

Uniting Church History and Heritage

Uniting Church National History Society: Vol. 3 No. 4 December 2021



Focusing on the important things...

If you can't read the small print at the bottom of the sign, it says "ALSO THE BRIDGE IS OUT AHEAD". I guess the humorous intention of the sign is to get people to focus their attention on the sign rather than to glance at it and forget—and potentially have problems when they get to the bridge that is 'out'.

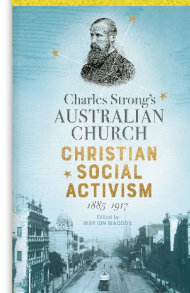
It made me think about what people are focusing their attention on as we exit from Covid lockdowns and attempt to get to 'normal' life again. Has history anything to guide or teach us?

Reading the story recently of how the influenza pandemic following World War I was managed (or mismanaged) made me realise just how similar some of the issues were to those we have faced with Covid in 2020–21, and how different others were.

Have we paid—and do we now pay now—enough attention to any lessons from the history of pandemics, not just the influenza pandemic of a hundred years ago?

Can we understand and learn how to deal with the riots and the mass demonstrations and the misleading information that abounds by paying more attention to history? (Robert Renton)

New publication



Advertised in Uniting History SA, Marion Maddox has recently published a new book, *Charles Strong's Australian Church: Christian Social Activism, 1885–1917*.

The untold story of the Rev. Charles Strong and progressive Christian activism. In the optimistic years preceding federation in 1901 the Melbourne-based Australian Church emerged as a progressive Christian movement to serve brand new nation. Galvanising many members of Melbourne's social and political elite, Strong imagined the Australian Church becoming the national church, while addressing a broad social and political reform agenda, inspired by both theological and social liberalism.

Strong and his wife Janet founded or led organisations for causes ranging from peace to penal reform. They fought for urban slum improvements, rural village settlements, childcare and adult education, the minimum wage and women's suffrage.

Some organisations endure today, others left lasting legacies in Australian methods of addressing social inequality.

Go to: <https://www.mup.com.au/books/charles-strongs-australian-church-electronic-book-text> for further information.

Words from the President



I have recently completed a manuscript on *The Political World of John Wesley* which will be published by Routledge in 2022. The book is the result of a decade of research into the fascinating world of eighteenth-century politics and religion. My investigation of Wesley's political and social tracts uncovered some rather unexpected results. None would have doubted his loyalty to the crown. It was a loyalty, however, not simply to regents as having 'divine right.' Rather, Wesley saw the 'ancient constitution,' in which regent, parliament, and people inhabited a relationship of trust, as the surest guarantee of religious and civil liberty. This loyalty had a strongly personal element to it which is in keeping with his gospel preaching. His field preaching constituted an appeal to ordinary

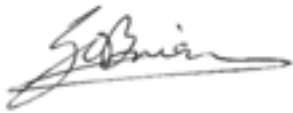
people to see themselves as objects of Christ's dying love, to seek refuge in his wounds, and as happy children to rush to the embrace of a crucified God. This may seem overly individualistic in an age like our own where political change is seen in terms of collective action, but it reflects the emphasis on the agency of the person typical of the eighteenth century. Methodism had a stress on personal agency that provided an avenue of individual choice that would lead in the nineteenth century to a wider participation of the ordinary person in the social sphere, including in the world of politics. Wesley 'offered Christ' primarily to the ecclesiastically disenfranchised 'middling sort' – shopkeepers, miners, agricultural workers, and artisans. Methodism was a popular movement decried as 'enthusiasm' (fanaticism), but it was an enthusiasm that was both rational and religious. These were people who knew little of the doctrinal and liturgical complexities of the Church of England, or any other church, but their instinct for a deeply personal and experiential religious expression was strong. They led the way in the religious expression of the succeeding century which would prove in so many ways to belong to Methodism.

Though Wesley had no opposition to trade or commerce, there is a profound social conscience in all of his writings on economic conditions. The national wealth should not be pursued as its own end, but in order that there should be plenty of readily available goods to support the basic needs of the population. For the self-denying Wesley, greed and luxury on the part of the wealthy were the chief causes of want among the poor. No economic benefit could ever justify the existence of slavery and a collapse of the entire British economy would be preferable, in Wesley's thinking, to the continuation of the trade in human beings, a villainous practice that was contrary to all notions of natural liberty. Wesley was very widely travelled and observed first had the impact of government trade and agricultural policies on the poor. When it came to practical solutions, he was not satisfied with individual responsibility alone but saw a place for government intervention that might alleviate food shortages, and he advised the Prime Minister on such matters. He seemed to approve of the newer economic theories of Adam Smith including that a fixed price on goods was an outmoded approach in the face of market fluctuations, but like Smith he was keenly aware of the social dimensions of economic practices. No economist, he at least offered economic solutions to social problems which even if deemed impractical were driven by a genuine concern for struggling people.

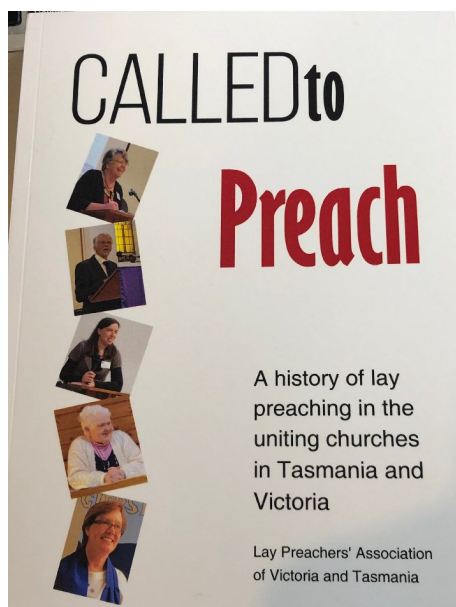
'Liberty and loyalty' are the twin themes that help crystallise John Wesley's political outlook. The surest guarantee of personal and political liberty was through a devout Protestant king ruling over a grateful people, while being held accountable to God (and to the Parliament) as a check on tyranny. This was a form of social contract, and loyalty to that contract would check seditious and rebellious grabs for power. Sentiments expressed by republican voices in America in the lead up to the American Revolution masked more sinister ambitions – an overthrow of this arrangement to be replaced by a democracy of 'the people.' In the end, however, Wesley believed that the hand of an all-wise Providence guided historical forces and the best response to political fluctuations was a personal one – to make God one's friend through repentance and faith. In the end, John Wesley was not a politician or an economist or a military strategist (even if he expressed strong opinions on all these matters). He was a priest and an evangelist, so that his political world ultimately existed as a subset of a world bounded by the cosmic drama of salvation.

In learning about the voices of its ancestors, the Uniting Church does not simply accept uncritically all of their views and opinions. It cannot do so, since they lived in times quite different to our own. There are, however, some principles held by Wesley to which we remain deeply committed. These include the conviction that God's love reaches every person, and that the gospel is good news for the poor. Those blessed with more of this world's material comforts (including governments) should not waste their privilege on greed and luxury but share their wealth more equitably. All people, whether rich or poor, may find Jesus Christ to be their most loving and faithful friend. May such convictions, which transcend the particular circumstances of historical context, guide us all through this Advent and Christmas season.

Yours,



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



Called to Preach

For the last two centuries, women and men in Victoria and Tasmania have heard and heeded the call of God to offer their God-given gifts in the very particular ministry of lay preaching. It's a gift to the Church and our wider communities that has a long story, with twists and turns along the way. It's a story that tells of the changing shapes and forms of the ministry of lay preaching over time.

As we travel through this book, we hear story after story of dedicated people—ordinary and extraordinary, rolled into one. These are people whose hearts were touched by God to give of themselves for the sake of the gospel and for love of the communities God loves.

But this book tells not so much a story of individuals, rather of the ministry of lay preaching. It is about the way lay preaching has found its place amongst the multifaceted and complementary ways in which God provides for ministry amongst the people of God. (*Denise Liersch, Moderator, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania*)

Chapters and authors

Lay preaching in historical perspective (Barry Brown); Methodist lay preaching in Tasmania and Victoria 1820–1902 (Barry Brown); A conversation with Arthur Tonkin (Barry Brown); Methodist lay preaching in the Victoria-Tasmania Conference 1902–1977 (Glen O'Brien); Congregational and Presbyterian lay preaching (Robert Renton); The Basis of Union and lay preaching (D'Arcy Wood); 'All ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ': lay preaching in the Uniting Church 1977 to the present (Cheryl Griffin); After the call to preach, what then? (Alastair Davison); As association of lay preachers (Alastair Davison); Information from the lay preacher questionnaire (Daryl Pedler); Observations, comments, challenge (Robert Renton). Also included is an extensive glossary of terms, and an index of names.

Copies may be obtained from Alastair Davison for \$25, plus postage and packaging of \$9. Email Alastair at yy-lp@iinet.net.au or phone 0412 653 218 for more details.

The Perth College of Divinity and Murdoch University partnership

William Loader

On 19 September 2021 an ecumenical service took place in the Worship Centre at Murdoch University to celebrate the achievements of the Perth College of Divinity and its partnership with Murdoch University over 25 years and to lament its demise. In this brief paper I sketch its history.



Murdoch University's Worship Centre

Until the 1980s church in Western Australia operated separate theological colleges. In most cases offering certificates and degrees awarded by institutions such as the Melbourne College of Divinity and the Australian College of Theology. Sometimes they also sent students interstate for study. By the 1980s there had developed a level of cooperation on both economic and ecumenical grounds which led to some joint teaching. There had also been discussions about possible cooperation between theological colleges in WA and universities, initially with the University of Western Australia but without successful outcome. The partnership with Murdoch University received its initial stimulus through contact between the then Archbishop Peter Carnley and the then Vice Chancellor, Professor Glen Wilson in 1984.

As a result, the Western Australia chapter of the *Australia and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools* brought together The Anglican Institute of Theology, the Baptist Theological College of Western Australia, the Catholic Institute for Adult and Tertiary Education, and the Perth

Theological Hall of the Uniting Church in Australia, to pursue the possibility. In association with the churches, it established the *Perth College of Divinity* (PCD). It was agreed as a basic principle that the churches would conduct negotiations with the university through their appointed representatives in the PCD, thus ensuring coherence in all arrangements and avoiding potential conflicts which history elsewhere had shown could arise when churches acted unilaterally.

During 1984–1985 the churches opened negotiations with Murdoch University through the PCD with a view to establishing the teaching of Theology at the university. On its side Murdoch established a working party in 1984, resulting in a Senate resolution “that subject to the establishment and incorporation of the Perth College of Divinity a programme in Theological Studies be established and the Perth College of Divinity (Inc.) be affiliated with the University by Statute under Section 25(4) of the Murdoch University Act (94/84)”. The resolution went on to provide for the award of a Bachelor of Arts in Theology, a Bachelor of Theology and a Bachelor of Divinity, and the establishment of a Board of Theological Studies with equal representation from both sides. The *Perth College of Divinity Inc.* was incorporated on 4 April 1985. An affiliation agreement was concluded in 1985, enabling teaching for degrees of the university to begin on Murdoch campus in 1986.

Theology at this stage was not funded by the university, although the university contributed significant infrastructure support in administering the degrees and in provision of teaching space and other general facilities. Staff who taught in the program, full-time or part-time, and administrative staff specific to Theology were funded entirely from the four PCD institutions. This was a major ecumenical achievement and at the same time a significant financial saving for each of the churches.

As a result of the initiative of the university in 1990 the funding arrangement changed. The university saw no reason not to seek to include Theology within its overall student load for purposes of normal government funding, since Theology had proven itself as a respectable discipline taught at a high standard. The result

was that from 1994 the university jointly funded the program with the PCD. Staff teaching in Theology had separate but complementary independent fractional contracts with both the university and the PCD on a 40–60% split. Also, Austudy became available for students.

In the 1990s the PCD in partnership with the university launched the Worship Centre and Theological Library appeal, which funded the building of the Worship Centre at Murdoch that opened in 1996. In the 2000s the Theology program in partnership with the university launched the successful Murdoch International Theologian appeal, which provided funds for an annual series of lectures in church and university by an international theologian.

Increasingly, Theology at Murdoch played a mentoring role for other providers, with many of their staff enrolling for postgraduate research. This leadership role facilitated good relations among the various institutions. Murdoch Theology became one of the strongest centres for theology research in Australia, ranked equal first with Australian Catholic University at level 4 in one major survey, all others being level 3 or below. It also ranked highly for teaching excellence. It was a major advantage for both staff and students to have Theology fully integrated on campus, providing unique opportunities for interaction and mainstream academia. I wished I could have transplanted that set-up to other Australian states with greater student numbers.



Staff and students in the mid-1990s

Falling numbers and poor promotion by the constituent churches placed the program under economic strain. The Baptists withdrew when their exceptional pattern of running courses separately on their own campus became financially unviable. There was loss when the Catholic diocese

transferred its staff to the new University of Notre Dame Australia, despite some limited, continuing involvement. There was weakening when the Anglicans sometimes sent ordinands elsewhere and finally when the Uniting Church in 2017 resolved to not fund the replacement for Systematic Theology and, by a slim majority, to withdraw funding altogether. A return to lay and distance education would have to suffice and without Commonwealth funding. In my view, lack of understanding of the partnership's strengths and inadequate efforts to keep the church informed lay behind the decision.

The Anglicans bravely kept the show afloat, but the final demise came with the Coalition Government's effective funding cuts and Covid's cutting off revenue from overseas students. Theology was among the Arts programs which Murdoch decided had to go. So ended what was one of Australia's finest university partnerships. Churches need serious theology. That challenge remains, as does the partnership's joint library collection. It is now back to beginning again with a new team and new opportunities. I wish them well.



Emeritus Professor William (Bill) Loader, FAHA, was New Testament lecturer at the Perth Theological Hall of the Uniting Church in Australia from 1978; from 1986, he was lecturer and later Professor of New

Testament at Murdoch University (1998–2003 also as Head of the School of Social Inquiry). He is a well-known prolific author. (Source: Wikipedia)



The unsuitability of the Presbyterian system for colonial New South Wales

Barry Bridges

The Presbyterian system of Church government worked well in small countries with compact populations such as Scotland, Switzerland and the Netherlands. It was the least suited system for colonial New South Wales, with a sparse population spread over a very large area with long journeys frequently required to get between inhabited places, especially before the coming of steamships and railways.

John Dunmore Lang's Synod of New South Wales, formed in 1850 to serve remote and frontier settlements, claimed to be Presbyterian but could never form presbyteries. This was in part an outcome of the remoteness and poverty of its few ministers and in part because congregations served by its men refused to have any formal association with Lang. This Synod normally held only an annual meeting in Sydney. Some of its cash-strapped voluntarist ministers could not afford the cost of travel to the capital, which might consume a significant part of their annual income, or the disruption of a long period of absence from their charges. These ministers took to sending in an annual written report, often their only contact with their Synod. The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, created in 1846, found it so difficult to get its ministers together that it adopted the device of holding presbytery meetings between sederunts of its Synod meetings. The minute book for its Presbytery of Illawarra for the early 1860s survives. It reveals that its meetings were generally held alternately in the residences of the Rev. William Grant of Shoalhaven and the Rev. John Kinross of Kiama, with the elder of the host minister the only other member present. Grant became so used to being moderator that on one occasion he called a meeting, having forgotten that at a meeting in Sydney a remotely placed minister had been appointed to the chair. John Dunmore Lang, as the man in the capital, became virtually the permanent moderator of the Synod of New South Wales. Some ministers had minimal contact with the bodies to which they notionally belonged. The Rev. John Morison

served the PCEA in New England for thirteen years, yet he was so isolated that had he not publish his memoirs it is unlikely that it would now be known that he was ever in New South Wales. The Rev. Dr William Lambie Nelson of Ipswich was a member of the Synod of Australia from 1853 to 1861 without ever attending a presbytery or synod meeting. Men such as Morrison and Nelson were, perforce, practical Congregationalists. In the early 1860s a number of newly arrived ministers also became practical Congregationalists by not joining any of the four existing Presbyterian Church bodies, a means of assisting the laity in applying pressure for union. Some ministers who seemingly might have reasonably easily attended meetings of their body did not do so over lengthy periods. This invites a suspicion that they shared the laity's disapproval of the clergy's constant infighting and were determined not to become involved.

Even when there was a presbytery the membership was generally too small for effective operation. Personal antipathies between members loomed too large when men were inevitably brought into close contact rather than being allowed to keep apart, as would be possible in a larger gathering. The able but fanatical Rev. William McIntyre mustered his fellow Gaels and engaged in in-fighting against a succession of more liberal opponents throughout the history of the Synod of Eastern Australia. In this Synod and in the Presbytery of New South Wales (1832–1840) there were cases of protecting alleged delinquent ministers, seeking to hasten ordinations and seating constitutionally unqualified persons because in very small bodies with various conflict between factions every vote might be crucial.

The base level presbytery, the kirk session, was very frequently absent, as at this time it was also in Scotland, partly because many ministers did not believe that there should be a lay element in church government and, for reasons of personality some did not want their authority trammelled. It was alleged that it was difficult to find men of the 'right sort' to set aside as elders. In pioneer districts men might be so preoccupied with clearing land, building a habitation and producing food for the table as not to be able to find any appreciable amount of time for anything

else. As one minister said, the eldership was either a power or a farce—and in New South Wales it was usually the latter.

The logical progression would have been for Presbyterian settlers who felt the want of a minister and church services to band together to raise money to send for a minister and to house him. This seldom occurred. Scots were given to leaving it to the clergy to take the initiative. New causes had generally to be 'excavated' from the population by an incoming 'missionary' hoping to work towards a call and settlement. There was a great deal of nominalism in an age when it was still considered necessary to claim some denominational allegiance for respectability. In isolated areas what many people wanted rather than religious ordinances were the means for legal marriage, baptism and secular teaching for their children. To marry and baptise, the missionary needed to be a minister. In Lang's eagerness to supply this need, and to beat rivals into new areas, his Synod of New South Wales often took short cuts. On one occasion an aspirant was ordained by only two ministers because no third minister was within reach. It was common for this body to license and ordain a man on the same day. All sorts of stratagems had to be resorted to in order to induct a new minister. He might be declared inducted at a place remote from his new congregation, given a letter to read to his people pronouncing him inducted from that date or simply have it noted in the Synod minutes that he was held to be inducted from the date of his ordination or appointment.

Presbyterianism in New South Wales suffered greatly from having to rely on a totally imported ministry. The great majority of the ministers came from Scotland and many of them brought with them the party spirit and bigotry of their Scottish socialisation. Much of the continual in-fighting of the clergy had to do with matters of contention imported from Scotland, some of the most important of which were irrelevant in the colonial situation. It took a long period of years for the majority to come to acceptance of that. This internecine strife, constantly aired in the press, lowered the denomination's standing in the eyes of the general public and led to wasteful use of men and resources.

Another imported weakness was the attitude of subservience to the Church of England. Scots were conscious of the advantages of Establishment for the Church of Scotland. It became deeply ingrained in the Scottish psyche that nothing must be done to offend the far more politically powerful Church of England which might provoke it into attacking the Scottish Church's Established status. In pursuit of this principle, it was policy until the 1830s to leave Scots in the colonies to the Church of England. It was argued that this involved no dereliction of duty because the Thirty-Nine Articles were interpreted in a Calvinist sense and the difference in Church government was an ecclesiastical rather than a doctrinal matter. After the Church of Scotland began sending ministers to the colonies some New South Wales ministers functioned as though their role was limited to serving expatriate Scots and Ulstermen. This was particularly the case with members of the Synod of Australia, the body connected with the Church of Scotland and alone accorded State recognition in New South Wales. It showed virtually no interest in expansion. In the 1840s when the population of the colony doubled it did not add a single minister to its roll.

Current UCNHS Board members

Rev. Associate Professor Glen O'Brien
(President) (Victoria)

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Wales

Pastor Richard La'Brooy (New South
Wales)

Pastor Lauren Merritt (Northern Territory)

Rev. Robert Renton (Editor) (Victoria)

We meet by Zoom six weekly.

The Presbyterian ministry was essentially a preaching ministry. Too often ministers or aspirants who came to the colonies were men who despaired of finding acceptability in Scotland or Ireland. It was characteristic of Scots immigrants in particular that they would not settle for standards of performance lower than they were accustomed to. There were cases of congregations going for years minister-less rather than call an available man they considered sub-standard in the pulpit. Similarly, there were several ministers in the Colony for decades unable to attract a call and a good many more frequently on the move in search of acceptance or dropping out altogether. Occasionally a minister was engaged on a contract for a term of a year or less to obtain a supply of sermons from a man about whom there were doubts or reservations.

The point was made a number of times in relation to Presbyterian conflict that episcopal church government consolidated power undemocratically, but it functioned efficiently in that it allowed one man, the bishop, to decide an issue and then require his clergy to get on with business.

The Presbyterian performance can best be measured against that of the Wesleyan Methodists who began with a negligible immigrant base. Presbyterians looked for 'settlement' with a pastoral tie between a minister and a congregation and rarely held services when a minister was not available to officiate. Wesleyan Methodist concept allowed for a better use of resources. Ministers itinerated within circuits giving variety in preaching in a denomination which in any case placed more emphasis on worship. Local preachers, pious laymen, learned in Scripture if not in other respects, kept up services when a minister could not be present. The higher status accorded the laity meant that people did not need to wait for clerical initiative to form and sustain a congregation. The connexional principle binding the congregation to the denomination provided a means whereby a congregation could obtain some financial assistance from more prosperous localities.

In 1852 the Missionary Committee of the English Wesleyan Church decided that greater independence would strengthen the Church in Australia. In January 1855 the Conference of the Australian Wesleyan Methodist Church began

administering the Australian and Pacific region.

The Statistical Register of New South Wales, for the year 1864 reveals that Wesleyans then had 331 places of worship to the Presbyterians 176, seating 29,000 people to 17,574, drawing an average attendance of 26,260 to 10,414. Wesleyan Methodists made up 25.13 percent of the churchgoing population, Presbyterians only 9.97 percent. These figures show graphically how far the Wesleyans had outstripped Presbyterians in gathering in active adherents.

Dr Barry Bridges has three doctorates from Australian, British and South African universities. Now retired, he lectured in history, government, politics and education and is the author of 19 publications, including a biographical register concerning the Presbyterian Church in eastern Australia from 1823 to 1865.

I A M S 2 0 2 2 I N T E R N A T I O N A L CONFERENCE - UPDATE

<https://missionstudies.org/>

The 15th General Assembly of the International Association of Mission Studies will be convened and meet on 7–11 July 2022, at Morling College, Sydney. The conference theme will be "Powers, vulnerabilities, and marginalities: mission in a wounded world", and members are invited to submit papers as part of the five-day programme. Many will be able to access major presentations and conference proceedings online.

The AAMS Executive committee has appointed a local support group to assist and liaise with the International Executive. Members include Peter Wilkinson, Xiaoli Yang, Dean Eland and Darrell Jackson. The local committee will focus on hospitality and invite others to join in and share their interest and expertise.

Dean Eland: djeland@bigpond.com

Methodists and Pentecostals—1920s

by Rev. Dr Brian Chalmers: from the December 2021 edition of Uniting History SA's newsletter. The article has been edited for space reasons.

In each generation, emphases of belief and practice identify the importance attached to what it means to be an exponent of the gospel. Such beliefs and practices have often been neither uniform nor uncontested.

In the 1920s, emerging Pentecostalism challenged aspects of Methodism as Pentecostals formulated their own distinctive markers of lived religion. This article explores some of the linkages between Methodism and emerging Pentecostalism in South Australia during the 1920s.

South Australian Methodism in the decade after the conclusion of the First World War continued to experience changing perspectives and attitudes to historic revivalism and evangelistic practices. Matters of concern included fewer conversions, lack of support for large revival-type meetings, a growing acceptance of gradual conversion as implied in the “doctrine of evolution” and competing priorities. (See “A Plea for Evangelism” by Rev. W.T. Shapley in the *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, 26 January 1922, 681.) The two contrasting priorities of property development and conversionary activity illustrate the challenging nature of 1920s Methodism.

During the 1920s Methodism experienced significant growth in the acquisition and development of property. Development included the building of new, or the upgrading of existing church, halls and manses. Arnold Hunt contends that they were “the most striking evidence of intense Methodist activity”. Hunt provides a summary assessment:

From 1920 to 1930, the total expenditure on church property came to £328,000, and 52 churches and 49 halls were erected. By 1929 it was estimated that the value of circuit property throughout the state was £939,000

Future date claimer

4th Uniting Church National History Conference

Thursday 24th August to Sunday 27th August 2023

The conference will begin on Thursday evening and conclude on Sunday afternoon.

It will be held in Darwin, Northern Territory.

The theme for the conference is:

Truth Telling: from Colonising to Covenanting

Look for further details in future issues of our newsletter.

**Plan to come and participate,
then stay to explore the Top End in the dry season.**



Milingimbi Church in 2017

**Milingimbi Mission established by
M.O.M. in 1923**

and the debt on it was less than 11 percent. In most years, every district was represented in the list of new buildings or in the amount spent on “enlargements and improvements”. Not until the 1950s was there again to be such a building boom. [Arnold D. Hunt, *This Side of Heaven: A History of Methodism in South Australia* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1985), 303.]

By contrast, in the same period, there was no parallel boom in conversion additions to the church’s membership. This increased from 23,115 in 1920 to 26,056 in 1930 at an average increase of 294 members per year. At the same time, the number of conversions recorded amounted to 1,079, or an average of 108 per year. Conversions represented about one-third of the membership increase. To put it another way, almost two-thirds of new members accepted in the period 1920 to 1930 were likely for reasons other than the result of a conversionary experience. Clearly, new and upgraded buildings and consolidations were markers of progress and advancement, but the lack of numerical growth through conversion was cause for concern for those who believed that revivalist Methodism was South Australia’s evangelism writ large.

For some Methodists, their commitment to revivalist practices and conversionary preaching found new avenues for expression in the emerging post-war era. The formation of the Methodist Local Preachers’ and Laymen’s Association in 1918 to conduct lay-led evangelistic meetings promoting a “richer spiritual experience” appealed to those trending away from the form and conventionality of Methodist services. The ability of local preachers to lead meetings extemporaneously without a formalised agenda, in what later generations would call ‘led by the Spirit’ was innovative, somewhat un-Methodistical, but well received.

In some respects, the 1920s saw elements of religious experimentation in Adelaide. Invited to Australia by Janet Lancaster of the Pentecostal Good News Hall in Melbourne, Smith Wigglesworth, the ‘Yorkshire Evangelist’ visited Adelaide in April 1922 to conduct revival meetings. Reports of his “healing mission” included “cripples who threw away their crutches” (Gawler *Bunyip*, 31 March 1922 2–3), while

Uniting Church National History Society Newsletter

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

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

A note from the treasurer

Dear members, I am pleased to report that the majority of you have paid your 2021 membership fees. Thank you.

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

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

A reminder about bank transfer details

BSB: 032-828

ACCOUNT NO.: 301985

ACCOUNT NAME: Uniting Church National History Society.

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



Have you enough room in your life for the things that matter most?

another correspondent warned of the cultish practices of “gifts of tongues” and “faith healing”. (*Register*, 11 March 1922, 8). It is likely that support for Wigglesworth came from the small but growing Pentecostal presence in Adelaide. This dates from around 1909 when Thomas James Ames (1858–1928) led the first assembly, which held meetings at his printing business in Pirie Street. [Barry Chant, “Waters to swim in: Adelaide’s first three Pentecostal churches, 1910–1935”, 2 *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* (2004)] The small group became known as Elim Assembly and Ames remained its leader until 1926. An early leader of Pentecostal meetings in Adelaide was the Methodist Fanny Collie. Barry Chant claims that “like many early Pentecostals Collie had had a Wesleyan Methodist background, a body in which her father was much respected”. Six months later the Pentecostal Aimee Semple McPherson conducted well attended evangelistic meetings in the Exhibition Building. Restrained Pentecostal ‘ejaculatory responses’ such as ‘Praise God’, ‘Yes, O Lord’, and ‘Amen’ often heard during hymn singing provided moments of expressive spirituality for some, and occasions of inquisitive interest for others. Prayers for healing took place after the main meeting, as reported the *Register* for 9 October 1922.

The early Pentecostals had some practices similar to the Methodists. These included tent (camp) meetings, open air evangelistic meetings (Botanic Gardens and Victoria Square), use of lay male and female preachers, small group meetings for spiritual purposes (class and ‘tarry’ meetings), an experienced understanding of conversion and the work of the Holy Spirit, and the revivalist enthusiasm of ante-Nicene Montanism. [Tarry meetings were extended prayer meetings to receive baptism in the Spirit; Montanism was a fervent apocalyptic movement which emphasised the fulfilment of the prophecy concerning the pouring out of the Spirit in the last days—Joel 2:28–32.) There was much common ground but little enthusiasm to be publicly identified with each other.

The pioneering work of Pentecostalism in South Australia and early colonial Methodism carried between them similar genetic characteristics. Above all, both embraced popular religious revivals, religious enthusiasm, personal experience, and the quest for holiness as

distinctive characteristics of evangelical piety. Both were movements from below and driven by an activist lay agency.

By the early 1920s, as Methodism benefited from greater social acceptance and respectability (but not greater membership), it increasingly questioned the place of the religious revival. As Methodism adapted to its host environment and moved to the cultural centre, the early Pentecostals, despite their distinctive emphasis on speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, appealed to Methodist sentiments favoured by the certainties of revivalism and the interior religion of pre-First World War Methodism. Adelaide’s early Pentecostals appropriated the revivalist dimension of that heritage in the early 1920s, while Methodism concentrated on expanding its physical presence throughout the state.

Unhappily, Methodism for all its revivalist tradition, could not accommodate these new phenomena [speaking in tongues, healing] ... Whether Methodism’s failure to accept Pentecostal phenomena ... was a conscious rejection or a general disinterest is not clear, but there seems to be more evidence for the latter view. It is apparent that for most Methodists tongue-speaking and associated gifts were seen as neither necessary nor beneficial. [Chant, ‘The Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Origins of the Australian Pentecostal Movement’ in Mark Hutchison *et al*, *Reviving Australia: Essays on the History and Experience of Revival and Revivalism in Australian Christianity* (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1994), 97–105]

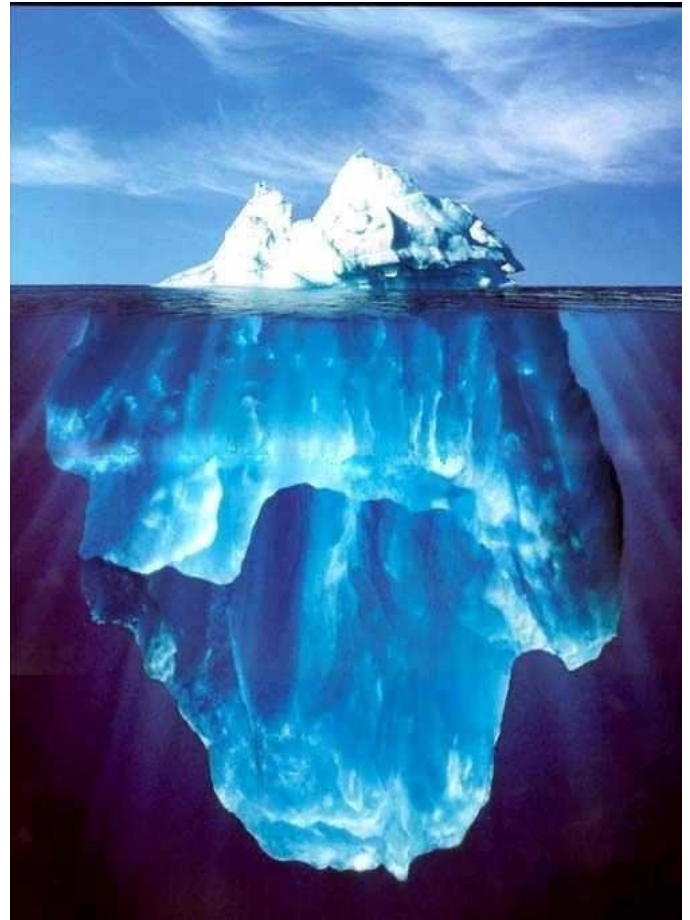
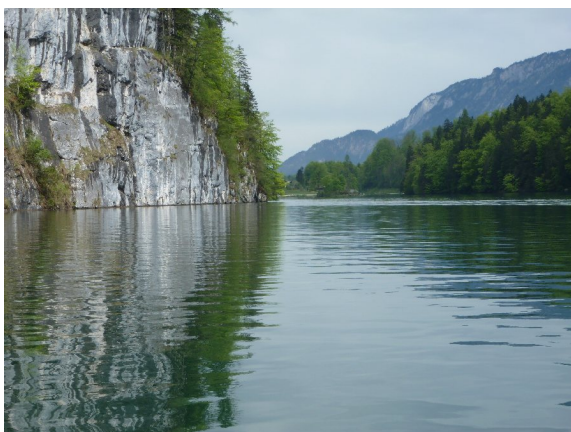
What is clear is that in South Australia in the early 1920s, Methodism still commanded the allegiance of one quarter of the state’s population, and had the largest church membership of any [Protestant] denomination.

The early Pentecostals introduced three elements of religious thought and practice which began to differentiate an emerging Pentecostal identity from evangelicalism and Methodism in particular. They were the baptism in the Holy Spirit with an associated sign of speaking in tongues, the use of spiritual gifts, and the healing ministry. Collectively, they fragmented

evangelical understandings, but they helped to define the development of Pentecostalism and the emergence of the charismatic movement in the 1960s and 1970s, as they became the devotional and practitioning markers of Pentecostal 'lived religion'.

The independent scholar Donald Dayton asserts that "Pentecostalism cannot be understood apart from its deep roots in the Methodist experience, and Methodism similarly cannot be understood entirely without acknowledgment of its paternity"; a relationship that he suggests "has often been suppressed in official historiography". Barry Chant acknowledges the historical relationship when he states that Methodism (among other forms of evangelicalism) is an "antecedent of Pentecostalism", and rightly claims that in Australia "it was the Methodists, especially the Wesleyans, who pioneered Christian revival". In the early 1920s South Australian Methodism, once the "Protestant light cavalry" in revival and gospel proclamation faltered in its commitment to revivalism and was unimpressed by the emerging Pentecostal variant of revival activity. By default, it opened the way for the emergence and consolidation of an independent Pentecostal movement. Methodism was evolving, with continuing mixed views on the once held traditional shibboleth of revivalism.

[Donald W. Dayton, 'Methodism and Pentecostalism', in William J. Abraham & James E Kirby, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2009). Other references are Chant, *The Spirit of Pentecost: The Origins and Development of the Pentecostal Movement in Australia, 1870–1939* (Lexington KY, Emeth, 2011) and Brian Dickey, ed, *The Australian Dictionary of Evangelical Biography* (Sydney: Evangelical History Association, 1994).]



I would like to beg you, dear Sir, as well
as I can,
to have patience with everything
unresolved in your heart
and to try to love the questions themselves
as if they were locked rooms
or books written in a very foreign
language.
Don't search for the answers which could
not be given to you now,
because you would not be able to live
them.
And the point is to live everything.
Live the questions now.
Perhaps, then, someday far in the future,
you will gradually,
without even noticing it,
live your way into the answers.

— Rainer Maria Rilke (1903)