. They may really believe that their own denomination is the only Church of God, or perhaps they see ecumenism as unnecessary, because they can experience the communion of like-minded Christians, either through their own denomination or through non-denominational activities. Again Frank Engel:

Non-denominational activities and organisations are those in which individual Christians join, simply as Christians, without regard to churchly structures or church loyalties of any kind. Christian unity is seen as a personal, spiritual experience; church union, is, therefore, not an issue of importance.

Australian Christians in Conflict and Unity, (Melbourne: JBCE, 1984), p. 15.

Certainly non-denominational experiences are helpful, but we need to recognise that many non-/inter-denominational activities simply reflect a pragmatic understanding of Christian unity. There is usually no attempt to come to terms with the issues that divide Christians and often, non-denominational groups contain a reasonably homogenous gathering anyway.

As I moved away from the university environment, I tried to find research orientated work in the church of my membership (Uniting). This was to no avail and so I also applied for Anglican positions. Having almost given up (at least temporarily), I was surprised to see a job advertised by the research office directly responsible to the Catholic Bishops Conference. I applied and was appointed as the Research Assistant for the National Catholic Research Council.

Here I was plunged into a new world of church relations. The job was located in a large Catholic owned office building and I am sure that many people assumed that because of my work I was a

Catholic. I certainly didn't walk around with a label saying 'non-Catholic'. With the people I was in close contact, I experienced nothing less than total acceptance as a fellow Christian and I certainly came to a greater understanding of the practice of the Catholic faith and the development of the Catholic faith within the Australian church scene.

After two years with the Catholic Church, I then embarked on contract work with different groups, including the Christian Research Association (an ecumenical coalition which provides information about Christianity in Australia).

I have now come into contact with people from a large variety of denominations. I have met local and national church leaders, all confronted by similar questions and issues and yet I still meet people in my own denomination and other denominations who display unrestrained prejudice toward another denomination.

As I reflect on my experience, I give thanks to God for the contact I have had with many of the colours of the church rainbow (though I still have a long way to go). In particular, I have been made aware that stereotypes are perfectly flawed and that most people are not aware of the changes that occur within denominations; changes that have brought denominations much closer in theology and practice. Some criticisms seem to be made by people stuck in the sectarian model of the 1950s.

I have also had contact with lay and ordained people, including many church leaders through participation in various councils of churches, including the Executive of the Australian Council of Churches. On a more informal basis, I have enjoyed stimulating contact with many people through *National Outlook*, an Australian Christian monthly. This magazine brought together a group of people with diverse theological and traditional experiences. The 'group' has now become a 'community of people'.

Overall, ecumenical experience has broadened my Christian experience. I have experienced different worship styles, liturgies, different polity and practice and, of course, different beliefs. Being ecumenical has also meant that I have come to an understanding of my own denomination's distinctive characteristics and beliefs and am able to discuss and debate matters of faith and order.

Being ecumenical also means having convictions – it means holding certain matters dear. It does not mean (as some opponents seem to argue) that ecumenism is all about compromise or giving one's faith away. It does however mean being open to the possibility of change.

In my journey, I have been challenged by many words of our Lord, but in this context, I have often stopped to think about our Lord's answer to his disciples when they came across someone who was not from their group.

John said to him, 'Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not one of us.' But Jesus said, 'Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us.' (Mark 9:38-40).

Peter Bentley is the Secretary of the Ecumenical Affairs Committee for the Synod of NSW and Secretary for the Commission on Doctrine for the National Assembly. Peter is also a Uniting Church representative on the Executive of the NSW Ecumenical Council, which has Catholic membership. He has a particular interest in Australian movies, especially those of the silent period.

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Drawing deeply on a time of theological education or similar experience

John Maazor

'Don't let them spoil your faith', 'Make sure you stay evangelical', 'Don't lose your enthusiasm', were some of the dire warnings I received before I went off to my three years of theological education in Kings College and the University of Queensland. The warnings were understandable but unnecessary. As a result of my experiences I grew in faith, in knowledge and as a person and became a much stronger disciple of Jesus Christ.

Only a few people in the church have the opportunity to undertake theological education as part of a residential community. A number of ministers do. Some people attend Bible Colleges which provide theological education within a community. In some parishes the minister and elders have realised the importance of a time of theological education and they arrange for groups to attend lay training courses together or provide opportunities for theological learning within the parish.

People who have participated in theological education in its many and varied forms can be found giving leadership across the life of the church as they draw deeply on their experiences.

Having claimed that my experience of theological education helped me to grow in faith, knowledge, the spiritual life and as a person, it is important to identify some of the factors that contributed to that.

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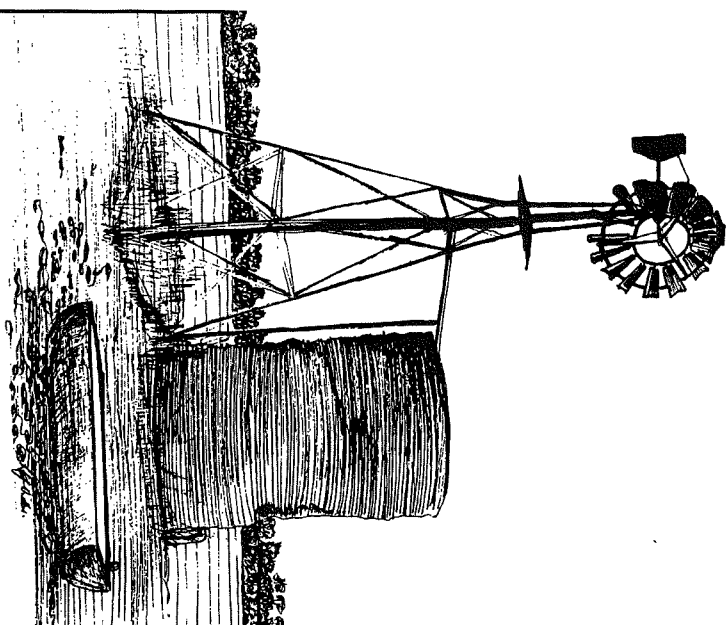
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In a questionnaire conducted by
National Mission and Evangelism,
people were asked to draw or write
about an image of Australian
spirituality that 'spoke to them'.

One of the most telling images was
the windmill. It depends on the wind
(or the Spirit), draws deeply on
spiritual resources and provides
refreshing water.

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The editor wishes to thank most sincerely all those people who contributed to the production of this book:

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