



Uniting History SA March 2021

Guest Editor: Judith Raftery

Singing Hymns and Reading the Bible

In Chicago, not long before Christmas 2015, I attended a performance by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus of Handel's *Messiah*. The following evening I attended a service of lessons and carols at the Fourth Presbyterian Church. Both events were notable for the stellar quality of the musical and dramatic performances, but what impressed me most was something else. I was very moved by the reiteration, in the sublimely matched words and music, of the familiar and deeply ingrained biblical message of hope - of rough places smoothed, of comfort for the afflicted, of God being with us. The two media and the two occasions spoke to each other and reinforced each other in a way that was a Christmas gift of lasting value.

Decades earlier, when I was growing up in the church and doing a lot of hymn-singing and Bible-reading, things were different. I loved it all, and it was laying the foundations for my openness to the Chicago experience, but it was different. However, although I didn't think about it then, I realise now that the hymn-singing and Bible-reading that I grew up on were always in some way connected. In my musically low-brow congregation we sometimes sang a hymn that linked the two specifically, using the appeal of singing to recommend faithfulness to the Bible and to the salvation it could deliver. It emanated from United States revivalism and first appeared in a Sankey hymnal in 1887. The first verse and chorus went like this:

Cling to the Bible though all else be taken;
Lose not its precepts so precious and pure;
Souls that are sleeping its tidings awaken:
Life from the dead in its promises sure.

Cling to the Bible! cling to the Bible!
Cling to the Bible – our lamp and our
guide!¹

Other hymns, while not appealing with such musical and literary banality to the power of the Bible, extolled its messages through words that made direct reference to biblical texts and stories. Another thing I wasn't aware of as I sang my way through childhood and adolescence was that many post-reformation

dissenters – my forebears in the Protestant faith – had believed that all hymns should be biblically based, that is, they should be vehicles for proclaiming the Word of God, *using God's words*. In the early dissenting congregations there was a marked wariness of 'subjective' or 'man-made' hymns that arose out of human experience and used human language. To sing 'human words' was an affront to the Almighty. Hymns should have the Holy Spirit as their author, and in content should limit themselves to the inspired Word. The Psalms were obviously a sound option for people who inclined to this view: they came straight from scripture and thus unquestionably had the divine imprimatur. And, as we know, psalmody retained an important place in dissenting worship for a long time.

There was another, later method of dealing with the problem of 'subjectivity' versus divine inspiration as it applied to the compilation of hymnals. This was the practice of printing at the top of the printed text of a hymn a biblical reference that purported to be its origin and inspiration. This practice was characteristic of hymn collections linked to evangelical and revivalist movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and you will be able to find evidence of it in, for example, collections of Sankey's hymns or song books from the Chapman/Alexander missions. The

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News from the History Centre

The Centre at 44a East Avenue, Black Forest, is open on Wednesday afternoons, 1:00pm to 4:00pm.

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.

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

The UCA History Centre

Open Wednesdays 1 - 4pm

44A East Ave
Black Forest

Website:
historicalsociety.unitingchurch.org.au

Facebook:
www.facebook.com/UCAHistoricalSocietySA

CORRESPONDENCE:

E: manager@ucsahistory.org.au

Post: UCA Historical Society
44A East Ave, Black Forest, SA, 5035
Phone: 08 8297 8472

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Judith Raftery (President)
David Houston (Vice President)
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Honouring the Rev. Norah Norris AM...



In the recent Australia Day Honours list, the Rev. Norah Norris AM was honoured for her leadership and work within the Presbyterian and Uniting Church in Australia.

A life time of 'firsts' for Norah has seen her open a way for women who have followed her in the leadership of the church. She was elected as the first female Clerk of the SA Presbyterian Assembly (1972), the first woman to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church in Australia (1976), and the first woman to preach in St Peter's Cathedral in Adelaide (1976-1977).

Norah's lifetime of service to God and to the church has included congregational ministry (in Ardrossan, Broadview, Port Pirie Mission, and Lower Murray Parish), care and spiritual support, as well as significant involvement in the work of the wider church, both Presbyterian Church (prior to 1977) and the Uniting Church (since 1977). Even in retirement, Norah has continued to serve where there has been a need, and she is an active member of the Scots Uniting Church (North Terrace, Adelaide).

Some of Norah's many notable achievements include:

- Deaconess in the Presbyterian Church of Australia
- Field Officer in Christian Education in the Presbyterian Church in SA
- Inaugural member of the Joint Advisory Council for Church Union
- President of the South Australian Council of Churches
- Member of the National Council of Churches Executive
- Affordable housing ministry project at Port Pirie Mission
- Secretary of the Assembly Commission on Liturgy (1989)
- Family Ministry in the Uniting Church (including the Mailbag Sunday school program, youth camps and Christian Education for children and young people)¹
- Trustee of the Spicer Cottages Trust for 20 years.

Norah has been for many years an active member of the Historical Society, serving on our Council from 2009 to 2018. Many members will recall the informed and insightful presentation she made on aspects of the history of South Australian Presbyterianism at a public meeting of the Society in August 2019. She has been our go-to person for all matters Presbyterian and we were sorry when health problems made it necessary for her to curtail her involvement. We join with the rest of the Uniting Church and the South Australian community in honouring her many achievements.

Brava, Norah!

¹ Ellis, Sue: <http://sa.uca.org.au/new-times/honouring-rev-norah-norris-am> for the list of Rev. Norris' achievements

You can receive this newsletter via email. Send your email address to office@ucsahistory.org.au and we will send you our up-to-date news and other items of interest.

Membership of the Society

Individual—1 year	\$20
Individual—5 years	\$80
Individual—Life	\$250
Congregational—Life	\$250

Contact the Centre for more information.

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biblical source texts often seem only weakly and opportunistically connected to the actual tenor of the hymns, which perhaps suggests an ongoing need among writers and compilers to appeal to older traditions about the overriding importance of biblical inspiration, even though, or because, the content and style of much of the hymn stock was undergoing significant change.

It needs to be said that some hymns, old and new, have proclaimed a more powerful message about the Bible – God’s word – and made a more sophisticated link between Bible-reading and hymn-singing than is suggested in the examples referred to above. A celebrated instance of this is the hymn ‘We Limit Not the Truth of God’, written by George Rawson in the 1850s, but echoing words of encouragement and farewell issued by John Robinson to the Pilgrim Fathers as they set out for the New World in 1620. He urged them to be open to any new insights that might be revealed to them in their new life, for he was confident that “the Lord [had] yet more light and truth to break forth from his word”.² Continuing revelation was a key tenet of Nonconformity, is reflected in the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church, and is a cherished part of its ethos. But its encapsulation in a strong and singable hymn – itself a significant historical document – may be, for many of us, the most effective way of underlining its importance.

However much singing might reinforce its message, the Bible needed to be read on its own too. There were plenty of opportunities for that to happen within the churches from which the Uniting Church emerged, and in many other churches as well. Listening to the Bible being read in church services, reading it for oneself at home, learning its stories and memorising key texts through Sunday Schools, studying some parts of it in more detail at youth camps or fellowship groups of various kinds, in an effort to understand its implications for our current lives, was central to the experience of many church folk at least up until the 1960s. It was a biblical exposure that was regular, prolonged and multifaceted, and it was promoted as vital to growth in the faith.

In the wider world beyond the church there were attempts to spread the biblical message through, for example, the mass publication and distribution strategies of the British and Foreign Bible Society, the placement, by the Gideon Society, of Bibles in hotel rooms, and the inclusion in the press and on radio and television of biblically based ‘Thought[s] for the Day’. This activity was based on a different premise from that operating within church communities. It assumed that the very presence of copies of the Bible in places where anyone might come across them, or the rendering of some decontextualised parts of it as stand-alone, take-home messages, was an effective way of extending its influence. Perhaps the jury is still out on all these strategies?

Other attempts to strengthen and extend the influence of the Bible in society involved long-term campaigns to include Bible-reading and/or religious education in

government schools. In South Australia, such campaigns began as early as 1875, when an Education Act established a system of free and compulsory primary education. This system was to be secular, except that teachers were allowed, but not required, to provide fifteen minutes of Bible-reading daily, to be delivered without comment and outside of normal school hours. This was actually a retreat from an earlier scheme under which the receipt of a government subsidy to schools was linked to the reading of a chapter from the Old or New Testament daily, providing they desisted from anything “likely to disturb the peculiar tenets of any sect”.³ From 1875 there were repeated attempts to devise a system of religious instruction in schools that, somehow avoiding the shoals of dogma and sectarianism, would provide a “simple foundation of common belief”. That proved to be a naïve and unrealisable hope, and it was abandoned in 1940, when a compromise scheme, based on the involvement of separate denominations offering their own instruction to students who elected to receive it, was initiated.⁴

The road from 1875 to 1940 was long and strewn with obstacles. There were significant differences of opinion between Protestants and Catholics. Some Catholics, whose priority was to control the religious education of their flock through the establishment of their own school system, believed that to introduce compulsory religious education into state schools amounted to “nothing more or less than the introduction of the teaching of Protestantism”. Protestants were by no means of one mind about the issue, and variously supported Bible-reading only, or denominational instruction, or opposed both out of fidelity to the principles of voluntarism. Politicians weighed into the debates with concerns about promoting “the truth that unites” rather than “the dogma which divides”, and rationalists railed against feeding children with “legends and dogmas” which were “insulting to the intelligence, painful to the heart, and a contradiction of the known facts of existence”. Some church and political leaders argued that religious education would produce “useful citizens” by emphasising “the virtues of honesty, cleanliness, chivalry and patriotism”, while others thought that any workable scheme would involve such a “disembowelling of the Bible” that what was left would be “a bloodless remnant covering no teaching worth having”.⁵ The debates were impassioned and sometimes unseemly, but they were an indication of a widespread if not always coherently analysed view that the bible had the capacity to make a difference to people – whether that was to lead them to a saving knowledge of God, make them into better citizens, provide them with a good moral compass, or lead them astray into the morass of superstition. Perhaps any of that was too much to expect from half an hour of religious instruction each week?

These stories of hymn-singing and Bible-reading are unfinished and ongoing. Within the churches we continue to sing, to write new hymns, to discard old ones, to find inspiration for them

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from the Bible and from human experience, and to express (consciously or unconsciously) our theology through what we sing. We also continue to read the Bible, seek new ways of discerning what it has to say to us, and wonder about how to make its message accessible to people whose ears aren't attuned to its message. The Historical Society is contributing to these concerns by focusing on hymns and on the Bible in its two first public meetings this year. We have lined up some experts to help us with this: musicians and poets who have made signal contributions to the contemporary church music movement that began in the 1960s, and an historian whose prize-winning book about the history of the Bible in Australia has commanded serious attention.

Please plan now to be present at these public meetings, on Friday 19 March at 7.00pm and Sunday 16 May at 2.00pm. Details in this edition of Uniting History SA.

Judith Raftery

¹ MJ Smith, 'Cling to the Bible', *Churches of Christ Hymn Book with Supplement*, 1957, no. 182

² George Rawson, *We Limit Not the Truth of God, The Australian Hymn Book*, 1985, no.335

³ Douglas Pike, *Paradise of Dissent: South Australia 1829-1857*, Melbourne, 1957, pp.490-491; Judith Raftery, 'Till Every Foe is Vanquished: churches and social issues between the two world wars', PhD thesis, Flinders University, 1988, pp.209-211

⁴ For details of this long battle, see Raftery, 'Till Every Foe is Vanquished', chapter 6

⁵ Raftery, 'Till Every Foe is Vanquished', pp.215-228

Membership Update

It goes without saying that last year was a most unusual year. In light of the effect that COVID-19 has had on all that we might have planned in 2020, the UC(SA) Historical Society Council have unanimously agreed that membership fees for 2020 will be carried over to 2021. All current financial members in 2020 have had their membership details updated to reflect this decision.

Any membership subscriptions received this year from current financial members will be carried forward to next year.

A membership year runs from January to December, and is open to individuals or congregations and organisations. Membership fees for new members in 2021 are:

Individual:

- 1 year \$20.00
(new members joining after 30 June \$10.00)
- 5 years \$80.00
- Life Membership \$250.00

Congregation/Organisation:

- 1 year \$30.00
- Life Membership \$250.00

Oral History Project...

Thank you to those who have already responded to our late 2020 call for volunteers willing to be involved in our Oral History Project.

As explained in our December 2020 newsletter, and elsewhere, oral history uses structured interviews to enable people's memories, insights and stories, perhaps especially those that are not recorded in other ways and therefore sometimes overlooked, to be preserved and made accessible to others, including future researchers. It allows interviewees to share their experiences with a trained interviewer, and have them recorded in their own words, without interpretation or judgement. It means that their voices and ideas, and their own accounts of their lives, will endure and speak for them when they are gone.



We are seeking people prepared **to be interviewed** about their experiences and involvement in the Uniting Church (and/or its antecedent denominations) or **to conduct interviews**.

For more information, and to register your interest in being involved, please contact

- Gaye Brown, (History Centre co-manager), at the History Centre (Wednesdays, from 1.00 to 4.00pm) on 8297 8472, or
- Judith Raftery (Historical Society President), at judith.raftery@gmail.com or on 0422 101 879, or
- emailing the History Centre at manager@ucsahistory.org.au.



Modern Christian Music Movement

Readers will want to note this event in their 2021 diaries. It will present the program envisaged for 19-21 September 2020 but postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

We will be considering the developments in music and hymnody from the 1960s until now, and hearing from (and singing along with) some key players; celebrating the Creative Singing Group with a reunion; hosting the launch of a new song book; and taking part in the Blackwood UC Occasional Series as we look at movements in music since the 1960s.

Friday 19 March

Historical Society Panel Discussion—Major Developments in music and hymnody from the 1960s to now.

Church of the Trinity—318 Goodwood Road, Clarence Park—7:00pm

The UC(SA) Historical Society's public meeting exploring 'Developments in The Modern Christian Music and Hymnody from the 1960s to 2020' with a panel of key contributors. The focus will be on the historical and theological context that inspired the changes in music, on its appeal to congregations and on how it has fared over time

There will be opportunities for you to contribute to the discussion and to join in singing some of the great songs that have emerged over the years. Please encourage others at your church, whether they are Historical Society members or not, to be part of this lively event.

Saturday 20 March

Creative Singing Group Reunion (1:00pm) and song book launch (4:00-5:30pm)

Pilgrim Uniting Church—Flinders Street, Adelaide

The Creative singing Group (CSG), a multi-arts performing group, burst onto the church music scene in 1970 with powerful new expressions of worship. It was created by Rodney Boucher, Douglas Simper, David Woods (who will all lead on the day) and the late Neil Quintrell.

The afternoon will include the launching of *Singing the Journey—100 contemporary Christian songs* published by MediaCom Education Inc. Adelaide. The songs are the work of Douglas Simper composed in the period 1968–2020 in collaboration with various writers including Neil Quintrell, Donald Bell, Bruce Prewer, Brian Wren, Shirley Murray and also his own words.

Sunday 21 March

Blackwood UC Occasional Series—Meaning through Music

Blackwood Uniting Church—266 Main Road, Blackwood—5:00-7:00pm

Well known composers Robin Mann, Leigh Newton and Douglas Simper will share their insights.

Under the Skin? Contesting the Bible in Australian History

The Uniting Church South Australia Historical Society is delighted that **Dr Meredith Lake**, author of the prize-winning *The Bible in Australia: a cultural history*, and presenter of Radio National's "Soul Search" will be its SA History Festival speaker.

You are invited to hear Dr Lake speak on 'Under the Skin? Contesting the Bible in Australian History'.



Sunday 16 May

2:00pm

St John's Anglican Church,
Halifax Street, Adelaide.

Please bring with you a copy of the Bible – perhaps one with an historic inscription, or a chequered past, or anything that makes it special for you.

Afternoon tea provided.

Gold coin donation.

Dr Lake recently spoke with Richard Fidler on *Conversations* about the Bible in Australia. You can hear the conversation at

<https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/conversations/meredith-lake-the-bible-in-australia-a-history/13068408>

History Grants Program 2021

The aim of the grants program is to support the cost of promoting church history in South Australia. Congregations, agencies and groups have a story to tell about their ministry and how the past has influenced our current ethos and character. The History Grants program assists local churches and groups to meet the cost of producing printed or audio-visual histories, mounting historical displays, preserving heritage items, etc.

The Society has allocated funds which will generally be distributed up to a maximum of \$1,000 per project. Each application will be carefully assessed by the Grants Committee. Funding is by way of reimbursement.

Applications forms are available from, and can be submitted at anytime to, the UC History Centre at 44A East Avenue, Black Forest (or by email to

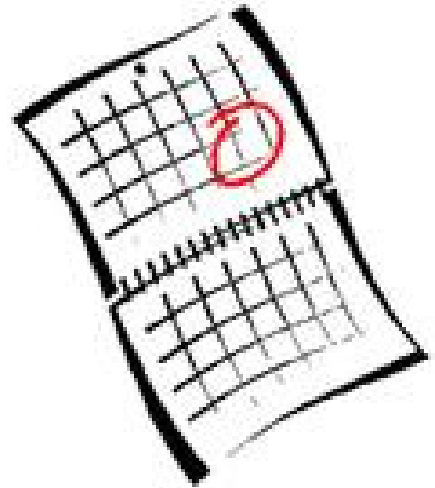


office@ucsahistory.org.au).

Grants will be awarded to congregations, agencies and groups who are publishing histories of the church in South Australia which are consistent with the Society's objectives including:

- Publish historical articles and lectures;
- Generate interest in and promote the study and discussion of the history of the Uniting Church and of the three churches existing prior to union;
- Promote the collection, preservation and exhibition of historical documents, records and memorabilia.

2021 Calendar of Events



Friday 19 to Sunday 21 March—History of Contemporary Music

Over the three days there will be a number of gatherings to discuss and celebrate the history of contemporary music.

Please refer to notice earlier in this newsletter.

When: Friday 19 March at 7:00pm

Where: The Church of the Trinity, Goodwood Road, Clarence Park
A public meeting exploring developments in Modern Christian Music and Hymnody from the 1960s to the 2000s with a panel of key contributors.

When: Saturday 20 March 2021 from 1:00pm

Where: Pilgrim Church, Flinders Street, Adelaide
Creative Singing Group reunion and sharing, and the launch of Douglas Simper's new song book, *Singing the Journey* on Saturday afternoon and evening.

When: Sunday 21 March 2021 at 5:00pm

Where: Blackwood Uniting Church
A Blackwood Uniting Church Occasional Series event focusing on Movements in Music since the 1960s.

Sunday 16 May—"Under the Skin—the Contested History of the Bible In Australia"

When: Sunday 16 May at 2:00pm

Where: St John's Anglican Church, Halifax St, Adelaide
Dr Meredith Lake will be the speaker at this History Festival event.

Please refer to the notice earlier in the newsletter.

Friday 11 June—Sunday 13 June— Third Biennial Conference

Where: The Centre for Ministry, North Paramatta, New South Wales

Join us for the third biennial conference of the National UCA History Society. The theme of this conference will be "Growing Up Uniting".

See page 8 for the 'Call for Papers' details.

Sunday 27 June—Annual General Meeting

When: Sunday 27 June at 2:00pm

Where: Morialta Uniting Church, 26 Chapel St, Magill

The Annual General Meeting will also include a presentation and discussion on the histories of the congregations that came together to form the Morialta Parish.

Sunday 22 August—The Reconciliation Movement

When: Sunday 22 August at 2:00pm

Where: To be confirmed.

The Reconciliation Movement...

How did it happen? Is it advancing? Included in this discussion will be the history of the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

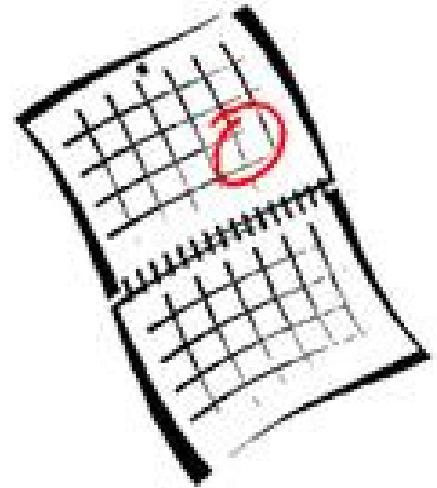
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Sunday 24 October—The Sunday School Movement

When: Sunday 24 October at 2:00pm

Where: To be confirmed

The Sunday School Movement—the rise, decline and demise of this movement in our preceding denominations and the Uniting Church following Union.



Wednesday 8 December

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

We will reopen on Wednesday 2 February 2022.

Third Biennial Conference

The Third Biennial Conference of the Uniting Church National History Society will be held at

The Centre for Ministry,
North Paramatta, New South Wales

11–13 June 2021



The theme is “Growing Up Uniting”.

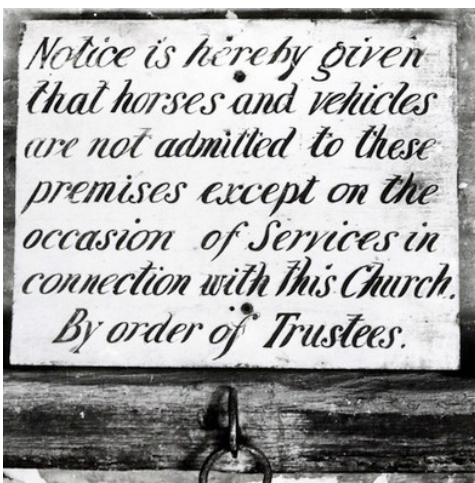
The Call for Papers is currently open. Contributors are encouraged to approach the conference theme creatively. It could mean growing up Uniting in a secular age, or growing up ecumenically, theologically, spiritually, proudly, liturgically, multiculturally, hopefully, and joyfully. It could also deal with the various struggles faced by young (and not so young) people growing up in the Uniting Church.

Papers may be presented in person or online.

Please send paper proposals of no more than 300 words to William Emilsen and Patricia Curthoys at: ucnhs2021conference@gmail.com.

The keynote speakers will be Dr Deidre Palmer, Associate Professor Ruth Powell, Rev. Dr William Emilsen and Dr Elizabeth Watson.

The Uniting Church SA Historical Society will reimburse the costs of an 'early bird' registration for all members attending the conference.



Parking restrictions for the Weymouth Street Primitive Methodist Church.

The church was at 179 Weymouth Street, Adelaide and was built in 1847. It was demolished in the 1970s.

Image courtesy of Michael Burden.

National Trust of South Australia Image ID: 2014.DIG.00305