

# Uniting Church History and Heritage

Uniting Church National History Society: Vol. 2 No. 1 March 2020



## Historical Tasmania

In 2007 17 members of the Vic/Tas Historical Society travelled around Tasmania on a guided tour led by the Rev. Hamish and Mrs Hilary Christie-Johnston, visiting historic Uniting churches and other historically interesting places as we drove from Launceston to Hobart on the central route. Somewhere in the middle of Tasmania we came across a small church called Kirklands. The Rev. Hamish Christie-Johnston, whose father was minister of the tiny church, has written a description and there's a photo of the interior on page 8. There is also an article about Benjamin Carvoso in Hobart Town, and some assorted photographs of places around Tasmania.

## Covid-19 and the church

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on the church throughout Australia, as it has presented us with challenges that we've not had to face before about what it means to 'be church'. From the point of view of church history, what we do now in the attempt to retain the congregational life of the church is likely to have a profound effect upon what shape the church takes once the pandemic has been overcome. Church historians may well need to be making notes right now!

## ★ Second edition

This is the second edition of the Uniting Church National History Society's newsletter, circulated to all members of the Society by email or post. It has also been made available to the members of the U.C. state-based societies for distribution with their local mailings.

## ★ Proceedings of the 2019 UCNHS Conference

The Proceedings of the UCNHS 2019 conference, held at Melbourne's Centre for Theology and Ministry in June, are now available. Members of the Society will automatically receive a copy, and additional copies at a cost of \$15 (plus postage \$9) will be available from the Editor, Robert Renton, who can be contacted on 0427 812 696 or by email at [robert.renton@bigpond.com](mailto:robert.renton@bigpond.com).

## President's Notes



Welcome to the second issue of *Uniting Church History and Heritage* which is sent in the midst of a global pandemic that is forcing us to reconsider virtually every aspect of our lives. Several historic precedents have been reflected upon of late, including the fourteenth-century Black Death, and the 1918 Flu Epidemic. These were catastrophic periods of history that have shaped our social imagination in ways that continue to be felt in our response to the present crisis. We now have some technological helps that were not available during earlier pandemics such as video conferencing software that enables us to be socially connected while remaining physically distanced. Congregations are on a steep

learning curve around meaningful worship in 'disembodied' modes that are stretching not only our technical skills but also our theological horizons as we think through what a virtual Eucharist might look like (or whether it is even possible) and what 'two or three gathered' in Christ's name now means. We also have a global system of media communication that ensures rapid communication and regular updates that keep the population well informed. Of course, along with this comes a good deal of 'fake news,' misinformation, bogus cures, and conspiracy theories that require our caution and discernment.

The Executive of the Uniting Church National History Society now meets regularly via Zoom which enables us to have a sense of 'presence' that is an improvement on telephone conferencing. It's amazing what the addition of faces does to the art of communication and dialogue. We will need now to address how the use of such video conferencing platforms can assist us with the hosting of events, including our upcoming Annual General Meeting and Panel on Uniting Church Redress scheduled for Brisbane on 22 Oct 2020 in association with the Queensland Synod. An expert panel including Sarah Lim of Uniting Redress, Dr Janice McRandal, and Professor Shurley Swain will consider the Uniting Church's response to the Royal Commission from pastoral, historical, and theological perspectives. Hopefully we will be through the present crisis and back to face-to-face gatherings by the time we meet in Sydney in June 2021 for our third UCNHS Conference, around the theme *Growing Up Uniting*. We have already begun fruitful engagement with younger members of the UCA and hope to have their increased participation at the Conference as well as a more creative approach to Conference presentations.

As I look for something positive to come out of the COVID-19 epidemic, a number of reflections come to mind. Perhaps we will reconsider our constant drive to produce more and more goods and let go of the myth of ever-expanding economic growth. Maybe the earth itself will have some time to breathe as the cessation of human activity allows some ecological 'bounce back' (of which the reported return of fish and fresh water to Venice's famed canals may be a sign). As our relationships with family members and friends are tested by forced absences, perhaps we will learn not to take such precious connections for granted and make every effort to express our love and appreciation for those dearest to us. Historically speaking, 2020 will no doubt be remembered as one of the hinges upon which future historians will conveniently hang their competing theories. While we are writing and researching history, we are also making history in the ways we respond to the present circumstances. May we each have the wisdom to discern the best responses we can make for the good of our present neighbours as well as the global citizens of the future.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to read 'Glen O'Brien'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

(Associate Professor Rev. Glen O'Brien, President, UCNHS)

## Benjamin Carvosso's first visit to Hobart Town

On 25 April 1820 a young Methodist missionary arrived in Hobart Town aboard the ship *Saracen*. Benjamin Carvosso was impressed by the small township nestled under the shadow of Mt Wellington. He estimated the population of Hobart town to be about 2,700, the majority of whom were convicts of British descent. He described the colony as “a little England on the south side of the sun” with the culture very British in nature. He found only a small portion of the land was cultivated and the weather pleasant and a little warmer than in Britain. The harbour was expansive and was so full of ships that it took two days before the passengers could disembark. Benjamin was accompanied by his wife Deborah, who was the first woman to go with her husband to mission in the South Seas. Once ashore, the couple made their way to find the Police Magistrate, Mr Humphreys, for whom they had brought gifts from England and he offered them accommodation during their stay.

Benjamin Carvosso was born in Gluvais, a small Cornish village, in 1789. He was the third child of William and Alice. His father William was a committed Methodist evangelist who was closely connected to John Wesley, accompanying Wesley on his 32 journeys into Cornwall. William became a class leader and was well respected and loved throughout Cornwall. He participated in many revival meetings during the Great Revivals in Cornwall which occurred between 1790 and 1860.

Like most Christian parents, William was concerned for the salvation of his children. Benjamin's older siblings were converted, but Benjamin was not interested in God and had turned his mind to furthering his studies. Prayerfully, William took an opportunity to talk to his son about eternity and Benjamin, rather reluctantly, attended a class meeting with his father. William was so affected with joy at his son's presence that he openly wept throughout the meeting. Seeing his father so deeply moved convicted Benjamin, who later wrote the following account of his experience: “the eloquence of falling tears and the sighs of a full heart—produced in my obdurate mind a deeper impression than any previous effort of your faithfulness and love.”

Benjamin experienced great anguish of soul and spirit in the following days. He could not rid his mind of the sight of his weeping father. He saw through his experience that he had rejected the love of his heavenly Father and the joy with which He would receive him. Benjamin came under what the Methodists called “conviction”—an awful realisation of their enmity with God, accompanied by feelings of guilt and uncleanness. This period of conviction lasted for eight days for Benjamin during which time he mourned as one without any hope.

Finally, he began to see “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” He spent a further three days at the foot of the Cross in deep repentance before he received Christ. Sometime later with great joy and anticipation he received “the Blessing” or the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Post-conversion Benjamin became more diligent with his studies. His relationship with his father became much closer and his father became a spiritual mentor to him. This relationship was a pivotal source of wisdom and comfort to Benjamin while he was on the mission field.

Benjamin felt called to the ministry. He was trained over a period of five years' probation during which time he spent a year in different churches facing different congregations and challenges. He had periods of deep doubt about his calling, but as he persevered in prayer he broke through into a greater assurance of his calling and faith. He also had times of great blessing where the Holy Spirit moved in power. His ministry was fruitful with many new and lasting conversions and backsliders returning to the fold.

Benjamin shared a testimony of a young boy who was gravely ill after being wounded. The boy was in a coma. Benjamin mourned over this young boy for days and interceded for him. After a time, the boy woke from the coma weeping and singing the hymn "A Charge to Keep Have I." The young boy then burst into acclamations of joy. Those who witnessed the event fell on their knees and wept. The local villagers came to witness the healing.

On another occasion Benjamin rode out at 10 pm at night desperate to have his friends come to pray. As they gathered in intercession they were visited by a "mighty rushing wind."

Benjamin started to speak but not long into his sermon a woman began to cry out to God for mercy. She was quickly followed by another and the service was taken over by weeping and prayer.

Benjamin received a call to the mission field soon after his probationary period ended. He wrote to the Missionary Society in London and was accepted and appointed to New South Wales. He wrote to his father with the news. His father became very sorrowful and was opposed to his son's plans. Benjamin's brother was so concerned about his father that he warned Benjamin that his father would die of a broken heart if he should go. In deference to his father Benjamin deferred his calling, but he could not find peace. He cried out to God who answered him in an astounding way. When William was at prayer he was visited by the Presence of the Lord and was asked the question "Canst thou not give thy son to go on an errand for Me? I will bring him back to thee again." Having received that assurance William wrote to his son giving him his blessing. At last Benjamin found peace.

Benjamin married Deborah Banks before departing to Australia and the couple had a four-month sea voyage from England. On their arrival in Hobart Town and with the help of Mr Humphreys, Benjamin asked permission of the Lt-Governor Sorell and also Mr Knopwood, the Anglican clergyman for permission to preach during his stay. Once given, the bell boy notified the public of the meetings to be held at the courthouse at 4pm. Benjamin estimated 200 people attended the first meeting. His wife Deborah played her harmonica as they commenced with singing hymns. Benjamin preached a sermon entitled "Awake O Sleeper" (Ephesians 5). As was his habit he used what he called "plain talk" which was well accepted.

On Sunday Carvosso was given permission to preach to the convicts. The sight of so many men held in chains affected Benjamin. He wrote "I was filled with shuddering and horror at the sight of so many men, "kept bound in fetters," every one of whom in more than one circumstance resembling the "fierce" and "injurious" man among the tombs." After preaching the convicts were given tracts and Benjamin heard reports of the many conversations the convicts had about his preaching.

On the last night in Hobart Town Benjamin estimated a crowd of 2,000 attended his final preaching engagement. He stood on the threshold of the courthouse so that the people inside and outside could hear. After the service as he walked back to his accommodation Benjamin was "accosted" (his words) by a group of men who pressed him to stay in Hobart Town. They said they were "like sheep without a shepherd" in need of someone to teach them. Benjamin had been appointed to New South Wales and felt obligated to fulfil his call, but he heard the men and at his earliest chance wrote a letter to the London Missionary Society asking for a minister to be sent to the colony at their earliest possible chance. He did not mince words in his description of the conditions describing the colony as:

the whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint; from the soul of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds, bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.



## Advance Notice

### 2020 Annual General Meeting

The Society's next Annual General Meeting will be held in Brisbane on Thursday 22 October 2020. It is likely that the meeting and the subsequent Forum will be available for viewing online. More details later.

The **Annual Public Forum** will be held in conjunction with the AGM. Sarah Lim, Janice McRandal and Shurlee Swain have all agreed to be part of a panel to discuss the current work of UCA Redress (established to address issues arising out of the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Abuse) and theological and historical perspectives on the churches' involvement in child sexual abuse in its institutions.

### Third Biennial Conference

The Third Biennial Conference of the Society will be held at the Centre for Ministry, North Parramatta, N.S.W., 11–13 June 2021. The theme is "Growing Up Uniting". Mark in it your diary!

### Annual Fees 2020

Members are reminded that the annual fee is \$20, and that 2020's fee are now due. The preferred method of paying is by bank transfer: BSB 032-828 A/c 301985. Please remember to add your name so that your payment is identified, and please send an email to Bob Coote ([bandybc@gmail.com](mailto:bandybc@gmail.com)). Alternatively, please send a cheque to the Treasurer, PO Box 2, Wentworth Falls, NSW, 2782, including your details.

(Benjamin Carvosso: continued)

In his letter he also described the governor and officers as the "Principal authorities living in open contempt of the law of God, and the mass of community lost to country character and family were doing evil, only evil, and that continually". Carvosso was appalled by their great moral destitution. His pleas to the London Missionary Society in 1820 resulted in £100 being donated for a missionary to go to Van Diemen's Land and others of the society emigrating to Hobart.



From 1820–1825 Benjamin Carvosso was an itinerant missionary in New South Wales. He and Deborah and three children. Benjamin became a valuable missionary especially with the convicts during the years from 1825–1830.

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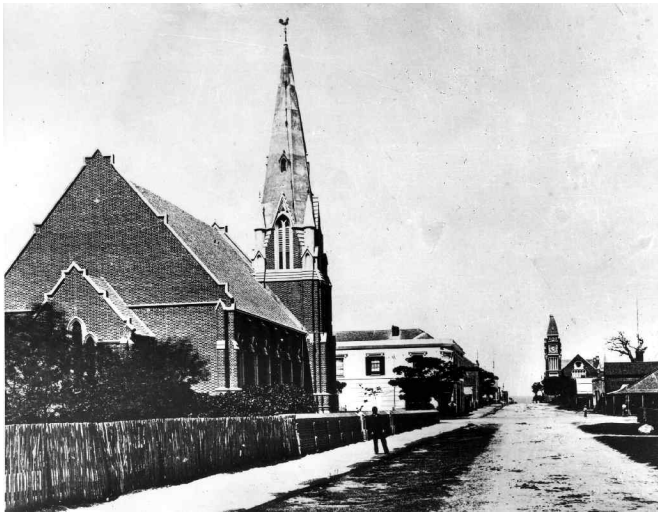
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Wesley Church Hobart



## Western Australia News



(The three photos, from top to bottom, are from 1875–80, 1970, and 2014.)

### Celebrations at Wesley Church Perth

Wesley Church, one of the worshipping communities of the Uniting Church in the City, will celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic building opened in 1870 on the corner of William and Hay Streets, Perth. Such celebrations will also mark the 190<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the congregation had its beginnings in the Swan River Colony in 1830 with a party of Methodist settlers from Hull, England arriving and taking up residence. The Hardey family established themselves on the Maylands peninsula building Tranby House and farm. They conducted the first Methodist service under a Jarrah Tree in Hay Street, Perth on Sunday 6 June 1830.

These celebrations will take place on Sunday 19 April with the President of the Assembly Dr. Diedre Palmer as special guest. Morning worship at 10.00am will have the Moderator Rev Steve Francis as guest preacher with greetings from the President. This will be followed by a lunch for the congregation with ticket entry required.

A Grand Celebration Service will be held in Wesley Church that afternoon at 3.00 pm with the President as guest preacher and the Moderator bringing the greetings of the Synod. Special music with the historic organ and Music Director Angela Currie, an augmented Wesley Choir and instrumental addition of a Brass Quintet will be a feature. Afternoon tea in the church will complete the day of celebration.

In addition to our day of celebration the President will host a 'President's Round Table Lunch' at Wesley College, South Perth on Saturday 18 April, tickets being available from the Synod Centre.

So many people have had links with Wesley Church over the years and there is an Open Invitation for all to attend our Grand Celebration Service on the theme 'WITH FAITH, HOPE AND VISION.'

Enquiries to Geoff Blyth  
9 2 4 6 7 7 8 3 or  
[gesb27@bigpond.net.au](mailto:gesb27@bigpond.net.au)



*Alison Longworth*



## Kirklands

The little white church at Kirklands sits on a slight rise above the River Macquarie, about 11 kilometres from Campbell Town on the Valleyfield road. Two cypress trees stand on either side of the gate, and the view is across to the Western Tiers. Presbyterian worship at the settlement along the Macquarie River began in 1823 at the property 'Baskerville'. The Scottish settlers were agreed on the need to establish a place of worship upon the river. They began a 'contribution'--'one good ewe for every hundred acres of landed property possessed by the subscribers', in order to raise a fund for the purchase of a glebe and the building of a church and dwelling house. The manse had to be built first so that a minister could be called from Scotland. (It continued to be the custom that ministers were called from Scotland.) The manse was completed in 1830, a fine twelve-roomed building facing the river, in a glebe of 100 acres (now sold). There was a schoolroom at one end of the 27-metre long stone-

flagged verandah. Worship took place in the manse until the church was completed in 1836, a small and plain place of worship with straight-backed cedar box pews on either side of a central aisle. There is a large and interesting graveyard surrounding the church, with many historic headstones.

The interior of the church has a very unusual feature. There is a small communion table, but on either side of it there is a long table with seating on both sides of the table. Traditionally the congregation moved to sit at these tables for

communion, with the tables dressed in white tablecloths. Normally there would be several 'sittings'. There is a similar arrangement in the church at Oatlands where the front pews have a swivel arrangement so that the pew back can become a table. At the back of the church there were originally high wooden-walled enclosures with seats for the use of any convicts. The roof was originally thatched. There is a very tall pulpit with sounding-board and door.

See also "Tasmanian treasures: three holy tables in the Scots tradition" by Robert Gribben in *Finding a home in the Uniting Church (UCNHS Conference Proceedings 2019, p. 18)*.

## Tasmanian treasures

At the 2019 national conference, the Rev. Dr Robert Gribben OAM presented a paper on the development of communion tables in the Scots tradition.

"Tasmania preserves three unique examples of architectural arrangements for communion in the Presbyterian tradition. They represent a stage in Scottish liturgical history between the early practice of setting up long trestle tables, then permanent ones, in the nave or by the wall of a church, and the 19th century custom (borrowed from Zwingli and 17th century English Puritanism) of the congregation remaining seated in the pews, and the elements brought to them by elders.

The solution was to create a space within the congregation's box pews a small table into which the communicants went and sat in turn to receive communion."

The paper (in *Finding a home in the Uniting Church: Proceedings of the Second National Conference of the Uniting Church National History Society*, from page 18) gives the historical, ecclesial and liturgical background to these arrangements, describes in detail the different provisions in the three churches of Kirklands, Oatlands and Evandale, and sets them in their context.



## ★ The Board

The Society has a Board that consists of the Rev. Dr Glen O'Brien (President, Vic.), Dr Judith Raftery (Secretary, S.A.), Mr Bob Coote (Treasurer, N.S.W.), the Rev. Dr Julia Pitman (Qld), the Rev. Steve Orme (N.T.), Dr Patricia Curthoys (N.S.W.), the Rev. Dr Alison Longworth (W.A.), the Rev. Dr William Emilsen (Past President, N.S.W.), and the Rev. Robert Renton (Vic./Tas.).

We meet via telephone conferencing approximately every two months.

## ★ Membership

Membership of the Society is open to all interested in history and the history of the Uniting Church and its preceding denominations in particular.

As a member you support the preservation and promotion of the history of the UCA and facilitate further research and reflection into that history.

Cost is \$20 annually, paid directly into the Society's account BSB 032-828 A/c 301985 (remember to include your name) or sent to the Hon. Treasurer, PO Box 2, Wentworth Falls, NSW 2782.

# Why I love the ING: Uniting—both challenge and hope

## Bernard Thorogood

(Bernard Thorogood was a missionary in the Pacific with the London Missionary Society (LMS) from 1952 to 1970, General Secretary of the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom, and the General Secretary of the Congregational Council for World Mission/Council for World Mission (CWM) from 1970 to 1980. He is now a retired Uniting Church minister and lives in Sydney. He is the author of numerous books and articles. His memoirs *A Minister's Minutes* were published in 2014.)

It has been a privilege, through the missionary movement and the ecumenical movement, to experience something of the life of united churches around the world. There they are, in Papua New Guinea, Zambia, Madagascar, South and North India, Canada, the United States, Britain, Jamaica and more. By using the word 'united' they testify to the action which has brought about different traditions together at a certain date, with much thanksgiving and joy. In Australia the vision was subtly different, that the event itself was incomplete but was a significant junction on the route to unity, so Uniting was the name. This seems to me much more realistic and wiser theologically. But are we living it out in practice?

### Three traditions

There are many ways into that question. We may start by asking whether the three traditions that came together in 1977 have melded together, enriched each other, and have become subsumed in the new ethos. There are still some distinctive notes and I have heard it said you can smell the difference as you are walking through the door of a local church. That would take a very good nose, and in most local churches the style and ordering of worship, the celebration of the sacraments, the seriousness of the preaching, and the warmth of the fellowship cannot be traced as belonging to any one of the three traditions. We owe much to the theological colleges, the common hymn books and the lectionary, the generous spirit of the moderators and the intentional, modest work of members of synods and presbyteries. So ex-Presbyterians have learned to relax and appreciate some informality, former Methodists have learned to appreciate the logic of liturgy, and those of us who were Congregational have rejoiced to learn more about the inter-relationships which bind the body of Christ together. Few members of the church define themselves in any other way than Uniting. In this aspect the ING has been real.





*The entrance portico of Horton College near Ross, Tasmania. Horton College was opened in 1855 and closed and dismantled in 1917.*

## One faith

But has there been a uniting process in faith and doctrine, in what we believe and hold as vital? This is much more difficult to assess, for we, with many others, would probably be happy to be called a broad church. We have local fellowships with all the fervour of evangelical revival, where the saving grace of God in Christ is the great theme, right through to those that stress a social gospel of justice and service. We have some fellowships where the Nicene Creed might be used with full assent and others which would prefer to write their own statement of belief. Not many would preach about sin or the Second Coming and most would be vague about heaven. It might well be argued that such diversity simply reflects the astonishing individuality of our humanity, that the same reality of the love of God in Christ strikes many different notes in our hearts and our varied circumstances. But I wonder if that is not something of a cop-out. A church, in the sense of a living community, is not an arena for airing our theological differences but for a common approach to God through Christ; that is the ground of the fellowship of the Spirit. So, on this score, Uniting Church congregations might be doing more to emphasise our common core belief, perhaps by using material already in the tool-box, acknowledged as basic, such as our Basis of Union—human and fallible—which we can all affirm until new “light breaks forth from God’s holy word”. We are not in the business of heresy-hunting or limiting the freedom of expression that has always enhanced the exclusive sectarian tendency of churches. But we can be positive that there is only one Christ, one cross, one human family, one Spirit of life and love. A little tincture of doctrine would strengthen the body; it would help us to counter

## ★ The objectives of the Society

To promote and advance the study of history of the UCA and its predecessor churches.

To encourage and facilitate research into and publication of the history of the UCA and its predecessor churches.

To organise conferences, public lectures and workshops.

To establish connections with other national and international history organisations.

To award prizes and scholarships which advance public knowledge of UCA history, including the Geoff Barnes Memorial Prize for excellence in church history.

To draw to the attention of the Assembly significant dates, events and people in the history of the UCA and its predecessor churches, with the aspiration that appropriate resources may be provided for the celebration of or reflection on their relevance to the contemporary life of the UCA.

To do all things necessary, including fund-raising, to enable the UCNHS to meet these objectives.



the popular perception that in the Uniting Church you can believe anything you like.

## Indigenous life

It has been a long, sad and confused story of the nationalise, and in the church there is no quick answer to the broken relationship of incomers with the indigenous people of the land. The Uniting Church has indeed moved through the creation of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, the Covenant, and successive Assembly decisions to acknowledge the proper place of the First Peoples. It is not easy. In a white, Anglo congregation there may be no active personal relationship with any indigenous people, so that discussion of the topic tends to be theoretical, perhaps idealistic, but not grounded in the daily business of life. I am grateful to be a member in a congregation which has a direct link with an indigenous community in the far west of NSW, with a two-way flow of information and activity. This is just a small, local attempt to bridge the gap; I wonder if it is repeated in many places.

Listening is surely a key. Where there is the sore, the pain, the unfulfilled hope, the insight, the courage, the knowledge and the poetry which indigenous people have to share? Those of us in a white suburb must learn to listen, and listen with patience, which is more than our inborn bossiness leads us to do. It is not easy. How often do we hear an aboriginal story on the news while we repeat the mental reservation, "They are always complaining"? Or we read an expenditure figure in the federal budget, with the subliminal question, "How much more do they need"? The 'us and them' in our thinking and behaving shows how far we have to travel, and how deep are the racist assumptions still to be overcome. Chris Budden, in his article in the July 2017 Studies sees that 'reparation' may be a more fitting goal than 'reconciliation'. I think they are inseparable, for justice and peace belong together. I am a beginner in this matter but I can see what a journey of unitING there is to go; there is a tough process here before we can be one in heart and soul.

## Ethnicity

Uniting has also meant the coming together of members from many ethnic groups. They have been a growing area of our Uniting Church as immigration has increased over our forty years of life together. There are now strong groupings of Koreans, Tongans, Fijians, Chinese, Samoans, Cook Islanders and others, bringing fresh voices, habits, traditions, enthusiasm and community involvement. There have been difficult issues for our Church to face. How much separation should be seen as right? How do we best act to accommodate their longing for a place of worship? Should they have separate representation in a presbytery or reserved places in the Assembly? How should we expect them to relate to the churches from which they come? Fellow citizens or welcome guests?

The first step is thankfulness. Many of these friends have come to Australia from a church that was pioneered through the missionary arms of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches. They testify to what our grandparents were enabled to do with courage, commitment, skill and much prayer. To have spent a Sunday in a flourishing Seoul Presbyterian Church says to me, "Praise the Lord! The promise of the Spirit was fulfilled". To have lived for years in a Polynesian island enabled me to ride on the shoulders of giants. They laboured, and we have entered into their labours.



Now these sisters and brothers infuse the Australian fellowship. We have been rather cautious. We doubted whether the ministers who came with them were adequately trained to serve here and some pastors of great experience and devotion were expected to go back to college as students again. It was sometimes taken as an insult. Others could see that the next context called for a fresh approach. Could a congregation here be at the same time an overseas congregation of another Church? Why not? I am a dual citizen (but not standing for parliament!). Something similar is surely possible in church life too. The tone should be a generous welcome and a readiness to receive. We have much to learn.

It takes some time for immigrant communities to feel wholly at home in a new context; reality therefore suggests that separate language groups will be needed for many years. If we can reach the point of bi-lingual worship as helpful and straightforward, that would assist many. Although speaking English is of the greatest help for immigrants to feel at home in Australia, the continued life of their homeland languages has a value of its own. In the deep places of experience we speak in our mother tongue. That is the message of Pentecost. Most in that Jerusalem crowd would have understood some common language, some Latin, some Greek, but to hear the Word of God they received it in their native languages.

We are grateful to all who have given thought and time and leadership in this process, which is one of the most invigorating aspects of unitING. It is important also as a permanent reminder that unity does not mean uniformity. Just as Desmond Tutu spoke of the rainbow nation, so we can speak of the rainbow church. Uniformity is in practice the enemy of unity, for it breeds resentment, the divergent spirit and, in the extreme, schism.

### **The one, holy and catholic church**

It was surely this aspect of unity which most engaged those involved in the 1977 event. As the three traditions were being united in one church, so they hoped the process would continue, binding up the fractures in the visible life of the whole Christian community. That was the 1970s mood in many places besides Australia. We can consider our contribution at local, national and international levels.

Locally, there is a great range of movement towards unity, movement which can be stalled at any point. The movement begins with friendship, as we discover how similar are the challenges and hopes of members in other branches of the church. We then express that friendship in local groupings or councils of churches, pledging to pray for one another, share in common social activity, and celebrate major events together. This has become normal and is the great advance on the divisiveness of earlier periods, particularly the nineteenth century in Australia. Local unity may then progress towards the sharing of a building, so that different congregations work out a reasonable plan to timetable services and meet costs. This has been happening in places where an immigrant community shares with a long-established Uniting congregation and also in areas of new housing where one church complex is all that can be afforded or sensible. The next stage is to commit to working as a group in a parish, with one church council, one preaching plan but distinctive worship in each place continuing. Another step is to share one ministry, so that, for example, a Uniting and Anglican congregation worship as one, with a Uniting minister for a period, and then an Anglican for a similar period of time. In effect, this is to create a new uniting church in one parish, held in full communion with both denominations. This takes a great deal of commitment and trust; there may be disappointment as well as joys ahead, and it can only happen in the local people are ready to pioneer for the sake of witness in the community. The Uniting Church has been fully involved locally, in an ecumenical spirit, but has not yet developed many advanced local unions; we are en route and perhaps a little unsure of the right way ahead.

This is partly due to the questions surrounding national denominational change, where the expectations of 1977 have not been fulfilled. We have not found partners willing to dance. This is in part a State by State matter—the Sydney Anglicans, for example, are against dancing at all, while the



NSW Catholics still sing a pre-Vatican 2 waltz. South Australia and Western Australia are more encouraging. The lack of progress may also be due to our own hesitancy, not knowing what is the aim and purpose of our inter-church relationships. Friendship, yes, by all means; some common action through councils of churches, no doubt at all. But is visible unity the priority? Can we uphold any form of structural unity together with the precious diversity of the great traditions? One indication that this is a possible step is the 1973 Leuenburg Agreement between the Lutheran and Calvinist churches of Europe. Although the language now seems rather too stiffly orthodox, the conclusion was to open the churches to a full communion in faith and order, with full mutual acceptance of ministers and open to the possibility of combined congregations. No doubt we would wish to use a different language, with a greater emphasis on the missional context of the churches, but I wonder if we have used that stepping-stone with serious intent. Another methodology was the situation in Milton Keynes, a new city built in central England after World War 2, where the planners allotted one key central site for a church. Who was to have it? The answer was all of us. So the funds were raised by Methodists, Baptists, Anglicans, United Reformed and Catholics to build and staff this church, which is used by all for a diversity of worship served by a team of three ministers. So the national bodies can change a local scene. Could we attempt that with a shared ministry in the Outback?

Or, if we are in the van of ecumenism, should we think seriously about the Baptist position on the sacrament, a position which is of importance for the global church? Suppose, for a moment, that every couple seeking baptism for their baby was told that they had the choice of a baptism now or to wait until the child could decide to be baptised as an expression of faith and commitment. Which way would they choose? Both traditions have a permanent place in the story of faith. Might that not be a fair way to represent the wholeness of the church? Does it open a door to closer relations with Baptist's and Churches of Christ?

The Uniting Church has played a significant part in the life of the international church, with many exchanges of personnel, much generous service, support in emergencies, and with the self-knowledge that we are not a great storehouse of wisdom. Yet we do not often remember our Asian and Pacific neighbours in our public prayers, and information of the world church that appears in our synod magazine is a very thin stream. Most of us know little of our sisters and brothers in the Indonesian province of Papua, or about our atoll neighbours facing rising sea levels, or about the churches in Zimbabwe under the new political leadership, or about the Coptic Church in Egypt under constant pressure. It is not that any of us can or should become experts in all this, but that some understanding of the global church should percolate through our prayer and praise, for I sense that our horizon has been drawing lower and closer and more introspective than is fruitful for the unity of the body.

One holy and catholic—just a dream? This why the ING matters so much. It is a process and in process. We are one in our hopes and prayers, we seek holiness in our confessions and service, we are catholic in our fellowship, but in none have we arrived. As long as humanity exists the unity of the people of God in Christ will be incomplete, we shall never have arrived at holiness or our catholicity will not embrace all who love Christ, for our human nature is such that individualism, charismatic leadership, fresh understandings and sin will always be bursting the wine skins, whether old or new.

I often wonder, in a veteran ecumenist way, whether we are open to discussion of the hardest and biggest questions about unity. Can we ever discuss what reforms of the papacy are essential before we can receive the Bishop of Rome as universal pastor; and what reforms in ourselves are essential before that Bishop can celebrate communion with us? We have all seen how spiritual authority is damaged by temporal power, yet the permanent separation of the Catholic stream from the Orthodox was largely due to this confusion. Why can't Christians get over it? The simple, challenging call of Jesus has been transmuted into the profound complexities of institutional Christianity. Is that faithfulness or disobedience? Why have Christians allowed nationalism, gender and ethnicity to shape their churches, when the grace of God declares that "there is no such thing as Jew or Greek, slave or freemen, male and female, for you are all

one person in Jesus Christ”?

## **The unity of humanity**

The call of unity goes far beyond the life of the church, since, in Paul's words, God is over all, through all and in all. Humanity is one household; it is ecumenical. Yet religious faith, in all its variety, has divided humanity in cruel ways, so that many now question whether it is a bringer of peace and hope or the world, or a torment of the spirit, a clinging to childhood fantasies of human development. We may comfort ourselves with the thought that it is the extreme fringes of the major faiths that are dangerous, not the mass of believers. Militant Buddhists in Myanmar, the ultra-orthodox Jews in Palestinian territory, Jihadist Muslims in Syria, Nigeria and the Philippines, militant Hindus in Assam, and some of the extreme sects that have sprung out of Christianity—these are the danger. But it is from religious faith that they have sprung, in every century. The intensity and passion of belief may release a violent spirit, but if we believe at all then why not with passion?

This is so great an issue that we seem powerless to affect it. It is like asking whether action by Australia can halt climate change. (The answer is no, but we can contribute to a global Yes.) So our small community of faith cannot abolish extreme militancy across the world, but we can share positively in the Christian search for peace and mutual respect. One of the major learning experiences in our lifetime has been the mingling of believers through immigration, so that what may have been distant from us is now a close neighbour. The mosques in our cities, our calendars give us the dates of Ramadan, and it is often a Nepali Hindu who cares lovingly for my wife in a nursing home. All the issues faced by mkissilogists from Xavier to Newbiggin have come home.

Do we still hold firmly and hopefully to the conversion of the peoples of other faith so that Jesus may reign universally? Was that part of the imperial mood of western nations, or is it implicit in the gospels? The Matthew 28 commission “to all nations” suggests the latter. We are all believers in Christ through the missionary service of apostles and preachers and priests through the ages, and so have to take the mission calling very seriously. There are many Christians who hear that call today and so seek to become bearers of the Word to the world, which often means to places where they are unwelcome. But I confess my doubts. I think of the temptations in the wilderness that Jesus experienced at the very start of his ministry, and his rejection of imperial authority, and at the end the cross of a criminal. People of the first century in Palestine could have had little conception of the weight and history and devotion of the masses following Hinduism or Buddhism. “All nations” had a different meaning for them and for us. I am no longer sure that I should be praying for the conversion of my Jewish friends, and I am sure that any crusading spirit, any imposition, is contrary to the common life of humanity.

Yet the mission of God in Christ does not have a closing date; we cannot drop that calling because of changed circumstances. We can see it, however, in a different mode. For us in the Uniting Church the outreach begins with friendship—both locally and internationally—as we relate through sister churches in a great circle from Indonesia, through Malaysia and Singapore, Timor Leste, north to Hong Kong, Taiwan and Korea, east to Papua New Guinea, the Solomons, Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Kiribati, Tuvalu, the Cook Islands and back through New Zealand, so we receive friendship unlimited. Through them we can serve their people. We can learn something of their languages, their struggles, their community life and their vision of the Kingdom. We may have some particular gifts to share, but I suspect that we gain far more than we give.

The more difficult question is how we engage with the other abiding faiths. Inter-faith dialogue has been attempted globally (for example, through the World Council of Churches), academically in many universities and seminaries, in local community endeavours, and by unnumbered individuals. The objective is mutual understanding which can only come, not through politeness over a cup of tea, but through sharing convictions and experience. The Christian hope is that in some measure, no doubt

inadequately, we can share with dialogue partners the reality of Christ. Honesty and obedience both demand that. Partners will share their confession. We may then be led on to think whether this Christ of God is already at work in the spirit that permeates their faith. Is the human divide already in some way divinely bridged? Is Christ already speaking in Judaism, for before Abraham was I AM? Is the Word the light that enlightens everyone who comes into this world? It becomes very hard to claim that we are in the light, and 'they' are all in darkness.

This is surely a long journey, but a necessary one for the sake of the peace of this world, including the peace of our multi-racial, multi-faith Australia. It has been a commitment of the Uniting Church, fittingly low-key but influential for all participants. We are in process.

The letters of Paul take us even further, towards the unity of all things in Christ, a vision of the coming of the Kingdom of God that includes not only the visible world but the forces of angelic or spiritual power. Nothing is to be outside the saving purpose. This is a vision that is beyond me; we have so much immediately before our feet that we may be permitted to decline the wings of the morning. But it is surely good to remember that the great saying in John 3:16 tells us that God so loved the world—and the Greek word there is *kosmos*. God loves the whole of it, all of us, all the time forever.

## Unity in Christ

In the great prayer of Christ, as John's gospel brings it to us, we read: "It is not for these alone that I pray, but for those also who through their words put their faith in me. May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, so also may they be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me". (John 17:20–21)

So we are called to the highest possible meaning of unity. It is not a regimented unity as in the army, with ranks of authority and punishment for stepping out of line. It is not a corporate unity, an enterprise directed from head office. Nor is it a security factor unity, all in the same boat in a rough sea pulling the oars together. Nor a sentimental unity when we embrace these dear friends because they are our sort of people. Not even a football club unity when we all cheer for the same team. It is a unity that is spiritually bonding us to Christ, and thus to each other. It is easy to mistake these words for the pieties of observance, that constant fascination with sanctity, the holy places and shrines and liturgies and all the ritual of devotees, as though only a life dressed in the sacred can untie us to Christ. There was a phrase of William Temple (who was a scholarly ecumenist and too briefly Archbishop of Canterbury) that in order to serve God wholeheartedly, there are times when we must forget God altogether. We are secular people, of this age and this place; it is this world that is the arena. Just as Jesus Christ lived in this human scene to witness to the will of God for humanity, so the disciple is to live as witness to the way of Christ. Spiritual unity in Christ can be best understood by most of us who are no mystics as life becoming prayer.

Coping with life takes our energy, will, intellect, discipline, forbearance, work and patience—enough to absorb us. For many it is a hard grind. But it is all we have to offer. The story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22, when God tests his servant but stops the sacrifice of son, reminds us that life is the most precious of offerings. All the butcher's shop details of animal sacrifice in Exodus tell of the desire to present the most precious of gifts to Go. But no lamb, no bull, no dove, all the most perfect of animals, comes close to the offering of a human life lived with honesty, generosity and love, imperfect but responsive to the ever-present Spirit. We do not make a conscious statement when we wake in the morning that today all my commuting, coffee chatter, committee work or whatever is offered to the Lord. Rather, it is the constant background, the context, the very air of life. Francis of Assisi found that sun, moon, wind, rain, fire, youth, death were all sisters and brothers in God's world. It is to be aware of this encompassing presence that we now call spirituality. To know that presence in one brief human life, one healing touch, one way of sorrows, ne call, that is how grace brings Christ to us, his spirit in our ordinary and not very holy lives.

To be united with Christ is a lifetime journey for individuals and an unlimited pilgrimage for the church. We should tremble at the thought of the body which has become separated from its head—that's a horror movie played out in the anti-Semitic church, the pro-slavery church, the homophobic church, the power-hungry



church which has settled down for a long sleep. We are grateful that the Uniting Church is in the process of uniting in many ways, but we cannot be smug. Much remains to attempt, and always there will be more challenges as opinions differ and needs change. So I rejoice in the ING and hope never to forget that we are, as a community, in process of constant reform towards the unity that is the very breath of the Kingdom.



## **Spirit of the Mountains: Tributes to Jim Tulip**

You are invited to the launch of *Spirit of the Mountains: Tributes to Jim Tulip*, edited by William Emilsen and Lawrence Woods. Jim was Professor of English at the University of Sydney, member of the Leura Uniting Church and a prominent lay person within the New South Wales Synod. Many friends, colleagues and former students of Jim's are represented in the book.

The Blue Mountains historian Ken Goodlet will be the guest speaker at the launch to be held at the Leura Uniting Church on 5 April 2020, at 3 pm.

Books will be on sale. Conversation over afternoon tea is encouraged after the launch in the way that Jim would have dearly loved. The editors, Peggy and Jim's family would love you to be present.

## Harry Makarrwala Munyarryun: Yolngu leader, Peacemaker, Visionary, Man of God

**Dr Gwenda Baker**

### Harry Makarrwala

Who is Harry Makarrwala and how do we know him? Why is he important in Uniting Church history? Makarrwala Munyarryun c1896–1951 was a peacemaker, and a visionary leader for Yolngu, the people of North East Arnhem Land. He is mentioned in legal records as an interpreter in the courts, in academic texts for his work with anthropologists, and in missionary diaries and books as a trusted Christian mediator. He worked with the Methodist missionaries on Milingimbi and became a missionary to his own people. His witness has left a lasting legacy for Yolngu Christians in Arnhem Land.

Harry Makarrwala was a leader of the Wanggurri clan, Yirritja moiety in North East Arnhem Land.(1) He travelled across land and sea, making contact with different people and different cultures. Makarrwala connected with the Macassans who travelled to Arnhem Land each year to gather trepang.(2) Makarrwala and his brother Djalatjiri travelled to Sulawesi with the Macassans and worked on their boats. On these trips Makarrwala encountered both the eastern and the western world. The Wanggurri clan were influenced by the Macassan's Muslim religion, and some elements of their ceremonial practices and language made their way into the Yolngu world. They did not however take this faith as their own.

Makarrwala could speak Wanggurri and other Yolngu matha languages, English and Maccarese (Malay). He worked with anthropologists W. Lloyd Warner and Donald Thomson as a researcher and interpreter. After



the missionaries arrived at Milingimbi in 1923, Makarrwala worked with the Rev. James Watson, the Rev. T.T. Webb, Harold Shepherdson, the Rev Arthur Ellemor, and the Rev. Edgar Wells.(3) Makarrwala had to adjust to new people and new ideas. He displayed a deep understanding of how to deal with different people. He utilized his superb negotiating skills to get along with all the missionaries.

The last missionary minister Makarrwala worked with was the Rev. Edgar Wells. He praised Makarrwala's work, and the insights it offered.

It was my very good fortune to have on Milingimbi as my first Aboriginal headman and general guide to Aboriginal affairs, Warner's principal informant Mahkarolla, whom we came to be known as Makarrwala, and from him and his companions we learned to appreciate the patterns of mind influencing the Aboriginal men of the area.(4)

Makarrwala's on going relationships and assistance to the missionaries helped them maintain a continuity of mission operations.(5)

## **Makarrwala the peacemaker**

Makarrwala is known in both Yolngu and Balanda worlds as a peacemaker. Makarrwala's descendants use this term in conversation. It also appears in missionary accounts. Here it is given as evidence of his acceptance of a Christian value system. But the peacemaker role predates Christianity and has a central role in the Yolngu world. Peacemaker is a designated Yolngu role, a particular person's role. Peacemaking is called magaya rom. Magaya can be translated as 'peace, no trouble, cessation of hostilities.'(6) Rom is Yolngu law, the legal and governmental system. "Magayamirr ngayi ga ngorra dhukarrngur romdja'." translates as 'peace and tranquillity lies on the structure (way) of the law'.(7)

Bob Baker from Milingimbi claims that to be a peacemaker and a leader in the Yolngu world it is necessary to establish yourself first as a fighter.(8) Physical strength and strategic planning were seen as necessary attributes of a warrior. Moral strength, integrity, perception, and persuasiveness were the special qualities of a peacemaker. At Galiwin'ku the story line is different. Makarrwala is a designated peacemaker from the start. He does not have to prove himself through battle: his role is as person who draws combatants together to achieve agreements and peace between people.

Makarrwala's adoption of the Christian faith intensified his peacemaking role. With Andrew Birrinydjawuy he persuaded many of his people to stop the constant fighting between groups. They even destroyed their fighting spears. They kept their hunting spears. Ella Shepherdson writes:

Andrew and Harry had a meeting with all the other men... and they decided that they would break up all their spears except their fish spears or the ones they get kangaroos with, and straight away went and broke them up and burned... [then they] went to a [peacemaking ceremony] on the mainland without a spear. When the others over there saw them coming they were speechless with amazement and put away their spears too.(9)

This aspect of peacemaking was attributed to the influence of the missionaries, who encouraged keeping the peace between competing groups.

## **Makarrwala the missionary**

Makarrwala identified himself as a Christian by the late 1920s. He became one of the first Yolngu missionaries, with Andrew Birrinydjawuy and Wili Walalipa, as they plied the boats along the coast of Arnhem Land.(10) They were well-known and influential men from different clans. They worked together in unity for a higher cause. Sue Harris calls these men 'the real missionaries', preaching to their own people.(11) The witness of these men was vital for the missionaries to establish and sustain their work.

Ella Shepherdson (wife of Harold Shepherdson) and Ann Wells (wife of the Rev. Edgar Wells) tell how close and important Makarrwala's engagement was with the missionaries. Makarrwala is always referred to by name, sometimes as Harry. English names were unusual in those days, but Makarrwala had other connections, which may have contributed to him adopting a Balanda name. The missionaries identified Makarrwala as a leader and his adoption of the new religion made him suited for leadership in both worlds, Yolngu and Christian. He began translating church services for Webb and Shepherdson and by the 1930s he was taking services himself.

Makarrwala worked in many capacities on the mission. He was trusted bearer of messages and a confidant. He would at times seek help from the missionaries when trouble threatened. He would also confront the missionaries if he thought they were doing the wrong thing. Both parties agreed to Makarrwala's dual roles. The missionaries were happy for Makarrwala to be a peacemaker on the mission. Makarrwala sustained his position of headman on the island with the help of the missionaries.

Makarrwala's integration into the mission at Milingimbi is exemplified in the following story. Christmas 1941 was an anxious time at Milingimbi. Yolngu had built a large airstrip on Milingimbi for the RAAF. When Japan declared war on America it became an operational base. The supply boat *Larrpan* was late with provisions. Most of the Yolngu moved back to the mainland to hunt. Ella Shepherdson wrote about



the Christmas celebrations that year:

On Dec 25<sup>th</sup> Harry Makarrwala took the service. All repaired to the Mission House for Xmas tea. There was cold colonial goose, beetroot and vegetables, fruit salad, jellies and cream, cool drinks from the tap, and coffee and tea with Christmas cake. Singing and story telling filled a pleasant evening. About 11 p.m. supper was served.(12)

During this time the decision was made to move to Elcho Island. Makarrwala's brother Batangga went with Harold and Ella Shepherdson to establish a mission. This move is seen both as a means of spreading political influence, and as a direction from God. Shepherdson is seen as a messenger from God. He asks the Wanggurri man to go with him to establish the new mission.

### **Makarrwala: the Visionary**

Makarrwala is seen as a visionary leader. In the spiritual domain he experienced visions in both Yolngu and Christian worlds. The Rev. Wilbur Chaseling, missionary at Yirrkala, described one of Makarrwala's visions from the Yolngu world. At great peril on the sea, Makarrwala remembered his totem and called on it for help. He said at that instant he saw a 'bright light', which 'filled his head.' 'By the light he was assured they would be brought safely to land, and when the wind abated, the family landed in an exhausted condition.'(13)

The appearance of a great light appears later in a story recounted by Ella Shepherdson. This time the light is attributed to God.

Then on another time... they went over with spears, but when they got over a big crowd came and started throwing spears at our boys & they were outnumbered. Our boys were on a small hill & others round throwing spears and not one hit them. When the fighting got fierce Andrew who had a picture roll with him, stuck a spear into the ground & hung a picture roll on to it & asked all our boys to pray which they did. The boys say that a big light seemed to come down on the enemy & they were temporarily blinded & couldn't see to throw the spears straight. It was a great revelation to them, showing God's power & the great part is they put it down to His power, which makes it all the more wonderful.(14)

It is important to realise that although Makarrwala's God may appear to us as an adopted Balanda God, Makarrwala and Yolngu Christians saw their God as a pre-existing God, one who was always there.

### **Makarrwala and the Covenant**

Makarrwala's descendants at Milingimbi put together a document called *History of a Covenant People of God*.(15) The dedication is to Harry Makarrwala and his brother Batangga who 'ministered the saving and healing power of Jesus Christ both in the Church and out in the bush along Arnhem Land coast north east of Darwin.' The document sets out the terms of the covenant.

Makarrwala and Batangga receive the terms of this agreement directly from God. It is not negotiated by any other party and definitely not through the missionaries or their church. Sometime in 1930 a decision was made to present a 'sacred object made with their hands' in full view of everyone. This was most unusual, as only certain old men could see these objects. 'Not long before this ceremony took place there was a mighty and scorching wind that ran through the community and the people know this was God's plan and will for them.' Heat, fire, and wind all have important spiritual attributions in the Yolngu world.

The connection between Makarrwala and God and the rest of the Wanggurri family are laid out in this document. There are commitments and commandments for the family to follow. Personal and political blessings will follow.

### **Makarrwala: Cross-cultural mediator**

We first hear about Makarrwala in written text through the American anthropologist W. Lloyd Warner.

Warner visited Arnhem Land in the 1920s and his work was concentrated around Milingimbi. Makarrwala was well travelled and knew some English. He became Warner's right hand man, travelling with him, translating and easing his relationships with other Yolngu.

Warner's 1951 book *A Black Civilization* made his name as an anthropologist, but he never returned to Australia. In the second edition of his book, Warner wrote about Makarrwala in an appendix. Warner had great respect for Makarrwala, his courage, and fortitude in all circumstances. He wrote about Makarrwala as a young man, his travels to Makassar on the boats, his time in Darwin. Many stories are told as if Makarrwala had dictated them. Most of all Warner wrote about his adventures with Makarrwala including a thrilling story of a dangerous passage around Flinders Point into Arnhem Bay. In this story Makarrwala is important for his bravery and his regard for Warner's safety. The importance of the white man's life is a familiar leitmotif in Balanda (white) stories about Indigenous people.

Makarrwala had a longer relationship with anthropologist Donald Thompson, who operated in the area from 1926. Thompson is highly regarded by Yolngu because he lived with them, learnt their language, and came back regularly. During the war he led them in a reconnaissance mission along the coast of Arnhem Land. Makarrwala was not part of this group. Thomson wanted fierce warriors, and Makarrwala was a Yolngu peacemaker. Some Yolngu think this made it easier for him to accept Christianity with its message of peace and love. Makarrwala's brother Bindjarrpuma was a fighter for the Wanggurri clan, defending their land. He was a fine warrior, an ideal candidate for a fighting detachment.

For anthropologist Louise Hamby, Makarrwala was 'most famous' for working with Warner. He is also identified as one of the 'key legendary leaders' who worked as 'cultural brokers with missionaries and other outsiders.' Hamby names missionaries as outsiders. Anthropologists were outsiders too, but they rarely see themselves in this way.

### **Makarrwala the interpreter, advocate and artist**

Makarrwala was often called upon by government agencies to translate and interpret. In the courts he worked as translator and advocate. In 1934 he was the official court translator for the trial of men accused of killing five Japanese trepangers at Caledon Bay. In the same year Makarrwala gave evidence at the trial of Mirera and Tuckiar for the Woodah Island killings of three white policemen. In both cases the title "interpreter" or 'translator' do not fit the description we would recognise for these roles. In both cases Makarrwala gave lengthy accounts of the events as told to him by the defendants on boat journeys. Makarrwala's testimony was criticised by the court because he did not have first hand knowledge of the events, and his language was not the same as the defendants. The court had appointed Makarrwala knowing both these circumstances.<sup>(16)</sup> Despite this criticism Makarrwala was accepted as a translator and acquitted himself well with lengthy expositions in English.

Makarrwala established himself as an artist in the post WW11 wave of Balanda and overseas collectors. Many artefacts and art pieces collected during this time from the Milingimbi area are deposited in museums around the world. The 1948 American Australian Scientific Expedition led by C.P. Mountford acquired one of Makarrwala's bark paintings, Milka (Mangrove Worm). Makarrwala called this painting a 'self portrait', indicating the very close relationship between the people and the creatures on land and sea. The painting was part of the *Old Masters: Australia's Great Bark Artists* on show at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra in 2013–2014. In 2018 the exhibition travelled to Beijing China as part of a cultural exchange program. Makarrwala's painting was part of the travelling exhibition.

### **Makarrwala's death and funeral**

From Galiwin'ku comes this story:

In the last days of Makarrwala's life, when he was sick, he called his younger brother to come and sit at his feet. This was his last statement: 'If I die I don't want a sacred object to go into the coffin. It would be better to put a Bible inside the coffin'.<sup>(17)</sup>

A Milingimbi story talks about how Makarrwala requested a Christian service on his death. There was a Christian service and then his body was taken back to his hut to wait for Yolngu from all over Arnhem Land to arrive. Yolngu ceremonies began several days later and finished with Christian readings and prayers. A procession followed to the cemetery for burial, with Makarrwala's coffin draped with the Australian flag. Yolngu and Christian rites accompanied the burial with the Rev. Mr Wells in full ministerial giri (dress)(18). Makarrwala's story is told through this ceremony: Yolngu practices, Christian rites and an acknowledgement of his connections to the new Western world with the positioning of the flag.

### **Makarrwala: Legacy**

Makarrwala's descendants are proud of his legacy. They store photos of Makarrwala, his brother Batangga, and their descendants on their phones. They often position themselves as a superior Yolngu group. On Facebook posts they lecture other clans on behavioural issues. They proclaim they are more spiritual, less concerned with the material world. In this you can see the influence of the covenant: these are God's people and they have a responsibility to keep and spread God's Word.

Makarrwala's wider family have held important positions in society. Wesley Lanhapuy (Batangga's son) was the first Yolngu Member of the NT Legislative Assembly as the Member for Arnhem; Gatjil Djerrkura was the ATSIC Chairman, Gary Dhurrkay was a champion AFL footballer. Many grandchildren and great grand children are teachers, nurses, cultural advisers, translators, pastors, and administrators. Timothy Buthimang (Batangga's son) is a pastor at Galiwin'ku. There is great pride in these achievements and a strong adherence to Christianity.

Makarrwala's story is strong, his life complex and interesting. His descendants keep his memory close, his example and his story and precepts to heart. As a peacemaker, visionary leader, cross-cultural mediator, and Christian missionary, Harry Makarrwala Munyarryun occupies a worthy place in Northern Territory Uniting Church history.

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17. Personal communication, Wanggurri elder, Galiwin'ku, 2019.
18. Ann Wells, *Milingimbi: ten years of life in the Crocodile Islands of Arnhem Land*, Angus and Robertson, 1963.





The story of Harry Makarrwala Munyarryun was submitted from the Northern Synod for this newsletter. We are grateful to the author Dr Gwenda Baker for permission to reproduce it.

An earlier version of this paper was given at the NT History Colloquium 2<sup>nd</sup>, November 2019 at Darwin

### **Meredith Lake wins five Australian literary prizes with *The Bible in Australia***

ABC Radio National Soul Search presenter, academic and Sydney Anglican laywoman, Meredith Lake, has won five prizes for her book arising from her PhD thesis in History from the University of Sydney, *The Bible in Australia: a cultural history* (NewSouth Publishing). The Australian History prize (\$15,000), of the Prime Minister's Literary Awards, is the jewel in the crown of these awards. Lake has also accepted the Australian History prize of the NSW Premier's History Awards (\$15,000), the Non-Fiction Award (\$15,000) in the Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature, the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences' (CHASS) Australia Book Prize (\$3,500) and the Australian Christian Book of the Year for 2018, presented annually by SparkLit, formerly known as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge Australia (\$3,000). Lake is the author of a short guide to *The Bible Down Under* (2016), a study in social welfare from the Great Depression to the present, *Faith in Action: Hammond Care* (UNSW Press, 2013), and the winner of the 2012 Bruce Mansfield award for the best article published in the previous year in the *Journal of Religious History*.

(From Julia Pitman, Queensland)



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Newsletter

Contributions to this newsletter are welcome, but please send them via email and in MS Word or Apple Pages format only.

Editor: Robert Renton  
([robert.renton@bigpond.com](mailto:robert.renton@bigpond.com))