

**Uniting Church: God, Humanity, and the rest of Creation: an annotated bibliography.**  
**Jason John for Uniting Earth 2017**

**A work in progress, Google doc stored at**

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This is an annotated bibliography of Uniting Church statements about the relationship between God, humanity and the rest of creation.

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Direct quotes are in **bold**, commentary in plain text, and possible questions in [purple](#)

<p>Basis of Union 1992 version</p>	<p>Originally published in 1977 as the founding document of the Uniting Church. This contains a radical, and often unnoticed, assertion that all Creation is God's, and that all Creation is destined for reconciliation and renewal, not just humanity.</p> <p><a href="#">Paragraph 3</a> is the pivotal one, stating that...</p> <p>...<b>God has “reasserted claim over the whole of Creation”</b> (ie the Earth is not just environment, it is parts of God's creative process, and <i>belongs to God</i>. <a href="#">What is the implication for the modern western legal framework of ownership?</a>)</p> <p>... <b>“Jesus is Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity.”</b> <a href="#">Should this be read as “a new creation [and] a new humanity” or “a new creation, that is a new humanity”?</a></p> <p>...<b>“that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve <i>that end</i>”</b> ie all of Creation is included in salvation, and the church is meant to work for that renewal and reconciliation of all things. <a href="#">Is this the reconciliation of all creation to God, or reconciliation within creation- ie especially of humans being reconciled in their relationship with other creatures?</a></p> <p>... <b>“The Church lives between the time of Christ's death and resurrection and the final consummation of all things which Christ will bring...”</b></p> <p>Andrew Dutney (ex President UCA)- “...this isn't the scorched earth version of the end of the world... It's the end of the world which we come to anticipate by looking at the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus... in whose name we expect the coming of 'reconciliation and renewal...for the whole creation' and nothing less<sup>1</sup>”</p> <p>Note that the few mentions of ethics in the Basis of Union are concerned only with humanity, not other creatures. For example <a href="#">paragraph 13</a> <b>“... many seek a renewal of the diaconate in which women and men offer their time and talents, representatively and on behalf of God's people, <i>in the service of humanity</i> in the face of changing needs.”</b> (note also the full inclusion of women in ministry from the beginning of the Uniting Church)</p>
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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Dutney, Where Did the Joy Come From? Revisiting the Basis of Union (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 2001), pp. 15-16.

<a href="#">Statement to the Nation 1977</a>	<p>Released to the public at the inauguration of the Uniting Church. It deals with many social issues and has a strident commitment to working for equality and justice for all.</p> <p>This statement is <a href="#">anthropocentric</a> and even anthropoexclusive<sup>2</sup> (concerned only with human need).</p> <p>The focus is on <b>“the importance of every human being... and a concern for the welfare of the whole human race.”</b></p> <p>The rest of Creation is mentioned, but as a non-living resource for humans to share equally,  <b>“We are concerned with the <i>basic human rights</i> of future generations and will urge the wise use of energy, the protection of the environment and the replenishment of the earth's resources <i>for their use and enjoyment.</i>”</b></p> <p><a href="#">How are the understandings of Creation in the 1977 Basis of Union, and Statement to the Nation, similar and different? What statement about Creation might you make to the Nation, based on the Basis of Union?</a></p>
<p>Aboriginal Opposition to Uranium Mining 1977</p>	<p>From the inauguration of the Uniting Church some, at least, did see Earth as more than a resource for humans to share amongst themselves. In 1977 the Northern Synod's Aboriginal delegates opposed uranium mining on the following grounds,</p> <p><b>(a) “We are deeply concerned about the damage it will have on our mother land and to her children the Aboriginal people.</b>  <b>(b) We strongly believe that the land is part of our being, it is within our bones. Digging our land is also digging something that is within us.</b>  <b>(c) We are deeply concerned that our sacred areas are going to be destroyed... ”</b> (Northern Synod resolution 77.37.1)</p> <p>This is a Synod, not an Assembly, resolution, so it does not represent a doctrinal position of the Uniting Church as a whole.</p> <p><a href="#">How does this compare with the Assembly's 1977 Statement to the Nation? Which better reflects your view of Creation?</a></p>
<p>Nuclear issues in the wider church</p>	<p>Nuclear issues dominated thinking about environmental issues in the early years of the Uniting Church (a place now occupied by Climate</p>

<sup>2</sup> John, J, (2005), “Biocentric theology: Christianity celebrating humans as an ephemeral part of life, not the centre of it.” reformatted PhD thesis [http://ecofaith.org/papers/JJ\\_thesis\\_Singlespaced.pdf](http://ecofaith.org/papers/JJ_thesis_Singlespaced.pdf)

1982-1985	<p>Change).</p> <p>The church relied heavily on an anthropocentric stewardship model<sup>3</sup>. The 1985 Assembly affirmed that,</p> <p><b>“God has given to humankind a unique place in creation. While part of the creation, people have at the same time been charged with dominion (Gen 1:28); which is to cultivate and guard (Gen. 2:5).”</b></p>
<a href="#">Statement to the Nation 1988</a>	<p>This was the next major national statement, and focussed almost exclusively on the relationship between Aboriginal people and later comers (it was the bicentennial year). At the time the UCA was divided about whether to celebrate the bicentennial, or protest it.</p> <p>The Statement starts with the anthropocentric view of the 1977 statement, in its concern only for human need, and assumption that the rest of the world is a resource,</p> <p><b>“We recognise a widening gap between the rich and the poor, not only within Australia, but within the whole <i>human community</i>. We will strive to uphold <i>the rightful claims of the poor on the resources of this nation</i> and the world. We will seek to identify and challenge all social and political structures and all human attitudes which perpetuate and compound poverty.”</b></p> <p>The penultimate paragraph, however, begins with a theological first in Assembly and Synod declarations about creation,</p> <p><b>“We affirm our belief that the natural world is God's creation; <i>good in God's eyes, good in itself...</i> and good in sustaining human life. Recognising the vulnerability of the life and resources of creation, <i>we will work</i> to promote the responsible management, use and occupation of the earth by human societies. We will seek to <i>identify and challenge all structures and attitudes which perpetuate and compound the destruction of creation</i>”</b></p> <p>Note that a strong distinction between humanity and the rest of creation is maintained, as is the management, or stewardship model.</p> <p>This statement was drafted by Andrew Dutney, and reflects the influence of Charles Birch, Sean McDonagh (who visited the campus where Dutney worked as a chaplain), and Warwick Fox, a friend of Dutney's who was also mentored by Birch.</p> <p>See also the <a href="#">statement on economic justice</a></p>

<sup>3</sup> I should probably make a page for UEW briefly outlining the dominion, stewardship, servanthood, web of life, and evolutionary family models. For now a draft of an old paper is at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6FYZzCWqLLoM1lBZDBtSThHYmc/view?usp=sharing>

<p>Comment on Context</p>	<p>The strong language about engaging the public did not go down well with all UCA members, leading to a shift from direct advocacy and statement making, to producing education resources in the church. Fascinating to track.</p> <p>For example, Jill Tabart reflected on this at the conclusion of her presidency of the Uniting Church, "From outside the [Uniting] church time and again come admiring comments about the Uniting Church's record and stance in these matters of opposition to social evils. And yet it would be the biggest area in which members of our church are critical of what the church is doing on their behalf and in the name of the Lord."<sup>4</sup></p> <p>John Harrison, reflecting on the first decade of the Uniting Church, affirmed that there had been, "...much... concern expressed by the church members about the decisions of church councils during the first ten years... it seems clear that the political conservatism of the majority of the lay membership of the church has moderated the way in which the church approaches questions of social justice... Synod and Assembly social justice committees have moved to a more educative and consultative mode."<sup>5</sup></p> <p>So from 1990 until about 2000 (check), Assembly agencies focussed on producing worship resources with embedded study guides, rather than statements. This "... represented not just a new work on the environment, but a new way of dealing with issues... more an invitation to struggle with the issue than a stated position"<sup>6</sup></p>
	<p>From here on I'm just putting in papers and a few draft notes</p>
<p>1990 Healing the Earth worship resource</p>	<p>I don't think this exists online but I might scan one. The entrance of the "web of life " to UCA theology</p> <p><b>"God is in, with and under the earth not in the pantheistic sense, but in the sense of the mystery of the eucharist."</b></p> <p>Each celebration of the eucharist includes the call to praise God, <b>"with the faithful of every time and place, joining with choirs of angels</b></p>

<sup>4</sup> Jill Tabart, "What I Know Now," in Marking Twenty Years: The Uniting Church in Australia 1977-1997, ed. William Emilsen and Susan Emilsen (North Parramatta: United Theological College Publications, 1997), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> John Harrison, Baptism of Fire: The First Ten Years of the Uniting Church in Australia (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1986), pp. 74-75.

<sup>6</sup> Commission for Mission, "Report to the 1991 Assembly," (1991), p. 101.

	<p><b>AND THE WHOLE CREATION”</b></p> <p>“If we take this call to praise seriously, every time we celebrate the eucharist we are affirming that <i>the whole of life, and all creation, is woven together</i>. The universe is one. All is interrelated and bound together. All things are connected...we join not only the whole inhabited earth, but the whole creation in a cosmic hymn of praise...</p> <p>“We place ‘the elements’ on the Lord’s table as <i>symbols of the whole creation for which we ask God’s blessing...</i> It is for all people and the whole creation that we ask God’s blessing. It is not a ‘private’ blessing that we ask for the life of the Church...not only...the bread and wine are affected by the action of the Holy Spirit; <i>the Spirit blesses the whole creation</i> which they represent.”</p> <p>“We believe in God... who spun a web of shimmering life, where creatures grew and changed... Each needing all the others, held in delicate kinship. We believe in God... who patiently provides for each according to their need. Who blankets the drowsy wintering spider with warm earth so she may go about her business in the springtime... <i>God calls us as the church to love the earth, to live humbly in the web of relationship, to announce the new wilderness</i>”</p> <p>“Why does it matter if an insect, a plant, or a bird disappears forever? It matters because each one is a creature who belongs to God. It matters because whenever the diversity of life is reduced the world becomes a poorer place”</p> <p>But there is also classic anthropocentric, stewardship language too, “<b>Genesis 2:15 gives humankind the role of cultivating and caring for the earth,... Scripture reminds us... that we are both to cultivate and care for the earth... [we have a] responsibility to care for the earth... Nature is... a companion for human sustenance.</b>”</p> <p>(there are multiple authors)</p> <p>The resource embraces ecology, but ignores evolution and cosmology, relying instead on a Genesis 1-3 mindset and so never really explores the implications of its startling eucharistic theology</p>
<p><a href="#">1991 Rights of Nature and Rights of Future Generations</a></p>	<p>Originally a World Alliance of Reformed Churches document, which Assembly adopted.</p> <p>The resolutions begin with a clearly anthropocentric affirmation, “<b>We believe that God, the Creator, upholds human dignity. God has</b></p>

	<p><b>created the human in the divine image. No human authority can take away or contest the dignity thus bestowed upon the human"</b></p> <p>Within that framework, the value of the rest of creation is also affirmed, based on Genesis 9,</p> <p><b>"We believe that God loves the divine creation and wills the development of its life. No creature is indifferent in the eyes of God. Each has its dignity and thereby also its right to existence... we reject the view that animate and inanimate nature are mere objects which stand at the arbitrary disposal of the human"</b></p> <p>The document then proceeds to outline the rights of future generation of humans, and then the rights of nature. The separation of the two reflects the anthropocentrism of the document. As with earlier Uniting Church resolutions, this anthropocentrism is simply assumed rather than defended. <i>Nevertheless, rights are attributed to "nature", and "creation" is declared good.</i></p>
1993 The Land our Mother (Social Justice Sunday worship resource)	
Statement on Covenanting 1994: Congress' Response	<p>Pastor Bill Hollingsworth, reiterates the preciousness of the land, though it does so in language which fits very well within anthropocentric, western Christianity,</p> <p><b>"God... gave humankind his habitation and placed him within his bounds. When He did this He gave humankind stewardship over the bounds of his habitation. For many thousands of years Aboriginal people moved in harmony with creation and subdued it as necessary by hunting, fishing and gathering, thus respecting God's command and allowing the earth to sustain us... In 1788 [our] relation with creation was violently disrupted by the invasion of the European, which robbed us of our stewardship of the land which God gave to us"</b></p>
<a href="#">Invitation to the Nation 1997</a>	<p>Note it's now an invitation, not a statement.</p> <p>Addresses Aboriginal, multicultural, widening rich and poor gap, and</p> <p><b>"takes its place as a country which makes its rightful contribution to the well-being of the environment, for the sake of the whole creation and for future generations."</b></p>

<a href="#">2000 nuclear fuel cycle policy</a>	<p>In 2000 the Assembly Standing Committee approved a new Nuclear Fuel Cycle Policy 106 . It explicitly affirms the first two components of anthropocentric theology,</p> <p><b>“Made in God’s image, we are commissioned to care for, nurture and sustain God’s good creation. As caretakers of the earth’s resources, we are called to defend the integrity and diversity of creation”</b></p> <p>In a resource released to accompany the new policy and educate Uniting Church members, Vicky Balabanski moderates this theology,</p> <p><b>“... the pinnacle of creation was not the creation of human beings, but the Sabbath, with God resting and celebrating the creation (Genesis 2:13).”</b></p>
<a href="#">2000 Alternative Energy Sources</a>	
2001 World Environment Day worship resource	<p>Paul Chalson. Reveals the compromises people with a “web of life” theology face when producing resources for the whole church.</p> <p>Ends with:</p> <p><b>“This we know, the earth does not belong to us, we belong to the earth. This we know, all things are connected, like the blood that unites one family.</b></p> <p><b>This we know, we did not weave the web of life, we are merely a strand in it.</b></p> <p><b>This we know, whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. Let us give thanks for the gift of creation.</b></p> <p><b>Let us give thanks that all things hold together in Christ</b></p>
<a href="#">2003 World Environment Day worship resource</a>	<p>Jason John. Provides a parallel resource for each part of the liturgy, one traditional, and one explicitly embracing an evolutionary, biocentric understanding.</p> <p>The question put to users is,</p> <p><b>“Are we divinely appointed stewards of creation? Are we alone the bearers of the image of God, fundamentally unique amongst all creatures? Or are we an integral part of the web of life, one species amongst many, different only in degree from the other animals?</b></p> <p><b>Is the primary story that between God and humanity, or God and life? Did pain and death enter creation through human action, as told in Genesis 1-3, or are they essential ingredients of life God’s good gifts to us? Are we the pinnacle of creation, or just a part of the ebb and flow of evolution?”</b></p>



<a href="#">2003 Tuvalu and the Impact of Climate Change</a>	One of many statements on climate change and the pacific (was it the first?)
<a href="#">2006 For the sake of the Planet and all its People</a>	
<a href="#">2009 An Economy of Life: Re-Imagining Human Progress for a Flourishing World</a>	
<a href="#">2014 Investment in Fossil Fuels</a>	Started by NSW/ACT Synod then spread to all other Synods and Assembly. Church was a leader in this area. Discuss Sacramental.symbolic significance versus economic impact.
2000-2010 survey of UCA engagement with ecological issues	A book chapter which explores Uniting Church engagement on matters of our relationship with other-than-human Creation in the new millennium, "We have drawn upon a wide diversity of sources – previous scholarship into Uniting Church ecological engagement, interviews with some fifteen to twenty present and former staff and ecological advocates from across the church, analysis of a variety of documents, quantitative surveys of ecological views and actions, and our own experience as practitioners and advocates. We structure the chapter as follows. First, we provide a brief presentation of ecological reflection and praxis in the Uniting Church in its first two decades, and at the same time start to introduce several categories of ecotheological thought. Next, we examine the ecotheological tendencies within the church, followed by activity in theological colleges. We then conduct an organisational analysis of how the Assembly and Synod councils and agencies have engaged with ecological matters, followed by an examination of congregational activity. Finally, we discuss key trends across the new millennium and offer some thoughts for the future. <sup>7</sup> "
<a href="#">2016 For a World Reconciled</a>	("a world Reconciled"- pointing back to the Basis of Union)

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<sup>7</sup> Pepper, M., & John, J. (2014). Ecological engagement. In William Emilsen (Ed.), An informed faith: The Uniting Church at the beginning of the 21st Century (pp. 189-213). Melbourne, Vic: Mosaic Press.
