



THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
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THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE UPCSA - THE UPCSA AS A SPIRITUAL HOUSE: No 1

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (NIV I Peter 2: 4-5)

In the recent “Let’s Journey Together”, I alluded to the need for all of us in the UPCSA to reflect on how to be and do church in contemporary times. We have many instruments that we may refer to or use in conducting this exercise. The Scriptures become the first of those instruments. In the Manual of Faith and Order (MFO) (being one of the instruments) Chapter 2 par 2.1, it is stated:

This Church accepts the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as inspired by the Holy Spirit to be the uniquely authoritative witness to Jesus Christ and in that sense the Word of God and the final rule of faith and life.

The General Assembly of 2012 agreed on the following about the UPCSA:

We are a diverse community of reformed Christians led by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, prayerfully seeking the will of God for our lives together and the world.

Based on 1 Peter 2: 4-5, I got a conviction that our reflection of how to be and do church should be informed by our desire to promote effective spirituality and our understanding of the UPCSA as a “**spiritual house** ... offering **spiritual sacrifices** acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”. This is the first of many reflections that will follow. I invite the Presbyterians to engage as individuals, groups, congregations, fellowships, consistories, and other structures, as we build ourselves as Christians and as Presbyterians, taking note of the MFO Chapter 1: par 1:12:

The objectives of this system of government [Presbyterianism] are the manifestation of the unity of the Church, the maintenance of a united testimony to the truth, mutual counsel and support, the faithful exercise of discipline, and combined effort in the furtherance of those ends for which the Church of Christ exists.

Our reflections will be based on the instruments that have been adopted by the UPCSA. In this first attempt, I invite us to reflect on this part of the MFO:

The Need for Redemption

1. The Human Predicament

1.1 Human beings were created in the image of God, as creatures little lower than the *angels*. As the story of Adam and Eve portrays, however, the tragic paradox is that humankind has from the beginning yielded to temptation and turned away from God. Instead of trusting and obeying God we have rebelled against God’s holy will. In pride we have aspired to be like God, self-sufficient and autonomous, choosing our own moral laws. Instead of living with and for God, and so also for other, as human beings we have come to live primarily for ourselves.

1.2 It is God's grace and holiness in Jesus Christ that reveal what sinners we are and how empty before God every human claim to be righteous is. Christ claims the whole of life for God and so reveals how far short of grateful and loving obedience to God we have fallen. That he needed to die for our sins shows how grave sin is.

1.3 Human society is capable of degrees of justice, and human beings of great altruism, heroism and self-sacrifice. Yet both societies and individuals are also capable also of appalling brutality and degradation. The most just society is radically flawed with injustice, and our noblest deeds and highest virtues with individual or group egoism, pride and self-interest. Group and individual interests distort even how we judge between right and wrong.

1.4 Sin is a corruption of our very nature; it infects and dominates the whole of human life. In our private and our public lives we fall under the power of evil. We sin individually and collectively. We are proud, self-centred, resentful, lustful, greedy, corrupt; we hurt, exploit, discriminate against and oppress others; we neglect the needy; we sin by commission and by omission. Sin misuses our greatest technological advances, so that instead of caring for the creation we pollute and ruin the environment and deplete the earth's resources, overpopulation spreads hunger and starvation, and modern weapons threaten us all with destruction. Sin warps religion itself with individual and group egoism, self-righteousness and prejudice.

1.5 Sin darkens our minds and perverts our very wills. All human beings are in bondage to sin, unable to rescue themselves and unable of themselves to turn to God to be rescued. The worst state is to believe in our own righteousness or moral superiority, as though we were not in radical need of grace and forgiveness.

1.6 Sin empties life of meaning and issues in despair. It makes us enemies of God, of one another, of our natural environment and even of ourselves. It grievously offends God, brings us all under God's righteous wrath and just judgement, and threatens final alienation from God.

1.7 In this predicament, because we reject grace and yet seek meaning and hope for our lives, we create or turn to a multitude of false gods. Even though it may well be of relative value, anything other than God to which we give absolute value or in which we put our final trust and so make into an idol is a false god. Some have made false gods of their race, nation, family or culture, or of social status, money, possessions, power, worldly success, fame, an ideology, nature, science, technology, sex, pop stars, political leaders, sport, alcohol or drugs. The idolization of every false god is itself further bondage.

You are welcome to share your observations and suggestions on what the UPCSA needs to do and to be.

May God bless you and keep you safe from COVID-19. Let us work together to fight against the spread of coronavirus.

Yours in Christ.



Lungile Mpetsheni
GENERAL SECRETARY