Uniting Church
History and Heritage

Uniting Church National History Society: Vol. 3 No. 1 March 2021

GROWING UP UNITING

3rd Biennial History Conference

Centre for Ministry, 16 Masons Drive, North Parramatta NSW 2151 : 11–13 June 2021

Registrations are now open through Eventbrite: go to:

http://growing-up-uniting.eventbrite.com.au

SPEAKERS include UCA President **Dr Deirdre Palmer**, "Roundtable Conversations with Uniting Church young people".

Associate Professor Ruth Powell, "Growing Up Uniting: an inside out perspective". Ruth Powell is Director of UCLS Research.

Rev. Dr William Emilsen and **Dr Elizabeth Watson**, "Growing Up Uniting: Insights to ponder; lessons to heed". William Emilsen is Hon. Associate Professor at Charles Sturt University Elizabeth Watson holds degrees in Anthropology and Sociology from the University of Sydney, the ANU, and the University of New South Wales.

To Zoom or not to Zoom

I wrote this the day after having spent an hour in a meeting and conversation with, amongst a dozen other people, Anna (Uniting Church) in Sydney, Peter (Anglican) in Brisbane, Tejopala (Buddhist) in Melbourne, Fahimah (Muslim) in Sydney, Shirley (Uniting Church) in Perth, and Alan (Quaker) in the other side of town from me (Uniting Church) in Hoppers Crossing, Victoria.

I guess when the telephone was first invented some people rejected its use, despite the fact that it brought distant people into direct contact. I like to see family and friends face-to-face, too, but, like the telephone, Zoom has given me so much more, so much enrichment. I'm glad our forthcoming conference will also be on Zoom. I could not attend otherwise. (Robert Renton)

This edition

This edition has been prepared as the national Assembly has commenced considering the future of the Uniting Church as a people of God on the way. ACT2 has been set up to gather the views of people across the nation through an open survey, Zoom conversations, and reflections on the Basis of Union.

One denominational contribution to the formation of the Uniting Church was that of the Congregational Church. In an article published originally in 2004, the Rev. Graham McAnalley provides an insight to this contribution that may well be a helpful historical reminder of the importance of the congregation in the scheme of things Uniting.

William Emilsen and Laurence Woods have recently compiled a book of reflections on the life and contribution of James Tulip. Elizabeth Watson provides an insightful review.

Glen O'Brien tells us the story of Thomas Shadrach James, lay preacher, and he has provided us with a review of the latest book by Katharine Massam.

President's Notes

One of the projects I am currently working on is a history of Uniting Church Lay Preaching in Tasmania and Victoria. My chapter is on Methodist lay preachers from 1902–1977. Early twentieth-century lay preachers were often far from the sedentary, bookish, soft handed figure of the popular imagination. Trevor Byard, in his family history *Kettle-Broth for Tea* (Newtown, Vic: Neptune Press, 1983) recalled his Tasmanian father and grandfather as men who largely by their own efforts and natural gifts were "skilled in many manual works and very proficient with tools" as well as musicians, singers and preachers. Clement Byard emigrated from England in 1857 at the age of five, eventually pioneering in the Central Highlands of Tasmania. Visiting the private chapel at Sir Henry Reed's estate *Wesley Dale* in 1883 for special evangelistic services, Clem was unimpressed as he "heard of nothing but hell and damnation; poor stuff in lieu of the gospel". Similarly, in 1886, "Went to Wesley Dale to hear Mr Tennant on the 'Second Coming'. A perfect mass of confusion". By 1892 he had gained quite a lot of experience in preaching himself, including in Methodist services at Chudleigh and Dairy Plains. His diary records such activities as flooring a kitchen, making architraves, sifting lime for brick laying, installing windows, constructing a chimney, ploughing, and preaching a sermon on "David's dealings with Mephibosheth". Actively campaigning for Federation in 1899, by the following year his diary includes attendance at the Methodist Quarterly Meeting.

There is little in his diaries to suggest much official involvement by the Methodist Church in Clem Byard's preaching ministry, at least in its earliest stages. In 1914 he broke with the Methodists over a local dispute and joined a Church of Christ congregation. In spite of his change of affiliation, Clem's name was not removed from the Deloraine Quarterly meeting preaching plan until March 1917, at least in part for health reasons as he could no longer cope with the physical exertion of riding his bike around the circuit. Some of his Methodist theology came through many years later, when he declared in 1930 that "Salvation [was] not attained by baptism, but by faith and repentance". This declaration "brought down a storm" on him and he determined it would be his "last attempt" to convince his Church of Christ siblings to the Methodist viewpoint. He periodically preached in Methodist chapels even after his official status ended. This is how it must have been for many, especially in the remote districts and serves as a reminder that official reports and statistics do not tell the whole story of what must have been a good deal of 'unregulated' Methodist preaching.

Thomas Shadrach James was born to Muslim Indian parents, married a Yorta Yorta woman, was embraced by Aboriginal people, and served as a local preacher at the Cummeragunja Mission on the NSW side of the Murray River near Barmah, Victoria. Here he established a school and a dispensary and made a significant contribution to the education of a number of important Aboriginal activists. He preached the gospel to Aboriginal people and White settlers on both sides of the Murray and was often in trouble with government authorities because of his advocacy for the rights of Indigenous people. He died in 1946 at Shepparton and was buried in Cummeragunja cemetery. James modelled "primitive physick" in the spirit of early Methodism, caring for the whole person—body and soul—recommending the Saviour to all, regardless of their life circumstances.

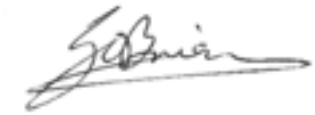
Many Methodist local preachers were women. Around half of those attending the Launceston Annual Council members meeting at Margaret Street Church in 1973 were women as were seven of the 24 local preachers in the Bendigo branch in 1974. Florence Salt was a local preacher for 42 years, at least 15 of those in Britain, before migrating to Australia in 1959. In 1971, she became the first woman to be elected state president and served two terms as 'chairman' of the Geelong branch before retiring at the end of 1975.

On the cusp of the merger that formed the Uniting Church, the General Statistical Returns in the 1976 Victoria and Tasmania Conference reported 880 local preachers, a slight increase of four from the previous year. The report of the Local Preachers' Committee in 1976 "indicated a keen desire on the part of members to continue in the service of the Church as preachers in the Uniting Church" (*Minutes*

of Conference, 1976) and reported sixty candidates entering for the local preacher examinations. All Methodist local preachers retained their credentials when they joined the UCA. This was particularly important to negotiate because the other two churches did not have the same local preaching tradition, although interestingly, the report noted that "several candidates have come from the other Uniting churches and one from outside the proposed union altogether".

The period I am surveying includes the last generation not to have 'grown up Uniting.' Our upcoming conference (details elsewhere in the newsletter) will focus on those for whom the Uniting Church has always been their spiritual home. The pre-1977 history of their church will be of interest to them, of course, but many of them continue in the lay preaching tradition and are making their own history as they continue to share the good news in congregations all over the country. The shortage of ministers in many presbyteries has meant that the lay preaching tradition is as strategic as ever in serving congregations. We are hoping to hear many more stories of lay preaching alongside other rich and diverse contributions to our Conference 11-13 June at the Centre for Theology and Ministry in Sydney and hope you can join us there or participate via Zoom.

Yours,



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

Yarns from Green's Plains... Some minor misadventures

(From the *Adelaide Register* - Saturday May 26,1923)

... The services were wonderfully well attended, the exception being to find any one missing. Local brethren usually officiated, with an occasional visit from a minister from one of the mining towns. There being no organ, nor even a piano to lead the singing, it was customary for some able bodied man in the congregation to start a tune, or as near as possible to something that might fit the hymn about to be operated on. The starter might, of course, hit it first try, or might be a few inches too high, or too much to one side, and before he could get back to the starting point some one else might have a shot at it.

Brother Billy Tammas, a well-rounded and somewhat aggressive-looking individual, with a fine boisterous-looking voice, by his own consent assumed the role of chief precentor and master of musical arts, and claimed the right of first try, in fact, of three tries; and if he failed to strike the right gauge, or to hit a tune that they could go on with, then, it would be time enough for some one else to have a go at it, but not before. With the view of adding a little more style, and maybe getting a better all-round start, Brother Tammas brought down a tuning fork, which he rapped smartly on a desk, and then applied swiftly to his ear, but it unfortunately happened to be the wrong ear, and of course he went off on the wrong tune; and next time went off before the fork did, and was wrong again, and at the third attempt jabbed the thing nearly up to the handle in his offside ear, and pit his tunes so badly mixed up that in disgust he threw the fork on the floor, where it bounced about for a time; and tried to start several tunes on its own account.

Some evenings later Brother Renfrey came along with a self-starting flute and a tune book, which he fixed up on a box, with a candle on one side and a glass of water on the other, and proposed with these appliances to give a lead to the singing. But through some mishap to its inner workings the flute missed fire twice, and then the performer put his top lip too far over the side of the blowhole, and missed again, and before he could reload Brother Tammas had got the tune going, and was looking sideways disdainfully at the unfortunate man with the flute. Even at its best, the new innovation could scarcely be called a pronounced success. *(Continued on page 13)*

Book Review

Spirit of the Mountains. Tributes in Honour of James Tulip, William W Emilsen and Laurence Woods (eds) (Lawson: Blue Mountain Research and Education Trust, 2020).

This small book is a collection of reflections on the life of James (Jim) Tulip, teacher, scholar, researcher, writer and friend to many. It focuses principally on the later period of Jim's life, the period of retirement, and most particularly of his time living with his second wife, Peggy Goldsmith, in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales (thus the title, *Spirit of the Mountains*). It is a collection of tributes from his friends. I suspect most of us come to recognise and treasure the place friends play in our lives—some met briefly and travelled with for a short while only, others through such long periods of our lives—and, in all that number and variety and depth, such richness. In this small volume there is a profound sense of that richness, of the value placed on friendship with this treasure of a man, and deep gratitude for simply having known him.

For all that connects these tributes they are, nevertheless, very varied in nature and style. So, for the reviewer it does pose a problem of how one might characterise or classify the volume as a whole.

For example, it is not a *festschrift*, although there are ample references to Jim's quietly distinguished career as a lecturer in the English Department and as the first chair of the new School of Religious Studies at the University of Sydney, and to the impact of that career upon students and colleagues alike. And throughout the collection, there is a recognition of the value of his scholarship and writing, and gratitude for the great many different ways in which that gift was so generously shared over a lifetime. Several pieces dwell solely on Jim's academic contribution. Garry Trompf's detailed chapter focuses not on Jim's varied contributions within the English Department but on his "role in fostering the study of religion at the University of Sydney". He regards Jim's involvement as a crucial link "between the closing of the Board of Studies in Divinity and the emergence of Studies of Religion as a departmental discipline within the Arts Faculty". Trompf's lively account provides an interesting historical context for Jim's notable achievements in the field of the study of religion in that institution, in particular his working to "free the study of religion from its long-term denominational and heavily Christian associations". For this history alone, this chapter is worth a careful read but it is also a fine testament to Jim's collaborative and respectful leadership style and his skills as a negotiator, of bringing others with him and of getting things done. A second celebration of the scholarly dimensions of Jim's life and work is Robbie Tulip's account of his father's doctoral thesis on that remarkable Shakespearian character, Richard the Third, the villain–hero. At the end of his account, Robbie returns to the observation Jim made at the beginning of his thesis, that "Richard is his own best expositor", and suggests there is a sad irony in the fact that his father, while entirely the opposite of a villain such as Richard, could nonetheless "have done with a keener focus on self-promotion", a skill a good many academics manage to exercise with a startling singlemindedness. A third contribution, while principally about Jim's life as an academic, dips in and out of the academic world. Paul Crittenden (former Dean of Arts at Sydney), like Trompf, traces Jim's contributions in helping develop the place of theology and religious studies in a secular university such as Sydney University, but he also sees his contribution as extending beyond the one university and beyond the academic world as such, to "intellectual life more generally in Australia". Indeed, Crittenden's excursions beyond the precincts of the university take him (and us) to the tennis court, with an engaging picture of Jim as a seemingly nonchalant but nevertheless deft tennis prayer, and into the inner workings of the intriguingly and beguilingly named Heretics Club. In the final section of his chapter, Crittenden returns to Sydney University and the changes and adjustments and ongoing restructurings that tested everyone through the 1990s and beyond, but where Jim Tulip's "benign guidance" sustained the growth of something of lasting value.

If this collection is not a conventional *festschrift*, nor is it simply a chronicle or memoir, although it is brimful of shared stories, shared experiences, endeavours, projects, and of the

joining together with others in "causes of social and moral importance". Joy Connor describes Jim Tulip as "a Renaissance man with a huge range of interests". She lists "public affairs, literature, music, the environment, theology, interfaith and ecumenical dialogue and the future of the church" and saw all of these diverse areas as "having benefitted from his enthusiasm and energy". Several accounts refer to Jim's involvement in the Blue Mountains Refugee Support group and note that, while a member of the Labor Party, he was always keen to ensure open discussion of critical policy issues and, in the run-up to an election, helped organise public meetings where all local candidates had an opportunity to present their party's platform. He supported initiatives with denominational groups and individuals beyond the Uniting Church and was a founding member of the Blue Mountains Interfaith Group.

Jim was "passionately in love with language", to borrow W.H. Auden's phrase. His great love of literature and especially of poetry shines through in various accounts. He valued its importance as food for the soul but also as nourishment of our life together. Several accounts recall with pleasure his teaching of poetry at Sydney University. Jane Buhler writes of "the sense of intellectual excitement" in the classes she attended and of Jim teaching you how to read poetry, how to be open to wider possibilities in interpretation, "rather than simply explicating an unfamiliar field of literature". Barry Spurr also singles out Jim's giftedness as a teacher of poetry. He writes of owing a deep sense of gratitude to Jim, a response he is "sure is true for numerous other students who enjoyed the privilege of attending his classes". Another former student, Yvonne Smith, also writes of his exceptional qualities as a teacher of poetry. She ends her chapter: "He was a scholar-teacher for life and for faith, for passion and intellect infusing each other to enrich what it means to be human".

David Malouf reflects on a longstanding friendship that stretches back to the mid 1950s when both were Junior Lecturers in the English Department at Queensland University. But that was not his first 'sighting' of Jim. He recounts how, in a Commemoration Day procession, Jim, then a 'fresher', was "being wheeled down Elizabeth Street (in Brisbane) in a barrow, from which he leapt as from a bathtub, every twenty yards or so, shouting 'Eureka', an image that has always seemed to me to be wonderfully evocative of the 'real' Jim, and which has stayed with me for more than sixty years". After a decade's break, the friendship was renewed in 1969 when Malouf, returning from living in the U.K, took up an appointment as Senior Tutor in the English Department of the University of Sydney where Jim was already an established Lecturer. Malouf pays tribute to both Jim's gifts as an English Literature teacher and critic to Jim's "consuming interest in the nature of the sacred and how to make a place for it in daily living". In writing of Jim Tulip's scholarship and teaching he names him as "one of the most influential teachers of his generation, a scholar of Renaissance and American Literature, and as a writer and critic (and as) a powerful voice in the changes that shaped Australian poetry in the late 1960s" and beyond.

One chapter, that by the poet, Noel Rowe (who died in 2007), is devoted to a poem written for Jim about our faltering, stumbling human attempts, in our busy, messy lives, to 'pin down', capture and name the nameless; about the profound necessity of that search for the nameless one, "Sometimes Known as God" (the title of the poem). Rowe's poem is mentioned in the moving tribute to Jim from Erin White (which rather fittingly forms the final chapter of the book). She refers to Rowe's use of language, of metaphor and symbol, which she describes as being "peculiarly Australian expressions of Christianity, of humanity" and of Jim sharing this peculiarity, of being 'at home' in the use of such language. William Emilsen, in his chapter entitled "The Prayers of Jim Tulip", also takes up this feature of Jim's writing and spirituality. The mainly liturgical prayers written for public worship in his local church, display this same imagery, this Australianness. Emilsen writes of worship "with an Australian accent" being especially important to Jim. He valued the distinctive commitment of the Uniting Church to being "an indigenous or Australian Church" and wrote of that church "learning to draw into our worship a sense of Australian space and sound and silence". Emilsen describes Jim's prayers as being "not only poetic and informative but also, and perhaps more importantly, as transformative". He describes Jim as an "adventurer of the Spirit" whose prayers

"opened people's lives to the mystery of God active in the Blue Mountains of Australia and the world today". In his prayers, writes Emilsen, Jim "with great imagination remembered the world", our own immediate world, "before God" and in so doing "made it possible for us to more willingly receive God in our everyday lives".

But to continue with my difficulty in pinning down just what kind of collected volume this might be said to be… If it cannot be described as *festschrift* or memoir or chronicle, nor can it be categorised as a collection of eulogies, although one tribute is actually named as a eulogy, that of Michael Griffith. Nevertheless, and not surprisingly, there is a eulogetic flavour to the collection as a whole, a summing up and celebration of a well lived life and gratitude for what that life has meant to so many. There are tributes from 'old' friends, some mentioned already but others such as Jean Gledhill, and Eugene Stockton both of whom celebrate a longstanding friendship; and from those who had only come to know Jim in this later period of his life, such as Lyn Phillips, director of the Leura Singers. Eugene Stockton traces his friendship from the 1970s when he was Catholic chaplain in the Newman Society at Sydney University and he and Jim were involved in nurturing ecumenical connections between the Newman Society and the Student Christian Movement. Like many others, Stockton describes Jim as "a dear, dear friend".

A number of pieces might be characterised as reflections that seek not simply to record aspects of Jim Tulip's character or of his many involvements but to prompt in the reader a more general reflection, aspects of Jim's life and character that we should underline and ponder further. I have mentioned several of these already or at least alluded to them. One is the value of the Arts in sustaining and enlarging our lives and, in Jim's case, of the place of poetry and the importance of nourishing a passion for this form of literature in a younger generation. How vital might that message be said to be right now! A second strand in this volume is that of encouraging in our worship, in our use of language in liturgy, an exploration of Australianness, of '"earning to draw into our worship a sense of Australian space and sound and silence". And a third is Jim's qualities as an 'encourager' and of the concept of spiritual encouragement. Several writers make mention of this quality. But it is the central focus of Carolyn Craig-Emilsen's thoughtful essay. We are invited to reflect on this fundamental quality of Jim in his relationships with others. Craig-Emilsen makes reference to other writers on this wonderful concept but also to friends who have experienced Jim's encouragement. They speak of attentiveness and of modesty. She quotes Joy Connor as speaking of Jim as someone for whom "hospitality and encouragement went hand in hand" and that "in the widest sense", this hospitality was enacted in his commitment to "social justice areas around the common good". I found myself drawn to this concept and reflected on how a much-used word such a 'empowerment', has become somewhat denuded of its original impact and oomph. Perhaps we need instead to explore the concept of 'encouragement' and the role of the 'encourager'. I can almost sense Jim's concern that we not over-use and deplete those fine concepts. As part and parcel of that role, Carolyn and Joy lay emphasis on Jim's qualities as a listener. Certainly that is something we could do with encouraging more widely, marking it as a virtue, something to be treasured in a person. And Jim's humility. No excess of that in contemporary society.

Perhaps it is of little consequence that this book is a difficult collection to classify. As I note it is a tribute to a man of so many parts—a Renaissance man—with so many friends who mourn his passing and wish to mark it in this way and give thanks for a well lived life. And its eclectic character makes for a particularly enjoyable and enticing read. It's a short book, but it is, nevertheless, a glorious 'grab bag' of different 'tributes' with different foci, pieces written with different intentions, in different styles by people who have known Jim in various different contexts. It would seem that the editors have given contributors an expansive brief, a freedom to write as they wished to. Further, they have chosen to order the contributions alphabetically, according to author's name, an unusual choice, no doubt but seemingly a most appropriate response to the sheer variety of pieces.

Finally, it is not unreasonable to ask of this book, of collections of this kind, what is the value of this kind of exercise for the general reader. What is its especial value to those who perhaps have not known Jim or not known him well, those outside the Uniting Church, outside any church? There will be different answers to this question, needless to say. Let me suggest one or two. Here is to be found history and story of a kind that, it might be argued, has not been widely recorded. One obvious example is the account of Jim's involvement in establishing and then serving as Head of the School of Religious Studies at Sydney University. What is especially noteworthy is that this enterprise represents and is based on an enlightened concept of the role of religious studies in a secular university, one that has been marked by an inclusive, questioning, open-minded, scholarly attention to an important dimension to human life, regardless of individual convictions in the matter. The second is that there is value always in ensuring we record the stories of those who have lived lives as full and constructive, as wise and generous as that of Dr James Tulip. Read and be enriched.

— Elizabeth Watson

Jesus in [1950s] Australia

Aiming to offer fresh perspectives on both religious and secular assumptions about Australia, this seminar on the figure of Jesus in the culture and theologies of 1950s Australia explores the communication of Christianity in that social context.

To be held at Pilgrim Theological College, 29 College Crescent, Parkville, Vic. 3052 from Friday 16 April to Saturday 17 April 2021.

Speakers include Prof. Em. Bill Ashcroft (UNSW), Prof. John Carroll (La Trobe), Prof. Mohamad Abdalla (UniSA), Dr Meredith Lake (ABC), Prof. Lynette McCredden (Deakin), Dr Paul Watt (Adelaide) and UD colleagues.

Contact Pilgrim Theological College for more details on (03) 9340 8800 and to register go to: https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/jesus-in-1950s-australia-tickets-145808407873

Writing a parish history

Ever thought you might try your hand at writing a parish history? Here's some hints.

Plan your history—as they used to say about writing an essay, work out what will be in the beginning, the middle, and the end. Try to identify a theme which will help to structure your writing.

Who will be your readers? Who is going to be interested in what you are writing about—so have them in mind.

Tell a story wherever possible. Facts and figures become tiresome very quickly, as does one list of members of the Church Council or the Ladies' Guild after another.

Keep in mind the **historical context of the events** about which you are writing. Keep in mind what was happening in the wider community, state, country, and world at the time. It helps to understand the attitudes and ideas of the time.

Historical accuracy is important. Do the research carefully, and check more than one source. Get someone else to read your work, not just to pick up spelling and grammatical errors, but factual errors as well.

Follow the rules!

- Anything quoted should be referenced correctly.
- Make sure that permission is obtained for any material that is copyrighted.
- Practise inclusive language and avoid any discriminatory language. Remember that history did not start in Australia in 1788! A local church site or family farm was the possession of another community of people for thousands of years before, particularly if you are writing about the days of colonisation of Australia.
- Be consistent with style—if publishing in a journal, you need to follow the style guide for that journal.

Congregationalism

Graham McAnalley

Let me begin with a quotation from Dr Erik Routley:

> Congregationalism is a covenanted order of Christians historically derived from the Puritan movement of the English Reformation. It is separated from the other Christian bodies at no point of credal belief, but only in that it holds the view that Christ rules in his Church not primarily through the Pope, or through the bishops, or through the clergy, but through the local congregations. Congregationalists hold the faith of the Holy Trinity and seek to work in the world in the closest cooperation with Christians of other denominations. It is only at the point of church government that they take a view not held by the majority of Christians. This view they share with the Baptists, but they differ from them in holding the doctrine of infant baptism, there being in agreement with the greater company of Christian churches.
>
> [Erik Routley, *The Story of Congregationalism* (London: Independent Press, 1961)]

History

In 1534 Henry VIII broke off relations with the papacy and the church in England became independent of the Roman church. This resulted in a reshaping of the Church of England, but there was no reforming of the Church of England as there had been of churches on the Continent. The sovereign replaced the pope as supreme head of the church. There were many in England who were far from satisfied with this degree of reformation; they wanted a church truly reformed. They wanted changes in the church, both in doctrine and in its government, which would bring it more into line with the reformed churches of Europe.

Under Elizabeth I the Church of England became more clearly reformed. She was content with the rather more modest title of Supreme Governor of the Church of England, but she proved to be just as determined as Henry to have her way in church as well as in state. Many churchmen in England remained dissatisfied with the extent of reformation in the English church and continued to agitate for further reformation. They were know as Puritans, but they were not all of the same mind. There were those who were prepared to remain within the Church of England and work for further reform; and there were those who felt that they could best witness to their convictions and press for the changes they desired by withdrawing from the established church. Among the latter were the first Congregationalists, known at the time as Independents, and sometimes Brownists.

These Independents established congregations on what they believed to be the New Testament model of a church. Membership was confined to genuine believers, whose way of life matched their Christian profession. These members were united by a solemn covenant with God and with each other, in which they acknowledged Christ as sole head of the church and committed themselves to seeking his will expressed through the members gathered together in Church Meeting. They gathered in Church Meeting, not to express their own opinions or even to seek a common mind among themselves, but to seek to know the mind of Christ for their life as a community of disciples. They denied the right of the Crown to interfere in matters of faith and church order; they argued that the church should reform itself without waiting for action by Queen or Parliament—"reformation without tarrying for anie" was the cry of Robert Browne, one of the first to enunciate Congregational principles. The earliest record of any such church dates back to 1567 when a company of devout persons met at Plumbers' Hall London, under the pastoral care of one Richard Fitz. This separatist congregation was more a precursor of Congregationalism than an expression of classic Congregationalism which we find in the 17th century churches established on Congregational or Independent principles.

Separatists, rejecting the sovereign as supreme head of the church, became liable to the fearful penalties for high treason. Many became martyrs.

Many Separatists sought refuge from persecution on the Continent. Some fled to Holland, establishing themselves firstly at Amsterdam and later at Leyden. Under James I, the number of exiles multiplied. In 1620 many of the Leyden congregation, concerned that their young people might lose their 'Englishness' in a foreign

country, somehow persuaded James I to grant them a charter for the establishment of a colony in America. They set sail in the *Mayflower* and landed in what they called New England. They found themselves in a tract of land bearing the Indian name Massachusetts. There they built a town which they called Boston.

It is interesting to observe that only sixteen years later in 1636, believing that the first requirement for the preservation of a good society was a learned ministry, that these early settlers founded the University of Harvard.

Congregationalism arrived in Australia in 1810 when William Pascoe Crook and a few friends met together in a school room in Sydney and celebrated the Lord's Supper according to the Congregational tradition. Crook had been a missionary in the Marquesas Islands with the London Missionary Society. These Congregationalists, however, were prevented from establishing a church by the colonial chaplain. It was 1833 before the first church fellowship was established in Pitt Street Sydney.

The first Congregational church in Australia was formed a year earlier, in 1832, in Hobart. This church resulted from the efforts of a very devout layman, Henry Hopkins, and his wife who had arrived in the colony in 1822 and had been distressed by the state of church life in the colony. Hopkins also took the initiative in establishing Congregationalism in Victoria, by appealing to the Colonial Missionary Society to send out a minister to Melbourne. The Rev. William Waterfield arrived in May 1838 and the first Collins Street Independent Church was opened on New Year's Day in 1841.

Congregational faith and order

The classic statement of Congregational doctrine and church order is the Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order. It dates from 1658 and is in two parts. The first is a confession of faith and is really a revision of the Presbyterians' Westminster Confession of Faith. There were five leading Independents at the Westminster Assembly which drew up the Westminster Confession of Faith. Although they argued very strongly for some emphases and convictions, they didn't carry the day at every point and so, some eleven years later, a group of Independents came together at the Savoy Palace in London to revise the Westminster Confession of Faith. A host of minor and relatively insignificant changes were made, but at five points the Westminster Confession was substantially amended. One deals with the role of the civil magistrate in relation to the church; another is a revision of the chapter on repentance; the third is an addition on the gospel and the extent of its grace; and then two chapters of the Westminster Confession are deleted – the chapters on church censures, and synods and councils. These subjects are dealt with in the Declaration of Order. The second part of the Savoy Declaration is much briefer and deals with the institution and order of churches.

Belief

It was the proud boast of Congregationalism that it had no distinctive Congregational theology; that it stood within the mainstream of historic Christianity. John Owen, probably the greatest of the 17th century Congregational theologians, wrote of the Dissenters around the time of the Great Ejectment of 1662:

> They are such as believe and make open confession of all the articles of the Christian faith; they do so as they are declared in the Scripture; nor is the contrary charged on them. There is nothing determined by the ancient councils to belong unto Christian faith which they disbelieve; nor do they own any doctrine condemned by them. They express an equal interest of consent in the harmony of Protestant confessions with any other Protestants whatever. They own the doctrine of the Church of England as established by law, in nothing receding from it; nor have they any novel or uncatholic opinion of their own. [Quoted in Routley]

A distinguishing characteristic of Congregationalism, however, was its refusal to impose any creed or confession as a test or condition of membership. It maintained that no human statement could do full justice of the truths of the eternal gospel. That gospel is greater than any human words which seek to describe it. Nevertheless, through the centuries Congregationalists issued many statements of faith; they were statements of what was commonly believed amongst them, not statement to which one must subscribe to be a Congregationalist.

Congregationalists seldom recited their faith in worship, but they certainly sang it. One can discern the strong biblical faith which nourished them through the centuries in the hymns they sang, such as those by Isaac Watts and Philip Doddridge, to name but two of the many hymn writers.

The history of the church, and the story of Congregationalism within it, has amply demonstrated that the imposition of credal texts does not guarantee doctrinal orthodoxy, and that the refusal to impose credal tests does not inevitably lead to heresy.

Polity

The distinctive witness of Congregationalism was its understanding of the nature of the church. That understanding rested on four basic convictions:

1. Christ, and Christ alone, is Head of the church.
2. The church is composed only of professing and practising Christians, and their infant children.
3. Christ is really present in his church—the acts of church bodies, duly constituted, were recognised as the acts of Christ himself.
4. Every member of the church has a personal responsibility for maintaining the authority of Christ in the church.

Traditionally, Congregationalists used the word 'church' in only two senses: to mean the one universal church of Jesus Christ (the whole company of Christian believers, past and present), and to mean the local Christian community which gathers for worship. A Congregational or Independent church was constituted in a very definite way. Dr Nathaniel Micklem puts it very succinctly:

> It was constituted religiously by the faithful preaching of the Word, by the due celebration of the sacraments, and by the exercise of Gospel discipline. It was constituted ecclesiastically by the offices of minister, elders and deacons, and by the gathering of the whole fellowship in church meeting. The churches were possessed by the grace of God all the gifts and all the organs necessary to the church's life.
>
> [Nathaniel Micklem, *Congregationalism and the Church Catholic*, (London: Independent Press, 1943)]

That was the basic understanding of the church to which Congregationalists subscribed. The local church was recognised as an outcrop or a local manifestation of the one universal church of Jesus Christ. In more recent times the functions of elder and deacon were usually combined in the one office of deacon. The deacon was a layman or laywoman called by their fellow church members to share pastoral oversight with the minister and to provide guidance and leadership for the church meeting. That, as has been noted earlier, was the gathering of all communicant members of the church meeting to talk together in an atmosphere of prayer about the life and work of the church, and to seek together the mind of Christ upon their life together.

It has to be acknowledged that a major weakness of Congregationalism was that it never really thought through the meaning of the gospel for church order and structure beyond the level of the local congregation. That may have been due, at least in part, to the historical circumstances in which Congregational churches were first established.

The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order did speak of the necessity of church synods. Local Independent churches were to come together in wider councils, not only for mutual advice and assistance, but also as an expression of unity in Christ and as a means of maintaining the local churches in obedience to the gospel. This was what no doubt led in time to the establishment of Congregational Unions, but these Unions were always seen as voluntary associations of independent and autonomous churches, the Unions only having as much authority as the local churches were willing to delegate to them. The Unions were largely expediency structures, set up to enable local independent churches to do together what they could not do separately, such as theological education, home and overseas missions, provision of social services, and so on. Congregationalists were always ready to acknowledge the authority of Christ mediated through the local Church Meeting; they were generally unwilling or very reluctant to

acknowledge that the same authority of Christ might also be mediated through assemblies and councils of their churches.

Some other characteristics of Congregationalism

The first is best described, I think, as *openness* – openness to what others may have to say and give to us, openness to the future, openness to encounter with and embrace of new truths and insights. It is best characterised perhaps by words which were spoken by Pastor John Robinson as he farewelled some of the Pilgrim Fathers, his own church members, as they set sail from Holland for America: "The Lord has more truth and light yet to break forth out of his holy Word".

Perhaps it was this openness which allowed Congregationalists to ordain women so long before most other denominations—77 years in Australia. Perhaps it was that openness that made Congregationalists unwilling to impose credal tests on their members and ministers, while still remaining within the mainstream of Christian orthodoxy. Perhaps it was this openness that put Congregationalists in the forefront of ecumenical endeavour, of modern biblical scholarship, and in many areas of public life—exercising an influence out of all proportion to their numerical strength. Perhaps it was this openness that allowed the London Missionary Society to declare that the churches founded as a result of its missionary endeavours must be free to choose the form of church government which seemed right to them in their circumstances. Few denominations have been more ready to lose their own identity in the search for a fuller unity and mission.

The second is *consensus decision-making*. Congregationalists did not discern the mind of Christ in narrow majorities; they discerned the mind of Christ when there was general agreement among them. They were fond of quoting from the Council of Jerusalem, "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us…." (Acts 15:28) I remember talking about decision-making by consensus to a couple of colleagues in the Joint Planning Committee prior to the creation of the Uniting Church. They were from one of our other traditions, and I was told bluntly that such decision-making would not work. I am interested —and pleased—that the Uniting Church has now adopted a form of consensus decision-making, and, as far as I am aware, the proposal did not have its origin among former Congregationalists.

The third feature is the *relationship of the Church Meeting to the minister*. I refer to this because, in some denominations which have a 'congregational' form of government in recent times at least, there has developed an understanding and practice which treats the minister as the employee of the congregation. It has sometimes degenerated into a 'hire and fire' mentality on the part of the congregation, or its governing council, with respect to the ministry. This was never so among Congregationalists. The autonomy of the local church was wedded to a very high doctrine of the ordained ministry. Neither a Church Meeting nor a Diaconate would ever have thought that it had the authority to dismiss a minister because it did not like the way he or she exercised ministry, nor would they have tried to direct a minister in his or her exercise of ministry.

And the fourth feature is *church law*. In preparing this paper, I was at one stage thinking about the difference between life in Congregationalism and in the Uniting Church as I have known it, and I immediately thought of the Uniting Church regulations. A volume like the Uniting Church's *Constitution and Regulations* would have seemed very out of place in Congregationalism. Each congregation and Congregational Union had its own constitution and rules, but they were very slim documents indeed; there was none of the very detailed regulations that we have become accustomed to in the Uniting Church. Congregations were left very largely to "work out their own salvation" in terms of ordering their church life. Freedom to order the church's life in the light of the gospel and the needs of the day was something highly prized by Congregationalists.

The contribution of Congregationalism to the Uniting Church

The first and most obvious contribution is the *understanding of the nature of the congregation*. Paragraph 15 of the Basis of Union gives expression to it:

> The Congregation is the embodiment in one place of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping, witnessing

> and serving as a fellowship of the Spirit in Christ.

That is pure Congregationalism. The local church is the outcrop of the one universal church of Christ which transcends all boundaries of time and space. The paragraph goes on to say:

> Its members meet regularly to hear God's Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to build one another up in love, to share in the wider responsibilities of the Church, and to serve the world.

The provision for the members of the congregation to "meet regularly… to share in the wider responsibilities of the Church, and to service the world" reflects the Congregational Church Meeting for, while Church Meetings were not perfect, rightly understood that is what they were about. The Congregational Church Meeting was not primarily a business meeting, nor a forum for members to press their ideas upon others, nor an instrument of majority rule. It was a gathering of members to share their deepest spiritual concerns and seek the guidance of the Spirit in all matters relating to the congregation's life and its witness in the world.

The second specific Congregational contribution is that *openness to new truths and insights* to which I referred earlier. We find it given expression in paragraph 11 of the Basis of Union, which reads in part:

> The Uniting Church acknowledges that God has never left his Church without faithful and scholarly interpreters of Scripture, or without those who have reflected deeply upon, and acted trustingly in obedience to, his living Word. In particular she enters into the inheritance of literary, historical and scientific enquiry which has characterised recent centuries, and thanks God for the knowledge of his ways with men which are open to an informed faith. She lives within a world-wide fellowship of Churches in which she will learn to sharpen her understanding of the will and purpose of God by contact with contemporary thought…. She prays that she may be ready when occasion demands to confess her Lord in fresh words and deeds.

This paragraph, which reflects Pastor John Robinson's words to the Pilgrim Fathers about the Lord having "more truth and light yet to break forth out of his holy Word", owes its place in the Basis of Union to the insistence of one Congregational layman on the Joint Commission for Church Union. It's a paragraph that doesn't always receive the attention it deserves.

The third specific contribution, I believe, was the *churchmanship of the lay persons* coming into the Uniting Church. That churchmanship was nurtured in Congregationalism's understanding of the privileges and responsibilities of church membership. Historically, no group of Christians had stressed more than Congregationalists the responsibility of every member of the church to profess openly and to practise faithfully Christian discipleship, and to share in the government of the church and the direction of his mission. Congregational lay persons, women as much as men, though not great in number, brought with them an experience of church life in which lay persons played a very significant role, not by virtue of any office they held, but simply as members of a local congregation. Their commitment and experience has enriched the life of Uniting Church congregations and councils in many places.

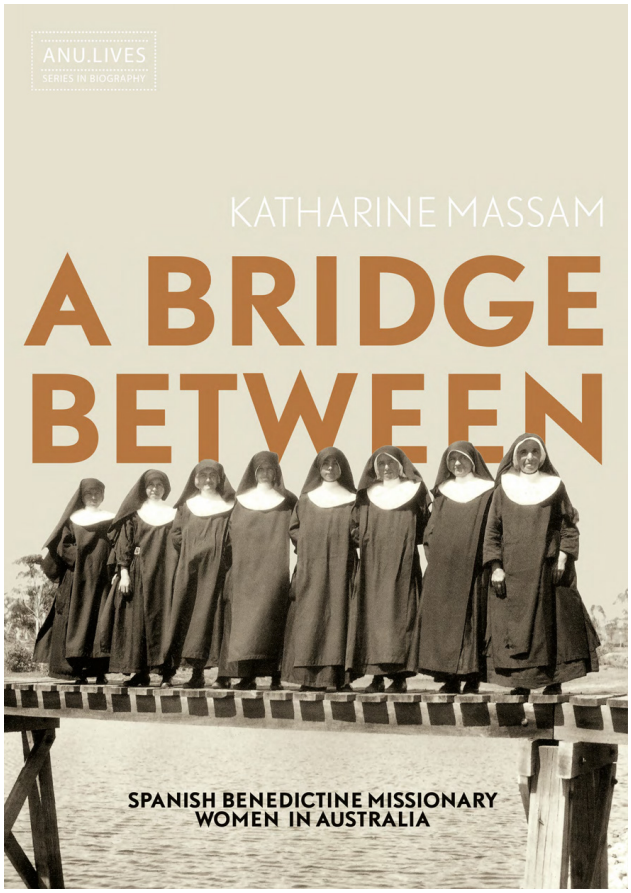
The Uniting Church in Australia would have been much poorer without the contribution that Congregationalism has brought to it.

[This is an edited extract from *The Proceedings of the Uniting Church Historical Society, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania*, Vol. 11, No. 1, June 2004. Reproduced with permission.]

"Prayer is no longer allowed in churches because it discriminates against non-believers."

BOOK NOTICE

Katharine Massam, *A Bridge Between: Spanish Benedictine Missionary Women in Australia,* (Acton, ACT: ANU Press, 2020), xix + 390 pp.



Associate Professor Katharine Massam is Coordinator of Studies in History at the Uniting Church's Pilgrim Theological College, within the University of Divinity. In her scholarly work she has drawn on oral histories, art, and literature, influenced especially by postcolonial and feminist analysis. Since 1993, she has been closely associated with the Aboriginal Corporation of New Norcia, Western Australia and its Benedictine communities. This association has led to exhibitions, conferences and liturgical events as well as a number of publications, most significantly this impressive history of the Spanish Missionary Women of New Norcia. The book is generously illustrated with maps, as well as black and white and coloured photographs. It is deeply spiritual in its approach to memory and offers many valuable theological insights.

This carefully researched history allows the women involved to speak for themselves, telling their own stories in ways that are at times confronting but always insightful. It does not shy away from the impact of dispossession on Aboriginal people. At the same time, it provides a sympathetic and affectionate portrait of the meaningful relationships established by the participants. The structure of the book begins with a 2001 reunion and the various commemorations that took place at that time before returning to the origins of the Company of Sister Teresa of Jesus (1904–1910), the establishment of St Joseph's Native School and Orphanage, the fresh recruiting period in the late 1940s, the establishing of a branch house at Bindoon in 1948, and the tracing of the "winding together" and "spinning apart" that eventually led to the closing of New Norcia in 1975. The account is brought full circle as we return to the 2001 reunion and a moving liturgy of reconciliation that speaks of the power of truth telling. This is not a triumphalist history, and as the author makes clear, that was not what the sisters wanted. Instead it is a sensitive and imaginative account of a community's experience that opens a space for hope, celebration and healing. (Glen O'Brien)

The book is available through ANU Press here https://press.anu.edu.au/publications/series/anu-lives-series-biography/bridge-between

(From page 3)

Sometimes it would work all right for a spell, but more times it would not, and one evening, after a series of brilliant discords, the exasperated flautist placed his mouth all over the mouthpiece, closed his eyes and bulging his cheeks to their utmost holding capacity, blew a terrific blast into the windpipe of the instrument with such telling effect that a tight wad of paper shot out of its southern end with a startling report, which snuffed out the candle and badly scared a couple of two year-old children that were not expecting anything like that. Later on Green's Plains had a new church and a new organ, and a splendid choir…

(From the Uniting History SA December 2020 newsletter, p. 5. Reproduced with permission.)

Thomas James: lay preacher

Glen O'Brien and several others are currently preparing a history of lay preaching in Victoria and Tasmania, and in his research Glen came across the story of Thomas Shadrach James.

Thomas Shadrach James (1859–1946) led a fascinating life, crossing many boundaries. Born to Muslim Indian parents who migrated to Mauritius in East Africa, he travelled to Tasmania, then Victoria, married a Yorta Yorta woman, was embraced by Aboriginal people, and as a Methodist Local Preacher served Aboriginal and White communities motivated by love and compassion.

Soon after his arrival in Tasmania he contracted typhoid fever and was cared for by Aboriginal people who treated him with traditional medicine. After coming into contact with the Cornish missionary Daniel Williams during a revival service in Brighton in 1881, James accepted the invitation to volunteer as a schoolteacher at the Maloga Aboriginal School in NSW, which Williams ran as a strict disciplinarian. In 1888, he moved to Cummeragunja Mission in Yorta Yorta country on the NSW side of the Murray River near Barmah, Victoria, where the residents of Maloga, eager to get away from Williams's strict regime had relocated. Here he established a school and a dispensary and made a significant contribution to the education of a number of important Aboriginal activists, including his wife, Ada Bethel Campbell, brother-in-law William Cooper, nephew Sir Doug Nicholls, and Eric and William Onus, who in 1946, would reform the Australian Aborigines' League.

Not restricting his activity to the Mission, James preached the gospel to Aboriginal people and White settlers on both the NSW and Victorian sides of the Murray River and was often in trouble with government authorities because of his advocacy for the rights of Indigenous people. In 1922 he moved to Barmah, then Melbourne, where he set up a herbalism and massage business in North Fitzroy, treating arthritis patients.

James died in 1946 at Shepparton and was buried in Cummeragunja cemetery. His son Shadrach Livingstone James (1890-1956) followed his father's example and became a teacher and Aboriginal activist, though the government sought to discredit his role by claiming he was not Aboriginal since his father was of Indian heritage and his mother a 'half-caste.' Thomas Shadrach James modelled 'primitive physick' in the spirit of early Methodism, caring for the whole person—body and soul—recommending the Saviour to all, regardless of their life circumstances.

A note from the treasurer

A very big thank you to those who have already renewed their membership for 2021 and in a few cases beyond!

A reminder that membership fees have been set at $25 as from 1 January 2021.

If you are sending a cheque please write the society name in full on the cheque "Uniting Church National History Society" This is a request from my friendly bank teller. Post to The Treasurer PO Box 2 Wentworth Falls NSW 2782.

A reminder about bank transfer details

BSB: 032-828

ACCOUNT NO.: 301985

ACCOUNT NAME: Uniting Church National History Society.

Don't forget to put your own name on the transfer so we know you have paid!

Uniting Church National History Society Newsletter
Contributions to this newsletter are welcome, but please send them via email and in MS Word or Apple Pages format only.
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