

## **WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR** **Theological Reflection**

“Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her”. St. John 8:3-11 [NSRV]

The above passage from the New Testament reminds us that Jesus himself acted ‘without fear or favour’- reaching out to the poor and marginalised and standing up to the authorities of his day when they were wrong. In this instance he exposed the hypocrisy of the men who were accusing a woman of adultery while they were guilty of sins themselves.

Jesus was accused of “eating with sinners” because he mixed with the tax collectors like Zacchaeus who were widely despised as collaborators with the Roman occupying forces. He touched lepers and spoke to prostitutes. Indeed, the story of Jesus in the New Testament is a story of a fearless person who spoke and acted out the truth as it was revealed to him from God.

Jesus was in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets who were also fearless speakers of the truth. They condemned false and hypocritical religion and stood up to both the rulers and the people when it came to issues of social justice. For example, the prophet Nathan confronted King David after his notorious affair with Bathsheba and his plot to have Bathsheba’s husband killed.

Isaiah the prophet told the people to stop practising hypocritical religion and to find the way to God through ceasing to do evil and learning to do good. The prophet Amos spoke out against the greedy people who “make the ephah small and the shekel great and practice deceit with false balances” and exhorted them to “let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”. Micah attacked those who practised injustice and called on people to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God”.

There are many examples in Christian history of saints and martyrs who have acted without fear or favour. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century there was the historic ministry of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others with him in the Confessing Church, who refused to fall in with the hatred and anti-Semitism of Hitler and his Nazi party. In the end Bonhoeffer was executed as a result of his active opposition to Hitler. Again in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there is the example of Martin Luther King, a preacher who dreamed of justice and peace and an end to discrimination against African Americans.

Speaking and acting ‘without fear or favour’ is a trademark of the most famous Christians throughout the centuries.



For UnitingCare 'without fear or favour' means treating people fairly and not discriminating against any particular group. It means open admission policies for

our services and accepting clients without discrimination. It means employing staff without discrimination. It means actively working to eliminate discrimination in our society. It means standing up for our clients and for people in need in our community when they are being disadvantaged by either policies or practices.

It means working for a better society.

The Medically Supervised Injecting Centre in Kings Cross is a good example of UnitingCare acting 'without fear or favour'. Although supported by the State Government of the day it was controversial in the community and large sections of the media were against its establishment. There was also a misconception by many who thought that injecting drug users had brought their troubles down upon their own heads and didn't deserve help. The Kings Cross Chamber of Commerce and Tourism took UnitingCare to the Supreme Court in an attempt to stop the Centre opening. However, despite all this opposition, the Centre opened and has since proved to be a valuable medical facility, providing a life line to its clients.

When UnitingCare, along with large sections of the Uniting Church and other churches, opposed the Howard Government's policy on asylum seekers and refugees, we were all accused of being 'do gooders' and told to stick to religious issues. Despite considerable public support for the Government's harsh policies, they were ultimately shown to be unacceptable and more moderate policies have now replaced them.

The Christian Church is at its best when it is acting 'without fear or favour', and especially when it is acting on behalf of the disadvantaged and vulnerable in our community. UnitingCare is proud to be part of that tradition and to be exercising its ministry on behalf of the people in the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT.

**Rev. Harry J. Herbert,**  
Executive Director,  
UnitingCare NSW.ACT.