

# *'Constructive and Courageous'*

Reflections on *Angels in this Wilderness* by the Rev. Dr Tim Hein.

Andrew's sixth book, his sixth 'State of the Union', does not contain vague allusions or empty rhetoric, but substantial content. In complete sentences! Points you can agree or disagree with.

**This is a constructive book, and a courageous one**, it is both rich and multi-dimensional. It begins with reflections on the novel *Gilead*, and then unfolds like a plotline.

I describe it as *constructive*, certainly because of what it says, but also because of what it avoids. Namely, despite being a book about a denomination, it avoids church patriotism. Andrew refuses an extended analysis of identity – a great temptation in this genre, especially on a relatively young church.

The Uniting Church can often mirror Australian society at large by engaging in an ongoing discussion about identity which often clangs in the ear, due to either simplistic jingoism or intense ideological deconstruction. Church patriotism in the UCA is similar. Finding our way forward shan't come through utopian claims about a uniqueness that denies reality, or through ongoing deconstruction of every facet of our life.

Instead, Andrew calls us repeatedly to the Basis of the Union, as a signpost rather than a hitching post. And the Basis calls us repeatedly to Jesus Christ.

As Andrew writes,

*"The confidence of the church is not based on its own strength, but on the grace by which it is created, sustained and equipped for its missional pilgrimage in a changing world."*

I found this whole section quite compelling and moving. I could not stop reading. The clarity of the thought connected elements and themes from Andrew's life, the history of our church, and our country, in powerful narrative. **It's a superb piece of unfolding accessible theological reflection** that could only be written at this time and place in history. I was caught up in its truth-telling, I felt included in it, and was helped by it. The book is also constructive in advancing the conversation, **because it is informed and educative**. As you would expect from an Educator and the Principal of Uniting College.

Andrew presents evidence from careful research, and helpfully explains it. Indeed he has a gifted way of mapping out reality and presenting in an understandable way.

This book is an especially great gift in complex times, on complex issues. Particularly with the current paradox that many in the church - on all sides of issues and debates - feel threatened by the very diversity it celebrates. This is where **the book is not only constructive, but courageous**. It is a helpful map for every person in the Uniting Church to be more deeply informed about the context we find ourselves in.

**This is a time for calm, courageous and constructive thinking. That is Andrew's speciality, and this book is a timely example.** It's my pleasure to commend *Angels in this Wilderness: Reflections on the Journey of the Uniting Church in Australia* to all of you.