

ASCM interview with Dr Helen Hill by Jane Yule, Melbourne, 23 April 1997.

Q: What school did you go to and were you involved with the SCM there?

A: I went to PLC Melbourne. I wasn't actually a member of the SCM group there, but I did, when I was in Intermediate which is [now] 4th Form, go to an SCM schools' conference.

Q: At Chum Creek?

A: No, it was at a much more classy place than Chum Creek. It was at Anglesea, I think, [and] was largely attended by students from MLC, PLC, Scotch and Wesley, and maybe some Melbourne Grammar people. It was interesting, but it was more [of] a one-off event than actually signalling any involvement in the schools' Movement.

Q: So you didn't really get involved fully with the SCM until you went to Melbourne University in 1963?

A: 1963, that's right and, in fact, I didn't even get that much involved until very near the end of my first year. I was doing Science and there were a number of people from our local church who went to university, and I guess for the first year I was [busier] attending the PFA, which was the Presbyterian Fellowship at the Blackburn Church. I think that it was probably my disillusionment [and boredom] with ... [the PFA that propelled me into the SCM]. ... I did attend a few of the lunch-time lectures of the SCM, and this ... [was] around the time the 'Honest to God' debate was taking place.

Q: Yes, I think it was 1963.

A: Yes, and I did find that attractive and interesting. [This was] partly because I was studying Science and it was totally unlike anything we did in our lectures, although I found a lot of the theological concepts very difficult to grasp, being a Science student. I was interested also in the fact [that] there was a questioning sort of attitude in the SCM, and it was more exciting than the old PFA. So at the end of the year, after the exams, there was a thing called a recovery camp at Chum Creek. I decided to go to that, full well fearing I was going to fail my exams and it would be my last week at university, my last experience of university anyway, so I might as well go and have a bit of fun or do something out of the ordinary. This was the day that Kennedy was assassinated and we

went up to Chum Creek. ... That was really my conversion to SCM, I suppose, because when I came back from the Chum Creek camp I decided to make every effort to go to the national conference in January.

Q: Where was that held?

A: In Adelaide and after that I did get much more involved in the SCM.

Q: So you were only at Melbourne for two years, but the second year you were quite involved with lunch-time meetings and study groups?

A: No, the second year I was actually part-time because I'd failed two subjects and got a job at the CSIRO. (It was just along the road from the campus and so I used to ride my bike to lectures from the CSIRO Division of Protein Chemistry.) [But] I did try to get involved in the SCM as much as I could while being a part-time student. It wasn't very good for my study because, in fact, I failed Chemistry a second time. I think I might have actually got on an SCM [committee, as] SCM in those days had a central committee and other committees [for] different issues. I was not on the central committee but I was on ... [a] committee [for social action], I think.

Q: Were they more concerned with political issues or theological?

A: Both. ... There was morning worship held and there were lots of study groups [organised by Faculty]. ... Now, I'm just trying to think what the political and social issues of the time were. I know there was a lot of attention to racism, ... [and] I did also get a little bit involved in ABSCHOL, which was the student organisation raising money for Aboriginal scholarships.

Q: [Were you involved] as part of the SCM or just personally?

A: Yes, many SCMerS were involved in that [as] I think it had been set up by the SCM. Similarly, the World University Service was another thing which lots of SCMerS were involved in. [It] had been actually set up by SCMerS, I think, although it was not an SCM [organisation] as such. And I remember those years at Melbourne University being a time when I probably began to wonder whether I really wanted to do a Science degree.

Q: Because you became more involved in political [issues]?

A: That's right. I became aware of the Social Sciences, which I didn't know existed when I was at school, and at the end of that year I ... went again to the national conference. Then I decided to take up a course at Mercer House Teachers' College to get a one-year diploma, which would enable me to be a junior secondary Science teacher with only three subjects of a Science degree.

Q: Those were the days.

A: That's right, they were the days. And I didn't particularly like Mercer House at all.

Q: Did they have an SCM group there?

A: No, no, they didn't have an SCM group, but I did continue to try to go to the SCM activities at Melbourne University.

Q: Who were the leaders at Melbourne then?

A: Now, I'm just trying to think. Some of the names of people who were significant in that first period when I was at Melbourne, before I went to Monash; Lindsay Farrell, Sandy Yule, Patrick McCaughey, Jim Minchin ... [Ross Terrill, Kaye Ferris, and Jenny Tinney].

Q: Rachel Faggetter?

A: No, Rachel had left by then, I think. Rachel I was told about when I went to New York in 1970 to attend the World Youth Assembly, but that's probably getting ahead of myself. [There was] Aileen Brown, John Langmore, Diane Adcock and Elaine Adcock, her younger sister who was in my year [and] did Arts when I was doing first-year Science. David Langmore was in my year also. There were ... a number of senior students, [like Brian Howe and Graham Romanes], who were only just still at the university when I was in first year [before they] went off overseas to do postgraduate work. I just got to know [them] slightly and then they headed off, ... [including] some of those ones I mentioned.

Q: Were there any staff involved with the SCM?

A: John Howes, Davis McCaughey and [his wife] Jean.

Q: He was Master of Ormond [College]?

A: Yes. Davis later gave me a job at Ormond ... [as] an Ormond maid and [I] lived on the campus there. This [was] actually when I was doing my fourth-year Honours at Monash oddly enough, [but] that was also quite significant. Davis McCaughey and Jean knew my parents, which is I think partly how that got set up. But I did [also] meet them through the SCM because they were at my first SCM conference in Adelaide.

Q: Harry Wardlaw?

A: Ross Terrill, that's right, Ross was still at Melbourne. Harry I don't remember meeting at that stage, he probably was there but I didn't actually meet Harry until a little bit later. [Also] Ian Weeks and Wendy Weeks.

Q: So quite a significant staff involvement then?

A: They were students then but, yes. ... I remember more staff involvement at Monash actually, but that might not be the case, because Herb Feith [was there].

Q: So Monash you began in 1966 and you were there for four years?

A: Yes.

Q: And Herb Feith was teaching Politics at the time?

A: Yes.

Q: What about other staff members?

A: Now I'm not quite [sure, but there was] Peter Fensham.

Q: He was in the Education Faculty?

A: Yes, although Peter might not have been there when I was right at the beginning of my time at Monash. Various chaplains at Monash were very active in supporting the SCM, and in my early years at Monash the Religious Centre was founded. We also had a visiting fellow from America by the name of Bill Yoltan, who had an office in the Sociology Department. It seemed that when I went to Monash we would have public meetings just about every week, and there would be a lot of interest from [staff]. I'm just trying to remember who the staff would be.

Q: What about student leaders at Monash?

A: When I came to Monash there was almost no SCM. There was an SCM which had been very weak indeed and its leadership had all either just left or decided to give up. In fact, (oddly enough) one of the people I'm currently working with at VUT was president of the SCM, Alan Patience. He was president of the SCM at Monash and he decided to resign because he didn't want anything more to do with the SCM. And [then] there was a bit of a gap, and somebody came and persuaded Jim Siemon and me to take on the role of president and vice-president and to sort of restructure the branch. So ... the SCM wasn't completely dead, but we were involved in getting a new committee together and getting people [to join]. Now people who were key in that, who were still involved, were John and Jeannie Adams (Jeannie Auldish and John Adams), Frank Brown and Libby Brown, and Phillip Williams. There was quite an active [group, and] again there was sort of a series of committees that did different things.

Q: By this stage was it more political than theological?

A: Not at the beginning, no, because in the first year we did, in fact, also cooperate with the Newman Society in setting up a Theological Association at Monash. ... Jim, in particular, became close friends with the president of the Newman Society and, in fact, he joined the SCM. But the Newman Society and the SCM used to hold a lot of joint activities, and there was also a Quakers Society at the campus and some of them [were conscientious objectors]. Now I'm not sure when the National Service Act was passed, but once there were people who had to register for national service, the debate about conscription and the Vietnam War became very big. We had a number of members [who were affected by the Act, but] I can't remember whether Phillip Williams was a conscientious objector or [not, though he was certainly against conscription]. The draft resistance movement hadn't started then, [so] it was more the question [as to] whether people became conscientious objectors within the Act.

Q: [But] the SCM was very supportive, though, of conscientious objectors and against the war in Vietnam?

A: Generally speaking, [but] there was one member who wasn't. There was a person at the Monash SCM—he started at Monash before [me and] actually later became a Liberal parliamentarian—by the name of Peter Falconer and he was a supporter of the Vietnam War. In fact, the very first debate about the Vietnam

War I ever remember hearing, ... no, I'm not sure whether it was a debate. The SCM had a debate on the Vietnam War at one of its national conferences, [which] might even have been about 1965 or before I went to Monash. They got Derek McDougall who was a member of the Labor Party, and Peter Falconer who was a member of the Liberal Party, between them to try and work out a policy on Vietnam, which would be a sort of even-handed policy, I suppose. Anyway, you should ask Derek about this. Peter Falconer was almost never heard of again in the SCM circles, I think.

Q: Because he left because it was too left?

A: I don't know. I have no idea if that's the case, but certainly that view wasn't popular within the SCM. Generally speaking, SCM members became involved in the Anti-Conscription Society at Monash, ... [which] was a society [that] campaigned for the abolition of conscription. It wasn't one initially that urged people to be draft resisters.

Q: So was it more a middle line that the SCM took rather than far left?

A: Yes, because at Monash there were far more left positions being put by [others]. The Monash Labor Club was putting a position of support for the NLF, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, in other words supposed support for the enemy. [But] that was not at the beginning of the time I was at Monash, that was about 1968. The SCM was really more concerned about the actual impact of conscription on Australian society, and the problems of its members who had to register for national service. But gradually everybody moved across towards the left. Another body that I was involved in in the late 1960s was Christians for Peace, set up by Dudley Hyde on a Melbourne-wide basis. Their position eventually did move across towards supporting the rights of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam to self-determination.

Q: So it changed markedly over the years with the worsening situation?

A: It certainly did, that's right, yes. Now I think it would be true to say that the SCM position on Vietnam would always have been further left than that of the churches at the time, apart from a few individuals in the churches who were active in the leadership of the peace movement [such as Terry Lane and Alan Matheson].

Q: Were there any magazines that you were involved with [at Monash] that supported this position, such as *Wot's Life* or *Political Concern*, were they concerned with the Vietnam War?

A: *Wot's Life* was the newsletter of the Monash SCM branch. [The Monash student newspaper was called *Lot's Wife* and when we started up the SCM Monash newsletter someone decided to call it *Wot's Life*.] I was founding editor of that, [and] it mainly [gave] information about coming events. We reprinted some of the material from the WSCF publications and we did have articles [on political issues, for example], we [had] an article by Phillip Williams on the conscription [debate]. There were other issues we were talking about as well as conscription, the Vietnam War didn't dominate the whole [time].

Q: What were the other issues?

A: ... [They were] to do with education actually, because there [were] great ... deficiencies in the education policies of the Menzies, [Gorton and Holt] governments. ... [Anyway,] there was a report put out in the first year I was at Monash, I think, [based on] a big inquiry into tertiary education. The Liberal government had been notably cutting [education funding, and] the per capita level of spending had gone down markedly. In fact, the first demonstration I ever took part in was not on Vietnam at all, but on education funding. That was when I was still at Melbourne University, [and] I remember [being] in the city [and] taking part in that. The other ones, of course, [were the massive demonstrations leading up to] the Aboriginal referendum, the referendum to [count Aboriginal people in the Census].

Q: To grant citizenship?

A: Yes, in 1967. There was a lot of activity [and] I remember going ... [to several rallies]. In fact, the Monash SCM had a banner and a contingent that went to a rally, which started at Spencer Street Station for some reason, on the Aboriginal vote. [It was held] to urge people to vote yes in the Aboriginal referendum of 1967.

Q: Those race issues were still quite strong then, all through the 1960s?

A: Absolutely, yes. We did also begin, at the time when I was at Monash, to have visits from people from South Africa. Father Colin Collins, a Catholic priest from South Africa, visited and spoke to SCMerS about the problems of apartheid, and

he was quite clear that when he went back to South Africa he could well get arrested for his views. There was really just beginning to be an awareness of the need for international [involvement, and], in fact, the ANC had called for international action in the apartheid case. [As for] the White Australia Policy, I don't recall taking part in any demonstrations on [that]. I know that students of a slightly earlier generation than [mine] had been involved. John Langmore certainly told me that he had been involved in demonstrations on the White Australia Policy. The White Australia Policy wasn't dead by 1966, but it seemed to be a bit in abeyance or not being talked about very much.

Q: And on its way out, perhaps, too?

A: It was only Whitlam who finally put the kybosh on it, but there were exceptions to it being granted. ... Probably when I was at Melbourne University, there was a case in New South Wales where some students went and 'kidnapped' a little girl, Nancy Presad, who was trying to stay in Australia. [She] was from Sri Lanka and ... [they 'kidnapped' her] in order to raise [awareness,] give publicity to her case and show what little of a threat she would be if she was allowed to stay. And so there were a few things like that happening, but I don't recall being involved in any of them myself.

Q: What about the magazine, *Political Concern*, that you edited? What was that aimed at?

A: ... *Political Concern* was started in 1968, and its purpose was really to convey to the ... grassroots members of the SCMs what was happening in the WSCF at a global level. [This was done] because the WSCF had launched a program of what it called politicisation, and it had regionalised the WSCF offices. In the Asian region there was a lot of interest in China. There was a China study group, [of which Ross Terrill (now in the US) was an active member], and we reported on that. There were discussions going on [about] the future of the university and the Christian presence in the university. There was material coming out of Latin America, ... [which] was really the first stirrings of ... Liberation Theology, and we were reporting on that. [We had occasional letters from SCMs in Indonesia, Rhodesia and New Zealand.] My view of it was to really bring an international perspective into the Australian SCM, through reprinting a lot of the materials from the newsletters that used to come into the SCM office that ordinary SCM people wouldn't otherwise get to see. But at the same time we also reported on

the activities of the branches in relation to political issues, this [was] mainly war and peace issues. We had some very good responses from people in other states, not only Victoria, because it was a national newsletter. In particular, there were three triplets, [the Mowbray brothers], in the SCM ... [in NSW who became draft resisters and they sent us material].

Q: ... I think they were conscientious objectors, but was there a big difference between the two?

A: ... Yes, there is a difference, yes. I think they were conscientious objectors ... because it was a bit early. The draft resistance movement really got off the ground much, much later, only in the last couple of years of the Vietnam War.

Q: What was the fundamental difference between the two positions?

A: ... To be a conscientious objector you go to a court and you explain your beliefs to a judge, and they either agree or disagree that you can do alternative service. If you're a draft resister you refuse to register for national service, and then you go underground. You move around from house to house every night and the police try to catch you and put you in jail.

Q: Were there a lot of draft resisters in the SCM towards the end of the 1960s?

A: No. I don't think there were ever a lot of draft resisters anywhere, because it took a great deal of courage to be a draft resister, and [also] it's really only a position that became known towards the end of the Vietnam War. There's a film that's been recently made by Rebecca McLean on the Save Our Sons [movement], and that illustrates very clearly the difference between conscientious objectors and draft resisters. Now, I happened to work with two people who were draft resisters, Michael Hammel-Green and Harry van Moorst. They weren't in the SCM but they did know quite a few people who were, ... and the SCM helped them avoid ... being caught by the police. There were a lot of Christian people, particularly Quakers but others [too], who had the philosophy that if a law is unjust then the just thing to do is to resist it, and so they gave shelter to these people.

Q: So at this time, towards the end of the 1960s, you were saying the Monash group was never very big, but it was fairly active by the sounds of it?

A: ... By comparison with this present-day's SCM it was big. It had about forty or fifty members on the books, not that they would all turn up, [and] we could organise lunch-time meetings of a couple of hundred. I remember Bill Yoltan speaking on the urban crisis and racial politics in the United States, because this was also happening at that time, [and he was in close contact with civil rights leaders]. ... We got a couple of hundred people packing out a lecture theatre at Monash to hear him.

Q: ... So the SCM was quite political at this stage, though?

A: The Monash SCM was more political than the one at Melbourne University, I do believe, because the nature of the Monash campus has always been more political.

Q: Did you ever have much to do with the Evangelical Union? Were they strong on campus?

A: They were, yes, they were bigger than us. We had some discussions with them, ... [and] I seem to recall we had some regular meetings with the Newman Society and the EU committees. But we always found it much easier to co-operate with the Newman Society, ... [and] after a while we gave up on trying to have even public meetings ... co-sponsor[ed] with the EU. [This was mainly] because the EU had this policy that all speakers had to agree to their articles of faith, [and] we usually couldn't find speakers who would necessarily agree with that. So we tended to co-sponsor lectures with either the Newman Society or the Anti-Conscription Society, if we were collaborating with other groups on campus.

Q: What about groups like Amnesty?

A: There was another group called Social Concern, ... [and] a lot of SCMerS were members of that. There was a big overlap of membership with Social Concern and many people went out and did voluntary work, [but] I wasn't actually a member of it. ... Again World University Service was a major group doing international [work;] not exactly solidarity work, but they were raising funds for things like a bus for the University of Papua New Guinea. That was a sort of student-to-student aid organisation. [Robin Burns, an SCMer who had come to Monash from Sydney, was active in that.]

Q: Was theology discussed much by this stage, towards the end of the 1960s?

A: Yes, we had the Theological Association and that brought out of the woodwork all sorts of people on the staff, interestingly, and students. [There was also] the Catholic chaplain, [and] I'm just trying to think who the other chaplain was. It tended to be slightly different people who were involved in that, ... because Monash, in comparison to Melbourne, didn't have a Theological College attached to it, so there was never an automatic supply of theologians around the place. But people were trying to read [the] various latest theologians, ... [such as John Robinson, Harvey Cox and] Bultmann from SCM Press, and things like that. I'm sure it was a lot more difficult than at Melbourne, because people didn't really know how to get hold of these books [and there were no theological libraries]. ...

Q: [No one to] interpret them?

A: Yes, that's right. Feminist theology certainly had not been heard of at that stage. I think the first time I heard of feminist theology was in the United States when I was visiting there ... in the 1970s.

End of Side A: Side B.

Q: About this time there was a big decline in SCM numbers in the late 1960s, early 1970s. ... Can you give any reasons ... why you think this happened?

A: Yes. I think it was because the people who were in the leadership of the SCM groups failed to recognise that you need to continue to recruit new people [to an organisation if it is going to survive]. ... I can even remember an actual case of this where the SCM had a stall at Orientation Week and some very keen young fresher came up, who was a Christian and who was interested in joining the SCM. But [he] seemed to be more interested in many other things, and [I] even [heard] the SCM people direct [him] off to other clubs and societies and things because that was more urgent and of the moment. I think that there was a lack of priority on keeping the organisation a welcoming body that would welcome new students in. I've noticed this at other times in the SCM too, that it can sometimes get to be a bit of an 'in' group, so that young students feel either that it would be marvellous to be accepted into the SCM or that they don't think they would be. ... There's always a very fast turnover of people in the SCM on campuses, because of the short nature of university careers, and at that time [in the late

1960s] it was often just a bit harder to find people. So I think that new students coming to the university—[and] I can think of people who came to the university in the years after my time there—who you would have thought would have joined the SCM, [didn't]. But in a sense it wasn't in a state to accept them or to draw them in, because the leadership was too busy with [too many] other things and they withered away very, very rapidly.

Q: Was there less emphasis on the Christian aspect of the group and more on the issues?

A: I'm just thinking about the time in 1976, [when] I spent ... a few weeks living in an SCM house in Fitzroy where I completed writing a book called *The Timor Story*. (I'd just come back from East Timor and I didn't have anywhere to live.) And I noticed at that stage that the SCM lost its visibility on the campus, [although] it was very, very active off the campus. [SCM members] were living in these houses and they were doing all sorts of action with that particular cohort who had gone through university with them, but they were totally inaccessible to any new people. So that a new student coming into the university in 1976, and maybe even earlier than that, would have had [an] extraordinarily difficult time [even] to find an SCM and join it.

And it's very interesting that later when I had [something] to do with SCM students from Australia, when I was involved in the SCM at the University of the South Pacific ... in the late 1980s, that most of the people who were in the SCM were, in fact, people whose parents had been in [it]. They were only in the SCM because they presumably, when they went to university, had gone searching for the SCM and found it after a very hard search, or if it didn't exist they'd recreated it. But the SCM ceased to become a body which was open to the ordinary student, who may be just looking around on the campus for a Christian organisation to join. And, of course, the other [organisations like] EU or Christian Union, or whatever it became, [were] always there in an organised fashion. So I think it's this lack of visibility, [because] it's a common problem that every voluntary organisation loses members when it ceases to regard of [top] importance the recruitment of new members. It forgets that it's got to be visible to the outsider if it's ever going to attract new members, and they just did completely forget about this.

Q: So have you had much to do with the current SCM's attempts at recruiting new members?

A: Yes, in fact, only yesterday because I'm now teaching at Victoria University of Technology. We have started this year to set up two branches of the SCM at VUT, one at the Footscray campus and one at the St Albans campus, and we're just having this very problem. How do you make the SCM visible so that those who wish to join it can find out that it exists? And while, supposedly, media and communications have got better, it is, I believe, harder now [to do this] in the current climate of universities, although this would vary from campus to campus. [But] it is currently harder, I think, to even let people know that there is an SCM, [that] there is an organisation like the SCM around for them to come to meetings. [There are so many other activities on that the SCM needs to 'position itself' in the marketplace of ideas.]

Q: Do you think the way it's been organised with Sean Whiting as the development [worker] is a good way to try and establish new groups and recruit members?

A: Yes. I think that what Sean is doing is good at the micro level, but it needs to be backed up by something at the macro level in terms of national, or maybe state-wide, publicity through student newspapers. ... There [also needs to be] contact people on all campuses not just the few that they select for Sean to do intensive work at. ... There would [now] be more sympathy within denominations like the Uniting Church, and perhaps the Anglicans, to actually publicise the existence of the SCM through those churches, [as] they don't have their own youth organisations that might be seen as competing with [SCM]. But you can't do that, you can't promote the SCM through the Uniting Church, unless there is an accessibility and a visibility for that organisation on every campus where there might be tertiary students. [For example,] you can't promote the SCM in *Crosslight* [and] say go and join your local SCM if you're a student, [when not all campuses have] ... one [to join]. ... So I think there's got to be more attention paid to the macro level of visibility of the SCM within the broader student community [and Christian community]. which, in some ways, should be easier because there are student newspapers [that are] easy to get stuff into. And yet, in some sense, it's more difficult, because it's much more difficult to attract the attention of students even through student newspapers and things like that.

Q: Do you think it's important for the churches to support the SCM?

A: I think that, yes, they fail to support it at their own peril. I mean I really noticed this when I was in Fiji. [The leadership of] the Pacific Conference of Churches there ... all comes through theological colleges [and they] have a narrow education, [and thus] have almost no concept of their laity's involvement in the ecumenical movement. ... When I came back to Australia I realised that we are in a bit of a similar position [here,] too. That if there is a vision of the ecumenical movement as a people's movement, and not just a movement of heads of churches, you've got to have a lay movement where people can get involved. [They need to] see it as in line with their own professional life, [and that] it's not just for the clergy. I think that there may have been, in former eras, SCMs [that] were very dependent on theological colleges, and they're not now. ... The churches have to address this issue and give resources, [but] not to make the SCM a branch of the churches ... and not even to require that SCM members be members of churches. [Because] if there isn't a body like the SCM around, where serious intellectual discussion of theological issues by laypeople within a background of their own professions can take place, then there's not going to be [those] sort of people coming into the churches or staying in the churches.

Q: For example, the Uniting Church in Sydney has set up through the UCA chaplain at Sydney University, a UCA group. Do you think that's possibly not as important as nurturing the SCM group on campus?

A: A UCA group of what?

Q: UCA group for students.

A: Really? Good heavens. That seems to me to be a very backward step. I mean why wouldn't they set up [or] support something ecumenical? [This] to me seems a very dangerous move, because I think that it then is saying to the other churches, 'We think you should do the same as well'. ... And Sydney, I mean the Sydney situation is so dire, it's very different from the Melbourne situation. The role of the Sydney Anglican Diocese in its conservatism, I understand, influences all denominations in Sydney. But for that reason I think the ecumenical movement is very beleaguered in Sydney, and it really has to get its forces together and not be [separatist]. Even if very good theology is going on in the UCA youth group on the campus, it would seem to me that it should be being done ecumenically.

Q: What about Senior Friends, do they have a role to help the current SCM membership?

A: I think they do in as much as they are requested and can do so. But ... I went to the WSCF centenary conference in Berlin in 1995, and I noticed there that in some countries ... the Senior Friends group is a more autonomous organisation of former students. In Germany I think it's called the Protestant Graduates Association, or something like that, [and it] has a life of its own. It's there partly to support the ongoing movement, but it's also there to be a form of Christian witness in the teaching profession, the medical profession and other areas where those graduates have gone on to work. And I would like to see the SCM Friends being more of an organisation in its own right, [by] doing work for its own members [and] assisting them to network. I mean a minimalist organisation in a way, because people don't have a lot of time to spend on it. But it [could be] a networking body, which enables them to keep in touch with their old friends and meet other Friends who are interested in similar areas of activity. [In Germany] they focus a lot on the professions. And, of course, they then can raise money [very easily] for the current SCM or they can provide speakers for conferences or something like that, ... but it's not an organisation [that] is dependent for its central purpose on that of assisting the current movement. This is where we run into some problems in Australia, [as] there's not quite a sense of what the Friends [are] for. Is it like a set of annual reunions of your mates from university or ...

Q: A social club?

A: That's right, yes. ... I recognise the situation in Australia is quite a bit different, but I thought this was quite interesting. And, you see, that in itself then becomes part of a vision of a sort of people's ecumenical movement. In Australia we tend to think of the ecumenical movement as being [mainly] the [National] Council of Churches [of Australia]. The [National] Council of Churches is really made up of heads of churches, and is incredibly bureaucratic. Now that the Catholic Church has joined, it's probably even more limited in the sort of things it can do. And I know that David Gill himself favours the SCM Friends as becoming like a people's ecumenical movement, [one] that's not constrained by the official line of any of the churches [yet which brings people together to do things which later the churches might take up].

Q: What do you think the Student Christian Movement's most important contribution to Australian life has been in the broader sense?

A: I suppose if you look at some of the people who have come through the SCM and have made a great contribution, one of the things that signifies that [SCM influence] would be [their] ability to question deeply while still holding a lot of faith; [of] being critical while not being oppositional [and] ... without being negative; and, in fact, carrying forward debates in various areas like the economy and Aboriginal rights. And being what I would say [was] genuinely Christian, but not in an exclusivist fashion. In fact, ending up at a position, while Christian, [that] can be broadly accepted by people of all faiths I think.

Q: ... And even secular people?

A: Yes, including people who are not believers in [God]. And, in a sense, SCM type of involvement is distinctive in a way and yet in another way it's not. It's main danger is that I think people often fail to recognise it as Christian. ... The SCM has a great deal going for it. It has a lot of human resources and hopefully, I think, it will have a great future if those human resources can be [brought together] in the best of ways, which is often a difficult thing [to do]. And I think that the SCM probably needs to pay a little bit more attention to organisational matters, as do many voluntary organisations at this stage in their development, because they can have excellent ideas and motivation and potential resources and yet still not get their act together. So they do need to do this.

Interview ends.