

# Finding a Home in the Uniting Church

The Proceedings of the Second Uniting Church National  
History Conference  
June 7–10 2019

The Centre for Theology and Ministry  
Parkville  
Victoria

Uniting Church National History Society

*Published by:*

Uniting Church National History Society  
PO Box 5064 Hoppers Crossing, Victoria 3029

*Edited by:*

Robert W. Renton

*Printed and bound by:*

Corporate Printers  
141–143 Moray Street, South Melbourne, Victoria 3205

*First edition February 2020*

National Library of Australia

Catalogue in Publication

Editor: Renton, Robert, 1946—

Uniting Church National History Society

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ISBN 978-0-9807168-6-3

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# Contents

Contents .....	2
Introduction .....	4
John Westerman: a new beginning or the beginning of the end? .....	7
Tasmanian treasures: three holy tables in the Scots tradition.....	18
The Methodist Sunday School Movement .....	33
The Forgotten Women .....	46
A Home in the Uniting Church?.....	57
The Ministry of Lay Preacher .....	81
Serena Thorne Lake.....	115
Religious History for a Secular Age.....	123
Continuing Influence of Denominational Legacies in South Australia .....	152
Rev. James W Crisp: Convict's son to venerable patriarch of the Methodist Church .....	175
The Uniting Church and Christian Unity .....	187
Stories of Lost and Found: Finding a home in Australian children's religious fiction .....	200
'Learning and living the faith' - a South Australian story of lay education and lay ministry training.....	215
Who was Harvey Perkins and why was he important? .....	232
'Seeing the clouds through the aperture of the helmet': reading Ned Kelly's life as a Christian life .....	256
After the bombing of Darwin... what? Peace and reconciliation find a home in Darwin Uniting Church .....	272
Significant local church anniversaries as pastoral care and evangelism: the endurance of St Paul's Uniting Church, Mackay, over 150 years from 1872 to 2022 .....	285

Finding a (new) home in the Uniting Church .....	295
“Instructions for knitting pattern for an octopus”: a view of changes and challenges experienced by Uniting World since 1977.....	311
Managing the news? Two editors, Warren Clarnette and Bruce Best .....	322
Theophilus Taylor and the beginnings of Methodism in Ballaarat.....	332
Notes on contributors .....	344

# Introduction

Glen O'Brien

President, Uniting Church National History Society

What does it mean to belong to the Uniting Church? Many grew up Congregationalist, Methodist or Presbyterian; others have grown up in the Uniting Church after 1977 without knowing the precedent bodies. Some have only ever known the Uniting Church as their spiritual home and others have transferred in from other denominations. What gifts have they brought into the Uniting Church and what gifts have they received? What does it mean to 'find a home' in a church that describes itself as 'Evangelical and Reformed' and is at the same time committed to theological diversity? These were some of the questions explored during the Second Uniting Church National History Conference, held at the Centre for Theology and Ministry in Melbourne from 7–10 June 2019.

Participants were treated to three keynote address by outstanding historians and a range of interesting elective papers. Dr Meredith Lake, the host of ABC Radio National's "Soul Search" programme, Honorary Associate of the Department of History, Sydney University, and author of the award-winning book, *The Bible in Australia: A Cultural History* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2018) got us off to a great start with her fascinating discussion of the role the Bible has played in Australia's history. Dr Lake showed that for a secular country, the language of the Bible has made remarkable inroads into the national psyche. In the second keynote address 'Intimate Enemies?: Missions, Governments and Aboriginal People in Australia, 1850–1970,'

Dr Joanna Cruickshank, Senior Lecturer in History at Deakin University, discussed how and why the unusually intimate relationship between missions and governments developed and what it meant for Aboriginal people. The third and final keynote was delivered as a public lecture by Professor Graeme Davison, Emeritus Sir John Monash Distinguished Professor of History at Monash University. Professor Davison asked what the point was of writing religious history in an age when the ‘conditions of belief’ have radically changed. In a post-Christian era, what might a history of Australian religion look like when written from the margins, rather than from the inside? Unfortunately, it has only been possible to publish the last of these keynotes in this present volume but each in their own way offered masterful explorations that raised broad issues of Australian religious history, under the generous canopy of which our more UCA-specific papers comfortably sat.

The papers collected here show a rich diversity of experiences of finding a home in the Uniting Church. There are Congregationalist stories, Methodist stories, and Presbyterian stories. Wowsers and radicals, lay preachers, editors, evangelists, revivalists, ecumenists, pacifists, novelists, Korean Christians, Japanese Christians, women, children, and men, queer people and straight people have all been part of the same family, and have sat together around Communion tables and in Sunday School classes. Tasmanians, South Australians, Victorians, Northern Territorians, Queenslanders, and Uniting World partners from Asia and the Pacific demonstrate a genuinely national and international scope. ‘Switchers’ that have enriched the UCA have included Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics and just plain ‘Christians.’ To borrow from Margaret Reeson, the human ecology of the UCA looks a little like ‘a

knitting pattern for an octopus'! As in every home there is tension and disagreement, and these are not hidden from view here. Taken together, this collection of papers demonstrate that the history and heritage of the Uniting Church in Australia continue to engage and provoke serious thought. It is a collection that looks back with keen insight but also demonstrates hope for the future of the People of God on the way.

# John Westerman: a new beginning or the beginning of the end?

Ken Barelli

## Synopsis

John Westerman was likely the most controversial figure in the last decades of the Methodist Church in Australia. Almost single-handedly, he attempted a makeover of Methodism's wowser image and tried to align its social policies more with his perception of community concerns.

A commitment to social action was always a key element of Methodism. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this manifested itself in campaigns against alcohol and gambling among many others. Westerman, in the 1960s, thought it was time to leave these social issues behind and, as there is no record of any commitment to retain Methodism's social activism during the discussions for the formation of the UCA, perhaps he was right. Instead, he actively gave priority to international aid and support for the peace movements. Westerman caused deep divisions among Methodists and exemplified the disconnection between the Church's leaders and its members.

In this paper I will interrogate these two contrasting opinions of Westerman to ask if he was at the leading edge of a new direction for the Church or was he just pulling the rug from under Methodism's long tradition of concern for social policy outcomes?



The Victorian Rev. John Westerman was a controversial figure in the Methodist Church in the last few decades of its



existence in Australia. To some, he was the harbinger of a progressive church but, to others, careless, if not reckless, in his oversight of the Methodist tradition of social action. These two near contemporary descriptions highlight the difficulty in assessing his contribution:

“John Westerman was conspicuous in his demonstration of intellectual and moral integrity, a rare occurrence of which a community can be proud”. P.D. Phillips, Royal Commissioner.<sup>1</sup>

“John Westerman has negated all the past witness of the [Methodist] Church for social righteousness and put little or nothing in its place”. Rev. Alan Walker<sup>2</sup>

These relate to his appearance at the 1964 Victorian Royal Commission into Hotel Trading Hours. Its recommendations saw the end of six o'clock closing which had been almost an 'article of faith' in Methodism's 100-year-old policy of unswerving hostility to alcohol. Westerman's testimony was extensively quoted by the Commissioner in support of his findings although this was overlooked by the daily press and the Methodist weekly, *The Spectator*.

In this paper I will interrogate these two contrasting opinions of Westerman to ask if he was at the leading edge of a new direction for the Church or was he just pulling the rug from under Methodism's long tradition of concern for social policy outcomes?

Westerman was born in Wonthaggi in 1914. His father was a coal miner and we can guess that his living circumstances were

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<sup>1</sup> PD Phillips Report of Royal Commission into Sale, Supply, Disposal or Consumption of Liquor in the State of Victoria, Part I Social Consequences of the Use and Consumption of Alcohol, 1964-5, 12

<sup>2</sup> Alan Walker, *The Age* 22 April 1964, 3

‘humble’.<sup>1</sup> Wonthaggi at the time was a centre of industrial unrest and the miners were much influenced by the union leader and communist, Idris Williams.<sup>2</sup> It seems likely that Westerman’s abiding interest in social justice was inculcated in his formative years.

Westerman went to the local state and technical schools and on deciding to offer for the ministry, had to resume his education to matriculate. In 1941 he then completed a B.A. with honours at the University of Melbourne and his theological studies in Queen’s College. At Queen’s, he won a gold medal for debating, a skill he used with great effect at the Methodist Conference and in the cause of social justice.<sup>3</sup>

Even at Queen’s he courted controversy. In 1940, as a student, he wrote two pieces for *The Spectator*. The large majority of church members, he said, while familiar with the idea of Christianity, had no concept of what the church could do for the world. Another large group affirmed the teachings of Christ but had become complacent, abandoning real hope and effort. Only a minority, with a deep and appreciative familiarity with the Church, had steadfast idealism and unshakeable faith. The average member’s faith was based on ‘plain common sense’ which was not enough. It was the role of theological students to seek the truth, consistently, relentlessly and honestly and no matter how it conflicted with preconceived tradition. The future of the church depended on this engagement with the truth.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Obituary*, 19<sup>th</sup> Uniting Church in Australia Victorian Synod Minutes, AA4.13.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Reeves, *Up from the Underworld, Coalminers and Community in Wonthaggi 1909–1968* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2011), 27–30.

<sup>3</sup> *Obituary*, 19<sup>th</sup> Uniting Church in Australia Victorian Synod Minutes, AA4.13.

<sup>4</sup> *The Spectator*, 31 July 1940, 585; 23 April 1941, 248.

His articles provoked a flurry of correspondence. The correspondents argued that the Church did not need to be led by highly polished intellectuals even if they had a Christian bias. It needed inspirational leaders to impart a personal experience of God's salvation. A passionate devotion to Christ was paramount. Characteristically, Westerman replied, with no sense of contrition, that 'throbbing sentiment' had had its day. Intellectual content was essential. The editor closed the correspondence. It seems, right from the beginning of his ministry, Westerman was seeking to break the mould and remake the Church, single-handedly if necessary.<sup>1</sup>

In 1942, he was stationed in Burnie then, in 1943, Deloraine where he was ordained in 1944. In 1946 he went to Geelong West before, in 1949, undertaking post-graduate studies in Edinburgh. On his return in 1952, he was stationed in the Gippsland town of Korumburra. While there, he attended the World Peace Council in Budapest in 1953 in the company of Tasmanian Senator Bill Morrow. Morrow had just resigned from the Labor Party due to his communist leanings. ASIO described Morrow as 'a most dangerous man' and he was the regular target of government attacks in Parliament.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding, Westerman and Morrow travelled to Hungary via China at the invitation of the Chinese Peace Committee.<sup>3</sup> The government actively discouraged such visits, so it was controversial to say the least. None of this activity was reported in *The Spectator* so it seems unlikely that Westerman's

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<sup>1</sup> *The Spectator*, 31 July 1940, 585; 23 April 1941, 248; 21 May 1941, 321; 11 June 1941, 373.

<sup>2</sup> Audrey Johnson, "Morrow, William (1888-1980)," *The Biographical Dictionary of the Australian Senate*, <http://biography.senate.gov.au/morrow-william> [6 January 2018]

<sup>3</sup> Senator and Churchman for Peace Meeting", *Tribune*, 27 May 1953, 3.

involvement had the Church's encouragement. It was too much for the church in Korumburra as he was not invited to stay. It is impossible to know if it was the nature of the activity itself or simply his absence from duty that prompted their decision. They may have taken a dim view of Westerman's distraction from the immediate work of the local church.<sup>1</sup> Given that he was a local man, the decision would not have been easy. In 1954, he was sent to the Prahran Mission where, uncharacteristically, he seems to have kept his head down until taking over the Directorship of the Department of Christian Citizenship from Rev. H. Palmer Phillips in 1958.

So, after only 14 years as a minister, and just seven years in Circuit ministry, John Westerman became the third Director of the Conference Department, a senior position in the Church. His predecessor had been a minister for 30 years when appointed and Rev. George Judkins before him, 29 years. This was a perhaps surprising expression of faith in his abilities to manage the most public role, that of prosecuting the Church's many causes of social concern. While many in Conference relied on emotion in their argument, Westerman did not. He was known for his intellect and debating skills, and this may have encouraged Conference to make the appointment. Cool logic was his approach and he didn't suffer fools too gladly. Some called him 'blunt' and he expected others to follow his lead.<sup>2</sup>

Phillips, in his retiring address, had nominated drink and gambling as the most important issues for the Church but Westerman had them well down his list. He wrote an article for *The Spectator* outlining his new priorities for the Department.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview Rev. Prof. Norman Young 24 May 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Interviews Rev. Dr H. D'A. Wood 26 July 2017; Rev. Dr R. Gallacher 4 May 2017; Rev. Kerrie Graham 5 April 2017.

International affairs and industrial relationships came first then marriage guidance, juvenile delinquency, aged care, mental health, housing and unemployment—all before liquor and gambling.<sup>1</sup> The Church needed to change—it had to abandon its negative attitudes and be positive instead.<sup>2</sup> It is not known if this revised approach was of interest or concern as there was no correspondence on the matter.

Westerman did not have to wait very long to put his new policy into practice. In 1958, the Bolte Government announced a Royal Commission into off-the-course betting. Gambling was one of Methodism's signature issues dating at least from the time of John Wren. Various governments had floated the idea of off-the-course betting but had bowed to Methodist-led public pressure. Westerman appeared at the Commission on behalf of the Victorian Council of Churches. As none of the other Protestant churches had a full-time social questions spokesman, the Methodist Director was almost the *de facto* leader of them all. He outlined the case against gambling and any expansion of it. However, at the end, he said that if the Commissioner could not see any way of policing illegal gambling, perhaps some limited form of legalised betting would be preferable. This was the green light. The Commission recommended the establishment of the totalisator which the Government took up immediately. Westerman had to defend his position in *The Spectator* given the surprise of his concession but the reaction was mild.<sup>3</sup>

In 1960, the Government turned its attention to licensing. An attempt to overturn six o'clock closing in 1956 had been

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<sup>1</sup> *The Spectator*, 30 April 1958, 7.

<sup>2</sup> *The Spectator*, 10 September 1958, 4.

<sup>3</sup> *The Spectator*, 15 October 1958, 1.

unsuccessful when 60% of voters voted for its retention but the ‘reformers’ had not given up. In 1960, Judge Fraser of the Licensing Court was sent on an overseas study tour to report on drinking conditions. Fraser famously reported that compared to overseas, drinking conditions in Victoria, especially the six-o’clock swill, were ‘deplorable’. He recommended, among many other things, an extension of trading hours to ten o’clock. Premier Bolte thought that popular opinion was still not in favour and shelved that recommendation but enacted the rest including the provision of allowing alcohol with meals until ten o’clock. The legislation had been unceremoniously forced through Parliament and Westerman’s reaction, reported in *The Spectator*, was mild. He seemed more concerned about the compromised parliamentary process than the outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the government noted Westerman’s muted response and thought the Methodists were softening their position. In 1963, a Royal Commission into trading hours was established and Westerman was the spokesman for the Victorian Protestant Churches and the Victorian Temperance Alliance. Previously, the Temperance bodies had thought it wise to have Counsel to represent them, but Westerman decided to do it himself. P.D. Phillips, one of the ‘most lively wigs at the Victorian Bar’ and a formidable cross-examiner, was appointed Commissioner. The government was, no doubt, confident he would deliver the desired outcome of extended trading hours.<sup>2</sup>

Westerman prepared poorly. He mostly rehashed previous arguments about the benefits of restricting the supply of alcohol

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<sup>1</sup> *The Spectator*, 15 June 1960, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Laurence W. Maher, “Phillips, Sir Philip David (1897–1970),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 15, 2000, <http://abd.anu.edu.au/biography/phillips-sir-philip-david-11387> [23 July 2017].

despite a 1951 NSW Royal Commission that had torn similar arguments to shreds. But since the government has repeatedly promised a referendum on the question, he may have thought he had a second chance. He explained his written submission in *The Spectator*. There should be no change in trading hours in the absence of full-scale research into the social consequences of alcohol abuse.<sup>1</sup> His verbal evidence was quite different. He had been confronted by a Commissioner who indicated he was not prepared to accept any submission unsubstantiated by evidence. By the time he gave evidence, he had seen statistics showing trading hours and consumption were uncorrelated. He told the Commissioner that his written submission might be in error. No problem, said the Commissioner, just listen to the evidence and if you want to change your submission, just indicate.<sup>2</sup> And this is exactly what he did in April. He conceded that trading hours and consumption were not connected and changed the submission to one of neutrality on trading hours. The Commissioner, he thought, would be in the best position to decide.<sup>3</sup>

Unsurprisingly this concession, seemingly out-of-the-blue and flying in the face of Methodism's policy on alcohol, caused pandemonium. Melbourne Central Mission's Irving Benson used the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon broadcast to denounce Westerman, and Alan Walker's letter of condemnation was published in *The Age*. Harold Wood, long-time Temperance campaigner, was slightly more muted. However, they all made the point that one individual minister could not change

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<sup>1</sup> *The Spectator*, 19 February 1964, 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Report of Royal Commission into the Sale, Supply, Disposal or Consumption of Liquor in the State of Victoria*, Transcript of Evidence, PROV 2953/P0000:000001, 137.

<sup>3</sup> *Report*, 2898–9.

Methodist policy which was unswerving hostility to alcohol. Westerman counter-attacked in public. Why did these ministers question his judgement? He had attended the Commission, he was aware of all the evidence, his opinion alone was informed. Any correspondent in *The Age* or *The Spectator* questioning his position was subject to a riposte. At one stage, he noted that his chief critics had not even bothered to speak to him. Wood replied that this was not quite correct as he had been to see Westerman. Westerman replied, yes, Wood had come but had not asked the right questions.<sup>1</sup> The Methodists were openly arguing in public and no doubt the government noticed their chief opposition in disarray. The Commissioner duly recommended a change to ten o'clock closing which was introduced by a gleeful government in 1966.

What had happened between February and April 1964? Westerman realised his submission was in trouble almost from the first day of the Commission but apparently did nothing until a few days before his resubmission. He says he consulted with the Conference Standing Committee and the Victorian Temperance Alliance but from what we know of Westerman's nature, it seems unlikely that there was much consultation, more likely the presentation of a *fait accompli*. A stronger President may have insisted on wider consultation but instead unleashed a divisive force within the Church. Correspondents in *The Spectator*, and elsewhere noted, if the church's leaders were at war with one another, what hope was there for the rest of the members? Those Westerman identified 'with unshakeable faith' probably just kept believing but the rest were left nonplussed. From this point, the Church, after more than 60 years, no longer

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<sup>1</sup> For example, *The Age*, 11 January 1965, 3.



had a seat at the negotiating table when it came to policies about alcohol.

Despite the controversy, or perhaps due to it, Westerman was elected President of Conference in 1966 and lent his voice to the growing concern with Australia's involvement in Vietnam. The Church was torn between its commitment to peace and need to counter the perceived threat of atheistic communism with a 'duty' to support government policy. Westerman was active in the opposition to conscription for overseas service and later, active in practical support of conscientious objectors.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps Westerman is best known, in a positive sense, for his advocacy of the Methodist Million campaign which he started in 1969. Returning to his 'first love' of international affairs, he persuaded General Conference that, while social issues such as gambling and liquor were important, they did not count when ranked against poverty, war and racial discrimination.<sup>2</sup> The aim was for Methodists to contribute \$1m for overseas aid. Some worried it was a top-down approach, imposed by Conference rather than as an initiative of members.<sup>3</sup> Westerman attracted a lot of publicity and money by conducting a sponsored walk from Melbourne to Echuca. Victoria, through Westerman's efforts, was the only state to exceed its allocation while the total fell short of target.

Just as Westerman's reputation was being rehabilitated, he found himself at the centre of controversy once again. He wrote to *The Spectator* in December 1975, declaring his personal view, and recommending that Methodists vote for the ALP. He declared that the dismissal of the Whitlam government was so

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<sup>1</sup> *The Spectator*, 26 February 1969, 6.

<sup>2</sup> *The Spectator*, 11 June 1969, 8.

<sup>3</sup> *The Spectator*, 11 August 1971, 7.

repugnant that regardless of the circumstances, the constitutional issues outweighed all other considerations.<sup>1</sup> Unsurprisingly there was a wave of correspondence taking exception to his breaking the taboo of party-political involvement.<sup>2</sup> Westerman put a resolution to the Methodist Conference calling for an amendment to the Commonwealth Constitution. He noted that the Methodist Church had difficulty dealing with controversial issues—a sure sign of its poor health.<sup>3</sup> He gave no indication that his role was other than blameless, it was just the others who failed to follow his lead.

Throughout his period of leadership, Westerman hoped the Uniting Church would take Social Justice seriously and not just be reactive or negative: it needed to act.<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding experience to the contrary, he thought the horse, if dragged to water, would drink eventually. His goal was to revive the Church as a living force in society and shore up its faith. But, in acting unilaterally, he failed to do so.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Spectator*, 3 December 1975, 2.

<sup>2</sup> *The Spectator*, 17 December 1975, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *The Spectator*, 27 October 1976, 5.

<sup>4</sup> *The Spectator*, 2 March 1977, 3.

# Tasmanian treasures: three holy tables in the Scots tradition

Robert Gribben

## Synopsis

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 19<sup>th</sup> century custom (borrowed from Zwingli and 17<sup>th</sup> century English Puritanism) of the congregation remaining seated in the pews, and the elements being 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. This paper gives the historical, ecclesial and liturgical background to these arrangements, describes in detail the different provisions in the three churches at Kirklands, Oatlands and Evandale, and sets them in their context.

## The Tasmanian treasures

The three formerly Presbyterian<sup>1</sup> churches in this article were each first built in northern Tasmania at the behest of an immigrant Scottish clergyman between 1836 and 1848. Each preserves an arrangement for the distribution of holy communion unique, as far as I know, to Tasmania and perhaps

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<sup>1</sup> Kirklands is in the safe hands of a Private Trust; Oatlands and Evandale are Uniting churches.

in Australia—joining a diminishing number of examples left in Scotland. Modern liturgical use has left them without purpose, and some of the associated vessels and other appurtenances, for instance, specially designed linen cloths, are in danger of loss.

Uniting Church people do not need to be told that there are many options when it comes to the distribution of holy communion; it was one of the practical issues after union. Do we remain seated, or do we come forward; once there, do we stand or kneel? We have had to adapt, to compromise.

Since the history and liturgical practice in our three traditions is poorly known, I need to take some time to sketch the common factor in my story: Scottish tradition. It is significantly different from the English experience after Henry VIII, who created a new national church and imposed Acts of Uniformity. His successors had to deal with many voices which echoed changes on the European continent, and particularly from those who had fled into exile, and found their moment during and after the Civil War (1642–51). The restored Church of England imposed the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* (and the episcopacy) and created Nonconformity.

Scotland's reform was more piecemeal and gradual, and largely from bottom up, if laity and congregations can be regarded as the Church's foot. The late Professor Nigel Yates summarises it this way:

The Reformation in Scotland was essentially a religious *coup d'état* in which a vigorous reform lobby, with a good deal of popular support, forced a reluctant, even hostile, monarchy to accept that

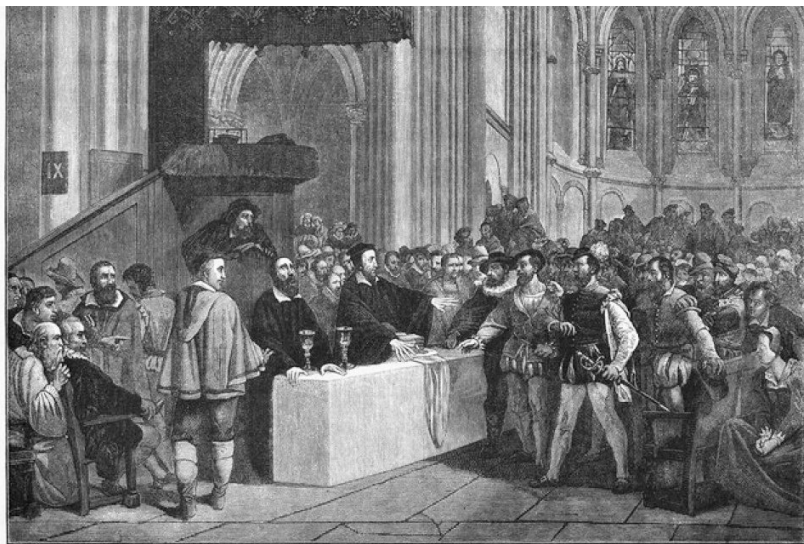
Scotland could not, as a corporate nation, remain part of the western Catholic church.<sup>1</sup>

Scottish worship developed under the leadership of John Knox, himself an exile in Geneva, who was involved on return in the preparation of the 1552 Prayer Book in England, fell out with Queen Elizabeth, and fled to his home country in 1560. Scotland, like Reformed Swiss cantons, found themselves as Protestants working with buildings and structures from medieval Catholicism.

Here is what happened in the former Roman cathedral in Geneva. The former altar has been removed (it stood under the eastern windows which are visible), and a replacement box-like Table stands in the shadow of the pulpit in the nave. Reform had a strong moral element, and Calvin is here ‘fencing the Table’, excluding from communion those who were notorious sinners—Calvin’s list was long—until they made public repentance.

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<sup>1</sup> Nigel Yates, *Preaching, Word and Sacrament, Scottish Church Interiors, 1560–1860* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2009), 5; one of his several books also covering English and European liturgical and architectural change. The classic study, which Yates brings up to date, is now rare: George Hay, *The Architecture of Scottish post-Reformation churches, 1560–1843* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), which I was able to read in the library of New College, Edinburgh.



*"Calvin barring communion to the libertines" (Public Domain)<sup>1</sup>*

The fence was physical in some poorer Scottish churches, consisting of wooden stakes hammered into the earthen floor, with an elder guarding the entrance to the Table area.<sup>2</sup> Later, it became virtual (but nevertheless effectual).

Communion was for the faithful, and the elders on their pre-communion pastoral visits catechised and examined the congregation. If they were counted faithful, a token was issued (here is one from my mother's parish kirk of West Calder),

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<sup>1</sup> Guillaume Farel was a reformer at Neuchâtel, who convinced Calvin to come to Geneva. He is standing next to Calvin in this engraving.

<sup>2</sup> The gate in the fence was called a 'yett', and the stakes a 'traviss'. One wonders about the relation to our word 'vet', to evaluate or check out; in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it applied to checking horses before a race, but the Scots use may be earlier (The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* does not know the Scots use).



*Author's photo*

which they handed in at the service. In recent times they were made of mere paper.<sup>1</sup>

I can only address one small item on a huge shifting agenda.

## John Knox's liturgical reforms

John Knox first produced *A Forme of Prayers* in 1556, and then *The Book of Common Order*, prepared on Genevan patterns<sup>2</sup>, in 1562, which remained the standard liturgy in Scotland for 80 years. But a further set of changes occurred after the monarchies of England and Scotland were united in James I (Stuart) in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; in the ensuing Civil War and during Cromwell's Commonwealth both national churches accepted the Westminster *Directory of Public Worship* (1644).

The key rubric for our purpose was:

After this Exhortation, Warning and Invitation, the Table being before decently covered, and conveniently placed, that the Communicants may orderly sit about it, or at it, the Minister is to begin the action with sanctifying and blessing the elements of Bread and Wine set before him (the Bread in comely and convenient vessels, so prepared, that being broken by him, and given, it may be

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<sup>1</sup> This side reads 'KIRK/1736'; the obverse has 'WCD' (= West [Kirk of] Cauder, the old name for Calder).

<sup>2</sup> By contrast with Zwingli's or later Puritan patterns.

distributed amongst the Communicants; the Wine also in large Cups)...<sup>1</sup>

## The matter of sitting at Table

The point to notice is the phrase “the Table being ... placed, that the Communicants may orderly sit about it, or at it” which embraced both the English Puritan habit—remaining in their



seats, the elements being brought to them; or “at it”, the Scots custom of coming forward to sit at a Table.<sup>2</sup> Sitting for communion (now that there were seats available in churches) became the Scottish rule.<sup>3</sup>

A notable modern application was the Communion Service at the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948.<sup>4</sup> The host church was the Dutch Reformed. The long trestle

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<sup>1</sup> The text is found in Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (New York: Collins, 1974) 369.

<sup>2</sup> Knox successfully argued for the insertion of the ‘Black rubric’ into the *Book of Common Prayer* of 1552. It insisted that kneeling did not imply veneration of the elements. The rubric was printed in black, rather than red, because it was a late addition. It was removed in the Elizabethan *Book of Common Prayer*, and curiously, replaced in 1662 (with some word changes).

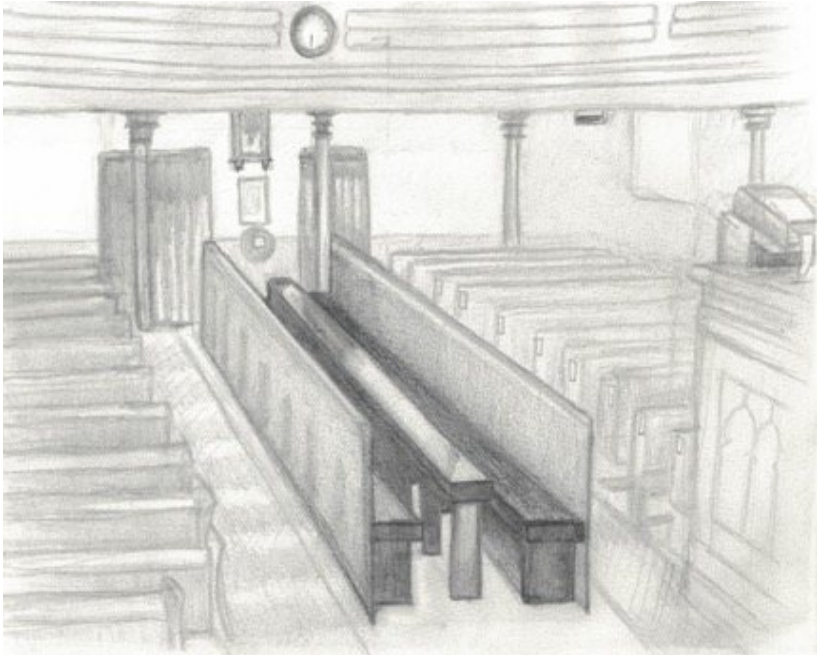
<sup>3</sup> This was also part of English practice during the Commonwealth. See the description by Baxter of his practice at Kidderminster in 1657 in Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England, From Andrewes to Baxter and Fox, 1603–1690* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 321. Baxter was an episcopally-ordained priest who, being unable to accept the 1662 *Book of Common Order* as mandatory, was ejected from his living.

<sup>4</sup> The photograph is from the World Council of Churches Archives.



table ran down the transept, not the sanctuary, and past the pulpit.

Note the importance of the table. Here is a Scottish example<sup>1</sup> of a permanent table, running down the centre of the congregation, open at both ends.<sup>2</sup>



At first, temporary tables, narrow trestles, with benches for sitting on, were set up in Scottish churches for communion days.<sup>3</sup> A permanent Table was not required. Seating on

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<sup>1</sup> The author's photograph of a drawing in his possession by his nephew. My Drawing: © Michael Saunders.

<sup>2</sup> The arrangement in a Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) building of about the same period as our Tasmanian examples: St Modan's Kirk, Benderloch, Ardochatten, in Argyllshire, built 1838–9. The communion pew is permanent, central, open at both ends.

<sup>3</sup> Many, of course, were inherited from the medieval 'Roman' Church.

‘ordinary’ Sundays was positioned in relation to the pulpit, preaching being the heart of Reformed worship. As fixed seating was adopted for churches during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, long communion tables and their benches became a permanent feature, often running from the pulpit down the nave towards the door, or along a long side wall.<sup>1</sup>

## From ‘sitting at’ to ‘sitting about’ the Table

This leads us to the next liturgical change we need as background.

In St John’s Church, Glasgow, and especially during the 1820s ministry of Dr Thomas Chalmers, the English (Puritan / Congregationalist) mode of receiving was proposed in Scotland.<sup>2</sup> The Assembly roundly condemned the innovation, but the people voted with their behinds. Chalmers borrowed another Puritan (but of medieval origin) custom of draping long white ‘houselling’ cloths<sup>3</sup> along the backs (and over their book boards) of pews, so that the whole congregation seemed to sit at

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<sup>1</sup> The entire long communion pew from the Tulloch Free Church of 1844 from Livingston, West Lothian, has been removed to the National Museum in Edinburgh and is on display.

<sup>2</sup> The practice began earlier but is usually associated with Chalmers. He strongly opposed civil interference in church affairs, such as in a congregation’s right to call a minister. In 1843, 470 clergy walked out of the General Assembly and formed the Free Church of Scotland with Chalmers as Moderator.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Housel’ is a Middle English term for giving the eucharist to someone. There were ‘houselling stools’ or benches in some churches instead of an altar rail. For their introduction see W.D. Maxwell, *Concerning Worship*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), 94–95. Nigel Yates, in his *Preaching, Word and Sacrament* suggests “This is in fact a survival of pre-Reformation houselling cloths used to drape the altar rails and to prevent any of the consecrated bread falling to the ground. It is perhaps ironic that one of the most Protestant of the ‘reformed’ churches of Europe should retain this interesting vestige of Catholic practice” (p. 87). Perhaps see also Donald Gray, “Communion” in P.F. Bradshaw, *The New SCM Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (London: SCM, 2002), 123.

the same table.<sup>1</sup> The Minister and Elders having communicated at a central (and now permanent) Table, the Elders carried first the bread and then the wine to the end of pews and the people passed each along to the Elder at the other end, who returned the vessels to the Table. With this custom, many modern Presbyterians will be familiar.

These changes, variously developed in Scotland, were brought to Tasmania and enshrined in the architecture of three churches.<sup>2</sup> The common factor in each is that each provided for the worshippers to leave their pews and come to sit, in groups, around a table set in a specially constructed pew.<sup>3</sup>

#### Kirklands<sup>4</sup>

Its first minister, John Mackersey, came newly ordained from West Calder in Scotland to northern Van Diemen's Land in 1829, settled and built a magnificent manse at what was to become Kirklands, opening the new church building in 1836.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It may divert Anglican readers to know that Dr Pusey favoured houselling cloths, and so used them at Christ Church, Oxford, as late as 1856; it was also the custom at St Mary the Virgin (the University Church) and at Trinity College, Oxford, until later. See J.C. Bowmer, *The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism* (Westminster: Dacre, 1951), 9, fn 4.

<sup>2</sup> Lachlan Campbell (1821–1907) at Oatlands was from a Free Kirk on Skye, and Robert Russell (1803–1877) at Evandale was a student of Chalmers at St Andrew's. (This was before Chalmers led the 'Disruption' in the Church of Scotland [1843] and formed the Free Church.) John Mackersey (1789–1871) at West Calder was Church of Scotland in West Lothian.

<sup>3</sup> Thus "liturgical altar of the Roman mass gave way to the long communion tables of the Reformed rite flanked by benches at which the communicants sat", George Hay, *op.cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> I am very grateful for the assistance of its Chairman, Mr John Taylor, for access to and further information about Kirklands.

<sup>5</sup> The story of his struggles to find the money, legal rights and labour to achieve his purpose can be found in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography: Mackersey, John (1789–1871)*, article by Lex Finlay, vol. 2, (MUP), 1967, and online.



There are two rows of eight box pews, their doors making a barrier much favoured in wintry Scotland, with a broad central aisle, the pulpit, with overhead tester, at front centre, with the entrance at the other end. The two front pews have no door, and the space is deeper, so that a narrow table has been placed in the middle of

each, with a bench on each side, one with its back to the pulpit.<sup>1</sup> Each pew would seat four comfortably, perhaps five, communicants.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Proceedings of the Uniting Church Historical Society (Victoria)*, vol. 14, no. 1, (June 2007), have a report "Visiting Tasmania's Churches" (p. 39ff.) which includes all three of our churches. At one point the article confuses two: on p. 60 Kirklands is correctly described except for where it says, "the back of the front pew can be turned horizontally to form the table top". That is the Oatlands arrangement. Kirkland's tables and benches need no alteration for use.

The table under the pulpit is simply the Minister's desk; the true 'Lord's Table' was in the special pews, not in front of the Minister. During the distribution, members would come in order and sit at these tables, this taking some time—but the congregation was not large.<sup>1</sup>

## Evandale



Evandale, under the ministry of Robert Russell, who was a student of Dr Chalmers, built a similar pew with fixed seating on three sides in a Greek Revival building (not Anglican Gothic) of 1840, two years after his arrival. But he did not follow his teacher in providing for communion in all pews, with houselling

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<sup>1</sup> The 1842 census counted 60 residents in the surrounding properties, including convicts; many were Scottish immigrants and Presbyterians. See Margaret Moray, *The Manse Folk of Kirklands* (Campbell Town), 16.

cloths; rather, there is a very elegant and distinctive arrangement in the front left corner.<sup>1</sup> Note the splendid candle sticks!<sup>2</sup>

### Oatlands<sup>3</sup>

Lachlan Mackinnon Campbell was sent out by the Free Kirk of Skye in 1852 and appointed to Oatlands. The church built under the first minister had been washed away in a storm, so Campbell oversaw a new building which was named after him, and he remained in the charge for 54 years.



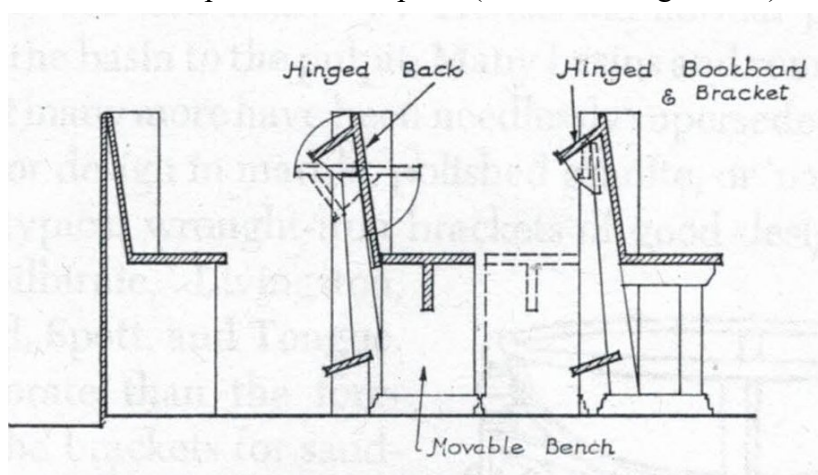
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<sup>1</sup> There is even an 'ordinary' pew tucked in behind it on the side wall. The article in *Proceedings* (see above) does not mention Evandale's communion pew.

<sup>2</sup> My thanks to Jeff McClintock for taking these photographs of St Andrew's.

<sup>3</sup> My thanks to the Rev. Des Cousins, Midlands Patrol Minister at Oatlands, for assistance and hospitality.

The second front long pew has an arrangement whereby the back of the pew each side can be unbolted and lowered 45° to form a table. Each pew would seat about five either side of the dividing barrier, and thus all four spaces would accommodate some twenty communicants at a sitting. Some of the long cloths with which they were covered are still kept, as are some of the cloths to be draped over other pews (the ‘houseselling’ cloths).



(Details of construction of a typical 19<sup>th</sup> century pew—from George Hay, 1911, *The architecture of Scottish post-Reformation churches, 1560–1843*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.)

## Reflection

Buildings shape worship long after a committee decides on the initial design. At origin, the members will have chosen on the basis of what was familiar to them, largely uninstructed by either history or liturgical theology. Prudential matters often guide change.

The introduction of fixed pews—not until the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Scotland<sup>1</sup>—radically altered the mobility of the congregation—but Zwingli welcomed it because it encouraged the stillness and silence before the sacrament he so revered.

Dr Chalmers' communicating the whole congregation at once, as it were, rather than by successive small groups, and the shortening of exhortations and sermons were responses to an issue even more urgent in our day: the increasing pressure of time (before everyone had a watch).<sup>2</sup>

For the Scots, there was also a theological (if not ecumenical) motive for deliberately differing from English practice in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

The Methodists also modified its 18<sup>th</sup> century Anglican inheritance by inviting members to come forward and kneel at the altar rail in 'tables', each small company being dismissed with a scriptural verse before making way for the next.

Since union in 1977, the Uniting Church has made many modifications for a diversity of reasons, good and less good, and rejoices in the diversity. Many of them reflect our acceptance of changing contemporary Australian culture: our sense of community, our preference for circles over regimented lines, our suspicion of tradition, our liking to be 'innovative' (undefined), but perhaps also our loss of an historical and aesthetic sense.

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<sup>1</sup> George B. Burnet, *The Holy Communion in the Reformed Church of Scotland 1560–1860* (Edinburgh: 1960), 268.

<sup>2</sup> Our society has become more dependent upon time over recent centuries. See Graeme Davison, *The unforgiving minute: How Australia learned to tell the time* (Oxford University Press, 1993).



Probably no-one especially notices these subtle changes—until they visit or move to another congregation. C.S. Lewis has reminded us of the importance of familiarity in worship.<sup>1</sup>

So in the scattered communities of colonial Tasmania, the Scots built these sacred places which gave meaning and continuity to their faith and distinctive worship. Encountering these signs of past faithfulness raises questions for our own time and practice.

I end with my one reference to our Conference theme. These three sanctuaries have found their home in the Uniting Church. My question is: for how long? And then what?

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis, C.S., *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, chapter 1, (1964 and many editions).

# The Methodist Sunday School Movement

Keith Hallett

## Synopsis

The Methodist Sunday School movement had an influence way beyond the Methodist Church membership. This paper explores the motivations of those who subscribed to the Sunday School movement, and is part of a larger study of this vigorous movement. Further study will encompass the teaching methods that were religiously motivated and educationally alert to pedagogical changes, and to the structures of the movement to the organised church.



The Sunday School movement began in the England of the eighteenth century with the clear motive to be a Sunday School for religious education. There was at best an *ad hoc* education provision in that country of small private dame schools, elite Anglican schools for the ruling class, and some church-run schools on the Anglican's Bell Monitorial scheme in 1811, and copied by Lancaster for the Nonconformists in 1814. Compulsory and free education did not come to that nation before the Education Act of 1870 and this act was replicated in its essentials in Victoria in 1872, with the additional secular clause:

All state aid to denominational schools was to cease from 1 January 1874... secular instruction only was to be given... children were to be taught that morality which was shared by all men of goodwill. This was

a blend of the Mosaic Law, the Sermon on the Mount, the golden rule and British patriotism.<sup>1</sup>

The 1870 British Act was the terminal point in the rising demand for schooling from the eighteenth century with the rising urbanism and industrialisation of society, bringing with it more complex needs than expected in a feudal village life, despite the tardiness of governments to provide this. Rupert Davies in his study, *Methodism*, commented that

It is well known that popular education in this country really began with the Sunday Schools set up by evangelical Christians towards the end of the eighteenth century. They taught the three R's as a necessary preparation for the study of the Bible... and the Wesleyan Methodist Conference organised them so successfully that in 1834 more than a third of a million children and 60,000 teachers were in Wesleyan Methodist Sunday Schools.<sup>2</sup>

There was no uncertainty in the minds of the early teachers that these schools would be the conduit to Christian commitment. Wesley commented on the inception of the schools “Who knows that some of these schools may become nurseries for Christians?” and with childhood as a separate stage of human development still to be affirmed by the later Victorians, Wesley tentatively commented “What can be done for the rising race? What will become of them?”<sup>3</sup>

These English schools did not just teach the Bible. John Scott, the moving spirit behind the English Methodist School

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<sup>1</sup> Manning Clark, *A History of Australia*, vol. iv, (1978), 282.

<sup>2</sup> R.E. Davies, *Methodism* (London: Camelot Press, 1961), 144.

<sup>3</sup> B. Kelly, *Nurseries for Christians?* (Uniting Church Historical Society, South Australia, 1989), 1.

expansion, showed at its inception a remarkably modern and liberal motive for such education: “It is *mind* you have to draw out, and mould, and fit for its duties to itself, to mankind, and to its Maker. From the child’s first entrance into your school, your object is to train him to *think*, and to teach him *how* to think”.<sup>1</sup> But this, the approach of the leader of the day schools and of the Sunday Schools, had a greater than simply a liberal motive. It was also to evangelise a nation that accepted its religion to be Christian, but which was failing to establish faith in the new industrial centres.

The movement grew quickly. Rupert Davies, in his history *Methodism*, drew attention to the most defining attribute of the denomination:

The first [characteristic] is a complete and whole-hearted acceptance of the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith as conveniently laid down in the historic creeds, combined with the conviction that doctrine which is not proved in devotion and life and does not issue in practical charity is valueless; in the last resort, ‘experiential religion’ (as John Wesley called it) is greatly preferable to doctrinal orthodoxy.<sup>2</sup>

David Hempton also celebrated the optimism of the Methodists: Missioners believed in the power of the Holy Spirit, the perfectibility of humanity—any humanity—and the utility of using “providential means”, whether the growth of empire or the spread of the English language, to further their objectives. This was characteristic Methodist style, especially in its remorseless

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly, 144

<sup>2</sup> Kelly, 1

pragmatism and sheer optimism of what could be achieved by a zealous minority.<sup>1</sup>

And so to the Sunday Schools. These were an instrument of saving grace, and the enthusiasm of early Methodism reached into the Australian situation, where the vision was caught and built upon in the nineteenth century and carried into the twentieth century. The concern expressed in the mid-nineteenth century gold rush chaos had its echoes a century later in the leafy streets of Camberwell. Janet McCalman, in her study, *Journeyings*, of middle class Melbourne growing up in the 1920s, identified such enthusiasm.

The teaching of religion and the saving of souls were for many Protestants and certainly for most Catholics, the most important task of all in the raising and education of the young; and few middle-class families went about the business of private life without the contact with organised religion in some form. Attendance at Protestant churches was quietly falling off, especially among men, but it seemed none the less that the churches were still at the centre of middle-class life; they defined morals and they bonded society.<sup>2</sup>

McCalman explored one of the contradictions within Methodism, which was the common belief that the will of the child, because of original sin, should be broken with the loving care that so many enjoyed in a supportive and forgiving community. Many Methodist children were raised in a church community, and certainly attendance at Sunday School was normative, but these schools attracted many on the periphery of

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly, 168

<sup>2</sup> J. McCalman, *Journeyings* (Melbourne University Press, 1993), 90f.

a church community, and attendance at Sunday School was seen to give the child moral education along with a little bit of religion. It was still important that “God should be in our thoughts”.

The Sunday School movement in Victoria began almost simultaneously with the white settlement of the Port Philip District which was initiated in 1835. Melbourne, which was initially called Bearbrass or Batmania, grew quickly after Governor Bourke proclaimed the legality of the Port Phillip District and named it after the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 1837 with a more genteel name. By 1839 a Sunday School was established in Melbourne with 12 scholars, and in the same year Brunswick Street opened with four scholars.<sup>1</sup> The movement soon spread into the regions. Irving Benson, in his study *A Century of Victorian Methodism*, noted that an early settler in the Geelong District, J. Dredge, an assistant Aboriginal Protector, described the Sunday School of 1842:

At two o'clock this afternoon the children of the Sunday School, about 45 in number, attended our temporary chapel to celebrate the return of Christmas. After taking a bun each, and singing a verse or two of a hymn, they walked in procession accompanied by their teachers to the cliff in front of the town, where they sang “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing”, and then returned to the chapel, where a plentiful repast of buns and tea was provided, after which a short address was given to them, when they

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1 C. Irving Benson, *A Century of Victorian Methodism*, (Melbourne: Spectator Press 1935), 246.

sang “Here We Suffer Grief and Pain”<sup>1</sup> and were dismissed”.<sup>2</sup>

This cheerful note of buns, anniversaries and picnics was to be replicated throughout the movement, but one hopes that more cheerful hymns were chosen.

The importance of this movement cannot be under-estimated. As Victoria grew with the gold rushes, then with the growth of Marvellous Melbourne in the 1880s, the centre of the state became the favoured vehicle for British investment. This boom was reflected in Sunday School enrolment. By 1873 the Wesleyans had 481 Sunday Schools and 42,786 pupils. The Anglican Church, by contrast, had 261 schools and 20,205 students, and the Anglican membership which was by far greater than the Methodist membership had half as many schools and scholars. Even the Presbyterian Church could boast only 50,000 scholars as compared to the Methodist 80,000 scholars.<sup>3</sup>

These statistics would indicate that there was great commitment, and enthusiasm for such provision. This enthusiasm can be attributed to religious commitment as indicated right at the start of white settlement in Victoria, with an advertisement: “Wanted, several parties of both sexes, competent to take the duties of Sabbath School teacher in the school recently formed in connection with the Wesleyan chapel, Lonsdale Street. For terms, see *Ecclesiastes 11*, verse 1”.<sup>4</sup> [Send out your bread upon the waters, and after many days you will

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<sup>1</sup> It was observed through one of the group that such a negative hymn was well chosen, due to the high infant mortality rate at the time which would have affected children from many families.

<sup>2</sup> Benson, 246.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics of Victoria, 1873, Papers presented to Parliament by Command, Session 5, 1874, 10ff.

<sup>4</sup> Benson, 89.

get it back.”] The Wesleyans showed an enthusiasm for teaching their religion with more fervour than their sister churches although all denominations, including the Roman Catholics, provided for Sunday Schools.

But it was not just religious enthusiasm that fuelled the movement. There was a link between religious education and moral education, which while it weakened over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was still strong. The eighteenth century enlightenment was at pains not to spread unbelief among those less ‘enlightened’ for fear of social collapse. Napoleon, an unbeliever, re-established a concordat with the Catholic church as a form of social control. The English Establishment believed that religion was a form of social control, and forced attendance at worship was part of the penal system.

Governors Phillip and Macquarie also saw church attendance as a part of the penal system, and Governor Arthur in Van Diemen’s Land built a church at Port Arthur to accommodate 1,000 convicts who were unlikely to be enthusiastic Anglicans. So the early years of Australian Methodist Sunday Schools were not so imbued with educational liberalism, but pre-eminently, sought to evangelise for the faith that the British colonial governors, in partnership, sought to establish as a common belief which included a common morality. The first ordained Methodist minister to New South Wales was the Rev. Samuel Leigh who arrived in Sydney in 1815. He immediately went about establishing a Sunday School, in face of opposition from the Anglican leader, the Rev. Samuel Marsden, who wanted the Anglican Church to be responsible for all education. The stated aim of the first Methodist Sunday Schools was overtly religious: this aim was “to promote Sunday Schools throughout the colony, with a view to the instruction of poor children of both



sexes to read the holy scriptures”.<sup>1</sup> Convict children were treated to a great deal of religion. At the Barracks school in Sydney, the Sabbath day started at 6.00 a.m. with a hymn and a prayer. The morning session took two hours with devotions, readings and catechism. Then breakfast was provided. The reading program over three years was remorselessly set out from Genesis to Revelation in that particular order. Then there was memory work followed by compulsory Church attendance.<sup>2</sup> One would hope that the Sunday School for non-convict children in the colony was easier, but the link between learning to read with the ultimate purpose to be able to read the scriptures was consistent in all early Sunday Schools.

The advance of secular thought made it abundantly clear that morality did not depend on religion, although some fought against this. Lord Salisbury, the imperialistically-inclined English Prime Minister, grudgingly acknowledged that morality could exist without Christian faith. “Christian morality”, he said

...is a blessing which can only be enjoyed by the world as a consequence of Christian faith... This rule is true of a community, but it is not necessarily true of an individual. Some of the brightest examples of what a Christian life should have been are men who have renounced all but the mere pretence of Christian faith. The fact in their case is that their morality was formed before their intellect went astray. Virtue had become easy to them before faith had become difficult... men will not be moral

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<sup>1</sup> B. Earnshaw, B., 1980, *Fanned into a Flame, The Spread of Sunday Schools* (Diocese of Sydney: Board of Education, 1980), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Earnshaw, 32.

without a motive, and... a motive can only be furnished by religious belief.<sup>1</sup>

When Ned Kelly held up the town of Jerilderie in 1879, he conversed with a young Jewish lad, later to become Sir John Monash. He recalled that conversation was of lasting significance, and commented that “a Sunday School superintendent couldn’t have given me better advice as to human conduct”.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, moral education and the Sunday School went hand in hand in the public mind.

Most citizens did not explore the nexus between faith and morality. Many saw the Sunday School as a way of teaching morality, and attendance was based on the hope that the children would learn about right and wrong. There was an attitude amongst many, still held today, that obeying the Ten Commandments and obeying the Golden Rule was enough religion to live by, and the Sunday Schools were entrusted to provide such a basis. Clearly, the rapid fall off in retention at senior levels, and the disappointment of the churches that so many did not proceed from Sunday School to church, suggests that such a basic understanding was enough for most people.<sup>3</sup>

The teachers, for the most part, saw the Sunday School as a means of evangelism. Admittedly, few would have reached the pietistic levels that some literature would posit, but most would have joined in the theological levels of piety as found in the hymns of *Alexander No. 3*.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Vidler, from W. Nesblett, *Moral Education in a Changing Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 80.

<sup>2</sup> D. Hunt, *True Girt* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2016), 387.

<sup>3</sup> This would accord with Kohlberg’s model of moral development where he posits that most people reach a level of basic functioning according to community expectations, and that the transcendent nature of morality, being right in itself, is achieved by relatively few people.

The popular comic strip, Ginger Meggs, understood the link between morality and Sunday School. Minnie, Ginger's girl friend, always tried to persuade Ginger to attend Sunday School. Ginger, the likable larrikin, tried to avoid it. But Ginger's mother saw attendance as a task to fulfil in her son's education. Ginger did admit: "It doesn't hurt a fellow to be a bit religious".

But only a bit.

Prizes were common in Methodist Sunday Schools, and the books offered affirmed the morality offered. One such prize, *Something to Do, Please*, by Annie Perren, was given to a student at Yongala Methodist Sunday School in South Australia for learning 30 memory verses in 1909. These stories were all about children learning relationships based on kindness. They were very close to the genre in the *Victorian Readers*, where in a secular system, moral precepts were unashamedly conveyed to the reader. Readers from Victorian schools in the earlier part of last century may remember, for example, the downfall of the Abbot of Aberbrothock in the poem "The Inchcape Rock" or of the Christmas handshake between squatter and selector in *The Fire at Ross' Farm*.

The motivation for Sunday School education strengthened after a period of decline in the post-World War Two years. The 1950s saw burgeoning Sunday Schools in the newly settled suburbs, but signs of decline in the older areas.

Janet McCalman, quoting from a history written by Winsome Matenson, clarified the thought of so many new families. "Now I believe that there were a lot of other people like me and we flocked to that church. [North Balwyn Methodist]. We were all the same. Our husbands were ex-servicemen and we came to build peace. We had ideals and we came to bring our children

up in the church and it wasn't necessarily to follow Methodism; it was to follow Christianity".<sup>1</sup>

Certainly many who wanted to build a better world after that devastation did not make such a commitment to the Church; some moved to Communism until the horrors of Stalinism and the 1956 invasion of Hungary was revealed, some joined political parties. But there was a spirit of optimism, and the emerging suburbs all saw the rapid building of churches, which is an obvious contrast to the burgeoning suburbs of today. It was to be a better world with Christian morality and faith. Not of the deep evangel of committed Methodists, but of getting on with one another in an ecumenical spirit. Sunday Schools offered Meggs' "little bit of religion" along with morality. This could be confirmed by the large Sunday School anniversary services where parents, who seldom came to church, made a rare visit on these important occasions.

There is yet another motive for Sunday School attendance, and that is for the social contact it offered. There are cynical comments dotted throughout the literature which refer to the rise of attendance figures as the Sunday School picnic drew closer on the calendar, with acerbic comments on free buns and bus trips. Certainly the picnic was a major social occasion and many older people can recount stories of children in crowded furniture vans heading to the Dandenongs. Its popularity can be ascertained by the attempt in the church to rename the Cup Day holiday in November as Picnic-day, but not even the popularity of the picnic day could lessen the community's affirmation of the Melbourne Cup race.

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<sup>1</sup> W. Matenson, *From Open Fields: a History of the Trinity Uniting Church, 1941–1991*, quoted from McCalman, *Journeyings*, 236

The impact and lasting significance of the picnic can be glimpsed in the following reminiscence from the Metcalf church:

The 1948 Sunday School picnic was a highlight of the church calendar. ... Evelyn Reeves told how the first Sunday School picnic began with a procession to the Bald Hill headed by Mr Charles Harris playing the bagpipes”.<sup>1</sup> In 1901 “little ones trooped gaily along; the scholars came in full muster. Large numbers of past scholars travelled long distances from various parts of the State, a special feature demonstrating that the golden link forged in early years still holds them to former associations, the middle aged and old, all constituting an assemblage, participating in the feeling of deep interest in the one event that draws them annually to renew the intercourse formed in youth or during association with the function.”<sup>2</sup>

As Sunday Schools were locally based, there was a homogeneous nature of social class which would have helped bond the scholars socially, and Janet (one of my interviewees) observed that such schools were strongest amongst “the respectable poor” in the 1950s. But the same interviewee commented that with the classes, the social events and the concerts, “there was a sense that we were loved”. In a more recent world where social bonding is electronically achieved, the social bonds and the personal loving care is something lost with the decline of such schools, but this need is now even greater.

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<sup>1</sup> K. James and N. Davis, “Metcalf Church’s History”, *Proceedings of the Uniting Church Historical Society Synod of Victoria and Tasmania*, Vol.19, No. 2, p. 87

<sup>2</sup> James and Davis, 88–89.

A cynic could suggest a further motive for the popular attendance at Sunday Schools, for “parents may have welcomed such peace at the price of a penny or two for the collection”.<sup>1</sup> This may be true, but beyond doubt, the Sunday School movement had significant influence on several generations of (mostly British) children.

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly, 33

# The Forgotten Women

Alison Head

## Synopsis

‘Finding a home in the Uniting Church’: for many people this phrase has a special meaning, because in the Uniting Church women were treated as equal with men. Women were ministers, elected as leaders and a percentage of most committees were to be women. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries this was not so. Any of the early histories of the churches in Victoria which came into the Uniting Church made little or no reference to women. There were many women who made a large contribution to these churches, so let us find out more about them—the forgotten women.



The focus of this paper is the church women of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century in Victoria, many of whom made a big contribution to their church in areas which have not been recognised as such. The women who preached regularly were from the minor Methodist churches, mainly the Primitive Methodist. The first woman recognised as a preacher by her church was Mrs Martha Ride. Martha was the wife of the Rev. John Ride and they arrived in Victoria in 1849. At the first meeting of the Primitive Methodist Society of Melbourne, the credentials of Mr Ride were accepted, then those of Mrs Ride’s also.<sup>1</sup>

Martha had become a travelling preacher in 1822, and served in a number of places before her marriage to John Ride who was

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<sup>1</sup> Melbourne Primitive Methodist Quarterly Meeting Minute Book, 1849.

also a travelling preacher in 1824.<sup>1</sup> The early Methodist churches had travelling preachers who were paid and moved around a circuit preaching and looking after congregations or societies as they were called. Today we would call them ministers. They also had local preachers, who lived and worked in the area and preached on Sunday.



Another Primitive Methodist minister's wife in a similar position was Mrs Sarah Watts. Together with her husband, the Rev. George Watts, they arrived in Victoria in 1851. One reference says that "soon after they came 'they' preached the gospel on a stone heap under a gum tree". In 1853 both their names were removed from the Melbourne Preaching plan as they were going to Geelong.

Another very active preacher in the Primitive Methodist Church was Mrs Harvey—a local preacher in the Smythesdale Circuit, and later under Ballarat Circuit. As well as normal services, it seems that she was in demand for special services. This quote from the *Primitive Methodist Miscellany* for January 1873 is one of many references and gives an indication of her work.

Clunes—Anniversary services of this church were celebrated on Sunday and Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> on November. We secured the services of Mrs Harvey of Smythesdale, for the occasion, and we are happy to say she did us good service by preaching three

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<sup>1</sup> E.D. Graham, "Chosen by God: travelling preachers of early Primitive Methodism" in *Proceedings of the Wesleyan Historical Society*, Vol. 49, Part 3, October 1993.



sermons on the Sabbath to such congregations as have never been seen in our church at Clunes. The word preached was with power, and many felt themselves to be ‘sinners in the sight of God’, and we sincerely trust they will be led to Jesus. On Monday the 4<sup>th</sup> of November, an excellent tea was provided by the ladies, which was largely attended. Just as we were finishing tea, it commenced to rain in good earnest, which no doubt prevented many of our friends being at the public meeting. However we had the church comfortably filled and all seemed to enjoy themselves. The meeting was presided over by C. Jobson, Esq. and was supported by Mrs Harvey, Messrs F. Sindon, G. Perry, W.H. Cox and others. It is only to add that the visit of Mrs Harvey, to Clunes was a blessing to our church and we hope at no distant period she will visit us again.<sup>1</sup>

Of course there are other preachers but we don’t have time for them. Let us move on to the paid women workers.



One of the first was Miss Selina Sutherland who attended Scots Church and became involved in the Scots Church District Association as a paid worker about 1880. The object of the association was to carry on what might be described as parish work in the neighbourhood of the church. In 1887 the Victorian government legitimised the child rescue movement by licensing certain individuals to remove children from unfit homes and situations. Miss Sutherland was the first person to be licensed under this

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<sup>1</sup> *The Primitive Methodist Miscellany* (1873), 415–6.

act. An interesting side light is that the Association bought a house for destitute children and it was named Kildonan House after the parish in Scotland which had been home for Selina. The name has been passed down through the Presbyterian Church and is still used in the Uniting Church for a Uniting agency. Miss Sutherland was always a controversial figure and after arguments with both Scots Church and the wider Presbyterian Church the organisation became the Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society—no longer a church one.



Mrs. Varcoe.

Around the same time the Wesleyan Methodist Church was employing Bible women. One who became well known was Mrs Varcoe. She was also licensed by the Government to recue children. Her first work was at Sandridge and the Home Mission report for 1880 shows she worked every day of the week holding meetings as well as visiting many people in their homes. She was moved to Wesley Church in the city and it was here that her work with children was recognised. Together with Mrs Crisp, the minister's wife, they established a home for children in Carlton where Mrs Varcoe and her family looked after them. This led to the establishment of a committee to establish a children's home and eventually Livingstone House was built in Cheltenham. Mrs Varcoe even visited Sydney to talk about her work where they were thinking of doing likewise. This brings me to what I think was one of her greatest accomplishments—her speaking and preaching in an era when hardly any women got to do it in the Wesleyan Methodist Church. There are reports of her preaching

at open air services at Wesley. As early as 1891 she was going on deputation work for the Home Mission Committee in Gippsland. An article in *The Spectator* under the title of “A Woman in the Pulpit” said she gave a capital sermon and the impression was a good one.

She continued her work as a sister at Collingwood and North Melbourne and finally did full time deputation for the Home Mission Committee. This involved travelling around the state spreading the word about the work of the Committee at meetings of congregations to raise money for the work. She was so successful that a direction was sent out that all requests for her to speak had to go through the Home Mission Committee. Her work continued until 1913 when it was reported that she was living in happy retirement.

The Sisterhood was established in 1893 when the Wesley Central mission was formed. They were known as ‘Sisters of the People’, and all the women working in the various missions under the Home Mission Committee were also called Sisters.



Many of these sisters have been forgotten for a number of reasons. Let us look at one who was quite well known. Sister Faith began work as a sister in Collingwood in 1905, having retired as a teacher due to ill health. As well as the normal work, she wrote for appeals for the mission and also for the Women's page of *The Spectator*, and for a few years the Children's page as well. In 1917, she left Collingwood and moved to the Brunswick Street Fitzroy Mission. Here she was to do the correspondence and literary work for the Mission, which at this time had a special outreach to children, so it was

appropriate that she took charge of the kindergartens. The Mission started a kindergarten as it was then described, as for “physical weaklings”, which became known as Yooralla. After a few months there were problems between the kindergarten and the Mission hierarchy. As in many such cases it was about money. Money received from pleas in *The Spectator* for the work in this case. Sister Faith resigned from the Mission and Yooralla became independent. Yooralla, now a large community service looking after people with disabilities, recognises Sister Faith as their founder.

Sister Faith continued on the Yooralla Committee and doing her writing for *The Spectator*, often under difficulties due to ill health. She died September 22, 1926. *The Spectator*, reporting on her funeral, said that not many people attended because notice had been given under her ‘private name’, Florence Evangeline Ireland, and not as Sister Faith.<sup>1</sup> This was a common problem as not many sisters used their own name.

Let us leave the Sisters and look at another group who do not get the recognition they should at this time—ministers’ wives. Quite a bit has been written about what was expected of a minister’s wife, in fact we could spend about an hour on just that. Here is one that took my fancy.

The minister’s wife ought to be selected by a committee of the church. She should be warranted never to have a headache or neuralgia, she should have nerves of wire and sinews of iron. She should never be tired, she should be cheerful and intellectual, pious and domesticated; she should be able to keep her husband’s house, darn his stockings,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Spectator*, November 29, 1926, 955.

and copy his sermons. She should keep up the style of a lady on the wages of a day labourer, and be always at leisure for ‘good works’, and ready to receive morning calls. She should be secretary of the Band of Hope and President of the Missionary Society: she should conduct Bible Classes and Mothers’ Meetings, she should make clothing for the poor, and gruel for the sick; and finally she should be pleased with everybody and everything, and never desire any reward beyond the satisfaction of having done her own duty- and other peoples’ too.<sup>1</sup>

While talking about any particular minister’s wife, when there are so many to choose from, seems a bit difficult, I have chosen one so that we can look at the sources.

One person who seems to fit the description we have just given was Mrs Matilda Symons, wife of the Rev. John. C. Symons, an early Wesleyan Methodist minister. The information about her comes from an obituary in *The Spectator*.



She was born in Truro in 1813, and joined the Methodists when she was nearly twenty. She married Mr Symons in 1847. They came to Victoria in 1849, then spent two years in South Australia before returning to Victoria during the gold rush. Mrs Symons was eminently qualified for the work of minister’s wife in those transition days. Bright, intelligent, active and sympathetic, she threw herself with characteristic energy into church and

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<sup>1</sup> *The Spectator*, February 21, 1913, 299.

philanthropic work. In Melbourne, Beechworth, Geelong, the Maryborough and Amherst Circuits, she was useful as a class leader, Sunday School teacher, and visitor of the suffering and bereaved. Her homely common sense, her quick intelligence, her racy speech, combined with her intense religious life made her “a burning and shining light, and many rejoiced in her light.” During the many years when her husband occupied departmental positions in the church, she was among the foremost in every form of Christian activity. She took her full share in the work of benevolent societies, and was always doing something for institutions, such as Livingstone House, or in aid of Foreign Missions. She died at the age of 90 years and nine months.

A word about the sources. Many of the obituaries have more about the husband than the wife who died, although we need to remember that the moves made by the minister affected the whole family. In this case although there is a date of birth, there is no mention of her maiden name. In obituaries of her husband there is no mention of a wife at all. It appears that there were no children as there is no mention of any.

I was going to mention a couple of other minister’s wives but we don’t have time. I would like to tell you about another publication on “The Minister’s Wife”, which gives a different perspective. It came from *Woman’s Magazine* but was published in *The Spectator*.<sup>1</sup>

Are we to expect nothing from a minister’s wife?”  
Said Miss Lane in a subdued voice.

Nothing more than her duty as a woman. If she has  
qualities that will give her a leading social influence,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Spectator*, 21 December 1888, 605.

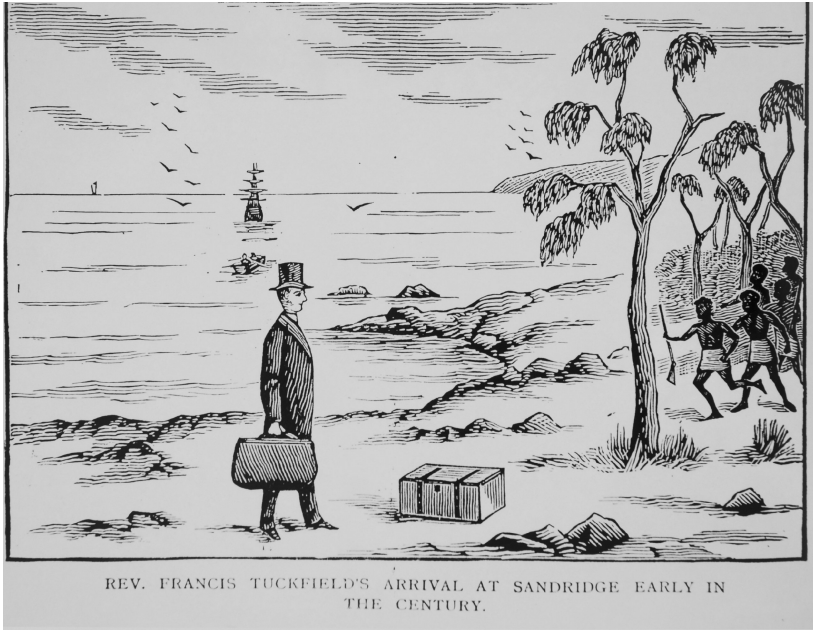
and has time to spare from her home duties, which are always first, she ought to let these qualities become active for good. But no more can, with justice, be required of any other woman in the congregation. Your contract for service is with her husband, and not with her; and you have no more claim upon her time, nor right to control her freedom, than you have over the wife of your lawyer, doctor, or schoolmaster.

If you think my services absolutely essential to the prosperity of the church, just state the amount of salary you can afford to give; and if for the sum, I can procure any person in every way competent as myself to assume the charge off my children and household, I will take into consideration your proposition. Beyond this, ladies, I can promise nothing.

“I could wish”, she continued, in a lower voice, “to number you all as my friends. I have come among you only as a stranger, seeking no pre-eminence, but desiring to do my duty as a woman. The fact that my husband is your minister gives me of right no position among you, and gives you no right to demand off me any public service. If my husband fails in his duty, admonish him; but in the name of justice and humanity, do not establish any supervision over me. Let my private life be as sacred from intrusion as that of any other woman. This I have a right to demand, and I will be satisfied with nothing less”.

Just let me finish with a couple of my favourite illustrations of the forgotten women.

This is the Rev. Francis Tuckfield arriving in Port Phillip, as one of the first Wesleyan ministers to do so. He was to set up an Aboriginal mission. With him was his pregnant wife. Where is she?



The forgotten women in this advertisement below are very evident.



## Births, Marriages, and Deaths.

FOR CASH, 24 words, 1s. ; and 8d. for each line (8 words) after  
FOR BOOKING, 24 words, 2s. 6d. ; 4d. each line (8 words) after

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### MARRIAGE.

PALAMOUNTAIN—STRANGER.—On March 16th, at "Easter brook," Thorpdale, Gippsland, by the Rev. W. J. Palamountain, John, second son of W. Palamountain, to Annie, eldest daughter of E. J. Stranger, and grand-daughter of James Matthewman and Elijah Stranger, of Fitzroy.

# A Home in the Uniting Church?

Ben Skerman

## Synopsis

The early years of the establishment of the Uniting Church coincided with the dismantling and abolition of the White Australia Policy. Included in the many non-migrants who have entered Australia since then are people from the Pacific and Korea, which in the past had been Mission Fields of the Churches which had entered Union. These people have set up their own congregations within the Uniting Church. In addition to having different cultures they each have different Christian traditions which have similarities with the 'sending churches' but also important differences. This paper examines the history and traditions of the Korean Churches and how these have been transferred to Australia and is reflected in the involvement of Koreans in the Uniting Church.



## Korea

In 1977 the Uniting Church was formed, after more than 70 years of aspiration, intermittent and finally intense negotiation, by the three Churches—Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregational. This was possible by concentrating on commonalities rather than their differences in history and culture. The early years of the Uniting Church also coincided with two other major changes: the decolonisation of the Pacific and the end of the White Australia Policy.

Immigrants arrived from countries which had been the mission fields of the three churches: Samoa, Tonga, Fiji,

Rotuma, and New Guinea, Vanuatu, and Korea. All the churches of these countries have commonalities with their mother churches, and hence the Uniting Church. However, they each have their own culture, language and history.

The newcomers found aspects of Australian church culture had little resonance and were sometimes mystifying. An early Korean Congregation in Sydney, in 1974, worshipped in an old Congregational church in Strathfield. It had three stained glass windows: Oliver Cromwell flanked by John Bunyan and John Milton. Another shares a Presbyterian Church with stained glass windows, depicting the signing of the solemn league and covenant in 1637, and the ‘great disruption’ of 1843.

Many found a home within the Uniting Church at the Presbytery and Synod level but not with individual local congregations. They developed their own churches with their own ministers, in church buildings shared with local congregations, buildings made redundant by church union, rented halls, or buildings in industrial estates. The churches provide a shelter in a new country, places to preserve culture, and places of comfort with familiar hymns and rituals

The Uniting Church met the challenge through statements and policies aimed at encouraging the development of a multicultural church. Formal partnership with churches in the Pacific and Korea have been developed. The ordination of ministers in partner churches has been recognised. Agreements have been made about joint property and variants in church structures.<sup>1</sup> In NSW Samoan and Tongan Congregations are under the oversight of the Sydney Presbytery but have churches

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.assembly.uca.org.au/images/stories/\\_archive/mcm/Multicultural\\_Policies\\_1985-2004.pdf](https://www.assembly.uca.org.au/images/stories/_archive/mcm/Multicultural_Policies_1985-2004.pdf) — Accessed 5th May 2019

scattered through other Presbyteries in Sydney, Canberra and Wollongong. The Koreans have their own Presbytery.

This paper is about the Korean Protestant Christians in Australia. Some have found a home in the Uniting Church, but the majority have not. Why is it so? Some of the answers can be found in the history and culture of both Korea and its churches.

## Demography

According to the 2011 Census there were 74,538 people in Australia who had been born in South Korea; 41,809 lived in NSW, 12,552 in Queensland, 10,192 in Victoria and 4,098 in Western Australia. (See Figure 1<sup>1</sup>) If children born to Koreans in Australia since 1975 are included, the number of people identifying as Korean Australians is possibly two or three times this number.

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<sup>1</sup>Community Summary Information, The Republic of (South Korea) Australian Government, Department of Immigration and Citizenship  
<http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/comm-summ/source.htm>  
Accessed 5 May 2019

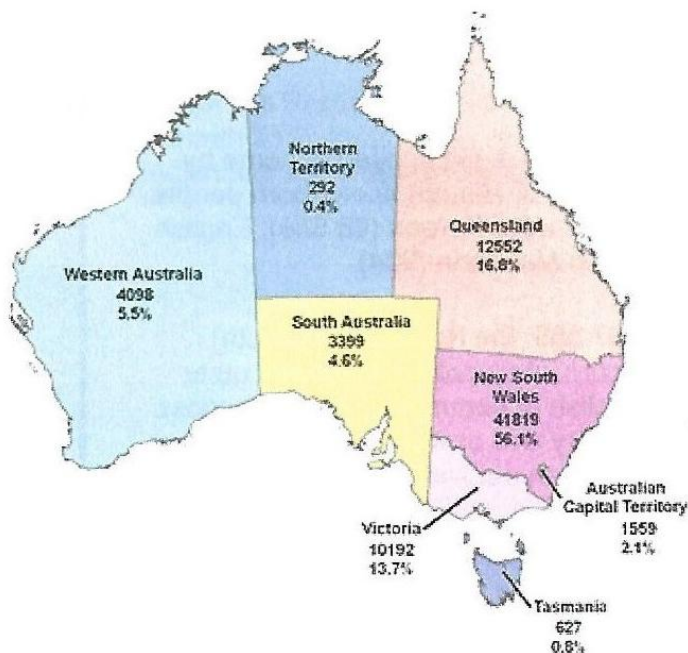


Figure 1 Korean Population in Australia

In 1971 there were only 468 Koreans living in Australia and perhaps 1000 students, and from 1976 to 1985 there were 500 immigrants per year. Between 1986 and 1991 there were 1400 settlers per year mostly arriving under the Skilled Migration Scheme. 57.3% of the 2011 Korean Australian population arrived between 2001 and 2011. (See Figure 2<sup>1</sup>)

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<sup>1</sup> Community Summary Information, The Republic of (South Korea) Australian Government, Department of Immigration and Citizenship

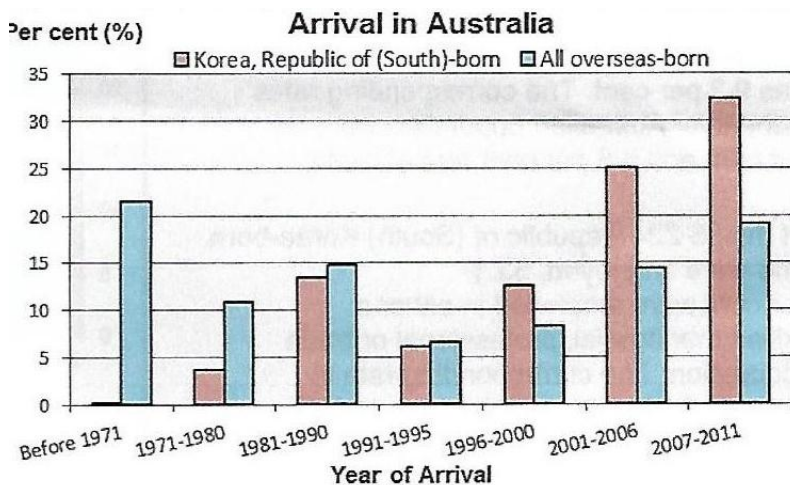
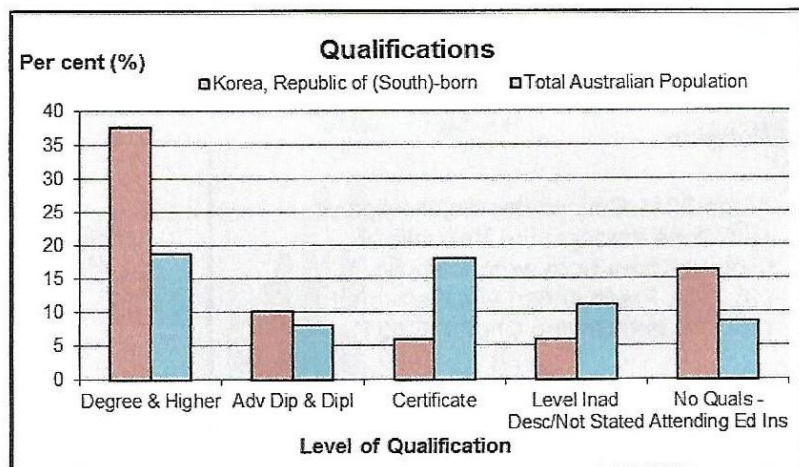


Figure 2 Arrival in Australia



*Level Inad Desc/Not Stated* = Education level inadequately described or not stated  
*No Quals - Attending Ed Ins* = No qualifications and still attending educational institution

Figure 3 Qualifications

When compared with the Australian population, they are younger, and slightly better educated. (See Figure 3<sup>1</sup>)

In terms of religious affiliation, 22.4% identified as Catholic, 21.6% as Presbyterian or other Reformed, 10.1% as Uniting Church, 21.5% as Other (probably Buddhist) and 24.3% as having no religion. (See Figure 4<sup>2</sup>)

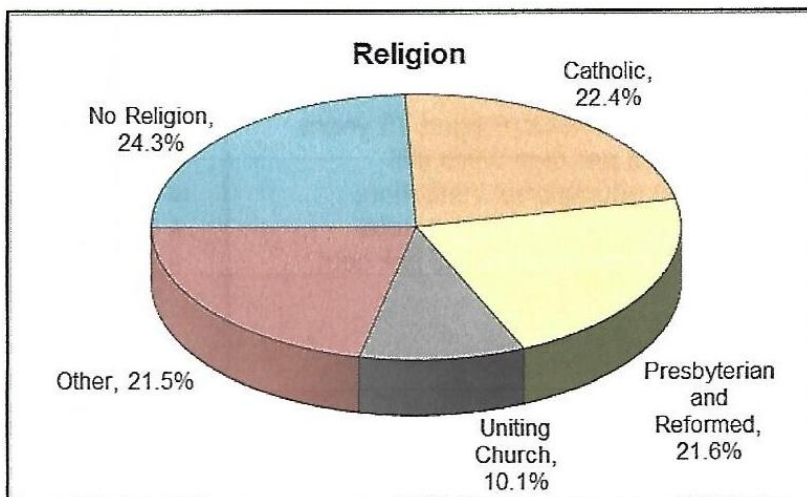


Figure 4 Religion (Australia)

This distribution is not like Korea. Korea is not (yet) a Christian country. (See Figure 5<sup>3</sup>)

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<sup>1</sup>Community Summary Information, The Republic of (South Korea) Australian Government, Department of Immigration and Citizenship

<sup>2</sup>Community Summary Information, The Republic of (South Korea) Australian Government, Department of Immigration and Citizenship

<sup>3</sup>Religion. [www.korea.net/About Korea/Korean Life/Religion](http://www.korea.net/About%20Korea/Korean%20Life/Religion) accessed 11 June 2019

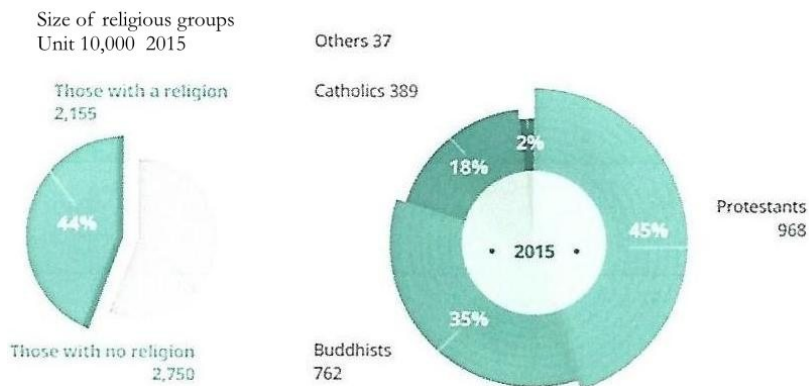


Figure 5 Religion in South Korea

In 2009 there were 223 Korean Churches in Australia, each with its own Korean Minister. One hundred and fifty four of these were in Sydney (69%) and 168 (75%) in the area covered by the NSW ACT Synod. 16 were in Melbourne, 28 in Queensland, 9 in Perth and 6 in Adelaide.<sup>1</sup> Of the 168 Churches in NSW, 19 are part of the Korean Presbytery of the Uniting Church, and a further 16 are connected to the Continuing Presbyterian Church.<sup>2</sup>

In summary, a minority of the Korean churches in NSW and the ACT are affiliated with what might be their Australian mother churches: the Uniting Church and the (Continuing) Presbyterian Church. The Presbyterian Church of Australia split

<sup>1</sup> S.H. Kwon, *The Fruit of Australia Missionaries Work—In Memory of the 120<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Australian Missionaries in Korea*, (Kuringai: Christian Review, 2010) pp. 636-8. (In Korean) Extracted from a list of every Korean Church in Australia complete with name of Minister and contact details.

<sup>2</sup> Compiled from data on the Internet for the Uniting Church <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1N11ToNdQfy-xfxqSGWUp96Y5GvA&usp=sharing> — Accessed 5th May 2019  
For the Presbyterians [Ministryblue.com/ethnic/Korean/htm](http://Ministryblue.com/ethnic/Korean/htm). Accessed 5 May 2019.



in 1977 with the larger proportion joining the Uniting Church and the rest remaining Presbyterian. This varies by state. The Australian Mission in Korea was established by the Presbyterian Church of Victoria but most Koreans and their churches are in NSW.

## Korean History

The Koreans do not call themselves Korean. They are Hangukin—the Han peoples. The name ‘Korea’ came from the Koryo Dynasty which ended in the fourteenth century but was known to Marco Polo. Korea has a documented history going back 2,000 years. Being contiguous Korea has adopted much of the culture of China, which through most of its history has been regarded as the big brother.

Buddhism was introduced by Chinese and Indian missionaries at the same time Christianity became dominant in Europe.<sup>1</sup> Korean and Chinese missionaries took Buddhism to Japan. Confucian philosophy and systems of government were adopted at the same time<sup>2</sup> and reinforced with each change of dynasty. Government was carried out by scholar aristocrats who won their positions by passing rigorous examinations. Ethics and ritual are important but so is education and so is respect for your teacher. Society is seen both as a family and as hierarchical. This is reflected in the very grammar of the Korean

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<sup>1</sup> See J.H. Grayson, *Early Buddhism and Christianity in Korea A study in the Emplantation of Religion* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1985), 16–59. The first Indian and Chinese Buddhist monks arrived in the Korean kingdom of Koguryo in about 350 C.E.

<sup>2</sup> W.J. Joe, *Traditional Korea a Cultural History* (Seoul: Chung’ang University Press, 1972), 53. Confucian materials and learning were introduced in the Korean kingdom of Paekche during the reign of King Song (523–553). For a description of Confucian influence on government, see 90–102.

language which changes in accordance with the rank of the person you are talking to. You start at the highest level.

Korea had moveable print more than 200 years before Gutenberg. One its treasures is a complete set of fifteenth century print wood blocks for the printing of Buddhist Sutras—the Tripitaka Koreana. King Sejong (1418–50) invented the phonetic Hangul alphabet so that women and peasants could read and write. It was adopted by Protestant missionaries to translate the Bible and has now replaced Chinese characters in books and newspapers.

In the thirteen century together with China, Korea was conquered by Genghis Khan. In the late sixteenth century it was invaded by Japan which wanted to cross it to attack China. In the mid seventeenth century, together with China it was invaded by the Manchus and became a tributary state to China under the Manchu Dynasty which ended in 1910.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century China and later Japan and Korea were opened to western trade and influence by force or the threat of force. The British and French opened China, the United States opened Japan, and Japan opened Korea in 1875. By 1882 there were embassies of the USA, Britain, Germany, Russia, Austria, France and Belgium.

A struggle for dominance ensued between Korea's immediate neighbours. The initial struggle was between China and Japan ending in Japanese victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1895. The Japanese overplayed their hand when they assassinated the Queen who opposed their plans for the modernisation of the country. The King, dressed as a washer woman by one of his concubines, fled to the Russian Embassy. The contest was then between Japan and Russia. It ended when Russia was comprehensively defeated by Japan in the Russo-

Japanese War of 1904-5. Korea was declared a Japanese protectorate in 1905 and annexed outright in 1910.

To the Koreans the period of Japanese annexation from 1905 to 1945 is a period of national 'clinical depression'. Japanese peasants were settled on confiscated land. A peaceful uprising in 1919 was brutally suppressed. In the 1930s the Koreans were told, to their astonishment, that they had always been Japanese. They were forced to adopt Japanese names, Japanese became the language of education, and Imperial Shinto was introduced into schools and then churches and homes.

Koreans were conscripted (some volunteered) into the Imperial Japanese Army. Some of those living close to the Manchurian and Siberian borders also fought in the Soviet Army (Kim Il Sung—the first President of North Korea), the Nationalist Chinese army and the Chinese People's Liberation Army (two Divisions which joined the North Korean army in 1949). Young women who volunteered for what they thought was a women's army auxiliary spent their war on their backs servicing 30 men a day as 'comfort women'. More than 2,600,000 Koreans were sent to Japan as forced labourers.<sup>1</sup>

At the sudden end of World War II in 1945 the country was divided at the 35<sup>th</sup> parallel so that the Soviet army could disarm the Japanese army in the north and the US army disarm it in the south. With the development of the Cold War this split became permanent and war broke out on 25 June 1950. To the 26 nations taking part led by the US under the UN Flag, this was perceived as war against aggression and the type of war which preceded World War II, and by many as a crusade against communism.

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<sup>1</sup> W.K. Han (K.S. Lee Translator), *The History of Korea* (Seoul: Eul-Woo Publishing, 1970), 496

To the Koreans it was a civil war of reunification. Fighting ended in a truce in July 1953 but hostilities have continued at a sub-clinical level ever since. The country remains split. Both north and the south have massive conscript armies, high-tech weapons and access to nuclear weapons in the north and from US allies in the south.

The country was devastated. Up to three million (10% of the population) Koreans were dead, there were five million refugees<sup>1</sup> and the economy and social fabric were in tatters. A massive influx of foreign aid was matched by an equally large incidence of corruption. In 1960 the government of President Yi Syngman, a Methodist convert who obtained a doctorate in political science under Woodrow Wilson at Princeton, was overthrown by a revolution led by students and backed by churches. This government was in turn overthrown in 1961 by the military under Major General Park Chung Hee. The new constitution introduced a form of government somewhere between a guided democracy and dictatorship and which oscillated between both.

Park Chung Hee revolutionised the economy through a series of five-year plans which has made Korea one of the ‘tiger’ economies. In 1972 GDP per head was in the order of US\$323.60. In 2017 it was US\$29,700. However, this was achieved by a repressive government, and on the backs of young women, living in factory dormitories and working 18-hour days, sometimes seven days a week. Anything that looked like a trade union was suppressed as communist. Students vehemently opposed the government with demonstrations for democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> D. Oberdorfer and C. Caekein, (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 8

Universities have memorials to students killed in the demonstrations.

In 1979 Park Chung Hee was assassinated by the head of the Korean CIA who was himself killed five minutes later. There was a military coup. Student demonstrations in the southern city of Kwangju were suppressed in a similar manner to that of Tienanmin Square in Beijing ten years later; by a brigade of commandos rather than tanks.<sup>1</sup> The new military dictator was compromised. The 1980s saw fierce student demonstrations and some street fighting. The President lost US support and the support of the army and was allowed to resign and enter a Buddhist monastery in 1987. A new constitution and truly democratic elections were held in time for the 1988 Olympic Games.<sup>2</sup> Since that time all elections have been democratic, and power has been transferred peacefully.

## Korea and Christianity

Korea's first experience of Christianity may have been Nestorian either from eighth century China or under the conquest by Genghis Khan whose mother and some of his generals were Christian.<sup>3</sup> During the Imjin War between 1590 and 1600 when Japan invaded Korea, one of armies came

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<sup>1</sup> For the background see D.N. Cark (Ed.), *The Kwangju Uprising- Shadows over the Regime in South Korea* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1988), 15–77.

<sup>2</sup> J.E. Carter, K. Lee, Y.I. Lew, M. Robinson, and E.W. Wagner, *Korea Old and New A History*, (Seoul: Cambridge Mass, and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 375–384

<sup>3</sup> J. Man, *The Mongol Empire Genghis Khan, his Heirs and the Founding of Modern China* (London: Bantam, 2014), 16–17, 166–8, 274.

E.O. Reischauer and J.K. Fairbank, 1960, *East Asia The Great Tradition* (Tokyo: Charles Tuttle and Co, 1960), 277.

D. MacCullough, *A History of Christianity, the First Three Thousand Years*, (London: Penguin, 2010), 245–254, 270–277. In 1973 the author met a Mary Knoll priest who said he had found Nestorians amongst the scavengers of Seoul.

complete with a Jesuit chaplain. A Jesuit mission based in Macau had been very successful in Japan, under Francis Xavier. In 1605 there were estimated to be 750,000 Christians in Japan.<sup>1</sup> Two decades later the church was suppressed with much loss of life. The remnant went underground for 230 years and emerged after the Western opening of country, practising Catholic rites as they were before the Council of Trent.

In 1777 a group of Confucian scholar aristocrats, who were out of office, had a holiday in a Buddhist monastery. The monastery library held books brought back by embassies to China. These included books written by the Macau Jesuits who had won recognition as scholars in Beijing. They had a small following and were used as interpreters but were prolific authors. The scholars converted themselves to Catholicism

Following advice from the Bishop of Beijing they abandoned concubines and ancestor rites. This was flagrant violation of Confucian practice. There were repeated pogroms and the death of converts. The greatest pogrom occurred between 1866 and 1868 when some 2,000 Christians were executed, including a French bishop and French and Korean priests.<sup>2</sup> The ruling regent, the Taewongun, alarmed at the effect of western influence in China and Japan had, decided to eradicate the 'virus' in Korea.

When a US embassy was established in 1882, missionaries in Japan saw their chance. H.H. Underwood of the United Presbyterian Church (Northern Presbyterians) and H.G. Appenzeller of the Methodist Episcopal Church North travelled

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<sup>1</sup> O. Cary, *A History of Christianity in Japan, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Protestant Missions*, (Tokyo: Charles Tuttle and Co., 1909 reprinted 1976), 261

<sup>2</sup> A.D. Clark, *A History of the Church in Korea* (Seoul: Christian Literature Society, 1971), 54-5

together to Inchon. Over the next ten years they were joined by members of a further four missions: the Methodist Episcopal Church South, The Presbyterian Church of the USA (Southern Presbyterians), the Presbyterian Church of Canada, and the Presbyterian Church of Victoria. There was also a small high church Anglican mission.

The Methodist and Presbyterian missions decided to work together and in 1890 formed a Council of Missions. The country was divided between them to minimise competition, but they could work in Seoul (see Figure 6). The Australians were allocated the south eastern province of Kyongsang Namdo. The missions worked together on translating the bible and publishing tracts. They used the Hangul alphabet rather than Chinese characters, and had a different word for God to that used by the Catholics. They aimed to develop self-sufficient churches financially and in leadership, with no ‘rice Christians’. This presupposed the education of elders and leaders and the development of an indigenous clergy.

In 1900 the four Presbyterian missions established a seminary in Pyongyang to train an indigenous clergy and in 1910 the Methodists established a seminary in Seoul. A Korean Presbytery was formed in Pyongyang and met for the first time in 1912. A Korean Annual Methodist Conference was formed in 1918 but rivalries between the northern and southern Methodist Conferences in the US delayed the creation of an autonomous Korean Methodist Church until 1930.<sup>1</sup>

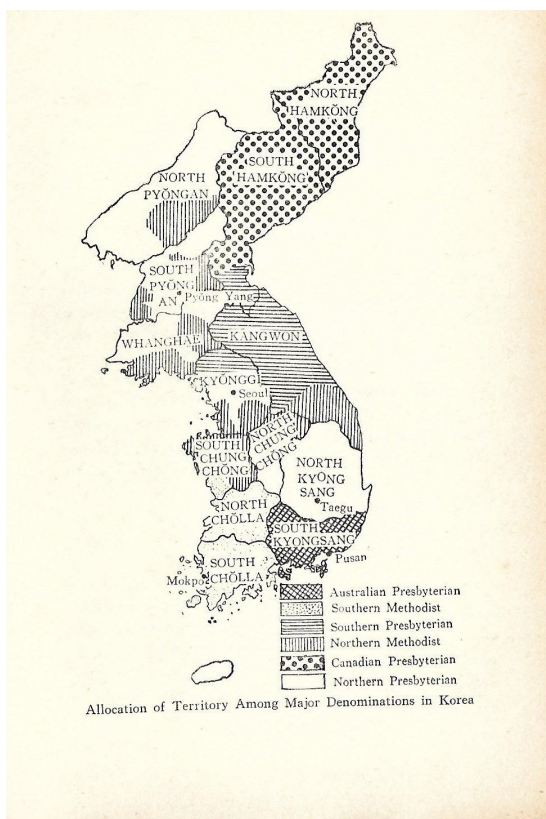
Korean politics greatly aided the growth of the church. A senior court official was badly injured in an attempted coup in

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<sup>1</sup> C.A. Sauer, *Methodists in Korea 1930–1960* (Seoul: Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1972), 16–33

1884 over the extent to which westernisation should be adopted. He was healed by a missionary in mufti who was the medical officer of the US Embassy. Another missionary stayed in Pyongyang in 1895 to treat the wounded and combat water borne diseases after the battle in Pyongyang between China and Japan. During the time the King was sheltered in the Russian embassy in 1895, he would not eat any food which had not been prepared in missionary kitchens because he was afraid of being poisoned.

During the Japanese occupation Christianity became a third



way, it was not associated with the Imperial power. The indigenous Churches were closely associated with Korean nationalism. The missions strictly adhered to Romans 13:3 about submitting to existing authorities, and saw their mission as including the Japanese in Korea. On the first of March 1919, a delegation of Methodists and Presbyterians

Figure 6



enthused by President Wilson's Fourteen Points, together with a number of members of Chondogyo, a syncretistic religion, presented a petition for independence to the Governor-General. This was accompanied by peaceful demonstrations across the country. The Japanese response was prompt, 40,000 people were shot down or imprisoned. The missions knew nothing of it.

The model mission station consisted of a V-shaped Church, a hospital and a Bible college. During winter when there was little activity on the farms, people were brought into the mission for education. On 6 January 1907 a combined Presbyterian and Methodist Bible Conference was convened in Pyongyang. The conference got out of control and continued out of control for a week. One missionary described his experience:

'I stood up and began to pray, "Father, Father" and got no further. It seemed as if the roof was lifted from the building and the Spirit of God came down in a mighty avalanche of power upon us... My last glimpse of the audience is photographed indelibly on my memory. Some threw themselves full length upon the floor, hundreds stood with their arms raised to heaven, every man forgot every other. Each was face to face with God. I can hear the fearful sound of hundreds of men pleading with God for Mercy'.<sup>1</sup>

This Pentecostal revival spread to every province and mission in Korea and has deeply influenced the church ever since.

The Japanese occupation was a time of rapid church growth with missionaries itinerating around large numbers of churches

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in A.D. Clark, 163

which were their responsibility. The growth has been likened to wildfire.<sup>1</sup>

Everything changed in 1932, with the Manchurian incident, the Japanese invasion of China, and in 1941 the outbreak of the war in the Pacific. Imperial Shinto was introduced into schools and later churches, on the basis it was a patriotic rather than religious rite. The Catholics acceded but the Presbyterians and Methodists did not. The missions closed their schools. Spies turned up in churches taking notes of sermons. Individual ministers were pressured to include Shinto in their worship and forcibly replaced if they did not. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church refused but when a meeting was stacked with Japanese plain clothes security officers it too acceded. Extreme pressure was placed on the Korean Methodist bishop and the Methodists also surrendered. Some missionaries, including an Australian, were imprisoned for their opposition to Shinto. In mid-1941 all missionaries were repatriated

1941 to 1945 was a period of extreme stress for Christians. The churches were combined by the Japanese into one organisation supervised by the Ministry of Rites in Tokyo. Preaching from Revelation and Exodus was banned and spies in the congregation reported on the political correctness of sermons and prayers. And of course, there were Imperial Shinto rites. About two hundred Methodist and Presbyterian ministers were gaoled for failing to comply and many Christians went underground.

The war ended suddenly. Those Koreans who had been gaoled or gone underground seized the churches and mission buildings and refused to admit any fallen brothers and sisters

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<sup>1</sup> R. Shearer, *Wildfire: Church Growth in Korea* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966).

unless they did severe penance. They did not. Both the Methodist and the Presbyterian Churches split. Returning missionaries tried unsuccessfully to reunite the churches. The Methodists succeeded; they could blame the bishop. The Presbyterians could not because decisions had been made by individual churches before the General Assembly surrendered to *force majeure*. There were now two Presbyterian Churches, the *Koryo pa* consisting of those who had gone to gaol or gone underground and those who had not.

During the Korean War there were mass executions of Christians in the north. Others fled south led by their ministers and elders.<sup>1</sup> In 1939 Pyongyang, now the capital of North Korea, was known as a city of churches. The immediate post-war period was characterised by immense poverty, refugees, homelessness, corruption and the entry of missions which had been expelled from China. The Presbyterian Church split another two times, partly about theology and partly from Confucian respect for leaders who could not agree. By 1960 there was a united Methodist Church, but four Presbyterian Churches; Koryo, Tong Hap, Hap Dong and Kijang, and a relatively new Baptist Church.

Christianity was encouraged as an antidote to communism by both Yi Syngman and Park Chung Hee. However social action emanating from it was regarded as subversion and communist inspired. Efforts to ameliorate the plight of factory workers through education on the labour laws, cooperative societies, and an Urban Industrial Mission resulted in young ministers and theological students going to prison on an almost revolving door basis. Police smashed down the doors of St

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<sup>1</sup> A.D. Clark, 244–7

Mary's Catholic cathedral in Seoul to break up and imprison members of a prayer meeting. Other prayer groups rotated through the city so as not to attract the KCIA's attention. Conservative churches backed the government. The more liberal ones were very nervous. By 1978 spies were once again taking notes of sermons.

With democratic government, after 1988, students became concerned about reunification of the north and south, a visceral desire of most Koreans, and finding the soul of Korea. Students at Koryo University found that their founder, a wealthy businessman with agricultural interests treated his farmers as peasants. The students worked with farmers and were successful in changing their conditions. They developed a theory that the soul of Korea could be found in the rural population and that Korean history was characterised by repression and anguish; the Min Jung theory of history. This was taken up by some Korean churches in Min Jung theology. *Ju Min* is the word for citizen. It is made of two Chinese characters *Ju* meaning State, and *min* being the individual. Min Jung reverses the order with the individual on top and the state underneath, a reversal of Confucian thinking.<sup>1</sup>

The growth of the Korean church has been described as wildfire. In 1973 Billy Graham had meetings of a million people in Seoul and had to be helicoptered in by the US army. To celebrate the centenary of Protestant mission in 1983 the churches aimed to establish one hundred thousand new churches and probably succeeded. A typical suburban church, Pusanjin in

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<sup>1</sup> N. Abelmann, "Minjung Movements and Minjungs: Minjung Farmers in a 1980s Movement" in K.M. Well (ed), *South Korea's Minjung Movement the Culture and Politics of Dissidence* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 119–155  
D.C. Clark, "Growth and Limitations of Minjung Christianity in South Korea", in K.M. Wells, 87–105

Pusan, grew from a morning congregation of the 200 in 1971 to 800 by 2001 and had to erect a new building. In 1972 Yongnak church in Seoul, established by North Korean refugees after the war had 10,000 communicant members. Its 10 am services had simultaneous translations from Korean to English. In 2012 when I worshiped there the translations were in English, Japanese and Mandarin. It had 50,000 communicant members, 26 services each Sunday and its own missionaries in Bangladesh and Uganda.

### The Korean Church in Australia

Possibly the first Korean Church in Australia was set up by the Rev. Dr John Brown in South Sydney in the early 1970s. In 1974 it moved to the Trinity Congregational Church in Strathfield. John Brown is a superb linguist and was a long term missionary and academic in Korea. He was head of the Presbyterian Board of Ecumenical Mission and Relations, and later held the equivalent position in the new Uniting Church. By 1978 he had recruited a Korean minister who had been chaplain to the Korean civilians in Vietnam. Church members came from all the Korean denominations, Methodist, the four different Presbyterian ones, Baptist and Holiness.

As their numbers grew tensions developed. Members wanted to preserve their culture for their children who were becoming too Australian. They also wanted worship and practice to reflect that which they were familiar with in Korea. This varied in small but significant ways between the six churches. The congregation broke up into its component parts, not always amicably. As Koreans moved from Strathfield and Campsie to the many suburbs of Sydney and other cities, they established their own church of whatever connection and they imported their

ministers from Korea. Korean churches continue to grow with each year's influx of immigrants.

Korean churches related to the Uniting Church struggled for many years to cooperate with English speaking churches and Presbyteries. In 2007 the Assembly agreed to accept Korean Church structures and traditions. Presbyteries found the independently minded Korean churches difficult to manage. In 2004 the Assembly created a bilingual Korean Commission which took over much of the responsibilities of the Presbyteries. In 2011 the NSW and ACT Synod approved the creation of a Korean Presbytery. The Presbytery has a conservative stance on theology and social issues.<sup>1</sup> Over the years since its establishment some tension has developed between the Presbytery and the Synod. The Presbytery adheres to Korean ways so far as possible and has a somewhat cavalier attitude to Uniting Church regulations. Same-sex marriage is an issue of concern and resulted in a strong statement from the Presbytery in 2018.<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusion

Many Koreans have found a home in the Uniting Church, but more have not, and some of those that have are at risk of leaving. There are opportunities and challenges.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Korean Presbytery Inaugurated' in *Insights*, Feb 2, 2012

<sup>2</sup> Declaration by the Korean Presbytery Meeting on 17 June 2018 and submitted to the General Assembly as "Item 53 To maintain the definition of marriage adopted by the Assembly in 1997", Abundant Grace Liberating Hope, 16<sup>th</sup> Triennial Assembly Uniting Church in Australia.

## Relationships

A minority of Churches are related to either the Uniting Church or the Continuing Presbyterian one. There are several reasons for this.

- Pride in their achievements The hierarchical Confucian heritage and reverence for infallible teachers does not fit well with Australian egalitarianism
- The split at church union in 1977. Which is the mother Church? The Uniting Church or the (continuing) Presbyterian?
- The 1890 division of the country between the six missions. Unless they lived in Kyongsang Namdo the mother church would be in North America and not Australia.
- The bitter and ongoing splits following World War II and the Korean War.
- The Uniting Church has partnership arrangements with the Korean Methodist Church and only two of the Presbyterian Churches; Tong Hap and Kijang.
- The large churches they come from in Korea and perhaps dismay at the apparent decline in Christianity in general in Australia.
- The largest population of Koreans are in Sydney but the retired missionaries who might have been able to influence the churches are in Melbourne.

## Evangelism

From the beginning, and especially after the 1907 Pyongyang 'Pentecost', Korean churches have placed a strong emphasis on both revivalism and evangelism. A common practice is to have dawn services every day, a Revival Service on Wednesday

nights, and lengthy services, with long prayers and even longer sermons, twice on Sunday. Many people tithe. Many churches, and even Christian hospitals, have their own foreign missionaries, as well as mission campaigns in their own country.

By contrast the CLS Survey of the Uniting Church found less than 50% of churches had evangelism, broadly defined, as a priority.<sup>1</sup>

Strong Conviction.

A history of repression, persecution, war, homelessness, desolation and reconstruction has resulted in convictions that have been forged in fire. It can be argued that as a result Korean churches in Australia have difficulty with the governance of the Uniting Church and probably that of the (continuing) Presbyterian Church. Hence tension between the Korean Presbytery and the NSW-ACT Synod over compliance with bylaws.

However older established immigrants, especially their children, have adopted Australian ways. Some have drifted to local congregations such as Paton Memorial Church in Melbourne. The last Moderator of the NSW and ACT Synod is a Korean, the Rev. Park Myong Wha. A few local congregations have Korean ministers. Others have joined the spiritual but not religious group or the frankly non-religious. In 2009 the 120<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Australian Mission was celebrated in Korea and in Australia. Major Korean celebrations revolve around a 60-year astrological cycle with jubilation for surviving first and sixtieth years. Celebrations in Korea included television documentaries, the creation of parks and museums and many

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<sup>1</sup> Evangelistic activities, *2013 UCA Census*, in NCLS Research



books on the history and influence of the mission. Australian celebration occurred on two consecutive weekends, the first in Sydney and the second in Melbourne. These involved all the Korean churches and not just the Uniting and Presbyterian ones. Retired missionaries were fêted as heroes. The following year many went to Korea as guests with their costs covered by the Australian churches.

The challenge for the Uniting Church is in deciding what a multicultural church looks like. Is it when 'culturally and linguistically diverse' (CALD) people join a local congregation and adapt to their ways? Is it a number of churches with their own languages and their own traditions and linked to the Uniting Church but not necessarily abiding by Uniting Church regulations? Will it be both? Or will CALD churches set up separate churches within Australia, some of which may be linked to churches in their home countries?

# The Ministry of Lay Preacher

Barry T. Brown

## Synopsis

This paper has a two-fold purpose. First, it provides an initial and partial response to a question recently asked by some members of the Lay Preachers' Association (LPA) of Victoria and Tasmania: "What would a history of lay preaching in Victoria and Tasmania look like?" Second, by presenting this paper at a national conference, it is hoped that it will provoke interest in similar projects in other synods. A particular focus below is development in Victoria, and only to 1902. For a fuller response to the above question, further work will need to be undertaken comprising an account of the history and some special topics. A series of research questions will be required for those who engage in such an undertaking.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction and lay preaching in historical perspective

The Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) ensured the ministry of Lay Preacher found a home in the UCA. This is confirmed in the Constitution, and in the Regulations it is listed as one of the Specified Ministries. It would be overly simplistic to claim the ministry of lay preacher was inherited from the Methodist tradition. While there is much truth in such a claim, it is important to begin with a broader perspective. Wesley scholar John Telford provides a useful starting point in

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<sup>1</sup> These will cover the Congregational and Presbyterian traditions, the Methodist Church of Australasia (1902–1977), and the Uniting Church in Australia from 1977.

*A History of Lay Preaching in the Christian Church*.<sup>1</sup> Telford's study will be followed at some points. It is useful to note, from the opening paragraph of Telford's book: "Some of the purest and most saintly Christian workers of both sexes have been lay preachers, and so have been some of the wildest Fanatics".<sup>2</sup>

The Bible provides testimony to lay preaching. Neither Moses nor most of the prophets of Israel and Judah were authorised religious agents. Each relied upon a strong sense of call by God to speak forth in God's name. Neither John the Baptist nor Jesus were religiously authorised, but were compelled to speak in the name of God. So too were the Apostles and other leaders in the infant church, such as Phillip, Barnabas, Apollos, and Priscilla and Aquila.

From the early centuries of the church, we might cite Justin Martyr, Origen and Eusebius as examples of men who, at least in their earlier vocations, we might consider to be lay preachers. It is worth noting that the present Pope Francis is a Jesuit, and that the founder of this order, Ignatius of Loyola, began his vocation as a lay preacher, and that Francis of Assisi, whose name is honoured by Pope Francis, also commenced his Christian vocation as a lay preacher.

Martin Luther was an ordained priest and took very seriously the importance of preaching. Luther's influence had the effect of inspiring numerous lay preachers during the early years of the Reformation. It was the Lutheran doctrine of 'The Priesthood of All Believers' that gave rise to the advancement of various lay ministries within Protestantism, including lay preaching. Luther was followed by other reformers. Telford raises the

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<sup>1</sup> John Telford, *A History of Lay Preaching in the Christian Church*, (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1897) Classic Reprint Series—Forgotten Books, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Telford, page v.

question, “Was Mr. Calvin ordained?” My reading of the studies on John Calvin suggests this question remains largely unanswered. If Calvin was not ordained, or if his ordination took place at a later stage in his ministry, he too must have been a lay preacher. The Anabaptists in Continental Europe and the Brownists in England provide witness to lay preaching that followed the Reformation.

George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends (the Quakers), was a well-known itinerant lay preacher in the middle of the seventeenth century—in England, Ireland, Wales, the West Indies and North America. Richard Davis, an Independent pastor at Rothwell, Northamptonshire, for 25 years to 1714, established a cluster of seven congregations and deployed 28 lay preachers. In some ways, Davis was a forerunner of John and Charles Wesley, who were each born during the latter years of Davis’ ministry.<sup>1</sup>

## The Wesleys and Early Methodism

There is no need here to repeat the well-known story of the Wesleys and the origins of Methodism, other than to attend specifically to Wesley’s lay preachers. Following the Aldersgate experience of John Wesley, there came three significant surprises. The first was that Wesley allowed himself to be persuaded by George Whitefield to engage in field preaching. The second was that there was an overwhelming response to this preaching. The third was the early realisation that, if the evangelical work then begun was to expand, it would be necessary to deploy lay preachers in this mission. Joseph

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<sup>1</sup> Mentioned in Telford. A more detailed record is found in Norman Glass, *The Early History of The Independent Church at Rothwell, alias Rowell, in Northamptonshire* (Northampton: Taylor & Son, 1871)

Humphrey and John Cennick may have been the earliest of Wesley's lay preachers. However, it was Thomas Maxwell whom Wesley seemed to consider the first of his 'sons in the Gospel'. The influence of Wesley's mother, Susanna, played a large part in Maxwell's preaching being acceptable to Wesley. By 1840, it is estimated that the Wesleys had around 40 Helpers; a few were Anglican clergymen, the rest were laymen. The 1744 Conference was significant. John and Charles Wesley and four other Anglican clergymen were present. The first item of business begged the question as to whether some of the lay preachers should also be present. Following agreement on this matter, four lay preachers were immediately welcomed into the conference—Thomas Richards, Thomas Maxwell, John Bennet and John Downs.<sup>1</sup> This event may be considered the beginning of institutional recognition of lay preachers having an essential role within Methodism.

Wesley scholar, Dr Frank Baker, studied the Wesleyan records for decades. Before his death, Baker had created a large folder comprising his notes on Wesley's itinerant preachers. He calculated there were 677 deployed by Wesley during his lifetime. Baker passed this folder on to Dr John Lenton in the hope that he would continue this work. In 2009, Lenton published a detailed study of John Wesley's preachers.<sup>2</sup> Lenton had by then calculated there were 802 itinerant preachers deployed by Wesley. However, by 2019, he concluded there had been probably 804 itinerant preachers, of whom 774 were

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<sup>1</sup> Henry D. Rack (Ed), *The Works of John Wesley, The Bicentennial Edition*, Volume 10 (The Methodist Societies, The Minutes of Conference, 2011), 123–124.

<sup>2</sup> John Lenton, *John Wesley's Preachers: A Social and Statistical Analysis of the British and Irish Preachers who entered the Methodist Itinerancy before 1791*, (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009)

laymen and 30 were Anglican clergy.<sup>1</sup> Around the time of Wesley's death there were an estimated 300 itinerant preachers, most of whom were laymen. There were also around 2,000 local preachers, most of whom were men, though a few women were exercising an 'extraordinary' calling.<sup>2</sup> These numbers clearly indicate the considerable importance of the lay preachers in the development of Wesleyan Methodism.

In the decades that immediately followed Wesley's death in 1791, Methodism became separated (more or less in some places) from the Church of England. The polity relating to ordination varied somewhat for a time. By 1822 it was largely assumed that all itinerant preachers who had been "received into full connexion" were, in effect, ordained. It is relevant to note that the Methodist ministry (missionaries) that first came to Australia evolved from this largely lay cohort of itinerant preachers.<sup>3</sup>

Wesley deployed a number of women in the work of Methodism. None are included in the cohort of itinerant lay preachers in the work of Baker and Lenton. However, it is evident that Wesley did not exclude women from preaching altogether, and this probably resulted from the memory of his mother's example and her influence. Wesley was, however, guarded in this matter and was always quick to point to the validity of an 'extraordinary call' in such cases. Some notable women who exercised a preaching ministry during Wesley's

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the lay preachers, possibly 29, were later ordained as Anglican clergy. Email and table received from John Lenton, 15 May 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Milburn's entry on Local Preachers in John Vickers (Ed), *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2000), 208.

<sup>3</sup> This continues to be an issue in ecumenical conversation with branches of the Christian church that adhere to the importance of 'Apostolic Succession' to validate the ordination of presbyters.

lifetime were Sarah Crosby, Mary Bosanquet (Mrs Fletcher), Sarah Mallett, Sarah Perrin, Grace Walton, Sarah Ryan, Betty Hurrell and Mary Barritt (Mrs Taft).

## Methodism in the Australian Colonies from 1811 <sup>1</sup>

To understand the beginnings of Methodism in Australia, it is appropriate to briefly consider the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS). The WMMS was formally constituted at a connexional level by the British Conference of 1818. However, District Societies, as the result of local and strong lay initiatives, had existed since 1813, the first being at Leeds. It is usual to date the beginnings of the WMMS from the earlier date, 1813. The WMMS played an important role in sending missionaries (ministers) to the Australian colonies. However, we shall note that this almost always followed from the initial leadership by Wesleyan lay leaders, including lay preachers and class leaders.

The first Methodist societies established in each of the Australian colonies were Wesleyan Methodist. Methodism had its beginnings in Australia with the efforts of a few laymen in 1811, when Edward Edgar started a Class Meeting at Windsor, New South Wales (NSW). On 6 March 1812, Thomas Bowden and John Hosking commenced a Class Meeting in Sydney. This was followed by a combined Love Feast on 3 April 1812. At this meeting it was resolved to write to the British Conference to

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<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere it will need to be recorded that from c1803 to 1825 a Presbyterian, Mr James Mein, provided lay leadership, including preaching, to the Ebenezer Church at Portland Heads, on the Hawkesbury River, NSW. He was sometimes assisted by lay and ordained Congregational missionaries from the London Missionary Society. The Ebenezer Church officially became Presbyterian in 1824 and is now a Uniting Church. The church and school are the oldest extant church buildings in Australia.

request one or more missionaries be sent to NSW. The Rev. Samuel Leigh's arrival in 1815 was the response.

Although there may have been a few Wesleyans present in the largely convict settlements of Van Diemen's Land (VDL—Tasmania from 1856) prior to 1820, this is the year the Rev. Benjamin Carvosso commenced what would become the Methodist cause in Hobart. He was the son of the famed William Carvosso who exercised a powerful lay evangelist role in Cornwall over several decades.<sup>1</sup> In April 1820, Benjamin Carvosso spent a week in Hobart on his way to Sydney. He preached several times in the yard of the Court House, in a few homes, in a prison and to convicts on a chain gang. His brief stay connected some Methodist sympathisers, and a visit by the Rev. Ralf Mansfield five months later, also on his way to Sydney, kept this alive. Among this small group was a soldier, Benjamin Nokes, who soon came to the fore as a leader. Seven weeks after Mansfield's brief visit, three soldiers from Sydney, who were members of the Wesleyan Methodist Society there, came to Hobart and became key leaders of the small group. During the following decade, several failed attempts by travelling ministers had been made to establish a Wesleyan cause at Launceston, in northern VDL. John Leach, a hired local preacher, played an important role as a lay preacher and class leader in founding what would become the Wesleyan Society in Launceston. VDL also provides an interesting story of an early woman preacher, Mrs Pullen. During the late 1830s, she played a leading role in establishing a Wesleyan cause in her husband's forge, and with the support of the Rev. Joseph Orton and other Wesleyan missionaries, a chapel was built at Kingston, south of Hobart, by

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Maker, *Cob and Moorstone*, (London: Epworth Press, 1935), 81ff



1838. A local preacher from Hobart led the service on the first Sunday. The preacher then walked seven miles back to Hobart.

The story of Swan River (Perth) dates the commencement of Wesleyan Methodism from February 1830, when the sailing ship *Tranby* arrived at Fremantle. A large proportion of the passengers were Wesleyans and at least four of these were lay preachers, namely Joseph Hardey, John Wall Hardey, Dr Brownell and John Leach. John Leach soon made his way to VDL. The first Wesleyan service was held on the beach at Fremantle soon after the landing and was led by Joseph Hardey. Hardey also conducted the first service in Perth, in July 1830. It would be 1840 before the first minister, the Rev. John Smithies, and his wife Hannah, arrived to serve the settlement.

For South Australia, it is convenient to rely of the record provided by Arnold Hunt.

The first Methodist service in South Australia was conducted on Kangaroo Island on 13 November 1836 by a Wesleyan layman, Samuel East. East had arrived a few days before with his wife and six children on the *Africaine*.... There were several Wesleyan families on the *Coromandel* which arrived at Holdfast Bay, Glenelg, on 12 January 1837. On the second Sunday after their arrival, 22 January, John C. White, a local preacher, conducted worship in a large tent belonging to Edward Stephens, cashier of the South Australian Cashiery.... Then on Monday, 11 May 1837, the first Wesleyan society

was organised in Stephens' home.... Fifteen people indicated their willingness to become members....<sup>1</sup>

The Brisbane River convict settlement had been established at Moreton Bay by 1824. There seems to have been little activity by the Wesleyans until 1847. John Harrison explains that the first Wesleyan agent to pioneer work in Brisbane was William Moore, a lay missionary.<sup>2</sup> Moore had initially volunteered for service in Fiji. In 1847, he was sent to Morton Bay to establish a Wesleyan cause. He found that various religious groups already existed and had established an interdenominational Mission Hall in Queens Street. It is possible there were already some Methodists present. Moore conducted the first Wesleyan service in the Mission Hall on 24 October 1847. Queensland became a separate colony on 10 December 1859.

The Port Phillip District (PPD – Victoria from 1851)

The PPD has been left to last in order to provide continuity with what is to follow. European settlement of the PPD by settlers from Northern VDL dates from 1835, and is associated with rivals John Batman and John Pascoe Fawkner. Henry Reed, a Wesleyan layman, is said to have preached at a small gathering in Batman's hut in the spring of 1835. In April the following year, the Rev. Joseph Orton, on a brief visit, conducted two services at the same hut and these are considered the first Christian services in Melbourne. In 1837, with the news of land sales by the NSW government, a large influx of settlers from VDL began arriving. This was the same year that the settlement

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold D. Hunt, *This Side of Heaven: A History of Methodism in South Australia*, (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1985), 24ff.

<sup>2</sup> John Harrison, "Queensland Methodism until 1902", in, Glen O'Brien and Hilary M. Carey (Eds), *Methodism in Australia: A History* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015), 75ff.

was officially named Melbourne. Thomas Watson, James Jennings and George Worthy were among the earliest Methodists to arrive, but none of these rose to prominence as leaders. Evidence suggests that a small group of early Methodists met, in the hut of George Worthy, near the Yarra River. Worthy was one of John Batman's shepherds. George Lilly was also an early arrival from Launceston where he had started the Wesleyan Sunday school. He seemed to be in charge of this first Wesleyan group to gather in Melbourne. However, following Mr William Witton and his family's arrival in March 1837, the group found Witton to be a willing and able leader. The Methodists moved to meet in a wattle and daub hut in Little Bourke Street, under Witton's leadership. The meeting of Methodists who had been led by George Lilly, became a Class Meeting with William Witton as the first Class Leader and preacher. Testimony to this was recorded, by the Rev. Joseph Orton in a Memorandum, inside the front of the first Quarterly Meeting Minutes Book of the Port Phillip Circuit.

Witton, with a few other local preachers, played leading roles in the period before the arrival of the first ministers, and then continued to do so as their co-workers. Witton would later serve for an extended period in the Western District, some of this time as a 'hired local preacher'. He and his family lived for a time in Portland, then on a farm nearby, and later at Belfast (Port Fairy). In each of these regions he worked tirelessly as a local preacher. In 1847, while Witton was living at Belfast, he walked to the designated site that is now the city of Warrnambool, to purchase

a block of land at the first land sale, to ensure there was a site for the Wesleyans.<sup>1</sup>

In November 1838, a nineteen year-old Methodist, Charles Stone, arrived in the PPD from VDL, commissioned by the Rev. Joseph Orton to exercise his gifts in lay preaching. At the first Local Preachers' Meeting, held in Melbourne on 5 July 1840, Charles Stone was formally received as a Local Preacher on trial. He preached in the outer parts of Melbourne for a few years, near what is known today as Richmond, and at Brunswick, Plenty and Brighton. In 1841, he moved to live in Williamstown, and then to Brighton in 1845, providing pioneering work for the Wesleyan causes in these places. At this, time Geelong was part of the Port Phillip Circuit. In 1842, a request for a minister was made to the Quarterly Meeting, and William Witton and Abel Thorpe (Circuit Stewards) were asked to visit Geelong and report back. Mr James Dredge, a local preacher, was commissioned for this ministry in Geelong in June 1842, thus making him the first Methodist agent to be appointed specifically to Geelong. James Dredge and Edward Stone Parker had earlier served as local preachers in Melbourne before taking up, for a brief period, roles as Assistant Protectors of Aborigines in the hinterland of the PPD. Thomas Wilkinson was another leading local preacher in Melbourne, then Portland, and later as 'the Father of Brunswick'. The first preaching plan of the Port Phillip Circuit, dated 1840, lists the Reverends Benjamin Hurst and Francis Tuckfield of the Buntingdale Mission, together with local preachers Witton, Dredge, Parker, Smith and Wilkinson. The preaching places were Melbourne, Newtown

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed account of the life and ministry of William Witton see: Barry T. Brown, *William Witton: 'almost perpetual curate'*, (Croydon, Victoria: self-published, 2011)

(Collingwood), Brickfields (Brunswick) and Forest (Heidelberg-Templestowe).

Miss Caroline Newcomb represents a prominent woman leader in the early years of the PPD. Miss Newcomb, and Miss Ann Drysdale whom she had met through Dr Alexander Thomson, established a pastoral property on the Barwon River East of Geelong. From here, Caroline Newcomb exercised a leading role in the establishment of Methodism in the Geelong region, often providing hospitality for visiting preachers. She was the first women's Class Leader in Geelong and held several leading positions. In the homestead, she frequently conducted devotional services which her servants, farm workers and visitors attended. The only photograph known to exist of Miss Newcomb is of her standing at a lectern with an open Bible, thus suggesting it is likely her role of 'exhorter' seemed to expand into that of a 'preacher', although it is unlikely she was ever accredited.

## The 1850s and the Victorian Gold Rush

Victoria was officially established a colony on 1 July 1851. Only four days later, on 5 July 1851, news broke that gold had been discovered at Anderson's Creek (Warrandyte). By December 1851 gold had also been discovered in the regions of Ballarat, Mount Alexander (Castlemaine) and Sandhurst (Bendigo), and almost half of the men from Victoria, and thousands from Tasmania and NSW, were working the diggings. The Wesleyan Methodist Church (WMC) had already resolved to establish Victoria as a new District. The First District Meeting was held in Melbourne, on 9 September 1851, with a new sense of urgency. At this meeting were the five WMC ministers in Victoria, under the leadership of the new Chairman, the Rev.

William Butters. The appointment of ministers for the year included two who were on their way to the colony, making seven in total. The challenge of the mission ahead was daunting. It was estimated that, by the end of 1851, there were around 20,000 men on the diggings and that around 4,000 of these were Wesleyans from Victoria, NSW, VDL and South Australia. These included many local preachers. Mr Butters had the double responsibility of overseeing the Wesleyans' work in Melbourne, and attending to the challenge of taking the Gospel message to the diggings. The available ministers made visits to the diggings and did their best. There were also visits from ministers from VDL and South Australia. An urgent message was sent to the British Conference requesting further ministers be sent to Victoria, and four arrived over the next few years, and another four were added by 1853, making 13 ministers in all. Mr Butters made several visits to Ballarat, as did the Rev. Mr Waterhouse. The Rev. Mr Harcourt was sent to Castlemaine where he undertook several preaching and pastoral missions. However, they soon found that the lay preachers were active and were exercising a most significant ministry of evangelism on the gold fields.

Space does not permit a detailed account of the extensive and faithful initiatives of the Wesleyan ministers and local preachers. However, such details are available in several standard sources.<sup>1</sup> Here it is enough to note that, with the support of several ministers sent to the gold fields for varying periods, the lay preachers and class leaders played the leading role in

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<sup>1</sup> For example: W.L. Blamires and J.B. Smith, *The Early Story of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Victoria* (Melbourne: Wesleyan Book Depot, 1886), and C. Irving Benson, *A Century of Victorian Methodism* (Melbourne: Spectator Publishing Co., 1935)

establishing Wesleyan causes in such places as Ballan, Kyneton, Ballarat, Castlemaine, Maldon, Maryborough, Talbot, Avoca, Sandhurst (Bendigo) and Eaglehawk. In some of these centres, hired local preachers were deployed to provide some continuity in the absence of ministers, and the mobility of many of the local preachers. Without doubt, the Wesleyan local preachers played a major role in missioning the Victorian gold fields and in giving the Wesleyans considerable advantage over other denominations.

It is important to note four key features of Methodist polity that gave it the effect of being the most successful denomination in missioning the gold fields:

- Connexionalism – allowing the wider church to swing into action.
- Collaboration of the ordained ministers and the local preachers and class leaders.
- The strong leadership, authority, flexibility and oversight of the ministers.
- The front-line ministry of the lay preachers and class leaders.

The general pattern for the establishment of Methodist causes followed this order (not just on the gold fields):

1. Local preachers commenced preaching in the open, a tent, a forge, a hut, or a home.
2. Classes were formed under lay leadership.
3. A society was formed.
4. A building was erected.
5. An application was made for the sending of a minister.

6. The arrival of a minister to provide oversight and the full ordinances of the church – in partnership with the lay leadership.

Up to this point, the focus on Methodism in Victoria has been on the Wesleysans. It is at this point that we need to consider other branches of the Methodist tradition. However, the matters of polity, mentioned immediately above, may generally be considered to apply to other branches of Methodism. The background to the various divisions of Methodism can be found in various sources.<sup>1</sup>

### The Primitive Methodist Connexion (PMC)

The PMC came into being as a result of American-style ‘Camp-Meetings’ in England as early as 1807. The key leaders, Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, were expelled from the Methodist Connexion because their camp meetings were considered contrary to order and discipline. Class Meetings started in 1810 and by 1820 they had formed a Connexion of their own, which had a strong emphasis on lay leadership. The PMC was strong in South Australia, and came to Victoria from there in 1848. The PMC soon established circuits in Melbourne and suburbs, at Geelong, on the gold fields, and in north and north-western Victoria.

The earliest PMC members to reach Victoria were Henry Woodyard and Thomas Lord, who arrived in 1848. William Belcher came in 1849, and was quickly followed by William Rogers, George Parnell and W.G. Lawry. The first Society Class gathered, in Fitzroy, on 14 January 1849. Thomas Lord was

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<sup>1</sup> For example: Barrie W. Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1995). See Chapter 8, “Controversies and Divisions, 63ff. See also Hunt, *This Side of Heaven*, 14ff.



chosen as leader, with William Belcher as his assistant. The PMC banner was raised on Flagstaff Hill at an open air service on 21 January 1849, creating some local disturbance. Land was purchased in La Trobe Street, and Mr J.M. Bryant laid the foundation stone on 17 December 1849. The first Quarterly Meeting was held that day, at which eight local preachers, two classes and 40 members were recorded. An urgent request was sent to London for a minister.<sup>1</sup>

By this time the Rev. John Ride and his wife Martha were already on their way and arrived on 17 January 1850. Soon after their arrival, at a Quarterly Meeting, the credentials of John Ride as a minister were accepted, as were those of Mrs Martha Ride as a local preacher.<sup>2</sup> Martha Doncaster had served in a number of places in England as an itinerant preacher before marrying John Ride in 1825, and she continued to serve as a local preacher as opportunity provided. It is probable that Martha Ride was the first formally credentialed woman preacher of the Methodist tradition in Victoria.<sup>3</sup> It appears her first sermon in the Melbourne was preached on 24 March 1850, on the evening of

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<sup>1</sup> A useful source of information about the PMC is to be found in Michael Clarke, *The History of Primitive Methodism in Victoria and Tasmania* (1872). This rare book is held in the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, and can be downloaded digitally. This seems to be the source used by Benson, 289ff.

<sup>2</sup> Alison Head, 2014, "The Forgotten Women", in *The Proceedings of the Uniting Church Historical Society, Synod of Victoria and Tasmanian*, Robert Renton (Ed.) Vol. 21 No. 1, 2014. Reference (footnote 2) is made to the Minutes of the Melbourne PMC Quarterly Meeting, but the date is not given. The minutes were previously held by the UCA Archives Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, but are now in the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

<sup>3</sup> This depends on whether or not some of the PMC lay women who had arrived in Victoria earlier were authorized local preachers. For information concerning Mrs Martha Ride, nee Doncaster, see Dorothy E. Graham, "Chosen by God: Female travelling preachers of early Primitive Methodism", in *Proceedings of the Wesleyan Historical Society*, Vol 49, October 1993. This is based upon Dorothy Graham's University of Birmingham PhD thesis of 25 years earlier.

the opening of the first PMC chapel in La Trobe Street. The following press article provides an interesting commentary on the occasion:

The primitive Methodists have erected a small place of worship in La Trobe-street, which was opened on Sunday last; in the evening a very unusual sight was exhibited of a female preacher in the pulpit holding forth to an overflowing house. The lady's name is Mrs Ride, and she selected the words—"What is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul", and she enlarged upon the text to admiration. We have heard of a blue-stockings, but seldom before of a black-stockings, but it is pretty evident that Mrs Ride belongs to this class. Apart from the indecency of a woman preaching—which appears to us little less than burlesque—we are bound to say that Mrs Ride is a fluent speaker, and that her sermon was delivered *extempore*, which was excellent—without a note or paper. We only regret a woman so evidently superior, should have placed herself in such an unenviable position.<sup>1</sup>

Mrs Ride is also recorded as preaching in the site of the future PMC chapel at Brighton on 14 February 1851, the day the foundation stone was laid by her husband. She was also one of three preachers on the occasion of the opening of the Brighton chapel on 20 April 1851.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Port Phillip Gazette & Settlers' Journal*, Tuesday, 26 March 1850, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes extracted from records in the back of a cash book relating to the Brighton Primitive Methodist Society, which is held at the Uniting Church (VicTas) Archives. For further comments upon Mrs Martha Ride, see Alison Head, "Forgotten Women", especially from page 68. Other women preachers of the Methodist tradition in Victoria are also mentioned.

Although 60 years old, the Rev. John Ride ministered for a time at Melbourne, Collingwood, Brighton, Brunswick, Heidelberg and Geelong – and later, in retirement, at Benalla.

The Rev. Michael Clarke arrived in 1853. Learning there were PMC members on the diggings, he requested a report. He soon made his way to Mount Alexander (Castlemaine), where he found services were being held in the open air by Richard ('Glory') Smith, and that fellowship was held in various tents. Clarke also conducted services at Castlemaine and Campbell's Creek. Mr William Calvert was sent to Campbell's Creek as a hired local preacher. Before long, Kilmore (1856), Gardner's Creek, Essendon, South Brighton and Campbellfield, Ballarat and Creswick, each were listed on the Melbourne Plan. The Revs L. Dobbinson and G.T. Hall also arrived. Dobbinson was sent to Eaglehawk

The Plan of the Melbourne Circuit of the PMC in January to March 1857 is revealing. It lists 36 preachers—two ministers (Clarke and Ride) and 34 lay preachers. M[artha] Ride is listed first after the two ministers on this list of preachers. In addition, it lists one exhorter and seven prayer leaders. There were 14 preaching places listed in Melbourne and its suburbs, and Kilmore and Sutherland's Creek in the Kilmore Branch. This illustrates both the growth of the PMC causes in Melbourne and suburbs, and in regional Victoria, and the high dependence upon the ministry of the local preachers.

### The Bible Christian Church (BCC)

The BCC was first established in Cornwall and Devon from 1815 under the leadership of an independent lay preacher, William O'Bryan, who was twice declined as a candidate for the Wesleyan ministry. The BCC was established in South Australia

by 1849, and had soon sent a message to their English Conference requesting missionaries. By late 1850, the Revs. James Way and James Rowe had arrived.

With the number of BCC members flocking to the Victorian diggings, James Way visited Victoria and its gold fields in 1854. He endeavoured to start up BCC societies in several places and was surprised and pleased to find one already at Creswick Creek (Clunes), and that the locals had also erected a BCC chapel. Here he also met James Jenkins, a local preacher who had preached at several of the diggings and had played a key role in the building of the chapel at Clunes. Later, Jenkin moved to spend the remainder of his life at Maldon, where he continued as a local preacher for 56 years. Way also visited Castlemaine before returning to Melbourne and then back to South Australia. During the 1850s there was limited success by the BCC on the diggings. This was largely due to the relatively small number of their local preachers.

The Rev. William Hosken later came from South Australia to Victoria and commenced services at Fitzroy, North Melbourne and Carlton. He did the same at Moriac and Barrabool Hills near Geelong. The energies of the ministers were principally devoted to following up people as they settled about the various gold fields. In 1856, the BCC had only three missionaries in Victoria and seven Local Preachers. By 1859 the numbers had only grown to five pastors and 22 Local Preachers. Most were in either Melbourne or Geelong.

An interesting example of women preaching within the BCC context is recorded in Travis McHarg's study.<sup>1</sup> Miss Serena

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<sup>1</sup> Travis McHarg, *The Bible Christians in Victoria, 1850s–1902* (Boronia: Mercia Press), 42ff.

Thorne was 25 years of age when she came to Victoria from Queensland in 1867. From the time of her arrival in Victoria, Miss Thorne exercised a gifted and successful ministry as a preacher and was used widely by the BCC in evangelistic preaching, temperance work and as a platform speaker in many centres, especially the emerging towns of the Victorian gold fields. Serena Thorne moved to South Australia and, in 1871, married the Rev. Octavius Lake, and she continued to preach for a further 30 years.

### The United Methodist Free Churches (UMFC)

The origins of the UMFC in Victoria can be traced to Mr J.A. Marsdon of Geelong and Mr Henry French of Melbourne. In response to their initiative, the Rev. Joseph Townend and his new wife arrived in Victoria in October 1851, just weeks after the discovery of gold. He found a UMFC Society that had been holding services at Collingwood. On his first Sunday he preached to a gathering of around 40 people. Soon, a church was built at Fitzroy. Only modest growth occurred during the 1850s. However, by 1862 there were 22 members at Ballarat, 34 at Geelong, 25 at Heathcote and almost 200 among the societies in Melbourne. In June 1862, the Rev. T.A. Bayley arrived and threw himself into extending the UMFC. Over the following decade, stations were established at Amphitheatre, Healesville, Heathcote, Lilydale, Box Hill, Richmond, Murchison, Sandhurst, Stawell, Toolamba and Williamstown. The Rev. Mark Bradney, UMFC minister from Geelong, is reported to have made three visits to Ballarat, the third being in 1856. He had some limited success, including the erection of a chapel. However, in his absence, the UMFC mission there had to be abandoned 'for want of preachers'. A cause also commenced in

Heathcote in 1858, under the leadership of an “assistant missionary”, James Oliver, who had been a Wesleyan local preacher at Bendigo. The work there was not successful during this period, essentially for the lack of local preachers to maintain and develop the cause.

## The Opening of the Land

The 1870s saw the start of a new phase in the history of Victoria, and this was true also of the four Methodist traditions. Much of the easily mined surface gold had been gathered, and the population in the larger mining centres was diminishing. The various Methodist circuits on the gold fields had built numerous, and often large, chapels, and the demands to repay the property debts, and to provide preachers became problematic. A rough calculation of the number of lay preachers needed, together with the ministers, suggests that in circuits with multiple congregations, the local preachers were in high demand. However, by this time their role was less in a pioneering sphere and more that of being truly ‘local’ preachers who filled those places the ministers could not supply. This, however, still demanded a great deal of travelling, and sometimes multiple services of a Sunday.

In the major gold field centres, such as Ballarat and Bendigo, gold was still being found, but this was mainly underground. A new form of mining was required. This provided good opportunities for the Cornish miners, many of whom were Methodists, to use their experience as underground miners. In Bendigo and Eaglehawk, for example, the Cornish people, some Primitive Methodists, others Bible Christians, became the chief workers in the deep mines. The Wesleyans, however, were more likely to be small business owners or managers. This sometimes

meant there was a divide between the various Methodist groups, both socially and in terms of their Methodist affiliation. This sometimes also resulted in considerable rivalry between Methodist chapels in places like Ballarat, Bendigo and Eaglehawk.

In the Ovens Valley and Beechworth, surface digging had given way to large-scale dredging for gold. The Wesleyans had been early in the field and, by the 1870s, had large circuits, initially centred on Beechworth, but also at Wandiligong. The various preaching places in these circuits were often serviced by only one minister, which meant that hard working miners who were local preachers often spent much of their Sundays walking considerable distances and preaching multiple times.

In the Yarra Valley, the Wesleyans had been early in the field. However, with the strong missionary push of the recently established UMFC circuits, the latter became the main Methodist group in the area. Records show the Lilydale circuit, by the late 1870s, included Heathcote to the north, Brushy Creek and Birts Hill near Croydon, Montrose, and various preaching places in the upper Yarra Valley, including Wandin. Local church histories record stories of men like Charles Trinder (originally a Wesleyan, but then serving as a local preacher for the UMFC), walking from Croydon to take services at Wandin on a Sunday, a walk of several hours duration each way.

For some people, including many Methodists who had gone to the gold fields, their hope of finding gold had diminished, and they chose to turn to the land as farmers. A series of Land Acts in the 1860s and 1870s opened up land that had previously been occupied by the squatters, and there was a rush toward those lands that were suitable for grazing—sometimes with hostile resistance from larger land-holders. There was a steady flow of

people to the drier country of the Wimmera, the Mallee and Northern Plains. Initially, this was for the purpose of grazing sheep; however, it was also apparent that some of these lands were good for growing wheat—in the right season.

By the late 1860s, the railways had reached some of the key centres of Victoria such as Ballarat, Bendigo and Echuca. However, in the 1870s, the most vigorous extension of railways in Australia's history enabled the opening up of wheat-growing lands. By 1874 the railway had reached Beaufort; then Stawell in 1876, Murtoa in 1878 and Horsham in 1879.

It is not possible to provide a detailed account of how these developments impacted all the local Methodist circuits. However, a few examples might illustrate some of the issues and patterns of ministry.

Echuca had been established as a Wesleyan cause by 1860, when a layman, Mr Watson, commenced conducting services in the new court house. In time, Wesleyan ministers like the Rev. Mr Bickford, made visits. However, by 1864 the Rev. Mr Jenkins was appointed to minister to Echuca and Moama (the latter in NSW) and several developing preaching places. By the early 1870s the BCC had also developed a cause in Echuca and their work was linked with other preaching places in the region. Between the two branches of Methodism an extensive network of preaching places developed in this northern Victoria region and also into the farming districts across the Murray River in NSW. The local preachers played a vital role in ministering to the various preaching places and they outnumbered the ministers by around seven to one.

The BCC had established small causes in the various gold field regions, but with limited success. However, when the Northern Plains were being opened up for settlement and



ministry was needed, an opportunity arose when lay people from Runnymede (near Rochester-Elmore) requested assistance. The result was the development of one of the BCC's largest enterprises, the Elmore Circuit. From this circuit, a large number of preaching places were established. One of particular personal interest is the 'Terricks' on the Northern Plains near Mitiamo. My family history records that, soon after settling at the Terricks, in the 1870s, David Hopper, a Wesleyan, had gathered together a small group of local Christians in his home. The young Irish Presbyterian, H.V. McKay of Drummartin, whose parents were from the same part of Ireland as David Hopper, preached the first sermon.<sup>1</sup> Once the BCCs were established in the area, the Terricks became one of their small, but strategically important preaching places. From here, and into other nearby farming communities, the local preachers served as key supporters of the BCC ministers. As well as the ministers appointed to this area, and assisting the strengthening of these small Christian communities, the BCC appointed travelling lay evangelists; first Mr W. Tremayne and from 1888 Miss Sleep. Miss Sleep, as Conference evangelist, visited the Terricks for nine weeks in 1889, and her inspiring and energetic ministry, together with the support of the circuit minister, the Rev. James Orsborn, strengthened and enlarged that local Methodist cause. Miss Sleep also spent several weeks that year at Echuca, where her ministry is reputed to have had similar success.

The name of Mr John Furphy, or at least his surname, 'Furphy', is familiar to many Australians. He was the maker of the famous 'Furphy Water Carts' that were developed for the orchard farms around Shepparton, and made famous for their

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Stevens, *Armagh to Australia: David and Richard Hopper and their descendants to 1998* (Pyramid Hill, Vic: Self-published), 11.

use during the First World War. It is suggested that the drivers of these carts on the battlefields were well known for spreading gossip and, over time, the term 'furphy' entered the Australian vernacular as a synonym for an idle rumour. John Furphy is recognised as the pioneer of Methodism in the Shepparton area and, as a local preacher, also held many other circuit offices for more than 35 years. In 1873, John Furphy conducted the first service of any denomination in Shepparton, in his own cottage, at the rear of his blacksmith shop. He, and a band of other local preachers, assisted the various UMFC ministers in pioneering such places as Carag, Wanalta and Rushworth. Sunday after Sunday, Furphy and his fellow local preachers travelled by horse and buggy to conduct up to three services, before returning home late in the evening, and needing to be ready for work the next morning.

William Witton, who had been the pioneering local preacher in Melbourne from 1837, then in the Western District in the 1850s, moved to Gippsland in the late 1870s. At this time Gippsland was being opened up for forestry and farming. Records from the Wesleyan circuits show that Witton was one of several local preachers who supported an ordained minister and a home missionary in ministering to a large number of preaching places, such as Warragul, Buln Buln, Drouin, Drouin West, Longwarry, Neerim, Poowong, and McDonald's Track. Each of these preaching places held services either weekly or every second or third week, and required the preachers to walk long distances through the bush. Mr Witton continued this ministry until a short time before his death in 1886. A similar

story could have been told of other, lesser known but equally dedicated, lay preachers in this developing region of Victorian.<sup>1</sup>

The Benalla region is of particular interest. From 1853 until Methodist union in 1902, there were more than 50 preaching places established by the various Methodist branches. While the BCC and UMFC circuits each had several small preaching places, by far the greater number were established and maintained by the PMC and the WMC. The Rev. John Ride was the first minister of the PMC to arrive in Victoria, taking up his ministry in Melbourne in January 1850, at the age of 60. By 1853, his health had failed and he and his wife Martha, a local preacher, moved to live in Benalla where their son had set up a business. In the mid-to-late 1850s, the population began to grow significantly, as gold was beginning to run out at the Beechworth and Ovens Valley diggings, and the diggers were looking for land to settle. This growth in population caused John Ride to resume preaching and holding cottage meetings. The result was the establishment of the PMC in Benalla and its regions, and the growth was so great that the PMC appointed a young (27 year old) minister for the area, the Rev. William Walton. Soon he was assisted by Mr John Gorwell as a local Exhorter. The first chapel was opened in January 1862. By 1877, significant growth had occurred in this, the only PMC in the northern part of Victoria. By then, there were 12 chapels and preaching places. By 1883, there were three ministers and 14 local preachers and eight class leaders working in this PMC circuit, which then had nine chapels and seven other preaching places. One observer estimated there were then around 1,000 people connected in some way with this PMC Circuit.

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<sup>1</sup> It is significant to note that the local preachers and friends in Victoria erected the gravestone of Mr and Mrs Witton at Warragul, and have twice restored the grave.

During the earlier years of the PMC development in the Benalla region, there was quite a number of Wesleyans who had ‘thrown themselves in with the PMC’, as they were reluctant to create division. However, the proportion of Wesleyans had grown, mainly as the result of arrivals who had been active Wesleyans on the Beechworth and Ovens Valley diggings. Chief among these were Mr and Mrs Charles King Witt. A request was made to the Ovens and Murray Wesleyan Synod in 1874 to build a chapel, and for support in furthering the Wesleyan cause in the Benalla region. The response was positive, and by April 1875, Mr John Donnes, a 31 year old layman from Castlemaine, arrived in Benalla as the first WMC agent. John Donnes was the first WMC Home Missioner to be appointed following the establishment of the Home Mission Society in 1875. It is worth recording here a section of John Donnes’ report to the Home Mission Committee later that year:

My Home Mission Circuit extends 35 miles in one direction, 25 in another, 30 in another and 14 in another. I travel 600–700 miles a quarter [on horseback] and preach 45 times. We have nine preaching places at which services are held nearly every Sabbath and 14 Local Preachers and Exhorters helping me in the good work, and return this quarter 83 full members and seven on trial. I have since the entrance of my work, held cottage meetings. I have spent some of the happiest days of my life in them.<sup>1</sup>

In August 1876, a fine Wesleyan chapel was opened at Benalla. It was described locally as “one of the finest buildings this side of Melbourne”. After only two years at Benalla Mr

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<sup>1</sup> “Home Mission Society Report, 1875”, quoted in K.R. George, *Methodism in Benalla and District, 1853–1975* (Benalla Methodist Church, 1975), 12.

Donnes had so advanced the work of the WMC that he was moved on (in April 1877). A married minister, the Rev. Henry Saloway, was appointed to what was, by then, a self-supporting circuit.

More will be noted below about the important role of lay preachers being deployed in the Home Mission work of the WMC. Here it is relevant to note the role of local preachers in the Benalla region, although space does not permit full details. Of the PMC, Mr John Cook (senior) was the first accredited local preacher, and of those whose names were later listed, a further 15 or more were giving valuable service. When the Rev. Robert Philp presided at the first Wesleyan Local Preachers meeting in June 1879, there were five local preachers present. Before long, the number had swollen to 17 serving in the region. Following Methodist union in 1902, a large cohort of local preachers continued to serve this large Methodist circuit. Of those who had commenced their ministry before union, the following were presented with long service certificates in 1933. The years listed here include those served beyond the date of the presentations: R. Cook (55 years), J. Cook (59 years), C. Gorwell (65 years), S. Wallace (41 years) and A. Wilson (45 years). Mr William Webb, who died the year before the presentation, was acknowledged as having served 44 years.<sup>1</sup>

## Methodist Home Missions

In 1871, the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Victoria established a Home Mission Society (HMS) in association with the Loan Fund. In 1872, the HMS was made a separate entity, and in 1875, the HMS was launched at a special gathering that

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<sup>1</sup> K.R. George, 22.

coincided with the meeting of the General Conference of the Wesleyan Church meeting in Melbourne. Two years later, it was renamed as the Methodist Home Mission Society. The prime mover and first leader was the Rev. John Watsford, who provided dedicated and wise oversight for several years. The purpose of the Home Mission enterprise was, with funds raised throughout the Methodist Connexion, to commence and maintain ministry in the most needed areas. Like early Methodism, it was the lay preachers who were marshalled for this ministry. Some were sent to distant and lonely stations, where their work was reliant on horseback transport. Others were appointed to assist the itinerant ministers, and often provided a continuity that the ministers could not. In each case, part of their role was to preach, lead, render assistance, and facilitate local lay leadership, including encouraging new local preachers.

At the 1875 Conference, members were told of the great need for this ministry in the many places where new populations were developing. The places reported included East Charlton, Toolamba, Kerang, North Loddon, Terricks-Echuca, Wedderburn, Boort, the Goulburn Valley, the Upper Murray region, Chiltern, Corowa, Rutherglen and Wahgunya.

The first appointment, in April 1875, was Mr John Donnes at Benalla. By June the same year, Mr H. Clarkson had been sent to North Loddon. Over the following years, home missionaries were deployed to provide the Church's ministry in a growing number of new and needy areas. By the time of Methodist Union in 1902, there were 68 Wesleyan home missionaries. The PMC followed the Wesleyans initiative and, by 1902, had 10 home missionary agents, so a total of 78 home mission agents were in stations. Unlike itinerant ministers, some home missionaries

were able to stay for longer periods. Richard Dunstan, a local preacher from Ballarat, served for 16 years, six at Merino, followed by 10 at Forrest. Mr F.A. McMurdie served nine years at Devenish, and Mr G.R. Hexter served 11 years at Collingwood.<sup>1</sup>

Mention needs to be made of a lay preacher of another kind. Mr Matthew Burnett, and his wife Sarah, arrived in Victoria from Yorkshire, England, in 1863. Matthew Burnett was a flamboyant Yorkshire lay evangelist and temperance advocate. He commenced a decade-long visit to Victoria in 1863, and conducted numerous missions in Methodist circuits in Melbourne (including Wesley Church) and its suburbs, and lengthy periods on the Victorian gold fields, particularly during the years 1864 to 1867. He held services at Geelong and key centres on the gold fields, such as Clunes, Creswick, Ballarat and Bendigo. His preaching had two goals—to win people for Christ, and to promote a life of temperance. It is estimated he gave around 4,000 addresses during these visits. He was described in the WMC *Jubilee History* as “a forerunner of the Salvation Army, and introduced some of their tactics and strategies—flaming placards, monster meetings, torchlight processions, sensational methods, stirring noisy exercises, having often more sound than sense, more of shouting than of grace”.<sup>2</sup> Burnett’s visit to the regional town of Warrnambool took place in the late 1860s, during the ministry of the Rev. C.W. Crisp.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Benson, 185–6

<sup>2</sup> Blamires and Smith, 96.

<sup>3</sup> An account of Burnett’s visit to Warrnambool during the ministry of the Rev. C.W.Crisp is reported in: Barry T. Brown, *Warrnambool’s Wesleyan Heritage, 1847–1977* (MA Thesis, Deakin University, 2003) 87–88.

Following the death of his wife Sarah in 1870, and two years back in England during 1872-74, Matthew Burnett returned to Victoria, and seems to have been recognised as the evangelist for the newly established Wesleyan Home Mission Society. In the Second Report of the Society, in 1876, it was reported:

Mr W. Burnett has laboured during the past nine months in the Clunes, Blackwood, Steiglitz, Daylesford and Castlemaine Circuits; and in all, or nearly all the Circuits in the Ovens and Murray District. He has been heartily welcomed and assisted in his work in every place, and the reports state that everywhere he has had a large measure of success. Many have been rescued from intemperance, and not a few have been converted to God.

It is hard to estimate the long term effects of Burnett's ministry in Victoria. Some indicators suggest it brought about considerable revival and increased membership across a number of Christian denominations. Others, who refer to Burnett as the "apostle of temperance" stress that his main influence was in the expansion of the temperance movement generally and within Methodism in particular. Benson records that "The South Yarra Home was brought into existence when a number of fallen women were reclaimed in his mission at Wesley Church".<sup>1</sup>

The Methodist Home Mission Society had other responsibilities too; it included providing much needed ministry in the inner city and suburbs of Melbourne. The influence of the 'minor Methodist' bodies upon the Wesleyans' polity concerning the roles of women was important. However, other factors were playing a role in opening up ministry roles for

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<sup>1</sup> Benson, 130.



women in WMC in Australia. Dorcas societies had been formed to enable women to use their practical gifts in support of the outreach ministries of the church, in both country and city. Developments in Britain were also finding expression in the Australian colonies, especially in urban contexts. Perhaps the first significant development in the cities, influenced by similar developments in Britain and elsewhere, was the appointment of Bible Women. Alison Head provides a useful account of this development in Victoria at the instigation of the Home Mission committee:

In 1879 the Wesleyan Methodist Home Mission report showed a plan for mission in Melbourne which included Bible Women. The first one employed was Mrs Varcoe, who without any special training took up her work which continued for more than thirty years. The Home Mission Report for 1880 gives some idea of the scope of the work of Bible Women, when it reported on the work done by Mrs Varcoe at Emerald Hill and North Sandridge ... Mrs Varcoe moved to Wesley Church the following year where besides her other duties she did a lot of outdoor preaching...<sup>1</sup>

Another significant development commenced when the Central Methodist Missions were formed in Sydney (1884) and Melbourne (1893)—the establishment of the Sisters of the People. The Sisterhood in the Australian Central Missions was patterned on the Sisters of the Poor in Britain. Mr A.J. Derrick, who was appointed in 1893 to assist the Superintendent of the Central Mission in Melbourne, the Rev. A.R. Edgar, provides a

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<sup>1</sup> Alison Head, commenting on the Home Mission Society Reports of 1879 and 1880.

very useful description of the role of the Sisters at this time. Much of the role was in support of the ministers in the form of welfare and organisational oversight. However, they also played an important role in leading classes and Bible study groups—interestingly, with men as well as women. There is also evidence that some of these women were able to exercise their gifts in public speaking and preaching. The following account of one sister provided by Mr Derrick serves as an illustration:

Sister Elinor (Miss Nellie Millar) was accepted on July 7, 1894. She was an experienced worker, with Salvation Army training. She took an interest in the Mission from the start, and having resigned from the Army, offered herself for our work. She was most capable as a platform speaker and preacher, and in personal dealings with applicants of all kinds.<sup>1</sup>

These developing ministries by women demonstrate some change in attitude by the WMC toward the role of women preachers in the period prior to Methodist union.

It is useful to note that, by the time of Methodist union in 1902, there had been considerable growth in the four branches of Methodism that became The Methodist Church of Australasia. There were over 30,000 members (as distinct from ‘adherents’) in Victoria and Tasmania, 268 itinerant ministers, 78 home missionaries who were mostly lay preachers, and 1,507 local preachers. In addition to this, there were a number of Bible Women and Sisters of the People who were also lay agents and, in some situations, lay preachers.

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<sup>1</sup> A.J. Derrick, *The Story of the Central Mission* (Melbourne: Spectator Publishing Company, 1918), 16.

Without doubt, lay leaders, and lay preachers in particular, played a vital and missional role in pioneering Methodism in Victoria.

# Serena Thorne Lake

Leanne Davis

## Introduction

The Uniting Church and its predecessor denominations have been a place where women in leadership and ministry have been able to find a home throughout history. This paper presents the story of one such woman, Serena Thorne Lake, who arrived in Australia in the 1860s as a Bible Christian preacher. After spending time in Queensland and Victoria, she arrived in South Australia and made her home there. Her life and ministry had an impact on the young colony of South Australia.

## Arrival in Australia

Her headstone reads:

*For 40 years she preached the Gospel. Her dying words were, "I am going home with a song".*

These are the words that we have to remember Serena Lake (nee Thorne)—a preacher, evangelist, activist, advocate, suffragist, wife and mother.

Serena was born on 28 October 1842 at Shebbear in Devon, England. She was the daughter of Samuel and Mary Thorne (née O'Bryan).<sup>1</sup> Mary was the daughter of William and Catherine O'Bryan (née Cowlin). William was the founder of the Bible Christian Connexion/denomination within the Methodist Church movement. Serena's paternal grandfather—John

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Jones, 'Lake, Serena (1842–1902)', in *ADB Supplement 1580–1980*. (Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 2005), 226. Accessed 12 September 2018.

Thorne—was instrumental in helping O'Bryan with the establishment of the movement, and donated land for the first chapel and school. Both Serena's mother and grandmother were preachers within the Bible Christian Connexion<sup>1</sup> so it is not surprising that Serena too became a preacher in the church. After hearing God's call on her life, Serena first began preaching at age 17, and from 1861 was preaching throughout Devon and Cornwall in Bible Christian congregations and gatherings. She has been described as the "sweet girl gospeller who drew crowds and converts, attracted by her persuasive, vivid oratory; unclouded faith and compassion for souls."<sup>2</sup>

In 1865, Serena, along with her brother, travelled to Queensland to work, in the first instance with the Primitive Methodists. In her obituary, Serena's husband, the Rev. Octavius Lake writes this:

A member of the Queensland Government, and a Congregationalist, who often used to hear her preach, and studied her faculty for organisation said to me—'If your conference had made Miss Thorne general superintendent of your work here, she would have had Bible Christian circuits in every part of Queensland.'<sup>3</sup>

In 1867, Serena left Queensland and travelled to Victoria to undertake evangelistic and mission work in that colony. She

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer M. Lloyd, *Women and the Shaping of British Methodism: Persistent Preachers, 1807-1907*. (Oxford, United States: Manchester University Press, 2013).  
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/flinders/detail.action?docID=1069635>, 14

<sup>2</sup> Helen Jones, 'Lake, Serena'.

<sup>3</sup> Octavius Lake, 'In Memoriam—Serena Thorne Lake'. *Australian Christian Commonwealth* (clipping in the diary of Serena Thorne held at the Uniting Church SA History Centre).

spent three years in Victoria, preaching, teaching and evangelising. Octavius Lake describes her work in Victoria in this way, “The round of sermons, speeches, lectures goes on for weeks, months, years, and one wonders how a woman could do it all.”<sup>1</sup> She is reported to have said:

My brethren are not illiberal in the work they give me. Three Sunday sermons, preaching nearly every week day afternoon, and a public meeting nearly every night. I feel I must slow off. Yet there are such pressing entreaties for work that I can hardly say ‘No’ without absolute unkindness. I pray for Divine light on my limitations.<sup>2</sup>

During her time in Victoria, Serena preached and taught. She evangelised, spoke on temperance and was invited to places as a special event speaker. Places she spoke were crowded to the point of people being turned away. A local Eaglehawk reporter is quoted as having said this of Serena, “she displayed none of that masculine manner which might have been anticipated from one of the fair sex placing herself in so prominent a position”<sup>3</sup>

In 1870, Serena came to South Australia at the invitation of the Rev. James Way and others of the Bible Christian movement in South Australia. She arrived from Melbourne on 19 May, and on that evening she wrote in her diary, “Pray my coming here may result in the salvation of many souls ... I need more of the quickening breath of Pentecost. May the God of Horeb answer me by fire.”<sup>4</sup> On the following Sunday, Serena preached the first

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<sup>1</sup> Octavius Lake, *In Memoriam*

<sup>2</sup> Octavius Lake, *In Memoriam*

<sup>3</sup> Travis McHarg, *The Bible Christian Church in Victoria: 1850s–1902* (Boronia, Vic: Mercia Press, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Thorne, Serena. 1870. *Diary*. Unpublished. Held by the Uniting Church SA Historical Society.

of many sermons in the Adelaide Town Hall. The newspapers of the time report the Town Hall was “crowded to the doors.”<sup>1</sup> Serena wrote this in her diary about the event:

Sunday Eve May 22<sup>nd</sup> I preached for the first time in this land, this afternoon at the Adelaide Town Hall, King William St.—Place crowded, over 2,000 present. Had a pretty good time speaking from Hosea 6:3.”<sup>2</sup>

Serena was paid a salary/allowance of £1 per week, and the various country circuits she visited were to meet the travelling and accommodation expenses. She would spend her weeks in various country circuits including Clarendon, Bowden, Gawler, and Kapunda, and often returned to the city on weekends to speak at the crowded Town Hall.

Besides her preaching and teaching in both the city and various country circuits, Serena made a point of visiting and sharing the gospel with the prostitutes of Adelaide. She and others involved in the City Mission would speak to gatherings of women late into the evening. She was concerned about how things, which she described as “the social evil in this city”, could be dealt with. On 2 July 1870, she writes:

...the low publicans are making bitter and violent opposition to our midnight meetings. Great talk and writings in the papers about this problem. The social evil in this city, may God teach us how to deal with it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Arrival Of Miss Thorne. (1870, May 28). *Adelaide Observer (SA : 1843–1904)*, 13. Retrieved 1 October 2018, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article158940160>

<sup>2</sup> Serena Thorne, *Diary*.

<sup>3</sup> Serena Thorne, *Diary*.

Newspaper articles, and Serena (in her diary) made comments about women preachers on a number of occasions.

*The Evening Chronicle* (among other papers) reported on her formal welcome to the colony, and to the Bible Christian Connexions. The paper reports that the Rev. James Way

...was well aware that the subject of female preaching was controversial, but he thought their prejudices sometimes carried their feelings further than their judgement. He held that it was not unscriptural; on the contrary, the Bible gave the warrant for females to preach and make know the truth...<sup>1</sup>

A few times, she wrote in her diary of the reactions she received. In December of 1870, she wrote “I am told that scores have lost their prejudice against female ministry by this visit of mine.”<sup>2</sup>

And a few days later she wrote “I received an anonymous letter last eve, quoting those passages in Timothy and Corinthians—I suppose the clever individual thought to frighten me. Today a number of the same sort were strewed along the road between Yankalilla and here. They have done no harm. I prayed that God would vindicate my cause himself today from those bitter tongues.”<sup>3</sup>

And sometimes the opposition and support came from the same place. *The Inman Valley Story*, a history compiled for the

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<sup>1</sup> Latest News. (25 May 1870). *Evening Journal* (Adelaide, SA: 1869–1912), p. 2 (Late Edition). Retrieved 4 June 2019, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article196731268>

<sup>2</sup> Serena Thorne, *Diary*.

<sup>3</sup> Serena Thorne, *Diary*.



centenary of the Inman Valley Church in 1971, says this of Serena's visits to the church:

The opening took place in 1871 when a Miss Thorn [*sic*] preached to an overflowing congregation. A most violent storm which occurred on the opening day was attributed by some to be the judgement of God for having engaged a lady preacher.

The following years saw a great revival during which hundreds were added to the Church rolls in the district. The great revivalist preacher seems to have been Miss Thorn [*sic*].<sup>1</sup>

By mid-June of 1870, Serena, feeling homesick and exhausted from her extensive preaching schedule (she reported to have taken eight services in the preceding week as well as a prayer meeting or two<sup>2</sup>) resolved to raise enough money for her passage back to England within the next year. However, her life was going to change before long on one of her trips to a country circuit, when travelling in the company of the Rev. Octavius Lake. A whirlwind romance followed, and after a fortnight, they became engaged. The engagement was not smooth sailing as Serena's diary records on 24 November 1870:

I have written to Octavius cancelling our engagement. I hope I have done right. When I read that he was 'among the members who in the English Conference cheered the announcement that we had not a single woman preacher left and that he rejoices that the practice is receiving such discountenance that only in special cases it can find support...'

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Lush, *The Inman Valley Story* (Victor Harbour: The Ambrose Press, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> Serena Thorne, *Diary*.

... I dare not sacrifice principles and duty even to love.<sup>1</sup>

To cut a long story short, this turned out to be a misunderstanding, Octavius was forgiven, and Serena and Octavius were married on 2 May 1871 at the home of Mr. Samuel Way. In their married life, Serena and Octavius had eight children. Only two survived to adulthood, with one of them, Florence, becoming an accomplished artist.

Married life did not stop Serena's work. She continued preaching and teaching, often working in partnership with Octavius in the parishes and circuits he was the appointed minister for. She continued her active involvement in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. She travelled the country to help communities set up branches of the WCTU, and in 1889, the WCTU appointed her as Colonial Organiser and Suffrage superintendent; in 1891 she was made a life vice-president of the WCTU.<sup>2</sup>

Serena's involvement in women's suffrage came about because of her faith. She believed that sexual equality was the original design of the Creator, so as a result, women should be naturally entitled to vote. In July 1888 she was elected to the council of the South Australian Women's Suffrage League and was often called upon to speak on the organisation's behalf, speaking with "logical argument, wit and evangelical passion."<sup>3</sup> She was working with Octavius in missionary and pastoral work in Moonta when suffrage was won.

Serena was instrumental in the establishment of the Bible Christian Woman's Missionary Board and was its founding

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<sup>1</sup> Serena Thorne, *Diary*.

<sup>2</sup> <https://atributetoaustralianchristians.wordpress.com/2010/10/28/serena-lake/>

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

president in 1891. This was established to support and train people for missionary work in China.<sup>1</sup>

Serena Thorne Lake died on 9 July 1902. The *Advertiser* obituary the following day, reported this:

Mrs Lake preached only three weeks ago in connection with the Ovingham Church anniversary with all her old power, and apparently in her usual health. A few days later it was discovered that the insidious disease cancer had already made alarming progress. An immediate operation became necessary though this was successfully performed, death resulted five days later from exhaustion.<sup>2</sup>

“I am not defeated; I am going home with a song”

And from her funeral service, the Rev. E.T. Cox prayed to God that

her mantle of gifts and consecration might fall on some women who should take up her work and carry it on to larger achievements. May we soon realise that we are in the very heart of that great ‘Afterward’, when God will pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, and our sons and our daughters shall prophesy.<sup>3</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> *ibid*

<sup>2</sup> <http://saobits.gravesecrets.net/1.html>

<sup>3</sup> Octavius Lake, *In Memoriam*

# Religious History for a Secular Age

Graeme Davison

## Synopsis

What is the point of writing religious history in an age when, as Charles Taylor (*A Secular Age*, 2007) argues, “the conditions of belief have radically changed”? Is it still, as with the biblical writers or Christian hagiographers, to draw inspiration or consolation from our forebears in the faith? Or to conserve or justify the traditions of a particular religious tribe? Or to correct the historical amnesia of secular historians oblivious to the influence of religion in past times? Mixed theological, sectarian, apologetic, nostalgic or historical motives may draw us to the religious past. But do “conditions of belief” also have a history and how should a historian write it? In 2011 the author was invited by the editors of a projected *Cambridge History of Australia* to comment on a draft table of contents. He noticed that the book would include a chapter on religion in the first volume, on the nineteenth century, but omitted one in the twentieth century volume. Was this an oversight or a considered judgment? he inquired. The answer came obliquely in the form of an invitation to write a twentieth century chapter himself. As an urban and cultural historian, with Christian convictions but no track record in religious history, he was not well qualified, but accepted the challenge. This assignment and other inquiries on the margins of religious history have inspired reflection on what one might call Australia’s ‘religious unconscious’, the liminal zone where religion, often unrecognised by historians, continues to shape our collective life. How would a history of

Australian religion look when written from the margins, rather than, as usual, from the inside?

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A few years ago, the editors of a projected two-volume *Cambridge History of Australia* invited me to comment on the draft table of contents. One feature of their plan, in particular, caught my attention. While the first volume, on the nineteenth century, included a chapter on religion, the second, on the twentieth, had no corresponding chapter. Was this an oversight or an implied historical judgment? I asked. Did the editors believe that religion was a significant feature of colonial Australia but had somehow sunk into oblivion or beyond notice in the twentieth century? Were they perhaps applying today's secular values to a time when religion still bulked larger in people's private and public lives?

Their answer came in the form of an invitation: if you really think religion deserves a chapter, why don't you write it yourself? It came at an opportune moment when other inquiries had led me to reflect more closely on the place of religion in Australian history. Charles Taylor's magnificent *A Secular Age* (2007) had raised fresh questions about a narrative of secularisation I had largely taken for granted. So instead of passing on the challenge to a better-qualified author, I took it on myself. I spent some of the summer reading in the wonderful Dalton-McCaughey Library, drilled some exploratory cores into primary sources and eventually the chapter appeared as the first of the thematic chapters in the second volume of the *Cambridge History*.<sup>1</sup> It reviews the place of religion in Australian life from

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<sup>1</sup> Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Australia*, vol. 2 *The Commonwealth of Australia* (Cambridge: 2011), 215–236.

the inauguration of the Commonwealth to the age of Howard and Pell. Every history is written towards a conclusion: already I'm wondering whether my chapter would look different if I were to write it again in the age of Trump and Morrison, Pell II and Israel Folau.

Underlying the chapter were some questions I'd like to share with you now. What is the story of religion in twentieth and twenty-first Australia? Is it, as my editors implied, a story of decline and extinction or—as others have insisted—of survival and occasional triumph? What does it mean to be religious in Australia and is it the same in 2019 as it was in 1901? To those questions, I might add another, present in my mind throughout, and especially relevant to this audience: What is the point of writing religious history in a secular age? Is it to vindicate the Christians or my own denomination? Is it to redress the secular humanist prejudices of my academic colleagues and give religion its due place in the national culture? Or is its purpose, as Taylor suggests, to inform a wider conversation with our fellows about the spiritual challenges of living in this very disorienting time?

To tackle those questions, I think we have to abandon the stance of the apologist and approach history in a more open-ended way, looking, as the Hebrew prophets did, for the signs of our troubled times. That's why I have chosen the title 'religious history **for** a secular age', not 'religious history **of** or **in** a secular age'. In thinking about these questions, I am drawn towards the margins of religious history—to the stories, people and places where religion almost imperceptibly shapes the secular culture. Adapting Freud's famous term, I call this 'the religious subconscious' of Australia.

The American novelist and essayist Marilynne Robinson, pondering the influence of Puritanism on American life, writes:

I am fascinated by history, and I don't know what it is. I believe that, whatever it is, it is profoundly important, and I don't know why. I am especially fascinated by erasures and omissions, which seem to me to be strongly present in their apparent absence, like black holes, pulling the fabric of collective narrative out of shape.<sup>1</sup>

I've been a professor of history for thirty years and I'm still finding out what history is. Like Robinson, I'm also fascinated by erasures and omissions, the features of our national story that lie somewhere just below the horizon of public consciousness. What do we see when we look into the black hole, the space where Australia's history is shaped by the absent presence of religion? Histories that seem on the surface to be entirely secular, and historians who profess to be quite agnostic, continue to be shaped by religious, including Christian, ideas and influences. Whether these influences are simply residual and likely in time to pass away, or are enduring foundations of our culture, is the tantalising question to which I may return.

But let me begin where I began my chapter, at the threshold of the twentieth century, with the inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia. "God wanted Australia to be a nation", writes the historian John Hirst.<sup>2</sup> He is echoing the shared conviction of the fathers of federation. "To those who watched its inner workings, followed its fortunes as if their own,

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<sup>1</sup> Marilynne Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here? Essays* (London: Virago 2018), 136-7.

<sup>2</sup> John Hirst, *The Sentimental Nation: The Making of the Australian Commonwealth* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4.

and lived the life of devotion to it day by day, its actual accomplishment must always seem to have been secured by a series of miracles”, their leader Alfred Deakin recalled.<sup>1</sup> He was making history in two senses: bringing a political movement to a successful conclusion and telling its story as a work of divine providence.

By bringing unity out of division, federation also encouraged Christian hopes for a larger union of peoples within the Empire and beyond. It helped to inspire the union of the several branches of Methodism and Presbyterianism, the first stage of an ecumenical movement that culminated three-quarters of a century later in the formation of the Uniting Church. Australia, these patriots believed, was destined by God to be British, White and Christian.

While agreeing that God had made their nation, Australians differed on how to acknowledge his presence in their national life. Delegates to the 1898 Adelaide federal convention passed two seemingly contradictory resolutions. One inserted the words “humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God” in the preamble to the Constitution; the other, inspired by the United States Constitution, guaranteed a separation of church and state. “The Commonwealth”, reads clause 116 of the Commonwealth Constitution, “shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth”. The churches had campaigned hard for the first provision and would later secure a measure to begin sessions of the Australian parliament with the saying of the

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Deakin, *The Federal Story: The inner history of the federal cause 1880–1900*, Second edition (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1963), 173.



Lord's Prayer. The separation of church and state was supported by many Christians determined to ensure that the state did not interfere with religious liberty, as well as by secularists determined to prevent the churches imposing their dogmas on the state.<sup>1</sup>

More than a century later, Australians are still debating what the founders of the Commonwealth actually meant to say. Are we (or were they then) a Christian country? Or are we a secular nation in which religion has no place?<sup>2</sup> When our Prime Minister recently hailed his re-election as 'a miracle' and ended his victory speech with the words "God bless Australia" was he speaking in the same language, and with the same unifying purpose, as Alfred Deakin?

This is not just a matter of historical interest, for how our parliaments and courts interpret these foundational documents may have profound implications for the practice of religion in Australia. As we enter what may be a vigorous, and possibly divisive, debate about religious freedom, it may be as important to resist the claims of secularists for the complete elimination of religion from public life as it is to resist pressure from the Christian Right to Christianise the state.

Patrick McMahon Glynn, the Irish-born South Australian politician, who had moved for the recognition of 'Almighty God' in the preamble to the Australian Constitution, had proposed the words as a "simple and unsectarian" statement of belief common to all faiths. A practising Catholic—he went to

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Ely, *Unto God and Caesar: Religious Issues in the Emerging Commonwealth 1891-1906* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1976)

<sup>2</sup> For a valuable guide, see Stephen A. Chavura and Ian Tregenza, 'The Political History of the Secular in Australia, 1788-1945' in Timothy Stanley (ed.), *Religion after Secularization in Australia*, (EBCO Publishing 2015), 1–30.

Mass every Sunday—Glynn was a complex character. Like many contemporaries, his faith had been shaken by the scientific and biblical controversies of the day. In reply to his brother's inquiry about his religious opinions, he admitted that "I am gradually losing any that I ever had". "A man", he decided, "might really be more Christian by going to Church less". Churchgoing, after all, may not denote true religion. "Faith, somewhat attenuated or indecisive, sympathy, gregariousness, respectability, fashion, the nervous disinclination to abandon old ways and hopes, all make up the mixed motives that move people churchwards", he observed.

Glynn illustrates how personal, social and political ideas were interwoven in the religious lives of individuals and of the nation. Personal faith might, or might not, issue in outward religious practice; formal observances might or might not signify private belief. Over the twentieth century, both church attendance and professed belief declined, but in that long downward march, they have not descended in a lock step or at the same rate. Believers and unbelievers alike supported the separation of church and state, either because it guaranteed religious freedom or because it guaranteed freedom from religion altogether. If there was a national consensus, it was not anti-religious, but anti-sectarian—an agreement that religious opinions should not be permitted to fracture national unity.<sup>1</sup>

## Religion in 1900

Religion, according to many people, was essentially a private matter. In his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald O'Collins, *Patrick McMahon Glynn: A Founder of Australian Federation* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1965), 134–150, 183–194 and compare Ely, *Unto God and Caesar*, 142, 199.

(published in 1902), the American philosopher William James had defined religion as “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine”.<sup>1</sup> Alfred Deakin, a public man with an intense but unorthodox interior life, was one of James’ approving Australian readers.<sup>2</sup> Like most politicians of that era he kept his religious opinions to himself. (Our supposedly secular society is, ironically, almost pruriently interested in politicians’ religious lives and opinions). But for many other Australians, Catholics especially, religion was much more than solitary communion with the divine: it included morality, ceremony, sacrament and community. The word could even be applied by extension to some apparently secular pursuits. “Trades unionism is a new and grand religion”, the writer Henry Lawson believed.<sup>3</sup> It did not usually extend far enough, however, to include the spiritual beliefs and customs of the first Australians. When the Aborigines’ Protection Association vowed to “spread religion among the aborigines”, they confidently assumed that the Aborigines were quite bereft of it.<sup>4</sup>

Only a few Australians had begun to think otherwise. In 1902 the Alice Springs post and telegraph master and part-time anthropologist Frank Gillen asked his friend Professor Baldwin Spencer a challenging question. In their book, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899), the first to describe the clans,

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<sup>1</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Gifford lectures, 1902), 31.

<sup>2</sup> Al Gabay, *The Mystic Life of Alfred Deakin* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 182–4; Judith Brett, *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2018)

<sup>3</sup> Henry Lawson, ‘The New Religion’ (1890) in his *Autobiographical and Other Writings*, edited by Colin Roderick (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1972), 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Town and Country Journal*, 11 July 1896, 35.

totems, songlines and ceremonies of the Arrernte people, Spencer and Gillen placed Aborigines on the lowest rung of human evolution and assigned their beliefs to the realm of magic, rather than religion. But Gillen, a restive Catholic, had begun to question that belief. In describing Arrernte spirituality, he reached for Christian analogies—journeys in the wilderness, sacramental wafers, and miraculous appearances. Religion, he had recently read, was “man’s belief in a power or powers beyond his control on which he feels dependent”. If this was religion, he asked Spencer, surely the Aborigines were religious too?<sup>1</sup>

One of Gillen’s other correspondents was a man from our own tradition, the Rev. Dr Lorimer Fison, a fellow of Queen’s College and editor of the Methodist *Spectator*. Born in Suffolk, educated in Cambridge, Fison was a missionary in Fiji and, with his friend William Howitt, wrote a classic study of Australian Aboriginal kinship systems, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*. I knew Dr Fison’s name long before I understood his importance. As a boy I sat under a window dedicated to his memory in the North Essendon Methodist Church. His daughter, an elderly lady we knew only as Miss Fison, still lived in the house where he died in 1907, just a short distance from the church in Richardson Street. In the debates over the nature of Aboriginal spiritual beliefs, Fison seems to have leant towards the opinion of his

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<sup>1</sup> F.J. Gillen to Baldwin Spencer, June 1902 in John Mulvaney, Howard Morphy and Alison Petch (eds.), *‘My Dear Spencer’: The Letters of F.J. Gillen to Baldwin Spencer* (Melbourne: Highland House, 1997), 368; also see Howard Morphy, ‘Gillen—Man of Science’ in Morphy, 30–40 and compare D.J. Mulvaney and J.H. Calaby, *‘So Much That is New’: Baldwin Spencer 1860–1929: a biography* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1983), 201–221.

Cambridge colleague, Sir James Fraser, that they were magic rather than religion.<sup>1</sup>

The Fisons' house in Richardson Street looked onto Lincoln Park, a small triangular reserve bordered by eucalypts and pine trees. We walked through it each Sunday, as we made our way back and forth to church and Sunday school where we learned occasionally about the Aboriginal people living in faraway in places like Arnhem Land. We had little idea that we might actually be standing on Aboriginal land ourselves. Just recently, however, I came across the reminiscences of George Bishop, an old Essendon man who recalled that in his youth, about thirty years before Fison's time, the land we knew as Lincoln Park was a regular meeting place for Wathaurung and Dja Djawurrung people. After erecting a dark backdrop of boughs cut from trees, they made two large bonfires for their songs and dances. In the 1950s we children also built bonfires in Lincoln Park for our own tribal ceremonies, Guy Fawkes Day and Empire Day. Religion, so far as we knew, was something that belonged in gothic buildings like our church, or maybe in Christ Church Anglican across the road or St Therese's Catholic a little further down Lincoln Road. It would not have occurred to us that we were walking across someone else's church as we walked to ours.<sup>2</sup>

When Lorimer Fison died, the question of Aboriginal religion was still controversial. Spencer's reply to Gillen's profound question has not survived, but a few years an attentive reader of

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<sup>1</sup> W.E.H. Stanner, 'Lorimer Fison' in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 4, 175-6; J.G. Fraser, 'Howitt and Fison', *Folklore*, vol. 20, No. 2, 30 June 1909, 144-180

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs of George Gregor Bishop (1908), Royal Historical Society of Victoria, VF 34.

Gillen, Spencer, Howitt and Fison, the famous French sociologist Emile Durkheim, a secular Jew living in a Catholic country, answered Gillen's question with a resounding yes. "Religion is something eminently social", he contended. Totemism, the system of symbols, sacred sites and ceremonies that connected the Aborigines to each other and to their land, revealed religion in its most "elementary" form.<sup>1</sup> Religion was not an inferior kind of knowledge, as sceptics and evolutionists assumed, but a fundamental dimension of human society. "There is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself", he concluded.<sup>2</sup> Very few then foresaw the day, now well upon us, when Australians of all beliefs, would look with reverence, even sometimes with longing, on the deep spiritual bonds between the Aboriginal people and their land. Lorimer Fison did not foresee a time when Aboriginal Christians would develop a Rainbow Spirit theology that blended biblical and indigenous spiritual traditions.<sup>3</sup>

### Less and Less as the Years Go By

In 1901 Christianity remained a powerful force in Australian life but it faced an uncertain future. Cardinal Patrick Moran, the

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<sup>1</sup> Like Durkheim, Fison recognised the social character of totemism and its 'sacred' character but in keeping with his evolutionary perspective, saw the Aborigines as 'savage' and their beliefs as superstitious rather than religious; see *Kamilroi and Kunai*, 161 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912) (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1915), 10, 47, 427. Although Durkheim's book was not published until 1912, his conclusions from Spencer and Gillen's work were already evident in his work a decade earlier: see Steven Lukes, *Emile Durkheim: His life and work* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), 237–244. For Spencer's critical view of Durkheim, see Mulvaney and Calaby, *So Much That is New*, 394.

<sup>3</sup> Lorimer Fison, *Rainbow Spirit Theology*, (1997) second edition (Hindmarsh South Australia: AFT Press, 2007).

leader of Australia's Catholics, thought his church would enjoy a new season of prosperity but among Protestants the mood was generally more sombre. The tiny minority of religious sceptics were convinced that history was on their side. "In the religious sense, probably nineteen-twentieths of Australians are heathen", observed A.G. Stephens of Sydney's *Bulletin*. "Our fathers, or their fathers, or some of them, had the kernel of religion; we in Australia have little more than the husk, and we shall have less and less as the years go by".<sup>1</sup>

Some historians, including religious ones, have shared Stephens' gloomy view of Australia as a godless country. "Perhaps Australia can be understood best as the first genuinely post-Christian society", the Catholic historian Patrick O'Farrell suggested in 1976.<sup>2</sup> O'Farrell later changed his mind but among the historians who have taken the temperature of religion in Australia in later years there is no consensus. Some writers, such as David Hilliard and Hilary Carey, write a narrative of secular decline while others, such as Garry Bouma and Stuart Piggin emphasise religion's remarkable persistence.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly Australia had neither the emotional fervour and restless innovation of Christianity in the United States nor the depth of religious tradition in Britain and other parts of Europe.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A.G. Stephens, 'For Australians' (*Bulletin* 1899) in Leon Cantrell (ed.), *A.G. Stephens: Selected Writings* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1977), 395.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick O'Farrell, 'Writing the General History of Australian Religion', *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1976, 65–73.

<sup>3</sup> David Hilliard, 'Towards Secularisation and One Step Back' in Callum Brown and Michael Snape (ed.), *Secularisation in the Christian World*, Ashgate Abingdon, ch. 6; Hilary M. Carey, *Believing in Australia A cultural history of religions* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1996); Gary Bouma, *Australian Soul Religion and Spirituality in the Twenty-first Century* (Cambridge University Press 2006).

<sup>4</sup> For example, R.W. Dale, *Impressions of Australia* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), 16–20, Walter Phillips.

Harold Harding, a newly arrived English immigrant and devout Methodist who accompanied my father's family when they emigrated under Methodist auspices in 1912, was struck by the absence of the "once-familiar church and churchyard with its wonderful history".<sup>1</sup> The average Australian, he thought, was "not too religious", although with about 40 percent of adults regularly attending church, Australia was actually more religiously observant than his homeland—as it is still.

With hindsight, we can see that Stephens' prediction of the imminent demise of religion was premature. As a sceptic, he was barracking rather than coolly observing. He was one of a long line of unbelievers who decide that, having given up religion themselves, everyone else is bound to do the same. Stephens' prediction ("less and less [religion] as the years go by") was a good local example of what Charles Taylor calls a "subtraction story".<sup>2</sup> The decline of belief, according to this narrative, was an inevitable process, a dynamo of disenchantment installed in the engine-room of modern society. As scientific knowledge increased, and the fog of superstition lifted, it said, the world would be revealed as it really was—without God.

But secularisation, Taylor argues, was actually a more complicated historical process; not so much a negation of religion as a transformation of its place in the world. Rather than the painless shedding of outmoded beliefs, it brought a changed sensibility and, with it, an acute sense that something is missing. In its absence, many people find themselves asking, in the words

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Harding, 'Greetings from "Down Under"', 1 January 1914, Birmingham Sunday School Magazine article, copy in possession of author.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 26–29, 530–39.



of the famous Peggy Lee song, “Is that all there is?” Depending on where you look, there was either less religion or much more of it than the subtraction story suggests.

## The Religious Subconscious

Deep undercurrents of religion persist in a society that considers itself otherwise entirely secular. Outsiders are often more aware of it than insiders. The political philosopher Bhikhu Parekh notes that many Muslims continue to think of Britain—a country in which churchgoing is now at a lower ebb even than in Australia—as a Christian country. Are they simply ignorant or are they noticing something that the rest of us have missed? “The fact that the historical roots [of many everyday practices] have been forgotten does not mean that their religious basis or overtones go unnoticed by non-Christians, Muslims or for that matter devout Christians”, Parekh observes. “They do not introduce an alien element into an otherwise secular society, rather they state loudly in the same language what the rest of the society says in a quiet whisper”.<sup>1</sup>

Listening for those quiet whispers is one of the important tasks of the contemporary historian of religion. How we think of ourselves as a nation is still deeply influenced by the biblical narratives of foundation, freedom, reconciliation and redemption that we drew from the Bible.<sup>2</sup> When Kevin Rudd apologised to the stolen generation, for example, he not only drew on Christian ideas of redemption and reconciliation, he even appropriated the ritual language of the Mass—We are

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<sup>1</sup> *A New Politics of Identity Political Principles for an Interdependent World* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 114.

<sup>2</sup> Graeme Davison, *Narrating the Nation in Australia*, Menzies Lecture (London: Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, King’s College, 2009).

sorry, we are sorry, we are sorry—*mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*. When I hear school children say, as they often do, that the heroes of Anzac ‘died for us’, am I mistaken in hearing echoes of the language that their parents or grandparents might have used in speaking of the sacrificial death of Jesus of Nazareth? Are such ways of speaking simply the husks, the lifeless relics, of religious belief? Or are they the kernel, buried in the soil of indifference, but capable of being warmed into life?

Religious thought is saturated by binary distinctions between sacred and secular, saved and damned, believers and unbelievers, church and unchurch distinctions that tend, however, to obscure the complicated and interesting ways in which many people, like Patrick Glynn, relate to the Christian tradition. In the last (2018) Australian Values Survey about one third of respondents said that God was very important to them, another third said he wasn’t important at all and the rest were somewhere in the middle.<sup>1</sup> Pressed on the point, many people would admit to hesitating, vacillating or oscillating between belief and unbelief, sometimes even in the course of a day. In his recent excellent book on *Australian Religious Thought*, Wayne Hudson identifies the large number of Australian intellectuals—*disbelievers*, he calls them—who challenged religious belief and institutions while remaining religious in other ways. The historian Ernest Scott, for example, was among those he describes as “both rationalist and credulous, albeit in different parts of their minds”.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Australian Values Survey 2018*, p. 20.

<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSNewsShow.jsp?ID=389>. Accessed 15 June 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Wayne Hudson, *Australian Religious Thought* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2016), chapter 1.

Christians from many traditions have sought, in different ways, to transcend the division between secular and sacred. In 1889 the visiting Congregationalist R.W. Dale noted the uneasiness of many Christians with the secular character of the Australian state. They had “a vague craving” for “the formal and public recognition by the State of the authority of God”. This was the impulse that led the churches to seek the insertion of a reference to God in the preamble of the Commonwealth Constitution and it has its followers still. Such symbolic gestures, Dale argued, might gratify the religious while leaving the State as secular as it was before. “What serious Christian men ought to desire is the practical recognition of the spirit and laws of Christian ethics in the actual business of the State: this is what makes a State Christian”.<sup>1</sup>

Catholics and some Anglicans espoused an incarnational faith that fused sacred and secular in ways that may have made them more open, as Frank Gillen was, to Aboriginal spirituality. Recent historians have drawn a speculative thread from the mid-nineteenth century Tractarians and Christian socialists via the Morpeth seminary to another clergyman-anthropologist A.P. Elkin and his student W.E.H. Stanner’s seminal essay on “The Dreaming”.<sup>2</sup> Protestant Australians, influenced by Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s prison reflections on the possibility of a “religionless Christianity” and Harvey Cox’s invitation to embrace the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert W Dale, *Impressions of Australia* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), 261–2.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Atkinson, ‘“Do unto Others”: Australians and the Anglican Conscience, 1840–56 and Afterwards’ in Stuart Macintyre, Lenore Layman and Jenny Gregory (eds.), *A Historian for All Seasons: Essays for Geoffrey Bolton* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2017), 139–40.; W.E.H Stanner, *The Dreaming and other Essays*, edited by Robert Manne (Melbourne: BlackInc, 2009).

challenge of the “secular city”, aspired towards something Hudson calls ‘sacred secularity’. Along with Bishop John Robinson’s call to be *Honest to God*, these radical texts helped to inspire the movement towards the foundation of the Uniting Church of Australia.<sup>1</sup> Its first President Davis McCaughey sometimes spoke of something he called “secular holiness”.<sup>2</sup>

Many people who leave the church or disavow belief remain religious in some way. A striking number of Australian politicians, judging by their biographies, had religious upbringings. Members of the Australian Parliament are more religiously observant than the rest of the population.<sup>3</sup> Rather than religion or irreligion, the most striking feature of their biographies is the transition from a religious childhood to a secular adulthood defined, at least in part, by the faith of their fathers and mothers. As a young man on the threshold of his political career Robert Menzies, a former member of the Student Christian Movement, addressed a young men’s Bible Class on ‘The Sacredness of the Secular’.<sup>4</sup> Gough Whitlam called himself a “fellow traveller of Christianity”, although his sister, a devout Christian, maintained that he was “completely motivated by our religious background; even if he did not acknowledge it”.<sup>5</sup> Many

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<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: Fontana, 1959), 12–122; John Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: SCM Press, 1961), 139; compare Hudson, 50, 211.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Martin, *Davis McCaughey A Life* (Kensington NSW: UNSW Press, 2012), photo caption between 256 and 257.

<sup>3</sup> <https://theconversation.com/as-australia-becomes-less-religious-our-parliament-becomes-more-so-80456>

<sup>4</sup> Cameron Hazlehurst, *Menzies Observed* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin 1979), 33. On the Student Christian Movement as a conduit into politics see Renate Howe, *A Century of Influence The Australian Student Christian Movement 1896–1996* (Kensington: UNSW Press, 2009); also John Warhurst, ‘The Faith of Australian Prime Ministers 1901–2010’, APSA Conference 2010.

<sup>5</sup> James Walter, *The Leader: A Political Biography of Gough Whitlam* (St Lucia: QUP, 1980), 199–213.

politicians transferred the values and sense of sacred purpose from their religious childhood into the adult world of secular public service. Among the members of the fourth Hawke Ministry, besides Hawke himself, Keating, Button, Blewett, Beazley, Howe, Evans, Jones and Crean all seem to fit this pattern.

## The Religious Subconscious in Australian History

Australian historians are sometimes characterised as an irreligious lot and accused of imparting a secular bias to the interpretation of our history. In a 1987 survey of the profession a majority described themselves as agnostics or atheists.<sup>1</sup> When you look more closely, however, a more complex pattern emerges. Keith Hancock, Manning Clark and Geoffrey Blainey—among many others—were sons of the manse or vicarage. I visualise young Manning and young Geoffrey peering through the door of their fathers’ studies as they prepared their Sunday sermons, then transferring the habits of reading, reflection, speaking and writing into their role as professional historians. I have noticed that many historians attempting to define their beliefs resort to hyphens. Hugh Stretton called himself a “Christian atheist”, John Hirst a “cultural Christian”.

One of Australia’s finest historians was the late Ken Inglis.<sup>2</sup> Ken is usually described as a social or cultural historian, although I think he was also a profound student of Australian

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<sup>1</sup> M. Campbell and M. Hutchinson, ‘After Serle, before the Bicentenary: A Survey of Academic Historians’, *Australian Historical Association Bulletin*, 62, May 1990, 19.

<sup>2</sup> The following paragraphs draw on my ‘Ken Inglis: Threads of Influence’, *History Australia*, vol. 14, Issue 4, 2017, 516–529; ‘Anzac and Civil Religion’ (forthcoming).

religion. He grew up in the Presbyterian Church in Preston, and attended school at Northcote and Melbourne High before studying history under Manning Clark and Max Crawford at the University of Melbourne. He was a member of the ALP Club and the Student Christian Movement, where he met his wife, the anthropologist Judy Betheras. They married next door in Queen's College Chapel before heading off to Oxford where Ken wrote a D.Phil thesis on the subject of what became his first book, *Churches and the Working Class in Victorian England*. Many of the students and academics drawn to the SCM in the 1950s and 60s were concerned about the apparent estrangement of working people from the churches. Was Christianity on the decline? Could the churches reconnect with their working class? In 1960 Ken published an article entitled "Patterns of Religious Worship, 1851" based on his analysis of the first religious census of England and Wales. It demonstrated that the alienation of the urban working from the churches was not a recent development, as some churchmen supposed, but a pattern already established a century earlier. "Any decline in in worshipping among the urban working class since 1900 has only accentuated a pattern which was already apparent in 1851", he concluded.<sup>1</sup>

Ken returned to Australia, planning to write about the history of Christianity in his own country. But in the early 1960s, while at the University of Adelaide, his life and academic interests took an abrupt turn. Through Judy's involvement in Adelaide's Aboriginal community, Ken took up the cause of Max Stuart, an Aboriginal man convicted—by a tainted judicial process—of murder. His book *The Stuart Case*, helped to save Stuart from

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<sup>1</sup> K.S. Inglis, 'Patterns of Religious Worship 1851', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, April 1960, 74–86.

the gallows. Then in 1962 Judy was tragically killed in a car accident. Ken later married Amirah Turner the daughter of Jewish refugees, and together they went to Papua New Guinea where Ken became professor of history at the new University of Papua New Guinea, a venture that, in my mind at least, was a kind of secular mission.

In February 1964 I attended the ANZUS conference in Canberra where I heard Ken give a paper, “The Anzac Tradition”, the overture to what would become his life-long preoccupation with Australia’s most powerful national myth. Soon afterwards, he gave a talk at St Mark’s Library reflecting on the complex relationship between Anzac and the churches.<sup>1</sup> If the returned servicemen evolved secular forms of commemoration it was not because they were irreligious, he argued, but because Catholics and Protestants could not agree on the religious form it should take. Was Anzac something of “religious significance”? an interviewer asked him years later. “It’s hard to know whether to use the word religious”, Ken replied, “but certainly sacred was in there”. Following the American sociologist Nathan Bellah, he sometimes described Anzac as a form of “civil religion”. And alert to the Aboriginal resonance of the words, he entitled his last book on Anzac *Sacred Places*. In feeling for words to describe the rites and beliefs of Anzac, Ken was tapping into Australia’s religious subconscious, listening for the quiet whispers in which our laconic countrymen voice their deepest fears and hopes.

Some church historians have accused Ken of obscuring the role of the churches and of Christian belief in inaugurating

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<sup>1</sup> K.S. Inglis, ‘Anzac and Christian—Two Traditions or One?’ *St Mark’s Review*, no. 42, November 1965, 3–12

Anzac Day ceremonies.<sup>1</sup> Surprisingly, they seldom cite his 1964 paper in the *St Mark's Review*. By making Christian orthodoxy the test of whether a work was religious, they overlook the more expansive understanding of religion that shaped Ken's work. Anzac interested him, he once said, as "an attempt to come to terms with death by people who can't get sustenance from traditional sacraments and statements". Was there an allusion here to his personal experience?

Was Ken religious? I don't know, and perhaps he didn't quite know himself. Certainly, he was gentle, wise and good. One day, a few months before he died, I visited him in the nursing home where he was still valiantly at work on his last project, a history of the *Dunera*, the shipload of mainly Jewish German refugees who were interned in Australia during the Second World War. When I arrived he was eager to tell me a story. It was census time and the management of the nursing home had appointed a staff member to help residents fill out the form. One question, in particular, the religious one, had caused him difficulty. None of the standard categories seemed to fit. No longer Presbyterian, never Catholic or Jewish, though sympathetic to both, neither was he atheist or agnostic. So he simply left all the standard categories blank. Only later did he discover that the staff helper, presuming to know Ken's intentions, had ticked the box 'no religion'. Ken insisted, quietly but firmly, that the tick be removed. His well-meaning helper could not have known that her charge was a historian who had written about the first religious census and had thought more deeply about what it means to be religious than most of his countrymen. Religion, he

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<sup>1</sup> John Moses, 'Anzac Day as Australia's Civic Religion?', *St Mark's Review*, no. 231, November 2015.



inferred, was something too profound and mysterious to be given an absolute no.

## The Role of Religious History

So what is the role of the religious historian in our confused multicultural secular age?

Religion, in its most general sense, is a part of our personal and tribal identity. For many people, it's part of their family heritage. Religious history therefore sits alongside ethnic history, indigenous history, gender history, as one of the several ways in which we identify ourselves in a pluralistic society. Even people who have abandoned the beliefs of their parents or grandparents continue to think of themselves as tribal or cultural Catholics, Presbyterians or Jews. Maybe the Uniting Church is still too young to have acquired such a tribal character?

True believers tend to think of such inherited allegiances as superficial or residual, although they may well go deeper than they think. Before I was a member of the Uniting Church I was a Methodist. You could even say that I was a Methodist before I was a Christian, for immersion in the church's culture preceded my awareness of what it believed. I sometimes think, guiltily, that I'm still a Methodist. After all, if the Jesuits can make a Catholic in six years then the Methodists had more than enough time to make me one before the advent of the Uniting Church.

To call oneself Methodist, or Presbyterian or Uniting Church is to claim a history as well as a creed and form of worship. By inscribing the names of new children in the flyleaf of a family Bible, our grandparents were reinforcing the powerful connection between family, religion and history. As children of the Protestant Reformation, Methodists looked askance on the holy pictures and icons venerated by Catholics and Orthodox

believers, but on reflection I realise that we had a few icons of our own, just as we had own holy days like Sunday School anniversaries and Cup Day picnics. Among the treasured legacies from my mother is a tiny Wesleyan Hymnbook inscribed with the names of her grandparents, a relic of the powerful revivals that convulsed the Methodist communities across the Victorian goldfields in the early 1860s. Another heirloom is a commemorative china plate carrying an effigy of Methodism's founder, John Wesley, and depicting scenes from our saint's life. My copy of Irving Benson's *A Century of Victorian Methodism* (1939) is inscribed by the author to my grandfather, Vic Hewett, Methodist local preacher and bible class leader, "who is helping to make the history of Methodism in this century", a flattering reference to his role as manager of its printer, the Specialty Press, in making the book itself.

But for people of faith, religious history is more than a source of personal or tribal identity; it is also a repository of inspiration and experience on which we continue to draw. We are heirs to Augustine and Francis, Luther and Calvin, Milton, Bunyan and Wesley. In the twentieth century, we draw on the witness and wisdom of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu, Mother Theresa and Dom Helder Camara. Ours is a cynical society, fascinated with celebrity and careless with people's reputations, yet filled with longing for saints and heroes: people who stand out from us poor flawed and broken mortals.

The Uniting Church was inspired by the call to become an authentically Australian church. In order to do so, it was prepared to cast off the denominational allegiances of the old world and embrace the challenges of the new. When R.W. Dale visited Australia in the 1880s he was struck by the blue skies and

fierce sun but surprised by how little Australian religion had taken on the colour of its surroundings. “The new environment has not produced any serious effect on the religious life [of the country]”, he observed.<sup>1</sup> The Uniting Church wanted to be different. The movement towards union began with an invitation to the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches to reflect on their own traditions in the light of the gospel call to unity. Having set their hand to the plough, however, its founders were wary of looking back too fondly on the traditions they were leaving behind. They should “hear what God has said, is saying and would say about his Church before we listened too closely to the understandings of [our] own traditions by Australian churches”, Davis McCaughey declared.<sup>2</sup>

The more resolutely the opponents of union clung to history and tradition the more its supporters were inclined to cast them off. In 1985 Gordon Dicker, a leading supporter of union in New South Wales was asked how he assessed the progress of the Uniting Church. “It hasn't achieved as much as we had hoped ... but ... it has broken the dead traditions that bound us”, he replied. “It was now possible to reshape the church more in line with the conditions which exist in Australian society, rather than with what forebears in England or Scotland had thought”.<sup>3</sup>

In retrospect, I wonder if the Uniting Church was too quick to discard the traditions of its antecedents. Did it unwittingly succumb to the assimilationist fallacy that to become authentically Australian you have to leave all your old beliefs and loyalties behind? Surely there is much in the legacy of Wesley—the religion of the warmed heart, wide mercy and a

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<sup>1</sup> Dale, *Impressions of Australia*, 218.

<sup>2</sup> Martin, *Davis McCaughey*, 164.

<sup>3</sup> *Canberra Times*, 28 August 1985.

parish as large as the world—to inspire us still.<sup>1</sup> Could we have done more to conserve and celebrate the diverse streams of Methodism, Presbyterianism and Congregationalism within a pluralist rather than unitary vision of the church? In his 1988 Bicentennial Lectures *Australia—The Most Godless Place Under Heaven* Ian Breward sounded a warning against a “clerical modernity, which ignored the needs of those who cherished the past. Unless denominations kept their historic roots”, he continued, “change for change sake could be a very destructive agent of secularisation”.<sup>2</sup> One of the contributions of this society has been to reconnect us with traditions that deserve to be kept alive, not simply for nostalgia but for the nourishment of the church.

To reclaim the past may also be to recover an older sense of history. Nothing so separates the mental world of Alfred Deakin from our own as his confident belief in history as a work of providence. The belief in history as a linear purposeful process was integral to Western culture, from Genesis and Exodus to Marx and Engels. Perhaps it is part of the religious subconscious of a society still half-Christian. One of the few occasions during my undergraduate years when the relationship between religious and secular history came into focus was in a guest lecture on Methodism by the theologian Colin Williams. Williams introduced the lecture, rather surprisingly from our point of view, by expounding the distinction, familiar to theologians like

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, Glen O’Brien, “What Wesley might say to the Uniting Church on its 40<sup>th</sup> Birthday” and Brian Howe, “Methodism and the Uniting Church” in *A Pilgrim People: Forty Years On*, Uniting Church National History Society, Conference Proceedings, Adelaide 2017, 234–56, 261–4.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Breward, *Australia—The Most Godless Place Under Heaven* (Melbourne, Beacon Hill Books, 1988), 83; and compare similar reflections in his *A History of the Churches in Australasia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 428–442.

Barth and Cullman, between *Historie*, the record of the past, *Geschichte*, the story or interpretation we draw from the evidence, and *Heilgeschichte*, or salvation history, the story of God's critical interventions into human affairs. The conviction that one could cooperate with God's saving purpose in the world empowered many of the great missionary and reform movements of the twentieth century. That conviction would take quite a battering over the course of the century. The mass slaughter of the First and Second Wars jolted liberal expectations of progress and with the collapse of Communism its last vestiges disappeared. In his dying testament *Ill Fares the Land*, the European historian Tony Judt observes that, after 1989, with the collapse of Communism, it was "no longer possible to believe that history moved in certain ascertainable directions". "What we now lack is a moral narrative: an internally coherent account that ascribes purpose to our actions in a way that transcends them".<sup>1</sup> The Christian sense of history was always a vision of hope rather than a theory of inevitable progress; now when secular visions of material and social progress give way to fears of environmental degradation, we need histories of hope more than ever.

In the final years of the twentieth century, the Christian churches, especially the liberal mainstream churches like the Uniting Church have experienced a precipitous decline. Not pulling my punches, in the *Cambridge History* I call this 'the collapse'. Then as in earlier eras, the most deadly challenges to faith were moral and political, rather than scientific. It was when religious creeds and authorities ceased to command respect, not just when they ceased to be believable, that faith came under

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Judt, *Ill Fares the Land* (Camberwell: Allen Lane, 2010), 140–1, 183.

challenge. When people now say that they have ‘no religion’ they are often casting a vote of no confidence in the institution, rather than rejecting the teaching of Jesus or belief in a spiritual being of some kind. ‘I’m spiritual but not religious’ is the credo of those who believe but emphatically don’t belong. Like the steep decline in church attendance over recent decades, it is one facet of the more general fraying of trust in institutions of all kinds. As few as we may feel ourselves to be, churches continue to be powerful sources of community solidarity.

Some Christians, and other people of faith, feel discomforted, and even beleaguered, by these developments. While their freedom to worship or express their faith may not be seriously threatened, they are uneasy in a society that is no longer Christian, even nominally. The feeling is most acute among religious conservatives, but liberals may also feel displaced in a society where market forces often seem to trump community responsibility.

How we feel about this crisis inevitably affects how we see and write our history. In a society forgetful of its religious past, one of the immediate tasks of the religious historian is simply to bear faithful witness to it. This is an enterprise in which I believe many secular historians may join. Because the past is a foreign country, they know that you must learn the local customs. For much of Australian history, the beliefs and customs were those of the Christian religion. Meredith Lake sub-titles her splendid book *The Bible in Australia* “a cultural history”. She offers her readers, religious and secular, a window into a world that is closed to some of them. Her tone is generous and her framework of reference is explicitly pluralist. “A confident, robust

pluralism requires tolerance of religious voices, including Christian ones, in all their diversity”, she writes.<sup>1</sup>

Demonstrating that religion was a force in the past, however, may only throw its absence into sharper relief. Some Christians feel that secularisation has advanced so far and infected historical perceptions so deeply that a counter-attack is required. The Evangelical historian Stuart Piggin argues that our national history needs to be “desecularised”.<sup>2</sup> His recent book, *The Fountain of Public Prosperity*, co-authored by Robert Linder, is a monumental tribute to the achievements of Australian Evangelicals between 1788 and 1918.<sup>3</sup> It seeks and deserves the attention of secular, as well as religious historians, although I fear its polemical tone may deter some readers. Some of those they count as Evangelicals, such as R.W. Dale, might well be claimed as progenitors by others, and some of the achievements totted up to the Evangelical cause in defending the rights of Aborigines, for example, were brought to light by secular historians. For myself, I’d prefer to think of ‘re-sacralising’ Australian history than ‘desecularising’ it.

We may be entering a testing time in Australia, with militant secularists and conservative Christians eager to advance rival versions of our history. Should Christians be arming to defend their heritage against secularists, or other religions, with histories that embolden believers? Or could there be another

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<sup>1</sup> Meredith Lake, *The Bible in Australia A Cultural History* (Kensington: New South, 2018), 365.

<sup>2</sup> Stuart Piggin, ‘Power and Religion in a Modern State: Desecularisation in Australian History’, *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 38, no.3. September 2014, 320–340.

<sup>3</sup> Stuart Piggin and Robert D. Lindner, *The Fountain of Public Prosperity Evangelical Christians in Australian History 1740–1914* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2018).

kind of religious history that listens for the quiet whispers in which our fellows speak of their tentative impulses towards the divine? Can we draw on our traditions, biblical as well as historical, to build bridges rather than walls? Is our history an anchor to hold us firm in the storm or a boat for venturing out into it?

There is surely room for more than one kind of religious history: histories that inspire and console the religious as well as histories that enrich our conversation with the irreligious; histories that celebrate our heritage and histories that subject it to searching scrutiny. If our world has become more secular it is also, in unexpected ways, more religious, if not more Christian. I long for histories that respond to the opportunities as well as the threats of that more complex world. Listen to the Calvinist Marilynne Robinson: “People who claim to care for the future of Christianity should listen to their critics rather than falling back on resentment and indulging the notion that they are embattled by rampant secularism”.<sup>1</sup> Or to the Catholic Charles Taylor: “I think what we badly need is a conversation between a host of different positions, religious, nonreligious, antireligious, humanistic ... in which we eschew mutual caricature and try to understand what ‘fullness’ means for the other”.<sup>2</sup> Every history, after all, is but a word in a long conversation. Right now, I think we need religious histories that widen the conversation rather than closing it down.

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<sup>1</sup> Marilynne Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, 312.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Afterword: Apologia pro Libro suo’ in Michael Warner, Jonathan Van Antwerpen and Craig Calhoun (eds.), *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 300–323.



# Continuing Influence of Denominational Legacies in South Australia

Dean Eland

## Synopsis

Denominational identities in nineteenth century South Australia (SA) were formed by immigrant communities with their distinctive cultural and theological traditions. Cultural traditions were expressed through ethnic and class associations and theological emphasis was evident in polity and ministry practices. In the early years of the province there was a degree of respect and cooperation between Protestant churches and differences were associated with doctrine and inherent ministry ethos and priorities. This essay explores questions we may have today about the residual influences of this legacy in the Uniting Church in SA today.

The formation of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) in 1977 sought to incorporate diverse theological assumptions and supersede inherent characteristics of three denominational traditions. The UCA set out to be a broad church, evangelical and reformed, while embracing the vision of being an Australian church reflecting the nation's distinctive multi-cultural and pluralist society.

Forty two years later divisions in the UCA have emerged as conservative and evangelical leaders are “standing aside” from decisions of the Assembly. One consequence of this growing alliance was evident by decision of the November 2018 meeting of the South Australian Presbytery-Synod. The Presbytery-Synod decided to form a “non-geographical” presbytery made

up of congregations holding similar views about equal marriage. Other diverse expressions in the UC can also be explained by contending ministry models, one expressed as “brave leadership-casting the vision” and the other as enabling servant style “where every member is a minister”.

Can the emergence of these differences be partly explained by nineteenth century influences, an implicit legacy of two antecedent denominations, Methodism and Congregationalism? Is the Methodist revival tradition one indicator why evangelical leaders struggle to be at home in the Uniting Church? A majority of liberal or mainline UC congregations are described as ‘open’ and ‘inclusive’ and include five former Congregational churches that are public in their support for LGBTIQ members. These and other similar congregations in SA are engaged with their contextual settings and their contemporary model of ministry can be described as new wine in old wineskins, “moving into the future by reengaging with their past”.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In a recent conversation a long-time colleague suggested that church members of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century were born into a denomination. Up until the 1960s parents presented their children for baptism and thriving youth groups provided new members for the nearby accessible local church. Congregations were often referred to as a second home and there were social and practical incentives for taking part in a wide range of activities and programmes. This was my

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<sup>1</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us. How the Neighborhood Church is Transforming the Faith* (Harper One, 2006), 4.

experience in teen-age years, a place where a youth group of about 100 members met and matched.

My local suburban church was located in the working class region of Port Adelaide and aged 19 I was called to ministry and sent out to Parkin Theological College to make up on my education and prepare for ministry. Over five years I discovered what it meant to become a convinced Congregationalist with liberal attitudes while leaving behind the evangelical and revival emphasis of the local pastor Bill Satch. Bill had trained at Cliff College in the United Kingdom and in week night study groups introduced us to the theology of Edwin Orr and Congregationalist, P. T. Forsyth.<sup>1</sup>

Since the formation of the UCA I have often been prompted by questions about the enduring ethos of former denominations and the continuing influence of ministry practices and the culture of congregations. With the inauguration of the UCA members were encouraged to look to the future but for many there was a degree of ambiguity about how to relate to, adapt and rework former identities. It was understood that we were leaving the past behind but at the same time coming to terms with a continuing ethos shaped by previous experiences and their social sources and cultural loyalties.

Niebuhr's 1923 critique of denominations suggested that social sources, class, and cultural association shape identity while the gospel invites us to embrace differences and invites us to witness to unity. "Theological opinions have their roots in the

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<sup>1</sup> Dean Eland, *Cheltenham Community and Church. Introduction to an Adelaide suburban community and a local church* (Historical Society of the UCA in SA, May 2005), 19–20.

relationship of the religious life to the cultural and political conditions prevailing in any group of Christians”.<sup>1</sup>

Recent divisions in the Uniting Church in South Australia have prompted questions whether differences are primarily based on current theological convictions and biblical interpretation or are new expressions of earlier debates between evangelicals and liberals. Emerging divisions are also evident in different mission models, priorities and ministry preferences. Are theological convictions and ministry practices in the UCA formed by current debates about the “definition of religious truth”, or are they in part expressions of a continuing denominational ethos including “the effect of social tradition, the influence of cultural heritage and the weight of economic interest”?<sup>2</sup>

### Formation of the Uniting Church: South Australia

The process that led to the formation of the Uniting Church involved extensive consultation, negotiation and theological reflection across three communities of memory. Over 16 years the Joint Commission on Church Union developed a theological consensus and hoped-for ethos, and in 1972 congregations and denominational councils voted on the Basis of Union. Presbyterians voted a second time in 1973.

In SA almost all Congregational churches voted for union and two voted to remain. Differences between New South Wales (NSW) and SA should be noted as a higher percentage of congregations in NSW voted to remain. Today 27 congregations in NSW and Queensland form the Fellowship of Congregational

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<sup>1</sup> H. Richard (Helmut Richard) Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York, Meridian Books Paperback edition, 1962), 16.

<sup>2</sup> Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, 17.

Churches.<sup>1</sup> One explanation for this difference can be explained by the continuing influence in NSW of the empire evangelist Lionel Fletcher.<sup>2</sup>

The second ballot for Presbyterians in SA closed on 9 September 1973 and SA results reflected the history of Free Church squatter settlement in western Victoria.<sup>3</sup> Of the 26 congregations in the Presbytery of Penola 16 voted to be continuing Presbyterian and 10 joined the UCA.

Of the 14 congregations in the Presbytery of Onkaparinga 12 voted for union and two continuing. In the largely urban Presbytery of Torrens, 24 voted for union and three continuing. Robert Scrimgeour concludes that the vote for union in SA by 42 out of 57 churches was higher than the national average, “due largely to the fact that by the 1970s many Presbyterian churches in this State were already working in united parishes”.<sup>4</sup> This topic was the focus of a meeting of the Uniting Church SA Historical Society on Sunday 25 August 2019 and members were invited to discuss whether sociological, cultural and geographical issues were more important than theological views and church polity in determining voting patterns.<sup>5</sup>

With similar percentages the SA Methodist conference voted to join the Uniting Church. Results of the ballot by circuits are

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<sup>1</sup> <https://fcc-cong.org/about-us/our-history/>

<sup>2</sup> C.W. Malcolm, *Twelve Hours in the Day. A Biography of Lionel B. Fletcher*, (1956); Peter Lambert, *Lionel B Fletcher Empire Evangelist 2015* (Uniting Church in SA Historical Society).

<sup>3</sup> Robert J. Scrimgeour, *Some Scots Were Here. A History of the Presbyterians Church in South Australia 1839–1977*, (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1986), 156.

<sup>4</sup> Scrimgeour, 223.

<sup>5</sup> *Uniting History SA*, Judith Raftery, ‘Presbyterians past, present, continuing: no more haggis and bagpipes?’ September 2019, 6.

recorded in the 2 August 1972 edition of *Central Times*.<sup>1</sup> Five circuits out of 102 voted against union or were evenly divided. One of the five circuits, Alberton, was urban and included four congregations. Members voted 114 for and 122 against. Rural fringe circuits of Willunga voted 68 for and 89 against and Summertown 34 for and 60 against. In the former Cornish mining towns of Moonta 50 voted for and 118 against and nearby Kadina 44 voted for and 110 against. On Eyre Peninsula the Far Western circuit the vote was close with 38 for and 32 against and 49 members of the Wudinna circuit voted for and 48 against. Surprisingly, members of the United Parish of Bordertown (Congregational and Methodist) 98 voted for and 67 against.

With this overwhelming support for Union few in SA would have anticipated the confusion, divisions and diversity that have marked the SA Synod over the past twenty years. Andrew Dutney has drawn attention to two issues noted by SA Methodist historian Arnold Hunt in his 1997 “Memoir: A Life in Methodism”. Dutney refers to Hunt’s conclusion that “the most alarming developments in the Uniting Church” since union are the prolonged debate on homosexuality and the “appointment or settlement of ministers”.<sup>2</sup> Dutney’s 2005 lecture, *So Differently So Quickly* explores the feelings of former Methodist ministers in relation to the placement of ministers and notes Hunt’s conclusion that many did not anticipate that church life would change as “most believed, especially in South Australia, that more of Methodism would survive than has been the case”.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold D. Hunt, *This Side of Heaven: A History of Methodism in South Australia*, (Adelaide, Lutheran Publishing House, 1985), 424–426.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Dutney, *So Differently So Quickly*, 2015, (Uniting Church Historical Society South Australia), 1

<sup>3</sup> Dutney, *So Differently so Quickly*, 1.

Does the phrase, “especially in South Australia” convey one factor when accounting for present diversity and divisions?

### South Australian denominational presence

Australian religious historians are agreed that SA denominational presence was distinctive when compared with eastern colonial settlements. “The census of 1901 recorded a pattern of religious adherence in South Australia that was markedly different from that of the eastern states”.<sup>1</sup> Hilliard concludes that “since the foundation of South Australia its religious climate had been strongly influenced by English Protestant dissent and in 1901 more than one third of the population (double the national percentage) professed adherence to Methodist, Baptist or Congregational churches”.<sup>2</sup>

The two larger denominations, Church of England and Roman Catholic, were not as dominant in public life, as Congregational and Baptist lay leaders were formative in establishing the South Australian Company.<sup>3</sup> Lutheran refugees arrived in 1837 were funded by the company’s dissenting leader, George Fife Angas.<sup>4</sup> With the arrival of Cornish miners Methodism developed a dominant rural community presence with 25% or more recorded in various census figures. “In the 1891 census the number of Wesleyans returned for South

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<sup>1</sup> David Hilliard, ‘The City of Churches in William Shakespeare’s Adelaide 1860–1930’, (ed.), Brian Dickey, (Adelaide: Association of Professional Historians, 1992), 62.

<sup>2</sup> Hilliard, *The City of Churches*, 62.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Pike, *Paradise of Dissent, South Australia 1829–1857*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957), 124–130.

<sup>4</sup> R.M. Gibbs, *Under the Burning Sun: A history of colonial South Australia 1836–1900* (Southern Heritage, 2013), 97.

Australia as a whole was 49,159, and of those, 30,728 were in District Council areas”.<sup>1</sup>

Niebuhr’s reference to denominational cultural heritage is evident in SA by country of origin and geographic presence. Lutheran families from Silesia settled in urban Klemzig and three rural centres.<sup>2</sup> Catholics from Ireland were at home in a few mid-north towns and the inner working class suburbs of Adelaide. Church of England and Congregationalist members emigrated from England and settled in growing middle class suburbs and Presbyterians from Scotland via Victoria and Tasmania settled in the south east and in other rural centres including Strathalbyn and Clare and in Adelaide.

Research and publications undertaken by SA historians conclude that the predominance of Methodists is explained by the arrival of Cornish miners with their evangelical ethos, revivalist movements and class identification. By the 1880s ‘Australia’s Little Cornwall’ had a population of 20,000 and was possibly the largest Cornish community beyond Land’s End.<sup>3</sup>

The dominance of English Wesleyans involved the presence of three primary branches of Methodism each with their own emphasis. Wesleyans were generally middle class and expressed their social status by raising the funds to erect landmark buildings. Urban sites for this presence included Pirie St in the city, Kent Town, Magill, Payneham Rd, Woodville, Semaphore and Alberton. The story of Wesley Kent Town documents the way generational change was evident as core families moved out

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<sup>1</sup> Hunt, *This Side of Heaven*, 211.

<sup>2</sup> David O. Paech, *The George Fife Angus You Might Not Know and Should, His Life, Character, and Motivation* (Self-published, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Hunt, 117.



of inner city suburbs to middle class leafy suburbs.<sup>1</sup> Five of these early buildings continue to be the home of UC congregations with a liberal outlook and a commitment to engaging with their neighbourhoods.

While all Methodist branches embodied an evangelistic ethos and commitment to church growth, the presence of Bible Christians and Primitive Methodists was largely evident through small chapel buildings. These were built through the commitment of Cornish local preachers and ministers who settled in the northern rural regions of the colony after the discovery of copper in 1845.<sup>2</sup> The first SA Labor Premier, John Verran, member for Wallaroo, often said he was a MP because he was a PM!<sup>3</sup>

Congregationalists in SA were active in promoting the voluntary principle, the separation of church and state. Raftery concludes that, “in earlier times Congregationalism had drawn considerable support from the wealthier, middle class sections of the urban population”.<sup>4</sup> Their influence included a significant number of lay leaders in 1851, including William Giles, secretary of the South Australian Company.<sup>5</sup> This influence did not result in growing the membership of the denomination when compared to Methodists who arrived as miners and farmers.

In the second decade of the twenty first century five former Congregational churches that occupy 150 year old heritage

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<sup>1</sup> Marlene Edwards, *The House of God-The Gate of Heaven: the Wesleyan Jubilee Church at Kent Town 1865–2015* (2015).

<sup>2</sup> Gibbs, 114.

<sup>3</sup> <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/verran-john-8917>

<sup>4</sup> Judith Raftery, ‘Till Every Foe is Vanquished: churches and social issues in South Australia, 1919–1939’, unpublished PhD thesis, Flinders University, July 1988, 69.

<sup>5</sup> <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/giles-william-2095>

listed buildings are celebrating 170 years since their formation. Each of these congregations could be described as mainline or progressive in their theology and outlook. Located on main street sites they continue to be a strong visible community presence in urban centres. Two mainline inclusive congregations in the city of Adelaide include Pilgrim Uniting Church Flinders St, opposite Victoria Square, and Brougham Place North Adelaide. Three others are located in early suburban regional centres, Port Adelaide, St Andrew's Glenelg and Clayton Wesley at the head of Norwood Parade. These buildings are reminders of the polity, class association, political influence and the theological ethos of Congregationalism, and the capacity to find the money! From 2005 to 2019 four of these congregations, along with Scots Church North Terrace and former Wesleyan Methodist congregations, Morialta and Blackwood, provided leadership for the Urban Mission Network (UMN).

### Trends in the UCA

Over the past 20 years the Uniting Church has been characterised by continuing debate and growing expressions of theological diversity. SA church historian, David Hilliard, argues that,

since the 1970s, in almost every major religious body in Australia, a new fault line has opened up between theological 'liberals' and 'conservatives'. This has been accompanied by the emergence of a number of movements and organisations that are in varying degrees alienated from or in rebellion against the dominant theology and habits of thought in their denomination and are committed to bringing

it back to what they regard as its foundational doctrines. Some of these bodies claim a space inside existing church structures and campaign to restore the denomination to spiritual health from within. More radicalised conservatives have separated in order to create their own alternative structures. These are the self-styled traditionalists. The denomination as it now exists, they argue, is beyond redemption; therefore to be loyal to the great truths of the faith it is necessary to withdraw from it, to form a pure church committed to traditional orthodoxy.<sup>1</sup>

There are several well-known examples of this fault line in the UCA. In the NSW ACT Synod the O'Connor Uniting (formerly Methodist) church became an independent congregation as a result of its charismatic, evangelical emphasis and leadership style of its minister, Harry Westcott.<sup>2</sup> Debates about infant baptism and lay-led communion led to ongoing tensions with the Canberra Presbytery.<sup>3</sup> In documenting the history of O'Connor's growth and style authors note that the Canberra North Methodist circuit with three congregations

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<sup>1</sup> David Hilliard, "Defending Orthodoxy: Some Conservative and Traditionalist Movements in Australian Christianity" in Geoffrey R. Treloar and Robert D. Linder (eds), *Making History for God: Essays on Evangelicalism, Revival and Mission in Honour of Stuart Piggin, Master of Robert Menzies College, 1990–2004*, (Sydney: Robert Menzies College, 2004), 273–92.

<sup>2</sup> William W. and Susan Emilsen, *O'Connor Exploring the History of a Uniting Church Congregation* (UTC Publications, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Emilsen, 14.

voted 61% yes and 39% no. Others including Westcott remember the vote as 60% against and 40% yes.<sup>1</sup>

In Victoria similar issues emerged in Melbourne's western working class region with the 'awakening' and evangelical emphasis of the minister of the Sunshine Methodist Mission, the Rev. John Blacker<sup>2</sup> who began his ministry in 1966. John's time at Sunshine involved a growing itinerant revival and healing ministry in the wider church across Australia. His emphasis and outlook may have influenced the 1972 vote for Union when 116 Sunshine members in four congregations voted 64% for union and 36% against.<sup>3</sup> Ministers who followed at Sunshine after union were required to work and adapt this revival legacy and local tension reflected the growing polarisation in the denomination between liberal and charismatic mission priorities.

In the first few years of his ten year ministry at Sunshine John became leader of the Charismatic Movement in Victoria. As a self-appointed missionary he was active in itinerant revival campaigns across the nation and sought denominational acceptance and recognition for this ministry. In 1975 John did not receive the required vote to continue at Sunshine but the final report of the Department of Mission of the Victorian and Tasmanian Methodist Conference in 1976 affirmed his ministry. Twelve years later a number of meetings were held with leaders of the Charismatic Movement about the Assembly's decision in relation to the practice of re-baptism.<sup>4</sup> These debates also

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<sup>1</sup> Emilsen, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Dean Eland, *The Sunshine Story: Changing Identity in a Pluralistic Society* (Doctor of Ministry Studies Melbourne College of Divinity, 2006) 242.

<sup>3</sup> Eland, 49

<sup>4</sup> Eland, 63

involved the para-church groups including the Fellowship for Revival, and John resigned as a minister of the UCA.

A number of former Methodist ministers in SA also resigned at this time and involved congregations where decisions were related to theological emphasis and questions of polity. Before union there was some indication of future alliances and reservations about the future. Two letters in the *Central Times* expressed doubts about the theological style of the *Basis of Union* and suggested that “the basis of union lacks crisp, authoritative evangelical theology”.<sup>1</sup> One author became a minister of the UCA and over 40 years was a strong advocate for the revivalist movement and the formation of Evangelical Ministers Uniting (EMU).

### Being at home in the Uniting Church

Alliances and sectional groupings in SA received wide coverage in 1989 and centred on the coming out as homosexual of a well-known youth leader, Simon Moglia. Simon was supported by his congregation, Pilgrim and some denominational leaders while others campaigned to remove him from youth leadership positions.<sup>2</sup> Ongoing divisions continued over the following years and related to decisions about the recognition and ordination of gay ministers and were exacerbated by the decision of the 2018 Assembly in relation to equal marriage.

It could be argued however that the seeds were already sown by indicators prior to union. Continuing DNA elements of evangelicalism and revivalism were expressed by ministers,

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<sup>1</sup> *Central Times*, 26 April 1972, 9.

<sup>2</sup> John Maddern, *Reflections of a Past Moderator. Simon Moglia and the Uniting Church in S.A 1989–1991* (Undated)

congregations and group alliances. The theological emphasis and outlook of these groupings appeared to both retain and embody new expressions of earlier nineteenth Methodist traditions.

In his chapter “Defending Orthodoxy: Some Conservative and Traditionalist Movements in Australian Christianity”, David Hilliard outlines the development of divisions within the Uniting Church and draws attention to the way “evangelicals in the Uniting Church were very critical of the reports of the Assembly Task Group on sexuality. They were a diverse minority group within the church, embracing charismatic groups such as the Fellowship for Revival and supporters of interdenominational bodies such as the Evangelical Alliance and the Scripture Union”.<sup>1</sup>

He suggests that the formation of the Evangelical Ministers of the Uniting Church in the Synod of South Australia in 1991 could reflect the fact that “the Methodist evangelical tradition was stronger than elsewhere”. This developed into a nationwide movement known as Evangelical Members Uniting (EMU) and “within a few years EMU had a membership of two thousand and a quarterly magazine *Travelling EMU*.” EMU believed it was scorned and even persecuted by the church’s liberal leadership, while some of its opponents felt that EMU sought to persecute them. Consequences of this divide included the resignation of ministers, decisions by some members to leave the UC and the formation of autonomous congregations.

In his study of SA Methodism Brian Chalmers outlines thirteen conclusions why Methodist revivalism declined in the twentieth century, when in the nineteenth century, “flourishing

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<sup>1</sup> Hilliard, *Defending Orthodoxy*, 273–92.

revivalism was the most significant factor in the expansion of Methodist ‘vital religion’. “It was a matter of strategy, and when that strategy faltered, as it did in the inter-war period, there developed no commensurate alternative”.<sup>1</sup> However the question remains, are there today faint echoes of revivalist culture through “traditioned innovation”, new forms expressing older traditions?<sup>2</sup>

In accounting for the influence of individuals one biographical study suggests that there are ministers who were able to strike a balance between Methodism’s conservative evangelical ethos and yet the affirmation of the ecumenical movement and being leaders in the UCA. In his study of Arthur Jackson, Dean Drayton comments that Jackson exemplified a style of ministry that embraced and affirmed the best of Methodism’s evangelical tradition and was able to work with the Student Christian Movement on campus, support the formation of the World Council of Churches, while being influential in the life of theological students.<sup>3</sup> His influence on theological students are listed and include Michael Neale, Dean Drayton, Owen Roberts, Rodney (Rod) James, Gregory (Greg) Pearce, Matthew (Matt) Curnow and Eric Densley.<sup>4</sup>

Not all these ministers and others were able to accept the more inclusive theologies and the UCA’s diverse traditions. Drayton and others provided leadership in the SA Synod for

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Chalmers, “Methodists and Revivalism in South Australia, 1838–1939: The Quest for ‘Vital Religion’”, (PhD, Flinders University, August 2016) 314.

<sup>2</sup> <https://faithandleadership.com/category/principles-practice-topics/traditioned-innovation>

<sup>3</sup> Dean Drayton, ‘Arthur Jackson: Preacher, Theologian, Charismatic (1918-2006)’, in *Out of the Ordinary. Twelve Australian Methodist Biographies*, eds. Patricia Curthoys and William W. Emilsen, 2015, 340.

<sup>4</sup> Drayton, 342

some years without drawing hard lines and the more dogmatic positions that has followed them.<sup>1</sup> Drayton suggests there were at least two indicators of the struggle to come. He comments on Jackson's experience with homosexual friends and his charismatic experience. In a letter to Drayton he refers to his personal struggle about his charismatic experience and its pastoral implications, "I wanted desperately to keep quiet about the charismatic element in my religious experience... I see it as private".<sup>2</sup>

In addition to biographies of ministers, stories of congregations also provide evidence of enduring legacies. Congregational studies in SA for example illuminate the late nineteenth century divide over biblical interpretation in both Congregational and Methodist traditions and the continuing ministry emphasis of those churches today.<sup>3</sup>

## A structural solution

In 2005 the SA Synod adopted an organisational solution to reassure evangelicals and limit further defections by merging seven presbyteries into one and forming networks.<sup>4</sup> Networks were formed across the state by congregations with similar theological outlooks and a common view about ministry priorities and mission.

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<sup>1</sup> Drayton was Synod Consultant for Evangelism 1978–1982, Dean Brookes Synod Evangelist 1981–1988.

<sup>2</sup> 352

<sup>3</sup> Studies include *The Methodist Pilgrimage via Pirie St* by Keith Smith, 2012, *James Jefferis Prophet of Federation* by Walter Phillips, 1993, *The Spire on the Parade Clayton Wesley Uniting Church 1856-2006* by Geoffrey C. Bishop, 1995, and numerous locally produced stories of congregations.

<sup>4</sup> *New Times*, April 2005, *New moves on new structure*, 3.



Networks in the SA Synod were informal associations, and not one of the four formal councils of the UCA. Presbytery responsibilities were largely delegated to Synod committees and meetings of the SA Presbytery-Synod often experienced confusion about the respective responsibilities of the two councils. The Synod Moderator and Presbytery Chairperson was the same person and preferences, differences and diversity across the Synod's 250 congregations were evident in charismatic worship and preferred models of ministry and mission.

Over 15 years a number of congregations decided not to participate and smaller networks declined. By 2018 four well organised networks represented diverse expressions of mission theology and attitudes about the exclusion or inclusion of gay leadership.

The Urban Mission Network included 35 or more congregations identified as progressive or mainline with a strong emphasis on prophetic justice, inclusion, and incarnational servant leadership. In the first five years UMN hosted a number of experienced international speakers to develop their emphasis on local public theology. Guests included Anne Morisy, former director of the Church of England Commission on Urban Life and Faith UK, Dr Chris Baker from the William Temple Foundation, Diana Butler Bass researcher from the US and Clive Pearson, former principal at the United College of Theology, Sydney. The witness and community presence of these congregations continues to be expressed by providing hospitality and common ground for local community groups to meet and collaborate on justice issues, interfaith dialogue and covenanting.

Members of the Hope and 3D networks included EMU and provided leadership in the formation of the national Assembly of Confessing Congregations (ACC). Evangelicals were invited to “fearless leadership conferences” to “make disciples” and plant new congregations. The term “senior pastor” is used and there is a commitment to church growth through developing regional congregations in growing middle class urban areas.

Over twenty years the organisational culture of the Synod was based on a leadership style evident in centralised decision making processes, dependency on Synod committees and evangelical leadership with strategic assumptions about the future of the church. In the Moderator’s report to the 2004 Synod the Rev. Dr Graham Humphris suggested that congregations need to “go and make disciples” as “declining and ageing congregations should engage with their communities with the Good News of Jesus Christ.” He commented that the “evangelistic effectiveness of many of our churches could only be described with some charity as minimal”.<sup>1</sup>

Following the Assembly’s decision in July 2018 about equal marriage the SA Synod-Presbytery November meeting agreed to form a number of presbyteries and give approval for one to be made up of congregations who were “standing aside” from the Assembly decision. While two presbyteries, one in the Northern Synod and one in Queensland (Calvary) are made up of NAICC members, a third in NSW is made up of Sydney Korean congregations. Each of these was formed on the basis of culture and traditions while the SA decision to form the Generate Presbytery on theological grounds is unprecedented.

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<sup>1</sup> SA Synod of UCA Minutes 2004, A6.2

## Why South Australia?

Historical explanations drawing on Niebuhr's class and cultural heritage insights continue to provide insights about divisions in SA UC. Insights emerge when exploring Hunt's question as to why more of Methodism has not survived in the SA? and in the history of congregations. These three dimensions plus biographic studies are sources to draw on when accounting for the current polarisation within the UC in SA.

The effects of social change sometimes named as "post Christian" and "post secular" include Australia's growing pluralist ethos and cultural diversity. Social changes and debates about community values and individualism impact the wider community and may explain why people are anxious and confused, and strong leaders appear to provide certainties and authority. Researcher Hugh Mackay suggests that two seminal facts, greater degrees of fragmentation and an epidemic of anxiety, are the underlying features our time.<sup>1</sup> These signs of the times offer some insights about the perceived need for reassurance. Generational differences in the church also appear to require commitment to clear directions and success though the promise of church growth.

External or extrinsic dramatic social changes were formative in the fifties and sixties when migrants from non-English speaking countries arrived with their own religious identity. "Now (2019) for the first time since the 1890s, one in every two Australians (52%) was either born overseas or has at least one parent born overseas".<sup>2</sup> Change also followed in the sixties with

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Mackay, *Australia Reimagined. Towards a More Compassionate, Less Anxious Society* (Macmillan, 2018), 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Getting Back on Mission. Reforming Our Church Together*, (Catholics for Renewal. 2019), 52.

major attitudinal or paradigm changes impacting traditional church attendance, loyalties, conventional routines and the assumed role of the church in the nation.

Class differences are also mixed and uncertain from earlier times when for example working class electorates in SA were based on industrial, mining and working class associations. While census figures indicate some variation of UCA percentages of nominal memberships across the state middle class, wealthy suburbs and some rural locations indicate a higher rate. Lower percentages than the state average are notable in regions with a higher percentage of overseas born and poorer communities. 2016 census figures of UCA nominals in the Copper Coast LGA with a population of 14,100 is 18.6%, Adelaide Hills 8.0% and Burnside 6.4% while greater Adelaide at 5.8% and the state as a whole is 7.1%. In the Port Adelaide Enfield LGA with a population of 125,000 the percentage is 4.4% with Islam at 4.8%.<sup>1</sup>

Sociological interpretation is one avenue when accounting for different models for ministry and provides a contextual framework for research and study.<sup>2</sup>

Local studies of congregations are another more immediate source to account for current diversity. These are drawn from local members and provide insights as members remember and recall their own personal experiences and enduring long term loyalties. In retirement I became the first organiser of the UMN in 2005 and for nine years was secretary and editor of the UC SA Historical Society. This ministry provided access to congregation narratives, numerous historical sources and drew

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<sup>1</sup> <https://profile.id.com.au/australia/religion?WebID=130>

<sup>2</sup> Dean Eland, *Action Research Project 2010–2011 Western Region Adelaide*, 2011.

my attention to the implications of nineteenth century revivalism and Methodist presence in SA.

Forty years of ministry in three states also provides a stimulus for the study of differences and comparative denominational formation. These experiences continue to prompt questions about enduring legacies, and one experience illustrates the local significance of continuing enquiry. In 1984 I began an eight year placement with the Alberton-Port Adelaide Uniting Church Parish. Of the four congregations in the parish three were formerly Methodist; Alberton formed in 1851 was Wesleyan, Trinity formerly Bible Christian and known as Yatla was renamed in 1993 with the merger of three nearby congregations. The third congregation, Royal Park was begun in 1896.

Prior to Methodist union the Yatla Bible Christian chapel was opened in 1880 and the nearby Rosewater congregation was Primitive Methodist and its building was opened in 1878. Hunt comments that these two traditions may have wanted revivals more often later in the century than Wesleyans but they placed as much stress as the others on a steady, evangelistic ministry coupled with pastoral care. "Bible Christian churches had fewer stained glass windows... they were too small and too poor to import the large pipe organs installed in in a number of Wesleyan churches".<sup>1</sup> The Yatla and Alberton buildings are about a half a kilometre apart and the prominent Port Road Wesleyan church, opened in 1858, was built on a sand hill.

The style of Sunday services in the two congregations was very different and it was evident that members came from different social backgrounds. Worship at Trinity began with a

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold Hunt, *The Bible Christians in South Australia*, (Uniting Church Historical Society South Australia, 2005), 17.

15 minute warm up and I was surprised to be singing rousing revival songs from the 1907 Chapman and Alexander revival campaign.<sup>1</sup> While the three congregations were formerly Methodist their different histories and character seemed to be embedded well before becoming part of the Uniting Church in 1977. After two years in ministry with these churches and the Port Adelaide congregation I discovered that this was the only urban Methodist circuit that had voted against union in 1972!

One recent example of extensive historical research about the nineteenth influence of SA Methodism is the monumental work of retired UCA minister Ted Curnow. In 2015 the SA UC Historical Society agreed to publish his 640 page compendium, *Bible Christian Methodists in South Australia 1850–1900. A biography of Chapels and their People*. This publication was enhanced by two UC SA Historical Society volunteers who over 12 months edited this work and both were members of liberal and inclusive congregations.

In summing up his study and its implications for today the author concludes that Bible Christians

were single minded about the stewardship of being entrusted with a message that transformed people and the world. Sadly, in an attempt to be relevant and to reinterpret the gospel, to be palatable, tolerant and inclusive, the church of our time appears to have retreated to a position of uncertainty that compromise the core essentials so that now the world transforms the gospel.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hunt, *This Side of Heaven*, 268.

<sup>2</sup> Edwin A. Curnow, *Bible Christian Methodists in South Australia 1850–1900. A Biography of Chapels and their People*. (South Australian Uniting Church History Society, 2015), 606.

This conclusion and other publications and statements reflect the theological disposition of the ACC and evangelicals in the UC in SA. So the questions remain: Is the ethos of nineteenth century Methodist revivalism a continuing unspoken influence? Given recent trends and increasing polarisation within the UC in SA should we conclude that more of nineteenth Methodism remains than anticipated?

As communities of memory, churches cannot escape the past but are encouraged by affirming the sources and foundational layers of experience and then re-imagining what this implies about the future. In his chapter, “Elements of an Emerging Ecumenical Missionary Paradigm” David Bosch acknowledges the multiple ways mission is understood. He points the church to a wholistic view of the gospel, where we find ways of being together as we join in the mission of God, the *missio dei*, into the world.<sup>1</sup> At its best the Uniting Church is a people on the way, one expression of the gospel in a particular time and place. Both the social interpretation and personal meaning of mission become the focus of denominational life when we follow the call to be with God in the world.

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<sup>1</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. (Orbis Books, 1994), 390.

## Rev. James W Crisp: Convict's son to venerable patriarch of the Methodist Church

Cheryl Griffin

### Synopsis

Son of a Tasmanian convict who made good, James Crisp was born in Hobart in 1832. Received into the Wesleyan Methodist Church aged fifteen, he was ordained at Westbury, Tasmania, in 1854. In the following year he came to Victoria where he remained until his death in 1917 aged 85. He was President of the Wesleyan Conference in 1889 and, with his second wife Hope and Mrs Emma Varcoe, was involved in child rescue work through the establishment of Livingstone House. In his later years he was also the Chaplain of Gaols. His ordination predated the establishment of an Australian Conference and by 1913 he was lauded as the oldest native-born Methodist minister in Australia. One of fourteen children and the father of three, his family connections to the Wesleyan Methodist Church stretch back to the first ordination of a clergyman on Australian soil in 1826 and move forwards at least 130 years to the 1950s. For him, the church provided a home, a place of meaning and hope, and it was through the church that he met the people who nurtured and sustained him.

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The themes of family and home go hand in hand. A house is a building. It provides solidity and shelter. Proverbs 24:3–4 reminds us that a home is more than that: “By wisdom a house



is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.”<sup>1</sup>

A home provides a secure and safe place. It is somewhere welcoming and inviting. A place of comfort and peace. A place where you are respected. A meaningful place to be. It provides the key to a better life, hope for a better life. It is a place of respite, of rest, of refuge. It is a place of love. A place of sustenance and warmth. It is a place where love, compassion, patience prevail. It is where you find your family.

But it is more than that. A home is a steadying influence. It’s where you receive your moral training. Proverbs 22:6 tells us “Train the children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.”<sup>2</sup>

For the Crisp family of Hobart, that way was the Methodist way and for James Crisp, the subject of this paper, it meant a lifetime’s commitment to Methodism as an ordained minister of the church. A Methodist clergyman of James Crisp’s era led a peripatetic lifestyle. In the days of his ministry, it was the custom to move on every three years, so the Crisp home could never have been one single building and the Crisp extended family could never have been located in one community. Yet he did have a home and he did have a family, provided by his ever-widening connections to the Methodist community in Victoria and to a lesser extent in Tasmania.

In the absence of personal papers and letters, I cannot write about Crisp’s interior life, his spirituality, his religious convictions, his responses to local or world events. So I have

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<sup>1</sup> Michael D. Coogan (ed.), *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, Fully Revised Fifth Edition), 934.

<sup>2</sup> *Oxford Annotated Bible*, p.931.

looked at his life through his actions, seen through the lens of official records, newspapers and the resources of the Uniting Church Archives in Melbourne and in Hobart. I have not located any published family history material so it is impossible to gauge the importance of the very large Crisp family on the course of James Crisp's life. Eleven of the fourteen Crisp children lived to adulthood—nine sons and two daughters. There is evidence that he did keep contact with his siblings and their children, particularly those in Victoria, and was the officiating clergyman at many a family wedding—in Victoria, at least—but it is the family of the church that emerges time and time again in his life story.

The origins of many Tasmanian families were quickly transformed to obfuscate their convict origins. The Crisp family was no different. In a 1938 newspaper article, our protagonist James Crisp's nephew, newly appointed Tasmanian Chief Justice Sir Harold Crisp, claimed to be descended from John of Gaunt, son of Edward III, born in 1340.<sup>1</sup> This may be so, but what is not stated in the article is that on a tour of the Tasmanian Archives, our James's eminent relation Sir Harold was deeply shocked to learn of his grandfather's convict past.<sup>2</sup> It has only been in very recent times that a convict connection has been considered acceptable, even desirable—the new 'Aussie royalty'—those with convict forebears.

Our Reverend James was the son of convict Samuel Crisp, transported from Sudbury, Suffolk for sheep stealing in 1826.<sup>3</sup> Samuel tried to buy his way out of the sentence, offering his

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<sup>1</sup> *Advocate*, 11 July 1938, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Alison Alexander, *Tasmania's convicts: how felons built a free society* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2010), 45.

<sup>3</sup> Van Diemen's Land convict records, CON 23/1/1 and CON 31/1/6.

position of Freeman of the Borough to anyone who would keep his crime secret.<sup>1</sup> To no avail. To Van Diemen's Land he came and two years later his wife and two sons joined him and twelve more children were born in the colony.<sup>2</sup> Samuel Crisp prospered. He established a timber business in Hobart and from the time of his free pardon in 1840 styled himself a timber merchant. Four sons followed him into the business that eventually morphed into Crisp and Gunn. Two of these sons later served as Mayors of Hobart. Another two sons took on life on the land in Victoria and of his other sons, three had careers in the law. Sons in succeeding generations also followed the law, including Sir Harold whom I mentioned earlier. So within a generation, the Crisp family had transformed into respected and respectable citizens.

The first reference to the Methodist Church emerges in the family story in 1838 when Samuel Crisp signed a petition for a second chapel to be built in Hobart.<sup>3</sup> From this point, Crisp family members identified as Methodist. They were christened, married and buried at the Melville Street Church. It was there, in 1847, under the mentorship of the minister John Eggleston, that the future Reverend James Crisp attended class meetings aged fifteen. Two years later he was teaching Sunday School. In 1850, aged 18, he became a local preacher and in 1854, aged 22, he was ordained and took up an appointment at Westbury, Tasmania (co-incidentally in the area where my own convict forebears were working out their sentences).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Bury and Norwich Post*, 13 December 1825.

<sup>2</sup> Application to bring out a convict's family, GO 33/1/3, p.231 and Tasmanian birth records, available online on the Tasmanian Name Index, [https://linctas.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/client/en\\_AU/names/search/results?qu=pie#](https://linctas.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/client/en_AU/names/search/results?qu=pie#).

<sup>3</sup> *Advocate*, 11 July 1938, 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Spectator and Methodist Chronicle*, 10 October 1917, 21.

In 1855, James Crisp left Tasmania for Melbourne where his mentor John Eggleston was based at North Melbourne. Crisp, who had been ordained before the establishment of the Australian Conference, attended the first Australian Conference in 1855, so in a sense his own coming of age and that of the church he served coincided.

His mentor, the much admired John Eggleston, always referred to Crisp as Timothy, St Paul's trusted right hand man. In the 1904 Jubilee publication of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Victoria, the authors tell us that Eggleston's

youthful friend, who, in the outset of his Ministry, was said to have much of his spirit and style, the Rev. J.W. Crisp, was his colleague in ministerial work in the year 1855, and then girded himself for that Christian warfare, which he boldly and successfully carried on through many years.<sup>1</sup>

Crisp did not return to Tasmania, but spent the rest of his life moving from place to place around Victoria, with one short period in Albury just over the NSW border. The Jubilee Methodist History tells us that he was one of "twenty-four ministers who then travelled the single district of Victoria" and that there were only ten in Tasmania at that time.<sup>2</sup>

He married Jane Butler in 1857. Eight children were born to the couple but only two daughters and a son survived to adulthood. Jane died at Daylesford in 1883 and 16 months later he married Mary Hope James (known as Hope), a 35 year old widow.

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<sup>1</sup> W.L. Blamires and John B. Smith, *The early story of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Victoria* (Melbourne: Wesleyan Book Depot, 1886), 69.

<sup>2</sup> *The Methodist History of Victoria and Tasmania*, 1904, reprinted from *The Spectator*, Melbourne.

In 1889 Crisp became President of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, just as the depression of the 1890s began to take effect. He was not immune to the losses of the era. In September 1889, his much loved brother Tom, a Melbourne lawyer who had speculated heavily during the land boom and had now lost heavily, committed suicide. The brothers had been “close mates”, Crisp said. They had attended class meetings together in the 1840s, both moved to Victoria in the 1850s and although they chose different career paths, they retained their closeness.<sup>1</sup>

Methodists have long been known as social and moral reformers and Crisp and his wife were no exception. They were strong supporters of the temperance movement, well aware of the problems associated with excessive alcohol consumption at a personal level, as Crisp’s much younger brother Joseph spent most of his adult life in and out of prison in Sydney and Melbourne, charged with drunkenness and petty crime. Joseph’s wife, Annie, lived a similar life. They were serial offenders and in the depression years in particular, they were serial pests for James Crisp and his Victorian relatives. In court, Annie would often use the plea that they were “very well connected”, making reference to her husband’s clergyman brother.<sup>2</sup> She would promise to take the pledge if the judge let her off.<sup>3</sup> But it is clear from both their prison records that there was no happy ending for either of them.

In 1896, James and Hope Crisp moved into the newly rebuilt brick parsonage on Sydney Road, Coburg, just opposite Pentridge Gaol and he served as Chaplain of Gaols from 1896

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<sup>1</sup> *Spectator and Methodist Chronicle*, 10 October 1917, 21.

<sup>2</sup> For example, *Geelong Advertiser*, 3 June 1884, *Herald*, 1 December 1884, *Melbourne Punch*, 9 February 1890.

<sup>3</sup> For example, *North Melbourne Gazette*, 20 September 1895.

to 1901. As he ministered to the prisoners (one of whom at times would have been his sister-in-law Annie) I wonder if he thought of his brother and sister-in-law and whether he knew of their only child Annie Mabel, born in 1870.

Annie Mabel first appears in the official record in 1875 when she was admitted to Melbourne Hospital with her mother.<sup>1</sup> Three years later the *Age* newspaper reported that her mother, while intoxicated, had assaulted her daughter. This is the last sighting of Annie Mabel until her marriage in 1890. For this child who had survived a nightmare childhood, there was a better life in store. In 1912 she and her husband moved to Western Australia where she and her family became active in the life of the Methodist Church. It seems that she had found a home and again, the Methodist Church was involved.<sup>2</sup>

It is impossible to know how Annie Mabel Crisp survived her early years and equally impossible to know whether James Crisp and his wife knew of her existence. They were deeply committed to working with destitute children and were well aware of the link between poverty, alcohol and domestic violence. When they were stationed at North Melbourne in the 1880s, Hope Crisp had established a local Dorcas Society and opened a ragged school, but it was when her husband became President of the Conference that Hope began her work in earnest. Alongside Mrs Emma Varcoe, she opened the Livingstone Home in North Carlton (and later in Cheltenham).<sup>3</sup> When the Cheltenham Home opened Hope declared “May our Home now opened be

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<sup>1</sup> Melbourne Hospital Admissions book, Public Record Office of Victoria, Victorian Public Record Series 12477/P3/17, Book 573\_93, page 81; *Age*, 2 August 1878,

<sup>2</sup> Western Australian electoral rolls, 1912-1943, West Australian death indexes, *Western Mail*, 11 September 1919, *West Australian*, 15 July 1950.

<sup>3</sup> Find and Connect website,

<https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/ref/vic/biogs/E000067b.htm>

the door through which many may be led to lives of honour, virtue, and distinction on earth, and to life everlasting in our Father's home on high."<sup>1</sup> Throughout the difficult 1890s Hope Crisp was President of the Wesleyan Neglected Children's Aid Society. She had no children of her own, but her dedication ensured that many destitute children could look forward to a life in a 'home', not on the streets or the inner city slums.

On 1 January 1902, the year Crisp retired after 48 years active work and on the first anniversary of Australia's nationhood, the Methodist Church of Australasia was established when five Methodist denominations united. On 25 February it held its first conference and James Crisp was there. He was one of only two clergymen present who had been at the first Conference in 1855. (The other was Joseph Albiston of Essendon.) He had attended the first conference in the first year of his ministry and was at this new first conference in the last year of his ministry. When his active participation in church matters ended in 1913, he had been at every Synod since 1854. By then the press lauded him as "Australian Patriarch and oldest native-born Methodist Minister".<sup>2</sup>

Crisp died in August 1917. In February of the following year a memorial service was held at Wesley where a stained glass window was unveiled in his memory.<sup>3</sup> In his will he left £500 to Queen's College for the endowment of a scholarship in his name. Queen's also has in its collection a John Wesley letter dated 1775 that was given to Crisp, who later gave it to a

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<sup>1</sup> *Spectator and Methodist Chronicle*, 4 December 1891.

<sup>2</sup> *Herald*, 27 January 1913.

<sup>3</sup> *Spectator and Methodist Chronicle*, 27 February 1918.

grandson. Another family member donated it in 2004. So Crisp's story takes us back to the very origins of Methodism.

Crisp's family connections to the church were far-reaching, both in time and place. His sister Elizabeth married a son of the Rev. John Hutchinson, the first clergyman of any denomination to be ordained (in 1826) on Australian soil, a very early missionary to Tonga (in 1827/28) and by 1830 (before James Crisp was born), the Superintendent of the Cascades Female Factory.<sup>1</sup> His daughter Ellen married the Rev. Henry Brownell, son of W.F. Brownell who was in all likelihood Crisp's Sunday School teacher at the Melville Street Wesleyan Methodist Church in Hobart. A granddaughter married into the Lelean family, active in both Tasmania and Victoria.

Crisp's connections to the convict system were also far-reaching. I have already mentioned his own father's convict past, and also his connection to the Rev. John Hutchinson who, with his wife Mary Ann, was in charge of the Cascades Female Factory in the 1830s and whose children, including their son Joseph who married Crisp's sister, were brought up within the walls of that institution. What I have not mentioned is that his first wife Jane was the daughter of convicts Edward Butler and Ellen Fraser, and born during her mother's time within the convict system. Edward Butler was transported at much the same time as Crisp's own father. He was young—only 17—and transported for pickpocketing.<sup>2</sup> Ellen Fraser was 19, worked for a linen draper in Marylebone and was transported for stealing

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<sup>1</sup> *Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser*, 17 February 1826; *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 29 April 1826; *Hobart Town Courier*, 3 May 1828; Baptism of son George Josiah Hutchinson, Wesley Church, Hobart, 29 April 1830, RGD 31/1/1 no. 3530.

<sup>2</sup> Van Diemen's Land convict records, CON 31/1/1; CON 23/1/1.



clothing.<sup>1</sup> Jane was their only daughter. The Butlers, like the Crisps, made a success of their lives, and followed their daughter and son-in-law to Victoria where Edward Butler, then a pawnbroker, died of cancer in 1867.<sup>2</sup> When his 95 year old widow Ellen died in 1900 she was living with her son-in-law James and his second wife Hope at the parsonage in Coburg.<sup>3</sup> Crisp had supported this elderly former convict long after the death of his first wife in 1883 and his remarriage.

I feel very connected to Rev. James Crisp. I first came across his name when I was researching the family history of a local Coburg family who had bought his Bell Street property after his 1917 death. Also, in 1896 he moved into the Methodist Parsonage on Sydney Road, Coburg. He lived there until his retirement in 1902. My own family lived in the same house 66 years later, from 1962 to 1968. There were still vestiges of the stylish house it must have been in Crisp's time—the return veranda with its parquetry base; the beautiful leadlight glass in the door panels; the bells on the wall near the rear of the hallway and the bell pushes in the main rooms, to summon the maid, no doubt; the beautiful, if now faded furniture in the lounge room and the wall-to-ceiling bookcases in my father's study—his sanctuary; the marble fireplaces and the ornate ceiling roses; the cellar off the pantry adjoining the kitchen—smelly, damp and a sanctuary for rats by the time we lived there.

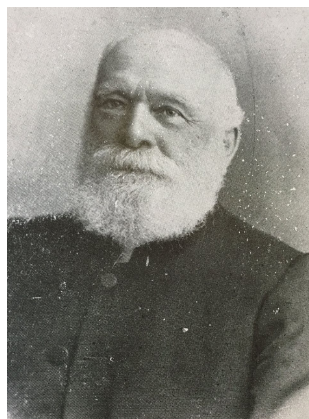
We lived in the Coburg parsonage in the last few years of the Methodist Church, during a period when the ecumenical movement was gathering momentum. My father met regularly with the local Catholic priest, Father Norris, and they enjoyed

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<sup>1</sup> Van Diemen's Land convict records, CON 40/1/3; CON 19/1/13.

<sup>2</sup> Victorian death certificate, 1375/1867.

<sup>3</sup> Victorian death certificate, 8607/1900.



Rev. J. W. Crisp.

their moments, spent mostly in the vegetable garden while dad got on with his latest gardening chore, discussing the future directions of both their churches. Interestingly, the Anglican priest, our immediate neighbour and very high church, had no interest in these discussions. My father retired at the end of 1971, some years before the Uniting Church in Australia came into being, but had shown interest in the ecumenical

movement (and the youth movement) well before he retired.



Mrs. J. W. Crisp.

Like me, James Crisp had connections to a convict past that was considered for so long a 'stain' on our nation's history that must be hidden at all costs. Within a generation, most members of his family had made respectable lives for themselves. Better than that, really. They were 'worthy' members of society, making their mark in commerce and the law. Crisp himself had removed to

Victoria where he made his way in the family of the Methodist Church, never forgetting those in need, working with his second wife Hope in child rescue work and finding himself at the end of his life working within the prison system, a system not all that far removed from the one in which his father and parents-in-law had found themselves only 70 years earlier.

As I prepared this paper my guiding text was: Isaiah 32:18. “My people will live in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.”<sup>1</sup> Looking back on James Crisp’s life as it played out in the sources available to me, I believe that it was his involvement in the Methodist Church that provided that “secure dwelling”. I wonder, though, whether I would tell a different story if I had had access to personal papers and letters. I suspect (and hope) not.

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<sup>1</sup> *Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1022.

# The Uniting Church and Christian Unity

James Haire

## Synopsis

This paper looks at the place of the search for Christian unity within the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) since its inauguration in 1977.

In 2002, as President of the Uniting Church Assembly, and at the request of the Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia, Archbishop Peter Carnley, I preached at the opening and closing services of the Anglican General Synod, and delivered the daily Bible studies, the first time in Australia for a non-Anglican. In introducing me, the General Synod thanked God for the name ‘Uniting Church’ and thanked the current UCA for its temporary stewardship of that name, which would, they said, eventually be the name for all Christians in Australia.

The place of this search for Christian unity within the self-understanding of the UCA is heavily emphasised in the *Basis of Union*. In Paragraph 1 the three uniting churches declare that they “seek a wider unity in the power of the Holy Spirit” (1971 text). In Paragraph 2 the about-to-be-formed Uniting Church declares its desire “to enter more deeply into the faith and mission of the Church in Australia, by working together and seeking union with other Churches” (1971). In the final Paragraph 18, “She (the Uniting Church) prays God that, through the gift of the Spirit, he [*sic*]...will bring her into deeper unity with other Churches” (1971).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rob Bos and Geoff Thompson, eds, *Theology for Pilgrims: Selected Theological Documents of the Uniting Church in Australia*, (Sydney: Uniting Church Press/The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, 2008), 191–205.

So this paper considers how, particularly in the years since 1977, this Uniting Church has given concrete and practical expression to the ideal of the search for Christian unity. It does so against the background of two factors, external and internal.

## External Context

First, this paper looks at the international situation of the search for organic Christian unity within the ecumenical movement during the years around the formation of the UCA and the years of its subsequent history. Second, it looks at a number of major theological concerns within the UCA during its history of 40 plus years, and examines the extent to which the charism of Christian unity formed an integral or driving dynamic in the discourse of those theological concerns.

So, first, we look at the external, and specifically the international, context. There have been a considerable number of inter-confessional unions of churches around the world. Many of these unions have come about in, post-colonial, independent nations, and have mainly involved Anglicans, Baptists, Brethren, Disciples, Lutherans, Methodists, Reformed (both Congregationalists and Presbyterians) and Evangelicals. The first major union of this kind was that of the United Church of Canada in 1925, but the high point of the formation of united churches took place in the years between 1965 and 1972. Frequently discourse within the World Council of Churches (WCC), particularly in its Faith and Order Commission (F&O), had their effects in national Christian communities 20 to 30 years later, as the practicalities of organic church unions and many other theological movements worked their way through national systems. It is important to bear this in mind. This was so for the UCA.

Nevertheless, the movement to create inter-confessional united churches in fact had their high point between 1965 and 1972, when in eight years church unions came about in Zambia (1965), Jamaica and Grand Cayman (1965), Ecuador (1965), Madagascar (1968), Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands (1968), Belgium (1969), North India (1970), Pakistan (1970), Bangladesh (1971), Zaire (1971) and Great Britain (1972). The inter-relationship between these churches on the one hand and the WCC on the other is significant, in that the union negotiations of many of these churches had been linked to the discussions within the WCC, especially in its Commission on F&O. In South Asia inter-confessional unions uniquely also involved Anglicans, in two of the broadest inter-confessional united churches internationally, the Church of South India (CSI) (1947) and the Church of North India (1970).

Central to the experience of these unions has been a dying to former confessional identities and a rebirth to a new confessional identity and practice. Parallel to this has also been a prophetic calling to advance their divinely given charism of unity for the sake of the universal church and the world.

This movement's leading proponent and expositor was Lesslie Newbigin, a theologian and evangelist of the Reformed tradition, and later a bishop in the CSI, who was to become a leading spokesperson for inter-confessional organic unions.<sup>1</sup> His work in the theological rationale for the formation of the CSI was then developed as he served as General Secretary of the International Missionary Council (IMC). The incorporation of the IMC into the WCC at the third assembly held in New Delhi in 1961 heavily influenced the work of that assembly. By the

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin: A Theological Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 81–134.

1960s his theological thinking on Christian unity had been developing, and would begin to gain wide acceptance internationally. The Australian Council of Churches (ACC) sponsored his visit to Australia in 1961. However, as far back as 1947 Newbigin had already used the concept of “all in one place”, and in 1954 he had maintained that the true form of church unity was that:

first that it must be such that all who are in Christ in any place are, in that place, visibly one fellowship; and second, that it must be such that each local community is so ordered and so related to the whole that its fellowship with all Christ’s people everywhere, and with all who have gone before or will come after, is made clear.<sup>1</sup>

The ideas developed locally in the CSI union negotiations, as seen in Lesslie Newbigin’s *The Reunion of the Church*<sup>2</sup>, developed on an international scale as the IMC and the WCC came together.<sup>3</sup> The New Delhi assembly in 1961 used the critical words:

We believe that the unity which is both God’s will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptised into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one

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<sup>1</sup> J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, “The Quest for Unity Through Religion” (Thomas Memorial Lecture, University of Chicago, 1954), *Journal of Religion* 1955, 35: 1, 17–33

<sup>2</sup> J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Reunion of the Church: A Defence of the South India Scheme* (London: SCM Press, 1948, revised edition, 1960).

<sup>3</sup> Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin*, 113–114.

Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people.<sup>1</sup>

New Delhi also formally enshrined the necessity of the ‘death-and-rebirth’ principle in relation to organic unions: “The achievement of unity will involve nothing less than a death and rebirth of many forms of church life as we have known them. We believe that nothing less costly can finally suffice”.<sup>2</sup> As Stephen Neill pointed out at the end of his survey of church unions: “The final and terrible difficulty is that Churches cannot unite, unless they are willing to die.... But until Church union clearly takes shape as a better resurrection on the other side of death, the impulse towards it is likely to be weak and half-hearted”.<sup>3</sup> As noted above, the New Delhi assembly and the decade immediately following it form the high point of organic unions. The union of the UCA came at the end of this period, and was a clear outcome of such discourse.

Why, then, did the movement for organic inter-confessional Christian unity decline internationally? The following international movements seem to have been the most significant. First, much New Testament scholarship of the period from the

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<sup>1</sup> World Council of Churches, *The New Delhi Report: The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (London: SCM Press, 1962) 116.

<sup>2</sup> *The New Delhi Report*, 117.

<sup>3</sup> Ruth Rouse and Stephen Neill, eds, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517–1948* (London: SCM, 1967, second ed.), 495.



1970s and 1980s onwards claimed to show that the organic unity of the church in the first century did not exist, or in not the same way, as had been claimed in the earlier years of the ecumenical movement.

Second, the entry of the Roman Catholic Church into the ecumenical movement in the 1960s as a result of Vatican II had an enormous impact. The generally joyous reception by the member churches of the WCC of the Catholic Church's involvement in the ecumenical movement, and in particular its membership of F&O, meant that discussion and debate would now be more focused on an international agenda rather than on agendas for national moves for organic union. The importance of this new international agenda was demonstrated as the Catholic Church's unity agency was renamed the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. So the emphasis shifted from that of national organic church unions to that of international bilateral dialogues between Christian World Communions (CWCs).

Third, after New Delhi the growing influence of the Orthodox Churches within the WCC brought much stronger recognition of the role of international ecumenical councils in the task of seeking Christian unity.

Fourth, the emphasis on the variety of models of *koinōnia* (fellowship, solidarity, etc.), as seen in the fifth world conference on F&O at Santiago de Compostela in 1993, was regarded as a less painful way forward than the 'dying and rebirth' trauma at times experienced in earlier decades in the formation of organic unions.<sup>1</sup> This *koinōnia* concept has in fact

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas F. Best and Günther Gassmann, eds, *On the way to Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order*, (Geneva: WCC, 1994).

more recently been interpreted under the format of *Receptive Ecumenism*, initiated in the University of Durham in the UK.

Fifth, there were major social and political influences, as well as the impact of religious pluralism, on the churches, and particularly on the WCC, in the period after the New Delhi assembly. This was part of the ‘paradigm shift’ described by Konrad Raiser, and was seen in the debates in the fourth assembly of the WCC at Uppsala in 1968, and particularly at the assemblies at Nairobi in 1975 and at Canberra in 1991. Organic union began to lose its central place, and even at times was seen as *dilettante*, as churches began to perceive that ecclesiastical arrangements should no longer be seen as primary, but that more emphasis should be placed on the churches’ common witness in the midst of social evils. Moreover, these tasks were seen to be global, and gradually moved to concerns about the unity of humanity and the unity of creation.<sup>1</sup>

For these reasons the central place occupied by the formation of organically united churches in specific localities, particularly in national localities, appeared to be passing.

## Internal Context

We now go on to the second part of this paper. This paper now examines the ecumenical journey of the UCA, and specifically looks at a number of major theological concerns within the UCA, during its history of 40 plus years. In doing so it examines the extent to which the charism of Christian unity formed an integral or driving dynamic in the discourse of those theological concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> See further in James Haire, “United and Uniting Churches”, in Geoffrey Wainwright and Paul McPartlan, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Ecumenical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Oxford Handbooks online, 2017).

Issues related to the search for Christian unity in Australia that were significant in the Uniting Church after 1977 were varied, some positive and some negative.

First, the Uniting Church has been a good and faithful national and international citizen within the ecumenical movement. The Church has played an important part in international ecumenical endeavours, through involvement in the leadership, councils and commissions of the WCC, the Christian Conference of Asia, and the ACC and later the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA). It has provided leading staff and committed members to these bodies. Its members have been leaders in the international commissions for dialogue between the CWCs. It shared in the hosting of the 1991 WCC assembly in Canberra. It made an important contribution to the ecumenical movement in the Special Commission of the WCC relating to the Orthodox Churches. In Australia, it shared in the expansion of the ACC into the NCCA, and participated in producing the widely-ecumenical common Certificate of Baptism.

Second, initially the ecumenical question, especially the search for Christian unity in Australia, seemed to feature to a considerable extent in the life of the UCA. Great emphasis was given to the inter-confessional dialogues, particularly to those where the possibility of inter-confessional organic unity could be envisaged (dialogues with Anglicans, Lutherans and the Churches of Christ, as examples). In fact, from the very beginning of church union negotiations in Australia in 1901, and the fits and starts of the negotiations, culminating in the final negotiations from the 1950s onwards, Anglicans and Baptists had shown more or less interest in being involved, in addition to

the three uniting churches. At its high point since 1977 there were ten active national ecumenical dialogues.

Third, an ecumenical vision was initially constantly seen in internal UCA theological discourse. Let us look at a number of examples. A clear example was seen in the unfinished business of church union negotiations in the issue of the Ministry of Deacon, which was resolved in the 1990s. By 1977 the newly formed UCA had left a number of matters to be clarified after union. In contrast to this, prior to its own act of union in 2004, the Protestant Church in the Netherlands had the long *Samen op Weg* ('Together on the Way') process so as to clarify precisely more areas of agreed faith and practice than had occurred in the UCA at union in 1977. So the understanding of the Ministry of Deacon in the UCA needed to be clarified after 1977. The concluding theological discourse on the Diaconate, and the reports presented to the six and the seventh Assemblies (1991 and 1994) were consciously carried out within an ecumenical theological framework. Here the influence of the Commission on Doctrine, and its ecumenical vision, were crucial.<sup>1</sup> Again, this was clearly seen in the earlier theological discourse regarding the introduction of Bishops, specifically Bishops-in-Presbytery, and the report presented to the fifth assembly in 1988.<sup>2</sup>

Further, it was seen in the agreement to delete the *filioque* from the UCA's use of the Nicaeo-Constantinopolitan Creed, as agreed at the seventh assembly in 1994, although this move was not in common with other parts of the Western Church in Australia. Moreover, perhaps the most observable

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<sup>1</sup> *Theology for Pilgrims*, 322–421, especially 337–341, 394–397.

<sup>2</sup> Assembly, Uniting Church in Australia, *Bishops in the Uniting Church*, 1988; see too *Theology for Pilgrims*, 251–254.

demonstration of the centrality of the charism in the UCA in the search for organic church unity was seen in the work of the Commission on Liturgy and its production of *Uniting in Worship 1*. This was a high point in the UCA's ecumenical vision for organic union. *Uniting in Worship 2* followed in that tradition, but did not demonstrate that high point of a search for organic union to such a degree. This had, of course, also been the aim of the *Australian Hymn Book*, its Supplement, and *Together in Song*.<sup>1</sup>

However, over time, this ecumenical vision, particularly in terms of organic unity, seemed to decline. The involvement with the international ecumenical movement remained, and the discourse there of declining interest in organic union influenced the UCA. As a result, the UCA, in terms of achieving new organic unions, has done no more than the Anglican Church of Australia, which does not claim this particular charism to the extent that the UCA does. For the ecumenical consciousness of church leaders, it is true that the influence of the Student Christian Movement (SCM) has largely disappeared. Nevertheless, the presence of ecumenical theological education consortia in the state capital cities have until recently played an important part in stimulating ecumenical consciousness.

However, other factors can be noted. First, the number of active dialogues declined, from the high point of around ten to around four. It is true that in 2004, at the NCCA Forum, the UCA shared in the signing of the very significant Covenant, largely on practical arrangements, with other Australian churches, in St.

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Pitman, "Unity, ecumenism and inculturation in the worship of the Uniting Church in Australia", Chapter 5, in Stephen Burns and Anita Monro, eds, *Christian Worship in Australia: Inculturating the liturgical tradition* (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2009), 69–89.

Peter's Cathedral, Adelaide. It is also true that there have been limited agreements with the Anglican and Lutheran Churches in Australia over co-operation in a very limited number of parishes, and in co-operation with the Roman Catholic Church over marriage. However, these agreements also depended on the agreements of local denominational leadership (dioceses, districts and presbyteries).

Second, the more recent theological discourses on issues including the theology of the environment and eco-theology, the relationship of Christianity with indigenous spirituality, and human sexuality, appeared to evoke less and less interaction with an ecumenical vision, and minimal, if any, discourse with other churches. In these discussions within the UCA, it seemed to be less required that a central point for any such discourse should be, first and foremost, dialogue on the issues with ecumenical partner churches in Australia. This may be compared to what happened in Canada after church union there in 1925. The new church was often seen as strongly holding on to its gift and charism of organic union at the expense of being rather cautious in its relation to other issues, for the sake of dialogue with partner churches in Canada. It initially delayed a number of theological changes for fear that it might compromise further unions. It seems that the central ecumenical vision in theological discourse in the UCA has been replaced by a much greater concern for the UCA to be relevant in 'mission', which often is related to a projection of debatable urban middle-class perceptions as to what is valuable in society. So what was initially a central charism of the UCA, this search for organic Christian unity, has decreasingly moulded the UCA's theological discourse, and has been replaced with alternative

theological and missional concerns, which subsequently have taken the place of that vision.

Third, the emphasis on the ecumenical vision in theological education has in many places in the UCA been replaced with an emphasis on denominational mission.

### Conclusion

Thus, over a period of 40 plus years in the UCA, affected by both external and internal factors, the term ‘uniting’ has changed its meaning from referring to the search for organic Christian unity to that of referring to the need to be an inclusive entity relevant to Australian society. A major issue for the UCA has been the degree to which its initial and particular charism of unity has been maintained as central, or the degree to which the UCA has simply settled down as a denomination, and primarily participated in the broader international ecumenical discourse or in the national and local theological debates of their place and time. Its strengths and weaknesses in relation to Christian unity have largely been related to its ability or failure to prosecute its particular charism and to work it through consistently in its internal faith and order, and life and work.

Following the vision of Lesslie Newbigin, the existence of the UCA may be the place where the foreshadowing of the vision of Christ’s one body is to be seen, however partially. At the fifth UCA assembly in 1988 Ian Tanner, in his outgoing address as President, called for a reinvigoration of that vision. It is sincerely to be hoped that, by the grace of God, in future years the UCA may be able to be reinvigorated to embrace that vision as central to its existence once again. However difficult the way, it is hard to envision the final goal without the organic union of the one body. To that extent the presence of the UCA, in all its

weakness, still presents a proleptic and eschatological vision of that goal.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See quotation from Archbishop Keith Rayner at the union service of the UCA in Adelaide, in *Central Times*, 27 October 1977, p. 1, in Julia Pitman, “South Australia: Devoted but Battle-Weary”, Chapter 5, in William W. Emilsen and Susan Emilsen, eds, *The Uniting Church in Australia: The first 25 years*, (Armadale, Vic.: Circa, 2003), 132.



# Stories of Lost and Found: Finding a home in Australian children's religious fiction

Kerrie Handasyde

## Synopsis

Methodist and Presbyterian children's literature took theologically informed approaches to popular Australian literary themes. Building on literary studies and denominational historiography, this article examines the theme of 'lost' children in early to mid-twentieth century religious fiction. Focusing on novels for young adolescents by Constance Mackness, Joseph Bowes and Edna Roughley, it explores themes of belonging and homelessness, charity and abuse. It finds that the novels, although not known for their literary qualities, were written with theological awareness of what it is to be 'lost' and the role of literature in Christian formation.

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Stories of lost and found feature in both the Bible and the literature of the Australian bush. While the New Testament tells of the lost sheep and the lost coin, popular fiction frets over lost children. In the colonial Australian imagination the bush was at once charming and malevolent, and children who wandered into it might be lost forever. Stories by colonial authors such as Henry Kingsley (*The Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn*, 1859) and Marcus Clarke ('Pretty Dick', 1869) and sensational news reports of lost children built an Australian myth—an "Australian anxiety" according to literary scholar Peter Pierce.<sup>1</sup> Lost

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Pierce, *The Country of Lost Children: An Australian Anxiety* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

children featured in fiction and non-fiction, in paintings by W.S. Gill and Frederick McCubbin, and in the imagination of the public. The theme had a powerful grip on the Australian imagination, with real children reporting their experience in terms shaped by the reading of popular narrative. Lost children are so much a part of the Australian mythology that by the early twentieth century juvenile literature was using the trope as a marker of nationalism: to be lost was to be (literally) located in Australia. Aspiring to write distinctly Australian religious stories, Methodist and Presbyterian fiction writers incorporated the theme into their works too. In their novels the theme of the lost child takes on both theological and popular nationalist hues, illustrating an awareness of the role of literature in defining both denominational and national identity. This article examines fiction for young adolescents written by prominent religious writers in the first half of the twentieth century: Presbyterian educator Constance Mackness, Methodist minister Joseph Bowes, and Methodist writer and editor Edna Roughley. Each draws on the popular Australian narrative of the lost child in their theologically informed novels.

The lost child has a long history in the study of Australian literature. Not only are there many stories of lost children, such as those by Clarke and Kingsley, but there are numerous studies of the literary phenomenon and cultural concern. In 1953 Clive Hamer noted the frequency of the theme, listing several examples, supplemented a year later by John McKellar, and then by Hamer again.<sup>1</sup> The theme was picked up again in the 1980s by Patsy Adam-Smith's popular *Outback*

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<sup>1</sup> Clive Hamer, 'Lost in the Bush', *Southerly* 14 (1953): 273; John McKellar, 'Lost in the Bush', *Southerly* 15 (1954): 222; 'Lost in the Bush', *Southerly* 16 (1955): 179.

*Heroes*, and by John Scheckter's scholarly 'The Lost Child in Australian Fiction' which noted more stories written in the years after Hamer's first publication on the subject.<sup>1</sup> Myth-making, often self-conscious, appeared increasingly deliberate. Analyses by Robert Holden and Peter Pierce followed in the 1990s, concurring with Scheckter on the interpretation of the lost child as metaphor for a young nation.<sup>2</sup> It is an interpretation that has been widely accepted, not least because of the self-conscious nationalism of many of the stories. More recently Elspeth Tilley has critiqued several earlier analyses for their participation in elements of the myth. She argues that the "white vanishing trope is so strongly naturalized that it structures not only the primary texts but also many of the secondary analyses of those texts" and that, in their interpretation of the finding of lost children as a "significant moment of achieved resolution or even reconciliation", they fail to see their own "participation in a race politics of land and cultural ownership".<sup>3</sup> Peter Pierce has also been criticised for mixing the legend of the lost child with stories of abused children but, as Methodist and Presbyterian sources demonstrate, abused children were often lost children.<sup>4</sup> It is the

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<sup>1</sup> Patsy Adam-Smith, *Outback Heroes* (Sydney: Lansdowne, 1981); John Scheckter, 'The Lost Child in Australian Fiction', *Modern Fiction Studies* 27 (1981), 61–72.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Holden, 'Lost, Stolen or Strayed: From the Australian Babes in the Woods to Azaria Chamberlain', *Voices* Vol. 1, no. 1 (1991): 58–69; Pierce, *Country of Lost Children*.

<sup>3</sup> Elspeth Tilley, *White Vanishing: Rethinking Australia's Lost-in-the-Bush Myth* (Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi, 2012), 36 and 35.

<sup>4</sup> Tilley notes that Laurie Clancy ('Legend of the Lost Child', *Australian Book Review* 210 (May 1999): 11–12) and Lucy Frost ('Terra Nullius and Australia's Vanishing Bodies', in *Spaces and Crossings: Essays on Literature and Culture in Africa and Beyond*, ed. Rita Wilson & Carlotta von Maltzan (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001): 219–233) each question Pierce's conflation of lost and abused: Tilley, *White Vanishing*, 29. For studies on the literature and language around child homelessness and abuse see, for example: Maureen Crago, 'Homeless Young People in Australian Children's Fiction, 1991–1995', *Youth Studies Australia* Vol.

nexus between being lost and abused that gives moral force to Australian religious juvenile fiction.

The four stories of lost and found that are examined here were written for 12–15 year olds by Australian Methodist and Presbyterian authors who were strongly aligned with their respective denominations and known for their beneficent regard for children: a school teacher, a children's page editor and a minister noted for his engaging children's 'talks'. Their novels offered a wholesome alternative to those cheap but entertaining novels known as 'penny dreadfuls', and they also functioned to bring children into the denominational 'fold' (like lost sheep). In this regard, juvenile religious fiction functions in ways similar to denominational history books from that period. Of course, one is fiction and the other fact but these categories tend to overlap, especially in the fictionalised portrayal of autobiography and the practice of myth-making. Both genres are uplifting, both provide positive role models and valorise heroic Christian action, both console and remind readers that all things are possible with God. They mythologise courage in the face of pain (something that much of popular Australian history does, according to Ann Curthoys),<sup>1</sup> and they romanticise the values of the denomination and legitimise its contemporary agenda. Providence is credited in both genres in that period; although Providence has no place in historical methodology, in earlier times many denominational histories were written by theologians, not historians, and Providence is frequently implicit. Denominational history and children's literature in the early decades of the twentieth century

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16, no. 3 (September 1997), 36–46; Dorothy Scott and Shurlee Swain, *Confronting Cruelty: Historical Perspectives on Child Protection in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 18–21.

<sup>1</sup> Ann Curthoys, 'Expulsion, Exodus and Exile in White Australian Historical Mythology', *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 23, issue 61: 2–3.

both sought to establish a trajectory, a narrative arc, which might be inscribed on the readers' lives and carried forth. These are adventure stories but of abiding truths, and in the telling of these tales of the recent past, the religious imagination is formed. In telling the past, the future is shaped.

In the context of 'lost and found', it is also worth noting that children are largely 'lost' to early twentieth century denominational history. Occasionally denominational or congregational histories mention a minister undertaking youth programs or the statistics on Sunday School attendance, both of which are more about adults and the future of their church rather than the children themselves. Even the churches' own institutions for neglected children get short shrift in early denominational histories. These authors, especially in their semi-autobiographical writings, provide a corrective to children's historical invisibility.

### Joseph Bowes, *Pals*

Towards the end of a long career in the Methodist ministry Joseph Bowes published his first adventure novel for boys in 1910: *Pals: Young Australians in Sport and Adventure*. The Reverend Joseph Bowes (1852–1928) was an immensely influential man in the Methodist church in New South Wales and Queensland.<sup>1</sup> He was Queensland Methodism's first Conference Secretary, Conference President in 1903, Secretary and Treasurer of the Home Mission Society (and a noted early advocate for Aboriginal Mission), and he was Connexional Editor for a period. In effect, he not only managed the church but conveyed its message to the people: in a non-hierarchical

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<sup>1</sup> Eldred Dyer, 'Joseph Bowes: A Minister Beloved,' *The Methodist*, 7 April 1928.

church, this was power indeed. He was an advocate for brotherly understanding of Indigenous people—he writes elsewhere of ‘throttling racial prejudice’<sup>1</sup>—and his nine adventure novels often feature heroic, capable, honourable Aboriginal boys. His message encouraged sympathetic understanding of Aboriginal people, influenced by the evangelical movement’s belief that all people are of “one blood”, as Acts 17:26 insists. Bowes pursues his message through his novels which, like denominational histories, romanticise and legitimise a contemporary agenda. More recently, literary scholars have rediscovered the novels of Bowes, reading them as relentlessly racist, nationalist, paternalistic and misogynist. These are legitimate observations – even when you know of his advocacy for Aboriginal people, reading Bowes is confronting. Contemporary literary scholars do not, however, read Bowes as a religious writer.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps it is because there are few outward signs—the scenes do not take place in church, chapter and verse is not provided for biblical references—but Bowes’ vision of the world was formed by decades of Methodist ministry and his writing is imbued with religious understanding.

Bowes begins his novel *Pals* with a biblical description of the local landscape in which the story is set. Two verses on from the “one blood” of Acts 17:26, he refers to Acts 17:28—“The place where these boys lived, moved, and had their being

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Bowes, ‘The Australian Aborigine’ in *A Century in the Pacific*, ed. James Colwell (Sydney: William Beale Australasia, 1914), 156.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Crotty, ‘Frontier Fantasies: Boys’ Adventure Stories and the Construction of Masculinity in Australia, 1870–1920’, *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, Vol. 3, no. 1 (April 2001): 55–76; Robert Dixon, *Writing the Colonial Adventure: Race, Gender and Nation in Anglo-Australian Popular Fiction, 1875–1914* (Melbourne, 1995). Note also the call for a missionary reading of children’s novels in Christine Weir, “Deeply Interested in these children whom you have not seen”, *Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 48, no. 1 (2013), 44.

was a district ... on one of the northern rivers in New South Wales.” According to Bowes, the boys—Anglo, Irish and Indigenous—belong here in this colonised and Christian land. They belong with the authority of the Bible. Despite (or perhaps because of) their belonging in the land one of the boys becomes lost in the bush. Realising his disorientation, young Joe recalls the “[g]ruesome accounts of the fate of lost travellers”. The mythology of the lost child, established in stories and newspaper reports, here shaped the expectations of the fictional child, and, no doubt, of the real child readers. The character of Joe was, more than likely, a fictional rendering of Joseph Bowes himself. Both the real and fictional Joe grew up on the northern rivers and had a Methodist minister for a father. The disjointed episodic series of stories that makes up the novel also suggest that it was autobiographical in origin rather than a coherently composed fiction. Joe’s experience of being lost in the bush encapsulates the interplay of experience and story the myth of the lost child:

[I]t dawned on Joe at last that he was off the track. None but those who have experienced it can understand the weird feeling that possesses one in the dawn of that consciousness... He became a prey to disquieting qualms and the creeping chill of apprehension. Gruesome accounts of the fate of lost travellers had often been related at the home fireside, and these memories awoke in his mind.<sup>1</sup>

Joe is lost for one night only though as Providence guides a squatter to find him and bring him back to town.<sup>2</sup> In many

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Bowes, *Pals: Young Australians in Sport and Adventure* (London: James Glass, 1910), chapter 18.

<sup>2</sup> Bowes, *Pals*, chapter 18.

Australian stories Providence did not find the children. Indeed, in Clarke's 'Pretty Dick', the boy is found dead as "God had taken him home".<sup>1</sup> As Bowes' story implies, God had other plans for young Joe Bowes.

Another more complex instance of lost and found in Joseph Bowes' *Pals* involves three female characters. This is remarkable in itself as women are vanishingly rare in Bowes' novels. In the episode a flood sees the local river swell and break its banks. Uprooted trees float in rushing waters and despite the danger this poses, the boys go out in a boat. Some way out of town they hear crying and see a human form sheltering in the fork of a tree. They manoeuvre the boat to reach up into the branches and are confronted by a snake, and then by the awful realisation that the person is dead. It is an Aboriginal woman and, in this flooded former Garden of Eden, she has died of snake bite or exposure. She is still clutching her crying baby to her breast, wrapped in woollen blankets. Bowes tells the reader three times that this mother has died in an act of self-sacrifice, prioritising the child's need for warmth and thus saving her. Bowes tells the reader that she is a good mother and "there is no doubt of this".<sup>2</sup> In reiterating this message Bowes refutes popular narratives of Aboriginal women as bad mothers. Colonised people were frequently cast as bad mothers, as uncivilised and insensitive, thus authorising their mistreatment and the taking of their children. It was a common theme in British accounts of neglectful Irish mothers too. But Bowes is concerned to portray Indigenous people as sensitive and deeply, compassionately human.

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<sup>1</sup> Marcus Clarke, 'Pretty Dick', in *The Penguin Best Australian Short Stories*, ed. Mary Lord (Ringwood: Penguin, 1991), 75.

<sup>2</sup> Bowes, *Pals*, chapter 9.



The baby is found in a she-oak tree. And like Moses found among the bull-rushes, she is rescued from the waters to be raised in a manner her poor mother could never have afforded. Or is she? When the boys return to town in their boat, discussion of what to do with the baby ensues. Stepping forward from among the townsfolk, a white woman offers to take the aboriginal child. She is Mrs Flynn, an Irish mother who has recently endured the death of her own baby daughter. This adoption is informally approved by the townsfolk on the basis that Providence has supplied this good Irish mother and her empty cradle (Bowes implicitly affirming another oft-maligned nationality).<sup>1</sup> But that is not the end of the story. As the mother takes the baby in her arms, the local minister (who is surely speaking for Bowes, or his father) warns that this arrangement is merely temporary because the baby's "father or near relations" may be looking for her.<sup>2</sup> Bowes tells us that the child is not found, as the townsfolk assume. Rather, she is lost to her caring family.

In his work as a Methodist minister, Bowes understood the trauma of the separation of small children from families but, along with most of the churches, he publicly and pragmatically approved many government interventions in Aboriginal lives. Other passages in his novel tacitly support the effects of the 1909 Aborigines Protection Act in NSW which authorised the

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<sup>1</sup> Racial purity, which historian Shurlee Swain says was of great concern in cross-racial adoption, is of no matter to Bowes' loving fictional characters. However, adoption of a white child by an Aboriginal family may have been unthinkable even in Bowes' fiction. See Shurlee Swain, "'Homes are sought for these children': Locating Adoption within the Australian Stolen Generations Narrative', *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 37, nos. 1-2 (Winter/Spring 2013), 208.

<sup>2</sup> Bowes, *Pals*, chapter 10.

removal of older children for work as apprentices.<sup>1</sup> In these days after the 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report we know that from 1910 when this book was written “between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were forcibly removed”.<sup>2</sup> In the Christian narrative, to be ‘saved’ is to be ‘found’ but as Bowes foreshadows, children who are ‘saved’ by well-meaning colonial intervention are ‘lost’.

### Constance Mackness, *Gem of the Flat*

Themes of lost and found inform the first of ten novels by Presbyterian author, Constance Mackness (1882-1973). The semi-autobiographical *Gem of the Flat* was published in 1914 while Mackness was a teacher.<sup>3</sup> She went on to serve for thirty years as Headmistress of the Presbyterian Girls College in Warwick, Queensland and was influential in education, an important matter within Presbyterianism. The story is about an orphaned girl called Gem who has found a home with her paternal grandfather in an environmentally degraded mining town named Needy Flat. It is a place where the Protestant work ethic, cheery determination and family loyalty are prized. Like denominational history, the storyline is uplifting: it consoles, and it mythologises courage in the face of pain.<sup>4</sup> The story warns, however, that not all charity is truly Christian charity.

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<sup>1</sup> The removal of younger ‘neglected’ children was already authorised under the Infant Protection Act (1904): Aborigines Protection Act 1909 (1909-1969), ‘Find and Connect’, <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/guide/nsw/NE00010>, accessed 7 August 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Peter Pierce, *The Country of Lost Children: An Australian Anxiety* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 199.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Bonnin, ‘Mackness, Constance (1882–1973)’, Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mackness-constance-7402/text12871>, accessed 10 May 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Curthoys, ‘Expulsion, Exodus and Exile’, 2–3.

The wealthy Mrs Mackay, Gem's maternal grandmother, comes from the city looking for companionship and amusement in the form of a child. She wants to take Gem. Mrs Mackay represents the kind of emotionally self-serving charity that sentimentalises tragedy. Some years ago, she had taken another girl under the guise of financial aid and, when the girl's mother died, was pleased that the girl "looked lovelier than ever in mourning".<sup>1</sup> Gem refuses to go with Mrs Mackay saying that she and her grandfather "have been mates always and we just belong to one another now".<sup>2</sup> It is a temporary reprieve. By the end of the story Gem is indeed lost to her grandfather and her home in Needy Flat, sent to stay with Mrs Mackay in preparation for boarding school. Presbyterian values are in evidence: education is vital, and Providence accompanies hard work. In the last chapter Gem walks through the paddock musing on how clearly she could see "the hand of God in human affairs; how strangely and how wisely things had worked together for ends they had none of them foreseen. But, as she meditated, she worked."<sup>3</sup>

### Edna Roughley, "The Lost Road"

'The Lost Road' was serialised in *The Methodist* in Sydney in 1942–43. It was written by Edna Roughley (1905–1989) who produced the children's page in *The Methodist*. The hero of the story is 12 year old Jon who is sent far away from home to live with another family and then with an uncle. He is, in some sense, a lost child. But he is also an agent of God; a minister to the people he meets on his journey. He uncovers the 'lost road' of

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<sup>1</sup> Constance Mackness, *Gem of the Flat* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1914), 181.

<sup>2</sup> Mackness, *Gem of the Flat*, 241.

<sup>3</sup> Mackness *Gem of the Flat*, 307–308.

the title and, in so doing, reunites two feuding neighbours.<sup>1</sup> He finds a girl lost in the bush. God acts through Jon. When he moves from one home to another it is not just a narrative device to facilitate action, it is a depiction of itinerant ministry. There are no churches in this novel, but the child Jon acts as a Methodist circuit minister, moving from place to place. Methodism has a long tradition of itinerancy: travelling preachers, vast circuits in which ministers would move from place to place, camp meetings in which God is encountered when the people are out of their places of belonging. For the hero Jon, home is not in the church but on the road like a Methodist minister, and like Jesus.

Jon instigates the search for an orphaned girl lost in the bush. Neglected and beaten by her foster father—the welts are described for the young readers, encouraging them to share in Methodism's social concern—she regularly runs away, only to return to her grim foster home. When one day she does not return, Jon finds her unconscious and bleeding at the foot of a cliff. Her rescue results in her moving to new foster home, one in which they sing “Rock of Ages, cleft for me”. She finds a home in Jesus, saved through individual charitable actions.<sup>2</sup>

The orphaned girl's name is Sunny. Cheerfulness is a virtue in twentieth century juvenile literature, likely because it bolsters the current agenda and works to protect from destabilising discontent. Finding herself in a loving environment at last, the gracious and forgiving Sunny ‘shines’.<sup>3</sup> She gets her own spin-off novel.

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<sup>1</sup> Edna Roughley, ‘The Lost Road’, *The Methodist* (20 February and 27 March 1943).

<sup>2</sup> Roughley, ‘Lost Road’ (18 July, 25 July and 1 August 1942).

<sup>3</sup> Roughley, ‘Lost Road’ (3 April 1943).

## Edna Roughley, “Sunny and Susan”

Also written by Edna Roughley, and published in instalments throughout 1943–44, “Sunny and Susan” is about two loyal friends sent to a Methodist boarding school in Queensland. The novel is some way between a British public school drama in which children are unceasingly mean to one another and a lesson in relational skills—a common theme in girls’ literature. As feminist writer Sara Maitland notes, “The mythology which says that women ... are petty-minded, tyrannical, bossy... gossipy, treacherous and boring, has been absorbed by most women from our childhood.”<sup>1</sup> Novels like this reinforce the myth even as they attempt to counter the behaviour. In “Sunny and Susan” the character that embodies treachery is Phillipa Lancaster. But this seemingly evil girl is revealed, through Sunny’s warmth and grace, to be another lost child whose bad behaviour is a symptom of her abandonment by a heartless and really rich family. In these religious novels one can never trust the motivations of the very rich. Phillipa’s many misdeeds bring her low, and she runs away.<sup>2</sup> She is lost for days until Sunny finds her, not in the bush, but hiding in the cold chapel where she develops life-threatening pneumonia.<sup>3</sup> A distant aunt hears of Phillipa’s plight and sends for her to come and live in Western Australia, offering her a new beginning.<sup>4</sup> As the novel concludes, Phillipa is driven off in a taxi and as it pulls away from the kerb, Sunny calls to Phillipa, “You’re not lost” and Phillipa calls back, “No, I’m not lost!”<sup>5</sup> She once was lost, but

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<sup>1</sup> Sara Maitland, *A Map of the New Country: Women and Christianity* (London: Routledge, 1983), 26.

<sup>2</sup> Edna Roughley, ‘Sunny and Susan’, *The Methodist* (22 July, 29 July, 5 August).

<sup>3</sup> Roughley, ‘Sunny and Susan’ (12 August, 19 August 1944).

<sup>4</sup> Roughley, ‘Sunny and Susan’ (26 August 1944).

<sup>5</sup> Roughley, ‘Sunny and Susan’ (2 September 1944).

now (in the back seat headed for a new but unknown home) is found. The conclusion is unconvincing, but the message that lost children and abused children are one and the same is clear. Edna Roughley's novels leave the readers in no doubt of their Christian responsibilities.

## Conclusion

Lost children, so much a part of the Australian literary heritage, were also significant to early twentieth century children's religious novels which articulated their patriotism through the use of the 'lost in the bush' trope. In the evangelical tradition, children's novels conform to the conversion narrative in which to be found is to be saved—at least, for the most part. In *Pals*, the Reverend Joseph Bowes was willing to disrupt that for a cause, warning charitable settlers of a future stolen generation. Mistaken charity is something to be wary of—in *Gem of the Flat*, "The Lost Road" and "Sunny and Susan" there are lost children who find homes without love. This essentially Christian message is central to each of the novels: children lost in the bush were a minority compared with those lost through neglect and abuse. With their realistic approach, these novels understand the prevalence of homelessness and its effects on children. But, in the tradition of evangelical piety, they ascribe as its cause individual sin and as its remedy individual charity. They do not question the broader social causes of children's suffering, and they do not mention institutional responses such as the churches' homes for neglected children. Novels for children 'found' the stories of children that were 'lost' from denominational history books. Like denominational histories they romanticised the past and justified the present, they consoled, and mythologised courageous suffering, and they told

stories of abiding truth that moulded thought patterns for the future. In the first half of the twentieth century, finding the lost was both a theme and an objective of religious novels for children.

# 'Learning and living the faith' - a South Australian story of lay education and lay ministry training

David Houston

## Synopsis

The 1950s were watershed years in the life of the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian churches. Strong, growing congregations and church 'planting' led to growth and development in Christian education and preparation for lay ministries—both within and beyond the local congregation. They were also the early preparation years for church union. Collaboration and partnerships in delivering Christian education were in place ten years before 1977.

Post church union lay education became more structured and 'fit for purpose'. Through campus, regional and local programs it became an important agency in preparing people for mission in the spirit of paragraph 13 of the *Basis of Union*. Intentional programs brought ordained and lay members to learn and practice ministry together. Diaconal, community and ecumenical ministries were developed in new ways. Parkin-Wesley College became a pioneer tertiary institution in its work of transferring vocational education training principles into Christian ministry programs. It did this in collaboration with the Anglican and Roman Catholic colleges with whom it already shared teaching and preparation programs for ordained ministries.



## In the Beginning

Among the first settlers who came to South Australia in 1836 were many active Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians. They were informed Christians who came with the mix of skills needed to begin new communities. They came as businessmen, farmers, labourers, pastoralists, miners, shopkeepers, doctors and public servants. They were also local and lay preachers, Sunday school teachers and Class or Bible study leaders who established congregations and Sunday schools within weeks of arriving. Their interest was to establish their congregations as part of the community they were helping to build. Their worship and learning shaped their daily life. It was several months before the first ministers arrived. The Congregationalists affirmed the worth and significance of each person. The Methodists proclaimed the transformative power in Jesus' message for whole communities. The Presbyterians brought the pastoral spirit of minister and elders nurturing a congregation.

Each denomination had influential lay leaders. Among them were William Giles, a Congregationalist, manager of the South Australian Company which had been formed in England by an Act of Parliament to plan and develop the colony. He was a gifted lay preacher and as he helped to shape social policy he was regarded as one of the 'Pilgrim Fathers' of the colony.<sup>1</sup> Another was John Colton, a Methodist, a Sunday School teacher and Local Preacher, a leader in business and public affairs, a

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<sup>1</sup> J. Cameron, *In Stow's Footsteps—a Chronological History of the Congregational Churches in S.A. 1837–1977* (South Australian Congregational History Project Committee, 1987), 15.

member of Parliament and Premier on two occasions.<sup>1</sup> The third, a Presbyterian, Peter Miller, a farmer at South Rhine, on the southern edge of the Barossa Valley, an elder and founding trustee of the church there, helped to build a schoolroom and a teacher's residence to further both the religious and secular education of local children.<sup>2</sup> Different contexts but each illustrates their capacity and commitment.

Across the first 60 years, expansion occurred in farming and mining in rural areas, and business and general industry in a rapidly growing Adelaide. The shape of government decisions relating to education, public health and hospitals were influenced by the participation of key lay leaders from local congregations. A Wesleyan Methodist, Alan Campbell, a medical practitioner founded the Adelaide Children's Hospital in 1876.<sup>3</sup> John Hartley, Governor of the Wesleyan Church's Prince Alfred College left that position in 1875 to be the president of the State Council of Education, the precursor to the Education Department.<sup>4</sup> Townships developed and congregations grew in number, in particular the Methodists being the majority group to migrate. Weekly worship provided Christian education and spiritual formation for adults, and Sunday Schools for their children.

The role played by local and lay preachers was a key to this growth. The three Methodist traditions and the Congregationalists used them widely, but the Presbyterians did not formally use them until the early twentieth century. Robert

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<sup>1</sup> A.D. Hunt, *This Side of Heaven—A History of Methodism in South Australia*. (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1985), 31.

<sup>2</sup> R.J. Scrimgeour, *Some Scots were Here—A History of the Presbyterian Church in South Australia 1839–1977* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1986), 50.

<sup>3</sup> Adelaide Women's and Children's Hospital Website 2017, also Hunt, 102.

<sup>4</sup> Hunt, 94.

Scrimgeour suggests this limited the sustainability of new and remote Presbyterian congregations. However, he also suggests the initiative of Robert Mitchell, the minister at Port Augusta in 1883, to conduct a lay preacher training program for members in his congregation shone a light on their value. When Mitchell left the parish in 1894, a member of this initial class, James Holdsworth maintained the parish until 1916, when the next minister arrived.<sup>1</sup>

## Into the Twentieth Century

Dr William Torr, son of a miner at Burra, a teacher and lay theologian, had been Headmaster of the Bible Christian Methodist Boys' School, Way College, from 1892 to 1903. In 1909 he established the Brighton Training Home for the education and training of home missionaries, evangelists and local preachers. Over the following six years he prepared 107 students for different areas of ministry—53 Local Preachers, 27 Home Missionaries or Circuit Assistants and 27 who entered the ordained ministry. Dr Edward Sugden, The Master of Queen's College in Melbourne, said of Torr, "I wish we could lay hand on the like of him for Victoria".<sup>2</sup>

In 1912, The Chapman Alexander Bible Institute (CABI) was established through the benefaction of Mr and Mrs R.H. White, members of the Pirie Street Methodist Church. Following the impact of the Chapman and Alexander evangelistic missions of 1909 and 1912, the Whites gifted their large property 'Wekewauban' in the inner suburb of Wayville for the purpose of "training young men and women in practical methods of

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<sup>1</sup> Scrimgeour, 207.

<sup>2</sup> Hunt, 253–257.

Christian work”.<sup>1</sup> World War One limited enrolment numbers but over the next 12 years 253 students undertook studies for local preaching, local or overseas mission service.

In 1927, ordained ministry training for the Methodists moved to share the CABI site at Wayville. It became known as Wesley College. The Bible Institute continued its lay preacher, theology and mission topics program via an evening class framework. In 1950, the R.H. White Scholarship was established to provide for lay students wanting to begin or extend their studies. Over the past 60 years more than 250 students have received scholarships.<sup>2</sup>

The Congregationalists partnered the Presbyterian and Baptist churches in the founding of Union College in 1872. It offered an ecumenical studies program for Christian ministry training. On its closure in 1886, the Congregationalists opened the Adelaide Theological College. It served a small number of both ordained and lay students until it went into recess in 1895. Training was revived in 1910 when Parkin Congregational College was established at Kent Town. This continued until Parkin merged with Wesley College at Wayville in 1969 to become Parkin-Wesley Theological College<sup>3</sup>

During the first half of the twentieth century, two world wars and the world economic recession created a climate in which, in wanting to value life more, many families turned to the church as a supportive and caring place. The Depression of the 1930s had brought great hardship to thousands of families. Stories abound in which church members in both urban and rural

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<sup>1</sup> Hunt, 270–271.

<sup>2</sup> Hunt, 337, and D.J. Houston, 2017, *By Word and By Deed, Lay People in the Uniting Church*, (Unley S.A.: MediaCom Education Inc., 2017), 84.

<sup>3</sup> J. Cameron, *In Stow's Footsteps*, 86–88

communities helped strategic care and welfare programs at many levels over these critical years.<sup>1</sup> The early church image of “sharing ...and distributing to others according to their need” – Acts 2:45 TEV, was very much at work.

### The Watershed years that led to Union

From this background, the 1950s and 60s became watershed years. Each denomination experienced strong levels of participation in local congregations, and each participated in the ecumenical movement that followed the formation of the World Council of Churches. They had many innovative leaders. I mention just two, both leaders in Christian education and leadership training at that time.

The Rev. Peter Mathews was appointed as Youth Director of the Congregational Union in 1947, and served for 11 years. For him, Christian education should lead young people toward a ‘lived’ discipleship, and training for mission and ministry was best done in partnership with others. For good learning outcomes, practice in any area of ministry should be a shared experience. His programs introduced young leaders to experiences in worship and preaching, and conducting stewardship and community service programs, preparing a new generation of leadership in the process.<sup>2</sup>

The Rev. C.T. (Cliff) Symons was appointed Director of the Methodist Department of Christian Education in 1951, and served for 19 years. He introduced new approaches to Sunday School teacher and youth leader training. He initiated regional Easter youth camps involving hundreds of young people each

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<sup>1</sup> Houston, 74–79.

<sup>2</sup> R.J. Brown, *Peter Mathews- a Memoir* (Prospect S.A.: G.W. Pope, 2001)

year. For him, coming to faith in Jesus should be a transformative experience leading to Christian service in the world. Adult leaders, ministry students and local youth leaders shared the planning and conduct of camping and local church programs. More widely, in 1966 he assisted in establishing the Certificate I Group Work at the SA Institute of Technology.<sup>1</sup>

## Migration, New Congregations and Ecumenical engagement

Following the post WW2 period of migration and population growth, existing congregations grew. Fifty-six new churches (seven Congregational, 40 Methodist and nine Presbyterian) were built in the new developing suburbs around Adelaide. Congregations began in homes, school halls or class-rooms. Between the three Churches there were hundreds of lay preachers supporting the expanding worship life of these congregations.<sup>2</sup>

National events were important. The Rev. (later Sir) Alan Walker led the Mission to the Nation program, beginning in 1953. Biennial National Christian Youth Conventions began in 1955. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Crusades followed in 1959. In the early '60s, the Australian Council of Churches encouraged participation in local Inter-Church Councils and the ecumenical small group program "The Church and Life Movement". In 1966, this program saw over 600 groups formed across South Australia with 8,000 people participating.

The introduction of the Joint Board of Christian Education's *Christian Life Curriculum* in 1970 created a new level of interest

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<sup>1</sup> Houston, 128.

<sup>2</sup> Drawn together from the three histories, Congregational (Cameron, 1987), Methodist (Hunt, 1985), Presbyterian (Scrimgeour, 1986).

in Christian education. It had ‘all age learning’ segments within it that involved adults and children learning and worshipping together. The three Departments of Christian Education formed joint training teams that travelled the state introducing the curriculum.<sup>1</sup> Their work enthused many congregations for church union. For 25 years it provided a structure and impetus for effective local faith and discipleship training.

### Church Union and ‘the ministry of every member’

At church union in 1977, the message within paragraph 13 of the UCA *Basis of Union* inspired members “to enter more fully into mission”.

A joint Commission established St Stephen’s House, a lay training institute at North Adelaide in February 1976.<sup>2</sup> It was a successful venture involving significant numbers each year. However, in 1980 it was re-located to a shared campus setting at Parkin-Wesley College and renamed the Lay Education Centre. Lay members would now study alongside ordained ministry students. They shared community time, chapel, meals, library access and student support group activities.

In February 1981, the Rev. Ian Tanner was appointed Director of the Centre, and Lay Ministry Consultant for the Synod. His immediate interest was to meet with presbyteries and congregations to discover the focus lay education and training would need for the changing demographic that had emerged during the 1970s. He said at the time, “... If lay education is to offer relevant programs to be a resource to the mission of the

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<sup>1</sup> M. McArthur, *Observations on Teacher and Leader Training and broader Lay Education Developments through the Methodist DCE in the 60s and 70s*. A Submission to the Lay Ministry Project, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Houston, 160–163.

Church, we need to be quite clear about the skills or resources necessary, and know the way in which they are to be applied”.<sup>1</sup>

With this in mind, by April that year, the Centre consulted widely through regional seminars. The ministries of Lay Preacher and Elder were given particular focus, and new topics related to leadership, pastoral care, current affairs, and ministry with youth were brought together into a new Lay leaders Certificate program. Over the next six years 49 youth workers completed this program, returning to serve in either parish or community appointments.<sup>2</sup>

With the ministry of Elder being strategic to the life of congregations, Ian Tanner published a handbook for the training of elders in 1984.<sup>3</sup> This resource was well used in South Australia. Regional and parish seminars were held each year over the next decade, and more than 1500 elected elders received training. This program enabled local mission and ministry to be undertaken more confidently. The UCA Constitution, paragraph 11, was informing this work, “Recognising that ministry is a function of the whole Church ... provision shall be made by the Congregations, Parishes, Presbyteries, and Synods, for the development and exercise of the gifts of all Members”<sup>4</sup>

The Order of St Stephen, the volunteer non-stipended lay ministry introduced by Cliff Symons during the 1950s, had become a valuable diaconal form of ministry. It provided opportunities in both local or overseas settings. Across 40 years more than 100 members served through the Order in areas such

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<sup>1</sup> I.B. Tanner, *A Strategy for Lay Education for the 80s*. A Presentation to a Lay Education Consultation, February 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Houston, 172.

<sup>3</sup> I.B. Tanner, *A Handbook for Elders within the Uniting Church in Australia* (Melbourne: JBCE, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Houston, 155.



as teaching, nursing, trade skills, pastoral ministries, aged care, community service, youth and young adult ministry.<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of 1989, I began my appointment as Director of the Centre and Lay Ministry Consultant for the Synod. Training and resources continued to respond to requests and interests of congregations.<sup>2</sup> We believed that over the first 12 years of union education for ministry had been imaginative and relevant in helping the church to grow in its new identity, while still allowing the wisdom and insight of our earlier educators to inform us.

The Rev. Dr Vern Cracknell, experienced in adult learning strategies, was appointed Course Coordinator in October 1989. He brought the existing Lay Leaders and Lay Preachers certificate courses together into a new program to be known as the Certificate in Lay Ministry. New topics were added, viz. Theology of the Laity in Ministry, Christian Education for Discipleship, Leadership Skills. Ministry with Children, and Ministry with Senior Adults. A Supervised Ministry Project and Semester Orientation Seminars became part of the program. Individual topics could be undertaken for assessment or audit only, and the distance learning mode was expanded.

The participation of women in preparation for ministry grew rapidly following church union, in particular for lay ministry. The areas of interest were Christian education, worship and preaching, pastoral and local community engagement. It was not surprising to see that three of our four lay Moderators in South Australia have been women—Elizabeth Finnegan, 1987–89, Jan Trengove, 2001–03, and Deidre Palmer, 2013–16.

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<sup>1</sup> Houston, 138.

<sup>2</sup> Education Service Committee Report, October 1989.

## Vocation Education and Training Accreditation

In time for the 1993 academic year, after consultation with an advisory team from the SA Government's Training Recognition Unit (TRU), all the Certificate topics were structured to contain competency-based learning requirements. A Certificate IV program in Lay Ministry was accredited. A positive response followed with 91 new enrolments—36 in campus classes and 55 in the distance learning mode. In addition, 42 people enrolled in single topics.<sup>1</sup>

In 1994, the course was accredited again by the TRU as the UCA Certificate IV in Ministry with Austudy provisions approved. Becoming a recognised provider of vocational education and training, teachers, youth workers, pastoral workers and lay chaplains benefited significantly from this development.

Trade and professional skills training already used competency-based learning, but research and testing was needed in the area of theological education. Biblical and theological beliefs needed task-related activities associated with them. Learning outcomes and competency achievements needed to be assessed. Lecturers were now being asked to design their program in terms of—"How can the student show me that they have learned to apply, use and analyse with this knowledge. Rather than expecting pieces of information, can they show me their ability to use knowledge in terms of their Christian ministry"?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Education Services Committee Report, March 1993, cited in Houston, 207.

<sup>2</sup> V.J. Cracknell, "The Application of Vocational Education Training Principles to Faith Based Education and Ministry Studies". A paper presented to the Lay Education Committee 1994.

## Specified Ministries and Shared Learning

In 1991 that the Assembly established the ministry of Deacon as an ordained ministry along with three specified lay ministries—Community Minister, Lay Pastor and Youth Worker. Candidates for these ministries had access to current and relevant forms of training and served our congregations well. The Rev. Dr Andrew Dutney, commenting on this development, suggested: “These specified ministries linked together ordained and lay ministries ... stipended and voluntary ... in a single pattern for which the church would provide appropriate formation”.<sup>1</sup>

The concept of Community Minister was innovative. Based on the idea of a congregation discerning a particular area of need in their local community, and having a local and gifted member available to meet it, they would inform the Presbytery. The shape of the ministry was determined by the congregation or parish’s own research in consultation with the Presbytery, and the appointment approved by Presbytery. The Barossa and Light Parish, 70 kms north of Adelaide, recognised a need for a community pastoral care and disability support ministry. Mary Plush, a retired teacher was appointed. With great acceptance, she served her community for 14 years. We hope this form of ministry won’t be lost in the more general ministry of Pastor.<sup>2</sup>

In February 1995 the Lay Education Centre and Parkin-Wesley Theological College formally merged. This gave fresh impetus to the understanding of all members preparing for ministry. The Rev. Dr Charles Biggs, Principal of the College at the time, said in April 1996, “We ... understand ministry as

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<sup>1</sup> A. Dutney, *A Genuinely Educated Ministry* (Unley S.A.: MediaCom Education Inc., 2011), 124.

<sup>2</sup> Houston, 221–222.

being part of the life of all Christians, and the Uniting Church now emphasises this much more deliberately. About 300 people are at the College this semester. Of these 250 are lay people. All understand they are entering into ministry”.<sup>1</sup>

## An Ecumenical Adventure

In 1997, after 30 years of partnership in delivering theological education, Parkin-Wesley, St Barnabas’ Anglican, and the Catholic theological colleges began a new journey in education and training for both lay and ordained ministries. The colleges moved to a common site at Brooklyn Park to form the Adelaide Theological Colleges Campus, and with Flinders University became constituent members of the Adelaide College of Divinity.<sup>2</sup>

The campus chapel, was dedicated as “The Chapel of Reconciliation”. It became a visible expression of fellowship and learning together. Soon after, the Training Aboriginal Christian Leaders program (TACL) was located on the campus. Its ‘parent’, Nungalinga College in Darwin, had become a member college of the ACD two years earlier. This relationship made the chapel a special place in another way. Here we prayed regularly for national recognition and reconciliation with all our Indigenous sisters and brothers.<sup>3</sup>

The Certificate IV in Ministry was reviewed in 1998, with Anglican and Catholic topics added to its framework. It was accredited in 1999 as the Adelaide College of Divinity’s

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<sup>1</sup> *New Times*, April, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> C.R. Biggs, *An Ecumenical Adventure – A History of The Adelaide College of Divinity, 1979-2009*. (The Adelaide College of Divinity in association with The Historical Society of the Uniting Church in South Australia, 2011), 69–71.

<sup>3</sup> Biggs, 87, and *TACL Newsletter Vol.1, No 21, July, 1999*.

Diploma in Pastoral Ministry, with a sub-set of various ministry Certificates I, II, III and IV within it.<sup>1</sup> There followed twelve years of creative ecumenical education and training. In 2011, with regret, the Anglican and Catholic colleges withdrew from the ATCC due to financial constraints within each Diocese at that time.

Dr Deidre Palmer, a faculty member at Parkin-Wesley for seven years and involved in co-planning and teaching various topics, reflected, “We built networks of teachers, who enjoyed teaching and working with each other. It was particularly wonderful to work ecumenically with other colleagues, while deepening our appreciation of the diversity of our Christian traditions”.<sup>2</sup>

Lay Ministry Teams (LMTs) become ‘the minister’

In the early 1990s, new challenges emerged for the church when drought conditions brought both financial and social stress to whole rural communities. Placement of ministers became problematic, and the oversight of congregations by the members themselves became a practical necessity. Local lay ministry teams (LMTs) were created. An example—thirteen congregations in the mid-north region of the state formed ministry teams with the support of an appointed ‘cluster’ minister, the Rev. Brian Robins, based at Snowtown. Describing his role, he nominated three principles: prepare the congregation for change; be an encourager and friend; and, be an educator and a resource agent. “It is a different form of education. It is mentoring and being alongside the local members. Education is

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<sup>1</sup> Diploma in Pastoral Ministry Accreditation Application 1998, cited in Houston, Appendix III, 391–401.

<sup>2</sup> Houston, 310.

received when needs arise”.<sup>1</sup> There are many lay ministry teams creatively leading their congregations in this way today.

## Becoming ‘Worldly Christians’.

Paragraph 18a of the UCA Constitution describes ministers and elders nurturing members and, “leading them into a fuller participation in Christ’s mission in the world”. Ian Tanner drew a connection between this statement and a section of the 1969 Report of the Joint Commission on Church Union. The statement says in part, “Representative laity involved in the vocation of the world will inform the life of the congregation and at the same time symbolise the reaching out of the ministry of the Church into the secular occupations of everyday life”.<sup>2</sup> Our life together gives us reason to believe and embrace this statement.<sup>3</sup>

In the decade 1985–1995, the Lay Education Centre facilitated “Christians in the Work Place” seminars. Sectors involved were police, teachers, social workers, health workers, secretaries and business administration. They provided the opportunity for shared lived experience as Christians to strengthen ongoing leadership in everyday work places.

Between 1989 and 1992, a group of members from various congregations—agricultural scientists, environment and sustainability planners, farmers, and ministers of the word, developed and introduced programs to help congregations understand the nature of changing environments and sustainable

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<sup>1</sup> B. Robins, *How a Cluster Minister sees Leadership*. A paper presented to the UC (SA) Historical Society, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> JCCU, 1969, cited in Tanner, *Handbook*, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Houston, 240–262.

land use. This has led to the present active environmental action groups within the Synod.

Members from urban and rural congregations have used their work-life experience to begin and grow important local care programs. They have befriended and helped low income families, refugees and asylum seekers through local op shops, food provision (in association with Food Bank and others), friendship centres with language classes, advisory services, cultural, art, craft and cooking programs. We see Micah's message at work: "doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God". (Micah 6:8 RSV)

Finally, two examples of transformational leadership through secular vocations. Dr Charles Duguid, an Adelaide medical practitioner, established the Ernabella Aboriginal Mission in the Musgrave Ranges in 1937. He had been the Moderator of the SA Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1935, and President of the Aborigines Protection League over several years. He consulted widely with state and church authorities in preparation for the venture. His message to the Church and community at the time was:

... an intelligent Christian mission must have a knowledge of anthropology, must learn the local languages and must have in them the spirit of Christ. It must have respect for identity and culture, with no imposition of the European way of life, and no deliberate interference with tribal customs.

The development of Duguid's impressive work at Ernabella is described by the Rev. Dr Bill Edwards as a place of relationships.<sup>1</sup>

Dr Basil Hetzel, who was a member of Pilgrim Uniting Church in Flinders Street, Adelaide, was a medical research scientist who led an international team during the 1980s in the implementation of the 'iodine deficiency remedial programs' of the World Health Organisation. The program changed the health and life expectancy for more than two billion people in some 130 countries. The WHO now recognises that iodine deficiency is the most common preventable cause of brain damage in the world today. Hetzel, an informed and compassionate Christian, was a researcher and teacher who lived his faith in the workplace with humility and great effect. Dr Hetzel died in 2017 at the age of 94.<sup>2</sup>

Looking back over our South Australian history, we discern that the Spirit has led every generation of ordained and lay leaders to nurture and mentor their fellow members in faith, mission and ministry. Our present and future leaders will be prompted by the Spirit to do the same. As part of their own discipleship they will be called to "teach and instruct each other with all wisdom ... and do everything [together] in the name of the Lord Jesus ... giving thanks to God." Colossians 3:16–17 TEV.

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Edwards, *Mission in the Musgraves: Ernabella Mission 1937-73, A Place of Relationships*, (UC (SA) Historical Society, 2012)

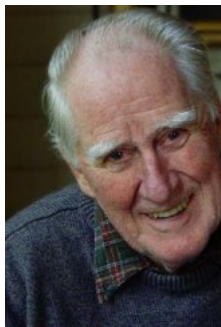
<sup>2</sup> *The Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Centre Website, 2015*, and Houston, 243–244, 373.



# Who was Harvey Perkins and why was he important?

Brian Howe

## Synopsis



*Harvey Perkins*

The Australian Christian minister Harvey Perkins was an important ecumenical leader in Australia and Asia in the immediate post-World War Two and post-colonial period. In Australia, he helped to create the Australian Council of Churches (ACC), which was an important symbol of ecumenism. It was later significant in providing development assistance to Aboriginal people in Australia and in the newly independent countries of South East Asia. While the secretary of the ACC in the 1960s and 1970s, he helped to found the East Asian Christian Conference (EACC). This was instrumental in providing Indigenous ecumenical leadership for the churches in Asia as well as offering a mechanism through which international aid could be linked to economic and social development programs. Perkins was influential in the EACC, later called the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), in helping to develop a contextual theology as a framework for Christian participation in economic development consistent with a grounded methodology for fostering growth and development in poorer communities. His resource book, *Roots for Vision*, illustrated his capacity to integrate biblical and theological insight with community

organisation and development.<sup>1</sup> Perkins was a very important Australian Christian leader who laid the foundations for a reformed Christian and Indigenous ecumenical movement in post-colonial Asia.

## Early Years

Harvey and his twin sister, Jean, were born into the family of Leslie and Doris Perkins in Hobart. His later years of schooling were at Wesley College in Melbourne. In 1937 he entered Queen's (Methodist) College and enrolled at Melbourne University, graduating with a Master of Laws in 1940 and a Bachelor of Commerce in 1941. There was much debate at Queen's regarding the war in the pre-war period; however, after graduation Perkins enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy (1942) and served as a lieutenant in the Pacific. His son reported that "to his children he explained his real justification as being the real threat of invasion, but it was the war that altered the direction of his life".<sup>2</sup> Throughout his life Perkins emphasised that poverty and inequality were underlying causes of war and on peace-making and war.<sup>3</sup> During this period from 1938 to 1948, the WCC was in formation and it was the threat of war that delayed the inaugural Assembly until 1948.

Perkins was awarded a scholarship to study at Wesley House, which was at the time a rather conservative Methodist University College. Perkins was already an expert on the Old

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey L. Perkins, *Roots for Visions: Reflection on the Gospels and the Churches: Task in Re-Peopling the De-Peopled* (Singapore: World Council of Churches-Commission for the Churches' Participation in Development, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> David Perkins, "A beacon for the most needy," *Sydney Morning Herald*, February 7, 2013, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/a-beacon-for-the-most-needy-20130206-2dyk1.html>.

<sup>3</sup> David Perkins, "A beacon for the most needy," *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Testament and his main purpose at Wesley House was to write a thesis on Professor W. Eichrodt, then a well-known Old Testament scholar, which he did not write in a way that enthused his examiners. Perhaps Perkins was too radical for Wesley House, and too enthusiastic about using the Old Testament exegesis to illustrate the way in which its stories could be used to illuminate modern societies.

Most importantly, as Robert Gribben (later a scholar at Wesley House) told me, during this period Perkins took up every opportunity to spend time in Geneva where he was inspired by M.M. Thomas' agenda. This aimed to strengthen Indigenous regional leadership in South East Asia with the support of the ecumenical leadership in Geneva.<sup>1</sup> Perkins was also a problem for Wesley House because of his increasing involvement not only in the SCM of Great Britain, but also even more worryingly, because of its radical agenda, in the World Student Christian Federation. Perkins took every opportunity to visit Geneva, not only because the WSCF was based there, but also it was the base for the WCC formed at a Conference in Amsterdam in 1948. Most of its leadership had been drawn from the SCM including Mott, J.H. Oldham, D.T. Niles and M.M. Thomas. Here was an opportunity to meet many of the emerging leaders of the World Council of Churches, who were then leading the World Christian Federation.<sup>2</sup> The experience was crucial in making possible his future career in the ACC and in Asia. Perkins was primarily driven by exposure in Europe to incarnational theology that emphasised the church as 'the body of Christ', and thus the need to see the future of the Church as dependent on unity and a commitment to a prophetic witness in

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Gribben, Interview with the author, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*, vii.

the world. He saw in Geneva efforts to re-think the nature and mission of the church in theological terms, which became his ongoing inspiration.<sup>1</sup>

Perkins returned to Australia in 1949 and was appointed to the Mitcham Methodist circuit in Victoria where he sought to create a more ecumenical approach to ministry from 1953–1956. He was an enthusiastic participant in the Methodist Church’s Mission to the Nation (1954–5) where he organised a strong local campaign and preached the message of the church. The theme of the mission was that of “Australia finding God” and Alan Walker, an influential Sydney Methodist clergyman, advocated for Australia to overcome the racism inherent in the ‘White Australia Policy’ and to see its location in the Asian region as an opportunity.<sup>2</sup>

Perkins’ appointment as the Secretary of the ACC in 1957 followed logically from his earlier involvement with both the ASCM, the WSCF and the WCC. In Australia, the ASCM had been especially important in making students more aware of the rise of nationalism in Asia and greater independence from colonial rule.<sup>3</sup> Howe argued in her history of the ASCM that the “two main achievements of the ASCM in post-war years can be identified as fostering the emerging ecumenical movement and building Australian awareness of the Asian Pacific region”.<sup>4</sup> This was partly an outcome of having the progressive

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<sup>1</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Walker, *Australia Finding God*, (Methodist Church Report of Mission to the Nation, 1953).

<sup>3</sup> Renate Howe, *A Century of Influence: the Australian Student Christian Movement 1896-1996* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Howe, *Century*, 308.

international links through the WSCF including contacts in the Asian Pacific region.

Harvey Perkins, General Secretary, Australian Council of Churches (1956–1966)

In 1956, Perkins was appointed to the position of General Secretary of the Australian Council of the WCC (later called ACC) and held the position until 1967. The Secretary immediately prior to Perkins, Congregational minister Rev. John Garrett, had a keen interest in the future of Christianity in Asia. Perkins built on his predecessor's work, especially in building good relations with Christian churches in Asia. Garrett had been a significant leader in the ASCM and had travelled to Indonesia in 1950 to convey the good will of the Australian ecumenical movement to the newly formed Indonesian Council of Churches. Lake noted that this trip was the first by a leader of the Australian ecumenical movement to one of the new Asian nations and marked the beginning of substantial interaction between the ACC and Asian Christians and Church councils.<sup>1</sup>

In Australia Perkins was important in promoting cooperation between churches with an emphasis on building a more informed Church. He emphasised social justice themes including the importance of land rights and opposing the White Australia Policy. Perhaps most importantly he was responsible for the inaugural ACC Conference held in Melbourne in 1960.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Meredith Lake, "Western Heritage, Asian Destiny: The Australian Council of Churches Activity in Asia, 1950–1965," *Eras Journal*, updated 2004, <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/eras/eras-journal-lake-m-western-heritage-asian-destinythe-australian-council-of-churches-activity-in-asia-1950-1965/>.

<sup>2</sup> David M Taylor (ed), *We were brought together: Report of the National Conference of Australian Churches held at Melbourne University, February 2–11, 1960*.

He was a visionary in the sense that he recognized the importance of a broad understanding of mission in Asia.

Frank Engel, who at various times was both the Secretary of the ACC and Secretary of the ASCM, was an important participant observer of the ecumenical movement in post-war Australia. Engel gives Perkins the credit for creating a unified vision for the principal activities of the ecumenical movement in Australia. According to Engel:

In 1963 there were three well developed organisations giving expression to ecumenical relationships and activities—the ACC, the Australian Commission for Inter Church Aid and the Australian Division of the Resettlement Department of the World Council of Churches... It was Harvey Perkins as General Secretary, who faced up to this oddity of growth and it was his vision that brought them together.<sup>1</sup>

Engel also noted that these reforms in the ACC were not achieved without both courage and a sense of the importance of longer term objectives. His concern was for causes and people rather than constitutions and procedures. Reflecting on this period in 1991 Perkins wrote “I suppose in some sense I have used or helped to create conciliar structures to serve the ecumenical movement or my perspectives on it. My ultimate loyalty is to the movement rather than the structures.”<sup>2</sup> Summing up Perkins’ contribution to the ACC, Engel wrote:

Perkins clarified the purpose and role of the ACC at its first general meeting in 1957 and enabled its

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Engel, *Times of Change 1918–1978: Christians in Australia*, Volume 2 (Melbourne: The Joint Board of Christian Education, 1993), 232.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Engel, *Times*, 232.

expression in a revised constitution, created a national office, built links with the Indonesian Council of Churches, launched the church and life movement, developed Australian thinking and theology on inter-church aid, helped form the Australian Council for Inter-Church Aid and was active in the World Council of Churches on inter-church aid refugees and world Service.<sup>1</sup>

### The Parapat Conference in Indonesia

The Parapat Conference in March 1957 was at the end of a long process that preceded the Second World War. It was interpreted by Thomas in his autobiography as an important stage in the post-war struggle on the part of the Churches of Asia to establish their independence within the wider Christian Church and creating the capacity for the Indigenous Churches of Asia to take control of their own destiny.<sup>2</sup>

For Perkins, with his significant experience in the SCM, it provided an opportunity to join hands with so many colleagues he had known in the WSCF and address the profound challenges facing Christian churches in post-colonial Asia. Thomas particularly stresses the importance of earlier student discussions in Asia when he singled out the Kandy Conference in Sri Lanka 1948–9, as the first student get together after the war and very important in having students consider the big issues to be faced by Christians in post-colonial Asia.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Engel, *Times*, 319.

<sup>2</sup> M.M. Thomas, *My Ecumenical Journey* (Triandrum: Ecumenical Publishing Centre, 1990), 59.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas, *Journal*.

The conference was organised by Kywar Than, a lay ecumenical leader and Professor from Myanmar, who had been general secretary of the WSCF from 1950–1956. Thomas from Kerala in Southern India had been a member of the SCM, on the staff of the WSCF, and a strategic leader of the WCC. Thomas had created a research centre in India on religion and society and helped to create through a preliminary conference the strategic context of the Conference, especially the broader economic, social and political challenges facing the region. Perkins would later write that D.T. Niles, the great ecumenical leader and Methodist pastor, was in many ways was the inspiration of the conference.<sup>1</sup> They were all student leaders in the SCM and later the central figures in Asia seeking to renew the Churches influence in the Council of Nations. Perkins especially emphasised that at the regional level the churches in Asia needed each other to belong to a fellowship of churches.<sup>2</sup> The challenge was to make a start to create the common membership of the Asian Churches in the Body of Christ. The preamble spoke of discerning “the movement of God’s Spirit in the events of our time. It was not pious rhetoric, you could feel it in your bones”.<sup>3</sup>

There are other reasons why the Parapat meeting was important to Australia. The Conference invited Harvey Perkins and Alan Brass, the co-secretary of the EACC from New Zealand, to sit as equal members of the conference with other Asian delegates and, as Niles claims, this represented the acceptance of the idea that Australia was very much part of Asia,

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<sup>1</sup> Ninan Koshy (Ed.), *A history of the ecumenical movement in Asia* (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Koshy, *history*, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Koshy, *history*, 131.



European in heritage but having its destiny in Asia.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the enthusiasm that Perkins brought back to Australia led to the successful first ACC Conference in Australia in 1960. Upon the return of the Australian delegates from Parapat, the ACC convened a provisional Division of Studies working group with the task of preparing a report on common Christian responsibility towards an area of rapid social change.<sup>2</sup> Perkins organised a NCC Conference in Australia in 1960 to have speakers from Asia well represented. The conference speakers included important leaders of the Church in Asia including Thomas, Bishop Lesslie Newbigin (India,) Bishop E.C. Sobrepena (The Philippines), M. Takenaka (Japan) and Miss Renuka Mukerji (India). Bishop Sobrepena noted that the formation of the East Asian Christian Conference and its commitment to the evangelisation of Asia required an ecumenical approach. As Taylor wrote, “It is our common conviction that the Church should be a full participant in the new life of Asia, if she is to be effective in witnessing to Jesus Christ”.<sup>3</sup> The EACC had limited resources in its early years and seemed to rely heavily on volunteers to get its programs under way. This Assembly was important, if for no other reason than it saw the International Missionary Council and the WCC come together as one body. There was consequently great emphasis in this conference on the mission of the Church.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rienzie Perera, “Called to prophesy, reconcile and heal”, *Theologies and Cultures*, VII, no.1 (June 2010), 37.

<sup>2</sup> Lake, *Western Heritage, Asian Destiny*.

<sup>3</sup> David Taylor (ed), *We Were Brought Together: Report of the National Conference of Australian Churches* (Sydney: Australian Council for the World Council of Churches, 1960), 149.

<sup>4</sup> Harvey Perkins, *No Night There* (New Delhi: A Report of the World Council of Churches, 1962)

## Perkins Officially in Asia

Perkins began his ecumenical ministry at the ACC in 1956 and from 1957 onwards he was heavily involved in the EACC and later the ACC that possessed a growing interest in Asia. As a post-war student at Queen's College and Melbourne University, there was great interest in post-colonial Asia. With the independence struggle increasingly successful, new leaders and governments were under pressure to build modern economies. This challenge was more formidable because the inherited structures of their economies were often shaped by the colonial era. Churches in Asia faced difficulties because in missionary times churches in Asia were seen to be heavily influenced by their historic ties with western missionaries and institutions that were more western than Asian.<sup>1</sup> Institutions such as the International Missionary Council, the WCC, the WSCF and the YMCA and YWCA were all seen as western institutions and thus not truly Asian in their ethos and interests. In the first decade following the war these institutions were reluctant to devolve power to local and regional leadership. Perkins from the beginning understood the need for local and regional autonomy and this became very clear in the work that he did through the EACC and later the ACC.

While at the ACC, Perkins was increasingly involved with the EACC, although for the first decade Perkins followed Parapat behind the scenes rather than holding administrative responsibility. During the following twelve years he held a number of appointments that directly related to his work in Asia: EACC Secretary for Inter-church Aid, Refugees and World

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey Perkins, *Guidelines for Development* (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 1980), 4–7.

Service (1968–71) Secretary for the WCC Commission on Churches participation in Development (1973–75) and with the CCA Secretary for Development (1976–80).<sup>1</sup>

Clearly there is a story associated with each of these appointments. As Secretary for Inter-church Aid, Perkins was essentially responsible for maintaining a food relief delivery program and health services during the Vietnam war without taking sides. Asian Christian Service (ACS) was the only international agency working in Vietnam in 1965. Perkins clearly had strong feelings about the US war in Vietnam. However, as he observed, “There is an issue of maintaining reasonable level of political neutrality since ACS had access to only one side of the conflict other than sending medical supplies to the North.”<sup>2</sup>

At the Asian Ecumenical Conference on socio-economic development in Tokyo in 1970 Perkins reflected on the tensions he faced in directing this program including the issue of maintaining reasonable political neutrality, difficulty in distinguishing service positions from politics, church identity in a total war situation, refugees and displaced people having to be helped irrespective of creed and allegiance and tensions as people could not separate themselves from views of their own country.<sup>3</sup>

This initial experience as a staff member of the EACC was important in that Perkins learned of the constraints that would be faced in his two later appointments with the WCC based in

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<sup>1</sup> Engel, *Living in a World Community: An East Asian Experience of the World Student Christian Federation, 1931–1961* (Hong Kong: WSCF Asian Pacific region, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Koshy, *history*, 174.

<sup>3</sup> Koshy, *history*, 174

Geneva and with the Christian Conference of Asia. In Geneva, he was Secretary for the WCC Commission on Churches participation in Development (1973–75) and later with the CCA Secretary for Development (1976–80). In Geneva, he had the opportunity to learn more about the development theory in regions such as Asia, Africa and Latin America. While he describes his theological approach as contextual theology, Perkins is ready to create a model for teaching community organizations and development that draws from these rich sources. Despite these diverse sources, it is obvious in *Roots for Vision* that Perkins had developed an integrated theory of change, which is applied in helping to prepare people to participate in developmental projects across Asia.<sup>1</sup> Perkins writes,

Which way can services move?... I became aware of three stages, the emphasis of moving from one to another. Beginning with an emphasis on community motivation (1976–7) the work then moved on to community organisation (1978–79) and finally to community transformation (1979–80).<sup>2</sup>

Perkins, rather than thinking in terms of delivering services, thought in terms of development.

Perkins' earlier studies suggested a successful career in business and commerce. However, following the war, Perkins chose a very different path in returning to Queen's College to study theology, intending to be ordained as a Methodist minister. The college in this period, under the leadership of Master Raynor Johnson, chose to include a number of returned soldiers,

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<sup>1</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*.

<sup>2</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*.

and a number of refugees including several of the ‘Duneera boys’. Queen’s College also included among both staff and students a very high proportion of people associated with the Australian Student Christian Movement (ASCM), which at the time was the largest student association at Melbourne University. While the large ASCM membership reflected the stronger position of Protestant churches, it also showed the ASCM’s open membership and its commitment to international causes such as in opposition to the White Australia Policy. Another academic and former president of the ASCM at Melbourne University was Professor W. McMahon Ball who wrote an influential book, *The Rise of Nationalism and Communism in East Asia*, and was also important in inspiring students with a more sophisticated understanding of changes occurring in Australia’s immediate region.<sup>1</sup> There was much there to educate and inspire the young Perkins.<sup>2</sup>

To understand Perkins’ development, it is important to recognize that the ASCM and the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) were together part of the international ecumenical movement. Before and immediately after the war,

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<sup>1</sup> MacMahon Ball, *Nationalism and Communism in East Asia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1953).

<sup>2</sup> It is important not to underestimate the importance of Queen’s College in understanding Harvey Perkin’s development as an important leader in church and society. Perkins was an undergraduate student at Queen’s before the war and as a graduate following his war time experience in the Pacific. Clearly well regarded by his fellow students he was elected as President of the Sports and Social Club in 1946 as he pursued graduate studies in theology. If the issues of peace and war had been the live discussion at Queen’s in the thirties, it was the future of the Pacific region, especially South East Asia, that was the principle subject of discussion in the immediate post war period. McMahon Ball set the context with his book ‘Nationalism and Communism in South East Asia, and while at Queen’s, students such as Herb Feith and James Webb were developing a program emphasizing the importance of graduates becoming involved in mission and service. This climate must have had a powerful influence on Harvey Perkins.

Perkins was educated in the ASCM on the importance of thinking internationally. The American John R. Mott, the founder of the WSCF and the first convenor of the ASCM, was convinced of the strategic importance of the Asian Pacific region. As early as the 1920s Australian people involved in the SCM were going to conferences in Asia as Mott was sending Asian Indigenous Church leaders to Australia.<sup>1</sup> The ASCM experience was preparing Perkins for a larger understanding of the movement he realized, and following Queen's he went to Cambridge to further his theological studies in 1949. It was when he was travelling to Cambridge that he met his future wife Jill McCrory whom he married in 1953.<sup>2</sup>

## Contextual Theology

What did Perkins do in his extended period of involvement in Asia from 1957–1980? What was he trying to do? What were his achievements? Perkins wrote about what he was trying to do in theological terms as well as in terms of his development theory. He did not think of his theology and understanding of development as being separate, rather he saw them as inter-dependant. In *Roots for Vision* Perkins sets out to demonstrate their interrelatedness in both theory and practice.<sup>3</sup> As Perkins writes “We ask how Christian hope for a better human society is served by our action, and where it points us beyond our present action; how love is released in the processes of our action and in structures we implement ... Political process for a

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Engel, *Living in a World Community* (WSCF, 1994)

<sup>2</sup> David Perkins, “A beacon for the most needy,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 February 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*.

more human society in the socio-political context of human hope”.<sup>1</sup>

A major theme to his approach in *Roots for Vision* to working in Asia is that of rereading the Bible as stories of liberation. Perkins sees two strong recurring themes in Asian religious thought of ‘transcendentalism’ and ‘over spiritualisation’ leading to barriers to getting across the Christian message. He argues that there is a need for the “whole process of reinterpretation of the Bible as being necessary to overcome individualisation... express[ing] the way the hope, the vision of the people of God, contending with oppression, hungering, thirsting after justice, identifying with the poor and seeking the wellbeing of people, thus repentance is socialised and therefore radicalised”.<sup>2</sup> Perkins also argues that “The kingdom is not otherworldly, but to be realised ‘on earth’ in history... The actions for justice, the struggles for human liberation, point to it”.<sup>3</sup> Perkins illustrates here the grounding of his theology both in the Bible and in the contemporary world especially in post-colonial Asia struggling to break free from the oppressive economic and social structures which are the legacy of colonialism.

### Biblical Realism: Contextual Theology

In Chapter 5 of *Roots for Vision*, Perkins illustrates how he used biblical language to inspire people to the concreteness of the biblical message and to how oppression is the root cause of poverty. Perkins emphasises that “you cannot have the

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<sup>1</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*, xxii-xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*, xxv.

<sup>3</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*, xxxiii.

oppressed without an oppressor.”<sup>1</sup> In some respects, contextual theology echoes biblical theology of an earlier era. As far as Perkins is concerned this would not ignore the significant influence of liberation theology when it comes to Asia, Africa and Latin America. As Perkins argues:

Christians turn to theology in their struggle with oppression—the enslavement of their peoples, racial oppression colonial exploitation, the alliance of new elites in newly politically independent countries with dominating structures of neo colonialism, the loss of human dignity and the destruction of cultural identity... People searching for theological liberation find it in the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

Perkins argues that ‘contextual theology’ is a reaction against traditional theology that rarely questions existing social structures and tends to be elitist and authoritarian. It emphasises the universal truth against contextual theology’s focus on the inductive and partial, the people and their situation. Contextual theology must be seen in contrast with an ethos that sets itself at a distance from political processes. Contextual theology is essentially a political theology, its leadership is among the oppressed, a theology on the liberation of the oppressed.<sup>3</sup> Perkins’ theology is a radical theology based an interpretation of the Bible that sees in the biblical word a source of realistic commentary on the fundamental issues that people face in everyday life; the realities of human conflict and the need to call out the oppressors who deny human freedom.

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<sup>1</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*, xxxii.

<sup>2</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*, 289.

<sup>3</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*, 292.



## Perkins and his theory of development

Perkins in his role as Secretary of Development and Service with the Christian Conference of Asia organised many workshops in Asia including Myanmar, Philippines and Indonesia. This was to think through and activate the CCA's commitment to encourage development and provide services to Asian countries in the name of the Christian Church. As Perkins declares "We believe as Christians, there are three main elements in the development process, people need to be released from bondage, people need to be restored from being mere objects to their role as subjects on society. Society itself needs to be transformed".<sup>1</sup> Focusing on similar themes, Perkins argues that "Development then is the process whereby the people, the poor and the oppressed being the prime bearers of humanisation, liberate themselves from all forms of enslavement and create a condition where there is no oppressor and oppressed".<sup>2</sup> These in-principle statements are set against the realities that were recognised and experienced in contemporary Asia still under foreign control, having its resources exploited, in debt under neo-colonialism, facing authoritarian structures of power and continuing to be subjected to cultural domination.

Perkins in taking up his role in the mid-1970s sought to guide the existing and new programs in organising communities to work towards social transformation.<sup>3</sup> His method of working with the region was through a series of workshops to address the issues of social development. The workshops appeared to have a biblical and theological dimension. Perkins writes:

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<sup>1</sup> Perkins, *Guidelines for Development*, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Perkins, *Guidelines for Development*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*, xi.

... the three-fold process of releasing, restoring and transforming which we found to be basic in the Bible... Increasing focus on social and structural analysis directed our attention to the biblical language of 'yokes' as depicting oppression through national and international power structures. That enabled us to discover in the Bible a lively awareness of dominant community, operating in political, economic, social and religious institutions which stood at the centre of prophecy and the ministry of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

While inspired by the Bible and Christian theology as the director in 1976 of the ACC Development and Service program in the Asian region, Perkins contemplates the processes of change that will be necessary to motivate and organise people. Perkins aimed to do so in ways that would ultimately realise a social transformation of societies, who while free of colonial occupation, still suffered from poverty and powerlessness in a region devastated by World War Two. Perkins is clear that substantial change will follow only if people are motivated to demand and work for change before finally being ready to pursue social transformation. He gave careful thought as to how people might be motivated. He contrasted on the one hand what he called the 'harmony' approach which he contrasted with the 'struggle'. While the 'harmony' model of community motivation seeks to prepare people for change, helps them to cope with it, and makes available to them the benefits of change, change is always being introduced by others. The 'struggle'

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<sup>1</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*, xi.

model, on the other hand, seeks to enable people to be participators in and initiators of processes of change.<sup>1</sup>

His overarching objective was to “let the people grow”. A more consensual approach recognises the depth of cultural factors, such as relating to attitudes to male and female roles or the caste system. In Indonesia, local communities may be incorporated into nation building, and encouraged to participate in economic and social progress. Conversely, Perkins emphasises the importance of people struggling to assert their right to pursue social development. He asks:

Have I expressed the differences too far? I am not saying that only the political struggle for justice is valid. Recognised that in the wholeness of Isaiah we are called not only to break the fetters of injustice but also to bestow care on the needy. But I find it essential to ‘human development’ that the fetters of injustice are broken. I do not want to see the poor and oppressed used and manipulated as tools to serve any particular revolution or ideology of right or left. They must know that the struggle for justice is theirs, and acquire powers for their struggle.<sup>2</sup>

Just as in biblical times, Asia as a rural society was strongly rooted in local communities, and thus produced the relevance of community development and community organisation in Asia. Perkins was interested in mobilising both rural and urban industrial communities. Early influences of urban industrial missions in Singapore, Manila and Seoul, which in turn were influenced by Saul Alinsky and the Industrial Areas

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<sup>1</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*, 48.

<sup>2</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*, 57.

Foundation(IAF) program that Alinsky had originally organised in Chicago. Perkins recognises that while

... change is inevitable it is only through organisation that the issue of power can be confronted. A vital part of the struggle for power is the aspirations and response of the poor and their will to act. Although the poor need allies in their struggle with the powerful, those allies will only be able to claim the attention of the powerful when they have clear credibility with the poor.<sup>1</sup>

Perkins emphasises that in primary communities a consensus approach around shared goals may work, but in more complex communities it is important to build an alternative power base to confront established power structures. This may be focused on local concrete issues around which people may organise, although in Asia the authoritarian nature of national government may spark change movements of resistance that will take on a national character. Perkins recognised that while the focus on power is important, it is also necessary for there to be an emphasis on cultural awareness. People must feel dignity in themselves, a sense of value in their culture and tradition and a pride in what they do and how they do it. The importance of appropriate technology is relevant to this point. This is a fundamental issue for Perkins, who claims that:

... the people and their human development require a transformation of the society by whose power structures they are crushed, but the process of

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<sup>1</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*, 59.

transformation must preserve and elevate that human development as the goal of transformation.<sup>1</sup>

He comments here on the tension between empowerment and the need at the end of the day to focus on human development.

## Tools and Goals for Social Transformation

Perkins questions the view in bodies like ACC that decision-making belongs to experts, that progress is good and that what is good for elites ultimately is good for the people. As Perkins argues that his work hopes to free people from such myths so that they can struggle for the right to make choices, and to pursue them until a community of justice is realised.<sup>2</sup>

Perkins is persuasive in arguing for social transformation as the result of highly motivated people working to organise communities and working to change the political culture. However, the evidence is scarce when seeking to assess the impact of the processes put in place by the CCA. A conference at Kalyani near Calcutta (1982) does look critically at community based programs to try to assess progress. One of the conclusions of this consultation was that “humanisation is a process as well as a social goal. It is important for the humanising experience to be real among people in the process of struggling for community transformation, and when it is, it is like a foretaste or early participation in the society we seek. The consultation included many stories illustrating the transformative power of community based programs”.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*, 69.

<sup>2</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*, 93.

<sup>3</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*.

On the other hand, some projects ended up benefitting the rich because of a failure to analyse the power factors in the community. Sometimes they became dominated by the functional purpose, losing the representative transformation, sometimes they support or supplement government plans and projects, instead of organising people for power to bargain with government. Sometimes they instil competitive profit-seeking which obstructs the building of any new community society. People must be full participants, planning and implementing according to their needs, so they are always aware that the struggle is theirs.

Of course, assumptions underlying evaluation are most important:

- How does the project release people, build sharing community and enhance the solidarity of the people?
- Does the project give power to the people to share their own future as a community, and uncover potentialities and strengths with cultural realities?
- Does the project enhance their understanding of their situation and the power factors operating within it, and their will to do something to change it?

Perkins' analysis of the importance of collective power with his insight into the importance of 'capability building' indicated that Perkins was not only a profound biblical scholar, but he understood the importance of social development as a sociological concept. This meant that he could integrate his biblical wisdom with quite deep insight into working with people, often desperately poor, to achieve social transformation.

## Conclusion

The ASCM deeply influenced Perkins before the Second World War and even more in Cambridge following the war through his growing involvement with the World Student Christian Federation. His theology was always a biblical theology largely grounded in the stories of the Old Testament that illustrated themes of justice and equality, as he claims that “there cannot be the oppressed without there being an oppressor”.<sup>1</sup> Perkins was a strong leader although in no sense an authoritarian. He was deeply committed to Christian unity although not unity for its own sake. He understood that the power of the biblical witness was best illustrated by practice in continuing aid through the Vietnam War. He could weld together his religious philosophy with a positive human development philosophy and approach. He brought the prism which he and colleagues in the WCC had developed for analysing power structures and relationships in development. He developed a biblical-theological-ideological framework in which to assess and formulate policies and establish priorities—a sort of prism through which to analyse situations: What is happening to the people for whom this program is being run? Who holds the power? Who makes the decisions? Who holds the purse strings? Who decides the priorities? Perkins is very clear that for Christians transferring power to the dispossessed must always be the highest priority. It is often forgotten the enormous contribution many Australians have made to the international. Ecumenical movement and to the challenge of human development in often deeply distressed communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Perkins, *Roots for Vision*, xxiii.

There has been no more important example than that of the Rev. Harvey Perkins.



# ‘Seeing the clouds through the aperture of the helmet’: reading Ned Kelly’s life as a Christian life

Glen O’Brien

## Synopsis

This paper considers the religious aspects of the life of Ned Kelly, in dialogue with Russel Ward’s *The Australian Legend*, in order to explore the relatively unexamined religious dimensions of the Australian national myth. Religious leaders could be surprisingly sympathetic towards Kelly, with the Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne, James Moorhouse, urging congregants to pray for the outlaws as they cowered in the bush on the run from the law. Kelly was an Irish Catholic, of course, but there are also interesting Methodist connections. His widowed mother Ellen married the Californian miner George King in the home of a Primitive Methodist minister, a perhaps surprising thing for an Irish Catholic to do in a sectarian age that frowned on such ‘mixed marriages’. The Wesleyan Methodist preacher John Cowley Coles visited Kelly in the Melbourne Gaol in September and October 1880 while Kelly awaited execution. Kelly, the penitent Catholic Christian knelt beside Coles, the forthright Wesleyan preacher, together calling upon God to grant mercy to a fallen sinner. An examination of the response of religious leaders to the Kelly Outbreak as well as Kelly’s own religious sentiments can inform and enlarge our understanding of one of Australia’s most enduring cultural icons and spin the ‘Australian legend’ toward a new trajectory.

Although I have been bushranging I have always  
believed that when I die I have a God to meet.

—Ned Kelly on death row, October 1880.

Ned Kelly stood before Judge Redmond Barry in October 1880 to be sentenced to death for the murder of the “deeply religious”, Sgt Michael Kennedy,<sup>1</sup> and two other police officers at Stringybark Creek two years earlier. Kelly declared that “before God” his mind was as easy and clear as it possibly could be, a statement Barry considered blasphemous. He was ready, in his own words, “to go to a bigger court than this” a court to which all, including Barry, must eventually go. The judge gave the sentence of death concluding with the declaration, more a formality than a prayer, “May the Lord have mercy on your soul”. No doubt to His Honour’s consternation, Kelly simply replied, “Yes I will meet you there”.<sup>2</sup>

This incident could of course be taken as evidence of Kelly’s well-known spite for the British legal system, his youthful arrogance, and his sense of his own importance. I would like to explore here, however, the possibility that it reflects genuine religious sentiment on Kelly’s part. In the final phase of his life, the rudimentary religious instincts that had been formed in him since his birth in the shadow of Mount Fraser’s extinct volcanic core near Beveridge, Victoria in 1854, might have been given a sharper and more definitive shape. In part this may have been due to the circumstance of life’s extremity where he now found himself. But is also significant (and little known) that Kelly was visited on death row by the Wesleyan Methodist preacher John

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<sup>1</sup> Photo caption, Ian Jones, *Ned Kelly: A Short Life* (Sydney: Hachette, 2003), between 118–119.

<sup>2</sup> John Hirst, *The Australians: Insiders and Outsiders on the National Character since 1770* (Melbourne: Back Inc., 2010), 31–33.

Cowley Coles in September and October 1880 and that in these visits (at least in Coles' account), Australia's favourite wayward child showed a quite remarkable response to the preacher's message of repentance and faith.

Russel Ward's classic 1958 work, *The Australian Legend*, considered the archetypical images, overwhelmingly masculine and often violent, that shaped the national myth. Ned Kelly is included in this "white man's dreaming", of course, and Ward echoes the *Bulletin's* call for the "annihilation of the Kellys" and the denial that the spirit they represented "possessed any redeeming qualities whatever" as "a wholly proper attitude".<sup>1</sup> In Ward, bushrangers were initially the product of a brutalising convict system, which gave rise to an opposition to "tyranny" given support by a "bush proletariat". The adoption of a Robin Hood persona enabled "gentlemanly ruffians" to legitimise their exploits in opposition to a rising post-gold rush middle class. Older rural bush settlers resented the appearance of this new bourgeoisie and the bushrangers were cheered on for their capacity to disrupt the privileged position of the wealthy.<sup>2</sup> Of course Ward's "radical collectivist" argument has been resisted by some, including John Hirst, who felt that Ward had overstated his case and failed to see the positive manner in which bush poets, like Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson, viewed police and other figures of authority. Hirst, while not denying the existence of a "pioneer legend", saw it as a "national rural myth, democratic in its social bearing, conservative in its political implications".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1966, first published 1958), 153.

<sup>2</sup> Ward, *Australian Legend*, 145–56.

<sup>3</sup> John Hirst, 'The Pioneer Legend,' in *Sense and Nonsense in Australian History* (Melbourne: Black Inc, 2006), 195–96.

What is missing from Ward is any sense of the significance of religion in the shaping of the Australian national consciousness. (There is a debate to be had, of course, about whether such a thing as a ‘national consciousness’ can even exist but I will not explore that here.) Americans have their Puritan founding fathers and frontier circuit rider myths and British history would be inexplicable without a treatment of the millennia of ructions over religion, but it is a commonplace that in Australian history, religion has been a neglected theme. This calendar year has seen the publication of several important works that contribute to our understanding of the way religion has shaped Australia. These include Meredith Lake’s cultural history of *The Bible in Australia*, Daniel Reynaud’s book on Anzac spirituality and Stuart Piggin and Bob Linder’s treatment of colonial Evangelicalism as the *Fountain of Public Prosperity*.<sup>1</sup>

What contribution to Australian self-understanding might be made by considering Ned Kelly one of the nation’s most enduring and iconic personalities and the religious dimensions of his life experience? Ecclesiastical leaders and the religious press could show a surprisingly sympathetic attitude toward the Kellys, calling for prayer and compassion toward these benighted sinners alone and huddled in the bush. Certainly they should be brought to justice but they were, after all, lost souls for whom Christ had a special care. Such sympathy was not confined to the Catholic Church where one might expect to find empathy toward an Irishman at the receiving end of British

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<sup>1</sup> Meredith Lake, *The Bible in Australia — a cultural history* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2018); Daniel Reynaud, *Anzac Spirituality: The First AIF Soldiers Speak* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2018); Stuart Piggin and Robert D. Linder, *The Fountain of Public Prosperity: Evangelical Christians in Australian History 1740–1914* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2018).

justice. Both Kelly and his brother Dan were baptised by Father Charles O’Hea, “possibly riding circuit from the village of Pentridge”<sup>1</sup> who would also accompany him to the gallows, a vivid example of the way the Catholic Church had a cradle-to-the-grave role in Ned’s life. Kelly’s biographer Ian Jones describes O’Hea as “the greatest single influence on Kelly in his convict years”.<sup>2</sup>

But Protestant leaders such as the Archbishop of Melbourne James Moorhouse and the aforementioned Wesleyan preacher John Cowley Coles were also enmeshed in the Kelly story to varying degrees. Certainly Kelly’s is a Catholic life and should be considered as such but the colony of Victoria was not as monolithically Catholic as Ireland. The origins of Kelly’s religious world begin of course in Ireland where sectarian conflict was often a ‘pull factor’ in migration to Australia or indeed gave rise to a criminal sentence of transportation. Both causes figure in the Kelly family history as ‘Red’ Kelly was transported for theft and James Quinn migrated looking for better opportunities for his family. Kelly’s mother Ellen’s family (the Quinns) were from Country Antrim in Northern Ireland where Scots Presbyterians had come to dominance. It is possible that they may have migrated to avoid sectarian strife but James Quinn said it was only to “improve their position”. Indeed many of the Irish settlers in north-east Victoria were glad to be rid of the sectarian violence of their homeland and forge a new identity.

When Ellen Kelly married George King after the death of her first husband ‘Red’ Kelly, it was in the home of the Primitive Methodist minister, the Rev. William Gould Jones, Ned serving

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, *Ned Kelly*, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Jones, *Ned Kelly*, 91–92

as the formal witness to the union. When Father Scanlan rode by night from Benalla to Mansfield, armed with a revolver, to conduct Sergeant Michael Kennedy's funeral service at St Francis Xavier's Catholic Church, it was quite an ecumenical occasion with Anglican Bishop James Moorhouse walking at the head of the procession alongside, and at the invitation of, Scanlan.<sup>1</sup> Samuel Sandiford, the Anglican rector of Mansfield, and the local Presbyterian minister, the Rev. Reid also joined the procession. For an age marked by fierce sectarianism this degree of cooperation is quite notable. Kelly's parents, Ellen Quinn, and 'Red' Kelly were married in St Francis Catholic Church, Melbourne, by Father Gerald Ward, and Ned was born in Beveridge, Victoria, in December 1854, though the official record of O'Hea's baptism of Ned has been lost. A Catholic church and school were built in Beveridge in 1858 and Ned began school there in 1863 at 8 years of age. In 1864 the family moved north to Avenel. Phillip Morgan, who lived across the creek from the Kellys in Avenel, is described by Jones as among the "rigid Bible-black Chapel Methodists".<sup>2</sup> It was at Avenel that Ned saved Dick Shelton from drowning and was rewarded with the famous green sash proudly displayed to this day in Benalla. Aaron Sherritt was part of what Jones refers to as Kelly's "Protestant circle" of friends.<sup>3</sup> Imprisoned at Pentridge in 1873, Kelly read the Douay Bible in the context of his close relationship with Charles O'Hea. Though the reading material was limited at Pentridge, Scots-Baptist James Ingram's

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from James Moorhouse to Canon Harvey, cited in Edith C. Rickards, *Bishop Moorhouse of Melbourne and Manchester* (London: John Murray, 1920), 129.

<sup>2</sup> Jones, *Ned Kelly*, 21.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, *Ned Kelly*, 106.

bookstore would later become was one of Ned's favourite haunts in Beechworth.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the obvious criminality, violence and brutality that Ned Kelly exhibited in his short life, at the popular level I think it would be fair to say that Kelly has always been viewed more sympathetically than not. This is not something read back anachronistically into a distorted past but began during his lifetime. Many alienated small farmers and farm labourers became Kelly 'sympathisers' during the "Kelly Outbreak". John McQuilton's *The Kelly Outbreak* (1979) describes widespread agricultural ignorance, poverty, and disillusionment in north-east Victoria at this time.<sup>2</sup> Colin Holden's history of the Anglican Diocese of Wangaratta, *Church in a Landscape*, states that the Kelly Gang enjoyed support in the local community because struggling farm workers saw Kelly's plight as an exaggerated form of their own situation. Rural newspapers of the day noted that the Kellys also enjoyed support among "the respectable and well-to-do" people, including Anglicans, "who might in other circumstances appear as supporters of law and order".<sup>3</sup> The *Church of England Messenger* said that bushrangers could always count on finding "punctual provisions and trusty spies among the settlers in the remote districts".<sup>4</sup>

Congregationalist missionary, the Rev. John Brown Gribble (formerly a minister of the United Methodist Free Church) was

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, *Ned Kelly*, 102.

<sup>2</sup> John McQuilton, *The Kelly Outbreak 1887–1880: The Geographical Dimensions of Social Banditry* (Melbourne: University of Melbourne Press, 1979), 27.

<sup>3</sup> Colin Holden, *Church in a Landscape: A History of the Diocese of Wangaratta* (Melbourne: Melbourne Publishing Group, 2002), 34.

<sup>4</sup> *Church of England Messenger*, 18 November 1878, cited in Murna Sturrock, *Bishop of Magnetic Power: James Moorhouse in Melbourne 1876–1886* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2005), 141–42.

present in the Jerilderie pub after Kelly had composed his famous letter and recalled how he threatened that the town would swim in its own blood.<sup>1</sup> McDermott refers to the Jerilderie Letter as “the Apocalyptic Chant of Edward Kelly” and in his penetrating essay he describes it as providing “the emotional blueprint that was to guide the trajectory of Kelly’s outlawry”.<sup>2</sup> The Jerilderie Letter is a swelling, fulminating rant, dictated by a man unhinged by a sense of the injustice he and others have been dealt, that careers toward a final apocalyptic denunciation in the style of an Old Testament prophet.

I give fair warning to all those who has reason to fear me to sell out and give £10 out of every hundred towards the widow and orphan fund and do not attempt to reside in Victoria, but as short a time as possible after reading this notice, neglect this and abide by the consequences, which shall be worse than the rust in the wheat in Victoria or the druth [durth?] of a dry season to the grasshoppers in New South Wales I do not wish to give the order full force without giving timely warning, but I am a widow’s son outlawed and my orders must be obeyed.<sup>3</sup>

Anyone familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures will hear the echoes of its themes—the tithe for the poor, concern for widows and orphans, ecological devastation and plagues of locusts as instrument of God’s vengeance. Only here it is Kelly himself who takes the Avenger’s stance, appropriating to himself the privileges of the deity.

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<sup>1</sup> Alex McDermott, “The Apocalyptic Chant of Edward Kelly”, in *The Jerilderie Letter* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2001), xxv.

<sup>2</sup> McDermott, “Apocalyptic Chant”, xxxiii.

<sup>3</sup> Ned Kelly, *Jerilderie Letter*, 83.



In September 1877 Kelly had been arrested for riotous behaviour in Beechworth. Constable Thomas Lonigan (who would be the first to die at Stringybark Creek two years later) “caught me by the privates and would have sent me to Kingdom come only I was not ready...”<sup>1</sup> Kelly saw a providential hand determining the boundaries of his existence. He was immortal until God decided otherwise. Kelly considered any Irishman who joined the Victorian police not only to be “a disgrace” to “the mother that suckled him” but “a traitor to his country ancestors and religion as they were catholics [sic] before the Saxons and Cranmore [sic] yoke held sway since then they were persecuted and massacred thrown into martyrdom and tortured beyond the ideas of the present generation”.<sup>2</sup> In this he sets the experience of the Irish in colonial Victoria into the longer narrative of sectarian conflict in Ireland and invokes St Patrick as his progenitor.

It will pay Government to give those people who are suffering innocence, justice and liberty. [I]f not I will be compelled to show some colonial stratagem which will open the eyes of not only the Victorian Police and inhabitants but also the whole British army ... and that Fitzpatrick will be the cause of greater slaughter to the Union Jack than Saint Patrick was to the snakes and toads in Ireland.<sup>3</sup>

James Moorhouse, the second Anglican Bishop of Melbourne, while standing in solidarity with the victims of the crime and insisting that the perpetrators should be tracked down and arrested, at the same time, showed a remarkable degree of

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<sup>1</sup> Ned Kelly, *Jerilderie Letter*, 48–49.

<sup>2</sup> Ned Kelly, *Jerilderie Letter*, 64–65.

<sup>3</sup> Ned Kelly, *Jerilderie Letter*, 27–28.

sympathy for the Kelly Gang.<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Canon Harvey, he wrote, “Poor wretches! One cannot help pitying them, crouching among the trees like wild beasts—afraid to sleep, afraid to speak, and only awaiting their execution. But bush-ranging is so horrible, so ruthless, so utterly abominable a thing, that it must be stamped out at any cost”.<sup>2</sup> Two days after the funeral while preaching in the church at Mansfield he repeated these remarks, prayed for the murderers and told the people they should “pity the poor wretches who caused us to mourn over these disasters”.<sup>3</sup>

Dean Matthew Gibney, *en route* to Albury, upon hearing that Kelly was lying wounded in the stationmaster’s office after the Glenrowan siege, alighted from the train and rushed to his side. Kelly asked him to “do anything he could toward preparing him for death”.<sup>4</sup> After an hour long conversation, which included the hearing of confession, Gibney was satisfied that Kelly was sufficiently penitent to receive absolution. He remembered that “although he was evidently suffering the most intense agony and pain from the wounds on his hands and feet, he never uttered a strong or impatient word”.<sup>5</sup> The Christological references in this account are hard to miss as parallels with Christ’s passion are constructed in Gibney’s memory of the event. When Gibney urged the need to recite the penitential words of the sacrament, “Oh, Jesus have mercy on me, and pray for forgiveness”, Kelly

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<sup>1</sup> Sturrock, *Bishop of Magnetic Power*, 139–42.

<sup>2</sup> Moorhouse to Canon Harvey, cited in Rickards, *Bishop Moorhouse*, 129.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Clune, *The Kelly Hunters: The Authentic, Impartial History of the Life and Times of Edward Kelly, the Ironclad Outlaw* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1955), p. 174, cited in Sturrock, *Bishop of Magnetic Power*, 141.

<sup>4</sup> Ian Jones, *Ned Kelly*, 327.

<sup>5</sup> Ian Jones, *Ned Kelly*, 327.

replied, "It's not now I'm beginning to say that: I've done it long before today".<sup>1</sup>

Dan Kelly and Steve Hart were still besieged and under fire in the Glenrowan Inn and when Gibney suggested to Ned that they might surrender to a priest, he showed concern for his confessor urging him not to attempt it. "Your cloth won't save you... They may take you for a policeman in disguise".<sup>2</sup> Instead, Gibney asked Kate Kelly to urge the boys to surrender but the police deterred her. All she could do was stand by helpless while her brother was burned to death in an inferno deliberately lit by the police. At this point Gibney removed his hat, made the sign of the cross on his own face and strode toward the entry of the burning inn, prompting the crowd to burst out in applause. Once inside he called out, "For God's sake men, allow me to speak to you: I am a Roman Catholic priest!" but it was too late.<sup>3</sup> They were all dead, Dave Mortimer's greyhound also lying dead beside them. Only Martin Cherry survived but only for the few minutes it took him to receive last rites from Gibney. As the Kelly sisters Maggie and Kate howled banshee-like over the sizzling, melting flesh of their brother and his mates, the tragic event drew to its inevitable end. They kissed the burnt bones of their beloved brother Dan as devotees might venerate a martyr's relics and called upon God to visit vengeance on their brother's murderers. Superintendent John Sadlier handed the charred bodies of Dan Kelly and Steve Hart to Dick Hart, Wild Wright and the Kelly sisters, for which they showed a touching gratitude. Reverently they covered the bodies with blankets and wheeled them away on a cart. The wounded Ned and the corpse

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Jones, *Ned Kelly*, 327.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Jones, *Ned Kelly*, 327.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Jones, *Ned Kelly*, 331.

of Joe Byrne were loaded on a train and taken to Benalla. The Kelly Outbreak had blazed ferociously over north-east Victoria; now, finally, it had burnt out.

The death row visits of the Wesleyan Methodist preacher John Cowley Coles in September and October 1880, demonstrate that Kelly received last rites from both Catholic and Protestant clergy.<sup>1</sup> Coles was able to admire a certain nobility in Kelly's character while at the same time holding him to account for the criminality and violence of his actions. He applied to the governor of the gaol "as representing a Christian Church", but the governor said, "No, Kelly is a Catholic and has his own minister". Not to be put off so easily Coles and his Methodist friends prayed that "the Lord would open the cell door" in order that he might "enter and see Kelly, in order to talk with him about his soul". Soon after, at the conclusion of one of the prison services, a warder approached Coles and asked if he would like to see Kelly, who said that he had heard every word of the service from his prison cell. Coles gives a fascinating description of Kelly. "This man by no means looked a ruffian. He had rather a pleasant expression of countenance. He was one of the most powerfully built and finest men that I ever saw. He treated me with great respect, listened to all I had to say, and knelt down by my side when I prayed".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Cowley Coles, *The Life and Christian Experience of John Cowley Coles Giving the History of Twenty-seven Years of Evangelistic Work in the Colony of Victoria, Australia, and elsewhere, principally in connection with the Wesleyan Methodist Church; also Chapters on the Doctrine of Entire Sanctification by Faith, and the Enduement of Power; and an Account of the Social Condition and Mode of Life of the Diggers, in the early days of Gold Digging, in the same Colony; written (at the request of many friends) by Himself* (London: Marshall Brothers and Melbourne: M. L. Hutchinson, 1893), pp. 136–38.

<sup>2</sup> Coles, *Life and Christian Experience*, entry for 22 September, 1880, 136.

As for Coles' ministerial approach to Kelly here is how he describes his advice to the captive bushranger.

I refused to hear anything from him about his bushranging exploits, but I kept him to this—that we might die any moment. I might not live another half-hour; but if he did not die before he was sure to be executed on a certain day, and that he was a sinner standing in need of a Saviour... He evidently wanted me to think that he did not care for his position, and that he would see it out like a man.<sup>1</sup>

This was some time after 22 September 1880. Coles spoke with Kelly again, heavily ironed *en route* to the exercise yard, this time for only a minute or two, on 7 October, and on 20 October, after preaching at Kelly's request, Coles accompanied Kelly to his cell. Coles had preached from Amos 4:12, "Prepare to meet thy God". Immediately he set the prisoner straight on his purpose in such visits.

Do not think, Kelly, for one moment that it is out of any foolish curiosity to see you that I have sought these interviews with you; nothing of the sort. Indeed, I wish I could be spared the pain of seeing an intelligent young man like you in such an awful position. My sole object in speaking to you this morning is to impress on you the fact that you have a soul to be saved, or for ever lost; that Christ died for the chief of sinners, and if you will but be sorry for your sin and confess it to God and ask for mercy for Christ's sake, He will have mercy on you.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Coles, *Life and Christian Experience*, entry for 22 September, 1880, 136.

<sup>2</sup> Coles, *Life and Christian Experience*, entry for 20 October, 1880, 137.

Kelly's response shows a remarkable openness and an exercised conscience as he reflected on his bushranging exploits.

I have heard all that you said this morning... I believe it all. Although I have been bushranging I have always believed that when I die I have a God to meet... When I was in the bank at Jerilderie, taking the money, the thought came into my mind, if I am shot down this moment how can I meet God?<sup>1</sup>

Coles and Kelly then knelt side by side and prayed together. Upon standing Kelly crossed himself before thanking the preacher for his ministry. This was the last time the two men spoke together and Kelly went to the gallows on 11 November. Coles had no desire to attend the execution. "I could have done the man no good by doing so," he reflected, "and was saved the pain of seeing a fellow creature ushered into the presence of God".<sup>2</sup> Here is a touching portrait of a little known instance of pastoral care in a moment of personal crisis. Kelly the penitent Catholic Christian kneels beside Coles the forthright Wesleyan preacher, the two men together calling upon God to grant mercy to a fallen sinner.

It is unsurprising that Kelly's life ended the way it did—at the end of a rope held in the hands of the criminal justice system. But it also ended, as it had begun, as a Christian life. Not that Kelly was particularly devout, by any means. I have no interest in drawing Kelly's life as a hagiography or beginning any kind of canonisation process. But tracing the religious dimensions of his life show that the Christian faith, in both its Catholic and Protestant dimensions, was part of the social imagination of the

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<sup>1</sup> Coles, *Life and Christian Experience*, entry for 20 October, 1880, 137.

<sup>2</sup> Coles, *Life and Christian Experience*, entry for 20 October, 1880, 137–138.

world he inhabited. The language of the Bible and of the church informed his conscience and his actions. What little education he had was given by the church and its book, and at key turning points in his life (Beveridge, Pentridge, Jerilderie, Glenrowan, Melbourne Gaol), Kelly gave serious consideration to the presence of God in his life and to religious instincts which impinged upon his conduct and his conscience in what could be seen as determinative ways. Where the idea of Kelly as a revolutionary republican has gained considerable traction in spite of the complete absence of historical evidence, the examination of Kelly as a religious figure remains uncharted territory. And this in spite of the fact that his religious instincts are clearly available in the sources ready to be drawn out and investigated.

Russel Ward claimed that “the dreams of nations, as of individuals, are important, because they not only reflect, as in a distorting mirror, the real world, but may sometimes react upon and influence it”.<sup>1</sup> Would Australia’s ‘pioneer legend’ have sounded any different notes, if the religious dimensions of Ned Kelly’s life had been better known? Deborah Bird Rose argued in a 1994 article, “Ned Kelly Died for Our Sins”, that Indigenous stories of Ned Kelly and of James Cook, formed part of Aboriginal peoples’ “search for a moral European” and suggests the possibility that through an awareness of these stories “coloniser and colonised [might] share a moral history and thus fashion a just society”.<sup>2</sup> It would be hard to trace in Ned Kelly the picture of ‘the moral European,’ but it is possible to trace the picture of the fallen and redeemed sinner, a figure of far greater

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<sup>1</sup> Ward, cited in Hirst, *The Australians*.

<sup>2</sup> Deborah Bird Rose, “Ned Kelly Died for Our Sins”, *Oceania* 65:2 (Dec., 1994), 175–186.

spiritual depth and meaning that one known only for ‘morality’. Australian artist Sidney Nolan was interested in painting Kelly in such a way that “the clouds could be seen through the aperture of the helmet”. What did Kelly see of the spiritual life through that aperture? The ‘Australian legend’ may be reconfigured as a myth of ‘creation and fall’ in which the Dreaming was disrupted by colonisation. When “the Lamb entered the dreaming” (to borrow from Robert Kenny) Nathaniel Pepper’s world was indeed ruptured.<sup>1</sup> But in the theological curriculum, creation and fall are followed by redemption and new creation. The reconsideration of Ned Kelly, one of Australia’s favourite wayward children, as a Christian figure may spin the Australian legend toward a new trajectory.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Kenny, *The Lamb Enters the Dreaming: Nathaniel Pepper and the Ruptured World* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2010).



# After the bombing of Darwin... what? Peace and reconciliation find a home in Darwin Uniting Church

Steve and Judy Orme

## Synopsis

The Darwin Uniting Memorial Church was built in memory of those who gave their lives and those who served in this area during the war. The foundation stone was laid in 1958 and the church officially opened in July 1960.

This period from 1958 to 1960 was significant in Darwin's history. The Japanese returned to Darwin Harbour, not to wreak destruction as happened with the bombing of Darwin in February 1942, but to clear the wrecks of merchant and military ships still lying in harbour. This time the Japanese came with the blessing of the Commonwealth government which had let the tender for the salvage to the Fujita Salvage Company.

The relationship between key players contributed to the significant gift made to the Memorial Church by the Japanese Government and the Fujita Salvage Company. In an act of reconciliation, the salvage company used metal salvaged from the SS Zealandia to fashion the 77 bronze crosses that feature on the church furniture and fittings. More significant at the time was that the Japanese Ambassador Mr Narita together with Mr Fujita Snr shared in the opening ceremony of the church alongside Commonwealth, civic and church dignitaries, including representatives of the Returned Services League (RSL). The congregation of the now Darwin Memorial Uniting Church continues to offer this gift of peace and reconciliation

through development of the Fujita Exhibition which now incorporates a peace garden, commemorative windows and historical displays<sup>1</sup>.

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It is all too easy to talk about ‘**the** history of ... whatever. We do it all the time and persuade ourselves that there is ‘**a** history’ of whatever or whoever we might be talking about. And yet, on the other hand, we know that when we witness or participate in any event there are as many eye-witness accounts as there were people present, almost all with subtle or not so subtle differences. So, I always assume that history is multiple rather than singular.

The other thing about these multiple histories is that they can get pretty messy. While the historian might have a sense of clarity about cause and effect and sequence, not everybody shares that same understanding.

So, this then is one strand of Darwin’s multiple history of the post-war journey. This strand centres on the Darwin Memorial Uniting Church in the CBD. The story includes the Fujita family, whose company salvaged six of the bombed ships wrecked in the harbour in 1959.

## The Place

I’d like to say that ‘the place’ is the one constant in this narrative. In one sense that piece of land is always that same

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<sup>1</sup> The story was originally told by Dr Wendy Beresford-Maning in a paper delivered at an event for the NT Branch of the National Trust in Darwin in 2018 and then adapted with permission by Judy and Steve Orme for presentation at the Uniting Church National History Society Conference in Melbourne in June 2019. The presentation at the conference incorporated images and some printed material.

piece of land, but we all know how streetscapes can alter over time—so can land ownership.

Prior to World War II, the site of the present church building was occupied by the McClure's flats. At the beginning of the war, these became the US Services Headquarters and the focus of the US military organisation in this theatre of the war. The US Headquarters were destroyed during the 1942 bombing raids whereas the church's Inter-Services Club built on the block directly across Peel Street was completely unscathed.

In the years before the war, the Methodist Overseas Mission was responsible for both the Arnhem Land Missions and the Darwin congregation and operated out of their Knuckey Street property. After the evacuation of the civilian population in 1941, the Darwin Methodist church building in Knuckey Street was in use as the Australian Navy's HMAS Melville Chapel.

Following the war and the gradual return to a semblance of normality, the now United Church congregation, at some point in the 1950s<sup>1</sup> moved their worship space from the Knuckey Street building to the undercroft of the Inter-Services Club building in Smith Street. Plans were developed for a new Memorial United Church building on the land where the American Headquarters had stood. A grant of the land was made to the newly formed United Church of North Australia in 1954. It incorporated that part of Peel Street that had disappeared in

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<sup>1</sup> Possibly around 1955. Ian Mitchell was baptised in the Methodist Church when it was gathering in the Services Club undercroft in 1955. His is thought to have been the first baptism there. (Ref: Sue Champion, sister of Ian Mitchell, April 2018). Minutes of Combined Meeting of the United Church Club on 5 June 1956 record that the last service at Melville Chapel was to be held on 15 July 1956 and services to commence at the United Church Club on 22 July 1956.

the post-war Darwin Town Plan giving the church two adjacent blocks facing Smith Street.<sup>1</sup>

The Methodist Church of Australasia responded to an appeal to build the new Darwin church as a national memorial to those Australian servicemen and women who had lost their lives, especially in the North Australian theatre of war. This national involvement is significant because the contribution can be seen still today in the furnishings of the Memorial Church building.

The stone in the front and rear walls of the building, the narthex and bridge was sourced from Rum Jungle uranium mine, about 100 kilometres south of Darwin. The men of the congregation at the time went down “The Track” (as the Stuart Highway is called locally) and collected the rocks and brought them to the site. Any that were too big to be useful were blown up on the Smith St site to reduce them to an appropriate size!

The steel girders from which the building effectively hangs, came from Western Australia. The roof decking and the glass came from South Australia and the ‘Stramit’ ceiling from Victoria. The silky oak of the pews, communion rails and table came from Queensland. The pews were actually made in New South Wales. All the other timber was formed by a local Darwin firm, as was the steelwork in the furnishings.

Other memorial symbols in the building are the flags of the Australian Forces and the American flag<sup>2</sup> presented by the US Embassy. There are also symbols of the Royal Australian Navy

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<sup>1</sup> In *60 Years After: From Interchurch Club To Uniting Church Complex*, a leaflet written by Ted Milliken for the opening of the new Darwin Community Services Centre and Administrative Offices and the refreshing of the 1960-built church, Sunday 1 October 2000.

<sup>2</sup> The flag presented by the US Embassy was one of the first to include the new fiftieth star for Hawaii, added to the flag by Executive Order in August 1959. It became official on 4 July 1960 only weeks before the church opening.

(from HMAS Melville) and a display cabinet in memory of the Rev. Len Kentish, taken captive off the Arnhem Land coast and killed by the Japanese as a prisoner of war<sup>1</sup>. These elements were brought together, and the building constructed by local firm Darwin Progressive Builders.

The foundation stone was laid by the Governor General, Sir William Slim on 25 June 1958. The new building was opened and dedicated over the weekend of 23–24 July 1960 by Dame Pattie Menzies GBE<sup>2</sup>, wife of the then Prime Minister.

## The People

Since we have already begun to mention people, it is probably time to look at some more of the people involved in this whole enterprise.

The present congregation, with its Minister and Community Engagement Pastor might seem to be the key people, but it should be recognised that the life of this congregation began in 1873—so generations of people have had some input into who the congregation is today and how they see their place in the city community.

That said, the Congregational Church—that rarely rates a mention in our story—should be recognised as the initiators of this saga. And it should be noted that, up until 1911, we were the Northern Territory of South Australia.

The Finance Secretary of the Congregational Union of South Australia, Alexander Gore, “felt an urge to do evangelistic work

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<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Kentish was on board the HMAS *Patricia Cam* when she was bombed off the Arnhem Land coast.

<sup>2</sup> Dame Pattie Menzies was appointed Dame Grand Cross of the British Empire (GBE) in the New Year’s Honours List, 1954. Her husband was knighted in 1963, but she retained her prior title.

in Northern Territory”<sup>1</sup> and in 1872 set sail for Palmerston as Darwin was then called. He planned to build a church in Palmerston and had a prefabricated church building shipped from Adelaide. Unfortunately, he contracted malaria and had to return to Adelaide. A gathering of leaders of the Methodist and Congregational Churches in Adelaide later in 1872 agreed that the Methodists should inherit the task and the building materials, so in 1873 the Rev. Archibald Bogle and his wife arrived in Palmerston to begin their ministry on the land donated for the purpose at the corner of Knuckey and Mitchell Streets after the earliest gatherings at the Administrator’s Residence.

Forty years later, in 1912, an early investigative trip by the young Presbyterian minister, the Rev. John Flynn, (in response to urging by local identity, Jessie Litchfield) recommended that the Presbyterians should not set up a congregation in competition with the Methodists but rather work with the latter to provide pastoral care for any of their number in what was by now called Darwin.

From the 1920s to the 1940s the Methodist Overseas Mission administered the Darwin church. All significant decisions were made by the MOM Board and the Methodist administration in Sydney.

The inter-church co-operation led ultimately to the formation of the United Church in North Australia. This was first evident in the building and operation of the Inter-Services Club which was officially opened in June 1940. The Presbyterian Church through the Australian Inland Mission had purchased the land and provided the funding.

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<sup>1</sup> Arch Grant, *Palmerston to Darwin* (Frontier Publishing, 1990), 16

Maisie McKenzie suggests that the work of the United Church became effective in 1955–6 when an independent board was established in Sydney with the Rev. Fred McKay as Secretary.<sup>1</sup> However, Arch Grant maintains that “the inaugural meeting of the Darwin United Church Committee was held on May 15 1946 and it was from that date that the United Church in North Australia became official.”<sup>2</sup>

There is, as yet, little information as to the processes of the board proposing and overseeing the building of the Memorial Church. As was usual at the time, all major and final decisions were taken in Sydney.

The ministers in Darwin at the time of the building and opening of the new church were Norman Pearce, Lloyd Shirley and Stewart Lang. The latter was a Presbyterian minister working across North Australia with the Australian Inland Mission.

The architect for the project was Gordon Brown of Brown & Davies, Adelaide. Brown was also at the time the President of the National Australian Asian Association and a personal friend of the Japanese Ambassador.

### The Fujita Story

Meanwhile, the post-war Australian government had launched an international bid to find a tenderer for the task of salvaging the bombed shipwrecks in Darwin Harbour which were seriously impeding the work of the port and in most cases endangering shipping. The tender was published internationally,

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<sup>1</sup> Maisie McKenzie, *An abbreviated history of the life of Darwin Uniting Church Congregation 1873–1998* (Darwin: DMUC, 1998), 7

<sup>2</sup> McKenzie, 124

three times in all, before the (Japanese) Fujita Company made the only bid for the work.

Both the Australian government and the Fujitas were well aware of the sensitivity that would most likely accompany their presence in Darwin for this purpose. Police Sergeant Barry Tiernan, coincidentally a member of the Darwin United Church congregation, was given responsibility for maintaining security, order and safety, both for the local population and the Fujita workforce and family. In addition to the ships to be salvaged according to the tender documents, Fujita salvaged other wrecks including the USS Peary (a declared war grave) which was drifting into the shipping channel. The salvage company also cleared inland wreckage including bridges and railway debris. This extra work was done at no charge to the Australian government and people.

When Gordon Brown heard of the involvement of the Fujita company in the 1959 salvage operation in Darwin Harbour, he suggested to the Ambassador that Mr Ryugo Fujita be asked to make crosses for the new Memorial Church from the metalwork salvaged (mostly from the SS Zealandia). These were to be presented on behalf of the Japanese government as well as the Fujita Salvage Company and family.





Mr Senichiro Fujita and family members, Darwin, April 2017.  
Image courtesy Darwin Memorial Uniting Church

The Fujitas were a Christian and pacifist family. Mr Fujita made the 77 crosses which the architect, who also designed the furniture and fittings of the church, integrated into the pew ends, the communion rail and table, lectern and pulpit.

A pulpit fall, fashioned from the golden silk of an *obi*, was a gift from the Kyoto congregation of the United Church of Christ in Japan. Mr Fujita saw all this as part of his personal reparation for the harm caused by his country. He and his family were present at the opening of the church in July 1960, as was the Japanese Ambassador.

During a visit in 2010 by Ryugo Fujita's son, Senichiro and Senichiro's daughter, Yoshiko, to hand over to the Northern Territory government the papers related to the salvage operation,

they visited the congregation and gave it one million yen. Since then, Darwin Memorial has been steadily moving forward with its peace and reconciliation initiative designed to integrate the Memorial Church intentionally into its city context in a way that had not previously been envisaged.

At the initiative of the youth of the congregation, a Peace Garden was established beside the church and reminders of the Fujita story installed around the church. As part of the peace garden, there is a reflection pool recognising the ships salvaged and those whose lives were lost at the time of the bombing.

Senichiro and Yoshiko Fujita have made a number of visits to Darwin and to the church. They have been part of the developing reconciliation and peace initiative at Darwin Memorial. When their father died, a propeller blade salvaged from USAT Meigs had been installed on his grave in Kyoto with an inscribed tombstone.

The Fujita committee at the church had asked for accurate details of the propeller blade in order to recreate a scale model for the Peace Garden. After a fairly long silence, the word came that Senichiro and his siblings wanted to return the blade because his father had always said it belonged in Darwin. The family then organised its removal with the inscribed tombstone from the father's grave, and their transport to Darwin.

Sitzler P.L.<sup>1</sup> (a local Darwin construction company) took delivery of the cargo of propeller and gravestone on its arrival in Darwin and stored it until the site was ready. They then installed it on the corner of the church drive and Smith Street to

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<sup>1</sup> For further information about the Sitzler Company see <http://www.sitzler.com.au>

make the point that this was a gift for the city and not simply for the church. In 2017, the Fujita family visited Darwin to see the relocated propeller blade and the inscribed tombstone. This was the first time that Senichiro's sister had returned to Darwin since 1960. To our mind this completed that phase of Darwin Memorial Church's peace and reconciliation journey. But it is not the end.

## The Idea

In 1873 the idea of establishing the church in Darwin was doubtless to provide pastoral care and support for the Protestant members of the growing community. In the 1920s, that idea broadened to include support for the work of the missions, missionary personnel and the Indigenous people of Arnhem Land. Not much changed then until the post-war period. Even as the new building was under construction, the focus was still largely internal, focused on the community of faith as it were.

The purpose of the new building, as outlined at the time of the official opening and dedication in 1960, was

to provide adequate and suitable accommodation for the worshippers in a rapidly expanding city; to perpetuate the memory of those who, in the grim years of war, defended our Commonwealth in this battle area; and to provide, at the very Northern Gateway to Australia, a church worthy of the great forward movement it represents.<sup>1</sup>

While much of the fabric of the church building serves a memorial purpose, some items were, at the time of their

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<sup>1</sup> Darwin Memorial Uniting Church, *A space for God in the city's heart* (Darwin: DMUC, 2010)

installation, already looking forward to delivering a symbolic message of reconciliation and peace. The foremost of the symbols is, of course, the crosses fashioned by the Fujita company, together with the gold silk pulpit and lectern frontals which included their own reconciliation and peace symbols—ocean waves and tiny birds.

More recently in the Darwin congregation's 146 year history, the focus of the building and grounds, and the mindset of the congregation has begun to change. In 2000, a refurbishment of the building as part of a development of the entire site<sup>1</sup> saw the mindset begin to focus outwards and become more deliberately aware of the surrounding community.



United Church interior, 1960, Fay Cheater Collection,  
Northern Territory Library  
From about this time the congregation adopted as its vision

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<sup>1</sup> CBD Plaza Development

the idea that the Memorial Church should provide “A Space for God in the City’s heart”. Its mission now is “To walk with Jesus in the city—honouring the past, transforming the present, creating the future”.

The welcoming back of the USAT Meigs’ propeller blade and its installation where it is fully visible to the people of the city is the culmination of the peace garden development. Now the congregation wants to share the story and the garden with the city.

The church is also delighted to be able to give a permanent home to the “Salvage and Salvation” display that was part of the Northern Territory Government’s travelling exhibition “The Territory Remembers”. This was an initiative for the seventy-fifth’s anniversary of the bombing of Darwin in 2017.<sup>1</sup>

This is not the end of the story. As the mission statement suggests, we are still in the process of transforming the present and creating the future as we engage with the people of the city of Darwin.

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<sup>1</sup> 19 February 2017 was the seventy-fifth anniversary of the first bombing raids on Darwin.

# Significant local church anniversaries as pastoral care and evangelism: the endurance of St Paul's Uniting Church, Mackay, over 150 years from 1872 to 2022

Julia Pitman

## Synopsis

How does a local church celebrate an important anniversary without being celebratory, or indulging in antiquarianism? This paper considers, as an example of a significant local church anniversary, the preparation of St Paul's Uniting Church, Mackay, for its sesquicentenary or 150th year celebration in 2022. It outlines the plans of the church for an anniversary that is prepared well in advance, that relies on appropriate methods in church history, and will produce a number of events and historical products that may be conveyed through different media. Local church anniversaries are an opportunity to provide quality church history that not only documents the past, but also serves important functions in the life of the Christian church. The paper will argue that when the life of a congregation is viewed in long-term historical and theological perspective, and when its history is considered through the best tools of historical and theological analysis, then the congregation can be cared for pastorally; the local, national and international community can be well-served; and the saving grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ can be proclaimed. The church can be encouraged to endure the tests of time.

The first task in celebrating church anniversaries is to be aware that such milestones are approaching and to plan for them well in advance. With ample lead time to collaborate locally, state-wide and nationally, to raise the necessary funds, and to communicate with a wide range of people, a significant local church anniversary can be an important opportunity for support and outreach. The minister or pastor and lay leaders play an important role in simply being aware of the founding date of the church, usually the year in which the first services were held, and to plan ahead to make the most of the possibilities for local, state and national co-operation.

As Minister at St Paul's, Mackay, inducted in November 2014, I am responsible together with the Church Council for a congregation established in 1872 that occupies an attractive, heritage-listed Queensland timber building, the second church property, which was opened in 1898. The building is the oldest church in Mackay (it was the only church to survive the 1918 cyclone), and its central location, traditional architectural style and historic role in the lives of many long-term Mackay residents, makes it symbolic of the presence of Christianity in the region. The iconic building is the last of its size in north Queensland, is central to the street-scape of the city heart of Mackay and in 2000 was heritage-listed. With the cost of maintenance and open consideration from the 1970s by church councils of tearing down old church properties and replacing them with contemporary buildings, in the late 1990s the St Paul's Church Council planned for the church to be demolished. However, a community campaign led by the Hon. Pat Comben, a former Minister of the Wayne Goss Labor Government, saved it. In the Mackay region, broad support for the St Paul's church building and ministry transcends narrow denominational

loyalties and especially the once-fierce divide between Protestant and Catholic.

Early into my pastorate at St Paul's, I became aware that the 150<sup>th</sup> year was fast approaching. I started work with some key lay leaders, notably two community-minded retired men in their 80s, who are church members, who initially wondered whether they would still be alive at the time of the anniversary! The first is Ian Hamilton, who was a manager in a family-owned retail store, Lamberts, and a former Deputy Mayor of Mackay Regional Council. The second is Ray Braithwaite, a chartered accountant and former member for the seat of Dawson in the Commonwealth parliament for 21 years from 1975 to 1996. Both Ian and Ray were raised Presbyterian, had long term involvement in St Paul's as lay leaders, and had published on local history projects. As a grandson of Samuel Lambert, one of the founding fathers of the church, Ian has a strong personal interest in family and local church history. In retirement, he realised his life-long love of writing by producing various works of local Mackay and family history including a history of Lamberts (2003) and a history of the people living on the 'Northside' of the river during the Second World War (2014). Ray had written on the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Porters, a local firm for hardware and building supplies (2008), a biography of a prominent Mayor, Sir Albert Abbott (2005), a celebration of thirty years of the Good Shepherd Lodge nursing home (with Janet Norman and John Tait, 2004), and *Waiting for Maggie*, a family history (2002). I suggested that we start work to identify materials and to apply for grants.

Ian quickly became absorbed in collating as much information as he could find on various parts of church life from local history sources, including a vast collection of photographs.



In particular, he started researching notable lay leaders from the founding families. An advert about the history project placed in the church newsletter was noticed by Bill Elliott, a former St Paul's church member and later Chairperson of the Yeronga Uniting Church Council in the suburbs of Brisbane. Bill was also a President of the Annerley-Stevens History Group (2016-2019), which in 2017 won the State Library Community History Award for the best history group in Queensland.

As Minister of St Paul's, I regularly receive historical material related to the church that others no longer require or is donated through the op-shop or Bargain Centre, which stimulated my interest in confirming the year of the anniversary. I started to identify primary and secondary sources: locally, and in the state and national libraries of Australia. Newspapers including the *Mackay Daily Mercury* and its antecedents are a font of contemporary information and expression. With much material accessible online, local church history is getting easier to research, but manuscript material should still be consulted: St Paul's has a full run of records from 1874 to 1981, contained in some 18 boxes lovingly preserved and sent in 1985 by Bruce Gibson and Jim White to the John Oxley Library in Brisbane. This comprehensive resource supplemented by other denominational and social history material has the potential to thoroughly revise the jubilee and centenary pamphlets of the church.

Early this year, as the committee reviewed its task, it became apparent that a coffee-table style publication with an overarching narrative, photographs and boxes to feature various subjects would be the best way to make the most of the available source material. A provisional title for the sesquicentenary was developed reflecting the methodology of the new religious

history of the 1970s with its emphasis on social history: *St Paul's Uniting Church, Mackay, 1872–2022: the contribution of a city church to the cultural and social life of a region*. Several grant applications were made, including to the State Library of Queensland, but some were extremely competitive and unlikely to be successful. The Public and Contextual Theology Research Centre of Charles Sturt University has provided \$5,000 towards research expenses and it is expected that the publishing costs of a book will be up to \$10,000.

As Minister, I suggested a range of ideas to the committee for consideration: a major weekend of events including church services and a concert, a photographic exhibition at the council chambers or another community venue, and a plan to promote the sesquicentenary year to past ministers and local politicians with at least a year's lead-time. Church Council, initially surprised that another anniversary was imminent—it wasn't that long since the centenary?—is very supportive, and the members of the finance and property committee are working hard to improve the facilities in time for the events. The sale in 2007 of the block on the corner of Macalister and Gordon Streets for more than \$2m provided the necessary funds for an upgrade to the hall and grounds, which was largely completed under the previous Minister, the Rev. Jan Whyte. A major upgrade to the pipe organ has just been completed at a cost of \$25,000, which attracted the support of state government, industry and private donors, which has improved the depth, colour and volume of the instrument.

Local church history, if it is to avoid antiquarianism, needs both thorough research and broad consideration of the significance of the topic for the life of the local area and also for the life of the church internationally. Local church history is

therefore significant for two fields of research that may be considered on two axes: time and place. The vertical axis is the 2000-year history of the Christian Church. The horizontal axis is the secular history of a region, state and nation. A significant local church is often an important driver of the social, cultural, political and economic history of a region. Church members invariably bring their beliefs into action in their daily vocations and in the creation of society. The life of a local church also takes its place in the world history of the Christian Church. A local church in Australia may not be of international significance, but may be considered in the light of international trends of thought and method. The final products may be prepared to an international standard rivalling the finest church histories produced in America, Britain, other former colonial societies, or the developing world.

St Paul's, Mackay, was the first Presbyterian Church in an area that eventually spawned about fifteen churches (Armitage in South Mackay, Northside in Andergrove, Seaforth and Calen to the north of Mackay some 45km and 55km respectively, Iona West in West Mackay, and the churches in the Pioneer Valley stretching directly to the east about 75km to Eungella, and the churches in the area about 35km south of Mackay at Sarina and further south to Koumala and Carmila). The majority of the Presbyterian and all of the Methodist congregations joined the Uniting Church in Australia when it was inaugurated in 1977; some, such as Calen (1930), had been union churches from the start. In Queensland there were no Congregational Churches that endured during the twentieth century north of Rockhampton.

For more than a century from the 1870s to the 1970s, St Paul's, Mackay, played a central role in community life. The heritage listing of the iconic church building reflects the

continuing value Mackay residents place on Christian observance, values and character—even if active church membership is now quite low compared to previous years. In the past, for a minister with the appropriate gifts and graces, the Mackay pastorate was a significant training ground and stepping stone for election to the position of Moderator of the State and General Assembly or other significant pastorates in Queensland. Among the laity, many of the leading business people, public servants and local councillors of the Mackay community could be found in the pews on a Sunday. One highly committed church member, William Forgan Smith (1887-1953), was Premier of Queensland (1932-42). The flourishing societies for young people, and men and women, such as the Sunday School, the local branch of the Presbyterian Fellowship of Australia, and the Women's Guild, attracted a broad constituency; a nominal form of 'hatch, match and dispatch' Presbyterianism was evident and can be documented statistically to a certain extent. The church's role in the community also involved pioneering areas of outreach that promoted human resilience and social flourishing such as The Distress Fund, formed during the First World War. The fund provided emergency relief first to members of the congregation, then later, to members of the community regardless of religious belief. This program now works co-operatively with local agencies and the Mackay Emergency Relief Network, and, in addition to donations from the congregations of St Paul's and Armitage, has been successful in obtaining grants from the charitable welfare and natural disaster recovery sector to further its work.

In terms of the vertical axis of the history of the Christian Church, national and international trends in Christian thought and practice had the effect of relating to a sense of Queensland

particularity. The contribution of successive ministers of St Paul's, Mackay, to public theology within the Mackay community and within Presbyterianism in Queensland led to the presentation of an intellectual, moderate and compassionate expression of mainstream Protestant Christianity that was reflective of trends nationally and internationally. St Paul's contributed to the cultural life of the local Scottish diaspora such as the Caledonian Society, the Mackay Choral Society and the Eisteddfod, the Mackay and District Pipe Band, the local Agricultural Show, and the Mackay District Inter-Church Council (later Mackay Churches Together), in which the resident minister was often actively involved. Particular to the region were the dynamics between Presbyterian cane-farming families and South Sea Islanders (Kanakas), who were removed from various islands in Melanesia, mostly from the Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides (later Vanuatu), for economic enslavement on cane farms and their frequent desire, once freed, to settle in Australia. By supporting the intentional missionary movement to South Sea Islanders, St Paul's was prominent in fostering their religious life. The extent to which the church was critical of slavery will also be explored.

St Paul's, Mackay, is a case study of the role of Christianity in a regional area; of the history of the evolution of city ministry in regional Australia over the twentieth century. Using the tools and techniques of the new religious history, St Paul's ministers and lay people created not only a congregation (or group of congregations in the region), but helped to establish a society. The contribution of the church to the region is hard to measure, but there are indications that it is valued to a degree far beyond denominational allegiance, membership rolls and financial figures. Like the response to the threat of demolition of the Pitt

Street Congregational Church, Sydney, in the 1970s, when Jack Munday, secretary of the Builders Laborers' Federation in response to appeals from Congregationalists placed a ban on the work,<sup>1</sup> the public outcry in the 1990s at the threat of demolition of the St Paul's Uniting Church building reflected the widespread fear of the effect on the whole community of the loss of the presence of the first Presbyterian Church in Mackay in its traditional form.

The history of St Paul's is one of the endurance of Christianity despite many ups and downs. A challenge is to record the history of the recent past, which has involved much upheaval as a result of secularisation, internal debates about options for decisions about property, and successive difficult ministries and tragic events, including the death of a minister, the Rev. Tony Paynter, while in placement. Over a period of one hundred and fifty years, St Paul's has survived external and internal threats: the church building is the only one in the town to have withstood at least three major tropical cyclones (1918, 1958 and 2016); it also survived the internal threat of demolition. For the history of the church to be told warts-and-all carries risk, but it has the potential to play a pastoral role for the congregation and a wider audience and to help the church in its evangelical task. Church history may make a theological point. The continued witness of a church in a local area, of regular worship for 150 years, and the example of the leading ministers and lay people of the past can contribute significantly to outreach, promoting commitment and endurance for:

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Emilsen, Ben Skerman, Patricia Curthoys and William Emilsen, *Pride of Place: A history of the Pitt Street Congregational Church* (Melbourne: Circa, 2008), 356–7.

since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 12:1–2, NRSV.

# Finding a (new) home in the Uniting Church

Judith Raftery

## Synopsis

This paper offers preliminary findings about why a considerable number of people, including me, whose background was not in the Uniting Church's predecessor denominations have chosen to join the Uniting Church. In attempting to quantify this phenomenon I have sought information from aggregated membership records. This has yielded only limited information. While annual additions to membership are recorded in Assembly statistics, this does not tell us the origins of such increases. Analysis of individual congregational membership records would likely provide better, though probably still incomplete, information, but I have been unable to undertake this work to date.

The other strategy I have used is to interview some who have joined the Uniting Church from elsewhere. This strategy too has its limitations. There are many possible starting points for people seeking a new home in the Uniting Church, and many possible destinations. To achieve a sample of interviewees that reflects this complexity and would allow generalised conclusions is a major undertaking. To date I have had little success recruiting interviewees from beyond my own, highly distinctive, congregation, despite having advertised through the South Australian Synod and the South Australian Uniting Church Historical Society.

My findings are thus necessarily unrepresentative. However, they reveal some instructive consistencies. Prominent among these is the apparently overwhelming importance to joiners not



of a theology and denominational culture that reflects evangelical and reformed traditions, as articulated in the *Basis of Union*, but of a local church community in which they can feel ‘at home’ and personally supported.

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On 17 November 1957, two weeks after publicly confessing my faith in Jesus as my personal saviour, I was baptised in the chapel of a suburban Adelaide congregation of Churches of Christ. The following Sunday I was formally received into membership of Churches of Christ, which I knew to be a movement for the restoration of ‘New Testament Christianity’ and the spiritual home of my family over several generations. I embraced its culture, its theology and its challenge to live life according to Jesus’ way as recorded in scripture. For me it was ‘the real deal’. I was 12 years old and nearing the end of my first year at secondary school.

Thirty years later, in 1987, I relinquished my Churches of Christ membership and joined the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA). In the interim a great deal had changed in my life and it was a long time since I had felt at home in or sustained by Churches of Christ.<sup>1</sup> By 1987 I had been attending Pilgrim Uniting Church in Adelaide for three years, and had become an active participant in its life. It hadn’t been a random choice. I knew about Pilgrim’s liberal and intellectually rigorous theology, its commitment to social justice and its reputation as a

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<sup>1</sup> There were several reasons for this, including my need for a more progressive and intellectually challenging theology than was the usual diet in Churches of Christ, and my growing appreciation of the richness offered by a somewhat more ordered and less informal and extempore style of worship than I had grown up with. This search for a more ordered style of worship was in part driven by the fact that my husband was Catholic and I knew that there was little chance of finding a worship experience with which he would feel comfortable within Churches of Christ.

welcoming and inclusive community. I had friends there whose take on following Jesus accorded with mine. And I discovered that I felt at home there. Therefore, it made good sense to me to make myself really part of it by formally joining the UCA. Even so, it was not entirely easy to relinquish—and that word captures the wrench that was involved—the church of my earlier life, and of my parents’ and my grandparents’ lives. In fact, I could do it only when I realised that some things which I still held to be ‘the real deal’—baptism of believers, lay leadership of the Lord’s Supper, congregational independence—were not things I had to relinquish. On the contrary, they were gifts I could contribute to the UCA. And so, in a very brief and simple ceremony, which involved no testing of my understanding of, or even awareness of, the *Basis of Union*, I was welcomed into membership of the UCA during a regular Sunday morning service. I have been there ever since, and continue to find a home there—a home with solid foundations, generous and flexible rooms, sustenance for my intellectual and emotional needs, and co-residents who are both challenging and supportive.

I have wondered about others like me. What prompted them to relinquish their earlier church connections and join the UCA and what has been their experience of that move? Have they found a home in the UCA and if so, or if not, what have been the determinants of that experience? And how has their presence within the UCA contributed to its culture and identity? The most obvious ways to find answers to my questions were to look at formal church membership data, and to ask people about their experiences—obvious, but of course neither simple and straightforward nor able to yield complete answers.

My starting point was to access aggregated membership data. Assembly Minutes from the second to the seventh Assemblies

contain some membership statistics. However, this is an incomplete record as it relies on congregations supplying their data to the Assembly, and congregations do not always comply with such requests. In addition, it provides at best only a partial answer to my questions. It includes numbers, though not points of departure, for new Members in Association, who are necessarily from some other denomination, but not for those, like me, who have taken the full membership route into the UCA. In 1979, the total membership of the UCA was nearly 370,000. Members in Association numbered a mere 3272 but the membership total included a much larger group—nearly 67,000—of ‘adherents’, that is regular attenders who, while not confirmed members of the church, were an acknowledged part of a congregation. Such ‘adherents’ of course could have included people from non-UCA denominational backgrounds.<sup>1</sup>

From 1997, national statistics were gathered not by the Assembly but by the National Church Life Survey (NCLS), thus increasing the likelihood of incompleteness through congregational non-compliance. The NCLS records attendance rather than membership data and so provides no direct comparison with the membership data previously collected by the Assembly. However, it does record numbers of ‘switchers’, that is people who have come into the UCA from elsewhere. In South Australia, the only place from which I have so far been able to access this information, ‘switchers’ have, from 2001 to 2016, amounted to seven to nine percent of attenders at the

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<sup>1</sup> Uniting Church in Australia, *Minutes of Proceedings of the Second Assembly, 1979*, x; Uniting Church in Australia, *Minutes of the Third Assembly, 1982*, 105; Uniting Church in Australia, *Minutes of the Fourth Assembly, 1985*, 196; Uniting Church in Australia, *Minutes of the Fifth Assembly, 1988*, 216; Uniting Church in Australia, *Minutes of the Sixth Assembly, 1991*, 58; Uniting Church in Australia, *Minutes and Reports of the Seventh Assembly, 1994*, 20A.

churches that responded to the NCLS survey. In 2001 this was 307 churches but by 2016 that number had fallen to 147. While these data are frustratingly incomplete, it is clear that a not inconsequential number of people have come into the UCA from beyond its antecedent denominations, and keep coming.<sup>1</sup>

Inevitably, these people have brought with them a variety of religious experiences and theological and ecclesial cultures and identities that might not always blend seamlessly with the Evangelical and Reformed traditions that the *Basis of Union* says are fundamental to the UCA. To shine some light on this reality I set out to find and talk with some of these people who have joined the UCA from elsewhere. To shape our conversations, I developed a questionnaire that was designed to encourage respondents to reflect on their decision to join the UCA as well as their subsequent experience of being a member.<sup>2</sup> Interviews lasted between an hour and an hour and a half and to date I have completed 15, with all but one of the respondents being from South Australia, and 10 of them from my own congregation. This is clearly unsatisfactory in terms of building up a representative sample of people joining the UCA from elsewhere, but my attempts to recruit respondents from other congregations have not so far borne much fruit.<sup>3</sup> Eight of my interviewees were formerly members of Churches of Christ,

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<sup>1</sup> National Church Life Survey, Regional Church Life Profile, Uniting Church SA, 2001, 2006, 20011; Church Life Profile for Uniting Church SA, 2016. In 2001, 11425 responses were received from 307 churches; in 2006, 9376 from 244 churches; in 2011, 7076 from 161 churches; and in 2016, 5882 from 147 churches.

<sup>2</sup> In an attempt to retain interviewees' anonymity, I have used single initials, not necessarily relating to their names, when referring to or quoting from their responses.

<sup>3</sup> I regard this research as very much work-in-progress, and am making further efforts to recruit more interviewees from different congregations and denominational and theological backgrounds.

three were Anglican, three were Catholic and one was Baptist. All became involved in the UCA as adults: their ages at the time of interview ranged from 68 to 88 and their years of involvement with the UCA, as adherents or members, from three years to 42. Their age means they are members of a cohort which has lived through enormous changes in the size and impact of the Christian church in Australian society, experienced a period of intense questioning of traditional beliefs and church priorities and seen the loosening and reshaping of many denominational loyalties and identities.

What have I found?

a. Drivers of leaving

For my respondents, joining the UCA from somewhere else has not just happened. It has been the result of some level of dissatisfaction with or searching for something beyond earlier affiliations. But this dissatisfaction and searching had various aspects, and although I have tried to separate them here in order to examine them, for some individuals they were clearly intertwined:

1. For some there was a gradual disillusionment with their current denomination and a sense that it had lost what had drawn them to it in the first place. This was particularly so with those who formerly belonged to Churches of Christ and who were old enough or connected enough through generations of their family to be well versed in, and committed to, the historic and distinctive character and theology of Churches of Christ.

- A said that she eventually felt that it had lost its way, that Alexander Campbell, one of its founders, wouldn't

recognise it and that the UCA “was closer to what Churches of Christ should have been”.

- G felt that there was more involvement of the congregation in the worship of the UCA than in Churches of Christ, despite the latter’s commitment to lay leadership.
- C and E experienced the Churches of Christ that they knew disappearing under the influence of American ‘crystal cathedral’ theology and a top-down style of ministry whose chief focus was numerical growth.

2. In other cases the drive to leave was connected to quite difficult personal experience of a particular congregation.

- N, after years of feeling under pressure to be always providing leadership and inspiration in his congregation, wanted to be part of a community in which he could, for a while at least, take a back seat and be supported and fed.
- W wanted to escape the “guilt-driven” and sin-focussed theology of her long-standing and, in many ways, cherished church home and looked for somewhere that would provide intellectual challenge, an inclusive and humanity-embracing culture and a social justice focus.
- D and P persevered for many years with a congregation whose fundamentalism and rigidity about what it meant to be ‘really Christian’ they found increasingly alienating. Not people to give up easily or walk away from what was a highly significant denominational connection, they tried, with others of like mind, to establish an alternative worship community within their congregation, but eventually realised they needed to leave and look elsewhere.

N, W, D and P had all been committed and active members of Churches of Christ. In theory, they might have found a new

church home within a different Churches of Christ congregation but they all settled within the UCA instead.

3. For some other respondents, leaving their original denominations and joining the UCA was about creating a greater unity within their marriages.

- I, a Catholic, and an immigrant to Australia, realised that her formerly Methodist and later UCA husband was never going to change his allegiance. After moving to Adelaide she still attended mass sometimes as well as attending church with her husband. But eventually the desire to be at one with him, and the lack of time and energy to keep up two church connections, led her to throw in her lot with the UCA.
- F, a Catholic, and J, a Baptist, wanted to find a church home that they could share after their marriage, knowing that this would involve significant compromise for them both. They set out on an intentional search across congregations of several denominations and eventually found a United Parish, later to become part of the Uniting Church, where they found what they wanted. F, unlike the others interviewed, had made a point of examining the *Basis of Union*, and found that it resonated sufficiently with his Catholic perspective for him to feel comfortable with it. In time he even came to terms with “mixing with Protestants”!
- S, an Anglican, who, from age 18, had been on a church-going journey that she said took her everywhere, married H, a Catholic. They married in an Anglican church, H having sought and been granted—“with extreme reluctance”—papal permission for this to happen. After their marriage they attended several Catholic churches including a Passionist monastery whose social justice focus they

appreciated, and they attended H's mother's parish during her declining years. After her death they felt free to make a different choice, and, apparently not constrained by strong theological or doctrinal considerations, or a sense of allegiance to anywhere else, responded to a personal invitation to give a city congregation of the UCA a try. What they found suited them both and they stayed.

4. Some stories were more singular.

- L, a questioner and searcher, stopped going to the Anglican church of her upbringing when she was at university, not as a result of any crisis or bad experience, but because it “just had no meaning” at that point. Many years later her searching, her community engagement and an invitation from a friend led her to a city congregation of the Uniting Church, where she had what she describes as an epiphanous experience. She felt she had come home spiritually, and instantly embraced the whole package that was on offer: a beautiful aesthetic, music, liturgy, formality as well as warmth and welcome, an inclusive approach to holy communion, a social justice message and an outward looking community.
- B, also Anglican, and a ‘clergy wife’, had a high level of involvement in the church, including paid work in various planning and training roles, and clearly articulated theological and ecclesial views. After her husband's death, and some parish experiences that she found unsatisfactory and not responsive to what she could contribute, B had some time out from church-going. Then she tried several non-Anglican congregations in response to Marcus Borg's invitation to “find a church that gladden[ed] her heart”. She found one in the UCA.



b. Drivers of joining and the experience of belonging

Most of my respondents reported that the impetus to make a connection with a congregation of the UCA involved a direct invitation to attend a service, or some prior knowledge about the congregation, communicated by friends who were already there. This struck me as a telling take on the old-style ‘witnessing’ or ‘sharing the faith’ that many of us grew up with and perhaps sometimes feel uncomfortable with.

1. Why a particular congregation?

When asked why they chose a particular congregation of the UCA some cited reasons that were pragmatic, or were mainly about worship style and aesthetic:

- there were existing links through sport and friendship;
- they had shifted house and their chosen congregation was geographically convenient;
- they liked the music or the more formal liturgy;
- the minister was friendlier and more accessible than their previous one.

Others indicated that their choice was driven explicitly by theology:

- They mentioned being drawn to a liberal theology, that did not rest on a literal interpretation of the Bible, that gave them the freedom to be equivocal, that said that questions and doubts were OK and encouraged exploration, that promoted a positive view of humanity and a sense of inclusion and connectedness, and that foregrounded social justice perspectives.

- W said that her UCA congregation provided the opportunity for her to join her head and her heart.
- N said of the same congregation that it had many points of connection with the ways in which he expressed his faith through his work and his community activism.
- N also felt that its focus on ‘uniting’ had resonance with the historic ‘plea’ for unity that had once been central to the witness of Churches of Christ.

One response that on the surface appeared to be at odds with all others came from H who said that theological considerations were no part of his decision to become involved with the UCA. However, some of his other responses revealed an implicitly theological view. He and S liked what they got at their UCA congregation in that it was inclusive, they were not preached at, it had a social agenda and was “exposed to the real world”, and it had a view of ministry that invited them to be involved and used their skills.

Only three of my small sample had experienced more than one congregation of the UCA.

- L had moved from the city to the country and happily found another UCA congregation in which she was able to feel equally at home.
- For several years C and E tried to maintain their links with the city congregation that they valued, while also offering their skills as organist and choir conductor to a less well-resourced suburban congregation. Finding this double loyalty too demanding they gave up their connection with the city congregation and devoted themselves to the suburban scene for many years. But eventually uninspiring leadership, an impoverished worship experience and what

they described as puerile theology drove them back to the city congregation.

In fact, all were opting to join a particular congregation and many indicated an awareness that the diversity and divisions within the UCA meant that there were large parts of it in which they would not find themselves at home. My small and skewed sample meant that my respondents had aligned themselves with the liberal and progressive end of the UCA's broad theological spectrum. The larger, more diverse sample that I hope to access will demonstrate that others have found homes elsewhere on that spectrum.

2. The process of joining seems to have been pretty informal and many struggled to remember when it happened or who had taken the initiative.

- I had to get her church secretary to check records to see if she was in fact a member.
- S and H seemed unaware of what membership entailed and in eight years the issue had not been raised with them.
- No respondents recalled instruction, though a few mentioned a conversation with a minister or elder, and, except in one case, the *Basis of Union* did not feature in the process.
- A few were unaware of member/member-in-association options, and did not remember being offered a choice.
- Some had opted for or were offered membership-in-association because this was thought to respect their former tradition, while others had consciously opted for full membership, because they “knew they weren’t going to go back” or they wanted to be fully committed and to really belong.

This informality about joining raises the questions, “Belong to what?” and “Does formal knowledge of what the UCA is about matter?” Perhaps not, since it was clear that for many of my respondents, initial gaps in knowledge about the theology and structure of the UCA were made good over time, through a variety of formal and informal means. These included: serving as an elder, member of the church council, or synod and presbytery representative; learning from sermons and structures of worship; attending fellowship and friendship groups; and being employed by the UCA. W’s experience was that it was something that was caught through involvement in the life of the UCA, rather than taught. However, D and P said that even after many years of involvement they still felt somewhat ignorant about the UCA’s structure and that there were still some “surprises”. And H, who was very happy with his UCA congregation, was also adamant that he “didn’t know or care about who or what the UCA is or had been”.

3. Fears about compromise or loss—because this had been an issue for me, I asked my respondents whether they had had reservations about what they would be losing or about compromises they might have to make when they joined the UCA. In fact they did not report many concerns.

- L framed the experience positively as movement in a new direction in which she felt supported by people important to her.
- Some former Churches of Christ people, predictably, had initial concerns about baptism, about the conduct of holy communion, and about formal creeds, but realised that it was possible to be part of the UCA and maintain their own views. As N put it, within a context that doesn’t draw exclusive lines between clergy and laity, differences of opinion can be

accommodated comfortably. And as W realised, “there was no pressure to fall into line” and “once you give up on magical interpretation” some of these issues “cease to matter in the same way”.

- B’s experience has been a bit different. She said that her view of holy communion “errs on the side of a Catholic understanding”, and she finds the UCA practice more like an agapé meal, with words and symbols that don’t always cut it. But she’s not leaving.

4. Experience of the UCA over time—my respondents all summarised their personal experience of joining the UCA in positive terms. They said:

- It’s been the right decision for me.
- It’s been freeing.
- I feel proud to say I’m part of the UCA.
- I feel bonded to the community.
- I appreciate the diversity of the congregation, the richness of ideas and the quality of the ministry.
- I’m glad I did it—but glad also to be able to feel part of Anglicanism when I need to.
- I’m very happy with the ‘way of life’ in the UCA.
- I’ve never felt like a stranger.
- What I found in the UCA is nearer to what I believe.
- It’s broadened my ideas and changed my view of the Bible.
- It’s been a liberating, evolutionary process. My congregation has supported and facilitated this and provides the discipline for me to explore.

- It's been a sustaining experience – though it's not the same as when I joined and there's always a need for revitalisation.
- It's been a coming out of the wilderness into community.
- We've wanted to keep coming because it feels like our home.

However, some were distressed about broad changes in the climate of the UCA, beyond their congregation. These included non-inclusive attitudes concerning sexuality and gender, and the push to create non-geographical presbyteries, divided from other presbyteries and essentially from the culture of the UCA, along theological lines. Others were disappointed by the ageing and numerical decline of the membership and regretted that theological education was not more highly valued and affirmed.

What have I concluded?

My modest research endeavour raises the question about the extent to which some people who have joined the UCA from elsewhere are, in a meaningful way, members of the UCA, or whether they are more accurately members of a particular congregation in which they feel at home? If the latter is the case, and if it is a widespread phenomenon, is this a signal that we are entering a post-denominational age? I'd suggest it might be one signal among others. Everywhere we see changes in the way local churches brand themselves. Denominational identifiers have given way to names that suggest distinctive theological perspectives instead. In addition, the UCA has long been troubled and divided by irreconcilable views about sexuality and gender issues. And now we are grappling with another issue that might be seen as a logical progression of these longstanding divisions: the desire of some congregations to establish a non-

geographical presbytery that would reflect and cement these divisions, would constitute a fundamental challenge to the UCA's conciliar model of decision-making and signal an unwillingness to work within the decisions and direction of Assembly.

If these trends continue—if the centre does not hold and things fall apart—the UCA will have entered a new age. It will then be vitally important that UCA people will continue to be able, as they are now, to find within it, in particular congregations, a home that sustains and challenges them, and allows them to flourish.

# “Instructions for knitting pattern for an octopus”: a view of changes and challenges experienced by Uniting World since 1977

Margaret Reeson

## Synopsis

An observer was struggling to make sense of a diagram describing one of the manifestations of the work that is now known as Uniting World, and commented, “It looks like a knitting pattern for an octopus”. It looked like a complex design to be used by someone working with at least eight arms simultaneously. Wondrous but a bit messy.

Uniting World and its predecessors have been a significant part of the national life of the UCA since the beginning. The inception of the UCA occurred at a time when there were global changes to the way churches like ours related to communities in regions like Asia and the Pacific. This presented challenges to those responsible for leadership in this area of ministry. This paper will bring an eye-witness account of some of the confusions, false starts and new beginnings, beautiful transformative results and efforts that unravelled, and both fresh visions and deep disappointments. It will consider the reasoning behind five changes of name and the elements that have been added and subtracted from the responsibility of Uniting World. It will discuss some of the ways in which understanding has continued to alter over the years as we in the Uniting Church in Australia relate to other cultures and countries.

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From time to time someone attempts to draw a diagram on a whiteboard to express the workings of the entity that is currently known as *Uniting World*. It has always been a complex body. During a thirty year period, this Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) agency has used seven different names. One observer remarked, 'It looks like a knitting pattern for an octopus'.

When the Uniting Church in Australia was inaugurated in 1977, each of the three uniting denominations had well-established agencies working in Asia and the Pacific. These three agencies, Methodist Overseas Missions (MOM), London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Presbyterian Board of Ecumenical Relations and Mission (BOEMAR), now came under the banner of Uniting Church.

They were not really strangers to each other. Their organisations had much in common. From 1960 prospective mission staff from all three agencies had trained together at All Saints College in Sydney so had built strong connections. I was among them. In the thirty years immediately before the inauguration of the UCA, many of us went to serve in Asia, the Pacific and in North and Central Australia. We already knew that change was coming in the nature of our mission.

Church union brought the three agencies together. It was time for a new approach and new relationships. Since the beginning, Executive Directors of this agency have been Brian Lee, Graham Brookes, Bill Fischer, Kerry Enright, Rob Floyd and Sureka Goringe.

## World Mission 1986–1993

After the earliest years of the Uniting Church in Australia, when this new denomination was working out how to structure their work in all its facets, in 1985 the UCA Assembly decided

to set up the Commission for Mission as a national body with the Rev. Dr John Brown as Director. World Mission was one of the five agencies of this new Commission, with National Mission and Evangelism, Social Responsibility and Justice, Frontier Services and Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. The national committees for these five agencies met together for the first time in February 1986 with almost one hundred members from around Australia.

I have been part of this story. In 1961 I attended the course at All Saints College under the principal the Rev. Frank Whyte and spent most of the 1960s and 1970s serving in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea with United Church of Papua New Guinea. I was immensely blessed and challenged by those years. I became a member of the new national UCA World Mission Committee in 1986 and continued to be part of subsequent working groups and reference committees until 2012. Like all such accounts, this will be from my own perspective and records.

The three denominations that united in UCA each brought their own historic links with churches overseas and these connections continued. In the early years World Mission was financially secure and was supported by designated staff in the Assembly and in each Synod. A number of UCA people were still working in partner churches. The new initiative of Interns in Mission sent young adults to participate in life in other parts of the world, returning with new insights.

The connections between UCA and churches in other countries over the last 40 plus years have changed significantly. Nations and churches had become independent. Our understanding of the theology of the mission of God was being reshaped. No longer did Australian Christians from UCA

imagine that they were taking God to the heathen in their backpack. By the 1970s we had already stepped back from earlier ways of expressing our mission and by the 1980s and 1990s we were using the language of partnership with fellow-Christians in Asia and the Pacific. Relationships between the UCA and churches overseas were maturing from dependencies into partnerships. This was a long way from earlier attitudes of paternalism.

As the UCA World Mission became better known internationally, churches beyond the original spheres of influence of the founding mission organisations began to ask for formal partnership with the UCA. By 1993 there were 22 partnerships. At the same time, World Mission Director Graham Brookes was worried by what he saw as a 30 year lag in general understanding of how the UCA related beyond its own borders. We were **not** still living in the old missionary era.

### International Relationships and Mission 1993–1998

In the light of this thinking, the agency changed its name to International Relationships and Mission.

What did we really mean by partnership? As more and more overseas churches joined us with formal partnership agreements, this question became more urgent. We had moved from historic dependence on the Australian churches for leadership, resources and funding to independence. For a time some overseas churches felt that they had been told, ‘You are on your own now’, and that UCA had lost interest in them. The next step was to move beyond independence to **inter**dependence and genuine partnership.

There have always been regular visits from UCA World Mission/International Relationships and Mission staff to partner

churches and visits to Australia from overseas church leaders. Sometimes these visits include study programs or participation in key meetings. There have been gatherings of leaders of churches in our region for shared study, discussion and vision for their churches. These have included, and continue to include, important theological reflection on shared issues such as climate change, disaster readiness, gender and family violence.

For some years a sequence of partner church leaders joined the meetings of International Relationships and Mission Committee as full members. The committee heard the voices of people from Vanuatu or India, Korea or Fiji, Indonesia or Papua New Guinea as we worked together on policy. This was often a source of real insight.

As well as staff visits, many UCA members have been intentional about travelling to spend time with partner churches. They have gone with work parties, as short-term volunteers, in church groups and as former mission staff re-visiting earlier homes. These face to face encounters have assured the people of the partner church that they are not forgotten and often have been life-changing for those who travelled. I and my husband Ron have had many opportunities of making visits to partner churches, including revisiting places where we once worked. They have been rich and often challenging experiences. I rejoice in still exchanging messages with friends in those distant communities via phone or Facebook, including the Easter greeting “Christ is risen!” Recently we received a letter from women leaders in our old home in the Highlands of PNG, signed by three good friends of ours, Aloha, Marama Lucy and Omolpi. Omolpi, among other gifts, has worked as a Bible translator and my claim to fame is that I was her teacher when she was a little

girl from a village, some 57 years ago. Such relationships can be real and significant.

On one occasion, John Mavor and I were representing the UCA at the Assembly meetings of the United Church of PNG and Solomon Islands in 1996. As I sat on the edge of a working group, listening as they struggled with a complex policy issue, one leader turned to me and said, “Don’t just sit there observing. If you are a partner, work with us. You can be scribe!” When I hesitated, thinking that it would be inappropriate, the formidable wife of the Moderator insisted, so I obeyed.

The program “People in Mission” was developed. Young people and early retirees set off to work for various periods in many parts of the world. Interns in Mission and Volunteers in Mission from the UCA were widely scattered during the 1990s, working in regions as diverse as Brazil, Jamaica, Korea, Tonga, South Africa, West Timor and elsewhere. What had been a great vision was becoming unwieldy and inadequately supported. In the end the Interns in Mission program was discontinued in 2002.

Over the years as more and more migrants have arrived in Australia from Asia and Pacific, many from churches that are our partners have found a natural home in the UCA. There is now a strong connection between groups such as Tongan or Korean Christian communities in Australia and the UCA. We have belonged to the same church family for decades. This has not been without challenges as members work out their loyalty to the ethos of their church of origin and their new connection with the UCA.

Formal international church partnership agreements were also multiplying. By 2003 there were 34 partnerships identified.

It was clear that only some of those partnerships could be given high priority.

At the same time, many UCA congregations chose to act independently, supporting the work of different aid and mission organisations rather than our own. Where someone travelled overseas, or met someone from another part of the world, they might be inspired to encourage their congregation to support the ministry in that place. This might be with a major agency or with an obscure independent group that had little in common with UCA. The connections between some UCA congregations and the work of International Relationships became very fragile. The network was growing ever more tangled.

The importance of genuine partnerships was expressed very strongly in the period 1999–2002. In an arc of our near neighbours from Sri Lanka through eastern Indonesia, Timor Leste, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Fiji, it was a time of serious national instability. These were all places where we had church partnerships. We were family. In 1999, the phone rang in the International Relationships office; the Moderator of our partner church in East Timor had been killed in the conflict, they said. Although this proved to be a false report, our shocked International Relationships staff members were constantly in touch with the church leaders in each of these troubled regions during this time. In the report to the Assembly in 2000, Bill Fischer wrote of the importance of our staff going into each place experiencing catastrophe “being present to share their fear, their uncertainty, their danger and their perception of the situation. To cry, eat, pray, struggle and laugh with them”. They kept in touch by phone, were public advocates for their partners and gave whatever practical help they could. Members

of the Ninth Assembly in 2000 were moved to meet partner church leaders and to hear first-hand of their intense struggles.

## Unity and International Mission 1998–2002

Another change of name happened in 1998. The Assembly Standing Committee needed to undertake a major restructure as a result of severe financial difficulties. The Commission for Mission with its five agencies was dissolved and different ways of doing the work had to be found. Among other changes, the Commission for Christian Unity, based in Melbourne and dealing with ecumenical relationships and dialogues, was to be located with International Relationships in a new agency titled Unity and International Mission. It may have sounded a good idea on paper but neither body was happy. I was one of the small team who formed an Interim Executive to plan for the future together. Not long before that meeting I attended a retreat and, in a space for meditation, I anxiously shaped a small clay model of this new unformed body. Prophetically, it had two heads.

We did try to find a way to integrate the two agencies with very different agendas. International Relationships had been working with international Church Partnerships, People in Mission, Human Rights and Aid Projects. Christian Unity was active with dialogue groups with other denominations in Australia and representation on ecumenical councils. We met in large and small combined gatherings during 1998 and 1999. We discussed a paper by James Haire and Robin Boyd on “Mission and Unity”, worshipped together and attempted to find new ways of working. But it was clear that they did not want it and neither did we.

Despite our best efforts in good faith to bring the two bodies together, it was a period of great anxiety for all of us. Staff

members in both Sydney and Melbourne were troubled, the budget had been severely cut, our status with AusAID for government grants was at risk, there was instability over months in the office in a period between Directors—and at the same time the whole region was in flames and crying for our attention.

By 2000 it was clear that the title Unity and International Mission was a misnomer. It was decided that “while there were major historical links between Ecumenical and International Mission work, there was no operational basis for the close linking of these two areas of work”. With mutual relief, Christian Unity was detached from Unity and International Mission and reported directly to Assembly Standing Committee.

### Uniting International Mission 2002–2009

Now we needed another new name. We chose Uniting International Mission, to retain the acronym UIM.

There was a growing awareness that International Mission work overlapped with the work of Social Responsibility and Justice where issues were related to our partner churches. UIM established a division called International Human Rights with staff member Joy Balazo. Confronted by the extreme stresses of the international crises that afflicted our region from around 1999, and having experienced some of the dangers personally, Joy began to dream of finding a practical way for UIM to support fractured communities. She devised a model of workshops called “Young Ambassadors for Peace” or YAP. These workshops brought together people from each side of a conflict. They lived and worked together for a period to begin to understand the reasons behind their conflicts and to discover together potential paths toward peace. The first workshop was held in 2001 and over the next ten years until Joy retired in 2011



the model was experienced many times in Ambon, Sri Lanka, Highlands region and Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, North-east India, Burma and the Philippines.

The story of this work of YAP across tribal, ethnic, religious and political boundaries is remarkable. I witnessed several of those workshops in action and wrote a book about it, *Live Peace*, published in 2015. People who learned ways to work for peace through YAP are still active in peace building in 2019.

### Uniting Church Overseas Aid 2000–2009

Yet another arm of this complex agency related to relief and development. There had always been a response from UCA when natural disasters struck the regions of our partners, as well as investment in projects like vocational training, water and sanitation, health or livelihood. From at least the 1990s, the agency had attempted to become an approved organisation under the government tax-deductibility legislation.

In the general upheaval of change during 1998, our review by AusAID failed to meet some of the criteria for full accreditation and barely qualified for Base Accreditation. A lot of work was needed. Any projects related to general relief and development needed to be separated from projects that related to the spiritual ministry of churches, such as theological training, children's ministry or Bible translation. To be able to fulfil the criteria for accreditation an independent agency was established in 2000 under the leadership of the Rev. John Mavor. It was called Uniting Church Overseas Aid, (UCOA). UCOA's mission was expressed as: "To live out our Christian values by hearing and responding to the expressed needs of communities in Asia, the Pacific and southern Africa, through relief and development programs that contribute to poverty alleviation".

There were immediate improvements in the management of aid projects with the new agency. One very practical outcome was that UCOA and Church Partnerships were able to work together at the time of the Boxing Day tsunami in 2004, bringing connections with both churches and aid agencies to help in this catastrophe.

Following major effort, by 2006 UCOA moved from base to full accreditation and is now a member of ACFID (Australian Council for International Development). One immediate result was that funding for the United Church in PNG through the Church Partnership Program in 2006 increased from \$150,000 per annum to \$750,000 per annum. Through this program the Australian government makes grants to seven Christian denominations in Australia for them to use with their partner church in PNG.

Uniting World 2009–

### **Church Partnerships with Relief and Development**

The latest name is Uniting World. In 2009 the work of UC Overseas Aid was integrated again, with Church Partnerships, into a single agency with two units. UCOA now became Uniting World–Relief and Development, with its own independent structure to retain accreditation for government funding but under the wider umbrella of Uniting World.

In 2019, the Uniting World team continues its vibrant and valuable work. Their website says: “Faith is the heart language we share with our partners”. I believe that for our health and life as Uniting Church this ministry must continue to be a vital part of who we are.

# Managing the news? Two editors, Warren Clarnette and Bruce Best

Neil Tolliday

## Synopsis

In this paper I explore the work of two editors of Uniting Church Victoria magazines in the period from the 1970s to the 2000s, and the reality of their constraints and limitations. To what extent was ‘explaining the church to the world’ achieved by the two editors? To what extent did these men exercise editorial independence? What were their strategies? How did they deal with outraged and hostile letter writers? What were their hopes and dreams as key persons informing the Uniting Church’s members about the church’s life? To what extent did the church papers reflect the relationship of church and society during those four decades? Looking now at the life and mission of the world church, what lessons might be learned by the UCA and its various Synod publications today in a multi-religious context?

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I declare my interest in this topic: I’m a church newspaper tragic since I read the *Presbyterian Messenger* and *Catholic Advocate* as a teenager in the 1950s. I’ve been a regular reader of *Australian Presbyterian Life (APL)*, *Church & Nation* and a contributor (1995) to *Crosslight*.

The radical social movements in the 1960s—the Vietnam War protests and the gender revolution—opened up a new political and cultural milieu. Biblical scholarship and public theology and the world movements against racism and

colonialism gave impetus to Uniting Church leadership, which was reflected in the journals.

In three decades following the inauguration of the UCA, the Synod of Victoria (and later Tasmania) news media had two long-serving editors, Warren Clarnette and Bruce Best. Both men demonstrated openness to reflect and comment on the church's engagement with society at local and national level, and in global affairs.

Leading up to church union, the Methodist papers had been edited by Clarnette and Presbyterian by Best. Warren Clarnette edited the Methodist *New Spectator* from 1971–77, then became editor of the new UCA Synod of Victoria's *Church and Nation* until 1988. Bruce Best (APL 1974–77) went to *Crosslight* in 1991.

I want to ask two questions: In what ways did those Uniting Church's papers attempt a prophetic role—that is speaking for justice and truth—as regards national affairs? In what ways did they advocate for Christian Gospel values of compassion and human dignity? Secondly, how did the Uniting Church papers interact with readers, particularly those who wrote to the editor?

### Church media's prophetic role?

I suggest those two journals provide a starting point for reflecting now, in 2019, on the prophetic role of the Uniting Church's media.

On 25 May 1977, Warren Clarnette was announced as the editor-to-be of the new journal.<sup>1</sup> He said: "*Church & Nation* policy will be to provide comment on religious, cultural and

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<sup>1</sup> Warren Clarnette, *Australian Presbyterian Life*, 25 May 1977.

social issues from the perspective of faith... It will be a medium for discussion and controversy within the church.”

In July, on the job, Clarnette said in *Church & Nation*: “Sooner or later the church has to speak out on issues of society. We cannot afford to draw back from public disapproval”.<sup>1</sup>

Best, when interviewed by me in April this year, said: “I was interested in taking on *Crosslight* as a new publication with freshness, not just answerable to church authorities, but answerable to readers and congregations”.<sup>2</sup>

As editor of *APL* Best had tackled issues of environmental conservation. From the World Council of Churches Assembly in Nairobi in 1976, he reported Professor Charles Birch saying: “Humans have easily complied with Genesis 1:28’s first directives—multiply, and have dominion over God’s creation, but we have failed to heed the third directive in Genesis 1:28 to ‘replenish the earth’”.<sup>3</sup>

Some snapshots—I offer some samples of the work of both editors

Aurukun: Church confrontation with Queensland Premier

From 1968 to 1987 Johannes Bjelke-Petersen had gerrymandered the electoral structure of Queensland, thus allowing his record tenure as Premier of Queensland. His government had expressed an implacable hatred of Aboriginal land rights. Best, editing *APL*, reported on the Bjelke-Petersen government’s agreement with the mining company Comalco,

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<sup>1</sup> Warren Clarnette, *Church & Nation*, 27 July 1977.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Bruce Best, 2 April 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Best, *Australian Presbyterian Life*, 18 February 1976.

excluding the local Aborigines from an agreement to exploit bauxite on their land.

On 4 February 1976, *APL* printed a letter from the Rev. John Brown, superintendent of the Presbyterian Board of Ecumenical Mission and Relations:

Comalco determines who is employable, [and] there is no clause in the agreement relating to training aborigines for employment. [Provision for] three percent of profits [available to the aboriginal community] is not a royalty. Companies can present their financial reports [so that] no profit appears.<sup>1</sup>

In *APL* 7 April 1976 the headline read: “Church leader stands firm on Aurukun. Government did not consult the people. Clash with Queensland government ministers”. *APL* quoted the Right Rev. G.A. Wood, Moderator-General of the Presbyterian General Assembly of Australia, refuting the Queensland government’s justification for allowing bauxite mining.<sup>2</sup> Two weeks later, Best reported that John Brown had expressed hope for a new Aurukun mining agreement, which would reflect the views of the Aboriginal people.<sup>3</sup>

Federal government uranium mining push

Over several years, pressure had been building on federal governments from the mining industry to approve expansion of its exploitation of uranium reserves. The Presbyterian Church was aware of these moves since 1975.

In *APL* for 18 February 1976 the Rev. Stuart Reid, Church & Nation committee convenor for the Presbyterian Church in

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<sup>1</sup> John Brown, *Australian Presbyterian Life*, 4 February 1976.

<sup>2</sup> G.A. Wood, *Australian Presbyterian Life*, 7 April 1976.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Best, *Australian Presbyterian Life*, 21 April 1976.

Victoria, urged parishioners to write to their members of parliament expressing concern and calling for a major revision in Australia's policy on mining uranium.<sup>1</sup>

In *APL*, the Rev. Alan Hardie, on behalf of the Social Justice Division of the soon to be inaugurated Uniting Church of Victoria, wrote: "We appeal to the Federal government to delay a final decision on uranium mining".<sup>2</sup>

On 23 August 1976, the federal coalition government cabinet approved uranium mining in several sites in northern Australia.

Clarnette published a letter in the 5 October 1977 edition of *Church & Nation* from the Australian Uranium Producers Forum,<sup>3</sup> claiming that survey results showed 57% of Australians wanted uranium mining to go ahead.

Howard Harris of Ringwood wrote a letter on October 19 saying "No to a nuclear future!"

The Ranger uranium mine began on 9 January 1979 at Nabarlek.

## A National Paper?

Clarnette and his journalist, the Rev. Bernard Long, had hoped for an Australia-wide journal at the beginning of the UCA. Clarnette in April 2019<sup>4</sup> said:

We both wanted a national paper. I put my foot in it at the first General Assembly, and said it's a great mistake we never had a national journal. The Rev. Ron Allardice, the Victorian Moderator, took

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart Reid, *Australian Presbyterian Life*, 18 February 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Hardie, *Australian Presbyterian Life*, 15 June 1976.

<sup>3</sup> Warren Clarnette, *Church & Nation*, 5 Oct 1977.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Warren Clarnette, 18 Apr 2019.

umbrage at that, because the decision had been made by a committee that we would not have a national paper. Each synod wanted its own paper. The other papers were basically enlarged parish papers.

Best, too, was an advocate of a national paper. His editorship of *Crosslight* regularly focused on national events.

Consistently, *Church & Nation* and later *Crosslight* reported on the World Council of Churches, the Christian Conference of Asia, and the life and mission of the UCA nation-wide, with occasional supplements from the Northern (Northern Territory) Synod.

## Indigenous Affairs

Clarnette's *New Spectator* had reported on the Methodist missions in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. Now *Church & Nation* reported on the beginnings and growth of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

On 25 Feb 1981, the *Church & Nation* article, "The Rev. Charles Harris ordained by Queensland UC Synod" started an unfolding story. "Charles Harris, as planning committee chairman of the national black Congress of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders within the UCA, is funded by Uniting World Mission to travel round Australia." Harris convened meetings at Crystal Creek and Galiwin'ku, Elcho Island, which brought the Congress into being.

*Church & Nation* journalist Roger Mitchell on 28 July 1982 in reviewing the SBS documentary series "Women of the Sun" said: "This [program] throws light on a dark Australian scene." On 25 August that year, in Mitchell's story "The First Tasmanians" about today's Aborigines of Cape Barren Island



and Flinders Island, a local person commented: “They’re not real aborigines”.<sup>1</sup>

Best’s *Crosslight* from 1991 onwards continued *Church & Nation*’s reports on the Uniting Church’s Indigenous communities and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

Along with strong leadership by Vince Ross, the Synod of Victoria funded the purchase of land on Torquay Road, Grovedale, Victoria and the construction of a suite of buildings for retail Indigenous arts and crafts, interpretive education and truth-telling. *Crosslight* reported on the opening of the Narana Creations Centre, with Shayne Blackman (National Convenor) and Warren Bartlett (Vic-Tas Synod Moderator) in December 1996.

## A Legion Of Letter Writers

Both editors responded to their readers, encouraging Letters to the Editor with views across the political and theologically conservative—liberal spectrum.

The Rev. Dr John Williams created a small avalanche of letter writing (60 were printed, 25 were not used) when *Church & Nation* published on 10 February 1982 his article “A Christian libertarian argues for capitalism and against the welfare state”. Williams said: “The beneficiaries of the welfare state are the concerned planners, bureaucrats and social workers who preside over the system”.

Academics, church leaders and members weighed in with responses. Professor Ronald Henderson asked: “As Christians,

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<sup>1</sup> R. Mitchell, “The First Tasmanians”, *Church & Nation*, 25 August 1982.

are we willing to make some sacrifice of our incomes to create a more just society?”

One reader called for more church, less nation; others wrote encouragingly. Clarnette said: “John Williams’ article was published to broaden the horizons of discussion within the church”.

Best said (in my interview on 2 April 2019):

Letters to the Editor is a field of flowers with many petals, some blowing this way, that way. I felt that if people had some interest in the UCA, they had a right to have views published. Letters were often very long, about 1500 words, and I had to cut them to three or four hundred.

### Indigenous Land Rights and Native Title backlash

In the decade of the 1990s, the High Court of Australia’s Mabo and Wik judgments (1991–2), shone new light on Australia’s Indigenous people, and exposed the nation’s racism and greed.

Pauline Hanson attacking “Aboriginal privilege”, her launch of One Nation Party (May 1997), and Prime Minister Howard’s ten point Wik response (May 1997) all fed into the nation’s political discourse, reflected in many stories and Letters to the Editor of *Crosslight*.

David Barnett’s letter to the editor (*Crosslight*, May 1997), like many others, criticised the federal government’s hostility to native title rights: “Will we Australians flee from our responsibilities for justice?”

Joseph Camilleri, President of Pax Christi Australia, wrote in July 1997, “The right for Aborigines to negotiate must be

preserved... An important hidden agenda [of the Prime Minister's response to the Wik decision] is obviously to have pastoral leases turned into freehold".<sup>1</sup> In that same issue, Ian Williams and Gary Deverell wrote [in an open letter to the Prime Minister], "Sir, your ten point plan deliberately restricts and erodes the modest rights to land... which the Mabo and Wik decisions finally recognized".

## Sexuality and Gender Rights

In both journals, the topics of the rights of LGBTI people, homosexuality of ministers, and same-gender marriage aroused about as much reporting, comment and correspondence as any other public issue.

Even before Sydney's first Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras on 24 June 1978, the Rev. Fred Nile, Director of the Festival of Light, sent broadsides across the bows of the gay community. On 16 February 1977, in Best's *APL*, Nile said: "The people of New South Wales could soon find the whole moral basis of their society swept away by permissive legislation [*sic*]", referring to the decriminalizing of homosexual relations.<sup>2</sup>

And on 15 January 1981, as the question of gays in ministry emerged, the Rev. Dr Robert Weatherlake, the President of the Fellowship for Revival said rather dramatically, "the toleration of moral perversity would post a devastating threat to our [church's] unity".<sup>3</sup>

In 1996 the General Assembly received an Interim Report from the Committee on Sexuality, expressing inclusivity toward gays and lesbians in the Uniting Church. In a letter to

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<sup>1</sup> J. Camilleri, *Crosslight*, July 1997.

<sup>2</sup> F. Nile, *Australian Presbyterian Life*, 16 Feb. 1977.

<sup>3</sup> R. Weatherlake, *Church & Nation*, 15 Jan 1981.

*Crosslight*'s editor (June 1996) the Rev. Sir Alan Walker said, "I express my distress at the Report... I reject [it] as mischievous and divisive".

The Rev. Alastair Macrae responded to Walker in September 1996's *Crosslight*, "The task group's process won't be served by dismissive, inaccurate and unfair generalisations".

*Crosslight* reported that at the September 1996 Victorian Synod meeting, the proposal to elect the Rev. Dr Jenny Byrnes as Moderator, had been rejected. Many letters to the Editor followed, discussing this incident.

## Conclusion

Bruce Best retired in 2007, ready for retirement "after 15 years of writing, editing and producing 15,000 words each month".<sup>1</sup>

These snapshots of *Church & Nation* and *Crosslight* during the years 1977 to 2007 show that both magazines within the limitations of their resources were a prophetic voice, in the best tradition of Amos and Hosea they attempted to "Let justice flow like a river".<sup>2</sup>

And, how about the present day *Crosslight*? Clarnette's view in 2019 is acerbic: "*Crosslight* now does nothing more than to be a promotional vehicle for the denomination. I'm totally disappointed".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Bruce Best, 2 April 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Amos 5:24 *Contemporary English Version*.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Warren Clarnette, 18 April 2019.

# Theophilus Taylor and the beginnings of Methodism in Ballaarat<sup>1</sup>

D'Arcy Wood

## Synopsis

It was lay people, especially local preachers, who set up most of the Wesleyan 'preaching places' in the early nineteenth century. But the Chairman of the Victoria District was keen to have an ordained minister on the Ballaarat goldfields, and sent the Rev. Theophilus Taylor, aged almost 25, in 1854. Taylor found that he had to shoulder most of the administrative and financial responsibilities as well as the preaching, pastoral and sacramental ministry. He established both day schools and Sunday Schools. His diary describes the Eureka uprising and contact with indigenous people. After three years, because of poor health, he was transferred to the Brighton Circuit but died in January 1859, aged 29.

Gold was discovered by Thomas Hiscock in Buninyong, just south of Ballaarat, on 8 August 1851. Further discoveries were made soon in Ballaarat itself and the famous goldrush began. The main centre of population was established in 1852 along the road to Geelong, now known as Main Road.

Those who come to Australia with the romantic notion of prospecting in a fresh, natural environment were quickly brought down to earth when faced with

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<sup>1</sup> Although this spelling varies in documents of the 1850s, mostly it was spelt as Ballaarat. Taylor often spells it 'Ballaaratt'.

the mud, noise and filth of living and working on the goldfields.<sup>1</sup>

Not all were romantics by any means. Professional miners from Cornwall came with their families and took charge of many of the diggings. Cornwall had been a Methodist stronghold from the time of John Wesley, so Methodism was soon established in Ballaarat. The habit of prayer meetings and preaching services in English Methodism was replicated in Ballaarat.

A history of Wesleyan Methodists published in 1886 says that the first preaching service was conducted by James Sanderson on 28 September 1851 at 11 am. It is said that 100 people attended.<sup>2</sup> Regular Sunday services continued from that time. Sanderson was born in Ireland and came to Australia in 1839. He had been an ordained Wesleyan minister but resigned when he married. There was no reluctance on his part to continue preaching, however; and he continued as a local preacher for decades.<sup>3</sup> Six weeks after Sanderson's first service a chapel made of saplings and boughs was opened, having a tarpaulin for a roof.

A significant proportion of the miners and other settlers were of Methodist background, so preaching places were quickly established. A 'preaching place' was Methodist terminology for a centre of worship which had not, or not yet, become a 'society' or, as we would say today, a congregation. As a digging ceased to operate, its tent could be transported to another digging. Even wooden buildings were sometimes dismantled and transported

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<sup>1</sup> Trevor Peers (Ed.), *Mount Pleasant Church 1855–2005: A journey through 150 years* (Ballarat: printed by the editor, 2005), 11.

<sup>2</sup> W.L. Blamires and J.B. Smith, *The Early Story of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Victoria* (Melbourne: Wesleyan Methodist Book Depot, 1886), 147.

<sup>3</sup> *The Spectator*, Melbourne, 19 March 1886.

to a new location. Thomas Maxwell and other local preachers were busy conducting services and it wasn't long before the usual pattern of Methodist meetings began to appear. After the very first service a 'class meeting' was formed, and during the following year a Sunday School, day school and Bible class began. In March 1853 the first Circuit Officers were elected.

So what of ordained ministry? At a District Meeting in Melbourne in 1852 it was resolved to send a minister to the growing flock in Ballaarat, but it was more than a year before a minister was found and he was not a Wesleyan but a minister of the American Methodist Episcopal Church by the name of J.B. Vipont. He arrived on 3 September 1853, six months after the Circuit was officially formed. A site for a 'church and house' was then chosen. The goldfields authorities were keen to help Christian denominations establish themselves because of the moral and educational influence they wielded in a mobile and sometimes unruly community.

During that year, 1853, the Methodist Conference in England, meeting in Bradford, appointed the Rev. Theophilus Taylor to Australia—not to Ballaarat specifically, but to the Victoria District. Taylor had been born in Yorkshire in April 1829. His success as a local preacher caused his Superintendent minister to encourage him to train for the ordained ministry, and he studied at the Richmond Theological Institution for two years, after which he served the Castle Donington Circuit for one year. In September of 1853, at Gravesend, he embarked on the vessel *Beulah*. His voyage to Australia took four and half

months. In his diary Taylor records many storms and also many days of calm when the sailing ship made no progress at all.<sup>1</sup>

On his arrival in Williamstown, near Melbourne, he was met by the District Chairman, Mr Butters. On his first Sunday he travelled to the “village of St Kilda” to preach. Within a month Taylor was on his way to Ballaarat, reaching that settlement on 4 March 1854. He was faced with numerous difficulties. First was accommodation for himself. After some days in a hotel, a tent was purchased, large enough for a bed, desk and chairs. It is recorded that the walls of the tent were lined with 19 pairs of blankets, presumably to keep out the drafts. Taylor was keen, naturally enough, for a wooden parsonage, but this was not built until the end of the year, eight months after his arrival. Taylor had left behind a fiancée in England, Narcissa Partridge, and the mission authorities of the church would not allow her to travel to Australia without something better than a tent to live in.

A second difficulty was the burden of administration. Taylor found that tents and buildings had considerable debts. Tents and even wooden buildings were destroyed in storms from time to time, so money had to be raised to replace them. In one case, the tent at Gravel Pits, which had cost £500, was “blown to tatters” and had to be sold for just £6. Fortunately, the Wesleyans were generous with cash, nuggets and gold dust, so debts were paid off fairly quickly. It is clear from Taylor’s diary that he was not greatly impressed with his predecessor, Mr Vipont. The issue was complicated by the fact that some of the flock wanted Vipont to stay longer in Ballaarat but after some meetings the

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor’s hand-written diary is in the Public Library of Victoria. I have a typed version, referred to below as ‘Journal’.



financial and other issues were resolved, and Vipont took up an appointment in an Anglican parish in Geelong.

A third difficulty was loneliness. The evenings would have been long and Taylor travelled by himself for services and meetings. He writes of his hopes for his fiancée to join him. He also writes of encouraging responses to his preaching, but there were not many conversions, which, for an evangelical preacher, was disappointing.

A fourth difficulty was the weather. He was neither the first nor the last to complain about Ballaarat weather! He travelled to Creswick and beyond by horseback and records how he was drenched by heavy rain. In April of his first year he wrote, “Tis an exceedingly stormy country: in winter incessant rain and wind, and in summer everlasting dust”.<sup>1</sup> On the following day he reported, “Wet through and perished with cold”.

Related to this issue was Taylor’s poor health. In the Taylor obituary, the Rev. James Bickford wrote that Taylor had lung problems as a theological student in England. On the voyage to Australia and then in Ballaarat the problems continued. In his journal for August of his first year he wrote:

In consequence of the exposure inseparable from a tent my health is seriously deteriorating ... I felt it my duty to request the Chairman either to put me in a position to build a small cottage immediately or remove me from Ballaarat.<sup>2</sup>

Yet another difficulty was what he calls the “encroachment” of miners on church land. Letters of 1855 and 1856 record discussions with his church superiors, the government

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<sup>1</sup> Journal, 30 April 1854. The underlining is Taylor’s own.

<sup>2</sup> Journal, 31 August 1854.

authorities, and the miners. Towards the end of his ministry in Ballaarat Taylor reached an agreement which evidently satisfied all parties, at least with regard to the central property in Lydiard Street.<sup>1</sup>

Taylor conducted a great many weddings, baptisms and funerals, travelling to places in the surrounding districts. He advertised his fee for a wedding as five guineas, with the banns of marriage at £2/10/-. Burials were 10/- for a person over the age of 10 years and 5/- for someone under 10. These fees went into the Circuit funds. He recorded only twelve celebrations of holy communion in the first twelve months, but I am fairly certain it was more often than that. On Sundays he preached three times, in two or three different locations, and these services were not as short as we experience in the twenty-first century. On 20 May 1855 Taylor recorded that he “preached 105 minutes” but adds in brackets that this was “too long”. How his hearers reacted to a sermon of this length is not mentioned.

Taylor was concerned that the churches had no representation on the Trust at the main Ballaarat cemetery, and entered into correspondence on this matter. Documents of the time make it clear that government authorities were in constant contact with the churches over property, education (both secular and moral), and issues of welfare. The Lieutenant Governor, Charles Hotham, visited the Wesleyan chapels and schools in Ballaarat in August 1854 and said, “It is highly creditable to the Wesleyans that they are doing so much for the diggings”.<sup>2</sup>

During the three years of Taylor’s tenure, Methodism in Ballaarat increased substantially. At one stage four new

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<sup>1</sup> Photocopied letters in my possession, dated 22 October 1856 and 27 November 1856.

<sup>2</sup> Journal, 28 August 1854.

preaching places were established in the space of two months. The Wesleyans were reported to be larger than all the other Protestant denominations put together.<sup>1</sup> Such a statement would seem difficult to verify, but when I took up an appointment in the Ballarat South Methodist Circuit in 1966, 112 years after Taylor began his ministry, there were 27 Methodist congregations spread across four circuits with nine ministers. The number of Presbyterian and Anglican congregations was much fewer than the Methodist.

Taylor's workload was such, by the end of his first year, that he asked for the appointment of a second minister to be based in Creswick (or Creswick Creek, as it was known). He commented that the income of the circuit was sufficient to support two ministers. In December of his first year, Taylor wrote an interesting report for the District meeting. He said that the population of Ballaarat is "estimated" at 60,000 people. The Protestant churches together had five ministers. He was worried about the general moral state of the population, and reported "drunken revelry and the vilest practices".<sup>2</sup> He said the "migratory habits" of the people were part of the problem. On the positive side, the Wesleyan congregations together numbered about 1,000 people, including 175 full members. The income for the year was "more than £2,000". Buildings consisted of two wooden chapels, a stone school house, and a neat "Mission House" (meaning a parsonage). A third chapel was being erected at Creswick Creek, and there were two other "preaching places". There were three day schools, with 150 scholars and four teachers. Where a chapel doubled as a day school, government grants subsidised the cost. By October 1854

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<sup>1</sup> Blamires and Smith, 155.

<sup>2</sup> Journal, 26 December 1854.

all debts except one had been repaid. There were three Sunday Schools, 180 scholars and 20 teachers. The big difference between the number of day school teachers and Sunday School teachers is no doubt explained by the need to pay the day school staff.

The reference to a “stone school house” is interesting in that it indicates not only that tents and wooden structures were subject to storm damage but that the Wesleyans intended to establish themselves permanently, whatever the future of the gold diggings might be. Brick and stone buildings were erected throughout the 1850s. In April 1855 Taylor went to Ceres, to the west of Geelong, and preached at the laying of the foundation of a new church. That building, of local stone and owned privately these days, is in bad repair but has a heritage listing, so will not be demolished in the foreseeable future.

Taylor and other clergy in Ballaarat were greatly concerned for Sabbath observance. They held meetings and lobbied the secular authorities but, from his diary, it seems they had limited success.

Taylor was also concerned for public order and so wrote at some length about the Eureka uprising. Like many Wesleyans of the nineteenth century he was strongly on the side of the authorities. He wrote on 30 November 1854:

... the mob assembled and by evening had organised themselves into a body of rebels. They proceeded through the diggings seizing all the firearms and ammunition they could meet with. This entirely suspended business—all the peaceable diggers were obliged to leave work and fly for safety.

Three days later he wrote:

This morning at two o'clock a company of troopers and military carried the war into the enemy's camp. In a very short time numbers were shot and hundreds taken prisoners. About 50 came at death by their folly. On the other side two soldiers killed and two officers wounded. The sight in the morning was truly appalling—men lying dead, slain by evil. The remedy is very lamentable, but it appears was necessary.<sup>1</sup>

This conservative point of view was not limited to Taylor or to other clergy, as 54 “officers and members” of the Wesleyan congregations signed an “address” to the Lieutenant Governor supporting the use of force against so-called “rebels”. Who were these signatories? We get an idea of the membership from the following description of a Wesleyan preaching service in March 1854:

The evening congregation was composed of persons of all ranks and persuasions. In it were persons of all grades from the most respectable to the humblest walks of life: lawyers and doctors, Oxford and Cambridge graduates and miners. Such is the usual composition of our diggings congregation.<sup>2</sup>

The high value placed on respectability is also indicated in Taylor's report of his contact with Indigenous locals:

... visited a tribe of natives in the bush. At the sight my soul was greatly humbled as in their depth of degradation I beheld how greatly our race has fallen from its pristine perfection. ... Living in a state of nudity. Their huts simply consisting of a few shreds

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<sup>1</sup> Journal, 30 November and 3 December 1854.

<sup>2</sup> Journal, 12 March 1854.

of bark thrown together upon an elevated pole. ... But their moral condition appears still worse. They appear to be entirely destitute of any sense of moral obligation or of a Supreme Being. Praise to Him from whom all blessings flow that I was born a happy English child.<sup>1</sup>

This attitude to indigenous people was common in the nineteenth century but that is not to excuse it. How Taylor decided that there was no “sense of a Supreme Being”, when he had no knowledge of the local language, is unclear.

Taylor’s diary entries tail off on 1 August 1855, his second year. His fiancée arrived in Sydney in June of that year and the couple were married in Sydney on 3 July 1855. They were greeted warmly by the Wesleyans on their arrival in Ballaarat on 27 July. Taylor wrote, “The house hung with evergreens decked with white ribbons and upon the table lay a sumptuous supper”.<sup>2</sup> Ten months later their first child, Mary, was born.

Because the journal ends before the end of his second year in Ballaarat, not much is known of Taylor’s third year, but his health was still poor, so the Australasian Wesleyan Conference of 1857 appointed him Superintendent of the Brighton Circuit, probably hoping that the temperate climate by the bay would be beneficial. But his health did not improve, so after a matter of weeks, he was given leave of absence and travelled to Maitland in New South Wales with his wife and little daughter. Narcissa had relatives in Maitland. A second daughter was born in Maitland but lived only eight months. After several months in Maitland the family returned to Brighton but his ministry there

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<sup>1</sup> Journal, 9 May 1854.

<sup>2</sup> Journal, 27 July 1855.

continued only until March 1858 when he retired on health grounds—in Methodist parlance he was ‘laid aside’. The family returned to Ballaarat and Theophilus, aware that he might not live long, set up a small bookshop so as to bring in some income. Narcissa sewed garments and household goods for sale. On 4 January 1859 Theophilus died, a little less than five years after arriving in Australia. He was aged 29. A couple of weeks after his death a son was born, also called Theophilus, but he survived only 12 hours.

After attempting to make a living in Ballaarat, Narcissa moved to Sydney where she had family support. Seven years later she married a widower, Dr Walter Le Croix O’Reilly. Ten years after that, her daughter, Mary, married Walter’s son, another doctor, Walter William Joseph O’Reilly, so for many years there were two Mrs O’Reillys, mother and daughter. Mary became very influential in Methodist circles, doing welfare work and raising money for overseas missions. In the book *Out of the Ordinary: twelve Australian Methodist biographies*, the historian Margaret Reeson devotes a chapter to Mary O’Reilly, describing her as a “mother in Methodism”.<sup>1</sup> She was a mother in more than one sense, as she had nine children, eight of whom survived into adulthood. My mother, Olive, was one of them.

Some final words about Theophilus. According to the Rev. James Bickford who succeeded Theophilus in the Ballaarat Circuit, and who wrote an obituary, Theophilus had a “mind of no ordinary calibre, clear, discriminating, logical, comprehensive and sound—and [he had] a severe conviction that the ‘call’ to the ministry is ... of a solemn and divine

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Reeson, “Mary O’Reilly: a Mother in Methodism”, in Patricia Curthoys and William Emilsen (Eds), *Out of the Ordinary: twelve Australian Methodist biographies* (Unley S.A.: MediaCom, 2015), 25–54.

character”.<sup>1</sup> A Wesleyan history written in 1886 says, “Mr Taylor was enterprising and devoted in a high degree, as well as a ‘wise master-builder’, and he laid the foundations of our Church broad and strong”.<sup>2</sup> As a typical Wesleyan of his day, Theophilus was committed to the spread of the Gospel throughout the world, to a warm and prayerful local fellowship, and to the availability of education to all children. While politically conservative in one sense, the Wesleyans believed in the fundamental equality of all people in the sight of God and to the unlimited reach of the grace of God. As a Charles Wesley hymn puts it, “Thy sovereign grace to all extends, / immense and unconfined. / From age to age it never ends, / it reaches all mankind”.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James Bickford, “Obituary for the Rev. Theophilus Taylor”. There are several typed copies of this document in existence, but I have, so far, not located the original.

<sup>2</sup> Blamires and Smith, 154.

<sup>3</sup> *The Methodist Hymn Book with Tunes* (London, Methodist Conference Office, 1933) Hymn 77, verse 2.



## Notes on contributors

**Ken Barelli** has recently completed research at the University of Melbourne about the influence of the Methodist Church on Social Policy in Victoria, 1902–1977 using temperance as a case study. He is presently conducting further research into the Methodist Church in Victoria and its decline over the course of the twentieth century.

**Barry Brown** served the Methodist Church as a Helper, Local Preacher, Home Missioner, Student Pastor and as an ordained Minister. Since 1977 he has served the Uniting Church. He is a keen student of family history, the Wesleys, and Methodist history, and has published a number of books on these topics. He is in active retirement.

**Leanne Davis** is the Administrative Officer of the Uniting Church South Australia History Society. She is a theological student and a lay preacher.

**Graeme Davison AO** was a Rhodes Scholar and studied at the Universities of Melbourne, Oxford and the Australian National University. He taught at Melbourne University and was Professor of History at Monash University 1982–2005. He has had visiting appointments at Harvard, Edinburgh, ANU, Tübingen and King's College London. He has published widely. He is also Chairman of the Heritage Council of Victoria, a Fellow of the Australian Academies of Social Sciences and Humanities, and is a prominent advisor and commentator on museums, heritage and urban policy.

**Dean Eland** is a member, former secretary and editor of the South Australian Uniting Church Historical Society. He was ordained in 1963 and served for forty years in inner urban and

industrial centres in Sydney, Melbourne and South Australia. He has a continuing interest in cross-disciplinary research in the study of congregations.

**Robert Gribben OAM** is Professor Emeritus of Worship and Mission of the Uniting Church Theological College in Melbourne (now ‘Pilgrim’) and an honorary Research Fellow of the University of Divinity. He served on the liturgical committees which produced the two editions of *Uniting in Worship* (1988, 2005), and he has a particular interest in the ecumenical dimensions of liturgy.

**Cheryl Griffin**, the daughter of a Methodist clergyman, worked as a teacher for more than 35 years. During that time she completed an M.Ed. and a PhD in the field of the history of education. She has volunteered at the Female Convict Research Centre in Hobart, at the Coburg Historical Society, and at the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. She has contributed a number of books on the lives of Tasmanian female convicts and in 2017 wrote *The Old Boys of Coburg State School Go to War* for the Coburg Historical Society.

**James Haire AC** is Professor Emeritus, Charles Sturt University, and Professorial Research Fellow, Public and Contextual Research Centre at Charles Sturt University. He was the ninth President of the UCA and fourth President of the National Council of Churches in Australia.

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**Alison Head** is a long-term member of the Uniting Church Historical Society (Victoria/Tasmania) and has worked as a

volunteer at the Synod Archives since 1980. She has written widely on the place of women in the Uniting Church and its predecessors, the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian churches.

**David Houston** is a former Director of the Lay Education Centre and was Lay Ministry Consultant for the Synod of South Australia 1989–1994. He lectured in Lay Ministries Studies at Parkin-Wesley College from 1994 until retirement in 1998. He has been a member and chairperson of a number of UCA local, state and national committees, and was co-Chair of the Council of Christians and Jews (SA), and is currently Vice-President of the Uniting Church South Australia Historical Society.

**Brian Howe AO** is a member of the Church of All Nations Carlton. He was a member of the Commonwealth Parliament 1977–1996 and a Minister in each of the Hawke and Keating Governments where he held mainly social policy related ministries. He is a Professorial Fellow at Melbourne University, and continues to write about social policy as well as continuing his interests and participation in the UCA and the ecumenical movement.

**Glen O'Brien** is Research Coordinator at Eva Burrows College within the University of Divinity, and a UCA minister. He is a member of the University of Divinity's Centre for Research in Religion and Social Policy, and Vice-President of the Religious History Association. He has published widely on Wesleyan and Methodist themes, and the author of *Wesleyan-Holiness Churches in Australia* (2018) and co-editor with Hilary Carey of *Methodism in Australia: A History* (2015).

**Steve and Judy Orme** live in Darwin. Steve is a UCA minister recently retired. His last placement was as Resource Worker with the Northern Regional Council of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. Judy served as the Executive Assistant for past UCA President Stuart McMillan and previously worked in the Northern Synod office with responsibility for Archives among other things. Both have an ongoing interest in the history of the church in northern Australia.

**Julia Pitman** is a minister and church historian currently in placement at St Paul's and Armitage Uniting Churches, Mackay, Queensland. She is a Research Fellow in the Public and Contextual Theology Research Centre of Charles Sturt University.

**Judith Raftery** grew up in Churches of Christ but has found a home in the Uniting Church since 1987. She is President of the Uniting Church South Australia Historical Society and is Secretary of the Uniting Church National History Society. Her research and publications deal with many aspects of Australian social and religious history.

**Margaret Reeson** is a writer who is now retired after many years of involvement in ministry as a lay person. This included Christian education in Papua New Guinea, and membership of local, Presbytery, Synod and Assembly boards and committees. She was also at one point the Moderator of the Synod of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

**Ben Skerman** holds post-graduate qualifications in history and health administration. From 1972 to 1978 he was a member of the Australian Presbyterian Mission in South Korea, later the Uniting Church Mission in South Korea working in the Il Sin

Hospital. Having spent his working life managing hospitals he is an active member of the Australian and New Zealand Society for the History of Medicine, and has contributed to a number of publications on Korea and medical missions.

**Neil Tolliday** is a retired minister of the UCA, previously a Presbyterian minister 1964–1976 in Australia, Canada and England. He taught Communication and Humanities at Box Hill College of TAFE for two decades. He and his wife taught English in universities in China 2005–2006.

**H. D’Arcy Wood** has served parishes in Melbourne, Ballarat and Canberra and was President of the UCA 1991–1994. For 15 years he taught Theology in Adelaide and is the author of articles on theology, liturgy, hymnology, history and ecumenism. He was on the editorial committee for the *Australian Hymn Book*, *Sing Alleluia*, and *Together in Song*.