

2020 Calendar of Events

Wednesday 5 February

The History Centre reopens at 1:00pm after our break for Christmas and New Year.

We will be open every Wednesday afternoon (1:00pm—4:00pm) until Wednesday 9 December.

Where: 44A East Avenue, Black Forest, SA



Sunday 8 March— From Methodist Mission to U City

An afternoon of historical reflection: From Methodist Mission to 'U City', Franklin Street (where Maughan Church used to be) with staff from Uniting Communities

When: 2:30pm—4:30pm

Where: U City,
42 Franklin Street, Adelaide

Sunday 24 May—History Month Event

Our special SA History Month event: lecture by Dr Meredith Lake, ABC Radio National presenter and author of the prize-winning book, *The Bible in Australia: a cultural history*.

When: 2:00pm—4:30pm

Where: St. John's
Halifax Street, Adelaide

Sunday 28 June—Annual General Meeting

Join us for our Annual General Meeting followed by historical exploration of a suburban church and its community.

When: 2:00pm—4:30pm

Where: Morialta Uniting Church
26 Chapel Street, Magill

Friday 18 September—Modern Music Movement

Developments in music and hymnody from the 1960s until now: hearing from (and singing along with) some key players

When: 7:00pm

Where: TBC

Wednesday 9 December

The History Centre closes on this day for our break over Christmas and New Year.

We will reopen on Wednesday 3 February 2021



The Committee and History Centre Volunteers and Staff would like to wish you a very blessed Christmas and a bright and prosperous New Year.



Uniting History SA December 2019

Guest Editor: Brian Chalmers

Doing Theology

The theme of this edition is *Doing Theology*. It takes little more than a cursory glance at church history to appreciate the emphasis on the importance of theological enquiry and formation. Christianity rests on historical facts, which form the context to understand God's redeeming love in the revelation and person of Jesus Christ.

Sound doctrine has always been vital to the health of the believer and the local church. The church of all ages has wrestled with interpreting the Scriptures and systematised theological formulation. From the outset, Paul wrote, 'Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers' (1 Timothy 4:16). Paul constantly dealt with 'false teachers' in order to maintain the centrality of God's grace.

Whether we like it or not, we can't get away from theology. Everyone has a personal worldview or creed or an understanding about God and Jesus Christ. Christians have long recognised the importance of theological statements such as the Creeds.

An important part of Uniting Church history is the study of theology that has helped to define and characterise the three antecedent denominations prior to union in 1977. But why is history and theology important? According to William Emilsen, Associate Professor in Church History and World Religions in the School of Theology at Charles Sturt University, one of the arguments for why Uniting Church history matters, is that 'church history helps us to be theologically accountable', because the discipline 'helps us to challenge dogmatic statements and dominant ideologies; and it helps us to think more clearly'.¹

Doing Theology is not confined to the academy. In this issue, Dr. Judith Raftery, President of the Uniting Church SA Historical Society, reflects on her experience of belonging to a 'Theology Reading Group'. According to Judith, reading and reflecting on theology in a small group 'has demonstrated that this is something of which we are capable, of which we don't need to be wary or afraid, and from which we can learn'. At the October meeting of the Historical

Society, Dr. David Hilliard, Research Fellow in the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences at Flinders University presented a paper on the history of the Adelaide Theological Circle from 1924 to 2005. The Circle, a forum for denominational and church leaders to present and discuss theological issues relevant at the time, provided an important opportunity to test ideas, strengthen ecumenism and promote professional collegiality. An abbreviated form of his lecture is included in this issue. Both Judith and David remind us that the task of *Doing Theology* is within all our reach.

For South Australian Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians, theology mattered. Doctrinal positions reflected long-held emphases and marked denominational differences inherited from the old world. Yet such markers of product differentiation existed within a relatively cooperative and occasionally competitive Christianity, united by the core beliefs of a common faith.

Congregationalists and Presbyterians originally shared a common reformed theological heritage as Calvinist Protestants. Both emphasised the sovereignty of God, the authority of the Scriptures, and the necessity of grace through faith in Christ. In governance, both embraced a polity based on the autonomy of the local

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News from the History Centre

Volunteers continue to serve the church and the wider community by providing advice and assistance for those involved in researching church, local and family history.

The centre welcomes volunteers to help manage the large and growing collection of documents, memorabilia, books and records of churches and agencies.

The Centre at 44a East Avenue, Black Forest, will close on December 11 for our Christmas/New Year break. We reopen on Wednesday 5 February, 2020

(Other contact details can be found on page 2.)

We would love to hear from you if you know anything about him—especially his name.

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twelve members of the Circle (of those who died before 2000) have been regarded as sufficiently significant to warrant inclusion in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, and in the future others will join them.

What was the significance of the Adelaide Theological Circle? For many years it was an important site for doing theology in Adelaide. At a time when each denomination was a more-or-less self-contained sub-culture, it built bridges between them. It brought together on a regular basis a cluster of influential scholarly clergy, and in its latter years lay people, from every major denomination, exposed them to new and unfamiliar ideas, encouraged them to think and write about topics that were congenial to them, and led them to form friendships outside their own denominational subculture. It was a thoroughly worthy body but as society changed it lost its relevance. It deserves to be remembered.

David Hilliard



A request from our Centre volunteers...

If you are emailing or sending us an online message to request help, please include a telephone number that we can contact you on.

Being able to ask questions directly ensures we can help in the most efficient way.

Port Adelaide Uniting Church is 170!

Celebrating 170 Years of Witness and Service.

On Sunday the 24th November 2019 Port Adelaide Uniting Church, formerly Congregational, celebrated 170 years since their beginning.

Twenty six members covenanted together on the 4th November 1849 to form the congregation and the first minister, the Rev Matthew Henry Hodge served for 28 years. For the first 17 years members worshipped in a sail loft and then in chapels on the corner of St Vincent and Lipson Streets. As a result of a fire in April 1866 they set out to build on a new site 169 Commercial Rd, then on the edge of town.

Over the years this two story 150 year old heritage listed building has been the home away from home for many generations. Committed members have expressed their faith in creative ways and adapted their community ministry in response to the economic and social changes in the region.

This anniversary event celebrated the church’s achievements, affirmed and remembered the way members have been innovative and faithful in meeting contemporary challenges.

Former minister, the Rev Dr Dean Eland described some of the turning points and critical moments in the life of this church when members have been adventurous, engaged with their community and have used their gifts and graces to create a future vision.

The celebration included a time for prayer and praise to reflect on the way the past provides insights for a hope filled future.

The service was followed by a BBQ tea in the new Bent Pine community garden.



Port Adelaide Uniting Church—Bent Pine Community Garden Mural
(Photo credit: Port Adelaide Uniting Church Website)

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War, conversion came to be regarded, in the language of one social scientist, as one of a ‘set of minimalist criteria for evangelical membership’.⁶ Other criteria included gospel temperance and Sabbath observance, as indicators of separation from the broader culture and markers of religious differentiation. New intellectual developments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries challenged the once dominant conversionist-revivalist ethos of South Australian Methodism. Broadly speaking, these challenges included rationalism, the historicity of Genesis, dogmatism in theology and science, Darwinian evolutionary theory, ‘new theology’, higher criticism, secularism, and socialism. From about 1874, the task of responding to the intellectual challenges, in what has been termed ‘The Victorian Crisis of Faith’,⁷ developed a sense of urgency that intensified through to the 1930s.

Of particular concern to Methodists was the manner in which ‘sin’ was understood in the light of Darwinian evolutionary theory. The theory implied an ascent from a lower to a higher state, in contradiction to the Biblical understanding of humanity following the Fall as recorded in the Genesis narrative.⁸ To remove or redefine the word ‘sin’ separate from its Biblical connotations challenged such doctrines as the depravity of humanity, conversion of the sinner, and the need of atonement. Take away the atonement, and ‘salvation is impossible’ declared the *South Australian Primitive Methodist Record* in 1868.⁹ By the early 1890s, disquiet and dissatisfaction with ‘plain speaking from the pulpit’ on matters of ‘sin’ occasionally found expression in Methodist public discourse.¹⁰ Attitudes to theology and preaching were changing.

By the late 1920s there was no longer widespread consensus on theological matters. Some Methodists lamented an apparent lessened need for grace because of a diminished sense of the nature of sin.¹¹ Others were convinced that evolutionary theory aided an understanding of ‘progressive spiritual development’ rather than efforts to ‘win souls’ based on the ‘miracle of conversion’. Preaching for conversion seemed to be replaced by the preacher as teacher, and revival meetings were thought by some to belong to another era.¹²

By the Second World War, South Australian Methodism, once the ‘Protestant light cavalry’ in revival and Gospel proclamation,¹³ faltered in its commitment to both. As there were fewer revivals there were fewer conversions. Methodism attempted to reposition itself as it moved away from conservative evangelicalism to accommodate a more liberalised outlook. The intellectual challenges of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created a crisis of confidence in the application of revivalist methods and conversionist oriented preaching. Methodists experimented in the 1920s and 1930s with other forms of revivalist activity such as the Spiritual Advance Crusades led by William Shaw from 1929 to 1933 and the Oxford Group Movement in the 1930s. Methodists attempted to both accommodate and reject elements of critical scholarship and modern thinking.

South Australian Methodism would not attempt a return to forms of massed revivalism until the Thanksgiving Memorial Crusades led by the Rev. A. E. Vogt in the late 1940s and the Australian-wide Rev. Alan Walker led Mission to the Nation in the 1950s.

Perhaps at the very least, *Doing Theology* in the light of historical enquiry can help us to ‘think more clearly’ as to the mission of the Uniting Church in an ever changing society. An informed understanding of the changing nature of belief and practice over time can assist the task of analysing contemporary Uniting Church theology and mission priorities.

Rev. Dr. Brian Chalmers

¹William W. Emilsen, *Why Uniting Church History Matters* (Uniting Church SA Historical Society, 2014), 9.

²Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (Oberlin, Ohio, E. J. Goodrich, 1868), 13.

³South Australian Bible Christian Magazine, August 1974, 4.

⁴Douglas Pike, *Paradise of Dissent: South Australia 1829-1857*, 2nd edn. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1967), 493.

⁵Both denominations experienced few, if any revivals. A notable Congregationalist exception was the Rev. Lionel B. Fletcher at Port Adelaide 1909 – 1915. During his ministry the Port Adelaide Congregational Church became the largest Congregational church in Australia.

⁶Lyman A. Kellstedt, ‘The Meaning and Measurement of Evangelicalism: Problems and Prospects’, in T. G. Jelen ed., *Religion and Political Behaviour in the United States*, (New York: Praeger, 1989), 5.

⁷Anthony Symondson, ed., *The Victorian Crisis of Faith* (London: SPCK, 1970).

⁸*South Australian Advertiser*, 21 March 1873, 3; *Christian Weekly and Methodist Journal*, 9 May 1884, 6.

⁹A statement made in a sermon on the Atonement published in the *SAPMR*, October 1868, 109.

¹⁰See for example, *Christian Weekly and Methodist Journal*, 27 May 1892, 1.

¹¹*Australian Christian Commonwealth*, 20 January 1928, 1.

¹²*Australian Christian Commonwealth*, 5 October 1928, 1.

¹³Brian Dickey ed., *The Australian Dictionary of Evangelical Biography* (Sydney: Evangelical History Association, 1994), ix.

The Adelaide Theological Circle, 1924–2005

The modern ecumenical movement became visible in South Australia in the 1950s but long before then there had been connections between members of the various religious denominations as they cooperated for particular and practical purposes. One of them was the Adelaide Theological Circle, a group of theologians and scholarly parish clergy for the discussion of theological ideas and issues, which began in 1924 and ran for 81 years.



Principal E. S. Kiek, 1950
(Uniting Church History Centre)

The founders of the Adelaide Theological Circle were products of English Congregationalism. One of them was Ernest Sidney Kiek, principal of Parkin College, who had come to South Australia in 1919. The other was his friend Alfred Depledge Sykes, a former Congregational minister who had joined the Anglican Church and was priest-in-charge of St Cyprian’s in Melbourne Street, North Adelaide. In May 1924 Sykes and Kiek sent out a circular letter to a cluster of scholarly clergy who were known to them – Anglicans, Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians – announcing their plan to form a circle for the discussion of theological issues, ‘more especially of those issues which are most prominent in present-day thought’.

Following the circular letter, a meeting was held at Parkin College on 30 May. Eight were present, with four apologies. Those present resolved to form a Circle. Its object: ‘to provide an open forum for the discussion of theological questions’. Its rules: membership would be limited to 12 (later increased to 15); it would meet on the fourth Friday of the month between April and October in the homes of members, to begin at 7.30pm and close at 9.30; the election of new members was to be unanimous; absence without explanation from three successive meetings was taken to indicate resignation.

The organisation of the Circle was simple. Each month one of its members presented a paper on a topic of his choice and every member, in turn, hosted the Circle at his home. The secretary kept a record of meetings, sometimes including a summary of the paper. The first paper given to the Circle, on 30 May 1924, was by Dr George Davidson, minister of Flinders Street Presbyterian Church, on ‘The doctrine of the Trinity in the light of modern philosophical discussions’. The following month Philip Carrington, warden of St

Barnabas’ College, gave a paper on ‘The doctrine of the two natures of Christ’ and in July Principal Kiek spoke on ‘The Christology of a modern fundamentalist’.

All these early members of the Circle were ordained clergy, all were males and all, except Sykes, were university graduates. Initially, Congregationalists and Anglicans were well represented. In 1932 for example, the Circle comprised 6 Anglicans, 5 Congregationalists, 2 Methodists, 2 Presbyterians, 1 Baptist, and 1 Unitarian.

The members of the Circle did not want to restrict it to Anglicans and Protestants of British background; they wanted to embrace all shades of established theological opinion. To represent the most liberal end of the theological spectrum, they included the minister of the Adelaide Unitarian Church, George Hale. They were also keen to include a Roman Catholic. The first Roman Catholic member was a Jesuit priest, Father Basil Loughnan, in 1929, but soon afterwards he was transferred to Melbourne. During the following decades several other Catholic clergy gave papers to the Circle but it was not until 1955 that it acquired its first permanent Catholic member, Jesuit priest Father Michael Scott. When he left Adelaide in 1961 he was replaced by the rector of St Francis Xavier’s Seminary. He in turn was succeeded by Catholic theologians from the Passionist Seminary at Glen Osmond and from St Francis Xavier’s Seminary. The first Lutheran members were Dr Siegfried Hebart of Immanuel Theological Seminary in the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (1944) and Dr Hermann Sasse of Concordia Seminary, in the deeply conservative Evangelical Lutheran Church (1949). Later, the religious traditions represented in the Circle expanded to include Eastern Orthodoxy: the Romanian Orthodox Church (1979) and the Coptic Orthodox Church (1994). In 1983 the Circle elected to membership the principal of the Bible College of South Australia, a conservative evangelical institution that usually distanced itself from the more liberal denominational colleges.

In 1935 the Circle decided to focus on a particular theme each year, with the syllabus and speakers agreed in the previous November. The first of these, in 1936, was on ‘Sin and atonement’, followed by ‘Religion and the modern situation’ and ‘The Christian ethic and the doctrine of grace’. Themes in subsequent decades included ‘Christianity and the crises of history’, ‘Christian ethics in the light of the war’, ‘Religion and democracy’, ‘Moulders of modern thought’, ‘The ministry of healing’, ‘The unity and disunity of the church’, ‘Councils ancient and modern’ (prompted by the opening in 1962 of the Second Vatican Council), ‘Great doctrines of the Reformation’ and ‘Great preachers’. This convention of

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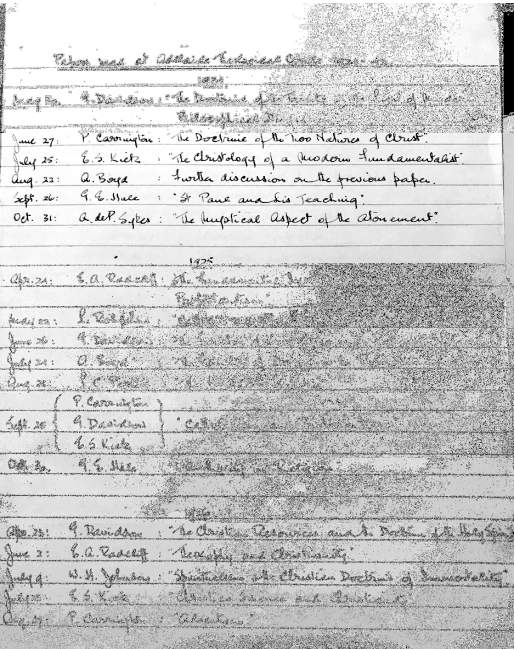
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having a set syllabus for each year lasted until 1967 when the Circle reverted to its original practice of allowing members to choose their own subjects.

At the end of the 1950s, when the Circle celebrated its 300th meeting, its basic pattern was well established. Its ethos and style had not changed much. The last of the founding members died or resigned from the Circle because of old age. Sykes had died in 1940; Kiek died in 1959. It continued to meet in the homes of members, occasionally in a theological college, and at the end of each meeting the host’s wife was thanked for her ‘delicious’ or ‘delightful’ supper. The membership hovered around 15 but sometimes went higher; in 1975 members voted to raise the upper limit to 25. Size was limited partly by the seating capacity of members’ sitting rooms and also to allow an adequate discussion of papers. Subscriptions had gone up from a shilling in the 1920s to 10 dollars in the 1990s. This was to cover the coast of mailing notices of meetings to members. From 2001 onwards notices went out by email and there was no further need for a subscription.

In its membership the Circle continued to evolve, reflecting changes in the church and society. In 1967 the membership comprised 5 Methodists, 5 Anglicans, 4 Lutherans, 3 Congregationalists, 2 Roman Catholics, and 2 Baptists. There was no Presbyterian. Of these, 8 were parish clergy, heads of university colleges and also the Anglican bishop; 13 were teachers in theological colleges, including 2 each from Parkin and Wesley Colleges.

Until the 1970s no women was nominated or even considered for membership as there were very few women in Adelaide who had studied theology. The first woman to join the Circle, and the first non-ordained member, was Dorothea Richards, who taught introductory courses at St Barnabas’ College. She took leave of absence later that year to return to England for family reasons and never returned. It was several years before another woman was invited to join. That was in 1984 – Sister Barbara Agnew, an American nun who taught theology at St Francis Xavier Seminary. In 1989 two more women were invited: Anna Catlin (now Grant-Henderson) who taught Old Testament at Parkin-Wesley College and Margaret O’Toole from the South Australian College of Advanced Education. The number grew. By the early 2000s over one-third of the Circle’s members



The papers given to the Adelaide Theological Circuit, 1924–26, as listed in the Circle’s minute book (State Library of South Australia)

were women.

New topics entered the discussion: in vitro fertilisation and embryo transfer; feminist theology; the theology of creation and the environment; the resolutions of World Council of Churches Assemblies; ecumenical discussions; Eastern Orthodox theology. Among the topics of papers presented in the late 1990s were ‘Luther and the Jews’, ‘Sin and saving grace in an evolutionary context’, Coptic spirituality, the Hindmarsh Island Bridge Royal Commission, biblical numismatics [coins], women in the Gospel of Mark, and the Orthodox theology of space time and movement. The

Circle was often used as a sounding board for members’ research projects, and some of papers presented to it were later published as book chapters or journal articles.

By the late 1990s it was apparent that the Circle was running out of steam. Although there were 25 members the attendance at meetings was usually about 10 to 15, sometimes less. One of the reasons for this decline is that the Circle was no longer the only forum in Adelaide for the scholarly discussion of theological topics. The foundation of the Adelaide College of Divinity in 1979 and the creation of the joint campus at Brooklyn Park in 1997 meant that academic theologians had many opportunities to interact and exchange ideas with each other. More members travelled overseas for conferences or to undertake study leave or were unavoidably absent when meetings were held. Moreover, as the Circle grew larger it lost its early camaraderie. The number of regular attenders continued to fall but no one was willing to bring the Circle to an end. Finally it expired. The last meeting, number 690, was held on 18 August 2005.

Looking back over the membership of the Circle since its foundation, it is striking how many of its members achieved positions of importance in the Church. Six of its members became Anglican bishops, mostly outside South Australia (one in Canada); and each Anglican bishop/archbishop of Adelaide since the 1940s was a member. Frank Lade and Frank Hambly were elected president-general of the Methodist Church of Australasia. D’Arcy Wood had a term as president of the Australian Council of Churches. He, along with Andrew Dutney and Deidre Palmer, were presidents of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia. At least

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