

200 YEARS OF ABORIGINAL ENCOUNTER
WITH CHRISTIANITY: A STORY OF HOPE

ONE BLOOD



JOHN HARRIS

Barbara Khan

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For
my father

Leonard John Harris

1911 – 1988

ONE BLOOD

200 YEARS OF ABORIGINAL ENCOUNTER
WITH CHRISTIANITY: A STORY OF HOPE

JOHN HARRIS



AN ALBATROSS BOOK

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	9
<i>Maps</i>	12
<i>Introduction</i>	17
 Part A: Nineteenth century:	
<i>Aboriginal missions in eastern Australia</i>	19
 1 The shock of the new:	
<i>Early New South Wales and Aboriginal missions</i>	21
Missionaries and the affirmation of Aboriginal humanity	22
First white settlement	36
The earliest Sydney missions	40
Lancelot Threlkeld	51
The Wellington mission	56
Evangelisation and civilisation	71
 2 The destruction of the old:	
<i>Civilisation and mission permeate north and south</i>	84
The Tasmanian tragedy and the church	86

Early Queensland missions	100
Early Victorian missions	117
The inescapable verdict	126
3 The hobbling of the remnant:	
<i>Protectorates, reserves and missions</i>	145
The plight of Aboriginal people	146
Victoria in the 1850s	151
The Victorian protectorate	154
First Moravian and Church of England missions in Victoria	159
The establishment of Victorian reserves	173
Enlightened colonialism: a contradiction in terms	180
4 The cries of the compassionate:	
<i>Key nineteenth century missionaries in eastern Australia</i>	189
The Moravian missions of the Wimmera and Gippsland	190
John Bulmer's Lake Tyers mission	205
Daniel and Janet Matthews and their Maloga mission	220
William Ridley	229
The missions as places of survival	235
<i>Part B: Nineteenth century:</i>	
<i>Aboriginal missions extend west, south and north</i>	253
5 The repetition of a violent pattern:	
<i>Western Australian society and Aboriginal missions</i>	255
A violent pattern	255
Early Church of England missions	259
Anne Camfield and the Native Institution at Albany	262
John Smithies and the Wesleyan mission	271
Dom Rosendo Salvado and the New Norcia mission	281

6	The failure of noble sentiments: <i>South Australian society and early Aboriginal missions</i>	313
	No different, after all	314
	The first Lutheran missionaries	320
	Heinrich and Friederike Meyer at Encounter Bay	328
	Clamor Schurmann and Port Lincoln	330
	Matthew Hale and Poonindie mission	340
	The Aborigines' Friends' Association	356
	George Taplin and the Port McLeay mission	357
	The Smith of Dunesk Bequest	370
	Epilogue	374
7	The violence of the frontier: <i>The remote centre and west and Aboriginal missions</i>	381
	The Lutherans at Cooper's Creek	382
	The Lutherans at Hermannsburg	389
	John Brown Gribble	411
	Catholic missionaries in the north-west	431
8	The isolation of the tropics: <i>First missions in the Northern Territory and north Queensland</i>	458
	First European settlement in the Northern Territory	460
	Jesuit missions in the Northern Territory	461
	European settlement of north Queensland	480
	The Mapoon mission	485
	The Yarrabah mission and John Gribble	499
	The Yarrabah mission and Ernest Gribble	502
	The later life of Ernest Gribble	511
	James Noble	519
	Epilogue	522

Interlude:

<i>Missionaries and Aboriginal culture in the nineteenth century</i>	530
--	-----

Part C: Twentieth century:

<i>Aborigines and the church in settled Australia</i>	547
---	-----

9 The shielding of the dying:

<i>Aboriginal protection and the churches in settled Australia</i>	549
--	-----

Protecting the dying race	549
The rise of non-denominational missions	553
Reserves and institutions	569
Missionaries and institutions	584
Life after the institutions	597

10 The breaking of the bonds:

<i>The struggle for Aboriginal personhood in settled Australia</i>	608
--	-----

The ethnic character of the new Aboriginal community	610
Aboriginal struggle for equality	611
Assimilation: a solution?	633
Resistance to assimilation	637
'Clean, clad and courteous': schooling at Collarenebri and Lismore	640
'We don't want niggers': schooling at Carnarvon	649
The struggle for acceptance in the churches	654
Aboriginal leadership and the autonomous Aboriginal churches	663
Beyond despair there is hope	671

Part D: Twentieth century:

<i>From mission to church in traditional Aboriginal communities</i>	687
---	-----

11	The reawakening of a vision:	
	<i>The Northern Territory Church of England missions</i>	689
	Roper River and the mission	691
	The missionaries	708
	Mission expansion in the 1920s	715
	Difficulties and reorganisation in the 1930s	729
	The peace expedition	737
	Conclusions	751
12	The emergence of a new age:	
	<i>World War II, traditional Aboriginal society and missions</i>	761
	The situation before the war	762
	World War II	768
	The aftermath of the war	774
	Changes in mission policy	782
	Putting policy into practice	789
13	The voices of freedom and hope:	
	<i>The 'new look' traditional culture and the church</i>	800
	Mining, land rights and the church	800
	Bible translation and Aboriginal languages	829
	An indigenous Aboriginal church?	846
	Epilogue	868
	 <i>Bibliography</i>	 875
	 <i>Index</i>	 935

Preface

I have been writing this book for most of my life. Although it is the product of rigorous historical research, it is also the product of my own personal pilgrimage. It will not be hard to detect in it the influence of my parents, the recollections of my childhood, the wisdom and memories of my Aboriginal friends and acquaintances, and the formative experience of living as a family in Aboriginal communities.

It was about ten years ago that I first knew that I would write this book, and it was then that I began to gather information systematically and to ask specific questions. It was, I then thought, a lifetime project: something I would only complete when I retired.

When I moved from the Northern Territory to become the Director of the Zadok Institute for Christianity and Society, I found myself frequently asked to speak and write on Aboriginal issues as the bicentennial year approached. Suddenly there emerged the possibility that I might write this book sooner rather than later. At first it was to be a bicentennial contribution, but it has grown larger and, I believe, much more important than that. I am grateful to the Zadok Board who gladly encouraged the idea.

My Christian belief is that it was the duty of the Christian church to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to Aboriginal people. Not only have I recorded how the church did that, but also, where necessary, I have criticised the manner in which it was brought – even, occasionally, questioned whether what was being brought

was the gospel at all.

So many people have contributed to this book in so many ways. Judith, my wife, and Nathan, Karina and Megan, my children, provided for me what I most needed to think and write my best – love and home. Diane Robertson at the Zadok office cheerfully kept things going while Gillian Hill, with great care and interest, typed the manuscript, written in pencil in seventeen exercise books. They both read and commented helpfully on the first draft. Brian Dickey and Jenny Dean made immensely important contributions by reading and commenting on the whole manuscript in great detail. Jenny Dean also undertook some valuable research. Sally Morgan sensed the spirit of this book and painted the superb cover. At Albatross Books, John Waterhouse caught the vision and enabled me to take it much further than I had ever hoped; Ken Goodlet edited the manuscript with great sensitivity and skill; and Jeanette Beer and Susan Willgoss patiently and accurately made countless changes and additions to the text.

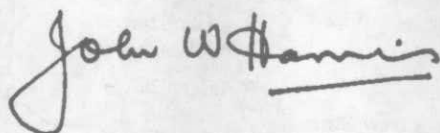
In the course of research I have visited most public libraries and State and Commonwealth archives in Australia, as well as many private institutions. I was always treated with consideration. I should particularly like to mention the courtesy and helpfulness of the staff of St Mark's Institute (Canberra), the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (Canberra), the State Museum of Victoria, the Lambeth Palace Library (London), the Darwin Institute of Technology (now the University of the Northern Territory), the Church Missionary Society, the Australian Board of Missions and the Benedictine Community, New Norcia.

So many people provided me with information that I can only name a small proportion of them. I trust that those whose names are not mentioned will be happy to be represented by those who are. Some of the Aboriginal people who have given me their time and shared their knowledge with me include Pigeon Rankin, Hick-ey Hood, Dinah Garadj, Betty Roberts, Jacob Roberts, Barnabas Roberts, Harry Huddlestone, 'Old Charlie' Galiawa Wurramarrba, Murabuda Wurramarrba, Michael Gumbuli, Jambana Lalara, Nandjiwarra Amagula, Didjidi Wurragwagwa, Aringari Wurramara, Jean Phillips, Bertha Chambers, Ronnie Williams, Sally Morgan, Gladys Milroy, Arthur Malcolm, Cecil Grant, Flo Grant, Ivan Williams, Lindsay Grant, Ossie Cruse, Larry Walsh, Graham Paulson,

Djinyini Gondarra, Faith Thomas, Alana Harris and Connie Isaac.

Equally important has been the contribution of many non-Aboriginal people who have provided insights, information or photographs. Some of them are Jack Horner, Keith Cole, Stuart Piggin, Pat Harrison, Peter King, Anthony Hall-Matthews, Alan Tippet, John Lewis, Barry Downes, Judith Stokes, Stephen Harris, John Sandefur, Barry Butler, Elisabeth Pellicaan, Tony Nichols, Robert Withycombe, Norma Farley, Robert Bos, Dorothy Tunbridge, Graeme Vines, Stephen Hall, Ross Mackay, Thea Shipley, Julie Waddy, Noel Loos, Alick Jackomos, David Ross, Eric Clancy, Margaret Morgan and Eldre Mann. Several of these people provided private information about themselves or their families at considerable personal cost. They, and many others, have my heartfelt gratitude.

The work, finally, is my own and all errors of judgment or fact are mine. Many people will be disappointed not to find their favourite mission or missionary mentioned. In this immense field, I simply could not treat them all and had often to make very difficult choices. I will be very happy to receive comments, corrections or additional information which may be included in another edition.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John W. Harris". The signature is written in a cursive style, with the first name "John" being larger and more prominent. The last name "Harris" is written in a smaller, more compact cursive. There is a horizontal line drawn under the last name.

John Harris
Canberra,
June 1990

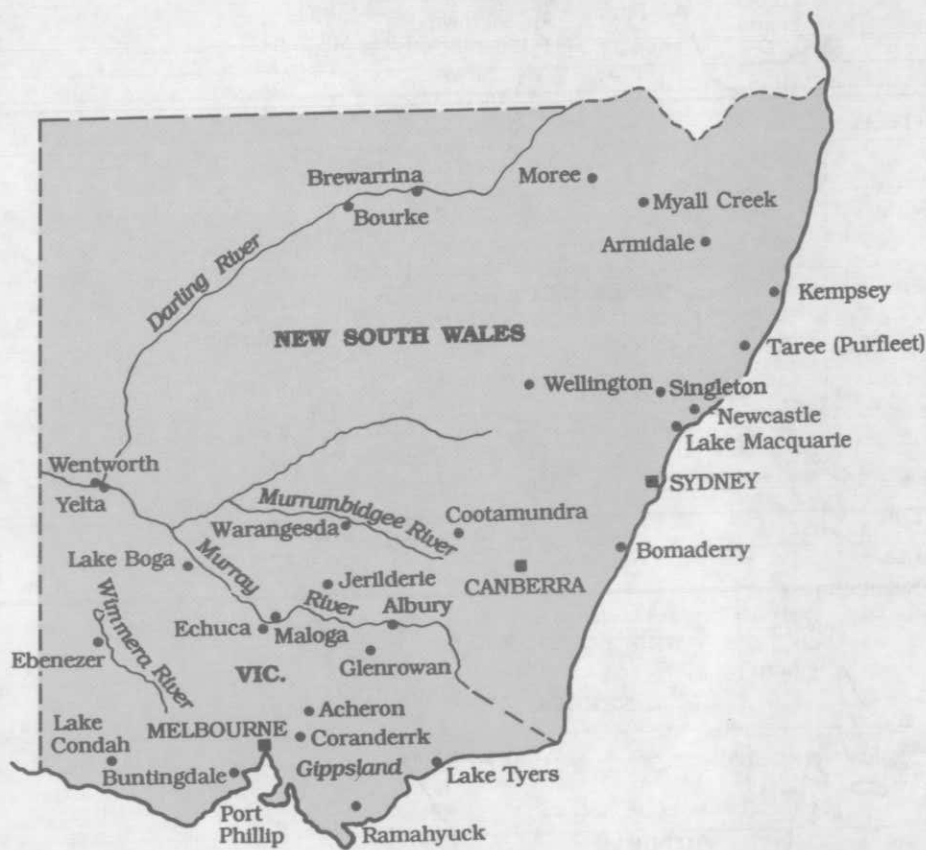
Map 1: Australia



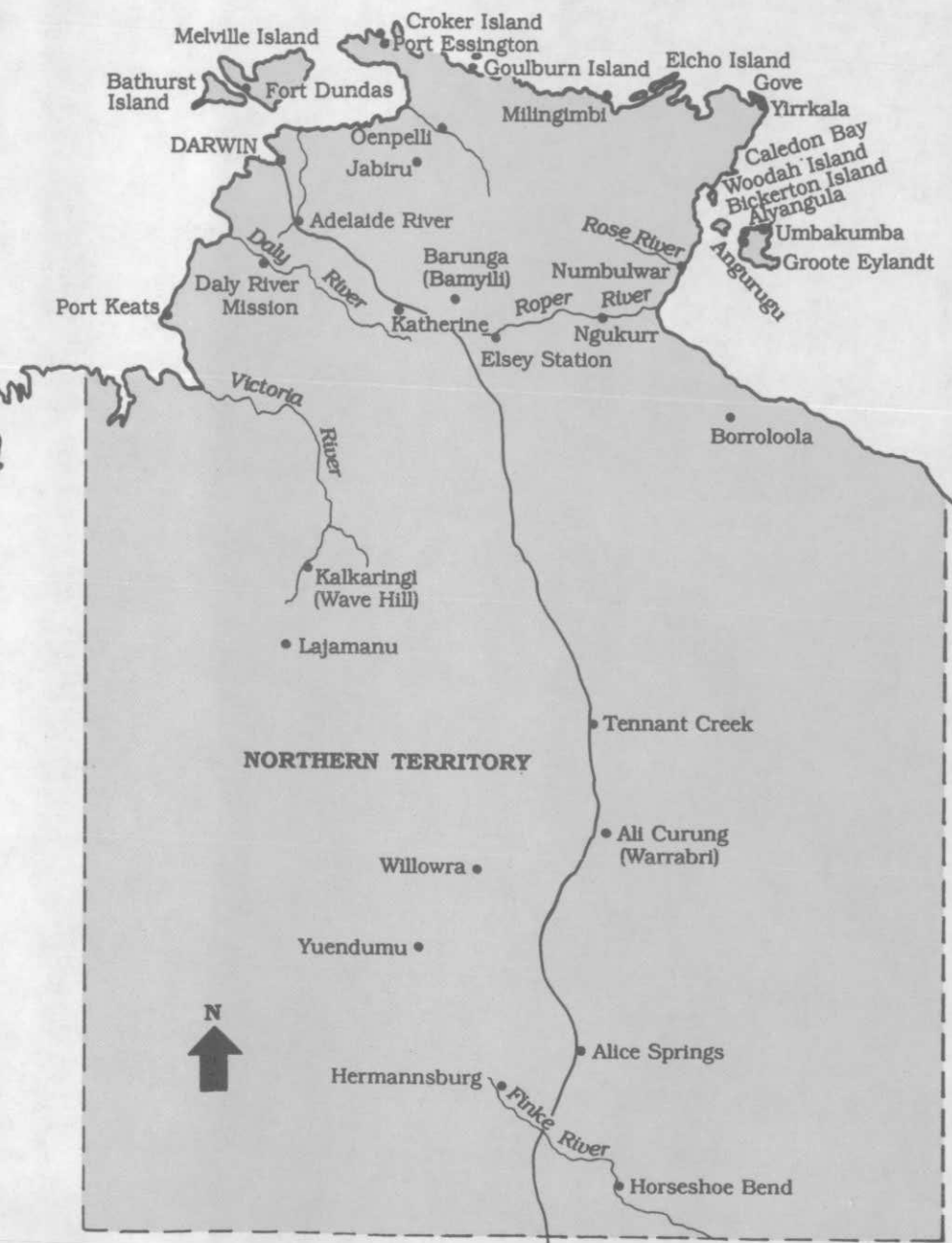


Map 2:

New South Wales and Victoria



Map 3: Northern Territory



Introduction

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE have inhabited this unique and awesome land for a very long time. No-one knows exactly how long. When Moses led the people of Israel into the wilderness, this rich continent was their home. By the time the Anglo-Saxon ancestors of the English had invaded Britain, Aboriginal people had spread throughout virtually every part of what we now call Australia.

When, a thousand years later, the Spanish imagined a great southern land and called it *Australia del Espiritu Santo*, the south land of the Holy Spirit, Aboriginal people were already its ancient inhabitants. The first European sighting of Australia by the Dutch navigator, Willem Jansz, in 1606 and the claiming of its eastern regions for King George III of England in 1770 by James Cook were very recent events indeed.

The first fleet did not transport God to Australia in 1788, along with the convicts. God was already here, present and active as Creator and Sustainer of every remote corner of the earth. God was not undiscernable to Aboriginal people, a religious people who sought to relate to their environment in spiritual terms.

What the Christians among the white settlers did bring, whether they realised it or not, was the knowledge of Christ.

The English evangelicals who arranged for Richard Johnson to be chaplain to the first fleet had envisaged the distant new settlement as a place from which the Christian gospel would emanate. Such a thought was hardly likely to have occupied the

attention of the first settlers with the exception, perhaps, of Johnson himself. It was no doubt far from the minds of the Christians among the convicts, transported across the world against their own will.

Yet, however unwittingly, however imperfectly, however inadequately, they did carry the knowledge of Christ to these shores. But the Christian settlers were few and their light was feeble. It is one of the great tragedies of the recent history of Australia that true Christianity was for so long so very difficult to discern in the life of this outpost of a distant nation which called itself Christian.

A generation was to pass before any missionaries arrived in Australia with the specific task of bringing the Christian gospel to Aboriginal people. This book is about these missionaries and those who followed them. It is about their weaknesses and their strengths, their mistakes and their achievements. It is about the Aboriginal people among whom they worked and about what happened to them, both inside the missions and outside them.

It is about greed and compassion, failure and success, hatred and love, death and life. It is about a long, long struggle by Aboriginal people from the depths of despair to the edges of hope. It is about how they encountered the Christian faith and made it their own.

Part A

Nineteenth century:

Aboriginal missions in eastern Australia

1

The shock of the new

Early New South Wales and Aboriginal missions

WHEN THE FIRST Christian missionary appointed to work among Australian Aborigines arrived in Sydney in 1821, thirty-three years of white settlement had already elapsed. Twenty years later, after missionary attempts by many different denominations and organisations, it was widely believed even by the missionaries themselves that these efforts had failed.

It was the despondency of the missionaries which Lord Stanley, British Secretary of State for the Colonies, found most disturbing. Having read their many reports, by 1842 he came 'with pain and reluctance' to the conclusion that 'their efforts have been unavailing':

The statements respecting the Missions, furnished not by their opponents nor even by indifferent parties, but by the missionaries themselves, are I am sorry to say as discouraging as it is possible to be. . .

In respect of the mission at Wellington Valley, Mr Gunther writes in a tone of despondency which shows that he has abandoned hope of success. . . That at Moreton Bay is admitted by Mr Handt to have made but little progress. . . while that at Lake McQuarrie had. . . ceased to exist from the extinction or removal of the natives. . . The Wesleyan missionaries at Port Phillip. . . acknowledge. . . 'that a feeling of despair sometimes takes possession of our minds and weighs down our spirits'. . . In the face of such representations, which can be attributed

neither to prejudice nor misinformation, I have the greatest doubts as to the wisdom or propriety of continuing the missions any longer. I fear that to do so would be to delude ourselves with the mere idea of doing something. . .¹

In 1819, two years before the first missionary arrived, the Rev. Samuel Marsden, Senior Chaplain of New South Wales, had concluded that the Aboriginal people were as yet beyond the power of Christ to save:

The Aborigines are the most degraded of the human race. . . the time is not yet arrived for them to receive the great blessings of civilisation and the knowledge of Christianity.²

Between these two quotations there is a tragic connection. The first acknowledged the immense failure of the Christian church in bringing the gospel to Aboriginal Australians in the first half century of white settlement. The second statement declared part of the reason for that failure. There were many problems.

Some of them were beyond the power of the missionaries to solve, yet it is also true that in most cases the missionaries themselves were not equal to the task. As Marsden's self-indictment shows, their theology was inadequate and they failed to distinguish properly between the gospel and what they called 'civilisation', European culture. Like Marsden, the missionaries appeared sometimes to speak as if they regarded 'gospel' and 'civilisation' as distinct entities. But in reality they believed the two were very closely connected. As we shall see, they did not really differ over whether the two were inseparable, but only over the order in which they should be instilled.

Missionaries and the affirmation of Aboriginal humanity

There was an even deeper, much more essential issue with which the missionaries had to grapple: whether or not Aboriginal people were fully human. This was openly debated during the greater part of this era of European settlement of Australia.

James Cook, like other educated people of the Enlightenment, had expected to discover Rousseau's 'Noble Savages' in the land he named New South Wales. He actually came to think that he had found them after his brief encounter with what he believed

were classless, non-materially minded Aborigines at one with their environment. Knowing very little about them, he fantasised:

. . . in reality they are far more happier than we Europeans, being wholly unacquainted not only with the superfluous, but with the necessary conveniences so much sought after in Europe; they are happy in not knowing the use of them. They live in a tranquillity which is not disturbed by the inequality of condition. The earth and sea of their own accord furnishes them with all things necessary for life. They covet not magnificent houses, household stuff, etc. . . they seemed to set no value upon anything of their own nor any one article we could offer them. . . they think themselves provided with all the necessaries of life. . .³

The white settlement of Australia coincided with the French Revolution. Not only did the musings of French intellectuals therefore become less influential, but the 'Noble Savage' of fantasy and the Australian Aboriginal of reality were a whole world apart. The idea of the 'Noble Savage' was nevertheless sufficiently long-lived for a Queensland missionary still to find it necessary to dismiss it in the 1890s:

'The Noble Savage' may exist as a romantic ideal within the covers of a book, but that secluded within the covers of the tropical scrub, and roaming wild his native forests, unfettered by the form and fashion of civilisation, he is a being very different in reality from the fallacious painting of his picture by a poet's imagination.⁴

The concept of the 'Noble Savage' was comprehensible because the European mind had invented it. The deep, ancient and very different culture of the Aborigines was incomprehensible. The invaders, secure in their sense of the intrinsic superiority of their own culture, rationalised their own lack of comprehension by dismissing Aborigines as sub-human, degraded or deformed:

A thousand times. . . have I wished that those European philosophers, whose closet speculations exalt a state of nature above a state of civilisation, could survey the phantom which their heated imaginations have raised; a savage roaming for prey

amidst his native deserts is a creature deformed by all those passions which afflict and degrade our nature, unsoftened by the influence of religion, philosophy and legal instruction.⁵

These words were written by Captain Watkin Tench, himself a Christian and one who tried to curb the brutal treatment of Aboriginal people. Despite this, Tench was influenced by a prevailing belief in the supposed superiority of European 'civilisation'. Tench accepted the Greek concept of the 'Great Chain of Being', popularised by John Locke, the English philosopher, in the seventeenth century. All creation was a chain in which each link was inferior to that above but superior to that below.

On the other hand, Tench had a belief in an essential equality of all humanity. Only 'the fortuitous advantage of birth' gave Europeans their superiority, he argued: 'untaught, unaccommodated man is the same in Pall Mall as in the wilderness of New South Wales.'⁶ Tench, like many of his thoughtful contemporaries, held these two ideas in tension. Humankind both were and were not equal. Even Rousseau believed, after all, that 'civilisation' could 'improve' the noble savage.

Opposing one eighteenth century philosophy with another, Tench could at one and the same time believe in an essential equality, but also argue that the Aborigines 'ranked very low, even in the scale of savages'.⁷ Yet compared to most of his fellows, Tench was a fair and compassionate person. As the years passed, this low view of Aborigines became entrenched and intensified.

In 1830, James Dawson recorded that to his fellow settlers the Aborigines were 'nearest of all to the monkey or orang-outang, and therefore incapable of enjoying the same state of intellectual existence as themselves'.⁸ In 1834, Peter Cunningham placed them 'at the very zero of civilisation, constituting. . . the connecting link between man and the monkey tribe'.⁹ They were, to many colonists, 'a species of tail-less monkeys'. Writing to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1838, a squatter, attempting to influence public opinion against the convicting of the men accused of the Myall Creek massacre, claimed that 'these hordes of Aboriginal cannibals, to whom the veriest reptile that crawls the earth holds out matter for emulation, are far, very far, below the meanest brute in rationality and everything pertaining thereto'.¹⁰

Objectionable as these views are, it is regrettable that they cannot be dismissed as simply misguided, as mere reflections of an inadequate world view. They are indeed that, but they are not just intellectual errors. They came to be part of a much more sinister rationalisation of reality. If Aborigines were not quite human, then killing one was a different act from killing a person.

There were, from the earliest days, those who could see this awful logic. The editor of the *Colonist* in 1839 was one:

Sordid interest is at the root of all this anti-Aborigines feeling. Because the primitive lords of the soil interfere, in some of the frontier stations, with the easy and lucrative grazing of cattle and sheep, they are felt by the sensitive pockets of the graziers to be a nuisance; and the best plea these 'gentlemen' can set up for their rights to abate the nuisance by the summary process of stabbing, burning, and 'poisoning', is, that the offenders are below the level of the white man's species.¹¹

Another who showed the same perception was the Congregational missionary, Lancelot Threlkeld, in 1853:

It was maintained by many of the colony that the blacks had no language at all but were only a race of the monkey tribe. This was a convenient assumption, for if it could be proved that the Aborigines. . . were only a species of wild beasts, there could be no guilt attributed to those who shot them off or poisoned them.¹²

Although fair-minded colonists, including many Christians, contested this view of Aboriginal inferiority, the opinion not only persisted but actually intensified during the second half of last century and well into this century. As Reynolds has so powerfully demonstrated, successive generations of white Australians became 'hardened against the natives'.¹³ Whereas there had always been a widespread notion that the inferior race had to be displaced by the superior race, the second half of the nineteenth century saw such views gain scientific support.

Darwinian evolution lent scientific respectability to the belief in European superiority. The rise of evolutionary theory coincided with the availability of data on Aborigines so that the world's scientific and anthropological journals, from the middle of the

nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, abounded with evidence of their physical, cultural and intellectual inferiority. Anatomical measurements were widely used to demonstrate Aborigines to be ape-like. Compared to Europeans they were invariably found to have smaller skull capacity, larger pelvises, longer arms, longer vertebral discs, vestigial tails and so on.¹⁴

They were even thought to exhibit features of animals below mammals in the evolutionary scheme – reptilian skin, for example, or little sensitivity to pain.¹⁵ 'They live,' said one scientist, 'in the lowest mud of barbarism.'¹⁶ They have 'hardly any of what are usually understood as the phenomena of intellect,' wrote another.¹⁷ The president of the prestigious Ethnological Society of London wrote in its journal in 1865 that '...in mixing with them we feel doubtful whether we have to do with intelligent monkeys or with very much degraded man'.¹⁸

In addition, convinced of the physical, cultural and intellectual inferiority of the Aborigines, the scientific community came to the almost unanimous conclusion that evolutionary theory, based on the survival of the fittest, demanded that the Aboriginal race was doomed to extinction. Educated thought generally tended to follow this conclusion:

Without a history, they have no past; without a religion they have no hope; without the habits of forethought and providence they can have no future. Their doom is sealed. . .¹⁹

Just as scholarly opinions such as the 'Noble Savage' or the 'Chain of Being' had influenced policies in the past, government policies now came under the influence of evolutionary theory. As early as 1860, the report of the South Australian Legislative Council on government responsibilities towards Aborigines showed some acceptance of the notion that the Aborigines would soon disappear.²⁰ The scientific legitimising of the belief in Aboriginal inferiority simply reinforced the existing stance of the more prejudiced sections of the media.

'Backward the natives must go before the tide of civilisation,' said the *Northern Territory Times* in 1884.²¹ 'The sooner the better' was the view of the Melbourne columnist who called himself 'The Vagabond'.²² It was what Stanner called 'the persuasive doctrine of Aboriginal worthlessness'.²³ It filled many of the jour-

nals and textbooks, the travellers' tales, the magazines and the majority of the newspapers, thus influencing the minds of generations of white Australians. Many people, their consciences eased, accepted the demise of Aboriginal society as inevitable, even if it were hastened by white aggression.

There was, as well, a sinister pattern to the most extreme outbursts of anti-Aboriginal writings. Reading through more than a century of newspapers, I found that there were periods when there was a more concerted than usual barrage of anti-Aboriginal writing to the press, periods when the debate about the status of Aboriginal people became more public and heated. These periods coincided with publicity surrounding particularly brutal or unprovoked massacres of Aborigines and the storms rose to a crescendo whenever any white person was likely to be tried for the killing of blacks.

Thus we find an upsurge of derogatory writing in the Sydney press in 1838, immediately prior to the trial of seven white men accused of the brutal and cold-blooded massacre of twenty-eight black men, women and children at Henry Dangar's Myall Creek Station on the Liverpool Plains.

'Anti-Hypocrite' wrote, for example, about the Aborigines in the *Sydney Herald* of 5 October:

...[They are] the most degenerate, despicable and brutal race of beings in existence, and stand as it were in scorn to 'shame creation' – a scoff and a jest upon humanity, they are insensible to every bond which binds man to his friend: husband to wife, parent to its child or creature to its God. They stand unprecedented in the annals of the most ancient and barbarous histories for the anti-civilising propensities they put forth.²⁴

That the jury was by no means impartial and well able to be influenced was clearly demonstrated in the remarks of one of the jurors after the first of the two trials:

I look on the blacks as a set of monkeys, and the earlier they are exterminated from the face of the earth the better. I would never consent to hang a white man for a black one. I knew well they were guilty of the murder, but I for one would never see a white man suffer for shooting a black.²⁵

On this occasion, however, the anti-Aboriginal lobby did not prevail. Attorney General John Hubert Plunkett, a devout Catholic, laid a new set of charges against the men, the new jury convicted them and the judge sentenced the seven men to death.

Another example of an occasion which prompted a spate of newspaper correspondence and editorials was the inquiry into a report by Corporal George Montague of the Northern Territory police in which he admitted that he and his party had killed 'between twenty and thirty' Aboriginal men near the Mary River late in 1884 while ostensibly investigating the killing of four white men at the Daly River Copper Mine.²⁶ The southern press, which had at first called for revenge, was outraged at the lawless and arbitrary action the police had taken. 'The manner in which Corporal Montague and his associates murdered these unhappy wretches is a disgrace to him, a disgrace to the community, and an outrage on the civilisation about which we boast,' wrote the *South Australian Register*.²⁷ 'Corporal Montague. . . and his party are. . . entitled to the hearty thanks of the whole community,' replied the *Northern Territory Times*.²⁸ 'As to the shooting of blacks,' said the *North Australian*, 'we uphold it defiantly.'²⁹

Newspaper invective reached its peak in the early years of this century in north Queensland and particularly in Western Australia during the protracted warfare with Aboriginal people in the north-west. Opinions such as the following were commonplace and newspaper editors, it would seem, happily published them:

Brutish, faithless, vicious, the animal being given fullest loose only approached by his next of kin the monkey. . . the Australian black may have a soul but, if he has, then the horse and the dog, infinitely superior in every way to the black human, cannot be denied possession of that vital spark of heavenly flame.³⁰

It was convenient to deny Aboriginal people immortality, and it was at this precise point that popular opinion and missionary opinion divided. The belief that Aborigines indeed possessed immortal souls, 'the vital spark of heavenly flame', was to become the final, non-negotiable tenet of missionary belief about the Aborigines. They possessed a soul. They were human and there-

fore capable of salvation.

Beyond this, however, most missionaries' views on Aborigines were not clearly distinguishable from those of the rest of the community. To the Wesleyan, Samuel Leigh, Aborigines were 'barbarians' to whom had been assigned 'the lowest place in the scale of intellect'.³¹ To the Lutheran missionary William Schmidt, they were 'the lowest in the scale of the human race'.³² John Harper of the Wesleyan Missionary Society was more specific. The Aborigines were 'degraded as to *divine* things, almost on a level with the brute'.³³

Harper's words provide the necessary clue to the distinction between the missionaries' attitude to Aborigines and the general community attitude. The missionaries employed some of the same language and held partly similar views, but to the evangelical missionaries, terms like 'depravity' and 'degradation' had theological overtones. There was a general sense in which the evangelical missionaries used these terms to describe all of unredeemed humanity, including themselves. According to their extreme version of the doctrine of total depravity, we are all 'utterly indisposed, disabled and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil'.³⁴ All good, the image of God, has been erased. As we shall discuss later, this view certainly influenced most strongly the content of the missionaries' teaching. At this point, however, we are more interested in those views which, in the missionaries' minds, distinguished unredeemed Aborigines from the rest of unredeemed humanity.

There was a sense in which the concept of degradation was seen to apply particularly to Aboriginal people or to other races like them. They were in the process of becoming ever more degraded from the once high civilisation from which they had descended. According to Archbishop Ussher's chronology, there were fewer than 6 000 years to account for the vast differences between Aboriginal and European peoples. This constraint had long forced biblical scholars into an unwarranted global interpretation of Genesis 9 and 10:

And the sons of Noah, that went forth from the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth: and Ham is the father of Canaan. . . And [Noah] said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God

of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. . . And the sons of Ham; Cush and Mizraim, and Phut, and Canaan.³⁵

Instead of seeing the fulfilment of the curse of Canaan in the Hebrew conquest of the Canaanites, the curse was seen to apply to Ham and all his descendants: Cush (Ethiopia), Mizraim (Egypt) and Phut (Libya). These were African nations and included black races. By extension, the curse was given universal application, not only to the black peoples of Africa, but to all black races of the southern hemisphere.

It needs to be emphasised that this has not been merely a fundamentalist or literalist interpretation of scripture. The rejection of the view that Aborigines were degraded descendants of Ham is not a denial of the verbal inspiration of scripture. No matter how literally the curse of Ham (or Canaan) is taken, no matter how extensively the curse is thought to apply to Ham's other descendants, there is still absolutely no biblical justification to connect Australian Aborigines with Ham or the curse. It is simply unwarranted exegesis and as such represents the kind of scriptural usage which evangelicals often criticised. But whatever its quality, this interpretation had two extremely important consequences in the thinking of the early Christians in Australia, one negative, the other positive.

On the negative side, this view meant that the Aborigines could be regarded as the ultimate example of Ham's curse. Were the Aborigines, asked William Hull in 1846, 'degraded descendants of the nations driven out by divine command to the uttermost parts of the earth, and to the islands beyond the seas'?³⁶ It was not simply that 'like the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Aboriginal Canaanites, they have been left to the natural consequences of the effects of not retaining the knowledge of God', but that of all the people in that condition, the Aborigines were judged to be on 'the lowest scale of degraded humanity'.³⁷ To the Wesleyan clergyman, Joseph Orton, the Aborigines were degraded 'far below the brute creation'.³⁸ When the Presbyterian minister, Thomas Dove, described the Tasmanian Aborigines in a scientific journal, he wrote of their total depravity in terms which he would never have used to describe Europeans:

They live in the lowest stage of degradation lacking all moral

views and impressions. . . such is the depth of their degradation that they have reached the level of the beasts, every thought bearing upon the nature of rational beings has now been erased from their breasts.³⁹

Dark skin had also been long thought to indicate inferiority. African slaves were, of course, black so that dark skin became associated with slavery. It was easy to justify such a view by a theology based on the extension of Ham's curse to the African nations. It was also easy to perpetuate it, knowingly or unknowingly, through the light and dark imagery of good and evil. The white/black dichotomy in Western thought has long equated whiteness with 'cleanliness, the light of day, moral purity and absolution from sins' and blackness with 'sin, dirt, night and evil'.⁴⁰

Examples of this are the following poem, *The Little Black Boy* by William Blake, and the tombstone epitaph which follows it:

My mother bore me in the southern wild
And I am black, but O! my soul is white.
White as an angel is the English child,
But I am black, as if bereaved of light.⁴¹

I who was born a pagan and a slave
Now sweetly sleep a Christian in my grave.
What tho' my hue was dark, my Saviour's sight
Shall change this darkness into radiant light.⁴²

The association of blackness with inferiority was already strongly implanted in the European mind in 1788. Together with nakedness, it came to symbolise Aboriginal degradation. To William Carey they were 'poor, barbarous, naked pagans'.⁴³ Whereas to James Cook, their being 'naked and not ashamed' was a virtue, evidence of the 'pure state of nature'.⁴⁴

Barron Field, Judge of the Supreme Court, held the opposite view. 'Without faculties of reflection, judgment or foresight, they are incapable of civilisation. They are the only natives in the world who cannot feel or know that they are naked and they are not ashamed'.⁴⁵

To the Anglican preacher, William Henry, darkness of skin indicated darkness of mind:

O Jesus, when shall thy kingdom come with power amongst them? When shall the rays of thine eternal gospel penetrate the gross darkness of their minds (well represented by their faces) and illumine their benighted souls.⁴⁶

There was, on the other hand, a vital, positive outcome of this missionary belief. The view that Aboriginal people were degraded, even that they were the most degraded of all people, still contained within it one essential safeguard. They were still human. Although the belief in their utter degradation was terribly flawed, it was not therefore fatally flawed. There was a point beyond which it could not go. In the final analysis, the belief itself demanded the essential humanity of the Aborigines. If they were descended from Ham, they were also descended from Adam.

Writing in the *Sydney Gazette* in 1824, 'Philanthropus', who was almost certainly the Church of England clergyman Robert Cartwright, expressed this most forcefully:

I suppose the New Hollanders to be human creatures and that their Maker has taught them more than the beasts of the earth. I think they have with myself, and all other men, one common ancestor. I am therefore willing to call them brethren, and to acknowledge them entitled to my compassion and fraternal respect. Hence, I have been led to estimate even the least one of these, my despised and injured brethren, at more value than all the sheep and cattle on Bathurst Plains, than all the flocks and herds in the territory of New South Wales, than all the animals in the whole world!

In the sight of the Creator, their souls I believe to be of infinite importance. . . If we therefore now hasten their destruction or neglect to promote their salvation, shall we be innocent or without blame?⁴⁷

Catholic Archbishop John Bede Polding and his fellow bishops expressed this well in a pastoral letter in 1869:

[Some of our fellow colonists] have, in justification of a great crime, striven to believe that these black men are not of our race, are not our fellow creatures. We Catholics know assuredly how false this is; we know that one soul of theirs is, like one of our own, of more worth than the whole material world, that any

human soul is of more worth, as it is of greater cost, than the whole mere matter of this earth, its sun and its system or, indeed, of all the glories of the firmament.⁴⁸

The missionaries, whatever their church affiliation, held this view against powerful and unrelenting opposition. They were assailed by a secular press claiming Aborigines to be a race of 'the monkey tribe' or of 'the orang-outang species'.⁴⁹ For some, it was all they could do to maintain their position, but maintain it they did. William Watson struggled with it in 1836 at Wellington Valley:

With all their moral degradation and apparent small degree of superiority to the brute creation, we believe that they are men and, as such, are interested in the economy of salvation. Under such views, we feel it our duty to labour to instruct them in the great things of God.⁵⁰

It was not only the secular public whom they had to confront, but also scientific opinion. The most outspoken critic of such views was the Congregational clergyman, Lancelot Threlkeld. When a French (and therefore probably Catholic) anthropologist claimed to have determined the innate mental deficiency of Aborigines by head measurements, Threlkeld enquired whether he had measured the head of the Pope.⁵¹ It was generally supposed, Threlkeld said in 1825, that Aborigines were subhuman:

[Others supposed that they] were a species of baboon and had no regular language. A French man of war arrived and the medical philosopher (falsely so called) endeavoured to confirm the opinion. Saxe Bannister Esquire in a postscript to a note sent to me at this time states that 'The French medical Gentleman has confirmed my opinion of the innate deficiency of these poor people by a careful examination of many heads. I ventured my opinion in the following postscript to that gentleman: 'Perhaps the Aborigines think that there is an innate deficiency in the bulk of white men's skulls which prevents their attainment of the native language.'⁵²

A third challenge to the belief in the essential humanity of Aborigines came from the writings of certain theologians. Missionaries in many parts of the continent reacted forcefully to the

claim by the French theologian, Ernest Renan, that Aborigines had no soul.⁵³ They also had to deal with the view that not all races were descended from Adam, a view which was originally popularised by the Dutch theologian Isaac de la Peyrere. When the Dutch were first sighting Australia, Peyrere wrote of 'those unknown countries to which the Hollanders have sailed of late, the men of which it is probable did not descend from Adam'.⁵⁴

Many missionaries and other clergy found it necessary to counter this view. The Presbyterian minister, William Hamilton, distributed a book of sermons in 1843 in which he argued that 'all mankind, not excepting the New Hollanders, are descended from common parents'.⁵⁵ 'These facts are not doubted by any who reverence the sacred scriptures as the word of God,' Hamilton wrote. Another Presbyterian, the missionary William Ridley, was appalled to discover that there were even Christian preachers who published the view that Aborigines could not attain immortality.⁵⁶ Most missionaries took refuge in Acts 17:26:

God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.

There is hardly a missionary in the nineteenth century in whose diary, letters or sermons this text is not found. When the Wesleyan missionary in Perth, John Smithies, first saw Aborigines, his 'fears were only allayed' by the remembrance 'that of one blood hath God made us and that for these my Saviour died'.⁵⁷ Another West Australian clergyman stressed that Aborigines were 'partakers of the same human nature as that which the son of God took upon him'.⁵⁸

Threlkeld expressed this with his usual eloquence:

Human nature is just the same, whether cloaked with the most delicate alabaster skin, or comely but black exterior of the image of God. Accidental circumstances may make individual differences but it is 'of one blood God hath made all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth'. The mind of man is the same, whether of saint, or savage, or of sage, darkness itself until the divine light shines within the soul and opens the eyes of the understanding to see the glory of God in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ. . .⁵⁹

There were times when the whole Christian community, laypeople or clergy, missionaries or not, Catholic or Protestant, evangelical, high churchman or dissenter, rose to their powerful best when confronted with community agitation for the massacre of Aborigines or public demand for the release of guilty white murderers. When public clamour reached fever pitch just before the Myall Creek trials late in 1838, Sydney preachers proclaimed Aboriginal equality from every pulpit, thundering their condemnation of white brutality and announcing, perhaps prematurely but no less certainly, the 'righteous retribution of insulted heaven'.

The controversial John Dunmore Lang reminded his congregation in Scots Church that the Aborigines were 'bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh - formed originally after the image of God'. He published his sermon as a pamphlet with the title *National Sins the Causes and Precursors of National Judgements*.⁶⁰ John Saunders told Sydney Baptists that all of humanity was of one species, descended from Adam and Eve. Just prior to the trials, Saunders chose his text most carefully from Isaiah 26:21:

For behold the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.

Saunders' theological position was thoroughly biblical and convincingly expressed:

Does it seem strange to speak of the majesty of the New Hollanders? Wilt thou despise the Saviour of the world? Then despise not him who sprang out of the same stock, despise not him for whom Christ died. The Saviour died as much for him as he did for you. Now by every sentiment of humanity and love you are bound to love him, to admit him to your fraternity and to treat him as a fellow man.⁶¹

Indeed, so fierce was Saunders' public condemnation, not only of those accused of the Myall Creek atrocity but also of those who expressed support for them, that the *Sydney Herald* sued him for libel.

Courage, as we shall see, takes many forms. It led the missionaries not only to champion publicly the essential humanity of

Aboriginal people, their equality in the sight of God, but it also led many of them to dedicate their lives to protecting and defending Aboriginal people in the only ways they knew how.

First white settlement

If any group of people in the world have a claim to their land by virtue of prior occupation, it must surely be the Australian Aborigines.

Little attention was given by the British to any right of occupation the Aborigines might have had. True, there was some high-sounding rhetoric about treating them properly. Phillip was supposed to 'conciliate their affections' and 'live in amity and kindness with them'.⁶² When, however, the first fleet disgorged nearly 800 convicts and their 300 jailers on the shores of Port Jackson, such sentiments as these were no doubt far from most people's minds. Future dealings with Aboriginal people demonstrated that the interests of the British colonisers would finally always be paramount. There were uneasy consciences from time to time, some theorising about natural justice, a few lonely prophets, even some strong words from the pulpit – all swept aside by the inexorable tide of colonisation.

In the unbalanced society of the early years of the penal settlement, convicts outnumbered everyone else; men far outnumbered women. Apart from a few officers' wives, the only women were convicts. Having very little control over their lives, many were assigned to male settlers as 'servants', were selected by the colonial gentry as their mistresses or drifted into a life of prostitution. When the shiploads of female convicts arrived, extra rum was issued. 'The whole colony,' wrote T.W. Plummer in 1811, 'is little less than an extensive brothel.'⁶³

Australian folklore accepts a view that gross brutality typified early colonial society. This was no doubt true of the out-of-sight-out-of-mind satellite prisons such as Norfolk Island and Moreton Bay, but these only affected ten per cent of the convict population. It was not long before officials, free-settlers and ex-convicts outnumbered the prisoners and influenced the type of society in which they were living. It was, nevertheless, a frontier society with all the moral problems such isolated outposts have in their early decades. It was not brutality which most typified it, but sexual immorality.

Governor Hunter wrote in 1798 that 'a more wicked, abandoned and irreligious set of people have never been brought together in any part of the world'.⁶⁴ The Christian missionaries, who were yet to come, would certainly have agreed with him.

Among the Aboriginal people of the region, such as the Dharawal, Dharuk and Kameraigal, there were many who strongly resisted the invasion of their lands. There were the notorious Pemulwy and his son Tedbury, and many other guerilla fighters whom Governor Macquarie termed 'banditti'.⁶⁵ Others welcomed the whites, unaware of the devastation the next few years were to bring. The most common response of Aborigines to the first white settlers was curiosity. They wondered who or what these newcomers were and what benefits they might offer.

Although it can no longer be proven, it is virtually certain that the first acts of aggression in the long war between whites and blacks were committed by white colonists,⁶⁶ and that the first deaths were Aboriginal, unrecorded like the majority of subsequent Aboriginal deaths. It is not even clear when the first white colonist was speared in retaliation. The surgeon on the *Sirius*, George Worgan, recorded in his journal that a convict was probably killed by Aborigines on 21 May 1788 and that two were killed on 30 May. It was the general opinion, Worgan noted, that 'the natives are not the aggressors'.⁶⁷

On 9 July 1788, Aborigines killed another settler. Governor Phillip still had 'not the least doubt of the convicts being the aggressors'.⁶⁸ Although this may simply have been a convenient way of excusing his inability to control what was happening, it does indicate an early willingness not to regard the Aborigines as automatically the aggressors. Eventually, Phillip demonstrated that even if guilty, convicts were to be valued more highly than Aboriginal people.

In December 1790, a convict named McEntire, Phillip's gamekeeper, was speared in retaliation for shooting Aborigines. Captain Watkin Tench noted his instructions: 'that we were to. . . make a signal example of that tribe. . . to bring away two natives and to put to death ten'.⁶⁹ Tench and his men were issued with axes and sacks to bring back the heads. At this point, despite the fact that McEntire was not dead and that his attacker's identity was known, the retaliation was to be both excessive and arbitrary.

Lieutenant William Dawes, Tench's second-in-command, was

a Christian and the assignment troubled him deeply. He had taken an interest in the Aborigines and had begun to study the local language. At first, Dawes refused to go with the detachment. When he sought advice from his pastor, Richard Johnson, he was counselled to obey his superiors. He did so and, as it happened, the expedition was a failure. Even so, on his return Dawes publicly stated that he regretted having complied with his orders and that he would not go on such expeditions in the future. For this insubordination, Governor Phillip sent him back to England.

It would seem that Dawes had a sounder Christian conscience than Johnson. Ironically, he was to develop a strong interest in missions and to become a much more significant figure in evangelical circles than Johnson.⁷⁰

Dawes' story was, however, only part of the story. Tench was also a Christian and his response was thoughtful. Tench remonstrated with Governor Phillip who relented somewhat and agreed that the instructions be reduced to the killing of any two Aboriginal men. Tench finally returned empty-handed, reporting that he had been unable to find any Aborigines. Although Tench did not confide his feelings in his journal, it seems evident that he did not try very hard to find them and that Phillip did not strongly press the point on Tench's return.

Even had he only succeeded in reducing the victims from twelve to two, Tench would have done a praiseworthy thing, but in the long run his act was irrelevant. Governor Phillip's decision to retaliate arbitrarily removed those lingering ethical and psychological barriers which had so far prevented great bloodshed.

This was a pattern that was to last for 150 years: aggression or mistreatment of Aborigines by whites, retaliation by the Aborigines and indiscriminate slaughter of Aborigines in revenge. It was rarely acknowledged by the whites that their very presence was itself the principal aggression. Aboriginal people clearly did not generally understand mass killings as reprisals. The slaughtered people often belonged to a totally different group so that their deaths were perceived simply as white brutality. Little wonder that their own retaliations were occasionally indiscriminate, although there is considerable evidence that Aboriginal people normally killed particular people for specific offences, especially the maltreatment of Aboriginal women.

Governor John Hunter, an active Christian, was well aware of

this, formally reporting it in 1800:

[The Aborigines'] violence against the military proceeded from a soldier having in a most shameful and wanton manner killed a native woman and child. . . You will discover, my Lord, what a host of evidence is brought forward. . . to prove what numbers of white people have been killed by the natives; but could we have brought with equal ease such proofs from the natives as they are capable of affording of the wanton and barbarous manner in which many of them have been destroyed. . . we should have found an astonishing difference in the numbers.⁷¹

Governor Lachlan Macquarie also thought it necessary to demonstrate military strength to the Aborigines. It is often said that Macquarie was exceptionally tolerant, but perhaps this was only by comparison with other governors even less humane than himself. Irrked by the Aboriginal resistance to the westward expansion of Sydney and particularly angry at what became called the 'harvest raids', Macquarie deployed the military into that region, putting down the resistance with what Bonwick described as 'great slaughter'.⁷²

There were other insidious forces destroying Aboriginal people wherever there was white settlement. These included prostitution, alcohol, malnutrition and European diseases. It was a medical practitioner, George Worgan, who made the important observation during the first few months of white settlement that the Aborigines 'seemingly enjoy uninterrupted health and live to a great age'. He also made the ominous observation shortly afterwards that venereal disease, 'that scourge of mankind', made its first appearances among the convicts, not the Aborigines.⁷³

This was only one of many European diseases which were to wreak unimaginable havoc among the Aboriginal population, as yet lacking resistance to European infections. Governor Phillip recorded that within fourteen months of the first fleet's arrival, half of the Aborigines of the Sydney region were dead of smallpox:

In the beginning of the following April (1789), numbers of the natives were found dead with the smallpox in different parts of the harbour. . . one half of those who inhabit this part of the country died and, as the natives always retired from where the disorder appeared, and which some must have carried with

them, it must have spread to a considerable distance, as well inland as along the coast. We have seen the traces of it wherever we have been.⁷⁴

More recent opinion is that the disease was European chickenpox, which the white colonists would not have recognised as a fatal disease but which was fatal to unresistant Aborigines.⁷⁵

The earliest Sydney missions

The European colonisation of Australia coincided with the rise of the modern Protestant missionary movement. To William Carey, the great missionary writer, Captain Cook discovered new mission fields. Carey made a wild guess that twelve million of the world's 420 million pagans lived in New Holland: 'poor, barbarous, naked pagans, as destitute of civilisation as they are of true religion'.⁷⁶

Despite this, the missionary movement virtually ignored Australia. A generation of Aborigines in south-eastern Australia were to experience the brutality and corruption of white society before the church formally responded to their need. The reasons are not clear.⁷⁷ One factor was certainly that the great nineteenth century evangelical missionary societies, the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), the London Missionary Society (LMS), the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the Wesleyan Missionary Society (WMS), had not been founded by 1788. The much older Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) and the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) simply gave the first chaplain gifts of Bibles and other books consistent with their concentration on the supply of literature. The Catholic Church had shown itself to be aggressively expansionist in South America and elsewhere, but it was also to be many years before the Catholic Church expressed formal interest in the Aborigines.

Given the date of the first white settlement, the ignoring of the Aborigines is still surprising in that Australian Christianity began under the influence of the evangelical revival. It was William Wilberforce and members of the Eclectic Society who convinced William Pitt to appoint Richard Johnson chaplain of the first fleet. They pictured the new settlement as a place 'whence the gospel light may hereafter spread in all directions, and multitudes may rejoice in it who are at present covered with a thick darkness',⁷⁸ but this did not inspire them to any early action on

behalf of the Aboriginal people. They focussed their attention on the British in the colony, prepared for many years to accept the notion that the locality was virtually uninhabited.

Johnson himself did take some interest in the Aborigines. Compassionate European settlers in Sydney tried to care for Aborigines during the devastating epidemic of 1789. Only two of those they tried to help survived, a girl Abaroo (or Boorong) and a boy Nanbaree.⁷⁹ Mary and Richard Johnson took the Aboriginal girl, Abaroo, into their household in 1789. He wrote:

. . . [I have] a native girl under my care. Have had her now about eleven months. . . Have taken some pains with Abaroo (about fifteen years old) to instruct her in reading, and have no reason to complain of her improvement. She can likewise begin to speak a little English and is useful in several things about our little hut. Have taught her the Lord's Prayer etc., and as she comes better to understand me, endeavour to instruct her respecting a Supreme Being, etc. Wish to see these poor heathen brought to the knowledge of Christianity and hope in time to see or hear of the dawnings of that time when these shall be given for our Lord's heritage, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.⁸⁰

Despite Johnson's optimism, within a few months Abaroo 'blushed into womanhood and sought a more natural protector, with whom she fled to the bush'.⁸¹ The same thing happened with a second girl. These efforts of Mary and Richard Johnson have sometimes been cited to demonstrate their positive attitude towards the Aborigines.⁸² The Johnsons were no doubt charitable and well-intentioned people, but this kind of strategy almost invariably failed. It was tried countless times, but the Aboriginal adoptees either ran away, died or became outcasts in colonial society.

Elizabeth and Samuel Marsden had several Aboriginal boys living with them from time to time. In 1826 Marsden wrote about one of them, Harry, in a letter to Archdeacon T.H. Scott:

The native Harry, whom you know, lived in my family thirty years ago, for a considerable time. He learned to speak our language, and while he was with me behaved well. I entertained very great hopes that from conversing with him upon the com-

forts of civil life, the nature of our religion, and such subjects as I thought were best calculated to enlarge his mind, he might become civilised. But at length he joined the natives in the woods, and from that time to the present, he only paid me occasional visits, when I generally advert to the time when he first lived with me, and what he would have enjoyed if he had continued with my family. Harry hears all I have got to say, with the utmost indifferences, and he never seems to think that he lost anything by living in the woods.⁸³

It was always a great mystery to Marsden why the benefits of 'civil life' were not immediately apparent to all Aboriginal people, particularly those who had experienced European households as children. The Marsdens had held out great hopes for success with another boy, Tristan, who lived with them from the age of four in 1790 until he was seventeen. Tristan showed intelligence and adjusted well, so it seemed, to colonial life. Samuel Marsden wrote enthusiastically to William Wilberforce about him in 1799.⁸⁴ George Caley wrote that 'he has lost all his native customs and may be ranked as a European, excepting for his features'.⁸⁵ Like James Bath, the infant Aboriginal boy raised almost to adulthood in early Sydney, Tristan was said to 'abhor' his origins.⁸⁶

Despite all this, when the Marsdens tried to take Tristan with them on a trip to England in 1807, he absconded in Rio de Janeiro from where, some years later, he was brought back to Sydney. Ill and a misfit, he tried to re-enter Aboriginal society but died not long after his return. He was said to have shown 'Christian faith and penitence' before his death in Sydney Hospital.⁸⁷

Even had he remained healthy, there was no future for Tristan in either Aboriginal society, from which he had become alienated, or in colonial Sydney where there would have been no chance of true acceptance, marriage and home life. Even in the Marsden household he was, like the majority of Aboriginal adoptees, raised to be a servant. Both Elizabeth Marsden and Thomas Hassall referred to Samuel Marsden's relationship to Tristan as 'master'.⁸⁸

This is not to deny that some adopted Aboriginal children were in genuine need when adopted, and that some colonists acted with compassion. These gestures, albeit well-meaning, were the first evidence of what was to become the prevailing attitude for

the next 150 years – the view that it was necessary to ‘civilise’ the Aborigines. This was, of course, not a peculiarly Australian view. It was consistent with missionary attitudes in Africa, the South Pacific and elsewhere. The great nineteenth century debate on Indian customs generally saw the missionaries in favour of Europeanisation. A particularly prevalent view in Australia was that it was not feasible to try to change the Aboriginal adults. The children had to be separated from their society as a necessary prerequisite to converting them to Christianity: ‘Before they are made Christians, you must make them men. . .’⁸⁹

Johnson did, however, have a wider concern for the Aborigines. He wrote to London ‘upon the propriety of sending out missionaries’.⁹⁰ He was appalled by the awful witness to British Christianity which surrounded him. In doing so, he was the first to acknowledge what was to become a recurring theme in later missionary assessment of the failure of their work among the Aboriginal people – the huge disparity between the gospel and the life of the settlement:

If these ignorant natives, as they become more and more acquainted with our language and manners, hear you, many of you curse, swear, lie, abound in every kind of obscene and profane conversation, and if they observe that it is common with you to steal, to break the Sabbath, to be guilty of uncleanness, drunkenness and other abominations, how must their minds become prejudiced, and their hearts hardened, against that pure and holy religion which we profess!⁹¹

It was a vain hope indeed of Johnson’s that he and the convicts shared a sufficiently similar Christian outlook for him to be able to appeal to them through ‘the holy religion we possess’ to refrain from swearing, drinking, Sabbath-breaking and so on for the sake of the Aborigines. It illustrates the depth to which was held the view that British civilisation was Christian civilisation and that to be British was in some senses to be Christian.

Aboriginal culture, so different from the culture of the Europeans, was beyond the comprehension of the early settlers. Indeed, it is a culture still inadequately comprehended by the majority of Australians. Most of the more thoughtful settlers were satisfied to accept that in the ‘chain of being’, Aboriginal people

occupied a place little above the animals, if at all. The view of the clergy was in practice only slightly more enlightened. Aborigines were degraded descendants of Ham, almost removed from the reach of the gospel. In 1799, in the middle of this period of missionary neglect, the Rev. William Henry, an Anglican, spoke for most of the clergy:

I am heartily sick of this place and have been so for some time on a variety of accounts, but chiefly from the little prospect I see of my usefulness among the inhabitants, and the still less prospect, yea, I may say, the almost impossibility of being useful among the poor natives, who are truly the most wretched and deplorable beings my eyes have ever yet beheld. I think the Greenlanders, Labradorians, or the inhabitants of Terra de Fuego cannot be much more sunk to a level of brute creation than they. O Jesus, when shall thy Kingdom come within power amongst them? When shall the rays of thine eternal gospel penetrate the gross darkness of their minds (well represented by their faces) and illumine their benighted souls.⁹²

Thus within a very few years of the white settlement of Australia, many of the ingredients were already present for the failure of the first missionary endeavours among the Aborigines. The most important of these were to be the low view of Aboriginal society and culture displayed by the missionaries, the brutal or immoral treatment of Aboriginal people by many settlers, and the gross contradictions between Christian values and the lifestyle of colonial white society.

The first institution specifically intended for Aboriginal people was Governor Macquarie's Native Institution, established at Parramatta in 1814.⁹³ It was not a Christian mission as such and its function was specifically educational, but the first headmaster was an ex-missionary, William Shelley, who certainly saw his role, with Macquarie's approval, as partly evangelistic. Shelley, who had been a London Mission Society (LMS) missionary in Tonga, had fled after the murder of three of his colleagues. After failing to convince LMS to re-open the Tonga mission, Shelley had gone into private business in Sydney. He readily gave up his business interests to work with Aboriginal children and there is some evidence that Macquarie's school was Shelley's idea.⁹⁴

Macquarie seems to have initially displayed little interest in the Aborigines. Having put down the Aboriginal 'harvest raids' of 1806, it was not until a resurgence of Aboriginal resistance in 1814 that Macquarie began to consider 'civilising the blacks'. It was then that he took up the idea of a school, put to him by Shelley.⁹⁵

The purpose of the school was to 'civilise' and Shelley quite early sensed the problem a 'civilised' Aboriginal would have in finding a 'civilised' spouse. They would not be accepted by free white men or women and would be forced to marry a 'bush' Aboriginal or perhaps a convict. This dilemma was to haunt later missions throughout the whole continent. Macquarie was impressed by Shelley's solution to educate equal numbers of boys and girls:

They would, when they grew up, be rejected by the other sex of Europeans, and must go into the bush for a companion; or, if educated among drunken or thievish servants, must become still worse. In order to [achieve] their improvement and civilisation, let there be a public establishment containing one set of apartments for boys, and another separate set for girls; let them be taught reading, writing, or religious education, the boys, manual labour, agriculture, mechanic arts, etc., the girls, sewing, knitting, spinning, or such useful employments as are suitable for them; let them be married at a suitable age, and settled with steady religious persons over them from the very beginning to see that they continued their employment, so as to be able to support their families, and who had skill sufficient to encourage and stimulate them by proper motives in exertion. The chief difficulty appeared to me to be the separation of the children from their parents, but I am informed that in many cases this could be easily done.⁹⁶

It seems only fair to say that from the inception of the Institution, Macquarie took it on as a pet project, gaining personal satisfaction at this more enlightened means of 'civilising' the Aborigines. Initially, the Institution was successful and the educational attainments of the children were ever afterwards cited by those who believed in the intelligence of the Aborigines.

In 1819, a fourteen-year-old girl from the Institution won first prize in the public examinations and her defeat of the white

children of the colony was widely admired.⁹⁷

A central feature of Shelley's ideas was the futility of attempting to 'civilise' an Aboriginal child or youth without 'civilising' at the same time a marriage partner. By 1821, several of the girls had reached marriageable age, but there were no boys sufficiently mature to be their husbands. It was decided to marry the girls to 'quiet' or 'tame' Aboriginal men already in European employment, and settle them on small farms.⁹⁸

So it was that on the morning of 15 March 1821, Rev. Richard Hill performed the first Christian marriage ceremony between Aboriginal people when he married Polly to Michael Yarringguy, a native police assistant at Richmond, and Betty Fulton to Robert Narringguy, son of the well-known Creek Jemmy. Governor Macquarie granted the couples farms at South Creek.⁹⁹ As a consequence, the locality was renamed Black Town. The farms rapidly became staging camps for Aboriginal people approaching Sydney, and the young couples soon returned to their tribal society and culture.¹⁰⁰

Because of the problems of the spread of white settlement in the Parramatta area, the school was moved westward to Black Town in 1823 but, as Macquarie had already left in 1822, the school languished. Governor Brisbane shared neither his enthusiasm for the project nor his belief in the intelligence of the children. The school lingered on for a few years, but it was reported in 1828 that 'its spirit, with that of its founder, is departed'.¹⁰¹

There had always been Christians at all levels of colonial society – among the military, the free settlers and the convicts. A number of these Christians felt strongly that the church was neglecting its duty to the Aborigines. Concerned citizens regularly wrote to newspapers. 'Are they not entitled to the first regards of Old England?' asked one writer in 1819 in the *Sydney Gazette*. 'Who will undertake to send out a plain, zealous Christian missionary for the Aborigines of New Holland?'¹⁰²

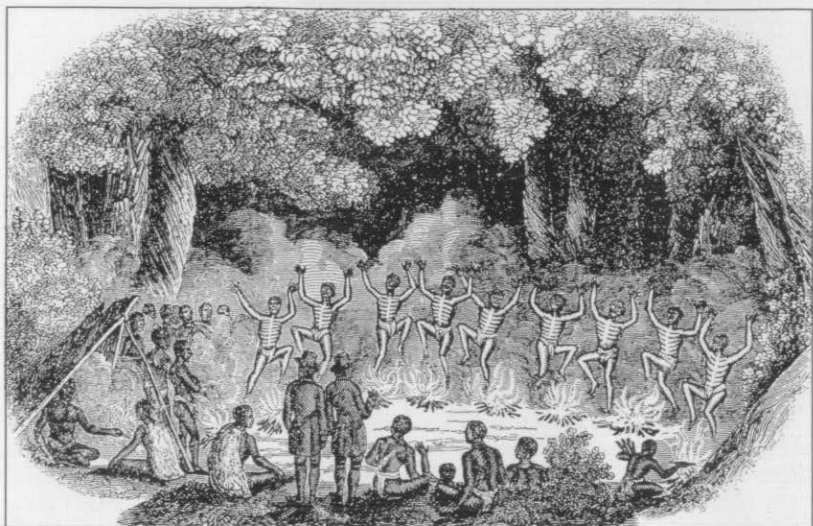
The clergy were too busy already although some tried to do a little. The most vocal was the Anglican Robert Cartwright, the fourth chaplain appointed to the colony. Writing as 'Philanthropus' in the *Sydney Gazette* of 7 July 1810, he stated his firm belief that the Creator 'had made of one blood all the nations of the earth', and asked for help to discover the means to



1. The way life used to be. Three generations of Aboriginal people

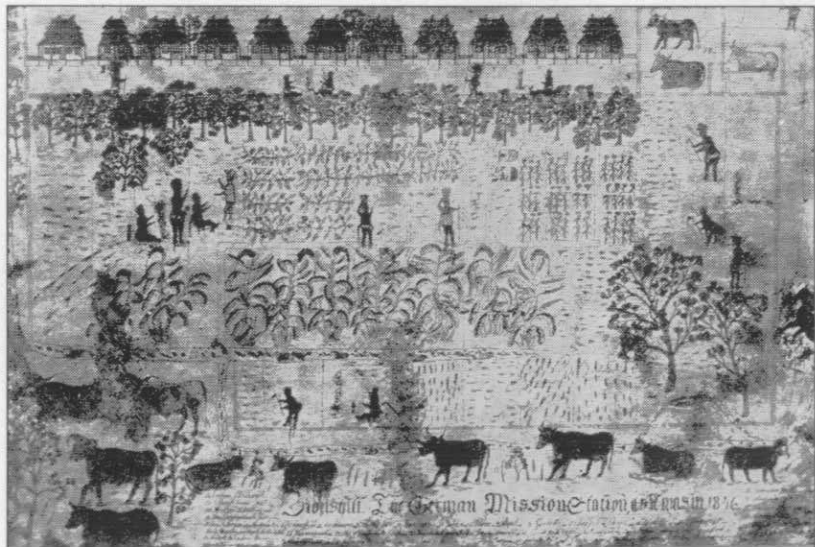
Acknowledgement: Mitchell Library, Public Library of NSW.

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2. An Aboriginal corroboree. The white observers are probably intended to be William Watson and Johann Handt

Acknowledgement: Woodcut, *Church Missionary Paper*, Christmas 1836.



3. The Lutheran mission station at Nundah, sketched by Carl Friedrich Gerter, 1846

Acknowledgement: Sparkes, 1938, p.22

'civilise and evangelise the natives of New South Wales'.

On 8 January 1824 in the *Sydney Gazette*, Cartwright complained that his question had not yet been answered. In the 1820s, Father John Therry of the Catholic church baptised Aboriginal infants, or children who were dying, but when William Ullathorne was appointed Vicar-General of Australia, he disapproved of the practice.¹⁰³

A third clergyman who showed interest in the Aborigines was the Methodist, Samuel Leigh. Although often called a 'missionary' he was never appointed as such. Through Leigh's efforts, the first person specifically appointed as a missionary to Aborigines, the Rev. William Walker of the Wesleyan Missionary Society (WMS), arrived from England in 1821.¹⁰⁴ He was, on his arrival, only twenty-one years old and said to be of exceptional intelligence, of lively personality and an outstanding preacher.¹⁰⁵ He married Elizabeth Hassall in 1823.

Walker stated at the outset the theological stance that was to be the essential view of many missionaries. Aborigines were descendants of Ham and under a curse. They were 'the progeny of him who was cursed to be a servant of servants to his brethren', but they were also 'about to stretch out their hands unto God'.¹⁰⁶

For several years Walker moved around the Sydney region talking to Aborigines and regularly visiting the Native Institution, but came to the conclusion that he should establish a permanent mission where Aborigines would settle:

The more I see of the disposition and habits of the New Hollander, the more rigidly am I confirmed in the opinion that a great length of time must elapse before any extensive good will be effected. And that is not with the adults, but with young men and children that the great work must be commenced, and through them the saving plan of redemption be disseminated to the uttermost bounds of their scattered, uncivilised, unsocial and cannibal tribes. Traversing the woods in their tribes, and living in a kind of domesticated manner with them will never do the work, nor will it prove conducive to their more quickly and readily receiving the blessed and saving truths of religion.¹⁰⁷

It is significant that the very first missionary should adopt the view that Aborigines must settle. It is to Walker's credit that

at least at first he contemplated a missionary approach which identified more closely with Aboriginal lifestyle. Perhaps the physical difficulty of doing so dissuaded him, or even his recent marriage, but in deciding upon the 'settlement' approach he could take comfort in the knowledge that he was applying generally accepted early nineteenth century missionary sociology.

Most early Australian missionaries believed a nomadic lifestyle and Christianity to be incompatible. Very few non-Aboriginal people, until very recently indeed, have ever understood the Aboriginal cycle of caretakership of their land. Had they understood, things may have been different.

Sydney Methodists supported Walker's idea. They appointed a Sydney layman, John Harper, as Walker's assistant and sent him to investigate the missionary potential of the Wellington region, over the Great Dividing Range to Sydney's north-west. This first missionary endeavour was immediately characterised by the arguments and even dishonesties which have from time to time been the downfall of several other missionary efforts and brought so little credit to the gospel. Harper, Walker and the WMS publicly differed over the payment of Harper's expenses. Harper, after just a few months in Wellington, grossly overstated the numbers of Aborigines present, their eagerness to be taught, and his own exaggerated success in school teaching and Bible translation. He returned to Sydney and, being thought unsuitable to work among white people, was appointed to work among the Aborigines in the Methodist's Richmond circuit, west of Sydney.

In the meantime, Walker considered his most effective work could be carried out at the Native Institution. Marsden, whose faction controlled the Institution's committee, refused Walker's first application because he was single and his next application, after his marriage, simply because he was a Wesleyan. Governor Brisbane, who considered Walker 'the best educated man in the colony', interviewed and appointed him.¹⁰⁸

This brought Walker into continual dispute with Marsden, most of which was not Walker's fault. In 1822 the WMS set up its own miniature version of the Native Institution at Parramatta under Walker, but it lasted only a few months. The chairman of the NSW Methodists, the Rev. George Erskine, thought it was not worth £300 to try to educate 'the most hopeless of the human race'.¹⁰⁹ Walker returned briefly to the Native Institution, but fell

foul of Archdeacon Scott in 1825, who claimed that Walker neglected his duties. He moved from there, without WMS approval, to the Female Orphan School also at Parramatta. Accused of 'trifling, precipitancy, worldliness and instability' by local Methodist officials,¹¹⁰ Walker quarrelled with the WMS, particularly over finances, refused to return their horse, and was suspended as a Methodist teacher in 1826.¹¹¹

Walker was mostly treated unjustly. Marsden was negative about all efforts to assist Aboriginal people and doubly negative about initiatives that he did not control. Curiously, the WMS in London regarded Marsden as a 'friend of Methodists' and accepted his judgments about Walker. The Rev. Joseph Orton, however, later wrote that Walker was 'most certainly a clever man, but he has been injudiciously managed by those who were placed over him'.¹¹² Walker was well-liked by Aboriginal people and gained considerable local knowledge. He was also very insightful regarding local church policy and practice in Sydney. For reasons which can now only be guessed at, Walker's valuable journal and other manuscripts were destroyed, at his own request, on his death in 1855.

The second missionary society to appoint someone specifically to work with the Aborigines was the Church Missionary Society of the Church of England (CMS), who managed to do so more or less by accident. George and Martha Clarke arrived in Sydney in 1822 en route to New Zealand, where successful missionary work owed much to Marsden's enthusiasm for New Zealand, an enthusiasm never matched by anything but pessimism regarding missionary work among the Aborigines. The Clarks were unable to proceed, firstly on account of Maori troubles and then because of Martha's ill health. Marsden arranged for George Clarke to be put in charge of the Native Institution at Parramatta. The mention of George Clarke by historians seems mostly to be associated with his vehement denunciation of Aboriginal depravity:

The natives are, I verily believe, the poorest objects on the habitable globe. I have seen the miserable Africans come from the holds of the slave ships; but they do not equal in wretchedness and misery the New Hollanders and to enter into detail of their habits and customs would not only be tedious but exceedingly offensive.¹¹³

Despite this view, George Clarke tried very hard to do his best under difficult circumstances. It is very important to realise that people like Clarke, who readily confided their private opinions in journals and letters, never departed from their belief in the essential humanity of Aboriginal people and their worth in the sight of God. This not only inspired them to selfless effort, but also brought them into conflict with many others in the colonial community.

Clarke's duties included responsibility for the Native Institution, the conducting of church services in the district, and an itinerant ministry to both Aborigines and convicts in Sydney's western hinterland. This required him to travel 150 miles a week on horseback.

Clarke believed he would be guilty of infidelity if he doubted the power of God to bring Aboriginal people to know and accept Christ. He once wrote optimistically that he was 'greatly inclined to think that the set time to favour them is not far distant'.¹¹⁴ Despite his low view of Aboriginal culture and society, which admittedly was already in a damaged state by the time the Clarks arrived in Sydney's west, George Clarke's greatest frustration was the immorality of the Europeans. Not only did their behaviour seem to deny the gospel in the lives of members of a supposedly Christian nation, but there were convicts and others who actively tried to influence Aboriginal people against the missionaries.

The Clarks, however, worked in Australia for less than two years. Although they were quite willing to remain, Marsden posted them to New Zealand in February 1824. George Clarke appears to have been an active and capable missionary, an impression confirmed by his long career in New Zealand. On leaving Black Town, he made a strong plea to CMS to appoint someone as rapidly as possible to carry on his work.

After Walker and Clarke, no further missionaries were appointed to work in the Sydney region. It was generally believed that success could be achieved only at a distance from the bad influence of colonial society.

Walker had baptised two youths. The first was the son of the famous Bennelong and the other was named Jemmy. Bennelong's son was baptised 'Thomas Walker Coke' in honour of the superintendent of the Wesleyan missions who had died in 1813 en route to Ceylon. The only previous Aboriginal baptisms in Sydney were

administered by Father Therry, fairly indiscriminately,¹¹⁵ to infants and dying children, together with the probable baptisms of some of the infant Aboriginal adoptees, such as James Bath.

Thomas Walker Coke Bennelong, it therefore seems, was the first Aboriginal converted to Christianity. Sadly, both Thomas and Jemmy died soon after their baptism. It was a great mystery to Walker that God should have permitted this to happen. He was not the last missionary to be brought almost to a state of despair by the deaths of their converts. It was to be a long time before the conversion rate exceeded the death rate and Christians were no more immune than any other Aboriginal people to death from measles, chickenpox, influenza or other European diseases.

Walker wrote at the time:

I have sustained a very serious loss. . . Two of the most promising native youths I have met with have gone into the eternal world. This was a sore trial. No man ever loved his son with more ardent affection than I did these youths. One was the son of the renowned Bennelong whom I baptised at his own earnest request, and from a serious conviction of his fitness to be outwardly initiated into the church of God, by the name Thomas Walker Coke. He learned to read his Bible in about three months; his attention to class and prayer meetings was very great and encouraging. . . He collected the young natives of his own tribe to whom he gave an exhortation, which he concluded with prayer. . .

I was absent when he died. . . Bandle, an old black, met me as I was returning, to say, 'Coke is dead: he died in my arms. . .' These providential occurrences have greatly impeded the prosperity of the work of God among the poor blacks . . . One soul, however, I am happy to believe, has out of this degraded class of human beings, by the blessing of God upon this mission, been admitted to his glory.¹¹⁶

Lancelot Threlkeld

The third society to commence work among the Aborigines was the London Missionary Society (LMS). The decision to work in Australia was taken by the LMS deputation to the South Seas, George Bennett and the Rev. Daniel Tyerman. Bennett and Tyerman sailed from Raiatea to Sydney on the same ship as the Rev. Lancelot Edward Threlkeld.¹¹⁷ Born in 1788, Threlkeld was an

out-of-work actor in his early twenties when he was converted. Shortly afterwards, in 1813, he offered himself as a missionary to LMS. After a short period of training, followed by ordination, Lancelot and Martha Threlkeld sailed for the South Pacific in 1816. Martha died in 1824 and Threlkeld was on his way to England to seek another wife when he met Bennett and Tyerman.¹¹⁸ They offered him the task of commencing a mission and arranged for a grant of 10 000 acres of land at Reid's Mistake, on the shores of Lake Macquarie, just south of Newcastle.¹¹⁹ Threlkeld married Sarah Arndell, daughter of the colony surgeon, in Sydney and accepted the new position.

Threlkeld's instructions were to learn the Aboriginal language, teach the Aborigines agriculture and carpentry, and commence a school. He was to use his own discretion in committing the LMS financially until an accurate annual salary could be determined.¹²⁰ A mission house was constructed and Threlkeld employed white supervisors to oversee the clearing of land for corn by the Aborigines who were paid in food, clothing, tobacco and fishhooks. Threlkeld devoted as much time as possible to language learning.¹²¹

Threlkeld, however, was soon at odds with his Society. The LMS found his expenses too high and believed he had taken excessive liberties with his instructions to charge all costs to the LMS, although it later became evident that the LMS had no idea how difficult and expensive it was to set up a mission station in virgin Australian bush. In future, all financial transactions were to go through Samuel Marsden as an intermediary.¹²² Threlkeld found this unjust and, furthermore, resented Marsden's involvement, particularly in view of their denominational differences.

Threlkeld continued his work, emphasising language learning, but also finding time to teach some children and to carry out charitable tasks. White mission employees supervised the agricultural activities. Threlkeld entered into a lengthy and unpleasant correspondence with Marsden.¹²³ He carefully detailed all his expenses and informed the LMS that he had only ever 'acted conscientiously to the best of my ability for the permanent establishment of the mission'.¹²⁴ The disputes were never settled and, in April 1828, the LMS closed the mission and dismissed Threlkeld.¹²⁵

Threlkeld was by then working on Bible translation and his

unflagging dedication to this task had already won him the admiration of some Christians in the colony, although his forthrightness had made him some enemies as well. Privately donated money helped him continue.¹²⁶

A sincere supporter was Archdeacon (later Bishop) William Broughton who, in his first charge to his clergy in St James, Sydney on 3 December 1829, had said of the Aboriginal people that 'as in the occupation of their soil we are partakers of their "worldly things", so in justice should they be of our "spiritual things"'.¹²⁷ Broughton convinced the Governor in 1830 to grant Threlkeld an annual salary of £150.¹²⁸ Threlkeld continued his work, moving across the lake from the LMS lease 'to prevent a supposition that I was personally benefited in any way from that which was derived from the funds of the London Missionary Society'.¹²⁹ He called his new site 'Ebenezer'.

Threlkeld had begun learning the Awabakal language as soon as he reached Lake Macquarie. His informant and teacher was Biraban, also known as McGill, whose intelligence Threlkeld admired. Having first published some notes on the Awabakal language in 1827, Threlkeld produced a more detailed grammar in 1834.¹³⁰

Threlkeld and Biraban completed the Gospel of Luke in 1830, revising it in 1831. This was the first book of the Bible to be translated into an Aboriginal language and Threlkeld said of his work:

This translation of the Gospel of Luke into the language of the Aborigines, was made by me with the assistance of the intelligent Aboriginal, McGill. . . Thrice I wrote it, and he and I went through it sentence by sentence, and word for word, while I explained to him carefully the meaning as we proceeded. McGill spoke the English language fluently. The third revisal was completed in 1831. I then proceeded with the Gospel of Mark [and] a selection of prayers from the Book of Common Prayer. . . ¹³¹

Threlkeld undertook some farming and fishing in order to be able to provide for the Aboriginal people whom he hoped would soon be attending his school. Yet Threlkeld did not actively engage in evangelisation. He believed that the gospel had to be first expressed to these people in their own language and so it was

language-learning and Bible translation to which he gave most of his energies. Although he still linked Christianity with 'civilisation', he did not think, as Marsden did, that 'civilisation' was necessary before the gospel should be preached:

With respect to seeing my system, it can be seen and known in two minutes, namely, first obtain the language, then preach the gospel, then urge them from gospel motives to be industrious at the same time being a servant to them to win them to that which is right.¹³²

Threlkeld did, however, actively assist Aboriginal people in many other ways. As Aborigines were not permitted to give evidence in court, not being allowed to swear an oath on the Bible, Threlkeld frequently represented them or acted as a court interpreter. He was also one of the few people willing to risk speaking out against the massacre of Aborigines. He calculated that in the region of his mission and westward into the Liverpool Plains, 500 Aboriginal people had been massacred in a year and a half. He detailed some of the atrocities in his public Annual Report for 1837:

...a war of extirpation [had] long existed, in which the ripping open of the bellies of the blacks alive; the roasting of them in that state in triangularly made log fires, made for the very purpose; the dashing of infants upon the stones; the confining of a party in a hut and letting them out singly through the doorway, to be butchered as they endeavoured to escape, together with many other atrocious acts of cruelty, which are but the sports of monsters boasting of superior intellect to that possessed of the wretched blacks!¹³³

Threlkeld, from the commencement of his private mission, submitted annual reports. These were forthright and honest. As the years passed, enthusiasm and hope changed to an acceptance of his lack of success coupled, nevertheless, with a determination to continue. Finally, in 1841, Governor Gipps ceased paying his salary. The reason was simple. There were very few Aborigines left. Massacre, European diseases and, for the small remnant, the attractions of rum and prostitution in Newcastle, meant Ebenezer was deserted. Threlkeld asked for support to work with the

remaining few Lake Macquarie people in Newcastle itself, but the Governor declined. Threlkeld wrote:

In submitting to this decision it is impossible not to feel considerable disappointment to the expectations formerly hoped to be realised in the conversion of some, at least, of the Aborigines in this part of the colony, and not to express concern that so many years of constant attention appear to have been fruitlessly expended. It is, however, perfectly apparent that the termination of the Mission has arisen solely from the Aborigines becoming extinct in these districts and the very few that remain elsewhere are so scattered. . . The thousands of Aborigines. . . decreased to hundreds, the hundreds have lessened to tens, and the tens will dwindle into units, before a very few years shall have passed away.¹³⁴

Threlkeld was a strong, even a hard man, as hard on his own weakness as he was on anyone else's. As Gunson notes, his photographs seem to show premature aging during the 1830s, the rigidity of his pose, necessary in the days of flashpowder, giving him what has been called an air of 'Calvinist gloom'.¹³⁵

One person who was quite possibly converted to Christianity through Threlkeld was his language informant and translation assistant, Biraban. When Biraban was assisting Threlkeld as a court interpreter, he was closely questioned by the Christian Judge, William Burton, who was so impressed by Biraban's clear understanding of the Christian oath and other aspects of Christian belief, that he asked Threlkeld if he had baptised him. Threlkeld replied that he had been unable to do so because of Biraban's partiality to alcohol.¹³⁶

One bright moment for Threlkeld followed the visit to his mission of the Quakers, James Backhouse and George Washington Walker. These two men had been sent by the London Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends to investigate Christian activities in Australia and the South Pacific. They later wrote to the LMS describing Threlkeld's work and faithfulness, and noting the costly nature of the mission enterprise. The Directors of LMS wrote an apology to Threlkeld, regretting their lack of trust fourteen years earlier and acknowledging his 'vigilance, activity and devotedness to the welfare of the Aboriginal race'.¹³⁷ It was, by now, too late.

Threlkeld and his family moved to Sydney in 1842 where he was pastor at the Watsons Bay Congregational Church and later at the Sydney Chapel for Seamen until his death in 1859.

The Bible translations completed by Threlkeld and Biraban were not published during either's lifetime, largely because so few speakers of Awabakal were left. The Gospel of Luke was published, more as a curiosity than anything else, in a collection of Threlkeld's linguistic writings in 1892.¹³⁸

The Wellington mission

Samuel Marsden established an auxiliary of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Sydney in 1825. A layman, George Langhorne, was accepted as a catechist in 1832 to train for missionary work. In 1836 he was appointed to work with Aboriginal people on Sydney's Goat Island where a number were serving prison sentences. He taught them English and tried to learn an Aboriginal language. In November he escorted six paroled Aboriginal prisoners to Threlkeld's mission at Lake Macquarie, from which they immediately absconded. Governor Bourke appointed Langhorne to his experimental government mission at Port Phillip in 1837.

There had for some time been a number of concerned Anglicans in Sydney who felt their church was doing little for the Aborigines. In particular, Archdeacon Thomas Scott and Archdeacon, later Bishop William Broughton took their responsibilities seriously. The *Letters Patent* of Scott's appointment (20 October 1824) specifically mentioned Aboriginal people and he supported and encouraged whatever initiatives he could. Scott had already investigated the Wellington Valley and it was there that CMS decided to locate their first mission station.

The first two missionaries were the Rev. William Watson and a German Lutheran, the Rev. Johann Handt. Watson was born in Yorkshire in 1798. He married Ann Oliver in 1819. A grocer turned schoolteacher, Watson offered to CMS while still a young man. A physically small man, he was said to be of 'good intelligence, boundless energy and exemplary tenacity'. After a short period of training, the Bishop of London ordained him specifically for work among the Aborigines. Handt, a graduate of the Basle Mission Institute, while serving as a missionary in Liberia, had quarrelled with his fellow missionaries and left them to form an

independent mission which subsequently failed. He had gone to England and offered his services to CMS, who accepted him also for missionary work in Australia.¹³⁹

The Watsons and Handts arrived in Australia in 1832 and, in horse-drawn carts and bullock drays, set out from Sydney to cross the Blue Mountains on 18 August, reaching Wellington on 3 October. As there were already government buildings there, they had no need to construct houses, but they shared the buildings with a detachment of six soldiers and some convict labourers. Governor Bourke granted them an allowance of £500 p.a.¹⁴⁰

Initially, quite a large number of Wiradjuri Aborigines gathered there, especially for the novelty of Ann Watson's cooking, by which it was hoped to encourage them to stay. Both missionaries were busy treating the sick, establishing schooling for the children, setting up agriculture and learning the language. Watson had undertaken a short course of instruction in medicine during his missionary training and struggled to learn more, reading old copies of the *Lancet* sent to him at Wellington. He became quite competent and eventually gained considerable fame in the district. European diseases were devastating the Wiradjuri people. Those who came to him, or whom he discovered and brought in himself, were frequently in a very advanced stage of their illnesses.

One Aboriginal man, whom Ann Watson supported in a horse-drawn cart, left 'pieces of corrupted flesh' behind when lifted out.¹⁴¹ Watson wrote in his diary that he was 'often sick' while treating such people.¹⁴² He wrote:

I often think that a residence in a charnel-house would scarcely be more disgusting than our employment here. We have generally some sick and occasionally from six to twelve, at the same time, destined apparently to an early death; filthy and corrupt in their bodies, from the ravages of disease; covered with sores and unwilling to move from their place on any account, or to do anything for themselves. I must wash and dress their wounds, and their victuals must be prepared for and taken to them.¹⁴³

Despite Watson's honest admission of his revulsion, we can only admire the fact that he persisted. He built a small 'infirmary' and, when it could accommodate no more, he and Ann brought

the most severely ill into their own living room. Furthermore, he was remarkably successful. Acknowledging his own very meagre knowledge, Watson attributed the healing 'to the blessing of Providence and not to my medical skill which I am free to acknowledge is very little'.¹⁴⁴

Watson found it difficult to understand a kind of fatalism on the part of Aboriginal people. With a decade of European contact behind them, death was now far more frequent than birth and Aboriginal people had in many cases despaired of trying to assist the sick. Watson often complained of what he thought to be a lack of gratitude,¹⁴⁵ although what he considered gratitude was more than a word of thanks; it was an acceptance of a 'civilised' European way of life.

One of the problems was that Aboriginal people did not at first comprehend the missionary motive. For a long time they thought that Watson and Handt wanted children to attend school at the mission for sexual purposes. Only slowly did they come to see the compassion which drove people like William and Ann Watson, to see that they were unlike the other Europeans.

On the other hand, the white settlers, who knew what the missionaries were, seem also to have been ungrateful. They, too, learned of Watson's skill and came for treatment. Yet Watson frequently recorded that on recovery, white men sought sexual intercourse with mission girls, that while still being freely treated they rarely offered to pay, and that many even stole Watson's property as they left. Nevertheless, by their compassionate persistence, the Watsons gradually gained the respect and appreciation of many in the district, both Aborigines and settlers.

It was the sexual abuse of young Aboriginal girls by white settlers, and the resulting horrifying incidence of venereal diseases, which caused the missionaries most anguish. There was scarcely a settler's hut in the district where white men, whether 'master, overseer or convict', did not retain Aboriginal women.¹⁴⁶ An eight-year-old girl who came to the mission suffering from venereal disease was one of four such children kept by one stockman.¹⁴⁷

It was the missionaries' public criticism of such practices, and their removal of young girls to the protection of the mission, which brought them into direct conflict with some white settlers. 'There is a great spirit of revenge manifested against me because I

have opposed [this] abominable practice,' wrote Watson.¹⁴⁸

As well as these moral problems, the Wellington missionaries faced many material difficulties. Drought ruined their crops year by year. Not only did this extend the mission's total dependence on outside support, it frustrated the missionaries' attempt to demonstrate to the Wiradjuri people what they considered to be the advantages of settled farming life. This was to be a burden to most missionaries for well over another century. They desperately wanted to prove to Aboriginal people the desirability of a European peasant farming community as a Christian lifestyle. Not only did this wrongly tether the gospel to arbitrary and ethnocentric social change; it was also very difficult to achieve agricultural success in drought-prone western New South Wales.

The missionaries, despite their many other duties, never lost sight of the evangelistic purpose of their mission. They took every opportunity to preach to Aboriginal people, trying to convince them of their sinfulness and the reality of eternal punishment if they did not believe in Christ. The missionaries felt a sense of heightened urgency about this because of the ever increasing number of deaths, but this itself proved to be a stumbling block. They found their intentions in conflict with the widespread Aboriginal cultural sanctions against discussing the dead. Aboriginal people often asked them why they talked of death so much when the other Europeans never did.¹⁴⁹

Watson struggled with this predicament, one of the few missionaries to confide his dilemma to his diary. He desperately wanted to convince Aboriginal people of God's love for them through Christ, but knew he was conveying the impression of a cruel and vengeful God. He was guilty, he wrote, of 'the sin of not glorifying God in the sight of the people'.¹⁵⁰

A second contradiction for the missionaries was the gross immorality of life outside the mission. Aboriginal people inevitably thought Christianity to be the religion of the British colonists. As they began to understand the missionary teaching on sin and eternal damnation, they began to ask awkward questions.¹⁵¹ They asked whether or not particular white men known to them would be punished for their very public sins, and why the missionaries preached about sin to the Aborigines so much and not to the whites. If whites really do have a God of light, asked one man, why do they keep asking for my wife and daughters?

White fellow all about make a Light God. . . What for white fellow always say you lend me yeener (woman) belonging to you, this night, so many nights, this moon. . . then I give you bread, I give you milk, shirt. . . when black fellow make a Light God then he never never lend yeener to white fellow at all.¹⁵²

The missionaries conscientiously held church services on Sunday and other days. At first these were held in the mission house, but this soon proved too small and a disused building was renovated for the purpose. Most of the congregation were women and children. The missionaries soon found that people, including the men, actually wanted to come to church, but that in doing so they infringed their rigid kinship avoidance rules. Watson eventually solved this problem by providing three separate open-air sessions for children and girls, unmarried men, and married couples. Watson baptised several dying children, but after three years felt that there had not yet been any other spiritual success. The Quaker emissaries, James Backhouse and George Walker agreed: 'None yet appear to have come under the influence of the gospel. . .'¹⁵³

Both the missionaries saw the importance of learning and using the Wiradjuri language. Within five months of his arrival in Wellington, Watson was attempting to use Wiradjuri when he met Aboriginal people in the bush. He noted that this pleased them and that some thought it proved Watson had 'been a blackfellow once.'¹⁵⁴ By the following year, Watson was pleased to be able to pray and converse on elementary spiritual matters in Wiradjuri.

In 1834, Watson completed a two thousand word Wiradjuri vocabulary. He translated into Wiradjuri the first three chapters of Genesis and selected chapters of the Gospel of Matthew. He also translated the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer and parts of the Anglican liturgy. By 1835, church services were being conducted in Wiradjuri and Watson was pleased that the Wiradjuri people neither laughed at nor mocked his many imperfections, but listened to his translations with seriousness.¹⁵⁵ Watson tried to make up for his lack of linguistic skill with dedicated hard work. He copied out all ten thousand words in *Johnson's Portable Dictionary*, and gave Wiradjuri equivalents for as many as he could.

Watson and Handt attempted to conduct a school for children from the time they arrived in Wellington. By 1835, Watson felt

confident enough to introduce some vernacular literacy in Wiradjuri. He was impressed from the outset with the intelligence of the children. He believed that as a race, they would eventually 'equal if not outvie some of the now civilised and polished nations of Europe'.¹⁵⁶

Regrettably, there were severe personal problems at the Wellington mission. The relationship between Watson and Handt was never good and slowly deteriorated to animosity. Handt was a stubborn and difficult man whose English was hard to understand. He rigidly maintained his status as a gentleman-clergyman. Watson, too, was a strong-minded person who took his seniority too seriously and gave Handt little responsibility. It must be said, however, that Watson was an energetic and competent farmer who believed in the material and spiritual potential of the mission. He had a vision which the more cautious and pessimistic Handt did not share. After four years had elapsed, it became evident that the two missionaries could not work together. They had even undertaken separate work on Wiradjuri translation.

CMS finally chose to support their senior missionary. In 1836 they moved Handt from Wellington, appointing him in 1837 chaplain to the convicts, schoolteacher and missionary to the Aborigines at Moreton Bay. CMS obviously did not know what to do with him and finally terminated his services in 1842 when the penal settlement closed at Moreton Bay, after which time he worked mostly as a hospital and prison chaplain in Sydney and Melbourne.¹⁵⁷

Handt was replaced by another man of German Lutheran background, Rev. James William Gunther. Born in Nagold, Württemberg, in 1806, Gunther had also trained while a young man at the Basle Mission Institute. In 1832 he became one of the four Basle graduates annually accepted by CMS, and was ordained into the Anglican ministry by the Bishop of London. Gunther was appointed to the NSW mission provided he 'connected' himself with a suitable individual. He chose to marry Lydia Paris. The newlyweds left London in November 1836, reaching Sydney in April 1837 but not finally getting to Wellington until August. Gunther was a physically small man, of even slighter build than Watson, and he soon acquired the nickname 'short one' from the Aboriginal children.¹⁵⁸

CMS, anxious that the Wellington mission succeed agricul-

turally, also appointed a farmer, William Porter, to take over this aspect of the work, although Watson, a competent farmer himself, did not readily relinquish responsibility.

In their stay in Sydney, the Gunthers had become firm friends of the Handt family. They were therefore already prejudiced against the Watsons before their arrival in Wellington. There was conflict from the moment they arrived. The Gunthers, particularly Lydia, had much grander notions of what mission life would be like. They considered their quarters to be very inferior and objected to sharing the house with the Watsons. The relationship between Ann Watson and Lydia Gunther was always strained. William Porter and James Gunther rapidly became allies in a bitter conflict with William Watson. Because a reluctant CMS eventually decided that Watson had been unable to work with any of his colleagues, and dismissed him, it has generally been assumed that he was at fault. The truth is not so simple. Watson was a difficult man to work with, but Handt, Gunther and Porter were also difficult people, in some ways less suited to missionary work than Watson.¹⁵⁹ I will not detail the personal disputes and try to adjudicate on this matter. It is no longer possible and there has already been as adequate a treatment as there is ever likely to be.¹⁶⁰

On the other hand, there were differences of opinion between Gunther and Watson which concerned crucial aspects of mission policy and practice. Their bitterest confrontations were over the practice of removing children from their parents. By the time Gunther arrived at Wellington, Watson had become particularly active in obtaining children for the mission, sometimes forcing Aboriginal mothers to give up their children to him. The Watsons had treated so many little girls with venereal diseases, had seen so many children die in the Aboriginal camps, and had known of the deaths of so many unwanted part-European babies, that they were totally convinced that children had no chance of survival outside the mission.

There is no doubt about the Watsons' motives. They saw no other alternative. It is also very evident that the childless Ann and William Watson deeply and sincerely loved the Aboriginal children and that they were loved in return. William wrote:

We cannot doubt but it is from our Heavenly Father that we feel



4. Lancelot Edward Threlkeld
Acknowledgement: Auckland Public Library.
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5. Bennelong

Acknowledgement: National Library of Australia. Reproduced with permission.



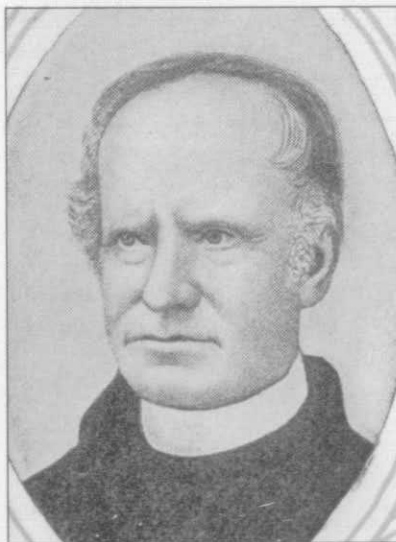
6. Samuel Marsden

Acknowledgement: National Library of Australia. Reproduced with permission.



7. Biraban (McGill), Threlkeld's Bible translation colleague

Acknowledgement: From a pencil sketch by Mr Agate of the US Exploring Expedition, 1839 (Threlkeld, 1892, p.88)



8. John Therry

Acknowledgement: Moran [1896], p.40

such strong affection for those native children who have been much with us. Where souls are the subject of increasing care, it matters not what is the colour of the body. ¹⁶¹

It appears, however, that Watson became more aggressive in forcing his will on Aboriginal mothers. Gunther began reporting this in his letters to CMS. Gunther once even hid a mother and child in his house only to have the child forcibly removed by Watson and two police officers. Gunther reported to CMS that whenever missionaries approached, the Aborigines hid their children. ¹⁶² This presumption of the right to remove children forcibly from their parents was still being exercised as recently as the 1950s by the Aborigines Welfare Board of NSW. Gunther was appalled to find that not only did the Aborigines refer to Watson as 'eagle hawk' but that they referred to missionaries in general as 'kidnappers'. ¹⁶³ Although Watson's motives were a kind of desperate compassion, it is a sad thing indeed that those who brought the gospel were so often perceived as those who destroyed the family.

Another major area of disagreement between Gunther and Watson was baptism. Although Watson had thus far baptised only children and young people who were critically ill, Gunther strongly disputed their right to baptism. Whereas Watson was anxious to recognise small tokens of faith in Christ, Gunther demanded evidence of immense and total change in lifestyle before he would consider any young person to be fit for baptism. 'Mr Watson has baptised another half-caste girl,' wrote Gunther. 'He is *determined* to make them Christians.' ¹⁶⁴

By late 1838, the strained relationship between Gunther and Watson had become irreconcilably broken. The two men functioned virtually independently of each other. Gunther regularly reported adversely on Watson to William Cowper and the Sydney 'Corresponding Committee' of CMS. His criticisms gradually became more deeply personal. Watson, Gunther alleged, was bad-tempered, uncooperative, insisted on sole rights to decision-making and behaved in a devious or contradictory manner. Furthermore, Gunther accused Watson of using mission property for personal gain in that Watson raised cattle and horses for his own possession and profit.

I will not discuss here the painful story of the next two years

of bickering and argument. The disputes between Watson, and Gunther and Porter, degenerated further. The criticisms and counter criticisms became more hostile, more exaggerated and more dishonest as time progressed and tempers frayed.¹⁶⁵ Watson, Gunther and Porter do not emerge at all well from this bitter period.

The CMS committee found itself in an impossible predicament. It finally seemed that, as Watson had alienated Handt, Gunther and Porter, he must have been the problem and therefore had to go. Despite Watson's vehement protestations, he was dismissed in mid-1840, finally departing in October.

Watson was bitterly critical of his missionary colleagues and his treatment by CMS:

The Society may prefer German Lutherans to English Episcopalians - and all their labourers may eventually be from Basle. Yet while other missionary societies can find a sufficiency of English candidates, it argues something faulty in the Church Missionary Society that more than half its labourers are foreigners who consider it hard that they must submit to episcopal ordination. . . we shall. . . proceed to England in order to plead the cause of the Aborigines and I shall have a tale to tell.¹⁶⁶

They did not, however, go to England. The Watsons left the Wellington mission on 27 October 1840, with all twenty-six Aboriginal children and the livestock and goods they considered belonged to them. They were homeless at first until a white settler, William Raymond, leased them 730 acres of his Apsley Lodge lands. The Aboriginal children and young people remained with the Watsons and were joined by others. The establishment was generally known as 'Apsley Mission', although Watson sometimes called it 'Murrunggallang'.

Although CMS thought Gunther unsuitable to take charge of the Wellington mission, there was no-one else available. The Gunthers and Porter remained at the mission with a small handful of Aboriginal people. Shortly afterwards, Porter confessed to behaving improperly with Aboriginal women. It is not clear whether Porter went as far as having sexual relations with them, but he was dismissed in 1841.¹⁶⁷

The Gunthers continued alone, but it was painfully obvious that Aboriginal people preferred Watson and the 'Apsley Mission'. Their only hope for spiritual success lay with the young Aboriginal man, Cochrane, who had been long associated with the mission. Gunther was pleased with his progress in religious understanding. Bishop Broughton, after visiting Gunther, tried to persuade Cochrane to accompany him to Parramatta in 1842 to receive a European education. Cochrane went so far as to set out with Broughton, but would not finally go beyond the borders of Wiradjuri land. Cochrane was almost certainly a Christian, but he never attained a sufficient standard of Europeanised behaviour for Gunther to recognise it.

The Gunthers persisted for a while longer, but the inevitable end of the mission was near. White settlement in Wellington, Dubbo, Mudgee and other nearby townships was increasing rapidly. Aboriginal people were lured away by money and rum for prostitution, some were killed, many died of European diseases. A number of Aboriginal people had, by now, gained employment on the sheep stations. Those who were content with the security of mission life mostly chose to live with the Watsons. Gunther's 1843 report was one of despair.¹⁶⁸ The mission was closed down in the same year. Gunther was made Rector of St John's, Mudgee.

Gunther was among the first of a long line of missionaries in Australia who failed to nurture and recognise the Christian faith of their own converts. He so entangled the gospel with European culture that he was unable or unwilling to see spiritual development, demanding to see total, absolute changes of lifestyle as evidence of conversion, which meant denying virtually all Aboriginality and becoming European.

A prime example of the cruelly high standard Gunther required is given in the story of Fred, which has been pieced together from his journal.¹⁶⁹ Fred's Christian development was first noted in January 1838. He said grace before meals 'in a most becoming manner'. Gunther overheard Fred repeating the general confession to himself. Over the following months Fred was frequently mentioned in Gunther's journal. Once, when sick, he sought prayer. Gunther did not believe him until Fred repeated his request. Gunther then questioned him first.

Did he believe in Christ? 'Yes'. Did he think he was good enough for heaven? 'Yes'. 'Did he know what a sinner was?' 'A

wicked native,' Fred replied. Then, when asked about repentance, he repeated the general confession.

Ten days later Fred asked to be baptised. Gunther told him: '. . .when you believe in Jesus Christ'. He replied, 'I long believe in him.' Gunther wrote, 'I endeavoured to show Fred that he did not firmly believe as yet, that he was too wicked still.'¹⁷⁰

Gunther felt that his judgment was correct when Fred said he was returning briefly to the bush to obtain a wife. Gunther thought that Fred would find one of those 'wild, wicked, women' which would prove his own wickedness. Fred responded, 'I put her in the playground with the girls and you make her good!' Gunther simply did not understand the social and cultural dilemma of a young man like Fred, attracted to Christ but not allowed, at least in the view of the missionaries, to have a normal Aboriginal married life.

Two days later, Fred was overheard saying the Lord's Prayer alone in the evening in his hut and singing a hymn. Later Gunther recorded that Fred led the other Aborigines in prayer 'apparently with much devotion'. Fred never did, however, convince the missionaries that he was fit for baptism. 'He wants grace,' wrote Gunther. I wonder what measure of grace Gunther used with the white citizens of Mudgee?

Watson, on the other hand, was less rigid than Gunther, at least in his attitude to the baptism of children in his care. He baptised young children, particularly if they were severely ill. He spoke to them of Christ and, accepting their simple statements of belief, he baptised them before they died. It is a sad thing, indeed, that for so many years the only success about which missionaries of all societies felt able to write home was the way in which a few baptised children died.

For Watson, the first of these was 'Billy Black', a boy of about ten, whom Watson took to Wellington from Sydney. Watson's report of his death was highlighted in the *Church Missionary Paper* in 1834:

His remarks on the death of Christ, and on Heaven, were sometimes truly affecting. . . He suffered a very great deal, with the greatest patience, especially during the last week of his life. When his happy spirit had left the cumbrous clod behind, though I felt assured of his felicity, I could not forbear weeping

and sorrowing exceedingly, for I loved him as a brother or a son; and it was the greatest difficulty imaginable that I got through the funeral service over him. The ways of God are mysterious but, I am persuaded, always full of wisdom and mercy. O that Billy Black may be the forerunner of very many of the Aborigines of New Holland to the realms of light!¹⁷¹

At Wellington, Watson baptised a number of such children. After the child died, he would tell the other children how the child had died in faith and had gone to be with Jesus. Gunther was quite disdainful of such actions, often claiming that he had seen no such evidence of faith.¹⁷² When it came to the baptism of adults, Watson, although generally more tolerant than Gunther, still looked for marked changes in lifestyle and a general adoption of European ways.

The children of the Wellington mission generally reached young adulthood at Watson's independent 'Apsley Mission'. Not a great deal is known of this establishment, which changed site several times between 1840 and 1855. Watson's critics claimed it was not easy to tell whether this was a mission or a farm with Aboriginal labour. John Lang grouped Watson with Anglican clergy who had accepted grants of land, terming them 'reverend stockfarmers'.

On the other hand, those who took the trouble to acquaint themselves with Watson's Apsley establishment were generally impressed. Governor Gipps, who visited both missions, found the Apsley children 'neatly dressed and well-behaved'.¹⁷³ Bishop Broughton was clearly more impressed with what the Watsons were achieving at Apsley than he was with the Gunthers at Wellington. Broughton would have preferred to support the Watsons but felt obliged to remain loyal to the official mission, but when it closed he gave William Watson a small salary to minister to the settlers in the district.

Watson believed that at least fifteen of the children had grown into Christian young people. On 2 December 1849, Bishop Broughton confirmed a young Aboriginal woman, Jane Christian Marshall, with eleven European confirmees from the surrounding district. Jane Marshall was the first and only Aboriginal admitted into full adult membership of any church before the middle of the nineteenth century. Broughton reflected deeply on the occasion:

It was altogether a solemn and delightful scene, and everyone present appeared so to regard it. My own mind was bowed down in serious reflection, yet elevated with joy and hope that some few, at least, of the native race whose territory we have occupied, may be found in the last day to testify that the labour of the Church among them has not been altogether in vain.¹⁷⁴

The Watsons' 'Apsley Mission' lasted, in various locations, for about fifteen years. There was little increase beyond the original group of children who left Wellington with the Watsons. Their chances of survival were much higher on the mission and, as time passed, they grew into young adults. They began to drift away from the mission. A few were caught up in the degradation and alcoholism of the town fringe camps, gaining both notoriety and shame in one or two cases by singing hymns or reciting prayers for liquor or money. Most of them, however, gained positions as domestics or stockmen on surrounding sheep stations. More literate than many ex-convict labourers, their services were in high demand.

Although the drift from Apsley slowly moved towards its inevitable conclusion, the end was hastened by a most unusual event. In July 1851, three young Aboriginal men, Tommy, Daniel and Jemmy, were working as shepherds for Dr W.J. Kerr on his station fifty miles north of Bathurst. They found the fabulous 'Kerr Nugget'. Many such finds had been rewarded by a bottle of rum, but Kerr had the honesty to give the Aborigines what must have seemed to them to be unimaginable wealth, including two flocks of sheep, a team of bullocks and a dray. Jemmy had spent some time at the Watson's mission and all the mission's young people left, with other Aboriginal people of the district, to share in the good fortune.

Although there was initially talk of an Aboriginal owned station, the dream quickly faded. They soon ate all the sheep and sold everything else for money which was rapidly squandered on alcohol. Eleven Aboriginal young people eventually returned to Apsley, but the Watsons realised that the future of the enterprise was limited and they lost their enthusiasm.

Watson was given the additional responsibility of the Ophir goldfields by his bishop in 1852, which involved him in much more travel away from Apsley. His 'mission' probably ended in

1855 when William and Ann scraped together the money to purchase the land on which the 'mission' stood.

Ill health forced Watson to resign his parish in 1857. In retirement he continued to preach regularly and he and Ann travelled widely, visiting Aborigines and settlers throughout the region. It appears that in later life the Watsons resumed contact with the Handts and developed an amicable relationship with the Gunthers.

William Watson died on 14 July 1866; Ann died not long after. They were buried in unmarked graves in the old Wellington cemetery, not far from the original Wellington mission. James Gunther had a distinguished career for thirty-eight years after the Wellington mission was disbanded. As Archdeacon Gunther, he died in 1879 and was buried in Mudgee.

The disputes and animosities at the Wellington mission can override deeper issues. Apart from these personal differences, there are two abiding impressions which I gain from reading about the Wellington mission, impressions identical to those gained from reading of any one of dozens of nineteenth century missions. The first impression is the missionaries' deep concern that the Aboriginal people should come to faith in Christ. The second impression is the manner in which the missionaries' beliefs and consequent actions frustrated that very purpose towards which they believed themselves to be working.

Watson, for example, tried to travel around with an Aboriginal companion, visiting Aboriginal people where they were. Watson was never in fear of the Aboriginal people, who usually received him courteously. He was more afraid, he said, of the bush-rangers. Unlike so many other settlers with whom the Aborigines came into contact, he did not see them as people to victimise or exploit, but as people in need of God. This diary account of Watson's meeting with an Aboriginal man near a creek makes the depth and sincerity of his concern clear:

Here, one of the black fellows fetched some water from a neighbouring brook, while another kindled a fire. We sat down with them; took some tea, of which we gave them also a share; and talked to them about God and their souls. But, alas! little did they, I fear, comprehend the meaning of my words; one of them, a very old man with no hair on his head, ripe for death, on the

verge of eternity, altogether ignorant of every moral and religious truth; no idea of the existence of a principle within him that must outlive the havoc of death; no knowledge even that there is such a being as God! What heart but must pity, what bowels but must yearn over, what eye but must shed tears, at such a scene as this!¹⁷⁵

Yet despite their deep desire to bring the knowledge of Christ, Watson and the other Wellington missionaries were almost obsessed with the need to settle the Aborigines by demonstrating to them the virtues of farming life. They saw the acceptance of this European village type of life as proof of Christian faith.

All of the missionaries were convinced, at least at first, of the importance of expressing the gospel in the Wiradjuri language. Watson wrote:

Several natives come up to-day, some from a distance of one hundred miles. They came to church with the others; but were not as well behaved. After dinner, I read over some of my translation of the scriptures. So interested did they appear, that they came and sat down with me, one after another, and paid the greatest attention: they said they understood what I read. When I gave over reading, some of them said: 'Kurrandirung myengool! Kurrandirung myengool – Book for black fellows! Book for black fellows!'

Surely there must be some degree of knowledge necessary, as preparatory to their conversion to the Christian faith. So true is the saying, How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And it may be added – without a preacher able to address them through the medium of a language with which they are familiar.¹⁷⁶

In time, even Watson began to believe that Christianity required such a change of lifestyle that English had to be the language in which it was expressed. Even when there was evidence that Aboriginal people might themselves have been taking the gospel with them in their own language, evidence that the gospel could be quietly moving beyond the frontiers of settled mission life, Watson was reluctant to believe it. Instead of greeting such news with joy and encouraging the flickering flame of faith, he was sceptical:

One of our youths told me, this morning, that the natives are very pleased to say prayers in their own language; and that many could now say the Lord's Prayer, when in the bush. I will just remark here, that we did not give credence to all they say; so that our recording their expressions is not to be received as an evidence that we always believe them to be true.¹⁷⁷

Only God knows the real effect of the Wellington mission. Certainly, some children survived who otherwise would not have. Whereas the missionaries became despondent and disillusioned, their witness, particularly the witness of William and Ann Watson at Apsley, may have been more successful than they knew. Here and there, in quite unexpected places, can be found a record of a Christian death, an Aboriginal person who in dying surprised a white stockman or traveller by speaking of Christ.

William Ridley, a Presbyterian missionary, recorded his observations twenty years later:

Because Mr Watson's scholars did not settle down in a body and organise a society on the European model, many colonists pronounced the Wellington Vale Mission 'a failure'. But I found, at a great distance from that spot, some of the good effects of the instruction received there several years before. And there are not wanting decisive earnestness that the labours of Mr Watson and Mr Gunther were 'not in vain in the Lord'.

Within the last two or three weeks the *Sydney Morning Herald* contained, in the obituary, a short notice of an Aboriginal woman who had been brought up under their instruction, who died 'in full assurance of heaven through faith in the atonement'.¹⁷⁸

Evangelisation and civilisation

The missionaries' own belief system presented them with an almost insurmountable barrier to the achievement of their aims. Although the precise nature of the relationship between the gospel and civilisation – that is, Europeanisation – was debated, there were no missionaries in this early period and very few in later periods who did not believe that there was a connection and that the connection was important.¹⁷⁹

It was not only in Australia that the terms 'Christianity' and 'civilisation' were used interchangeably,¹⁸⁰ but Australia provides

some very clear examples. When Lord Stanley lamented the failure of the early missions, he described their work as 'the civilisation and protection of these people'.¹⁸¹ When the Lutheran missionary, William Schmidt, listed the missionary failures he described them as failures to civilise.¹⁸² This view was true of missionary endeavour throughout the world.

Nineteenth century Christian missionaries generally had two main aims: the conversion of the heathen to Christianity and the introduction of European 'civilisation'. The process of 'civilising' involved both teaching the skills which would enable the people to fit into European society, and convincing them to give up their own culture. The 'Christianising' and 'civilising' aims were often mentioned together, as if they were inseparable. Indeed, to the missionaries they were inseparable – to them, the rejection of pagan ways was as important as the rejection of pagan religion.¹⁸³

When Henry Venn wrote to his daughter about Richard Johnson's appointment, he predicted that the Australian Aborigines would be brought Christianity and that then 'all the savageness of the heathen shall be put off'.¹⁸⁴ Christianity and civilisation, to Venn and his contemporaries, went hand in hand. As we have seen, it was to be thirty years before any missionaries were actually appointed. By this time, a lively debate as to which should come first, Christianity or civilisation, was already well underway.¹⁸⁵

By civilisation, the missionaries generally meant that which they considered to be opposite to barbarism or the savage way of life, namely the European way of life. This was partly an ethnocentric view, a belief in European superiority, but it was bolstered by the fact that it was also a theological view. If Aborigines were under a curse, and in the process of degenerating, then Christianity would enable them to return to the state from which they had fallen. In 1848, J.J. Freeman wrote an influential book on the 'advancement of nations from the barbarous to the civilised state' and in it said:

All barbarism is deterioration, a state to which men have degenerated from some higher and anterior state. His *primaevae* state was a condition of knowledge, he was made competent to live in a society, to aid its improvement and to profit, in turn, by all its advantages.¹⁸⁶

The idea of degeneration, with its theological explanation as the curse of Ham, was a clear example of Christians reading back into the Bible what they wanted to read. They accepted their own culture's view of European superiority and found its justification in scripture. No doubt this theological sleight of hand is easier to detect a century and a half later than it was at the time.

Samuel Marsden typified the view that civilisation had to precede Christianisation, that people had to be made ready for the gospel. The Aborigines were, according to Marsden, 'not yet ready' for Christianity. In this, Marsden was echoing the advice, given to him by the Church Missionary Society in 1810, that he should 'contribute to the civilisation of the heathen and thus prepare them for the reception of moral and religious instruction'.¹⁸⁷

This view of CMS was consistent with much of the current theological thinking on the subject. George Hamilton, for example, told the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland this in 1796:

...to spread abroad the knowledge of the gospel among barbarians and heathen nations seems to me highly preposterous, in so far as it anticipates, nay, as it even reverses, the order of nature. Men must be polished and refined in their manners before they can be properly enlightened in religious truths.¹⁸⁸

It was Marsden's belief in 'civilisation first' for most of his life that made him so negative towards missionary work among Aboriginal people. Marsden was unknowingly being more insightful about the nature of European society than about Aboriginal society in stating in 1826 that Aborigines could not be influenced because they were not materially-minded: 'They have no wants, nor is it in our power to create any which will benefit them.'¹⁸⁹

Ten years later, Marsden was still gloomy about missions to the Aborigines because 'they have no wants'.¹⁹⁰ It was essentially for this reason that Marsden largely dismissed missionary outreach among the Aborigines and spent his energies on the Maoris of New Zealand who seemed, to Marsden, to be attracted to European goods and to European ways.¹⁹¹ He wrote:

Missionaries going amongst savage nations are very differently situated from those who go to preach the gospel to civilised heathens. It is necessary to introduce the simple arts amongst

the savages in order to arrest their idle vagrant habits. . . I think it will be very difficult for missionaries to maintain their ground in any savage country without the introduction of arts and commerce.¹⁹²

The Aborigines, to Marsden, were 'savages' while the Maoris were 'civilised heathens'. Much of his writing exhibited this tendency to categorise different societies. The Irish, apparently, were savage but civilised!

The number of Catholic convicts is very great. . . and these in general composed of the lowest class of the Irish nation: who are the most wild, ignorant and savage race that were ever favoured with the lights of civilisation.¹⁹³

Marsden's observation that Aborigines 'have no wants' was not in itself incorrect. From James Cook onwards, for a century or more, surprised observers commented on the general Aboriginal disregard for the artefacts to which Europeans attached such importance. Food they happily accepted; axes and knives were desired because they made normal traditional life easier; but clothing, houses and other items which have ever been the status symbols of Western society they treated with indifference.

Elizabeth Macarthur wrote to a friend in England in 1791 that when Governor Phillip gave Aborigines various trinkets as gifts, 'they accept of his presents as children do playthings, just to amuse them for a moment and then throw them away disregarded'.¹⁹⁴ As for labouring hard to make the drought-ridden Australian environment produce crops, Aborigines never saw the point. As one insightful settler, Charles Griffith, said:

They do not court a life of labour – that of our shepherds and hutkeepers, our splitters and bullock drivers – appears to them one of unmeaning toil and they would by no means consent to exchange their free, unhoused condition for the monotonous drudgery of such a dreary existence.¹⁹⁵

The desire for material possessions was seen by many to be the only path to work and therefore to civilisation and thence Christianity. Aborigines must, said Judge Burton, acquire 'a taste for the enjoyments and security of civilised life'.¹⁹⁶

William Schmidt, the Lutheran missionary at Moreton Bay, thought that European goods should be freely distributed to Aborigines in order to create in them a desire for such things.¹⁹⁷ 'Every new want which they acquire,' wrote the South Australian Colonisation Commissioners, 'will eventually prove a permanent stimulus to the degree of industry required for its gratification.'¹⁹⁸

Marsden's view that Aborigines were not materially-minded was not inaccurate. The problem was his view that the absence of 'wants' impeded the gospel. Although an obsession with property was a defining European trait, it was a characteristic which was among European society's least Christian features. How can the Aborigines ever own property, asked William Watson at Wellington, if they persist in sharing?¹⁹⁹

Negative as Marsden was, there still remained even for him, as for all of the missionaries, that point beyond which he would not be forced. Although he believed the Aborigines to be the most degraded of all people, he believed that the 'task of civilising the blacks', although 'almost a hopeless task', was not absolutely impossible.²⁰⁰ It was not totally hopeless because, in the final analysis, he respected their humanity and was, furthermore, one who was willing to express this view forcefully.

Marsden began to see towards the end of his life that Aboriginal people were more degraded by the European presence than they had been before white settlement:

From us they have suffered infinite loss. . . from us they have contracted the most painful and fatal diseases, under which many of them hourly suffer until death relieves them, and from our example and excitements they are sunk into the deepest moral corruption in every respect. I conceive, as a nation professing Christianity, we have much to answer for on their account to the judge of all the earth. The utmost one can do for them will only be a small atonement, a trifling return for the permanent injury they have sustained.²⁰¹

Despite such sentiments as these, Marsden's vision did not extend much beyond simple charity – gifts of food and blankets. As to missionary efforts, he remained doubtful of any success until almost the end of his life. It is true that in a conversation with Bishop Broughton, who suggested that Aborigines' minds

needed to be enlarged by introduction of the arts and sciences before they would be amenable to the gospel, Marsden said, 'civilisation is not necessary before Christianity'.²⁰² This was still in reference to New Zealand. His views on Aborigines may have changed, but this does not alter the fact that he held the opposite view for most of his life.

It is one of the more unfortunate aspects of early missions in eastern Australia that Marsden was so often closely involved in decision-making processes and in such an influential position. He was, for example, on the board of Macquarie's Native Institution, predicted that it would not succeed and was pleased, years after, to be able to say, 'I told you so'. He represented both CMS and LMS and was responsible for much of the gloomy advice tendered to the headquarters of both societies. His advice was also sought by the WMS.

Not all missionaries agreed with Marsden's position, but none divorced the gospel from European civilisation. By the time CMS was appointing Watson, the British evangelicals seemed more inclined to the view that evangelisation and civilisation should be pursued together as indicated in this CMS letter to Watson:

In connection with the preaching of the gospel, you will not overlook its intimate bearing on the moral habits of a people. One effect arising from its introduction into a country, is the 'beating of the sword into a ploughshare, and the spear into a pruning hook'. Seek then to apply it to the common occupations of life; instruct the natives in husbandry, in the erection of houses, and in the useful arts of life, and instead of waiting to civilise them before you instruct them in the truths of the gospel, or to convert them before you aim at the improvement of their temporal condition, let the two objects be pursued simultaneously.²⁰³

There were a number of early Australian missionaries who went a step further and declared that the gospel had first to be preached. Threlkeld was the one who most vehemently expressed this view which brought him into direct conflict with Marsden, through whom he was supposed to report to his Society. Another who held this view was the Wesleyan missionary at Geelong, Francis Tuckfield:

All merely civilising schemes have hitherto failed and if ever we [are to] benefit the Aborigines of Australia I am quite convinced it must be done by bringing the gospel to exert its full and glorious influence upon them.²⁰⁴

This view appears to have been shared by a large number of missionaries, clergy and other Christian people, including not only Lancelot Threlkeld but the Anglican clergyman William Cowper, Daniel Tyerman and George Bennett of the LMS delegation, and Aboriginal protectors James Dredge and Edward Parker. For some, such as the Lutheran missionary Christopher Eipper, it was still evident that civilisation was the more important outcome of the gospel:

The gospel it was, that changed the lazy Hottentot into an industrious subject: the gospel it will be that works a change in the habits of the individual Australian.²⁰⁵

This was the opinion finally reached by the 1837 British House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines (that is, natives of all British colonies), a committee dominated by evangelical Christians:

There is but one effectual means of staying the evils we have occasioned, and of imparting the blessings of civilisation, and that is, the propagation of Christianity, together with the preservation, for the time to come, of the civil rights of the natives.²⁰⁶

Up to about 1850, despite all this discussion, the Australian opinions were, in the final analysis, completely theoretical. None of the missionaries in the earliest era could claim to have fulfilled their civilising goals.

ENDNOTES

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2. Marsden to Pratt, 24 February 1819, in Elder, 1932: 231-232
3. Cook's Journal (Wharton Edition 1968: 323)
4. Hodder, 1895 (V): 193-194
5. Tench, 1793: 200
6. *Ibid*, p.204
7. *Ibid*, p.187
8. Dawson, 1830: 332
9. Cunningham, 1827: 202
10. *Sydney Herald*, 5 October 1838
11. *Colonist*, 16 January 1839
12. Threlkeld, 1853 in Gunson, 1974: 46
13. Reynolds, 1987: 58-80
14. These are a few examples from the vast literature on this subject:
Turner, 1891 (jaw); Rolleston, 1888: 34 (brain shape); Klaatsch: 164
(nose); Cunningham, 1889 (spine and pelvis).
15. Reptilian skin, Oldfield, 1865: 220; insensitivity to pain, Robarts,
1913:445; annual copulation, Oldfield, 1865: 230; physical recupera-
tion, Harley, 1888: 110
16. Farrer, 1867: 115
17. Wake, 1872: 74
18. Oldfield, 1865: 227
19. Woods, 1879: xxxviii
20. Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the
Aborigines, SAPP, 3, No.165, 1860
21. *Northern Territory Times*, 4 October 1884
22. *Vagabond Papers* (4th Series: 1877), Melbourne: Robertson
23. Stanner, 1965: 213
24. *Sydney Herald*, 5 October 1838
25. *Australian*, 8 December 1838
26. Report on the pursuit of the Daly River murderers, SAPP, No. 170, 1885
27. *South Australian Register*, 14 November 1885
28. *Northern Territory Times*, 26 December 1885
29. *North Australian*, 8 January 1886
30. *Western Australian Advocate*, February 1906. See also *The Golden
West*, 1906, p.6
31. Strachan, 1870: 114, 116-120
32. Report from the Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines,
NSW LC, V & P, 1845, p.20
33. John Harper's Journal, BT, Box 53, ML (*italics added*)
34. Westminster Confession, vi: 4
35. King James Version of the Bible (KJV), 1611, Genesis 9:18; 9:25-26;
10:6
36. Hull, 1845: 1

37. Threlkeld, 1853, in Gunson, 1974: 54, 71
38. Aborigines of Australia: Copy of a letter from Rev. Joseph Orton, dated Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land, August 1836, in Reece, 1974: 76
39. Dove, 1842: 249
40. Cairns, 1965: 75
41. William Blake, 'The Little Black Boy', in Blake, 1974: 125
42. Epitaph on an English tombstone. There is a photograph in Miller, 1985: 24
43. Carey, 1792: 3, 51, 623
44. Beaglehole, 1955: 508
45. Field, 1825: 224
46. William Henry to S. Pinder, 29 August 1799, LMS South Seas Letters, LMS Archives, London
47. *Gazette* (Sydney), 5 August 1824
48. Pastoral Letter of the Archbishop and Bishops of the Province, Assembled in the Second Provincial Council of Australia. . . 1869 (reproduced in O'Farrell, 1969: 413-418)
49. Reported by Threlkeld, 1853, in Gunson, 1974: 46, 56
50. William Watson, 1836, *Church Missionary Paper* LXXXIV
51. Threlkeld, 1853, in Gunson, 1974: 66
52. Threlkeld, 1825, in Gunson, 1974: 91
53. For example, Moravians at Lake Boga (c.1850), Hutton, 1922: 347
54. Isaac de la Peyrere (1655), *A Theological Systeme Upon that Presupposition that Men were Before Adam*. Quoted in Casson, 1940: 114-115
55. Hamilton, 1843: 137
56. Ridley, 1875: 171
57. 18 January 1841, Smithies Letters 1840 - 1855, MN 172, Acc Nos 3702a - 3704a, BL
58. Rev. T. Alkins, 1867, quoted in Reynolds, 1987: 93
59. Threlkeld, 1853, in Gunson, 1974: 59
60. Lang, 1838: 15
61. *Colonist*, 20 October 1838
62. George III's instructions to Governor Phillip, *HRNSW*, I, ii, p.52
63. T.W. Plummer, cited in Ward, 1907: 40
64. Governor Hunter, cited in Ward, 1967: 40
65. These guerilla fighters included Murrah, Myles, Wallah, Carbone Jack, Narrang Jack, Bunduck, Kongate, Woottan, Rachel, Yallaman. See Lachlan Macquarie's 'Proclamation of Native Outlawry', 20 July 1816, *HRA*, I, ix, pp.362-364
66. I do not include here the shots said to be fired by Governor Phillip's landing party when two Aborigines offered resistance, nor the shooting of Aborigines by La Prouse.
67. Worgan, 1788: 51
68. Governor Phillip's opinion: *HRNSW*, I, ii, pp.146 and 148, p.50

69. Barton, 1889: 127-128
70. Bridges, 1978: 82-83
71. Governor Hunter to Duke of Portland, 2 January 1800, *HRNSW*, IV, p.2
72. Bonwick, 1870: 131
73. Worgan, 1788: 25
74. Governor Phillip to Lord Sydney, 13 February 1790, *HRNSW*, I, ii, p.308
75. Wright, 1987
76. Carey, 1792: 3, 51, 62-63
77. There is some speculation, for example, in Bollen, 1977: 263-291
78. John Newton to Richard Johnson, 28 November 1789, in Bonwick, 1898: 148
79. Richard Johnson to Henry Fricker, 9 April 1790, in Mackaness, 1954 (I): 29
80. Bonwick, 1882: 180
81. Samuel Marsden to William Wilberforce, 1799, BT, Box 40, ML
82. The most recent was probably Archbishop Donald Robinson in his address at the Bicentennial Service, St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney, on 7 February 1988 (see *Southern Cross*, March 1988, p.7). Robinson was correct: the Johnsons were compassionate people. The point remains that these strategies, although well-intentioned, rarely achieved anything.
83. Samuel Marsden to T.H. Scott, 2 December 1826, in Gunson, 1974 II: 347 (Yarwood 1977: 113 wrongly coalesces Harry and Tristan, two of the Marsden adoptees)
84. Samuel Marsden to William Wilberforce, 1799, BT, Box 40, ML
85. Caley to Banks, 16 February 1809, in Caley, 1966: 178
86. Bridges, 1978: 86-87
87. *Ibid.*, p.88
88. Elizabeth Marsden to Thomas Hassall, 9 January 1808, Rowland Hassall Correspondence, MSA 1677, Vol. 1, p.174, ML
89. *Sydney Herald*, 5 October 1838
90. Richard Johnson to Henry Fricker, 18 March 1791, Letters from Rev. Richard Johnson 1787 - 1797, MS C232-2, ML
91. Richard Johnson, *An Address to the Inhabitants of the Colonies established in New South Wales and Norfolk Island*, quoted in Bonwick, 1898: 221
92. Henry to S. Pinder, 29 August 1799, LMS South Seas Letters, LMS Archives, London
93. Governor Macquarie to Earl Bathurst, 8 October 1814, *HRA*, I, viii, pp.367-370
94. Lockley, 1949: 11, 15, 154, 194-195, 240-241
95. Bridges, 1978: 108
96. William Shelley to Governor Macquarie, 8 April 1814, *HRA*, I, viii, p.371

97. *Gazette* (Sydney), 17 February 1819
98. Mrs Shelley's evidence, *Report . . . on the Aborigines Question*, p.55
cited in Bridges, 1978: 128
99. *Gazette* (Sydney), 17 March 1821
100. Bridges, 1978: 130
101. E.S. Hall to Sir George Murray, 26 November 1828, *HRA*, I, xiv, p.597
102. *Gazette* (Sydney), 1819, cited in Bonwick, 1870: 364
103. O'Farrell, 1977: 34
104. For a detailed treatment of the early missions in NSW, see the careful
and insightful study by Woolmington (1979).
105. Colwell, 1904: 72; Holdsworth, 1921 (III): 149
106. W. Walker to R. Watson, 5 October 1821, BT, Box 51, ML
107. W. Walker to General Secretaries, WMS, BT, Box 53, ML
108. Bridges, 1978: 145
109. G. Erskine to R. Watson, 23 April 1823, quoted in Bollen, 1977: 276
110. G. Erskine to R. Watson, 20 February 1824, quoted in Bollen, 1977:
276
111. Woolmington, 1979: 23
112. Joseph Orton, cited in Colwell, 1904: 240
113. Report of CMS London, 1824, BT, Box 54, ML
114. George Clarke to Pratt, 21 October 1823, cited in Bridges, 1978: 141
115. William Walker to Watson, 26 October 1821, cited in Stockton, 1988:
201-202
116. William Walker, cited in Colwell, 1904: 176
117. Detailed information on Threlkeld and reproductions of all significant
written sources are in the important collection by Niel Gunson, 1974.
118. Champion, 1940: 303
119. Deed of Trust, 8 February 1825, *HRA*, I, xi, pp.512-513
120. D. Tyerman and G. Bennett to Threlkeld, 24 February 1825, quoted
in Gunson, 1974: 178-180
121. Threlkeld, 1828: 6-8
122. W.A. Hankey and G. Burder to L.E. Threlkeld, 2 March 1826, in
Threlkeld, 1828: 13-14
123. Copies of a number of these letters are in Gunson, 1974.
124. L.E. Threlkeld to G. Burder and W.Hankey, 31 October 1826, in
Threlkeld, 1828: 15
125. Champion, 1940: 355
126. *Gazette* (Sydney), 12 January 1830
127. Whittington, 1936: 38
128. W.G. Broughton to Governor Darling, 3 June 1830, *HRA* I, xv, p.676.
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129. Threlkeld, 1841
130. Threlkeld, 1827; 1834
131. Threlkeld's Preface to the Gospel of Luke, dated 15 August 1857, pub-
lished in Threlkeld 1892: 127

132. Threlkeld to Saxe Bannister, 27 September 1825, in Gunson, 1974: 187
133. Threlkeld, 1837
134. Threlkeld, 1841
135. Gunson, 1974: 28
136. Threlkeld, 21 September 1838, in evidence to the Committee on the Aborigines Question, cited in Gunson, 1974: 271
137. W. Ellis to L.E. Threlkeld, 6 January, 1838, cited in Gunson, p.143
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139. Bridges, 1978 contains details of the Wellington mission. Early lives of Watson and Handt from this source.
140. Governor Bourke to Goderich, 5 August 1832, *HRA*, I, xvi, p.691
141. Watson Diary, 12 February 1834, *AJCP*, M233, *NLA*
142. *Ibid*, 6 October 1853
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144. William Watson to Hill, 3 November 1835, *AJCP*, M215, *NLA*
145. Bridges, 1978: 355-356
146. Watson to Jowitt, 17 January 1837, *AJCP*, M215, *NLA*
147. Watson Diary, 5 March 1833, 18 August 1833 etc., *AJCP*, M233, *NLA*
148. *Ibid*
149. Watson Diary, 28 March 1834, 29 July 1834, *AJCP*, M233, *NLA*
150. *Ibid*, 14 June 1835
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153. Backhouse and Walker Reports, Vol.1, pp.327-328, MSB706, *ML*
154. Watson Diary, 16 March 1833, *AJCP*, M233, *NLA*
155. *Ibid*, 11 January 1835
156. *Ibid*, 4 December 1832
157. Woolmington, 1979: 31-34
158. Bridges, 1978: 454-8
159. *Ibid*, p.620
160. Bridges, 1978: chs 13 - 16
161. Watson Diary, 2 October 1833, *AJCP*, M233, *NLA*
162. Bridges, 1978: 643
163. Gunther Diary, 1836 - 1865, 16 and 17 December 1839, 17 and 19 January 1840, *AJCP*, M 224, *NLA*
164. Gunther to Cowper, 9 January 1841, *AJCP*, M215, *NLA*
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166. Watson to Jowitt, 12 September 1842, *AJCP*, M233, *NLA*
167. Gunther to Broughton, 2 April 1842, *AJCP*, M2154, *NLA*
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170. Gunther Journal, 13 August 1838, *AJCP*, M224, *NLA*
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174. *Annual Report of the Sydney Diocesan Committee*. . . 1849, p.11, cited in Bridges, 1978: 484
175. *Church Missionary Paper* LXXV (1834)
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186. Freeman, 1848: 4
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190. Marsden to Coates, 23 February 1836, BT Box 54, ML
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194. Elizabeth Macarthur to Miss Kingdon, 7 March 1791, in Macarthur Onslow, 1914: 34
195. *Select Committee on the Aborigines, Return to a Circular Letter*, NSWLC, V & P, 1845, p.17
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197. *Select Committee on the Aborigines*. . ., NSWLC, V & P, 1845, p.17
198. South Australian Colonisation Commissioners, *Fourth Annual Report*, 1840, cited in Woolmington, 1979: 189
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202. J.B. Marsden, 1858: 268
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2

The destruction of the old

Civilisation and mission permeate north and south

CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES who moved further afield – north to Moreton Bay and south to Port Phillip – arrived within a few years of official settlement. They therefore found themselves in a situation far more violent than Sydney and its hinterland had been when missionaries had arrived more than a generation after the first fleet. Some missionaries quietly deplored the violence while some spoke out forcefully against it, but none could ignore it. It was not they who rationalised history, but those writers who consciously or unconsciously distorted or disregarded the treatment and fate of Aboriginal Australians.

Far too much of Australia's recent Aboriginal history has been ignored for far too long. Until the last decade, Australians were taught a laundered history. A number of historians have promulgated the belief that the European settlement of Australia was peaceful, even uniquely peaceful.¹ As early as 1816, Kittle, in his history of NSW, was claiming that the settlers had 'not established themselves by the sword, nor willingly done injury to the naked miserable stragglers, who were found on these barren shores.'² Blair, in 1878, believed that Australia was not founded by 'armed conflict' but by 'progressive sheep farming'.³ The world had seen 'no grander victory of peace', he proudly emphasised.

In 1881, Fitzgerald agreed that nowhere had dispossession by a superior race proceeded 'with less hardship and suffering'.⁴ According to Sutherland, there was nowhere in the British Empire

where more 'conscientious care was taken of the lives and rights of the natives' than in Victoria and South Australia.⁵ Such sentiments continued to be expressed well into this century.⁶

There was another group of historians who, while consciously distorting history, had at least the honesty to admit they were doing so. Spencer and Gillen thought that in parts of Australia 'it is well to draw the veil over the past history of the relationship between the blackfellow and the white man'.⁷ This same phrase - 'to draw the veil or curtain' - was used in a variety of histories and settlers' reminiscences across the continent.⁸ Some writers even acknowledged their motives.

Stokes in 1846 regretted that the facts of the colonisation of Australia 'must reach the eyes of posterity'.⁹ Ferrara felt that details of frontier violence in the north-west of the continent would affect 'Western Australia's reputation abroad'.¹⁰ Knight in 1895 would not elaborate on the terrible Kilcoy poisoning in early Queensland because it would harm 'the honour of the white race'.¹¹ Crawford in 1896 felt that many activities of the settlers were 'wisely left unexplained'.¹²

Many more recent writers have followed the same principles. Neville, Director of Aboriginal Welfare in Western Australia felt, in 1936, that there was no need to criticise the actions of the pioneers.¹³ Even Hasluck in 1942 seemed unwilling to treat the issue of violence in any depth,¹⁴ while as recently as 1960, Cleland felt that it was a 'matter of deep regret that atrocities committed by unscrupulous white people on our natives years ago are raked up and recounted'.¹⁵

The effect of this whitewashing of the past was effectively to write Aborigines out of the history which most non-Aboriginal Australians were taught. People were not taught an anti-Aboriginal history, as such, but simply, by default, absorbed the notion that Aborigines were unimportant. This situation only really began to change in the 1950s and 1960s with historians like Shaw, Crawford, Greenwood, Pyke, Clark and Ward who at least acknowledged the better known events such as Tasmania's Black War, Western Australia's Battle of Pinjarra or the Myall Creek Massacre of NSW.¹⁶ More recently still, historians such as Rowley, Markus, Loos, Ryan and Reynolds have begun to redress the imbalance with painstaking scholarly research into Aboriginal and European contact history.¹⁷

While the first Christian missions were opening and closing in what is now NSW, white settlement was rapidly spreading north and south. In the north, a penal settlement at Moreton Bay in 1824 hastened the influx of eager squatters to what is now southern Queensland. In the south, the government grudgingly admitted in 1836 that the Port Phillip district had in fact been settled unofficially.

This chapter will examine the work of the first missionaries in these localities. Before doing so, however, there is the question of Tasmania.

The Tasmanian tragedy and the church

The Church's efforts in Tasmania were so minimal and the tragedy there was so great that it is tempting to disregard it, as if it were irrelevant to a study of mission. To ignore Tasmania, however, as if what happened did not happen, would be a grave injustice, and would repeat in church history the same whitewashing that has, until recently, characterised secular history.

When Australia's second penal settlement was established in Van Diemen's Land at Hobart Town in 1803, there were about four thousand Aborigines living on the island and its surrounds.¹⁸ Twenty-seven years later, when they were taken away into exile, over ninety per cent of them had been killed by the white settlers. The last Tasmanians of full Aboriginal descent died well before the century ended. James Bonwick's words about the Tasmanian Aborigines in 1870 haunt us today: 'We cover our faces while the deep and solemn voice of our common Father echoes through the soul, "where is thy brother?"'¹⁹

What the Christian churches were doing while all of this was going on is a question which is shameful to have to ask. The answer is simple: almost nothing. Church of England, Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist churches had all been established quite early in Hobart, yet in 1829, Henry Widowson was led to write: 'I have never heard, nor do I believe, that any teacher of the Gospel ever went half a dozen miles from Hobart Town to inquire into their condition.'²⁰

The British settlement of Van Diemen's Land, the 'Botany Bay of Botany Bay',²¹ was once described as 'a place where the most turbulent and rapacious could find no scope for their passions'.²² Van Diemen's Land turned out to be a place where the newcomers

were provided with the opportunity to display exactly those passions, and worse.

The general reaction of the Aborigines to the settlers was initially peaceful, despite the fact that explorers, such as the French under Marion du Fresne, had already shot and killed some of them.²³ Very few, however, were in the vicinity of Risdon Cove on the Derwent River when the British landed there in September 1803. The Tasmanian Aboriginal people hunted in the inland forests and plains in the warmer months, wintering on the coast from about May to August.

In May 1804, a large party of them, moving from their inland hunting grounds towards the mouth of the Derwent River, passed close to Risdon Cove. Using their traditional hunting strategy, they advanced in a semicircle, driving a herd of kangaroos before them. Although the presence of women and children disproved any hostile intent, a party of the 102nd Regiment (NSW Corps) of the British Army under Lieutenant Moore shot fifty men, women and children, some with cannon fire.²⁴ The commander of Risdon, Lieutenant John Bowen RN later reported that he did not think that the Aborigines were 'of any use to the British'.²⁵

Moore's official report claimed that the Aborigines were the aggressors and that only two or three were shot dead,²⁶ but gross official understatement of Aboriginal deaths was almost invariable. The killings were not investigated in any detail for twenty-seven years until included in 1830 in a wider investigation into hostilities. Witnesses then stated that the Aborigines were not aggressive, that many were killed, and children were taken. Governor George Arthur's report estimated that fifty were killed, but hoped that the estimate might have been 'overrated'.²⁷

The Risdon massacre set a pattern for European and Aboriginal relations in Van Diemen's Land which led rapidly and inexorably to immense evil. Due to food shortage, convicts were armed and released to fend for themselves. It has been common to blame these convicts, who had themselves been brutalised, for the violence towards the Aborigines.²⁸ Although in many cases this was undoubtedly so, as an explanation for what amounted to virtual genocide, it is far too convenient and far too simplistic. It has been observed time and again throughout the long era of European colonial expansion that morality was suspended at the frontier - 'the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is

triumphant'.²⁹ The British administration in Van Dieman's Land knew what was happening, even admitting to being appalled by it. Governor Thomas Davey wrote in 1813: 'I could not have believed that British subjects would have so ignominiously stained the honour of their country and themselves as to have acted in the manner they did toward the Aborigines.'³⁰

Their shame, however, was not sufficient to rearrange their priorities. The authorities no doubt wished that their invasion might have been accepted peacefully by the Aborigines. They made some feeble efforts to curb the settlers' brutality. As in most early Australian settlements, the founding rhetoric contained all the right words:

You are to endeavour, by every means in your power, to open an intercourse with the natives, to preserve them from oppression, and to conciliate their good will – enjoining all persons under your government to live in amity and kindness with them; and if any person shall exercise any acts of violence against them. . . you are to cause such offender to be brought to punishment, according to the degree of the offence.³¹

The words were empty. The Government did not have the will to enforce the law. It was often said that the British, who had recently defeated the French, could easily overcome the Aborigines. This could well be put another way. The British, capable of defeating the French, could easily have protected the Aborigines. In the final analysis, the possession and settlement of Tasmania was a much more important goal to them than the preservation of Aboriginal life, let alone any recognition of their culture or rights.

The Tasmanian Aborigines mounted a fierce and proud resistance, but it was doomed in the face of the relentless and brutal determination of the whites. Bonwick, a Christian historian, when chronicling in 1870 the last years of the Tasmanian race, hesitated to record all that his research had revealed for fear of not being believed. He wrote:

[There was] not even the apology of avarice, as they had nothing to give; it was rather a demoniacal propensity to torture the defenceless, and an insatiable lust, that heeded not the most

pitiable appeals, nor halted in the execution of the most diabolical acts of cruelty, to obtain its brutal gratification.³²

At first, as was the pattern elsewhere in Australia, the Aborigines avenged death for death, marking their man and awaiting their opportunity. Such was the aggression hurled against them that inevitably, as also happened elsewhere, they began to regard all whites as their enemies. *What other choice did they have?*

Those simply shot were fortunate. Many were cruelly tortured, maimed, blinded, burnt and castrated. The evidence in official documents is horrifying enough without guessing at that which was never divulged. They were shot for dogs' meat. Women were chained to the huts of white settlers, used by the men, then tortured to death, some being forced to wear the heads of their murdered husbands. Whereas Aborigines were hung for crimes against British law, no whites were ever hanged for killing Aborigines. There were a few token punishments – there are records of a man being flogged for having taken Aboriginal ears, another for having cut off an Aboriginal finger to use for a tobacco stopper.³³ In 1824, several men were sentenced to twenty-five lashes, the normal punishment for convict insolence, for a crime towards Aboriginal women listed as 'indescribable brutality'.³⁴

Worst of all to the Aborigines was the perpetual theft of their children for sexual purposes or, if they were lucky, to be domestic servants. One technique was to chase women and children until the toddlers fell behind or the infants were dropped. The first chaplain, the Rev. Robert Knopwood, recalled that Aborigines used to come into Hobart.³⁵ One day their children were taken and they never visited again. Can anyone wonder that they were goaded beyond human endurance into a courageous, hopeless, suicidal resistance?

The question that I am compelled to keep asking is: where was the church, my church, in this? The occasional captured or abandoned child was baptised. Robert Knopwood even baptised one taken in the Risdon Massacre in 1803. He was baptised Robert Hobart May. Lieutenant-Governor David Collins ordered him to be returned to his people. Apart from such tokens as this, the church almost totally ignored the Aborigines. There were a few Christian laypeople distressed by the situation. Occasional

letters to the newspapers asked why there could not be 'a clergyman exclusively devoted to promote their conversion'.³⁶ It was Governor Arthur who approached CMS in 1828 for a missionary to work among 'the wretched Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land', but CMS declined. The Society pleaded that it was not able 'until larger means are obtained, to enter on new fields of labour'.³⁷

In 1830, Governor Arthur set up an Aborigines committee, although by this time almost all of the Aborigines had been killed. The two Anglican chaplains, Edward Norman and William Bedford, were members of that committee, as were P.A. Mulgrave, the Chief Police Magistrate; Jocelyn Thomas, Colonial Treasurer; James Scott, Editor of the *Hobart Town Courier*; and Samuel Hill, Port Officer, with Charles Arthur, the Governor's nephew acting as secretary.³⁸ The Aborigines committee was ineffective and quite frequently very negative towards the Aborigines. They briefly toyed with the idea of a native institution, but the suggestion did not gain any funds from the already stretched colonial treasury. Membership of this token committee was about as far as the church became involved. No doubt members of the committee were moved by high motives, but not even this group acted with any real conviction.³⁹

The church was failing badly. The word 'failure' has been repeatedly used of the early missions on the Australian mainland, but at least this judgment is applied to an effort that was made. There was a much worse failure – the failure of the church to exert its influence upon depraved white society. Not only did the clergy remain silent, but their congregations did not encourage such action of their clergy either. The thunder from the pulpit came from a later generation of clergy after the violence was all over. The church's failure was not the result of its efforts, nor a lack of success – we are not required to succeed. The failure was in not even trying.

By the late 1820s, there were, unknown to the settlers, perhaps only 300 Tasmanian Aborigines left, scattered but maintaining their strong resistance. Governor Arthur formalised the Black War in 1828, proclaiming martial law and offering a £5 reward for each adult captured. It proved to be simply a licence to kill. In 1830 Arthur conceived the idea of the 'Black Line'. Over two thousand men were mobilised including soldiers, policemen, settlers and convicts. They were to form a huge cordon, at times

twenty-five kilometres wide, and force all Aborigines in the eastern part of the island before them, trapping them in Tasman's Peninsula. Arthur's insistence that it was intended to be a non-violent expedition is belied by the provisions. One advance depot at Oatlands held one thousand guns and 30,000 rounds of ammunition.⁴⁰

The Line scoured the bush, constructed elaborate defences and consumed vast quantities of government rations. Two Aborigines were shot and, by accident, an old man and a boy were captured. After three weeks of endurance and what Fenton called 'wonderful feats of locomotion',⁴¹ the cordon tightened and advanced down the peninsula. At the end of the narrow strip of land, the trap was empty. The whole operation had been an expensive failure.

William Bedford, the Anglican chaplain, was asked to pray for the success of the Line before it set out. This prayer created some controversy and there were those who saw it as inconsistent with Christian principles to ask, in the one prayer, for the success of a military campaign against the Aborigines and their conversion to Christianity. One journalist blamed the prayer for the failure of the Line – 'the very arrogance, presumption and impiety of this special prayer ensured its defeat'.⁴²

Into this situation came the enigmatic and controversial George Augustus Robinson about whom historians will forever argue. Was he a hero or a villain, the saviour of the Aboriginal remnant or their betrayer? A Methodist, often described as a 'bricklayer-turned-missionary',⁴³ Robinson was never, in fact, a missionary. That is, he was never employed by a church to evangelise the Aborigines. He was, however, a Christian. He had long taken a keen interest in the Tasmanian Aboriginal people and was one of the few European people to be on friendly terms with any of them. Being fluent in their language, Robinson decided that he could convince the Aborigines to surrender peaceably and be taken to a safe place.

Jorgen Jorgenson, one of Robinson's contemporaries, wrote:

[Robinson] proposed nothing less than proceeding into the wilderness, all unarmed, to endeavour to fall in with the Aboriginal tribes, if possible to bring about a conciliation, and persuade them to surrender peaceably. I must confess, after all I

had seen and experienced, I thought Mr Robinson either a mad-man or an imposter.⁴⁴

Robinson gathered a party of eight Europeans and ten of his Aboriginal associates, including Truganini, later to be famed as 'the last Tasmanian'. Robinson firmly believed that the Aborigines were intelligent; that they could be convinced that surrender was for their own good. He also believed that they would be better off becoming 'civilised':

I considered that the natives of Van Diemen's Land were rational, and although they might, in their savage notions, oppose violent measures for their subjugation, yet, if I could but get them to listen to reason, and persuade them that the Europeans wished only to better their condition, they might become civilised, and rendered useful members of society.⁴⁵

Robinson's plan was surprisingly successful. Without any bloodshed whatsoever, he brought in fifty-four people by 1831, a further sixty-three in 1832, forty-two in 1833 and the remainder, seventy-six, in 1834 (although, to everyone's amazement, seven more turned up in 1842). The Aborigines trusted Robinson, but did the Europeans really wish 'only to better their condition'? The Aborigines believed they were going to a better, a happier and safer sanctuary.

When finally they were all gathered together, they were transported to Flinders Island, off the north-east coast. It was a barren and forbidding place. When they glimpsed what they thought was to be so wonderful a home, it is said that they 'betrayed the greatest agitation, gazing with strained eyes at the sterile shore, uttering melancholy moans and, with arms hanging beside them, trembled with convulsive feeling'.⁴⁶ The settlement was named *Wybalenna*, meaning 'Black man's houses'.

Their exile was initially supervised by soldiers under Sergeant Wight who augmented his forces by enlisting sealers – ex-sailors and runaway convicts – as mercenaries. He imprisoned a large number of the Aboriginal men on a rock in the ocean who were lucky to be rescued by Captain Bateman in the *Tamar*. They told Bateman that they had been removed from Flinders Island to allow the whites unlimited possession of the women.

Later superintendents were an improvement upon Wight. Robinson himself was in charge for over three years, but his knowledge of the language and friendship with some Aborigines there were not sufficient to make him a good superintendent of what has been called the 'Flinders Island concentration camp'.⁴⁷ It is probably a fair assessment of Robinson that his fame went to his head. Although he had strong views, he did not really have the answers to what should have been done. He left Flinders Island, attracted by the offer of a high salary and important position as Chief Protector of Aborigines in NSW, with initial responsibility for the Port Phillip District (Victoria). In this, too, he failed.

Conventionally, Robinson has been regarded as an heroic figure, a courageous philanthropist who saved the remnant of the people, one who had earned the 'applause of all good men' and whose name would be held 'in everlasting remembrance'.⁴⁸ More recent and more hostile writers have judged him harshly as a traitor who duped the last Tasmanians into surrender and sent them into exile to die.⁴⁹ Robinson's latest biographer, magnifying his faults and belittling his achievements, calls him a liar and a cheat, a man of little honour and one who invariably turned any situations to his own material advantage.⁵⁰

Fortunately, reviewers of the biography have recognised its intemperance and lack of balance.⁵¹ The eccentric Robinson certainly had flaws in his character, but to make a big issue of indiscretions committed even before he left England is simply unfair. Furthermore, a person with any concern for the well-being of the Aboriginal people should not be judged by the criticisms of those contemporaries who had no such concern at all.

Judged within the racial climate of his era, Robinson's views were in advance of most of his contemporaries – as one reviewer noted, there are still those today who would find him too radical!⁵² Among Robinson's strongly expressed opinions were racial equality, justice, and Aboriginal land rights. He firmly believed that gross injustice had been done to the true owners of the land. Finally, however, valuing their actual survival above all else, it is easy to see how even exile on an island could have seemed to Robinson to be preferable to violent death:

After all, it is the will of Providence and better if they died where they are kindly treated than shot at and inhumanly destroyed

by the depraved portion of the white community.⁵³

As the years passed, the Aborigines on Flinders Island were generally treated with benevolence, but they were still in exile, in sight of their beloved homeland. Many simply sat and gazed tearfully at it. They died in large numbers. Even the medical reports gave the cause of deaths as nostalgia or homesickness. They simply pined away, disillusioned, powerless, longing for a past that was gone forever.⁵⁴

After the military regime, religion became one of the important facets of life at Wybalenna. Under W.J. Darling, in 1832-33, there was some simple religious instruction as well as some church services. A catechist, Thomas Wilkinson, was appointed in 1833. Wilkinson early tried to implement Aboriginal languages, translating the first four chapters of Genesis into one of the dialects. Governor Arthur was critical of this translation work which led him 'deeply to regret that a person who can be so useful should have, unfortunately, acted so imprudently'.⁵⁵ Wilkinson, unfortunately, fell out with Darling and was dismissed in 1834.

Robert Clark replaced Wilkinson as Church of England catechist. He was dismissed for his trouble-making among the Europeans in 1839. A Presbyterian, Rev. Thomas Dove, was also there in 1838-39 as chaplain. He 'largely neglected the Aborigines and caused trouble',⁵⁶ and his own writings displayed a very low view of the Aborigines.⁵⁷ Clark was re-employed in 1844 until his death in 1850.

The only detailed records of Clark's religious activities are those which Robinson made during his three-and-a-half year stint as commandant. Under Robinson's influence, a catechetical method was used to drill the Aboriginal people in Christian doctrine: 'Where is God?' 'Who made you?' 'Where do good people go when they die?' 'Where will bad people go when they die?' and so on.⁵⁸ The pupils were examined regularly in these matters and the questions and answers painstakingly recorded. Just what value this rote learning had is difficult to say, but in the absence of any real relationship to their situation and needs, the effect must have been small. This recent opinion may well be close to the truth:

What was thrust upon the natives was not a true Christianity

but the garbled verbage of fools and for this Arthur, Robinson, Clark and Dove were responsible.⁵⁹

It is a pity that Wilkinson did not remain and translate more of the Bible. That would not have been the 'garbled verbage of fools', but even its message would have been stifled in the absence of the evidence of living Christian faith in the lives of the Europeans.

Although Truganini's devotion to Robinson is legendary,⁶⁰ the only person to whom the exiled Aborigines seem to have formed even the vaguest attachment was Robert Clark, the enigmatic Anglican catechist. He was an unsophisticated man, eccentric, and generally disliked by the other staff. Robinson wrote in his journal:

He had on a check shirt, no waistcoat, old greasy dirty fustian jacket which he had worn until as Mrs Nicholls observed would make excellent soup if boiled. . . the legs were without hose and quite bare and dirty heavy shoes and he had on his head an old travelling cap. . . when he prays his eyes are open. . . he is an inveterate smoker and is very uncleanly in his person. . .⁶¹

Robinson's opinion of Clark alternated between praise and criticism. He could write of Mr and Mrs Clark as being faithful, zealous people but also that Clark was irritable and had a 'suspicious disposition'. Clark was often accused of neglecting the secular aspects of his work, such as the proper care of the children in the dormitories. He was also criticised by most commandants and seems to have alienated many of the Europeans. He always referred to the Aborigines as his 'black brethren' although some recent opinion questions the extent to which these feelings were reciprocated.⁶² It is, however, likely that those who criticised him disapproved of his ease with the Aborigines. James Bonwick, who knew him, paints a very different picture:

He gained the confidence of all. He would sit down on the ground with the men, and smoke his pipe with them, while listening to their yarns of hunting and war, when he would appeal to them, in their own soft tones, about him who loved the dark-skinned race, and yearned over them for good. With the women he was ever a favourite; having the ready kind word and smile

for each, with a bit of ribbon for one, a piece of tobacco for another, a joke for a third, and good counsel for all. Mrs Clark was a helpmate to her husband, and their children were school-mates and playmates with the natives.⁶³

Clark remained long after Robinson had gone to his better paid position as Chief Protector of Aborigines in NSW. It seems that it was not only Clark's antisocial behaviour among the Europeans but his concentration on Christian teaching which made him unpopular with the later Flinders Island officials. One commandant, Henry Nickolls, complained to the Governor of Clark's emphasis on the gospel. The Colonial Secretary's reply forcefully supported Clark's priorities, but it was also a powerful statement of the 'Christianity precedes civilisation' principle:

...the Lieutenant Governor [Arthur] is by no means assured of the accuracy of your reasoning as to the best mode of instructing the Aborigines, nor is he aware that any attempt at civilisation should precede scriptural instruction, such an opinion being at direct variance with missionary experience in every part of the heathen world, in Greenland, in America, in Africa, while its practical application would be in diametrical opposition to the divine command to preach the gospel to 'every creature', to man in every part of the world, in every different state as regards civilisation.

In truth, the inculcation of the first principles of the religion, not of nature, as it is called, but of the Bible, is the most effectual mode of introducing civilisation; His Excellency conceives it, therefore, to be of the very greatest importance that every practicable facility should be given to the catechist in the performance of his most important duties. . .

I am therefore to request that you will not interfere with the catechist in the performance of his duties, but that he may be allowed free and unrestrained intercourse with the Aborigines, at all times when convenient to him, and I am to desire that you will by every possible way expedite the completion of the building intended to be used as a school house and the place for the performance of divine worship and, if anything is required and has been omitted, which is likely to promote the spiritual or moral welfare of the Aborigines, or that may be conducive to their health, no time is to be lost in reporting such, as the Lieutenant Governor earnestly desires their welfare.⁶⁴

It has been pointed out that this rhetoric is not so far from the view of Sir Humphrey Gilbert that 'Christianity was more than a fair exchange for the wealth of the Indies', and that in Tasmania, the cheapness of providing 'Christianity' rather than justice was attractive to Treasury attitudes.⁶⁵ Cheap it certainly was. All that they were given was Clark, with all his weaknesses. It is to his eternal credit that he not only tried to teach them sincerely, but stayed with them for life. In view of Bonwick's opinions, it may be possible that this strange man has been judged too harshly.⁶⁶ Many writers recorded inspiring Christian deaths on Flinders Island. I do not dare to suggest that this justifies their treatment in any way, but Clark was, finally, all they had and behind his strangeness some of them saw enough compassion to want to know the Christ of whom he preached.

Governor Arthur, perhaps alone of all Van Diemen's Land officials, felt a personal responsibility, even guilt, for the fate of the Aborigines:

Undoubtedly, the being reduced to the necessity of driving a simple but warlike, and, as it now appears, noble minded race, from their native hunting grounds, is a measure in itself so distressing, that I am willing to make almost any prudent sacrifice that may tend to compensate for the injuries that government is unwillingly and unavoidably the instrument of inflicting.⁶⁷

Arthur issued instructions in 1836 that the Aborigines were to want for nothing in order to prevent their extinction, instructions which were surely too late once extinction was all but inevitable. Indeed, two weeks after he issued them, he was recalled to England.

Death was perpetually present on Flinders Island. Of the 242 people who had, in hope, given themselves up into exile, only forty-four remained in 1847 and the Government removed them to Oyster Cove at the Derwent mouth, not far from Hobart. Here they were more or less left to their own devices with grants of food and clothing. They instantly became the victims of the lust of white settlers. The Clarks lived with them but could do little. Some became alcoholics. Most became sick. They died rapidly of European diseases. So did Clark.

Bonwick gives the following account of their last days:

Mr Clark was spared the grief of seeing the worst. His wife's health was affected by the ill-conditioned quarters allotted to her family. She was removed to Hobart Town for a change, and died there. Her tender-hearted husband returned to Oyster Cove a changed man. He had lost a partner indeed. He strove at first to forget the past and live for his future, but his future had been bound up with the life of his wife and the life of his natives. The first had gone, the second was going. Why should he stay? In a few weeks, the melancholy of the Aborigines seemed to fall heavily upon him. He took to his bed of death.⁶⁸

Clark's epitaph was perhaps the words of Pinnano-bathae, one of the last of the Aboriginal women, who called herself Bessy Clark, after Robert Clark's wife, Elizabeth. 'Very good man! All the blackfellows love him.'⁶⁹

After Clark's death, almost all pretence at Christian care was abandoned. The people at Oyster Cove were visited occasionally by a local clergyman, the Rev. Freeman, to 'admonish them against drunkenness and immorality',⁷⁰ but the Aborigines disliked this man and hid in the bush when he came.⁷¹ The Aborigines themselves were conscious that they had been neglected. 'They think we have got no souls now,' said one of them.⁷²

The Christian church had failed them.

There were a few people of full Aboriginal descent apart from the exiles. They were all women, mostly those who had been married to or abducted by sealers and still lived with them on the Bass Strait islands. All but a few of these women were treated cruelly. Many had been abducted as very young girls and knew no other life and set of values than those of the sealers. The last of them, Julia, wife of Edward Mansell the sealer, died in 1867. Julia and Edward Mansell's descendants are a well-known Tasmanian Aboriginal family today.

The last Aboriginal man of full Aboriginal descent was William Lanney. The youngest of the men taken from Flinders Island to Oyster Cove, he worked for some years on whaling ships. He died of cholera in 1867 and was given a large funeral, attended by the crews of the whaling fleet and many of the residents of Hobart.⁷³ The pall-bearers included three black crewmen from the whaling ships: an American negro, a Kangaroo Island Aborigine

and an Hawaiian. The coffin was draped with possum skins and a Union Jack.

Lanney's body was of scientific interest as the last male of his race. The morgue where his body was kept was entered and, in a brilliant piece of macabre surgery, Lanney's head was skinned and replaced with the skull of a dead white man from the same morgue. When this was discovered, the authorities suspected that the rest of the body would be stolen from the grave and reunited with its proper head. To make it worthless, they removed the hands and feet. They then closed and sealed the coffin, stamping the wax with the only seal they could find, bearing the one word 'world'.

Thus, draped with the flag of the Empire which did not recognise him, stamped with the 'world', and carried by blacks of three other races, William Lanney's mutilated body with a white man's head was carried through the streets of Hobart to its grave. Not even there did it rest. The body was stolen from its grave the same night, but it does not seem that the pieces were ever reunited.⁷⁴

The last of the Flinders Island exiles to die was the legendary Truganini, dubbed 'Queen' by romantic whites when she was thought to be all that remained.⁷⁵ She was forever haunted by the butchering of William Lanney's corpse. One of her dying requests in 1876 was: 'Don't let them cut me, but bury me behind the mountains.'⁷⁶

She died in the home of Mr and Mrs James Dandridge at two o'clock on 8 May 1876 at the age of sixty-four. In her last words, she did not name Christ but Rowra, her tribal spirit who, she believed, had come to take her.

Despite pressure to retain her skeleton, Truganini was buried, but shortly after her body was exhumed in the name of science and her skeleton displayed for sixty years in the Tasmanian Museum until 1947. Then, after twenty years of argument about the skeleton, Truganini's bones were cremated in 1976 and scattered on the waters of D'Entrecasteaux Channel, a century after her death.⁷⁷

At the time of Truganini's death, it had seemed to most people that an era had passed. The guilty salved their consciences by convincing themselves that the death of a race was God's will, and unavoidable. There were even those who thought it a conse-

quence of disobeying God. They have not complied with the conditions on which the Lord of the whole earth granted to the first progenitors of our race this habitable world,' wrote Rev. T. Atkins in 1859. The Aborigines of Tasmania, he said, *had failed to subdue the earth.*⁷⁸

As the many surviving descendants of Tasmanian Aboriginal women and European men quite rightly point out today, Tasmanian Aboriginality was not extinguished with the death of the last people of full Aboriginal descent. In this sense the romantic legends which grew up around the person of Truganini have not helped their cause. 'Her sun has set for ever,' said Hugo Munro Hull in a lecture the year before Truganini died. He went on to say:

Along the shores of D'Entrecasteaux's Channel lingers the last Tasmanian Aboriginal, whose husband and fathers have long since passed to far happier hunting grounds.

We must come to the conclusion that the beneficent Creator never intended Tasmania to be the permanent home of the savage, but to be filled with a free, an honest and a gentle people.⁷⁹

Not everyone agreed that the genocide was inevitable. Among those who did not was Governor George Arthur, forever angry at his own impotence in the face of a tragedy which he believed could have been averted:

It was a fatal error in the first settlement of Van Diemen's Land, that a treaty was not entered into with the natives. . . had they received some compensation on the territory they surrendered, no matter how trifling, and had adequate laws been from the very first introduced and enforced for their protection, His Majesty's Government would have acquired a valuable possession without the injurious consequences which have followed our occupation and which must forever remain a stain upon the colonisation of Van Diemen's Land.⁸⁰

Early Queensland missions

The second quarter of the nineteenth century saw rapid extension of white settlement towards the northern regions of NSW into what is now Queensland, but was then the Moreton Bay District. In

1824 a new penal settlement for doubly-convicted prisoners was established on Moreton Bay itself, at the mouth of the Brisbane River. By 1840, the first squatters had overlanded their flocks to the rich Darling Downs.

The ingredients of intense frontier conflict were all present: a sea-borne invasion by twice-convicted felons and their reluctant jailers, closely followed by an overland invasion of squatters. Among these were ex-convicts and other fortune-seekers, determined to find, occupy and develop the northern land. Awaiting their arrival were Aboriginal groups as yet not directly affected by a European presence, but increasingly aware of its potential consequences for them.

Although Aboriginal people often experienced European aggression, it took a long time for many Aboriginal groups to realise that they were being dispossessed of their land. While conflict was certainly part of traditional Aboriginal life, land conquest was not. Aborigines throughout the continent did not always react to the first white presence with violence. If they did not at first resist the invasion of their country, it was because they were not aware that an invasion had occurred. Reynolds states: 'They certainly did not believe that their land had suddenly ceased to belong to them . . . The mere presence of Europeans, no matter how threatening, could not uproot certainties so deeply implanted in Aboriginal custom and consciousness.'⁸¹

On many occasions when the arrival of Europeans was met with violence, it can be shown that the Aborigines had already encountered white aggression or had, at the very least, heard of it from their neighbours. It is quite evident that Aboriginal people did not need to have had direct experience with white people in order to know about them. News of white people and their activities passed rapidly and accurately along Aboriginal information networks far into what Reynolds calls 'the other side of the frontier'.⁸² Some of the clearest evidence of this comes from the reminiscences of escaped convicts and shipwreck survivors, some of whom lived for many years with Aboriginal people.

An important Queensland example of one such shipwreck survivor was James Morrell, a sailor on the *Peruvian*, wrecked on Horseshoe Reef in 1846. He lived with the Jurn and Bindal people of what is now the Townsville region for seventeen years.⁸³ During Morrell's sojourn with them, these groups received information on

overland expeditions, such as those of Leichhardt, Mitchell or Gregory, despite the fact that these explorers passed hundreds of kilometres to the west.

From the late 1850s, news of the pastoral occupation of central Queensland, and the accompanying violence, began to reach Morrell. As the months passed, the information increased both in frequency and detail. Morrell was given accurate descriptions of the strange new animals – cattle, sheep and horses – and of saddles and harnesses. He heard of guns, of their noise and smoke, of their power to kill, of a funeral party interrupted and a mourner shot. People became increasingly apprehensive and met to discuss the potential new threat.

Finally in 1863 stockmen arrived in the neighbourhood with a huge herd of cattle. Morrell gave himself up to them, ending his seventeen year exile.⁸⁴ As Reynolds notes, 'For his Aboriginal kinsmen, the events were even more portentous; many thousands of years of freedom from outside interference were coming to an abrupt and bloody end.'⁸⁵

It is clear, therefore, that Aboriginal people of the Moreton Bay region would have been quite aware of the potential threat posed to them by white invaders. The penal colony settlers, arriving by sea, may have been a surprise, but they soon demonstrated the same aggression which was to become much more intensified as the overlanders arrived. Nevertheless, throughout Australia there developed a tradition that whites coming by sea were somewhat less dangerous than those coming by land.

Aborigines of southern Queensland would certainly have been told of the bitter struggle and relentless violence in what is now northern NSW. They would, for example, have heard of the massacre on the Orara River where large numbers of Aborigines were shot in retaliation for a theft on Ramornie Station, which was subsequently found to have been committed by a white employee. For some days bodies floated down the Orara River into the Clarence River and past the new township of Grafton.⁸⁶

There was still, however, a general preparedness on the part of many Aboriginal people, particularly if they had not yet experienced large-scale violence, to hope they might benefit from white contact, and to judge individual newcomers on their own merits. This was indeed fortunate for the first missionaries who arrived in the region.

The first mission interest was on the part of Presbyterians. Presbyterians in NSW had for some time demonstrated a growing concern regarding their neglect of the Aboriginal people. It was not, however, until the controversial clergyman, Rev. Dr John Dunmore Lang, promoted the idea of a mission in the late 1830s that anything was actually done. The Presbyterians wanted to locate a mission away from the problems of Sydney, yet not totally isolate it from white settlement. They also wanted to establish their work where it would not compete with existing Church of England or other missions. In these pre-ecumenical years, denominational competitiveness was often a strong factor in church decisions regarding Aboriginal evangelisation. Lang settled on the idea of siting the mission in the vicinity of the new settlement on Moreton Bay.

There was at the time a shortage of Presbyterian clergy in the colony. Lang was sufficiently astute to realise that any English-speaking clergy brought out as missionaries would be lured to town parishes. He proposed that the Presbyterians invite German Lutheran missionaries.⁸⁷ Lang was in touch with Johannes Gossner who headed the Gossner Mission and its associated missionary training school in Berlin. Gossner was against lengthy missionary training, believing that the 'godly mechanic' made a better missionary to 'savage heathen' than the highly trained scholar. Another of his precepts was that missionaries should support themselves by their own labour: 'I promise you nothing, you must go in faith. And if you cannot go in faith, you had better not go at all.'⁸⁸

Both these principles appealed to Lang. He approved of godly mechanics, so long as they were under the guidance of soundly trained clergy.⁸⁹ He also knew that the Presbyterians quite possibly would not donate particularly generously to the Aboriginal mission.

Gossner despatched twelve missionaries. They were mostly young men in their twenties and most of them were accompanied by wives and children. Two, Christopher Eipper and K. William Schmidt, were ordained clergy. The other ten, people representing a range of trades, were John Hausmann, Peter Niquet, Friedrich Franz, August Olbrecht, Augustus Rode, Gottfried Wagner, Willhelm Hartenstein, John Zillmann, Louis Doege and Moritz Schneider.⁹⁰

It is said that they each wore a silver medallion bearing a plough and an altar, with an ox between and the words inscribed on it 'Ready for Either'.⁹¹

They arrived in Australia in 1838 where Schneider died of typhoid fever. The others went on to Moreton Bay in two groups, one with Eipper arriving in April and the second with Schmidt in June. Not a great deal is known of their first years, as few of their diaries of the period survive. They were supported initially by Sydney Presbyterians and grants from colonial government funds arranged by the sympathetic commandant of Moreton Bay, Major Cotton.

They were at first allocated disused buildings at Humpy Bong, now Redcliffe, but found themselves in danger from the local Aboriginal people. This was another clear case of the heritage of previous bad experiences of whites. As Meston put it, the Aboriginal people had known only 'three types of white men - the chained convict, the armed soldier in a ridiculous costume and the tyrannical overseers'.⁹² Their experience with these was not calculated to make the missionaries immediately welcome.

Eventually they were allocated a more protected location much closer to Brisbane at Noonga Creek, now Nundah. They named the creek 'Brook Kedron' (John 18: 1) and the mission 'Zion Hill', although everyone else called it 'German Station'.⁹³ They intended to make their mission self-supporting as rapidly as possible. The *Colonist* was impressed with their financial restraint, contrasting them with the previous appointment of Johann Handt, referred to earlier. The *Colonist* belonged to Lang who welcomed the opportunity to criticise the expensive failures of the other missions:

As a specimen of the spirit of devotedness to their work. . . Rev. K.W. Schmidt, a regularly ordained clergyman of the Prussian church, who had studied at the Universities of Halle and Berlin, wrought like a common mechanic at the building of his own cottage at the missionary settlement at Moreton Bay, and it is the general desire of the missionaries to reduce the expenditure by their own labour. . . The German missionaries. . . will have been brought out from the heart of Germany, across the vast oceans. . . and settled and supported for two years in this colony. . . for considerably less than it cost a single missionary

and his family to proceed from Sydney to this settlement. . . and to subsist for a similar period. . . [This] is proof positive of the prudence and discretion with which the whole affairs of the German mission have been conducted.⁹⁴

Ironically, this very 'prudence and discretion' was to be one of the causes of the mission's failure. The preoccupation of missionaries with their own living conditions became a common feature of many missions over the next 150 years, but it was especially evident in any mission which was intended to be self-supporting. The achievement of economic viability took precedence over other mission activities. The soil at Zion Hill was quite fertile, but it would have taken many years even under ideal conditions to become self-sufficient. The missionaries frequently resorted to wheeling a crudely-constructed wheelbarrow the thirteen kilometres to the military barracks to beg bones and offal. They learnt to eat local food including 'roots, snakes, iguanas, possums, native bears and bandicoots'.⁹⁵

An important secondary aim of their farming efforts was to demonstrate to the Aboriginal people the advantages of a settled village life. For this reason, as well as for their own subsistence, the missionaries were reluctant to give away too much food to the Aborigines, although they also wanted Aborigines to see the results of growing food for themselves. Aborigines had quite a different view, believing they had a right to take food growing on their own land. This brought them into continual confrontation with the missionaries, whose tin dish, beaten to summon the missionaries to worship, signalled to the Aborigines that the vegetables would be unguarded.⁹⁶

On at least one occasion, the missionaries fired on the Aborigines 'in order to frighten and drive them away' from the gardens. The incident was the subject of an enquiry by the Moreton Bay commandant, Lieut. O. Gorman.⁹⁷ Eventually the missionaries sought military protection, which did not help their already difficult relationship with the Aborigines.

The German missionaries spoke very little English. Despite this, they endeavoured to run a school for Aboriginal children. As was invariably reported from all such mission schools, they found the children intelligent, quick to learn and at least the intellectual equivalent of European children. They were, however, discouraged

by the children's irregular attendance patterns and believed the school could only succeed by separating the children from their parents.

This was yet another case of the missionaries and the Aborigines having differing agendas. To the missionaries, schooling was part of a civilising process, a strategy to change the children. It was particularly important to the missionaries because of the general belief that there was little they could do to change the adults. To the children, the novelty of schooling had a brief initial appeal. They saw no more purpose in it than in many of the other seemingly pointless tasks for which the missionaries paid the Aboriginal people. Schmidt reported that the children expected wages. They think, he said, 'that the scholars work, during instruction, for the benefit of the teacher, and expect therefore payment for attending school'.⁹⁸

The Lutheran clergy travelled among other nearby Aboriginal groups, but according to Schmidt did not find their efforts achieved anything:

Poor creatures! Our hearts break, our souls faint on account of the great misery in which they languish, 'their God being their belly'. . . We endeavoured to speak to them about spiritual things, but they could not conceive them, and as soon as I read to them some passages from the sacred scriptures, which I had translated with Bracefield, they fell asleep. Only one listened attentively a few minutes and told us, rubbing his belly, that it did good to his bowels and desired me to read more. He had, however, scarcely uttered his wish, when he, like the rest, answered with snoring upon our questions.⁹⁹

The Lutheran missionaries found themselves with a real dilemma. Aboriginal people became increasingly attracted to the rum, tobacco and food obtainable in Brisbane, especially by prostitution. The missionaries could only attract the Aborigines to the mission with food and tobacco, but they hardly had enough for themselves. Aboriginal numbers at the mission therefore fluctuated wildly causing the missionaries considerable frustration, for they conceived that an unbroken Aboriginal presence at the mission was essential to its success.

Relationships with local pastoralists were, as was usually the

case with missions, strained. Schmidt and Eipper, while prepared to be outspoken about Aboriginal faults, were much less prepared to alienate the settlers, and refrained from speaking out even when they should. Schmidt, for example, said nothing public about his knowledge of the large-scale poisoning of Aborigines early in 1842. In an enquiry in 1843, he told Commissioner Simpson that he had thought it unnecessary to say anything 'concerning that most horrid event', because he thought the authorities knew about it and would enquire into it. Simpson, however, commented that Schmidt was motivated 'by fear of offending the squatters'.¹⁰⁰

There had never been effective support for the mission in the Presbyterian churches, so in 1842 a committee was formed more widely representative of Protestant churches. Lang was co-secretary with the Rev. Dr Robert Ross of Pitt Street Congregational Church, while other members included the Rev. John Saunders of the Baptists, the Rev. Lancelot Threlkeld and the Congregational merchant, David Jones.¹⁰¹ This was probably as good a committee as could be put together in Sydney, but was already too late. The missionaries, particularly the clergy, Schmidt and Eipper, were already depressed and pessimistic, their reports giving little encouragement to the committee. Schmidt summed up his feelings at the end of 1843:

And looking upon the work in which we are engaged and observing no coming of the kingdom of God, even the smallest degree, we must sigh with trembling hearts and tears in our eyes, shall we spend here our strength in vain and for nought? Will the Lord not have compassion on these poor creatures?¹⁰²

By the time Schmidt was writing that, the Sydney committee had already made the decision to close the mission. When Governor Gipps declined to give any more assistance, Sydney Presbyterians, hard hit financially by the economic depression of the early 1840s, also ceased their support. The decision to close was taken in August 1843, but the mission lingered on for a while.

Of all the negative attitudes of missionaries to aspects of Aboriginal culture, this particular group of Lutherans seems to have been particularly intolerant. Whether or not, as one historian suggests, this has anything to do with 'national temperament',¹⁰³ it is nevertheless true that their judgments were exceptionally

scathing. To Eipper, Aborigines were the living embodiment of Philippians 3:19. He said:

. . . [Aborigines' savage nature was] clearly evinced in their intercourse with each other when they are excited by hatred, jealousy, or carnal passions. . . Their God is their belly: their will, or rather their passions, are their law, as long as they are able through violence and cruelty to maintain their point.¹⁰⁴

To Eipper, venereal diseases contracted from the whites were the righteous judgment of God: it was 'that shocking malady which Divine Providence has wisely ordained as the due reward of profligacy'.¹⁰⁵

Before the mission commenced, Schmidt had felt that the Aborigines' 'unusually degraded state offers an opportunity for an unusually glorious display of the power of divine grace'.¹⁰⁶ In a few short years, he came to believe that absolutely nothing could be done for them until the 'Christian churches present the most fervent supplications before the Throne of God on their behalf, that a feeling of their deplorable degradation and wretchedness may be created in them'.¹⁰⁷

Eipper remained at Nundah until 1844, Schmidt until 1845. An arrangement was made for the lay missionaries to retain the mission land and farm it. Due to internal disputes only five of them elected to stay. They were joined by four more Gossner missionaries who had been unable to reach their original destination in the New Hebrides.¹⁰⁸ As well as farming the Nundah land, they tried to open another farming site to the north-west near Caboolture. Aboriginal people resisted this incursion. Tension mounted until John Hausmann was attacked and injured.¹⁰⁹ They then concentrated on the Nundah site. German Station became an important part of the early agricultural development of Queensland. The *Moreton Bay Courier* suggested that on prime land given to them freely, they had done very well for themselves:

The German missionaries, phlegmatic and philosophical, have become the German graziers and market gardeners. . . It may be gratifying to their friends. . . to know that they are 'doing well'; that is, that they have much cattle and their butter and vegetables are much prized in Brisbane, that if their spiritual

harvest has been small, their vegetables are most luxuriant; and that if during their mission they have made no converts, their last increase of calves is at least 90 per cent.¹¹⁰

Eipper became a Presbyterian clergyman for a few years at Braidwood in NSW. After 1851 he served as a teacher and died at Braidwood in 1893. Schmidt became an LMS missionary in Samoa, where he died in 1864. Most of the lay missionaries who left Nundah were ordained in the Presbyterian church, but later in their lives many of them founded Lutheran congregations. One of these, Hausmann, established the Bethesda Aboriginal Mission at Beenleigh which lasted from 1866 to 1883.¹¹¹

* * *

Another churchman who was concerned that something be done for Aboriginal people was Archbishop John Bede Polding. Polding arrived in Sydney in 1835 as head of the Catholic Church in Australia, and by 1840 was deeply concerned at the little that his church was doing for Aborigines. He decided to set some initiatives in motion prior to a trip to Europe, first communicating his feelings to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith ('Propaganda') in Lyons, the organisation responsible for the Catholic Church's missionary work:

I have felt sincere and deep regret for not having a priest to devote to the conversion of the savage nations. I am convinced by my own experience that the faith would easily spread among the tribes which are removed from all intercourse with the Europeans, with whom any contact is commonly a source of corruption. These savages, the object of so much contempt, appear to us intelligent, cheerful and very deserving. I have had from time to time the opportunity of seeing them, and when I speak to them of religion, I find it very easy to make them comprehend. . .¹¹²

Polding was bitterly disappointed that he could not maintain a Benedictine domination in Australia by attracting Benedictine missionaries. He turned instead to the Passionists. With some difficulty he eventually obtained the services of four priests; three Italians, Raymund Vaccari, Luigi Pesciaroli and Maurice Lencioni, and a Swiss, Joseph Snell.¹¹³

In 1843, Polding brought the four Passionist Fathers back

with him from Europe.¹¹⁴ Led by Father Raymund Vaccari, they too were sent to Moreton Bay where they had been granted the use of Stradbroke Island by Governor Gipps.¹¹⁵ Like the Lutherans, they believed their best success would be achieved far from corrupt white society. Polding, in fact, had welcomed the offer of Stradbroke Island because he thought it so barren that no white settlers would want it. Like the Lutherans, they also felt it necessary to have the protection of police or military within reasonable distance until they gained the confidence of the people.

This presented the missionaries with a dilemma because they wanted to keep the Aboriginal people away from the corrupt influence of white frontier town life. They too found that the Aboriginal people were attracted to developing Brisbane: rum, tobacco, and food were obtainable there much more readily and in larger quantities. Neither set of missionaries at first realised that they were dealing with the same group of Aboriginal people who traditionally moved freely between the islands and the coast and now moved freely between there and the two missions and the township.

The Passionist missionaries were particularly upset to discover that Stradbroke Island itself was not the isolated, unchanged place they had imagined. They knew that there had already been a short-lived convict outpost there in 1826 and that it was these buildings they intended to use. They were surprised, however, to find six or seven white men already living on the northern tip of the island at the pilot station established for passing ships. The missionaries noted half-caste children as soon as they arrived. Even before Archbishop Polding, who had gone there to select the mission site, returned to Sydney, three Aboriginal girls were forcibly abducted by a sailor.¹¹⁶

It was true of these men, as it was of all the early missionaries, that the reality of the mission site was nothing like the mission of their imagination before leaving Europe. To make matters worse, these men were of a generally studious and contemplative disposition. Only Snell had had any practical experience, but the convict houses, which were by then badly damaged, were beyond repair. Vaccari wrote at this time:

In this locality there are six or seven rooms, but all one storey high, with an underground passage, and a place large enough to



9. George Augustus Robinson of Tasmania

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10. Wybalenna, the Flinders Island Aboriginal settlement of exile
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11. The last Tasmanian Aborigines at Oyster Cove, about 1860
Acknowledgement: National Library of Australia. Reproduced with permission.

serve as a church. However, this latter and all the other rooms are in a state of ruin through the weather. We agreed to cover up the holes in the room as best we could with some bark from the trees, but it was no use because for the nine months we have been here it has not ceased to rain, summer and winter. Though we have mended the roofs as many as seven times, we are always in water.¹¹⁷

They managed, nevertheless, to construct a small timber chapel and, with Aboriginal help, to decorate it with shells. They also planted vegetable gardens which produced very well in their exceptionally rainy first year.

On Stradbroke Island, the Passionist Fathers began their work with high hopes. Writing to the Archbishop in 1843, Vaccari said he was 'free from anxiety and full of hope for the conversion of these my Aboriginals'. He and his companions were 'bearing joyfully the privations that occur' and learning the local language. Vaccari, however, was almost as negative towards Aboriginal culture as Eipper, and showed that the Protestant work-ethic, so-called, is not exclusively Protestant:

. . .the natives are by nature inconstant and prone to laziness, and they frequently leave us and wander from tribe to tribe for several days and even for a month. . . These poor Aboriginals have naturally strong passions and depraved inclinations, which require time, patience and prayer to overcome them.

Vaccari went on to say that the local people exhibited such traits as 'extreme sloth and laziness', 'fickleness', 'vindictiveness', 'deceit', 'cunning', and 'extreme gluttony'. 'It only remains for me,' he concluded, 'to ask your frequent prayers that these poor Aboriginals may be brought to the knowledge of the truth.'¹¹⁸

A major obstacle the Passionist missionaries had to overcome was communication. Of the four, only Snell knew any English at all. Vaccari, preaching in Sydney, had been obliged to use Latin. Had they spoken English, they may have been able to speak to the local people sooner, as the Aborigines had already acquired some English, but even Snell found it difficult to understand the Aboriginal pidgin. None of them had any real flair for languages. Although Vaccari reported after six months that they could con-

verse 'on the ordinary matters of everyday life',¹¹⁹ they were very largely unable to speak of spiritual matters:

You see, then, our poor islanders are still very far from the holy ideas of faith. The means of inculcating them would be to preach readily to them in their native tongue. Their language is difficult. . . . (which) makes it hard for us to express an opinion in regard to their conversion, for we are not yet able to explain the truths of faith to them in their own tongue in a way that would bring results; but God is omnipotent and will not allow the trust we have placed in his infinite mercy since our arrival here to be confounded. . . .¹²⁰

It was not long before food shortages added to their difficulties. The Catholic mission was not significantly better off than the Lutherans. Eventually they decided never to give out food except in return for work, but this was not a principle readily acceptable to the Aboriginal people who felt a right to that which grew on their own land. It was a continual frustration to the missionaries that food, rum and tobacco were easier for the Aborigines to obtain in Brisbane, particularly through prostitution.

Eventually, like so many of the Protestant missionaries, they concluded that there was nothing they could do for the adults. They believed they could do something for the children by segregating them from their parents, but ruefully acknowledged that they did not have the resources to feed and clothe a large number of children.

Baptism of the children was a controversial issue for the Pas-sionists. Favouring a purely sacramental approach, Archbishop Polding had instructed the missionaries to baptise all the young children irrespective of their family background. The missionaries, however, by comparison with general Catholic mission strategy, adopted an unusually non-sacramental attitude. They would not baptise children whose parents were not Christian, believing the baptism would serve no purpose. Pesciaroli said:

Should we perhaps have baptised the children of the Aborigines and then having baptised them should we have abandoned them again and allowed them to wander about with their parents and live as they lived? But in such circumstances what purpose would their baptism serve? It would perhaps have

worked miracles? Such an idea, however, never even entered our heads. On the contrary and in accordance with the teachings of moral theology, we resolved that considering the actual conditions under which the Aboriginal children were living we should not baptise them.¹²¹

As a result they only baptised some part-Aboriginal children brought for baptism by European fathers, and some children who were dying.¹²²

Again, like so many of the other missions, internal disputes and external church politics hastened the demise of the mission. It was very poorly funded, and the Passionists often found it difficult to obtain sufficient supplies. Polding, despite the sincerity of his attempt to assist Aboriginal people, proved to be an inept administrator.

There was, furthermore, a rift between Vaccari and the other missionaries. Vaccari had been made Prefect-Apostolic of the mission which placed him outside the jurisdiction of Archbishop Polding and led to considerable tension. Finally, when John Brady, who had been Vicar-General of Western Australia, was consecrated Bishop of Perth, he obtained approval from the Sacred Congregation to ask the three junior priests to set up an Aboriginal mission in his diocese.¹²³

Snell, Lencioni and Pesciaroli deserted Stradbroke in June 1846 in an open boat and reached Brisbane from where they obtained passage to Sydney.¹²⁴ Vaccari struggled on for another year. He was unable to prevent the pilfering of his crops and found himself in confrontation with one of the Aboriginal men. When he sought protection from the Brisbane police, it marked a psychological turning point, an end to the 'time, patience, and prayer' which he had said were the only means of success. He left alone in an open boat in 1847, reached Tweed Heads and thence by ship to Sydney.¹²⁵

Father Maurice Lencioni summed it up for them all in a letter to Rome from Sydney in 1848:

Prostrate at the feet of your Eminence, I humbly and earnestly request you to obtain sufficient monetary assistance to enable me to return to Italy where, without doubt, I can do a little more for my own spiritual welfare and that of my neighbour than I

can do on this mission. An unhappy experience covering five years has convinced me of this, for those years have produced nothing but useless sufferings and inconveniences.¹²⁶

Lencioni never did get back to Italy, nor did any of them reach Western Australia. Lencioni and Snell both became respected priests in Adelaide. Pesciaroli was less successful and his congregation took up a collection and paid his fare to Italy.

There are mysteries associated with Vaccari. He apparently sailed to Valparaiso under the assumed name of Wilson, although he spoke virtually no English. Thirteen years later he was found working as a gardener in a Franciscan Friary in Lima. The Franciscans, discovering his status, asked him to stay. He became a Franciscan and died in Lima.¹²⁷

In 1845, a Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines was appointed by the Legislative Council of NSW and chaired by Richard Windeyer. The Select Committee interviewed personally or by questionnaire a large number of people in order to consider 'the condition of the Aborigines and the best means of promoting their welfare'.¹²⁸ Only one of those interviewed was an Aboriginal person. Schmidt, of the Lutheran mission, and Archbishop Polding were interviewed at length and much can be gauged from their responses, particularly their views on why the missions had failed.

Schmidt, it is obvious, found it difficult to conceal his personal disillusionment and bitterness. He blamed three things for the failure of Zion Hill: financial difficulties, the failure to see any spiritual success and the proximity of white settlement. When pressed, he acknowledged that immoral white society was the major problem. Schmidt's dilemma is evident in his concluding remarks to the committee. He believed that missionary efforts would fail near white settlement, but he also believed that the missionaries needed protection. His conclusion is horrifying:

It is evident that a mission station situated near the principal settlement, or in the immediate neighbourhood of squatting stations will never prosper. . . A mission far in the interior cannot exist without the protection of a police force, or else the missionary must hold in his left hand the gospel of peace, and in his right hand the weapon of war.¹²⁹

Schmidt also stated that Aborigines had to be made aware of their wickedness. Success would not attend missionary effort until the whole church fervently prayed to God to create in the Aborigines 'a feeling of their deplorable degradation and wretchedness'.¹³⁰

Polding approached the committee quite differently. The committee included Lang with whom he had had many disputes, and Polding's careful answers reveal that he had no intention of being manoeuvred into giving answers the committee wanted to hear:

Q. Looking to the Aborigines, generally, as members of the human family, what does your Lordship consider their position to be in the scale of humanity?

A. That is a very difficult question.

Q. Do you consider them the lowest in the scale, or exceedingly low?

A. We must first have the scale to determine by - I do not understand the phrase 'scale of humanity' as it is generally used.

Q. Are you aware that the children of Aborigines of this country have been taken by settlers and brought up in their families and that these children, after they have become adults, have abandoned their civilised habits and gone into the bush?

A. And what harm was there in that?¹³¹

Polding was confident that the real reasons for the failure of missions was much deeper than the immediate practical difficulties faced by the missionaries. The short-term reasons he attributed to the evil influence of corrupt white society, while the long-term reason was related to the manner in which Aboriginal people had been dispossessed:

Q. Can you account for the difference of success that has attended the missionaries' efforts with regard to New South Wales, as compared with the neighbouring islands? Does it not appear an anomaly of an inscrutable character?

A. I think it may be attributed to the settlement of white men among them, who have introduced vicious habits.

This is one reason, but in great part, the want of success must be attributed to the bad feeling and want of confidence, naturally caused by the mode in which possession has been taken of

their country – occupation by force, accompanied by murders, ill-treatment, ravishment of their women, in a word, to the conviction on their minds that the white man has come for his own advantage, without any regard to their rights.

Feeling this burning injustice inflicted by the white man, it is not in the nature of things that the black man should believe the white man better than himself, or suppose the moral and religious laws, by which the white man proposes the black man to be governed, to be better than those of his own tribe.

Let charity and Christian equity – the means which the grace of God employs for the dissemination of truth amongst uncivilised natives – be used, and from esteem and affection will proceed confidence. Without this you will neither civilise nor Christianise.¹³²

Like his contemporary, Lang, Polding was a controversial figure who gave almost a lifetime of colourful service to the Australian community. For a generation, Polding was perhaps the most consistently outspoken church leader on the subject of the mistreatment of Aborigines, and the church's duty towards them. As Archbishop, it was a frequent subject of his forthright pastoral letters, in one of which he wrote:

We have dispossessed the Aboriginal of the soil. . . In natural justice, then, we are held to compensation. We are held by all claims of natural pity, and kindness, and justice. . .

But why speak of natural justice and compassion only to you who are Christians and Catholics? We know with certainty of faith that God has made of one all mankind, *fecit ex uno omne genus hominum*; that Christ died for all, *pro omnibus mortuus est Christus*; and therefore, that these Aborigines, who seem, and who are indeed so low, are still our fellow-creatures, fallen from the same natural and supernatural gifts of origin, heirs of the same redemption and regeneration through Christ. We know too, with the certainty of faith, that we who have received the gospel of Christ are bound to communicate it to them. 'Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost'.

This, then, is what white men should have done; in this light of faith they should have acted towards the black men of this continent. The combined influence and means of the incoming nation, since it professed to be a nation of Christians, should

have been applied to protect, and teach, and make disciples of Christ those poor children of the soil, where they have found new homes and worldly wealth. Alas! it is shocking to think of what has, in fact, been done.

With very little, with short-lived exception, injustice, neglect, cruelty, and, a million times worse, the actual teaching of vice, have branded the annals of white men. The stain of blood is upon us – blood has been shed far otherwise than in self-defence – blood, in needless and wanton cruelty. It is said, even now, that as Europeans progress northwards, blood is so shed. Shall we not protest against this? Bishops and priests, all ministers and disciples of Christ, shall they not protest by word and deed?¹³³

Early Victorian missions

When Port Phillip formally became a settlement in 1836, Aboriginal people of the region had already learnt to be in fear of Europeans. White people had been in the area since at least 1802, although the first permanent settlers, apart from the notorious escaped convict, William Buckley, were Tasmanian pastoralists in the early 1830s.

In 1803 there was an abortive attempt to settle Port Phillip under Lieutenant Colonel David Collins, who abandoned the site after four months and went to Tasmania instead. William Pascoe Crook's description of their first encounter with Aboriginal people speaks for itself:

When we first came into the harbour Capt. Mertho went with a few people into a lagoon that is in the north-west part of the harbour to examine it. Here, as they approached the shore, they perceived a native on the beach with a shield and spear, brandishing his weapon as if to prevent their landing. A musket was fired over his head, when he ran, and was joined by others out of the bushes. . . The party landed, went into a hut, where they found fire. They brought away a bark basket with them, and threw about the fire in such a manner that it communicated to the hut and burnt it.

What impression this first visit made on the savages I leave you, sir, to judge. A party has been out twice for several days together, and have explored the whole harbour. They saw natives in several places. . . At one place they assembled in great numbers when the parties separated, and alarmed them so that

the other party arriving at the time were called on to fire, which they did, and wounded some and made them all fly. It was thought necessary to show them the effect of firearms; therefore one native, who had sat for some time under a tree, but who was following after the rest, was fired at by three persons at the same time and killed. The sailors stripped him, and brought away his ornaments and weapons.¹³⁴

Aggressive European action once more marked the early contacts between the two races. By the time the first missionaries arrived, soon after Port Phillip was formally recognised, violence and counter-violence had already escalated. Among all the regions where white settlement was particularly aggressive, some parts of Victoria were the most ruthlessly and violently conquered in Australia. Vast tracts of land were available merely for the license fee. They were very profitable, wrote Niel Black in his 1839 diary, 'provided the conscience of the party was sufficiently seared to enable him to, without remorse, slaughter natives right and left.'¹³⁵

In ghastly repetition of what had occurred in Tasmania, white settlers not only killed, but took delight in it. The Rev. Joseph Orton, Superintendent of Wesleyan Missions in Australia, recorded that some Aborigines in Victoria had been crucified.¹³⁶ James Dredge, one of the Christian Protectors of Aborigines in Victoria, obtained first-hand evidence of the most horrific atrocities:

In one case, the belly of a black man is ripped open, and an intestine is severed, one end of which is nailed to a tree, and the wretched being driven round and round until his bowels are wound round the tree - and death releases him from unutterable agonies.¹³⁷

The first missionary effort in what is now Victoria was sponsored by the Government. With a new settlement at Port Phillip, Governor Bourke was anxious to make a fresh start with 'civilising' the Aborigines. Bourke and Judge Burton of the Supreme Court, both of whom had had administrative experience with the Kaffirs at Cape of Good Hope, worked together on the plans.¹³⁸ Their basic strategy was to provide model villages for the Aborigines. Gifts followed by kind treatment were to be the initial means of attracting them there and all work was to be

rewarded in food and clothing. The villages were to be managed along the lines of Robert Owen's socialist experiment at New Lanark, Yorkshire: 'The great object will be gradually to wean the Blacks by proving to them experimentally the superior gratifications to be obtained in civilised life.'¹³⁹

Bourke appointed George Langhorne, the Church of England catechist from Sydney, to be in charge of the experiment. William Buckley, the former convict who had escaped from Collins' party in 1803 and lived with the Port Phillip Aborigines for thirty-two years, was made his intermediary. Langhorne stated from the outset that the only hope for such a scheme was to site it far from white corruption but Bourke disagreed. Part of Bourke's master plan was to 'amalgamate' the two races by bringing Aborigines into contact with lower classes of whites under controlled circumstances.¹⁴⁰ This was not the first occasion such an idea had been proposed. The NSW colonial authorities had once considered the extreme idea of bringing out lower class white women and giving them to Aboriginal men.

Bourke consequently established the station on the Yarra River about four kilometres from the town. Being supported by the Government and in close proximity to Melbourne, Langhorne did not have the worry of developing a mission station. As with many of these efforts, there was an immediate illusion of success. In this case, gifts, kindness and free houses were bound to attract many interested Aboriginal people. The mistaken logic is much more obvious now than it appears to have been at the time. To the whites, the gifts and kindness had a sincere but ulterior motive. The recipients were supposed to respond by obediently adopting the new lifestyle offered to them. To the Aborigines, it was simply that some white people were giving out food, clothing and shelter. They did not know there was a trick attached to it. They did not know they were expected to respond in a particular way.

The mission rapidly became little more than a free temporary home for Aborigines attracted to Melbourne from all over the district. Langhorne went against his own principles and removed some boys for schooling.¹⁴¹ He finally requested that the mission be moved to a more remote location but Bourke refused. The mission was abandoned in 1839. Langhorne joined his brothers in some pastoral endeavours but later regarded their financial failure

as punishment for neglect of his duties to the Aborigines. He resumed his studies and became a Church of England clergyman.¹⁴² In retrospect, he felt his views had been proven: 'I have ever been convinced that nothing short of isolation from intercourse with the whites would suffice to save a remnant of the Aborigines from destruction and the event has proven I was right.'¹⁴³

Meanwhile, the Wesleyan Missionary Society (WMS) decided to re-enter the Australian mission field. Orton, chairman at the time of the NSW Methodists, was keen to recommence missionary work in Australia. He had come from Jamaica, where he had been imprisoned during the anti-slavery agitation. Disappointed that his new appointment was 'not sufficiently missionary in its character', he tried to compensate by developing an interest in Aboriginal people.¹⁴⁴ Orton was impressed with the potential of a mission at Port Phillip. Assured of a government grant of £400 per annum, the WMS sent two ordained missionaries, Benjamin Hurst and Francis Tuckfield. In 1839, the Government granted land on the south side of the Barwon River, near Geelong. The missionaries named it Buntingdale, after Jabez Bunting, chairman of the WMS.

Much careful planning preceded the Buntingdale mission and some of the strategies were quite progressive. While one missionary, Hurst, was to remain permanently at the mission, maintaining the school, the other missionary, Tuckfield, was to travel with the Aborigines to learn the language and customs.¹⁴⁵

The problems experienced by other missions in pastoral areas also arose at Buntingdale. The local settlers disapproved strongly of the mission. Not only did they dislike the provision of a haven for Aborigines in their district; they were jealous of the land allocated to the mission. The outspoken Hurst accused the local settlers of murder, which created public controversy.¹⁴⁶ Somewhat naively, Hurst publicly recounted some exaggerated rumours of atrocities without realising that he had been the brunt of some particularly tasteless settlers' jokes. As Hurst's general accusations were substantially true, it is unfortunate that his gullibility was used to destroy his credibility.

Tuckfield and Hurst quarrelled over mission strategies and arrangements. As a result, Hurst asked to be transferred to a white community in 1841. In doing so he said he disliked school-

teaching and the secular duties associated with the mission. His report expressed strongly his despair of ever achieving anything with the Aborigines, least of all their conversion to Christianity.¹⁴⁷

Francis and Sarah Tuckfield remained at Buntingdale another seven years. Tuckfield travelled considerably with the Aborigines and, despite his own lack of education, learnt much about language and culture. He regularly reported the mistreatment of Aboriginal people and criticised government inaction but little notice was taken and violence, disease and demoralisation slowly destroyed many Aboriginal clans.¹⁴⁸ Tuckfield wrote in his journal:

The Government is fast disposing of the land occupied by the natives from time immemorial. In addition to which settlers under the sanction of government may establish themselves in any part of this extensive territory and since the introduction of the numerous flocks and herds. . . a serious loss has been sustained by the natives without an equivalent being rendered. Their territory is not only invaded, but their game is driven back, their marnong and other valuable roots are eaten by the white man's sheep and their deprivation, abuse and miseries are daily increasing. . .

Thus there is a contest between the feebleness of untutored barbarism and the skill and power of civilised man and unless some change of system is adopted, I fear the appalling result will be the final and utter extinction of the Aboriginal race. . .

The blood of the black man is pouring forth and reeking up to heaven. . .¹⁴⁹

It was this severe and rapid reduction in numbers which led to a problem which seems to have been particularly evident at Buntingdale. Around white settlement, various tribes or clans invariably diminished in size until the group reached a point where it was unable to protect itself. The group then ceased to trouble the whites but became a prey, instead, both to depraved whites seeking the women and the girls, and to traditional tribal enemies. Tuckfield said:

The local government is laid under a moral obligation to take some practicable measures for the better protection of the Aborigines within the settled districts for such has been the ex-

tent of depopulation from acts of cruelty by Europeans, diseases and the introduction of ardent spirits that some of the tribe are unable to protect themselves from the hostilities of those tribes who have not suffered so much from the demoralising effects of this kind of intercourse.¹⁵⁰

The white invasion created vast social problems, one of which was the bringing together of Aboriginal groups who had normally lived apart. This resulted in increased tensions so that feuding between Aboriginal groups began to account for many more deaths than it had ever done before. Small, unprotected groups were particularly at risk. One of their survival techniques was never to remain long in the one place, which included the mission.

Tuckfield's reports indicate that the Buntingdale mission became either a place of hostility between rival groups or empty.¹⁵¹ As the years passed and the population decreased it became empty more often. The mission was closed in 1848. Tuckfield was placed in charge of the Geelong Methodist churches, but visited his Aboriginal friends regularly for the rest of his life. The moment the mission was closed, La Trobe, Superintendent of the Port Phillip District, was besieged with settlers' requests to occupy the mission lease.¹⁵²

Francis Tuckfield was unusually perceptive regarding the Aborigines and the European settlers, and in his understanding of the role of the missionaries. He never lost sight of the importance of the gospel, but he was one of the few to recognise that for the gospel to be effective, it had to be visible to the Aborigines in the lives of those who called themselves Christians. He said:

I see no means of remedying the miseries which are daily increasing but by an enlightening and elevating process. . . . Nothing but the gospel is sufficiently efficacious . . . and in order that this gospel. . . might be brought to exert its full and legitimate influence, its agents should be persons filled with love to God and with love to man.¹⁵³

In 1858, Robert Young, of the Wesleyan deputation in Australia examined the failure of the Wesleyan mission. It was undoubtedly due, he determined, to the effect of the European influence resulting in 'deep mental and moral degradation of the

natives'.¹⁵⁴ He recorded the missionaries' own reflections upon their failure:

Let me show how colonisation counteracted our labours and prevented our success. First, I would mention the total neglect of religious duties by which most of the Europeans, especially the shepherds and hut-keepers, were characterised, and which was well calculated to induce the natives to undervalue and disregard the instructions we gave to them.

Amongst the lower class chiefly, although I am sorry to be obliged to say not exclusively, an appalling amount of vice and wickedness prevailed. . . drunkenness. . . profane swearing. . . the desecration of the Sabbath. . . and the prostitution of the native women and girls [were] universal. Can it then be matter of surprise if, with these agencies constantly at work against us . . . we all but laboured in vain, and spent our strength for naught? But these things, distressing though they were, would not have disheartened us, had they not been connected with another circumstance, more appalling than they; and that was, the rapid diminution of the Aboriginal population. Within three years from the commencement of the mission, the three tribes with which we are more immediately connected had decreased fully one-half, and the progress of annihilation was still going on with fearful rapidity. Some fell before the musket's deadly aim, a few died in the course of nature, and a few were killed clandestinely by their countrymen, or fell in war; but fatal disease, introduced by licentious Europeans, committed the most fearful ravages, and brought multitudes to a premature grave. . . These are the causes of the almost total failure of our mission. I say almost total failure, as I cannot admit that our labours were altogether in vain. As far as the main object of our labour was concerned, I am ready to allow that we were not successful: and yet, as far as our influence over, and intercourse with, the natives tended, by Divine blessing, to promote their physical and social welfare, and frequently prevented collision both amongst themselves and with Europeans, we have the satisfaction of knowing that some good resulted from our toil; and assuredly our record is on high, and our witness is with God.¹⁵⁵

The only other Christian institution for Aborigines at this time was the Baptist Merri Creek School, located where the Merri Creek flowed into the Yarra River near Melbourne. It was impor-

tant because it became the focus for the debate on whether Aborigines were capable of 'civilisation' or not.¹⁵⁶

The Merri Creek School began after members of the Richmond Baptist Church had coaxed some Aboriginal children into attending Sunday school in 1845.¹⁵⁷ The Baptists proposed a full-time school. In 1846 the government granted them the use of a house on the junction of Merri Creek and the Yarra River as a boarding school. The church raised enough money to employ Edward Peacock as teacher.¹⁵⁸ Attendance rose rapidly to forty-two. As Peacock's letters reveal, he was not a particularly well-educated person and he had once been dismissed for incompetence from a protectorate school.¹⁵⁹ At Merri Creek, however, Peacock's other virtues came to the fore and he was regarded as a patient and successful teacher. By 1847, he was introducing what were then progressive ideas on schools for 'Coloured Races of the British Colonies' which had been proposed by Kay Shuttleworth, Secretary of the Privy Council Committee on Education.¹⁶⁰ This scheme related academic learning to practical and economically profitable activities. Twice in 1846 public meetings attended by Melbourne dignitaries were held to display the pupils' achievements.¹⁶¹

The white community of Melbourne was divided as to the worth of the school. The *Port Phillip Gazette* represented those who saw the successful education of the Aboriginal children as evidence of their potential to be 'civilised'. The Baptist experiment was described in glowing terms, the Peacocks praised, and the intelligence and conduct of the pupils commended.¹⁶² On the other hand, the *Geelong Advertiser* took the pessimistic view that 'no permanent benefit need be anticipated'. The paper claimed that 'the propagation of the race had ceased' and that 'the present generation of Aborigines is the last that will have existence':

All measures taken with a view to the eventual civilisation of future generations are founded upon delusion. We have already expressed an opinion which, under the expectation of receiving the obloquy of pseudo-philanthropists, we unhesitatingly repeat, that the perpetuation of the race of Aborigines is not to be desired. That they are an inferior race of human beings it is in vain to deny (the probable extinction of the race from natural causes is a proof of this); and it is no more desirable that any inferior race should be perpetuated, than that the transmission

of an hereditary disease, such as scrofula or insanity, should be encouraged.¹⁶³

The pupils displayed considerable academic aptitude. The school was regularly visited by such people as John Ham, first minister of Collins Street Baptist Church, and William Thomas, Assistant Protector of Aborigines, who reported that the children were quick to learn.¹⁶⁴ The school committee reported that their progress was good and that some of the 'older boys could read and write well'.¹⁶⁵ The Baptists were pleased with the acceptance of their school by Aboriginal people, particularly when the elders of the local Yarra tribe enrolled their children. Things seemed to augur well for the future. Not only was there academic success, but the school's practical farming projects prospered.

The Merri Creek School was to fail mostly because organisers and supporters did not understand the pupils' Aboriginal cultural responsibilities. They found it difficult that the older girls were already betrothed and that their prospective husbands would come and remove them at the culturally appropriate time. This was discouraging enough, but the Baptists were distraught when late in 1847 the Yarra tribe left their Merri Creek camp and moved to the mountains, taking the Yarra children with them, so that only three children remained.¹⁶⁶ The Baptists closed the school and dismissed Peacock.

It says much for the school committee that they were particularly anxious that this admission of failure would not give further ammunition to their anti-Aboriginal critics. They knew that many would see this desertion as proof that the Aborigines were incapable of sustained intellectual effort. Andrew Ramsay, a Presbyterian clergyman and secretary of the school committee, wrote a particularly forthright letter to La Trobe. The committee, he stressed, had not been 'forced to this step by any conviction that the Aborigines of the country are incapable of mental or moral improvement'. He wrote:

[I flatly reject] the unscriptural and unhallowed sentiment so frequently promulgated from the colonial press, that the natives of this country are irreclaimable savages, thus giving as it were the watchword to the selfish, grasping and cowardly portion of the settlers to shoot and destroy them. Partial and imperfect as

the experiment at the Merri Creek has been, it has greatly confirmed the committee to the belief that there is nothing wanting on the part of the native population, either as respects quickness of mental apprehension or the ordinary sensibilities of their nature, to hinder them from rising in the scale of society, and one day take their place amongst the civilised portions of mankind.¹⁶⁷

Despite the fact that the tribe – and the children – came back, the school committee could not cope with the periodic desertion of the school. They reopened it under a new teacher, but the school never regained its vigour. Floods destroyed their farm in 1849-50 and Aboriginal feuding took place which culminated in a pupil, Big Tommy, being killed by an ex-pupil.¹⁶⁸ The school, however, had already failed. These last disasters confirmed the decision to close it permanently.¹⁶⁹

The demise of the Merri Creek school experiment, despite the best intentions of the pro-Aboriginal Baptists, was construed as a victory to the anti-Aboriginal lobby. The sad irony is that the pro-Aboriginal settlers had given themselves an impossible dilemma. Desperately anxious to prove conclusively the intellectual equality of the Aborigines, they attempted to do so by showing that the Aborigines were capable of 'European civilisation'.

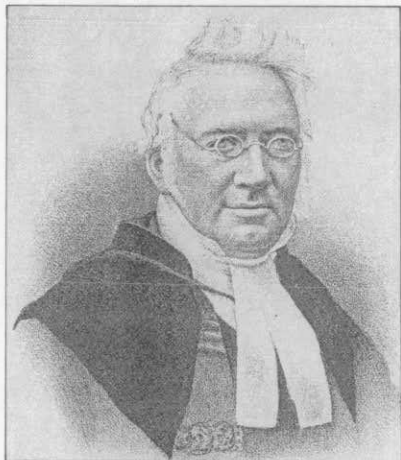
The inescapable verdict

It is hard to sum up the early missions with any word other than *failure*. Jean Woolmington could think of no other title for her detailed doctoral thesis (1979) on the early missions than *A Study in Failure*. The nineteenth century historian, James Bonwick, to whom we are indebted for his painstaking transcription of mission manuscripts, came to the same conclusion in 1870:

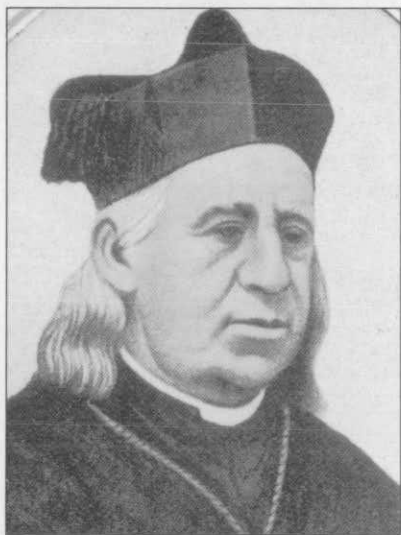
The failure. . . of all the public efforts to convert the Aborigines in these colonies is enough to dishearten further enterprise. Missions had been organised in New South Wales from 1826, and all had failed. The Lake Macquarie Mission under Mr Threlkeld lasted till 1841, and then expired. The Church of England Mission at Wellington lived from 1832 to 1843, costing several thousands of pounds, and failed. The Lutheran attempt seemed at first most hopeful, from the enterprise and self-denial of the German teachers; but it sank in despair. The Roman



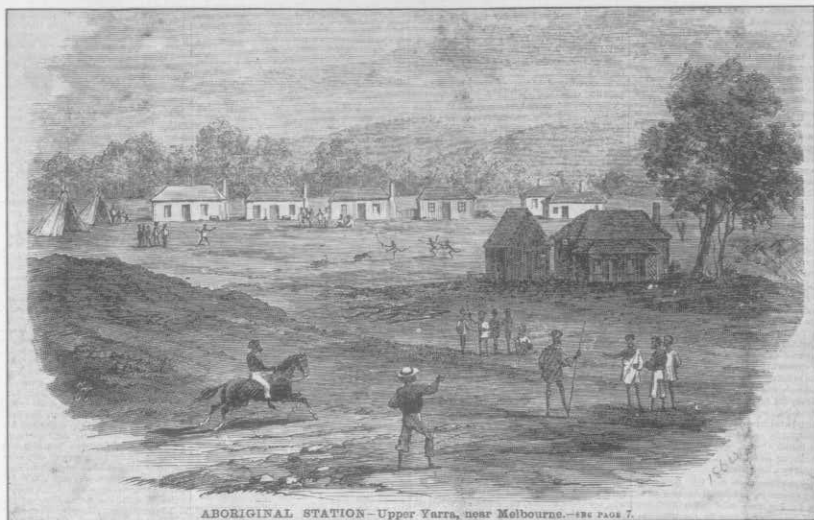
12. (l to r) Truganini, William Lanney, Bessy Clark, 1866
 Acknowledgement: *Album of Tasmanian Scenes*, National Library of Australia.
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13. John Dunmore Lang
 Acknowledgement: *Australian Men of Mark* (Vol. 2), Charles F. Maxwell,
 Melbourne, 1889, p.25

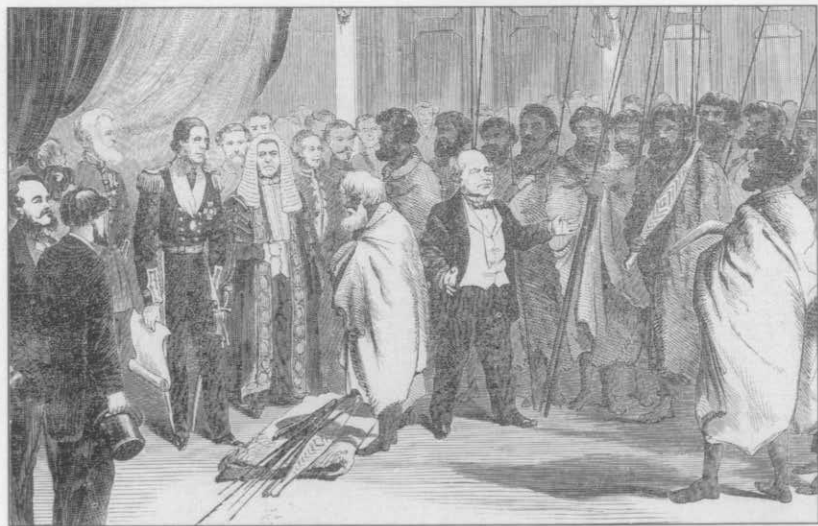


14. John Bede Polding
 Acknowledgement: Moran [1896], p.1



15. Narre Narre Warren, William Thomas' Protector's Station,
Upper Yarra in the 1840s

Acknowledgement: *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 1860,
National Library of Australia. Reproduced with permission.



16. Aboriginal deputation at the Victorian Governor's house, 1863

Acknowledgement: *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 18 June 1863,
National Library of Australia. Reproduced with permission.

Catholic missions, under able Italian monks, on an island removed from settlers, failed as miserably. The Wesleyan Mission flourished for a while, but suddenly collapsed like the rest. The Committee of Council, Queensland, in their report to the legislature in 1861, reluctantly concludes: 'The evidence taken by your committee shows beyond doubt that all attempts to Christianise or educate the Aborigines of Australia have hitherto proved abortive.'¹⁷⁰

In presenting evidence to the Select Committee in 1845, Schmidt, the Lutheran ex-missionary, catalogued the mission failures up to that year:

The civilisation of the natives of Australia, it is obvious, has been in every experiment a pitiable as well as a mischievous failure.

1. The government schools, established by Lady Darling in 1821, failed. 2. The mission on Lake Macquarie, under Mr Threlkeld in 1826, failed. 3. The German mission to Moreton Bay in 1836 failed. 4. The church mission to Wellington Valley, in 1832, failed. 5. and 6. The missions to Port Phillip, under Mr Langhorne in 1837, and Mr Tuckfield in 1836, failed. And lastly, 7. and 8. The Protectorate has failed, and the native police have failed. The Roman Catholic and Lutheran missions at Moreton Bay are recently abandoned.¹⁷¹

The opponents of the missions also took great delight in pointing out the failures but, as we have seen, the missionaries themselves also believed they had failed. Threlkeld, typically using scripture (2 Samuel 5: 23-24; Ezekiel 37: 1-3), put it most eloquently. There was, he said, 'nothing here to encourage the feeble minded, no moving on the tops of the mulberry-trees, no shaking of the bones, but all dry, dry, very scattered bones, in the midst of a waste howling wilderness'.¹⁷²

Despite this lack of encouragement, Threlkeld was not one of those who gave up quickly or easily. Threlkeld at Lake Macquarie, together with Watson at Wellington and Tuckfield at Buntingdale, were people of tenacity and dedication. They were not daunted by apparent failure, although it affected them deeply. They fought to remain at their missions until it was absolutely impossible to do so any longer. Watson wrote:

We are very apt to think our giving instructions to them is like writing on the sand, the impression of which may be effaced by the first breeze or wave that passes over it. . . We know not what thoughts were entertained by them, or how often what we have said comes into their minds, [but] having the promise of God, we feel it our duty and desire to continue to sow.¹⁷³

Yet their personal dedication could not alter the fact that their reports spoke of little success and revealed that they often felt despondent. One person who read the reports from all of the missions was Lord Stanley, Secretary of State for the Colonies. It was the sense of discouragement of the missionaries themselves which Lord Stanley found most telling in 1842. He was, nevertheless, most reluctant to admit that the failures were final. Like almost all others, including the missionaries, he believed that the failure of missions, the failure to gain converts to Christianity and the failure to civilise were one and the same thing.

In 1842, when Stanley made the following remarks, the last few missions of the first half of the nineteenth century were struggling towards their inevitable end:

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your despatches. . . reporting. . . the result of the attempts which have been made, under the sanction of Her Majesty's Government, to civilise and protect these people. I have read with great attention but with deep regret. . . It seems impossible any longer to deny that the efforts have been unavailing. . . You will be sensible with how much pain and reluctance I have come to this opinion. . .

The statements respecting the missions, furnished not by their opponents nor even by indifferent parties, but by the missionaries themselves, are I am sorry to say as discouraging as it is possible to be. . . In respect of the mission at Wellington Valley, Mr Gunther writes in a tone of despondency which shows that he has abandoned hope of success. . . That at Moreton Bay is admitted by Mr Handt to have made but little progress. . . while that at Lake Macquarie had. . . ceased to exist from the extinction or removal of the natives. . . The Wesleyan missionaries at Port Phillip. . . acknowledge. . . 'that a feeling of despair sometimes takes possession of our minds and weighs down our spirits'. . .

In the face of such representations, which can be attributed neither to prejudice nor misinformation, I have the greatest doubts as to the wisdom or propriety of continuing the missions any longer. I fear that to do so would be to delude ourselves with the mere idea of doing something. . . ¹⁷⁴

Stanley was only too painfully aware that most of the missions depended on government finance. To what extent was this indicative of a lack of genuine interest or will on the part of the missionary societies? Were the missionary ventures 'too little, too late'? One historian described the missionary societies' efforts as limited interest, modest undertakings, ungenerous financing and early withdrawal. ¹⁷⁵

There is obviously some truth in this. Whereas some of the missionaries were clearly unsuitable for the task, there were many who deserved much more support than they ever received. The question is: *Would it have made any difference?* That is, in terms of 'success' and 'failure', would the missions have fared better with better support?

In this context, it is important to examine the reasons the missionaries themselves gave for their failures. Mission societies certainly did not comprehend the immense problems many of the missionaries faced in simply surviving in their remote locations. Despite this, with the notable exception of the Passionist missionaries on Stradbroke Island, most missionaries did not openly attribute the failure of the missions to church politics or inadequate support.

The missionaries were well aware that had they been able to achieve dramatic, large scale conversions to Christianity, such as those recently experienced in some Pacific islands, their missions would have received a much higher and more sustained level of support. Thus, when the missionaries spoke of failure, they spoke particularly of the failure to see rapid acceptance of Christianity by Aborigines.

On the other hand, the failure to gain converts must be seen against the immense and tragic experience of the death and diminution of Aboriginal people. That it should happen at all was a grief and a mystery to so many missionaries, and where it was related directly to the actions of white settlers, they were frustrated at their powerlessness to prevent it.

When government and church support was finally withdrawn for Threlkeld's Lake Macquarie mission, he stated that it was terminated 'solely from the Aborigines becoming extinct in these regions'.¹⁷⁶ This was, of course, the obvious explanation, but for the real reasons why such a situation arose, we must consider the causes of the disappearance of the Lake Macquarie Aboriginal people. Threlkeld discussed this in detail in his 1837 report. He gave four clear causes for the 'very great decrease in the black population':

The private revenge of injured Europeans. . . will surely secretly and speedily annihilate the Aborigines from the face of this land. Supplying their wants with ardent spirits. . . they are then urged on to maddening intoxication, the besetting sin of this colony, too often to the loss of human life.

Thousands of male prisoners scattered throughout the country amidst females, though of another colour, leads them by force, fraud or bribery to withdraw the Aboriginal women from their own proper mates, and disease and death are the usual consequences of such proceedings. The official return from one district gives *only two women to twenty-eight men, two boys and no girls!* The continued ill treatment and frequent slaughter of the black women can only be deplored. . .

The last but far from least cause to mention as occasioning the rapid diminution of the Aborigines of this territory is far above the control of mortal men. . . The measles, the whooping cough and the influenza have stretched the black victims in hundreds on the earth, and in some places, scarcely a tribe can be found.¹⁷⁷

Benjamin Hurst of the Wesleyan Buntingdale mission at Geelong made similar observations. After discussing the corrupting influence of Europeans, he explained that this alone would not have disheartened the missionaries. Rather, they despaired at the 'rapid diminution of the Aboriginal population'. Within the first three years of the mission, the population had halved and 'the progress of annihilation was still going on with fearful rapidity':

Some fell before the musket's deadly aim, a few died in the course of nature, and a few were killed clandestinely by their countrymen or fell in war; but fatal disease, introduced by licen-

tious Europeans, committed the most fearful ravages, and brought multitudes to a premature grave. Added to this was the effectual interference with the natural source of supply and increase. . . there were only two really Aboriginal children born after our arrival in Port Phillip.¹⁷⁸

Hurst's colleague, Francis Tuckfield, who remained faithfully at Buntingdale long after Hurst departed, agreed completely with this assessment. The closure of Buntingdale was a pragmatic decision, based upon the drastic population decrease, caused, Tuckfield observed, to a very large extent by 'acts of cruelty by Europeans, diseases and the introduction of ardent spirits'.¹⁷⁹

Archbishop John Bede Polding came to identical conclusions. Questioned by the Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines in 1845, having answered many specific questions on the Stradbroke Island mission, Polding was asked how he accounted for the decrease in Aboriginal population generally. The main causes, Polding argued, were:

The aggressive mode of taking possession of their country, which necessarily involves a great loss of the natives.

The horrible extent to which sensual indulgence is carried by the whites, in the abuse of females in an early period of life – mere children – who are thus made incapable of becoming the mothers of healthy offspring.

The introduction of diseases for which they have no proper remedy.¹⁸⁰

In considering Threlkeld's Lake Macquarie mission and the Wesleyan Buntingdale mission, the question of whether greater support for the missions would have made them more successful is easy to answer. No amount of effort on behalf of the supporters of these missions would have averted the rapid decline in Aboriginal population. The case of Threlkeld's mission provides very clear proof of this assertion. His mission society, the London Missionary Society, did, in fact, close his mission, at which point it might have been possible to conclude that the mission would have succeeded with better support. The government and private donors then stepped in to rescue the mission. It was saved, but the decline in the population reached its inevitable conclusion.

The Moreton Bay Presbyterian (Lutheran) and Catholic (Pas-

sionist) missions cannot be said to have failed because of depopulation. This was to occur in the Moreton Bay region shortly after the departure of the missionaries. Both missions were very inadequately supported: the Lutherans because their whole philosophy was to be one of self-sufficiency; the Catholics because of poor organisation by Polding and complex church politics.

Would better support have achieved anything? In the case of the Catholic mission, it appears that the Passionists were so unsuited to an admittedly very difficult task that no amount of support would have turned the venture into a success, although it may have eased tension on the mission for a while.

In the case of the Lutherans, the Nundah mission would certainly have remained longer with better support. One of the lay missionaries, Augustus Rode, giving evidence before a Queensland select committee in 1861, was adamant that the mission failed 'not for want of success, but for want of support'.¹⁸¹ Whether surviving longer would have made them more successful is another matter entirely. They, too, seem to have been unsuited to the task and, indeed, the manner in which they conceived their role effectively counteracted what might have been their aims.

Schmidt, in acknowledging the failure of the Lutheran mission to the 1845 select committee, gave three reasons for failure. The first two were financial difficulties and lack of spiritual success.¹⁸² Schmidt gave no indication that he perceived how closely related these matters were. Had there been news of success or even hopeful or optimistic reports, the mission would have received better and longer support. Even Governor Gipps' withdrawal of funding was related, at least in part, to the acknowledged failure of the enterprise.

Schmidt, however, when pressed about explaining the mission's failure, stated that the greatest cause was the proximity of white settlement.¹⁸³ This was particularly striking to Schmidt, because a white settlement had been founded close to the mission after the mission had been established. The missionaries found themselves quite unable to compete with the settlement for the presence and interest of the Aborigines. They saw the rapid rise in prostitution and the availability of liquor begin to degrade the people.

This opinion of Schmidt's is very significant. Of all the missionaries, these Lutherans appear to have been among the most, if

not *the* most ethnocentric – that is, those who held Aboriginal culture in the lowest esteem. Yet, with all their stress upon Aboriginal depravity and wickedness, when it came to the point, Schmidt did not blame that for the failure of the mission. He blamed the degrading influence of white society.

The failure of the Church of England mission at Wellington Valley had a number of features in common with the failure of the Lutheran mission, as well as a number of important differences. The missionaries at Wellington, although they believed they were having no success, had much more reason for feeling encouraged than the Lutherans at Moreton Bay ever had. As we have noted already, they probably did see some conversions, although Gunther was strangely loathe to recognise or encourage the first evidences of Christian faith.

Like the Lutherans at Moreton Bay, the Wellington missionaries had problems keeping the Aborigines at the mission. They needed food for this and were frustrated by the regular failure of their crops on the drought-prone western slopes. This was a double frustration, for the crops were also intended to demonstrate to the local Aboriginal people the advantages of a settled farming life. The missionaries' relationship to the local people was never as bad as that of both Moreton Bay missions, but in the end the mission was deemed a failure.

William Watson left Wellington to establish his own mission at Apsley where he claimed that fifteen young people became Christians while one young adult was certainly baptised. Ironically, Watson's mission was able to survive because it was an agricultural success. This brought him considerable criticism, not only from those local pastoralists who accused him of using free child labour, but also from Lang, who referred to Watson as one of the 'Reverend Stockfarmers'. The fact that Watson's mission succeeded at all is important, because it demonstrated that missionary success for many years was only ever to be associated with missions where Aboriginal people had cause to settle and where the means to live there were provided.

Wellington Valley, however, finally failed because there was no inducement for Aboriginal people to stay, and the missionaries and their society were unable or unwilling to change their minds about how the mission should operate. Gunther reported that in one three-year period, around five hundred different people had

visited the mission, but that 'a great majority of them remained only a short time, a few days, or even a few hours only'.¹⁸⁴ Instead of rejoicing in this and adjusting his strategies to recognise this cultural reality, Gunther – like everyone else – saw it as a token of his failure.

There was at Wellington Valley and both Moreton Bay missions a vicious cycle of mission failure. The teaching of the people in a formal, structured and continuous fashion was the major missionary strategy for which it was necessary to provide food for naturally hunting and gathering people who could not otherwise remain there. The missionaries resented the growth of a purely 'hand-out' economy and felt it obligatory to teach the people the merits of a settled farming life. The failure of their crops led to frustration because the people could not be convinced to remain on the missions. The failure to gain converts was seen to be related to the failure to induce people to settle.

The lack of success, then, made the missionaries despair of their task, discouraging their supporters, thus reducing further their means of attracting the Aborigines to where they might hear the gospel.

The missionaries' obsession with *settling* the Aborigines was a huge stumbling block to the spiritual success for which they yearned. They found it impossible to proclaim the gospel independently of a settled, European-style village way of life. The very first missionary, William Walker, tried moving around with the Aborigines of the Sydney region and soon concluded that 'traversing the woods in their tribes' would never achieve anything.¹⁸⁵ Several missionaries, notably Tuckfield, Watson and even Schmidt, tried an itinerating ministry, but all found it very difficult and concluded that the Aborigines had to come to them.

They found no inconsistency in this, for to many of them there was a theological principle involved. Nomadism and the hunting lifestyle were part of the curse of Ham, while Shem and Japheth were blessed with the virtues of a settled farming life.

Thus the missionaries became increasingly perplexed that Aboriginal people did not immediately recognise the blessings of settled mission life. Tuckfield and Hurst complained that the Aborigines would disappear without warning.¹⁸⁶ The Passionist missionaries were frustrated by the 'wanderings' of the Moreton Bay people.¹⁸⁷ Gunther acknowledged that the Aborigines' com-

ings and goings nearly exhausted his patience, and that in their refusal to settle, they showed themselves to be an ungrateful and undependable people.¹⁸⁸

The missionaries also considered European education to be a gift which Aboriginal people would immediately value. As we have seen, at least the first generation of Aboriginal pupils considered schooling a task carried out to please the missionaries, and that gifts of food and clothes were payment for attending classes. At Wellington, Aboriginal people thought that the missionaries placed such great stress on learning to read, that it must be a pre-requisite for Christian faith.¹⁸⁹

It was not long, however, before many Aboriginal parents questioned whether Aboriginal children gained any useful knowledge at all in mission schools. On a number of occasions, Aboriginal people offered to educate white children. An old man threatened that if any more of his children were taken away to school, he would take white children in their places and teach them Aboriginal knowledge. He could give them, he said, useful instruction in hunting, fishing and net-making while European education did his children no good at all.¹⁹⁰

The missionaries thought the advantages of the settled community so outweighed the disadvantages of a nomadic existence, that Aboriginal people would gladly exchange their way of life for what was virtually the life of a peasant labourer. Thus to become a Christian was to exchange freedom for drudgery.

A consequence of this low view of the destiny and status of Aboriginal people was that the early missionaries maintained a social distance between themselves and Aboriginal people whom they regarded as their inferiors socially. They expected to be called 'Master'. William Thomas, one of the Victorian Protectors of Aborigines called Aborigines who had been brought up in the white community those 'who had been taught to bow the knee'.¹⁹¹

Aboriginal people, however, had their own sense of relative status. When Gunther asked his Aboriginal protégé, Cochran, why he obeyed the old men, Cochran asked Gunther why he obeyed the Governor.¹⁹² One young Aboriginal man, refusing an instruction to plough a field, told Gunther that 'he was master too'.¹⁹³ Fifty years later, the Church of England missionary at Lake Tyers, John Bulmer, wrote that Aborigines 'did not understand exalted rank' and that therefore it was 'difficult to get into a

black fellow's head that one man is higher than another'.¹⁹⁴ Bulmer was wrong. Whereas social class distinctions were unknown in Aboriginal society, Aboriginal people rapidly learned what such distinctions meant in European society, but they refused to be neatly slotted in at the bottom. Gunther wrote:

No man has an idea of serving another. This idea of their own dignity and importance is carried so far that they hesitate long before they apply the term 'Mr' to any European even when they know full well the distinction we make between master and servant.¹⁹⁵

In his responses to the select committee in 1845, Schmidt acknowledged that Aboriginal people pitied Europeans:

Chairman: Were they conscious of inferiority to the whites?

Schmidt: From some of their own expressions, I judged that they considered themselves superior to us.

Chairman: Do you mean that they consider themselves superior to the whole of the white race, or to those they saw in the condition of convicts?

Schmidt: To the whole; they preferred their mode of living to ours. . . they pitied us that we troubled ourselves with so many things.¹⁹⁶

There were some who came to realise that, unless compelled by fear or hunger, Aboriginal people performed acts of service out of compassion or friendship. 'Affection made them willingly perform acts of service regarded as the fruits of friendship rather than as tasks of servants,' wrote G.W. Rusden.¹⁹⁷ The Quaker, G.W. Walker, made the same observation: if the Aborigines 'do service for others, they do it through courtesy'.¹⁹⁸ It was Walker and his colleague, Backhouse, the Quaker investigation team, who realised that social status was an impediment to the gospel:

There is that kind of distance between them and the missionaries (notwithstanding much that is kind and conciliatory on the part of the latter) that. . . renders the reception of the gospel less hopeful than it otherwise might be. . . It will be doubtful whether it will ever be overcome, until persons are raised up and prepared by the power of the Divine Grace to sub-

mit to follow these untutored people in all their wanderings and to associate with them. . . ¹⁹⁹

There is, however, another side to all this. While it is true that these early missionaries saw Aborigines as their social inferiors, they also saw them as people of worth. They continually performed acts of compassion towards the sick or injured, towards the very young and the very old. Their words sometimes sounded like everyone else's denigration of Aboriginal people, but many of their actions carried a message of selflessness and love. Although early missionaries were generally very negative towards Aboriginal culture, many of them were prepared to bear the ridicule of white society for placing value on Aboriginal people and often on their languages.

It is unfair to criticise these missionaries for being negative towards Aboriginal culture, while outside the missions Aboriginal people were being shot, tortured and sexually exploited by those who would deny them their very humanity.

Above all white people, it was the missionaries who saw the injustice of the dispossession of Aboriginal people of their land. Many missionaries had the courage to speak out against abuses. Among the missionaries were those who saw with bitter and painful clarity that the dispossession of Aboriginal people by members of a so-called Christian nation contradicted the gospel and prejudiced Aboriginal people against the religion of the whites. Lang very clearly saw this contradiction, as shown in his satiric response to the suggestion that missionaries should teach Aborigines not to trespass on white pastoralists' land.

What could a missionary say to the Aboriginal people? Lang asked. Perhaps something like this:

Dearly beloved brethren, I have hitherto been telling you that the great God who made the sun, the moon, and the stars, the land and the salt water 'hath made of one blood all the nations of men for to dwell upon all the face of the earth'; that his white and his black children are all alike in his sight, and that he hath sent his Son from heaven to die for you, to bless and save you.

But I have now to tell you that the great white Jin [Queen Victoria] beyond the salt water requires your country for the cattle

and sheep of her tribe, and has given the whole of it from the river back to the mountains to her brother Mr, here; and you are not to 'sit down' or 'walk all about' over it, to hunt the kangaroo and opossum, or to gather bangwall any more. No doubt it is your own country, the place where you were born, and you have no place else to 'sit down and walk all about', to hunt and to gather bangwall; but remember the great white Jin is very strong, and there are many soldiers in her tribe.

Such are the 'glad tidings' which the missionary was actually requested, in the instance under consideration, to proclaim to the heathen people of his charge. Such is the squatters' gospel to the Aborigines of Australia!²⁰⁰

ENDNOTES

1. For a thorough study of this issue, see Reynolds, 1972
2. Kittle, 1816: 8
3. Blair, 1878: 1
4. Fitzgerald, 1881: 37
5. Sutherland, 1888: 229
6. e.g. St Clare-Grondona, 1924: 20
7. Spencer and Gillen, 1912, Vol.1: 189
8. e.g. Thorn, 1867: 340; Eden, 1872: 117; Hamilton, 1923: 31
9. Stokes, 1846, Vol.II: 462
10. Letter of Peter Farrara to *Western Australian*, reprinted in Reilly, 1903: 346
11. Knight, 1895: 104
12. Crawford's comments are appended to Willshire, 1896: 101
13. Neville, 1936: 43
14. Hasluck, 1942: 13
15. Cleland, 1960: 29
16. Shaw, 1954; Crawford, 1957; Greenwood, 1960; Pyke, 1962; Clark, 1963; Ward, 1967
17. Rowley, 1972; Markus, 1974; 1979; Loos, 1982; Reynolds, 1982; 1987; Ryan, 1982
18. Ryan, 1981: 14
19. Bonwick, 1870: 400
20. Widowson, 1829: 188
21. Fenton, 1884: 25-26
22. West, 1852 (1971: 331)
23. Ryan, 1981: 50
24. Bonwick, 1870: 32-39
25. Robinson and York, 1977: 22
26. Moore to Collins, 7 May 1804, *HRA* III, i, pp.242-243. See also Collins to King, 15 May 1804, *HRA*, III, i, p.238
27. Arthur, cited in Fenton, 1884: 37
28. West, 1852: 263
29. Turner, 1945: 38
30. Davey, cited in Bonwick, 1870: 59
31. Lord Hobart to Lieut.-Governor Collins, 7 February 1803, *HRA*, I, iv, p.12
32. Bonwick, 1870: 57
33. West, 1852: 264
34. Plomley, 1966: 28
35. Knopwood Diary, 15-16 November 1815, MSC 236-243, ML
36. *Hobart Town Gazette*, 4 February 1826
37. *Missionary Register*, February 1829, BT, *Missionary* Vol. VI, p.1838, ML
38. The Aborigines Committee only briefly included Archdeacon Broughton,

- who was visiting at the time.
39. Plomley, 1966: 43, n.44
40. For a concise summary of the Line, see Ryan, 1981: 110-113
41. Fenton, 1884: 109
42. Bonwick, 1870: 155
43. Franklin, 1976: 30
44. Jorgen Jorgenson, cited in Fenton, 1884: 112
45. Robinson, cited in Bonwick, 1870: 216
46. Bonwick, 1870: 247
47. Robinson and York, 1977: 28
48. e.g. Bonwick, 1870; Fenton, 1884
49. e.g. Robinson and York, 1977: 27
50. Rae-Ellis, 1988
51. e.g. Reynolds, 1988
52. *Ibid*, p.51
53. Robinson's Journal, 7 December 1835, MS 7032-7084, ML
54. West, 1852 (1971: 316)
55. Governor Arthur, cited in Plomley, 1988: 97
56. Plomley, 1988: 98
57. e.g. Dove, 1842: 249
58. Australian Aborigines. Copies of Extracts of Despatches Relative to the Massacre of Aborigines of Australia. . . , BHCSP, 1839, 34, No.526, p.15
59. Plomley, 1987: 215
60. Rae-Ellis, 1981: 145
61. Robinson Journal, 14 December 1835, MS 7032-7084, ML
62. Plomley, 1987: 214
63. Bonwick, 1870: 278
64. Colonial Secretary to Henry Nickolls, 30 May 1835, in Plomley, 1966: 941, n.29
65. Plomley, 1966: 942, n.29
66. See, for example, Plomley, 1988: 98
67. Arthur to Goderich, 6 April 1833, in West 1852 (1971: 318)
68. Bonwick, 1870: 278
69. Bonwick, 1870: 281
70. Plomley, 1988: 99
71. Dandridge to Colonial Secretary, 12 July 1859, cited in Plomley, 1987: 186
72. James Bonwick to Governor Young, 10 June 1859, cited in Plomley, 1987: 186
73. All details of Lanney's funeral from *Hobart Town Mercury*, 8 March 1867
74. Ryan, 1981: 217
75. Truganini was probably survived a few years by one or two of the last remaining 'full-blood' Aboriginal wives of the Bass Strait sealers. See Tindale, 1937; Basedow, 1914

76. *Hobart Town Mercury*, 11 May 1876
77. I am aware of the questions which have been raised regarding the identity of the skeleton (e.g. Rae-Ellis, 1981: 167-172).
78. Atkins, 1859: 14
79. Hull, 1875: 14
80. Arthur to Hay, 24 September 1832, CO280/35, PROL, cited in Ryan, 1981: 174
81. Reynolds, 1982: 65
82. Reynolds, 1982
83. Morrell, 1863 [James Morrell, variously spelled Murrell, Morrill etc.]
84. The Story of James Morrell, collated by the *Bowen Independent* (n.d.)
85. Reynolds, 1982: 19
86. Reminiscences of Thomas Bawden, cited in Rowley, 1972: 113
87. Lang to Sir George Grey, 12 May 1837, HRA, I, xix, p.8
88. Brown, 1854: 472
89. For Lang's missionary views, see his series of articles commencing in the *Colonist*, 5 November 1835
90. W Gunson, 1961: 521. These would appear to be the names and spellings which the missionaries decided upon in Australia. Eipper's list (1841:3-4) differs slightly.
91. *Courier Mail*, 17 July 1937
92. Meston, 1895, cited in Nolan, 1964: 28
93. Eipper, 1841 (Title page)
94. *Colonist*, 2 January 1839
95. Nolan, 1964: 43
96. Gunson, 1961: 525
97. Schmidt to Lieut. O. Gorman, 25 March 1840, in Sparks, 1938: 26
98. Report from the Select Committee on the Conditions of the Aborigines, with Minutes of Evidence, NSWLC, V&P, 1845, p.21
99. K.W. Schmidt, Journal. . . during a journey to Toorbal made with A. Rode from 28 December, 1842 to 6 January, 1843, pp.4 and 6, Lang papers, MSA 2249, Box 20, ML
100. Simpson, Commissioner for Crown Lands, cited in Sparks, 1938: 39
101. Minute Book for the Committee for the German Mission, Lang Papers, MSA2249, Box 20, ML
102. Schmidt made frequent reference to the failure of the mission. See especially NSWLC, V&P, 1845, pp.20-21
103. Reece, 1974: 78
104. Eipper, 1841: 7,9
105. Eipper, 1841: 10
106. Schmidt, cited in Nolan, 1964: 38
107. Schmidt's evidence, NSWLC, V&P, 1845, p.21
108. Gunson, 1960: 527
109. Sparks, 1938: 43; Gunson, 1960: 528
110. *Moreton Bay Courier*, 27 June 1846
111. Gunson, 1960: 536-7

112. Polding to Central Council for the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, Lyons, 10 January 1840, cited in Thorpe, 1950: 187
113. Thorpe, 1950: 25-29
114. Moran [1896]: 407
115. *Ibid*
116. Polding's evidence, NSWLC, V&P, 1845, p.10
117. Vaccari to Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, 19 February 1844, cited in Thorpe, 1950: 100
118. Vaccari to Archbishop Polding, 19 December 1843, cited in Moran [1896], 412
119. *Ibid*, 213
120. Pesciaroli to Bishop of Viterbo, 29 January 1844, cited in Thorpe, 1950: 216-217
121. Pesciaroli to the Father General, 2 November 1848, cited in Thorpe, 1950: 225
122. It is almost certain that Cardinal Moran's claim (Moran [1896]: Ch.XI) that 200 children were baptised is erroneous. See Thorpe, 1950: 146, n.37. It is probably based on an estimate of the number of children in the district and the presumption that the Passionists would have baptised them all.
123. Thorpe, 1950: 105-109
124. *Moreton Bay Courier*, 27 June 1846
125. Thorpe, 1950: 114-119
126. Lencioni to Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda, 1 May 1848, cited in Thorpe, 1950: 221
127. Thorpe, 1950: 147-171
128. NSWLC, V&P, 1845, p.1
129. *Ibid*, p.21
130. *Ibid*
131. *Ibid*, pp.8-9
132. *Ibid*
133. The Pastoral Letter of the Archbishop and Bishops of the Province, 1869: 14-16, cited in O'Farrell, 1969(I): 413-416
134. William Crook to Joseph Hardcastle (LMS), 8 November 1803, *HRA*, I, v, p.254
135. Black Diary, 1839-1840, MS8996, Box 99/1, SLV
136. Orton, cited in Colwell, 1904: 168
137. Dredge, 1845: 28
138. Reece, 1974: 68
139. Instructions to Langhorne on undertaking the employment of Missionary for the Civilisation of the Aboriginal Natives at Port Phillip, Gurner Papers, MS A1493, p.39, ML
140. Langhorne's notes, appended to 'Instructions to Langhorne. . .', *ibid*, p.91

141. Nelson, 1965: 60
142. Gunson, 1974: 326-327
143. Langhorne's notes, appended to 'Instructions to Langhorne. . .', Gurner Papers, MS A1493, p.66, ML
144. Bollen, 1977: 278-279
145. Nelson, 1965: 61
146. Bollen, 1977: 279
147. Woolmington, 1979: 46
148. Bollen, 1977: 279
149. Tuckfield Journal, MS 655, pp.138-140, 152, SLV
150. *Ibid*, pp.268-269
151. Report of the Wesleyan Missionary, Mr Francis Tuckfield, *BHCSP*, 1842, Vol. 34, No. 627, 1844, Encl. 12, pp.256-257
152. Woolmington, 1979: 46
153. Tuckfield Journal, MS 655, p.144, SLV
154. Young, 1858: 187
155. Benjamin Hurst, recorded in Young, 1858: 188-190
156. Christie, 1979: 140
157. Wilson, 1880
158. *Port Phillip Christian Herald*, 4 July 1846
159. W. Thomas to La Trobe, 12 December 1845, in Christie, 1979: 143
160. Kay Shuttleworth, *Brief Practical suggestions on the Mode of Organizing and Conducting Day Schools of Industry, Model Farm Schools and Normal Schools for the Coloured Races of the British Colonies*. Several circulars enclosed with Grey to Fitzroy, 8 February 1847. Copies in e.g. ML, PROVIC, but now published in *ANZHS Journal* (1976), 5(1): 16-30
161. Blake, 1973: 10
162. *Port Phillip Gazette*, 18 March 1846
163. *Geelong Advertiser*, 2 May 1846
164. Thomas to Robinson, 3 November 1849, Series 11, Box 12, APR, PROVIC
165. Report of the Baptist School Committee, in NSWLC, V&P, 1845, appendix p.15
166. Thomas to Robinson, 1, 4 and 9 December 1849, Series 11, Box 12, APR, PROVIC
167. Ramsay to La Trobe, 31 January 1848, Superintendent's Inward Correspondence, PROVIC
168. Edgar, 1865: 67
169. Christie, 1979: 144
170. Bonwick, 1870: 365
171. Schmidt, 1845, cited in Hull, 1846: 38
172. Threlkeld, 1828: 29
173. Watson Journal, 1 September 1833, AJCP, M233, NL
174. Stanley to Gipps, 20 December 1842, *HRA*, I, xxii, pp.436-7
175. Bollen, 1977: 280

176. Threlkeld, 1841
177. Threlkeld, 1837 [Italics added]
178. Hurst, in Young, 1858: 188-190
179. Tuckfield Journal, MS655, pp.268-269, SLV
180. NSWLC, V&P, 1845, pp.10-11
181. Report from the Select Committee on the Native Police Force, QLA, V&P, 1861, p.59
182. NSWLC, V&P, 1845, p.16
183. *Ibid.*, p.19
184. Governor Gipps' Report on the Wellington Valley Mission, CMS Archives Records, AJCP, M215, NL
185. Walker to General Secretaries WMS, BT, Box 53, ML
186. Benson, 1935: 49
187. O'Farrell, 1968: 90
188. Gunther's Journal, 9 August 1838, AJCP, M224, NL
189. Gunther Journal, 16 August 1838, AJCP, M224, NL
190. e.g. Westgarth, 1848: 118
191. e.g. William Thomas, Letterbook and Journal, 18 September 1841, MS 214/8, ML
192. Gunther Journal, 7 August 1838, AJCP, M224, NL
193. Gunther, cited in Reynolds, 1983: 127
194. Bulmer, 1888: 30
195. Gunther, cited in Reynolds, 1983: 127
196. NSWLC, V&P, 1845, p.18
197. Rusden, 1883 (II): 237
198. Walker, 1902: 249
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200. Lang, 1861: 392

3

The hobbling of the remnant

Protectorates, reserves and missions

THE PRACTICE OF MAKING GENERALISATIONS about Aboriginal people suggests incorrectly that they were a unified Australia-wide group, or that they all faced similar circumstances and responded in identical ways. At no period were generalisations less likely to be true than in the middle of last century.

In the north and centre of the continent there were Aboriginal people who had not yet actually encountered white people, though no doubt they had heard of them. In the far south in Tasmania, the last few traditional Aboriginal people were dying in exile. Some languished in special prisons such as Perth's Rottnest Island and some had actually become convicts, sentenced in Sydney for transportation to dreaded penal colonies like Norfolk Island. In the southeast, Aboriginal people had virtually nowhere to go. Many lived in hopeless squalor on the fringes of white townships.

As the century progressed, a few were to have a somewhat better life on mission stations. Some struggled against all odds to maintain their independence. A very small number of Aboriginal women were legally married to white men. In the pastoral frontiers, now mainly moving north, Aboriginal people were still mounting fierce resistance, still hoping to thwart the invasion and occupation of their lands. In the major centres of white settlement, many groups had all but disappeared. One generalisation that does hold true is that the plight of the remnant of the Aboriginal people was serious, and it is to this that we now turn.

The plight of Aboriginal people

Trespass on Aboriginal land was one thing, but dispossession was another matter entirely. As we have noted already, Aboriginal people did not always react negatively to the first trespass on their land. True, some resisted such incursions strongly. Perhaps they were the more astute of their people.

Not everyone, however, resisted. Explorers' journals often tell of Aboriginal people accepting their presence even in the remotest parts of the continent. Frequently Aboriginal people hurriedly conducted them through their country, sometimes by a circuitous route to avoid desecrating sites of special local significance, but actual aggression was not their usual response.

It was not trespass to which Aboriginal people reacted most strongly, but the ruthless assertion by Europeans of exclusive proprietorial rights even from the first day of occupation.¹ The newcomers coveted and occupied places essential to Aboriginal life: fertile plains, valleys, rivers and creeks, springs and water-holes. Aboriginal people were often excluded from them by force. In remote parts of Australia, where white settlement was more recent, there are still elderly Aboriginal people who recall the past:

Oh terrible days we used to had: we never walked around much 'mongst the plain country or groun'. We use to upla hill alla time to save our life. Our old people you know used to take us away from plain or river or billabong. Only night time they used to run down to get the lily, alla young men you know. Can't go daytime, fright [of] white people. Too many murderers went about killing native.²

This is part of Barnabas Roberts' description of life early this century in the Roper River region of the Northern Territory, an historically important place because the frontier years are still in living memory. Another person who remembers is Dinah Garadjji. Her lowlands group did not have rocky hills to hide in:

They all used to hide their children. They hid them underneath vines in the creek. Everybody used to hide there. The adults went out to search for food from time to time but we were all afraid of the white men. . . . They just regarded us Aboriginal people as animals.³

Where Aboriginal people were permitted to remain on their own land, they were often subjected to all sorts of indignities. At Roper Bar in 1884, the local people were forced to camp on the river bank opposite the sly grog shanty. They had to ask permission to cross their own river. If granted permission they were required to wear a tin plate slung around their neck. Anyone not wearing a permit plate was simply shot.⁴

These events took place on the relatively well-watered northern coast. In the southern inland, more intense white settlement and fewer watercourses meant that in many regions Aboriginal people were totally denied access to their rivers. The effect on them was devastating both physically and psychologically.

The Presbyterian missionary William Ridley saw the consequences in northern NSW in 1861:

On this river the effect upon the Aborigines of the occupation by Europeans of the country was forcibly presented. Before the occupation of this district by colonists, the Aborigines could never have been at a loss for the necessaries of life. . . . There is water in the driest seasons; along the banks game abounded; waterfowl, emus, parrot tribes, kangaroos, and other animals might always. . . . be found.

But when the country was taken up and herds of cattle introduced, not only did the cattle drive away the kangaroos, but those who had charge of the cattle found it necessary to keep the Aborigines away from the river. . . . After some fatal conflicts, in which some colonists and many Aborigines have been slain, the blacks have been awed into submission to the orders which forbid their access to the river. And what is the consequence?

Black fellows coming in from the west report that last summer very large numbers, afraid to visit the river, were crowded round a few scanty waterholes, within a day's walk of which it was impossible to get sufficient food. . . . Owing to these combined hardships many died.⁵

Some Aboriginal people, particularly those who saw what might happen and did not wish to suffer the same total dispossession as their neighbours, tried to negotiate. The shipwrecked sailor Morrell, after seventeen years' tribal life, saw the fear among his tribespeople as they awaited the arrival of white settlers on their land.

With tears in their eyes as he departed from them, they offered a compromise:

The blacks. . . began to surround me and ask me whether I had seen the white people and how many there were. I was obliged to tell them that there were a great many people, many more than themselves, and plenty of guns, and that if they went near they would be killed before they got there. I told them the white men had come to take their land away.

They always understand that might not right is the law of the world, but they told me to ask the white man to let them have all the ground to the north of the Burdekin, and to let them fish in the rivers; also the low grounds they live on to get the roots - ground which is no good to white people, near the seacoast and swampy.⁶

Such compromises were not to be. The invaders wanted it all. Aboriginal people were not recognised as having the kind of rights to the land that called for negotiation. The few fair-minded settlers who treated Aboriginal people more humanely or with more understanding than others were a small minority subjected to ridicule by their contemporaries. For most, Aboriginal people had no rights at all. They were simply evicted. 'Niggers and cattle don't mix' was the accepted wisdom of the pastoral frontier.⁷ The sight of any blacks 'disturbed the cattle' wrote one Protector of Aborigines, so the blacks were 'dispersed by the stations' hands'.⁸

The term 'disperse' was perhaps the most widely used euphemism for killing Aborigines, Police Inspector Paul Foelsche defining it in 1885 as 'shooting them'.⁹ A Victorian Aboriginal man described it to James Dredge in 1840:

Blackfellow by and by all gone, plenty shoot em, whitefellow - long time, plenty, plenty.¹⁰

This situation presented many Aboriginal people with an insoluble dilemma. They actually had nowhere to go. Bishop Broughton saw this clearly in 1850, after the closure of the Church of England mission at Wellington: 'We have no place for them to flee into,' he wrote.¹¹ This acute problem is rarely acknowledged or understood even by those who admit the historical truth of massacre and dispossession. It was a situation which

lasted for a century in the south-eastern states. Quite literally true in the second half of last century, it was still partly true for some people as recently as the 1950s. While the 'killing years', for all their horror, have become for some a bitter but now ancient injustice, the experience of being refugees in their own country is an experience of recent memory. It was this homelessness, coupled with disease and malnutrition which led to the vicious cycle of despair, alcoholism, childlessness and death.

Despair was the main reason for the fatal impact of European settlement and European diseases. Once their land had gone and the web of life of traditional society had been shattered, Aboriginal people lost the will to live.¹²

Although there were places where the Aboriginal inhabitants were completely shot out, there were still quite large numbers remaining in some areas when open or large-scale conflict came to an end. The decline in population, however, did not cease when the shooting stopped and was evident even in the few relatively peaceful districts where there was little or no violence.¹³ Disease annihilated many Aboriginal communities. Venereal diseases, colds, influenza, tuberculosis, whooping cough, smallpox, dysentery and measles were the most frequent carriers of death.

As early as 1828, Oldfield described the plight of Sydney Aborigines:

[They were] mere lumps of misery; their legs and arms shrunk like anatomical preparations, their eyes fixed in a state of insensibility, and looking altogether as if they were waiting to give up the ghost.¹⁴

Statistical returns in south-eastern Australia show that by 1843, Aboriginal populations were declining by about a third of their strength every decade. Even before the death of the persecuted Tasmanians, many mainland tribes were virtually extinct, especially those of the Sydney region. As well as the death toll from massacre and disease, there was a tragically low birthrate. Many attributed this to sterility caused by venereal diseases in very young girls,¹⁵ but some thoughtful observers knew another reason was despair.

One such observer, William Thomas, one of the Victorian Protectors of Aborigines, kept detailed records of the Port Phillip

and Westernport Aborigines. Only twenty births were recorded amongst all seven tribes in the decade from 1839 to 1849 and in the next decade to 1859 the population decreased from 92 to 56 and only one child survived. Thomas reported that there was an 'indifference to prolonging their race, on the ground as they state of having no country they can call their own'.¹⁶ Many people recorded Aboriginal people's own words of despair:

What good hab him piccaninny?
 What por? Blackfellow, him all die.¹⁷
 No country, no good have it piccaninny
 No country now for them and no more come up piccaninny¹⁸
 Why me have lubra? Why me have piccaninny? You have all
 this place, no good have children, no good have lubra, me
 tumble down and die very soon now.¹⁹
 Look, all dying away, all dying away.²⁰

James Bonwick, Christian, historian and friend of the Tasmanian Aborigines at Oyster Cove, made the mistake of asking one of his friends about the decline of his people:

I repented of my curiosity. His face became suddenly clouded, his eyes lost their lustre, his mouth twitched nervously at the side, he sighed deeply and his body seemed to bend forward. He slowly turned himself round, but said nothing. He looked like one oppressed with secret and consuming grief – as one without hope. He had no child. All his dark friends were childless, and were silently leaving him on the strand alone.²¹

The environment of despair gripped the hearts and minds of Aboriginal people throughout south-eastern Australia in the second half of the last century. In describing it, I could not begin to match the descriptive power of the poet, Judith Wright:

It was the loss of land which was the worst. As time went on, the Aborigines retreated or were driven out of whole territories into the inhospitable foothills which formed their boundaries. The land itself was now disfigured and desecrated, studded with huts, crossed by tracks and fences, eaten thin by strange animals, dirtied and spoiled, and guarded from its owners by irresistible and terrifying weapons. The all-embracing net of life

Will you now select for us also a portion of land? My country all gone. The white men have stolen it.²³

Although locally devastating, the town concentrations of white settlement were less damaging to Aboriginal people than the remorseless spread of pastoral occupation. This is dramatically visualised in the maps of pastoral expansion from the 1830s to 1860 which show rapid increase in the shaded, occupied areas.²⁴ By the middle of the century, hardly any of the map is unshaded. Unwelcome in their own land, Aborigines tended to congregate on the outskirts of country towns where they were further devastated by disease, alcohol, malnutrition and prostitution. The fringe camps soon became places where drunken whites worked off their aggression and their sexual energies.²⁵

In the descriptive writing of the period, there was a distinct shift in the manner in which Aborigines were depicted. The earlier writings, as we have seen, showed Aborigines as savages. Favourite words included 'barbaric', 'cunning', 'treacherous', 'unpredictable', 'irrational', 'brutal' and 'vicious'. In the 1850s, however, writers began to depict Aborigines as 'dirty', 'drunken', 'lazy' and 'diseased'.²⁶ This stereotype has lasted even to the present day.

Like many stereotypes, it was difficult to contradict, as it contained elements of truth. By the standards of European writers, the Aboriginal camps were disorganised and dirty, alcohol was a problem, the men were generally unemployed and there was a high incidence of disease. This stereotype was particularly insidious, however, because it was used not only to describe Aborigines, but also as proof of the validity of current racial theories.²⁷

This view of the hopeless, derelict Aboriginal affected even the most humane of people. William Howitt, a Christian whose powerful condemnation of colonialism in his book *Colonization and Christianity*²⁸ won much acclaim, was still pessimistic about Victorian Aborigines. Their abject condition, he argued, validated the biblical distinction between the hunter races (the cursed sons of Ham) and the tillers of the soil (the sons of Japheth). The sons of Ham were destined to disappear, wrote Howitt, because they had 'no organ of imitation, no emulative principles or faculty of constructiveness and progression':

and spirit which had held land, and people, and all things together was in tatters. . . The exiled camps were racked by sicknesses; pale unfamiliar babes were born to the women; deaths were now so frequent that proper burial became impossible and injustice had to be done to the rights of the dead.

The blighted camps dwindled, their food inaccessible or the hunters and gatherers too weak to find and bring it in. The elders and the children died. Some began to leave the camps and cling to the settlements where by clowning, begging and selling their women they could survive. Disease and listlessness increased. The rags they were given became noisome, damp and filthy, for they had not been taught to wash them; slept in by night they bred more disease and the survivors coughed their way to death.

It was a story which was to be told, with variations of misery, across the whole continent.²²

Victoria in the 1850s

Victoria was the first Australian colony to demonstrate the problems which would be faced by Aboriginal people when all their lands within the colony were entirely controlled by others. The rapidity of white occupation of Victoria can be gauged from the dates on which the various townships gained formal recognition: Ballarat, 1852; Echuca, 1853; Maryborough, 1854; Horsham, 1854; Bendigo, 1855; Morwell, 1861; Wangaratta, 1863.

Some of these were gold towns, the gold rush being the main reason for the population growing from 224 non-Aborigines in 1830 to 77 000 in 1851 and 540 000 in 1861. In that year the Board for the Protection of Aborigines estimated that the Aboriginal population was 2 341 people. At the time of invasion, there had been an estimated population of 15 500.

Victoria was substantially an enclosed colony. Its northern border was the Murray River, which gave settlers access along the waterways, while the rest of its borders were mostly seacoast. By the 1850s, the Aboriginal people of Victoria were virtually surrounded. A mere twenty years after official white settlement, they had hardly anywhere they could go. Not long after the formal settlement of the Port Phillip District, Aborigines of what is now Melbourne and Geelong already knew they had been dispossessed.

One of them told the Wesleyan missionary, Francis Tuckfield, that white occupation was theft:

With all my feelings for justice towards the Aboriginal tribes. . . I really could not help asking myself, on seeing this miserable spectacle of humanity, in the midst of a race full of activity and progress, whether such a race could be intended to ramble over, without possessing, much less improving, large portions of the earth? and I could not avoid admitting to myself that that which will not go onward in the world's progress must go down.²⁹

Howitt's simplistic use of the Bible, coupled with his uncritical acceptance of head measurements as evidence of inferiority, served to obscure the real reasons for the dwindling number of Aborigines in Victoria, and for the squalor and poverty in which they lived. Howitt was observing a group that had endured two decades of white colonisation, the survivors of a brutal frontier experience in which their fellows had been dispossessed, shot, poisoned, raped, diseased and ridiculed on the assumption that they were the lowest form of humanity and an impediment to progress.

The survivors were left without land or dignity or any means of supporting themselves apart from begging or odd jobs. Their situation was the result of oppression. They were victims of a systematic attack on the group's life, livelihood and culture, and they bore the inward, psychological and emotional marks of that oppression just as they wore the external signs of European diseases, such as syphilis and smallpox.

It was no wonder that many sought oblivion in alcohol, that they felt themselves to be a dying race and that no effort they could make would avert their destiny. Their condition was the result of political and economic factors, not racial ones. Any group of people, subjected to the same merciless treatment they had received, would have emerged equally broken, displaced and impoverished.³⁰

For the colonists, however, the new image was just as convenient as the last one had been. The image of the treacherous savage, little different from the animals, had provided them with a rationalisation for the killing of Aborigines. The new image of the lazy, irreclaimable derelict justified their unwillingness to provide any material compensation for the dispossessed remnant and eased their resentment of the Aborigines' obstinate refusal to adopt a European lifestyle.

The Victorian protectorate

The initial idea of protectors came from the British House of Commons Select Committee Inquiry into the Condition of Aboriginal Peoples which was dominated by evangelicals. This group heard witnesses from July 1835 until May 1837, amassing extensive evidence of injustices inflicted upon native peoples in all British colonies. This included irrefutable evidence of deliberate killing, loss of land, the introduction of drunkenness and prostitution, the dislocation of traditional lifestyles, and the introduction of European diseases.

In its report, the Committee stated that Britain was answerable to God for the treatment of colonised people:

The British empire has been singularly blessed by Providence, and her eminence, her strength, her wealth, her prosperity, her intellectual, her moral and her religious advantages, are so many reasons for peculiar obedience to the laws of him who guides the destinies of nations. These were given for some higher purpose than commercial prosperity and military renown.

It is not to be doubted that this country has been invested with wealth and power, with arts and knowledge, with the sway of distant lands, and the mastery of the restless waters, for some great and important purpose in the government of the world. Can we suppose otherwise than that it is our office to carry civilisation and humanity, peace and good government and, above all, the knowledge of the true God, to the uttermost ends of the earth?

He who has made Great Britain what she is will inquire at our hands how we have employed the influence he has lent to us in our dealings with the untutored and defenceless savage; whether it has been engaged in seizing their lands, warring upon their people, and transplanting unknown disease, and deeper degradation, through the remote regions of the earth; or whether we have, as far as we have been able, informed their ignorance, and invited and afforded them the opportunity of becoming partakers of that civilisation, that innocent commerce, that knowledge and that faith with which it has pleased a gracious Providence to bless our own country.³¹

The Committee's conclusions stressed that the original in-

habitants of all colonies must be treated as British citizens with full rights. Lord Glenelg, the British Secretary of State for Colonies wrote:

. . .to regard them as aliens with whom a war can exist, and against whom H.M.'s troops may exercise belligerent right is to deny that protection to which they derive the highest possible claim from the sovereignty which has been assumed over the whole of their ancient possessions.³²

The Committee was astute enough to realise that words needed backing up with action, and that it would therefore be necessary to install official 'protectors' in some places. Australian Aborigines certainly needed protection from unscrupulous whites but throughout the long era during which most government activity on their behalf was labelled 'protection', what they needed had very little to do with what they received.

'Protectionism' as a national policy will be discussed in later chapters, but at this point it is simply necessary to acknowledge briefly the Port Phillip Protectorate and its failure.

Lord Glenelg decided to introduce the protection scheme gradually, mostly for financial reasons. The scheme was to be supported from Colonial funds, which almost immediately guaranteed that it would only be grudgingly accepted by the Colonial government. Glenelg appointed a Chief Protector and four Assistant Protectors to work only in the Port Phillip District. The Chief Protector was George Robinson of Van Dieman's Land fame, who had already been offered a similar position in South Australia, but turned it down in favour of the Victorian appointment with its higher pay and authority. In Britain, Glenelg chose four Assistant Protectors - James Dredge, William Thomas, Edward Stone Parker and Charles Sievwright.

He advised Governor Gipps that the Protectors' function was to promote the well-being of the Aborigines and to represent them when necessary to the Colonial or British governments. They were to move around with the Aborigines, learn their customs and languages, record their numbers and tribal boundaries, and safeguard them from 'encroachments on their property, and from acts of cruelty, of oppression and injustice'. Their immediate aim was to protect them physically, so they were made magistrates.

Their longer-term aim was to civilise them – that was, to teach them agriculture, to educate them to adopt a settled European lifestyle and to convert them to Christianity:

The Assistant Protector should promote to the utmost extent of his ability and opportunity the moral and religious improvement of the natives, by instructing them in the elements of the Christian religion, and preparing them for the reception of teachers, whose peculiar province it would be to promote the knowledge and practice of Christianity among them.³³

The four Assistant Protectors, three schoolmasters and one military man arrived in Sydney in September 1838. Having no Australian experience at all, it was disturbing to them to reach Sydney in the middle of the furore over the Myall Creek trials. Caught up in this, they found themselves confronted by the antagonism 'of the press and the community'.³⁴ Perhaps it was as well that they learned immediately the opposition they were to face.

Evangelicals were prominent in the selection process for the Protectors. Although Sievwright appears to have been appointed as a favour to someone with influence in the government, the other three men were chosen for their Christian commitment. This did not in any way guarantee fitness for the task, but it is only fair to say that the task was impossible anyway. How could four men protect all the Aborigines of Victoria against those virtually committed to their destruction? When they arrived in Victoria early in 1839, the press was scathing about wasting Colonial funds on what anyone 'with the slightest Colonial experience would stamp as reckless folly' and also about 'sending forth characters upon such a mission so totally unfit for their avocations'.³⁵

Robinson allotted his men to four regions of Victoria – Sievwright to the west, Parker to the northwest, Dredge to the northeast and Thomas to the Melbourne district.³⁶ It took two years for all the Protectors actually to reach their designated areas, mostly due to their difficulties in arranging suitable conditions for their families.

Dredge established himself on the Goulburn River. By offering medical care, money for odd jobs and food for the sick and

elderly, he was initially able to attract large numbers of Aboriginal people, but found it frustrating that they came and went according to whether he had supplies for them. It was, of course, the same old dilemma. Be it a mission or Protector's station, it was equally unattractive on an empty stomach. Dredge did travel for two months with Robinson, surveying the Aborigines of his district. He found that he disliked Robinson and that the work was not of such a missionary character as he had hoped. He resigned in 1841 and was inexplicably replaced by the paranoid William Le Socuf who hated these 'lawless savages' and was eventually dismissed for cruelty to them.³⁷

Sievwright left Melbourne in mid-1839, but only got as far as Geelong. He travelled a little further afield, but found it unpleasant. At Robinson's insistence he eventually established himself further west at Mount Rose. He preferred to spend most of his time in his role as magistrate and in this capacity he was very active indeed in investigating settler atrocities, bringing 'respectable squatters before the courts'.³⁸ This earned him the bitter hatred of the press and the squatters.³⁹ He was suspended in 1842 on various charges including misuse of government property and immorality. It has been suggested that these charges were trumped up by his enemies, but whether they were or not, Sievwright was never reinstated.⁴⁰

Parker also moved initially only a very short distance from Melbourne to Sunbury, pleading illness and his wife's pregnancy. He reached his allotted district in mid-1840, first to a site on the Loddon and then one near Franklinford. In both cases he displaced squatters, but Gipps reluctantly approved the second site as a central Aboriginal station. A large number of Aboriginal people moved there initially. Parker rapidly put thirty-five acres under cultivation.

The only Protector who might have fulfilled the spirit of the scheme was Thomas who did not like being confined to Melbourne. He slowly widened his interests to include more distant Aboriginal groups, travelling extensively with them. Robinson kept recalling him to Melbourne, preferring him to act as his private secretary and confine his attention to Melbourne Aborigines. In a compromise move, Robinson allowed Thomas in 1840 to select a permanent site outside Melbourne, at Narre Narre Warren.

So all of the Protectors eventually occupied central stations,

hoping to attract Aboriginal people to them. This was not at all consistent with the original concept of itineration, but the Protectors' various decisions to settle became *fait accompli*.

An immediate reason was that they did not want to take their families travelling on foot through the bush with Aborigines, but in the longer term, although the authorities did not admit it, the new arrangements actually suited them. Permanent stations provided measurable data – buildings constructed, acres ploughed, Aborigines in residence, medicines dispensed and so on. This was the kind of information governments prefer to the more intangible results of itineration.⁴¹

By 1842, the various lines of advice being offered to Governor Gipps came together. Squatters did not want Aborigines on their properties or even in their district and petitioned Gipps to create permanent Aboriginal reserves. The Protectors were demonstrating that they wanted to reside on central stations and attract Aboriginal people to them.

Parker, in particular, had been most forceful in his arguments. It was not possible, he said, to itinerate because tribes on the move split into ever smaller hunting groups and a lone Protector could accompany only one small segment. Providing them with a 'fixed station' was essential, because the usurping of their food sources had forced them to become fringe dwellers to squatters' outstations where they begged, stole or engaged in prostitution. The Protectors, said Parker, must be able 'to offer a counter inducement':

[If the Aborigines were concentrated] and their wants provided for they might soon be brought under such restraints as would guard them against injury and secure the property of the colonists from depredation. But left in their present state to be beaten back by the 'white man's foot', to be excluded perforce from lands which they unquestionably regard as their own property, and from scenes as dear to them, as our own native homes to us – despoiled, denied the rights of humanity, classed with and treated as wild dogs – I can entertain no other expectation but that they will be driven to more frequent depredations and exposed to more rapid and certain destruction.⁴²

Gipps was pleased to have found what he thought was a

solution to his impossible task of pleasing both the philanthropists and the squatters. He approved reserves for each Protector consisting of a square mile for homestead, school and farm and five square miles for hunting.⁴³ This important decision was the real beginning of the reserve system. Whereas the idea of the Protectorate was dumped, the idea of reserves was not.

The Protectorate, as a formal arm of government, struggled on for a few more years with reduced support until in 1849 it was disbanded. It was said that it had been 'a complete failure, a lavish waste of public money' and that it had even turned Aborigines against the settlers by encouraging in them 'feelings of jealousy and mistrust'.⁴⁴ This latter complaint seems hardly realistic, as if somehow the Aborigines had not already learnt to mistrust the settlers.

Even the Protectors reluctantly agreed that the system had not achieved its original aims of physical protection and 'moral enlightenment'.⁴⁵ What did survive, however, was the view that the best thing for Aborigines was to create reserves for them and force them to live there. La Trobe, in fact, came to hold very strongly the view that force was necessary as well as compulsory separation of parents and children:

Nothing short of an actual and total separation, from their parents, and natural associates, and education, at a distance from the parents and beyond the influence of the habits and example of their tribe would hold out a reasonable hope of their ultimate civilisation and Christianisation.⁴⁶

The ex-Protectors, Dredge, Thomas and Parker, continued to take an interest in Aboriginal affairs, sometimes being employed in various capacities relating to later church or state activities regarding Aborigines. In particular, they continued to be influential 'authorities' whose opinions were often sought, playing an important role in Victorian public life.

First Moravian and Church of England missions in Victoria

The invitation to the Moravian church to send missionaries to Victoria came from Charles Joseph La Trobe, Superintendent of the Port Phillip District, and later Lieutenant-Governor when it be-

came Victoria. He belonged to Britain's most prominent Moravian family. His father, Christian Ignatius La Trobe, and his grandfather, Benjamin La Trobe, had been distinguished Moravian ministers. La Trobe's father had been secretary both of the Moravian church in England and of the Moravian missionary society. La Trobe's brother Peter, also a Moravian minister, had succeeded his father as secretary of the Moravian missionary society and was secretary when La Trobe was appointed to Australia. La Trobe himself had originally been trained for the Moravian ministry.⁴⁷

The Church of the United Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum*), better known as the Moravian Brethren, was formed in 1722 when, following the persecution of central European Protestants after the Thirty Years War, Count von Zinzendorf invited some Bohemian Protestant refugees to form a Christian community on his estates. The sole remaining Bohemian Protestant bishop consecrated one of their number a bishop in 1735, which restored their order of ministry. They were in communion with the Lutheran and Anglican churches, but sometimes preferred a 'diaspora model' of being a church within a church, particularly within the Church of England in England. They became essentially a missionary movement with a proportion of one missionary to sixty members compared to one to 5 000 in the rest of Protestantism.⁴⁸ They were particularly famed for their work in remote and allegedly difficult locations such as Greenland, Labrador and Tibet.

It was La Trobe's Moravian connection which led to his superintendency of Port Phillip, an unusual appointment as he lacked military or naval training. Together with his father and other leading Moravians, La Trobe had been active in the anti-slavery movement and had been associated in it with William Wilberforce. In 1837, he was sent by the British government to report on the measures which should be taken to assist the freed slaves in the West Indies. He impressed the Colonial Office and was appointed Superintendent of the Port Phillip district in 1839.⁴⁹

With this background, it was not surprising that La Trobe should have been interested in the welfare of Aboriginal people. He arrived in Australia in September 1839, exactly twelve months after the four Protectors. Glenelg had briefed La Trobe on the situation in the Port Phillip District and confided his hopes about

the success of the Protectorate. La Trobe had high expectations that the Protectors would succeed. He was therefore continually frustrated by their apparent failure. Although not going so far as Gipps and accusing them of 'feeble action and puling complaint',⁵⁰ La Trobe felt they had not entered into the spirit of their positions. Lord Glenelg, Secretary of State for Colonies, summed up the situation well: 'Instead of going to the Aborigines, the Aborigines were brought to them.'⁵¹ He was fair-minded enough to recognise that despite the inadequacies of the Protectors, their task was of an 'anomalous character'.⁵²

The Wesleyan mission at Buntingdale had also begun before La Trobe's arrival, and during his superintendency the Baptist's Merri Creek School came and went. La Trobe supported these institutions while they had seemed to have some chance of success, but also accepted the missionaries' own acknowledgements of failure and subsequent closure of their institutions.

These failures, together with the perceived failure of every mission in New South Wales proper and at Moreton Bay, were very discouraging. There had been no dramatic conversions like those in the famed South Seas missions where the culture and social structure of the communities meant that the conversion of the chief included the conversion of the village.⁵³ The churches seemed to display temporarily the same general apathy towards Aboriginal people that characterised the rest of the European community in the early 1850s in the eastern States.

In Western Australia, John Smithies was losing his battle to keep his Wesleyan mission alive. In South Australia, the Church of England Poonindie Mission was just beginning. Its success was eventually to provide encouragement to others, but there were no Matthew Hales in Victoria in 1850. Indeed, the one clear lesson which was to be learnt later in the nineteenth century was that the dedication and personal qualities of a few individuals were very critical factors in the success or failure of missions. Some missions failed for reasons beyond the power of the most dedicated of missionaries to solve, but few if any missions succeeded which were not commenced and nurtured by an outstanding individual.

The idea of inviting the Moravians was probably first suggested by Alexander Thomson, who was aware of both their famed success in establishing missions where others had failed, and of

La Trobe's connections:

These men are not usually men of classical education, but men of devoted Christianity who will not fear to labour with their own hands and thus teach the natives both by precept and example. These humble but devoted missionaries have been signally successful among the Greenlanders, the Eskimos and the Hottentots of South Africa.⁵⁴

Whether the idea was originally La Trobe's or Thomson's, La Trobe certainly acted on it. Since none of the established churches in the colony seemed willing or able to resume missionary work among the Aborigines, La Trobe asked his brother if the Moravians could. They agreed and in 1849 sent two missionaries, the Rev. Andrew Tager and a lay helper, F. William Spieseke, from Germany.⁵⁵

Arriving in Melbourne in February 1850, where they were warmly welcomed by La Trobe and the Church of England bishop, Charles Perry, who called on all church members to pray and to support the mission financially. La Trobe selected the northwest of the State for their enterprise, so the missionaries were sent to what had been the Loddon Protectorate Station, where Parker was still employed as a teacher. Parker helped them select a site south of Swan Hill. La Trobe came personally to approve the use of a 25 000 acre reserve around Lake Boga, including a grant of 363 acres specifically for the use of the Moravians.⁵⁶ Tager and Spieseke were greatly assisted in settling in by a sympathetic pastoralist, Archibald Campbell of Coonawarra Station. They moved to the Lake Boga site in October 1850.

Tager and Spieseke worked hard setting up their station. They were joined there in 1853 by the Rev. C.W. Kramer. For several years they could not attract many Aboriginal people. For reasons still unclear this changed suddenly, and in 1854 there were up to 100 Aboriginal people at Lake Boga mission.⁵⁷

The missionaries, however, found it hard to convince them to remain for any length of time. The Aborigines simply regarded Lake Boga as one of the pastoral stations of the district and tended to move between it and the other stations, undertaking seasonal work in return for rations. The Aborigines also found that desirable items like tobacco were available more frequently

and in more generous quantities at other places.⁵⁸

As had happened elsewhere, the Aborigines did not really distinguish between Lake Boga mission and other stations where they were occasionally welcome. They did not perceive the missionaries' demands as differing significantly from the activities for which they were elsewhere paid in tobacco, rum or food. They were content to listen to the missionaries because they saw it as a task for which they expected payment.⁵⁹

Tager and Spieseke at Lake Boga had a real dilemma because, naturally, the local people would only remain as long as they were fed. They were a hunting and gathering people and had no choice but to seek food elsewhere when there was insufficient at the mission. Furthermore, although the missionaries gave out tobacco, they would not supply liquor which could be obtained at other stations for work but especially for prostitution.⁶⁰

The greatest problems for the Moravians came with the discovery of gold in their district in 1856. The Lake Boga lease stood directly between Swan Hill and the goldfields and the missionaries found themselves in direct confrontation with the prospectors. When the missionaries tried to prevent them prostituting Aboriginal women, the gold diggers harassed the missionaries and slandered them to the Aborigines.

As a Moravian historian said:

For certain vile purposes of their own, a number of gold-diggers in the immediate neighbourhood – fearing that if [the Aborigines] became Christians the women would no longer sell their souls for an ounce of tobacco – now made a deliberate attempt to destroy the Mission. First they pilfered the Brethren's garden and stole their horses; then they informed [the Aborigines] that the Brethren fully intended to poison them, boil them in a pot as big as a beer-house, and serve them up for dinner. . .⁶¹

When the missionaries erected a fence to prevent access to the mission lease, a local magistrate, Theophilus Keene, who coveted the mission land, ordered it dismantled. The missionaries refused and when two farmers destroyed the fence, they took the matter to the Swan Hill court. They lost their case, appealed to the Surveyor-General, and lost again.⁶²

La Trobe had, by this time, left Australia and the new govern-

ment of the recently constituted State of Victoria was somewhat less sympathetic. Trager decided to abandon the mission, against the advice of people like Bishop Perry.⁶³ He and Spieseke returned to Germany where they were severely admonished for deserting their task.⁶⁴

While now, over 130 years later, it may be somewhat unfair to criticise missionaries for abandoning their work under very difficult circumstances, their action demonstrates the very widespread reluctance on the part of missionaries to respond to the real situation they faced. Their problem was a depraved white society, but they rarely ever saw this as their mission field. Throughout the continent, when white corruption drastically affected their missions, many simply gave up or moved to another site.

The significance of Lake Boga was not in its achievements – Spieseke ruefully admitted that they had made no converts⁶⁵ – but in the fact that it somehow broke the apathy that had paralysed the churches, prompting further efforts. This was particularly so in the case of Canon S. Lloyd Chase. He supported the Moravians from the outset, followed their work with interest, and championed them when they sought compensation after the government resumed the Lake Boga mission buildings.⁶⁶

Chase had for some time urged the establishment of a Church of England mission to the Aborigines. He was instrumental in organising the Melbourne Church of England Mission to the Aborigines, inaugurated on 31 October 1853. The society decided to support a missionary outreach somewhere on the Murray River, where Aborigines were still fairly numerous. Perhaps more significantly, the society chose a location where white population density was the lowest in Victoria and where there was no township. An Englishman who had recently come to Australia, Thomas Goodwin, was appointed to survey the situation.⁶⁷

Travelling via Parker's Mt Franklin station and the Lake Boga mission in September 1854, Goodwin eventually selected a site at the junction of the Murray and Darling Rivers, near the present town of Wentworth, where he said he found the Aborigines to be both numerous and needy.

Goodwin returned to Melbourne where he reported his findings early in 1855 at a public meeting at St Mark's Collingwood. At the meeting was another young Englishman, John Bulmer,

who, on returning recently from the goldfields, had seen an advertisement for the missionary meeting. Bulmer recorded his motives:

I had been on the gold-diggings and had seen the wicked way in which [Aborigines] were treated by those who ought to know better. They were encouraged in everything that was degrading and therefore they sank even lower than they were before the advent of Europeans. . . My great desire was to try to do something for them, to raise them out of their misery. . .⁶⁸

John Bulmer was to become an exceptionally long-serving missionary, and his life is discussed in much more detail in chapter 4. At the Melbourne meeting, Bulmer offered himself for the work and, after some discussion about his being Methodist and not Church of England, he was accepted. Goodwin and Bulmer journeyed from Melbourne by horse and dray, reaching the site on 3 August 1855.⁶⁹ The Society had been allowed the lease of a square-mile section of Rutherford and Crozier's property near the junction of the two rivers⁷⁰ containing a small billabong which the Aborigines called Yelta. The nearby settlers were neighbourly, supporting the concept of the mission.⁷¹

Although the Yelta mission was to be yet another failure, it is important to the present study because it provides one of the clearest examples of the claim that some failures were due to problems external to the missions and quite beyond the power of the missionaries to solve. It is also important because the missionaries in their brief ten years there were spectators of but not participants in the destruction of Aboriginal society. Their observations are all the more telling for the fact that they did not really understand what they were observing.

There was by then little confrontation between settlers and Aborigines, at least in the immediate vicinity. After violent clashes between Aborigines and Europeans in the 1830s, a relatively peaceful era came with the beginning of permanent European settlement there.

This was partly due to an unusually high proportion of fair-minded settlers, but also due to the nature of the environment. Settlers and Aborigines at the confluence of the Murray and Darling Rivers were in less direct competition for the resources than

in more densely populated areas. The rivers themselves, their associated lakes and billabongs, and the Great Anabranch of the Darling, combined to make a remarkably good environment. The wetlands provided exceptionally fine hunting and fishing while at the same time these swamper parts were not particularly suitable for sheep.

A government report detailed something of Aboriginal life there as it was before the 1860s:

[Aborigines] hunt kangaroos and emus with dogs, which is mostly a mongrel breed of the kangaroo dog and other dogs. They shoot and net ducks etc., and catch fish, both with net and line.⁷²

The white pastoralists were quite aware that Aborigines were a potentially important labour pool in a region as yet sparsely populated by whites. The situation was not idyllic, but it was for a while stable. This was far from being the case further inland. Goodwin travelled considerable distances up the Darling and was horrified at the frequent evidence he found of cruel treatment and mass murder of Aboriginal people.⁷³

The teeming wildlife of the region was, in some ways, a negative factor to the missionaries. Given that their strategy was, as elsewhere, to set up a station and expect Aborigines to come there, they could only hope to attract them with gifts of food. This was not easy if Aborigines were not hungry. As Goodwin reported in 1866:

During the past month there has been very little attendance at the station, many days none. The river has been so unusually low and clear, they have been able to spear large quantities of fish, and many of a very large size, so that they have been quite independent of any stores.⁷⁴

To further complicate matters, there were times when the mission was completely out of rations. This was locally interpreted to mean that the missionaries were angry and withholding the food. This was particularly so in 1859, when they were temporarily not receiving government assistance:

The low state of our store has kept most of the adult blacks away from us, for they know they could not be employed if they came. They also appear to think, because we have not had a supply for them this season, that we are offended at them; or, as they express it, 'growl at them'.⁷⁵

Like those associated with other missions, Goodwin, Bulmer and their society saw the solution to this in agriculture, both to become self-supporting and to teach Aborigines the virtues of settled life. They found, as future agriculture in the region was to demonstrate, that it was impossible to grow anything without irrigation. Their gardening ventures were therefore limited to the watering capacity of their one windmill.⁷⁶ The mission station itself, like most missions, grew to resemble a typical sheep station:

A well fenced, spacious stock yard was enclosed on three sides by comfortable cottages for the missionaries, the school-room and by the store-room; other buildings are in the rear, amongst which was a hut used by the natives. Between the cottages and the steep bank of the river was a pleasant garden, well stocked with flowers and vegetables; and at about a quarter of a mile distance on either side of the mission premises was a camp of blacks, whose mia mias presented a somewhat substantial appearance, being thatched with reeds and perfectly secure from the weather.⁷⁷

This was also one of the regions where pastoral expansion was more rapid than the labour supply could cope with. Aboriginal men learnt to shear sheep and, to the credit of local pastoralists, were paid the same wages as white shearers.

Goodwin and Bulmer took an immediate interest in learning the local language, although the Aborigines had already acquired some use of English. While most Aboriginal people came and went, one couple, Nanwitchero and his young wife, stayed on and taught the missionaries about local languages and customs. Bulmer proved particularly adept, learning to speak Maraura fluently which gave him a high degree of acceptance.⁷⁸ He observed:

I had not been there many weeks before I could make myself understood by them. . . After I had been there six months I was told I was nearly a blackfellow.⁷⁹

The stated aims of the mission were to convert the Aborigines to Christianity, to provide employment, and to educate the children. As the mission's second annual report stated:

The plan on which the missionaries are recommended to proceed is, by every means in their power, to draw the natives to them, and to endeavour to preach Christ Jesus to them; using as a means to this end the rewarding them for their work by wages in the shape of food, and the obtaining of their children to be educated. . . they are careful to avoid giving them the idea that they will be maintained unless they labour in return for food.⁸⁰

The mission's educational objectives were assisted when Bulmer married Miss Stocks, a young schoolteacher, while on leave in Melbourne in 1855. The evangelistic objectives were never neglected. Bulmer translated Bible stories and tried to use culturally appropriate illustrations, but observed that 'the idea of living a spiritual life by faith in Christ or that they were responsible for their activities to God, was most difficult to impart'.⁸¹ Believing that faith in Christ was not possible without consciousness of sin, the missionaries concentrated on teaching about sinfulness. After four years, however, Bulmer reported that most of their time was spent in building, ploughing, planting and constructing their irrigation system.⁸²

It is difficult to assess what might have been the future of Aboriginal people in this region had the situation remained unaltered. In the mid 1850s there were, relative to other parts of Victoria, a number of positive features: an environment which enabled easy and continued access to traditional food supplies; some sympathetic pastoralists who paid fair wages to Aborigines for seasonal work; sincere missionary families who provided some medical care and schooling for children and tried to preach the gospel; and relatively small and widely scattered concentrations of white people.

This situation changed rapidly. The growing prosperity of the region caused a rapid increase in the white population. Europeans began to reach the district in quite large numbers, seeking work. A township, now Wentworth, sprang up on the NSW side of the river where paddle-steamers loaded and unloaded, and where grog

shanties provided the shearers with somewhere to spend their pay cheques. The missionaries saw the arrival of the three European-borne factors which together spelled doom – disease, grog and prostitution.

The beginnings of prostitution and drunkenness were noted by Mrs Bulmer in 1858. Writing about the schoolchildren, she said, 'We cannot keep the girls: they find it profitable to be about the resorts of idle shepherds, shearers, etc.' Of liquor, she wrote, 'the people have not, till lately, had much taste for grog, as it is called here, but since last shearing, when the men came to spend their money at the Darling, they have frequently been drunk'.⁸³

Goodwin went to South Australia in 1860 to visit Poonindie. He was very impressed with what he saw and as a result 'thanked God and took courage'.⁸⁴ He was ordained in 1861 by Bishop Perry.

The Bulmers were invited to commence a mission in Gippsland, but Mrs Bulmer contracted tuberculosis and slowly weakened. She persisted in her work until she could carry on no longer. Even when she could only speak in a whisper, the schoolchildren behaved towards her only with gentleness and obedience. The Bulmers left Yelta in 1861. Mrs Bulmer died shortly afterwards in Melbourne. Bulmer was replaced by Robert Holden who was joined in 1862 by another young Englishman, Joseph Shaw. Bulmer went on to commence the Lake Tyers mission, a story to be taken up later.

By about 1862 it was obvious that the twin effects of an unhealthy lifestyle and demoralisation were further reducing an already low resistance to European diseases. Aboriginal people died of chest diseases in increasing numbers.

The Aboriginal people themselves were aware that this unhealthy condition was related to the coming of the whites, without understanding the exact relationship. Goodwin found to his dismay that some of them at first attributed the illnesses to the mission, having 'taken it into their heads that the "news" makes them sick'.⁸⁵ This view did not last, but the illnesses and death reappeared regularly. Said one old man to Goodwin:

Before whitefellow come, blackfellow could run like emu; but now, supposing big one run, then big one tired, and plenty heart jump about; not always like that blackfellow.⁸⁶

In 1864, Goodwin recorded a huge gathering of Aborigines from quite distant places. It is very likely that this was the last initiation ceremony to be held in the district.⁸⁷ The cessation of ceremonies like this was not due to the missionaries, although they disapproved of them, but to white exploitation of the Aborigines, turning them into a community of fringe dwellers.

The missionaries observed the rapid destruction of the once-balanced Aboriginal lifestyle, and were appalled, as their report to the Victorian government in 1866 testifies:

The desire for intoxicating drink has greatly increased among them – men and women alike – and this vice is much encouraged by evil white men, who frequent their camps at night for the sake of the women; and as there is now no law in New South Wales to punish those who supply them with drink, they generally encamp on that side of the river near to the township and roadside inns where they can obtain drink openly; and consequently nearly all their earnings are spent in drink, which is taken to the camp, and frequent quarrels and fights are the result. Their one desire is now to obtain money, in order that they may procure drink.⁸⁸

The missionaries, supported by fair-minded townspeople and pastoralists, petitioned the NSW government to prohibit the giving of liquor to Aborigines and were disappointed when no such prohibition was written into the new NSW Act relating to the sale of liquor.⁸⁹ Total prohibition may not, of course, have been the answer, but we should commend those who cared enough about the destructive effect of alcohol to try to do something about it.

The situation, however, was more complex than simple legislation, as the Police Magistrate in Wentworth realised:

[Although] steps should be taken by the Legislature to check as much as possible an undue quantity of intoxicating drink being given to the Aborigines, I would not advocate the entire prohibition of spirits to the natives, for there are occasions when to give them a little is really beneficial – I allude to special services sometimes performed by them, such as diving for the recovery of bodies drowned etc., when the offer of a little spirits is a great inducement to them to engage in the search. . . but I think the sale to them should be stopped.⁹⁰

The missionaries eventually became quite discouraged. There had been only one apparent convert, Fred Wowinda, and possibly two or three other young men. A few Aboriginal families had actually tried to farm, but did not persist with it. In the earlier years, some children had learnt to read and write and there were reports of them using their new skills to assist illiterate whites. The missionaries, however, felt their efforts were being wasted. The Aborigines knew of their disapproval of liquor and drunkenness, so even those with whom they had once been friends began to avoid the mission and the missionaries.

Looking back on the failed mission, John Bulmer came to some very important conclusions. He saw that the only hope for the Aboriginal people would have been the moral strength to resist the corrupting influence of immoral whites, and that this could have been gained through a Christian faith. He therefore concluded that the missionaries had given the wrong impression by concentrating on the attempt to turn the Aborigines into farmers:

We had a good garden and grew plenty of vegetables. Dear Mr Chanson visiting us admired the garden but thought it would be much better to have plants in the Lord's garden. In looking back I fear we had not sufficient faith in the power of the gospel. I was young and altogether inexperienced but I often feel we should have been more active and zealous in letting people know our message alone.⁹¹

Furthermore, Bulmer saw that the message that they did present to the people was incomplete, concentrating as it did on sin and punishment, rather than hope. It was, he said, 'not the gospel'.⁹²

Despite wholehearted support from the better pastoralists and townspeople, who petitioned the Government to prevent the exploitation of the local Aborigines, Goodwin's 1865 report was gloomy. The society therefore took the decision, in 1866, to close the mission. The Society's conclusions are most revealing. The site had been chosen at Yelta precisely because there was no township, but once there was, Aboriginal society was irreparably damaged and the missionaries saw no further point in the mission, a point the Melbourne committee made clear in their report to the Victorian government in 1866:

The Committee have now sold the improvements for the sum of £300, and have thus parted with their first Station after an occupancy of fifteen years.

The chief reason for this step on the part of the Committee was the rise of the township of Wentworth on the bank of the Murray opposite to Yelta. The temptations offered to the natives in a township, and the contracts into which they are there brought with dissolute white men, render a site in the neighbourhood of one particularly unsuited for a mission station.

When, fifteen years ago, the Society first established their station at Yelta, a township where Wentworth now stands was unthought of.⁹³

Fred Wowinda was sent to Matthew Hale at Poonindie in South Australia where, much to his delight, he was soon joined by Robert Holden who took up the post of Superintendent there. Goodwin remained as Church of England Rector of Wentworth, sparing as much time as he could for the Aboriginal fringe dwellers.

What else could or should the missionaries have done? They did their best to urge the Government to act to punish exploitation of Aborigines. They tried to provide a safe place for Aborigines and then demonstrated acceptance and compassion. They regretted that they had preached judgment rather than hope, but perhaps the more significant question is whether they should have stayed. Why did not they or their society see that they could still have been the presence of Christ for a damaged community? What were they fleeing?

The Aboriginal people became like those of most of the rest of Victoria, an oppressed minority on the margins of white society. But their tragedy was to continue. The remaining Kulkyne men, one of the groups which had been at Yelta, were massacred early this century because two white children inexplicably went missing. Their womenfolk buried them beside a billabong which they named Mourn Pool.

Now famed for its beauty, the pool is being used to promote tourism in the Mildura district. Some people have already noticed the name being surreptitiously altered to Morn Pool. Thus is history changed and forgotten by the whites, but the Aboriginal people know, and remember.

The establishment of Victorian reserves

The establishment of the Church of England mission at Yelta marked the beginnings of a new era of wider concern about the fate of Aborigines in Victoria.⁹⁴ The Port Phillip District had become the State of Victoria in 1851. Many institutions were seeking to act with responsibility in their new status.

Within a very few years of self-government, the Protestant churches were becoming increasingly autonomous, with an associated shift of emphasis to local issues.⁹⁵ The spiritual and physical welfare of Aborigines within the Colony were not necessarily high on the list of such issues. When the newly established Church of England Diocese of Melbourne was appealing for clergy and support, Aboriginal outreach was specifically excluded. Bishop Perry wrote in 1847:

. . . No account has been taken of the 4 000 Aboriginal inhabitants. . . We must first make provision for the necessities of our brethren and fellow Christians and afterwards we may hope with the blessing of God to be enlarged abundantly so as to preach the gospel of Christ to the heathen also.⁹⁶

Taken on its face value, this is a curiously inverted theology: 'Let's look after our own church people and, if God materially blesses us for doing that, we might have enough money to consider the Aborigines.' Perhaps it was intended to be no more than an embarrassed apology for their very inadequate resources. It is to the credit of Perry and the Church of England church that they kept their word. After self-government, with gold making Victorian settlers rich, an Act was passed establishing the Church of England in Victoria with its own governing Synod or Assembly. One of the first provisions of that Assembly was to set up a committee in 1856 under George Rusden to advise the Church on how best to 'perform its duty to the Aborigines'.⁹⁷

Although the new concern for Aborigines was spearheaded by the churches, it was not confined to them. There were other groups and individuals in sympathy with the Aboriginal cause. Among them one historian lists, as well as churchgoers, 'philanthropists, ethnologists and a small group of concerned ex-squatters'.⁹⁸ Although I most sincerely acknowledge the humane contribution of these people, I suspect it is not technically correct

to list these people as if they were distinct from Christians or, at least, from churchgoers. It is true that these people did not speak formally on behalf of the churches. Edward Parker, for example, spoke as a member of parliament, Edward Wilson as a newspaper editor. They spoke on behalf of other institutions, or used these other institutions as forums for the expression of their own opinions, but the fact remains that most of these people were also Christians.

I do not wish here to fall into my own trap, by treating 'churchgoers' and 'Christians' as two distinct groups which did not significantly overlap. I think it accurate, however, to say that most of those with a conscience about Aborigines were Christians. I would not make such a claim for the 1980s, but I most certainly would for the 1850s.

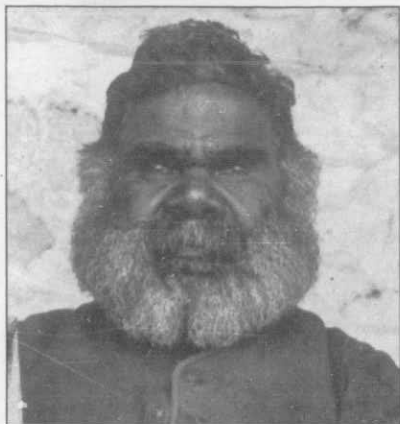
The more prominent people in the group included S.Lloyd Chase, Edward Parker, Thomas McCombie, Edward Wilson, William Westgarth, George Rusden and Charles Griffith. Perhaps their most important common factor was that they cared. In what they thought should be done there was a complex mixture of compassion, justice and imperialism. Their concern was genuine and deeply felt. They believed the Aboriginal people to have been gravely harmed and they believed that Victoria with its new-found wealth could and should spend some of it on the remaining Aborigines. While accepting that colonisation had occurred – even, in many cases, that colonisation was justified – they did not accept as inevitable the death of the Aboriginal race. In particular, they rejected the glib ascription of Aboriginal death to the will of God.

Edward Wilson, editor of the *Argus* from 1848 to 1858, was particularly outspoken in his influential editorials. He was angered by the laughter which accompanied the announcement by the newly-formed parliament that what he called 'the contemptible sum' of £1 750 had been set aside for Aborigines. During just the few years that Victoria had been a separate colony, wrote Wilson, the Government had sold Aboriginal land worth £4.5 million, £35 million worth of gold had been extracted and there had been millions of pounds worth of beef, mutton and wool.

Wilson accepted the usual derogatory view that Aborigines were inferior both mentally and physically. Although this presumption was wrong, his conclusions based on it followed a



17. Charles Joseph La Trobe
Acknowledgement: Sutherland, 1888,
p.175



18. Fred Wowinda — probably
the first Aboriginal Christian in
Victoria. Photograph taken in
later life at Point Pearce
Acknowledgement: State Library of
SA. Reproduced with permission.



19. Nathanael Pepper, first
convert and Christian leader at
Ebenezer
Acknowledgement: R. Brough Smyth,
Aborigines of Victoria, Mason, Firth &
McCutcheon, Melbourne, 1876, Vol.1, p.9

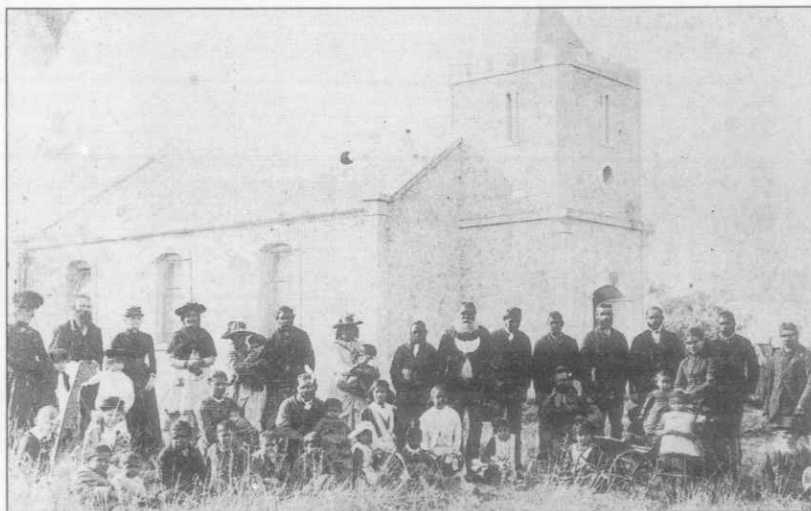


20. William Ridley, 1878
Acknowledgement: *Sydney Mail*,
12 October 1878.
National Library of Australia.
Reproduced with permission.



21. Frederick and Christiana Hagenauer

Acknowledgement: Alec Jackomos and the Australian
Institute of Aboriginal Studies. Reproduced with permission.



22. Ebenezer Mission about 1892

Acknowledgement: Alec Jackomos and the Australian
Institute of Aboriginal Studies. Reproduced with permission.

truly humanitarian, perhaps even Christian, logic. Their 'weakness', he reasoned, was not an argument for dispossessing and destroying them, but an argument for treating them justly:

We do not say that the Anglo-Saxon was not justified in taking possession of this fine country, and developing its magnificent resources, as the original occupant never would have done. If even our presence here should be made the instrument in the hands of Providence for the early extermination of this people, we still say that the onward march of the white man must not be arrested. But there is too great a readiness in recognising, as 'the hand of Providence', that which is directly traceable to our own nefarious neglect and wickedness.

In less than twenty years we have nearly swept them off the face of the earth. We have shot them down like dogs. In the guise of friendship we have issued corrosive sublimate in their damper and consigned whole tribes to the agonies of an excruciating death. We have made them drunkards, and infected them with disease which have rotted the bones of their adults, and made such few children as are born amongst them, a sorrow and a torture from the very instant of their birth. We have made them outcasts on their own land, and are rapidly consigning them to entire annihilation.⁹⁹

In terms of the philosophical (or theological) stance which impelled these people, it is significant that they rejected the widespread and racist claim that Aborigines were sub-humans whose extermination was a law of nature. They believed Aborigines to be inferior but not irredeemably inferior. It was morally justifiable to take and improve their land in the interests of progress, but it was not morally justifiable to destroy them in the process.¹⁰⁰

The ex-Protector, Edward Parker, by then a member of the Legislative Council of Victoria, put this most strongly in an address to a young men's Christian organisation:

One other opinion as to the destiny of these despised people I must remark upon before I close. It is a common opinion, expressed, too, in quarters often whence better notion might be expected, that they are a doomed race - that they must pass away.

Nay, the opinion assumes a more daring form in the assertion that it is an appointment – the inscrutable decree – of Divine Providence that uncivilised races should perish before the march of civilisation. I may admit to the probability of the event as to the Australian Aborigines, but I deny its inevitable necessity. I want to know where the decree is written. . . Do you not see that if the argument be worth anything that, if followed out to its ultimate consequences, it can be made to justify every outrage, and to palliate every crime? – God has suffered it, and therefore he wills it!

. . . Let men of the world say, if they will, 'Let the people alone.' 'Let them die, as die they must,' and as has been actually said to me, 'The sooner they perish the better.' But let every Christian young man rise, and say with one voice, to the Government, the legislature, and the nation; occupy the land, till its broad wastes; extract its riches, develop its resources, if you will; but, in the name of God and humanity, *Save the people*.¹⁰¹

Largely as a result of the efforts of these people, the Victorian Parliament in 1858 set up a Select Committee on Aborigines 'to inquire into the present condition of the Aborigines of this colony, and the best means of alleviating their absolute wants'.¹⁰² The evidence presented to this committee, which carried the most weight, was that of William Thomas, the former Protector. His views were almost identical to those of his former colleague, James Dredge, who had published his plan for the Aborigines' 'moral and social improvement' in 1845.

Essentially Dredge had suggested the creation of reserves for each Aboriginal tribe or language unit. Most importantly, the reserve was to be in their own traditional areas 'within the limits of such territory as by common usage belongs to them, the reserve selected being as eligibly situated as may most nearly [conform] with their wishes, combining the natural advantages of wood and water etc and as remote from purchased lands and squatting stations as possible'.¹⁰³

Thomas went a significant step further in his recommendations. The reserves should be substantial – Thomas suggested 100 square miles¹⁰⁴ – and should be chosen by the Aborigines. Thomas agreed with Dredge that it should be made compulsory to live on the reserves, and that the reserves should be supervised by

missionaries who should both evangelise the Aborigines and lead them towards a settled agricultural life.

Although Thomas' suggestions were still ethnocentric, still presuming the inherent superiority of European culture, his basic concept had much to recommend it. Given the situation in colonised Victoria in 1858, and given the reality that whites were not about to go away, the next best thing was to allow Aboriginal people in each tribal area a significantly sized piece of land of their own choosing.

It is indeed a pity that the Select Committee did not adopt the full spirit of Thomas' ideas. Although the Committee seemingly adopted some of Thomas' suggestions, they ignored the most important: the large size of the reserves and the obligatory involvement of Aboriginal people in choosing the site. Thus they destroyed the basis of Thomas' recommendation. Had the Committee listened to Thomas, Aboriginal people in Victoria would have had something not dissimilar from what they are still seeking today.

In the event, the Committee recommended moderate, well-funded reserves for each tribe, the size being related to the agricultural potential of the land. In some cases this would mean as little as 500 acres in the more fertile areas. They were only prepared to grant Aborigines the minimum economic units. This doomed the future reserves to be judged not on the happiness and well-being of the Aborigines who lived there, but upon their agricultural success – once more, the white person's measure.

Even given the half-hearted response of the Select Committee, there still remained an opportunity for good to come of the recommendations they did make. In particular, it is regrettable that Aboriginal involvement in the selection of reserves was not enshrined in law. The story of the first reserve to be created under the new regime is a perfect example of what might have been but was not allowed to be.

If not actually obligatory, Aboriginal involvement was by no means impossible, even in the 1850s. People like Thomas and Parker were in close contact with Aborigines and no doubt assisted them to understand how the white government made its decisions. Some Aboriginal people were becoming quite politically sophisticated. Even before the parliament had fully considered the Select Committee's recommendations, there were Aboriginal

people aware that there was a change in mood and that now was the time to present a case to the Government.

In February 1859, a delegation of Aborigines of the Yarra and Upper Goulburn regions asked Thomas if he could obtain a grant of land for them. He arranged a meeting with the Land Board. On 4 March 1859 two Yarra elders, Wonga and Munnarm, and five Goulburn elders, Beaning, Murrin Murrin, Parugean, Baruppin and Koo-gurrin, put their case to the Board.¹⁰⁵ They asked for a tract of land at the junction of the Acheron and Little Rivers. The hilly, wooded land was of little use to white pastoralists but abounded in game. The Surveyor-General, however, insisted upon an undertaking that the Aborigines would cultivate it.¹⁰⁶ They promised that although they would obtain their food in the traditional way 'some would always stop and turn up ground and plant potatoes and corn'.¹⁰⁷ The Land Board agreed.

The Aboriginal delegation, Thomas, and a government surveyor selected the exact site on 10 March. Close to one hundred Aboriginal people happily shifted there. The Acheron reserve seemed, at that point, to have every chance of success. Aborigines had proposed the idea themselves and selected the site. They had agreed to a reasonable plan of land use combining traditional food gathering and European farming. The Government eventually provided funds and selected a sympathetic and experienced white man, Robert Hickson, to act as superintendent and schoolteacher.

When Thomas was asked to submit detailed plans for other reserves, he was rather pessimistic because in mid-1859 the Government was still delaying the funding. It was approved in 1860. Thomas stressed, however, that to have any success at all the reserves had to be chosen by the Aborigines. He used the selection of Acheron as a model:

It would be well for the Aborigines themselves to select the localities. Hitherto, white men have selected the spots. White man's taste is widely different to the Aboriginal.

That was powerfully exemplified to me in my late accompanying of the Upper Goulburn delegates to their ('Goshen') promised land: no white man, even the most zealous missionary, would have selected such a spot. My impression is that much of the ill success attending previous exertions has been through this - drawing them to a locality in which they took no interest, or felt

no pleasure in encamping on.¹⁰⁸

The scheme had, however, one serious flaw which those interested in Aboriginal land rights today understand only too well. While the government accepted in principle that the tribes had a right to compensation for the loss of their traditional land, it did not give Aborigines title to the land nor autonomy in their use of it. Four white trustees were appointed, all local squatters and magistrates, to oversee the reserve and determine whether or not it was being used effectively.¹⁰⁹

Unknown to Thomas, while he was recommending Aboriginal initiative in the choice and siting of reserves based on the Acheron experience, one of the Acheron trustees, Peter Snodgrass, was scheming with a squatter, Stephen Jones, who owned a sheep run called 'Mohican' four miles up the river, to sell it to the government for an inflated price and to move the reserve there. Thomas strongly opposed the move, advising the government of the Aboriginal people's desire to stay in their chosen home and of the excessive price being asked for Mohican.¹¹⁰

Thomas was ignored. The government took the local trustees' advice. The Aborigines became very angry when the trustees demonstrated their point by allowing two squatters, Nash and Glass, to use Acheron. Hickson was ordered to move to Mohican in September 1860. The Aborigines refused to go, but Hickson obeyed and went with the help of four Aboriginal women.¹¹¹

The new Acheron reserve, unlike the original reserve, had nothing in its favour. The Aborigines did not want to go there. The hunting there was poor. The white superintendent, Hickson, was disillusioned, ran foul of Snodgrass and was dismissed. The government and the trustees disagreed over control of the reserve. No more than about a third of the Aborigines ever went there.

In March 1862, the new Acheron was closed. The Central Board reported:

The old station was selected by the Goulburn Aborigines and they seemed to like it extremely, and as many as ninety blacks were congregated there at first. Now at the new station, there are seldom more than twenty-five or thirty, and these are dissatisfied and careless of its success.¹¹²

The Acheron initiative was destroyed by a combination of bureaucracy and greed. The government, wary of allowing Aboriginal people to be really in control of anything, never actually gave them the land. The trustees made sure that they alone had control of what was happening in their district and saw the reserve simply as a way of profiting out of government initiatives for Aborigines. This kind of affair has been repeated numerous times throughout Australia, even to the present day: governments responding only partially to Aboriginal need and white people in privileged positions finally being the only ones to profit.

Enlightened colonialism: a contradiction in terms

La Trobe, Glenelg, the Protectors, British Evangelicals of Exeter Hall, the Aborigines' Protection Society, the missionary societies, the Lake Boga and Yelta missionaries – indeed, all who were concerned about Aboriginal welfare – believed in enlightened colonialism. They did not seem to perceive that if people had to be forced to accept British civilisation, it may not have been as inherently desirable as they thought.¹¹³

These people were sincerely interested in the welfare of Aboriginal people, genuinely concerned about their plight. They believed that if settler violence could somehow be controlled, a humane type of colonisation could be implemented which would benefit both the settlers and the Aborigines.

What they failed to see was that 'humane' and 'colonisation' were antithetical.¹¹⁴ Colonisation was engaged in because it was profitable. This profitability was based solely upon the exploitation of the colonised people and their resources. Colonisation was everywhere exploitative. No-one has ever put this more powerfully than William Howitt:

We have now followed the Europeans to every region of the globe, and seen them planting colonies, and peopling new lands, and everywhere we have found them the same – a lawless and domineering race, seizing on the earth as if they were the first-born of creation, and having a presumptive right to murder and dispossess all other people. For more than three centuries we have glanced back at them in their course, and everywhere they have had the word of God in their mouth, and the deeds of darkness in their hands. In the first dawn of discovery, forth

they went singing the *Te Deum*, and declaring that they went to plant the cross among the heathen. As we have observed, however, it turned out to be the cross of one of the two thieves, and a bitter cross of crucifixion it has proved to the natives where they have received it. It has stood the perpetual sign of plunder and extermination. The Spaniards were reckless in their carnage of the Indians, and all succeeding generations have expressed their horror of the Spaniards. The Dutch were cruel, and everyone abominated their cruelty.

One would have thought that the world was grown merciful. Behold North America at this moment, with its disinherited Indians! See Hindustan, that great and swarming region of usurpations and exactions! Look at the Cape, and ask the Caffres whether the English are tender-hearted and just: ask the same question in New Holland: ask it of the natives of Van Diemen's Land – men, transported from the island of their fathers. Ask the New Zealanders whether the warriors, whose tattooed heads stare us in the face in our museums, were not delicately treated by us.

Many are the evils that are done under the sun; but there is and can be no evil like that monstrous and earth-encompassing evil which the Europeans have committed against the Aborigines of every country in which they settled. And in which country have they not settled? It is often said as a very pretty speech – that the sun never sets on the dominions of our youthful Queen; but who dares to tell us the far more horrible truth, that it never sets on the scenes of our injustice and oppressions!

. . . There is no sum of wickedness and bloodshed – however vast, however monstrous, however enduring it may be – which can be pointed out, from the first hour of creation, to be compared for a moment with it.¹¹⁵

What were Christians in the Australian colonies to do? What were the humanitarians to do? What choices were available to fair-minded Europeans?

It is simply not true that none of them ever pondered the gross injustice of colonisation. They did indeed, but by the mid-nineteenth century the European settlement was seventy years old and regions like Victoria were a mosaic of pastoral properties and country towns. An unjust but irreversible historical event had occurred and the colonisers were here to stay. They were not going to pack up and go home.

Some, as we have seen, took the view that the demise of the Aborigines was Providential, the will of God. It was sad, but it had happened, so it must have been the design of Providence, otherwise it would not have occurred. William Westgarth was amazed that God should have created a race so doomed:

Behold him a wandering outcast; existing apparently without motives and without object; a burden to himself, a useless encumberer of the ground! Does he not seem pre-eminently a special mystery in the designs of Providence, an excrescence, as it were, upon the smooth face of nature, which is excused and abated only by the restless haste with which he disappears from the land of his forefathers? Barbarous, unreflecting and superstitious, how strangely contrasted is an object so obnoxious and so useless with the brightness of a southern sky, and the pastoral beauty of an Australian landscape.¹¹⁶

Even some of the more outspoken Christian leaders, who deplored the killing of Aborigines, were lured, by the compelling evidence of their eyes, to believe that God must have willed the Aborigines out of existence. 'It seems, indeed,' wrote Lang, 'to be a general appointment of Divine Providence that the . . . miserable Aborigines of New Holland should be utterly swept away by the flood-tide of European colonisation.'¹¹⁷ Many found it more comfortable to romanticise this belief. There was no shortage of metaphorical euphemisms: the blacks were 'fading away', 'fading out', 'decaying', 'slipping from life's platform', 'melting away like the snow from the mountains at the approach of spring', 'perishing as does the autumnal grass before the bush fire' and so on.¹¹⁸

Worst of all, even some of the few Aboriginal people who were becoming Christians began to believe that although there was hope in the next world, there was none in this. Many Aboriginal people who learnt of God could only believe that what was happening around them was God's doing. Governor Bourke wrote: '[Aborigines] conceive that the God of the English is removing the Aboriginal inhabitants to make room for [Europeans].'¹¹⁹

The perceptive visitor, Captain J.L. Stokes, observed in 1846 that colonists were mostly willing to 'content themselves with the belief' that the imminent disappearance of the Aborigines was 'in accordance with some mysterious dispensation of Providence'.¹²⁰

According to Count Strzelecki, such statements were like an 'inquest of the one race upon the corpse of another' which usually ended in the verdict: 'dead by visitation of God'.¹²¹

There were many thoughtful Christians, including most of the missionaries, who did not accept this theological sleight of hand. As Christians, they had only one other position to which they inevitably had to come. This was that the sweep of history was in God's hands, that the pattern could not be discerned from a position so close to the events, and that God would finally judge those who acted with injustice and mistreatment towards those less powerful than themselves.

'Keep your hands free from human creatures' blood,' wrote Lillie Matthews to her fiancée, or they will 'rise up in judgment against us in the last great day'.¹²² The questions of justice to Aboriginal people, declaimed Matthew Hale, 'have hereafter to be tried again before a much higher and more impartial tribunal than any earthly judgment seat'.¹²³

Among those who perceived that in the case of the dispossessed Aborigines justice was either blind or deaf or perhaps both was Joseph Orton, superintendent of the Wesleyan missions. He clearly saw the contradiction between the gross injustice of colonisation and the petty harassment of Aborigines for trivial offences by the police and law courts:¹²⁴

It becomes a grave question whether we have a right to bring them to a British tribunal, with all the parade and form of a perplexingly refined civil court, and there place them at the bar and try them. . . . Rather, before we tantalise them with the mockery of a British trial, let British subjects be compelled to act upon those laws of justice and equity which are the professed pride of the nation; especially wherein the rights of man are so sacredly held.

Where is the justice of robbing, starving, murdering, and then bringing the survivors of the aggrieved to a bar of justice for a petty larceny to satisfy the bitter cravings of hunger, by taking that which their nature teaches them is right?¹²⁵

Another who was publicly prepared to condemn the injustices of the dispossession of Aboriginal people of their land was Bishop Broughton. In 1840, in a speech to the Legislative Council of NSW, he spoke most forcefully:

The Aboriginal natives. . . have an equal, nay, a superior right to the white man to subdue and replenish the soil; and anyone who goes among the Aborigines and interferes with their natural right of procuring the necessities of existence is an aggressor, and whatever proceedings may arise out of those acts are chargeable upon him who first gave the provocation.¹²⁶

The truth we must face is that these people who spoke out against injustice or acted with compassion were the best the nineteenth century had to offer. There were: clergy like the Baptist John Saunders or the Catholic Matthew Gibney, who forcefully condemned white brutality; missionaries like the Anglican John Gribble or the Moravian Louis Giustiniani, who fearlessly spoke out for justice for Aboriginal people; compassionate citizens like Anne Camfield and Daniel Matthews, who were prepared to give of themselves; Christian women like Lillie Matthews, who tried to influence their menfolk to act with mercy; settlers with a conscience like George Shenton in Western Australia and Alexander Elder in South Australia; ethically-minded military men like Watkin Tench in Sydney; a few morally-responsible journalists like A.J. Vogan or Edward Wilson of the Melbourne *Argus*, or W.A. Duncan of the *Australasian Chronicle*; policemen like Sergeant Bennett, who knew where their real duty lay; and ex-convicts like John Casey and David Carly, who understood only too well what it was to be powerless.

Such people often stood between particular Aboriginal groups and their complete destruction. Like the Aboriginal resistance fighters, they too were, in their own different ways, people of courage and determination. Like the Aboriginal resistance fighters, they often did not succeed.

They were not perfect. They were ethnocentric. They saw the world through what have been called 'cultural spectacles'.¹²⁷ They were people of their time, influenced by the spirit of their age, but they were also the best of their age. Nineteenth-century Britain produced no-one better.

They were a small and feeble force to counter the rampant greed and selfish brutality of their contemporaries. They did not do it very well because they carried their own weaknesses. But, without them, the plight of Aboriginal people would have been immeasurably worse.

ENDNOTES

1. Reynolds, 1982: 66
2. Barnabas Roberts, quoted in Sutton and Hercus, 1986: 66
3. Dinah Garadj, personal comment, 1983
4. Searcy, 1909: 113
5. W.Ridley, Appendix in Lang, 1861: 439
6. *Bowen Independent* compiled the story of James Morrell in 1966 from old newspaper reports and other sources. [See ch. 2, nn.83 and 84]
7. Reynolds, 1982: 158
8. Report of Northern Protector of Aborigines 1902 *QVP*, 2, 1903, PROSA
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4

The cries of the compassionate

*Key nineteenth century missionaries
in eastern Australia*

MISSIONARY WORK IN THE second half of the nineteenth century in Australia is not the story of the work of the churches or missionary societies, but the story of a small number of outstanding individuals dedicated to doing what they believed was best for Aboriginal people. While some of these individuals were employed by the churches or missionary societies, some of them operated outside the formal church structures – even, at times, in spite of them. They demonstrated courage in the face of opposition and compassion where there was need, even if sometimes their zeal was misdirected.

These missionaries would include, at the very least, Frederick Hagenauer, John Bulmer, Daniel and Janet Matthews, John Gribble, William Ridley, Matthew Hale, George Taplin, Anne Camfield and Rosendo Salvado. I will treat Gribble, Hale, Taplin, Camfield, and Salvado in their South or Western Australian situations in later chapters.

It would, however, be quite incomplete to leave the nineteenth century eastern Australian scene without acknowledging the life and work of the Moravian missionaries and of John Bulmer, Daniel and Janet Matthews, and William Ridley. The separate contexts of their lives and work were quite different. The Moravians were career missionaries of a remarkably mission-minded church, John Bulmer volunteered himself as an untrained missionary, spending his life as a missionary of the Church of

England, Daniel and Janet Matthews worked entirely independently of any church, while the Presbyterian William Ridley tried desperately to be a missionary, but finally lost support. All of them, however, shared a common deep concern for Aboriginal people and a willingness to give up everything else in order to do something about it.

The Moravian missions of the Wimmera and Gippsland

The Moravians did not like failure. Embarrassed at their withdrawal from Lake Boga in 1856, the Moravian church remained in contact with the Victorian government (see chapter 3). This was partly because there was a protracted dispute about compensation for the material improvements to the Lake Boga site, but they also expressed a hope that they would be allowed to return. The new Governor, Sir Henry Barkley, invited them back, suggesting a new mission site in the Wimmera.

In 1858, William Spieseke, who had by now been ordained, returned to Victoria with a new colleague, Rev. Frederick Augustus Hagenauer. They were encouraged by their loyal advocate, Canon S. Lloyd Chase, and by the promised support of both the Church of England and Presbyterian churches as well as the Government.¹ Spieseke and Hagenauer travelled from Ballarat to the Wimmera on foot, investigating possible locations. They rejected potential sites near Mt Zero and Polkemmet because of nearby townships, believing the proximity of white settlements would nullify the work of the mission.² They walked up the Wimmera River until they reached Antwerp Station, not far from Lake Hindmarsh, where Horatio Ellerman welcomed them warmly.

Ellerman, a Belgian, had been one of the first settlers in the district in 1843. He was particularly notorious for his cruel treatment of Aborigines who had encroached upon 'his' land.³ Sixteen years later, when the Moravians arrived at Antwerp Station, Ellerman had become an affluent squatter, a prominent Presbyterian churchman, and a supporter of Aboriginal missions.⁴ He was actually ordained to the Presbyterian ministry in 1864.

This raises an issue which we will encounter again later. Had Ellerman and others like him genuinely repented of a violent past and were now seeking in some way to recompense Aboriginal people, or was Christianity a religion of convenience which could



23. Ramahyuck Mission about 1900

Acknowledgement: Alec Jackomos and the Australian
Institute of Aboriginal Studies. Reproduced with permission.



24. Warangesda Mission

Acknowledgement: *Sydney Mail*, July-December 1880, p.1112



25. Daniel and Janet Matthews, and Paddy and Jenny Swift,
London, 1889 Acknowledgement: Norman Collection (PGR 422),
Mortlock Library of South Australiana. Reproduced with permission.



26. Cumeroogunga School and children, about 1913.
Thomas James is on the left
Acknowledgement: Alec Jackomos and the Australian Institute
of Aboriginal Studies. Reproduced with permission.

be resumed when it suited?

In February 1846, Ellerman took part in a punitive raid on an Aboriginal camp site in which, among others, a woman with a young child was shot.⁵ Ellerman took the child home and cared for him, but some years later the boy was lost from a wool dray while on a trip to Melbourne. Unknown to Ellerman, children from St James' School, attached to Canon Chase's church, found the boy weeping and hungry and took him to school with them. Chase adopted the child, named him Willie and took him to England to be educated, hoping that he might grow up to become a missionary in Australia. Willie was baptised 'William Wimmera'. Unfortunately, Willie died of tuberculosis in England in 1852.⁶

Chase published the story of Willie Wimmera in a pamphlet. Early in 1858, when the Moravian missionaries were in London on their way to Australia, Charles La Trobe gave Hagenauer a copy of the pamphlet in his brother's house.⁷ The significance of this will become clear as the narrative progresses.

Ellerman offered the Moravians a limestone ridge by the Wimmera River which the Aborigines called Bungo-budnutt, but the Moravians called Ebenezer. Unknown to them, this was a site of significance to the local Wotjabaluk people, who returned there regularly for ceremonial purposes. It was also the site of the Aboriginal camp which Ellerman and his party had raided in 1846. Hagenauer recorded the beginning of the mission:

On Monday 10 January 1859 we began our work with the blacks of our place, where we cleared the ground. We employed several men. . . After prayer on the place where we shall endeavour to put up our first hut, we cut the first tree. The blacks prayed with us, or were attentive to our prayers.⁸

The following week, Hagenauer and Spieseke opened a school with one pupil, a boy named Bony. Two others named Tallyho and Corney joined him the next day, and on the following Sunday these three boys and an Aboriginal man and his son attended the mission's first service. For some weeks the mission prospered dramatically. At the next Sunday service, there were twenty-two Aborigines and sixty by the end of March. Then the Aborigines held a corroboree and left.⁹ The missionaries were distraught. Not only were they unaware that this was a site to which the

Aborigines would return; they never did comprehend the necessity for the Aboriginal people to travel their country regularly in order to care for it.

In April, the three pupils returned and in June they were joined by three others, including Bony's brother Pepper. They built themselves a hut near the comfortable mission-house which, by now, Ellerman had built for the missionaries. By the end of August, eighty Aborigines had gathered. They listened attentively to a church service, immediately staged their own corroboree and once more departed. Only Corney, Tallyho and Pepper remained.

This was repeated in early September, but on this occasion, at the conclusion of the corroboree, Hagenauer told the Aborigines that the land now belonged to Christ and that they could not corroboree on it any more. Quite naturally, this annoyed the Aboriginal people and created a tense atmosphere for some weeks. Hagenauer did not assist the situation by refusing to allow another visiting Aboriginal boy to use the hut in which his pupils lived. On 26 September, the Aborigines refused to attend the church service and some of them ordered the school boys out of the hut and removed their belongings. When Hagenauer protested, they became very angry. Fearing an attack, Hagenauer and Spieseke locked themselves in the mission house and prayed. There they commenced singing 'Rock of Ages' which they afterwards said had soothed the angry locals. This pious claim seems a much less likely explanation than the timely arrival of Ellerman, whom the Aborigines still feared.¹⁰

The situation calmed down the next day and the Aborigines stayed for several weeks before leaving. Pepper remained behind, later bringing Corney and a new youth, Teddy, with him. Slowly the other young men returned to the school. Spieseke and Hagenauer spent a great deal of their time with these boys, teaching them to read and write English and to understand the Bible and the Christian faith. The boys also taught the missionaries the Wotjabaluk language and helped in the translation of some Bible verses.

On 18 January 1860, while Hagenauer was away from Ebenezer, Spieseke and the boys translated the Good Shepherd passage from John 10. Pepper was obviously moved by the image of the shepherd. Later that evening he came back to speak to Spieseke:

Shortly after the conclusion of that meeting and after I had sat down to write a few lines, Pepper came to me and said, 'O, I want to speak to you about my state.' He was outside and I asked him to come in. At first he made a few inarticulate remarks about the liking he had for a certain book, but soon began: 'O, I do not know how I feel. I have wept about my sins. Last night I could have cried aloud, before I went down to the river for to fetch some water; and I have thought and have thought - I have thought about how our Saviour that night went into the garden and prayed there till the sweat came down from him like drops of blood, and that for me.'

I spoke with him, prayed with him, wept, shook hands and parted. It was to me like a dream and yet it was reality. How I felt and how I spent that night I cannot tell. I was afraid at the thought, how this tender plant of Divine grace is exposed to so much that can hinder the growth thereof, how old customs, flesh, the still wicked heart, the world and what therein is - how all this will strive to get the upper hand, and to check this plant in its first bud and springing up.

I was afraid. I wanted to go after him and speak more to him, but I did not and gave him over in my humble prayer into the careful hands of the Heavenly Gardener.¹¹

There is an interesting comparison here with Gunther's sceptical response to the spiritual convictions of Fred at Wellington Mission. Spieseke and Hagenauer personally shared their great joy with Pepper and encouraged his growing confidence. The effect was dramatic. Within a few days, Pepper was evangelising the other Aborigines, travelling throughout the district to wherever they were camped. Said Pepper's mother: 'My word, my picaninny keep him prayer longa blackfellow, not longa station but longa bush.'¹²

As a direct result of this, about sixty Aboriginal people became more or less permanent residents of the mission. There was still the issue of corroborees but a compromise was reached. The Aborigines appear to have agreed not to corroboree in the near vicinity of the mission while Spieseke and Hagenauer appear to have agreed not to try to stop them.

'You know we never keep you,' Spieseke told them. 'Each one can do as he pleases'.¹³ Pepper gained in confidence and assiduously evangelised his people:

Pepper soon began to speak to his countrymen about what he felt, and invited them to partake of the same blessing. The following Saturday, he and Boney went to Upper Regions, a station fourteen miles from here and had, on the Sunday after, prayer meetings with the blacks staying there. On Monday following, he returned, and brought several others with him. His mother came, too.¹⁴

Despite the clear conversion of Pepper and the resulting acceptance of the mission, it was 2 May 1860 which Hagenauer forever after regarded as 'the mysterious beginning of the mission'.¹⁵ Why he had not read Chase's little pamphlet about Willie Wimmera to the boys before seems strange. When he was first handed the pamphlet in London, Hagenauer would have had no way of knowing that he would be led to found his mission at the site of 'Willie's' mother's murder.

On 2 May, Hagenauer decided to read it to the boys. When he did so, the atmosphere, wrote Hagenauer, was electric:

'This was Jim Crow,' an older youth said. 'I was with them when his mother fell dead to the ground after the ball had entered into her heart. That (pointing to one of the youths) is his little brother and outside in the camp is his old father, Dowler, and all of us are his cousins. Close to where the hut stands, under the shade of the tree, we children were sitting with our mothers when the white man's ball killed Jim's mother, and down near the corner of the garden is where she is buried.'¹⁶

In deep silence, the boys took Hagenauer to the grave site. They knelt there and Hagenauer wept with them: 'It was not as if a missionary, with a number of heathen people, had been around that sacred spot, for our hearts had been truly united.'¹⁷

The next morning, Hagenauer planted a tree over the grave. Certainly, from this moment on, the mission prospered. With some local help, the Aborigines built a log church. The expenses were defrayed by a committee which was formed in Horsham to support the mission, consisting of local squatters, businessmen, 'three JPs and the policeman'.¹⁸ Generous donations were also sent from a Melbourne committee and the newly formed Presbyterian church in Melbourne.

In August 1860, Canon Chase dedicated the church. During

the ceremony, Spieseke baptised Pepper who chose his own baptismal name: Nathanael. A bell, sent from Saxony, rang out and 'the Gloria was sung by 110 Aborigines and forty whites'.¹⁹ The story of Nathanael Pepper created a sensation in Melbourne and overseas. He was widely, but incorrectly claimed as the first Aboriginal Christian. Certainly, his was the first truly public conversion. A huge thanksgiving rally was held in St Paul's, Swanson Street, Melbourne and chaired by the Governor, flanked by the leading churchmen, judges and politicians of the colony.

The following year, 1861, was a mixture of both joy and sorrow. Many more Aborigines became Christians, particularly the young men led by Bony, Nathanael's brother, who was baptised Phillip Pepper. Two Moravian sisters were sent out as brides for Hagenauer and Spieseke. They were married in a double ceremony at St Paul's, Melbourne by Canon Chase. On the other hand, 1861 was a year of sickness and death. Church services had to be held in the Aboriginal camp as so many were too ill to walk to the chapel. To add further to the problems of the community, a grog shanty was opened at nearby Dimboola.²⁰

An interesting event in 1862 was the arrival of a young Aboriginal woman, Rachel Warnedeckan, from Anne Camfield's school at Albany in Western Australia. Rachel was the first of a number of young Aboriginal Christian women who were sent far afield by the missionaries to find Christian husbands. This is a difficult practice on which to pass judgment. Rachel was a genuine orphan who had been brought up almost entirely by the Camfields. No doubt a tribal marriage would have been difficult if not impossible for her.

Not all of these arranged marriages were successful, but Rachel's was happy. She married Nathanael Pepper within a few months. She and Nathanael were given immediate responsibility, being placed in charge of Ebenezer's small orphanage. Rachel was highly respected and well-liked. She was described as hard-working, competent and charming, with an exemplary Christian faith. She died in 1869.²¹

In 1862, Hagenauer left to commence a mission in Gippsland. He was replaced by the Rev. Francis. Other Moravian missionaries who worked at Ebenezer over the years included the Revs Adolphus Hartmann, C.W. Kramer, J.H. Stoeble and Paul Bogtsch.

Illness and the proximity of liquor created continual problems at Ebenezer. The poor soil made agriculture a risky activity. There grew up, however, a loyal core of Christian men and women, particularly those who had been boys in the first little school in 1859. One of the positive features of the Moravian missionaries was that they gave Aboriginal people responsibility for various community functions as soon as they could. Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, there were regularly between fifty and eighty Aboriginal residents.

On 11 August 1873, Phillip Pepper died from rupture of aortic aneurism, to the immense sorrow of Aborigines and whites alike. He had lived a fine Christian life and had taken a great deal of responsibility. His wife, Rebecca, tried to carry on after him, but she, too, died a year later of dropsy.²²

On 24 June 1877, Spieseke died, having guided the Ebenezer mission for nearly twenty years. Aboriginal men walked a long distance to purchase and carry back a proper coffin. The Aborigines bewailed Spieseke's death for a long time, knowing how much their safe and mostly happy community had depended upon his leadership.²³

Kramer became the new manager and he, together with Hagenauer, convinced many of the oppressed Murray River Aboriginal people to move south to the Wimmera, increasing the mission population to over one hundred. Numbers were also swelled by the decision of the Wimmera tribes, most of whose survivors were now aging, to move permanently to the mission as the Wimmera region was now becoming so closely settled.

This increasing white settlement was to create tense times for Kramer. Like many missionaries, he did not really want to acknowledge his own success at encouraging Aboriginal people to cope confidently and independently in the new circumstances. Kramer found it difficult to adopt a less authoritarian role. Aborigines had survived at Ebenezer and now, as work became available on such labour-intensive projects as the new railway, they felt confident to seek outside employment. Some succeeded, while others fell into bad company, but it was always hard for the missionaries to allow the Aboriginal people the dignity of managing their own affairs, whether there was risk attached or not.

Kramer died in February 1891 and this event marked the decline of the mission. Through the death of older people and the

departure of the mission generation to seek work, there were few left at Ebenezer. Kramer was not replaced. Bogisch and the remaining staff continued for another decade. The decision to close the mission was taken in 1902. Bogisch died in 1903 and the mission lease was revoked in 1904.²⁴

Bishop P. La Trobe of the Moravian Mission Board wrote to the Victorian Board for the Protection of the Aborigines:

The Moravian Mission Board would feel grateful if the Government would make a permanent reservation of the burial ground at Ebenezer. The plot contains hallowed interest for us, as five of our missionaries are buried there among some 150 of the blacks, to whose temporal and spiritual welfare they have ministered.²⁵

Meanwhile, a second Moravian mission had been established in Gippsland. In 1861, Hagenauer had been asked to go to Gippsland to set up a new mission. The Board for the Protection of Aborigines had become anxious to establish several more reserves, particularly in eastern Victoria, and encouraged the churches to undertake to run them as a further missionary outreach. Emboldened by the apparent success of the Ebenezer mission, the Presbyterian and Church of England churches accepted the challenge. The Presbyterians asked Hagenauer to select a site and establish a mission, while the Church of England invited John Bulmer, previously of the Yelta mission, to do the same.

In the two decades since white invasion of eastern Victoria, the 2 000 Kurnai people had been reduced to 250. During the 1840s, a huge number of the Kurnai were massacred. Most of the slaughter went unrecorded, but what is known is plain enough. In the Bruthen Creek area in 1842 there was large scale systematic hunting of Aborigines who were 'shot by hundreds'.²⁶ By 1843, five white settlers had been killed by Aborigines in retaliation. The fifth of these was Ronald Macalister. There are numerous and varied accounts of the supposed reasons for his death.

A punitive expedition was organised. Whether or not Angus McMillan the famed 'discoverer' of Gippsland led the party is still a matter of controversy in Gippsland.²⁷ The posse located a large group of Aborigines near Warrigal Creek. In the massacre, it is es-

timated that as many as 150 Aborigines were killed. Warrigal Creek is said to have run red with blood.²⁸ Since the murder of Ronald Macalister, wrote Charles Tyers, the Aborigines 'have not been seen in the neighbourhood'.²⁹

There were massacres which had much more flimsy excuses than the spearing of a settler, including particularly the search for a possibly non-existent white woman said to be with the Aborigines.³⁰

Precisely which settlers were involved in all these massacres may never be known and their identity is unimportant to this study. What matters is that the killings occurred; that the fate of Aboriginal people in Gippsland was similar to so many other parts of the pastoral frontier; and that these events have become an indelible part of Aboriginal memory in the region. In white history, they have been enshrined only in curious Gippsland place-names, names which remind those who know of the events they commemorate: Boney Point; Skull Creek; Butcher's Creek.

Writing in 1846, Henry Meyrick, a young Christian settler, calculated that at least 450 Aborigines had been killed in Gippsland in the previous few years:

No wild beast of the forest was ever hunted down with such unsparing perseverance as they are. Men, women and children are shot wherever they can be met with. Some excuse might be found for shooting the men by those who are daily getting their cattle speared, but what can they urge in their excuse who shoot the women and children I cannot conceive. I have protested against it at every station I have been in Gippsland, in the strongest language, but these things are kept very secret as the penalty would certainly be hanging.³¹

How did settlers with some conscience, like Meyrick, cope with the situation? Whereas he once said that he would shoot a person whom he actually surprised in the act of taking one of his sheep, he was always against arbitrary and indiscriminate reprisal. At first he protested to the individuals concerned. In time, however, he admitted, by the very prevalence of the atrocities, to becoming inured:

I remember the time when my blood would have run cold at the

mention of these things, but now I am become so familiarised with scenes of horror from having murder made a topic of everyday conversation.³²

In the end, he could confide his feelings only in his mother, who was at a safe distance in England, but he felt unable to speak out where he was. His excuse to himself was that it would not have achieved anything:

I have heard tales and some things I have seen that would form as dark a page as ever you read in a book of history, but I thank God I have never participated in them. If I could remedy these things, I would speak loudly though it cost me all I am worth in the world, but as I cannot, I will keep aloof and know nothing and say nothing.³³

For the first decade of the white settlement of Gippsland, until about 1850, massacre by whites was by far the major cause of drastic population decline. When the Aboriginal resistance was broken, inter-tribal feuding became responsible for further deaths. This was an unusual circumstance, brought about by the severe dislocation of Aboriginal society. Virtually all perceptive observers of Aboriginal society, including the Gippsland missionaries, have noted that confrontations between both individuals and groups only rarely led to actual killing. Anger and retaliation in Aboriginal society were strictly controlled by acceptable ways of publicly exhibiting anger and by ritual methods of taking revenge.

Bulmer frequently observed such things:

A blackfellow in all his anger has some method. He takes care not to do anything which would involve him in further trouble . . . They generally made great displays at their fights. They talked big and one would have thought there was going to be a tall fight, but they were very easily held back and, I dare say, were thankful that some were near to stop the fight.³⁴

After the massacres by whites, however, and the dispossession of Aborigines from much of their land, groups already under immense stress were forced to cohabit the same tracts of land. The authority structures within the groups were already severely damaged by the sudden and violent deaths of so many important

members. Now powerless to act for their own good, the traumatised remnants of once-powerful groups preyed upon each other. Francis Tuckfield experienced this at Geelong in the 1830s.³⁵ In Gippsland in the 1850s, the Omeo Aborigines attacked Sale Aborigines on Christmas Day 1854, while the Sale people attacked the Snowy River people the following year.³⁶ The last major hostilities took place at Bushy Park in the summer of 1856 – 1857³⁷ and at the mouth of the Tambo River between the Tambo and Port Albert groups in the same year.³⁸

The now very shattered remnants of these groups degenerated further, although Bulmer found them less ravaged by disease than at Yelta. A marginalised people, their lives were slowly becoming dominated by liquor and prostitution. These were the remnants to whom Bulmer and Hagenauer gave the rest of their lives. One of their descendants, a member of the Pepper family, recently wrote:

Just in Gippsland alone there were over 2 000 Kurnai and that's a lot of blackfellows. That was before Angus McMillan came here. By the time the Rev. John Bulmer and the Rev. Hagenauer rescued our inob, there were 250.³⁹

Hagenauer left Ebenezer in 1861 to choose a mission site in Gippsland. His friend Nathanael Pepper travelled with him for forty miles, but eventually turned back to rejoin his family. Hagenauer chose a site near Lake Wellington called Boney Point, while Bulmer eventually chose Lakes Tyers. Bulmer had doubts about Hagenauer's choice of Boney Point because it was so named 'from the fact that a great many Aborigines were killed on the spot' and their bones scattered there.⁴⁰ His fears, however, did not appear to affect adversely its acceptance by the remaining Braiakalung and Tatungalung people of the region.

Hagenauer named the Lake Wellington mission 'Ramahyuck' meaning 'our home' – from a Hebrew term for 'home' (Ramah) and an Aboriginal term for 'our' (yuck).⁴¹ The mission prospered. By then there were few places left where Aborigines could live. Some gained temporary employment as station hands, especially as stock riders or shearers, but few of the stations encouraged their permanent presence. Aborigines found it essential to have somewhere to go. They used Ramahyuck and other missions as places

from which to venture out for seasonal work or hunting and fishing where this was still possible, but gradually they settled at these places. At least they were welcome there.

The missions became 'total institutions', miniature villages complete with church, schoolhouse, dormitories for boys and girls, kitchen, manager's residence and other white staff residences, huts for the Aborigines, sheds and barns. Regular routines were established which varied little from mission to mission, with set hours for school, station work, hunting, church services and ration distribution.

Whereas Hagenauer had been responsible to Spieseke at Ebenezer, at Ramahyuck he was in charge. He proved to be a competent, hardworking but very authoritarian, even despotic administrator. At Ramahyuck his word was law. He set out to destroy Aboriginal culture. He would tolerate no tribal customs or ceremonies. He burnt all spears and boomerangs.⁴²

The deepest criticism of Hagenauer is that he became an official – for a time, secretary – of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines. In this dual role, Hagenauer was guilty of 'serving God and Caesar', for his official duties seriously conflicted with his Christian duties. In particular, he was party to implementing the iniquitous Aborigines Protection Act of 1886 which distinguished between full-blood and half-caste Aborigines, requiring half-castes to be evicted from missions and reserves.⁴³ No doubt Hagenauer genuinely believed that Aboriginal people with some European blood were capable of independent life outside the missions, but the law split families. The resultant trauma for these Aboriginal families is still remembered.⁴⁴

Hagenauer was unpopular away from Ramahyuck. It was said that on other reserves, Aborigines 'would rather see the devil himself than old Hagenauer' because of the forced expulsions which followed his inspectorial visits.⁴⁵

Despite this, most Aboriginal people at Ramahyuck, who knew Hagenauer best, grew to respect and appreciate him. They called the Hagenauers *moongan* and *yucca*, meaning father and mother. Many Aboriginal people, particularly the generation who came as children or were born on the mission, became Christians. To Hagenauer, however, this was inseparable from what he called 'civilised community'. He provided this description of the effect of the mission to Howard Willoughby in 1886:

The beneficial influence of true Christianity, through the progress of education and civilisation, has worked a wonderful change in the lives, manners and customs of the blacks. Anyone not acquainted with their former cruel and most abominable habits, but knowing them only as now settled in peaceable communities, would scarcely believe that the description of heathen life which the apostle Paul gives in the Epistle to the Romans was a correct picture of their mode of life. . .

In the midst of their quarrels and bloody fights, at their ghastly corroborees and during the time of their most pitiful cries around their sick and dead ones, we have been able to bring to them the gospel of life and peace, and many times did they throw down their weapons and stop their nocturnal dances in order to listen to the Word of God and the joyful news of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. In the beginning of 1860, a remarkable awakening amongst the blacks began with earnest cries to God for mercy and sincere tears of repentance, which was followed by a striking change in their lives, manners and habits. The wonderful regenerating power of the gospel among the lowest of mankind worked like leaven in their hearts and, through patient labour and the constraining love of Jesus, we were soon privileged to see a small Christian church arise and a civilised community settled around us.⁴⁶

Nathanael Pepper joined his friend Hagenauer at Ramahyuck when his wife, Rachel, died in 1869. Nathanael remarried at Ramahyuck, but died of tuberculosis in 1877. His example of Christian character was long remembered in Gippsland, all the more so because he showed he could rise above his own imperfections.

'In the course of the years he was several times overcome by temptation and fell into sin,' wrote Hagenauer. Nathanael, however, did not allow these lapses to destroy his faith. 'He was endowed with many noble qualities,' Hagenauer also wrote. 'He was kind to all, sympathetic to the afflicted and charitable beyond his means.'⁴⁷ Nathanael's grave is still visible in the old Ramahyuck cemetery, the only Aboriginal grave to have been given a granite headstone. On it are engraved the words:

[Sacred] to the Memory of Nathanael Pepper, who fell asleep in Jesus, 7 March 1877, aged 36

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is – 1 John 3, v.2.

Encouraged, nevertheless, by the happiness of Nathanael and Rachel's brief marriage, Hagenauer arranged for many more girls to be sent from Anne Camfield's school in Western Australia. Many Gippsland Aborigines today have some Western Australian ancestry. One of the Western Australians, Bessy Flower, was sufficiently highly educated to replace Kramer as the schoolteacher.⁴⁸ The school thrived under Kramer and Bessy Flower, achieving the highest standard in Victoria, according to this Inspector's report:

This school has again passed an excellent examination. This is the first case since the present result system has been enforced that 100% of marks has been gained by any school in the Colony. The children, moreover, show not only accuracy in their work, but also exhibit much intelligence – excellent progress is shown. The discipline is very good. The children show creditable proficiency in drill and extension exercises. Records are faithfully kept.⁴⁹

Hagenauer also encouraged the marriage of Christian young men and women of the mission, even though they infringed tribal kinship rules in doing so. On one occasion he was remarkably innovative, but blatantly dishonest:

When two of the mission Aborigines, Polly and Joe, though apparently in love with each other, would not marry despite his entreaties because of certain tribal taboos, he arranged a plot with the captain of a steamer, which habitually called at the station. The steamer came up the river with flags flying and its whistle blowing. The captain stepped ashore, while the band played 'God Save the Queen'. The assembled Aborigines stood silent while he unrolled a scroll and read from it that 'since Joe loves Polly and Polly loves Joe, I am commanded by the white Queen to say that they are to be married'; and Polly and Joe were married on the spot.⁵⁰

It may seem inexplicable that the Aborigines should have tolerated Hagenauer's behaviour at all, but Aboriginal people were

pragmatic and their decisions were carefully thought out. They were not oblivious to the fact that their traditional culture was dying out. Certainly, missionaries like Hagenauer were part of the reason for this, but only a very small part. The reduction in population, the usurping of Aboriginal land and the new landscape of towns and sheep stations combined to make the old system seem ineffective to the rising generation. Hagenauer's destruction of weapons, for example, would have deeply hurt the elderly, but was less hurtful to the young who, by this time, had begun to accept not only the permanence of European presence, for many of them had known nothing else, but the necessity for them to adopt some European ways.

The reality was that there was a trade-off. Missions were still places where food and shelter were available free or at most for token work, but there were more attractions to mission life than that. As people gathered there for rations, their very companionship made the mission attractive. The missions were often happy, convivial places. They also offered protection from harassment by whites. Killing may have nearly ceased, but Aborigines were also safer on missions from the demand for prostitution and, above all, their children were safe.

Thus the Aborigines consciously exchanged their freedom for protection. They paid for their choice by submitting to the missionaries' rules. Especially, they exchanged their control over their own children for the protection of their children on the missions, even where that meant European domination of their children, European education and a degree of isolation in dormitories.

Ramahyuck mission lasted until the early years of this century but, like its Wimmera counterpart, it had been slowly deteriorating for a decade or more. By the turn of the century, the missions had finished their task. The Aborigines no longer needed the same kind of protection. Many had acquired skills which enabled them to seek employment elsewhere. The older generation of people who had found safety at the mission had almost all died. The new generation was able to think positively about life outside so there was some movement out of the mission.

This created tensions but, despite very small numbers, no-one really wanted to close old Hagenauer's own mission. Ramahyuck was finally closed on 17 March 1908. The last resi-

dents were shifted to Lake Tyers. Frederick Hagenauer died on 28 November 1909. He was eighty years old and had laboured among Victoria's Aboriginal people for over fifty years.

All that remains of Ramahyuck today is the graveyard, a small reserve excised from the surrounding farmlands.

John Bulmer's Lake Tyers mission

Courage and determination in the face of what others would call hopelessness were the marks of the long and dedicated missionary service of John Bulmer:

Is it the duty of Christians to continue a work so unpromising. The command of the Lord has been given, go into all the world. . . . In the year 1855 when the Church of England sent them to missions the men went forth with very small hopes of success. Those who met them on the road would hardly believe they were going on such a hopeless task.⁵¹

He said himself that he took the motto for his life from this Latin inscription on a bridge near his birthplace:

Nil Desperandum Auspice Deo (Despairing of nothing under the guidance of God), Horace, Odes, 1, 7, 27.⁵²

John Bulmer was born in Sutherland, England in 1833.⁵³ Orphaned while a young child, he was raised by an aunt and uncle. In 1849 he was apprenticed to a cabinetmaker, John Eggers, with whom he emigrated to Australia in 1852. Eggers died on the voyage out so that the young Bulmer worked as a carpenter for two years to repay his passage to Eggers' family who later returned to England. After working briefly on the goldfields, Bulmer offered himself in 1855 to the Melbourne Church of England Mission. After some misgivings about his Methodist background, the Society accepted Bulmer and sent him to the Yelta mission, which was described in Chapter 3. He left Yelta in 1861 because of his wife's ill health. Mrs Bulmer died in Melbourne shortly after.

Before his wife became ill, John Bulmer had been asked by the Melbourne Church of England Mission Committee to establish a new mission station in Gippsland. After his wife's death he took

up this new task. In 1861 William Thomas, acting for the Victorian government's Central Board, with Gippsland settler John McLeod, chose a site near what is now Buchan, a name derived from a local Aboriginal word for the caves in that region. A young Aboriginal employee of Macleod's, Tulaba (also named Billy Macleod), was sent to meet Bulmer and guide him to Buchan. They became friends.⁵⁴

At the proposed site, Bulmer began building a hut and clearing some land to plant vegetables.⁵⁵ He was joined by a number of Aboriginal people with whom he rapidly became friendly. They told him, however, that the site was too far inland from their traditional fishing spots for people to settle there. There is also a tradition today that the Buchan caves were of special significance to Gippsland Aborigines and not a good location for a permanent home.⁵⁶

An Aboriginal man whom the whites called William Hanner guided Bulmer to Lake Tyers, a much more neutral site.⁵⁷ Bulmer was delighted that it 'had all the qualities given in my instructions':

I found Lake Tyers just the ideal place for a station. It was isolated; there was not much chance of there being any great [white] population for some years and there were plenty of fish in the lake and game on the land. . . . Our nearest neighbour was six miles away and the nearest township was twenty miles off so the blacks were far from temptation. The only place where there was likely to be gold found was Nowa Nowa about nine miles off.⁵⁸

Bulmer returned to Melbourne where the Church of England Mission accepted his choice of location. Hagenauer had chosen a site much further to the south west. The Church of England and Presbyterian (Moravian) authorities made an agreement to divide the work up accordingly:

It is with much satisfaction that your committee have arranged with the Moravian missionaries that, if they will seek to evangelise the tribes of the southern division, your missionary shall be located in the northern division of Gippsland. And it is intended shortly to make application to the government for a small section of land at Lake Tyers.⁵⁹

In January 1862, Bulmer married his second wife, Caroline Blay, and with the Hagenauers travelled by a coastal steamer to Gippsland. John and Caroline completed a small hut which John had started building the previous year of timber from a shipwreck. John wrote: 'At first I built one small bark hut with two rooms. Afterwards another room was added - no floors because of shortage of stones. Taught blacks in the evenings in the sitting room.'⁶⁰

Bulmer placed great importance upon teaching the Christian message clearly from the beginning. He had made two very important observations about his work at Yelta. The first was that they had given too much stress to agriculture and not enough to the gospel. Bulmer, in fact, acknowledged that to the missionaries 'living the gospel' meant hard, purposeful physical work:

In our first going to the Murray, I fear we made a great mistake in not making the preaching of the gospel our first [aim]. Thank God we at least saw the necessity of active work.

I dare say the character of the people in some measure was the cause of this. We had a very poor estimate of them being capable of understanding the gospel message and, besides this, we did not know their language. Though they spoke good English, yet I dare say the gospel message would sound better in their own speech. Still I fear we had not so much faith in the work as we ought to have had. I dare say our idea was to try to live the gospel and thus show an example. . . We certainly showed the people an example of industry for we worked hard enough.⁶¹

With even more belated theological hindsight, Bulmer saw that the gospel they had preached was not the whole gospel, that convicting people of their wickedness was not in itself enough. It was not that Bulmer ceased believing that people should recognise their sin. Indeed, consciousness of one's sinfulness was always part of his message, but he realised that preaching which stressed nothing else was not faithful to the gospel:

I will not say we did no good, for we protested against their evil ways, we pointed out the terrible end which awaited those who pursued the course they were pursuing, and so we at all events shed some light upon sin and its effects. Still, this was not the

gospel. I must therefore state honestly that we made a mistake.⁶²

By the time Bulmer was establishing the Lake Tyers mission, over twenty years of white settlement had drastically reduced the number of Aboriginal people in the region. A number of groups ('tribes') were loosely organised into an affiliation they called *Kurnai*, but their numbers had, as previously mentioned, drastically dropped. Having Yelta with which to compare Lake Tyers, Bulmer felt that there had been fewer deaths from European diseases than had occurred along the Murray, but that death at the hands of white people had been high.

Soon after the Bulmers settled at Lake Tyers, fifty Aborigines were regularly visiting the mission. Clothing, rations and farm equipment were supplied by the government, while the Church of England Mission Committee paid Bulmer's salary. Bulmer's objective was to establish a self-supporting community where the Aborigines would settle permanently and acquire useful skills, enabling them to contribute materially to their own community. In his annual report for 1863, he listed fifty people being fed regularly while twelve people were learning to read.⁶³ Already, Bulmer was experiencing the same dilemma as earlier missionaries: how to maintain sufficient rations to keep the Aboriginal people at the mission.⁶⁴

On 15 May 1863, the government gazetted a 2 000 acre reserve.⁶⁵ With this commenced the long dispute between the mission committee and the government over the control of Lake Tyers mission, a dispute the Aborigines inherited with the government which did not end until 1971.

As early as 1863, the first Lake Tyers Aboriginal people accepted Christianity. These included such men as William Hanner, Billy McDougal and Jimmy Barlow.⁶⁶ Bulmer, however, was not prepared to acknowledge the genuineness of their conversion for some years. He wrote, for example, in 1869:

...there is a young man who offers himself for baptism, but really it requires great caution in dealing with them, for I find they generally have some motive in these matters. I would be very glad to see many of them baptised, but I could not conscientiously recommend them.⁶⁷

Between 1863 and 1868, despite frequent shortage of funds, Lake Tyers mission began to assume the form of the typical mission compound with rows of huts for the Aborigines, a schoolhouse and various sheds. By 1869 there were seventy people in residence. Over the next forty years, a succession of people were appointed to assist Bulmer, usually as schoolteachers. In 1868, the wooden church of St John was built by the Aborigines and Bulmer. It still stands today.⁶⁸

The first years of the Lake Tyers mission were often tense. Whereas many Aboriginal people were grateful for the safety, relative peace and reasonably regular food supply obtainable at the mission, there were others who viewed the mission differently. Some, who increasingly found that they had little choice but to settle at Lake Tyers, resented their loss of freedom and Bulmer's assumption of authority.

Added to this, the remnants of several groups were settling in close proximity to each other, groups who had suffered severely at the hands of the whites two decades ago and had further weakened each other by inter-tribal fighting during the last decade. The worst of this was now over, but the truce was uneasy.

It was some time before the Aboriginal people actually understood what the mission and the Bulmers were all about. At first they saw it as another sheep station: one where they were unusually welcome, but a white man's selection nonetheless. This white station-owner was strangely different from the others. He paid them in food and other items for some of the usual station tasks – fencing, building, clearing and so on. But he also required other things of them. They had to attend church services and the children were supposed to attend school. At first the Aborigines expected payment for these 'tasks', too.

John and Caroline Bulmer's attitude to the Aboriginal people was to treat them with 'firmness and kindness'. They believed they knew what was best for them and that only from the disciplined life of the mission would the Aborigines acquire the skills to live in the emerging white-dominated world. Bulmer said:

The blacks should be treated in a strict business way, kindly but firmly, so that they may not in future be mere paupers but have an independent mind. This is the course I pursue, kind-

ness as well as firmness and the blacks know very well that I love them and would do them good.⁶⁹

The Aboriginal people came to regard John and Caroline Bulmer with respect and affection, putting up with their demands in return for what they perceived as the benefits of mission life. They realised that the Bulmers were interested in their long-term welfare in ways that other settlers were not. For the majority of Aborigines, the advantages they derived from the mission in this time of social and cultural turmoil were worth the price of loss of freedom.

John Bulmer's enduring dilemma was his attitude to Aboriginal culture. He often referred to an intrinsic inferiority, regarding them as 'physically, morally and indeed phrenologically . . . very low'.⁷⁰ He connected an alleged thickness of skull to intellectual underdevelopment⁷¹ and agreed with Bishop Moorhouse that 'the blackfellows cannot resist temptation any more than a beast can its instincts'. Their only future, he often stated, was to become 'civilised' – that is, to accept not only Christianity but a European lifestyle. Even the most innocuous of Aboriginal activities he often saw as an impediment to progress: 'They will never be thoroughly civilised while they have to hunt for meat.'⁷²

This was a dilemma for Bulmer because, on the one hand, he felt nomadic hunting and gathering to be a hindrance to the aims of the mission, but on the other hand he did not welcome the change from self-sufficiency to the 'hand-out mentality' of survival on the Board's rations. He did, however, perceive the relationship between the acceptance of handouts and the Aboriginal understanding that such handouts were the least they were owed in return for the theft of their land:

. . . they are so well supplied by the Board they do not think they ought to be under control. They take all that is given them as their due as we have got their country and they get what is given as rent. All this makes it difficult to deal with them, and I must say that most of my troubles have come from this source. We ought not to control others but in spite of all this I am quite willing to finish my life among them.⁷³

This was, of course, the perennial problem of the work ethic,

so frequently distressing to the missionaries, so regularly mentioned in their writings that one could be pardoned for thinking that it was, to them, the primary Christian virtue. Bulmer found it most difficult to accept lack of concern for the future and this despite Christ's clear injunction to 'take no thought for the morrow':

On the whole it is difficult to do anything for the people as they have no ambition. So long as they get their present wants supplied they are content. . . I once spoke to a man who was a great drunkard as to the folly of his life. I asked him if he ever thought of the future, 'Oh,' said he, 'when I die if I get a sheet of bark to cover me I will be all right'. He wished to live and die like a blackfellow.⁷⁴

Bulmer was at first strongly opposed to Aboriginal nomadic life, finding 'the wandering habits of the blacks a great hindrance to their acquiring knowledge'.⁷⁵ He considered Aborigines lazy who would not put in a hard day's work for mission pay, which he admitted was less than the pay they could receive when they managed to find work on nearby stations.⁷⁶ He did not at first respect tribal marriage laws.⁷⁷ He always believed, however, that no matter how degraded Aborigines may once have been, white influence had made them infinitely worse:

I have. . . seen the wicked way in which they were treated by those who ought to know better. They were encouraged in everything which was degrading and therefore they sank much lower than they were before the advent of the whites.⁷⁸

Because of this view, Bulmer's attitudes changed as time passed. He began to see that the lawlessness and immorality he was observing were the consequence of cultural trauma and not intrinsic to Aboriginal nature: 'In their old state they had laws for their government which they must not break on pain of even death . . . Here they were living in a lawless state.'⁷⁹

Bulmer was willing to acknowledge that he had sometimes acted in error. On one occasion he protected his second convert, William McDougall, who had eloped with his cousin Mary. The couple had breached tribal consanguinity rules and an angry

crowd surrounded Bulmer's house. Bulmer eventually released the couple to their punishment, but his earlier protection of them had been a severe breach of Aboriginal morality. In later life, Bulmer realised that he had made a mistake and that his actions had encouraged young Aboriginal couples to bypass marriage laws and elope, hoping for his influence to assist them. He blamed his own actions on his being inexperienced and 'totally unacquainted with the laws of the tribe':⁸⁰

It was the greatest mistake I ever made. . . I thought [only] of the terrible punishment which awaited her. I should at once have given the girl up as it would have. . . discouraged any [further] elopements.⁸¹

Bulmer showed a much greater willingness to compromise than Hagenauer did at Ramahyuck. He did not confiscate and burn weapons but, in 1870, the Aborigines at their own instigation surrendered them to him.

In response to this overt relinquishing of authority, Bulmer inaugurated a tribal council to deal with local matters, particularly the punishment of offenders. This served both to return some authority to the tribal elders and, indirectly, to enhance Bulmer's own position and reputation.⁸²

Gradually, Bulmer began to see that 'the old ways', as he so often called them, had much in them that was good. Food was plentiful in pre-European times and the effort spent procuring it was healthy and enjoyable:

In Gippsland they usually had a great harvest of fish. When they were going out to sea, both eels and mullet were plentiful. They generally appeared at these times in good condition, their well-fed bodies being well greased with fish fat; they shone from head to foot.

Thus they spent their days in hunting and playing. The nights were spent talking aloud from their camps, perhaps telling some funny story or mimicking some peculiarity of some black who of course was not present.⁸³

He saw, too, that much of what Europeans had introduced was bad for the Aborigines. Not only did he think this of liquor and opium, against which he continually campaigned, but also

more mundane things. Western houses and clothing, he eventually concluded, were unhealthy.⁸⁴ 'In Gippsland people were certainly very comfortable as during winter they made themselves good camps with sheets of bark and with good rugs to keep themselves warm. They were well off.'⁸⁵

Bulmer increasingly felt that the newer generation of Aboriginal people were inferior in character to their traditional forbears:

. . .one cannot help looking back to the time when wild in the woods the noble savage ran, for after all, with all his civilisation, he was a very much superior individual in times gone by as he is today. If I were asked if I loved the wild black or the civilised one best, I should say the wild one. . . It is a pity to have to say it, but really the old blackfellow was the better man.⁸⁶

The Kurnai did not kill half-caste babies like some Aboriginal groups did elsewhere and so, as a result of white demands for black women, a very large proportion of the new generation were of mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry. One of their descendants recently wrote about this period:

See, there were a lot of queer white blokes about at that time, men working for the stations, most of them convicts. Some had done their time, some were working out their sentences and plenty of them were escaped convicts who come in along the Gippsland coast. They ran loose around the place. Didn't have any women of their own and they shot the tribesmen and chased the women - and they got them, too. They never just shot at them; they slaughtered a lot of the Aborigines to get the women. . . that's where the change of the colour often come in.⁸⁷

Bulmer virtually regarded the younger generation and 'half-castes' as one and the same thing. He was very scathing about them, seeing them as citizens of a no-man's land, neither one thing nor the other. 'There is nothing more repulsive than a half-civilised Aboriginal,' he wrote.⁸⁸ 'The little education he gets seems to make him a more dangerous character.'⁸⁹ Bulmer began to regret even more deeply the passing of the traditional old people:

Alas, all these men have passed away; there was something interesting about them. They have left behind a nondescript lot who are neither fish, flesh nor good red herring. Education has been introduced, but where there has been no change of heart it has made the Aboriginal not in the least interesting. He may be athletic; so were their fathers even more so.⁹⁰

By 'athletic', Bulmer was referring to the one thing for which the new generation seemed to him to have both enthusiasm and skill: that was sport. Although Bulmer had taught cricket and other games, he generally disapproved of their sometimes all-consuming passion for sport, particularly when it was associated with Sabbath-breaking. From time to time Aboriginal men were paid well to play in sporting competitions quite far afield. Bulmer was angered that they did not show the same enthusiasm for work on the mission: 'They go to work just as if they were going to their deaths'.⁹¹

In 1869, in the Victorian parliament, the *Bill to provide for the protection and management of the Aboriginal natives* was passed, replacing the old Central Board with a much more powerful Board for the Protection of Aborigines.⁹² Lake Tyers became a 'central station' and Bulmer was required to conform to the Board's requirements. Bulmer was always much less happy with these requirements than was Hagenauer who himself became a senior Board official and was responsible for many of its policies.

Government controls of different kinds began to tighten on the 'central stations'. The Aborigines could now be forced to live on these stations and be moved from one to another. As well as the Church of England mission at Lake Tyers, these now included the Moravian missions at Ebenezer (Wimmera) and Ramahyuck, the government stations at Coranderrk and Framlingham, and the Church of England mission at Lake Condah. After the government enquiry into all Victorian stations in 1877, managers were given power to move Aborigines from station to station for disciplinary reasons. Bulmer was widely thought the most able to 'handle' problem people, so this procedure swelled the numbers at Lake Tyers. Several times in the 1880s additional reserve lands were added to Lake Tyers.

In 1887, giving evidence before the Victorian Royal Commission on the Aborigines, Bulmer considered that about ten or

eleven people were Christians, although he had the greatest confidence only in one of them, William McDougall.⁹³ In all of Bulmer's writings, only seventeen probable conversions were mentioned, thirteen men and four women.⁹⁴ To Bulmer's perpetual disappointment, these people were sometimes the ones who caused him the most trouble. Perhaps he had much higher expectations for them, but people like King Tommy Bumberrah, Ben Bolt, John Cooper and Charles Rivers, whose Christian development was recorded, were also frequently mentioned in connection with drunkenness, vandalism and wife beating.⁹⁵ William McDougall, after his early problematic elopement with Mary, married Emma and became a devout Christian, holding family prayers and preaching in Bulmer's absence.

Sadly, Bulmer's writings suggest that, to him, Christianity was often synonymous with lifestyle. He always questioned conversions if later the same people breached what he considered to be the Christian moral code. Falling back into 'sin' or 'the old ways' was always a severe disappointment to Bulmer and these breaches brought long-term disapproval.

Bulmer was, however, quietly thankful that on their death beds many of these converts of his expressed faith in Christ. Of Emma Cooper he wrote: 'On her death [1895] she was very much pained by her sins and earnestly prayed for forgiveness. She died with words of prayer on her lips. . . one good feature of her character was that she was repentant.'⁹⁶

Another whose death he described was Johnny the whaler:

. . . a poor paralysed fellow who did not seem to have much intellectual powers, he had seemed to be able to grasp the idea of salvation through Christ. When he was dying, I asked him if he knew and loved Jesus. He said 'Gna', yes, and when all other senses seemed to have gone, I asked him the same question with the same [answer] 'Gna'. The poor fellow, asked if he required anything to eat and drink, made no response, but when asked do you have Jesus, it was very [clear] for. . . his last truth he gave the same response.⁹⁷

Bulmer came to the conclusion, in the end, that Christ would accept these people, that he would understand their 'sinfulness'. Bulmer noted the frequent repentance of Aboriginal people with

whom he kept vigil as they approached death:

This I found voluntary in the deaths of most Aborigines. They are ready to express hopes of heaven, but seem to have no idea they are sinners. However, the poor people have One to deal with who knows them.⁹⁸

Bulmer began to see the 'sinfulness' of Aboriginal people as being related to weakness shared with all humanity. They were not intrinsically evil, but simply gave in to temptation and genuinely regretted doing so. God, Bulmer believed, understood:

Many poor fellows have come to me and expressed a desire to live a better life, but had fallen again into the old habits and have expressed sadness that they should do so. It is a good thing that the Lord does not judge with our judgment. He knows these poor fellows and may even overlook a great deal, for after all it is not from evil propensities, but from weakness that they fall.⁹⁹

Despite this, like so many missionaries, Bulmer was hesitant to recognise the evidence of Christian faith in many Aboriginal people. Far more than Bulmer ever knew, Aboriginal people accepted the Christ whom he tried to preach, not because of his words, but because they saw Christ in the lives of John and Caroline Bulmer.

The most traumatic experience for the mission – especially for Aboriginal families, but also for Bulmer – was the implementation of the new 'half-caste' policies. In 1886, the Aborigines Protection Act was passed, declaring children of mixed parentage to be white. 'Aborigines' were now defined as each of the following: full-bloods, half-castes over thirty-four, female half-castes married to 'Aborigines', infants of 'Aborigines' and half-castes licensed by the Board to remain on a station.¹⁰⁰ In other words, all people of mixed parentage between childhood and the age of thirty-five had to leave all stations, including Lake Tyers. Their expulsion caused great hardships and is still today one of the most bitter memories of injustice among Victorian Aborigines.¹⁰¹

The intent of the legislation was to force people of mixed descent to enter the white community. Its effect was to push these

people suddenly into a hostile environment without the benefit of capital or saleable skills. Even more disastrously, it split families. Teenagers were forced to leave home. Some husbands were forced to leave their wives. Many full bloods, unwilling to be separated from children and grandchildren of mixed origin, chose to leave the mission. These included many who had been born on the station or who had made it their home for twenty years.

Bulmer, although he had spoken disparagingly of some of the mixed-race people, was not in favour of the splitting of families and, over the implementation of the Act, disagreed with Hagenauer, who was party to the drafting of its wording. Bulmer took about four years to implement the Act, striving as best he could to place the evicted people somewhere suitable.

By 1893, the remaining Lake Tyers people were entirely dependent upon the mission. Native food sources were drastically depleted, despite Bulmer's efforts to prevent commercial fishing in the lake. This tended to make Bulmer's authority more absolute because the right to withhold rations gave him great power. He could, for example, enforce church attendance and sanction certain behaviours.

Despite the eviction of part-Aborigines, the mission population increased markedly during the 1890s. Having wiped its hands of the bulk of the future descendants of the Aboriginal people, the Board became more interested in looking after the diminishing full-blood remnant as cheaply as possible. Assuming them to be dying out, the Board commenced a program of closing down and amalgamating stations. Bulmer protested most vehemently, but was ignored and became unpopular with officialdom. Aborigines were sent to Lake Tyers from Framlingham in the 1890s.¹⁰² Despite Bulmer's further protests, they began to be sent from Ramahyuck in 1905, many against their will. Ramahyuck mission was formally closed on 30 April 1908.

Bulmer had always been a Methodist, despite the fact that he had faithfully served the Church of England in one of its key positions since 1855. Indeed, it was only through Bulmer and his fellow missionaries at Lake Condah that the Church of England in Victoria could feel any satisfaction at all in its dealings with the Aborigines. The church owed Bulmer a great deal and, in his seventieth year, it was finally acknowledged. John Bulmer was ordained a Church of England priest on 6 January 1903.

Bulmer's family had faithfully supported him through those years. When he sought permanency for his son Frank, who had for some years been acting assistant manager, the Board for the Protection of Aborigines saw its opportunity to take over Lake Tyers and remove Bulmer, whose criticism of Board policies was an embarrassment. Instead of confirming Frank in his position, they replaced him with a Captain Howe. After a few months Howe was appointed manager. Bulmer was advised that after 31 December 1907 his services were no longer required.¹⁰³ This came as a terrible shock, but it says much about Bulmer's reputation in the community that there was a storm of protest from both Aborigines and whites, including some in high government posts.

Finally, when the Church Missionary Association offered to continue Bulmer's salary for 'spiritual work among the blacks',¹⁰⁴ the Board reluctantly agreed that Bulmer and his family should remain. In this new role, life was not particularly fulfilling for the Bulmers in their declining years. Howe always exhibited considerable animosity towards them.

Despite all the difficulties, Bulmer could say:

...everything in God's providence worked to bring me to this work and I have never desired to leave it. At present everything seems to show I will end my life here among the poor blacks.¹⁰⁵

Towards the end of his life, Bulmer recalled his motto – 'Nil Desperandum Auspice Deo':

The motto I saw on the bridge, Nil+ has been mine during the whole course of my work among the Aborigines. Sometimes I have been tried and have felt there was no hope, but Nil+ has helped me and I trust will to the end.¹⁰⁶

John Bulmer became sick in August 1913 and was moved to his daughter's home in nearby Bairnsdale. As he approached death, the older Lake Tyers Aboriginal people kept a mournful vigil outside his house.¹⁰⁷ Eighty years old, he had spent fifty-one of those years at Lake Tyers.

'I look back to some of the poor fellows as my best friends,' wrote Bulmer not long before his final illness. 'They were faithful and able.'¹⁰⁸ He died on 13 August. Now, seventy-seven years

later, those who knew him so well have also passed away and John Bulmer has passed from history into legend.

Within a few weeks of John Bulmer's death, Howe evicted the aged Caroline Bulmer from Lake Tyers: he said her 'misplaced sympathies' weakened his control of the Aborigines.¹⁰⁹ The Church Missionary Association formally complained about the unsatisfactory state of affairs at Lake Tyers where they believed conditions had become very bad. The Board replied coolly that there were no grounds for complaint.¹¹⁰ The Association was no longer welcome at Lake Tyers and no chaplain was permitted until 1926.¹¹¹

In 1980, Phillip Pepper recalled the old Lake Tyers:

There never was another manager of the mission like John Bulmer. A few years after John Bulmer was made a minister of the Church of England the government took the station over, and that was the finish of it being called a mission. They must have thought Rev. John Bulmer was getting old and needed help because they sent in a bloke called Captain Howe. He was a hard man, that one. He was the manager then, not John Bulmer. John stayed on in his home there with his wife. He looked after the religious side of the business.

He died in 1913 at eighty years of age and is buried at the Lakes Entrance cemetery. . .

It's got on his gravestone, John Bulmer was a devoted worker amongst the Aborigines and that's true. He was a friend to the people and everyone who knew him said he was a great man - a good man.¹¹²

He wrote that Bulmer and Hagenauer 'rescued our mob' and continued: 'Only for the missionaries there wouldn't be so many Aborigines walking around today. They're the ones that saved the day for us. Our people were finished before the mission men came.'¹¹³

In July 1971, the Governor of Victoria presented to the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust the unconditional title deeds to the 4 000 acres of land which formed the original Lake Tyers Mission Station. The small wooden church of St John is still the hub of the community, a symbol of what they have become. But when I visited there recently, I was shown a different symbol.

In a tall eucalypt tree on the edge of the Lake Tyers land, a

large natural cross formed from two tree trunks hangs suspended high above the ground. The timber is aged, but still solid. The cross has been there longer than anyone can remember. Some say that God put it there, but some say the legendary John Bulmer suspended the cross there himself.

Daniel and Janet Matthews and their Maloga mission

Daniel Matthews came to Australia as a teenager in 1853.¹¹⁴ His father John, a ship's captain and one-time slave-trader who had been converted and become a strict Wesleyan, had come to Australia to seek his fortune in gold in 1851. He thought himself successful enough to send for his wife, Honor, and youngest sons Daniel and William in 1853. Five-year-old Janet Johnston arrived in Australia the same year, but it was to be many years before Daniel and Janet met and married.

On the Bendigo goldfields, Daniel met Aborigines for the first time. Even as a teenager he wanted to know them, stammering in his eagerness to make their acquaintance.¹¹⁵

Many years later he wrote:

From my earliest recollections of the blacks in boyhood, on the goldfields, and more recently on the Murray River and in the Riverina district, I have formed but one opinion of them: they are a simple-hearted and, among themselves, virtuous people.¹¹⁶

He also saw in them the living proof of the corrupting and degrading influence of liquor of which his strict Wesleyan upbringing had warned him. He was saddened to see drunken Aboriginal people begging around grog shanties and appalled to see white men plying them with liquor for the sake of the spectacle of drunken brawling.

Like most people, the Matthews family did not make their fortune on the goldfields. They tried various occupations until 1864 found Daniel and William opening Matthews Bros store in Echuca as ships' chandlers and hardware merchants.

Daniel became a close friend of the Aboriginal people, going on hunting expeditions with them, swimming, fishing and witnessing the last great corroboree of the northern Victorian tribes. They called him Maranooka, meaning 'friend'.¹¹⁷ Even before the end of

1864, he was already petitioning the Victorian Board for the Protection of Aborigines about the plight of the Echuca people.¹¹⁸ He wrote frequently on Aboriginal issues in the local *Riverine Herald*. On one such occasion he wrote: 'It is to be hoped that ere long the pre-occupants of this land will, instead of suffering the derision and contempt of the dispossessors, receive their sympathy and friendly feeling.'¹¹⁹ He later described his own feelings when he first swam the river to talk to them:

The eagerness of their faces melted my heart into tenderness. . . when I looked at their rags and the signs of want in their faces, I inwardly cried 'My God! Can this be right?'¹²⁰

Daniel was a tall, dark, full-bearded man with an energetic, lively manner. He was described as 'a vivid, active, enterprising man, but venturesome'. To some, he was a crank 'with blackfells on the brain'.¹²¹ To others, however, he had 'come to be regarded as their legitimate protector'.¹²²

In 1865, the Matthews brothers purchased three blocks with several kilometres of river frontage on the NSW side of the river about twenty kilometres east of Echuca.

The idea of doing something for Aboriginal people on his own land possibly came to Daniel as a result of his friendship with John Green, the sympathetic manager of Coranderrk Aboriginal Station.

Discovering that a sandy promontory on the block was a traditional gathering place for Aborigines, the Matthews brothers set it aside for them, using its traditional name, Maloga.¹²³ Daniel then began developing a plan for a refuge for them on the site. He commenced by attacking the accepted dogma that Aborigines were a doomed inferior race:

Who 'inevitably doomed' them? Not the Creator. He never brought a race into existence merely to blot them out. They have valid claims on the government of these Colonies. . . The only compensation received for the loss of their land has been a blanket annually presented to each by the State.¹²⁴

Meanwhile Daniel met and married Janet, daughter of the Rev. Kerr Johnston of Melbourne's Seamen's Mission. She was a

brave and resourceful woman whose efforts contributed at least as much as her husband's to the life of the Maloga mission. Indeed, it gradually becomes hard to think of one without the other. One recent writer has said:

Janet Matthews, as she became, was a remarkable woman in many ways. Small and slight, with . . . an upright, dignified carriage and a bright, alert, direct gaze; great courage and indomitable will combined with womanly sympathy, she commanded both respect and affection.¹²⁵

Janet fully supported Daniel in his vision for the mission from the beginnings of their courtship. For years he wrote to almost every newspaper in NSW and Victoria, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Melbourne Age*, *Bendigo Advertiser*, *Albury Border Post*, *Ballarat Star*, and *Riverine Herald* amongst others. In 1873, in his 'Appeal on Behalf of the Australian Aborigines', he announced his intention to provide a permanent home on his property for the Echuca people:

Touched with the deepest sorrow for their miserable state, and ardent with an irrepressible desire to reclaim their helpless little ones, for seven years I have raised my voice and wielded my pen in endeavouring to awaken the sympathies of the public on their behalf. . .

The Australian Aboriginal is not the impractical and slothful creature many of our writers have designated him. Many years of experience have taught me that there is a great deal of honesty, generosity and docility in his primitive character. . . There are many hundreds of blacks still scattered through the Murray districts. . . and among all these tribes are to be found children . . . willing to learn, and capable of being taught.

We propose a schoolroom - church - dormitories - storeroom - huts for adults and teachers. We also aim to teach the means of gaining their own livelihood, since a natural aptitude is evinced by many. . . and with confidence leave the issue to Him.¹²⁶

Matthews' letters and correspondence of this era, a resource we can hardly begin to touch upon in this book, constitute possibly the most eloquent, compassionate and persistent pleas on

behalf of the Aborigines in Australia's history. The pleas came, not from the institutional church, but from the church proper: an ordinary, compassionate and courageous Christian who sincerely believed that 'it is not the Government only, but every individual member of society, that is morally responsible for the neglected and humiliated condition of the Aborigines'.¹²⁷

Matthews' vision caught the imagination of many concerned citizens and the project received widespread financial support. Maloga mission can be said to have begun in June 1874 when the Matthews family moved from Echuca to the newly-constructed schoolhouse where they lived until their homestead was completed the following year. From 1875 onwards, the NSW government also provided some support.

Matthews' criticism of the local treatment of Aborigines had already made him some enemies among the local pastoralists, who told the Aborigines that children of families who went to Maloga would be sent away to Melbourne.

Despite Matthews' reputation among the Aborigines, this belief at first made them unsure about living there so that for a while the school had very few pupils. Families came and went, still hesitant for a year or more. One of the first families to settle there were the Coopers. Young William was to grow up to be a fearless leader of Victorian Aboriginal people. Another of the first permanent residents was Louisa, a lonely fifteen-year-old from a distant tribe who had found herself trapped in Echuca. Matthews took her from 'a low house' in Moama on the NSW side of the river.

At Maloga, Janet gave her love and attention as this extract from Janet's diary shows:

October 20: Louisa. . . is getting on nicely and helps with the children. Her face really lighted up and looked so nice when I was teaching her to crochet last night. . . October 21: I gave Louisa an old chemise, one I wore when I was married. It was rather a struggle to give it - but I thought of 'In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least. . .'.¹²⁸

Gradually, Daniel and Janet's sincerity defeated the 'designs of unprincipled men' and people began to settle at Maloga or to leave their children in the Matthews' care. Daniel and Janet were well aware that the opposition to their establishment came from

those who resented the loss of cheap sex and near-free labour on their properties. So opposed to slavery was Daniel that he would in times of hardship allow his farm to deteriorate rather than be accused of using Aboriginal labour without fair payment.

Since he first arrived in Echuca, Daniel's exploits had earned him a reputation for physical as well as moral courage. This was never more necessary than when he ventured into the sawyers' or station hands' camps to rescue Aboriginal girls. Some of them gave birth to part white babies at the age of eleven or twelve. Daniel was often physically assaulted or threatened with firearms.

Daniel spent a great deal of time away from Maloga on business or drumming up support in the cities. Much of the work was done by Janet, one opinion being that she was 'the prime worker undoubtedly at the mission'.¹²⁹ Janet recorded the first conversion in her diary on 30 October 1875:

Yesterday I believe Susannah was converted. I was washing up the dinner things with her and telling her about Jesus coming to die for us. She said, 'I am believing in him, Mrs Matthews.' Her words sent a thrill of joy through me. I asked her if she felt happy, she said, 'I have never been so happy before.' I felt that she understood and believed.¹³⁰

Janet had an especially close relationship with the girls. In 1936 they were still writing to her in South Australia. Three whom she regarded almost as her own daughters, Susannah, Louisa and Sarah, 'remained constant Christians, through tempestuous circumstances, to the end of their lives', she wrote.¹³¹ Daniel always acknowledged Janet's contribution:

It was the knowledge of the many wrongs committed, and compassion for the remnant of this expiring race, that caused me twenty years ago to write and labour on their behalf and later in life to devote my entire energies to alleviate their conditon. . . This impulse has been sustained by the undaunted energy and indomitable courage of my devoted wife, who under God has nerved me to accomplish a work that, humanly speaking, could not have been done single-handed.¹³²

Daniel firmly believed that productive work and self-respect went hand in hand. He did not devalue traditional skills: indeed,

Maloga in hard times survived on fishing and hunting. He saw, however, that Aboriginal people were being gradually forced from their traditional life into a demeaning, fringe-dwelling existence, depending upon handouts. He therefore set about teaching the boys and men such skills of farming as carpentry, ploughing, shearing, fencing and stockwork.¹³³ As the *Sydney Morning Herald* put it, '...if he had not been able to make the mission entirely self-supporting, he has reduced this necessity for outside assistance to a minimum'.¹³⁴ Furthermore, many of the men became strong Christians.

By 1880, Maloga had become a small village. It had its own church, school, cottages, ration depot, water supply, killing pens and vegetable gardens. As the Matthews' family increased, the old house, with wide verandahs on three sides, had been added to all round.

A reporter for the *Footscray Advertiser*, returning to Echuca after twenty years, commented on the Matthews' achievement:

The huts of the blacks are laid out in streets on the bank of the river, and have a neat and natty appearance. . . Mr and Mrs Matthews have spent the best years of their life in working and slaving for the men, women and children [who] have used the land, the cattle and the garden. . . Mr D. Matthews must have the heart of a lion and the soul of a saint to labour as he has done, along with his estimable wife. . . to undertake the onerous duties. . . in connection with the mission. . . [he] has impoverished himself and his family, being forced to neglect his own material interests through his extra care and affection for the blacks.

I left the place feeling that a life had been given away in devotion to the natives' welfare.¹³⁵

The Matthews were encouraged by a friendship which developed between them and the Congregational clergyman in Jerilderie, John Brown Gribble. In 1879, Gribble spent part of his furlough at Maloga, baptising fourteen Aboriginal Christians in the river. Gribble's admiration for the Matthews' work led him to establish the Warangesda mission on the Murrumbidgee. Indeed, by a further complex chain of events, it led him to the northwest of Australia where he championed the Aboriginal victims of settler brutality, finally confronting the pastoral lobby, the press, the

judiciary and the government of Western Australia, suffering defeat and dying a broken man. This story will be told later.

Matthews and Gribble became the virtual conscience of the State of NSW. Maloga became a household word. Aboriginal people from far afield – Sydney and Maitland, for example – found refuge there. Maloga, and later Gribble's Warangesda, both the creation of dedicated and compassionate individuals, were the only places in NSW at that time to which Aborigines seeking a safe home could go. By 1880, there were seventy or eighty permanent Aboriginal residents at Maloga and 153 by 1887.¹³⁶

Maloga was technically in NSW, but many Aboriginal residents were from the Victorian side of the river. Matthews persistently lobbied influential colonists and criticised Aboriginal policies both in NSW and Victoria. This made him many enemies. Regrettably, one was Frederick Hagenauer whom he had confronted over the Victorian policy of removing part-Aborigines from reserves and missions. Hagenauer, furthermore, had always been critical of Daniel Matthews' unofficial status, questioning his giving of the sacraments as an unordained person.

On 1 August 1881, the Maloga mission school became a recognised public school. This meant a government salary for the teacher. Daniel immediately appointed Thomas Shadrach James, a highly educated Mauritian Indian.¹³⁷ His intelligence, education and lack of prejudice impressed Daniel. He remained for many years at Maloga, married Ada Cooper, one of the mission girls, and became a close friend of the Matthews family.

Matthews' efforts finally led to the formation in 1881 of the NSW Aborigines Protection Association, a voluntary body which promoted missions, sought funds and lobbied the Government. 'Mr & Mrs Maloga' were delighted with their success at creating public recognition of Aboriginal needs. Daniel and Janet were paid by the Aborigines Protection Association, the mission prospered and its facilities expanded. Some of the Maloga Aboriginal people had long wanted their own land. An 1882 government enquiry into Maloga and Warangesda was relatively favourable and recommended the acquisition of further land,¹³⁸ so in 1883 the Government set aside 1 800 acres adjoining Maloga. It was named Cumeroogunga.

Daniel had little sympathy with Aboriginal cultural activities. He forbade corroborees at Maloga and sometimes engineered mar-

riages contrary to Aboriginal kinship regulations. Nevertheless, he loved Aboriginal people and, what is more, they knew it.

As the young people and children who had first come to Maloga grew up, they became less tractable, often wanting to assert their independence. Daniel saw this as 'ingratitude' and frequently felt bitter about it. He failed to recognise these as healthy results of his own teaching. When, for example, Bagot Morgan, who had come to Maloga as a 'grubby little half-naked urchin', insisted on building his hut at Maloga out of line with the other huts, Daniel was angered.¹³⁹

He did not see that his efforts to teach the Aboriginal people self-confidence and to assert their individuality had worked. Matthews was paternalistic and authoritarian, yet the self-will and pride which developed in men like Bagot Morgan was the greatest tribute to his work among them. Long after Daniel's death, Maloga people like William Cooper were courageous political leaders.

The Matthews' efforts in lobbying officialdom finally led to the formation of the NSW Aborigines Protection Board. Daniel thought it the crowning achievement of his life. He was not to know that he had created a monster that would destroy him. It was the first Protector of Aborigines, George Thornton, whose views were to set in train, not only the government assumption of responsibility for Maloga, but the future secular nature of Aboriginal reserves. He believed that although Aboriginal people could become literate, they were incapable of benefitting from religious instruction.¹⁴⁰

These beliefs led to their inevitable conclusions within a few years. First, in 1887, the Aborigines Protection Association separated the secular and religious activities of Maloga, reducing Daniel's responsibilities to 'religious teacher'.¹⁴¹ Then in 1888, despite the fact that the Matthews legally owned all the buildings and could have kept them, the APA moved them all from Maloga to Cumeroogunga. In response, Daniel and Janet resigned their positions.¹⁴²

Aboriginal people were presented with a dilemma. Most had little choice but to move to Cumeroogunga although a core of loyal people remained with the Matthews. The Matthews' friend, Thomas James, moved to Cumeroogunga with his school. Life at Cumeroogunga under the new superintendent, George Bellenger,

was strict and lacked the compassion of Maloga. Bellenger was said to be 'harsh and arbitrary' and, unlike Daniel and Janet Matthews, took little interest in the sick or dying. Furious with the people who wept and asked the Matthews if they could live at Maloga, Bellenger withdrew rations from any Aborigines who visited Maloga and banned the Matthews from visiting Cumeroogunga.¹⁴³

The Matthews struggled on with their private mission, moving to the Victorian side of the river. They only occasionally visited Cumeroogunga if James could quietly arrange it for them. Bellenger was a clever manipulator of public opinion and used the label 'Maloga' to his own advantage.

The Matthews suffered much criticism, losing credibility and much of their financial support. By 1899, however, their old antagonist Bellenger was gone and Cumeroogunga was a happier place under George Harris, formerly of Warangesda. It became a prosperous small village such as Daniel had envisaged, almost entirely self-supporting. The Matthews were welcome there and began to see it as their own achievement which, in so many ways, it was.¹⁴⁴

Eventually the Matthews decided to found another mission at Mannum on the South Australian end of the Murray. They called it Manunka. Daniel did not live to see much of it. He died on 17 February 1902. His gravestone in the Mannum cemetery bears the word 'Maranooka', friend. Janet carried on the Manunka mission until 1911 when she retired. She died in Adelaide on 21 September 1939.¹⁴⁵

Managers came and went at Cumeroogunga and, by the time of Janet's death it was, like all NSW reserves, an oppressive place. In the year of her death, there was a mass walkout when the people crossed the Murray and camped at Barmah. They claimed that Cumeroogunga was riddled with disease and malnutrition and that their children were not being educated. 'We had to come off Cumeroogunga to live like human beings,' wrote Theresa Clements who, in 1883, had been the youngest pupil at Maloga school.¹⁴⁶

Great Aboriginal people like Kerin Atkinson, Colin Walker and Sir Douglas Nicholls led the Maloga people in a twenty-five-year battle to have Cumeroogunga made an Aboriginal-managed community. They won their case in 1964.¹⁴⁷ Daniel and Janet

Matthews' vision was finally fulfilled exactly 100 years after Daniel first cried out to God, 'Can this be right?'

William Ridley

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Christian churches in NSW made very little effort to do anything for Aboriginal people. Not only were the efforts to bring the gospel to them minimal, but so was any attention to their material well-being. There were occasional acts of charity by churches and well-meaning people,¹⁴⁸ but remarkably little organised effort.

The fact that there were three – but only three – outstanding missionaries does not contradict this conclusion, for they were self-motivated people who set out on their own to do something, only later being formally recognised by the church, if at all. These were Daniel and Janet Matthews, treated earlier in this chapter, and John Gribble who will be treated later. William Ridley deserves to be included with them and certainly he would like to have been, but his zeal was only very briefly matched by any enthusiasm from his church.

Unlike the Matthews and Gribble, William Ridley was already well-educated when he arrived in Australia.¹⁴⁹ Born to an Essex farming family in 1819, he graduated from London University in 1841 with honours in classics. He briefly practised law but preferred preaching. Fired with a desire to become a missionary, he applied to the LMS to go to India but was rejected on doctrinal grounds.

Ridley returned to farming, preaching and spare-time studying until he came to the attention of John Dunmore Lang in 1848. He arrived in Sydney in 1849 and taught Hebrew, Latin and Greek at Lang's Australian College until its closure in 1850. He was then ordained by the Presbyterian Synod of New South Wales on 10 April 1850, serving for two-and-a-half years as an itinerating minister to colonists in the New England region and other parts of northern NSW, returning periodically to his wife and children in Balmain.¹⁵⁰

This appointment suited Ridley well. He had become interested in the Aborigines before he left England, joining the Aborigines' Protection Society, an organisation which tried to protect indigenous peoples from mistreatment throughout the British Empire. He had been commissioned to survey the condi-

tion of Australian Aborigines when he left England. Indeed, Ridley had seen his teaching post as the training of preachers for the Australian interior who could bring the gospel to the Aborigines.¹⁵¹ During his itinerating ministry, Ridley determined to devote his life to evangelising the Aborigines:

If it please God to prolong my life and health, the next twenty years will be probably the very prime of my earthly career. I resolve to make the salvation of the blacks the chief work of this period; first seeking the best way of access to them, acquiring their language and gaining all possible information concerning them; then declaring plainly unto them in their own tongue the way of salvation of Jesus Christ.

The very prosecution of this design will lead me into communication with that class of colonists who most need the labours of a gospel ministry, the shepherds and others in stations remote from the towns.¹⁵²

Reminiscent of Threlke'd, but of very few other nineteenth century missionaries in Australia, Ridley stressed the necessity to learn languages and study culture before preaching the gospel. With a few outstanding exceptions, it was to be another century before it could be said that this principle was gaining acceptance among missionaries. Ridley was already a competent linguist and so it is not surprising that he should have seen the validity of uniting his two burning passions: evangelism and linguistics. In southern Queensland, Ridley sought out the only white experts on the Aboriginal languages of the region, 'Duramboi' Davis, the 'white-blackfellow', and the young boy Tom Petrie who had been raised in the company of Aboriginal children.

Petrie's daughter wrote many years later:

[Ridley] seemed very clever and as fast as [Tom Petrie] could speak the language he was able to write it down. He took a part of the Bible and read out verse after verse, and the lad followed in the black's tongue. Afterwards reading out the Aboriginal version for his young companion's approval, it was almost as though a blackfellow spoke.¹⁵³

As an itinerant preacher, Ridley had considerable flexibility in his choice of locale. Having decided to direct his efforts to

Aborigines, he spent 1853 and 1854 in exploratory surveys. Centring his attention on the Liverpool Plains, the Barwon-Namoi region, his travels confirmed his choice. It seemed to him that the low agricultural but high pastoral potential of the region would keep the white population sparse.¹⁵⁴ Wishing to avoid Threlkeld's experience of learning a language which was disappearing, he was encouraged by the very widespread use of the Kamilaroi language from the Murrumbidgee to Point Curtis. During 1853 and 1854, Ridley began his lifetime study of Kamilaroi, collecting vocabulary and sketching a grammar.¹⁵⁵

Although the pastoral potential of the region may have ensured sparse white settlement, it also ensured that the Kamilaroi people were in the midst of the pastoral frontier. Ridley was appalled to see the abject state of Aboriginal people, terrified of being shot, dying of thirst and starvation as a result of being denied access to water.¹⁵⁶ He petitioned the NSW Legislative Council to take immediate action to provide secure reserves for dispossessed Aborigines,¹⁵⁷ but his petition, like most petitions, was received, printed and set aside to gather dust.

Early in 1855, Ridley received what seemed to be the answer to his prayer that he might be given the means to work as a full-time missionary. On 13 February the Moreton Bay Aborigines Friends' Society was formed to support his work, and a second similar committee was formed in the Congregational church in Ipswich. Ridley also received aid from Sydney Presbyterians. In Brisbane, Ridley was encouraged by the support of J.G. Hausmann, now ordained but originally one of the German Lutheran lay missionaries to Moreton Bay. Hausmann accompanied Ridley as he moved around the Brisbane district. Ridley learned the Turubul language with remarkable rapidity, teaching Aborigines to read it and publishing six tracts in the language.¹⁵⁸

Ridley then set out on a 2 000 mile journey into south-western Queensland and northwestern NSW.¹⁵⁹ He made a detailed linguistic survey and population estimates. Throughout his journey he distributed his do-it-yourself spelling books and was delighted at how rapidly Aboriginal people learned to read their own languages. He prepared a small booklet, *Gurre Kamilaroi or Kamilaroi Sayings*, to teach the elements of Christian faith.¹⁶⁰

Ridley's mission can hardly be said to have begun when he

discovered, not only that white settlers were unenthusiastic about his plans, but that his erstwhile supporters in Queensland could not raise sufficient money to pay his salary.¹⁶¹ Ridley ceased his formal missionary work on 13 May 1856.¹⁶² Momentarily there was the possibility that the Church of England would sponsor a mission under Ridley. Unfortunately, Bishop Barker made it a condition of the offer that Ridley accept Church of England ordination. The strict Presbyterian declined and the plan came to nothing.¹⁶³

Ridley returned to parish work in Victoria and Sydney, but supported himself and his family mainly as a journalist and newspaper editor. He maintained his deep interest in and concern for Aboriginal people, publishing several significant books on the Kamilaroi language and culture.¹⁶⁴ He carried out more field research in 1871 and wrote a number of remarkably accurate ethnographical papers. His anthropological writings have been widely acclaimed and, as a result, Elkin lists Ridley as one of the 'founders of social anthropology in Australia'.¹⁶⁵

Despite his deep knowledge of Aboriginal people and his undeniable affection for them, Ridley still saw their future as adopting European 'civilisation' and as becoming 'useful' workers for white Australian society. Unlike so many of his contemporaries, however, his ethnocentrism was balanced by his strong belief in the validity of many of their cultural practices and, in particular, the worth of their languages.

Because Ridley was prepared to learn from Aboriginal people, he did not suffer from the same cultural and linguistic arrogance as many of his contemporaries. He saw translation problems as *his* problems, not inadequacies in the language. He used a translation of Immanuel as the name of Christ, because 'God with us' was immediately meaningful while 'Jesus' and 'Christ' were more difficult semantically. He was pleased to confirm his phrase for explaining 'sin' (*Ngeane kanungo warawara yanani* - 'We all crooked have gone') with a Christian Aboriginal man who back-translated it as 'We have all sinned'.¹⁶⁶

Ridley found much to admire in Aboriginal culture. Aborigines 'were by no means destitute of qualities in which civilised men glory', wrote Ridley. In particular he stressed that which no other nineteenth century missionary emphasised and which most did not even recognise - 'the thirst for religious

mystery'. As well he admired Aboriginal oral literature, the sense of dramatic tragedy and sarcastic fiction, reverence for the departed, and stoical contempt of pain.¹⁶⁷

Ridley also noted the compassion of Aboriginal people towards whites in need or danger. 'Many a lost English child has been saved from a miserable end in the bush. . . many a colonist rescued from the floods. . . many a time has the poison injected by a snakebite been sucked from a wounded settler by a blackfellow'

Ridley took particular note of Aboriginal care of their own people:

One common characteristic of the Aborigines of Australia, which ought not to be unnoticed, is their tender care for the blind, and especially for the aged blind. . . These afflicted people were the fattest of the company, being supplied with the best of everything.

I also saw an old blind Murri, on the Balonne, who was treated with great attention by his tribe. He held a spear in his hand and, when he wanted guidance, stretched it out for some one to take. Seeing him signalling for a guide, I took the end of the spear for him and all his friends joined in an approving laugh as the old man said to me 'murruba inda' (good are you).¹⁶⁸

On a whole range of issues, Ridley's thinking was remarkably balanced and objective, revealing the depth of his knowledge and concern. He believed, for example, that missions should always include traditional Aboriginal activities in their daily schedules, and that in school, attention should be given to the cultural differences of Aboriginal children:

An attempt to drill them at once into the exact modes of European labour would drive them off in disgust. But let them be placed under the superintendence of men somewhat acquainted with their life in the bush, who know how to lead them willingly through a succession of various employments. In the course of the day let a few hours gardening, then road making, then burning off and fencing, with an interval for opossum hunting, or honey getting, or fishing: divide the time from sunrise to dark. Though the work may seem fragmentary at first, much more might be thus accomplished than by a vain attempt to force them into the usual routine of civilised habits.

Aboriginal children generally prove quick at learning to read; but it is in vain to attempt to coerce them into long continued study. Their hours of school should be short, and an abundant variety of outdoor work should be provided for them. Instead of attempting to force children or adults into habits foreign to their nature, let there be such an adaptation to their peculiarities as is here suggested, and the results will, I am confident, prove satisfactory.¹⁶⁹

Ridley very clearly perceived the problems Aboriginal Christians faced because they were socially unacceptable in a supposedly Christian white society:

Many a blackfellow brought up among civilised men has been tractable and quick at learning up to a certain time, and then has suddenly thrown aside the garb and habits of civilisation. And looking on such instances good people exclaim that their supposed improvement is but superficial, that their nature is incorrigible! But is it reasonable to expect that they should lose their attachment to their kindred and the customs of their fathers? – that a solitary black, among people who look on him as an alien in blood, will be content to remain a stranger to his own people also?¹⁷⁰

While admitting that Aborigines had committed some 'horrid crimes' against the settlers, Ridley was quick to point out that 'people of British origin' had committed crimes against the Aborigines 'at least equal in atrocity to theirs'.¹⁷¹ It was very clear to Ridley, when Aborigines asked him to warn white offenders of God's wrath, that Aboriginal people saw the inconsistency between the gospel and the lifestyle of colonial white society:

One poor fellow on the Mooni addressed me in a long and pathetic harangue on the wrongs which his people have suffered at the hands of the white men and urged upon me, as I had been telling the black fellows not to do evil, to go round and tell the white men not to wrong the blacks, especially not to take away their gins.¹⁷²

Ridley's clear thinking extended not only to his recognition of the worth of Aboriginal language and culture, and his acute sense

of justice, but also to an exceptionally strong view of what the Australian church should be like:

When the Christianity we profess has become a living and a ruling power in the British Australian community – when the questions concerning different ecclesiastical traditions and rules, which at present engross too large a proportion of our zeal, have given place to a supreme desire that the will of God be done on earth – it will be one of the objects which the Australian church will seek with the utmost intense earnestness, to convey to the remnant of the race of Murri [Aborigines] and to their kindred, from Cape York to Cape Leuwin, the knowledge of the love of him who gave himself a ransom for all.¹⁷³

It is indeed a pity that a missionary with so great a potential for good should have been given so little opportunity to put his principles into practice. His significance lies in the observations he made, and the insights he left behind, more than in anything he actually achieved. Never a well man, William Ridley was said to have succumbed from overwork, dying of a stroke in 1878. He has been praised as one who 'earned a reputation for transparent goodness'.¹⁷⁴ Sadly, he saw the thwarting of his ambition to assist the Aborigines as a failure on his own part.

On 5 June 1864, he wrote in his diary:

O Lord! shew me, but mercifully, wherein the great cause of my wretched failure as an evangelist consisted. My hope and aim was that Thou wouldst make me Thy mouth to speak unto the Aborigines of Australia words whereby they might be saved. Alas, how have I failed in this. . .¹⁷⁵

The missions as places of survival

In southeastern Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century, missions like Lake Tyers and Maloga were places of survival. The major threat from which these missions protected Aboriginal people was no longer violent death. Missions later provided such refuges elsewhere in Australia, as the frontier extended north, but in Victoria and NSW the killing was mostly over. The ultimate threat to Aboriginal survival came from the low birthrate.

As we have seen, violence was the cause of much death, as

were European diseases, but the greatest threat finally to the remnant of Aboriginal people was their failure to reproduce. This disaster began with the destruction of Aboriginal society, and the subsequent exploitation and corruption of the survivors. Many women lost the ability to reproduce through venereal diseases, but finally despair led Aboriginal people to lose all hope of a future.

Aboriginal families desperately needed two things: protection from white exploitation, and a hope in the future. The missions which were able to withstand the moral onslaught provided protection and hope, but many missions failed to survive. The aggressive and unbridled immorality of unbalanced white colonial society was the direct cause of the demise of a number of missions, and contributed to the failure of many others. It was the obvious reason for the collapse of the Lake Boga and Yelta missions, but they were far from isolated cases: the Jesuit mission in Darwin in the 1880s, for example, was another. From one end of the continent to the other and well into this century, missionaries found that their greatest trial was attempting to stand against the twin evils of alcohol abuse and prostitution.

The point which must be made, and made emphatically, is that Aboriginal people were not naturally a promiscuous or immoral people. Those who knew them best were those few missionaries who not only spent their lifetime in their company, but who also took a deep interest in Aboriginal culture. Despite the fact that these missionaries also spoke out unceasingly against sexual immorality, it was they who, of all people, came to realise that in their traditional state Aborigines were a moral people. That is, they had an exceptionally strict code of sexual behaviour and stern punishments for those who broke the code.

As we have seen, John Bulmer was one of those missionaries who, after almost a lifetime in Gippsland, recognised that 'in their old state they had laws for their government which they must not break on pain even of death'.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, Bulmer admitted that protecting an offending girl from severe punishment for a moral offence was 'the greatest mistake' he ever made, for it encouraged disrespect for the Aboriginal moral code.¹⁷⁷ 'They are, among themselves, a virtuous people,' wrote Daniel Matthews.¹⁷⁸

In stark contrast, among all those who condemned Aboriginal people as immoral, the most vehement denunciations often came from those most guilty of mistreating them. The idea of 'the exist-

ence of chastity among their women', wrote Northern Territory pastoralist, Alfred Giles, 'is preposterous. . . no less preposterous is the idea of the black woman being outraged.'¹⁷⁹ His close friend, Mounted Constable William Willshire, believed that God meant Aboriginal women to be used by white men 'as he had placed them wherever the pioneers go'.¹⁸⁰

Whether or not any other white pioneers saw Aboriginal women as God's provision, they certainly found them and exploited them sexually wherever they went. 'The pioneer makes the country by using the gifts within it to his needs,'¹⁸¹ wrote the famous bushman-author, Bill Harney, in 1958, in reference to what he and his fellows labelled 'Black Velvet', a widespread term for their Aboriginal sexual partners.¹⁸²

William Watson, over a century earlier at the Wellington mission, observed that Aboriginal women were universally exploited by all classes of settler:

I am sure your heart would sicken, had you any idea of the moral wretchedness with which we are surrounded. Amongst the hundreds of Europeans who live in this neighbourhood whether masters, overseers or servants, scarcely an individual is to be found who has any fear of God before his eyes; and a very large majority of them live in the violation of every moral principle. On some establishments, where there are from thirty to forty servants [i.e. convicts], scarcely a hut can be found where there is not a native female living in adulterous connexion with the European inmates.¹⁸³

Watson found most horrifying the sexual exploitation of children, both girls and boys. Matthews brought young girls of eleven years of age to the Maloga mission who were pregnant to white men, while Watson reported the abuse of even younger girls at Wellington:

The white men at the different stations. . . have laboured hard to prevent the blacks and their children from coming to me. There is a great spirit of revenge manifested against me because I have opposed the abominable practice of living in adultery and fornication with black women and black girls. Your soul would be horrified in the extreme if you were acquainted with only a fraction of the circumstances that have come to my knowledge.

A short time ago we had a little girl about eight or nine years of age. . . I am told a stockman whom I know well is living with her as his wife and that this monster of iniquity has sometimes three or four such children living with him at the same time in this manner. Three weeks ago a girl came here and remains (perhaps she is ten or eleven years of age) with us. She had the disease and told me it was given her by a stockman about three miles from me.¹⁸⁴

Black women were presumed to be available, presumed to be the right of the conqueror and, in any case, to be devoid of morality, as Ernestine Hill could claim as recently as 1938.¹⁸⁵ Rape was therefore not rape and there was, in this affectionless sex, not just force but heartless cruelty. Whalers, sealers and others abducted coastal women who were never seen again. In-land, 'gin hunts' were common.

'Half the young lubras now being detained,' wrote Constable R.C. Thorpe of the Northern Territory Police in 1898, 'would say that they were run down by station blackguards on horseback, and taken to the stations for licentious purposes, and there kept more like slaves than anything else.'¹⁸⁶ A station manager acknowledged that the women were 'kept in irons until they are too terrified to make any attempt to return to their own tribe'.¹⁸⁷ At Glenormiston Station in western Victoria in the 1840s, Niel Black was told, 'It is no uncommon thing for these rascals to sleep all night with a lubra - and if she poxes him or in any way offends him, perhaps shoot her before twelve next day.'¹⁸⁸

I have pondered the possible criticism that I have exaggerated the situation or used selective quotation. There certainly were moral and compassionate people among the convicts and other settlers. Indeed, some of the most outspoken critics of frontier immorality were ex-convicts. There were also fair-minded and moral people among the landowners. No mission was ever totally unbefriended by local pastoralists. These few people were, however, held in contempt and subjected to ridicule.

Although it may be true that frontier attitudes began to change with free settlement and the arrival of white families in the pastoral regions, this took a long time to influence the prevailing frontier morality. The non-Aboriginal population of the pastoral regions was at first exclusively male and certainly predominantly

male for a very long time. Many of these were ex-convicts, but as so many early observers point out, their employers were no less guilty of the oppression of Aboriginal women.¹⁸⁹ In the Northern Territory by 1911, there were 576 non-Aboriginal females to 2 734 non-Aboriginal males.¹⁹⁰ Most of these women were in Darwin which still further reduced the proportion of non-Aboriginal women in the pastoral districts.

Jeannie Gunn in her romantic *We of the Never Never* spoke of a 'world of men' where there was not 'another white woman within a hundred mile radius' of Elsey Station.¹⁹¹

The 'lubras being detained' to which constable Thorpe referred were what, for want of a better term, have been described as the station harems or brothels. The provision of black women was a side-benefit, an inducement for working on remote sheep and cattle stations.¹⁹² 'They had to be there; without available women, men would refuse to work on remote stations,' Xavier Herbert, the renowned north Australian writer, told Ann McGrath.¹⁹³

So widespread and well-known was this practice that it prompted some linguistic engineering: there was a distinctive vocabulary developed to describe its features. The women were 'black velvet'; orgies were 'gin sprees'; men particularly obsessed with Aboriginal women were 'gin jockeys'; men who took the women by force were 'gin busters'; the more discreet were 'gin burglars'. The men who committed the unpardonable social crime of actually developing an affection for an Aboriginal woman were 'combos'; the station manager's black girl, forbidden to anyone else, was his 'stud'; managers who tried to protect Aboriginal women and girls from sexual abuse were 'gin shepherds' and were despised.

There is, however, despite the ruthless exploitation of Aboriginal women and girls, another side to this issue. This is the question of the extent to which Aboriginal people were in some places willing accomplices in their own corruption. Aboriginal culture was never a consistent, undifferentiated phenomenon across so many tribes and as large a continent as Australia.

Among some Aboriginal groups there was an accepted practice of honouring male visitors with the provision of female sexual partners. It was never meant to be a loose and promiscuous practice, never an arbitrary or casual gesture. It was carefully thought out and required reciprocal generosity, placing the receiver under

strict obligation. Indeed, it is certain that the death of some white settlers was punishment for failure to fulfil the obligations under which their acceptance of women had placed them.

Many early settlers, however, found ways of exploiting this Aboriginal cultural gesture to their own advantage. Not so the affronted Lutheran missionaries in central Australia who, in moral indignation, repelled the advances of Aboriginal women with stock-whips!

When the missionaries arrived, the [Aborigines] sent their wives and daughters that they might have illicit intercourse with them. That is the manner in which these poor heathen show their friendship and courtesy to strangers. But. . . the missionaries showed their detestation at such a demand and, as they would not go, used the whip to drive them away.¹⁹⁴

There were also the cases of Aboriginal men who, when all else failed, gave their women and girls to invading white settlers in an attempt to curb aggression and thus save their lives. In all the sad heroic story of Aboriginal resistance, among the most heroic people were the young girls who went out bravely and alone to present themselves as a peace offering to the armed invaders.¹⁹⁵ Lewis, during his expedition to Lake Eyre, recorded that despite the terror his party obviously caused, the local clans sent 'as is customary with them six of their lubras as a peace offering'.¹⁹⁶ This situation, too, the invaders could and did fully exploit.

A third situation open to gross exploitation by settlers was the temporary delusion held by Aboriginal people that European items were extremely desirable wealth. Before white settlement, iron tools, like axeheads or knives, were priceless treasures in the south, exchanged across the continent, down the long Aboriginal trade routes from the northern coasts where they were obtained from the Macassans. Confronted with what must have seemed unbelievable wealth, there were Aboriginal men who were willing to barter the use of women for European goods. This, too, was fully exploited by whites who soon discovered how cheap sexual gratification was.

Matthew Moorhouse, the South Australian Protector of Aborigines, after investigating the intense conflict between Aborigines of the lower Murray and white overlanders from NSW in

the 1840s, was told by Aborigines that every white man they had ever seen had asked for women. He wrote:

. . .the Europeans promised the Aborigines food, clothing and tomahawks for the use of their females, but the Europeans did not fulfil their promises and, after gratifying their passions, the women were turned out late in the evening or in the night and, instead of the men having their promised rewards, they were laughed at and ridiculed.¹⁹⁷

It is also true that there were Aboriginal women who willingly, even happily, entered into casual or longer-term relationships with white men. Young women found a certain independence in associating with white men, were lured by European goods or were attracted to white men. There was also a gain in status by association with those whom they thought were the new lords of the land, particularly the privilege of selection as the station manager's woman.

Missionaries as widely apart in time and space as Mrs Bulmer at Yelta¹⁹⁸ and the Lutheran missionaries at Hermannsburg¹⁹⁹ reported their anxiety and frustration at being unable to restrain the older schoolgirls from absconding to the excitement of the stockmen's camps or the sly-grog shanties. All this, too, was exploitation, whether the girls were willing accomplices or not. Genuine concern for their well being was rare. They were sex objects and their frank sexuality and naive aspirations were easily taken advantage of.

The exploitation of women rapidly became part of the chain of events leading to the degradation of Aboriginal people and the destruction of Aboriginal society. Men and women both found themselves in a vicious cycle out of which it was almost impossible to escape. When the European goods lost their attraction, white men found they could easily bargain with Aboriginal men and women with liquor. Then, as food supplies dwindled or were made out of bounds, prostitution finally became for many the major source of food to simply survive.

The sinister and deadly consequence of this widespread, continual and unrelenting sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women and girls was that venereal diseases reached epidemic proportions. The evidence that these diseases were introduced by Europeans is

almost overwhelming. Where these diseases may have seemed to have preceded formal white settlement, they were almost certainly introduced by earlier unofficial white contacts with sailors, escaped convicts, or other visitors. Those who met Aboriginal people who had previously had no contact with whites report that they were healthy people. Often within a decade they are reported as diseased and addicted to alcohol.

George Worgan, a ship's surgeon, observed in Sydney in 1788 that the local Aboriginal people 'enjoyed uninterrupted health'.²⁰⁰ In 1837 in Adelaide, a few months after settlement, Stephen Hack wrote that the Aborigines were 'almost invariably free from disease'.²⁰¹ Whereas Aboriginal people long adhered to their traditional view of illness and saw European diseases as the result of sorcery, venereal diseases were the exception. They understood them to be a white person's infection and therefore curable by white medicine.²⁰²

It is sometimes suggested that venereal diseases may have entered Australia's northern coasts through the long South-East Asian (Macassan) trade.²⁰³ Although this is quite possible, the evidence is very inconclusive. There were diseases, such as yaws, which were unfamiliar to Europeans and which they therefore confused with conditions better known to them such as leprosy and VD. Even the alleged existence of Aboriginal words for VD is questionable, as Aboriginal people, like all people, rapidly extended the function of terms for familiar diseases to cover new ones.

The only accurate observation that can be made is that if VD existed in the north before white settlement, it was uncommon and its spread kept in check by the strict Aboriginal moral code. People like Alfred Searcy, who was most familiar with Aboriginal people of the northern coasts, rarely reported disease of any kind, but where there was intense permanent white settlement, the same shift from health to disease became rapidly evident.

In 1873, a year after the founding of Darwin, William Wildey described the Larrakia people in positive, even glowing terms. They were 'most happy' and 'contented'; they 'knew not the taste of alcoholic liquor and refuse to taste it'; the young girls were 'very pretty, were symmetrically formed, and walked majestically'.²⁰⁴

Nine years later, William Sowden recorded his disgust at the same people as being 'dirt encrusted, nearly all syphilitic'.²⁰⁵ Even allowing for Sowden's blatant racism, it is obvious what had

happened in only nine years.

Those much more sympathetic to Aboriginal people than Sowden was, still recorded their horror at the high incidence of VD, and at the extreme suffering such diseases caused to Aboriginal women in advanced stages of the illness. Annie Baxter of Yambuk Station in southwestern Victoria kept detailed diaries in the 1840s.²⁰⁶ The 'large camp across the river' which she described in 1844, became, by 1847, the 'Camp Des Invalides'.²⁰⁷ 'They really don't remind me scarcely of human beings,' Annie wrote.²⁰⁸

She told the story of an attractive Aboriginal woman who became terribly disfigured after catching VD from the white stockmen. Her palate rotted away and she could speak only in a whisper. Her white ex-lovers tried to cure her in 'a tub of sublimate used for sheep dressing, after which she fell into a rapid decline'.²⁰⁹ When she died, Annie buried her and confided to her diary:

Man (I mean white man) in this instance, as in many more, has been only the means of making this woman's condition worse than it originally was: all she knew of him was to bring her to that fearful state in which she suffered and eventually died.²¹⁰

In most parts of Australia in the nineteenth century, venereal diseases reached epidemic proportions among Aboriginal people. In southeastern Australia, it peaked in the middle of the century. Two-thirds of the Aborigines of the Port Phillip district died of VD in this period.²¹¹ Furthermore, there was 'hardly a shepherd without the disease'²¹² and, as T.F.Bride recorded, many sheep stations collapsed simply because 'all the men and masters got fearfully diseased'.²¹³

In the 1845 Report from the Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines (NSW), responses to the fourth question on the reasons for the decrease in the Aboriginal population frequently blamed venereal diseases. The magistrates of the Dungog district, for example, said that 'the diminution in births was most remarkable' and attributed this 'to sexual intercourse with the whites at a very tender age, excessive venery, syphilis and intemperance'.²¹⁴

The Select Committee asked the same question of John Bede

Polding, Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, who said, in connecting sexual abuse of young Aboriginal girls and sterility, that they were 'mere children, who are thus made incapable of becoming mothers'.²¹⁵

This same sinister connection was widely reported by the early missionaries. 'Fatal disease, introduced by licentious Europeans' interfered with 'the natural source of supply and increase' wrote Benjamin Hurst, Wesleyan missionary at Geelong in the 1840s.²¹⁶ Ten years earlier, Lancelot Threlkeld the Congregational missionary at Lake Macquarie wrote that the withdrawal of 'Aboriginal women from their own proper mates' led inevitably to 'disease and death' and 'the slaughter of the black women'.²¹⁷

This was one of the key elements in the vicious cycle of disease, death and despair. As one of the Victorian Protectors of Aborigines reported, there developed 'an indifference to prolong their race'.²¹⁸ The inexorable process began with the loss of the warriors in resisting the whites, continued with widespread death from disease, and was followed by the death of most of the women and girls from venereal disease so that the group lost both the ability and the desire to reproduce itself.

Statistics from the districts of the missionaries whose observations I have quoted speak for themselves. In Hurst's district, Port Phillip, only one Aboriginal child was born and survived between 1839 and 1845 while the group was reduced from 207 to 152.²¹⁹ By 1859, the group had been reduced to fifty-six. In Threlkeld's district, Lake Macquarie, a count in 1837 showed an appalling imbalance: *twenty-eight men, two boys, two women, no girls*.²²⁰

The great missions in southeastern Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century, such as Lake Tyers, Ramahyuck, Maloga, Lake Condah and Ebenezer (Wimmera), were places of survival. The missionaries who dedicated their lives to helping Aboriginal people have been criticised as ethnocentric do-gooders. Some of these criticisms are deserved, but when they are examined with an understanding of the situation which the missionaries confronted, many of the criticisms are seen to be ill-informed and unfair.

Unknown to the missionaries, these missions were generally established at a critical stage in the sequence of events which were

destroying not just Aboriginal culture but Aboriginal life itself. The 'killing years' were over, or nearly over, and European diseases had already, as Threlkeld put it, 'stretched the black victims in hundreds on the earth'.²²¹ The incidence of venereal diseases was at its highest, morale was at its lowest and despair was at its worst. Aboriginal people physically needed protection from white sexual exploitation and spiritually needed hope. The missions, with all their faults, were to provide both of these.

As we have seen in the case of missions like Lake Boga, corrupt whites aggressively demanded the use of the black women and girls. Many astute observers throughout Australia realised that the opposition to the missions was not just due to envy of mission lands but to simple lust, to frustration at the loss of cheap sex. As a Western Australian woman said in defence of John Gribble in 1886, 'The vices of some settlers have not been condoned, and their interests are endangered. If missionary work goes on, they may have no black paramours. . .'.²²²

The missionaries were not able to protect Aboriginal people from normal European infectious diseases. Measles, influenza and other virulent diseases were just as lethal within the mission compounds as they were outside. As we will see in a later chapter, in this era of limited medical knowledge, Matthew Hale at the Poonindie mission in South Australia found it difficult to comprehend why so many Aboriginal people died at his mission despite his efforts to provide a healthy lifestyle. Indeed, there were tragedies, like John Smithies' Wesleyan mission in Perth, where the Aboriginal young people contracted tuberculosis from milk from the mission cows.²²³

The missionaries were, however, able to protect Aboriginal people to a very large degree from contracting venereal diseases. Unlike infections caught from airborne pathogens, the mode of infection with VD was well understood by both Europeans and Aborigines. Aboriginal girls in the controlled mission life, supervised and even in some cases restrained, did not nearly so readily contract VD. The missionaries knew it and so did the Aboriginal parents who allowed the missionaries to take charge of their children. Exchanging freedom for regimentation, they saved their children's lives. They knew what they were doing and they accepted the cost.

It is true that missionaries continued to regiment and dis-

cipline Aboriginal people long after the need for it had passed. Some missionaries in recent years were party to a repressive system of institutionalisation of Aboriginal people when they should have been accorded equality and self-determination and the means to fulfil their aspirations. It is, however, also true that in this earlier era the disciplined and restricted mission life protected Aboriginal people, especially young women and girls, from degradation, disease and death.

It is easy to caricature these missionaries as 'wowsers', as sexually-inhibited killjoys forcing their own brand of puritanical morality on Aboriginal people. This caricature is a denial of the very real guardianship which these missionaries exercised. They alone cared enough about Aboriginal people to create sanctuaries in which they could survive. To shield Aboriginal girls from unscrupulous and immoral whites was not pettiness; it was life-saving. To rail against immorality was not narrow-mindedness, but a commendable concern to stem a great social evil. It was not wowserism, but courage.

In these sanctuaries, Aboriginal young people survived. They married and produced healthy children. Many became Christians. Their descendants are alive today. The missions became places of hope for the future.

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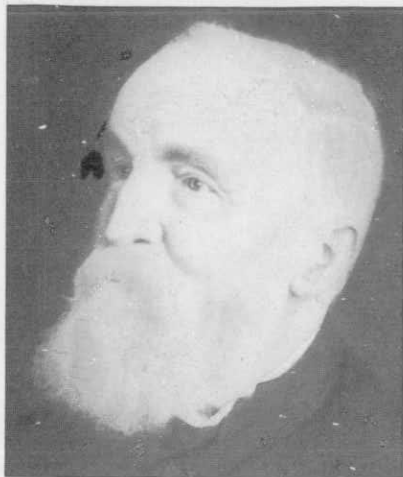
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Part B
Nineteenth century:

*Aboriginal missions extend west,
south and north*



27. John Bulmer

Acknowledgement: Graeme Vines and
the Lake Tyers Community.
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28. The cross in the tree at
Lake Tyers

Acknowledgement: John Harris



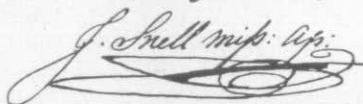
29. Double wedding at Lake Tyers, 1907

Jonny McDougall married Bella O'Rourke (centre) and Charlie Green
married Lydia Gilbert (right). John Bulmer is on the left.

Acknowledgement: Alec Jackomos and the Australian Institute
of Aboriginal Studies. Reproduced with permission.

Anno Domini 1844. Die 20. Mensis Junii
 Ego Joseph Snell Mission. Apott. in Insula Dunwich,
 Moreton Bay, baptizavi infantem presentatum a
 Patre, annorum circiter tres, natum ex Dick Smith
 Hibernensis, et Neli Indigena, cui impositionis est
 nomen Albertus Maria. Patrinus fuit Joseph
 Daps Anglicus. —



J. Snell miss. Ap.


30. Record of the first baptism of an Aboriginal child in Queensland.
 (Translation: In the year of our Lord 1844, December 29, Month of
 June, I Joseph Snell, Apostolic Missionary, on Dunwich [Stradbroke]
 Island, Moreton Bay, baptised a child, presented by the father, about
 three years old, born of Dick Smith, Irish, and Neli, Aboriginal, giving
 him the name Albert Mary. Godparent was Joseph Daps, English.
 J. Snell, Apostolic Missionary) Acknowledgement: Moran [1896], p.592

Are there many Persons in god's
 ngalmogher galduni varpi?
 Three divine Persons
 narxar xla varat varpi
 What name have the three
 Marokha noie ngummi
 divine Person?

31. Portion of Angelo
 Confalonieri's Iwaidja catechism,
 Port Essington, 1848
 Acknowledgement: Archivio di
 Propagazione Fide, Rome.



32. Donald MacKillop
 Acknowledgement: Moran [1896], p.120

5

The repetition of a violent pattern

Western Australian society and Aboriginal missions

SOME FORTY YEARS after the first white settlement in eastern Australia, settlers were beginning to establish themselves in the south and west. Once more, Aboriginal people had thrust upon them aggressively expanding white townships and the ever outward moving boundary of the pastoral frontier. In the colony of Western Australia, there was some resolve on the part of a few fair-minded colonists, if not always on the part of government, to try to avoid the pattern of conflict which arose between Aborigines and settlers in the eastern settlements. This turned out to have been a vain hope.

Christian missionaries began to work in Western Australia much sooner after the initial settlement than had been the case in the eastern colonies. Here also the earliest missionary efforts failed or were, at the very least, short-lived. There were, however, several outstanding people who made sustained missionary endeavours. These included Anne Camfield, John Smithies and Rosendo Salvado. The work of these and other missionaries will be considered in this chapter.

A violent pattern

In June 1829, Lieutenant Governor James Stirling read the Royal Proclamation founding the Swan River colony. The pattern of subsequent European/Aboriginal interaction was predictably similar to that which began forty years earlier in the eastern states. Swan

River Aboriginal people were at first curious about what was happening, investigating the potential benefits to them of these unexpected arrivals. They had no way of knowing the degree of permanence of white settlement, nor the drastic effect it would have upon their society.

It soon became apparent that the settlers intended to stay, increasingly encroaching upon Aboriginal land, forcing them out of their hunting grounds and depriving them of their natural food sources. Even the most kindly disposed of the whites presumed the Aborigines to be free to roam further afield at will to seek food. They did not grasp the complex reality of tribal territory and responsibility. Indeed, few ever thought Aboriginal society capable of detailed group and land arrangements, or of inter-tribal law.

The first Aboriginal person was killed in 1830 as a result of a trivial but predictable incident which was repeated many times throughout Australia. A white man named Smedley, seeing an Aboriginal man taking potatoes from the garden of someone by the name of Butler, shot and killed him. Shortly afterwards, a party of Aborigines attacked Butler's house, killing his convict servant, Entwhistle.¹

The first European foods with which Aboriginal people supplemented their natural diet were gifts. The white settlers, however, had no intention of giving food away indefinitely, whereas Aboriginal people began to perceive it as a right, even as a kind of payment or rent for the land occupied by the Europeans. When the gifts stopped, they turned to taking what they wanted. The most obvious targets were animals and vegetables. The idea of ownership of animals and plants was foreign. Aboriginal people did not necessarily perceive them as property in the same way as the white settlers did.

Killing and retaliation were, it would seem, inevitable, yet there was a dreadful inevitability, too, that the war should begin, not over the grosser injustice of the invasion of Aboriginal land, but over the taking of such trivial yet symbolic property as a few European vegetables growing in Aboriginal soil. The Aboriginal retaliation was led by Midgegoroo and his son Yagan. Attempts to capture them only exacerbated the situation. They became active and successful guerilla fighters for several years.

When Yagan's brother was killed, Aborigines retaliated by attacking settlers on the Canning River, which led to their being

declared outlaws. Midgegoroo was captured and publicly executed by firing squad in May 1833.² The *Perth Gazette* expressed this criticism of the onlookers:

The feeling which was generally expressed was that of satisfaction at what had taken place and in some instances of loud and vehement exultation, which the solemnity of the scene, a fellow being – albeit a native – launched into eternity ought to have suppressed.³

Yagan was killed in July by two youths, William and James Keats, who first won his confidence, shared his food and then shot him. This was by no means the only time in Australia's history that white youths and even children murdered Aborigines. In retaliation, William was killed. James was hastily sent away from the colony. The *Perth Gazette* was horrified at the whole episode:

[It was] a wild and treacherous act; and not the heroic and courageous deed which some unthinkingly have designated it. . . . What a fearful lesson of instruction have we given to the savage! We have taught him by this act to exercise toward us deceit and treachery. . . . we are not vindicating the outlaw, but we maintain it is revolting to our feelings to hear this lauded as a meritorious deed. . . .⁴

Whereas loss of leadership had an immediate salutary effect on the Swan River Aborigines, the long-term effect was disastrous and far-reaching. Aborigines of neighbouring regions could now hold no illusions. They knew the Europeans intended to stay, knew that they would take Aboriginal land, and knew that they would kill to keep it. This, as we have seen, happened all over Australia. Aborigines where Europeans first intruded were usually inquisitive, even friendly. By the time they understood what was happening, it was too late but, as the frontier moved, Aboriginal resistance tended to increase as ever more distant groups were determined not to suffer their neighbours' fate.

So as the Swan River settlement expanded, the colonists encountered increasing resistance. The scene of conflict shifted from the region around Perth to the Murray River district, where even the first groups of settlers were immediately attacked. By the end

of 1834, about seven white settlers had been killed,⁵ together with an unknown number of Aboriginal resisters. Matters were brought to a head by the Aborigines' embarrassing imprisonment of the 21st Regiment in their own barracks and their theft of half a ton of flour from Shenton's Mill.

Stirling decided to lead an attack himself, in what came to be known as the 'Battle of Pinjarra'. Stirling's troops surrounded the Murray River people and shot a large number of them. Minimising the fatalities, as was invariably done, Stirling's official report claimed that fifteen Aboriginal men were killed and a few Europeans injured.⁶ Septimus Roe, the Surveyor-General, who had accompanied the military expedition recorded that between nineteen and twenty-six Aborigines were killed.⁷ Joseph Hardey, a Christian settler and prominent Methodist supporter, although not involved in the attack, wrote that it was 'a shocking slaughter' and that between twenty-five and thirty had been killed, including women and children.⁸

Stirling specifically stated that 'on this occasion the women and children had been spared'. He warned the survivors that if there were any more trouble, 'four times the present number of men would proceed amongst them and destroy every man, woman and child'.⁹ Stirling's view was that the only way to deal with Aborigines was to exhibit extreme force, to 'reduce their tribe to weakness' and to inflict 'such acts of decisive severity as will appal them as people'.¹⁰ Stirling's actions delighted many settlers, particularly Thomas Peel who had been anxiously seeking title deeds to the Aborigines' land around the Murray. In the same month, November, Peel received title to 250 000 acres. He was negotiating the sale of 100 000 acres for a handsome profit by December.¹¹

Armed resistance to the Europeans diminished in the Murray region following the Battle of Pinjarra, but the massacre served both to convince Aborigines further afield to resist the invasion vigorously, and to harden the resolve of settlers to kill as soon as possible a large enough number of Aborigines to instil fear in the remainder. By 1835, the frontier was further inland in the York region. Aboriginal resistance met with stern reprisals until, by 1838, active Aboriginal resistance was crushed in all areas where settlement was taking place.

Within this region now lived only those Aboriginal people who did not pursue aggressive resistance to the settlers. Some chose

to align themselves with the whites, but it is far too naive a generalisation to presume that they ever had any real choice. In 1839 Rottnest Island was established as a jail for Aborigines where large numbers were soon confined. Resistance to white colonisation could now take only passive forms.

The gradual corruption of Aboriginal life in the settled region was due to the drastic destruction of their society and resentment led to disillusionment. Many fell easy prey to depraved whites. As early as 1834, the *Perth Gazette* was regularly reporting that Aboriginal men were being made drunk so that the women could be sexually exploited. As in the eastern colonies, disease and disillusionment led not only to a high death rate but a low birth rate. It was in this context that the church first considered its obligation to the Aborigines.

Early Church of England missions

The first formal institution for Aborigines in Western Australia was, as in NSW, financed by the Government, but managed by a Christian. After the Battle of Pinjarra there was, if not an actual admission of guilt, at least a widely-held view that humane gestures were necessary. Several Christians had long been concerned that something should be done. None went so far as saying that the settlement should not have occurred, which would have required them to question their own presence in it. Unlike most of their contemporaries, however, they believed that there were powerful moral obligations to act more justly towards the original inhabitants.

One such Christian was Captain (later Colonel) Frederick Chidley Irwin, Stirling's second-in-command, a committed member of the Church of England, described as 'a pious military officer',¹² who had himself conducted the first Christian services in the colony. Although he believed that Aborigines had become British subjects and that if they broke British law they should be dealt with according to the law, Irwin believed that as British subjects they also had rights which should be defended.

He wrote:

. . . it is impossible for a moment to maintain or vindicate the abstract right of civilised nations to establish themselves in the territories of savage tribes, without at least acknowledging that

such intrusions involve the settlers, and the nations to which they belong, in deep and lasting responsibilities. . .¹³

Within a few weeks of the Pinjarra massacre, a Native Institution was established at the foot of Mt Eliza on the river bank below what today is Kings Park. In charge was young Francis Armstrong, a prominent Methodist and one of the few settlers to have taken an interest in learning Aboriginal languages. Much less repressive than many more recent institutions, Mt Eliza was essentially a place set aside where Aboriginal people could live and be free to come and go as they pleased. They were assisted to build huts and were paid in food for community work. They could choose not to work, in which case they had to procure their own food by traditional means for which boats were provided. Profit from any surplus fish was their own. They were protected from molestation by blacks or whites while resident at the Institution.¹⁴

Despite all this, the Mt Eliza institution was short-lived. Like Bourke's similar establishment at Port Phillip, the Institution was at first very popular. It failed because of its own 'hidden curriculum'. It was supposed to lead the Aborigines 'to a more civilised and happier state of existence'.¹⁵ Not even as knowledgeable a person as Armstrong understood that Aboriginal culture demanded that the people travel from time to time to fulfil their obligations.

This regular departure of the residents was construed as failure. The Institution was closed in 1838.¹⁶ Had the Aboriginal people's need to maintain their regular cycle been respected and the Institution kept for their purposes whenever they needed it, not only would it have fulfilled many of the better intentions of the settlers, it may well also have suited the intentions of Aboriginal people as they made their own adjustments to changes which were being forced upon them.

For a decade, the only clergyman in the colony was Rev. John Wittenoom, the official Church of England chaplain, whose formal responsibilities left him no time to display any particular interest in Aboriginal people. Indeed, settlers outside of Perth felt that even they saw far too little of him, those at Guildford petitioning the Archbishop of Canterbury to send them 'a zealous, active and pious clergyman'.¹⁷ Further, many were deeply concerned that the Church of England do something for Aboriginal people.

Irwin was instrumental in the formation of the Western Australian Missionary Society in Dublin.¹⁸ This Society first sent Dr Louis Giustiniani, an Italian scholar and physician,¹⁹ accompanied by his catechists, Frederick and Fredericka Waldeck, and Abraham Jones. Giustiniani rapidly built a church and mission house in the Guildford area.²⁰ Appalled by the brutal treatment of Aboriginal people on the expanding frontier of white settlement, Giustiniani became an outspoken critic of white brutality and an untiring advocate of justice for the Aboriginal people.

Later historians often dismissed his courageous outspokenness as 'tactlessness'²¹ or 'allowing his zeal to outrun his discretion'.²² Such estimates failed to give a balanced picture of one of the few whose sense of moral duty was stronger than his personal ambition. He became very unpopular. Petty criticisms – his foreign nationality or his refusal to spend his time teaching white children – masked the real reasons for his rejection. He named those he believed guilty of brutality and criticised colonial Perth society. He went so far as to write to the British Colonial Office, detailing specific events and naming particular colonists.²³

Governor Hutt advised Lord Glenelg in London that Giustiniani's views were 'involuntarily biased by the deep interest which, as a Christian missionary, he might be expected to feel in the condition and future prospects of a race who hitherto certainly have benefited little or nothing from their intercourse with our countrymen'.²⁴ Inevitably, Giustiniani alienated many influential colonists, including his sponsor, Irwin, and was finally forced to leave the colony. Sailing to Mauritius in the company of the Quakers, James Backhouse and George Walker, he confided his experiences and opinions in them.²⁵ 'The Europeans,' said Giustiniani, 'stand in as much need of religious instruction as the natives.'²⁶ No true Christian could dispute that.

On Giustiniani's departure, Church of England people sought a missionary from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. The Rev. William Mitchell with his wife, children and a governess, Anne Breeze, was sent in 1838 to establish a mission and school at Middle Swan. An ex-missionary from India, Mitchell expected to be able to domesticate Aboriginal children and gave up missionary work almost immediately, attributing his failure to their 'low level of civilisation'.²⁷ He remained a clergyman in the region for over twenty years.

Following this failure, the Church of England was associated with the Government in another school, opened in 1841 on Giustiniani's old site at Guildford, under the charge of his former catechist, Abraham Jones. The school could best be described as a training institution for domestic servants, the pupils spending most of the day in household employment in local homes. Within a few months, eleven of the school's twenty-three pupils were dead of European diseases. Aboriginal parents perceived the school as a place of death and were reluctant to send their children there.

The school struggled on with more deaths and decreasing enrolment for ten years in a semi-official capacity,²⁸ but early in 1842 the Rev. John Wollaston visited Perth and wrote in his journal: 'There is a Sunday and a Native school, the latter in the hands of the Wesleyans and successfully carried on. What is our church doing in this way? Nothing.'²⁹

Shortly afterwards, the Church of England opened a school in Fremantle in 1842 with fifteen pupils, mostly girls, under the Rev. George King. His circumstances gave him little chance of success. He was not well himself and was expected also to travel extensively to minister to the white colonists. The school was plagued by illness and death. King left the colony in 1849. Although the school struggled on, the arrival of convicts in Fremantle in 1851 posed severe moral problems.³⁰ Places were found for a few of the children at the Wesleyan School in Perth. By 1852, only seven remained.

Anne Camfield and the Native Institution at Albany

Anne Breeze arrived in Fremantle from England in August 1838, aged in her early 30s. She was an orphan and had come, as mentioned earlier, as governess with the Mitchell family. After assisting Mitchell during his brief missionary efforts at Middle Swan, she remained with his household afterwards. She was an exceptionally tall woman, described as 'good, very religious, much respected, of an amiable temper and sound understanding'.³¹ An intelligent person, she nevertheless patiently carried out the menial domestic tasks required of her in the Mitchell household. Mrs Mitchell wrote in her diary on 6 September 1838: 'We are all busy. Miss Breeze cooking, baking, ironing, fire-lighting, drawing water from the well and attending to the turkeys and rabbits.'³²

Not long after her arrival, Anne Breeze met Henry Camfield, a

one-time explorer, fortune-hunter and associate of the Henty brothers. Camfield was now working in middle-level government posts and was shortly to become Postmaster General. Henry and Anne were married in December 1840. In 1848, Henry was made Government Resident in Albany.

In the same year, John Ramsden Wollaston was appointed Church of England rector of Albany, and made Archdeacon in 1849. He determined without delay to do something positive for the Aboriginal children in the region, many of whom were in need. Wollaston was particularly encouraged late in 1848 by a visit from Bishop Short and Archdeacon Hale of Adelaide, both of whom were particularly concerned about the plight of Aboriginal people.³³ Short wrote from Fremantle to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, pointing out that:

. . . the native Australians have been very untruly underrated. In intelligence, good temper and faithfulness to their engagements they are remarkable. . . Several who have conversed with me at this place and elsewhere appear to me to negative altogether the commonly received notion. . . of their low position in the physical and intellectual scale.³⁴

Short believed that Aborigines would respond well to kindness, firmness and belief in their worth, but regretted that 'all persons have not the faith and love' to treat them as they would white people. His aim would be to 'rescue them from barbarism and heathenism', but he strongly condemned those who despised them. As he wrote:

They are counted an inferior class, sometimes defrauded of their fair wages, and it is wondered that they prefer their native associates to being despised and wronged as a pariah caste among whites, many of whom are below themselves in honesty, truthfulness and self-respect.³⁵

Wollaston began making specific plans. He found enthusiastic supporters in the new Government Resident and his wife. Henry Camfield had been appalled by slavery in South America on his voyage to Australia,³⁶ and his disapproval of mistreatment of Aborigines was well-known. Anne had come to Australia to assist

a missionary and had never lost her interest in the task for which she had come, caring for several Aboriginal children and preparing them for baptism. Two were baptised during Short and Hale's visit. Hale described them as 'the offspring of a native woman, a girl about ten and a boy about seven. They are being brought up in a most careful and Christian manner by a good woman in the settlement who acted as one of the sponsors upon this occasion.'³⁷

Wollaston approached Governor Fitzgerald who granted him £100 and a sixty-acre site at Middleton Bay, three miles from Albany. Encouraged by this and by good news of the early years of the Poonindie mission, he then wrote to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG):

The local government, sanctioned by that at home, having thought it expedient to carry out the full rigour of the law against the Aborigines. . . a very strong feeling prevails among the right thinking portion of the white population that a greater effort than ever should now be made to promote the civilisation and Christian education of native children.³⁸

Promised some assistance from the SPG, Wollaston's major anxiety was to find suitable people to be in charge of his native institution. Unwilling to delay its commencement indefinitely, Anne Camfield offered to look after the first few children in her own home for a year in addition to the children for whom she already cared.³⁹ This temporary arrangement, marking the beginning of the institution, commenced on 1 November 1852. By May 1853, there were ten children and Anne Camfield had two Aboriginal assistants, Ellen Wells and Ellen Trimmer. Wollaston wrote:

I have admitted ten children, three of whom are half-castes, and three have become orphans, from the prevailing influenza, since I received them. Three are infants in arms, one of whom, however, being very sickly, soon died. I have baptised the whole, privately, and shall receive them all together publicly into the church as soon as I can secure suitable sponsors - a measure at all times important - but in their case of the utmost consequence. Mrs Wollaston and Mrs Camfield will be two of them.⁴⁰

For several years the Albany Native Institution was within the Camfield's own private home, named 'Annesfield'.⁴¹ Wollaston

continued to seek suitable people to take over the work and arranged the construction of buildings on the Middle Bay site. Not only did Wollaston find it difficult to find anyone suitable to take over the Institution; he also harboured no illusions as to the likelihood of local financial support from church people. On Easter Saturday, 1853, he wrote: 'On enquiry at bank found (but not to my surprise, well knowing the colonial prejudices to be overcome) that as yet the result of my appeal for the Aborigines was, as we used to say at Cambridge, -O.'⁴²

A few weeks later, Wollaston commented on this lack of support in his report to the SPG:

The truth must be told - I have always found the majority of our colonists and the Imperial Government indifferent towards the Aborigines as fellow creatures and fellow subjects, on those points which Christianity most imperatively insists upon. . . The most niggardly excuses are made in justification of the refusal of trouble of any kind in the matter, whilst the poor natives have, to their cost, imbibed nothing but the worst vices of the white population. Surely the home government, having possessed itself of this colony for its own advantage and convenience, ought long since to have taken effectual steps for the amelioration of the condition of the original owners of the soil. If Christianity be left out, common humanity at least demands this. From past experiences, however, I entertain little hope of any due and adequate support from that quarter and, trusting to His Providence 'who hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the Earth', must look to the local government, the Society and benevolent individuals wherever I can find them. The Aborigines are made amenable to our laws. . . are punished with death, and yet no opportunity has been afforded them of acquiring a knowledge of the principles on which those laws are founded and which are opposed to their most cherished notions and customs.⁴³

Wollaston was even more disappointed at his failure to find any suitable people to take charge of the Institution. Grateful as he was for Anne Camfield's selfless support, he felt he should not presume upon a long-term commitment by the Resident's wife. Anne Camfield herself expressed her desire that a suitable replacement be found. She wrote:

I sincerely hope that you may be able to interest the Society for these poor little children – for several of them are orphans. Fanny, Matilda and Deborah have each lost their mother. Sarah, Lydia and Andrew have neither father nor mother. Deborah was brought to us on the day of her mother's death. Fanny's mother has died since she came to us; her father (Harris) went to the eastern colonies 5 or 6 years ago. Rhoda's father is dead too. I am very anxious as to whose hands they will fall into when they leave us.

They are a most interesting and affectionate set of children, and much more easy to manage than so many white children. I do hope you may be able to obtain sufficient funds to send out and support a suitable master and mistress for them, as I am sure a considerable number of children might be collected. They ought to be people whose hearts, and not their pecuniary interests, are concerned in the appointment.⁴⁴

Over the next two years, a dormitory and schoolhouse were constructed on the Middleton Bay site. Wollaston never did find a replacement for Anne Camfield, who continued to care for the children in her own home as best she could with the help of her two assistants. As it would have been impossible for the Government Resident to reside at Middleton Bay, Henry built a schoolhouse and dormitory in the grounds of his house, which they named 'Camfield'. The Middleton Bay site was never occupied.⁴⁵

The remaining girls and younger children from the Fremantle School were transferred to Albany. Older boys were sent to orphanages in Perth catering for white orphan boys, so that the Albany Institution housed young children and girls. Anne continued to run the Institution, she and her husband providing part of the food from their own resources.⁴⁶

Wollaston died in Albany on 3 May 1856, still disappointed at the slow progress of his project. The Camfields then took it over as their own task. Formally called the Native Institution at Albany, it was informally called either 'Annesfield' or 'Camfield'. Various referred to as an 'institution', 'school' or 'mission', it was in fact and in spirit an orphanage. In later years, institutions for Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their parents were sometimes termed orphanages, but the Albany Institution was a genuine orphanage.

As we have noted, in many parts of Australia, particularly where white settlement led to violent death, followed by several decades of disease, there were in this period real orphans. Although the idea of an orphan is contrary to the ethics of Aboriginal extended families, in these times of unprecedented death Aboriginal society could not cope. Many children were orphaned, while many other parents found that they could not raise their children in a safe or healthy environment, choosing therefore to leave them in the care of institutions like the one at Albany.

Anne Camfield was a remarkably selfless, compassionate and talented woman. Indeed, the Institution depended solely on her personal dedication. As in all institutions of its kind in that era, children were trained as domestic servants, the older girls spending part of their day as domestics in Albany homes. This procedure was no different to the Perth orphanages for white children and, in any case, Anne Camfield had herself been 'in service' and no doubt did not consider such work as demeaning as many do today.

On the other hand, the use of Aboriginal children as domestic servants, a widespread practice throughout Australia for well over 150 years, was symptomatic of the view that such a life was the only reasonable expectation and role of all Aborigines. It is very much to Anne Camfield's credit that she had higher ambitions for the girls. She tried to take their educational achievements far beyond those required of household servants.

It is probably true to say that the young women who had completed all their schooling under Anne Camfield were, by Europeans standards, the best educated Aborigines in Australia at the time, better educated than a large proportion of the white population. Anne and Henry Camfield were, for many of the girls, mother and father figures whom the girls affectionately called 'Missie' and 'Martie'.⁴⁷

Janet Millett, a contemporary of Anne Camfield's, wrote this description of the orphanage:

The Institution is on the model of an industrial one at home, all the housework and cookery being performed by the pupils, in addition to which they receive such an education as is usually imparted in National Schools in England. None of the inmates of Mrs Camfield's home have ever run away from it, the secret of

her art in retaining them being that she really loves the natives, and treats their children in all respects like those of white persons as to their clothing, diet, and lodging.⁴⁸

Anne's Christian young women presented her with the same dilemma which faced many missionaries who had made converts. Whom should they marry? This was a particularly crucial question for Anne Camfield, for she had raised the young women since infancy. Millett states:

Mrs Camfield's chief difficulty is how to settle her girls in life, for when grown up the inevitable question arises, Whom are they to marry? They cannot, after the training that they have received, take a savage husband; and though I believe two of her pupils have married ticket-of-leave men, yet the prospects held out by such alliances are poor rewards for adopting Christian habits, and but sorry inducements for retaining them.⁴⁹

A few years earlier, marriages had been arranged between some of the older members of the Fremantle school and the Wesleyan mission. There were, however, very few missions in Western Australia and Anne Camfield began to consider seeking much further afield. She corresponded with the Moravian missionaries in Victoria and, as a result, Rachel Warnedeckan was sent to Ebenezer. She became known as a hard-working, competent, charming young woman with an exemplary Christian faith.⁵⁰ Shortly afterwards, Rachel married Nathanael Pepper. Theirs was a short-lived but happy marriage, Rachel dying in 1869.

When Frederick Hagenauer opened up the new Moravian mission at Ramahyuck in Gippsland, he arranged for two young women to come to Ramahyuck as brides, Carry and Emma, but both died in Melbourne on their journey from Perth in 1865.⁵¹

In 1867, five more young women were sent to Ramahyuck: Bessy Flower, Ada Flower, Rhoda Tanatan, Nora White and Emily Peters. Four of them were sent specifically as brides, but Bessy Flower was sent as a schoolteacher. The most outstanding intellectually of the Anne Camfield's girls, Bessy had been organist at St John's Church Albany, a role she quickly assumed at Ramahyuck. She replaced the Rev. Carl Kramer as the salaried teacher in the Ramahyuck school, as he had been transferred to

the Moravian mission at Cooper's Creek.⁵² As well, Bessy lived with the Hagenauers and acted as governess to their children.

Fortunately, many of her letters home to 'Missie' in Albany have been preserved. These reveal an intelligent, perceptive, sensitive and highly literate person. On one occasion, she defeated Victoria's chess champion. 'I had to fight so hard,' she wrote to Anne Camfield. 'He is a very good player.'⁵³ Here is an extract of the letter she wrote on commencing her teaching duties:

I have begun school in great earnest: we sing, say catechism, Joseph, Harry and Albert write in copy books, and Theo (Mr Hagenauer's little boy), Alfred, Bert, Rosanna, Emily read and say the ABC. All that class are as big as Harriet; they are as quick in learning and mind me quickly. All of them call me Miss Flower because Mr Hagenauer says they will show me more respect. And I hope, dearest Missie, I shall be able to keep it up and I will try.⁵⁴

In 1857, Matthew Hale of the Poonindie mission in South Australia was consecrated first Bishop of Perth, arriving there in 1858. He was very impressed by Anne Camfield's self-sacrificial work and tried hard to raise funds for its continuance. He gave a series of public lectures to draw attention 'to the culpable apathy that existed in many minds with regard to the spiritual condition of the Aborigines'.⁵⁵

The *Perth Gazette* suggested that Protestants would be unlikely to find the right kind of selfless people and enough funds to do anything:

His Lordship the Bishop of Perth's lectures on the Aborigines have had the effect of rousing general attention to the necessity of something being done towards raising them in the scale of humanity, if possible; the success which has attended the efforts of the Benedictines at New Norcia to us clearly points out the only method by which success can be hoped for. But the difficulty for Protestants to get over will be the machinery for working such an institution - the obtaining of such a number of self-denying, patient and persevering persons willing to undertake the work, and to carry it out to such an extent that a sensible impression will be made upon the greater portion of the native tribes within the colony. For such a work large funds will

be required and then the question is forced upon us – are those funds likely to be forthcoming?⁵⁶

The *Perth Gazette*'s pessimism was not entirely misplaced. With all his deep concern for Aboriginal people, and all his experience at Poonindie, Hale, like Wollaston, found great difficulty in gaining support or interest.⁵⁷ One underlying problem was the frontier conflict between pastoralists and Aborigines, and the dependence of the church upon the financial support of some of the same pastoralists.

There was considerable controversy, for example, over the trial of Lockier Burgess in 1872 for shooting an Aborigine. He was a leading member of the Church of England and Hale refused to be drawn on the subject.⁵⁸ This may be of little significance, as Hale certainly made strong representations on behalf of Aborigines on many other occasions. It is true, however, that Hale found it much harder to influence policy from his high position as bishop than to assist Aboriginal people personally and directly as a missionary, as he had done at Poonindie.

When Anne Camfield became critically ill in 1870, Hale decided to resign his bishopric and take charge of the Institution himself:

I will mention first then, the great uneasiness of mind which I have always felt with reference to the native population of this colony, and the sanguine hope which I entertain that my removal to Albany may have the effect of not only preserving the Native Institution there from the extinction which seems now to be impending over it, but I think I may be enabled, under God's blessing, to give it something more than revived activity and to make it really useful to the rising generation of natives and half-castes in this colony.⁵⁹

He allowed himself to be talked into withdrawing his resignation, but nevertheless took positive action. When Henry Camfield died in 1872, he relocated the Institution to Perth, next door to his own home under the charge of Ellen Trimmer, an Aboriginal woman, who had previously been an assistant to Anne Camfield. He funded the transfer from his personal resources and fought hard and successfully for adequate government support.⁶⁰



33. Anne Camfield with her adopted daughter

Acknowledgement: Frank Nelder Greenslade.

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34. John Smithies

Acknowledgement: Wesley Central Mission,
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35. Francis Armstrong

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36. Rosendo Salvado

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37. John Baptist Dirimera and Francis Xavier Conaci

Acknowledgement: Benedictine Community, New Norcia.

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Like Wollaston before him, Hale failed to find a suitable person to be in charge of the Perth home. He left Perth for Brisbane the following year. His successor, Bishop Parry, lacked his enthusiasm for the Institution and it was eventually merged with the Church of England orphanage at Middle Swan. This was yet another example of the dependence of the church's enterprises among Aborigines upon the personal qualities and dedication of a significant individual.

Fifty-five children had passed through the Albany Native Institution. Although unwell, Anne Camfield lived for many years after her husband. She did not sell her home until 1889. The buildings became a Christian Brothers school in 1896 and some older residents of Albany told Bonnie Hicks that they recalled the school having a day of mourning when Anne Camfield died.⁶¹ She would have been about ninety years old.

One kind of memorial, at least, to Anne and Henry Camfield is not in Albany but far away in Gippsland, where there are families who trace their ancestry back to Anne Camfield's girls. Many continue as Christian families. They know this interesting aspect of their complex past and are grateful that there were, long ago, a few white people who cared enough to rescue their ancestors from despair and death.

John Smithies and the Wesleyan mission

The most significant Christian mission in the early period of white settlement of Western Australia was John Smithies' Wesleyan mission. Among the early settlers there were some prominent Methodist families. The Clarksons and the Hardeys, for example, both had close connections with influential English evangelicals. Two Hardeys were missionaries in India, while William Wilberforce had married a Clarkson, the family having become well-known in the anti-slavery cause.⁶²

The Methodist lay preachers maintained regular Sunday services, but felt at first unable to finance a minister.⁶³ They were, however, concerned at the neglect of Aboriginal people and, prompted by the arrival of Giustiniani, requested the Wesleyan Missionary Society (WMS) that they be sent a missionary they could call their own, 'a man of deep piety, full of holy zeal and burning charity and love for the salvation of precious souls'.⁶⁴

We think no heathens more worthy of compassion of Britons, for we believe it is the univereal opinion of all who have seen them that it is impossible to find men and women sunk lower in the scale of human society. With regard to their manners and customs, they are little better than the beasts that perish. . . And when we look around and think how many thousands of these poor dark benighted creatures are wandering about in the woods. . . ignorant of God and of the Saviour who died for them, deprived of the blessings of civilisation, and every domestic comfort. . . we pray that the Lord of the harvest may send forth from your Society more labourers into his vineyard.⁶⁵

This statement was typical of the sentiment of Christians of all denominations of that era, both wedded and yet not completely wedded to the spirit of the age. Under the influence of European thought and culture, the Methodists believed the Aborigines to be the lowest beings on the scale of humanity. Furthermore, they were unable to speak of the gospel without speaking of civilisation, by which they meant Europeanisation. Yet unlike so many of their colonial contemporaries, they did not believe the Aborigines to be beyond redemption. In their desire to share the gospel with them, they were, after all, willing to share something they believed to be more important than life itself.

It was another four years before the WMS sent an ex-Newfoundland missionary, Rev. John Smithies, to the Swan River colony. Setting out from England, Smithies wrote: 'I am viewing our ship as carrying salvation to the ends of the earth. O that God, even our God may guide us to this haven and people where we would be to proclaim the Saviour's name.'⁶⁶

The Smithies family arrived on the first Sunday in June 1840. Smithies preached that evening on the well-chosen text:

Unto me, who am less than the least of all the Saints, is the grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (Ephesians 3:8).

'A real live Methodist parson,' it was acknowledged, 'created no small stir in Perth.'⁶⁷ Smithies was described as a 'short portly person. . . a cheerful and jolly fellow, both in appearance and manner'⁶⁸ and was immediately popular. He had been instructed to minister to both colonists and Aborigines and he lost no time in

trying to carry out his charges, commencing the construction of chapels in Perth and Fremantle and travelling widely to visit both settlers and Aborigines.

Smithies' reactions to his first glimpse of Aboriginal people, almost naked and smeared with the traditional grease and ochre, was a mixture of fear and sympathy. He had to remind himself 'that of one blood hath God made us and that for these my Saviour died'.⁶⁹ Undeterred, Smithies soon began caring for several Aboriginal children and within a month opened the Wesleyan Mission School at the Subscription Chapel, William Street, Perth with thirty Aboriginal pupils and Francis Armstrong as teacher.⁷⁰

All thirty children slept at the Smithies' home in separate boys and girls' rooms so that they could 'pass the evening with their little relatives and friends and sleep in company'.⁷¹ Each week day the children worked as domestic servants in Perth homes, until after midday. They attended Armstrong's school from two till four each afternoon, returning home after school to their various duties. Saturdays included both household chores and free time. On Sundays they attended Sunday school and morning and evening services.⁷²

As was the case in Anne Camfield's Institution, some of the children were placed in Smithies' care by their parents, while some were orphans. The immediate success of the school surprised most settlers. The children's work as domestics was considered quite satisfactory and within a few months Armstrong reported to the Governor:

. . . [the children have] learnt the alphabet perfectly [and] were taught to spell words of one or two syllables which by the sound of the letters they were beginning to recognise remarkably well, and could also give the name for many words, English as well as native, when spelt to them. The whole class were learning to count and within the last fortnight were making very satisfactory progress, several having reached to nearly one hundred.⁷³

Some teaching incorporated the local Aboriginal language and some Christian songs were translated into it. This would have been an important factor in maintaining self-esteem among the children, although it is doubtful whether Smithies would have

bothered with Aboriginal languages if Armstrong had not already had some knowledge of them. Smithies believed Aboriginal languages incapable of fully expressing the Christian gospel, but in time came to think that the languages were at least useful for the missionary in order to be able to converse with Aborigines and 'gain access to their hearts and feelings'.⁷⁴ Although he regarded many features of Aboriginal culture as 'barbaric' and 'degraded', Smithies also found much to admire and was willing to acknowledge the possibility of bias in his own thinking:

As to the capabilities of the natives of Western Australia, for any and all the ordinary purposes of life with which they are acquainted, I cannot possibly perceive any physical or mental defect whatever.

It's true that at first sight, judging from the outward appearance, we may be tempted to think that they are not of our race but when we remember 'that tis the mind which makes the men' and look at some of their symmetrical and athletic figures, call to mind their powers of perception, which are quick, their readiness and ability to perform whatever comes within their knowledge, their aptitude at the art of mimicry, their adroitness of remark at any person or thing which may come before their attention, and especially the progress which the boys and girls have made in our school. . . All shew and perfectly satisfy my mind that their mental abilities are good and equal in general to any children I have seen.

Smithies was even-handed in his assessment of white and Aboriginal behaviour:

As to the morals of these Aborigines, they are such as nature and circumstances have created among them. Like all the family of Adam they are fallen, depraved, wretched; in their habits they are lazy, under circumstances of greed they are dishonest and given to fornication and though I regret to record it, yet awful to say that many who know better, and should have done better, have had illicit connections with the natives for the mere pittance of bread or other trifling remuneration.⁷⁵

Smithies' position on Aboriginal religion was that although they were 'universally ignorant of the true God', they did not have

any 'false gods' – they did not worship idols.⁷⁶ This is a very important issue which will continue to be encountered – the importance of what is termed general revelation, the truth of God available to all people. Very few missionaries acknowledged the possibility that Aboriginal spirituality could have been derived, even in part, from God's general revelation of himself.

Impressive accounts of the scholarly achievements of the children continued to be made in reports, newspapers and government despatches. Governor Hutt approved financial support for the school, reporting on it in glowing terms to Lord Russell in May 1841. Eight months after the founding of the school, pupils read to the Governor from the New Testament. Smithies wrote:

When I remembered that barely 8 months had passed away since those whom I saw before me, clean in their persons, well behaved and decently clad, were running over the country unclothed and almost uncared for, I could not but indulge in the expectation that in this colony better days were in store for a race whose ultimate doom has been unfortunate in other parts of Australia.⁷⁷

Smithies was particularly gratified at the spiritual progress of the children. His letters were full of reports of the most minor pieces of evidence of developing Christian awareness – the boy who would not discard paper on which God's name was written, the girl who dreamed that she had seen Jesus calling her, the children's interest in their Sunday school lessons, the boy who chided another for gathering firewood on the Sabbath and so on.⁷⁸

He commented:

To see those young Australians come forth, clean, washed and neatly dressed and walking to the house of God is indeed a cheering change amongst them; but to hear them sing God's praises, join in responding to the word of life and to hear their replies to catechetical enquiries cannot fail to impress us with the conviction that 'God alone the work hath wrought'.⁷⁹

Some controversy surrounds Smithies' first Aboriginal baptisms. In November 1842 he baptised Wyreup, aged seventeen, and Dwuyup, aged sixteen, naming them John and Mary 'as a necessary step in reference to their marriage' which Smithies per-

formed on the same day.⁸⁰ Smithies was specifically acting to prevent the girl having to enter a polygamous Aboriginal marriage and was aware that he was risking a severe breach of Aboriginal law. Wollaston, while admitting the Church of England's failure to do much for Aborigines, was very critical of Smithies' action, not so much the marriage but what he deemed a baptism of convenience:

. . .the native school [is] in the hands of the Wesleyans and successfully carried on. What is our church doing this way? Nothing. The present Governor. . . has countenanced, however, a highly improper proceeding in the baptism by the Wesleyan Minister, Mr Smithies, of a native in order that he might be married the same day to a native woman (professedly as an experiment to get rid of polygamy among these savages), although [the man] was very imperfectly acquainted with the sacred ordinance.⁸¹

The propriety of Smithies' actions will never be known. John Wyreup contracted influenza and died early in January. His final words reported by Smithies show his struggle to understand his illness from a Christian perspective:

. . .he said on that day 'Me now too much "men-dyke"' (sick). On the following day he died. During his sickness he was interrogated about his state and (though but a few months connected with the school) he gave very satisfactory hopes for his final state. He said, 'Lord, great, good.' He enquired saying 'Christian not make him well, doctor not make him well, then he "wan-ka" (talk) God make him better.' He asked, 'What for God not make him "Quabba" (well)?' He evidently believed he could do it, but was at a loss to conceive why he did not do it. When told that God make white men 'men-dyke' and, if good when die, God take him to heaven (wy-er) and also, when black man good and pray and love God and be 'men-dyke' and die, then God take black man to heaven, too, he said, 'O that be "Quabba" place: no more pain, sickness, death. O heaven "Quabba" place.'⁸²

This was to be the first of many deaths. The next was a young girl, Mon-jil, burned to death in a fire and given a Christian

burial by Smithies and the schoolchildren. Several of the children died of European diseases in 1843. One of these, Mary Wanka, dying of influenza, saw visions of angels and spoke of going to see Jesus. In the presence of all the children, Smithies baptised her just before she died. Dreams were also significant in the conversion, shortly afterwards, of Eliza Wobart and it is noteworthy that dreams, so important a feature of Aboriginal culture, should have figured prominently in their Christian experience. Eliza married a Christian white man, John Stokes, a few years later, but she, too, eventually died of influenza in 1849.⁸³

These deaths were naturally very discouraging to Smithies, added to which was the fear of reprisal killings. Aborigines traditionally avenged not only violent death, but also unexplained death, attributed to enemy sorcery. European diseases confronted Aboriginal society with far too many inexplicable deaths. When the 'payback' killings became rarer, Smithies thought it was his influence. It was more likely due to the severe weakening of Aboriginal society, diminished by death and disease, together with a growing fatalistic acceptance of the new reality of frequent death.

By late 1843, the usual optimism of Smithies' letters became tinged with discouragement. The deaths were one obvious factor. Another was the need for perpetual watchfulness to protect the girls from white men. As well, there were financial difficulties. The government was not always sympathetic. The Methodists always considered their work to be for the benefit of both Aborigines and colonists and so their applications for assistance were increasingly refused, the amounts being considered disproportionate to the number of Methodists in the colony. It was also true that the Church of England, being the official colonial church, had more influence on government decision-making processes. Smithies was angry that in 1846 his government funding had been decreased to enable a government grant to Anne Camfield's Institution in Albany.⁸⁴ Privately, however, Smithies and his Church of England counterparts were on friendly terms.⁸⁵

A major positive factor which distinguished the Wesleyan mission from missions which quickly failed in many parts of Australia was the dedicated and generous support of Christian laypeople. People like Frederick and Fredericka Waldeck, George Shenton, Joseph Hardey, George Lazenby and Francis Armstrong gave generously of their money and, more importantly, their time.

Smithies, overworked, in desperate need of additional missionaries and with an ill wife, could not have continued without them.

The number of deaths at the mission school continued to increase and it burdened Smithies that parents now wanted to take their children away from what seemed a place of death. Whereas previously the disease was at least known to be influenza or measles or whatever, a spate of deaths which began in 1844 was inexplicable. Smithies described it as 'dissolution of the mesentery gland, a disease accompanied by little or no pain, a loss of appetite and a gradual sinking away into the arms of death'.⁸⁶ Reports of post-mortems conducted on some of these children are still available. The disease has recently been diagnosed as Tuberculos peritonitis. Unknown to Smithies, the children were now dying of tuberculosis contracted from the milk of their own cows.⁸⁷

Despite such tragedy, Smithies was sustained by dramatic evidence of faith and conversion. This was particularly evident in April 1844 when there was a revival among both the Aborigines and the colonists, many of both groups making dramatic and emotional commitments to Christ. 'The feeling and fire are spreading from house to house,' wrote Smithies. 'O may it run through the land.'⁸⁸

Smithies inevitably had to face the most difficult problem of all, the crisis which would finally lead to the downfall, not only of this Wesleyan mission, but of so many other seemingly successful institutions. What was the future of their educated Christian converts? The seeds of failure were already present in their success.

Some years before, when most people were praising the children's school successes, one less-than-enthusiastic newspaper editor was astute enough to identify the potential problem. They may become educated and civilised, but white colonial society would still not accept them as equals. Their choice would be to return to traditional life and 'fall back into their original habits' or live in colonial society as second-class citizens:

What will be done when these children grow up as men and women? . . . We believe it quite possible that some few may leave the schools so benefited by the instruction they received as to be prepared to follow civilised habits and even Christian principles, yet we cannot but fear for the great majority. It is asking

too much of human nature to suppose that persons will consent to live nominally in our communion and yet be excluded from those social advantages which they see enjoyed around them by [everyone else]. . .⁸⁹

Even at the Wesleyan mission there is no evidence that Aboriginal Christians became part of the Class Meetings in settlers' homes, nor part of the decision-making groups.⁹⁰ It is clear that throughout the nineteenth century and well into this century, the majority of missionaries saw the eventual destiny of the Aborigines as a servant class. As we shall see in a later chapter, Aboriginal young people were still being forcibly placed as domestics in well-to-do city homes as recently as the 1950s.

We may wish to pardon a good man like Smithies for holding views typical of his era, even to praise him for thinking Aborigines capable of entering white society at all when so many did not, but the unavoidable truth remains. Smithies and so many others were so convinced of the superiority of European culture and society that they believed Aboriginal people would actually choose to live as servants or labourers in preference to living freely on their traditional lands. They did not know that Aboriginal people were sorry for, even contemptuous of a society which doomed so many of its members to what they considered useless drudgery.

The problem began forcibly to strike Smithies' Wesleyan mission as early as 1843. The older, teenage boys were becoming dissatisfied with the dull and menial tasks of domestic servants. This began to evidence itself in deteriorating behaviour at home, called by Smithies 'moral corruption', 'brawls' and 'waywardness'.⁹¹ Similarly, the girls were reaching what would, in their traditional life, have been marriageable age and becoming restless.

Smithies did his best to try to find a solution, although it was a white person's solution and therefore finally destined to fail. Smithies conceived the idea of a mission farm outside Perth. He thought it could fulfil a number of purposes. It would protect the morals of the boys and girls; it would provide them with meaningful farm work where they could personally benefit from their own exertions; it would be a place to which adult Aborigines could comfortably come and learn; it would reduce mission expenses by becoming a profitable agricultural project.⁹²

The first site chosen was on land adjoining George Shenton's

property, about thirteen kilometres north of Perth on the Wanneroo Road at a place generally known as Lake Goollelal which Smithies named Alder Lake.⁹³ Smithies himself did not live there, but remained at the mission school, appointing an overseer to set up the scheme while he retained general administrative oversight.

By late 1845, most of the children were living on the farm. The boys spent two days each week on gardening, two on carpentry and building and two hunting and fishing. The girls were responsible for cooking, washing, sewing and the general domestic side of the institution. Schoolwork was reduced, but not totally neglected.⁹⁴

Like the lapsed missions of eastern Australia at Wellington Valley and Moreton Bay, the success of the whole venture depended upon the success of the agriculture. The children had to be fed, but money was becoming harder to obtain. The Aboriginal adults it was hoped to attract would also need to be fed. Most important of all, the farm was supposed to prove to the young people the merits of settled agricultural life.

The farm, however, finally failed. Dwindling finance, poor seasons and bad soil prevented anything but a few vegetables being grown. Smithies believed he was doing the work of three men and continually requested help from the Wesleyan Mission Society whose own finances were not good. Thirteen kilometres did not seem to be far enough away to prevent whites corrupting the girls. And there were more deaths, including Smithies' youngest child.

By 1849 Smithies was considering relocating the farm further afield, working better agricultural land and removing the young people from immoral influences. One of Smithies' few encouragements that year was the visit of Bishop Short and Archdeacon Hale of Adelaide who praised his work and, importantly, married four couples, three of the brides being supplied by the Church of England school at Fremantle. By 1850, however, Smithies knew the Alder Lake farm had to be shifted or abandoned.

In 1851, the Wesleyan mission was granted good wheat land with a river frontage at York, fifty miles from Perth. Smithies spent the greater part of 1851 at York, supervising the preparation of the site. To his immense relief a second missionary, Rev. William Lowe, unexpectedly arrived to assist him in March 1852. Smithies relinquished all the work among the white settlers to

Lowe and moved permanently, with his family, to York.⁹⁵

Although the York venture seemed promising, it never succeeded. Smithies did not fully realise how strongly the mission Aboriginal people were attached to their own land. Alder Lake, like Perth, had been within their traditional country, but York was not.

Thus they were uncooperative at moving to York and unhappy when they were there. Many ran away and, of those who remained, a large proportion died during the next two years of European diseases such as influenza, measles and 'pulmonary disease'. The young married couples remained the longest because they had been allocated their own homes, but slowly they too left or died.

Finally, by 1854, there were only three residents left and parents refused to send any more children there to die. Smithies admitted defeat. The Governor agreed to take back the lease and compensate the mission for its improvements. Smithies was transferred to Van Diemen's Land in 1855 where he ministered at New Norfolk and then at Barrington where he retired and took up farming. He died in 1872.⁹⁶

Smithies, however, never believed that the mission had been a failure. Hundreds of children had passed through his hands. Many had died, twenty of whom Smithies considered to have died as Christians, and many more were living as Christians. As Smithies wrote in 1854, to him this made it all worthwhile:

I do not feel that the mission has been to no avail; much good has been done by it. Some twenty of the natives have reached the heavenly state and a good many are in the bush and have the fear of God within their hearts and read the scriptures.⁹⁷

Dom Rosendo Salvado and the New Norcia mission

Rosendo Salvado was born in Spain in 1814 into a family famed for musical talent.⁹⁸ At fifteen, he entered the Benedictine Abbey of St Martin at Compostela, taking his vows in 1832 and distinguishing himself as the Abbey's organist. In the Spanish Revolution of 1835, monasteries were closed. In 1838 Salvado and his brother monk, Dom Joseph Serra, took refuge in Italy in the abbey of La Cava near Naples. Despairing of returning to Spain, Salvado and Serra decided to devote their lives to mission-

ary work. Salvado wrote:

On 11 July 1844 we had just come back from our usual stroll in the woods near the monastery and were talking, as we often did, about the foreign missions, especially those among the most primitive of peoples. Then my companion, a young man and lofty of mind as he was small of stature, exclaimed: 'There is something really magnificent about these missions and I feel deeply attracted to them - there is nothing finer a man may do - but on the other hand. . .'

Here I fancied that he was balking at the prospect of the inevitable hardships and so I broke in and asked him if he would be prepared to go if I went with him. 'If you can face it, I can too,' he replied, 'as long as we go together.' This was all I needed to hear and with a heart full of joy I told him of my plans and a few preliminary steps I have taken.⁹⁹

About the same time, Catholics in the Swan River Colony, 'without church, altar or priest', became concerned at the Protestant monopoly of the churches and Aboriginal missions. In 1841, a group of Catholics wrote to Vicar-General Ullathorne in Sydney:

We, the Catholics of Perth, West Australia, beg to call your attention to the following facts. In this and the surrounding towns there are to be found all kinds of Protestant ministers who show a good deal of activity in preaching their creed. There are to be found two of them in Perth, one in Fremantle, one in Guildford and in almost every district of the colony. Not only do they try the conversion of the natives, but also endeavour to bring about the perversion of the Catholics by getting them to give up their religion. Hence the difficulty for a Catholic to persevere in his faith, many a one having already fallen away and joined one or other of the Protestant sects.

Should a favourable opportunity present itself, they would, we believe, come back to their faith. To us Catholics our greatest and, I dare say, our only joy would be to build a church and to have a priest sent us whom we promise we would support to the best of our means.¹⁰⁰

In 1843, Archbishop Polding responded by sending to Western Australia an Irish priest, Father John Brady, as Vicar-General.¹⁰¹ Governor Hutt granted Brady some land for a church.

Brady travelled around the various settlements, concluded that the colony was in desperate need of priests and so, after three months, sailed for Rome to seek assistance.

In Rome, Brady convinced the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith ('Propaganda'), the department responsible for Catholic overseas missionary work, that the vast distance and slow communications between Perth and Sydney necessitated the excision of Western Australia from the Bishopric of Sydney. Brady was consecrated Bishop of Perth in 1845.¹⁰² Bishop Brady appealed for missionaries and among those released to him were Salvado and Serra. Brady also recruited staff in France, England and Ireland.

When the party finally sailed from England for Australia on 17 September 1845, there were twenty-seven missionaries, including, as well as Salvado and Serra, an Austrian priest, Don Angelo Confalonieri, three French priests, an Irish priest, six Irish Sisters of Mercy and fourteen other novices, students and lay people.¹⁰³ They arrived in Fremantle on 7 January 1846. George Russo in his book on Salvado pictures his arrival in this way:

When, clad in the black habit of a Benedictine monk which he had worn throughout the voyage, Salvado disembarked at Fremantle, he was thirty-two years old. He was short, but well knit and robust, with dark hair, already receding from his lofty forehead, and a thick black untrimmed beard. The eyes, large, expressive and powerful, were more than striking, giving the impression of a strong, determined nature. He appeared to be physically brave and well fitted for a pioneering life. Nevertheless, his disposition was kind and he had a cheerful temperament.¹⁰⁴

Brady had divided the missionaries into four groups: one to work in the north, one in the south, one – led by Salvado and Serra – to work in what was called the 'centre' inland from Perth, while the fourth – the Sisters of Mercy – was to remain in Perth itself. Two of these groups were ill-fated. The southern group, having walked to Albany, lived in dire poverty near Mount Barker until they were withdrawn to Mauritius. The northern group was shipwrecked in Torres Strait, only Confalonieri miraculously surviving to reach Port Essington.¹⁰⁵

Serra, who was in charge, Salvado and three others – Brother Dennis Tootle, Brother Leandre Fonteinne and John Gormon – accepted the suggestion of a Catholic settler, Captain John Scully, to establish their mission beyond his property, eighty-six miles to the north-east of Perth, at an isolated location called Badji Badji. They took nearly two weeks to walk there. Salvado wrote that they were ‘. . . alone in the dense bush, where unknown natives lurked. But we felt no feelings of fear. Our lives were in the hands of him whose name we had come to proclaim and we had asked him to bless these wild surroundings, these immemorial trees. . .’¹⁰⁶

For two months, the missionaries remained at Badji Badji, building a hut, gaining the confidence of the Aboriginal people and learning the local language. They began, however, to run out of supplies and, although they had learnt to eat local food, they gradually approached starvation.

Salvado decided to walk back to Perth and seek help. Guided by an Aboriginal man, he reached Perth after many days. Bishop Brady had no resources to help him whatsoever. Some special collections were taken up which were far too inadequate. Salvado, the musician, then had the idea of putting on a piano recital and charging an entry fee of £1. Reporting on the Soiree Musicale, the *Inquirer* praised the ‘capabilities [of] a very fine performer’.¹⁰⁷ Salvado himself, however, was embarrassed at his appearance:

I wore my usual monastic habit, but was in very sorry shape indeed. My tunic reached only as far as my knees, and from there on was a thing of rags and tatters; my black trousers were patched with pieces of cloth and thread all of different colours; my socks, after I had darned them, looked fairly respectable, but my shoes – a good pair which I had bought in Italy – had parted company with the soles somewhere in the Australian bush, so that my toes were kissing Mother Earth. Add to that a beard which had been growing for three months and which needed more than a touch of the comb, and a deep tan on my face and hands – close enough, for all intents and purposes, to the colour of the natives.

Altogether I cut a comical and pitiful figure. I was received with applause. . . but the acclamation did not go any further than my eardrums; my heart was unable to share in the joyful congratulations and the excitement. I could only think of my four brethren dying of starvation in the bush.¹⁰⁸

With his £70, Salvado bought provisions and two bullocks. Given a dray 'by a good Protestant', Salvado was about to start back when Serra and Tootle turned up in Perth, having set out to look for him in case his long delay had been due to an accident. Two Catholic settlers volunteered to drive the missionaries' bullock wagon back to Badji Badji. On their way back they met two of Captain Scully's Aboriginal employees bearing letters for them. John Gorman was dead and a distraught Fonteinne had boarded up the hut and left the body there.¹⁰⁹

Serra hurried on ahead with the two Aborigines to arrange a burial, while Salvado and the settlers came on behind with the bullock wagon. Serra's party arrived at Badji Badji in the evening four days later to find the place deserted. Next morning, however, they were joined by Fonteinne and a group of Aborigines. They prepared the body for the funeral using a jarrah coffin sent by Scully. Just as the rite commenced, Salvado arrived and recorded these impressions:

Four naked Aborigines took the coffin on their shoulders and they were followed by Father Serra in his surplice and stole, and by the catechist bearing the cross and holy water. The sad cortege was wending its way to the burial-place, when we reached the top of a hill overlooking the mission and witnessed the scene.

The two Frenchmen who were with me ran to assist the missionaries, while I in tears drove the wagon to the hut. There I found poor Fonteinne; he was too upset to attend the funeral and had shut himself away. A little later we all assembled and recited the Office of the Dead.¹¹⁰

Despondent at Gorman's death, the missionaries decided to abandon the Badji Badji site which, in any case, had poor soil and inadequate water. Selecting an alternative location was also made feasible because they now had a bullock wagon. In July, they found a much better position on the Moore River and worked extremely hard to establish themselves. The Benedictine Rule included the necessity and dignity of labour and the missionaries impressed everyone with their dedicated hard work. After a month, the settlers who had assisted them returned to Perth, taking Fonteinne who had never recovered emotionally from

Gorman's death. This left Serra and Salvado and the Aboriginal people, who camped near them. Salvado wrote:

Without losing heart, we went on with our agricultural labours; it was rather late in the season for sowing grain, but we cleared another piece of land and ploughed it. This was pretty awkward work for us, as we had no boots. Father Serra drove the bullocks, while I managed the plough. To make the furrows deeper, one had to push on the ploughshare with one's feet and these were badly cut by the rocks and roots. So we ploughed that land not only with sweat but with blood.¹¹¹

Their willingness to engage in manual labour was one of their chief characteristics and contributed to Salvado's success. They found no task too menial. It was said of Salvado that he never asked an Aboriginal person to do anything that he did not also do himself. Not only their labour but their poverty were obvious to all. They shared their last food with the Aborigines. The Aborigines recognised that these men were different. They hoarded nothing, keeping no food back for themselves. The Aborigines brought the missionaries their own food and Salvado records how they surprised them by obtaining flour when they were at their most destitute:

Towards the end of October, after twenty-nine days without a scrap of bread, we received fourteen pounds of flour from Helen, Captain Scully's Irish maid, a fine, generous young woman. It was the natives who, noticing how things were with us, had told her about it and it was they who gave us a pleasant surprise by bringing the flour to the hut. We gave thanks to God who thus came to our aid when things were at their worst. . .

We were not only short of food but of clothing, too. Our monastic habits were unrecognisable and hung down in tatters all around. We had patched our trousers with the natives' reject kangaroo-skins and we supported them by tying dried kangaroo-gut around our waists or using a bit of string. We could not continue barefooted, with our sore feet and sometimes bleeding, and so we made some boots out of wood and more kangaroo-skin.¹¹²

Their acceptance by the Aborigines was greatly enhanced by

their remarkable success in healing. Salvado believed that God blessed their simple remedies. For external wounds they used olive oil and, for internal pain, Epsom salts, tea and rice soup.

They sewed up a small boy's abdominal wound through which his intestines protruded, while his relatives sang death chants. Nine days later he recovered. A woman carried her husband on her back to them. Suffering from 'inflammation of the lungs', he recovered after thirty days.¹¹³ Salvado wrote:

Father Serra knew as much about medicine as I did, that is to say, nothing, and our remedies were very few and simple. For all that, through the mercy of God no wounded or sick native came to us without obtaining a cure. There is no need to say what contribution this made to the progress of the mission. The natives gave us their complete confidence, and this is one of the things that a missionary finds most important. Each day they approached us with increased respect and affection. Our good name reached even the natives in distant parts and these came to our hut to meet us, often bringing their sick with them. After recovering they tried to show their gratitude in every way possible. . . . As a result we were able to go about in the bush without the slightest danger and the natives were only too pleased to carry out our orders on the spot.¹¹⁴

Late in 1846, Salvado and Serra began to feel as all earlier missionaries felt. An itinerant ministry to the Aborigines seemed to them to be difficult and of limited value.¹¹⁵ They felt, as Salvado wrote, that they should work towards a permanent mission:

Thus the practical study of the language, laws, traditions and customs of the natives made us realise, among other things, that the very demanding wanderer's life which we had first adopted was only of doubtful use. It called for the sacrifice of health and life on the part of missionaries, with little to show for it at the end. On the other hand, the method of stability – that is, the founding of a mission where hospitality could be given to all the natives who wanted to learn a trade or receive religious instruction – would yield good results, without exposing us to all the hardships of the nomadic life.¹¹⁶

Arranging with Captain Scully to provide a caretaker for their

mission, Serra and Salvado journeyed to Perth where they put their proposal of a permanent mission to Bishop Brady. The bishop sent one of his own employees to look after the mission. He agreed with the proposal to found a permanent institution. Although the missionaries 'would suffer every kind of privation rather than leave the poor natives in the lurch',¹¹⁷ they needed some money for the mission simply to survive, let alone construct what was in effect to be a monastery. Salvado taught music, an unexpected donation arrived from Rome and the government gave them permission to select twenty acres.

Encouraged by these things, they returned to the Moore River. Salvado recorded their disappointment on arrival there:

On 20 December we were back again at the hut, but what a sight met our eyes! The fields which had been watered by our blood and sweat were ruined; everything we had planted, trees, vines and vegetables, had been uprooted, smashed or trampled down; the articles of furniture in the hut were broken and scattered; the whole place was deserted and left in a chaotic state. That domestic who was sent from Perth did not care a rap about the mission and allowed a mob of horses to break in and reduce everything to a shambles.

Although this was a great blow, it was small compared with the next; we were given notice by a magistrate to quit the property as the land had been leased to sheep-farmers. After all the tremendous efforts put in to tilling those fields, we were not merely robbed of the fruits of our toil but forced to walk out! In spite of all this, we did not despair. We had come to Australia, and to this spot, for a very different kind of harvest. So, full of trust in the Blessed Trinity, we looked about for another place.¹⁸

Serra and Salvado found another even better site, on the north bank of the Moore River in a fertile district later to be known as Victoria Plains. They quickly secured title to it. They spent two months clearing, ploughing and building a hut with the help of the Aboriginal people. They 'encountered more trouble' than Salvado could find time to record. 'We scarcely could have borne all this,' he wrote, 'if it had not been clear that Divine Providence was continually helping us.'¹¹⁹

In February 1847, they were ready to build their monastery.

Seventeen Perth people gave freely of their time and labour. Salvado recorded how they rallied to his cause:

As soon as the volunteers for the construction of the monastery knew that I was in Perth, they came and heaped their tools onto the dray.

On the twenty-second of the same month I left for the mission, leading a caravan of Irish and French workers and with them an excellent Protestant bricklayer who had been inspired by God. . . to come to the aid of the Catholic missionaries. On the twenty-eighth we arrived happily. . .¹²⁰

They laid the foundation stone on 1 March 1847, a St Benedict medal buried beneath it. Fifty days later the monastery was finished. The chapel they dedicated to the Trinity and the mission they named New Norcia, after the birthplace of St Benedict.

To Salvado, it had all been a miracle and he saw God's hand in everything. Even his dog, which had thus far shown no predisposition to hunt, began to bring in kangaroos when food for the labourers ran low. 'Who can fail to see a sign of Divine Providence here?' asked Salvado.¹²¹

Large numbers of Aboriginal people gathered at the monastery. Salvado and Serra were occasionally assisted by one or two catechists. About this time the first Aboriginal person was baptised, a man fatally wounded in a fight.

It soon became evident that twenty acres was far too small an allotment. Captain Irwin, who was Acting Governor at the time, granted them a further thirty acres and leased them 1000 adjoining acres as grazing land.¹²² They soon stocked this with cattle and 710 sheep. Here, Salvado perceived yet another miracle: driving the flock from Perth through country where the settlers feared there were plants poisonous to sheep, without losing one animal. Yet again, when their first wheat crop was half-harvested, a huge bushfire threatened the crop and the monastery itself. The extreme efforts of the missionaries and Aborigines to protect the property failed. All that was left was prayer and, as Salvado advanced, praying, towards the approaching fire, the wind changed instantly, driving the fire back along its own path.

News of this event spread widely, bringing the monastery

fame among even quite distant Aboriginal groups.¹²³

In December 1847, Serra and Salvado opened what they called the 'College of New Norcia' with three students. The historian of the Benedictines later wrote:

[It was set up] for the children of the Aborigines, who were beginning to see the advantages quiet settled life had over the wandering and uncertain life of the chase. With the consent of their parents, three of the youthful savages received baptism and were admitted to live in the monastery and share the life of the monks. It was a great happiness to the zealous monks to listen to the young Australian neophytes joining their voices in the choir duties and to see them vested in cassock and surplice, devoutly serving at Holy Mass.

At the same time, the number of families that came to settle permanently near the monastery were constantly increasing and almost daily one or more of the converted savages received the waters of baptism. Each morning, at a certain hour, the monks gave away a basin of soup to anyone who chose to come for it; and at this hour they could always be certain of an audience to whom they could speak on religious subjects.¹²⁴

The Benedictine missionaries had found themselves excellent farming land but, as the region began to open up to pastoral occupation, envious settlers tried to sabotage the mission in numerous ways, grazing their flocks on the mission lease, defaming the missionaries to the Aborigines and endeavouring to procure Aboriginal women. The missionaries became convinced that complete segregation of Aborigines and Europeans was the only possible solution.

The first step, they felt, was greatly to increase the mission lands in order to keep neighbours as distant as possible and to provide not only farmland but hunting grounds as well. Bishop Brady agreed with this in principle, but had no funds. He therefore sent Serra to Europe in February 1848 to seek contributions and to recruit a group of Benedictines to staff the monastery. Serra took with him a seven-year-old Aboriginal boy, Benedict Upumara, to become a Benedictine and return to his own people. The *Inquirer* reported on the plan:

Benedict Upumara is to remain in Europe for such a period of

years as will complete his education in every branch of literature, science, and art and then bring him back to this colony when the grand experiment of the civilisation of the Aborigines will be fairly tried on a scale that has never yet been attempted in this part of the world.¹²⁵

A fortnight after Serra's departure, Brady was able to arrange the purchase from the Government of 2 560 acres of land adjacent to the mission at favourable rates (10/- per acre), the money to be paid in London by Serra in three instalments at intervals of seven, eleven and fifteen months.¹²⁶

Salvado began assisting Aboriginal people to farm their own individual plots of land and paying them to work on them. He also instituted a kind of local bank in which the money they earned could accrue until they had enough to purchase clothing or household items or their own livestock. The first harvests were successful beyond all expectation. Salvado encouraged the Aboriginal farmers to divide their crops into two parts, one to keep and one to sell. In this way, they made some profit and all were delighted with their results.

With added responsibility, Salvado had the opportunity to demonstrate many unexpected talents. He turned out to be an expert surveyor, a skill which was to assist the mission in years to come in selecting and leasing vast tracts of land. Using these skills, he surveyed and built a remarkably successful road from New Norcia to Perth.¹²⁷

Salvado was pleased to be granted citizenship in 1848 after an exceptionally short period of residence, opening up for him a whole new sphere of activity on behalf of the Aborigines. He could now represent them in court. Almost immediately he was able to defend successfully the case of an Aboriginal man from the mission vicinity falsely accused of sheep-stealing. This further enhanced his reputation among the Aborigines.

It seemed to Salvado to be very bad news for New Norcia when he heard, while visiting Perth, that Serra was to be made Bishop of Port Victoria.¹²⁸ In retrospect, this may seem a very strange appointment. 'Port Victoria' was in fact Port Essington, a bay in the Coburg Peninsula on what is now the Northern Territory coast. A small British garrison, established there in 1839,¹²⁹ was brought to the attention of the Vatican by the

miraculous arrival there of the shipwrecked priest, Angelo Confalonieri. Victoria was a very small settlement indeed, the only European settlement in the tropical north of the continent.¹³⁰

The geography and demography of north Australia were only vaguely understood at the Vatican and it was felt that it would be politically astute to establish a strong, early Catholic presence in north Australia. The see of Port Victoria was created and Serra was consecrated to it.

Salvado felt that Serra had deserted the mission and that his new responsibility to seek support for a new diocese would detract from his promotion of the interests of New Norcia, diverting funds which might otherwise have been applied to the New Norcia land debt. Thinking that he could now be seeing the collapse of their 'fine hopes and plans', Salvado fell into a mood of deep depression and was 'like a man who had lost his senses'. Brady, however, considered going to Rome himself to sort things out and Salvado recovered his sense of perspective:

I shook myself out of the deep depression that had overwhelmed me for four days: I perceived that this aberration simply proceeded from an excessive reliance on human means and the truth was that the work belonged to God alone; I had been looking to our own efforts for the results that only Divine Providence could bring about – that Providence which again and again had saved us in the midst of grave and imminent dangers, and had watched over the mission of New Norcia more than such a puny creature as myself could ever understand. Thereupon, in a spirit of repentance and humility and full of trust in him, I returned to the mission, where in the name of the Blessed Trinity I took up my customary tasks with a new heart and went on with the building of the small church.¹³¹

In December 1848, Salvado took the New Norcia wool clip to Perth. When a ship, bound for Europe, arrived unexpectedly, Brady decided that Salvado should go immediately to Europe in his place. Salvado was suspicious of Brady's motives, but was obedient to his superior. Very reluctantly, Salvado agreed to leave his mission and sailed for Europe in January 1849, taking with him two Aboriginal boys, Francis Xavier Conaci and John Baptist Dirimera.¹³² He did not know that Benedict Upumera was already dead.¹³³

Salvado and the boys visited many parts of Europe where they provoked great interest. Their public-relations potential had obviously been in Salvado's mind when he took them to Europe on his fund-raising tour, but he also genuinely wanted them to have a European education. More than that, he wanted them to become Benedictine priests like he was. Salvado could accord them no greater symbol of his belief in their equality with himself.

The boys were to enter Salvado's own Abbey of La Cava. So momentous was this event that the Pope himself, Pius IX, robed them in their Benedictine habits and gave them each a silver crucifix. Ferdinand II, King of Sicily and Naples, met the boys and offered to support them personally in La Cava. Salvado had very high hopes for Francis Xavier Conaci and John Baptist Mary Dirimera, to whom the Pope had given his own name.

Salvado, busy preparing to return to New Norcia, buoyed by a number of volunteer missionaries and generous donations, could hardly have predicted the great changes which were about to occur. The first event was that in response to a request from Bishop Brady for an assistant Bishop, Bishop Serra's appointment was transferred from Port Victoria to Perth. Salvado was delighted: 'I received this decision as a merciful dispensation of Divine Providence: words were unable to express my satisfaction and joy at seeing the New Norcia Mission saved. The Holy Trinity was doubtless watching over the mission. . . .'¹³⁴

The second event, following hard on the first, was that the Pope had chosen Salvado to be appointed to the new diocese of Port Victoria. Salvado was mortified. He argued strongly against his appointment with the Cardinal-Prefect, but the Pope had already signed the Bull. Within a few days, Salvado was consecrated Bishop of Port Victoria. 'Divine Providence,' he wrote, 'seemed to be arranging things at odds with my own desires.'¹³⁵

Salvado, however, sailed to Spain and was overcome with joy to set foot in his own country for the first time in twenty years. There he finally met up with Serra, from whom he heard that the British authorities now intended to abandon the Victoria garrison at Port Essington, a decision which was put into effect on 30 November 1849.¹³⁶ Confalonieri had already died of malaria,¹³⁷ so with the closure of the garrison, Salvado would have had no priests and no white parishioners. Although he knew he could work among the Aboriginal people there, he was realistic enough

to know that without the garrison, and with the nearest source of supplies and assistance 2 000 miles away, life at Port Essington would be most difficult. In any case, he did not want to desert New Norcia.

Salvado decided to return to Italy to explain the situation to the Pope. Before he left on 6 October 1849 at the Port of Cadiz, he watched Bishop Serra, thirty-eight Spanish and Italian Benedictines missionaries and one Irish monk, Dominic Urquhart, set sail for Fremantle in the *Ferrolana*, provided by the Queen of Spain.¹³⁸ In January 1850, the missionary band arrived in New Norcia to a tumultuous welcome. New Norcia was about to change forever. It was destined to become a very important institution, but the huge band of white missionaries would in time, inevitably, turn it into a place very different from its humble beginnings with Salvado, Serra and their Aboriginal acquaintances. The Benedictines were also to become unwittingly embroiled in a bitter decade of feuding, jealousy and controversy which almost destroyed the Catholic Diocese of Perth.

In Italy, Salvado turned his enforced sojourn into profit by writing innumerable letters to win support for his mission. More importantly for us today, he wrote his *Memorie Storiche dell' Australia*, which was published in Rome in 1851.¹³⁹ The *Memoirs* are the only substantial source of information on Salvado's early years in Western Australia. They are particularly revealing of the character and attitudes of the man and I have used them liberally in this brief study. It is as well, however, to bear in mind that Salvado wrote the document specifically to convince the Pope of the importance of New Norcia.

In Italy, Salvado was able to remain in contact with Francis Conaci and John Dirimera. They corresponded with him. Francis, in particular, progressed rapidly and within a year was writing fluent Italian in the florid mid-nineteenth century style. In a letter to Salvado he wrote:

We are pleased to receive your letter and very pleased to learn that you are well. We pray for the Australians and for you. Why don't you come to the monastery by the new moon? It would give us great pleasure to see you. We are well and happy. I, Francis, study well. John does not study very well, but he behaves well.

Would you greet our Holy Father, the Pope, for us and Father Master. Please pray for us at Mass and we would like a holy picture. Father Master greets you and so do all our companions. We cherish your letter, kiss your hand and ask your blessing. Francis Conaci, John Dirimera.¹⁴⁰

Salvado was able to visit the Aboriginal boys at La Cava where he took pleasure in the progress of the 'black Benedictines'. Francis distinguished himself in the examinations, being one of the only two of his class of twenty novices to receive distinctions.¹⁴¹ Salvado was particularly proud to attend Matins and hear Francis read the Latin Bible so fluently that Salvado 'could see the language was familiar to him'.¹⁴²

At last in 1853 Salvado was granted permission to return to New Norcia, retaining the title of Bishop of Victoria but under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Perth. He took with him £7 612/18/- in donations to the mission and thirty-six more Benedictine missionaries.¹⁴³ They arrived on 15 August 1853.

Two months later, far away in Italy at the age of seventeen, Francis Xavier Conasi died of a 'chest complaint aggravated by the climate'.¹⁴⁴ Also ill, John Baptist Mary Dirimera was brought back to Australia, where he shortly died in the bush.

Salvado returned to Perth to a bitterly divided Catholic diocese. Although the difficulties were not initially due to ethnic tensions, they sparked a situation where the Catholic community was split along ethnic lines. The hostilities became part of the long Irish/non-Irish tension in the Catholic church in Australia. (There is a summary of this in the endnotes.¹⁴⁵)

These bitter years of Irish/Spanish struggle scarred Serra. He became obsessed with ensuring that the Spanish Benedictines could never be threatened by the Irish Catholics again. He set in motion an imperialistic plan which would guarantee Spanish domination of Western Australian Catholicism. He envisaged a chain of Spanish Benedictine monasteries throughout the colony. Instead of returning the Benedictine monks to New Norcia, he founded a new monastery for them at New Subiaco close to Perth, where the monks, after building it, could work on the construction of Catholic schools and churches.

This was the situation to which Salvado returned in 1853. New Norcia had become little else but a farm to support the

diocese. The Aborigines believed the church had deserted them. Serra, authoritarian, touchy and alone, had once been Salvado's friend. Now their relationship was strained, to say the least.

Salvado, always obedient to those over him, accepted Serra's authority and, although the situation was tense, worked as Serra's assistant bishop as effectively as he could. Anxious to return permanently to New Norcia, it was a blow to Salvado when Serra decided to visit Rome again, leaving Salvado in charge of the diocese for two years.

During this time, however, Salvado assiduously carried out his duties, travelling widely and gaining a reputation for compassion, commonsense and efficiency. He made close friends with many government officials and was respected by Protestants and Catholics alike. Salvado's period as administrator also gave him time to try to steer New Norcia back to its original purpose, rather than continue as a diocesan farm. He strove to keep his vision true to its purpose, ordering the repair of the church and the reallocation of cultivated land to Aboriginal families.

Serra returned in 1855, but his high-handed manner now seemed even more disdainful than before by comparison with the compassionate administration of Salvado. Still cultivating his imperial dream, he began to lose the loyalty of his supporters, particularly when he diverted funds intended for New Norcia to the construction of an imposing episcopal palace.

Salvado became desperate to return to New Norcia. He tried to renounce his episcopal status, writing to Archbishop Polding that '...the whole of our time and the whole of our means is spent in the benefit of the white population, forsaking at the same time the poor Australians, as if they were not committed to our care.'¹⁴⁶

At last, in 1857, Salvado's pleas were answered. Rome granted permission for his return to New Norcia, although he was to remain under Serra's direction. Serra agreed, but demanded the whole of the 1859 wheat crop. 'What does he expect us to eat - stones?' asked Salvado.¹⁴⁷ But the writing was already on the wall for Serra and his administration. His health began to fail. Polding believed he suffered from 'grievous hallucinations'. Serra resigned and returned to Spain in 1861.

In February 1857, Salvado took up residence once more at New Norcia, where he was to be in charge for almost another half

century. He was now forty-three, mature, strong and experienced, with more tenacity of purpose than ever.¹⁴⁸ Through his experience of the past eight years, Salvado had come to a sad but inevitable conclusion. Not only did he believe that the Aborigines needed to be segregated to protect them from corrupt and unscrupulous whites, but he now believed that the mission needed to be protected from the church – or at least from the unpredictable scheming of officials of the diocese in which it happened to be situated.

Salvado immediately began a detailed correspondence with Cardinal Barnabo, head of Propaganda, arguing the case for New Norcia being granted some kind of independence, perhaps under the direct authority of the Pope. One of his letters ran to 16 000 words! Salvado's reputation in Rome was sound and the long and bitter controversy in the Diocese of Perth was clear proof of his assertions. On 12 March 1859, Pope Pius IX, in a rare act of recognition, made New Norcia an abbey *nullius dioecesis*, free of any diocesan control, with Dom Rosendo Salvado as its abbot and bishop.¹⁴⁹

Having achieved formal independence, Salvado uncompromisingly worked towards financial independence. More than ever, he now saw the necessity of carving a self-supporting community out of the fertile Victoria Plains. The Pope had given monks still in the colony the choice of New Norcia or Perth and most of them – forty-seven – chose to go with Salvado. This provided a band of loyal tradesmen and labourers whose contribution was essential to the realisation of Salvado's vision.

Russo comments:

Anonymity shrouded the monastic brothers and their work. They were simple, religious men who preferred their quiet obscurity to the rough and tumble of the outside world. Within the monastery they led their ascetic lives of prayer and discipline; in the fields and workshops they were completely dedicated to manual work. Many of them were skilled tradesmen.

A neighbouring settler described their establishment as being 'like a little town, with all kinds of trades. . . blacksmiths and cooks, vine-dressers and doctors, husbandmen and sawyers, a bishop and a tailor'.¹⁵⁰

There was a nucleus of Aboriginal people who had remained at the mission during its troubled years and, with Salvado's return, many others came back until soon there were over one hundred. Salvado purchased or leased much more surrounding property to extend his strategy of allocating land to Aboriginal families so that they could enjoy the profit of their own labour. He apprenticed the younger men to individual monks, who between them practised a wide variety of trades.

New Norcia as an economic unit prospered greatly. It was one of the few missions which truly achieved a self-supporting status for any length of time. At its height, New Norcia controlled one million acres of land. Its success was acknowledged in this account in the *Downside Review*:

The largest and most important station on the Victoria Plains was the New Norcia Mission station, belonging to the Spanish Benedictines. Their lands held either on lease or 'fee simple' from the government were very wide-spreading and their command of capital enabled them to purchase many choice runs in various parts of the colony, quite apart from the many thousand acres composing the New Norcia run. They counted their sheep by the thousand, had great numbers of cattle and their herds of horses, all bearing the well-known mission brand, were to be met with in the bush for many miles around the head station.¹⁵¹

A network of wells were sunk, carefully walled by skilled stonemasons in the Spanish style, which vastly increased the productivity of the grazing lands. This task was made possible by the water-detecting ability of some of the Aboriginal people.

Sheep were the main income-producing livestock. As early as 1868, 12 420 sheep produced 33 700 lbs of wool, as well as fat lambs and stud stock.¹⁵²

A lucrative activity was the breeding of horses for the British Army in India. Cash crops included wheat and wine, although most of the agricultural produce was consumed at New Norcia itself.

New Norcia achieved the model village for which so many missions had striven, as this assessment of 1911 indicates:

The monastery is surrounded by cottages built for married natives, of whom there are about twenty resident. These cottages, with the schools for boys and girls, the granary, stables, storehouses and workshops, make up a good-sized village, in the midst of which stands the chapel, a building of considerable size and not wanting in architectural merit. There is also a post and telegraph office, the post-mistress and telegraph operator being a native girl, pupil of the institution.¹⁵³

The daily routine was not unlike that of other long-lived missions, but some significant differences come to light in this account:

[The residents of New Norcia] rise with the sun, at the sound of the monastery bell. The Benedictines have recognised that to form the entire man, the family life must be united with that of the citizen. They consequently make all the children spend the night with their parents in their own homes. When dressed, they betake themselves to the church, whither their parents soon follow them. Then comes Mass and the Laudate, after which they go to their respective refectories for breakfast. This over, half-an-hour is given for recreation, which is followed by some work suitable for their age; some help the shepherds to lead their flocks to the pastures, some work in their parents' gardens, others in shops of different trades. The little girls assist their mothers and sisters in cooking, or learning to sew, etc. At eleven all work for the children ceases and they troop off to their studies for the hour before dinner. At twelve, this is served to them by the monks and consists of simple but abundant food.

Then again comes recreation, always joyous and noisy, and a visit to their parents, so that they may see and know each other once more; from two to four in winter and three to five o'clock in summer come studies and class work, followed by manual labour till sunset. After this, they have their supper and evening hours with their parents at home, followed by prayers all together in the church, and then to bed – in the winter at eight, and at nine in the summer.¹⁵⁴

As this description by Dom Berengier shows, a major difference between New Norcia and many other missions was the specific decision not to have dormitories. Salvado stressed the im-

portance of keeping the family together despite the disciplined routine of the community.

Another difference was that Salvado allowed for maintenance of traditional skills. All the Aboriginal people went hunting every Thursday and from time to time Salvado sent the men and young people into the bush for a fortnight: among other things, Salvado believed that it 'strengthened their constitution'.¹⁵⁵ When any Aboriginal people appeared listless or lacked enthusiasm for work, they, too, were sent to the bush to hunt or, if they wished, simply to sleep on the ground.

All this was made possible by the large number of monks. Although to Salvado it was important that Aboriginal people learn Western skills, the mission was run for them, not dependent upon their labour. This was a major philosophical difference between New Norcia and every other mission, but it was only made possible by the large community of monks, augmented by a number of other white employees, including convicts.

The Australian Benedictines were like no other Benedictines:

It is no uncommon sight, though a somewhat strange one to those who are only acquainted with the tranquil life of the Benedictines in older countries, to see a mounted party of the monks, dressed in their bush garb, gallop up at break-neck speed, swinging their long stock-whips close at the tail end of the mob of wild horses which they have been galloping after in the forest, until they have at length out-generalled them and have forced them down to the stock yard.

Having yarded the 'mob' and led their steaming stock-horses to the stables and unsaddled, these riders might be observed proceeding to a corner of the stable, whence each would extract a carefully rolled up garment and, in the twinkling of an eye, each sunburnt bushman would be transformed into a monk and would walk off towards the monastery or the Abbey church, as the case might be, as staid and solemn a company as one could see anywhere, were it not for an occasional tell-tale clink of the spurs or the coils of the raw-hide stock-whip peeping out from under the habit. . .¹⁵⁶

The significance of a large group of self-denying monks was not lost on the Protestant churches. Alexander Maitland, a Church of England missionary on leave from India, was given

hospitality at New Norcia. He was deeply impressed to see the Aboriginal people 'an integral part of an organised Christian community':

I have been surprised to find not, as I expected, an organisation for reclaiming from savagery and training in the elements of civilisation the natives of Australia, but the natives living as an integral part of an organised Christian community, humanised, civilised, Christianised. I can imagine no more complete answer, the answer of accomplished facts, to those who maintain that it is useless to expect more from the Aborigines than from animals and that all efforts to humanise them are thrown away. The faith, patience and courage which have been enabled to effect this and to establish the monastery and Christian village of New Norcia, as we see it now, are beyond all praise of man. Their success, we may believe, is the seal of their acceptance by him for whom all has been done.¹⁵⁷

The Presbyterian clergyman, James Innes, regretted that an institution as fine and successful as New Norcia was not 'under Protestant instruction and supervision'.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, the Protestant-owned *Perth Gazette*, arguing that mission Aborigines were 'Christians only, in name' if they were not also made 'upright, laborious and industrious', claimed that Protestants could not do it!

So far, the only true success has been obtained by the Catholic colony of Victoria Plains. In this mission of the Spanish monks, the natives were very happy, educated to work and to recognise the advantage of it. . .

The success obtained by the Benedictines of New Norcia shows us clearly the only means by which a happy result may be obtained. But for Protestants it will always be difficult to establish and maintain a similar institution, with our habits of comfort; and above all to find a like number of men so full of self-abnegation, patient, persevering and entirely devoted to this work of civilisation.¹⁵⁹

Although it had many successes, New Norcia, like all the nineteenth-century missions, could not prevent deaths from European diseases. Despite the efforts of Salvado to maintain a

healthy environment, the death rate at the mission was high for some years:

The mortality at the mission as elsewhere has been great, although every care is taken of the health of the native inmates. The young people die fortified by all the sacraments of the church, and the old natives are prepared for eternity as far as their intelligence and perception of divine things permit.¹⁶⁰

Despite this, New Norcia was a happy place. Food was never in short supply. Within the mission's borders, Aboriginal people had dignity. None of them doubted how genuinely Salvado cared for them. Furthermore, he encouraged them in many European cultural and recreational pursuits. Salvado himself trained a twenty-piece string orchestra and an Aboriginal man, Paul Piramino, conducted a brass band. There was a choir and, most famous of all, a cricket team called 'The Invincibles' – undefeated in many seasons, despite challenging every club in Western Australia. The favourite relaxation at New Norcia was to join in or watch an afternoon cricket match between the Aborigines and the monks. The Benedictines of Europe would have been amazed to see it.

Salvado had one more battle to fight with his church. Throughout all these years, he had still been notionally Bishop of Port Victoria and, as the Northern Territory became settled by whites, there was pressure upon him to move to his diocese. He did go so far as arranging priests for Darwin, but resisted all pressure to leave New Norcia. Several times it was suggested that he actually live in 'Port Victoria', administering New Norcia from there. This was obviously an impossibility and finally, in 1889, Rome gave in to him. He ceased to be Bishop of Port Victoria and, as he had to be bishop of somewhere, was made bishop of a non-existent diocese, the titular See of Adriana.

'Forty years a bishop to a place that I have never seen,' exclaimed Salvado, 'and now a new title!'¹⁶¹

Salvado became a powerful figure in colonial Western Australia. If nothing else, the size of New Norcia's pastoral property would have guaranteed it. Salvado, however, had long cultivated the respect and even friendship of many of the colony's leading citizens, such as John Forrest.¹⁶²

When, in 1887, the Aborigines Protection Act was passed, creating the Aborigines Protection Board of Western Australia, Salvado, with some reservations, accepted the title and responsibility of Protector for his district. After all, as he said, he was 'already much more than a protector'.¹⁶³

Far-reaching changes to the New Norcia population happened as a result of the new act. Within the vicinity of the mission, the original Aboriginal population had already declined rapidly. Some died from white brutality, but most died of European diseases. Furthermore outside New Norcia itself, there was a devastatingly low birthrate. There was, however, a rising number of Aboriginal people of mixed descent. New Norcia now became an institution for Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal people from a very wide area. Salvado was obliged to accept orphaned, abandoned or convicted children, mostly mixed race, from as far away as Geraldton, Bunbury and Albany.

At New Norcia itself, Salvado knew that what was now partly a children's home could not be organised in the same way as the original mission. As the number of new residents gradually outnumbered the old, the character of the institution changed: it became more regimented. Some had even been sentenced to New Norcia, so punishments for wrong behaviour had to be introduced – something which in the past had simply not been necessary.

Once Salvado accepted charge of this much wider group, however, he took full responsibility for them, championing their causes and defending their rights forthrightly with the government. He argued time and time again with the Aboriginal Protection Board over what he considered unjust or arbitrary decisions. He found it particularly irritating when the Board quibbled about whether a needy child was actually an orphan or whether a child had ceased to be legally a child:

Some are bereaved of fathers, others are bereaved of mothers, others are not orphans at all, and others I do not know what they are. They may be orphans in the full sense of the word for what I know of it. I do not know if they are orphans because I never took any interest in that particular matter, and I never took any particular interest in that matter because this Benedictine mission of New Norcia was never intended to be, and it is not at all an orphanage.¹⁶⁴

New Norcia was, he argued, a place for protecting and civilising 'the unfortunate Aborigines of this country as far as was in my power with the help of God to do it, and according to that my purpose I do not remember having ever refused to admit here a child, boy or girl, whose parents, father or mother, living or dead, were or had been Aborigines or half-castes; taking no notice whatsoever whether those children were or were not orphans.'¹⁶⁵

By the end of the century, Salvado's health was deteriorating. As the Australian colonies approached Federation, he gathered enough strength to fight, and to lose, a last, unspectacular but very important battle. His one-time friend, John Forrest, had become Premier of Western Australia. Salvado was disappointed that the affluent Forrest government, commanding vast revenues from Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie gold, gave such meagre assistance to Aboriginal people. Forrest represented Western Australia at the Federation conventions. Salvado became disillusioned with Forrest. Aborigines were completely overlooked at the Federation conferences and conventions of 1890-1898 when future Australian citizenship was discussed.¹⁶⁶ They were not even mentioned by the delegates of the separate colonies who drafted the Federal constitution.

Salvado, always interested in politics, followed the decade of discussion and controversy leading to Federation with keen interest. He soon realised that no-one cared about the Aborigines: they were simply a non-issue. Salvado lobbied the influential and powerful. By what Christian principle, he asked, could these representatives of the colonies totally omit to take into calculation 'the Aboriginal inhabitants who had been around for centuries'?¹⁶⁷

Salvado's voice was not heard. The Aboriginal voice was not heard. The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia mentioned them only for the purpose of dismissing them: they were not a race with which the Commonwealth was to concern itself; they were not to be included in any count of the people of the Commonwealth.¹⁶⁸ Today, even as I write this, Aboriginal Australians are fighting for recognition, seeking that the same Constitution may be amended to acknowledge, as Salvado simply put it, that they have 'been around for a long time'.

Salvado had always had an exceptionally high regard for Aboriginal people, but he was certainly not uncritical of them. He spoke out against those aspects of Aboriginal culture which he

thought were sinful or degrading, particularly infanticide, vengeance killing and the oppression of women. On the other hand, he considered Aborigines particularly intelligent, capable of the same vocation as his own. He saw them as having physical beauty and a dignified bearing.

Unlike many other missionaries, he did not make an issue of breaches of minor European etiquette. In the matter of nakedness, for example, although he made a rule that all who came to the mission should be clothed at least in a kangaroo skin, he never pressed the issue. 'We did not tell them the reason for this rule,' he wrote, 'to avoid giving them feelings of guilt. . . . On the innumerable occasions when. . . . I have slept among them, I have never been aware of any unchaste or improper action.'¹⁶⁹

Knowing Aboriginal people as well as he did, Salvado recognised that what most casual observers saw as depravity was behaviour arising from social disintegration, stemming from the degrading influence of corrupt whites. In their traditional life, he found much to admire in the strictness of the Aboriginal moral code:

A native will never forgive any affront to the chastity of his women; indeed, he will make the offending party pay dearly for it, often with his life. The first white men who committed these offences have cause to know this. Certainly our travellers will not find such strict morals among the natives near the white man's settlements, because there the poor blacks are reduced to misery and, if overcome by force, find no legal redress, so that for the sake of survival they are obliged to swallow their shame for fear of something worse.

Things are very different with those who live in the bush, away from contact with the white man. In the three years of my stay in the interior, I have never seen any unchaste or indecent behaviour among them; on the contrary, I have found their behaviour very creditable indeed.¹⁷⁰

Salvado did not quite live to see the Commonwealth of Australia inaugurated, its Constitution ignoring the Aborigines. Old and tired, he returned to Rome in 1900 to negotiate his successor. Just before Christmas, he fell ill and was confined to bed. Two days before Federation, on 29 December 1900, he was given the last rites. Then Rosendo Salvado quietly passed away,

whispering the names of the Aboriginal children of New Norcia.

His obituary in the *West Australian Record* acknowledged that an era had passed with his passing:

If the Catholics of the colony have to mourn a pastor of the faith, who did their church honour and gave them edification, the settlers generally have lost one, the example and success of whose pioneer settlement have enriched the colony and added to its repute. In the death of Bishop Salvado, a colonial event must be recognised and a colonial epoch is marked by it.¹⁷¹

His body was brought back to Western Australia and entombed behind the high altar in the small cathedral of New Norcia. 'The Aborigines,' it was said, 'had lost the best friend they ever had.'¹⁷²

* * *

Over the next eighty-eight years, New Norcia became a different institution. Many Aborigines moved into Perth or Geraldton and the mission gradually became less a centre for Aboriginal people. Its boarding schools were extended to European children as well. The casual visitor today can be forgiven for thinking that the monastery is as much a tourist attraction as it is a religious institution.

The last Abbot, Bernard Rooney, regrets the changes and works as a parish priest at Moora, sixty kilometres north of New Norcia, carrying a specific outreach to Aboriginal people and assisting them to reconstruct the Nyungar language.¹⁷³

ENDNOTES

1. Kimberly, 1897: 61
2. McNair and Rumley, 1981: 5
3. *Perth Gazette*, 25 May 1833
4. *Ibid*, 20 July 1833
5. Deposition accompanying Stirling's despatch, 1 November 1834, Governor's Despatch Book, BL
6. *Ibid*
7. Roe Journal, 28 October 1834, Acc.No.629, BL
8. Burton, 1929: 26
9. *Perth Gazette*, 1 November 1834
10. Stirling, cited in Hasluck, 1942: 48-49
11. Fletcher, 1984: 1-5
12. Backhouse, 1839 (V): 28
13. Irwin, 1835: 27-28
14. Kimberly, 1897: 99
15. *Ibid*
16. McNair and Rumley, 1981: 15
17. Hawtrey, 1949: 17
18. *Ibid*
19. *Perth Gazette*, 2 July 1836
20. Burton, 1941: 25
21. Hasluck, 1942: 163
22. Burton, 1941: 29
23. Lord Glenelg returned Giustiniani's letters to Governor Hutt for investigation with his Despatch 3 of 4 August 1838. See John Hutt to Lord Glenelg, 17 May 1839, reproduced in *Aborigines (Australian Colonies)*, BHCSP, 34, No.627, 1844
24. This statement and other materials are in John Hutt to Lord Glenelg, 17 May 1839, with enclosures, reproduced in *Aborigines (Australian Colonies)*, BHCSP, 34, No.627, 1844
25. Backhouse, 1839(V): 55
26. Giustiniani, cited in Hasluck, 1942: 163
27. Burton, 1941: 65
28. Green, 1981: 90
29. Wollaston's Picton Journal, 27 January 1842 (Wollaston, 1948: 50)
30. McNair and Rumley, 1981: 60
31. Bassett, 1954: 475
32. Francis Mitchell Diary, 6 September 1838, B-MIT-WA, 1840/50, BL
33. Wollaston's Albany Journal, 2 November 1848 (Wollaston, 1954: 67)
34. Bishop of Adelaide to Hawkins, 17 November 1848 (Wollaston, 1954: 67)
35. *Ibid*
36. Hicks (n.d.), Ch.1, p.4
37. Hale Diary, 27 October 1848, in Robin, 1976: 33

38. Wollaston to Secretary, SPG, 21 June 1851 (Wollaston, 1954: 111)
39. *Ibid*
40. Wollaston to Secretary, SPG, 19 May 1853 (Wollaston, 1954: 195)
41. Hicks (n.d.), ch.7, p.6
42. Wollaston's Albany Journal, 26 March 1853 (Wollaston, 1954: 180)
43. Wollaston to Secretary, SPG, 19 May 1853 (Wollaston, 1954: 198-9)
44. Anne Camfield, in Wollaston, 1954: 198
45. Hicks (n.d.), ch.7, p.8
46. Wollaston to Secretary, SPG, 19 May 1853 (Wollaston, 1954: 196)
47. Pepper and De Araugo, 1985: 136
48. Millett, 1872: 131
49. *Ibid*
50. Massola, 1970: 39-42
51. Pepper and De Araugo, 1985: 134
52. *Ibid*, p.142
53. *Ibid*
54. Bessy Flower to Anne Camfield, 24 July 1867, in Pepper and De Araugo, 1985: 140
55. *Western Australian Church of England Magazine*, Vol.4, Nos.5, 7, 8, 10, September 1865 - February 1866
56. *Perth Gazette*, 17 November 1865
57. Robin, 1976: 147
58. *Ibid*, p.211, n.54
59. Hale, in Millett, 1872: 133-134. For Hale's intention to resign and go to Albany, see also *Colonial Church Chronicle*, October 1870, Vol.24, p.93
60. Hawtreay, 1949: 72
61. Hicks (n.d.), ch.7, p.5
62. McNair and Rumley, 1981: 2. (I am indebted to this important work for much of the data on the Wesleyan mission.)
63. Clarkeson *et al* to WMS, 13 October 1830, cited in McNair and Rumley, 1981: 3
64. McNair and Rumley, 1981: 30
65. Methodist Church, WA Petition for a Missionary, 1836 (McNair and Rumley, 1981: 30)
66. Smithies Letters, 10 January 1840, MN172, BL
67. Thomas Farmer, *A Short History of the Rise and Progress of Methodism in Western Australia*, MS., c1880, BL
68. Jenkins, 1930: 18
69. Smithies Letters, 18 January 1841, MN172, BL
70. Green, 1981: 90
71. Colonial Secretary's Office, Vol.95, January 1841, BL
72. Sunday school lists still exist and some are reproduced in McNair and Rumley, 1981: 44.
73. Governor's Executive Council Minutes, 24 November 1840, cited in McNair and Rumley, 1981: 49
74. Smithies Letters, 18 January 1841, MN172, BL

75. *Ibid*
76. *Ibid*
77. Governor's Despatch Book, 15 May 1841, BL
78. Smithies Letters, 20 September 1841, May 1841, MN172, BL
79. *Ibid*, 1 May 1842
80. *Ibid*
81. Wollaston's Picton Journal, 27 January 1842 (Wollaston, 1948 :50)
82. Smithies Letters, 1 May 1842, MN172, BL
83. McNair and Rumley, 1981: 72-106
84. *Ibid*, p.109
85. Wollaston's Albany Journal, 24 February 1853 (Wollaston, 1954: 166)
86. Smithies Letters, 26 October 1844, MN172, BL
87. McNair and Rumley, 1981: 96
88. *Ibid*, p.100
89. *Inquirer*, 16 November 1842
90. McNair and Rumley, 1981: 102
91. *Ibid*, p.86
92. Smithies Letters, 26 October 1843, MN172, BL
93. McNair and Rumley, 1981: 89-92
94. Colonial Secretary's Office, Vol. 147, 9 January 1846, BL
95. Smithies Letters, 25 September 1852, MN172, BL
96. McNair and Rumley, 1981: 139-143
97. Smithies, *op cit*, 15 July 1854
98. Details of Salvado's early life, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*
99. Salvado, 1851 (1977: 17)
100. Robert D'Arcy to Ullathorne, 12 December 1841, in Salvado, 1977: 15
101. O'Farrell, 1968: 64
102. Salvado, 1851 (1977: 20)
103. *Ibid*, p.22
104. Russo, 1980: 24
105. Green, 1981: 91
106. Salvado, 1851 (1977: 36)
107. *Inquirer*, 27 May 1846
108. Salvado, 1851 (1977: 43)
109. *Ibid*, p.44
110. *Ibid*
111. *Ibid*, p.49
112. *Ibid*, p.53
113. *Ibid*, pp.50-51
114. *Ibid*, p.51
115. Russo, 1980: 43
116. Salvado, 1851 (1977: 54)
117. *Ibid*, p.42
118. *Ibid*, p.56
119. *Ibid*, p.57
120. *Ibid*, p.58

121. *Ibid*, p.59
122. *Ibid*, p.60
123. *Ibid*, p.67
124. Birt, 1911: 479-480
125. *Inquirer*, 23 February 1848
126. Salvado, 1851 (1977: 73)
127. Russo, 1980: 56
128. Salvado, 1851 (1977: 82)
129. Spillett, 1972: 19-26
130. Stormon, 1977: 282. Gladstone, in north Queensland, existed briefly in 1847.
131. Salvado, 1851 (1977: 83)
132. *Ibid*, p.90
133. Russo, 1980: 139
134. Salvado, 1851 (1977: 97-98)
135. *Ibid*, p.99
136. Powell, 1982: 61
137. Russo, 1980: 36
138. Salvado, 1851 (1977: 104-105)
139. The full title is: *Memorie Storiche dell' Australia, particolarmente della Missione Benedettina di Nuova Norcia*.
140. Francis Conaci and John Dirimera to Salvado, 24 June 1850, in Russo, 1980: 142
141. Stormon, 1977: 287, n.18
142. Salvado to Zelli, 6 January 1852, in Russo, 1980: 145
143. Russo, 1980: 70
144. Stormon, 1977: 284, n.9; Russo, 1980: 145-146
145. A succinct summary of the bitter Perth dispute is in O'Farrell, 1977: 76-78; a more detailed description in Russo, 1980: 65-82; key original documents in O'Farrell, 1969: 137-44. Here is a brief overview:
 Bishop Brady had been successful as an impoverished and hard-working priest. His self-denial had become legendary: his first dwelling in Perth had been an enclosed but roofless bell-tower just over a metre square, with a chair to sleep in and an umbrella for shelter. As a diocesan bishop, however, with financial responsibility for his diocese, he was a disaster. By 1849, there was an accumulated diocesan debt of £10 000 and diocesan affairs were in disarray. Brady was personally besieged by angry creditors. It was then that he began to see New Norcia as the salvation of his diocese. When he changed his mind and sent Salvado to Rome in 1849, instead of going himself, it was because he had realised that the charismatic Salvado could rouse more support for New Norcia than he could for Perth. Brady then arranged for the legal transfer of all New Norcia property to his own name.
 The Western Australian colony as a whole faced bankruptcy and extinction by 1849, so Brady found an almost penniless government unwilling to assist him financially. Brady developed a seige mentality,

believing that he was fighting an aggressively anti-Catholic government dominated by Orangemen. Salvado's friendship with the Protestant hierarchy was later to disprove this, but Brady was dangerously near breaking point in health and mind. It was then that Brady had asked for an assistant bishop and been given Serra.

When Serra, with the thirty-nine missionaries, arrived in Perth, he soon realised what was happening. He banked the funds he had collected for New Norcia in his own name to keep them out of Brady's reach. He told Brady that the Pope had given him all responsibility for diocesan finances and property, but Brady was unimpressed. He appointed the Irishman, Urquhart, his Vicar-General and left for Rome on 8 February 1850. Before doing so, he instructed Urquhart to evict Serra and the Benedictines from New Norcia.

Here, British law favoured Brady, for the Catholic church could not hold property in its own name and New Norcia was now in Brady's name. Urquhart obtained a court order and with armed bailiffs evicted the missionaries at Easter. With dramatic symbolism, the Benedictine monks carried their few belongings on wooden crosses for three waterless days to Guildford where they established a tiny monastery. Urquhart was then able to sue Serra in the courts for all New Norcia property, including the funds in Serra's name. Serra wrote to Salvado who informed the Catholic hierarchy. Serra was sent an official letter appointing him Coadjutor Bishop of Perth with all temporal responsibilities. He immediately excommunicated Urquhart, but the Irish Catholics physically threatened Serra.

Meanwhile in Rome, Brady was detained and deprived of all authority. Without permission, he left Rome, arriving back in Perth on Christmas Eve 1851. He rounded up his Irish followers who stormed the Christmas Day Masses in Fremantle and Perth, physically contesting the sanctuary with Serra in Perth and Father Martin Griver in Fremantle. The diocese then became divided between the 'Bradyites', mostly the Irish Catholics, and the 'Serraites', the Spanish and other Catholics, including some Irish such as the Sisters of Mercy, who chose to remain loyal to Rome's appointee. When Serra published Pope Pius IX's decree on 3 October 1851, expelling Brady from office, the whole unpleasant episode should have ended, but Brady still held New Norcia and other property in his own name and decided to take his grievances to the civil courts. His faction saw the whole affair as an anti-Irish plot organised by the Vatican.

Amazed Roman authorities urgently ordered Archbishop Polding to travel from Sydney to Perth which he did, covering half of the journey on horseback. In front of the Sunday congregation on 4 July 1852, Brady knelt before Polding, submitting to the Papal suspension and relinquishing all claim to diocesan property. Still insubordinate, some of the 'Bradyites' objected to this humiliation. Polding promptly excommunicated them all. Polding privately believed that Brady was 'not

sane in his intellect'. Brady left Perth to seek his absolution from the Pope, retiring to Ireland where he died, still technically Bishop of Perth, in 1871.

146. Salvado to Polding, 19 June 1854, in Russo, 1980: 79
147. Russo, 1980: 84
148. *Ibid.*, p.83
149. Erection of New Norcia into a Prefecture Apostolic and an Abbey Nul-lius. Reprinted in Russo, 1980: 292-3
150. Russo, 1980: 85
151. Taunton, H.R. (1896), in the *Downside Review*, 15: 130
152. Russo, 1980: 87
153. Bourke in Birt, 1911: 488-489
154. Birt, 1911: 485
155. *Ibid.*, p.484
156. *Ibid.*, p.493
157. Alexander Maitland, in Birt, 1911: 491
158. *West Australian Times*, 10 March 1871
159. *Perth Gazette*, 1867, in Birt, 1911: 487
160. Birt, 1911: 489
161. Russo, 1980: 118
162. See, for example, Salvado's early correspondence with John Forrest, collected in William, 1961
163. Russo, 1980: 250
164. Salvado to Aborigines Protection Board, 4 August 1896, in Russo, 1980: 253
165. *Ibid.*, p.250
166. Sawyer, 1966: 17-36
167. Russo, 1980: 256
168. The Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act, Section 51 (xxvi):
The parliament shall have power to make laws for 'the people of any
race other than the Aboriginal race'.
Section 127: 'In reckoning the numbers of the people of the Common-
wealth. . . Aboriginal natives shall not be counted'.
169. Salvado, 1851 (1977: 70)
170. *Ibid.*, p.140
171. *West Australian Record*, 5 January 1901
172. Henry Prinsep, cited in Russo, 1980: 261
173. Wilson, 1988: 8

6

The failure of noble sentiments

South Australian society and early Aboriginal missions

SOUTH AUSTRALIA WAS to be different. There were to be no convicts, only free settlers inspired by humanitarian and enlightened principles.

Yet well before the formal white settlement of South Australia, Aboriginal people – at least along the coast – had already learned what to expect from white intruders. Sealing and whaling ships had operated in those waters for twenty years or more and the abduction of Aboriginal women by the crews had been commonplace. Aboriginal people had learned to fear white people. When they could, they killed any intruders lest more of the women be taken.

No doubt this resulted in the death of innocent whites, the best documented of which was the spearing of Captain Collet Barker. Accustomed to the friendship of Aborigines at the Raffles Bay garrison in north Australia, he swam the Murray River to talk to some in 1829, unaware that women had just been abducted. Charles Sturt, the explorer, happened to be there to observe and record the event.¹

Information about the mistreatment of native peoples in the Empire filtered back to Britain where it played on English consciences. When knowledge of the massacre of Aboriginal people in the Australian colonies came in the wake of the evangelical revival and the anti-slavery movement of the 1820s and 1830s, these concerns began to influence colonial policy quite significantly.

The British Colonial Office was under the control of Charles

Grant (Lord Glenelg) and Sir James Stephen, both of whom were children of Clapham.² They had both participated in the evangelical anti-slavery campaigns and they made early moves to try to ensure the protection of native rights in South Australia. These included the idea of the Aboriginal Protector, whose role was to safeguard the property of the Aborigines and to enforce compensation should they wish to surrender their land.³

In addition to this, Lord Glenelg and James Stephen were aware of the deficiencies of the 1834 Act, under which South Australia was constituted a colony⁴, and acted to counteract them by a provision in the South Australian Letters Patent of 1836 that the property rights of Aboriginal people were to be respected. The form of words they provided to King William IV stated:

Nothing in these our Letters Patent shall affect or be construed to affect the rights of any Aboriginal natives of the said province to the actual occupation or enjoyment, in their own persons or in the persons of their descendants, of any lands therein now actually occupied or enjoyed by such natives.⁵

No different, after all

What was to come of such noble sentiments? The South Australian Colonisation Commissioners, Robert Torrens and John Brown, fearful that such provisions would jeopardise the economic success of the colony, contrived to ensure that the Aboriginal Protector had no control over land sales by passing an Order declaring all the lands of the colony open to public sale.⁶ There was never any expressed commitment by the Commissioners to honour the humanitarian concerns of the Colonial Office. Central to the whole question was the contradiction between the South Australian Constitution Act, which declared all the lands of South Australia to be 'waste and unoccupied', and the protective provisions of such documents as the Letters Patent.

Governor Hindmarsh's Proclamation in 1836 was supposed to give the Aborigines the rights and protection of British subjects and ensure that acts of violence or injustice against them would be punished 'with exemplary severity'.⁷ In practice, the Proclamation did little more than pay lip service to the ideals of evangelical reform, while paving the way for the economic interests of the early settlement to be fostered.⁸

This was the way the settlement would be conducted:

. . .not only to protect the natives in the enjoyment of existing rights, but to extend the guardianship of legal government, offer them subsistence and comforts of civilised men, win them to regular industry and secure reserves of improving value for the endowment of schools and Christian teachers. . .⁹

In response to the insistence of Glenelg and Stephens of the Colonial Office, temporary Protectors were appointed early in 1837, but the first three resigned in quick succession. This should be hardly surprising, for the actual role of the Protector was in direct contradiction to the whole purpose of the enterprise of which the Protector was part. Indeed, John Brown the Emigration Agent noted in his diary that 'the Commissioners were exceedingly anxious that the office (of Protector) be in the hands of one who thoroughly understood the principles of the Colony'.¹⁰

The first permanent Protector, Dr William Wyatt, appointed the same year, was instructed to give Aborigines 'protection in the undisturbed enjoyment of their proprietary rights to such lands as may be occupied by them in some especial manner'.¹¹ He was also instructed to make them friendly to the settlers, induce them to labour and lead them to civilisation and religion.¹² Wyatt, however, was more sympathetic to the Aborigines than Hindmarsh had expected. He took a genuine interest in language and culture and, as a result, became more concerned about Aboriginal rights than the local authorities had intended. His appointment, said Wyatt, 'is just the thing to please me, and I assure you that my black children (for they call me *Ichenle*, father) interest me beyond description. . .'.¹³

Wyatt's instructions were carefully worded with respect to the one issue crucial to the settlers – land. Aboriginal rights over land were to be respected only for land *occupied by them in some especial manner*. Indeed, this careful phrase summarises the convenient legal opinion under which Aboriginal land rights never were recognised and it is still the opinion with which land rights negotiations must deal today.

The phrase, which might have sounded well when read superficially in London, left it up to the local colonial authorities to define what 'occupying' and 'especial manner' meant. Wyatt found

that these were immediately defined for him. He was instructed to advise the Government where there were lands which the Aborigines used for *cultivation, fixed residences or funeral purposes*.¹⁴ In other words, farms, villages and cemeteries could be protected. Of course, Wyatt could point to none. He tried to arrange for land to be reserved for Aborigines at the land sales, but J.H. Fisher, the Resident Land Commissioner, refused. Wyatt gave up trying to secure Aboriginal reserves, stating with a degree of sarcasm that it 'appeared that the natives occupy no lands in the especial manner'.¹⁵

Wyatt was left with the remainder of his instructions: making them friendly, inducing them to work, leading them to civilisation and so on, all of which, far from being a protection of any rights, were an imposition of the will of others on them. Wyatt did not remain much longer as Protector. Perhaps he did not 'thoroughly understand the principles of the Colony' or perhaps he understood them only too well. He was replaced late in 1839 by Dr Matthew Moorhouse. Some thoughtful people, aware that Wyatt had at least made some attempt at protecting Aboriginal rights, suspected that the new appointment 'was not in the best interest of the blacks'.¹⁶

It is important to record that there always were a number of fair-minded settlers who would have preferred to see some recognition of Aboriginal land rights. In September 1838 a Quaker, Robert Cock, remitted £3/16/6 to the Protector as rent on one-fifth of his property, the proportion of the land originally promised to be reserved to the Aborigines. 'I disclaim this to be either donation, grant or gift,' wrote Cock, 'but a just claim the natives of this district have on me as an occupier of those lands'.¹⁷ Some concerned Adelaide settlers formed a local branch of the British and Foreign Aborigines' Protection Association.

The parent organisation in London was soon made aware that the careful phrasing of official reports did not give a true picture of the real situation:

It will doubtless be asked how the worthy and honourable gentlemen whose names are attached to the [South Australian Commissioners' Report] can have allowed a system to be established so completely at variance with the sentiments they have therein recorded.¹⁸

So it was that the land rights of Aborigines were ignored deliberately and completely and the Protectors were prevented from protecting. The dispossession of South Australian Aborigines proceeded unchecked in much the same way as did their dispossession elsewhere. Given the violent confrontation between settlers and Aborigines in earlier-settled colonies such as Van Diemen's Land and Western Australia, it is not surprising that South Australia was finally no different at all.

The early confrontations between Aborigines and marauding Europeans which took place prior to formal settlement occurred further east than Adelaide and so the general attitude of Aboriginal people around Adelaide was one of interested curiosity and friendly communication. Stephen Hack wrote in May 1837:

The doubts I always had of the way the blacks would behave are, I am glad to say, completely set at rest; they are honest to a remarkable degree, generally well-behaved and often extremely useful; in point of fact, there are fewer instances of the blacks misbehaving than the whites and these few are of the most trifling nature. . . The natives I have no fear of. Parties of them frequently come down to the house. . .

Our children are a great amusement to them, particularly the youngest; they pat his cheek and laugh; and he seems as much pleased with them. . . They seem very fond of their own children and often bring them to be named. These people. . . are remarkably well-made and muscular. . . but not ugly and are almost invariably free from disease.¹⁹

Within a few months of European settlement, a white man had been killed at Encounter Bay for an offence against Aboriginal morality. The suspect was captured, posing all the problems of how to apply the law to a British subject who had never heard of its provisions and had acted in strict accordance with his own laws. The question was avoided for the time being when the suspect escaped.²⁰

Around Adelaide, colonists found Aboriginal interests began to conflict with their own. Customary grass burning and spearing of stock enraged settlers. They retaliated, a shepherd was killed and two Aboriginal suspects were executed by hanging in 1839.²¹ No Europeans, however, were even brought to trial for the killing of Aborigines. Had they been, a plea of self-defence would have

been upheld. On the other hand, some of the more thoughtful colonists were already wondering whether they had any more right to kill kangaroos than Aborigines had to kill sheep.

In the same year, Aborigines in the Coorong, a group which had been particularly severely preyed upon by sealers, killed the survivors of the shipwrecked *Maria*. Governor George Gawler despatched Police Commissioner O'Halloran, at the head of a force of mounted police and volunteer militia, to capture and execute on the spot up to three Aborigines in accordance with 'principles of strictest justice'.²² In the course of carrying out their instructions, two Aborigines were fatally shot and two were captured. As judge, jury and executioner, O'Halloran determined that the two men 'looked guilty' and hanged them on the spot.²³

The question of the legality of Gawler's instructions created considerable controversy in Adelaide. Gawler claimed he had acted under martial law. The Colonial Office in London was not convinced, but it seems to have been simply a coincidence that Gawler was replaced within a few months by Governor George Grey.²⁴

In 1841, Richard Penny, who was familiar with some of the Aboriginal people of the Coorong, recorded their views of the *Maria* incident. They said that some Aboriginal people had provided food and water to the survivors of the shipwreck and that they had guided them towards Adelaide. A confrontation occurred when the Aborigines refused to go beyond the borders of their own tribal territory and all the Europeans were killed.²⁵

That Europeans believed they could not be brought to trial for killing Aborigines was well borne out by incidents near the Murray River in 1841. There were severe confrontations between overlanders droving sheep from NSW to South Australia along the Murray near the border between the two colonies. Some private punitive expeditions were mounted in which Aboriginal people were shot. Governor Grey, however, recalled the police punitive force approved by Gawler, and resisted requests for a volunteer force. He reminded settlers that Aborigines were British subjects and that it was not possible to 'regard them as aliens with whom a war can exist, and against whom Her Majesty's troops may exercise belligerent rights'.²⁶

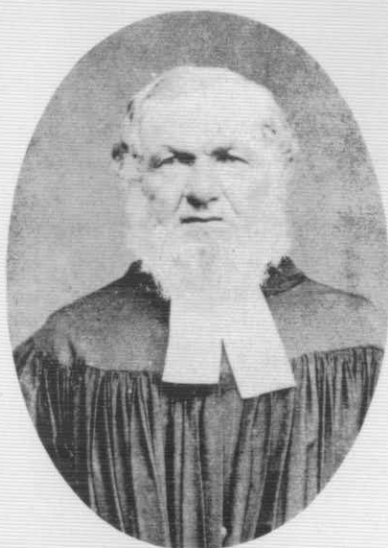
Grey tried unsuccessfully to prevent further overlanding of sheep along the Murray. Finally, in October 1841, he despatched



38. The Abbey Church, New Norcia, late 1860s
 Acknowledgement: Benedictine Community, New Norcia.
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39. The Benedictines of New Norcia, 1893.
 Rosendo Salvado is at the very rear.
 Acknowledgement: Benedictine Community, New Norcia.
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40. Clamor Schurmann

Acknowledgement: Edwin Schurmann.

Reproduced with permission.



41. George Taplin

Acknowledgement: H.T. Burgess,
Cyclopaedia of S.A., Adelaide, 1907,
p.39, State Library of South Australia.

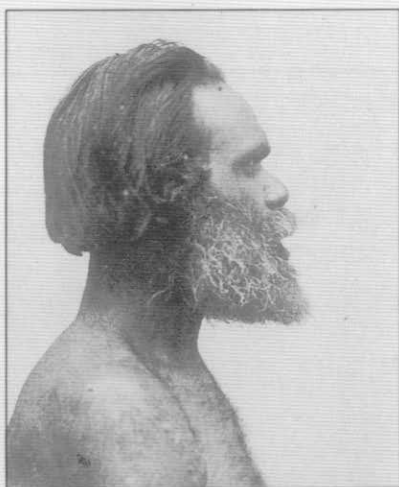
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42. Matthew Hale

Acknowledgement: Mortlock Library
of South Australlana, B11130.

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43. James Unaipon
(Ngunaitponi)

Acknowledgement: Taplin, 1879, p.80

a party of police and volunteers to protect the overlanders. The Protector, Moorhouse, was in charge of the expedition, but was accompanied by Police Sub-Inspector Shaw who was to take command during any hostilities.

Near the Rufus River, Moorhouse's party met a well-armed body of overlanders who had already shot five Aborigines. Their now combined force of fifty-five armed Europeans confronted 150 Aborigines. When negotiations seemed impossible, Moorhouse handed over to Shaw who took the initiative and ordered an attack before any spears were thrown. In an engagement lasting twenty minutes, thirty Aborigines were killed, most of whom were shot when they fled into the river. One European was wounded in the arm.²⁷

At the subsequent enquiry, Moorhouse argued that they had been in personal danger, that they had been obliged to attack and that the killing had had to be sustained so long to prevent the Aborigines regrouping. The magistrates unanimously agreed that the actions had been 'justifiable and unavoidable'. One of the magistrates was the famed explorer, Edward John Eyre. He stated that he was not convinced that a sufficiently severe lesson had been given to the Aborigines.²⁸

While always justifying what he regarded as defence of his party's lives, Moorhouse nevertheless believed that the attacks on the overlanders were not simply to steal sheep or even to defend territory, but because of the abuse of Aborigines by the overlanders, particularly conflict over women. Moorhouse stated this briefly in his report to Grey and confided much more to the Lutheran missionary, Christian Teichelmann, who recorded his impressions:

Whatever outrages the natives may have committed, on all such occasions the cause of it has been Europeans. . .

There is one thing in the conduct of the men who have charge of the cattle or sheep to which all the mischief is to be imputed, and that is the relations which they have with the natives' females on the way to Adelaide, which is carried on whenever opportunity occurs. Meat and clothing are promised to the husband as a remuneration and the European, being unable to keep his promises, must impose upon the native. He now tries to get by force what faith and promise did not render him: the

consequence is that either the native or the European must pay with his life. Well may it now happen that an innocent party is attacked. In the instance to which I refer, I believe that Mr Moorhouse [the Protector of the Aborigines] acted as he thought it necessary, for the preservation of his life and that of the rest. But he himself told me that he had almost to be an eyewitness of the abominations committed by the shepherds of the same party, for whose protection equally he had gone forth and for whose safety he suffered the natives to be fired at, without it being in his power to prevent it, the wretches replying that there was no law against such a practice and that they would do the same in spite of any prohibitory command.²⁹

At the same time in Adelaide there was already an Aboriginal man, named 'Encounter Bay Bob' by the settlers, who was sufficiently articulate in English to point out that land being subdivided with a small section reserved for him belonged to him in the first place.³⁰

Around Adelaide in particular, the corrupting influence of unscrupulous whites was destroying Aboriginal society as effectively as the gun and poison were elsewhere. Alcohol and prostitution degraded the lives of an already marginalised people on the fringes of white society. European diseases took an immense toll. The encroachment of pastoral activities onto the Aborigines' territory reduced their natural livelihood and forced them through starvation to seek rations at designated depots away from their own disputed lands, which provided further disruption to social ties.³¹ The 650 in the vicinity of Adelaide who had survived by 1841 were reduced to 320 in a decade.³² This was the background against which we must judge the churches' work among the Aboriginal people.

The first Lutheran missionaries

In 1837, Lutheran Pastor A.L.C. Kavel travelled to London to discuss with George Fife Angas, financial backer of the colony of South Australia, the possible emigration of persecuted Prussian Christians. Kavel mentioned that the Evangelical Lutheran Missionary Society in Dresden would be willing to send missionaries to the Aborigines. Angas was interested and offered his personal financial support to both proposals.

The London German Sunday School Society also promised to assist.³³ On 21 May 1838, Pastor Christian Gottlob Teichelmann and his former student, Pastor Clamor Wilhelm Schurmann, sailed from London³⁴ on the *Pestonjee Bomanjee* with the new Governor, Colonel George Gawler.³⁵ Colonel and Mrs Gawler were avowed evangelical Christians.³⁶ They spent much time in conversation with the missionaries.

Among other things, Schurmann and Teichelmann expressed their strong belief in the validity and worth of Aboriginal languages:

Naturally our conversation was about the country to which we are going. Surprisingly, His Excellency said that the best way to educate the natives would be to bring them nearer to larger towns. Naturally I spoke against such an idea and so did Teichelmann. If the natives blended with the Europeans, the language of the natives would be lost. His Excellency and Mr Hall then agreed and stated they would do everything possible to preserve the native language.³⁷

They arrived on 13 October 1838, disembarking the next day. Schurmann was just twenty-three years old, Teichelmann thirty. Schurmann's diary for that day set the tone of his and Teichelmann's future observations about Aboriginal people: it was objective and detailed with a sufficient touch of personal opinion to lend their writings an air of honesty:

...we saw our first natives, one man and two women, and then another group with one man, two women and a child. I spoke to them, and found the men less willing to talk than the women. They are of medium height, and the men have a high chest and strong limbs. Their hair hangs down in thick curls and is often smeared with red ochre to keep off the heat. The women seem to wear their hair the same length (a hand's width) as the men, but the curls and the pigment are missing.

Their skin is not black as a Negro's, but rather brown. The men can be quite handsome, but the flat broad nose can look quite unpleasing to us. To our eyes, the women are less attractive than the men, with lower foreheads and with thin flat hair covering their cheeks.³⁸

At first, the missionaries found themselves with nowhere to live and unable to draw on their letter of credit from George Angas. They were befriended by a number of prominent citizens, including the Governor, whose acquaintance they had already made, the Aboriginal Protector, William Wyatt, and the Congregational minister, Thomas Stowe. They soon were allocated a site on the bank of the Torrens River where Wyatt gave them use of a temporary building which had been intended to be an Aboriginal school. Governor Gawler had two small white cottages erected for them there.³⁹ This was just to the east of what is now the Morphett Street Bridge,⁴⁰ the construction of the first form of which obliged the missionaries to move to a new site somewhere near the present jail.⁴¹ The Aboriginal camp became known as the 'Location'.

From the day they stepped ashore, Schurmann and Teichelmann assiduously collected words and learnt the language of the Kaurna, the local Aboriginal group. 'I asked some of them their words for the sun and different part of their bodies,' wrote Schurmann on that first day, 'and they were very willing to answer.'⁴²

During the first weeks they established a friendly relationship with the Aboriginal people who camped on the outskirts of the tiny white settlement of Adelaide. They were invited to corroborees and acquired a substantial vocabulary, Schurmann in particular exhibiting a flair for rapidly acquiring the language. Their positive attitude to Aboriginal languages was strengthened by their own experience of being foreigners in an English-speaking colony. On 4 November in the Congregational chapel, they conducted Adelaide's first Lutheran service with a congregation of one. The three together joyfully 'greeted our Lord in our mother tongue'.⁴³

Discussing the missionaries' first year, Clamor Schurmann's great grandson, Edwin Schurmann, observed that 'all current diary entries dealt with the natives and their affairs'.⁴⁴ Their nearest Aboriginal neighbours were Wattewattipinna and his family. This man became a trusted informant from whom Schurmann learned much. Wattewattipinna told him of the stars and the legends associated with them; of their belief in immortality; of the *Munaina*, beings who lived long ago; of the details and meaning of initiation ceremonies; of Nganno who had walked their country, assigning to it the names by which it was now known.⁴⁵

The missionaries rapidly became involved in the affairs of the

Aboriginal people. They soon realised that in and around Adelaide they were not observing unspoiled traditional Aboriginal society, but its disintegration. They were distressed by the treatment of the Aborigines. On 31 May 1839 they witnessed the 'sad spectacle' of the hanging of three Aborigines convicted of murder. 'The sensation of the colonists was great,' wrote Schurmann.⁴⁶

Unlike the other colonists, the missionaries knew of the deep sorrow of the Aboriginal kinfolk. 'On many mornings and evenings I heard their loud laments,' wrote Schurmann.⁴⁷ In time, the missionaries were to come to understand the gross injustice of what was happening, but already they felt uneasy.

During the first two years, the two missionaries travelled a great deal with the Kaurra on hunting expeditions and other journeys, particularly in the company of Tuitpurro, who had made Schurmann his brother. During these trips, Schurmann's hopes of gaining 'a better knowledge of their way of life and language were entirely fulfilled'.

'I have also enjoyed,' he wrote, 'the gracefulness and decency evident among the natives, and particularly the obedience of the young men toward the older ones.'⁴⁸ These occasions also gave them an opportunity to exchange information with their Aboriginal friends. Schurmann's new insights into Aboriginal culture and experience enabled him to speak of a Christ who was comprehensible in their own cultural terms:

[I gained] an important insight into the religious imaginings of the natives. But I enjoyed a no-less-great pleasure in teaching some of them the main principles of the Christian religion. I told them that. . . Jesus has been circumcised like the black men, had thought well, spoken and done well, then was hanged by his country people, but on the third day he went to heaven. Though my explanation was deficient, I was fortunate to have used the biblical teaching that Jesus had a father on earth. When they questioned whether I had seen all this in heaven, I answered that Jesus took twelve young men, who told it all to their friends and wrote it on paper so that people like myself, Teichelmann, Howard [the Colonial Chaplain] and Kavel could tell it to their listeners. How easily one could be misunderstood through lack of knowledge of their language!⁴⁹

By the end of 1839, the missionaries felt that they were suffi-

ciently fluent in Kaurua to commence schooling the children. They opened their school on 23 December, with Schurmann mostly responsible for the face-to-face classroom teaching:

There were seven [children] and a few adults, including Ityainaitpinna. He followed the letters so fast that he was soon a help to me with the teaching. . . Brother Teichelmann has printed all the letters of the alphabet for me in Indian ink. I have these on little boards and, with a row of nails on the black-board, I can assemble them as I wish.⁵⁰

Within a few days the enrolment rose to around twenty pupils, mostly children. Schurmann, already popular, proved also to be a competent teacher. He was worried by the same problem which confronted any missionaries who tried to teach – how to maintain progress when the pupils' other obligations took precedence over schooling:

Today all the South tribe (Putpameyunna) invited most of the Forest men (Wirrameyunna) to go hunting, which meant that my school was empty. I have a lot of joy in seeing the more progressive ones learning their letters and enjoying the gospel tales, but I sometimes fear that the wild life may make them forget.⁵¹

Despite fluctuating attendance, there was real progress in the school. The missionaries believed strongly in the use of Aboriginal languages as the medium of instruction. Schurmann wrote to George Angas about it in April 1840:

We of course instruct them in their own language and think it not only unnecessary and unjust, but altogether impracticable for the present to introduce the English language. We hitherto must be contented with the single sheets and letters pasted on small boards, but we feel now the want of a small spelling book which we hope soon to be able to compile and print. I feel a great interest and some delight in this however feeble beginning, and hope and pray to God that it may go on with success. . .⁵²

Schurmann and Teichelmann's attempts to conduct formal church services were less successful than the school, a failure

they attributed partly to their inadequate grasp of the language and partly to Aboriginal preoccupation with other matters. The school, however, continued to provide evidence of progress. On the Queen's Birthday, 25 May 1840, the schoolchildren demonstrated their achievements as part of the celebration. The Governor spoke to them and the newspaper on Tuesday 26 May 'reported favourably on the children's display'.⁵³

Schurmann and Teichelmann worked on a description of the Kurna language, calling for subscriptions to the publication in an advertisement on 10 June.⁵⁴ The book was published and released on 21 November with the full title *Outlines of a Grammar: Vocabulary and Phraseology of the Aboriginal Language of South Australia, Spoken by the Natives in and for some Distance around Adelaide*. The missionaries maintained a keen interest in language and ethnology and published a number of other small volumes during the next few years.⁵⁵

Schurmann and Teichelmann were pleased when, on 9 August 1840, two more Lutheran missionaries arrived in Adelaide from Germany, Pastor S. Klose and Pastor Heinrich Meyer. Meyer was to become a lifelong friend of Schurmann. Now that there were four missionaries, the Governor decided to allocate them to different regions. Teichelmann and Klose were to remain in Adelaide, Meyer was to go to Encounter Bay and Schurmann to Port Lincoln.⁵⁶ Teichelmann, with Klose as his assistant, continued with the school on the 'Location'.

The colonists who cared about what was happening to Aborigines were impressed with the dedication of these two missionaries. One newspaper report recorded:

Of the great, laborious and self-denying zeal of the German missionaries amid hardships of which few possess any adequate idea, the feelings of the colonists towards them have ever been those of unabating and unqualified respect. Fulfilling the high purpose of their mission, they have laboriously devoted themselves to the acquisition of the language of the Aborigines and have, perhaps, carried their linguistic attainments in this department to as high a pitch of acquisition as has ever been done for any other persons under equally disadvantageous circumstances. At their personal risk, a grammar and vocabulary of the native language was published. . .

Besides this, however, it is known to all who take the trouble of visiting the 'Location' or of informing themselves of what the missionaries are really doing, that they are constantly at their post, either conversing with the adults or instructing the children, and endeavouring to impart to them the blessings of salvation through the knowledge of a crucified Christ. . .⁵⁷

There were, however, a large number of colonists who were antagonistic to the missionaries. These included those who were convinced of the inferiority of Aborigines and those who resented the fact that the missionaries sometimes frustrated their attempts to exploit the Aboriginal women. There were, in any case, several hundred Aborigines and only two missionaries with little power or authority to protect them. Teichelmann and Klose were distressed observers of a slow but inexorable corruption of Aboriginal people and their society. They did, nevertheless, find some encouragement in their work. Not only did many children become literate but some, both children and adults, became Christians.⁵⁸

The new Governor, George Grey, was less sympathetic towards the missionaries' strategies than Gawler had been. Grey believed that Aboriginal education should be exclusively in English. He also believed that in the long term, the Government could run schools better than missionaries, not least because this could guarantee funding.

In this, Grey was not altogether wrong. It was a period of economic crisis of depression proportions, during which dwindling support was soon to end the work of Teichelmann and Klose and that of the other two missionaries as well. In 1842, the Dresden Society informed the missionaries it could no longer provide financial support. On 6 June 1842, a group of concerned colonists rallied to the missionaries' aid at a meeting which was described as 'one of the most numerous and highly respected meetings held for any religious purpose in the province of South Australia'.⁵⁹ It was chaired by the Advocate-General, William Smillie. In his address he said:

It was our duty, as witnesses on the spot, to testify to the exertions of the missionaries, but it was also our duty who benefited by their exertions to contribute to their support. It must not be forgotten that the German missionaries had a strong claim on

the community. . . The Germans were the only ministers among the Aborigines. They alone of the ministry had mastered their languages and were intimate with the feelings, customs and modes of the Aboriginal people. And most piously had they persevered in their arduous task. . .⁶⁰

Leading citizens formed a committee to try to negotiate with the Dresden Society and to collect contributions locally. The Governor assisted by paying Teichelmann as a part-time interpreter. As a result, the missionaries carried on for several more years. Slowly, however, their support dwindled. One reason was that, like all the other early missionaries, they did not achieve the kind of spectacular successes which mission supporters longed to see as a reward for their donations. This was exacerbated by the fact that the Lutheran congregations in South Australia were struggling financially.

A far deeper reason was that, as white settlement of South Australia began its second decade, Aboriginal people in the vicinity of close settlement entered a phase of social disintegration, ill health and population decline. The same sequence of events that had occurred around Sydney and Melbourne was being repeated around Adelaide. It salved the consciences of many colonists who could rationalise away the deaths as inevitable and therefore not their fault. The best thing to do, many said, was nothing: 'Leave the blacks alone. You are only wasting time, and money, and talent. They are doomed to extinction and the sooner they are extinct, the better.'⁶¹

Teichelmann and Klose, to their lasting credit, reacted vehemently to this sinister rationalisation of the truth in words which rank among the most powerful, balanced and striking Christian responses of the nineteenth century:

Who is responsible for their acquisition of the white man's vices and diseases? Is it not the depraved whites who infect them morally and physically? Why are they doomed to extinction? Is it not largely because of the bad habits some white people teach them and because of diseases they transmit to them? Who must take the greater blame for their degradation and acquired corrupt practices, the benighted blackfellow himself, or the vicious white men upon whom the light of reason and the blessings of civilisation have been shed in vain? Why are many

of the natives not taking kindly to the teachings of the white man? Among other reasons also because they lose confidence in the white man, when they see some of their number abused and ill treated by white men, and their wives and sisters and relatives becoming the victims of the most loathsome diseases which formerly were utterly unknown to them.⁶²

The view that Aborigines were moving towards extinction eventually influenced not only popular white opinion and government policy development, but Christian conscience as well. The missionaries' spirited responses only temporarily revived the dwindling contributions. Soon the funding ceased altogether. Moorhouse, as Protector, took over the school as a government-sponsored institution.

Teichelmann and Klose moved out to Morphett Vale to supplement their meagre income by farming, hoping in vain that the Aborigines might follow them. They named their enterprise 'Ebenezer', but Aboriginal people evinced no desire to go there. Poverty-stricken, Teichelmann accepted an offer to become pastor of a white congregation. Klose, in desperation, went to dig gold, and actually found some. No-one begrudged him his little piece of good fortune, although Schurmann said that he would sooner dig potatoes.⁶³

In a major modern survey of Australian Aboriginal languages, a terse comment under the heading 'Kurna' reads: 'This tribe was extinct by 1850.'⁶⁴ This is an overstatement, but not by many years. By that date the Adelaide population was declining very rapidly. When the majority of the remaining young people were taken to Poonindie late in the same year, the Kurna as a social group effectively disappeared.

Heinrich and Friederike Meyer at Encounter Bay

Heinrich Meyer, just before he left Germany for South Australia, married Friederike Wilhelmine Sternicke, lady-in-waiting to Princess Marie of Prussia. This fact, which seems to have intrigued many writers, is often all that is said of Meyer, particular attention being drawn to Friederike's demotion from palace to isolated mission shack, from attending to royalty to dealing with Aborigines.

Friederike, however, proved to be a dedicated and versatile woman. When Adelaide residents told her Encounter Bay was

dangerous, she replied, 'My faith and trust in God has enabled me to overcome all fears and apprehensions as regards my safety at Encounter Bay.'⁶⁵

Police had been stationed at Encounter Bay, at what is now Victor Harbor, in 1839 and the Government had constructed two small buildings, a police residence and a visitors' quarters for government officials, nicknamed 'Government House'.⁶⁶ The Governor approved the construction of a mission house within the same complex⁶⁷ into which the Meyers moved in 1840.

The Aboriginal people of the Encounter Bay region had been rapidly 'pacified'. There had been a number of violent clashes and some punitive retaliation by police. The Meyers arrived just after the two Aboriginal men had been hanged for alleged complicity in the *Maria* incident, under what the Governor called 'martial law', a thought-provoking admission in view of the accepted dogma that possession of Australia was not by force. As a result, there was now an uneasy peace at Encounter Bay.

Meyer immediately set about learning the local Raminyeri (Ramindjeri) language and conducting a school attended mainly by young men and boys. The school was at first held in the open, but the Governor later permitted Meyer to use 'Government House', afterwards approving the construction of a school building.⁶⁸ Meyer's success in teaching the young people was admired by all who visited Encounter Bay, as was his rapid acquisition of the language. Like Teichelmann and Schurmann, he too published materials on the language of his region.⁶⁹

Both Heinrich and Frieda became much loved and respected by the Encounter Bay Aboriginal people. Like his colleagues, Meyer's interest in the Raminyeri language contributed significantly to his popularity. Another factor was that he simply taught the young and talked with the older people. He did not demand anything of them or try to turn them into labourers and domestics.

The Meyers, however, suffered the same financial problems as their Adelaide colleagues. Meyer actually ended up supporting himself and his growing family by carting goods to and from Adelaide. Finally, in 1848, he could survive no longer and accepted an offer to become pastor of the Lutheran congregation at Bethany.⁷⁰ The Aborigines were particularly upset. He died fourteen years later in 1862. Even after so long a period, the grief of the Encounter Bay Aboriginal people was very real. His death, it

was said, 'cast a deep gloom over his former flock at Encounter Bay'⁷¹ and their lasting affection for him was widely commented upon.

Frieda was also loved and remembered. After Heinrich's death, she lived with her daughters at Hahndorf. Every May, for twenty-seven years, the Encounter Bay Aboriginal people visited her, delighting in her children and grandchildren. After Frieda's death in 1889, they continued to visit her daughter Mary. When, in turn, Mary died, the Aborigines declared:

Mother Meyer dead; Mary Meyer dead.
Come no more.⁷²

And they came no more.

Clamor Schurmann at Port Lincoln

Schurmann was appointed by Governor Gawler to Port Lincoln in 1840 as a Deputy Protector of Aborigines. He had already agreed with his fellow missionaries that he should go to Port Lincoln to start a school there, but he had doubts about the advisability of occupying two posts. He wrote:

The Governor, through the Protector Mr Moorhouse, offered me the office of Deputy Protector in the district of Port Lincoln, with a salary of £50 and lodgings. At first I was very much adverse to this plan because Port Lincoln was so far out of the way and quite unknown to me, and Encounter Bay with the numerous tribes on Lake Alexandrina, who all speak the same dialect, promised to become an intensive and interesting field for missionary labour. Besides, I was doubtful whether my friends in Germany would approve of such a combination of offices. But His Excellency, who I was assured would advise me nothing but what he was convinced would benefit the natives, refuted all my objections, saying that I have been sent to SA generally and not to any particular portion of it.⁷³

Schurmann's prediction that it would be difficult to balance divided loyalties turned out to be accurate. In Port Lincoln, he rapidly gained the impression that the townspeople did not want the Aborigines near the town and that his presence was therefore not generally welcome.⁷⁴ Many Port Lincoln settlers imported tick-

et-of-leave men from Van Diemen's Land as stockmen. Given the brutal treatment of Aborigines there, this act did not tend to improve an already tense situation.⁷⁵ A few of the more prominent citizens, however, befriended Schurmann, particularly Dr J.B. Harvey.

Schurmann immediately set about acquiring a knowledge of the local Nawu language, becoming a close friend and confidant of several Aboriginal men. He later opened a successful school for the Aboriginal children, but at first very few Aboriginal people came near the town.

He soon found himself at odds with the Port Lincoln police. The town was tense as there had been some serious incidents on surrounding pastoral properties. The most serious involved the spearing of young Frank Hawson. A few days later a party of nine Aboriginal men, some quite elderly, came into town. Schurmann, quick to take the opportunity of meeting them, visited their camp site and had an amicable conversation. Eager to capitalise on his first meeting, he returned to their site the next day, only to find that the police had cruelly beaten and jailed them.

Schurmann told Harvey and they immediately took food to the Aborigines in the police cells. They 'accidentally' left the door open, enabling the prisoners to escape. Schurmann officially reported the incident to Moorhouse (the Chief Protector) which seriously strained Schurmann's relationship with the police.⁷⁶ Things became even more tense when a petition was drawn up in the town supporting Governor Gawler's action in granting the Police Commissioner power to summarily try and execute Aboriginal suspects. There was a public meeting. 'Everybody present signed the statement, except me,'⁷⁷ wrote Schurmann.

Schurmann's diary indicates that while he accepted that the actual Aboriginal offenders should be arrested and punished, he strongly believed that the law should be applied to them in the same fashion as it applied to whites. They should be innocent until proven guilty. Furthermore, Schurmann believed that the police should not involve themselves at all in matters which concerned Aboriginal law only:

The Government should remember that the natives have rules of their own, and customs of their own, and are to all intents and purposes different from white men. We regard it as a mistake to

try these people by the white man's law before they have been educated to understand that law and to know that actions contrary to that law will be punished. Nor should the natives be brought from the interior to Adelaide to stand their trial.

If the trials took place in the locality where the crime was committed, it would probably have a deterrent and beneficial effect on the natives. An attempt should be made to deal out justice among the Aborigines according to their own laws. They have laws and rules and customs of their own for the punishment of a crime and they do not hesitate to carry them out, therefore more would be achieved if they were tried and punished according to their own laws.⁷⁸

Schurmann made numerous friends among the Nawu people, especially Punalta who saved his life when he was weak from thirst and exhaustion in the bush. He accompanied them on hunting excursions and was very pleased when, after a few months, he felt that the Aboriginal people accepted him, seeking him out when they had any needs. The Aboriginal people with whom he associated were generally peaceable and genuinely upset when Aborigines from other more remote regions came into the district and harmed white pastoralists or their property.

The crisis for Schurmann came in March 1842 when two white men and a white woman were killed on one of the sheep stations. Schurmann was as upset as anyone else and he noted that his Aboriginal friends were also upset, realising as they did that this would spoil their amicable relationship with the whites. In his role as Protector, Schurmann agreed to accompany the Aboriginal trackers who were going with the police in search of the killers. They came across a camp of Aborigines among whom they thought the suspects might be.

Schurmann later wrote:

We proceeded downhill toward the camp and, as we came over a small rise which had hidden our approach, the natives fled in all directions. Only four men and a few women remained. Driver ordered Stewart to shoot the native nearest to us. He repeatedly called: 'Knock him over'. I asked Driver why he ordered the man shot when he was unarmed and could have been taken prisoner. He said that he didn't want any prisoners, since they were useless.⁷⁹

Back in Port Lincoln, Schurmann heard from Yutalta, one of his Aboriginal friends, that many Aboriginal people in the district had been randomly shot by other parties searching for the alleged criminals. A few weeks later, Lieutenant Hugonin and a party of sixteen men of the 96th Regiment arrived to seek the murder suspects. Schurmann agreed to accompany them because he felt he may have been able to recognise the innocent and prevent their being harmed.

The party came across a group of Aborigines on a beach who, instead of fleeing, awaited their approach and told the soldiers they were innocent, that they had been with other white people on the day of the murder. One of the men, Yamba, recognised Schurmann and came up to speak with him. As they stood together conversing, a soldier fired his pistol at Yamba, but it misfired. Desperate, Schurmann knew the soldiers were anxious to shoot, but he did not know how he could protect the people.

Later he recorded his horror and grief:

At first there were three native men, two women and some children. Then a fourth man, Nummalta, was observed by the soldiers. A soldier shot a bullet into his abdomen so that his intestines protruded on each side. The bullet passed below the left rib and left of the body on the right hip. This man was ten to twenty steps from the other natives, standing in the water, occupied in spearing fish.

I hadn't noticed him and did not hear the shot fired. My entire attention had been concentrated on seeing that the other three were not shot. I was horrified when Nummalta came to me with dreadful wounds and a terrified expression, and saying that he was a friend and not a killer. 'I Kappler, I very good.' When he heard that they wanted to take him to Port Lincoln, he said: 'I bamba bye-bye (I will stay)'. For a few moments he leaned on two of his friends, but soon sank to the ground, laying his head on the lap of another friend. He begged me for my handkerchief with which he covered his face. His eyes were now glassy, so he could not last much longer before his deliverance.

I have known this man for over a year, and he was always so good and open. The year before he had been our 'pathfinder' when we went to Punyunda. . . I had last seen him at Wadnelli, two miles from the town, indeed on the same day that Biddle was murdered. It was like a knife in my heart to see this in-

nocent man shot, and I could not hold back the tears.⁸⁰

Schurmann then left the search party and wrote to Moorhouse regarding his action: 'I left the party next morning and came to town, feeling it inconsistent with my missionary character and good faith with the natives to witness such actions.'⁸¹

Over the next weeks, Schurmann heard of many more deaths from his Aboriginal friends, all of whom told him that the real killers were not of their Nawu group, but from another tribe much further north. On one occasion he wrote:

This morning I went to see the natives released from captivity to find out about them for myself. Wornama told me that the following natives had been shot: Ngulga, Munta, Tubu, and two children named Tyilye and Tallerilla, aged ten and twelve years. Munta and Tubu accompanied us to Mallei (in the search party which left on April 2), and the former was in my house when the news arrived of Biddle's murder. So heinous are the whites! Mr Driver said the butchery will continue until they hand over the guilty ones. But it hasn't even been proved that the guilty ones are among them. It is possible, as they insist, that the real murderers are somewhere in the north.⁸²

Schurmann wrote again to Moorhouse advising that the innocent continued to be killed and that as Protector he had no power to protect. 'Circumstances are gradually convincing me,' he wrote, 'that my presence will not much longer be wanted in this part of the province.'⁸³

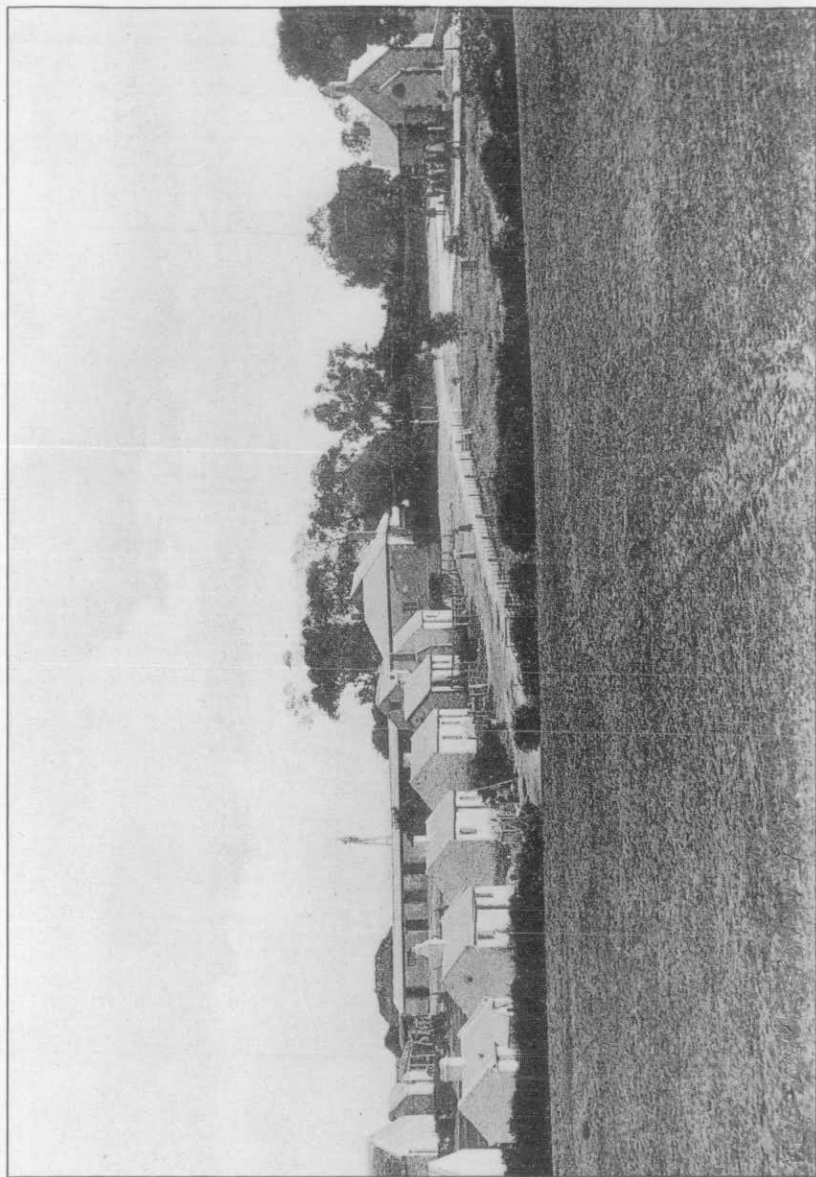
Schurmann's conversation with the senior police officer in Port Lincoln is worth quoting in full:

Police Official: You are a deputy protector, and as a government official it is your duty to assist me to find out and arrest the murderer.

Schurmann: I shall gladly render you all the assistance in my power consistent with my position as missionary; but I cannot play the role of a spy, as it would be detrimental to my work as missionary.

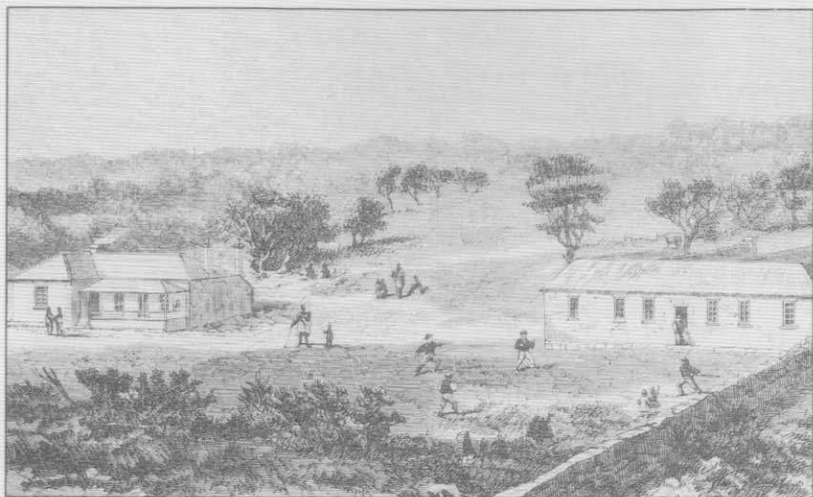
P.O.: But you are also a government official.

S.: That is true: but I am not a policeman, or police-spy appointed to do the work of a policeman.



44. Point McLeay Mission

Acknowledgement: Daisy Bates Collection, University of Adelaide.
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45. Cricket practice, Poonindie

Acknowledgement: *Town and Country Journal*, 17 June 1874,
National Library of Australia. Reproduced with permission.



46. Display of agricultural equipment, Poonindie

Acknowledgement: *Album of Australian Views*, 1886,
National Library of Australia. Reproduced with permission.

P.O.: I see, it is cowardice on your part. You are afraid of the blacks.

S.: It is nonsense to talk like that, as I daily mix with the blacks, and even go to those who are very hostile to white men, in order to undo the harm done by some white people, and to persuade the natives not to take revenge on innocent white people who have done no harm.

P.O.: I shall report to the authorities that you refused to assist me.

S.: I do not mind, as long as you make a full and fair report. I am willing to accompany you and to act as interpreter, or in any capacity consistent with my office as missionary, but not as spy, or detective, or policeman. If I were to comply with your demand, I might just as well pack up my belongings and return to Adelaide, because compliance with your demand would prove the death-blow to my office and work among the natives.⁸⁴

Schurmann found himself in an invidious position. He was unpopular with many Europeans because he championed the interests of the blacks against white settlers. On the other hand, apart from his close Aboriginal friends, many Aboriginal people saw him as an apologist for the whites, partly because he was so frequently called upon to interpret for the courts or for police, and partly because he often exhorted the Aboriginal people not to put themselves in danger by harming whites.⁸⁵ Schurmann knew that for this reason he was often in danger himself, but he was not one to shirk what he knew to be his duty. He continued to remonstrate with the police and military. He was appalled at their attitude to the situation. Schurmann reported that on one occasion, the police shot an Aboriginal man and sawed off his head:

The soldiers and policemen stuck the head on a pole and put it on an old pig sty, forcing a short clay pipe between the teeth. I remonstrated with the Lieutenant against the impropriety of such conduct, but could not prevail on him to put a stop to it.⁸⁶

Some years later, in an uncharacteristic display of brutality, Aborigines killed John Hamp, found a saw and cut off his head. Schurmann remembered from whom they had learnt such an act.⁸⁷ He was not alone among the early missionaries to note that torture and mutilation perpetrated by Aborigines were in imitation

of the whites. Schurmann felt that the whole system was against the Aborigines, confiding his feelings to his friends in Adelaide:

It is bad enough that a great part of the colonists are inimical to the natives; it is worse that the law, as it stands at present, does not extend its protection to them, but it is too bad when the press lends its influence to their destruction. Such, however, is undoubtedly the case.

When Messrs Biddle and Brown were murdered, the newspapers entertained their readers week after week with the details of the bloody massacre, heaping a profusion of epithets upon the perpetrators. But of the slaughter by the soldiers. . . among the tribes who had had nothing to do with the murders – of the teachery of attacking in the darkness of the night, a tribe who had the day before been hunting kangaroo with their informers, when one of the former guides to the magistrate's pursuing party was killed among others, of the wanton outrage on the mutilated body of one of the victims; of these things the press was as silent as the grave.⁸⁸

When he was able, Schurmann persisted in his efforts to establish a farm and a school. He was allocated a block of six acres about three kilometres out of town. Schurmann felt, like most missionaries, that the Aborigines should be 'settled down'. This view was partly due to the same work ethic, the same linking of Christian behaviour with European lifestyle. Like so many others, he, too, regarded the Aboriginal lifestyle as an indolent, wandering life.

In Schurmann's case, however, there was another factor. He became aware that Port Lincoln Aborigines had little other option. Their hunting lands had been gradually decreased and on what was left they were unwelcome. Schurmann felt that he could help them survive by assisting them to acquire the skills of settled life. A few of Schurmann's closest friends among the Aborigines joined him in his project. In 1843, they gained a further eighty acres of which they initially dug, hoed and planted wheat on two-and-a-half acres. The Aborigines actually succeeded in harvesting their own wheat.

In 1844, Schurmann was called to Adelaide to act as court interpreter, being away for about a year. On his return, his Aboriginal friends poured out to him pathetic stories of killings

and ill-treatment. Schurmann was particularly angered at the injustice of a legal system which virtually denied Aboriginal people a fair trial or even access to courts if they had legitimate grievances against whites:

Notwithstanding the Aborigines are so-called British subjects, and in spite of the so-called protection system, there is no shadow of protection for them, while they are debarred from the first and most important of all liberties, namely, that of being heard in a Court of Civil Justice.⁸⁹

Schurmann also saw most clearly that the presentation of the gospel was marred by the example of a corrupt but so-called Christian white community:

What awful and melancholy reflections crowd upon one's mind in thinking of [the settler's actions]. But what conclusion must a poor people, whom a Christian civilised nation call savages, arrive at with such facts before them?⁹⁰

Schurmann became desperate to do something positive for the Aborigines. He had done all that was humanly possible to intercede on their behalf. He wanted to give them hope. He saw this in terms of a place for them, isolated from white corruption, a place where they could acquire farming skills and where the children could be schooled. Other than that, he saw no other future than that of oppressed fringe dwellers to a corrupt white community. Schurmann tried all sources of assistance, but his plans were thwarted at every turn. He suffered the same decrease in funds as the other missionaries. The colonial government had other priorities for its limited resources, and the Dresden Society also ceased support.

With regret, Schurmann scraped together a little money and bought himself ten acres of land at Encounter Bay. There, in 1847, he married Wilhelmina Charlotte Maschmedt.⁹¹ Frau Pastor 'Minna' Schurmann became known as a loving, gentle and hardworking woman. The Schurmanns worked their farm at Encounter Bay in poverty-stricken circumstances for a year.

In 1848, the Governor offered Schurmann the position of interpreter at Port Lincoln. He hesitated, remembering his earlier

confrontations with the police and the legal system, but the attraction of a salaried position prevailed. Back in Port Lincoln, the situation had worsened. Schurmann was immediately required once more to accompany the police, to investigate the murders of John Beevor and Anne Eastone. While these investigations were under way, it was discovered that large numbers of Aborigines had died of poisoning.

It is to the credit of Inspector Alexander Tolmer and the police that they chose to investigate the poisonings first. Aborigines took them to many places where the dead had been buried in shallow graves, all in a region which became known as Mount Arsenic.⁹² The Aborigines told Schurmann that the flour had been poisoned by Patrick Dwyer. In Dwyer's hut, the police found a quantity of arsenic. Dwyer was arrested, but the authorities in Adelaide purposely did not remand him in custody so that he could escape on a ship bound for California.

In a surprise move late in 1849, the colonial government offered Schurmann a higher salary to open an Aboriginal school in Port Lincoln. This suited Schurmann, who had resented the fact that he was paid as court interpreter, but was expected to assist the police. It also meant security as the Schurmanns now had two children, Rudolph and Luise, and were soon to have a third, Ernst. Twenty-four children attended the Schurmann's school, which lasted for about three years. It was, however, the beginning of the end for Schurmann's career as a missionary to Aborigines. His missionary society had failed him, the local Lutherans had failed him and the government was shortly to lend its support exclusively to an Church of England mission.

Schurmann's school was absorbed in 1853 into the Church of England's Poonindie Institution at Port Lincoln. Schurmann accepted a call to a congregation in Victoria, where he served in several churches for forty years. He died suddenly while attending a synod in South Australia in 1893.

It was said of him:

Pastor Schurmann. . . was of small stature and of ruddy complexion. He was of a particularly genial disposition. He was held in the highest esteem by the whole Lutheran church, because of his geniality, meekness, kindheartedness, straightforwardness, and conscientious devotion to duty.⁹³

Clamor Schurmann's ultimate significance, and that of his three fellow missionaries, lay not in his missionary achievement, but in what his life and words reveal about the powerlessness of a few good people to change the direction of Aboriginal history. There is little success that one can point to in Schurmann's Port Lincoln efforts. The opinions of his school were, at best, mixed. The Governor, damning it with faint praise, said that if the school managed to keep a few children away from their parents, it would be worth its very small cost to the government.⁹⁴

Schurmann's farm for the Aborigines was not given a chance and Schurmann himself acknowledged that spiritual success was minimal. He felt unable to say that 'any native of the Port Lincoln district had been led to embrace the doctrines of the Christian religion or to adopt civilised habits'.⁹⁵

In many ways, Schurmann and his fellow missionaries were ethnocentric, treating the Aborigines with a degree of paternalism. They saw themselves as bringing more than the gospel or, more accurately, they did not always separate the gospel from what they saw as the benefits of a settled, productive, agricultural European way of life.

On the other hand, Schurmann saw a great deal that was worthwhile in Aboriginal culture, frequently acknowledging that much that was essentially good was corrupted by European influence. Even more importantly, he defended vigorously the rights of Aboriginal people as he saw them: the right to a greater share of the bounty of the colony, the right to a fair trial, the right to protection under law. In particular, he risked his own position and reputation in outspokenly criticising the mistreatment of Aborigines by the police and the military.

These German Lutherans, however, were themselves aliens, their accented English the subject of ridicule. Theirs was a feeble voice indeed to counter the call for colonial expansion at any cost, the demand for land and the right to profit. Whereas the very existence of the missionaries was the result of a genuine concern for Aborigines on the part of European missionary societies and the British Colonial Office, the efforts of the missionaries were more often than not thwarted by the hypocrisy and cupidity of officials in South Australia like Hindmarsh, Fisher and O'Halloran, and by the actions of many settlers. Alongside their behaviour, the ethnocentrism of the missionaries was minor indeed.

The missionaries' efforts were impressive, courageous, selfless, loving and generous. They were powerless to stem the tide of exploitation and oppression. But at least they tried.

Matthew Hale and the Poonindie mission

Despite the general apathy and even antagonism towards Aborigines in early colonial South Australia, there were always people with a conscience, both among the settlers and in the government. Matthew Moorhouse, whose 'protection' of the Aborigines hardly merited that label, was nevertheless embarrassed that the granting of reserves and rations by the Government had done nothing to ensure the survival of the race⁹⁶ and wrote: 'It is very disheartening and also somewhat humiliating to see all our attempts at improving the natives, assume the aspect of failure.'⁹⁷

Senior government officials were increasingly conscious of their inability to control the situation. They punished Aboriginal crimes against whites with unyielding severity in the belief that Aborigines would thus respect British law. In one case where Aborigines were tried for murder, found guilty and hanged at the scene of the crime, the authorities hoped their action would serve as a strong deterrent to future aggression. They were unable, however, to get any Aboriginal people to attend the execution and the curious conclusion was that their reluctance to watch was because they had not yet been 'sufficiently influenced by the feelings of civilised life'.⁹⁸

In 1849, the Government Resident in Port Lincoln admitted that it was unreasonable to expect the Aborigines to act with restraint; that having been dispossessed of their land, they could hardly be expected to respect settlers' property:

The cause of the outrages appears to me to have arisen from an injudicious reliance on the trustworthy and forbearing character of the natives; their forbearance especially is kept in constant exercise by the sheep-farmers, who appear to expect that their moral perceptions should be sufficiently vivid to deter them from doing wrong, although at the same time they are to be starved out of their inheritance and allured by the presence of large supplies of provisions insufficiently protected.⁹⁹

When the Church of England church offered some positive proposals, an embarrassed government was willing to grant some support. Governor Young, in particular, was conscious of the failure of his predecessors and willing to listen to new suggestions. The first Church of England Bishop of Adelaide, Augustus Short, firmly believed that the church should be actively involved in the 'education and training' of Aboriginal people. In 1847, before leaving England, Short invited Rev. Matthew Blagden Hale to accompany him to South Australia to be Archdeacon of Adelaide with special responsibility for Aborigines.

Hale was a remarkably apt choice. He had long been interested in missionary work and actively supported the Church Missionary Society. He was free to go, having resigned his parish due to grief at his wife's death. Furthermore, he came from a wealthy and charitable family whose personal financial resources were to prove crucial in his future efforts.¹⁰⁰

In 1848, shortly after their arrival in South Australia, Short took Hale on a tour of Western Australia. There is an interesting link between John Smithies' Wesleyan Mission (then at Wanneroo) and Hale's later work at Poonindie. Short and Hale visited Smithies and were impressed with his work,¹⁰¹ becoming keen on the Christian village concept as the best strategy. The key to this plan was that Aboriginal schoolchildren should be encouraged to marry at puberty and then live as a family on reserves which they would cultivate as farms. These would in time become 'native townships' in which Aborigines would gradually become 'more completely rescued from barbarism'.¹⁰²

One of the last things Hale could be accused of was indifference or complacency. In stark contrast to the clergy who failed to protest at brutality in Van Diemen's Land and elsewhere, Hale was publicly outspoken from the outset. In 1849, for example, four Aborigines were sentenced to death for the murder of a white man while four whites were acquitted at the same sessions of the murder of Aborigines. Hale organised a protest on the ground that racial prejudice had influenced the jurors.¹⁰³ The evidence was re-examined and two of the accused Aborigines were freed.

As soon as Hale was familiar with the Adelaide situation, he faced the same dilemma which had burdened Smithies a few years previously in Western Australia: what was to be the fate of educated Aboriginal children? In the Adelaide schools, now ten years

old, most of the original pupils were in their middle to late teenage years.¹⁰⁴ Originally Schurmann and Teichelmann's school, and later Teichelmann and Klose's school, the Adelaide schools were now government institutions under the general supervision of the Protector, Matthew Moorhouse. Hale wrote:

If these young people are left to their own way for the next eight or ten months, there is every reason to suppose (because the same thing has happened over and over again with their predecessors) that they will by that time have become vitiated and corrupted, either by being drawn away again to their former wild habits of life or by associating with the dregs of the population of this city.¹⁰⁵

Hale was a man of great zeal and compassion. Although he presumed European culture to be superior, he was not blindly critical of the qualities of Aboriginal people. Most of the children in the Adelaide schools were from Adelaide itself, mostly therefore members of the Kaurna tribe. The traditional society and culture of the Kaurna who had the misfortune to live where Adelaide now stood were already damaged and their numbers were falling rapidly. Most of these young people did not have a viable culture to which to return. Hale was even-handed in his criticism of those who would harm these children: he referred to 'the vicious portion of the white population and the wild portion of the blacks'.¹⁰⁶ Hale wanted to protect the young people from the bad influence of the immoral sector of both societies and began to believe that the only way to do this was by total segregation. This plan was not totally new, as Schurmann had proposed it in 1844, but had received insufficient financial support.

Hale published his plan in his *Prospectus of an Institution about to be formed at Port Lincoln for the Religious Instruction and Moral Training of Aboriginal Natives*, in the *South Australian Register* of 28 August 1850. Following the model he and Short had devised, Hale proposed the establishment of a 'Native Institution' in the Port Lincoln District, where the young people could be 'gathered together in one little community'. While it is true that his deliberate concentration on the young drove a wedge between them and what little authority the remaining elders had, he acted out of compassion. While a portion of white society

counted the Aborigines as sub-human and to be shot, he defended their humanity. Where yet another sector of white society saw them simply as a source of cheap sex, he wanted to uplift them and give them hope. He represented the few white people who cared, people whom he called 'the quiet, retiring portion of our colonists', the decent whites with a conscience.¹⁰⁷

It is sad that Hale should find moral uprightness linked with being 'quiet and retiring', yet it was symptomatic of the frequent association of churches with conservatism, respectability and distrust of confrontational tactics. There were many whites who were appalled at what was happening and despised those who wilfully harmed the Aborigines. Theirs, however, was the minority view and, regrettably, often less strongly expressed, while the negative views of others were widely and publicly promulgated.

'Don't waste your sorrow on the Aborigines' was one of the responses two days after Hale's public announcement of the establishment of the mission. One newspaper correspondent said, 'It would be a very decided waste of sorrow to regret that the mosses and lichens and other forms of primitive vegetation should have been gradually supplanted by forest trees.'¹⁰⁸

It was perhaps Hale's combination of gentleness of spirit but public courage which made him popular with the Christian colonists. Like Smithies in Perth, Hale had the quiet loyalty and support of sincere Christian lay people such as Alexander Elder of later pastoral industry fame. Hale publicly and from the outset emphasised that the institution was to be Christian and that he hoped thereby to lead these young Aboriginal people to Christ.

He forcefully defended their humanity and therefore their equality before God:

That success. . . is possible, no-one who believes the scriptures can doubt; being men it cannot be impossible that these natives should come to the knowledge of the truth and obtain eternal life. . . To say that the individual men, women and children of any given race are absolutely and essentially incapable of attaining everlasting life would be a position which I trust no-one would venture to advance. . . How shall we dare to stay our efforts or say that we are weary of the work, until we have exhausted every means which God shall put it into our power to attempt.¹⁰⁹

Hale's proposals came at a particularly opportune moment for a government embarrassed by the prevalence of Aboriginal attacks on settlers' lives and property, and by the failure of its policies.¹¹⁰ The new Governor, Henry Fox Young, was a practising member of the Church of England and therefore inclined to support a promising initiative proposed by his own church.

Hale's proposal was quite modest. He realistically expected little financial support from the colonists and asked for no salary of his own from government or church, intending to live on his private income. He asked the Government to grant land and, for an advance of £600, to establish the Institution, £200 to be repaid at the end of eighteen months and the remainder to be a gift. After that, the Institution would require £300 per annum from the Government for rations and for salaries of a teacher, matron and a farm labourer.¹¹¹ Governor Young strongly recommended the proposal to the Colonial Office, praising Hale whose 'character, station, zeal and disinterestedness afford every chance of success in the project'.¹¹²

The first site chosen was Boston Island, just outside Port Lincoln Harbour. On 10 September 1850 Hale, five married Aboriginal couples, a schoolteacher and a builder landed on the island. In a few weeks it was obvious that the site was unsuitable, largely due to the lack of adequate fresh water. Hale applied for and was granted the lease of the Poonindie run, twelve kilometres north of Port Lincoln on the Tod River, purchasing the 3 400 sheep on the run for £1 200 of his family's resources. The Government declared the area a native reserve, leased to Hale's 'Poonindie Native Institution' at £1 per annum.¹¹³

In order to preserve his essential condition of separation from outside influence, Hale proposed to admit only children from the Adelaide schools together with some adult married couples and unmarried women, also from Adelaide.¹¹⁴ The absence of single adult males was to guarantee as far as was possible the moral tone of the Institution while the restriction that children and young people should have passed through the Adelaide schools ensured a prior degree of education and training.¹¹⁵ At its commencement, the Poonindie Institution was regarded as completely independent of Schurmann's Port Lincoln school.

Hale experienced no difficulty at all in getting Adelaide people to agree to go to Poonindie. If anything, his problem was how to

refuse those who did not qualify according to his criteria. There were nineteen residents in 1850, thirty-one by 1852 and forty-five by 1853.¹¹⁶ The Institute rapidly developed into a busy and enterprising community. In 1853, Bishop Short described the daily routine at Poonindie in a letter to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel:

At half-past six in the morning and in the evening after sun-down all assemble at the Archdeacon's cottage for the reading of scripture and prayer. The schoolmaster leads the singing of a simple hymn and the low soft voices of the natives make pleasing melody. A plain exposition follows. After breakfast they go to their several employments: the cowherd's milk. . . some were engaged in putting up posts and rails for the stockyard; the shepherds with their flocks; two assisted the bricklayer, one preparing mortar, the other laying bricks.

At the proper season they plow, reap, shear, make bricks, burn charcoal, cut wood; do, in fact, under the direction of the overseer, the usual work of a station. . . The younger children attend school; the married women wash and learn sewing clothes, making and mending. . .¹¹⁷

From the beginning, Hale was aware of the necessity to ensure a desirable future for the Poonindie people. He knew, and often stated, the problem of rejection, even of educated Aborigines, by the wider society and the demeaning prospect of their being doomed for ever to be no more than members of a servant class.¹¹⁸

Hale not only wanted the Institution to be self-supporting; he wanted it, finally, to belong to the Aborigines. He wanted the Aboriginal people rapidly to acquire independent farming skills. They were to work for wages and he expected that after a few years they would acquire both capital and technical knowledge. They would then be ready to be granted their own farms on an equal footing with any settler in the district.

No doubt, from our perspective, this can be seen as ethnocentric, a denial of Aboriginal people's right to their own land and to a life neither judged nor governed by European standards. Hale, however, saw the despair of the Adelaide fringe-dwellers and believed he was offering them a future with hope. He went far in succeeding in these goals. What he was trying to create for them

was more than is given to dispossessed Aboriginal fringe dwellers today in many parts of settled Australia.

Very rapidly, Hale reduced white supervision and showed trust in Aboriginal people's judgment. He never allocated a task that he did not sometimes carry out himself. Soon, Aboriginal teams were contract shearing on surrounding sheep stations. Initially this was due to labour shortage during the gold rushes, but they became regarded as the best shearers in the district. By as early as 1852, the success of the Institution exceeded even Hale's 'most sanguine expectations'.¹¹⁹ Impressed by this promising early start, the Government made some significant policy changes. Poonindie would henceforth be allocated £1 000 per annum on two conditions: that the Institution take in any Aboriginal person sent to it by the Chief Protector and that the Poonindie Institution take over Schurmann's school at Port Lincoln.¹²⁰

These two conditions effectively destroyed Hale's principle of total segregation, but he thought the increased grant was worth it and, furthermore, he felt he already had a reliable core of loyal and trustworthy members of the Institution who could ensure its future. Hale had admired Schurmann's work in the school and he genuinely tried hard to convince Schurmann to join him. Schurmann, however, resented Hale and refused the offer of ordination to the Church of England ministry.

Hale had already approached Schurmann a few years earlier when he was still struggling to survive as a farmer at Encounter Bay. Schurmann knew full well that the Lutheran church had neglected him and that he had found himself relatively powerless in his first Port Lincoln appointment as interpreter, but he resented hearing this from Hale. As Schurmann said:

You know that in Encounter Bay Archdeacon Hale had appealed to me to join the English church. Just before my departure he entreated me again more urgently. He mentioned the fact that I had no church backing for my work and also my 'comparative uselessness' in Port Lincoln. But I, too, have my conscientious convictions and refused his offer. I wonder about his motives. How humiliating it is that a strange church community should try to denigrate my work! But I do believe that everywhere the Lutherans have been found wanting, neglecting many areas. Much change is needed.

I have spent the first days of the week in Morphetvale with Teichelmann and Klose. Both these poor fellows are badly off, but at least they are not fighting for the privilege of following their own convictions. It seems to me that Archdeacon Hale intends to see that all the missions are consolidated. If he cannot get me to change my religion, he will find some means to move my school to the black settlement at Poonindie.¹²¹

In the end, Schurmann accepted an offer of a call to a Victorian church and all pupils at Port Lincoln were transferred to Poonindie.

The inhabitants of Poonindie were not recruited by force. This is well evidenced by the relationship between the Institution and the local Pangkala people. They camped nearby and received rations in exchange for work, but only a few who wanted to joined the Institution formally.¹²²

An important aspect of the Poonindie Native Institution was the loyalty to it which developed among the Aboriginal people who lived there, particularly those who came originally from Adelaide. On other missions, the removal of people from their own tribal country virtually guaranteed failure. Poonindie's contemporary, John Smithies' Wesleyan mission in Western Australia, was a case in point.¹²³

At Poonindie there developed a strong sense of belonging.¹²⁴ Perhaps it was partly due to the personality of Matthew Hale himself. His selflessness, friendliness and genuine care were obvious to all, and it was no doubt clear to the Aboriginal people that Hale did really intend that they should own their own farms. Perhaps, too, it was the rapid emergence of a strong, communal Christian faith. There are even stories, contrary to experience elsewhere, of Aboriginal people desperate to return to Poonindie to die.

The most notable fact of the Poonindie mission was the spiritual development of the Aboriginal members. It cannot be known who the first Aboriginal Christian convert was in South Australia, but Hale and many others were deeply moved by the confident Christian death of a young man called Takan-arro. Chosen to go to Poonindie from Adelaide, he was too ill to make the journey. He spent his last few days praying, talking of the things of God and reading his favourite Bible passages from 1 John. Both Hale and Short were constantly at his bedside.

Hale baptised him a few days before he died. Takan-arro said that he 'believed if he should die he should go to heaven, where Jesus Christ is, and that he should be happy there'.¹²⁵

Takan-arro's conversion was the first of many. Hale did not baptise anyone without evidence of belief in Christ, but he was quick to recognise and nurture the first glimmers of faith. Most of those who came to Poonindie developed such faith. Hale recognised that the Christian development he observed had begun with the dedicated work of the Lutheran missionaries in Adelaide. Several young people were baptised in 1851, more in 1852 and twenty-eight in 1853. Poonindie became a remarkably close-knit, caring community where Christian morality was normal. Drunkenness and venereal disease were unknown and only on a very few occasions was anyone asked to leave. Indeed, the worst difficulties were caused by the corrupt behaviour of white tradesmen occasionally employed.

Poonindie's one great problem was death. The Aboriginal people were no safer there from other European diseases than they were anywhere else. Six died in 1852, seven in 1853, eight in 1854. . . a total of fifty-one by 1857. Most of those who died did so confident of eternal life in Christ, a point made by Hale:

I have the happiness of being able to state that. . . the last hours of the sufferers were so cheered by the peace and hope which they derived from their belief in the blessed truths of the gospel that our sorrow, we may say, has for the time been turned into joy and our mourning into gladness.¹²⁶

There were those cynics, anxious to criticise Poonindie, who called it the 'valley of the shadow of death', but they were balanced by fair-minded people who pointed out how widespread Aboriginal mortality was.¹²⁷ Hale and the whole Poonindie community lived perpetually in the presence of death. They all came to regard it as a test of their faith. They lived happily and they died peacefully. Poonindie, Hale stressed, was in no way a gloomy place.

In Hale's papers there is a poem written by one of the Aboriginal youths. It shows not only his Christian development and his gratitude for food, shelter and security, but it also shows his awareness of a status different from that of Aboriginal people outside the Institution:

Whenever I take my walks abroad,
 How my poor I see.
 What shall I render to my God
 for all his gifts to me?
 Not more than others I deserve,
 yet God hath given me more;
 for I have food while others starve,
 or beg from door to door.
 The poor wild natives whom I meet,
 Half-naked I behold,
 While I am clothed from head to feet
 And covered from the cold.
 While some poor wretches scarce can tell
 Where they may lay their head,
 I have a home within to dwell
 And rest upon my bed.
 While others early learn to swear
 And curse and lie and steal,
 Lord, I am taught thy name to fear
 And do thy holy will.
 And these thy favours day by day,
 To me above the rest,
 Then let me love thee more than they
 And try to serve thee best.¹²⁸

Visiting Poonindie in 1853, Bishop Short reported on it to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. He baptised ten young men and a young woman. Questioning them closely, he was obviously impressed with their Christian development and understanding. Yet even Short appears to have been more impressed with their clothing and cleanliness as evidence of their Christian faith:

When the archdeacon came in from Poonindie to meet me, he was followed by ten of the elder boys and young men. . . . Some I had known in the Sunday school at Adelaide. I was agreeably surprised to see them nicely dressed in the usual clothing worn by settlers; check shirts, light summer coats, plaid trousers, with shoes and felt hats. . . . Not far off was a small native camp, and the contrast between these two groups would have convinced any candid observer of the truth. . . . that the Aborigines are not only entitled to our Christian regard, but are capable,

under God's blessing, of being brought out of darkness into light, and from the power of Satan unto God.

It was very pleasing to see these young men on Sunday morning before church sitting together reading in their Testaments or hymn-books which they had brought with them, and afterwards filling, at both services, two benches of the pretty little church.

I conversed severally with ten men and Tanda, the wife of Conwillan, in the presence of the archdeacon. . . . After hearing them and asking them questions, I agreed with the archdeacon that there was good ground for admitting them by baptism into the ark of Christ's church, believing them to be subjects of God's grace and favour. We held regular evening services at sundown; and after the second lesson I baptised Thomas Nythie, James Narrung, Samuel Conwillan, Joseph Mudlong, David Tolbonko, John Wangaru, Daniel Toodko, Matthew Kewrie, Timothy Tartan, Isaac Pitpowie, and Martha Tanda, wife of Conwillan.¹²⁹

So upper-class English was Short's cultural perspective that he went so far as to state that their 'civilisation' was proven by their cricketing ability:

One more incident I may mention in proof of their progress in civilisation: a cricket match played by the Poonindie lads and young men on a holiday given on the occasion of my visit. I was pleased at watching, with the Archdeacon, two Australian native 'elevens' thus enjoying themselves and remarked not only their neatness in 'fielding and batting' but, what was far more worthy of note, the perfect good humour which prevailed throughout the games; no ill-temper shown or angry appeals to the umpire, as is generally the case in a match of whites.¹³⁰

Short's opinions on cricket were both elitist and trivial, but this should not detract from the genuine observation that there was 'a small body of trained Christian natives, the nucleus of the native church'.¹³¹ Many Aboriginal people, including some whom Bishop Short had just baptised, became strong Christian leaders. Narrung, Todbrook and, later, James Wanganeen became evangelists, while Conwillan led church services in Hale's absence. Wirrup and Wanganeen also frequently assisted in leading worship.¹³² It had been Hale's aim to create a 'Christian village of South Australian natives reclaimed from barbarism and trained to

the duties of social Christian life'.¹³³ In many ways he could justifiably feel that he had succeeded.

In 1857, Hale was consecrated Bishop of Western Australia. With his departure, Poonindie ceased to be strictly a mission, although it remained an essentially Christian community. We will therefore provide only a very brief outline of its later history.

Hale's departure left a number of problems. First and foremost, Hale's own personality and talents were very important factors in the life of Poonindie. He had, as well, provided a considerable sum of money himself, of which he asked for only a very small proportion to be refunded. Yet another important factor was his personal friendship with the Governor. Those who followed him also felt that in his farewell speech he had told the Aborigines that he was leaving Poonindie to them, giving them what A. de Q. Robin has called 'false ideas of independence'.¹³⁴ Others, however, have seen that this is what Hale intended all along.¹³⁵

Poonindie became the responsibility of a three member trust, one of whom was the bishop. This institution, however, was to be entirely funded by the government and by its own profits. The new superintendent, a surgeon-priest, Dr Octavius Hammond, was to draw all funds from the Colonial Treasurer and it was stressed to him that the main aim of the institution was self-support. The new Governor, MacDonnell, while acknowledging Hale's 'arduous and pious struggle', did not believe that much had been achieved. The Aborigines, he said, were 'altogether an inferior race':

I think it evident that the Aboriginal race is destined to melt away entirely. All attempts to civilise them appear to fail, or, if successful, the native when civilised dies. . . . Despite of the care bestowed on them, no less than twenty out of sixty inmates had died within fifteen months. They are bound to decline. It only remains for us to see that in their decline they suffer nothing for want or ill-treatment.¹³⁶

Poonindie certainly entered a difficult era after Hale's departure. Twenty Aborigines died within twelve months. Furthermore, the new members from Port Lincoln and elsewhere did not accept the routines and ethos of the Institution in the way that the original Adelaide people had. A government investigation in 1859, led by Edward Hitchen, was particularly negative, although some

sympathetic Port Lincoln people claimed that there had been undue influence by neighbouring pastoralists who envied the Poonindie lease.

By 1862, however, Poonindie was beginning to pass its crisis, although its major aim had shifted to 'preparing Aborigines to take ultimately an independent position among the white settlers', which had not been Hale's primary emphasis at all.¹³⁷ Although Hale might in fact have been assimilating them, his actual aim was not to assimilate but to lead them to faith in Christ. Poonindie, nevertheless, gradually gave every impression of success in both aims. It became prosperous and there was a strong Christian commitment, especially among the original Adelaide people. This was assisted by the arrival of Fred Wowinda when the Yelta mission closed. Poonindie's very success, however, spelled its doom. It became even more desirable pastorally and had to survive many attempts to have its land subdivided and sold.

On an emotional occasion, Hale revisited Poonindie in 1872 after fifteen years absence. There were then eighty-six members in excellent health running a highly productive enterprise. At least three-quarters of them were committed Christians. Bishop Short, who was present, wrote a lengthy report extolling the industry, virtue and Christian faith of the Poonindie people:

Let prejudice, then, give way before the inexorable logic of facts, and let the caviller, if he can, point out a hamlet of equal numbers composed of natives from different districts of Great Britain and Ireland, so dwelling together in peace and harmony, and equally free from moral offences, or so attentive to their religious duties as are the natives and half-castes now living in the institution at Poonindie: enjoying consequently much happiness and walking in the fear of God. . .¹³⁸

In the same report, twenty years after his earlier observations on Poonindie cricket, Short still regarded their cricketing as the surest evidence of their human equality. He saw the Poonindie eleven depart for a match in Adelaide:

To those who have any doubts as to the identity of the manhood of the white and black skinned races, it may be satisfactory to learn that the same hopes and fears, the same zeal for the

honour of the institution, the same pride in the cricketing uniform and colours, the same self-complacent vanity in looking 'the thing', the same, it may be affectionate, pride on the part of the dark-skinned 'loving wife' in the appearance at Adelaide of her 'well got up' husband, animated on this occasion the (former) denizens of the wilderness; as the like feelings annually manifest themselves on the part of mothers and sisters of Etonians and Harrovians at the cricket matches at Lord's – proving incontestably that the Anglican aristocracy of England and the 'noble savage' who ran wild in the Australian woods are linked together in one brotherhood of blood – moved by the same passions, desires and affections; differing only because in his wisdom God has ordained that his revealed truth, made known first to a Syrian, 'ready to perish' from 'Ur of the Chaldees', should travel westward from the hills and valleys of Canaan; until at the appointed time the stream of divine knowledge should turn eastward and cover the whole earth 'as the waters cover the sea'.¹³⁹

Ridiculous as this seems, there is another side to this observation. The Poonindie people did not need cricket or any other English cultural activity to prove their true humanity. On the other hand, in the face of the destruction of their own culture, they had used Poonindie as a place to adapt with dignity to the culture of the invaders, accepting much of it, but never accepting all of it.¹⁴⁰ They retained an essential Aboriginality, but their new Aboriginality had been forged at Poonindie. To many it was now home.

The depression of the 1890s meant that Poonindie's profits fell markedly for the first time in many years. This provided those who coveted its lands the opportunity to pressure the government to close the Institution. The trustees gave in to government pressure – many thought far too easily, labelling the transaction 'Naboth's Vineyard'. After a long and often bitter negotiation, the Poonindie Aboriginal people finally lost virtually everything.

The Aborigines were literate and astute enough to follow the newspaper debates, including criticism of their own worth. They wrote to the papers themselves:

Sir, We would like the people of South Australia to know of the refusal of the land board to grant our applications for a few

acres of native land for the purpose of making homes, as we are compelled to leave the place where we have lived and laboured for over a quarter of a century.

We are ignorant of the principles by which the board is guided, but cannot help looking on our position as hard in the extreme. Away from here a few miles, we will be wandering strangers, homeless and helpless, and yet we must go to join the crowd looking for work.

We appeal to all fair and right-thinking men just to give our case a little thought and say if it is not a barren and hopeless outlook, and whether, keeping in view the dispossession of our race, it does not savour strongly of inhumanity.¹⁴¹

What they predicted happened. In the end, they had nowhere to go and one by one drifted away to become 'wandering strangers, homeless and helpless' in their own land. The last few people, including Fred Wowinda, were sent to Point McLeay. The meagre compensation paid by the Government was applied to Point McLeay and, later, to the Northern Territory. Hale's little church of St Matthew's, Poonindie, became the church of the white farming community.

The significance of Poonindie was not simply in its own achievement, but in the fact that it was widely acknowledged to have been a 'success'. It became the model for many subsequent missionary endeavours, only some of which had as much to commend them as Poonindie. Poonindie was economically viable, a success in European terms, according to the measure by which the whites judged – and still judge – anything done by or for Aborigines. In Christian terms, Poonindie was a spiritual success. It became a Christian community. In the face of death, the Aboriginal Christians lived with joy and died in peace. It was also, for the new generation, a place where a new Aboriginal identity was created.

Writing his reminiscences in 1889, the aged Hale recalled the Aboriginal people's 'calm, uninterrupted happiness at the approach of death'. In their presence, he said, God had given him his richest blessing. His earnest prayer was that in death, he could be like them: 'Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like theirs.'¹⁴² He died in 1895. There were many who regretted that the old bishop had lived just long enough to hear of the sale of Poonindie.

On hearing the news, he wrote to the people who had been forced to move away:

I little thought I should receive the sad news that you had been torn from your homes, where you and your fathers and mothers before you dwelt more than forty years, and that you had been scattered some here and some there over the colony of South Australia and separated from one another.¹⁴³

Tom Adams, one of the Aboriginal men who remembered the early days of Poonindie, wrote to Hale in reply, but Hale did not live to receive it:

Point Pierce

March 29th 1895

My dear father,

I with the rest of your sons and daughters who are still alive received one of your. . . letters. . . It pained us very much to learn that the news concerning the fate of Poonindie had reached you for we know such news. . . have been but a blow to you.

In your letter you refer to us no doubt having heard that in the early days of Poonindie we often had sorrowful times when it pleased God to take from us some of our beloved one first one and then another causing us much grief – [illegible] yes, not as one who have heard, but one who saw and experienced those times. We indeed had much sorrow and how at those times you used to talk to us about the Bible and taught us to remember how God said we must through much trial and tribulation enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Some of us now are here on the Point Pierce mission and some at Point McLeay mission separated from one another and feel as if we are strangers in a strange land. And now, dear father, Poonindie is taken from us, but not without leaving good results. I am sure it would please you very much to see some of the young people who have grown up. . . and who are a credit not only to themselves, but to the place where they have been brought up and who are now living monuments of the good work Poonindie has done and of Christ Jesus. . . but we can't help feeling that we are amongst strangers and the times is indeed hard with us, but we know that here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come. . .¹⁴⁴

The Aborigines' Friends' Association

In 1856, a few people concerned about the welfare of Aborigines in South Australia began meeting in the Holy Trinity schoolroom in Morphett Street, Adelaide. On 28 July 1857, a public meeting was called, chaired by Bishop Short.¹⁴⁵

Encouraged by Short's report on the apparent success of the Poonindie Aboriginal Institution, a motion was moved by the Rev. William Ingram of the Pirie Street Methodist Church and George Fife Angas of the South Australian Company, that '...in the opinion of this meeting some further efforts should be made to ameliorate the physical and spiritual welfare of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the colony'.¹⁴⁶

The motion was carried, and a committee was formed which met in the offices of the South Australian Company. The committee circulated a questionnaire among settlers and as a result decided to concentrate on the lower Murray River. George Allen was engaged to visit the Goolwa region to study the Aboriginal situation. He reported to the committee that Aboriginal people there were in destitute circumstances, severely stricken by European diseases.¹⁴⁷ There were thirty or forty children. In view of this, the committee resolved that '...it is the duty of the Christian public of this colony to offer the means of Christian education to such Aborigines - adults or children - as may be willing to accept them'.¹⁴⁸

They further resolved that they put this into effect by establishing a school in the Goolwa district and that the Government be approached for support. A favourable response from the Commissioner of Crown Lands led the committee to decide to establish a formal organisation for the purpose of 'providing relief and promoting welfare among the Aborigines of the Encounter Bay, Goolwa, Lower Murray, and Lakesides neighbourhoods'.¹⁴⁹

On 31 August 1858, another public meeting was called of citizens concerned about the welfare of South Australian Aboriginal people. An overcrowded meeting in Green's Exchange, William Street, Adelaide, chaired by the Governor, Richard MacDonnell, carried with acclamation the motion that '...a society now be formed, to be called the Aborigines' Friends' Association, whose object shall be the moral, spiritual and physical well-being of the natives of this Province'.¹⁵⁰ The Governor became Patron of the Aborigines' Friends' Association. The President was George

Angas and committee members included many prominent clergy, politicians, judges, business people and leading citizens.¹⁵¹ The AFA, however, tended to be dominated by Protestant clergy and this gave it its essential nature.¹⁵²

George Taplin and the Point McLeay Mission

George Taplin, born in Surrey, England in 1831, became a committed Congregationalist and wanted to be a missionary from the age of fifteen. In 1849, he emigrated from England to Australia. After working briefly in labouring and clerical jobs, he commenced study for the ministry in 1851 with the Rev. Thomas Quinton Stowe.

In 1853, Taplin married Martha Burnell, a servant of Stowe's who also aspired to missionary work.¹⁵³ Late in 1853, George and Martha Taplin set out on their own to Currency Creek and later to Port Elliot where, in 1854, they opened a school in the Congregational chapel. The Central Board of Education took it over but kept Taplin on as teacher. He has been described as 'a fine-featured man with a determined mouth, bushy beard and penetrating eyes'.¹⁵⁴ From his arrival in Australia, Taplin had a sense of the unjust treatment of Aborigines and a desire that the church should do something more for them.¹⁵⁵ At the age of only nineteen he wrote these words in a letter to England:

How awful to think that even Christians can coldly look on their wretched conditions and say it is no use to spend our time and money on these black fellows. They can never learn. No. No! I do think that we who by the Providence of God are placed among them and have any means of doing good to them, will be accountable to a great measure for their blood.¹⁵⁶

In 1859, the Aborigines' Friends' Association advertised for a 'missionary agent'. George Taplin applied and was accepted.¹⁵⁷ He was considered particularly suitable, being a sincere Christian, a teacher and already in the district. He was provided with a horse and instructed to tour the district to select a site in April 1859. He first considered Meyer's previous site at Encounter Bay but, after careful investigation, he recommended Point McLeay,¹⁵⁸ a traditional campsite known to the Aborigines as Raukkan ('the ancient way'). Taplin reported:

Point McLeay. . . is situated on a peninsula formed by (Lake Alexandrina) and Lake Albert and the Coorong; consequently the spot is very much isolated, being separated from the settlements by fifteen miles of water. It is a favourite resort of the Aborigines, who come there to assemblies of the tribes for various purposes.¹⁵⁹

The four Aboriginal tribes of the lower Murray lakes grouped themselves into a basic organisation they called the Ngarrinyeri (Narrinyeri),¹⁶⁰ which means simply 'we are the people'. Their plight, by 1859, was similar to the majority of Aborigines in southeastern Australia.¹⁶¹ Their first contact with Europeans was to be preyed upon by sealers and whalers, but even more destructive was the smallpox which travelled from European settlers in NSW through the Murray River tribes before the first white overland explorers followed the same path.

By 1859 there had been massacres, several Aboriginal men had been hanged for murder and active resistance had ceased. Some of them were now working occasionally on sheep stations and there was much prostitution and venereal disease. So many were dying of influenza and measles that one police trooper wrote that 'their bodies are becoming a nuisance'. They had, said one of the overlanders, 'lost all and gained nothing'.¹⁶² Fishing in the lakes, however, provided the survivors with a small degree of independence. When George Taplin arrived, the Ngarrinyeri language was still intact, but the elders were already fighting a losing battle to retain any cultural integrity.

The Point McLeay site was endorsed by the Association which applied to the government for two sections of land, two tents and £500. As well, they received substantial private contributions. A boat was purchased for £138/16/- for Taplin's use. He was authorised to engage two Aboriginal boatmen who were to receive blue serge shirts, white canvas trousers, red woollen caps and 2/- each per week plus rations.¹⁶³

Taplin left immediately, moving around the lakes in company with the Aborigines, making their acquaintance and learning something of their language and customs. By October, a builder had constructed a 'two-room cottage with lean-to' at a cost of £136/15/- into which Taplin moved with his wife, three children and a servant girl.¹⁶⁴

Taplin's early writings reveal a particularly aggressive disapproval of virtually everything associated with Aboriginal culture, against which he campaigned unceasingly, particularly in the first years of his ministry. Narrow-minded as this was, it was not mere bigotry, but a carefully considered position. Taplin believed he was working with a group whose culture was already damaged and whose way of life had been destroyed and was now irreclaimable. He believed that there was good in their past, but that this had mostly been lost as a consequence of dispossession and mistreatment:

Their country has been occupied and the game nearly exterminated. The reeds of which they used to build their houses, and the grass on which they used to sleep, have in many cases been made useless to them. The skins with which they used to make rugs, and the bark with which they made canoes, have been almost destroyed. Their present condition, therefore, is not to be taken as a fair representation of what they were in their natural state; and we must not expect to find amongst their broken and scattered tribes many of those good qualities which they used to possess as savages.¹⁶⁵

It is easy to criticise people like Taplin, if for no other reason than that they left detailed diaries full of their opinions which we can now analyse and judge. Such writings were not left by those who exploited, prostituted or shot Aborigines. Throughout Taplin's life his greatest burden was the hatred of those who resented his protection of the Aborigines so that they could no longer profit from their exploitation.

Although Taplin's views soon brought him into confrontation with the Ngarrinyeri elders, the presence of the mission seems to have been welcomed by the Aboriginal people from the outset. A decade earlier, Meyer had had his little mission about fifty kilometres to the west. His popularity guaranteed acceptance of the Taplins. Taplin himself recorded that no matter how long he was absent from his wife and family, 'never in a single instance did they receive insult or annoyance from the numerous blacks who lived on the place'.¹⁶⁶ Point McLeay mission became a ration station for the distribution of government rations and blankets, part of a network by which some settlers received goods for that

purpose. The Aborigines' Friends' Association, however, had the following more specific aims for its institution:

To instruct the natives in such industrial pursuits as may make them useful on the land and enable them to earn their own living.

To encourage and assist natives in forming civilised homes.

To instruct them in the doctrines, precepts and duties of the Christian religion.

To maintain a boarding school where the children may receive, gratuitously, the ordinary elements of an English education and be trained in civilised habits.¹⁶⁷

From the very first Sunday, services were held in the Taplins' home. Many Aborigines attended the first service, attentive to Taplin's attempt to preach in a mixture of pidgin English and Ngarrinyeri. The services were regularly crowded, with Taplin using simple picture books such as *Line upon Line* to illustrate his message. In an especially early Australian example of women's ministry, Taplin recorded his misgivings about Martha's assumption of a public preaching role:

A little incident in that first year which will give some idea of what missionaries' wives have to do sometimes. One week I had to be away from the station, and I left my wife and children and the servant girl at home. On Saturday, down came the blacks and asked Mrs Taplin, 'I say, Missis, what we do long a Sunday, no have em chapel?'

After some talk she told them to come down at the usual time, intending to have a sort of Sunday school instead of worship. The hour arrived and, to her dismay, a perfect crowd assembled . . . There was no help for it, Sunday school was out of the question, so my dear partner stood up behind the table and gave out a simple hymn and pitched the tune. This concluded, she read the scriptures and offered prayer, then gave out another hymn.

Now came the crisis; what was to be done? It was soon decided; she took a volume of *Line upon Line*, selected a chapter and made it the foundation of an address upon the subject contained therein, and kept their attention the usual time; then again sang a hymn and offered prayer, and dismissed the people. The natives said afterwards, 'My word, Missis, you very

good minister'. I don't suppose my wife seriously infringed any law of the New Testament by acting thus in such very exceptional circumstances.¹⁶⁸

Taplin initially conducted schooling for the children when and where he could, but after exactly one year, the Aborigines and Taplin completed construction of a schoolhouse. Although traditional classroom control proved a near impossibility with children quite literally climbing up the walls, Taplin nevertheless found the children good-natured, intelligent and eager to learn.

His acceptance by the original owners was not matched by the attitude of the new settlers. The Honourable John Baker, in particular, resented the excision of the mission lands from his sheep run and, with other pastoralists, the potential loss of cheap Aboriginal labour. Baker had sufficient influence, not only to initiate a Select Committee inquiry into Aboriginal affairs as a thinly disguised attempt to discredit the Point McLeay mission, but also to ensure that he was a committee member.

Baker almost certainly engineered the presentation of submissions¹⁶⁹ such as that by the Goolwa policeman, stating that the Aborigines at Point McLeay were 'in a most wretched and pitiful condition' due to a lack of food and blankets,¹⁷⁰ but the report of the Select Committee admitted that this was widely true of Aborigines generally and not confined to Point McLeay.¹⁷¹ As in other inquiries which attempted to discredit various missions, it was easy to embarrass missionaries and their societies, playing on their usual honesty in response to questions about the distribution of rations and blankets, medical attention, disciplinary measures and so on. Baker's personal vendetta was obvious by his persistent manipulation of the direction of the questioning of Taplin, moving away from central issues to minor local concerns, trying to trap Taplin, promoting the concept that he was a wowser with no experience in real life.¹⁷²

Taplin's answers showed him to have been authoritarian and strong-minded with rigid views on how to deal with the Aborigines, but also a man of conviction and sincerity.¹⁷³ Frequently, his clear biblical responses caught his questioners off-guard.¹⁷⁴ He emerged from the enquiry in a reasonably favourable light.

The first person to be converted at Port McLeay was Waukeri, a young Aboriginal man. He began to shun Aboriginal customs

and act in a more European manner. He gave up smearing his body with fish oil and ochre, began wearing European clothes and breaking the Aboriginal kinship avoidance rules. Threatened by the elders, Waukeri sought Taplin's protection. When asked why he was giving up his culture, he said he no longer wished to serve the devil but to serve Jehovah. Taplin writes:

His profession of religion had many faults and inconsistencies, as might have been expected, but still it was maintained amidst difficulties and persecutions and discouragements to the last. . . He died of pulmonary consumption in November 1864 and I trust found acceptance with him who will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax.¹⁷⁵

Waukeri no doubt did find acceptance with God, but the sad thing is that so much of what he was did not find acceptance with George Taplin, who could not see beyond his own narrow vision of the Christian life. It was a travesty of Christianity, repeated for so long and in so many places, that evidence of the efficacy of the gospel should be found in such matters as the use of fish-oil lotion, clothing and customary etiquette. It is clear from Taplin's own writings that it was from Taplin's preaching that Waukeri deduced that in order to become a Christian he had to give up ochre and wear clothes.¹⁷⁶ It was his subsequent public flaunting of his Europeanisation which angered his elders and alienated him from his community. This is not to deny the reality of his conversion, but to deny, rather, the distorted teaching which made an already difficult cross so much harder to bear.

There were several other conversions over the next few years. They were young people, obviously so much more under Taplin's immediate influence than the elderly. They were also mostly either death-bed conversions or the new converts died within a very short time. By the end of the mission's first year, seventy Aboriginal people were regularly in residence at the Port McLeay mission.¹⁷⁷ Taplin's main activities were the supervision and teaching of the children and the care of the sick and elderly.

These, too, were typical features of so many missions. As compassionate Christians, the missionaries invariably tried to assist the aged and the sick. As social engineers they adopted the strategy of concentrating their efforts upon the children. At Point

McLeay there was a demanding daily program:

Our daily routine was as follows: 6.00 a.m. in summer and 7.00 in winter the bell rang as a signal for every one to get up. From that time until 7.30 was occupied in giving out rations to the aged, infirm, and sick, and weighing out the school rations for the day. At 8.30 I gave the children their breakfast. At 9.15 we had morning prayer, and after that school until 12.00. Then at 1.00 p.m. I gave the children their dinner, and at 2.00 had afternoon school until 3.30.

Then the children went off to play, and I had time to write letters and look after any business requiring attention. This was the time I gave to translations and visitation of the camps. After 5.30 in winter and 6.30 in summer the children had supper, and immediately after we had evening prayer, and then the children went into their bedrooms and were locked in. After 9.00 the lamps were taken away and everyone retired for the night. On Saturday nights we gave all the children a complete change of clean clothes. On Sundays we had worship twice and Sunday school. My wife was matron of the school, and the making and mending of clothes came heavily upon her. After some trouble we got the natives to cook the provisions for the children, and also to act as servants in the schoolhouse.¹⁷⁸

Taplin soon found that he was overworked and so the Aborigines' Friends' Association appointed an assistant, initially Alfred Stapley, who left after a few years due to illness and was replaced by J.A. Ophel.¹⁷⁹

Like so many other missions, death from European diseases was the greatest burden. Whereas the first year of the mission was relatively free from illness, this rapidly changed. By late 1864, Taplin recorded that there had been fifty deaths in the past three years, ten recently from influenza. By March 1865, so many children were dying that the parents could not bear to part with the remainder to allow them to go to school.¹⁸⁰ Taplin began to believe that perhaps there was nothing he could do to prevent the tribes dying out. His combination of prayer and medicines was failing him.¹⁸¹

For many years, Taplin believed that the sickness was due to Ngarrinyeri cultural practices, like smoke-drying the dead or even witchcraft, but in time he began to perceive that the healthiest

Aborigines were the ones who adhered to the old customs and avoided European habits, although among the young he noted that part-white children had more resistance to European diseases.¹⁸²

Although the Aborigines' Friends' Association regarded Point McLeay as primarily an educational and spiritual institution, and the Government regarded it as a ration station, Taplin found it incompatible with his European Christian values not to provide the opportunity for Aborigines to work. It is to his credit that he encouraged their traditional fishing skills, organised systematic marketing for their catch and forcefully demanded for them a fair financial return.¹⁸³ At the mission, Taplin trained Aboriginal people in the skills necessary for the functioning of a small 'European' community: farming, butchering, baking, cooking, washing, mending, fencing, shearing and so on.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, in later years the mission became dependent upon its own produce.¹⁸⁵

Taplin was greatly encouraged in 1861 by the appointment of an itinerant missionary to his district, Rev. James Reid of the Free Church of Scotland. Taplin described him as 'a good but eccentric man'.¹⁸⁶ Reid's brief itinerant ministry was successful and very significant for the future Christian development of Point McLeay. He was liked by the Aboriginal people. He was certainly different from Taplin, not just in personality but in that he was not in a position of authority over the Aboriginal people. The significance of his ministry was that two men were converted as a result of it – Allan Jamblyn and James Unaipon (Ngunaitponi).¹⁸⁷ Unfortunately, in 1863 Reid was drowned when he struck a gale crossing the lake alone in a small boat.¹⁸⁸

Allan Jamblyn died shortly after, but James Unaipon became what Taplin termed 'a sterling Christian'. In 1864 he decided to live at Point McLeay. Shortly afterwards, James Unaipon with James Wanganeen from Poonindie and William Kropinyeri made a missionary expedition along the Coorong. James Unaipon, the first of the 'Taplin men', Aboriginal evangelists, travelled widely to preach and pray with his people. In 1871 he became the first Ngarrinyeri deacon.¹⁸⁹ In 1874, Taplin wrote:

[James Unaipon] has maintained his Christian profession in the face of many difficulties and persecutions. His coming was

most advantageous for us; it gave me what I had long needed – a steady Christian adult native, who would always take the side of truth and righteousness. He became also a nucleus around which those who were impressed by divine truth could rally.¹⁹⁰

The arrival of James Unaipon marked the spiritual turning point of the mission. His life and witness may well have been as powerful as all of Taplin's preaching. James Unaipon had been converted through a gentler and less aggressive man than Taplin, but as a Christian he understood Taplin. Taplin was overjoyed to have an adult Christian. Far from being an 'Uncle Tom', as some have suggested, James Unaipon was one of those early traditional men who, in embracing Christianity, were able to operate comfortably in both cultures.

In 1865 Taplin organised a 'class' of new Christians, 'on trial' to see if their profession was genuine. Three of these were baptised that year.¹⁹¹ Huge pressure was placed upon these new Christians to abandon Aboriginal customs. The Ngarrinyeri marriage system came under particular attack. William Kropinyeri, for example, had two wives and, although Taplin acknowledged he had already 'embraced Christianity', he had to abandon his youngest wife, Tina, before he could be baptised. This action had violent and complex consequences. Tina, Kropinyeri and his father were all beaten by the Ngarrinyeri elders. Finally, the Christian Aborigines felt obliged to arm themselves for self-protection.¹⁹²

Despite Taplin's confrontation with the Aboriginal elders, he regarded the hostile settlers as the greatest threat. He was frequently in dispute with John Baker and his employees, and later with Allan McFarlane and the Bowman brothers.¹⁹³ He had legal battles with them over land and other matters, but these were much less dangerous to Taplin than the flagrant immorality, dishonesty and general ungodliness of many of the settlers. He spoke out strongly against their sexual abuse of Aboriginal women and girls, their brutality and dishonesty, their sale of 'sly grog' to the Aborigines, their profanity and their Sabbath-breaking.

He was particularly angered by their unfair reception of his fishing project by which he hoped that the Ngarrinyeri could support themselves using traditional skills. Not only did he find it difficult to obtain fair prices, but unscrupulous whites paid the

Aborigines with bogus money and even went so far as regularly to steal the fish from the live-storage nets. The opposition to the Point McLeay mission, Taplin believed, was not simply hostility to him or to the Ngarrinyeri, but to the gospel: 'I find that one only has to show some attachment to Christ and zeal in his service and you are avoided like the plague by lots of people. . . .'¹⁹⁴

Taplin was ordained a minister of the Congregational Church in 1868, enabling him to administer the sacraments and to celebrate marriages. Gradually, the Point McLeay mission gained the acceptance of the local white settlers. They contributed generously to a church building fund, as did the Aborigines themselves and friends of James Reid in Scotland. The church was opened on 2 May 1869. Taplin wrote in his diary:

In all, 185 sat down to tea, seventy-two white people and thirty-one civilised natives had tea together in the schoolroom, the children had tea in one of the dormitories and I gave the wurley blacks tea and sugar and one pound of plum cake each.¹⁹⁵

By 1874, Taplin had baptised forty-one Aborigines, all young people. Slowly these people abandoned the Aborigines' 'wurleys' for houses they constructed themselves from stone and burnt lime. To Taplin, this was an important step in adopting a 'Christian' – that is European – lifestyle, which included, among other things, the ownership and protection of property. He noted:

The Christian natives soon began to find the wurleys very uncongenial to the practice of Christianity. There is no privacy, no security for property, and every hindrance to piety which barbarous heathenism can devise.¹⁹⁶

It was the 'wurley blacks' whom Taplin spurned. With all his zeal and devotion to his task, with his genuine affection for some of the Aborigines as individuals, he was, it would seem, permanently embittered by the early opposition of the Aboriginal elders who had opposed his early influence over the young men.¹⁹⁷ Taplin felt that ' . . . it is monstrous that. . . all the efforts of Government and Christian people should be overridden by a few old blacks'.¹⁹⁸

For many years, almost everything Aboriginal was, to Taplin,

the work of Satan. In order to become Christians they had to learn to behave as Taplin wanted them to, to accept not only Christ, but Taplin's rules as well. As a Christian protagonist, it is obvious that he would have confronted the more overtly religious practices such as initiation or funeral rites, although it is hard to justify what amounted to his disrespect for the dead. It is also obvious that Taplin would have opposed the more extreme breaches of his moral code – infanticide, for example, or polygamy. Some very heated confrontations, however, were over his insistence on the most minor matters of European behaviour – hair cutting, clothing and punctuality to name just a few.

In one unbelievably harsh demonstration of Taplin's narrow interpretation of Christianity, when a Ngarrinyeri Christian, John Sumner, struggled to farm his own land for three years, Taplin excommunicated him for getting into debt.¹⁹⁹ Taplin also restricted what he regarded as sinful European activities; not just the use of alcohol, but such trivia as card games and playing marbles, particularly on Sunday.²⁰⁰ The heathen wore paint but Christians wore clothes, Taplin contended: 'Some have passed away to the rest of God who came to us painted heathen savages, but were led to sit at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in their right mind.'²⁰¹

A strange but not uncommon contradiction in the life of many missionaries, including Taplin, was that despite their early opposition to Aboriginal culture, they developed a keen interest in it. Taplin slowly became more and more fascinated by the very customs he sought to stamp out. Eventually he spent much time with James Unaipon, systematically recording Ngarrinyeri stories and customs.²⁰² The lesson Taplin needed to learn, and which many missionaries still have not learned, was that their task was to present the simple gospel. It was the task of Aboriginal Christians to determine what in their culture the gospel might challenge and what it might affirm. Confident of both his Christian faith and his Aboriginality, James Unaipon could confidently embrace what was good and worthy in his people's past. His family showed both his Christian faith and his love of Ngarrinyeri culture. His son David Unaipon published a book of Aboriginal stories.²⁰³

Taplin was astute enough to realise that young people could and did feign conversion for their own purposes. As the following statement by Taplin shows, he also recognised that the young generation, the products of his teaching and influence, were

capable of using Christianity as part of their rejection of the power of their elders and therefore of all authority, even Taplin's:

. . . When the boys who had been in the school grew up to be youths of sixteen or seventeen, we found great difficulty in dealing with them at the first. Their education made them superior to their fellows, and their pride knew no bounds. . . It was. . . a cause of great annoyance and hindrance at the first. On the one hand the old blacks wanted to make the youths go through the disgusting ceremonies of *narumbe* (initiation) which I felt bound to oppose and, on the other, the young fellows were intoxicated with vanity, conceit, and self-assertion.²⁰⁴

The strangest paradox, however, was Taplin's attitude to the local language. He seems to have had a natural ability in languages, readily learning and using Ngarrinyeri. Although he was anxious to acquire the language and apparently excited by his progress, he seems to have felt that this was a temporary inconvenience, a step on the way to the full use of English. He actually translated some portions of the Bible, which were published in 1874,²⁰⁵ as well as some hymns and prayers.

Ironically, he did not know just how much he was honouring Ngarrinyeri culture by so doing, not appreciating at all the link between language and culture. Even when he observed the power of the word of God in the language of the people, he thought he was demeaning himself to use it:

Very small signs of spiritual life cheer the heart of a missionary to such heathen as these. Circumstances which in civilised communities have no significance are encouraging indications of movements amongst a heathen people. Such an event was the first time a poor dying woman asked me to read to her out of that 'very good book' – meaning some translations of Holy Scripture into the native language. How gladly I read and prayed with her, and encouraged her to look to Jesus! There was not much response, it is true; but yet it gave a glimmering of hope, and a glimmering is to be hailed joyfully where there has been thick darkness. Since that time I have been at all sorts of deathbeds – dark and gloomy, fearless and horror-stricken, calm and exulting. And I have noticed, in some instances, that natives who could speak good English when in health, would

entreat that I should read and pray in native when they were near death. It was so much less difficult for them to apprehend it. And, while I have done so, the talk of the wurley would be hushed and an expression of solemnity manifested in every face; and afterwards warm thanks would be given by the sick man or woman. *We cannot stoop too low to save souls.*²⁰⁶

By 1874, Taplin began to feel that he was achieving his objective: the creation of an orderly Christian village:

One Saturday night, a few weeks ago, I went, as I always do, to take away the lights at nine o'clock, see the children were comfortably in bed, and lock up the schoolroom. It was a soft, still night. When I got down there, I stood a moment and listened to the sounds around me. Nobody knew I was there.

From the young men's sleeping-room came the sound of voices singing devoutly and with feeling Lyte's beautiful 'Abide with me, fast falls the eventide'. From my own dwelling rolled the low tones of the harmonium, where my eldest daughter was practising the tunes for the coming Sabbath. From beyond, where the chapel lifted its silent form amidst the darkness, I could hear the sound of a hymn, sung in the native deacon's cottage. There a party of natives had gathered for a Saturday evening prayer meeting.

As I stood there a gentle rain began to fall, and I could not help thinking of 'My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew.' Yes, Lord, thy word shall be as the rain which cometh down from heaven, and watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud. It doth not return unto thee void, but accomplishes that which thou pleasest, and prospers in the thing whereunto thou hast sent it. And to thy holy name be all the glory for ever and ever.

To sum up the results of the mission at this place, I may state that at the time when these words are being written there are twelve families living in cottages on the place. Christian homes, conducted with more or less comfort and decency. And I know that in those homes the voice of family devotion is heard morning and evening, led by the head of each family. This has come about by Christian influence, not by any positive command on my part. On the Lord's Day, instead of a wild and oddly-dressed throng of savages, our chapel presents the appearance of a decently-dressed congregation of worshippers.²⁰⁷

George Taplin died in 1879 at the age of forty-seven and was buried at Point McLeay. Many believed he died from overwork.

The Smith of Dunesk Bequest

In 1839, Mrs Henrietta Smith, widow of Dr Peter Smith of 'Dunesk', a manor house overlooking the village of Lasswade, Scotland, decided to make a bequest for the distinct purpose of promoting Christian work among Aboriginal people in South Australia.²⁰⁸ The fate of this bequest reflects little credit on the Presbyterian Church of South Australia.

Mrs Smith's plan was to ensure the continuation of her bequest by purchasing property in South Australia and applying the rental profit for the benefit of the Aborigines. Her efforts were frustrated for twelve years by bureaucratic bungling and red tape, but eventually, by 1852, she had obtained six sections of eighty acres each at £1 per acre.²⁰⁹

In Mrs Smith's negotiations to give the land to the Free Church of Scotland, there is absolutely no doubt that she intended the money to be applied to the spiritual and material welfare of the Aborigines. Before she actually signed the deed of gift, however, she was informed that the Aboriginal race of South Australia was about to become extinct. This was a devious distortion of the truth.

The Colonial Committee of the Free Church of Scotland were no doubt relaying second-hand information based upon correspondence with church officials in South Australia. Although it was true that Aboriginal people were in destitute circumstances around Adelaide, the Presbyterians could hardly have failed to be aware that Poonindie, albeit an Anglican enterprise, was in the same year being lauded as an outstanding success, that Aboriginal people were still fiercely resisting the pastoral invasion by Europeans, some of whom were Scots, in the more remote parts of the State and that concerned citizens in Adelaide were privately considering their obligations to the Aborigines.

Mrs Smith still wanted the funds administered according to her wishes. The Colonial Committee advised her that her bequest would be useless if given exclusively for Aboriginal people, so she allowed herself to be persuaded to sign a deed of gift drawn up by the lawyers of the church. This deed made no mention of Aborigines.²¹⁰ Mrs Smith later became concerned that the broad

terms of her gift might mean that the money was not clearly understood to be for Aborigines whenever possible, so she wrote late in 1853 to the Colonial Committee:

With reference to the gift of certain lands in South Australia recently made by me to the Free Church of Scotland, I beg to state that my original design in purchasing from the Government, fourteen years ago, six sections of land in that colony of eighty acres each, was that the annual proceeds of them might be entirely devoted to the education and evangelisation of the Aborigines of South Australia.²¹¹

Mrs Smith went on to say that she had only agreed to make the gift over to 'any Christian work in South Australia' in the belief that the church would never lose sight of the welfare of the Aborigines for whom the funds were intended.

Mrs Smith herself became knowledgeable about South Australia. She personally supported George Taplin at the Point McLeay mission. She was a friend of James Reid and sent him money as well until he was drowned in 1863.

It took from 1853 to 1859 for legal complications to be sorted out between the Colonial Committee in Scotland and the Free Church Presbytery in South Australia. After 1859 the South Australian church could draw on the accumulating funds so they applied some of it to solicitors' fees, presbytery travelling expenses and other internal matters. They did give a little support to James Reid and, after 1861, decided to give £50 annually to the Aborigines' Friends' Association. By 1868, the fund contained £600.²¹²

When Mrs Smith learned that her fund was not being used substantially for work among the Aborigines, she wrote on many occasions by the hand of her sister, Jemima Russell, to the Colonial Committee. On one such occasion she wrote:

Mrs Smith of Dunesk wishes to know the reason why her black mission at Point McLeay has got none of her fund since Mr Irving went out of the committee. Mrs Smith is most particular and told Mr Irving that she wished it all spent on the conversion of the blacks. . . Mrs Smith assured Mr Irving that it was purchased for the blacks.²¹³

The aged Mrs Smith continued to write herself, up until a few weeks before her death:

I regret that a misunderstanding should have arisen regarding the object which the proceeds of the land in South Australia as purchased by me should be devoted and I therefore take the opportunity once and for all of informing the Colonial Committee of the Free Church my design in making the purchase was from the first and still is that the money accruing from it should be employed only in promoting the spiritual interests of the Aboriginal natives. Any other application of it whatever is therefore directly at variance with my original intention. The land was devoted to God for the exclusive use of the poor blacks in particular.

With regard to my giving any part of the fund to any colony but South Australian blacks alone, not whites, I would look upon as robbery as all of it was solemnly given to God for the behoof of the South Australian blacks alone, again I say not whites and no other colony has any right to a farthing of it.²¹⁴

There were some people of conscience in the South Australian Presbytery and so, as a result of Mrs Smith's strong stand, it was decided in 1871 that the entire proceeds should be divided among the Aboriginal missions. When Henrietta Smith died in July 1871, she believed that her bequest of 1839 was at last going to be used for Aborigines. She was wrong.

After Henrietta Smith's death, the South Australian Presbytery decided, through its attorney, that while using the funds for Aborigines was consistent with the actual words on the deed, they were under no obligation so to use the bequest. George Taplin and Jemima Russell appealed strongly to the Colonial Committee who advised South Australia that the money was to be divided between the Point Pearce and Point McLeay missions. The South Australian Presbytery ignored them, agreeing only to pay £100 per annum to Point McLeay.²¹⁵

By 1890, the accumulated funds totalled £2 663/8/5. When the Aborigines' Friends' Association asked for the £100 grant to be increased, the South Australian Presbytery advised them that they would, instead, withdraw it altogether. The Association published the details of their case. The *South Australian Register* supported them:

It will say very little for the fairness and generosity of the Presbyterian church if, in the face of an admittedly expressed wish, the trustees do not move a peg beyond the lines of their piece of parchment. It seemed natural enough for Shylock to exclaim, 'Tis not in the bond', but for the same plea to be urged by a Christian church is incongruous to say the least of it.²¹⁶

The South Australian Presbytery agreed only to phase out the gift, rather than withdraw it. The last gift of £20 was given in 1896. The way was then clear for the fund to be used for other purposes. The Smith of Dunesk Mission was formed to minister to Scottish settlers in remote parts of the State. The Presbytery claimed that this 'would be distinctly in the spirit of the Bequest', and handed over to them £2 900.²¹⁷

The Smith of Dunesk Mission was later to become the Australian Inland Mission. Its origins in the shameful story of the Smith of Dunesk bequest may explain why from time to time it has been declared quite forcefully that the Australian Inland Mission was *not* a mission for Aborigines.

The Smith of Dunesk Bequest was used exclusively for the AIM for forty years. It was not until Dr Charles Duguid persuaded the Presbyterian Church of South Australia to commence an Aboriginal Mission at Ernabella that the use of the bequest was questioned.

Duguid wrote:

[The Australian Inland Mission] is, and always has been, for the white pioneer population; never at any time in the interests of the natives.

There is, therefore, a Christian obligation to honour the wishes of Mrs Smith of Dunesk, Scotland that in using her money we should 'not lose sight of the welfare of the natives for whom it was first intended'.²¹⁸

As a result of Duguid's plea, the General Assembly began to use part of the bequest to support the Ernabella Mission. By the time of the formation of the Uniting Church in 1974, the proportion of the bequest being use for Ernabella had risen to seventy-five per cent, the remainder being used for the AIM.²¹⁹

Epilogue

At Point McLeay, George Taplin was followed by his son, Frederick Taplin, to whom the Ngarrinyeri objected and whose ten-year regime was disastrous. The Aborigines' Friends' Association continued to support the mission until 1916 when it became a government station, but the Association supplied a missionary until 1923. After this, a missionary was appointed by the Parkin Trust until 1943 when the Salvation Army took spiritual responsibility for the community.²²⁰

A sad comment on the life and work of George Taplin was written in the Point McLeay visitors' book seven years after his death by a visitor pleased to note the Westernising of the Ngarrinyeri: 'I have noticed the absence of native language among the children, thus showing what civilisation and Christianity can do.'²²¹

In the 1930s and 1940s, there were still elderly Aboriginal people who could recall George Taplin.²²² They remembered him as extremely authoritarian. In particular, they recalled his impatience and quick temper. Ironically, they also remembered his competence in the Ngarrinyeri language and regretted that the Ngarrinyeri hymns were not still sung.²²³

In 1974 the people of Point McLeay asked the Bible Society to reprint, after 100 years, the Ngarrinyeri (Narrinyeri) Bible translation. Perhaps George Taplin had been responsible personally for hastening the destruction of part of the Ngarrinyeri culture, but surrounding groups suffered as much if not more cultural destruction without a mission. In the end, George Taplin left them a written, concrete symbol of it which is more than many such people now have.

ENDNOTES

1. Sturt, 1834(II): 239
2. The Clapham Sect was the name given to the close-knit group of wealthy Church of England Evangelicals who lived in Clapham. Its most famous figure was William Wilberforce, and the abolition of the slave trade was their most notable achievement.
3. Gibbs, 1960: 61-78; Summers, 1986: 284-285; Reynolds, 1987: 107
4. An Act to Empower His Majesty to Erect South Australia to a British Province or Provinces, and to Provide for the Colonization and Government thereof, 4 and 5 Will.IV, C.95, 15 August 1834
5. Letters Patent, facsimile in Dickey and Howell, 1986: 75
6. Summers, 1986: 285
7. Proclamation by His Excellency John Hindmarsh. . . of His Majesty's Province of South Australia, 28 December 1836 (facsimile in Dickey and Howell, 1986: 77)
8. Berndt and Berndt, 1951: 51
9. The Colonisation Commissioners, cited in Rowley, 1972a: 74
10. John Brown Diary, 7 January 1830, cited in Reynolds, 1987: 115
11. Reynolds, 1987: 118
12. Instructions to William Wyatt, in Rowley, 1972: 77
13. Stephens, 1839: 14
14. *South Australian Gazette*, 12 August 1837
15. *Ibid*, 18 May 1839
16. Clamor Schurmann Diaries, 9 December 1839, in Schurmann, 1987: 76
17. British and Foreign Aborigines Protection Society, Papers and Proceedings, 1839 (5): 137
18. *Ibid*, p.139
19. Stephens, 1839: 12
20. Rowley, 1972a: 78
21. Clyne, 1987: 45-46
22. Clyne, 1987: 50; Summers, 1986: 289-290
23. Summers, 1986: 291
24. Clyne, 1987: 51
25. Summers, 1986: 291
26. Clyne, 1987: 58
27. Clyne, 1987: 64-65; Summers, 1986: 293
28. *Ibid*
29. Teichelmann to Angas, 16 September 1841, in Grenfell Price, 1929: 215-6
30. Cleland, 1936: 21
31. Summers, 1986: 301, 307
32. Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines, SAPP, No. 165, 1860, Appendix to Evidence of the Aborigines, p.iv

33. Price, 1929: 201
34. *Ibid*, p.85
35. Hebart, 1938: 187
36. Dickey, 1988: 36
37. Schurmann, 1987: 21
38. *Ibid*, p.50
39. Brauer, 1956: 145
40. Hebart, 1938: 137
41. Brauer, 1956: 149
42. Schurmann, 14 October 1838, in Schurmann, 1987: 30
43. *Ibid*, 4 November 1838 (1987: 38)
44. Schurmann, 1987: 40
45. *Ibid*, pp. 41-61
46. *Ibid*, p.49
47. Schurmann, 31 May 1839, in Schurmann, 1987: 40-41
48. *Ibid*, 10 September 1839, (1987: 66-67)
49. Schurmann, 1987: 41-42
50. *Ibid*, pp.80-81
51. *Ibid*, p.84
52. Schurmann to Angas, 3 April 1840, in Schurmann, 1987: 98
53. Schurmann, 1987: 104
54. *Adelaide Chronicle*, 10 June 1840
55. These included Schurmann and Teichelmann, 1840; Teichelmann, 1841; Schurmann, 1844; Schurmann, 1846
56. Schurmann, 1987: 106-107
57. Newspaper report cited in Brauer, 1956: 150-151
58. Brauer, 1956: 153
59. *Ibid*
60. *Ibid*, p.154
61. *Ibid*, p.155
62. *Ibid*
63. Schurmann, 1987: 197
64. Oates, W.J. and L.F., 1970: 93
65. Brauer, 1956: 161
66. *Ibid*
67. Schurmann, 1987: 99, 106
68. Brauer, 1956: 161
69. Meyer, 1843
70. Schurmann, 1987: 183
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72. *Ibid*, p.170
73. Schurmann, 1987: 109
74. *Ibid*, p.113
75. Brauer, 1956: 172
76. Schurmann, 1987: 117, 118
77. *Ibid*, p.121

78. Statement by Lutheran missionaries, cited in Brauer, 1956: 156
79. Schurmann, 1987: 149
80. *Ibid*, pp.151-152
81. *Ibid*, p.152
82. *Ibid*
83. *Ibid*, p.154
84. Brauer, 1956: 173-174
85. *Ibid*, p.174
86. Schurmann, 1987: 154
87. *Ibid*, p.185
88. *Ibid*, p.170
89. *Ibid*, p.169
90. *Ibid*
91. *Ibid*, pp. 179, 182
92. *Ibid*, pp.186-189
93. Brauer, cited in Schurmann, 1987: 207
94. Governor Young, cited in Schurmann, 1987: 195
95. Protector's Report, C.S.O., cited in Walsh, 1966: 57
96. Walsh, 1966: 56
97. Moorhouse to Young, Somerville papers, CN1380, Vol.1, p.175, SLSA
98. Protector's Report, in Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory, 17 January 1850, SAPP
99. Government Resident's Report on the Aborigines of Port Lincoln, 26 July 1849, SAPP
100. Robin, 1976: 17-20
101. McNair and Rumley, 1981: 125-6
102. Short to Governor Young, 11 December 1848, in Whittington, 1887: 92
103. Memorials to Colonial Secretary, Nos. 1847 and 1850, September 1849, cited in Robin, 1968: 38
104. Hale, 1889: 4
105. Hale to Governor Young, 17 August 1850, in Hale, 1889: 6
106. Hale's Prospectus, *South Australian Register*, 28 August 1850
107. Hale, 1889: 7
108. *South Australian Register*, 30 August 1850
109. Hale's Prospectus, *South Australian Register*, 28 August 1850
110. Walsh, 1966: 72
111. *Ibid*
112. Governor's Despatch No.108, Somerville Papers, CN 1380, Vol.1, pp. 181-182 (SLSA)
113. Robin, 1976: 47-48
114. Walsh, 1966: 73
115. *Ibid*
116. Robin, 1968, table 1
117. Short to Hawkins, 14 February 1853, in Hale 1889: 51-57
118. See, for example, Hale's *Letter from his Lordship the Bishop of Perth Concerning... the Support of Aboriginal Native Children*, WALC,

V & P, 1, No.2, 1874

119. Walsh, 1966: 82
120. *Ibid*
121. Schurmann to Meyer, August 1851, in Schurmann, 1987: 193-194
122. Brock and Kartinyeri, 1989: 30
123. McNair and Rumley, 1981: Ch.5
124. Brock and Kartinyeri, 1989: 29-31
125. Hale, 1889: 37
126. *Ibid*, p.48
127. Protector's Report, in Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory, June 1853, SAPP
128. Hale Papers, PRG 275, 130/224, SLSA
129. Short to SPG, 14 February 1853, cited in Hale, 1889: 55-56
130. *Ibid*, p.56
131. *Ibid*, p.57
132. Brock and Kartinyeri, 1989: 29
133. Hale, 1889: 95
134. Robin, 1968: 46
135. Brock and Kartinyeri, 1989: 76
136. Governor MacDonnell, Despatch No.186, Somerville Papers, CN 1380, Vol. 11, pp.137-8(SLSA)
137. Walsh, 1986: 114
138. Short, 1872, in Whittington, 1887: 112-113
139. *Ibid*, pp.111-112
140. Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 182
141. *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 20 November 1894
142. Hale, 1889: 54
143. Hale Papers, PRG 275, 130/205, SLSA
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146. *Adelaide Observer*, 1 August 1857
147. Rowe, 1960: 3
148. *Ibid*, p.4
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150. *Adelaide Observer*, 4 September 1858
151. The Committee was listed as follows: President, Hon. George Fife Angas; Vice-Presidents, the Bishop of Adelaide, Mr Justice Boothby, and Hon. F.S. Dutton; Treasurer, Messrs. N. Oldham and G.W. Hawkes; Secretary, Mr C.B. Young (pro tem); members, Messrs. William Giles, F.S. Monk, William Milne, M.P. Samuel Goode, James Smith, F.H.Faulding, Thomas Padman, Charles Smedley, William Peacock, George Prince and Daniel Kedwick, Captain Watts, Dr Mayo, Revs. Archdeacon Woodcock, C.W. Evan, R. Haining, J. Gardner, W. Ingram, J. Lyall, G.Stonehouse, A.R. Russell, and R. Needham
152. Jenkin, 1979: 74
153. Rowe, 1960: 5

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157. Report of the Select Committee on Aborigines. . . , Minutes of Evidence of George Taplin, SAPP, 3, No. 165, 1860, p.63
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159. Taplin, 1874: 51
160. Ngarrinyeri: spelt Narrinyeri by Taplin. Also spelt Ngarrindjeri
161. Linn, 1988: 44
162. Police and overlander statements, cited in Linn, 1988: 44
163. Rowe, 1960: 5
164. Taplin, 1874: 52
165. Jenkins, 1979: 82
166. *Ibid*
167. Berndt and Berndt, 1951: 75
168. Taplin, 1874: 58
169. Linn, 1988: 47
170. *Aborigines at Point McLeay*, Report of Thomas Rickaby, SAPP, No.151, 1860
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174. Linn, 1988: 48
175. Taplin, 1874: 57-58
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177. Report of the Select Committee on Aborigines. . . , Minutes of Evidence of George Taplin, SAPP, 3, No.165, 1860 p. 54
178. Taplin, 1874: 60
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182. Taplin to Dept of Aborigines, 5 April 1870, GRG 52/1/1, cited in Linn 1988: 57
183. Report of the Select Committee on Aborigines. . . , Minutes of Evidence of George Taplin, SAPP, 3, No. 165, 1860, p.59
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185. Taplin, 1874: 68-69
186. *Ibid*, p.64
187. *Ibid*, p.65
188. Rowe, 1960: 7
189. Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 186
190. Taplin, 1874: 65-66
191. *Ibid*, p.66

192. *Ibid*
193. Linn, 1988: 54
194. Taplin, 13 September, 1877, PRG186, cited in Linn, 1988: 55
195. Taplin Diary, 5 May 1869, in Rowe 1960: 8
196. Taplin, 1874: 69
197. *Ibid*, p.55
198. Taplin Diary, 5 January 1867, in Berndt and Berndt, 1951: 50
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200. Taplin, 1874: 59-60
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202. Linn, 1988: 52
203. Unaiapon, n.d.
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209. *Ibid*, p.106-107
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211. Smith to Colonial Committee, Free Church of Scotland, 28 November 1853, in Scrimgeour, 1986: 107
212. Scrimgeour, 1986: 107
213. Jemima Russell to Colonial Committee, Free Church of Scotland, 6 February 1871, in Scrimgeour, 1986: 107
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215. Scrimgeour, 1986: 108
216. *South Australian Register*, 3 December 1892
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218. Charles Duguid, in Scrimgeour, 1986: 115
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7

The violence of the frontier

The remote centre and Aboriginal missions

FOR MOST OF THE PAST two hundred years, much of Australia was a frontier, conflict typifying most of the interactions between the original inhabitants and the colonisers. There is a sense in which the frontier was more particularly located at those edges of white settlement where the onset of racial conflict was the most recent and where confrontation was most aggressive.

It was a moving frontier. From the early white settlement in the east and south of the continent, the frontier generally moved north and west as settlement expanded. As H.C. Allen points out in his important study of the American and Australian frontiers, by its very nature the frontier was considered by the invader to be temporary:

Because [the pioneer] is a civilised man and not a primitive, he regards [the frontier] as a temporary phase; he is not there to come to terms with the outback, as his native predecessors tended to do, but to conquer in the name of civilisation.¹

One of the invariable features of a frontier is that it is a place where morality is suspended. What would normally have been considered accepted European or British values in Australia were not the values of the frontier. Indeed, those who criticised the suspension of morality frequently referred to white behaviour as *un-British*, because at the frontier 'the bonds of custom were

broken and unrestraint was triumphant'.²

Missionaries, although dedicated to a very different ethic, were often part of the frontier whether they wanted to be or not. Only rarely were they ahead of it, although many tried to be in order to work with unaffected Aborigines. There were colonial governments, too, who proposed a role for missions as a kind of soft vanguard, 'pacifying' the Aborigines in advance of the settlers. Missions, however, required organisation, so missionaries rarely reached the Aborigines before the squatter, the gold-digger or, on the coast, the sealer or the pearl-seeker. Rather, the missionaries usually arrived after these pioneers – often well after, when Aboriginal people had already been subjugated.

There were, however, a number of missions which found themselves in the very midst of frontier conflict. There are examples in the early mission period, but the best cases are found in the decades just before and after the turn of the century. In this period, the frontier was at its most extensive within almost all of the north and centre of Australia, while at the same time the era of greatest missionary enterprise was just beginning. In this chapter we will examine examples of such enterprise which best illustrate the differing responses to the frontier – missions which simply failed and withdrew, missions which so challenged the frontier mentality that the frontiersmen destroyed them, and the missions which finally outlived the frontier and survived. As our focus is on the frontier, only a brief outline of the post-frontier history of missions that survived will be given.

The Lutherans at Cooper's Creek

In the centre of Australia on 23 April 1862, John McDouall Stuart ushered in a new era:

[We] built a large cone of stones, in the centre of which I placed a pole with the British flag nailed to it. Near the top of the cone I placed a small bottle, in which there is a slip of paper, with our signatures to it, stating by whom it was raised. We then gave three hearty cheers for the flag, the emblem of civil and religious liberty, and may it be a sign to the natives that the dawn of liberty, civilisation and Christianity is about to break upon them.³



47. Carl and Frieda Strehlow's wedding photograph

Acknowledgement: Lutheran Archives, South Australia.

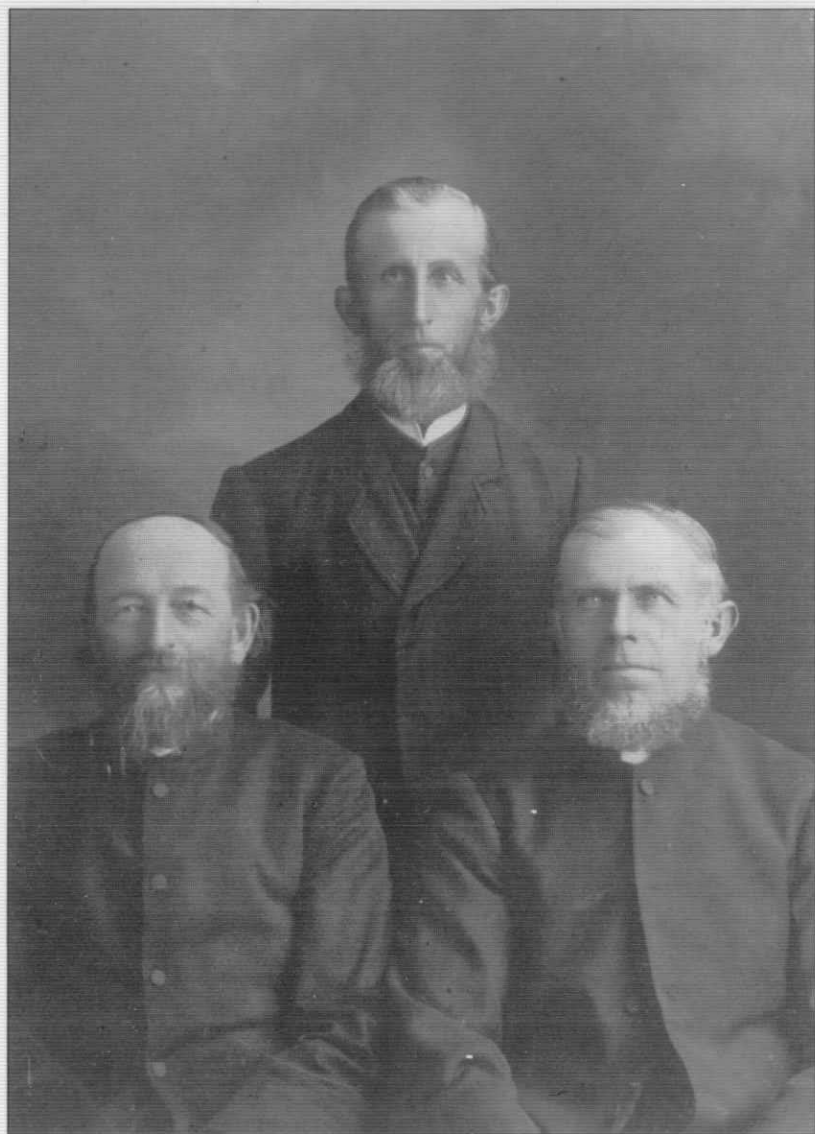
Reproduced with permission.



48. Bethesda Mission, about 1900

Acknowledgement: Mortlock Library of South Australian, B470.

Reproduced with permission.



49. The pioneer Hermannsburg missionaries,
W.F. Schwarz, L.G. Schulze and A.H. Kempe
Acknowledgement: Lutheran Archives, South Australia.
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It was the Lutherans of South Australia who were first to show an active interest in central Australia. They had already engaged in mission work amongst Aborigines, but there had been problems. The first four Lutheran missionaries in South Australia – at Adelaide, Encounter Bay and Port Lincoln – gave up almost entirely because of poor support from the Lutheran churches. They hardly deserved Pastor J.E. Auricht's biting comment: 'they should have stayed at their posts'.⁴ But by the 1860s, the situation had improved: South Australia was a more prosperous place, there were many more Lutheran congregations, and many Lutherans were embarrassed that internal disputes had so monopolised their energies for two decades that they had misplaced their original vision for Christian outreach to the Aboriginal people.

The 1846 Lutheran schism resulted in two synods and was primarily over *chiliasm*, the belief in a future millennium.⁵ This had important implications: it affected the church's understanding of its relationship with the State, an issue which raised strong emotions among Lutherans who had suffered persecution in Germany and had emigrated to Australia to seek religious freedom.

There were, nevertheless, those who regretted the schism and felt the differences to be trivial. The Lutheran missionary at Port Lincoln, Clamor Schurmann, attended the 1846 meeting at which the split occurred. Some objected to the presence of missionaries, as if the church's outreach to the Aboriginal people should proceed irrespective of divisions and in-fighting. Schurmann felt that there was hostility for hostility's sake, comparing it privately to Aboriginal ritual aggression.⁶

The successful crossing of the continent by Stuart in 1862 caused great excitement. His reports of encounters with Aboriginal people reminded many Lutherans of both synods of their lack of initiative in missionary outreach. Pastor J.F. Meischel, previously a missionary in India and particularly influential, wrote:

I share the clear conviction that it is the first vocation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia to carry on mission work among those heathen in whose land she dwells: for they are our neighbours, and if we do not have pity on them and en-

deavour to help them to life through the holy gospel of Jesus Christ, they must without the means of grace be irretrievably lost.⁷

Pastors representing both synods met several times in 1863, forming a joint mission committee. Failing to convince Clamor Schurmann to return to South Australia as a missionary, they requested Pastor Ludwig Harms, director of the Hermannsburg Missionary Society, to supply missionaries. Cooperation in the venture led directly to discussions of union of the synods.

The point was not lost on one observer:

Neither the memory of their common experience of persecution, nor their common confession of faith was sufficient to heal the breach of 1846. Now the Lord uses the poor Lazarus, the Aborigines, as a means of bringing the divided Lutherans nearer to one another.⁸

Harms hesitated to supply missionaries for a church where chilliasm was a sufficient reason for separation. At a large gathering at Langmeil in June 1864, the two synods agreed to regard it as an 'open question' upon which it was permissible to debate. Stopping short of actual amalgamation, the two synods restored confessional unity and pulpit fellowship.

The combined mission could now proceed. Looking towards central Australia, the mission committee had heard of the care which the Dieri (Diyari)⁹ Aboriginal people had shown to the survivors of the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition. The region was already being settled by pastoralists. The committee applied for land east of Lake Eyre in the northeast of the colony and a reserve was made bordering Lake Hope and Cooper's Creek. Missionaries J.F. Goessling and E. Homann were sent from the Hermannsburg Missionary Society in Germany.

The missionaries had been in Australia just a month when, on 9 October 1866, they left for their new mission. A huge crowd of people from both synods attended the service at Tanunda where the missionaries and two lay helpers, Vogelsang and Jacob, were commissioned. In distinctive 'German wagons', each drawn by four horses, the missionary cavalcade set out for Cooper's Creek, led for the first mile by the Langmeil and Bethany brass bands.

The arduous journey took three months, beset by all the problems which typified any such 'pioneer' journey. The missionaries, daily impeded by broken wheels and axles, sick horses, heat, lack of water, eye infections and rugged terrain, finally arrived at their destination on 31 January 1867. There they discovered that three Moravian missionaries, Heinrich Walder, Gottlieb Meissel and Carl Kramer, had arrived a month earlier and commenced a mission at Kopperamanna on behalf of Melbourne Presbyterians.¹⁰

The Lutherans decided therefore to move to another site at Killalpaninna, initially naming their mission Hermannsburg. In six weeks they built a small church, six metres by three metres, but already they were experiencing grave problems.¹¹ Many factors did not augur well for this missionary enterprise. The missionaries were ignorant of Australian outback conditions. The remote location of their mission was in a particularly challenging, arid environment. The most serious factor was that the missionaries had been preceded, not only by explorers, but by settlers. Their new mission was on the very edge of the tense and violent pastoral frontier.

As violence had already escalated in the area, police had been stationed there to ensure that the pastoral invasion proceeded unopposed. There had already been police punitive raids and Aboriginal people had been killed. 'The natives have great fear of the police and their weapons,' wrote Homann.¹² Almost as soon as they arrived, the missionaries heard from the pastoralists that there was talk of a huge gathering of Aborigines who would drive all Europeans from the district.

It is worth pausing at this point to analyse what was happening. There is no doubt whatsoever that the Dieri people had been extraordinarily kind to the survivors of the tragic Burke and Wills expedition. Giving them food, they had tried to teach them how to live off the land, showing them how to gather nardoo seeds and grind them into flour. They had taken pity on the only final survivor, John King, helping him to bury his dead. Far from objecting to white trespass on their land, they tried to help.

The explorers, however, were followed by squatters. There were confrontations. Some Aborigines were excluded from their waterholes. Some sheep were speared. There was retaliation. This wasn't trespass: it was dispossession. It was this that the

Aborigines began to resist and there is evidence that they planned a large, organised campaign. Suddenly overtaken by the frontier, the Aborigines could not distinguish between the missionaries and other settlers, all of whom seemed to represent the same threat.

Like other settlers, the missionaries arrived with wagons and animals. They began to construct buildings on a site where Aboriginal people traditionally gathered near the creek. The missionaries rejected the offer of Aboriginal women but far more seriously 'decided that the natives should be trained to do some work', trying to force them to carry wood or to do other labouring jobs before being given flour or tobacco. This angered the Aborigines so that the missionaries were not popular from the start.¹³ This was all connected with the arrogant European belief in their own inherent superiority. They were strangers in a strange land. Indeed, they were strangers in someone else's land, yet they did not pause to think of what the customary courtesies might be. Assuming their own superiority, they set about insisting on that all-important European ethic - *work*.

They were also part of a violent frontier situation not of their own devising. The threat to the missionaries was very real and, the psychology of the situation being what it was, they became obsessed with the exaggerated rumours they had heard from settlers of Aboriginal torture and cannibalism. As early as 9 March, Goessling wrote to the mission committee expressing the missionaries' fears. He said that the Lord would be their refuge, but asked the committee to petition the Government to supply permanent police protection.¹⁴ A fortnight later, the Moravian missionaries fled on horseback from Kopperamanna to the Lutherans at Killalpaninna. A few weeks later, in April, the missionaries left and returned to Adelaide.

As we have seen, the South Australian government had already adopted the technique of ensuring the success of the pastoral invasion of the more remote parts of the colony by stationing armed police, with very wide powers, at the sites of frontier tension. The authorities, therefore, hastened to protect their pastoral interests in the north-east of the colony. A police station was immediately established at Kopperamanna. Concerted police action, largely unreported, 'made the country safe' within a year.¹⁵

The mission was then recommenced at Killalpaninna when

Homann and Vogelsang, now with wives from Germany, returned in January 1868 with a young schoolteacher, W. Koch. Now that Aboriginal resistance had been put down, and an uneasy peace had come to the region, the missionaries found greater acceptance among the Aborigines. That they were not the same as the other pastoralists slowly became more evident and a number of the Dieri people were interested in hearing what they had to say.¹⁶ Koch died within a few months of typhoid fever, but the mission was joined by Pastor C.H.M. Schoknekt and Mr and Mrs F. Wotzke.

The Killalpaninna mission at Cooper's Creek was soon faced with immense problems. Now they had to battle, not the Aborigines, but the harsh, unpredictable central Australian environment. A severe drought struck in 1872. Most of their sheep and cattle died and the missionaries spent much time driving the remaining stock to find water. The Aborigines had their own solution. They had always lived there. Cooper's Creek was only one of their places, so they simply went away a great distance to where water was. Homann, discouraged, accepted a call to an Adelaide congregation. These words of Schoknecht, already ill, reveal his struggle to keep the mission alive: 'And now followed two years of disappointments and failures; in short, two years of misery and want which I will not and cannot describe.'¹⁷

The drought and the departure of the Aborigines were discouraging enough, but internal church matters added to the mission's burdens. The joint management by the Hermannsburg Mission Society and the Australian Lutheran synods met with difficulties, but worst of all was the pending split between the two groups, the ELSA and Immanuel synods. The common vision of the Cooper's Creek mission, which once seemed enough to keep them together, was not enough when the mission had difficulties and was most in need of their encouragement and support. The mission was closed again. The missionaries went back to Adelaide. The ELSA Synod withdrew from the work altogether. Immanuel Synod did not wish to desert the mission, so the property was divided according to the synod contributions. ELSA received two-thirds of the property and Immanuel Synod one-third, including the mission.¹⁸

It was an act of considerable faith from the small Immanuel Synod to carry on the work at Cooper's Creek. Unable to obtain trained missionaries, the work continued under lay missionaries,

Vogelsang, Jacob, and C.A. Meyer. Four years later in 1878, they were joined by Pastor Johannes (John) Flierl of later New Guinea fame. Under the lay missionaries a number of young people accepted the Christian faith. Flierl baptised twelve in 1879. The mission at Cooper's Creek was renamed 'Bethesda'. The pastoral frontier had, by 1879, moved further north and was now in the Northern Territory.

Bethesda lasted until 1915. Two of its more famous missionaries were Carl Strehlow and J.G. Reuther who, between them, translated the New Testament into Dieri (Diyari). The first New Testament in an Aboriginal language, it was published in 1897. About three hundred Aboriginal people were associated with Bethesda. One hundred and eighteen were baptised, but by the early 1900s, the Dieri were obviously dwindling in numbers, dispossessed of much of their land and suffering severely from European diseases. There had been a very low birthrate. In 1911, for example, there were fifteen deaths at Bethesda but only one birth. The missionaries tried to convince the young people to go south to Adelaide, but none would.¹⁹

World War I brought prejudices which made it difficult for the Lutherans to support their mission. Bethesda was closed in 1915. The missionaries wanted the Dieri people to go north to the Hermannsburg mission on the Finke, but once more they refused. They preferred, they said, to die in their own country. A layman, G. Jaensh, tried to carry on the mission for a few years on his own, but the wartime government closed it down together with all Lutheran schools in 1917, transferring the run to a returned soldier. In 1938, Theodor Hebart, the Lutheran historian, wrote:

. . .the relentless desert wind sweeps over the mission buildings covering them with sand. Today a hole in the gable serves as entrance to the one-time missionary's residence. The desert is burying the work of the mission. . .²⁰

Did these European buildings at Cooper's Creek define 'the work of the mission'? The early days of the Cooper's Creek mission show very clearly the untenable position of many missionaries on the frontier. To the Aborigines, understandably, they were at first indistinguishable from other settlers. The white settlers were also often suspicious of their motives. The environment was most

unsuited to a permanent settlement. All these factors led to a stressful situation which could only be tolerated if there had been clear, unanimous support for the missionaries by the Lutheran synods. When they most needed this, the missionaries were not given it.

When the small Immanuel Synod gave such strong encouragement, the mission was able to begin again. Behind the frontier, the mission could succeed. A dispossessed people briefly found acceptance. There are, however, only a dozen elderly speakers of Dieri left. When they die, the language will be extinct.²¹ Part of the old Bethesda mission, Etadunna Station, was recently sold by one pastoral company to another for \$1.31 million.²² It is one of the deepest ironies of Aboriginal history and missionary activity that for people like the Dieri, a New Testament translation will remain their only memorial.

The Lutherans at Hermannsburg

In the late 1860s the frontier's edge was still in Dieri country in the north of South Australia. In the early 1870s it had crossed the white people's border into the Northern Territory. In this unusual case, the explorers were followed, not by pastoralists, but by the Overland Telegraph construction gangs, young men for whom the frontier had a compelling attraction. Joining the 'OT', young Alfred Giles dreamed of 'undiscovered wealth, of great rivers, of bold mountain peaks. . . of new minerals. . . and wild savages'.²³ The Overland Telegraph was to change the Northern Territory for ever. Although post-hole diggers found gold, this was finally a less important by-product than the path that the line marked into new pastoral lands. By 1873, several pastoralists had already arrived in the vicinity of Alice Springs (named after Alice Todd, wife of the South Australian Postmaster General), although their numbers were still far too small to say that frontier conditions yet prevailed.

The legendary construction saga of the Overland Telegraph was the event of the decade. The height of its fame, with the lure of lands only just opened up for European expansion, coincided with the withdrawal of the ELSA Synod from cooperation with the Immanuel Synod in the Cooper's Creek mission. The mission committee of the two synods had been planning to work in the newly 'discovered' region of central Australia, and had already negotiated a grant of land from the government at the Finke River.

The ELSA needed to save face and to demonstrate that doctrinal division had not stunted their missionary vision. Central Australia provided that opportunity. The ELSA negotiated a joint arrangement between themselves and the Hermannsburg Missionary Society. G.A. Heidenreich, pastor of the Bethany congregation was to be superintendent. Pastors A.H. Kempe and W.F. Schwarz were sent from Germany, arriving in Adelaide on 16 September 1875. A month later on 20 October they were commissioned for service at St Michael's Church, Hahndorf.²⁴

The missionaries Heidenreich, Kempe and Schwartz, together with drovers, mechanics and other skilled laymen, travelled in several separate contingents. At Bethesda, the mission property was to be divided and the Finke River missionaries were to take their two-thirds on to the new location in Central Australia. With the children of Bethany singing 'Jesus, Lead Thou On', Kempe and Schwarz's party left in their large covered wagon,²⁵ beginning one of white Australia's epic pioneering journeys. For adventure, disaster, tension, privation and endurance it ranks with the treks of the Duracks or Milner. The journey took an incredible twenty months from 22 October 1875 to 8 June 1877.²⁶ Max Lohe, another Lutheran historian, writes, 'In the annals of missionary endeavours in all parts of the world, this journey stands alone.'²⁷

Several would-be missionaries joined and left the cavalcades at various times during the long trek, horse riders easily overtaking the wagons moving at the pace of the flock of sheep - 2 400 of them, plus forty-four horses, twenty-three cattle, five dogs, four hens and one rooster.²⁸ Heidenreich, as an absentee superintendent, moved back and forth between the travellers and his congregation in Bethany. From time to time various members of Lutheran congregations and other settlers gave assistance.

Finally, despite heat, cold, drought and flood, the team which arrived at the Finke were Kempe and Schwarz and three assistants: builder, F. Stone; teamster, T. Mills; and drover, G. Spence. Their diaries and letters record the emotional and physical stress of their journey:

Bodily and mentally we were broken. . . Long waterless stretches of fifty to eighty miles lay before us. The heat of the burning sun robbed men and beast of all energy.

It is dreadful, shocking, to travel here in summer. Nobody could

imagine things to be as bad and have any conception of what this journey entails. . .

Kempe and Schwarz were physically, mentally and spiritually exhausted. . .

Often have I been almost tempted to exclaim in the words of the prophet: 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life,' for I am sick at heart.²⁹

Having selected the mission site, the missionaries constructed the first buildings, initially of local timber and thatch and then, as supplies arrived, of stone with iron roofs.³⁰ Director Harms of the Hermannsburg Missionary Society decreed the name of the Finke River mission 'Hermannsburg'. In 1878, more missionaries arrived from Germany: Pastor Louis Schulze, lay helpers Heinrich Hollermann, August Tuendemann and Heinrich Jurgens and two people whose 'price was above rubies': Dorothea Queckenstedt and Wilhelmine Schutz, brides of Kempe and Schwarz. They took twenty-one weeks to travel from Adelaide, arriving on 11 April. Kempe, unable to wait, journeyed south to marry Dorothea en route. Over the next few years, more men arrived and more brides for those already there until by 1883 there were twenty-one white men, women and children.

Shortly after the first missionaries arrived, the local Aranda (Arrernte)³¹ people showed interest in what they were doing. Their initial motivation was curiosity. After deciding that the missionaries posed no threat, some started camping nearby.³² Schulze recorded his first impressions of the Aborigines in a letter to Director Harms. He considered them very 'degenerate, living like animals', naked, eating distasteful things (rats, snakes, grubs and roots), sleeping in the open in summer or winter. Yet even among these first impressions, the missionaries were prepared to find something good, concluding that the Aborigines were not as stupid and depraved as some 'civilised' people made them out to be. They were physically handsome, the missionaries thought, and not lacking in intelligence.³³

The Hermannsburg mission spanned a long period of time and so it is difficult to generalise about the opinions of the missionaries, which varied from person to person and changed over time. Generally speaking, the early missionaries defended Aboriginal intelligence and physique against their many detractors,

though emphasising their spiritual depravity, while later missionaries were to gain deeper understanding of Aboriginal culture.

Schulze wrote:

[The Aborigines] are not unable to be educated. Unfortunately this was disputed for a long time by the ignorant and by the enemies of the mission. . . It makes me cross to read or hear degrading judgment about these people. They have sunk deep spiritually indeed for despite all our efforts we found no trace of any religious act among them. Nevertheless, they are Adam's children, the first glance indicates it. [With] their beautiful slender bodies, six feet tall, as well as the capabilities of mind, in many respects they even excel Christians.³⁴

A vitally important factor which was to affect the whole future of Hermannsburg was that the missionaries preceded the pastoral frontier, arriving just soon enough to enable the Aborigines to make an independent assessment of them. They arrived before the onset of violence and so, unlike their predecessors at Cooper's Creek, they were not presumed to be part of it. When very shortly frontier violence did occur, the Aranda already knew and trusted the missionaries.

The Aranda people, of course, had as yet no knowledge of English – in fact, many of the missionaries had very little competence in English either. It was essential that the missionaries learn Aranda in order to converse with the people at all.

Kempe wrote:

. . . no white people have ever been here before us and we have great difficulty in even drawing a single word out of them. They were not inclined to converse with us or to even answer our questions. Frequently we became aware that the natives deliberately lied to us. However, we realised that if we had to succeed in spite of the difficulties, the fault was not always of the natives, but perhaps the nature of our questions.³⁵

This pressure to learn to communicate gave rise to a second very important factor in the long survival of Hermannsburg – the respect accorded to the Aranda language. This respect may have at first been unintentional, but simply pragmatic. In some of their early comments on Aranda, the missionaries were somewhat dis-

paraging about the presumed inability of the language to convey abstract ideas. Despite this, their persistence in using Aranda and in translating the Bible were, for many years, unique among Australian missions. Indeed, the act of Bible translation itself contradicted their earlier doubts.

As soon as they were able, the missionaries gathered the children for schooling. The missionaries were quick to notice their intelligence and rapid learning. They criticised strongly those who denigrated Aboriginal mental ability. As with other missions, this concentration on the children was a conscious strategy.

As Kempe said:

Nothing is gained by impatience or rash haste. We have preferably concentrated on the growing generation, giving the children lessons in reading and writing, and recently have made a beginning with memory work and singing. Contrary to our expectations, the children have made good progress in these subjects. We have also begun to gather the adults and to tell them the Bible stories from Genesis and some from the New Testament. . . Sermons in the proper sense of the word have not been preached yet. The stories are told and questions asked, and thus we ourselves have the advantage of becoming more fluent in their language.³⁶

The Aboriginal population at Hermannsburg fluctuated due to the necessity, in this arid environment, to range very widely to obtain food. When Hermannsburg became an official ration station, the missionaries used the rations to prompt people to remain at the mission and made the daily distribution a means of gathering the children, teaching around thirty each morning before giving out the rations. During 1880, the Aboriginal people and the missionaries built the most substantial building so far, a stone church and school complex with verandahs. For many years, however, worship in German or English virtually excluded the Aborigines. Three years after the missionaries arrived, their mission began to assume the appearance of a small outback township.

To the missionaries, the overwhelmingly important behavioural change they sought to implement was what they considered to be *work*. The Aborigines rapidly discovered that

they could obtain food, iron tools and cloth from the mission in return for fencing, gardening and other labour. The missionaries were pleased, believing they were inculcating the work ethic. Up to a point they were, and many Aborigines became successful shearers, stockmen and so on. The missionaries did not really appreciate that the Aborigines were also exploiting them in return. As has been so frequently reported, Aboriginal involvement was periodic and selective. To a very large extent, while the Aranda remained confidently in control of their own lands, they could also dictate their own movements. They manipulated the situation, intelligently utilising the mission for their own purposes.

The missionaries found the teaching of the work ethic a problem, continually aware of the difficulty, in such a remote locality, of providing truly useful and meaningful work – that is, financially rewarding work. Aware that the Aborigines could not be forced to remain at the mission, the missionaries tried to be firm without being harsh. As time went by, however, the missionaries gained more control over the children and instituted much stricter discipline in ordering the lives of the young people.

The missionaries preceded the frontier by only two years. In 1877, when they arrived, there were three other white establishments in the region – the telegraph station at Alice Springs, then known as Stuart, and two cattle stations far to the east. In two short years, the land surrounding the mission lease was fully occupied by graziers. The relationship between the missionaries and the graziers was tense from the outset, almost all of them objecting to the presence of the mission.

By 1883, frontier violence had flared in central Australia. Aborigines who were suspected of spearing cattle were hunted relentlessly. After a number of Aboriginal people were mercilessly shot down, many fled to the mission for safety. Schwarz wrote in 1884:

At the present time there are many. . . here for fear of the police, who had shot a number of natives around the neighbouring cattle stations. In recent weeks the police also visited Hermannsburg on numerous occasions and took four of them away. As a result of our mediation one was returned, but the others have been shot.³⁷

By 1885 Kempe believed that what they were observing amounted to genocide. Hermannsburg became a kind of haven, but in the extensive region occupied by the Aranda and surrounding groups there was continued and widespread violence. The missionaries, having gained the trust of the Aborigines before the onset of the violence, felt that neither they nor their property were in any danger.³⁸ Heidenrich wrote:

In ten years time there will not be many blacks left in this area and this is just what the white man wants. With all the shooting that is taking place, it is hard to conceive that the native people have any kind of future and our only hope is that they are rescued from this intolerable position.³⁹

The whole matter of the relationship between Aborigines and settlers in central Australia was brought into the public arena by Schwarz. Visiting Adelaide, he spoke of the decimation of the Aboriginal population by police and graziers, and of the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women. Schwarz's revelations sparked heated correspondence in the press.⁴⁰ Some people demanded justice for the Aborigines or, at least, punishment of those wilfully harming them, while others supported the station owners and their right to defend themselves and their property. The pastoralist lobby denied the missionaries' charges and, in a now all-too-familiar 'smoke-screen' technique, deflected attention from themselves by laying charges against the missionaries.⁴¹

The charges were that the missionaries treated the Aborigines brutally, using flogging as a punishment.⁴² The situation was complicated by the fact that these accusations were partly true. The missionaries' discipline of the children and young people had become harsher as they gained more control over them. Their most severe actions, however, were in the punishment of Christian young people, particularly for moral offences. If Christian parents found it necessary to hold their children 'constantly under the rod', they reasoned, it was also necessary to punish 'heathen Christians' who were 'children in understanding'.⁴³ The missionaries drove from the reserve Aborigines who were tempting the Christians into immorality, rode down Christian absconders and fetched them back, beat Christians who committed misdemeanours and chained young women up to prevent them from

visiting white settlers.

The Minister of Education, responsible for native affairs in the South Australian government, declared that he would instigate an investigation and that he would close the mission if the grazier and police accusations were true. Other members of parliament, less sympathetic to the pastoralist lobby, were more cautious. The Lutherans lobbied the German MPs, representing predominantly Lutheran electorates, who convinced the Minister to agree to a joint investigation. The Government chose as their member a magistrate, Henry C. Swann, with Inspector Beasley representing the police. The Lutherans chose C. Eaton Taplin, son of George Taplin and missionary at Point McLeay, with Heidenreich representing the mission.⁴⁴ The investigators travelled to Hermannsburg mainly by camel. Considering the frequently biased selection of many such investigative committees, this panel was particularly fairly chosen. All things being equal, such a group may have been able to reach a just decision in the many matters which were to be placed before it. The chief charge against the missionaries was that they inflicted corporal punishment on the Aborigines. The chief charges against the police and station owners were indiscriminate and unjustified killing of Aborigines and immoral dealing in Aboriginal women.

The inquiry, however, was fatally flawed. The witnesses were screened first by Mounted Constable W.H. Willshire, a curious choice, considering that Willshire was one of those accused by the missionaries. A notoriously brutal man, Willshire's writings revealed an unbalanced personality, sadistic and perverted. He was almost certainly responsible, directly or indirectly, for hundreds of Aboriginal deaths. As many as one thousand Aborigines were shot within a radius of 300 kilometres of Alice Springs in the decade 1881-1891.⁴⁵ Willshire described his part in it as having 'worked hard' and that 'all's well that ends well'.⁴⁶ Willshire claimed that if most policemen dared accompany him on an attack, 'they would need a clean pair of pants'.⁴⁷

In a strange contradiction, Willshire both argued for the use of Aboriginal women by white bushmen as a God-given right, but loathed the half-caste offspring of their union:

Men would not remain so many years in a country like this if there were no women, and perhaps the Almighty meant them for

use as he has placed them wherever the pioneers go. . . what I am speaking about is only natural, especially for men who are isolated away in the bush at outstations where women of all ages and sizes are running at large.

. . . I certainly do object to the mongrel half-caste. . . I hold out no gleam of hope for such a repulsive breed. . . a nameless child, an intrusive creature, the bastard gift of a shameless nature, conjecturally condemned. . . why should the taxpayer be burdened with the expense of supporting such a valueless breed as half-caste Aborigines.⁴⁸

In his strange reminiscences, Willshire delighted both in the savage drama of his attacks on Aboriginal men and the sexual spoils of battle, which he romanticised in curiously sentimental prose:

. . . at 3.00 p.m. [we] came upon a large mob of natives camped amongst rocks of enormous magnitude. . . It's no use mincing matters – the Martini-Henry carbines at this critical moment were talking English in the silent majesty of those great eternal rocks. The mountain was swathed in a regal robe of fiery grandeur and its ominous roar was close upon us. . . Out from between the rocks came a strapping young girl. . . she was arrayed in her native modesty. . . the prettiest black girl I ever saw.⁴⁹

Whilst tracking some natives who had been killing cattle. . . we came upon them camped in a gorge. When we had finished with the male portion, we brought the black gins and their offspring out from their rocky alcoves. . . one girl had a face and figure worthy of Aphrodite as she dwelt in a Grecian sculptor's brain.⁵⁰

Recently we were tracking up a small mob of cattle killers. . . We were flanked on either side by great walls of stone and the bucks will fight like demons when there is no 'get away'. Then we rose to show ourselves and there was a furious stampede. . . Language is not equal to the task of expressing the abject fear of the tribe. . . Out from their flower-festooned alcoves came the brilliant bevy of blushing maidens, all timorous and coy.⁵¹

When, a few years later, Willshire was actually charged with murder, his bail of £2 000 was paid by sixty central Australian settlers. Defended by Sir John Downer, former Premier of South

Australia, he was found not guilty. Willshire subsequently recorded his opinion:

I don't mind [the Aborigines] experimenting on a hypocritical missionary, but they must leave the practical bushmen alone, for they are the brave pioneers who push out to the frontier and are exposed to the full force of the naked barbarians.⁵²

The man who wrote these words was the man who, while one of those whose activities the missionaries were criticising, was responsible for screening the fifty or more witnesses who were to present evidence to the investigators. Hardly in a position, therefore, to obtain a true account of events in the centre, it is not surprising that the investigators brought down an unsensational, even-handed report. The settlers and police did not deny that some Aboriginal people had been shot, but claimed that it was legal and in connection with suspected cattle-killers resisting arrest. No evidence of large-scale or unjustified killing was presented to the investigators. A few settlers admitted that they had practised 'immorality'. The missionaries reported honestly to cross-examination and so it was found that they had shown some lack of judgment in their manner of punishing some Aborigines and that they had harboured Aborigines guilty of cattle-spearing.⁵³

One parliamentarian described his impressions of the inquiry in this way: 'the gentlemen. . . carried out their duties faithfully, but they seemed to be successful in letting everybody down easily. . . So far as the report was concerned, it left matters very much as they were before.'⁵⁴

The situation in central Australia illustrated with striking clarity the differing attitudes of the settlers and the missionaries within the pastoral frontier. To the settlers, the Aborigines stood in the way of what they considered to be their rightful claim to the land. Mary Durack, descendant of a famous pioneering family, writes:

To these first comers. . . bound to the context of their times, they were simply 'niggers', another hazard to be overcome with the rest. If it was to be a battle for survival, there would be no question of sentiment or the black man's rights.⁵⁵



50. Mounted Constable William Willshire (right), posing as himself

Acknowledgement: Mortlock Library of South Australiana, B13496.

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51. Central Australian police, pastoralists, missionaries and Overland Telegraph workers carved their names in stone

Acknowledgement: John Mulvaney. Reproduced with permission.



52. Hermannsburg Mission, 1934

Acknowledgement: National Library of Australia.

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53. Hermannsburg school, about 1921

Acknowledgement: Senator Sir John Newlands
Railway Route Survey, National Library of Australia.

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'As for the shooting of the blacks,' said the *North Australian* in 1886, 'we uphold it defiantly.'⁵⁶

To the Lutheran missionaries, the Aborigines were spiritually and morally degraded, but still within the plan of God for the eternal salvation of all humankind. 'The devil, the world and our own reason,' wrote Schwarz, '. . . would constantly whisper to us that these heathen are far too deeply degraded ever to become true Christians and children of God. But our hope is in the Lord. . . His promise still remains true.'⁵⁷ Arguing that the curse of Ham lay upon them,⁵⁸ the degradation of the Aborigines, in the eyes of the missionaries, justified the imposition of harsh discipline in order to control their predisposition to sin. They were human and the creation of God and to kill them was a grievous crime, but they were inherently sinful, so to discipline them was essential.

What ultimate historical perspective should we take on this issue? On the one hand it is true that the Lutherans were unnecessarily destructive of Aboriginal culture and blindly ethnocentric in their arrogant assumption of authority to change the Aboriginal way of life. On the other hand their presence ensured the survival of many Aboriginal people. Were it not for the Lutherans at Hermannsburg, there would be very few Aranda people left today. If we wanted reliable evidence of the role of the missionaries in providing sanctuary for endangered Aborigines, we could do no better than a hostile witness, Mounted Constable Willshire himself:

And as to those natives that frequent mission stations and come in contact with religion, they are the worst miscreants under the sun. They leave the mission stations to commit their diabolical murders and thefts, and go back to the missionaries quick so as to take off anything that may appear like guilt. They often, unknown to the missionaries, use the station as a place of refuge.⁵⁹

The missionaries were anxious to evangelise the adults, but they had to wait until the people trusted them sufficiently, which would not happen until they knew enough Aranda to communicate. This took two years and so the first religious instruction classes were commenced in 1880.⁶⁰ This was a cultural imposition: formal classes were, after all, a very Western way of giving

information. It is sad that the Christ to whom the Aranda were to be introduced was a formal Christ of ordered instruction. Indeed, it seems unlikely that these first adult learners even encountered a formal classroom Christ in their religious classes. The Lutheran missionaries, like so many others before and after them, believed that Christ could not be apprehended without a sense of guilt, and that this could only be inculcated by teaching the law. The law, they believed, had to precede the gospel. The Aranda people could not come to Christ until they were convinced of their sinfulness before a righteous God. Only when they understood their guilt before God could they appreciate their predicament and that Christ had died to save them from it.

It is hardly surprising that the Aranda rejected this unbalanced version of the gospel; hardly surprising that they rejected a 'good news' that was barely good news at all; hardly surprising that they found unacceptable the teaching that in order to find acceptance with God through Jesus Christ, they had first to give up everything that they had known, all that they had ever been, regard it as evil, and adopt entirely alien, European patterns of life.

One could well ask what 'law' it was that the missionaries believed the Aranda should understand in order to learn of their guilt before God. It was almost certainly not the Mosaic Law, but the Lutheran's own strict and legalised version of Christian behaviour. It is sad that the missionaries were not prepared simply to share their knowledge of Christ with the Aranda and allow them to determine the extent to which Christ's teachings might challenge the negative or undesirable features of their own culture. They failed to realise that the Aranda lived a life of obedience to law far more truly and deeply than the missionaries could begin to understand and that their path to Christ, who came not to destroy law but to fulfil it, need not pass through the Lutheran code of behaviour.

To the missionaries' credit, it must, however, be acknowledged that they recognised that the worst breaches of God's law were being committed by some of the police and settlers, placing their land-hunger above the basic human rights of the Aborigines, their greed above human life itself. Furthermore, God's law was being broken by those whites who exploited Aboriginal people's weaknesses in order to gratify their sexual appetites. Also in

breach of moral law were those Aboriginal men, attracted by the empty promise of white man's goods and patronage, who sold their wives and daughters as if they were mere chattels for the white men's use. It is no doubt true that initially they may have been making gestures of welcome, but this was not so for long.

Also blindly destroying themselves were those Aboriginal girls who allowed themselves to be used by white men, not just for token reward, but in the false hope of status by association with the new lords of the land who, they did not realise, saw sexual rewards as their right. Indeed, there were those like Willshire who dared to invoke the name of God in claiming that he had prepared Aboriginal women in advance for the white settlers' use.⁶¹ Even though these Aboriginal women may initially have been party to their own degradation, they came to know, often when it was too late, that they had never been in control of what was happening to them, that they were only ever victims of treacherous and inhumane deception.

Again, it is small wonder that the Aranda, like Aborigines throughout the continent, should have judged the gospel by the lives of the 'Christian' white settlers and found it wanting. Even the missionaries used the words 'Christian' on occasion to mean the same as 'European'. Aborigines did not see evidence of the truth of the gospel reflected in the behaviour of those whose lives it was supposed to control. They could not but ask why it was *their* wickedness which the missionaries especially singled out for criticism, why *they* should be so especially displeasing to God. The gospel preached to them was incomplete and, denied in the lives of supposedly Christian invaders, the gospel seemed to them to be a lie. As Kempe wrote in 1885:

. . . The Father of Lies has ensnared them in such a net of lies, that they much prefer to regard their naive, silly fables as the truth - fables which are so naive and absurd that every child must recognise them for what they are, namely nothing but lies - than to believe what we tell them. Yes, they hold so firmly to their fables that they have already told us straight out that we tell them nothing but lies.⁶²

Kempe had by then, with the other missionaries, concluded that the older Aboriginal people were beyond redemption, too far

degraded in sin, and that the only hope – and a small hope at that – was in the younger generation. The missionaries organised daily schooling for the children, partly to educate and partly to segregate the children from the influence of the adults.⁶³ Although numbers tended to fluctuate with the seasons, by 1885 Heidenreich believed that forty children had had some basic education. After 1886, there were never fewer than twenty-nine children at the school. The missionaries were impressed with the children's rapid academic progress, comparing them favourably with German children.⁶⁴

The missionaries also felt that they discerned some 'moral improvement', although they were particularly discouraged by the older girls who were too easily 'decayed away by the whites and... spoiled forever'.⁶⁵ Kempe actually wrote to the Protector seeking permission to 'bring back to our station all girls and women belonging to this reserve, who were used now on the surrounding stations for prostitutes, thus perishing in body and soul'.⁶⁶ The request was refused. Despairing of segregating the girls from the white settlers, the missionaries began to concentrate on the boys.

Their efforts began to be rewarded in 1885. When Kempe was obliged to travel south for medical reasons,⁶⁷ two teenage boys, Kalimala (Andreas) and Tekua (Thomas), volunteered to accompany him.⁶⁸ Travelling with him as far as Bethesda (Killalpaninna), they stayed until Kempe and his family returned from Adelaide. Here, Kalimala and Tekua came under the influence of Christian Dieri people and decided themselves to become Christians. It is important that a critical factor in their conversion was the witness of *Aboriginal* Christians.

On returning to Hermannsburg, Kalimala and Tekua announced themselves ready for baptism. This was the public declaration the missionaries had awaited and nine other teenagers followed their lead. After a course of instruction four were eliminated: two boys for misconduct, one because he was too young and a girl who refused to break her betrothal to a married man.⁶⁹ The other seven, having chosen their own Christian names – Andreas (Kalimala), Thomas (Tekua), Jakobus, Matthew, Nathanael, Johannes and Maria – were baptised on 30 May 1887.⁷⁰ The little church overflowed with people to watch the seven teenagers renounce the world, the flesh and the devil.

The missionaries wept. So did the Aranda people, although

opinion is divided as to whether they wept in sympathy or sorrow. Kempe preached on Acts 10:34: 'God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.'

The effect on the people, especially the young people, was very great. Seventeen more of them declared that they wanted baptism on the same day. By the time the last of this first group of missionaries left in 1891, twenty-five Aranda had received baptism.

Despite this apparent success, the missionaries became disillusioned. Ill health sapped their energies physically and emotionally. Schulze and Schwarz left for Adelaide with their families. Kempe's wife, Dorothea, died after childbirth and Kempe, a sick and broken man, had to be lifted into the wagon that was to take him and his children south. Even then he had to face criticism that he left the mission without a valid reason. Although sickness and death were tragic, alone they would not have ended the mission. The worst causes of disillusionment were growing divisions in the Lutheran Church, and the missionaries' consequent doubts about whether or not their work was appreciated and whether their meagre support of £12 each per annum would be continued.

Their forebodings were correct and by 1891 they had all left. The ELSA split with the Hermannsburg Mission Society over doctrinal issues. The ELSA argued for a few years over the future of the mission during which time Pastor Heidenreich did his best to look after it, sending his son there as a kind of caretaker.

Baldwin Spencer, passing through with the Horn expedition in 1894, penned these words:

A good track leading through the scrub showed that we were getting near the old missionary station of Hermannsburg, which we reached late in the afternoon and where Mr Heidenreich, who was then in charge, made us welcome. The mission at the time of our visit was abandoned and fast falling into ruins. The few blacks, the remnants of a larger number who were camped about the place when it was opened as a mission station, still remained, living in a squalid state in dirty whurlies.

If, which is open to question, the mission had ever done any permanent good, there was no evidence of it to be seen, either

amongst these blacks or others whom we met with and who had been in contact with it.⁷¹

It is ironic indeed that, having endured the opposition of the settlers and the immense difficulties of climate and isolation, the mission should have been destroyed by the Lutheran church itself. The missionaries withstood the frontier, but they could not withstand the apathy of their own supporters.

By the end of the century the frontier, in its worst manifestation, had passed through Aranda territory and was now further north. It would, however, be incomplete not to trace briefly the later history of a mission as important as Hermannsburg.

Although frontier conditions were to prevail to some extent in central Australia for many years to come, the worst of the killing was over. The Aboriginal population had been drastically reduced and the remainder now lacked the will and the numbers to continue any serious resistance. White townships and cattle stations were now a permanent part of the environment. White settlers had been there for a generation by the 1890s. Many of the old Aranda people were now dead and a new generation of people did not know a world which was not dominated by settlers, police and missionaries. The last Northern Territory massacre, the Coniston killings in 1928,⁷² was far to the north in Warlpiri country.

Several churches wanted to take over Hermannsburg, but in 1894, Heidenreich negotiated its sale for £1 500 to the tiny Immanuel Synod, already struggling to support Bethesda (Killalpaninna), their Bloomfield mission near Cooktown in north Queensland and the Lutheran mission in New Guinea. This courageous decision was a real challenge to the member churches of the Immanuel Synod.⁷³

Re-establishing Hermannsburg could, at this juncture, easily have been an impossible task. The renewal of Hermannsburg and its long-term survival were entirely due to the Immanuel Synod's choice of missionary, Carl Strehlow from Bethesda. Still only twenty-four years old, Strehlow was young, strong and enthusiastic. With far fewer white assistants, he placed his reliance upon the support of the Aranda people and set about restoring the buildings, recommencing the mission program of welfare, social change and evangelism, and re-establishing relationships with the local people.

Hermannsburg continued to be run as a cattle station, most of the responsibility being undertaken by Aboriginal stockmen. From 1897 to 1907, however, the mission economy was virtually destroyed by a prolonged drought. This had a significant effect on the mission population, as the Loritja people from the west were forced to seek food and water in the country of the Western Aranda, with whom they had traditional affiliation. Many Loritja people came to the mission station where they were given food and medical care.

Strehlow was a skilled linguist and an acute observer with a lifelong interest in Aboriginal languages and culture. He made a detailed study of both the Loritja and Aranda languages publishing his major work in five volumes, *Die Aranda und Loritja Stämme in Zentral Australien*. He found the Aranda language well able to express abstract and spiritual concepts, so he revised the earlier missionaries' Aranda texts, replacing foreign terms. Strehlow worked at Hermannsburg from 1894 until his death in 1922.

In September 1922, a telegram reached Adelaide with the news that Carl Strehlow was gravely ill. No motor vehicle at Hermannsburg was in sufficiently good order to take him to Alice Springs, nor was any vehicle in Alice Springs able to reach Hermannsburg. Pastor J.J. Stolz obtained a vehicle in South Australia and with M. Kleinig, immediately travelled north. When Strehlow's condition deteriorated further, it was decided to take him south in a horse-drawn cart.

The party set out on 10 October in blistering heat, travelling south-east through forbidding stony desert to intercept the overland telegraph line near the South Australian border. The story of this sad, heroic, remarkable trek has been sensitively told by Strehlow's son, Theodore, in his *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*.⁷⁴ Accompanied by Aboriginal stockmen with spare horses, changing finally to donkeys when the horses could go no further, the little cavalcade struggled for ten days, covering over three hundred kilometres and reaching the isolated Horseshoe Bend hotel, just north of the border on Thursday 19 October. In the early hours of Friday morning, Stolz arrived on a camel. He was able to pray with Strehlow who passed away at 5.30 a.m. Carl Strehlow's lonely grave can be seen today at Horseshoe Bend.

Strehlow's most lasting contribution to the Aranda people was his Bible translations. Although parts of his translation were

published in his substantial *Aranda Service Book*, none of his translations of entire books of the Bible was published until after his death. His *Gospel according to St Luke* was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1925 and all four Gospels in 1927. Although Carl Strehlow had finished the Aranda New Testament before his death, it was completely revised by his son, Theodore, later Professor of Anthropology at the University of Adelaide. The revised manuscript was given to the Bible Society in 1944, but the first printed copy was not received until 1956.

Like Lake Tyers, New Norcia, Ramahyuck and other great nineteenth century missions, the history of the second era at Hermannsburg is indelibly linked to dedicated and long-serving individuals of strong personality and determination, Carl Strehlow from 1894 to 1922 and his successor, the Polish Lutheran missionary, Friedrich W. Albrecht from 1926 to 1962.

Hermannsburg was always a controversial place. It was born of a dispute between the two Lutheran synods, a dispute which once closed the mission. The division brought little credit to the ELSA Synod which persecuted the clergy who continued to support the work at Hermannsburg. In one particularly shameful act at the infamous Eudunda Synod, Pastor Heidenreich was expelled. The necessary unanimous vote was falsely obtained by first denying the right to vote to any who opposed the motion.⁷⁵ Theological dispute also occurred on the mission itself, the most serious being Pastor N. Wettengel's disagreement with Strehlow over the translation of certain New Testament passages. Following an enquiry, Wettengel was repatriated to Germany.⁷⁶

During both world wars, but particularly the first, many sectors of the Australian public, press and parliamentarians urged the closure of the mission. In the war-hysteria of the day the missionaries were called 'alien enemies', accused of 'Germanising the natives' and even of intercepting strategic messages on the Overland Telegraph.

A long and bitter controversy was the antagonism between Carl Strehlow and Baldwin Spencer. A biologist and anthropologist, Spencer first visited Hermannsburg as a member of the Horn expedition in 1894.⁷⁷ This was just before Strehlow's arrival and during the period when the run-down mission was almost abandoned and it is understandable that he should have formed a low opinion. It is also probable that he was influenced

by the police who guided the expedition and who were antagonistic to the mission for its championing of Aborigines against police and settler brutality.⁷⁸

Although Spencer was to become Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory after the Commonwealth assumed responsibility from South Australia in 1911, and Professor of Anthropology at the University of Melbourne, it seems that he did not visit Hermannsburg again until 1923, just after Strehlow's death when the mission was once again unmanaged. Indeed, it is not certain whether Strehlow and Spencer actually ever met. Things may have been different if they had, but on many occasions Spencer tried to have Hermannsburg closed.

Their professional rivalry was intense. They developed distinctly different views of key aspects of Aranda society and culture of which space precludes consideration here. More importantly to our discussion, Spencer's views were firmly embedded in a Darwinian evolutionary view of human development. The Aborigines were Stone Age people, revealing the human race 'in the making'.⁷⁹

It is well for those thoughtful non-Christians who criticise the Hermannsburg missionaries for cultural and religious imperialism, and who are tempted to sympathise with Spencer's view that the Aborigines should be left 'as much as possible. . . in their native state',⁸⁰ to consider why he thought that. Spencer believed that Christian teaching was destructive of Aboriginal society because these were ideas which Aborigines were '*utterly incapable of grasping*'. Christianity was '*beyond the comprehension of an Aborigine*'.⁸¹

To Spencer, the Aborigines – like the platypus or the kangaroo – were of scientific interest. Spencer countenanced, for example, the robbing of Aboriginal ceremonial storehouses.⁸² Whether he was ever physically involved himself is not known, but he certainly profited from the thievery of his friend and associate, Alice Springs postmaster, F.H. Gillen. In one case, on the Horn expedition, Charles Winnecke and Edward Stirling, director of the South Australian Museum, forced an Aboriginal man to reveal a ceremonial store in a cave near Haast's Bluff. They removed all fifteen Tjurungas – carved stones of deeply religious significance – and many other items, replacing them with steel axes and knives.⁸³ The historians Mulvaney and Calaby have said of this:

This single rape of tribal lore in the name of science was no less insensitive to the Aboriginal mind than were the despised mission endeavours. Its repercussions were more destructive and immediate both to morale and human life, for the unfortunate and protesting informant was later killed.⁸⁴

Gillen, in a further three years, amassed over a hundred Tjurungas from sacred caves and ceremonial objects from graves which he desecrated.⁸⁵ Strehlow was horrified, not simply because he himself would not act with such arrogant and callous superiority, but because he knew, much more than Spencer did, the awful repercussions. Strehlow has documented a long series of tribal killings related to the revelation of the location of ceremonial objects.⁸⁶ Their removal was justified by an anthropology based upon the doctrine of the evolution of the human mind and an arrogant certainty of white superiority.⁸⁷

In all his negative assessment of the mission and the missionaries, Spencer and many others like him failed to acknowledge certain important positive outcomes. A recent re-assessment of Hermannsburg casts rather a different light on it:

Food supplies and medical facilities were better than those available on most cattle stations and living conditions generally were immeasurably better than the shanties of urban fringes. If conditions were as bleak as [Spencer] judged them, it was remarkable that almost 200 people chose to remain there. What Spencer overlooked, and as an anthropologist this was inexcusable, was that these people were living in 'their' country, so their morale was higher than urban drifters. While they were deprived of some freedoms by the missionaries, they were also free of alcohol and its attendant evils. The significance of this was overlooked by Spencer and other aspects virtually escaped his notice, even though he collected factual data with care.

Significantly, births had exceed deaths during the previous five years by twenty-four. Able-bodied men were as numerous as women, indicating that they were staying at the mission, rather than drifting to European centres. Children constituted forty-four per cent of the population. Such a healthy demographic state probably was unmatched in any other culture-contact situation in the Territory. A salutary contrast was offered by Spencer's own Alice Springs experience, with 100 per cent mor-

talities within his own informant and totemic group.⁸⁸

Modern educators, aware of the merit of bilingual/bicultural education, would have commended Strehlow's use of both Aranda and English. Prejudice blinded Spencer to all these positive features which he should have acknowledged.

A more recent controversy has been the protracted negotiations over the return of the mission lease to the Aranda people. On the one hand, the Hermannsburg missionaries vigorously opposed the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Bill*, and became finally, in 1982, the last Northern Territory mission to return their lease to the government, thus allowing Aboriginal owners to reclaim their land.⁸⁹ On the other hand, the mission authorities – particularly Friedrich Albrecht's son Paul, who became Field Superintendent of the mission – had a schedule for handing the land back. Their resistance to pressure to relinquish their lease was based to a large extent on their mistrust of the new Central Land Council which they did not believe truly represented the interests of the Aranda people.

The controversies have not ended. Locked deep within the basement of the Museum of the Northern Territory are the Strehlow artifacts, gathered at Hermannsburg during a century – most of them, it is claimed, being gifts. Hidden at one stage in New Zealand, the rightful repository of these treasures is still the subject of heated debate.

It is very difficult to assess the spiritual impact of Hermannsburg or what would have been the fate of the Aranda people had the mission never been there. There are strong reasons for believing that had there been no mission, the police and settlers would have more nearly completed their massacre of the Aboriginal people and that Aranda society would be far more damaged than it now is. Whatever position we may take on the differences between Carl Strehlow and Baldwin Spencer, time has proven Spencer wrong. The Aranda were not and are not Stone Age survivors, incapable of comprehending Christian truth.⁹⁰ Many became Christians, maintaining a lifelong commitment to their faith.

It is particularly significant that the major beginnings of community acceptance of the Christian gospel came in the years 1923–1926, between the Strehlow and Albrecht eras when there was no ordained missionary. During this time, Aranda Christians

accepted the responsibility for evangelising their own people. The most outstanding Christian leader at this time was Moses. Becoming blind as a teenager, he had memorised the scriptures and developed a powerful gift of oratory. 'Blind Moses' travelled as far as Alice Springs and Arltunga and began a tradition of Aboriginal evangelists. Albrecht described him as a man whose 'kindly disposition won him friends among the white people as well as among his own Aranda. One could not but feel attracted to him and happy in his company.'⁹¹

Like all missionaries, the Lutherans were slow to admit Aborigines to the level of ordained pastor. They were, however, in advance of many other missions in that they did at least formalise and recognise the position of evangelist, giving these Christian leaders considerable responsibility, particularly at outstations of Hermannsburg such as Jay Creek, Haasts Bluff and Maryvale. In 1964, the first Aranda men were ordained, Conrad Raberaba and Peter Bulla. It had taken almost a century for the mission to reach this point. It is indeed thought-provoking that a missionary of the stature of Friedrich Albrecht, while acknowledging the Aranda people's love of the word of God, should still regret that they had not really changed from nomadic hunters to settled farmers:

In spite of difficulties, . . . occasioned through their past as nomads, these people have little difficulty in believing God's Word even in parts where we find difficulties. . . . The question of earthly possessions and monetary gain which have a big part in the teachings of our Lord, mean little to them; native Christians have told us that such passages of scripture refer to white people. . . . They find little interest in what God said to Adam, that he should dig in the garden, that he should eat his bread in the sweat of his brow. . . .

We have often deplored the fact that these natives, outwardly, show so little for what has been done for them. In very many cases there is not even a desire to change from collecting food. . . . to producing. Neither have these nomads. . . . accepted much of what we thought would be a blessing to them; essentially they continue their lives as their fathers did, with the great exception as regard the Word of God. . . . It has become a great power in their lives and means to them as much as it means to us. . . . Much of our hope for their future centres around this book.⁹²

John Brown Gribble

For a few months in 1886-1887, John Brown Gribble, full-bearded, bespectacled missionary from the Western Australian frontier, was a household name throughout Australia. In this section we consider the contribution of this missionary who was prepared to challenge the frontier, even if it destroyed him:

. . .if I am to continue working as their Missionary, it must be on lines of justice and right to the Aborigines of this land, in opposition to the injustice and wrong-doing of interested and unprincipled white men. This is my decision and by it I stand or fall.⁹³

Before looking at his work in Western Australia, I shall briefly cover his background and earlier work amongst Aborigines elsewhere in Australia.

Gribble was only one year old in 1848 when he and his parents, Benjamin and Mary, emigrated from England.⁹⁴ He grew up in Geelong, where he married Mary-Anne Bulmer in 1868. There, he wrote, 'I was led to admire the native nobility and genuine kindness of the blacks of Victoria.'⁹⁵ Imprinted on his mind was his earliest childhood recollection. He once became separated from his parents and lost, but was found by an old Aboriginal woman who gave him food and took him home:

It is not to be wondered at, then, that I should be led to love the natives, who in my childhood had showed me such kindness. The feeling of pity for them has grown with my growth and strengthened with my strength as year after year I have been confronted with the terrible wrongs to which they have been subjected. And while I have life and strength I trust my only ambition will be to befriend the black population of that land where I have spent thirty-five years of my life.⁹⁶

John Brown Gribble was converted at the age of fourteen⁹⁷ after which he dedicated his life to preaching the gospel. In time, he was admitted into the ministry of the United Free Methodist Church in 1876, but soon joined the Congregational Union of Victoria for which he travelled as an itinerant preacher in northern Victoria and southern NSW. He became the first resident clergyman in Jerilderie.

It was in Jerilderie that Gribble had his legendary encounter with the bushranger, Ned Kelly.⁹⁸ When the Kelly gang held up the town in 1879, Gribble, living a mile out of town, was at first unaware, hearing the news from an escaping bank official. Gribble set off for town. On the way he met a distraught girl, daughter of the local publican, whose horse had been taken by Steve Hart, a surly and ill-tempered member of the Kelly gang. Gribble then found Ned Kelly himself, riding the girl's mare. Calling on Kelly to stop, Gribble told him it was unmanly to steal from a girl. Kelly told him he would consider returning the horse. Going on his way, Gribble came across Steve Hart in the act of stealing a new saddle from the publican at gunpoint. Gribble told Hart that he had told Kelly of his 'unmanly act'. Hart then aimed his revolver at Gribble and, after some argument, took Gribble's watch.

An angry Gribble then went back to find Kelly who was by now drinking in the hotel. Striding down the dusty main street of Jerilderie, Gribble confronted Kelly, calling him out of the pub to demand the return of his watch. For a brief moment, two men of courage stood face to face. Perhaps they glimpsed something similar in each other. Gribble got his watch back and bowed to the bushranger 'before they went on their separate paths to the great ordeal of their lives'.⁹⁹

Although Gribble had always had a concern for the Aborigines, it was after witnessing the deplorable conditions under which they lived that he began to consider how he might do something about it himself. He was particularly incensed by what he called 'traffic in the blacks'¹⁰⁰ – prostitution and slave labour – and by the corrupting influence of Europeans and their vices:

With the noble institutions of England, which are the pride and boast of her children in the colonies, we have introduced its vices; and these exotic plants have taken deep root in the new soil and have brought forth a terrible harvest. The Aborigines in their low moral condition came into the closest contact with these new and injurious influences; and they have gone down before them just like snow before the rising sun. The vices which we introduced, which by our practice we recommended and which they naturally adopted, have sent them wholesale into eternity and are still rapidly mowing down the remnants of the race.¹⁰¹

By the end of 1878, the idea of providing a place to care for Aboriginal people began to firm in Gribble's mind. On 15 September 1878, he wrote in his diary that he was 'deeply impressed with the wretched conditions of the poor unfortunate Aborigines. They are here in large numbers utterly uncared for. Cannot something be done for their present comfort and eternal good? I think so. . .'¹⁰²

In 1879, Gribble spent his leave with Daniel and Janet Matthews at Maloga mission on the Murray near Echuca. With Daniel Matthews he toured the Murrumbidgee River, visiting Aboriginal camp sites. Gribble decided he should commence a mission on the Murrumbidgee. Initially he considered a joint venture with Matthews, but eventually undertook the work himself. Late in the year he announced his intention to 'give up the regular work of the Christian ministry', publishing a pamphlet entitled *A Plea for the Aborigines of New South Wales*. He wrote:

I am well aware that the work will involve much self denial and hardship, but the love of Christ constraineth me, and I would simply enter upon the work trusting to the faithfulness of him who has said 'inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me'.¹⁰³

Gribble and Matthews chose a site for the mission near Darlington Point on the Murrumbidgee. Having received encouragement from Sir Henry Parkes, the Gribble family set out for the new mission early in March 1880, an event he has later described:

I resigned my charge, a very comfortable and profitable one and. . . to the utter amazement of our old friends, we left the town of Jerilderie with our little belongings. As we passed through the town, we must have made a singular procession for everybody 'came out for to see'. Our household stuff was conveyed in two wagons, my wife, little ones and several black girls followed in the wagonette, the rear being brought up by myself and the black lads driving the cattle and goats.¹⁰⁴

They chose an untenanted site on which the lease had been revoked, but from the outset experienced problems with the white settlers in the area. Using their own meagre resources, the Grib-

bles and the Aborigines built huts from timber on the site. Then, after about a month, a letter from the Lands Department cautioned them to proceed no further. Gribble travelled to Sydney and, with the help of some Sydney Christians, put his case personally to the authorities. He found that complaints had been made to the Lands Department by 'certain interested parties'. He was, however, able to sort out the land question, obtain approval to continue and even gain appointment as a teacher at a salary of £90 p.a. 'which, in our straitened circumstances, proved a very great blessing'.¹⁰⁵

In two years the usual mission village complex was constructed - cottages for married couples, boys and girls' huts, schoolhouse, mission house, sheds and outbuildings. They named the mission *Warangesda*, 'Camp of Mercy', from *warang*, the word for 'camp' in the local Wiradjuri language, and *esda*, Hebrew for 'mercy' from the biblical place name 'Bethesda'. Gribble's cousin, W.P. Carpenter, joined them as schoolteacher while Gribble travelled seeking donations.

Although 'frequently reduced to the deepest poverty', *Warangesda* was a place of faith and hope. 'In ways most wonderful,' wrote Gribble, '... God interposed for us in every season of want, and cheered our hearts with assurance of his favour and guidance'.¹⁰⁶ As the mission became known, destitute Aborigines arrived there 'from the Darling, the Lachlan, the Murray and even from the distant Namoi'. A major problem faced by the *Warangesda* community was the aggression of corrupt whites:

For the first two years of our mission life the main difficulties we had to encounter were from the white man's horrible passions. But, thank God, stronger was he that was for us than all the powers of evil that were arrayed against us; and now, after four years struggle, we see the same Darlington Point, once the standing horror and disgrace of the district, thoroughly reformed as regards the traffic in the bodies and souls of the poor blacks.¹⁰⁷

In 1880, the Church of England Bishop of Goulburn, Mesac Thomas, visited *Warangesda*. Many of the Aboriginal people had already become Christians. Bishop Thomas baptised nineteen of them.¹⁰⁸ He decided to sponsor the mission, making Gribble a

stipendiary reader. Gribble joined the Church of England, being ordained deacon in 1881 and priest in 1883. By then over one hundred Aboriginal people had settled at Warangesda from many parts of inland NSW.¹⁰⁹

Many of those who came were already sick and dying, people with absolutely nowhere to seek safety and care except Warangesda or Maloga. Many of those who died glimpsed Christ in the love shown to them by John and Mary Gribble and died confident Christian deaths. Some of the first of these were Rowley, a reformed drunkard; Johanna, a twelve-year-old Wiradjuri girl; and Eliza Nelson, who said she no longer feared death 'because Jesus is with me'.¹¹⁰ Gribble wrote:

From the commencement of our work at Warangesda, our great end and aim has been to enlighten the minds of the poor blacks upon the great truths of the gospel. Pervading all our temporal efforts there has been the desire to reach the inner feelings of their souls. We have endeavoured, in season and out of season, to win them to him 'who is able to save to the uttermost' and we rejoice in the knowledge that the gospel of Christ has proved itself to be the very power of God unto salvation, even in the case of those whom so many regard as little more than animals. Several of our people have been brought to a saving knowledge of the truth. Some of them are still with us, adorning the doctrine of God their Saviour, while others, after witnessing a good confession, have peacefully and hopefully passed away, to 'be for ever with the Lord'.¹¹¹

Warangesda was to suffer the same fate as Maloga. Following the 1882-1883 inquiry into both missions,¹¹² more government financial assistance was provided enabling the appointment of additional staff, the school was upgraded and additional land was granted. This signalled the secularisation of Warangesda. In 1882, the same year in which the mission church was built, George Thornton, the first Protector of Aborigines in NSW, questioned the ability of Aborigines to grasp religious ideas, claiming that any measures to 'make them useful' were at best of limited value as they were 'destined soon to become extinct'.¹¹³ Unlike the Matthews at Maloga, the Gribbles were not at Warangesda to see the government take over the mission.

In its first few years, Warangesda was no more a failure than

any other of the nineteenth century missions. The Gribbles had worked very hard physically to make it succeed and had seen some evidence of the spiritual success for which they longed. But Gribble was hard on himself.

To the end of his life, he never lost his anger at the mistreatment of Aborigines, nor his zeal to do something about it. He often suffered from depression. His direct, confrontational, uncompromising style made him few friends. He continually berated himself for what he perceived as failures at Warangesda, blaming his own lack of faith and lapsing from time to time into what he called his 'fearful mental condition' or temporary loss of balance.¹¹⁴

Gribble began to feel that the best path for him was to start again somewhere else. He began corresponding with Bishop Parry of Perth with a view to work in Western Australia. Bishop Thomas, however, was one who understood Gribble and believed that his dedication outweighed his failings. In 1884, Thomas arranged for Gribble to take a long sea voyage to England, hoping that he would recuperate and return to work at Warangesda.

On the voyage, Gribble wrote *Black but Comely*, his description of Aborigines and the Warangesda mission, which he published in England with the assistance of the Archbishop of Canterbury.¹¹⁵ Gribble returned to his family and Warangesda in 1885 but, back in the old situation, his dissatisfaction resurfaced. At his urging, Bishop Parry invited him to Western Australia. Initially leaving his family in Sydney, Gribble left for Perth in August 1885.

On the way to Perth, Gribble displayed that fierce and instantaneous defence of Aboriginal people for which he was already well known in the east and which was to characterise his efforts in the west. In the port of Bunbury, he reacted strongly to criticism of Aborigines, recording as follows in his diary on 15 August 1885:

Dr Rogers of Albany. . . told me that it was his candid opinion that a blackfellow was not susceptible to the higher influences of Christianity and I told him that I had done with him. A Mr Gardner said he thought the Aborigines were very little better than monkeys and I told him he himself was certainly not much superior than a monkey. At this he threatened me serious bodily harm.¹¹⁶

On Gribble's arrival in Perth, the Church of England Diocesan Missions' Committee appointed him to work in the Gascoyne River region, around Carnarvon, 1 000 kilometres north of Perth. The Committee, although impressed with Gribble's record as a spokesman for Aboriginal people, was well aware of the potential friction his presence could cause in the conservative pastoral white population of the region. The Gascoyne member of the Legislative Council, Charles Crowther, had already stated in parliament that 'no good would be attained by any endeavour to civilise and Christianise these northern natives by missionaries'.¹¹⁷

An article in the *West Australian* on 26 August 1885 argued that missions removed Aborigines from the labour force and that, if missions had any value at all, it was to teach 'the value of obedient, steady and intelligent toil'. The article advised Gribble that in order to succeed, he would require tact and 'a practical, unprejudiced and sympathetic understanding of the relative positions of whites and blacks'.¹¹⁸ Tact, however, was not a virtue which Gribble cultivated, nor was he inclined to accept 'the relative positions of whites and blacks'.

Gribble's NSW experience, although it was with Aboriginal people, hardly prepared him for what he was to face in Carnarvon. Although he had confronted the mistreatment of Aborigines before, Gribble's NSW work had very largely consisted of the rehabilitation of people stricken by alcohol, disease and prostitution. Here, in the north-west, a severely oppressed and mistreated Aboriginal population were locked by extreme force into a labour system which was little better than slavery. His presence would only be tolerated if he confined his efforts to conducting religious services in the town and tending sick and elderly discarded Aboriginal workers.¹¹⁹

On arrival in Carnarvon, Gribble set out almost immediately on a long inspection of the condition of Aboriginal people in the inland. It did not take long for him to assess the injustice and oppression. He saw much on his trip that disturbed him: Aboriginal women the assigned property of white stockmen, shocking employment conditions and inhuman disciplinary measures. The forced labour system was brutally simple provided there was solidarity between those who enforced it and those who benefited from it.

Theoretically, under the *Masters and Servants Act*, Aboriginal people entered into what Gribble called 'bondservice' by signing assignment papers. In a majority of cases the signing was not voluntary. Aboriginal people were 'run down' and captured. They were forced to touch the pen which marked the assignment papers, the content of which they could not read. They were then legally bound to their employers. Gribble was particularly angered that women and girls were assigned to single white men in this way.

If they ran away, the police were informed and a warrant issued for their arrest. They were then technically fugitives from the law and could be – and were – shot for 'resisting arrest'. When arrested, prisoners were chained at the police station, often for weeks, pending trial. Gribble saw them himself at Junction Bay Police Station, naked, cold, hungry and chained both by neck and ankle. Such chained prisoners were not yet proven guilty and chained together with them were witnesses as well as suspects. He saw and heard of even worse practices including the torture of recaptured runaways.

Aboriginal labour was gained by the imposition of terror. If the 'slaves' ran away, they had to be brought back and punished. Escape would never be permitted. The system depended upon fear. Gribble readily acknowledged that there were exceptions,¹²⁰ such as fair-minded settlers who tried to employ Aboriginal labour under reasonable conditions, but such people were rare and ridiculed for their honesty in the treatment of Aborigines.

On returning to Carnarvon, he commenced construction of the mission on the north bank of the Gascoyne River, about four kilometres from the town. He called it 'Galilee'. His only assistants were two handicapped Aboriginal men, one of whom had lost an eye and the other a foot.¹²¹ In Carnarvon, Gribble's views soon became known. He was first forced into confrontation with the pastoralists when an Aboriginal runaway sought refuge on his mission. When the 'owners' came in pursuit, Gribble told them that 'the blacks were free subjects of the Queen and that they were not slaves'.¹²²

Public meetings were held in Carnarvon in November and December in which Gribble was attacked and a petition sent to the mission committee calling for his withdrawal. It is significant that in all the statements and letters from Gascoyne pastoralists, there

was a careful insistence on the use of the word 'servant' to describe the status of Aboriginal 'employees', the same word that had been invariably used for assigned convict labourers. A letter to the *West Australian* in 1886 stated:

It must be clearly understood that we positively refuse to acknowledge the Reverend Mr Gribble, or any other person that will interfere or tamper with our servants, and we respectfully request the removal of the Rev. Mr Gribble from the district.¹²³

In response, Gribble went to Perth to explain in person to the church dignitaries and to deliver a public lecture entitled 'Only a blackfellow, or the conditions and needs of our Aborigines'.¹²⁴ As well as general discussion of the condition of the Aborigines, Gribble criticised their treatment at the hands of the Gascoyne settlers in both the cattle and pearling industries. On his return to Carnarvon, he found he could no longer obtain his supplies in the town and that slogans had been posted all over the town reading:

Down with Gribble and all his supporters and confusion to all Sneaks¹²⁵

Furthermore, a piece of doggerel on the church door proclaimed:

Old Parry sent a Parson Here,
His name is J.B. Gribble.
Poor Silly Wretch, he damned himself
to Save the Lord the Trouble.¹²⁶

Gribble was not left totally alone in the white community of Carnarvon. He was gratified, 'for the sake of Australian Christianity', that a few people had declined to sign the petition. Some who had, including George Baston and Thomas Bird, contacted the Bishop to have their names erased from the petition, feeling that they had been misled. Some tried to assist by purchasing extra supplies for themselves to provide some for Gribble, but they, too, were soon boycotted.

At another public meeting in Carnarvon on 28 December, Gribble was called upon to resign. Amidst heckling from the white crowd and cries of 'we are not slave-drivers', Gribble took the floor,

declaring that he would never cease to fight 'for the downtrodden natives'. The *West Australian* reported the comments made at the meeting. Gribble had not proved himself to be 'a true Britisher', said Mr Rotton. Gribble had not acted Christianly, they said. 'If we were not Christians, Mr Gribble could not make us such.' A Mr Russell said that if Mr Gribble was a Christian, he certainly did not want to resemble him.¹²⁷

Incensed, Gribble wrote to the Perth newspapers in January 1886, enclosing his diary of his first three months in Carnarvon. The *Inquirer* warned Gribble to mind his own business and get on with devoting his time to the 'wild blacks'.¹²⁸ The *West Australian*, owned by influential members of the Church of England, said that they had had enough of Gribble and that the Church of England could expect no more support from them in keeping Gribble as a missionary.¹²⁹ Nevertheless, both newspapers had their eyes on potential sales and published Gribble's diary in serialised form. This created a furore and effectively moved the scene of the confrontation from Carnarvon to Perth.

By this time the Church of England in general and the missions committee in particular were balking at the controversy surrounding Gribble. The missions committee passed a lengthy resolution critical of Gribble which read in part: 'The action of the Rev. J.B. Gribble in publishing the articles referred to in the *Daily News* and *Inquirer* meets with (and we deeply regret so to express it) the unqualified condemnation of this committee.'¹³⁰

Bishop Parry and Rev. J. Allen recorded their minority objection to the wording of the motion. The carefully worded resolution did not go so far as disputing Gribble's claims, but asked him to apologise for his action 'in publishing to the world, after so short an acquaintance with the district, the details of the domestic life and faults of the settlers therein committed to his pastoral care'.¹³¹

At the end of January, Gribble travelled to Perth on the *S.S. Natal*. A gang of men, including a Gascoyne landholder, physically assaulted and abused him. In Perth, Gribble attempted to lay charges against his attackers, but was thwarted at every turn. He was unable at first to find a solicitor to accept his case and, when he finally did, the process of law was continually frustrated. Despite the fact that the Attorney General, Colonial Secretary and even the Governor perused the file,¹³² the case was delayed until

the elapsed time exceeded the legal limit. This served to harden Gribble's resolve to make known the mistreatment of Aborigines in Western Australia. It had also by this time become a great personal ordeal and at least one other attempt was made on his life.

He wrote to the Secretary of State for Colonies in London, with copies to the Governor, Colonial Secretary, the Dean of Perth and the missions committee, regarding the unjust handling of his case:

I am obliged to abandon this case through the force of circumstances, [and] I shall most certainly lay the blame at the door of the government of this colony and I shall be prepared to act accordingly. I shall not keep anything back from the sister colonies, nor from the authorities, civil and ecclesiastical in England. I shall make it my mission to reveal to the Christian world the wrongs and injustices, and the cruelty obtaining under the British flag in the colony of Western Australia.¹³³

This was too much for the Church of England church and the missions committee. Gribble's main supporter, Bishop Parry, was out of the colony and his position on the committee was filled by two men strongly opposed to Gribble's stand. Both owned pastoral properties in the north and one was an editor of the *West Australian*.¹³⁴ In February, the committee forbade Gribble from preaching in Carnarvon and restricted his official mission activities to the Dalgety reserve, a desert area 300 kilometres north of the town.¹³⁵ In June, Gribble was refused permission to preach at the Cathedral and anywhere in the Perth parish,¹³⁶ and some church officials actively sought his resignation.

The connection between the pastoralists and the church officials was not lost on everyone. A woman signing herself 'An English Lady' wrote to the *Inquirer*, strongly criticising those whose religious and secular interests were 'mingled':

Mr Gribble is an accredited missionary, not a greenhorn, and has gone about his work in a manly way, single-handed and in the teeth of the most determined opposition. But the vices of some settlers have not been condoned and their interests are endangered. If missionary work goes on, they may have no black paramours and the Aboriginal will probably demand regular wages for his labour! The whole thing lies in a nut shell.

There is so much of the world in the church and so little of the church in the world, that ecclesiastics derive half of their funds from men whose lives they must wink at. There is no doubt the Roman Catholics will smile at the efforts of so-called Christian settlers to expel the first missionary of their own faith who has set foot in the land. We deserve their taunts and I for one blush for the effigy of religion that has been set up in our midst. Truly the feet are of clay.¹³⁷

Unwelcome in his own Church of England churches, Gribble addressed a crowd at the Working Men's Hall. A large number of supporters attended and 'Gribble support committees' were formed.¹³⁸ Gribble became a kind of focal point for opponents of the conservative Perth establishment. The *Inquirer*, newspaper of the colonial liberals, saw its opportunity and backed Gribble as well, pointing out that the motives of the missions committee may not have been entirely spiritual:

Of whom is this committee composed? Mainly of men who, however honest they may wish to be, have their interests bound up with the settlers – men some of whom would feel keenly in a pecuniary sense the defection of influential members of their church.¹³⁹

In late June, supported by the *Inquirer*, Gribble made his most dramatic move yet. He published his small book, *Dark Deeds in a Sunny Land or Blacks and Whites in North-West Australia*.¹⁴⁰ In it he detailed his own experiences, described the 'native labour system' on the Gascoyne, and provided his own and other people's reports of atrocities, including particularly the eyewitness accounts of a David Carly, ex-convict stockman.

There was a certain inevitability that Carly and Gribble, two courageous and persecuted champions of the oppressed Aborigines of Western Australia's north-west, should join forces. As an ex-convict seeking work, Carly had moved throughout that region for more than ten years prior to Gribble's arrival. Deeply shocked by the persistent brutality, rape, kidnapping, forced labour and murder which typified the treatment of Aborigines in the north-west, he protested to the local authorities, to Perth and finally to London to the Secretary of State for the colonies.¹⁴¹ In 1886, he wrote to the Aborigines Protection Society in London: 'I

have defended these murdered slaves to the best of my ability for thirteen years and to my complete ruin, so I will defend them to the last as I have long since given up all hope of aid. . .¹⁴²

Bashed by police and jailed in the north, Carly was virtually ignored in Perth. He was a nobody whose opinions carried little weight, not helped by the fact that his letters were somewhat less than literate. Not so the much more literate Gribble. His collaboration with Carly was a powerful combination and their combined views were now published in a book. Gribble's final paragraph said it all:

. . . even in Australia, under its sunny skies, deeds – the most dark and horrible in their nature – have been committed and are still being practised. . . even in the face, so to speak, of the representative of the greatest sovereign the world has ever seen, and who emphatically declared that the justice and righteousness of the word of the Living God constituted 'The secret of England's greatness'.¹⁴³

The response in Perth was hysterical. The bishop's commissary withdrew Gribble's missionary licence on the slim but convenient pretext that he had left the diocese without his bishop's consent. The missions committee ordered the Gascoyne mission to be closed. It had hardly even started. 'The church,' wrote Gribble's son Ernest, 'finally abandoned the attempt and also abandoned my father'.¹⁴⁴

Despite the order to close his mission, Gribble left Mary, his wife, and Ernest to maintain the work and travelled in the eastern colonies seeking support. In a discreetly pointed move, the bishops of Sydney, Goulburn and Ballarat issued Gribble with general preaching licenses and employed him to lecture for three months. Gribble's old friend, Bishop Mesac Thomas of Goulburn, offered to re-employ him.

Melbourne's *Daily Telegraph* published some particularly condemnatory articles on Western Australian society, together with extracts from *Dark Deeds in a Sunny Land*.¹⁴⁵ This further enraged the influential conservatives of Western Australia. Finally, in August 1886, the editors of the *West Australian* wrote:

We must apologise to our readers for giving them so much Grib-

bliana of late, but the papers of the eastern colonies have been full of articles upon the assertions of one whom without exaggeration, we might designate as a lying, canting humbug.¹⁴⁶

These final words, 'lying, canting humbug', prompted Gribble to take the extreme action which finally destroyed him. Believing that he had sufficient support, he sued the *West Australian* for libel, claiming damages of £10 000.

Returning to Western Australia, Gribble was, despite his lawsuit, hoping to go back to his mission. On the *SS Thomas* en route to Perth, Gribble wrote a forceful, angry letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury:

Because I have tried to help the helpless and free the enslaved. . . I have been denounced as an imposter and a slanderer by interested parties. . . while by my own brethren in the ministry I have been set at naught and entirely sacrificed. I am now returning to my sphere of labour (where my dear wife has been faithfully holding the position for the four or five months of my enforced absence) without the least prospect [of employment], humanly speaking, for my position as a missionary clergyman has been wrenched from me.¹⁴⁷

Gribble was joined in Perth by his long-suffering family. The Gribbles' youngest child died in Perth and they lived in poor circumstances on the outskirts of the town. Gribble supported his family by loading bricks and chopping firewood,¹⁴⁸ awaiting the long-delayed court case which did not commence until 16 May 1887. The libel suit of *Gribble versus Harper and Hackett*, the editors of the *West Australian*, lasted for twenty days. Gribble was in the witness stand for eight days. The courtroom was packed and transcripts of the hearing were published daily in the newspapers. It was clearly seen by many as a test of the power of the influential conservatives of Western Australia.

Much evidence at the trial was highly incriminating, revealing widespread mistreatment of Aborigines, both on pastoral properties and pearling luggers, as mere chattels. The statements by Gascoyne pastoralists and pearlers revealed a strong belief that their own race, class and status as British settlers entitled them to special privileges. The situation they described was to them simp-

ly 'the natural order of things'. George Bush, an influential Gascoyne pastoralist and a practising member of the Church of England, told the court:

I have heard of natives. . . being run down and unlawfully taken and I believed they were chained up. . . I have heard that nigger hunting in the northern parts of the colony has been a profitable employment. . . I have sent the women off to the white men myself. . . the women will be used as the white man wishes.¹⁴⁹

Confident that right was on his side and buoyed by the intensity of public support, Gribble was convinced that he would be vindicated. Indeed, he had previously corresponded with Chief Justice Alexander Onslow, who had written, 'I believe you have right and justice on your side, and I believe and hope you will ultimately be able to prove this. . .'¹⁵⁰

It took eight days for Justices A. Onslow and E.A. Stone to come to their decision after the hearing was completed. Although Onslow may have sympathised with Gribble, it seems highly likely that during these eight days they were under pressure to vindicate the colony's name. The pastoralists and the powerful Perth families to which many of them belonged needed to keep face within their own society. Indeed, if the *West Australian* was found guilty of libelling Gribble, this would threaten the entire powerful conservative elite which the newspapers represented, up to and including the Governor himself.¹⁵¹

In June 1887 Justices Onslow and Stone, before an overflowing court room, found in favour of the *West Australian*. The newspaper had been true, just and accurate in calling Gribble a 'lying, canting humbug'. The *West Australian* exulted that 'every genuine son of Western Australia will rejoice that Gribble's foul career of slander has at last been effectively barred by the unanswerable command of the Supreme Court'.¹⁵²

The *Inquirer*, which had once told Gribble to 'mind his own business', forcefully claimed that Gribble had become a victim of 'Might versus Right':

We believe the public will regard the Rev. J.B. Gribble as neither a liar nor a canting humbug. This trial will not be the first in-

stance in which the decision of the court of law is not endorsed by public opinion, nor will it be the last. . . Let the squattocracy say the colony is cleared! But of what? Not of anything Mr Gribble has said respecting their cruelties towards the 'niggers', but cleared of a missionary effort that would have made the colony what a vigorous church and good government should strive to make it. . .¹⁵³

Penniless and unable to pay his legal costs, Gribble left Western Australia a broken man, destroyed by the formidable and unholy alliance of the 'six ancient families', the Governor, the *West Australian* and the Church of England elite.

A few years later, Bishop Charles Riley was enthroned as the first Archbishop of Perth. The *West Australian* took the opportunity to pay homage to the status of the Church of England in the colony. After noting that, in numbers, the Church of England membership exceeded all other denominations put together, the writer frankly boasted that this same membership included most of the people of influence and standing in Western Australia and, as well – through them – most of the property.¹⁵⁴

Riley's biographer could but agree:

Anglicans certainly did predominate in the genteel English families who had played such a part in directing the fortunes of the colony since its establishment. A few of these families had been rewarded with imperial honours; many of them had pioneered new pastures and won their fortunes from the sheep's back. Others could point proudly to distinguished service on the bench or in the legislative council. The Brockmans, Hamersleys, Stones, Moores, Wittenooms, Bussells and others could boast of loyal service to the first of the governors, whilst other families no less prolific and no less distinguished continued that tradition during the next fifty years. The Burts stemmed from a background of legal service, the Lefroys and Lee-Steeres combined politics with grazing, whilst the Padburys quite literally shipped the woollen industry to the empty north west.¹⁵⁵

The editor of the *West Australian*, Winthrop Hackett, now knighted, was one of those whom Gribble had sued for libel. Did he spare a thought for Gribble when he penned these words, ex-

tolling the selflessness and purity of his church?

Representing the great Anglican Church of England, Ireland, and other colonies, with its splendid store of ancient memories, with its record of ardent toils, its unselfish labours for holiness and the public good, with its immense charities, and with its noble and saintly examples, its daughter in WA has a warrant second to none for pressing forward in the task of leading men and women to purer aims, higher desires, and the larger and the grander hope which all believe lies before the nation and the individual in the future.¹⁵⁶

In the case of John Gribble, it is hard to see how the church could claim to have demonstrated 'unselfish labours of holiness and the public good'. Despite this, embarrassed church historians, if not actually claiming that Gribble was in the wrong, have suggested that he should have acted more discreetly, showed more humility or set an example of Christian behaviour to the northern settlers.¹⁵⁷ This, indeed, had been Bishop Parry's advice:

The way to remove the evils of which you complain is not by calling down the fire of public opinion upon the settlers in the district, but by yourself setting the example of the true Christian mode of dealing with the natives and by making such recommendations to the government as will lead to the appointment of Native Protectors and the regulation of their employment etc. by law.¹⁵⁸

In a sense, this is what the Carnarvon pastoralists wanted him to do. If they were to tolerate him at all, they wanted him to provide a church service for them on Sunday and spend the rest of his time caring for aged and infirm Aborigines – in other words, to 'concentrate upon his task'.¹⁵⁹

That was not Gribble's style, nor did he ever see the gospel as consistent with standing by and failing to speak up against injustice and oppression. It does not seem that he actively pursued confrontation in Carnarvon. It was when a runaway Aboriginal sought refuge with him, that he found himself in an argument with the Aboriginal's 'owners'. It was this stance which prompted the public meeting which called for his dismissal. Certainly he

pulled no punches, intent on revealing the suffering of the Gascoyne Aboriginal people, and it has been suggested that his 'temper and tactlessness' did not help his case.¹⁶⁰

The Archbishop of Canterbury sought information on the Gribble case and accepted this advice from Bishop Parry:

[Gribble] is an earnest man and enthusiastic on behalf of the Aboriginal natives of Australia, but he is not only utterly wanting in judgment, but declines altogether to be guided by my own instruction. . . . He has thus placed me in a very serious difficulty at the outset of the work and brought our mission into general disrepute.¹⁶¹

Would a more moderate, less public approach have been more successful? History does not seem to bear this out. We do not find much evidence, in the years following Gribble's departure from Western Australia, that those who advised him to act more meekly, such as Bishop Parry or the Church of England Synod (which contained eleven parliamentarians, four senior military officers and a supreme court judge), were quietly working behind the scenes to alleviate the plight of the Gascoyne Aborigines. They were the real losers in this case. There is no evidence that anything changed after Gribble's departure. In fact, his son Ernest was to come back forty years later and find himself yet again confronting the pastoralists in the north-west.

Back in the east, despite the best efforts of sympathetic NSW Church of England churches, John Gribble was never happy, never fully recovering from his ordeal. In 1892, he cashed in his life assurance policy and, at his own expense, travelled to north Queensland and selected the site of what was to become the Yarrabah mission – a story which will be told in a later chapter.

There, within a few months, Gribble became seriously ill. Just before his death he said:

I have given my life and substance to befriend the blackman of Australia; I have walked hundreds of miles for his benefit and endured many hardships that I might serve him; I have sacrificed my worldly interests for his good but, oh, I don't regret it. Would that I had fifty lives that I might spend in such service.¹⁶²

John Brown Gribble died on 3 June 1893. His funeral oration was given by an Aboriginal Christian, Martin Simpson, who preached on Isaiah 37:4, the text Gribble himself had chosen in 1878 for his first sermon on the Aborigines: 'lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left'. On his tombstone in Sydney's Waverley Cemetery are inscribed the words:

In loving memory of the Rev. John Brown Gribble, F.R.G.S., founder of the Warangesda mission and the blackfellows' friend, who fell asleep June 3rd, 1893, aged 45 years. 'God is love'.

During the next twenty years, only a few courageous individuals expressed their concern about what was happening to Aboriginal people in the north-west. Journalist Arthur J. Vogan found that the more established newspapers tired of stories of atrocities and turned to more popular outlets such as the *Truth*, 'a low paper in many ways, yet it lies closer to the poor humanity of these parts than do the better-typed periodicals'.¹⁶³ Vogan, too, petitioned the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1897 in the hope that the church could intervene:

For the last ten years I have done what little I could to work public opinion up to the point of insisting upon the humane treatment of the natives; but, so far, I have been little able to command attention. . . I have spoken, written and prayed the Primate and various Bishops here to show that the church, to which I belong by training, is not so cowardly and weak as to be afraid to tackle these abuses - but in vain. I do not imagine that this letter will do any good. . .¹⁶⁴

In 1904, under pressure from the Colonial Office, from the newly-formed Commonwealth government and from within Western Australia itself, the Governor of Western Australia appointed W.E. Roth, Queensland's Chief Protector of Aborigines, to conduct a Royal Commission into the treatment of Aborigines in Western Australia's north-west. Roth's report 'revealed a truly shocking state of affairs'.¹⁶⁵

[There was] nothing to prevent the greatest scoundrel unhung, European or Asiatic, putting under contract any black he pleases. . . Employers can work natives without a contract. . .

Wages are not stipulated. . . Police are invoked to bring runaway [Aborigines] back. . . At Broome, quite half the children (from ten years and upwards) are indentured to the pearling industry and taken out on boats. . . with regard to the most suitable age at which a child can be indentured as laid down by law, the Chief Protector considers this to be about six years. . .

Blacks may be arrested without instructions, authority or information. . . Chains. . . are fixed to the necks of native prisoners . . . chains are used for female natives. . . These women are the unwilling witnesses arrested illegally. . . [a police constable does not] prevent assisting stockmen and trackers from having sexual connection with the chained-up female witnesses. . . [Constables] are charged by the natives with intimacy with the women. . . The females brought in as witnesses are usually young. . .

By their own [police] assertions, every native caught means more money in their pocket. . . The prisoner is neck-chained from the day he comes into gaol until the day he leaves, sometimes two or three years and upwards. . . ¹⁶⁶

The publication of the Roth report brought John Gribble back to the memory of many Western Australians. Predictably, the report was criticised by the *West Australian*,¹⁶⁷ but supported by other newspapers. The *Daily News* republished Gribble's *Dark Deeds in a Sunny Land* with a new title, *Blood-Curdling Cruelty: A Chapter of Horrors*.¹⁶⁸ The Methodist, Roman Catholic, Baptist and Church of Christ denominations welcomed the results of the Commission.¹⁶⁹ The Church of England remained 'cautiously neutral'.¹⁷⁰ According to Bishop Riley, the 'whole of Dr Roth's time has been more or less wasted'.¹⁷¹

Many regarded Roth's report as a vindication of Gribble's charges. Roth himself wrote to Mary Gribble, saying that his findings exonerated her late husband.¹⁷² The Ratepayers' Associations of Perth and Fremantle also wrote to her, advising that they had at their meetings passed resolutions of sympathy with Gribble's wife and family 'for his undeserved fate and untimely death, his statements with reference to the natives having been proved true by the recently published report of the Royal Commission'.¹⁷³

John Brown Gribble was 'a man of earnest piety but. . . impetuous temperaments,' Bishop Mesac Thomas had once written. 'Nevertheless, we like him for he has done good work.'¹⁷⁴

Catholic missionaries in the north-west

Late in the nineteenth century, there were a number of dedicated and outstanding Catholic missionaries in the north of Western Australia. Their missions owed their existence to the zeal of the outspoken Bishop Matthew Gibney of Perth. As he said of himself:

So long as there is traffic in human flesh between certain gross and unscrupulous men, and so long as I consider that the blacks are being cruelly treated under the sacred name of justice, I shall not cease to raise my voice. . .¹⁷⁵

It is one of the sad realities of the history of the relationship between Australian churches and the Aborigines, and in this case the Catholic church in particular, that the forthright views of people like Gibney, his long interest in Aboriginal people, and his keen awareness of the injustices they suffered, are well-known largely because they are exceptional.¹⁷⁶ The welfare, spiritual or physical, of Aborigines has never attracted the popular generosity of the Catholic community in the way that churches and schools have.¹⁷⁷

A Catholic historian has recently written that 'a peculiar ambivalence marks the Catholic church's dealings with the Australian Aborigines'.¹⁷⁸ Whereas there were a number of missions established in isolated corners of the continent, 'the record of the official church is one of general apathy with intermittent stirrings of a troubled conscience'.¹⁷⁹ This judgment could be equally well applied to some of the Protestant churches, but there is a sense in which it is particularly true of the Catholic church at least until the 1940s. When, in 1885, all Australian Catholic bishops decreed an annual collection for Aboriginal missions, only £795 was collected in ten years.¹⁸⁰ In a similar period, Protestants contributed many times that sum just to Daniel Matthews' Maloga mission, as well as to many other missions, including Point McLeay, Poonindie, Lake Tyers, Bethesda and Hermannsburg. I am certainly not applauding the limited interest which Protestants displayed in the needs of the Aborigines but, generally speaking, Catholics were even less concerned.

There were, of course, notable exceptions. We have considered in detail the selfless and dedicated work of Dom Rosendo Salvado. We have seen, too, the efforts of Archbishop John Pold-

ing and of his continual shame and Christian rage at the behaviour of a supposedly Christian white society. He felt it his duty '...to lay upon the conscience of all who have property in these colonies the thought that there is blood upon their land and that human souls, to whom they are in so many ways debtors in the name of natural justice and in the name of the Redeemer, are perishing because no man careth for them'.¹⁸¹

Polding was generally unable to influence his fellow bishops to do anything positive for Aborigines. After Polding's failed Passionist mission on Stradbroke Island, there were no Catholic missions in the nineteenth century in the eastern and southern colonies. In 1881, Archbishop James Goold admitted that the Catholic church's efforts in regard to the Aborigines was 'a sad reproach'.¹⁸² Among concerned Catholic laypeople, W.A. Duncan particularly stood out. Editor of the *Catholic Australasian Chronicle* until dismissed for his forthright support of social justice issues, he wrote unceasingly of the wrongs perpetrated against Aborigines:

We have deprived them of their means of subsistence, we have driven them from their haunts, we have communicated to them our diseases and our vices; in a word an edict has gone out for their extermination.¹⁸³

Whether they supported their missions adequately or not, it was true of all churches, Catholic or Protestant, that any missionary enterprise very much depended on the dedication and personality of a single exceptional individual. Catholics often expressed the view that mission work was impossible without a Rosendo Salvado – indeed, some Protestants doubted that a Protestant Salvado existed!¹⁸⁴

In the frontier years in Western Australia, the most outstanding individuals were Matthew Gibney, Duncan McNab and Nicholas Emo.

Matthew Gibney, born in Ireland in 1835, arrived in Perth as a young priest in 1863.¹⁸⁵ He soon assumed administrative responsibilities, becoming vicar-general to Bishop Martin Griver. A physically powerful and naturally courageous man, he became an outspoken advocate of justice for Aborigines. In a curious quirk of fate, Gibney, like John Gribble, was to have an encounter

with Ned Kelly before he and Gribble met in Western Australia as fellow champions of Aboriginal rights. On a fund-raising tour of the eastern states, on 28 June 1886, his train passed through Glenrowan where the Ned Kelly gang was barricaded in the hotel, shooting it out with the police. Leaving the train, Gibney ministered to Ned Kelly, whom he thought was dying. Ignoring the police, he then forced his way into the burning Glenrowan Hotel to administer the last rites to the dead and dying Kelly gang. This courageous act brought him fame and respect back in his Perth diocese where, a few months later, he became assistant bishop, succeeding Griver in 1887.¹⁸⁶

Gibney was most outspoken in his criticism of the treatment of Aboriginal people in the north-west of the State. Travelling in the region in 1878, he had seen Aboriginal road gangs, chained by both neck and ankle, labouring in the blistering heat. At La Grange Bay he had seen the grief of a community whose young men had drowned trying to escape forced labour on the pearling fleet. He had seen pregnant women diving, some with hands crushed with iron bars for having clung too long to the sides of the boat between dives.¹⁸⁷ Gibney was totally convinced that the oft-stated pending extinction of the Aborigines was occurring only as a result of white aggression, cruelty and neglect:

Our blackfellows do, indeed, seem fated to disappear, but not because of any inherent inability to adapt themselves to the conditions of civilisation. Nor is it solely, nor chiefly because the easily-acquired vices of the white man prove fatal to them. Their misfortune is that they stand in the way of unchecked spread of flocks and herds. Insatiable earth hunger and monstrous unscrupulousness are main factors in that process of 'removal' of which they are the victims. They disappear rapidly on the outskirts of civilisation because in such a situation the white man is practically beyond the cognisance of the law, shoots straight and shoots often. . .¹⁸⁸

Anxious to establish a missionary presence in the north-west, Gibney first tried to interest Salvado, but New Norcia was too precious and personal to him, and he was already busy avoiding transfer to Darwin. It was not until the death of Salvado that the Benedictines extended their work to include Kalumburu in 1908.

Having tried other possibilities, almost as a last resort, Gibney turned to Duncan McNab, an aged priest who had for many years been waging a losing battle for Aboriginal rights in Queensland.

Born in Scotland in 1820, Duncan McNab entered a seminary at an early age with the intention of training for missionary work in Australia. The frustrations that were to dog his life began when his bishop, short of priests, detained him in Scotland until he was forty-seven.¹⁸⁹ His parents being too old to leave behind, he brought them with him to Australia in 1867, working as a priest in Portland for four years to pay their passage.

Although appropriately labelled a 'maverick',¹⁹⁰ it is perhaps too fanciful to argue that McNab's zeal to assist downtrodden Aborigines stemmed from his persecuted Scottish Catholic background. Although there have been some exceptional individuals in Australia who sympathised with Aborigines after having themselves been part of an oppressed minority, the generalisation does not hold true. Emancipated Irish convicts were no less brutal to Tasmanian Aborigines than anyone else. The oppressed, near-refugee Scottish Presbyterians in Victoria's Gippsland treated Aborigines just as they themselves had been treated.¹⁹¹

Refused entry into the Benedictine monastery at New Norcia, McNab obtained an appointment to the Aborigines Protection Board of Queensland, working initially on Bribie Island in Moreton Bay. He proved to be an indefatigable supporter of Aboriginal land rights. If the Aborigines are to survive, he wrote to a Queensland government official, the 'essential requisite' was land. They had 'the first and best right to it' because it was 'their own country which they had always occupied and used and never renounced or alienated'.¹⁹² He found, however, that those in authority were not particularly interested in the survival of the Aborigines. His plans were thwarted by an uninterested government and antagonistic white landowners.¹⁹³

To applaud McNab, as some have done, as 'the priest who initiated land rights 100 years ago'¹⁹⁴ is a little over-enthusiastic, as there were others long before him who urged similar plans on various colonial governments: Clamor Schurmann in South Australia, for example, and William Thomas in Victoria. McNab was, nevertheless, a fine example of a little understood truth, which is that Christian missionaries were the first to argue strongly for Aboriginal land rights. There have been missionaries

pressing this point upon unwilling authorities for the past 150 years.

Disillusioned with the Queensland government, McNab resigned his position¹⁹⁵ and, unable to convince a lethargic Catholic church to support him, he supported himself:

I maintained myself here for the first year by means that I had earned in Victoria. For the rest of the time I subsisted by fishing and begging. . .

From the beginning I was told that any attempts to civilise [the Aborigines] would be fruitless because they are said to be the lowest of the human race, incapable of forming an abstract idea and certain soon to die out. I did not think it necessary to discuss these points, knowing them to have been created by God for the same end as other men. . .¹⁹⁶

When sore eyes, malaria, low finance, hostility from land-owners and, finally, sunstroke, convinced McNab that he needed others to help him, he returned briefly to Victoria from where he sailed for Europe.¹⁹⁷ He took his grievances both to the Colonial Office in London and to Pope Leo XIII in Rome.¹⁹⁸ One positive result of this trip was that his visit to Rome influenced the reluctant Superior General of Austrian Jesuits to begin a mission in the Northern Territory.¹⁹⁹ On the advice of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, McNab travelled to the United States to recruit help. Unsuccessful and frustrated, he returned to Australia in 1883 where an almost equally frustrated Matthew Gibney invited him, at the age of sixty-three, to come to Western Australia.²⁰⁰

For a few months, he worked as chaplain at the Aboriginal prison on Rottnest Island, a depressing place where 'gangs of exiles, ludicrously clad in short flannel smocks, expiated in the misery the error of not changing the ancient ways for those of the white'.²⁰¹ McNab did, however, find the mix of different Aboriginal prisoners a useful group from which to gain some information on the local tribes.²⁰²

In 1884, Gibney sent McNab further north with a very small amount of money provided by Gibney himself and a few parishioners. McNab travelled to the port of Geraldton by boat. There he obtained a horse and, under the shelter of his broad

'cabbage tree hat', he set off inland to survey the Aboriginal situation. He was generally well accepted by white settlers, most of whom did not know the real reason for his journey.²⁰³ McNab travelled several thousand kilometres, riding between the Murchison and De Grey rivers and back again. Plagued by fever and lame horses, he nevertheless gathered a great deal of information from which he could make an accurate assessment of the situation.²⁰⁴

All river frontages and water sources were taken up by pastoralists. Aboriginal people were denied access to them. The few 'Aboriginal reserves' which had been created at the insistence of the British colonial office were on generally inferior land. No Aborigines lived on them. The reserves only really existed as notices in the *Government Gazette* 'which the natives never see and if they did they cannot read'.²⁰⁵ The only possibility of a viable mission site would have been a lapsed riverfront lease and even then, why would any Aborigines want to live there, especially if it happened not to be in their traditional country?

McNab soon found that the Aboriginal people of the region fell into four groups: those permanently resident on cattle stations, having resigned themselves to a new regime with little prospect of future change for the better; those 'employed' in the pearling fleets, mostly unwillingly and mostly desperate to escape; those serving sentences far away in Perth's Rottnest Island prison; and those seeking refuge from the police in inaccessible areas. How could McNab demonstrate that he could offer them anything better? Miserable as their situation was, it was still virtually impossible to convince them that one white man held their interests much above another.²⁰⁶

Like so many missionaries, McNab was seeking his impossible dream of 'a people untouched by the corrupting hand of civilisation through whom the Christian message might be revived in all its dynamism'.²⁰⁷ In sympathy with this ambition, Gibney sent McNab yet further north to the Kimberleys where white settlement had only just begun.

Having surveyed the hot, ugly little frontier port of Derby – bush timber, galvanised iron, police contingent and chain gang of Aboriginal prisoners – McNab toured the surrounding district. There were few if any suitable mission sites and, besides, he was realistic enough to realise that, although Aborigines might come to

him briefly out of curiosity, they would need material inducement to stay permanently:

Without means I do not believe a mission can be successfully opened anywhere, for a savage will only listen to a missionary as he would to a musician unless he can confer on him some tangible benefit. . . I never desired to have the direction or management of a mission in Western Australia. I am not the originator of this scheme. . . I only agreed to co-operate, leaving the honour and merit of the enterprise to others. . .²⁰⁸

Gibney promised him a helper and launched an Australia-wide appeal for funds. With this assurance, McNab travelled north by lugger to Swan Point. This, together with nearby Sunday Island, was in the country of the Bard people, who were less influenced by Europeans than any group McNab had so far encountered.

The Bard, after satisfying their initial curiosity, decided he was no threat to them and left him alone. McNab filled his days with morning and evening prayers, an occasional Mass, cooking, fishing and tending his horses. He sometimes wandered the beaches in search of Aborigines, but communicated with only one who had the nickname 'Knife', spoke a little English and was attracted to him. Everyone else avoided him except for occasionally stealing his food, although always leaving him enough.

McNab was not surprised. His way of life, he knew 'must appear to the native more irksome and laborious than his own', so he could see no reason why they should want to join him in it.²⁰⁹ Mary Durack has recently said of him:

Father McNab's desolation and sense of futility can be imagined, for apart from finding himself completely alone in a silence broken only by the screaming of sea birds and the wash of the restless tides, he knew that no one in this godless land really wanted or understood his mission. It seemed that even his friend in the south had lost faith in his work, though for himself he still believed that, given support and some authority as a protector of Aborigines, he could do much to prevent the exploitation and eventual extinction of the peninsula tribes and might yet succeed in helping them find a place in their radically changing world. In his more sanguine moments he had visions

of a fishing industry operated by the Aborigines with boats they had built themselves. He pictured native villages, farms, market gardens and a growing tradition of local handicrafts – all the dreams of all the missionaries who ever hoped to bring the stability of Christian life to this drifting soil.²¹⁰

McNab's eye trouble returned and, tortured by malaria and infected insect bites, he was on the verge of giving up when Knife unexpectedly turned up, offering to remain with him and be his interpreter. At last McNab had a friend and hope could flicker once more for him. He recovered somewhat from his afflictions. When Knife explained to the Bard people that McNab wanted to set up a mission, they liked the plan. Acutely aware of the way in which Aboriginal groups on better cattle country had been dispossessed, the idea appealed to them.²¹¹ They accepted the old priest, calling him 'Macanab'.

McNab and Knife toured on horseback, selecting a mission site about sixty kilometres south at Goodenough Bay. Riding on to Derby, they found that Gibney had sent some stores and a cheque, the proceeds of the Australia-wide appeal: £13/17/3.²¹² Gibney promised another appeal, but McNab responded that from past experience the results would be 'pathetic'.²¹³

It was one thing for the Bard to accept and understand McNab, but it was quite another to expect them to devote themselves to his mission. Even in as biologically productive an environment as the Kimberley coast, a hunting and gathering people needed to occupy most of their time in obtaining food. For a short time, McNab's new shipment of stores supplied the 'tangible benefit' necessary to attract and hold them on the mission site, but when the lugger bearing McNab's wet season supplies was sunk in the 1886 cyclone, he could no longer feed them. Except for Knife, they left to seek their traditional food sources. No doubt there was a sense in which Knife was what Durack called 'faithful',²¹⁴ but it was also frequently true of cases like Knife that he was a kind of benevolent spy, even a 'minder', left with McNab by conscious decision of his people.

In April 1886, McNab's long-awaited help, a young priest called William Treacy, arrived with stores, a small boat, a cart, and building and farming supplies.²¹⁵ The Bard people returned and assisted the two priests to erect a small wood and thatch

church and house. McNab and Treacy fenced and ploughed a garden plot and planted seeds. The Bard showed little interest in working in the garden, but a great deal of interest in the rituals which took place in the church.²¹⁶ They were themselves a people of ritual. Soon they were singing hymns. McNab managed to translate a few verses into their language. Gibney had long envisaged a translation of the Gospels for the northern tribes, but learned from McNab that no single translation would suffice, there being perhaps a hundred distinct languages.²¹⁷

After five months, McNab and Treacy felt that they had begun to succeed. In improved health, McNab went on mission business to Derby. There he heard of the gold rush at Halls Creek and that prospectors were dying of fever and privation, so he set out on a long journey to minister to them.²¹⁸ While McNab was in Halls Creek, Treacy went down with malaria. Delirious, he was taken by lugger to Derby and thence back to Perth. When McNab returned to the mission he found it desolate: the buildings were burnt down, the garden was reverting to bush. Some thought a bushfire had come through in the dry, others that the Aborigines had done it, but the most likely explanation was that it was destroyed by pearl-ers, many of whom were soon to prove themselves opposed to the moral influence of any mission presence.²¹⁹

Eventually, the Aborigines found McNab lying in the ruins of the mission, helplessly sick and broken. They tried to comfort him, offering to build it all again, but 'poor old Father Macanab' was too old, too worn out and too ill to start again.²²⁰ Under the anxious care of Knife, he was taken by horse to Derby from where he was shipped to Darwin to be cared for by the Jesuits. His health continued to decline, so he was taken south to the Jesuits at Richmond in Victoria. There, surprisingly enough, he recovered, living in the care of the Jesuits until his death in September 1896.²²¹ Mary Durack has provided this tribute:

His uncompromising honesty had recognised no short cuts to the goal of Christian conversion. He had baptised a few natives at the point of death, but he claimed no converts in the Kimberleys and probably thought his work had been to no avail. This was not the case, for the sincerity of 'poor old Father Mac-a-nab' had sown a seed of trust that spread among all the tribes of the peninsula. Never again would a missionary, whatever else his

trials, find himself shunned as a stranger by the native people of that strange land.²²²

From the 1890s until today, there have been Catholic missions in the Kimberleys. We will not consider these missions in detail in this book. Firstly, their complex history has already been meticulously and sensitively written by Mary Durack.²²³ Secondly, in a single volume such as this certain choices have to be reluctantly made. Thirdly, this chapter is concerned with frontier missions, and during the frontier period in the north-west, complex controversies and bitterness between the various orders which successively became involved in the Kimberleys tended to overshadow their work among the Aboriginal people. There were of course notable individual exceptions such as Alphonse Tachon and Xavier Daly at Beagle Bay, Jean Marie Janny at Disappointment Bay and Nicholas Emo at Broome and Lombadina.

As Martin Wilson has recently commented, 'there have been a number of transfers of mission responsibility in the Kimberleys over the years; all have been fraught with what seems to an outside observer an unnecessary amount of personal hurt'.²²⁴ We will therefore outline very sketchily the mission history of the region, pausing to consider a little more deeply the life and work of an eccentric but dedicated frontier priest, Nicholas Emo.

At his consecration as Bishop of Perth in 1886, Matthew Gibney had pledged himself to 'promote every possible mission of mercy for the sick, the poor, the natives, the outcast and the sinner', and had since pressed even more strongly the need for missions in the north-west of Western Australia.²²⁵ Through Cardinal Patrick Moran, he appealed to Pope Leo XIII who had also taken note several years earlier of the pleadings of Duncan McNab.²²⁶

In 1888, the Pope suggested that the challenge be taken up by the Cistercians (Trappists). They already had a number of missions, largely as a result of the temporary expulsion of religious orders from France in the 1880s. The Cistercians were reluctant, as their resources were already strained. In 1889, however, Dom Ambrose Janny and his failed community from New Caledonia arrived back at Sept Fons, their French headquarters. It was decided to send them to Australia.

The first two Cistercians arrived in Perth in 1890 and a

delighted Gibney himself assisted them to select a mission site in Nyul Nyul land, north of Broome at Beagle Bay.²²⁷ Seven more Cistercian missionaries, mostly French, arrived in 1892,²²⁸ yet in 1893, the Cistercian Abbott-General informed Gibney that his order would withdraw. While citing financial and farming problems and lack of locally recruited vocations, his main reason was that 'Aborigines were a race of people such as it seems impossible to convert to the true faith.'²²⁹

Gibney was shocked and spent a great deal of effort trying to convince the Cistercian authorities to allow the missionaries to remain. The discussion stayed at this high level for four years, but in 1897 the Cistercian missionaries were asked for their opinions. While several were horrified at the prospect, the majority were in favour, their stated reason being that it was impossible to hold together both the contemplative and the active life.²³⁰ The decision to withdraw was affirmed.

Meanwhile in 1898, the north-west had become a separate Diocese of Geraldton under Bishop William Kelly. On a visit to Rome, Kelly negotiated with the German branch of the Pallottine missionary order to replace the Cistercians. The Abbott-General of the Cistercians chose the Spanish priest Nicholas Emo to supervise the handover.²³¹ It was a bitter and difficult task.

Born of an influential Spanish family, Nicholas Emo had spent twelve years as a missionary priest in Patagonia before entering the Cistercian monastery, Sept Fons, in order to be sent to Australia because of 'the secret attraction I felt for this unfortunate race'.²³² The Cistercians, however, saw him as the answer to Gibney's request for a Spanish-speaking monk to minister to the Filipinos in the pearling fleets.

Emo arrived in Australia in 1892 and, after a short period at the Beagle Bay mission, he was placed in charge of the parish of the rough frontier port of Broome. Short, thick-set and black-bearded, in Trappist habit, cowl and cross, he soon became one of the best known people in cosmopolitan Broome, with its population of Japanese, Chinese and Filipinos, a mere fifty Europeans and an Aboriginal fringe camp.²³³ Having a Spanish priest was like home to the Filipinos and they adopted Emo immediately. He legitimised their various *de facto* relationships, baptised their children and made them a community. They helped him construct a timber church and a small shack for himself.²³⁴

Emo hid his disappointment, longing always to work with remote, traditional Aborigines. He lost no time in trying to assist the oppressed Aboriginal fringe dwellers who lived mainly by begging and prostitution. Emo was greatly encouraged by the offer of help by a pious and compassionate Filipino, Caprio Anabia and his remarkable wife. Of part-Aboriginal descent, she had been educated in Perth and her marriage to Anabia arranged before her return to Broome. Before Emo's arrival, they had already tried to treat sick Aboriginal people, making their camps more hygienic and teaching them of Christ.²³⁵

Emo and the Anabias established a small school for Aboriginal children and a hostel for teenage 'half-caste' girls. They arranged foster homes for some of the younger children, while others were cared for at the hostel by the teenage girls. Mrs Anabia, young but seemingly inexhaustible, doubled as hostel matron, nurse and schoolteacher. The happy, clean, neatly dressed little group of children and older girls who were shepherded down Broome's main street to church every Sunday rapidly became the talk of the town.²³⁶

Mrs Anabia and her troop of sexually attractive young girls became the brunt of local jokes in which she was caricatured as their 'Madam'. Small town imaginations soon created a relationship between her and her priestly protector. The jokes were assisted by the fact that some crewmen from the pearling fleet managed to seduce some of the girls and that a few of the girls, whom the townsfolk knew had engaged in prostitution before Emo's arrival, proved quite ingenious in outwitting their new guardians.²³⁷

In a sense, much of the joking was good-natured enough: Emo was in fact a popular eccentric in Broome. These things, however, have a habit of going too far. Some practical jokers began directing newcomers to the hostel when they were seeking a brothel. One of these, disgruntled at being refused entry, set fire to the hostel and school, burning them to the ground. The culprit was arrested, tried and deported. The townspeople rallied and assisted Emo to rebuild. The idea of arson, however, had now been suggested to some fertile minds and a few teenage boys, angry at being denied access to the girls, burned down the church.²³⁸

Emo erected a stone cross in the sandhill beside their school and, with the support of the townspeople, especially the Filipino

community, he built a larger church.

These dramatic events, however, could not pass officially unnoticed and a visiting government official named Marsden, taking town gossip as fact, accused the hostel of immorality in a report to the Aborigines Protection Board. Influential townspeople, both Protestant and Catholic, rallied to Emo's defence. Corporal Thomas of the Broome police reported on the hostel in glowing terms and stated his surprise that Marsden had not discussed the false rumours with the police, who would have corrected him.²³⁹ The local magistrate, H.W. Brownrigg, drew up a petition to the Board signed by twenty-seven prominent citizens, stating that the hostel and school had 'greatly improved the condition of the natives, morally and intellectually'.²⁴⁰

Emo wrote a heartbroken letter to Bishop Gibney and received a very supportive reply: 'Do not, on any account let it worry or annoy you. It is no wonder that such things are said. Are there not some who would like to see the school put to an end altogether?'²⁴¹

Despite such staunch support, Emo was hurt and discouraged. Seven years later, giving evidence before the Royal Commission, he stated that '...the very fact of [Marsden] having made such a slanderous statement did a great deal of harm, with the final result that, disgusted and disheartened, I gave up this particular school and distributed the girls into service amongst the European ladies in Broome'.²⁴²

There were, in any case, many more things to do than one lone priest could possibly manage, even with the Anabias. Emo rented ten acres on the headland nearby and set up a clean, quiet refuge for sick and aged Aboriginal people. He visited every day, bringing food and medicines, frustrated at how little he could do for the blind, the deaf and those suffering venereal diseases.²⁴³

Then, totally unsuspecting, Emo was given the impossibly difficult task of assuming charge of the Cistercians and supervising their withdrawal and the handover of the Beagle Bay mission to the German Pallottines.²⁴⁴ He was instructed to keep the withdrawal a secret from Gibney and his Australian supporters and from the members of his own order until the last possible moment. Emo, torn apart emotionally, had, he later told Gibney, no choice than 'to obey the final and unconditional orders before which a religious is able only to incline his head'.²⁴⁵

Emo had to endure the misunderstanding of his colleagues in stoic silence: their anger, their sorrow and, worst of all, their belief that he had somehow ambitiously ingratiated himself with the Abbott-General. Then he had to supervise their departure from Beagle Bay mission, amidst weeping Aborigines and ruined buildings, some of which the Cistercians had themselves set on fire.

Then, to save the mission from resumption by the Western Australian government, he had to restore the buildings and gardens. His small band of labourers included the dedicated Bishop Gibney, quick to understand and forgive; a number of Aboriginal women; and the amazing Irish journalist, Daisy Bates, in her tight-waisted frock, buttoned boots and white gloves – eventually to write *The Passing of the Aborigines* and to become a legend herself.²⁴⁶

Finally, to discharge his duty, Emo had to hand over the refurbished mission, saved by his efforts, to Father Walter George and the Pallottines in 1901. Emo had only joined the Cistercians in order to come to Australia, so he chose now to remain. He was never at ease, however, with the German monks – hard-working, efficient, but at odds with his own preferred style.²⁴⁷ Walter clashed with Emo over many issues, but when matters came to a head in 1905 and Walter tried to have Emo removed from Broome, a secret ballot of Broome Catholics voted 128 to four that Emo remain.²⁴⁸

Despite this overwhelming vote of confidence, Emo felt unable to stay. His old dream of a remote mission, far from the degrading influence of a frontier township, still haunted him. 'Never have I understood the sympathy I have among the people here,' he wrote to Walter, who had accused him of lobbying public support in Broome. 'It would please me well to escape and to hide in the rocks beside the sea and live in solitude with God.'²⁴⁹

Emo obtained dispensation from the Trappist rule, leaving the Cistercians to devote himself, as a secular priest, to the coastal Aborigines and the Filipino crews. He exchanged his Trappist cloak for an old black alpaca suit. He raised enough money for a down payment on a fourteen-ton schooner. Unable to pay it off, he was close to forfeiting it when his Filipino friends came to his aid, particularly Filomeno Rodriguez, who paid off the schooner. Overcome with relief and gratitude, Emo named the vessel *San*

Salvador and shifted his few possessions onto what was now to become his home.²⁵⁰

Emo's initial intention was to base himself on Cygnet Bay in King Sound, an area where there were many pearling crews and Aborigines in close contact. In September 1906, he advised Bishop Gibney that he had constructed a little chapel on the hill overlooking the bay. He dedicated it to 'Our Lady of the Aborigines' and inscribed on it *Nigra sum sed formosa* - 'I am black but I am beautiful' (Song of Solomon 1:5). He was surprised to find that the Aborigines were not impressed at all when he blackened the faces in a statue of the Virgin Mary and Jesus.²⁵¹

Cygnet Bay turned out much like Broome for the frustrated Emo. Its corruption and immorality still disturbed him, but his mission, as it had been in Broome, was a success. It was so successful that some Aborigines came from Beagle Bay, which put Emo once more into dispute with Walter who thought he was challenging the Beagle Bay mission. It seemed therefore an answer to his prayer when the New Norcia Benedictines asked him to assist them establish a Benedictine outpost far to the northeast at Drysdale River.²⁵²

This difficult experience shattered his dream. Emo and the Benedictines did not know that the few experiences of Europeans these Aboriginal people had had were to be murdered, kidnapped and raped. No doubt the Aborigines were also aware of the dispossession of their southern neighbours. They reacted to the missionaries either with fear or aggression and the missionaries mishandled the few occasions when communication seemed about to occur. It was in fact to be six years before any of them were to voluntarily contact the Benedictines.

On his schooner trips to Broome, Emo learned that his antagonist, Walter, had been replaced by a more tolerant superior and that he would be welcome back. In particular, they had sold their more northerly property, Lombadina, to a Manila Filipino, Thomas Puertollano. It had been a government ration depot for Aborigines, but there was now a problem as Puertollano was not an Australian citizen. Corporal Thomas suggested that Emo might like to consider opening a small mission there. It did not take Emo long to make up his mind. He realised that the gift God had given him was to work for the Filipinos and the oppressed Aborigines of the pearling coast about whom so few others cared.

Durack writes:

He knew when he sailed off. . . that he had burned his boats with the Benedictines and that he was not after all to earn a martyr's crown among the 'uncorrupted' tribes of the remoter north. He seems, however, to have had few regrets on this score. He was no [longer] nostalgic for the arid peninsula. . . and his enthusiasm for moulding the raw material of humanity into Christian shape had been dampened. He yearned now towards the muddled, warm-hearted Filipinos who loved him and the poor, lost, half-way people who so truly needed him.²⁵³

At Lombadina, there was still a solid core of Bard people, stubbornly maintaining a traditional dignity and avoiding where possible the most destructive cultural changes. They still live there today, a strong-willed and independent people. Most of the residents, however, were Filipinos with their part-Aboriginal wives and families, camped in the little bays and creeks. Emo found the mixed-race children to be attractive and intelligent. He stopped seeing the pearling region as simply a hot-bed of corruption, but began to see it as a place where the mingling of races was not necessarily tragic.²⁵⁴

Emo's little mission soon became the centre of the people's lives. He legitimised their relationships and they began attending church, bringing their children to be baptised, their young men and women to be married, their sick and dying to be comforted. These were the new citizens of the north-western ports, born of that unique mix of Filipino, Aboriginal, Chinese, European, Japanese, Pacific Islander and South-East Asian. There was a similar multicultural mix in all the northern ports and their descendants are the 'coloureds' of Australia's tropical north, from the 'Broome coloureds' and the 'Darwin coloureds' right around to Cairns.

I know many today who use the word 'coloured' with pride in their rich ancestry, an ancestry well-attested in this extract from Emo's baptismal register:

April 14th 1911, is baptised Joseph Maria, [half the half-caste], by Father Nicholas Emo, missionary in charge. Father - Thomas Puertollano, Manilaman. . . Mother - Agnes Bryan Puertollano, daughter [of an Aboriginal woman] and the white

man William Bryan. Godfather – Joseph Marcelina of Chile, S. America. . . Godmother – Maria Lamborg, Aboriginal Christian of Disaster Bay.²⁵⁵

Emo was still not free of rumour and innuendo, perpetrated by those ill-disposed to the moral influence of missions. Not until his death was it revealed that a part-Filipino child, in whom he took an affectionate interest, was not – as gossip would have it – his own child, but that of a disturbed Cistercian novice who had fathered the child and, on leaving the order, begged Emo to care for it.

The Pallottines began to appreciate his presence in the region and, indeed, his schooner *San Salvador* was constantly at their disposal. The German Pallottines were by now assisted in Broome by a fine group of Irish St John of God nuns under Mother Antonio O'Brien. They saw in Emo that devotion to the outcast and the oppressed that the ordinary residents of Broome had been more ready to acknowledge than his fellow missionaries. They always welcomed his visits to Broome, defending him against the still inevitable rumour-mongering. Mother Antonio was eager to join Emo at Lombadina, but was told this was not possible until there were more recruits.²⁵⁶

On his visits to Broome Emo worked as hard for the needy as he had ever done, despite failing health. He insisted on relieving the nuns of their night vigils by the sick, claiming that he continued to follow the Trappist rule of wakefulness. His works of compassion are still recalled in Broome, and the fact that the possibility that his actions might be misconstrued never prevented him from acting. Mary Durack records:

Typical also of the kindnesses recalled of his was his concern for an Aboriginal Christian woman who, suspected of being a leper, had been isolated in a wire enclosure wherein she was subjected to the nightly molestations of the lugger crews. Moved by her pitiful condition, he had looked after her until he succeeded in making better arrangements for her accommodation.²⁵⁷

Finally, in 1913, three nuns were spared for Lombadina. The Puertollano family vacated their home for the sisters. Using what little they had, the Aboriginal and Filipino people built them

paperbark huts for a school, girls' dormitories and a dining hut. Despite poverty, remote little Lombadina was a happy place. The genuine love and care which were shown to all people encouraged warm response and Aboriginal and Filipino people alike willingly shared in building and labouring tasks.

The ailing Emo was often at sea in the *San Salvador*, more so when the German Pallottines' movements were restricted during the First World War so that they greatly needed his assistance. Early in 1915, the Government requested Emo to investigate a report that the Benedictine mission in the north had been destroyed and the monks murdered by Aborigines. The nuns were very concerned for Emo's health but, believing he could be of help, he went north in his *San Salvador*, only to find that the report was false.²⁵⁸

Emo returned even more emaciated and weak but refused to rest, arguing that if in fact he was to die, he had no time to waste. On 5 March 1915, Father William Droste of Beagle Bay felt an uncanny impulse to go to Lombadina, although he had only recently visited. He rode the fifty miles by mule to discover Emo about to die of a severe stroke.

A matter-of-fact reference in the Lombadina *Liber Defunctorum* records the end of its founder's strange and turbulent life:

On the 8th of March 1915 at 3.40 a.m. died Rev. Father Nicholas Maria Emo, born 6th July 1849, Villa Flames, in the Province of Castellon (Spain), son of Vincent Emo and Mary (born Conception). The burial took place the same day, Rev. Father Droste assisting him in his last moments.²⁵⁹

At his own request, Nicholas Emo was buried without a coffin, wrapped in a blanket like the burials of the humble people he had tried to serve. The symbolism, misinterpreted by some not present, was not lost on the huge polyglot crowd at his Requiem. He passed at that moment from history into legend. For as long as they lived, the Bard and the Nimanboor (the Aboriginal people of that area), the Filipinos and the new mixed race people whom he had accepted and befriended over the years, revered his camps and the anchorages of the *San Salvador*.

Nicholas Emo and John Gribble were very different people.

Both were moved by compassion for those who were oppressed and mistreated. While Gribble responded in vehement denunciation of the system, Emo responded with untiring acts of love and charity. Oppressed people need both kinds of help. Perhaps the qualities of a John Gribble and a Nicholas Emo are not found in the one person.

Mary Durack writes:

When the drifting dunes threatened to obliterate all signs of his grave, the bones of the mission's founder priest were removed to the centre of the present Lombadina cemetery. Here, under a cross erected to his memory, lies all that remains of one of the most controversial figures ever to find his way to the multiracial peninsula of pearls. In his time both revered and despised, his actions sometimes honoured, often twisted and misconstrued, he was a priest of true fervour, a man of practical deeds and romantic illusions.²⁶⁰

* * *

Space does not permit a study of the later years of the Catholic missions in the north-west. Being German, the Pallottines were under severe restraint during World War I. They were confined to their mission stations, no new recruits were allowed from Germany and, under pressure, the Pallottines were made to agree to be administered by an Irish Redemptorist.²⁶¹

During this period, with the Pallottine future looking bleak, the Australian bishops invited the Italian Salesian order to take over the Kimberley missions. They arrived in the north-west in 1924 and immediately created controversy. The Pallottines did not want the Salesians who also alienated the St John of God sisters, questioning their status. This embarrassing situation did not end until 1926 when the Australian government lifted the restriction on German missionaries and the Salesians, quick to be discouraged, went home.²⁶²

The Italians had quickly assessed the Aboriginal situation and were appalled at the oppression and mistreatment. Their bishop, Ernest Coppo, shocked the white residents of Broome by preaching a last sermon declaring that the pearling industry merited 'the wrath of God'. It was, however, a parting sermon and

the dour Pallottines wryly observed that words were empty if they were not going to stay and cast their lot in with the people.²⁶³

The Pallottines were then given back responsibility for the region. They established further missions at places such as Rockhole, Balgo and La Grange. Among the new missionaries was the priest-anthropologist, Ernest Alred Worms, who carried out important research into Aboriginal spiritual life.²⁶⁴ During the Second World War, the German missionaries were again in a difficult situation. Those who had not taken out Australian citizenship were imprisoned for some time in Broome, but allowed to return, 'guarded' for the rest of the war by three Australian army chaplains.

The present bishop, John Jobst, is still a Pallottine and they continue to have a significant but no longer exclusive influence in the region.

ENDNOTES

1. Allen, 1959: xii
2. Turner, 1945: 38
3. Hardman, 1865: 165-166
4. Hebart, 1938: 187
5. This dispute concerned differing interpretations of Article 17 of the Augsburg Confession.
6. Schurmann, 1987: 180
7. Lohe, 1977: 7
8. Hebart, 1938: 74
9. The old spelling, 'dieri', will be retained. In the new standard orthography, 'diyari' is the preferred spelling.
10. *Ibid.* 76
11. Hutton, 1922: 355
12. Brauer, 1956: 227
13. *Ibid.* p.226
14. *Ibid.* p.227
15. Hebart, 1938: 188
16. *Ibid.* p.189
17. Schoknecht, in Brauer, 1956: 230
18. Hebart, 1938: 189
19. *Ibid.* pp.192-193
20. *Ibid.* p.193
21. Austin, 1981: 13
22. Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 194
23. Giles, in Hartwig, 1965: 192-196
24. Lohe, 1977: 9
25. Brauer, 1956: 234
26. A detailed account of this journey is given in Scherer, 1963.
27. Lohe, 1977: 13
28. Albrecht, 1950: 360
29. Extracts from letters and diaries of Kempe and Heidenreich, cited in Lohe, 1977: 9-11
30. *Ibid.* p.13
31. The old spelling, 'aranda', will be retained. In the new standard orthography, 'arrernte' is the preferred spelling.
32. Lohe, 1977: 15
33. Scherer, 1963: 81
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35. Lohe, 1977: 15
36. *Ibid.*
37. Schwarz, December 1884, in Lohe, 1977: 17
38. Heidenreich, 1886, in Lohe, 1977: 17
39. Kempe, 1885, in Lohe, 1977: 17

40. Lohe, 1977: 18
41. *Ibid*
42. *Ibid*
43. *Lutherische Kirchenbote*, 8/89, p.124, cited in Hartwig, 1965: 520
44. Lohe, 1977: 18
45. Hartwig, 1965, See also Willshire entry in *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography*
46. Willshire, 1895: 20
47. *Ibid*, p.90
48. *Ibid*, pp.18, 4, 35
49. *Ibid*, pp.40-41
50. *Ibid*, p.43
51. *Ibid*, pp.60-61
52. Willshire, cited in Harris, 1986: 217
53. Hartwig, 1965: 533
54. SAH of A, PD, 14 October 1890, Cols 1535-1536; *South Australian Register*, 24/9/90 (editorial)
55. Durack, 1959: 256
56. *North Australian*, 8 January 1886
57. *Lutherische Kirchenbote*, cited in Hartwig, 1965: 512
58. *Lutherische Kirchenbote*, 1/90, cited in Hartwig, 1965: 516
59. Willshire, 1896: 26
60. Hartwig, 1965: 513
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65. A.H. Kempe, in Protector of Aborigines, Incoming Correspondence, cited in Hartwig, 1965: 515
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70. Brauer, 1956: 235
71. Baldwin Spencer, cited in Lohe 1977: 23.
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74. T.G.H. Strehlow, 1969
75. Hebart, 1938: 150
76. Lohe, 1977: 27
77. Spencer, 1896
78. *Ibid*, p.125
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81. *Ibid*

82. See full discussion in Mulvaney and Calaby, 1985: 126-128
83. Spencer, 1896 (Vol.4): 76-80 (See also Winnecke's journal: *SAPP*, 2, No.19, 1896, p.16)
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87. Mulvaney and Calaby, 1985: 127
88. *Ibid*, pp.380-381
89. Eames, 1983: 272-273
90. For Spencer's assertion: Spencer, 1896 (Vol.I): III
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93. Gribble, J., 1886: 27
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111. *Ibid*, pp.47-48
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115. J. Gribble, 1884
116. J. Gribble, Diary, 15 August 1885
117. W.A.P.D., 18 September 1885
118. *West Australian*, 26 August 1885
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121. *Ibid*, p.13
122. *Ibid*, p.36

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131. *Ibid*
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135. *Ibid*
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141. Reynolds, 1987: 88
142. Carly to Aborigines Protection Society, 1886, cited in Reynolds, 1987: 88
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145. Hunt, 1984: 40
146. *West Australian*, 24 August 1886
147. J. Gribble to Archbishop of Canterbury, 24 September 1886, Benson Papers, Vol.40, Fols 353-356, LPL
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151. Hunt, 1984: 48
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154. *West Australian*, 5 February 1895
155. Boyce, 1957: 54
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171. *West Australian*, 2 February 1905
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179. *Ibid*
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186. *Ibid*
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191. See Watson, 1984
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193. Reynolds, 1987: 56
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195. Loos, 1988: 102
196. McNab to Bishop Griver, 1885, cited in Durack, 1971: 36-37
197. Wilson, 1988: 9
198. *Ibid*

199. O'Kelly, 1967: 2
200. Wilson, 1988: 9
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202. Durack, 1971: 38
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204. *Ibid*, p.42
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206. Durack, 1971: 42
207. *Ibid*
208. McNab to Gibney, August 1885, cited in Durack, 1971: 46
209. Durack, 1971: 47
210. *Ibid*, pp.48-49
211. *Ibid*, p.49
212. Wilson, 1988: 9
213. McNab to Gibney, Derby, 1 March 1885, cited in Durack, 1971: 50
214. Durack, 1971: 50
215. *Western Australian Catholic Record*, 15 April 1887
216. *Ibid*
217. Durack, 1971: 51
218. *Ibid*, p.52
219. *Ibid*
220. *Ibid*
221. McNab obituary, *Advocate*, Melbourne, 19 September 1896
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244. Wilson, 1988: 10
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246. Bates, 1936
247. Stockton, 1988: 207
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249. Emo, Broome, to Walter, Beagle Bay, 1905, cited in Durack, 1971: 182
250. Durack, 1971: 184
251. Telegram from Emo, Derby to Gibney, Perth, 9 September 1907, cited in Durack, 1971: 213
252. Durack, 1971: 214-215
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258. *Ibid*, pp.229-230
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8

The isolation of the tropics

First missions in the Northern Territory and north Queensland

STRANGE, DISTANT, HARSH, adventurous, wild, untamed, romantic, mysterious. . . these are the words a century of writers have chosen to describe tropical Australia. To these writers, tropical Australia was a distant, unfamiliar, even alien environment, a place where crocodiles 'lurked', mangrove swamps 'festered', wild blacks danced their 'frenzied' corroborees, and a tough breed of white frontiersmen hunted buffalo, sought pearls or drove huge herds of cattle, battling the unpredictable elements of a 'primitive' land.

At the turn of the century, Elsie Masson wrote of *An Untamed Territory*,¹ while *We of the Never Never* was Jeannie Gunn's label for that Northern Territory mix of Aborigines, Chinese and Europeans.² Half a century later, Geoffrey Bolton called his study of north Queensland *A Thousand Miles Away*.³ Even more recently, Alan Powell has titled his definitive Northern Territory history *Far Country*.⁴

It is a region to which it has proved hard for Europeans to adapt. Unwilling to modify their lifestyles, many Europeans found the climate debilitating and the remoteness unbearable, and they became susceptible to tropical diseases and alcoholism. Asians fared much better, but the Aboriginal people were the real survivors. By the time most white Australians were living comfortably in southern suburbia, there were still Aboriginal people in the north to whom the white world was a distant irrelevance. It is still

today a region where Aboriginal languages are spoken. It is still an area where most of the white population, living and working in 'air conditioned splendour', have not adjusted to the environment, liable to be blown away in the next cyclone. Very few of them, if any, are Crocodile Dundee, but most Australians believe that someone like him lurks somewhere up there.

When the British first arrived in north Australian waters, Aboriginal people had long been in contact with the outside world. The famed navigator and explorer, Matthew Flinders, was probably the first Britisher to pass through. He was amazed to find, just off Cape Wilberforce, six of a fleet of sixty South-East Asian *praus*, each containing a crew of about thirty men.⁵ These were the Macassan fishermen-traders who had traded with the coastal Aboriginal people at least since the end of the seventeenth century, a trade which was to persist until the Australian government discontinued it in 1907.⁶ During these two centuries or more of Macassan contact, large numbers of Aboriginal people travelled to South-East Asia. Indeed, before the trade formally ended, the presence of large numbers of Aborigines in Macassar was of concern to the Australian authorities. Aborigines of the Northern Territory coasts widely used the 'Macassan' pidgin as a trade language and its effects on Aboriginal languages of the region were considerable.⁷

The Macassans were almost certainly not the first Asian visitors. There are strong arguments for Javanese, Gujerati and Arab visits, while Chinese historians claim that Ch'eng Ho visited North Australia in 1432.⁸ More significantly, Aboriginal people of north-eastern Arnhem Land believe that before the Macassans, mysterious visitors, the Bayini, came to them from the west.⁹

The question of who were the first Europeans to visit Australia's northern coasts remains unsolved. Standard texts on the exploration of Australia attribute the first European 'discovery' to the Dutch, when Jansz in the *Duyfken* sailed along part of Cape York.¹⁰ Manning Clark is a little more cautious: this was the first 'officially recorded' sighting.¹¹ There was certainly unofficial Portuguese activity in Australia's north, particularly by slaving ships. Melville Island, for example, was known to the Macassans as Amba or slave.¹² The taking of slaves was, according to contemporary sources, extensive.¹³ Early English visitors to Melville Island were surprised to find Portuguese words spoken.¹⁴

First European settlement in the Northern Territory

The first European attempts to colonise north Australia were the short-lived British garrisons on Melville Island (1824-1829), Raffles Bay (1827-1829) and Port Essington (1838-1849).¹⁵ Although there was talk of a second Singapore controlling the southern section of the South-East Asian archipelago, their main function was strategic. It was necessary to demonstrate British presence to other world powers, including the French, the Russians and the Americans, none of whom may have been certain that the coast of what is now the Northern Territory was actually connected to New South Wales, nor willing to concede that the planting of flags on the distant east coast by James Cook or Arthur Phillip guaranteed British ownership of a whole continent.

The Aboriginal inhabitants of the north had no way of knowing that their status had changed. Confident of the timeless possession of their own lands, they could not have comprehended that they had become British subjects, their countries now the property of a distant monarch whose annexation of their lands was agreed to be just and proper under so-called international law, a law not even of the majority but of the powerful.

At Fort Dundas, Melville Island, the relationship between the British and the Tiwi people was tense and aggressive from the outset. 'Slave Island' had no reason to welcome Europeans and, even if they had, a 'second Singapore' on Melville Island would have destroyed the Tiwi. Their ferocious reputation has served them well.

At Fort Wellington on Raffles Bay, any chance of the early creation of an amicable relationship was initially shattered by a massacre of many Aboriginal people. Later, under a new regime, the remarkable second commandant, Captain Collet Barker, had just succeeded in developing an atmosphere of mutual acceptance when he was instructed to withdraw the garrison.¹⁶

Victoria garrison on Port Essington was longer lasting. It was more an historical accident than anything else that it did not survive. Had it done so, it would very likely have been Darwin. With the heritage of Collet Barker's short but memorably friendly regime at nearby Raffles Bay, the Iwaidja people welcomed the British, the relationship between the two groups remaining exceptionally good.¹⁷ 'Friendly relations,' wrote George Windsor Earl, 'were never once interrupted.'¹⁸

Under exceptional if not miraculous circumstances, into this unusually harmonious settlement came the Tyrolean Catholic priest, Don Angelo Confalonieri. Born in the Austrian Tyrol, Confalonieri had spent most of his life in Italy. Having trained as a missionary priest at Propaganda College in Rome, he volunteered to go with Bishop Brady to Australia in 1845 in the group which included Salvado and Serra.¹⁹ In 1846, Brady sent Confalonieri and two Irish brothers to Port Essington, part of a plan to ensure an early Catholic domination of what was thought to be potentially a significant new settlement. In the Torres Strait, their ship, the *Heroine*, was wrecked. Confalonieri and Captain Mackenzie were the only survivors. Miraculously found by one of the rare passing ships, they were taken on to Port Essington.²⁰

Confalonieri set up camp on the opposite side of the bay from Victoria garrison, learning the local language, an ancestor language of what is now called Iwaidja. He translated some prayers and a catechism, and was well-liked by the Aboriginal people. John Sweatman, who visited Port Essington, recorded his amusement at the Aboriginal people's jokes at Confalonieri's expense.²¹ They used to give him wrong translations, including obscenities, and then laugh uproariously when he unwittingly used them in his sermons.²²

Sweatman also readily acknowledged that the Aborigines had a high regard for this 'very gentlemanly and well-educated man',²³ but they did not adopt Christianity. They had 'no understanding but for their belly' complained Confalonieri.²⁴ This contrasts strongly with Cardinal Moran's claim that Confalonieri won 'about four hundred of them to Christ'.²⁵ Moran tended to exaggerate such claims of success and, if his figure had any basis in reality at all, it may have represented simply the number of Aboriginal people in the region with whom Confalonieri was in some kind of contact.

Never really well after his shipwreck ordeal, Confalonieri contracted malaria and died, alone and disappointed, on 9 June 1848.²⁶ His grave is one of the few recognisable remains of the garrison.

Jesuit missions in the Northern Territory

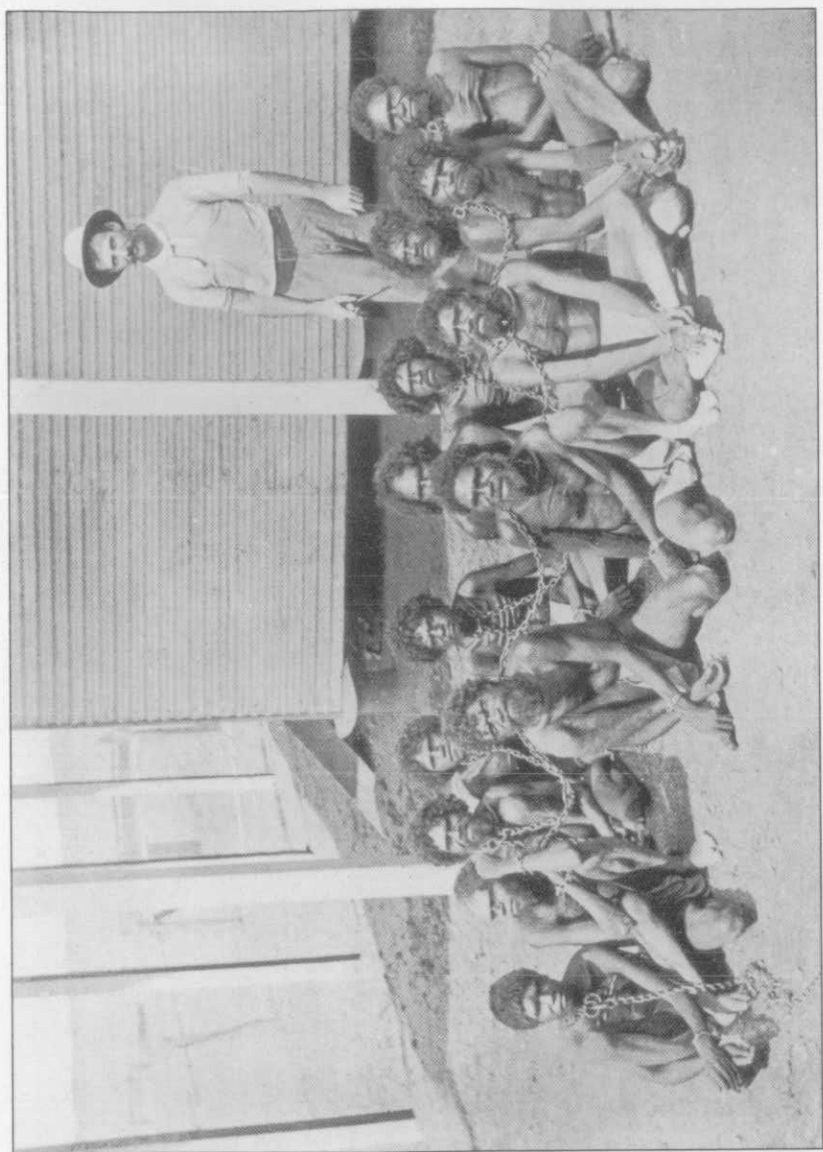
In 1863, the central and northern parts of the continent became South Australia's Northern Territory. After an unsuccessful at-

tempt at a settlement at Escape Cliffs on the Adelaide River in 1864, it was decided to establish a permanent township on Port Darwin in 1870, the town at first being named Palmerston. On 4 September 1882, four Jesuit missionaries sailed into the harbour: the Very Rev. Anton Strele, Fathers J. O'Brien and Neubauer, and Brother G. Eberhard.²⁷ Between 1882 and 1899, nineteen Jesuits worked in their Northern Territory missions. Except for O'Brien and Donald MacKillop, all were from Austria-Hungary.²⁸

Like the Cistercians who came to Western Australia, the Jesuits had recently suffered religious persecution. During one of their periodic expulsions from their homeland, some Austrian Jesuits had come to South Australia.²⁹ They had wanted to engage in missionary work among the Aborigines, but had been refused permission by the Jesuit Superior General until they had gained a sufficient body of local candidates for the Jesuit order.³⁰ The pleadings of a few Australian bishops, particularly Polding and Gibney, and the personal representations of Duncan McNab achieved a change of mind in Rome, and the Austrian Jesuits agreed to open a mission in South Australia's Northern Territory.³¹

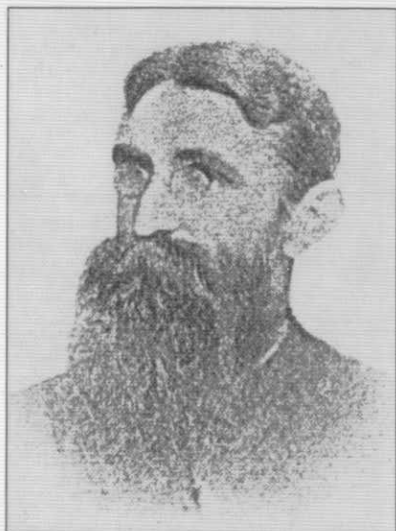
The Jesuit missionaries had in mind the Paraguayan Reductions as a possible model. The Reductions were a series of Guarini Indian communes set up by Jesuit missionaries along the Rio Plata during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Self-governing collections of farming people, the Reductions preserved the Indians from total loss of land and from capture into slavery, as well as promoting a 'civilised' way of life.³² They were destroyed when the Jesuits were expelled from South America in 1768.

On arrival in Palmerston, the Jesuits founded a mission station on Rapid Creek. About thirteen kilometres from Palmerston township, the site is now well within suburban Darwin. The Aboriginal people of the immediate region were the Larakia,³³ who owned all of what is now the city of Darwin. They belonged to a much wider speech community which included a number of nearby language groups. As has happened so often in recent Australian history, the rivers, harbours and lakes which the white settlers favoured were also important places to Aborigines, marking tribal boundaries and often places to which several groups had access. Port Darwin was no exception. Even George Goyder's

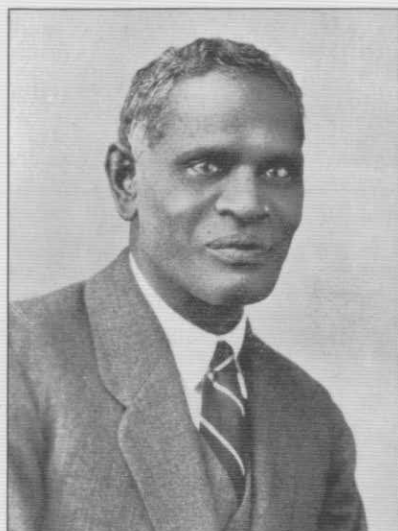


54. Aboriginal prisoners in chains, the practice vehemently opposed by John Gribble

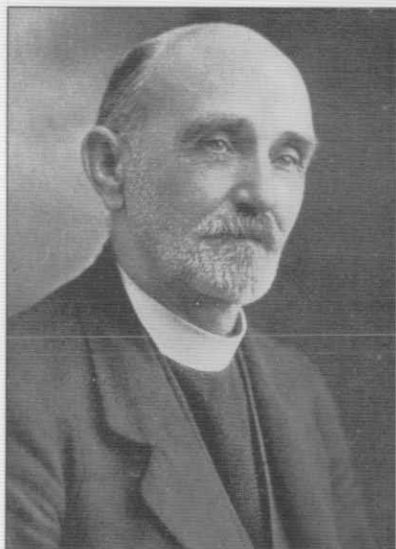
Acknowledgement: National Library of Australia and the Uniting Church of Australia. Reproduced with permission.



55. John Brown Gribble
Acknowledgement: E. Gribble,
1932, p. 20



56. James Noble
Acknowledgement: E. Gribble,
1933, p. 103



57. Ernest Gribble
Acknowledgement: E. Gribble,
1933, p. 39



58. Mary Gribble
Acknowledgement: E. Gribble,
1933, p. 6

original survey in 1869 took in some of the lands of a group north-east of the Larakia, the Woolna (Djerimanga),³⁴ who were frequent visitors to the harbour.

Palmerston was at first a tiny colonial outpost with a population of less than 200 Europeans. Its only real reason for existence was that it was the northern terminal of the Overland Telegraph, completed in 1872. But gold was discovered in some of the Northern Overland Telegraph post holes and Palmerston rapidly became a rough frontier town with a mobile population, most of whom were connected in one way or another with the gold rush. The non-Aboriginal population of the Northern Territory when the Jesuits arrived in 1882 consisted mostly of about 3 000 Chinese and 800 Europeans, rising to over 6 000 Chinese and 1 500 Europeans in 1888.³⁵ About half of these people lived in Palmerston itself.

Pitching their tents beside Rapid Creek, the Jesuits named their mission St Joseph's and immediately set about constructing their station and planting gardens. Enticed with gifts of food and tobacco, the Larakia people gathered at the mission after a few weeks, interested in this new activity of the European settlers. The Larakia were among the most friendly of all Aboriginal groups towards the white invaders. In all the years of change, which they could not have foreseen, they never harmed a white person, nor were any massacres ever perpetrated against them.³⁶ The sad irony of this is not lost on the few struggling Larakia people today. European vices, European diseases and traumatic social disruption – the price of their friendly acceptance of the whites – still came close to destroying them. As one of their elders, Koolamurinea, said in 1974, 'Because we were trusting and generous people, the white man has treated us like children. . . we were left with nothing.'³⁷

A century earlier, however, the Larakia were not to know what lay ahead. Exciting, unprecedented events were happening in their lands. Their traditional food supplies were not yet damaged or forbidden them as was so often the case in the drier regions more suited to pastoral development. Furthermore, there was the new and interesting European food, liquor and tobacco.

At St Joseph's, it seemed that the food was to be free, but to the disappointment of the Larakia this did not last long. The Jesuits expected them to work for their food in the newly laid-out

gardens, helping the missionaries to plant their small experimental plots of bananas, sago, tapioca, pineapples, tobacco and rice, as well as some less tropical crops. As usually happened, the Aboriginal people could not see the point of all this. They tried it out, working for a month, but the results of their labours would have been in the future, so they returned to Palmerston where life seemed more exciting and European goods could be obtained for much less effort. There, wrote the Jesuits, 'they live by begging and sin. And for this the whites are to blame'.³⁸ So it was that in the first few weeks of their mission, the Jesuits encountered two of the major problems which were to be their downfall: the Aboriginal people's lack of interest in agriculture and their corruption by white society.

The missionaries worked on alone. A few weeks later, in mid-January 1883, some of the Larakia returned, bringing a large number of children, having deduced already that the mission was a safe environment for them. Some of the adults became semi-permanent residents and, in return for the care of their children, were prepared to cooperate a little in agricultural activities. The missionaries had the commonsense to grow mostly tropical plants and in the 1882-1883 wet season, for which their first plants happened to be ready, their small tropical crops produced very well. The missionaries, following the Reductions model, constructed four timber houses in which to settle the first Aborigines on their own land, but the Larakia were not particularly interested in occupying them, preferring, as the Protector of Aborigines reported in 1880, 'sleeping and feeding outside'.³⁹ A century later there are still many Europeans who do not understand the Aboriginal preference to eat and sleep in the open around a fire.

Although the garden plots yielded well at the end of the wet season, later on there was not always enough to feed the Aboriginal people. To their sorrow, the missionaries had occasionally to send them away for a while. Indeed, the missionaries were often hungry themselves and referred to their situation as one of extreme poverty. 'We sometimes catch a bandicoot,' wrote Strele in 1883⁴⁰ and three years later the Jesuits were still saying that 'up to the present we have lived on Divine Providence. Often we don't know where the bread we are to eat will come from.'⁴¹

From the outset, it grieved the Jesuits that their building and

farming tasks left them little time for teaching and for 'being priests'.⁴² After only a few months, Neubauer was too ill to remain, so throughout all of 1883, St Joseph's was staffed by two priests and one brother. Nevertheless, they began to learn the Larakia language as soon as possible, a task which they found to be 'of the greatest difficulty'.⁴³ When two more missionaries arrived in January 1884, one person was immediately appointed to full-time language study.

The first results of this more concerted language research appeared within a few months as translations of prayers and hymns. Later missionaries were to benefit from 'notes on grammar collected from the actual speech of more than a thousand natives'.⁴⁴ Although this seems an unrealistically high number of informants, the Jesuits certainly became particularly fluent in Larakia.⁴⁵ By March 1885, they felt they had gained sufficient language competence to start a school with Larakia as the language of instruction. What seems to have been a very lively group of about twelve pupils was taught basic literacy in Larakia, basic numeracy and Bible stories. Later the same year the mission received their small printing press with which they printed lesson books and songs.⁴⁶

The Jesuits were continually frustrated by fluctuating attendance. Whereas the adults were happy for the missionaries to care for the children, they were not happy to leave the children without a relative nearby. Consequently, whenever adults went away, they took certain children with them. At times everybody went away. The missionaries labelled this 'inconstancy'.⁴⁷ Naturally it affected the agricultural pursuits. There were sometimes as many as fifty adults willing to do some work, at other times none at all. Agriculturally, the mission still succeeded exceptionally well when compared with the other failures in the Darwin region.⁴⁸ This was important to the Jesuits, as they considered St Joseph's to be a 'head station' from which they would extend their missionary outreach into the inland.

The Jesuits decided to expand their work first into the Daly River region. By 1886 there were ten missionaries, so they felt able to spare three men for some exploratory work. They were granted a mission reserve with an eight kilometre frontage to the river. On foot, with a drayload of supplies, they struggled for 250 kilometres to reach the Daly River late in September 1886.

Father O'Brien observed:

They were surprised at the small body of its waters which they expected to resemble the Danube, no doubt, in its majestic flow, and found it smaller than the Inn! The flavour of the water did not please Bro. Scharmer: it had a soft soapy taste, like an extract, as it were, of alligators.⁴⁹

They spent some anxious nights, fearful of both the 'alligators' (crocodiles) and the Aborigines, four white men having recently been killed in the region.⁵⁰ The Daly River Aborigines, however, proved friendly. 'In fact they helped. . . with the work for a very meagre reward and brought fish etc.'⁵¹ They chose a site locally known as Uniya. The region proved very rocky, shattering almost immediately their dream of an agricultural paradise. On the other hand, they were gratified to have arrived before any significant influx of other Europeans. As one of them said, 'Our work requires virgin soil - the free savage with all his vices, but with his only.'⁵²

'The complete absence of the white man on the left bank of the Daly River,' wrote MacKillop, 'is the greatest blessing to our mission.'⁵³ In this regard, they even saw blessing in the poor terrain. 'The uninviting character of the soil,' argued Strele, 'may prevent the only thing we fear - the occupation of the country by our white brethren.'⁵⁴

Meanwhile back in Palmerston, things were not progressing well. As we have seen elsewhere, settlement sites like Palmerston tended to bring different groups of Aboriginal people together with unaccustomed frequency and intensity, leading to conflict. The Woolna people began to take an interest in St Joseph's, displacing some of the Larakia.⁵⁵ This did not overly concern the Jesuits. The languages were similar and they even considered concentrating on the Woolna, perhaps inviting all 150 of them to settle at St Joseph's. These plans were thwarted when a third group entered the situation. This group is now difficult to identify, but the Jesuits called them the Alligator tribe. They probably came from further west, near what are now the Alligator rivers. Strele wrote:

They were between 300 and 400 men, women and children with all their possessions. But a splendid race of men they were! . .

They seemed lively and well-fed. . . and they were kind, frank and cheerful.⁵⁶

Their presence offended the Larakia and Woolna. On a later visit, the tension culminated in a battle which the 'Alligator tribe' easily won. Like most of these Aboriginal battles, the casualties were carefully controlled – in this case one dead and five wounded.⁵⁷ This event seems to have marked the end of St Joseph's. Although a few young men were brought from the Daly River for training, the work at the mission declined. The Woolna and Larakia came much less frequently, claiming to be apprehensive of the 'Alligator tribe' returning. The Jesuits believed this to be a facade and that they preferred 'the traffic of souls with lubras'. An 1887 report stated, 'They prefer Palmerston because most of them are thoroughly corrupted.'⁵⁸

Father Donald MacKillop, who succeeded Strele as Superior in 1890, formally closed St Joseph's in December of that year. The mission, they sadly recorded, had been 'completely destitute of success'. It had had 'a miserable existence from beginning to end'.⁵⁹ Only one healthy adult had proven fit for baptism, 'the first and last Woolna' of all the Woolna, Larakia and Alligator people who had frequented the mission.⁶⁰

Meanwhile at Uniya, the situation was near desperate. In their anxiety to copy the Paraguayan Reductions, the Jesuits were caught in a dilemma. The only part of the land suitable for farming was the river bank itself and this was subject to unpredictable and devastating floods.⁶¹ Year by year they lost their crops and, lacking a balanced diet, their health declined. They caught malaria and tropical complaints of various kinds – eye infections, diarrhoea and fevers. They could not look at the light, not even at the nails they were hammering. In their abject misery and hunger, the Aborigines sometimes brought them fish and game, but in their damp house and damp clothes and bedding through the long wet seasons, their health deteriorated further. On Good Friday 1887, the Journal entry reads: *Tristitia Domini inter fratres eremitas in silvis*⁶² ('The sorrow of the Lord among the brothers alone in the bush').

Perhaps hardest to take was the lack of understanding of the situation by the Jesuit authorities and even the Australian bishops. Often, the response to their frank descriptions of their

state ('we are very poor. . . in sore need. . . hungry and ill-clad. . . very ill and weakened'⁶³) was the stern injunction to remember their Jesuit vows of poverty and obedience. They often craved a word of comfort more than they craved food.

Despite all this privation, the painstaking labours of the Jesuit missionaries in clearing, gardening and even in language learning meant that quite early at Uniya they managed to commence what they considered the real work of the mission. They laid out a mission site on high ground, and gardens and buildings were to radiate out from a ten metre central cross. The first religious instruction was given beside the cross on 4 September 1887 and school classes were commenced the next day.

The Jesuits thought they had selected their site well at a point where three 'tribal' areas met – the Woolwonga, the Malak Malak and the Agaquilla.⁶⁴ But soon the European presence increased in the area, as did the Chinese, which created tensions between the tribes. The missionaries decided therefore to give most of their attention to the Malak Malak people in whose lands the mission was actually sited.⁶⁵ There were some early hopeful signs. Twenty boys who regularly attended their school seemed to progress even faster than those at Rapid Creek. Up to sixty adults attended weekly religious instruction. Several of them were baptised. Twenty-two adults were in daily employment around the mission. Three families were actually trying out the idea of living on and farming their own plots of land 'less sandy than the rest'.⁶⁶

With the Wet, however, their early hopes were dashed. Floods destroyed most crops. Unable to be fed, the Aboriginal people had to go away to seek their traditional food supplies. Communication with the outside world was severed. The missionaries found that sleeping on corrugated iron enabled the rainwater to run off.⁶⁷ Again ravaged by disease, despondency fell upon them once more, aggravated by the thought that their superiors expected them to be self-supporting.⁶⁸ Year by year, the same pattern emerged. The Aboriginal people returned in the Dry. Classes recommenced. A Malak Malak catechism was written. Rice fields and other gardens were prepared. Then each Wet, all was destroyed and disillusionment further reduced the missionaries' already low resistance to tropical diseases. Furthermore, the Aboriginal people, too, became severely ill in 1889 in what was probably an influenza epidemic.

As more priests and brothers arrived, the Jesuits were determined not to be defeated in their deep desire to evangelise the Aborigines. In 1889, they tried to set up a mission outpost at Serpentine Lagoon, thirty kilometres to the west, in order to contact Aboriginal people who would not stay at Uniya. For the missionaries, living in tents, the beginnings of Serpentine Lagoon were as arduous as the other missions had been. One of the missionaries wrote: '... it is for the glory of God that we are in need. The thought that God wants it will give us what strength we may need.'⁶⁹

Unlike Uniya, however, the soil around Serpentine Lagoon was much better for agriculture and it was well above the low-lying river banks where the worst floods occurred. The missionaries soon established a good rapport with the local people. Together, they set up gardens and rice fields. In order to avoid the seasonal extremes of floods in the Wet and drought in the Dry, they dug an irrigation canal, 300 metres long and three metres deep from the lagoon to the fields. Their gardens prospered and in the second year they were able to supply Uniya with rice.⁷⁰

The short life of the Serpentine Lagoon mission was to demonstrate yet again that Aboriginal logic and European logic were not the same. Serpentine Lagoon was already a fertile, food-producing locality. The rich soil, slightly swampy, was near-perfect for rice, but it already produced yams and other native foods in abundance. The moment at the end of the Wet when rice was ready for harvest was precisely the moment when the yams were also ready.

To the Aboriginal mind the whole exercise was pointless. They cooperated for tobacco and because they liked the missionaries and were willing to go along with their whims. Putting in such an immense amount of work to produce one crop when the soil naturally produced another made little sense to them. The promises of the missionaries that they would eventually be rewarded with houses of their own made even less sense.

As Father Marschner wryly observed:

... they prefer their former mode of life to the tiresome labour of tillage and ploughing. Though we promise them that later on they will live in houses, the prospect leaves them quite cold, for their shelters of bark suffice them. . .⁷¹

Many different Aboriginal groups had foraging rights to Serpentine Lagoon. This meant that the mission was strategically located. Had the Jesuits adjusted their thinking to this reality, instead of persisting with the Paraguayan Reductions model, things may have been different, but the Jesuits seem to have thought that their only choice was between their farms and opting out. The comings and goings of so many different language groups simply frustrated them and they felt quite unable to preach their message consistently. 'Almost every day new listeners take the place of those who preceded them', wrote Marschner. 'I cannot be sure that a single one of them will make the Sign of the Cross correctly.'⁷²

By 1890, Rapid Creek was failing due to the corrupting influence of nearby Darwin and different tensions between Aboriginal groups thrust together by white settlement; Uniya was failing due to the total unsuitability of the locality of agriculture; Serpentine Lagoon was failing because it was traditionally frequented by so many different groups; and all three missions were suffering from lack of financial support. The Jesuits decided to close all three and pool their resources and personnel in a last effort to establish a single successful mission.

With Aboriginal guides, the Jesuits at Uniya made several exploratory trips, selecting finally a site about thirty kilometres downstream on the other side of the river. The new site was thought to be above flood level, the soil was the best in the region, and the Aboriginal people were involved in its selection. Things seemed to augur well for the new initiative. They called the Daly River mission St Joseph's, New Uniya.

Four priests and seven brothers staffed the new mission station and, when they arrived there in August 1891, some Aborigines from both Old Uniya and Serpentine Lagoon followed them there. At the end of the year, about fifty of them were in fairly permanent residence and thirty children began attending school. Merging the missions also merged the working animals – horses, cattle, asses and goats – with the result that clearing and building proceeded at a speedy rate. By November, several acres had been cleared; a chapel, a house, boys and girls dormitories, a forge, a store, work sheds and stables had all been built; and a windmill erected for irrigation.⁷³

Despite all this, 1892 was the darkest year the mission had

yet experienced. The financial depression, particularly the collapse of the Australian banks in April 1893, halted almost all of the already meagre donations from Australian churches. By pure coincidence, the normal Austrian funds did not arrive that year either. Provisions had to be paid for and there was no hope of any further reduction in expenses until crops were harvested the following year. Influenza struck again, peaking in June, when forty Aborigines were severely ill at the station: twelve died, including the two most promising converts, Amand and Old Zachary.

Rather than disperse the still enthusiastic school children, a priest and a brother accompanied them with a herd of goats to a distant billabong where they lived for months on goat meat and native plants. Goat meat was the only food at New Uniya where the weakened missionaries became completely prostrated by malaria.

Urgent letters for help brought £100 from Cardinal Moran in Sydney and ten fifty-six pound bags of flour from the Government Resident in Darwin. MacKillop, with two young Aboriginal men dressed in neat European suits, set out to beg for funds in the southern colonies. Why, he was asked, did they persist with a task so seemingly hopeless? MacKillop's reply showed he still dreamed of perfecting the Paraguayan Reductions ideal:⁷⁴

Why then continue? Ask the leader of a forlorn hope why he rushes to almost certain death. Because, he will tell you, after all he holds a hope. So it is with us. Present legislation, even when it means to be kind, is simply death and extermination to the black man. But public opinion, the true ruler here, may change all this. . .

Our aim and our hope is to reproduce on the banks of the Daly and among the western tribes those Reductions – triumphs of humanity even Voltaire called them – which, as Henry George writes, 'to their eternal honour the Jesuits instituted and so long maintained in Paraguay'. If only South Australia would allow us room we would have no difficulty to overcome which our fathers of old did not master in South America. We have the same organisation to back us (the Jesuit Order) and from which to draw men as the advancing work will require; the same traditions to guide us, the same goal ahead – the temporal and the eternal welfare of our fellow men. This has been the daydream of my life.⁷⁵

In a curious piece of irony, in the same year in which MacKillop wrote of his dream of establishing a socialist New Paraguay in Australia, Henry Lane and two hundred Australians left on their ill-fated attempt to found their own socialist New Australia in Paraguay.

From the day they first arrived in Palmerston, the Jesuits were dismayed at the attitude of white colonial society to Aborigines. Strele wrote, '...the whites can hardly conceal the wish of their hearts that all the blacks should be exterminated'.⁷⁶ In his first report to his Jesuit Superior, Strele wrote, *Alborum ingressus in Coloniam, et inter per eam sanguine Albis effuso satis indicator* ('White progress in the Colonies is well traced by the blood they have shed.').⁷⁷

On the Daly River mission, the Jesuits had found themselves in confrontation with settlers and police, including the ubiquitous Mounted Constable Willshire, who had been transferred further north to avoid any more controversy over his treatment of Aborigines in the region of Hermannsburg. It was not just the immediate physical danger to the Aborigines which worried the missionaries, but the corrupting behaviour of settlers, both European and Chinese, bringing liquor, opium and prostitution.

Perhaps hardest of all for the Jesuits, as well-educated men, was the intellectual battle: the need to counter the low view of the Aborigines which pervaded current scientific writing. 'In all that is essential to our nature they are our equal,' stressed MacKillop. It was also necessary to counter the accepted wisdom that this was a dying race. Indeed, the Jesuits knew the Aborigines were in danger of dying out, but not through their own inadequacies. 'The doom of the whole people is not yet sealed,' wrote MacKillop. 'We must move quicker or in the end fail.'⁷⁸ He continued:

Australia, as such, does not recognise the right of the black man to live. She marches onward, truly, but not perhaps the fair maiden we paint her. The black fellow sees blood on that noble forehead, callous cruelty in her heart; her head is of iron and his helpless countrymen beneath her feet. But we are strong and the blacks are weak; we have rifles, they but spears; we love British fairplay, and having got hold of this continent we must have every square foot. Little Tasmania is our model and, I fear, will be until the great papers of Australia will chronicle,

'with regret', the death of the last black fellow. There is a feeling abroad, too, which might be worded thus – it is in God's providence that the native races here, as elsewhere, must disappear before the British people. This, of course, I do not admit. The laws of nature, not God's providence, require that in given circumstances an inferior race will disappear before a superior, but so do they require that death will follow starvation, or be the consequence of poisoning.⁷⁹

MacKillop's fundraising trip brought him considerable public attention. An interested and reasonably sympathetic southern press generally reported him well and he was also asked to present his views to learned societies. To the Royal Society of South Australia, he said:

Shall we succeed? Even in the interests of science, Australia should enable, or at least permit us to do so. But the odds are at least ten to one against us. Not from any unfitness on the side of the Aborigines; not certainly from want of will, or through failing in the spirit of sacrifice in the Society of Jesus; but, to put it kindly, because the Anglo-Saxon race is what it is. Proud of its present superiority, that race will remember the lessons of history only when an invading people shall have meted out to it the justice which it has shown to the helpless black man. A hundred years, perhaps hundreds, may pass; but with the teeming millions of Asia at our door, who shall say no day of retribution will come upon Australia?⁸⁰

To a less academic audience, readers of the *Southern Cross*, Adelaide's Catholic weekly, he was more succinct and more forthright:

On the Daly River certainly a remnant of the race might have been saved. But the blood-stained hand of fair Australia presses heavily upon us. We are tolerated – and barely that – yet so tolerated that when it will be convenient for the noble white to go on with his work of murder, we shall have to go.⁸¹

In the *Adelaide Register*, MacKillop was able to discuss at length the Jesuit missionary strategy, unarguably placing it in the 'civilise first, Christianise second' category:

Our idea is to teach [the natives] self-reliance, to understand that they must work for the good of the whole community, and the more they work the better it will be for them and for the settlement generally. In fact, it is a kind of socialism. Each man works for himself, his family and the community. . . Out of the labour of the whole adult community something is taken in the way of tax for education purposes and general expenses, and the balance goes entirely to the workers, who know that the more industrious they are, the better it will be for them individually. . .

Religion is primary in our intention, but in a manner secondary in our practice, because we recognise that we must first civilise the blacks before we can Christianise them. . . it is a kind of socialism, but one that will work well, for there is true religion and self-reliance at the bottom of it.⁸²

The Catholic community did respond – if not generously, at least sufficiently. The pleas of MacKillop, his two Aboriginal assistants and Father Marschner, who joined them later, raised £800, enough to purchase a few more years of life for the Daly River mission.⁸³ New Uniya was never prosperous, but it was never again destitute. Although they could continue to describe their finances as 'precarious', from 1893 farming and stock-raising covered 'a good part of our actual needs'.⁸⁴ Maize, African corn and tropical fruits were the most successful crops, goats the best stock although cattle also increased.

There were about sixty acres under cultivation, half-worked by the missionaries and paid Aboriginal labour for the station's needs. The other half was divided into two-acre blocks which, with a house and some goats, were the marriage portion of young couples who had passed through the school and wished to settle on the mission. As Father Conrath wrote, '. . . it is the plan of the missionaries to settle the Aborigines on the ground and to turn them into a farming population. If we succeed in this, we are convinced to succeed in bestowing Christian civilisation upon them.'⁸⁵

As I have pointed out before, the features which attracted white settlement or, in this case, led to the selection of a mission site, were often features which attracted Aboriginal people. Over the centuries rivers, lakes, bays and valleys had become places where Aboriginal lands converged. At New Uniya, at least five distinct groups visited the mission and there were occasional

tensions. The Jesuits sometimes even bore arms. There is no hint anywhere that they ever used them, although they came close to doing so when a departing Chinese gardener further down the river gave his liquor and 'blunderbusses' to some Aborigines not associated with the mission.⁸⁶

The Jesuits continued with their earlier policy at Old Uniya of concentrating upon the Malak Malak language, as it was the language of the people most closely identifying with the mission. The Jesuits themselves were highly educated people, displaying knowledge of Latin, Greek, Hebrew as well as Austrian, English and other modern European languages.⁸⁷ As competent linguists, their praise of the Malak Malak language is all the more convincing. Yet it is indicative of the degree to which even they were influenced by notions of the superiority of European civilisation that they were led to the conclusion that a language so sophisticated as Malak Malak could only be indicative of a once-higher social state. MacKillop said:

It is a beautiful language - or rather, contains the elements of a very perfect one. So philosophical it is, that it forces the conclusion that this despised race in time remote and in other lands was very much higher in the social scale than we now find it. Their language abounds in highly metaphysical distinctions unknown to ours. The precision with which they express the different modes of being is astonishing. . . they have a verb 'to be' in a sense to which we can lay no claim. It unites the perfections of the Latin or Saxon verbs with those of the Celtic, and goes far beyond the powers of either.⁸⁸

At New Uniya, a full catechism was translated into Malak Malak, with twenty 'editions' before the Jesuits were satisfied that it did justice to the complex grammar of the language. A hymnal was also composed, a combined volume being given to all who learned to read. Secular songs were written as well, set often to popular tunes like 'God Save the Queen' and 'The Camptown Races'. Sung masses were composed in Malak Malak, including Haydn's 'Mass for the People'.⁸⁹

Together with the Lutherans in Central Australia, the Jesuits showed an exceptional grasp of the importance of using Aboriginal languages. This may have had something to do with their own

background in language study, or even the fact that they were not first-language English speakers. Nevertheless, they were presented with a dilemma when other Aboriginal groups slowly began to align themselves with the mission – speakers of languages such as Djeradj, Bongo-Bongo and Maranunggu.⁹⁰ They chose, therefore, from about 1895, to conduct the school in English, but to continue with Malak Malak as the general language of the station. This choice accorded with the general Aboriginal convention of speaking the language of the land in which they happened to be.

The Jesuits' deep interest in and respect for the Malak Malak language and their eagerness to use it was not matched by their attitude to other aspects of Aboriginal culture. They certainly were interested in Aboriginal culture and some of them left behind valuable anthropological observations, but they did not regard very much as worth retaining. Like almost all other nineteenth-century missionaries, Protestant or Catholic, they ignored tribal kinship rules, encouraging the mission young people to marry each other. This not only alienated those young people from their families, but seriously damaged the local kin classificatory system.

As early as 1883, Strele summed up the Jesuits' attitude. There was, he said, '... nothing in Aboriginal customs or habits that patience and the Christian religion is not able to either do away with or so reduce that it is not an impediment to faith'.⁹¹

As we have seen on other missions, the attitude was universally adopted that the old men and women were beyond redemption and that the best strategy, therefore, was to concentrate upon the young. Such was the automatic consequence of the belief that European civilisation must precede Christianisation. Even the Protestant missionaries, who may have thought they saw the gospel in more personal terms than the sacramentally-oriented Catholics, also generally acted as if it were necessary first to train the young people to adopt a new lifestyle.

In this, the Jesuits were no exception. The whole mission policy was based on training up the younger generation and it was often said that they must be freed from 'the tyranny of the old men'. As one of the Jesuits wrote: 'Full victory cannot be hoped for until the older generation has died out and the younger has succeeded to the ranks of authority'.⁹²

The Jesuits, however, were patient. The 'civilising' process,

they accepted, might take several generations and they were prepared for slow progress. They did not aggressively challenge the authority of the elders. They were known for their patience, compassion and self-sacrifice. They were generally held in high esteem, respected, even venerated.

As it happened, the Jesuits were not granted enough time to discover whether or not their patience would have achieved anything. They continually strove to implement their Paraguayan Reductions dream of self-supporting Aboriginal peasant farmers. They lived out their own dedicated and self-denying brand of Christianity as they best understood it. They taught a Christ who demanded that those who would come to him must turn aside, not just from evil, but from almost everything they knew – not just from their own religious practices, but even from the very hunting and gathering by which they survived in this environment far better than the Jesuits, with their fragile agriculture, ever did.

Already some of the Aboriginal people had recognised that, if they were to adjust at all to the European economy, agriculture was risky, even pointless, but that herding animals not only suited the environment better, but suited *them* better. They asked the missionaries if they could compromise, cultivating the fields in the Wet and engaging in stock work in the Dry. The future was to prove this estimate correct, but it will never be known whether or not the Jesuits would have accepted the Aboriginal advice.⁹³

From 1895, the Jesuits knew that their superiors in Rome were pondering the future of their mission. The mission's daily journal of 4 June 1895 recorded the receipt of a telegram which led them to 'fear the probable destruction and end of the mission'. They were despondent, the journal entry said, but confident that their future and that of the Aboriginal people of the mission were 'safe in the hands of God'.⁹⁴

As with the Protestant mission societies and their supporters, the Jesuits back in Europe were looking for success. Cardinal Moran sentimentalised the mission's achievement:

A small nucleus of earnest but pious Christians has been formed; the sacraments are frequently received, pagan customs abandoned, Christian marriages celebrated, Christian families founded; and on the Daly. . . the traveller will feel his heart touched and his eyes suffused with tears as he hears in a

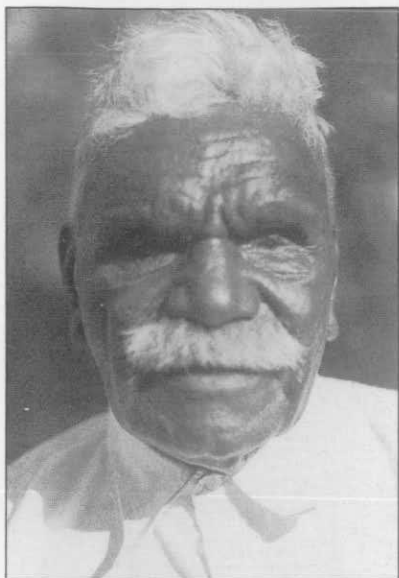
tongue unknown to him the Kyrie, the Gloria, the Creed, the Benediction hymns, sung by fresh young voices to music familiar to European ears.⁹⁵

But the Jesuit authorities wanted more than pious prose. They knew that there had been over 300 baptisms (362 by the time the mission closed), but that most of these were the newborn and the dying. Only thirty healthy adults were baptised at New Uniya. Even more telling to the authorities was the failure to turn foragers into farmers. The premise was that, using the Paraguayan model, the evolutionary stages of European society would be reproduced: from wanderers to settled farmers, to civilisation, to Christianity.⁹⁶ At New Uniya there were never more than fifteen Aboriginal families resident on the two-acre blocks.

It was also believed in Rome that the Australian Aborigines were a dying race. This was the clear message of governments, scientists and the popular press. Even the Jesuits at New Uniya reported drastic reductions in population due to European diseases, lower birthrate and high infant mortality: '...this year [1898] twenty-six Aborigines were born and forty-two died on or near the station of whom twenty-four were less than ten years old'.⁹⁷ Father Fleury said:

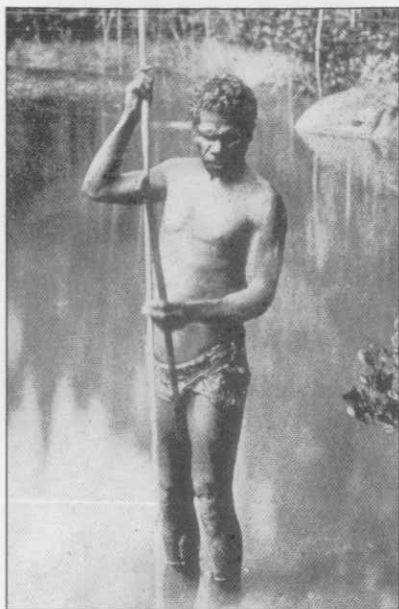
I consider as inevitable the gradual decrease and final disappearance of the black race in the Northern Territory, and *this* was the principal reason why I thought the closing of the mission amongst them advisable. . . . There are not many children, but they die wholesale. . . . It would cost several generations to transform a *tribe* into real Christians; but there will not be several generations for any tribe.⁹⁸

Far beyond the control of the Jesuits in Australia was another factor. Welcome once more in Austria, the Jesuit Houses there needed all the men they could repatriate for work in Austria and for relocation to their more successful foreign missions. Now that there were Irish Jesuits in Australia, it became less logical for non-English-speaking Austrians to remain, particularly as the Daly River mission was presumed unsuccessful, with a limited future. The missionaries' argument that 'civilisation' was a long-range objective 'needing time' did not prove persuasive.



59. Blind Moses, first Aranda evangelist

Acknowledgement: Lutheran Archives, SA. Reproduced with permission.



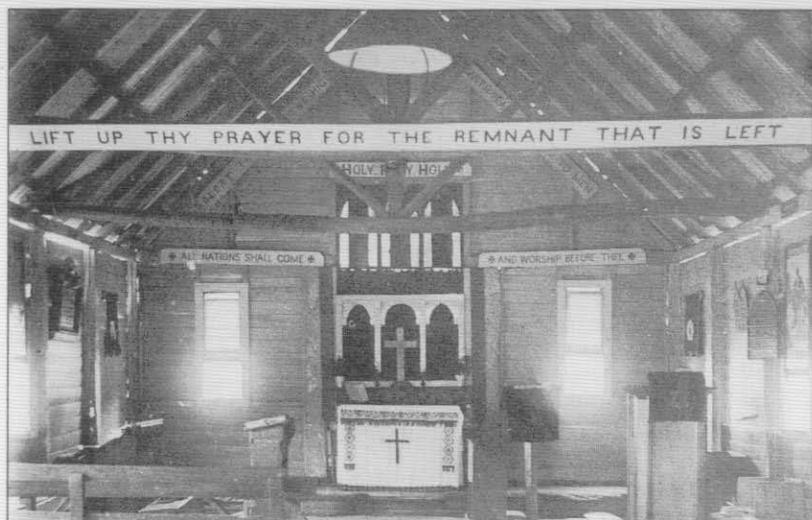
60. Menmuny of Yarrabah

Acknowledgement: E. Gribble, 1932, p. 25

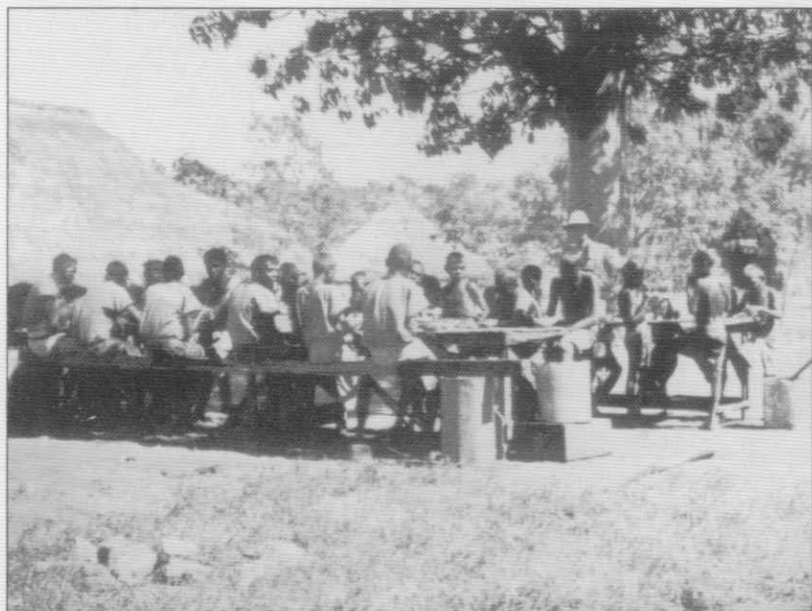


61. Yarrabah in the 1920s, with memorial cross to John Gribble

Acknowledgement: Needham, 1935, p. 100



62. St Alban's Church Yarrabah, with the Gribble text
Acknowledgement: Noel Loos. Reproduced with permission.



63. Boys' lunchtime, Forrest River Mission, about 1920
Acknowledgement: White, 1927, p. 17

Then, in 1898, the missionaries found to their horror that the mission was not above the flood level and all their crops, being closest to the river, were destroyed. Again in 1899 the mission was inundated by an even higher flood, destroying not only the crops, but most of the buildings.

The missionaries set about selecting a safer site, but their superiors closed their mission on 21 June 1899. The floods may have been a contributing factor in the decision to close the mission, but it is evident that the decision had already been made. Austrian accounts of the closure speak of the problem of settling nomadic people, not of the floods, but add that 'Divine Providence seemed to ratify this decision, for in March 1899 a mighty inundation, repeated later again, laid waste the Mission Station.'⁹⁹

The last entry in the mission journal reads simply:

Ita clausum est opus hoc
(Thus this work is concluded).¹⁰⁰

In all that makes us human, all that is 'essential to our nature', MacKillop had written in 1893, 'the blacks are our equal' and the Jesuits never departed from this view which they held implicitly and defended vehemently. They also found much to admire in the Aboriginal people themselves. They could describe Aboriginal ceremonies as 'obscene', 'vile' and 'heathenish', but on the same page of their journal they could conclude by writing, 'pray for these gentle people'.¹⁰¹

After the closure of the mission, Father Kristen looked back nostalgically, remembering only the good:

There is no cruelty in their heart, but the utmost tenderness for love and sorrow. I should speak of their hospitality, frugality, courage in defending their beloved ones, peacefulness, fidelity to friends approved in hardships, thorough submission and obedience to their tribal authorities, love of their children and kind, together with a keen resentment of every sort of injustice. Tears of joy, sympathy and sorrow flow quickly.

I should speak of the gratitude for real works of charity done especially to them when in sickness or in danger, though they have been calumniated often in this point by many; and I could and should show, by manifold facts, what a noble nature is theirs at bottom.¹⁰²

The Aboriginal people of the Daly River region also remembered only the good. The Jesuits had shielded them for a while, their tolerance and sympathy providing a gentler acculturation than the huge social destruction that was to follow the missionaries' departure.¹⁰³ The Catholic church did not open another mission in the Daly River until 1955, with Sacred Heart missionaries. Just before that, Berndt asked the older Aboriginal people of the region about their memories of the Jesuits. 'They didn't hit us or shoot us,' he was told, an obvious comparison with their more recent experience of Europeans.¹⁰⁴ They recalled the Jesuits with affection, even reverence. They remembered their acts of healing and compassion.

The Christian message, however, had become garbled. Jesus, Mary, Adam and Eve all lived in a confused contemporaneity, the stories arranged to explain the disparity between the abundant material possessions of the Europeans and the 'nothing of the Aborigines'.¹⁰⁵ Adam and Eve, driven from Paradise and cursed, forced to dig in the ground for food, were the Aborigines. Christ was European and celibate like the Jesuits. Their conclusion would have broken the hearts of the nineteen Jesuit missionaries:¹⁰⁶ 'This is the Christ of the white men.'¹⁰⁷

It was still to be a long time before the Australian Catholic community showed any real interest in the Aborigines. The German Pallottines continued to work in the Kimberleys. In 1911, the Alsatian, Father F.X. Gsell, a Sacred Heart missionary, later to become the 'Bishop with a hundred and fifty wives', began his work among the Tiwi of Bathurst Island.¹⁰⁸ By 1930, the missionary vocation was still left to foreign orders: there was still only one Australian Catholic missionary among the Aborigines, Father E. McGrath, an MSC priest on Bathurst Island.¹⁰⁹ It was with an almost cynical disregard for Aborigines that in 1905, six years after the Jesuits departed, the annual *Acta et Decreta* of the Plenary Council of Australian Bishops, in the section entitled 'On Spreading the Faith among the Aborigines', was still routinely printing an 1885 description of the first Jesuit mission as it was in 1883.¹¹⁰ The same token report had sufficed them for thirty years.

European settlement of north Queensland

It may never be known who the first Europeans to sight Cape York were but, as noted earlier, the first official sighting was probably in

1606 when Jansz sailed along part of it in the *Duyfken*.¹¹¹ Several other Dutch explorers followed him, each of whose visits resulted in bloody conflict, creating a reputation among the Dutch that Australian Aborigines were fierce, treacherous and bloodthirsty.¹¹²

After Cook and Banks in the *Endeavour* in 1770, there were frequent but intermittent visits by British sea-borne explorers such as Flinders, King, Stokes and Stanley, and even more numerous unofficial visits by ships of a variety of nationalities. Although it is true that some British navigators acted with restraint, there were nevertheless violent clashes with fatalities on both sides.

The exploits of the unofficial whalers, traders and other seafarers are mostly unrecorded, but if the use of a swivel gun by the crew of the *Will O' the Wisp* to kill Aborigines is any indication, the Aborigines had learned to mistrust Europeans long before formal settlement took place.¹¹³ There is a degree of ironic symbolism in the fact that in 1860, the members of Queensland's first official survey of the Burdekin region, under George Dalrymple, Commissioner for Crown Land, unhesitatingly used firearms every time they encountered Aborigines.¹¹⁴

Permanent European colonisation of north Queensland began in 1861 when, following Dalrymple's survey, the Queensland government encouraged the taking up of land in the Kennedy District, the region of the Burdekin and Herbert rivers. Government ships took officials, settlers and their families north to Port Denison, now Bowen, in March 1861. White settlement expanded outward rapidly from that point. In twelve months, 454 pastoral runs totalling 82 000 square kilometres had been applied for and by 1863 most of them settled,¹¹⁵ despite concerted Aboriginal resistance in many places.

It was in connection with Aborigines of this district and era that E.M. Curr penned his contemporary description of the pattern of frontier conflict:

... after the first occupation of a tract of country by a settler, from three to ten years elapse before the tribe or tribes to which the land has belonged from time immemorial is let in, that is, is allowed to come to the homestead, or seek for food within a radius of five to ten miles of it. During this period the squatter's party and the tribe live in a state of warfare; the former shooting

down a savage now and then when opportunity offers, and calling in the aid of the black police from time to time to avenge in a wholesale way the killing or frightening of stock off the run by the tribe. . .

When the settler locates his stock on a piece of country hitherto in the sole possession of a tribe, the roots, grass-seeds and game on which the people habitually live quickly fail. Then come hunger and also anger, for amongst themselves the hunting or gathering of food by a tribe on land which does not belong to it is always considered a *casus belli* by the rightful proprietors; just as in our case to take or destroy a neighbour's sheep or cabbages is a punishable act. Then some cattle are speared, or frightened off the run by the mere presence of the blacks in search of food. In either of these events the blacks are attacked and some of them shot down. In revenge, a shepherd or stockman is speared.

Recourse is then had to the government; half-a-dozen or more young blacks in some part of the colony remote from the scene of the outrage are enlisted, mounted, armed, liberally supplied with ball cartridges and despatched to the spot under the charge of a Sub-inspector of Police. Hot for blood, the black troopers are laid on the trail of the tribe; then follow the careful tracking, the surprise, the shooting at a distance safe from spears, the deaths of many of the males, the capture of the women, who know that if they abstain from flight they will be spared; the gratified lust of the savage, and the Sub-inspector's report that the tribe has been '*dispersed*' for such is the official term used to convey the occurrence of these proceedings.

When the tribe has gone through several repetitions of this experience and the chief part of its young men been butchered, the women, the remnant of the men and such children as the black troopers have not troubled themselves to shoot, are *let in* or allowed to come to the settler's homestead, and the war is at an end. Finally, a shameful disease is introduced and finishes what the rifle began.¹¹⁶

Although the idea of native police was tried out in many parts of Australia, it was in Queensland that the strategy had its most active – and therefore its most sinister – expression. Young Aboriginal men, typically from communities already damaged and lacking both hope and direction, were drafted into a paramilitary force. They were invariably sent to localities distant from their

own. Uniformed and armed, they formed mounted contingents under the control of a white police officer. Each band was virtually a law unto itself. They were widely used to 'disperse' (slaughter) Aborigines who were causing trouble to settlers by spearing cattle or in other ways. The settlers knew that when they were called in, the 'problems' would disappear. Numerous cases have been recorded while many more were never reported at all.

To give just one example, D'Arcy Uhr was a Sub-Inspector of Police attached to the Queensland 'black force'.¹¹⁷ Among his more notorious exploits were the massacre, in 1868 near Burketown, of approximately thirty Aboriginal people for spearing some horses and a similar number in the same locality following the spearing of a man named Cameron.¹¹⁸ The Burketown correspondent to the *Brisbane Courier* wrote exultantly: 'Everybody in the district is delighted with the wholesale slaughter dealt out by the native police and thank Mr Uhr for his energy in ridding the district of fifty-nine myalls.'¹¹⁹

In later life, the ex-native policemen were more often than not misfits. They were frequently unwelcome, even feared in their own communities. They had obtained a 'tincture of European civilisation'¹²⁰ and prided themselves on their knowledge of European ways, but they were not acceptable in either Aboriginal tribal society or European society. A few used their newfound knowledge to become outlaws, of whom the Western Australians Captain, Pigeon, Major, Nippy and Dibby were the most notorious. They have been hailed by some as black patriots, heroes of the Aboriginal resistance.¹²¹ Perhaps they were in their own tragic way. Perhaps, too, it had been the Europeans from whom they had learnt un-Aboriginal ways. Perhaps for them violence had become cathartic – an obsessive way of life.

In north Queensland, the pastoral invasion merged with another kind of invasion – the gold rushes. The first goldfields were in areas opened up by pastoralists, but by the 1870s the prospectors had moved their frontier further north. In 1877, there were around 7 000 Europeans and 20 000 Chinese on the Palmer River field alone.¹²² The pastoral invasion was traumatic enough for Aboriginal people, but the mining invasion was much more immediate and in vastly greater numbers. Aboriginal resistance was fierce and perhaps more constant than anywhere else in Australia,¹²³ but despite that it was even more relentlessly put

down. As if this were not enough, there were other contexts of oppression and exploitation of Aborigines, particularly in the pearling industry.

The earliest Christian missions in north Queensland tended to be opened a decade or two after the frontier had passed through. The most severe conflict was over, but sporadic violence and increasing exploitation were common.

The first Christian mission in Queensland was the Nundah mission on Moreton Bay, commenced in 1838 by Lutherans on behalf of NSW Presbyterians and described earlier. After its demise in 1845, some of the men retained their interest in their missionary vocation and encouraged the same interest in the Queensland Lutheran congregations they founded. Also in 1838, the first contingent of Lutheran settlers arrived in South Australia and they, too, had a missionary zeal, as we saw earlier. Given this zeal, an increasing prosperity in their communities and the historic association with work among Queensland Aborigines, it is not surprising that the first missions in north Queensland were Lutheran.

In 1886, the United German and Scandinavian Lutheran Synod of Queensland opened a mission at Mari Yamba, on the Proserpine River north of Mackay, assisted by a small government subsidy of £10 per month.¹²⁴ The previous year the famous Lutheran missionary, Johannes Flierl, had arrived in Cooktown on his way to commence a New Guinea mission. Delayed in Cooktown, Flierl saw the plight of the Aborigines. Ascertaining the availability of a reserve at Cape Bedford, he began a mission on the reserve in 1886, confident of the support of his Neuendettelsau Missionary Society and the Immanuel Synod of South Australia.¹²⁵ This mission was shortly moved a short distance to Hope Valley (later Hopevale).¹²⁶ Approving the idea of missions taking responsibility for Aboriginal reserves, the government offered the Bloomfield River Reserve to the Lutherans. The Neuendettelsau Missionary Society agreed to fund Hopevale while the Immanuel Synod agreed to support Bloomfield, opening the mission there in 1887.¹²⁷

In 1891, the Presbyterian Church established the Mapoon mission, while John Gribble founded what was to become the Church of England mission at Yarrabah. The Mari Yamba and Bloomfield River missions were abandoned in 1901, but the other

three missions, Mapoon, Yarrabah and Hopevale, became firmly established.

As space prevents a detailed discussion of the beginnings of all five missions, I have chosen not to discuss Mari Yamba and Bloomfield River missions because they were abandoned and I have already discussed the abandoned Jesuit missions in the Northern Territory in this chapter. Of the other three, I have chosen not to discuss Hopevale because in Chapters 6 and 7, Lutheran missions elsewhere in Australia have been treated in some detail. My case studies for the beginnings of missions in north Queensland will therefore be Yarrabah and Mapoon.

The Mapoon mission

The first mission on the western or Gulf side of Cape York was the Mapoon mission. The decision to engage in mission work in north Queensland was made at the first Federal Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, held in Sydney in 1886.¹²⁸ Early negotiations with the Queensland government broke down, due largely to a lack of enthusiasm by Queensland Presbyterians. The main impetus came from Victorian Presbyterians, strongly influenced by the Moravian missionaries at their Presbyterian missions in Victoria, treated earlier.

The Presbyterian Foreign Mission Committee, based in Victoria, sent a deputation to Queensland in 1890, prominent in which was the Moravian superintendent of Ramahyuck, Frederick Hagenauer. There he found what to him were wild and degraded savages, desperately in need of Christ:

... Every day we met large numbers of wild blacks who had come in from the surrounding mountains. These were the very people of whom we had been told in Cooktown that they were so wild that we should not go to meet them without a strong police protection. Setting aside all fear of danger, but knowing that, in a friendly way, you are surrounded by one or two or three hundred of such poor and degraded human beings who had not a sign of clothing about them, with no hope nor prospect in themselves for the better, but to live and die in misery like the beast of the field, what Christian heart will not be filled with the intense pity and compassion for these our fellow-men?

Yes, truly one's heart bleeds for the poor creatures; you stand in their midst, forgetting all danger, and your thoughts and wishes

and prayers ascend to the throne of grace for their conversion, and your longing desire and earnest petitions for help go forth to your Christian brothers and sisters in all the churches, your heart appeals to all who have feelings of humanity and kindness, saying in Heber's words,

'Can we whose souls are lighted
with the wisdom from on high,
Can we to men benighted
the Lamp of Life deny?'

The answer to that question should follow with all the power which the love of Christ can produce in the believer's heart, but, alas! how little is done.¹²⁹

We may well admire Hagenauer's conviction that the knowledge of Christ was as much the right of Aborigines as it was his own, and his zeal that nothing be spared to bring that knowledge to them. We may well, at the same time, regret his ethnocentric dismissal of Aboriginal culture as 'living and dying in misery like the beast of the field'. Yet Hagenauer and those like him stand in stark contrast to that large proportion of the north Queensland community to whom Aborigines were less than worthless, vermin which should be exterminated.

A north Queenslander wrote:

The nigger is a treacherous, lying, double-dealing, thieving black brute with no sense whatever of honour, gratitude or fair play. . . The writer never held a man guilty of murder who wiped out a nigger. They should be classed with the black snake and death adder and treated accordingly.¹³⁰

Indeed, there were those who reserved their strongest abuse for the missionaries for their failure to condemn Aboriginal behaviour even more strongly. One wrote in a Cooktown newspaper in 1884: 'Every common decency is being outraged. . . We are astonished that the ministers of religion have not denounced their indecencies and orgies, *those vile caretakers who revel in black lewdness.*'¹³¹

Not long before Hagenauer was urging the Christian community to spare no effort to bring Christ to the north Queensland Aborigines, pastoralists were invading the very region where the first Presbyterian mission was to be sited, massacring Aborigines

as they advanced. These cattlemen were led by Lachlan Kennedy and Frank Jardine. Mapoon people still tell the stories. Twenty years ago there still were those who could actually remember.

Jerry Hudson said:

Jardine and Kennedy came through Batavia River. Jardine wanted to put his station 50 miles up – you can still see the stone walls he made for his footpath. They were killing people all the way up. At Dingle Dingle Creek they killed most of the tribe. That's the Batavia River people. Billy Miller and Andrew Archie are of that tribe. Only fifty left out of 300.¹³²

Lachlan Kennedy had twenty notches on his gun, tallying the Aborigines he had personally shot. According to Mapoon people, he eventually regretted his past and married an Aboriginal woman. At his request, they buried his dead body in a vertical position as a sign of his disgrace as a murderer.¹³³

In the wake of the pastoral invasion came the exploitation of Cape York people by the pearling fleets. By 1890, the far northern region of Cape York had been exhausted of its labour force and 'recruitment' now took place further down the Gulf. Recruiting procedures varied. Some went voluntarily, seeking adventure in the new world; some were kidnapped and forced to work as divers; many were sold for a bag of flour by tribal elders who themselves were exploiting the young men.

The effect of the pearling industry was disastrous. Some recruits never returned; many of those who did died of lung complaints from excessive and uncontrolled deep diving, the symptoms being 'coughing, blood-spitting, pains in the back and chest and general emaciation'.¹³⁴ Equally deadly was the introduction of venereal diseases contracted from the pearling fleet crews by the women. Added to this was immense social disruption and disintegration.

The Queensland government responded favourably to the Victorian delegation and agreed to the establishment of a mission on a 100 square mile reserve on the west coast of Cape York, along the Batavia River from Cullen Point. The Foreign Mission Board decided to adopt the successful Victorian technique of appointing Moravian missionaries. In Germany, the Moravian Mission Board agreed and sent three missionaries, an English Moravian the Rev.

James Ward, with his wife, and a German Moravian the Rev. Nicholas Hey,¹³⁵ who was later to marry Mrs Ward's sister.

Arriving in Melbourne, they were met by Hagenauer. The Moravian missionaries then travelled north through Sydney and Brisbane. They gained the distinct impression that the further north they got, the lower was the general opinion of Aborigines and the higher was the degree of cynicism with which their mission was viewed. As J.E. Hutton, the Moravian historian wrote:

The amount of pessimism in Queensland was enormous. The nearer the brethren approached their destination, the more critical and scornful everybody seemed. At Townsville a candid host informed them that he had prepared to receive a couple of fossils; at Cooktown another, equally candid, said that he had expected idiots; and others warned that the enterprise was hopeless.

'You are fools,' they said. 'You don't know these blacks; they are treacherous and malicious; they are cannibals and will probably kill and eat you; and even if they don't, you needn't imagine that you'll make them Christians. The fact is they are not fit to live and ought to be killed off.'¹³⁶

They were most distressed by the discouraging attitude of Queensland Presbyterians. The Presbyterian authorities believed that '...the men who were going to devote their lives to such a despicable work are expected to be ne'er-do-wells.'¹³⁷

There were always a few who encouraged and assisted them. John Douglas, the Government Resident at Thursday Island, welcomed them. He had already had a site selected for them at Mapoon on the mouth of the Batavia River. He had also prepared two luggers to transport them with four builders and the building supplies. Although the missionaries objected, Douglas also insisted on providing a police guard – a white police constable and two native policemen.¹³⁸

The mission party arrived at Mapoon on 28 November 1891. Accustomed to pearling luggers, a large number of Aborigines met them on the beach. The presence of the police caused apprehension which it took some time for the missionaries to dispel. Having inspected the site, Ward, who was superintendent, returned to Thursday Island to pick up his wife who had remained

behind. During his absence, Hey managed to allay the fears of the Aborigines. Hutton recorded:

... Leaving his rifle behind, he visited the native camp. On the natives his conduct acted like magic. For the first time in their experience they beheld a white man without a weapon in his hand. ... Hey, to their amazement, dressed a boy's wounded foot. ... and gave presents to the children. Forthwith [the Aborigines] showed signs of gratitude. Each morning they gathered round him to hear him read the texts. ...¹³⁹

A hilltop site for the mission house was selected at some distance from the Aboriginal camp by the river. After the mission house had been constructed, the builders left and the missionaries immediately began agricultural plots. They were disappointed by the poorness of the sandy soil – it was to be a perpetual problem in all agricultural projects at Mapoon. Fortunately, Hey was an experienced farmer and within a year fifty acres were cleared with four acres under intensive planting of tropical crops.

The Aboriginal people worked quite willingly for the missionaries. The missionaries never appear to have had difficulties in being accepted by the people. It was as true of Mapoon as it was of many other missions, that as soon as the Aboriginal people understood that the missionaries intended them no harm, they were glad to have them there. They were a source of European goods, provided protection and even simply made life more interesting, giving the young an opportunity to come to grips with the changing world.

Ward and Hey adopted the 'no work, no food' principle, but found less problem in implementing it than was the case at many other missions, perhaps because the Aborigines already understood something of wages for work from the pearling fleets. At first they were paid in food and tobacco.¹⁴⁰

The nearest pastoralist was a Mr Embley of Batavia Downs. He was sympathetic to the missionaries, thoughtful, and willing to make at least some amends for the past slaughter of Aborigines which he admitted had achieved little. He said, 'Many of them have lost their living owing to the existence of my ranch and it has done me no good. Besides, one is compelled sometimes to think of eternity. ...'¹⁴¹

He gave a small herd of cattle to the mission. The herd did well and began the long tradition of cattle raising at the mission which was much more successful than agriculture. Soon a small version of the typical mission compound rose on the banks of the Batavia River and with it the regulated mission day. As Hutton described it:

. . .the brethren soon arranged a daily programme. At seven the missionaries breakfasted in the mission house; then a loud bell was rung; and every morning Ward or Hey conducted family prayers in the open air. For the next two-and-a-half hours i.e. 7.30 a.m. to 10.00 a.m., the men, under Hey as foreman, were engaged in useful labour. Ward taught boys on the verandah steps; and Mrs Ward taught the girls to sew, and cooked both for the brethren and for the workmen. At ten the men had dinner; in the afternoon they resumed their labours; and at half-past five, after tea, they were paid and returned to the camp.¹⁴²

Gradually, Aboriginal groups from considerable distances north and south began to settle near the mission. Some sought protection, like the group from Pennefather River which had already been 'decimated by raids by pearlers and beche-de-mer fishers'.¹⁴³ Others came seeking remuneration or simply to be part of what was new, to be involved in the changes which were taking place. Although it was to be a long time before this particular group of missionaries would acknowledge that any development of Christian faith had taken place, they felt, after the first year, that they had made some progress.

Here is Hutton's summary of the missionaries' reports:

On the lives of the people generally the gospel had, as yet, little effect. . . In the schoolroom itself, however, shone faint gleams of hope. Good scholars earned a few rewards; on Sundays, after the church was opened, the people listened quietly; and one boy delighted the brethren by calling Mrs Ward 'Mother'. At the close, therefore [of 1892], the missionaries had made some definite progress. They had taught some of the men to be industrious; they had won the esteem of all by tending the sick; they had learned the natives' ideas on marriage; and, in a few cases, they had taught the young to think about Christ.¹⁴⁴

Ward and Hey found themselves in a dilemma over the pearling industry. On the one hand, they condemned the abuse and exploitation of Aboriginal people, but on the other hand the mission benefited from the industry. The missionaries seem to have adopted the view that as they could not prevent the recruiting of Aboriginal labour, they might as well control the dealings between the pearlers and the mission Aborigines. The mission co-operated in supplying labour and in return received half the earnings. Certainly there were those who felt the missionaries had compromised themselves in so doing, but on the other hand the missionaries were able to introduce some industrial reforms. Mission Aborigines could not, for example, be taken away for more than six months.

The missionaries forcefully opposed the worst abuses. They tried to make it illegal to recruit boys under the age of fourteen.¹⁴⁵ They also tried to find alternative mission employment for the young men. This opposition to the exploitative practices of the pearling industry led to open hostility between the labour recruiters and the missionaries. False rumours were circulated by the pearlers, some of which were printed in newspapers, blaming the missionaries for murders committed by Aborigines and claiming that the missionaries incited the Aborigines to resist Europeans.¹⁴⁶

In fairness to the missionaries, it is very clear that they would have preferred to see the recruitment of Aborigines by pearlers totally prohibited, but that they were realistic enough to see that it was not likely to end soon. In the meantime, they were prepared to try to supervise recruitment from the mission as best they could and to use some of the proceeds for what they considered to be the benefit of the Aborigines.

The connection between the high mortality among Aborigines and the pearling industry was obvious to anyone who, like Hey, actually lived in the vicinity of Aboriginal people. According to Hey, about two-thirds of the boys died within six months of their return. In 1897, there were four births and fifteen deaths at Mapoon. As Hey wrote:

This statistic speaks for itself and shows clearly that the Aborigines are a doomed race, and will soon have disappeared from the face of the earth. During the past year over 100 na-

tives, mostly between fifteen to thirty years of age, were recruited on our stations for employment in the pearl shell, beche-de-mer and turtleshell industries.¹⁴⁷

The missionaries continued to press for an end to recruiting and in 1904 a law was passed prohibiting recruiting from the mission itself. To Hey, this was still not enough:

From my experience and observation gained by living almost six years among the natives, I believe only by absolutely prohibiting the employment of Aborigines in the pearl shell, turtle and beche-de-mer industry can the existing evils be remedied and further evils prevented, but I believe the said industries would suffer and the proposal would also meet with great opposition.¹⁴⁸

In December 1894, James Ward returned unwell from an exploratory trip up the Batavia River. He was thought to have caught some kind of 'fever' from drinking infected water. He became very sick on Christmas Eve and steadily worsened. In his conscious moments he sometimes screamed with pain, but sometimes spoke of his faith and asked to speak to the Aboriginal people. Hutton has recorded some of Ward's last words to them:

'Do you remember that picture in the church,' he said, 'of the Good Shepherd carrying a lamb in his arms? That is how I feel now. I am tired and weak as a child. I have asked the Good Shepherd to take me, and now he will lift me in his arms and take me home.'¹⁴⁹

On the evening of 2 January 1895, as Ward sank slowly towards death, in his agony and delirium he glimpsed a truth that seared his mind. He saw with blinding clarity that the way the mission operated was wrong. The separation of mission house and Aboriginal camp symbolised a superiority which was contrary to the gospel. Ward bitterly reproached himself:

I ought not to have lived in the mission house at all. I ought to have lived in the camp among the Aborigines. For that sin of neglect I must now make full atonement. Let me go once more to the camp.¹⁵⁰

With these words James Ward rose from his bed. Hey and six Aborigines struggled with him, holding him down until morning. Ward quietened and the Aborigines left. 'I must follow,' he said, and went to meet his God.¹⁵¹

After Ward's death, both his wife and the Heys also became ill and left the mission for six months. Fully recovered, all three returned later in 1895 to the great joy of the Mapoon people.¹⁵²

Hey became superintendent and several new missionaries joined his staff. This enabled new mission stations to be opened up: Weipa, not far south of Mapoon on the Embley River in 1898; and Aurukun, further south still on the Archer River in 1904. At Mapoon itself, the mission complex began to take shape: cottages, a bush church, dormitories, a boathouse and jetty. Cattle and, to a lesser extent, agricultural industries were developed. In 1901, the mission was made an industrial school so that government officers could send Aboriginal children and young people there from elsewhere. In the same year, the James Ward Memorial Church was built and the first couple baptised.¹⁵³

Many of the young people sent to Mapoon were of mixed descent. They were well accepted by the local people and married locally. Gradually Mapoon became a settlement for Aboriginal people of mixed ancestry. Hey proved to be a much harsher disciplinarian than the gentle James Ward. All the children and young people were eventually housed in segregated dormitories with strict disciplinary rules. The Chief Protector reported:

Great precautions are taken to ensure the safety of the children, especially the girls. The garden where they work, playsheds and dormitories are all surrounded with wire netting so no-one can get in or out, and all the doors are controlled by wires from the Superintendent's house.¹⁵⁴

In 1909, Hey received a great deal of unfavourable publicity over his public flogging of a teenage girl. There was a government enquiry, but the Presbyterian authorities supported Hey, accepting his explanation that stern measures were necessary to curb her behaviour.

Hey was for many years one of the foremost examples of those missionaries to whom everything Aboriginal was Satanic. Christianity and an idealised European culture, as he perceived it,

were synonymous. Even in order to learn the meaning of such sins as covetousness or theft, Hey believed the Aborigines had to be made to discard their traditional co-operative attitudes ('communistic') and learn 'the value of private property'.¹⁵⁵ Even after twenty years at Mapoon, Hey still believed that traditional Aboriginal society was totally decadent. He said, 'They [were] not in a low stage of human development. . . as they [were] not in a state of development at all; they (were) not on the upward road but on the downward grade. . .'.¹⁵⁶

Aboriginal society and culture, to Hey, were 'contemptible - hideous and disgusting'.¹⁵⁷ A missionary journal pictured Hey with four Mapoon Aborigines, likening him to 'a lion tamer and four of his half-tamed young lions'. The writer drew the readers' attention to 'an animal expression' on Aboriginal faces and told how 'the missionary has to venture into the crowd of bloodthirsty, treacherous lions. . . and dwell there in faith in the constant protection of his God'.¹⁵⁸

Hey was so convinced that there was an inherent conflict between Aboriginal culture and his nineteenth century Christian concept of sin, that as late as 1912 he made the suggestion that theologians should rethink Christian doctrine in the light of his and others' experiences.¹⁵⁹ For Aborigines, he speculated, the doctrine of free will might not apply - might not be part of the plan of salvation as it applied to them. They might have to be controlled to prevent them from sinning. This, of course, was a theological re-emergence of the old view that Aborigines were not as human as Europeans and not as capable of becoming fully Christian.¹⁶⁰

In practice, circumstances quite often forced missionaries like Hey to act with more tolerance than their writings reveal. It is always worth remembering that material particularly written to shock European Christians into generous donations to missions was often made to seem more lurid or more dramatic than was actually the case. As early as 1905, commenting on being welcomed to Aurukun by a corroboree, Hey wrote:

Ten years ago, I would have done my best to prevent them from [having a corroboree] so, but I now look differently upon these things. They gave their best and we accepted it in that spirit. . . It is now for us to give them something better.¹⁶¹

Up until 1905, Hey operated what a sympathetic Moravian historian called a 'limited monarchy' by which he meant that Hey made all the decisions and issued all the orders, but that he sometimes listened to advice.¹⁶² After ten years, however, Hey instituted a form of village council and handed over some of the authority to elected Aboriginal leaders.

Christian development at Mapoon was at first slow. The first baptism – a married couple – was in the new James Ward Memorial Church in 1901, but it was not followed by many more baptisms for a long time. One important exception was an early convert, Mamoos, who was a great help and support to the missionaries for thirty years.

As I have already suggested, Hey was one of those missionaries who wanted to see a total change of lifestyle from the sinful or Aboriginal to the Christian or European. The agents of change were the school, the dormitory system, disciplined work and the teaching of a European set of values from the pulpit. 'Old habits are not quickly changed,' the missionaries reported in 1910, 'and much more still has to be done to overcome fatalism, apathy, and firmly-rooted customs and superstitions.'¹⁶³ They felt, however, that they could discern progress and that the young people at Mapoon were happy, showing 'merriment' in their faces 'in striking contrast to the stolid, frightened and expressionless look of their heathen friends'.¹⁶⁴

In comparing the lives of the mission children to those of the children of the damaged and disillusioned coastal communities of Cape York, the missionaries' observations may have been true. As the years passed Hey, in looking back, felt that '... gradually the naked savages were not only seen clothed and in their right mind, listening to the gospel of peace, but they also endeavoured to shape their lives according to the principle'.¹⁶⁵

As early as 1908, James Ward's brother, Arthur, who was to become a bishop of the Moravian church, could entitle his book *The Miracle of Mapoon*.¹⁶⁶ Its subtitle *From Native Camp to Christian Village* aptly described what it was that the missionaries were trying to create.

Hey, by the time he left Mapoon in 1919, had become synonymous with it. Even with all his disapproval of, or seeming hostility towards Aboriginal culture, Hey can be included in that substantial list of long-serving missionaries whose views mellowed

with time, as they came to know and understand Aboriginal people better and to count some of them as friends.

Asked how he had so rapidly won the confidence of the Mapoon Aborigines, Hey replied, 'By learning at the footstool from the natives and then being guided by what I had learned.'¹⁶⁷ This sounds a little like wisdom after the event, but it is true that Hey did try to understand Aboriginal people even if he generally disapproved of what he found out. Long after he left Hey, maintaining a lifelong interest in Mapoon, glimpsed an important principle which is still incompletely understood by some European Christians today. He wrote in 1931 that only Christian Aborigines from their understanding of Aboriginal culture 'can say whether a particular custom is or is not consistent with the principles of our Christian religion'.¹⁶⁸

It is difficult to assess the extent to which the missionaries were real agents of change in the destructive sense or, rather, agents of adjustment. They did not come to a healthy traditional cultural context where Aboriginal society in its pristine, unspoiled state was living in harmony with its environment. We can argue that Aboriginal society should not have been so brutally damaged in the first place, but no number of Lachlan Kennedys having themselves buried standing up will bring back the dead. We may argue that the exploitation of Aboriginal people by the pearling industry should not have been allowed to take place by a supposedly enlightened and Christian government, but the profit motive was there and the profit motive took priority over the humanitarian motive. It may be argued that even then there were better solutions to the crisis into which Aboriginal people had been forced than the regimented mission life which the missionaries offered. There no doubt were better solutions, but it is historically naive to imagine that had the missionaries not gone to Mapoon, anything better would have been done.

In October 1919, with the departure of the Heys, Mapoon ceased to be a foreign mission of the Moravian church run on behalf of the Presbyterian church, but a home mission of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.¹⁶⁹

As time passed, an increasing number of Mapoon residents had either been born there or known little else. By 1930, 400 people had been baptised and there were sixty communicant members of the Mapoon church. Many married couples lived in

their own cottages and gardened their own plots of ground, the men supplementing this with income from occasional work outside Mapoon as seamen. The mixed race people had happily intermarried with the local people, so that an ever-increasing proportion of the Mapoon people were descended from both.

Mapoon had become home.

After World War II, the unsuitability of the site for a township became evident with problems related to water supply, communications, limited employment prospects and poor soil.¹⁷⁰ These problems, however, inevitably seemed to worry the mission authorities and government officials more than they did the local people.

Ironically, the crisis for Mapoon people was once more connected with the fact that they stood in the way of profit. The world's richest deposits of bauxite were discovered in the Weipa and Mapoon reserves. Mining leases were granted to Comalco in 1957 and extended in 1965. The Queensland government and Comalco agreed that the Mapoon people should be moved somewhere else.

The Presbyterian authorities at first hoped that compensation paid to the Aborigines could be used to overcome the community's difficult living conditions. When it turned out that Comalco had no intention of paying any compensation, the Presbyterian church decided that their role was to encourage the people to go, as this church memo indicates:

From every point of view they must go voluntarily. We know that they will be better off in the future if they move. Our problem is to get them to recognise this and act upon it with good will. When the mission closes there will be no ongoing basis for a livelihood or of living standards for the people. They may not believe this now, but it is our duty in love to lead them to see it.¹⁷¹

The missionaries placed great pressure on the Mapoon Aboriginal people to leave. A new community, New Mapoon, was proposed at Bamaga on the tip of Cape York. Mapoon people, however, began forcefully to express their independence and refused to consider moving. A Mapoon Aboriginal man, Jack Callope, said in 1961, 'The mission said, "If you don't make up your

minds to leave, we'll close the store, close everything". The people said, "That's all right, we'll manage. We'll stay here".¹⁷²

His views were echoed by an Aboriginal woman, Jubilee Woodley, in these words: "The church stated there was no money to keep up the mission, but the people are independent. They don't have to close up because there's no money. You people want too much money."¹⁷³

Mapoon was home. It was home for the Mapoon people for two very important reasons. It was tribally home and it was their Christian home. Looking back to their pre-European days, Mrs Rachel Peter described what Mapoon meant to her:

I was born here, my father was born here, my mother, my great grandparents. This is our tribal land. . . I hope we will never leave this place. Here is our home, our Mapoon, there's plenty of everything for us to eat. . . wallabies, kangaroo, oysters and crabs. . . wild yams and much else that we were taught to eat by our grandparents and our fathers and mothers. . . In our home, in Mapoon, we just get these things freely. . . We don't have to spend money on anything.¹⁷⁴

The people also looked back with gratitude and reverence to their old Christian heritage. Jean Jimmy said:

Mapoon mission was our tribal land from birth. And that is the place people of Mapoon were taught their Christian teaching. The light was brought all the way from England by our first missionaries, the Rev. J.G. Ward and Rev. N. Hey on 28th November 1891, when the light shone its beam and landed on our shores. For all the saints who from their labours rest. Is this the protection the Director of Native Affairs and the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Missions brought to the people? They came like burglars. This is what Protection, not Christian ministry has done: made us like slaves and traded people of Mapoon for thirty pieces of silver. . . May our Creator help us to overcome the evil.¹⁷⁵

The Mapoon people were placed under intense pressure. Their attempts at strikes and demonstrations were put down. They were threatened with all sorts of deprivation of services which all Australians perceive as their right. Many were punished

by expulsion and prevented from returning. People who left legitimately for employment, medical or other purposes were not allowed back so that families were divided.¹⁷⁶

The Mapoon people particularly associate with this era a missionary they called Mr 'Whiteman'. They remember his strictness, his expulsion of people, his punishments like cutting off the hair of 'striking' girls. When *The Mapoon Story* was compiled, detailing their struggles, its careful editors did not name Mr 'Whiteman'. When the final form of the book was shown to the people they approved it with one request: 'Add the name of Mr "Whiteman".' This was done on page 8: 'The name of Mr "Whiteman" is Garth Filmer.'¹⁷⁷

Eventually the missionaries did as they had said. They left. All facilities provided by church and government were closed down – health service, school, store, communications and so on. But over seventy determined Aboriginal people remained. They began to live off the bush and to fetch other supplies from elsewhere in their own boat.¹⁷⁸

This was the last straw for the Queensland government. Independent Aboriginal communities simply could not be tolerated. On 15 November 1963, under government instruction, an armed detachment of police landed after dark, arrested the whole community, placing them under armed guard.¹⁷⁹

In the morning they set fire to the people's homes, the school, the store. . . And they also destroyed by fire the James Ward Memorial Church.

The Yarrabah mission and John Gribble

John Brown Gribble, struggling for justice for Aborigines in the north-west of Western Australia, challenged the Establishment and lost (see chapter 7). A broken man, he returned to NSW in 1887.

Bishop Alfred Barry of Sydney and Gribble's old supporter, Bishop Mesac Thomas of Goulburn, tried to find him a position which would interest or challenge him. He ministered briefly in several parishes, spent a short time working for the Aborigines Protection Association from which he resigned in anger and returned once more to parish work. He was still ill at ease, unsettled and restless.

In southern NSW, Gribble met up again with his old friend

Daniel Matthews at Malaga. It was almost certainly in Matthews' company that he began to dream of a remote mission station in north Queensland, far from interference and confrontation. A contact with the botanist Baron von Mueller and the opportunity to hear first-hand descriptions of Cape York were all he needed to prompt him to act.¹⁸⁰ He travelled north to seek a mission site at his own expense. Only after his death was it discovered that he had financed the journey by cashing in his life assurance policies.¹⁸¹

The driving forces behind Gribble were his sense of his own personal need of salvation through Christ, his zeal to bring this same message to others and his outrage at injustice, not only in the physical mistreatment of Aboriginal people, but also in the failure of the Christian community to bring them the knowledge of Christ. He wrote in 1884:

And as to [the Aborigines'] spiritual and eternal welfare, theirs is indeed a darkness which can be felt. . . Their contact with the white population, instead of being the means of enlightening them upon these great subjects, has only resulted in increasing their darkness and misery. For what purity, what nobility, what grandeur can they detect in Christianity as represented in the lives of those with whom they are brought into contact?¹⁸²

It was always the oppressed and exploited whom he championed. This was true at Warangesda and Carnarvon and it did not take him long to see what was happening in north Queensland. He looked for somewhere he could provide a sanctuary. He concentrated upon the coast near the Bellenden Ker Ranges and was able to obtain government approval of a reserve to the south of Cairns. Returning to NSW, he tried for six months to convince the Australian Board of Missions (ABM), the new Church of England mission organisation, to support him in founding a mission there.¹⁸³ The financially embarrassed Board could only agree to recognise the mission and to provide 'practical support', which meant no money.¹⁸⁴ Undeterred, Gribble resigned from his parish and toured the eastern colonies, raising sufficient funds to begin the work.

Gribble was also disappointed not to receive assistance from the Queensland Colonial Secretary, Horace Tozer. Initially, he was

made very welcome and was led to believe that he would be assisted quite generously with money and equipment. When subsequently papers were received in Queensland detailing Gribble's confrontation with Western Australian authorities in attempting to expose atrocities committed against Aborigines in the north-west, Tozer refused assistance.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, the Church of England Diocese of North Queensland also heard of Gribble's confrontation with the Church of England in Western Australia over the treatment of Aborigines by settlers. Bishop George Barlow gave him a cool reception. Gribble wrote:

[The bishop] gave me severe warning against saying anything about the doings of the whites to the blacks, going so far as to declare that he would rather the mission should not be carried on in his diocese than anything of exposure of wrongs should be made by me. This pained me deeply. Why are the bishops so afraid of vindicating the cause of this long-suffering race? My opinion of my diocesan is not an exalted one.¹⁸⁶

The bishop, anxious not to alienate his white congregations in a financially impoverished diocese, would not at first commit himself to support the mission. He later relented, providing Gribble with a small stipend.

The site Gribble chose for the new mission was on the shore of what was then called False Bay. Gribble, with Willie Ambrym, a Pacific Islander; Pompo Katchewan, a south Queensland Aboriginal youth; and James Tyson, a white assistant, landed at the mission site on 17 June 1892.¹⁸⁷ The exact spot is now marked by a large cross. For a while the mission was called the Bellenden Ker Mission after the mountain range behind it, but was later changed to Yarrabah, an attempt to write the local Aboriginal term for 'meeting place'.¹⁸⁸

The mission party immediately set about the physical construction of the mission, clearing a road inland to the chosen location. Tyson left almost immediately. Gribble, Willie and Pompo continued the work, living in tents. They constructed a temporary shed of saplings and corrugated iron and then commenced a two-roomed mission cottage.

Perhaps it was only what seemed to be the imminent fulfilment of his dream that buoyed Gribble up, as he was already a

very sick man. An easy prey to tropical ailments, he caught malaria and in November Willie and Pompo took him to Cairns Hospital. During his few months at the mission he had not seen another Aboriginal person.

John Gribble called for his son, Ernest, by telegram. Ernest, at twenty-four years old, was catechist at Tumbarumba, having decided to study for the Church of England ministry after working for a few years in a variety of occupations including teaching, gardening, prospecting and droving. Ernest left immediately for Cairns where his father, recovering slightly, took him to Yarrabah and asked him to take over his mission. Ernest eventually arranged for his father to be taken to Sydney where he died in September 1893.¹⁸⁹ He had given his life to 'save' the Aborigines both spiritually and physically.

Many years later Ernest wrote:

His text for the first sermon he preached on behalf of the Aborigines was 'Lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left' (Isaiah 37:4). The last time he ever preached was at Yarrabah to a congregation of four, Pearson, Willie, Pompo and myself, on this same text. It was also the text for his funeral sermon. . .¹⁹⁰

The Yarrabah mission and Ernest Gribble

Ernest Gribble was, at first, a reluctant missionary. He certainly would have had no illusions, growing up at his father's Warangesda mission and commencing his adult life at the Gascoyne mission. He had witnessed the destruction of his father. Mission life held, for him, no promise of romance and adventure. He knew what it was like and he did not desire it:

My father had. . . gone to northern Queensland to start a mission to the Aborigines there. He had urged me to join him but my reply was emphatic, that I would never go as a missionary among the blacks.¹⁹¹

Ernest Gribble changed, however, at Yarrabah with his dying father. Several times his father urged him to remain and take over the mission, but he promised only to stay until his father returned from Sydney, knowing full well that he would never return at all.¹⁹²

Before that day passed I had made the decision which determined my life work. Feeling somewhat wretched after my father's leaving, I went up the side of the mountain to think and pray for guidance. A few days afterwards I sent a telegram to my father saying that I had definitely and finally thrown in my lot with the mission.¹⁹³

Living on their own meagre resources, Ernest Gribble, Willie and Pompo remained at the mission after John Gribble was sent south. Ernest wrote:

It was a peculiar position in which I now found myself – in charge of a mission, but with no natives to deal with. However, the four of us set to work building and clearing land for a garden. We completed the erection of a small two-roomed house, and then started a schoolhouse thirty feet by twelve, on high piles, but we had no-one to teach.¹⁹⁴

Gribble sailed around the nearby coast and rivers in the cutter *Hazelhurst* in search of Aboriginal candidates for the still-empty mission. He made some amicable but insubstantial contacts and returned somewhat despondently to Yarrabah. A few days later small numbers of Aboriginal people started visiting the mission and, on 12 December 1892, eighty men, women and children came. He recorded his impressions in these words:

We gathered them together, and at once knelt down and asked God's blessing upon the work of the mission. That was the first service of any kind held with the Aborigines, but the daily services of the church were continued regularly. We gave them a meal of boiled rice, which we cooked in a kerosene-tin. . . . There being a large number of children with these people, I at once decided to start a school, but this was an exceedingly difficult matter since it was a great hardship for these children of nature to sit still for even ten minutes at a time.

We were, of course, very poor and could not afford to feed any blacks, having barely sufficient for our own needs. However, we contrived to get them one meal a day and this was given them at midday. As soon as they finished their meal, I would start them at learning the alphabet. Thus our school had its beginning. In those days we could get very little work done by the blacks and, as we were not in a position to make much towards payment for

the work done, we missionaries necessarily had ourselves to do all the work in the way of clearing, building and fishing.¹⁹⁵

In November 1893, after his father's death, Ernest Gribble took formal charge of the Yarrabah mission, initially receiving a small allowance of £4 per month from the Diocese of North Queensland, with which he supported his mother, his four sisters and his brother. After a few months the diocese withdrew even this token support. Gribble contacted the Anglican Primate, Bishop William Saumarez Smith, who agreed that the Diocese of Sydney would continue his stipend and provide £1 per month for the mission itself. Gribble agreed to this small amount, on which he maintained Yarrabah for two years. Yarrabah then became an Australian Board of Missions responsibility, formally having the status of an extra-diocesan outpost of Sydney.

For twelve months the Aborigines came and went. For a start Gribble was unable to feed them all, managing only to provide a midday meal for the children who intermittently attended his school. Furthermore, the Aborigines did not yet quite trust the mission. Mothers feared that their children would be taken away.¹⁹⁶ This was, as Gribble later explained, yet another case of Europeans antagonistic to the mission circulating false rumours:

[The Aborigines] had some queer notions as to our intentions towards them. From beche-de-mer (trepan) fishermen and other whites they had been led to believe that we missionaries intended to take all their children away from them to another country, and this idea was long held by them.¹⁹⁷

The turning point was probably 12 December 1893, twelve months to the day after the first large group had visited the mission. On that day an Aboriginal elder, Menmuny, asked to stay at the mission with his family, provided they could come and go as they pleased. He was, Gribble wrote, 'a notable man among the blacks far and wide, a redoubtable warrior'.¹⁹⁸ Gribble gladly agreed and Menmuny, later dubbed King John, stayed, guaranteeing the acceptance of the mission.

It is an important fact that at this and so many similar missions, the first Aborigines chose of their own accord to live at the mission. Slowly it became a way of life, slowly it became home. It

had advantages for which acknowledging Gribble's authority was a small price to pay. Gradually, as Gribble himself described it, the people adopted the new lifestyle:

Slowly we gathered the blacks around us and slowly but surely gained their confidence. . . The natives attached to the mission for the first two years numbered about eighty. They camped near us on the beach, but very frequently they would leave us and make their camps at different places on the reserve. I got them into the habit of telling me when they intended moving; in course of time they grew to asking for permission to shift camp. Later it came about that the adults would move away, leaving the children with us.¹⁹⁹

The original eighty local people formed the nucleus of the mission, but Gribble travelled as far afield as Mareeba, Atherton, Thornborough, Herberton and Port Douglas, as well as walking long distances from Yarrabah to visit local camps and encourage people to move to Yarrabah.²⁰⁰ Gribble exhibited a particular compassion for needy Aboriginal children, many of whom in the oppressive fringe camps were orphaned, starving and diseased.²⁰¹ He often encountered very young children already addicted to alcohol or opium, the girls suffering sexual abuse by Europeans, Chinese and Filipinos at a very early age.²⁰² Gribble's great passion for rescuing the needy resulted in a very rapid growth in the mission.²⁰³

After a few years, Gribble had no need to travel to find needy people. Some came of their own accord, having heard of the sanctuary which Yarrabah provided. Many more were sent there by the police or the Chief Protector.²⁰⁴ Gribble also took in all the children from the Lutheran mission at Bloomfield River when it was closed.²⁰⁵ In 1899, Yarrabah had a surprise visit from the Queensland Home Secretary, Colonel Justin Foxton, who was particularly impressed and offered the mission an increased subsidy of £17 per month.²⁰⁶

Several missionaries were appointed to assist Gribble, but few, except for William Reeves, stayed long. Reeves married one of Gribble's sisters and remained at Yarrabah from 1894 until his death in 1906. Never a well man, he suffered from tuberculosis and became gravely ill just prior to an intense cyclone early in

1906. At the height of the cyclone, Reeves lay dying in his cottage. All the Aboriginal men of the mission and Gribble passed ropes across the roof of the cottage and held the roof on all night, sheltering the man dying in his wife's arms, while every other building in the mission was totally destroyed. An hour after the cyclone abated, Reeves died and was buried in the old Yarrabah cemetery.²⁰⁷

To Gribble, like his father before him, the role of the mission was to 'save the remnant that is left'. Although Gribble shared the pessimism of his contemporaries regarding the destiny of Aboriginal people, he saw missions as their only chance of survival. To Gribble this could only be achieved in one way – by preaching the gospel and inculcating the work ethic, what Gribble called 'the duty of life':

There is yet opportunity for the saving of the 'remnant that is left'. . . The aims of the mission are the elevation and the evangelisation of the Aborigines by the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ and by teaching them habits of industry. And this is done by gathering them into communities, surrounding them with Christian influences, protecting them from evils too often associated with European service, getting them to take an interest in themselves as a race and cultivating their self-respect. The fundamental idea of the station is that it shall prove a permanent home for the blacks. . .²⁰⁸

It was also very important for Gribble's objectives to be achieved that there be segregation of the Aboriginal people from European and Chinese influences. For this reason, he was in favour of this aspect of the 1897 Queensland Act, but his views went beyond the narrow Act. Although his opinions could be construed as racist, they were far ahead of his time and far ahead of views still espoused by many Australians today. Segregation was not just to protect Aborigines from corrupting influences. He saw it as their right.

Speaking of areas still occupied by Aborigines in a traditional tribal manner such as Arnhem Land and parts of central and north-western Australia, Gribble stated:

If segregation had been considered many years ago, the condi-

tion of the Australian Aborigines would have been far more creditable than it is today. . . . If such areas were proclaimed segregation areas for the Aborigines still in possession, we should be showing the world that we are in occupation for a definite purpose, that is, for the good of Australia's minority – the Aborigines who are the rightful owners.²⁰⁹

Gribble rejected, on the one hand, those schemes for Aboriginal advancement which benefited only whites and, on the other hand, the total isolation of the Aborigines as had been proposed by some anthropologists:

We have no right to debar the race from any opportunity of upliftment. We, as a race, were helped by other races. Then, too, our civilisation cannot and will not leave them alone. We are in the country for all time. Our vices will afflict them as our presence is all around them. If our civilisation contains anything that is good for them to have, it is our bounden duty to see that they have a chance. . . . to acquire that good.²¹⁰

In Christian terms, there was exceptionally sound and rapid spiritual progress in the first few years of Yarrabah mission. 'King John' Menmuny himself became a Christian, 'a regular communicant for many years'.²¹¹ His Christian leadership and friendship were a great personal encouragement to Gribble.

In 1894, Gribble was ordained deacon by the Bishop of Sydney. The preacher on the occasion was Rev. Alfred Yarrold, Secretary of the Australian Board of Missions council. His text was Exodus 12:26, 'what mean ye by this service?':

This service means recognition, on our parts, of responsibility and opportunity of duty and privilege in regard to the fragments which remain of the Aborigines of this continent. We may no longer treat them with indifference, we dare not argue that they are so low as to be beyond the grace of God – outside the influence of the gospel. There is forced upon us the conviction that Christ was thinking of such as these when He declared, 'For as much in that day the Son of Man shall say – as ye did it unto the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me.'²¹²

As was the case at many other missions, many of the early

converts were young people, although it cannot be said that in the case of Yarrabah they had grown up in dormitories with years of brainwashing. Many were baptised in the first few years of the mission. As early as 1896, nine Yarrabah Aboriginal people – six men and three women – were confirmed. The bishop confirmed them in Cairns, deciding not to confirm them with the white candidates, but afterwards at an evening service, almost certainly so as not to alienate the white congregation.²¹³ Indeed, they were not offered their first communion and, as no priest visited Yarrabah for a long time, they had to wait over a year as Gribble had at that point only been deaconed.

The nine confirmees were given responsibilities at Yarrabah. It was one of the strengths of Yarrabah that Christian leadership was encouraged much earlier than at most other missions. Although their authority derived from Gribble's recognised authority, it was nevertheless real leadership.

It is now difficult to assess why this happened and happened so quickly, but it was certainly due at least in part to Gribble's willingness to recognise Christian development in its very early stages, to nurture the growth of Christian faith and to respect Aboriginal people's spiritual gifts. Gribble was one of the few who did not make literacy a prerequisite to Christian leadership.

Seven Aboriginal men held the bishop's licence as lay readers, 'and all these men were adults and married before they learnt the alphabet'.²¹⁴ Christian men like George Christian and Alick Bybee took responsibilities on their own initiative. Alick Bybee took it upon himself to organise and preach at informal services for Aborigines who camped near the mission compound.²¹⁵ James Noble, who came to Yarrabah as a Christian, was the first Aboriginal person to be ordained in the Church of England.

Gribble also rapidly encouraged Aboriginal leadership, responsibility and decision-making in secular activities. One of the best examples was his setting up of the Yarrabah court for punishing wrongdoers and arbitrating disputes. It was presided over by Menmuny. Gribble took pride in the fact that, although he accepted released prisoners sent by the police and those expelled for offences at other missions, no-one was ever expelled from Yarrabah.²¹⁶

Gribble always encouraged Aboriginal people to believe in their intelligence and ability to acquire and use new skills, and

many of them competently performed tasks reserved for European staff on other missions and government settlements. Within a very few years, Aboriginal women were teaching, dispensing medicines and playing the organ while Aboriginal men were maintaining the launch engine, typesetting and printing the mission newspaper, carrying out basic dentistry and generally running the mission community.

'The great aim of the mission,' wrote Gribble, 'has been to place as much trust as possible in the most able of the people.'²¹⁷ He was in return well-respected and liked by the majority of the people, who called him 'Dadda'. Not all was work at Yarrabah. There were sporting teams, a sailing club, a rifle club and a very famous brass band.

Although Gribble established at Yarrabah the now-predictable, regulated mission day,²¹⁸ he was much more interested in encouraging small, close-knit Christian villages spread throughout all parts of the reserve. This enabled self-sufficiency, not placing too much hunting, gathering and fishing pressure on a single locality. It was very important, also, to Gribble that this scheme optimised the number of people who had to take community responsibilities. Gribble was also cunning enough to realise, as Aboriginal people are often discovering today, that in order to confirm rights to land it was strategically important to demonstrate continuous residence on and utilisation of it.²¹⁹ This decentralisation was a significant health factor, ensuring natural food and preventing the spread of disease.

Gribble was particularly proud that they eventually achieved a higher birthrate than death-rate:

During the first ten years or so of our work at Yarrabah, the death-rate was considerably above that of the births, but during the last six or seven years the very opposite has been the case. Owing to the fact that the young people of the mission have been growing up and marrying, and to their being healthy and sound, the birthrate has so increased that in the year 1908 the births numbered fifteen over the deaths.²²⁰

Like nearly all missionaries of his era, Gribble did not have a high regard for traditional Aboriginal culture. He did not, however, hold the extreme views of his Lutheran and Moravian

contemporaries at other north Queensland missions.²²¹ There was no active opposition to Aboriginal ceremonial and other practices. He believed that these things would disappear anyway and that there was little point in alienating the Aborigines whom he frequently held in high regard as people. He said, '...I respected all the old beliefs of the blacks, although they were all mistaken, and I was confident that in a year or so, with God's help, they would all disappear as we progressed in our mission work.'²²²

Gribble, nevertheless, was a tough man, proud of his early experience as a labourer and stockman which he believed assisted him to understand and gain the respect of men.²²³ He has been described as 'somewhat forbidding'.²²⁴ It was certainly true that once people became mission residents, he was not afraid to use physical punishments.²²⁵ It must be remembered, in fairness, that Yarrabah received hundreds of Aborigines from all over Queensland, many of whom were released prisoners or sentenced to Yarrabah as an alternative to prison. The remarkable thing is that Gribble achieved the level of community responsibility and support that he did.

Such physical punishments today seem totally unacceptable, but many missionaries of Gribble's era pointed out that they did not punish Aboriginal offenders any differently from the manner in which they punished their own children. It was also true in Gribble's case that he resorted to the use of fists or stockwhip mostly in response to abuse of women. Although Aboriginal culture may have given husbands the right to beat their wives, Gribble was always affronted by it. He believed that one of his duties was to liberate Aboriginal women from the oppression of Aboriginal men.

After eighteen years at Yarrabah, despite his strength of character, Gribble began to find the pressure too much to take. The population had grown to the point where it was becoming difficult to maintain the kind of community Gribble envisaged. An increasing number of residents were there under compulsion and did not wish to be there. Unlike the earlier Yarrabah residents, they did not feel the advantages outweighed the disadvantages.

Gribble suffered a breakdown in 1908 and was sent to hospital in Brisbane. Although he recovered after some months, he was initially instructed to remain away from the tropics and never returned to Yarrabah in the capacity of a missionary.²²⁶ Only two

years after Gribble's departure, there was considerable criticism of conditions at Yarrabah as a consequence of a formal inquiry.²²⁷ Gribble had left while the achievements were still at their peak, but they had been maintained by the force of his personality:

I left Yarrabah with a population of close on five hundred natives, two hundred of whom were communicants. There were one hundred married couples, one hundred and eighty-seven children in the school, fifteen village settlements, five churches, a hospital and a fleet of three vessels. Cotton, coconuts and all kinds of tropical fruits were grown. One of my native boys has since been ordained a clergyman of the Church of England. Seven others held licences as lay readers. During the Great War several of my boys whom I used to drill at Yarrabah heard the call and served in Palestine and one of them, Jack Baker, lies buried near Jerusalem.²²⁸

The later life of Ernest Gribble

After his illness, Ernest Gribble was not permitted to return to the north, so he accepted a position as Rector of Gosford, NSW. While there, in 1913, he responded to an urgent request from Gerard Trower, first bishop of the north-west of Western Australia, to come to the Forrest River mission.

The Church of England had first attempted a mission in the Kimberleys in 1897 under Harold Hale, son of Bishop Matthew Hale of Poonindie fame. The Aborigines had previously experienced much violence at the hands of Europeans, but had successfully driven away Harry Stockdale's Victorian Pastoral Company and had not allowed the missionaries time to demonstrate that they were any different to anyone else. In fact, the missionaries had unwisely tried to establish themselves at the exact site from which the pastoralists had been driven. After a few months, when two of the missionaries were injured in a confrontation with the Aborigines, the mission was abandoned.²²⁹

The government, discovering the obvious, had found that if large reserves were set aside where Aborigines were unmolested, cattle spearing diminished. The Marndoc Aboriginal Reserve was created in the Kimberleys covering one-and-a-half million hectares. In 1912 Bishop Trower, anxious to evangelise the Aborigines in his newly-created diocese, set up the Mission of

Saint Michael and All Angels, usually referred to as the 'Forrest River Mission', on the reserve.²³⁰

The first missionaries were sent from a mission in Africa. New to Australian conditions, they resigned in frustration after five months. They had built a kind of rough fort as a mission-house with half-a-metre thick walls surrounded by barbed wire entanglements.²³¹ Gribble was of the opinion that the Aborigines and the missionaries had been equally afraid of each other.

It was at this point that Trower sent for Gribble. As soon as he arrived, Gribble acted with his usual air of confidence and authority, enlisting the aid of the Aborigines in unloading his boat. He immediately let Aboriginal people feel welcome to come to the mission, encouraging them to stay there, despite the gloomy forebodings of the last of the previous missionaries who was about to depart and believed that 'niggers could not be trusted'.²³²

As well as assuming authority, Gribble showed kindness and, within a short time, the local people appreciated that he would care for the sick and injured. They were still generally wary of the mission. The real breakthrough for Gribble came when the Aborigines were able to show kindness to him, as Gribble records:

In the early days of the Forrest River Mission, [I] was alone for eight days and very ill with dysentery. The natives had been very shy of the mission and rarely came across the river from where they had made camp.

One day a native named Wajamay called and, finding the solitary white man sick in bed, at once recrossed the river and returned with his two children, a boy and a girl, the elder child being only about ten years of age. He left them with instructions to care for the sick white man. They came each day and did all they could, bringing water and carrying out any orders given them. These two, Ooomah the boy and Jaymunda the girl, were among the first scholars to attend the mission school. They are now both married and with their families have been permanently resident on the mission settlement ever since.²³³

Gribble was acutely aware of the importance of having Aboriginal missionaries. He requested help from Yarrabah. James and Angelina Noble responded and, with their arrival, work began in earnest.

Gradually the people's fears were completely allayed. Gribble

did not overtly oppose any of their religious practices, actually showing interest in them. Within just a year, large numbers of Aborigines attended his Sunday services, where he or James Noble preached and he was able to open a school with himself as teacher.

This school was an important institution. The parents realised that the mission was a safe place to leave children in an otherwise unsafe world, while Gribble had the young people under his influence. Angelina Noble was an outstanding missionary for whom Gribble had the greatest admiration.²³⁴ She was a particularly gifted linguist and this skill was a great help in communication.

In the Kimberleys in north-west Australia, Gribble felt he had even more reason to believe that the Aborigines were a doomed race. He set about what he saw as a concerted effort to 'save the remnant' on the safety of a reserve and under the tutelage of the mission.

For fourteen years, Gribble administered the Forrest River Mission with autocratic paternalism.²³⁵ Gradually, a large proportion of the Aboriginal people of the region allowed him to take control and order their lives, exchanging freedom for safety. For children growing up there, the mission became a way of life. Many young people and some adults became Christians and were baptised and confirmed. Believing, not without reason, that the mission provided the only hope for the Aboriginal people, Gribble insisted ever more sternly upon adherence to the disciplined mission life. He used physical punishment more frequently than before, desperately trying to realise his dream for the people, to make the mission their refuge and their home.

Then, in July 1922, Gribble's dream was shattered. A police party, seeking cattle killers, entered the Marndoc reserve, killing a large but unknown number of Aborigines until the local people reported to Gribble that 'the country all stink from the dead fellows'.²³⁶ Appalled by the massacre and shocked by the violation of the safety of the reserve, Gribble wrote to A.O. Neville, the Chief Protector, trying to prompt an enquiry, but with no success.

Then, to add insult to injury, the southern section of the reserve was excised for a land settlement. The property was taken up by returned servicemen, Leonard Overheu and Frederick (William) Hay, who had already lost their licences to employ

Aborigines because of cruelty.²³⁷

During the next few years, there were several murders and attempted murders of Aborigines by stockmen and police.²³⁸ The murders, the cover-ups, the denials, the brutality and the injustice brought Gribble to a state of despair.²³⁹ The fact that Gribble had sometimes assisted the police to apprehend Aborigines he believed truly guilty of serious crime only adds weight to Gribble's revulsion at police brutality. He was not simply anti-police. He in fact believed strongly in law and order and in British justice. His testimony thereby carries all the more conviction.

In 1926 on the Marndoc Reserve, Australia's second-last large-scale massacres of Aborigines took place. Gribble described them as 'awful atrocities'.²⁴⁰ From Gribble's own description, court evidence and Aboriginal oral history, the best that can be pieced together is that about May 1926, large numbers of Aborigines began moving towards Overheu and Hay's Nulla Nulla Station, probably for ceremonial reasons. Gribble sensed they were in real danger and tried to convince them to turn back.²⁴¹ Hay and Overheu began boundary riding to keep the Aborigines out. This culminated in a confrontation with Lumbulumbia, a tribal elder. In one version of events, Hay tried to abduct an Aboriginal woman. In any case, in a confrontation with Lumbulumbia, Hay flogged him with a stockwhip and broke his spears. The old man killed Hay with a broken spear.²⁴² Gribble wrote in the mission journal, 'Hay has paid for his harsh sadistic treatment of the natives.'²⁴³

The Wyndham police immediately organised a punitive expedition led by Constables Regan and St Jack. The mounted party of thirteen men rode through the Forrest River area, capturing, chaining and finally killing every Aborigine they could find.²⁴⁴ Gribble began to hear rumours, but before he was aware of the real extent of the atrocities, he cooperated with the police in the arrest of Lumbulumbia and his removal to Wyndham.²⁴⁵

Many years later, Gribble privately acknowledged that he assisted the police who he believed had the right to investigate Hay's death in the arrest of the actual killer, but that his main motive was to try to find out what else they were doing.²⁴⁶ He did manage to prevent at least one massacre.²⁴⁷ Gribble also said that he took the police and their prisoner to Wyndham in the mission launch to get them off the reserve as rapidly as possible so

that he could investigate their activities.²⁴⁸

Gribble immediately despatched James Noble, an expert tracker, to backtrack the police and see what he could find. The Forrest River Mission journal of 21 June, 1916 has the sentence that led finally to a Royal Commission:

Noble returned this evening, having found the spot on the Upper Forrest where the police shot and burned their native prisoners. He brought back a parcel of charred remains. The natives were shot on the stones in the bed of the river. Blood is still all around.²⁴⁹

Gribble's publicising of the police massacres made headlines around Australia. Police Inspector Douglas visited the reserve and Gribble, Noble and mission Aborigines took him around the four massacre sites. Many Aborigines had been shot, women and children being usually clubbed to death. The number will never be known. Gribble personally knew thirty of the victims. Aboriginal people still speak of hundreds.²⁵⁰

During his investigation, Police Inspector Douglas was visibly moved. One day they followed the tracks of three women who had been led away by mounted police from the site of one massacre and burning to the site of their own death. Gribble later recalled the effect on Douglas:

[We] followed this trail up the Forrest River for about six miles, to the foot of a large gum-tree, which had been scorched for a considerable height above the ground by a large fire near the base. All were visibly affected by the awful sight. The official with the party said: 'I am not a praying man, but I will now pray to God to bring the fiends that did this, to justice.' This he did, kneeling there on the ground. In the fire were found a number of teeth. The tracks of the women led to that spot, but did not leave it, although the horse tracks and the mule track went away to the north-west.²⁵¹

Afraid that even yet the whole episode might be ignored, Gribble pressed the government, the church, politicians and officials for an enquiry. He alienated the whole town of Wyndham where people refused to deal with him or the mission.

Finally, in 1927, a Royal Commission, under Commissioner

Woods, investigated all allegations. Although most of the evidence was destroyed by the 1926 wet season, the Royal Commission was able to name twelve Aborigines specifically killed by police.²⁵² The Commission was frustrated by the solidarity of Wyndham with the police and with the 'disappearance' of principal witnesses during the hearing. Subsequent to the Commission, Constables Regan and St Jack were tried. It was found that they had acted in self-defence. They were then promoted out of the district.²⁵³

Gribble now posed a problem to his diocese and the Australian Board of Missions. It had been felt for some time that his obsession with 'saving the remnant' had negatively affected his approach to running the mission. He had become tyrannical and the other missionaries found working with him almost impossible. James and Angelina Noble, perhaps the only people who understood Gribble, were the only ones who remained loyal. Although the ABM committee knew Gribble had acted heroically in attempting to prevent the massacre of Aboriginal people, the fact that he was now ostracised by the local Europeans presented them with a dilemma.

In 1927, Rev. Dr Adolphus Peter Elkin, the Church of England priest-anthropologist, later to become Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, went on a field trip to the Kimberleys, where one of his visits was to the Forrest River Mission. Elkin had met Gribble before and was associated in an advisory capacity with ABM.

Elkin found Gribble to be an angry despot, obsessed with his impossible dream of a mission utopia, desperately struggling to force the mission Aborigines to conform to his vision. Gribble was 'sheer bloody-minded', wrote Elkin's biographer.²⁵⁴ 'Gribble thought his job was to turn them into British subjects and salute the flag every morning,' wrote Elkin. 'It was a sad picture.'²⁵⁵

After leaving the mission, Elkin met up with Rev. John Needham, chairman of ABM, who was touring the north Australian missions. There are people who were associated with ABM in those years who told me that Needham had already asked Elkin to enquire discreetly into the mission. This would seem to have been highly likely, although Elkin's journal indicates that the decision to write a report was one with which he struggled.

Whatever the truth, he wrote a lengthy report for ABM, critical of Gribble. 'There is too much repression,' Elkin wrote, 'and, I

regret to say, a little terrorising in the attitude taken up inside the mission towards the inmates.²⁵⁶

Gribble was dismissed in 1928. He was always bitter, believing that ABM and Elkin had misled him and enquired into his work without his knowledge. The extent to which Gribble's alienation of most residents of the pastoral north-west was a factor in his dismissal will never be known. His dismissal came in the same mail as tidings of his mother's death. Gribble said, 'News of mother's death and my trial, condemnation and dismissal without a hearing. This is all hard to bear. Yet my Master knows.'²⁵⁷

Not everyone wanted him to go. Aboriginal people wept bitterly at his departure.

Gribble volunteered to be chaplain of Palm Island in north Queensland. It was a government Aboriginal settlement partly used for penal purposes. There he was not the boss, but the chaplain, leading a life more beside the people than in charge of them. Gribble's happiest years were when he was joined at Palm Island by James Noble as his assistant and friend.

Like his father, John Brown Gribble, Ernest Gribble was a complex and difficult man. He was most difficult, however, to those who sought to harm Aboriginal people, and his anger at their mistreatment drove him to his obsession with isolating and protecting them. Just after leaving Forrest River he wrote:

There is a page in our history that can never be written and that is the full history of our dealings with the Aboriginal race. It would indeed be a black page. . . . Although the Aboriginal has been an asset to the pioneer, he has never benefited as a race. On the contrary, he has been neglected, ill-treated, despised, forgotten and almost exterminated.²⁵⁸

In 1957, at the age of eighty-nine, Gribble was awarded the OBE. He returned to Yarrabah where he died a few months later on 18 October and was buried near his protégé and friend, James Noble.

Dominating his beautiful St George's Church, Palm Island, resplendent with pear shell inlay, is his text, 'Lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left.'

On the other side of the continent, in the Aboriginal township now named Oombulgurri, the few remains of the unnumbered vic-

tims of the Forrest River massacres – some charred fragments of their bones and teeth – lie beneath a cairn of stones, surmounted by a cross.

Above all, Ernest Gribble believed that to 'save the remnant' of the Aborigines, they desperately needed not just somewhere to live, but something to live for – and that this could come from nowhere else but Christ:

Today we have a threefold debt to pay to the Aborigines. We owe them a debt for the country we have taken from them. We also owe the race reparation for the neglect and cruelty of over a century. Lastly, we owe them the best that our civilisation has to give and that is the gospel of our Lord, which above all can instil into the race peace, love and an incentive to live.²⁵⁹

In a remarkable and rare leap of spirit and intellect, Gribble declared that, even if we European Australians thought we had no need of Aborigines, God needed them and the church needed their special gifts:

It is not by might nor by power, but by the spirit of Almighty God. Christ paid the same price for the souls of the Aborigines of Australia as he did for the souls of any other race. We may despise the race, but Christ does not. We may not need them any longer, but he does. He needs them in the building up of his body, the church. They have qualities as a race that he needs and, among other qualities, they have those of patience and cheerfulness in adversity.²⁶⁰

Ernest Gribble will always remain a paradox, both praised and criticised, revered and denounced. The opinions which matter most were those of Aboriginal people. William Cooper, the prominent Aboriginal political activist of the 1930s, showed his personal respect when writing to Gribble in October 1938:

I did not get any sympathy from the church people here in Melbourne. The government and our Christians are very dull on [the Aboriginal] question. I am at a loss to know why, as I am sure they know their responsibility for the Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal men, women and children [are the same as the non-Aboriginals are] in God's sight. God has made us after his

own image and left with us the fear of himself, the same as he did with the white races. . . If every man had the same respect as you have for the Aboriginal race, there would be no suffering for this race of people.²⁶¹

James Noble

James Noble, of full Aboriginal descent, was born in 1876 near Normanton in the gulf district of western Queensland. As a teenager, he began to work as a stockman, joining the Doyle brothers' droving party, moving stock between 'Invermein', their property, near Scone in NSW, and 'Riversleigh', their new property on the Gregory River in western Queensland.²⁶²

Tall, good-looking, athletic and highly intelligent, James Noble impressed the Doyles in Scone. He asked if he could stay and be educated. The Doyles agreed, employing him at Invermein during the day and arranging for him to be taught in the evenings by the staff of Scone Grammar School. The Doyles were a Christian family and so Noble attended Mrs Doyle's Sunday school with the other children and young men and women on Invermein. He became a Christian. The parish records of St Luke's, Scone show that he was baptised at the age of twenty on 1 July 1895 and confirmed a week later.²⁶³

Becoming unwell in the cold climate, Noble was sent back to north Queensland to live with Canon Alfred Edwards, the Rector of Hughendon. Canon Edwards died very shortly afterwards. Noble, who was an outstanding natural athlete, had already been noticed by some professional racing promoters who wanted to train him as a sprinter. Bishop Christopher Barlow, who took considerable interest in Noble, thought he was 'in danger of drifting' and asked Ernest Gribble to give him a home at Yarrabah.²⁶⁴ Thus began James Noble's long association with Gribble and his life of Christian service.

At Yarrabah he met and married Angelina, who was also originally from western Queensland. She had been abducted by a white stockman as a young girl, dressed in boy's clothes, renamed Tommy and forced to accompany him for many years. She finally was freed by the police, who arranged for her to go to Yarrabah. There she showed herself to be a highly intelligent young woman with a real gift in learning languages.²⁶⁵

James developed considerable preaching and teaching gifts.

In many ways he and Angelina were indispensable to Gribble. They both accompanied him on his exploratory trips to Mitchell River to investigate the siting of a mission there, caring for the party in many ways and negotiating with the Aborigines on Gribble's behalf.

In 1908, James and Angelina volunteered to go as founding missionaries to the new CMS mission at Roper River. They remained there for several years, providing invaluable help in establishing a rapport with the local people. James is still remembered at Roper River as one of those who brought the gospel.

Returning to Yarrabah, James and Angelina answered Gribble's call to join him at the Forrest River Mission in Western Australia. Again, both of them provided loyal service to the mission and the people of the Kimberleys, to whom the 'black parson' became legendary. In May 1925, Gribble sent James on a preaching tour of the eastern colonies where he gained great fame as a preacher. On his return, while in Perth, he was ordained a deacon in St George's Cathedral, Perth.

To Gribble the experience was very moving as he recalled his father's expulsion from the same cathedral and diocese nearly forty years before:

I was present at James's ordination in St George's Cathedral, Perth, by Bishop Trower of the Diocese of North-west. The cathedral was full and quite a number of the clergy took part. The Rev. L. Parry preached a most eloquent sermon. After the act of ordination, I knelt beside James and received with him the Blessed Sacrament. My heart was full of gratitude to Almighty God. My thoughts went back to that year, 1887, when my own father was defeated for the time in his fight for the natives and was abandoned by his church.²⁶⁶

Even those who still smarted from John Gribble's criticisms saw the event as highly symbolic. As C.L.M. Hawtrey, the Western Australian church historian, said:

It was a day of hope for the Christian church when he was raised to the diaconate on September 13th, 1925 in Perth Cathedral, and it was dramatically suitable that at that moment the son of Bishop Parry should have stood over against the son

of John Gribble who had so deeply wounded the Perth Diocese – with the Aborigine in the midst. The words said were words of healing.

'It was God's Holy Spirit,' said Mr Parry to Noble. 'It was God's Holy Spirit that led you to seek holy baptism. . . that led you to work at Yarrabah. . . that made you a fellow worker in God's vineyard with Ernest Gribble as your father in God. He is giving his life for your race. . . We are proud of you and we are proud of Ernest Gribble, and what you and he have done for Christ and his children makes us feel very humble as we take part in your ordination today.'²⁶⁷

James was very popular indeed with Aboriginal people everywhere. Quite recently, an elderly Aboriginal man in the Kimberleys recalled him as if he had been in charge of the mission: 'The boss was an old bishop sort of black like me.'²⁶⁸ James also impressed white people, even those who were at first cynical.

Ernest Gribble wrote:

Three days after his ordination, I accompanied him to the steamer in Fremantle to return to his work at Forrest River. As we stepped onto the wharf, the lumpers were at their lunch. As we passed a group, one said, 'You, chaps, here is the black parson,' and all of those men and many nearby came up and shook hands with James. One, clapping him on the back, said, 'Well done, Noble, old man; good luck to you.' A week or so after the steamer had gone, I met a lady in Fremantle who told me that she had seen a letter written by a steward on the steamer to his wife and sent down by aerial mail, in which he stated that they had the black parson on board and that on the Sunday he had held service in the saloon and preached 'a dinkum sermon'.²⁶⁹

James and Angelina returned to north Queensland a few years after Gribble in 1932. James was licensed as assistant to Gribble on Palm Island, but in 1934 his health began to fail. The Nobles returned to Yarrabah with their six children. James never fully recovered his health. He spent much time in the hospital and, when he was well enough, he taught traditional skills for which he was renowned. Following a bad fall, James died on 25 November 1941 and was buried at Yarrabah. Angelina died on 19 October 1964 and was buried beside him.

Epilogue

The Aboriginal mission at Yarrabah had, after Gribble left in 1908, a long and varied history, with both good and difficult periods. Its Christian – and Church of England – continuity remained. There has always been a core of sincere Christian residents. In 1960, Yarrabah became a government settlement, but the Church of England remained its most important institution. Alcoholism and petrol-sniffing have been severe problems within the community.

In the 1980s there has been a strong Christian revival at Yarrabah. The seeing of miraculous visions has been an important component of the revival. Many people have found an escape from alcohol and other addictions in a renewed faith in Christ. The path has not been easy and the Yarrabah Christians remain divided on the issue of whether or not alcohol should be avoided altogether. Many Yarrabah people have been ordained deacons and a number have become priests. Several of these priests have served Aboriginal communities in such places as Palm Island, Queensland, Oenpelli, Northern Territory and Oombulgari, Western Australia. One of them, Arthur Malcolm, a nephew of James Noble, was consecrated bishop in 1985. All of them express their common vocation in the James Noble Fellowship.

Many Yarrabah Christians believe that the Yarrabah church is now the mother church of Aborigines throughout Australia, particularly in the north.

ENDNOTES

1. Masson, 1915
2. Gunn, 1908
3. Bolton, 1963
4. Powell, 1982
5. Flinders, 1814: 228
6. MacKnight, 1976: 96
7. Walker and Zorc, 1981; Urry and Walsh, 1981
8. Mulvaney, 1969: 32
9. R. and C. Berndt, 1954: 15
10. e.g. Sharp, 1963: 16; Schilder, 1976: 44
11. Clark, 1962 (Vol.1): 23
12. Searcy, 1909:46; Campbell, 1834: 155
13. Earl, 1853: 210
14. Harris, 1986a: 117
15. Powell, 1982: 45-61
16. Harris, 1985a; 1986a: 118-146
17. Harris, 1985a: 161-163
18. Earl, 1863: 34
19. Salvado, 1851 (1977: 19). See Chapter 5 for details about this work.
20. *Ibid*, p.246
21. Powell, 1982: 60
22. Sweatman in Allen and Corris, 1977: 116-117
23. *Ibid*, p.116
24. *Ibid*
25. Moran [1896]: 560
26. Powell, 1982: 60; Wilson, 1988: 7
27. Moran [1896]: 549
28. O'Kelly, 1967: 73
29. Wilson, 1988: 9, 11
30. O'Kelly, 1967: 2
31. Wilson, 1988: 12-13
32. *Ibid*, p.11 (The recent film, *The Mission*, depicted the Paraguayan Reductions.)
33. 'Iarakia'; variously spelt 'Iarrakeah', 'Iarrakiyah' etc.
34. The Woolna (Woolner, Wulna) are now usually termed the Djerimanga, but the old term will be retained to avoid confusion between text and quotations.
35. Inglis, 1967: 21; Donovan, 1981: 172
36. Harris, 1984: 4
37. See Buchanan, 1974
38. Jesuit comments cited in O'Kelly, 1967: 13
39. P.M. Wood, Protector of Aborigines, Report to Government Resident, 8 January 1886, *SAPP*, No. 53, 1886, p.2540. Strele in *Catholic*, 20 October 1883

41. Kirsten, cited in O'Kelly, 1967: 16
42. *Ibid.*, p.14
43. Cited in O'Kelly, 1967: 15
44. Marschner, 22 February 1889, cited in O'Kelly, 1967: 15. The number of informants seems inflated, unless Marschner meant that over 1 000 people spoke the language on which he had collected information.
45. See, for example, Parkhouse, 1895: 4-6
46. O'Kelly, 1967: 15
47. *Ibid.*, p.17
48. *Northern Territory Almanac*, 1887: 4; 1889: 4
49. O'Brien, cited in O'Kelly, 1967: 27
50. On 7 September 1884, Harry Houschildt, Thomas Schollert, Johannes Nottenius and John Landers were killed by Aborigines at the Daly River Copper Mine (Waters, 1913: 101). The reprisals by police and settlers led to the slaughter of large numbers of men, women and children even at places remote from the Daly. See Harris, 1986a: 217-222 and Markus, 1974.
51. Cited in O'Kelly, 1967: 27
52. *Ibid.*, p.22
53. 1887 Report, SAPP, 3, No. 53, 1888, p.42
54. 1888 Report, SAPP, 2, No. 28, 1889, p.26
55. The Woolna and Larakia have tended, in the literature, to be cast as traditional enemies (e.g. Wildey, 1876: 115; Daly, 1887: 70; Donovan, 1981: 181). This is a misunderstanding as they belonged to the same speech community and intermarried (Parkhouse, 1895: 2). Palmerston was what created the tension between them.
56. Strele to Reynolds, 27 January 1885, *Our Australian Missions*, p.100
57. O'Kelly, 1967: 18
58. 1887 Report, SAPP, 3, No. 53, 1888
59. O'Kelly, 1967: 20
60. O'Kelly, 1967: 17. Some infants and dying adults had been baptised, as had some men in the Palmerston prison and a Queensland Aboriginal.
61. Willson, 1988: 12
62. Cited in O'Kelly, 1967: 61
63. MacKillop in *Australian Messenger*, July 1892, p.297
64. O'Kelly, 1967: 33
65. Malak Malak, also spelt 'Mulluk Mulluk' in Oates and Oates, 1970: 23, was spelt by the Jesuits as 'Molloch Molloch' and in other ways. Woolwonga and Agaquila are more difficult to identify. Oates and Oates (1970: 20) list them both as dialects of Wuna.
66. O'Kelly, 1967: 35
67. Moran [1896]: 549
68. O'Kelly, 1967: 33
69. Marschner letter, 28 December 1890, cited in O'Kelly, 1967: 47

70. O'Kelly, 1967: 47-48
71. Marschner letter, 10 August 1890, cited in O'Kelly, 1967: 49, n.30
72. *Ibid*, 10 April 1890 and 29 May 1891
73. O'Kelly, 1967: 51
74. *Ibid*, pp.51-52
75. MacKillop in *Southern Cross*, 6 October 1893
76. Strele, October 1885, cited in O'Kelly, 1967: 86
77. Strele, *Literae Annuae*, 1882, cited in O'Kelly, 1967: 55
78. MacKillop in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 December 1892
79. *Ibid*
80. MacKillop, 1893: 263
81. MacKillop in *Southern Cross*, 6 October 1893
82. MacKillop in *South Australian Register*, 30 May 1893
83. O'Kelly, 1967: 56
84. 1895 Report, SAPP, 3, No.45, 1896, p.10
85. 1892 Report, SAPP, 3, No.158, 1893, p.10
86. Dahl, 1926: 105-107
87. Harris, 1987a: 26
88. MacKillop 1893: 263
89. O'Kelly 1967: 94-95
90. Spelled by the Jesuits as 'Marenungo', 'Cherite' and 'Ponga Ponga'
91. Strele, cited in O'Kelly, 1967: 95
92. O'Kelly, 1967: 97
93. Wilson, 1988: 13
94. Cited in O'Kelly, 1967: 63
95. Moran [1896]: 552
96. Wilson, 1988: 13
97. Cited in O'Kelly, 1967: 69
98. Fr Fleury, cited in O'Kelly, 1967: 70
99. *Gedenkbatter*, p.109, cited in O'Kelly, 1967: 73
100. Cited in O'Kelly, 1967: 72
101. O'Kelly, 1967: 74
102. Kirsten, 1900: 849
103. As detailed in Stanner, 1933
104. Berndt, 1952: 2, n.7
105. O'Kelly, 1967: 102
106. *Ibid*
107. Berndt, 1952: 9
108. Gsell, 1956
109. 'Except for one Sacred Heart Father on Bathurst Island, there is no Australian, Irish, English or Scot priest working among the Aborigines' (Livingston, 1979: 190).
110. See *Acta et Decreta Concilii Plenarii Australasiae 1885* (Sydney 1887), p.67 and the *Acta et Decreta* for 1895 (Sydney 1898), p.89 and for 1905
111. Sharp, 1963: 16; Schilder, 1976: 44

112. Loos, 1982: 8
113. Macgillivray, 1852: 97-100
114. *Port Denison Times*, 12 June 1869
115. Bolton, 1963: 27
116. Curr, 1886 (II): 469-470
117. See article in *South Australian Register*, 10 September 1884
118. Loos, 1982: 37
119. Quotation from reprint of *Brisbane Courier* article in the *Queenslander*, 13 June 1868
120. Biskup, 1973: 21
121. For example, Robinson and York, 1977: 88-89
122. *Hodgkinson Mining News*, 19 January 1878
123. See Loos, 1982: 62-87
124. Thiele, 1938: 103-104
125. Lohe, 1966a: 34-36
126. Loos, 1988: 103
127. Lohe, 1966b: 40-41; Evans, 1972: 28
128. Edwards and Clarke, 1988: 188
129. Extract from the account of Rev. F.A. Hagenauer's Tour of Queensland, from extracts of the Periodical Accounts, Missions of the Church of the United Brethren Among the Heathen, MS2676, p.15, AIAS
130. *North Queensland Herald*, February 1907, cited in Higgins, 1981: 37-38
131. *Cooktown Independent Record*, December 1884 [italics added]
132. Jerry Hudson, in Mapoon People, 1975 (Part 1), p.6
133. Mapoon People, 1975 (Part 1), p.6
134. W.F. Roth (Chief Protector) to Under Secretary, Home Dept., 4 October 1899, cited in Evans, 1969: 71-72
135. Hutton, 1922: 416
136. *Ibid*, p.418
137. James Ward, cited in Chase, 1988: 125
138. Hutton, 1972: 418
139. *Ibid*, p.419. Hutton calls most black people 'Papus'. I have substituted 'Aborigines' in all quotations.
140. Evans, 1969: 73-74
141. A. Ward, 1908: 199
142. Hutton, 1922: 421
143. Annual Report of the Chief Protector, QP, V&P, 1902, 1, p.1143
144. Hutton, 1922: 426. Original has 1891, but this date is in error.
145. Mapoon People, 1975 (Part 2): 22
146. Hutton, 1922: 427
147. Hey, 1897, cited in Mapoon People, 1975 (Part 2): 45
148. Unidentified newspaper clipping, 21/7/1897, cited in Mapoon People, 1975 (Part 2): 21
149. Hutton, 1922: 430-431
150. *Ibid*, p.431

151. *Ibid*
152. *Ibid*, p.432
153. Edwards and Clarke, 1988: 188
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262. Higgins, 1981: 1-2
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264. *Ibid*
265. E. Gribble, 1933: 129
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Interlude:

Missionaries and Aboriginal culture in the nineteenth century

TO UNDERSTAND THE NINETEENTH CENTURY missionaries and missions, we need to understand the attitude of the missionaries towards Aboriginal culture. Not until very recently did the attitude of missionaries differ markedly from those of the earliest missionaries.

The first missionaries were predisposed to find 'utter degradation' in the 'poor, barbarous, naked pagans' of New Holland.¹ On arrival they thought that their self-fulfilling expectations were confirmed. In 1840, when the Wesleyan missionary John Smithies first glimpsed Western Australian Aborigines, he quickly quoted scripture to control his horrified amazement:

I was. . . rowed up by two native lads about sixteen years of age who were greased and wilged all over the head and face and but very partially covered with the last remains of a Kangaroo skin. My visions and feelings were arrested, my sympathies excited and my fears only allayed by the remembrance 'That of one blood hath God made (these) and that for these my Saviour died'.²

The Aborigines first encountered by the earliest of the missionaries were the damaged, partly detribalised fringe dwellers of the ports, such as Sydney and Melbourne, where the missionaries

disembarked. Aboriginal culture may have been difficult to discern beneath the disease and the cast-off rags of European clothes. Drunkenness and prostitution, too, were ugliness of a different kind. Perhaps such a background may help to explain why Aborigines may have seemed to the Rev. George Clark in 1824 to be 'the poorest objects on the habitable globe' with lives of 'wretchedness and misery'³ or why to the Rev. William Henry in 1799 they were the 'most wretched and deplorable beings my eyes have ever seen'.⁴

For some missionaries, the image of the Aborigines did not change when they first encountered them in a much more traditional state away from the immediate vicinity of the towns. To William Watson and James Gunther at Wellington, NSW in the 1830s, they were still gluttonous savages. The missionaries were repulsed by Aboriginal eating habits and nakedness and by their use of fat as a body lotion. When Gunther first met 'bush blacks', he said that they presented 'a revolting and disgusting sight, they being all of them almost entirely naked'.⁵

His colleague, Watson, used his impressions of savagery to solicit support from Christian friends in England:

Could they see from fifty to one hundred of these poor creatures half or entirely naked, lying on the ground, pulling to pieces an opossum with their hands and teeth, and covered with filth and dirt, they would indeed with a heavy heart enquire, 'Can these bones live?'⁶

Yet it says something important about people like Watson that he added, '*Thank God we know that they can.*' Watson, like so many other missionaries, found his compassion much stronger than his revulsion, not hesitating to dress infected wounds and wash diseased bodies.⁷ On the other side of the continent, Rosendo Salvado could feel that the Aborigines were 'creatures more bestial than human', but then, for fear of causing offence, accept damper made by an Aboriginal man who, having no water, had mixed the flour for him with his own saliva.⁸

For the vast majority of missionaries, the wearing of clothes was one of the most important expressions of what they considered a Christian way of life. Despite this, Salvado good naturedly fed Aboriginal women who, not knowing which parts of

themselves were supposed to be hidden, thought that a kangaroo skin over the shoulder conformed to the mission's dress rules.⁹ Nevertheless, with very few exceptions, missionaries went to extreme lengths to ensure that Aboriginal people were dressed so as not to offend European decency. To most, achieving this was a mark of spiritual progress.

Of the many recorded examples, let Bishop Augustus Short's observations on Christian Aboriginal people at Poonindie in 1853 speak for them all:

Many young adult natives, who would have belonged to the most degraded portion of the human family, are now clothed and in their right minds, sitting at the feet of Jesus. . .¹⁰

In many ways Aboriginal social behaviour was simply an offence to the niceties of nineteenth century European etiquette and the early missionaries' reactions are understandable in the light of this. Few of us today are immune from making value judgments when confronted with people whose culture condones behaviour which our own culture forbids. In this sense, the missionaries were no better or worse than anyone else. Indeed, the missionaries were generally much more restrained in their descriptions. Secular writers of travellers' tales took great pains to dramatise their feelings of revulsion when they first encountered Aborigines.

One such writer was E. Lloyd in 1846:

We saw a number of half-naked dusky savages. . . lounging down the street with spears and waddies in their hands, filthy and slimy and greasy, leaving behind them an odour enough to turn the stomach of the stoutest dog.¹¹

William Sowden in the 1880s described the Larakia people in early Darwin as monkey-like, 'wizened old women and haggard old men, prattling but dull-eyed children'.¹² To J.D. Balfour, visiting Sydney forty years earlier, the appearance of Aborigines inspired in him 'a dislike for them that time and almost daily intercourse' did not remove.¹³ Lt W.H. Breton regarded the custom of inserting a bone through the nostrils as sheer perversity, 'as though they were not sufficiently ugly' already.¹⁴ George Lloyd found the women

presented 'the most hideous appearance imaginable' and that the use of white clay increased 'that loathsome appearance'.¹⁵

Those features which were most frequently criticised were those which were most different from the European norm of what constituted attractiveness. Thus we find derogatory comments about Aboriginal skin colour, about nose size and thin limbs.

It is, on the other hand, quite certain that Aboriginal people were, in turn, repulsed or amused by European physical features. European skin colour was thought to resemble clay. Port Jackson Aborigines could not tell whether the beardless, clothed young sailors on the first fleet were female or male. George Worgan, a first fleet surgeon, was one of those who dropped his trousers at Sydney Cove in 1788 to prove his manhood 'which made them laugh, jump and skip in an extravagant manner'.¹⁶

Janet Millett, wife of the Rev. Edward Millett, an early Western Australian Church of England clergyman, was an interested observer of Aboriginal people. She recorded descriptions of them and their opinions during the 1860s. One was Khourabene's dislike of drawings depicting Aborigines with European legs:

[Binnahan] was a very slight little creature with the thin limbs of her wild race; in fact, the natives in general were so slim that I remember Khourabene's ideas of art being much offended by a picture of savages in the *Illustrated London News*, which had represented them all with large calves to their legs, and he pointed out the defect, perhaps I ought rather to say superfluity, with very great disdain.¹⁷

As a general rule, the majority of missionaries were fairly objective in their physical descriptions of the people among whom they had come to work. Clamor Schurmann gave an objective and honest appraisal of Adelaide Aborigines in 1838, admitting that what he found unattractive was simply a matter of taste:

They are of medium height, and the men have a high chest and strong limbs. Their hair hangs down in thick curls. . . The skin is not black as a Negro's, but rather brown. The men can be quite handsome, but the flat broad nose can look unpleasing to us. To our eyes, the women are less attractive than the men, with lower foreheads. . .¹⁸

Many of the missionaries spent a very long time with Aboriginal people and so came to know and love them as individuals. Such missionaries certainly found Aboriginal people physically attractive, their writings frequently mentioning their admiration of a girl's shiny teeth or an old man's shock of grey hair.

They also, in time, saw things differently. Limbs, described by others as spindly or stick-like, became to them lithe or slender. Some of the missionaries even came to view habits of personal hygiene differently. Referring to the oiling of their bodies, one traveller, E. Lloyd, found Aborigines greasy and smelly.¹⁹ On the other hand, John Bulmer, long-term missionary at Lake Tyers, admired the fact that 'they shone from head to foot'.²⁰

Janet Millett was one who saw attractiveness and dignity in Aborigines' simple adornments:

The Kangaroo mantle, nearly reaching the knee, hangs gracefully over their fine figures, the uncovered head is carried loftily and a dignity is added to the high, well-shaped forehead by the bending of a fillet round the hair and brow, after the fashion of an antique bust.²¹

Louis Schulze at Hermannsburg felt that the attractive human form of the Aranda people proved their humanity, although he slipped into the view that there may even have been such a thing as a Christian physique!

They are Adam's children, the first glance indicates it. [With] their beautiful slender bodies, six feet tall, as well as the capabilities of mind, in many respects they even excel Christians.²²

Of course, it was much more than physical appearance which inspired Lancelot Threlkeld to write that Aboriginal people represented the 'comely [beautiful] but black exterior of the image of God'.²³ It is statements like this which show the degree to which missionaries positively affirmed the essential humanity of Aboriginal people. It was, therefore, this kind of statement which those who would deny Aboriginal humanity most strongly criticised.

'A goldfields clergyman of the early days,' wrote an angry

Western Australian, 'was wont to refer to the native as "God's image cut in ebony" and it is doubtful if anything more offensive to white Christians could have proceeded from the lips of a blasphemous bullock-driver.'²⁴

It was not Aboriginal appearance, but their *nakedness* which missionaries most strongly condemned. No doubt the Aborigines' lack of embarrassment at their nakedness and their frank sexuality offended the sensitivities of the missionaries. That this view was not entirely universal among Europeans is evident if for no other reason than that prostitution was so appallingly prevalent. Apart from the obvious evidence of sexual attraction, a few honest men acknowledged a certain beauty and even innocence in Aboriginal women.

Watkin Tench was one of these, as also was George Barrington in Sydney in the 1790s, who wrote of Bennelong's wife that she had 'such an air of innocence about her that clothing scarce seems necessary'.²⁵ 'One did not detect their nudity,' wrote George Hamilton of Aborigines in early Adelaide, 'masked as it was by grace and dignity'.²⁶ William Wildey in early Darwin thought the bearing of the one-eyed teenager, Emma, 'the sable belle of Palmerston', to be much more attractive than the affected posture of the European ladies.²⁷ To most missionaries, however, nakedness bespoke sexual permissiveness and they condemned it.

From their point of view, it is understandable that Christian missionaries should have opposed the more extreme cases of what they considered sinful behaviour such as, for example, infanticide, which almost certainly became common only as a consequence of European settlement. In traditional Aboriginal society, infanticide was rare but not unknown.

There was a kind of euthanasia. Babies deemed unlikely to survive were sometimes disposed of. These included very weak or deformed babies, particularly in the more nomadic groups where women had to carry babies long distances. In such groups it was not unknown for otherwise healthy babies to be destroyed, particularly in times of drought, if the mother was breastfeeding one or two other children and still obliged to carry them all long distances. Some groups, under such circumstances, practised abortion.

After white settlement, particularly in the southern, earliest-settled regions, there was an increase in infanticide for two

reasons. The first was the killing of babies in those Aboriginal groups in such frantic despair that they had no way of caring for children. The other was the disposal of part-European babies, although this varied widely across the continent. Some groups could not cope with all that this portended and did not allow them to live. Other groups accepted these lighter-skinned children and raised them as their own. Many were killed by their white fathers. The missionaries certainly spoke out against infanticide of any kind. In the early days of white settlement, missionaries tried to rescue babies who were at risk. As Aboriginal people learned that the missionaries would care for them, they brought babies to them, such as those brought to Anne Camfield at Albany.

* * *

The question of cannibalism is one that is so often raised that it merits a digression. To the European mind, nothing symbolised 'savagery' quite so much as cannibalism. Travellers, explorers and pioneers had a morbid interest, even an obsession with it. It is, of course, the perennial 'man-eating myth' which, as Arens showed, was never as common in real life as it was in the vivid fears and imaginations of nineteenth century writers of travellers' tales.²⁸

All manner of people were eager to question Aborigines about cannibalism. The answer was almost invariably the same: cannibalism was practised by some strange person somewhere or by a remote tribe, but not by the informant's tribe. This showed little more than that Aborigines were like everyone else: enemies or distant, little known groups were readily accused of bizarre or atrocious conduct.

Aboriginal Australia provided a new source of fictitious or exaggerated tales for eager nineteenth century readers.²⁹ Hundreds of narratives were published, some containing particularly graphic accounts of cannibalism, such as G. Loveless's *A Narrative of the Sufferings of James Loveless, James Brine and Thomas and John Standfield*. . .³⁰ Possibly the most famous were the many versions of the story of the wreck of the *Stirling Castle* north of Moreton Bay in 1836. Eliza Fraser and three male survivors lived with the Aborigines for several months. Numerous versions of their 'captivity' were written, sensationalised and re-written for an avid public in both London and New York.³¹

On the other hand, some cannibalism did exist in Aboriginal Australia. Missionaries as far apart in time and space as Rosendo Salvado in Western Australia, Ernest Gribble in north Queensland and John Bulmer in Victoria recorded having been told of isolated incidents. Having taken missionaries' observations as accurate in other matters, such as the torture and murder of Aborigines by Europeans, I cannot, therefore, doubt in these cases that they have reported what they heard. The important point is that these were isolated events and that Aboriginal informants themselves reported them as if they were newsworthy or sensational stories.

Some Aboriginal warriors in a few parts of Australia removed the kidney fat of slain enemies. There is little evidence that they ate it. The action was more akin to the taking of Aboriginal ears as trophies by some white settlers. No-one ever accuses them of eating them. There was certainly the belief among some Aboriginal people that the fat could endow them with the powers of the enemy and, for this reason, there are reports of cattle being speared for the purpose of taking kidney fat. There are also accounts of some kinds of ritual cannibalism following the death of a relative.

This leaves the uncommon but real occasions when, under extreme circumstances, such as severe drought and famine or warfare, some Aborigines killed and ate other human beings purely for food. There is little doubt that this occurred. Roger Oldfield's conclusions in 1828 were apt: cannibalism was abnormal, but not completely unknown.³² John Bulmer, with long experience in widely separated missions, came to the same kind of conclusion: cannibalism was unknown 'among the Murray people', but there were 'traces of it in Gippsland'.³³

From the information we can now piece together, there is little doubt that most Aboriginal people were as horrified by the stories as anyone else. Lancelot Threlkeld, the LMS missionary at Port Macquarie, reported that Aboriginal people were disgusted to learn that a group of white sailors, adrift after a shipwreck, had cast lots to see which of them was to be eaten.³⁴ Cannibalism in such extreme circumstances was not uncommon among the Europeans. A number of convicts were hung for cannibalism, including Alexander Pearce in 1824, and Edward Broughton and Matthew Maccavoy in 1832.³⁵

Among the early white settlers there were some honest

enough to admit that most tales of cannibalism were fabricated to justify brutality to Aborigines or to prove that they were sub-human savages. One such piece of honesty came from Lt W.H. Breton, despite his generally low opinion of Aborigines:

[Tales of cannibalism have been] greatly exaggerated [and are] probably utterly false; because whenever any of them have been killed by convicts and others, the latter have invented all sorts of ridiculous tales. . . in order that they may be furnished with an excuse for taking away their lives.³⁶

Another such settler was Robert Dawson, the fair-minded manager of the Australian Agricultural Company's establishment at Port Stephens. Quashing a rumour that whites had been killed and eaten in his locality, he was 'exceedingly glad to have it in [his] power to contradict a tale which was fabricated solely to excite prejudice against the natives'.³⁷ Dawson also made the observation that Aboriginal people, having learned of the white horror of cannibalism, used this to their advantage in maligning other Aboriginal groups: 'The natives cannot, in any way, so much degrade their enemies in the eyes of white people, as by calling them cannibals'.³⁸

Aborigines were not the only ones who used the rumour of cannibalism to political advantage. The exposure of false reports and rumours in 1845 led the liberal *Weekly Report* to wonder whether these had been concocted purely to 'excite hostile feelings against the Aborigines or. . . to obtain a stronger police force'.³⁹ It is incredible, indeed, that European preparedness to believe that cannibalism was widespread among Aborigines can still be manipulated today by those who wish to prejudice opinion against Aboriginal people or their culture. Hugh Morgan, the executive director of a large mining corporation, did so as recently as 1984.⁴⁰

One of the best proofs of the rarity of cannibalism and of the fact that it was not a normal or accepted feature of Aboriginal culture is that the missionaries did not preach against it. If anyone was likely to have discovered yet another sinful practice in Aboriginal society, it was the early evangelical missionaries. They railed against everything else from infanticide and polygamy to gluttony, nakedness and sabbath-breaking. The only mis-

sionaries, as far as I know, who ever spoke against it were Pacific Islanders this century whom the Methodists brought to their Northern Territory missions. They were no doubt influenced by the occurrence of some cannibalism in their own traditional past, but Aboriginal people who reported this preaching to me were simply amused.

To return to the missionaries and their attitudes to Aboriginal society, it is important to note that among the missionaries, throughout the whole period of contact, there have always been those who were particularly interested in Aboriginal culture. In 1975, A.P. Elkin, from his vast knowledge of Australian anthropology, selected the ten 'founders' of social anthropology in Australia. 'The foundations of social anthropology in Australia were laid by amateurs,' wrote Elkin. 'That is, by persons who pursued the subject, mostly in spare time from a natural love for it, not to make money. . . They were not, however, amateurish.'⁴¹ Of his ten 'founders', five were missionaries and clergy: Lancelot Threlkeld, William Ridley, Lorimer Fison, George Taplin and John Mathew.⁴² The other five were R.H. Mathews, A.W. Howitt, E.M. Curr, W.E. Roth and Baldwin Spencer.

Nevertheless, despite their sometimes deep interest in Aboriginal culture, most missionaries held very negative views about it. It is hardly surprising that Christian missionaries should have opposed the most extreme examples of what they considered sinful behaviour – infanticide, feuding, polygamy and child brides, for example. It is much less reasonable that they objected to other behaviours which were morally neutral. With a few notable exceptions such as William Ridley, most missionaries until very recently found very little which was worthwhile in Aboriginal culture. Thus we find various missionaries opposing such things as the use of ochre in the hair, unsophisticated eating habits, kin avoidance behaviours and even the hunting and gathering lifestyle itself.

European traditional skills were automatically presumed to be superior to Aboriginal traditional skills. One of the Christian Aboriginal Protectors in Victoria, Edward Parker, once stopped a tribal healer who was treating a boy for inflammation of the lung. In order to demonstrate to the Aboriginal people 'the utter absurdity of their notions', Parker first bled the boy and then dosed him with an emetic, antimony tartrate.⁴³

While disapproving of polygamy and other Aboriginal behaviours they considered immoral, missionaries failed almost always to see that Aborigines also considered the missionaries' behaviour to be immoral. Missionary men and women sat together, for example, and behaved in public in what Aborigines regarded as an unseemly fashion. Much worse, in arranging Christian marriages, missionaries often infringed the Aboriginal marriage taboos under which the closest permissible marriages were between third cousins. Missionaries encouraged some Christian marriages between second and even first cousins as approved under Western law. To Aboriginal people, such marriages were incest.

It is Aboriginal Christian people today who in their own direct, clear and uncomplicated manner are demanding a rethinking of the whole attitude to Aboriginal culture. 'Who taught our ancestors where to find food and water, which plants were good for medicines and which poisonous plants were to be avoided?' an elderly Aboriginal Christian woman in Brisbane asked me recently. The atheistic evolutionist has a simple scientific answer, but to a Christian like myself who believes that all which is good has its ultimate origin in the goodness of God, the answer is not so simple.

It is even less simple when we come to values like love, obedience, self-denial, patience and responsibility, all of which were evident in Aboriginal society. Aboriginal people lived by a set of laws, imperfect no doubt as are all human laws, but who was the ultimate lawgiver behind them? From whom did Aboriginal people learn to govern and control their lives, to punish crime and to reward that which was good? Again, the secular explanation can be couched in Social Darwinism, in the evolution of culture. To a Christian, such an explanation is stunted and incomplete. Certainly law has evolved as society has become complex, but behind all law, I believe, is the One from whom all goodness and order emanate, the God of all people of the earth.

This leads us, finally, to the complex problem of the attitude of the nineteenth century missionaries to Aboriginal religious beliefs and practices.

It was relatively easy for European settlers to form opinions about observable Aboriginal behaviours. Many Europeans went much further, expressing strong opinions about those cultural activities of which they were, in fact, quite ignorant. This was especially true of opinions regarding Aboriginal religion.

There were, firstly, those who denied the very existence of Aboriginal religion. What little they saw of ceremonial life they dismissed as childish, ridiculous, obscure, lewd or barbaric. To a society which understood European religious notions as the high point of human development, a people whom they regarded as racially and socially inferior could hardly be expected to have a religion.

Such was this general belief in Aboriginal inferiority, that the explorer Edward Eyre, not comprehending Aboriginal beliefs, presumed that Aboriginal people did not comprehend their own beliefs either:

The ceremonies and superstitions of the natives are both numerous and involved in much obscurity; indeed, it is very questionable if any of them are understood even by themselves.⁴⁴

Missionaries arrived in Australia not expecting to find among Aboriginal people ideas of any intellectual or spiritual depth. The English missionary societies' general policy was that the appropriate missionaries for places like Australia, Africa and the Pacific were 'humble artisans' and 'godly mechanics' who would be the most suitable for working with 'untutored savages'.⁴⁵ In countries so 'rude and barbarian',⁴⁶ the native people's intellectual capacities were judged to be 'so mean, and the things they know so very few and of so ordinary a sort, that a man of liberal education never could stoop to make use of such low, not to say absurd imagery, as would be necessary to convey ideas to them'.⁴⁷

The selection and training of missionaries generally reflected these views. The better educated missionary candidates were usually sent to such places as China or India where it was anticipated that they would be competent to debate Buddhist or Hindu philosophies.⁴⁸ The standard for Africa, Australia and the South Pacific was much lower. Missionaries ordained for overseas service under the Colonial Service Act were not considered fit to be clergy in England when they returned home.⁴⁹

A significant number of the early Australian missionaries fell into the 'humble artisan' class but, whether they did or not, they shared a universally low expectation of Aboriginal people's religious perceptions. John Dunmore Lang wrote:

[The Aborigines] have no idea of a supreme divinity, the creator and governor of the world, the witness of their actions and their future judge. They have no object of worship. . . They have no idols, no temples, no sacrifices. In short, they have nothing whatever of the character of religion or of religious observance, to distinguish them from the beasts that perish.⁵⁰

The Lutheran missionary, Christopher Eipper, wished that Aboriginal people did worship idols. He would have liked to have been able to cast them down, but also believed that their existence would have at least indicated a capacity to worship:

I confess the prospects here are less encouraging, for the presence of an idol shows yet the dependence of the creature, and the necessity presented. . . to the mind, of having something to worship. This here must be first created.⁵¹

Missionaries like Eipper, who spent only a short time among Aboriginal people, were highly unlikely ever to have acquired enough language or established sufficient rapport with Aboriginal people to learn much of their religious life. What few ideas they did pick up about Aboriginal beliefs they tended to dismiss as childish superstitions or what Rev. W.P. Crook called 'gross mythology'.⁵²

Some missionaries changed their minds. The Jesuits in the Northern Territory, inclined at first to ridicule Aboriginal beliefs in conversation with Aboriginal people, modified their attitude when they observed supernatural phenomena which 'staggered' them.⁵³

A very common trend was for missionaries to regard everything associated with Aboriginal religious beliefs as simply evil. George Augustus Robinson, for all his sympathy for Aboriginal people, labelled Aboriginal religion as 'Satanic' and called Aboriginal people 'devotees of the devil'.⁵⁴

It was some unknown settler, almost certainly an early convict, who taught Aboriginal people to describe spiritual beings as 'devil' and religious activities as 'devil business'.⁵⁵ Believing this to be correct English for the spiritual dimension of their world, Aboriginal people perpetuated the use of the term, thus unwittingly reinforcing the practice among missionaries of ascribing what seemed to be non-Christian to Satan.

Although some long-serving missionaries persisted in the opinion that Aboriginal beliefs were Satanic or, if not, that there was nothing worthy in the Aboriginal view of the world, these attitudes were by no means true of all nineteenth century missionaries. John Bulmer saw clearly that Aboriginal people's mythologies were no more or less worthy than Greek or other European mythologies, which were the passing down of ancient traditions and were never thought to indicate intellectual inferiority:

We may well excuse the poor blackfellow if he tells us such wonderful events which were just as likely to happen as similar stories told among ourselves, and we may say with the poet:

*I know not how the truth may be;
I tell the tale as told to me.*⁵⁶

Bulmer was pleased to discover that Aboriginal people shared his belief in a creator of the world and in the immortality of the soul:

The question has been asked, 'Have the Aborigines of Australia any idea of a supreme being? . . .' They certainly have ideas of beings who existed long ago. . . and that to them all things as they now exist are due. . . Thus the Murray people had their *Ngalambru* or ancient of days. . . The Gippslanders had their *Ngalambru*, meaning the first. . . The Maura people had their *Boganbe* . . . meaning *big or high*. . . The people of the Wimmera had their *Ngramba Natchea*, meaning the oldest spirit. . .

The blacks did not think death was the end of existence. They recognised the fact that a man had a spirit, *Gnowk*.⁵⁷

Further, in NSW, Aboriginal people spoke to William Ridley of *Baiame*, described as the Great Master, whose very name was derived from the word 'to create'. The Wiradjuri people told James Gunther of *Baiame's* distinctive attributes: immortality, power and goodness.⁵⁸ Alone of all the nineteenth century missionaries, it was Ridley who recognised Aboriginal religious tradition and speculation for what it was – 'the thirst for religious mystery', a reaching out to God.⁵⁹

It was to be another sixty years before Bob Love, among the Worora people in the north-west, was to dare to acknowledge that

in an Aboriginal ceremony of washing and sharing water to drink, he glimpsed the shadow of the sacraments.⁶⁰ Ten years later still, Grace, an Aboriginal woman, awed at the translation of Genesis 1 into Nunggubuyu, was to say, 'we are very interested in the beginnings of things.'⁶¹

ENDNOTES

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3. Report to CMS London, 1824, BT, Box 54, ML
4. William Henry to S. Pinder, 29 August 1799, cited in Reece, 1974: 76
5. Gunther Journal, 1836 – 1865, 6 August 1837, AJCP, M224, NLA
6. Watson Journal, 26 June 1833, AJCP, M223, NLA
7. Church Missionary Paper, LXXX (IV), 1836
8. Salvado 1851 (1977: 84 and 76)
9. *Ibid.*, p. 70
10. Bishop Short to E. Hawkins, SPCK, 14 February 1853, cited in Hale, 1892: 53, in reference to Poonindie. The allusion is to Luke 8: 35. Other examples include: Thomas Goodwin, Report to Church of England Mission to the Aborigines, 19 January 1860, cited in Hale, 1892: 88, in reference to Poonindie; George Taplin 1874: 69, in reference to Point McLeay; Nicholas Hey, 1931: 14, in reference to Mapoon; and Ernest Gribble, *Missionary Notes*, 25 (15 January 1897), p.3, in reference to Yarrabah.
11. E. Lloyd, 1846: 83-84
12. Sowden, 1882: 145
13. Balfour, 1845: 7-8
14. Breton, 1835: 26
15. G. Lloyd, 1862: 468
16. Worgan, 1788 (1978: 6-7)
17. Millett, 1872: 141
18. Clamor Schurmann, cited in E.A. Schurmann, 1987: 30
19. E. Lloyd, 1846: 83-84
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21. Millett, 1872: 71
22. Schulze, L (1980). Letters and Reports, 1877 – 1891 (trans: Max E. Altmann), Supplement to *Schulze Family History*, Hahndorf
23. Threlkeld, 1853, cited in Gunson, 1974: 59
24. *The Golden West*, 1906, p.6. See also *Western Australian Advocate*, February, 1906
25. Barrington, 1795: 36
26. Hamilton, 1880: 36
27. Wildey, 1876: 118-119
28. Arens, 1979
29. For the ready market for sensationalism in the nineteenth century, see Roe, 1965: 27
30. Loveless, 1838
31. There were numerous versions of the story of Eliza Fraser. The most famous was probably Curtis (1838). Much of the material has been gathered together in Alexander (1971). The issue is discussed briefly in Reece, 1974: 97-101.

32. Oldfield, 1828: 101-115 [probably a pseudonym for the Rev. Ralph Mansfield]
33. Bulmer Papers, Box 11, Paper 12, p.3
34. Threlkeld's *Reminiscences 1825 - 1826*, published in Gunson, 1974: 48
35. For Pearce, see *Hobart Town Gazette*, 25 June, 9 and 23 July, 1824. For Broughton and Maccavoy, see *Bell's Weekly Despatch*, 22 January 1832. There is a popular account in Beatty, 1962: 79-87.
36. Breton, 1835: 243
37. Dawson, 1830: 334-335
38. *Ibid.*, p.336
39. *Weekly Register*, 21 June 1845
40. Hugh Morgan, Executive Director, Western Mining Corporation. See, for example, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 May 1984
41. Elkin, 1975: 1
42. Fison and Mathew were not Australian missionaries in the same sense as Threlkeld, Ridley and Taplin. Fison was a missionary in Fiji who spent much time researching Aboriginal kinship in Australia. Mathew was a Presbyterian clergyman who had developed an interest in Aborigines in outback Queensland.
43. E.S. Parker, Report 1 September 1841 to 30 November 1841, Box 5, APR, PROVIC
44. Eyre, 1845(II): 332
45. For a full discussion of this policy, see Woolmington, 1985.
46. Lovett, 1899: 68
47. Knox, 1789: 35
48. Beetham, 1967: 12
49. CMS, for example, put forward ordinands under the Colonial Service Act (Stock 1899 [Vol.1]: 245).
50. Lang, 1861: 374
51. Eipper to Lang, *Colonist*, 12 May 1838
52. *Colonist*, 23 May 1838
53. Mackillop, 1893: 260
54. G.A. Robinson, cited in Plomley, 1966: 301
55. See, for example, E.M. Curr (1883: 129): 'This spirit the White had taught the Blacks to call *debble-debble*. . . ' This term 'debble' or 'debble-debble' entered the south-eastern Australian Pidgin and thus spread throughout the continent.
56. Bulmer Papers, Box 11, Paper 8, p.16, SMV
57. *Ibid.*, Box 11, Paper 4, p.1 and Paper 12, p.12, SMV
58. Ridley, 1876 (III): 285
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Part C
Twentieth century:

*Aborigines and the church
in settled Australia*

9

The shielding of the dying

Aboriginal protection and the churches in settled Australia

IN THE LONG-SETTLED southern and eastern parts of the continent, Aboriginal people had been almost fully dispossessed of their land well before the end of the nineteenth century. Some Aboriginal people had associated themselves with sheep or cattle stations.

For some, missions such as Lake Tyers in Victoria, Poonindie in South Australia and Warangesda in New South Wales were places of survival where they exchanged their freedom for life and for the lives of their children. By far the majority, however, had become fringe-dwellers of cities and towns, with absolutely no choice but to eke out a hopeless existence on the outskirts of white settlement, on tiny, often barren tracts of waste land where their presence was barely tolerated by those who had dispossessed them.

As the federation of the colonies approached, the founding fathers of the Commonwealth became even less interested in taking any positive actions to assist Aboriginal people. They did not rate a mention in the constitutional debates. In such a climate, what was the likely future for Aborigines?

Protecting the dying race

Whereas there had been a time when various colonial governments had welcomed missionary efforts, providing token support to salve their consciences about the fate of the original inhabitants, by the

turn of the century there was an increasing trend towards secular solutions. People who criticise the proseletysing activities of missionaries would do well to remember that those who proposed secular solutions were not usually high-minded humanitarians with a belief in cultural equality and other progressive, more recently popular values. Like Baldwin Spencer in his efforts to close Hermannsburg, they believed missions to be futile, not because they thought missionaries were interfering zealots, but because they thought Aborigines were mentally inferior, incapable of comprehending the gospel.¹

On the basis of this view, George Thornton, the Mayor of Sydney who became the first Protector of Aborigines in NSW in 1881, was instrumental in the development of the concept of government reserves for Aboriginal people:

I am of the opinion that it would be wise and beneficial that reserves of suitable land in various parts of the colony should be set apart for the use of the Aborigines, for purposes of forming homes [and] cultivation. . . this would prove a powerful means of domesticating, civilising and making them comfortable. . . It is my firm belief that Aborigines cannot be made properly susceptible of or duly appreciate religious instruction. . . I cannot conceal my knowledge of the painful fact that the black Aborigines are fast disappearing, destined to become extinct.²

At the end of the nineteenth century, the evidence that Aboriginal people were dying out seemed irrefutable. In the settled south and east, people of full Aboriginal descent were fast disappearing. Even the emerging Aboriginal people with mixed Aboriginal and European descent were declining in numbers. Not until the 1920s even for this group did the birthrate begin to exceed the death rate. In some remote parts of the continent, Aboriginal people were still being massacred, while the survivors of earlier violence were apparently dying rapidly of introduced diseases or hastening their own death with alcohol or opium.

The question to ask did not seem to be whether Aboriginal people were a dying race or not, but what should be the response to this situation. The convenient and widespread assumption was that their death was inevitable. Appeal could be made to biology ('We cannot fail to recognise in their extinction a decided widening

of the chasm by which mankind is now cut off from its animal progenitors³); to history ('This is the history of all new countries. . . The Australian blacks are moving rapidly on into the eternal darkness. . .'⁴); to theology ('One of those necessary processes in the course of Providence. . .'⁵). To some, like the Melbourne columnist, 'Vagabond', the Aborigines were about to die out and 'the sooner the better'.⁶

Voices raised against this convenient assumption were few and unpopular. To missionaries like John Gribble, the disappearance of the Aborigines was not inevitable and that it was happening at all was a long-standing disgrace.⁷ 'Who inevitably doomed them? Not the Creator!' said Daniel Matthews.⁸ It was, said Bishop Matthew Gibney, simply a convenient euphemism for genocide:

'The Aboriginal races of Australia are doomed to disappear before the advances of the white man'. . . 'Doomed to disappear!' Blessed phrase! Over how many bloody outrages, over what an amount of greed on the part of some, weakness on the part of the government and apathy on the part of the public does this convenient euphemism throw a thin but decent disguise.⁹

There were many missionaries who agreed with Gibney, along with a few fair-minded pastoralists and a small number of other thoughtful humanitarians, mostly city folk. This enabled them to be dismissed as mere romantics, their opinions no more than the 'howling of uninformed sentimentalists' and 'mealy-mouthed philanthropists'. Even the paranoic Mounted Constable Willshire entered the debate, deriding the humanitarians as 'oily, soapy hypocrites in town. . . canting snufflers'.¹⁰

Most of the humanitarians eventually succumbed to the all-pervading view that the disappearance of the Aborigines was a regrettable but unstoppable phenomenon. 'We have deprived them of the means of subsistence,' wrote W.A. Duncan, editor of the *Australasian Chronicle*. 'We have driven them from their haunts; we have communicated to them our diseases and vices; in a word, an edict has gone out for their extermination.'¹¹

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the humanitarians began to see their task as 'protecting' the last of the race, making their last days more bearable. 'To smooth the dying pillow of the

Aboriginal race' became the slogan of those campaigning for some kind of charitable response.

Even some of the missionaries, after years of struggling to achieve a birthrate higher than the deathrate, became convinced that the end of the Aboriginal race was inevitable. In 1919, Nicholas Hey, the Moravian missionary, after twenty-eight years at Mapoon, felt that the full-blood Aborigine was 'only a passing phase of Australian occupation. The best that the missionary can do is to minister some little Christian consolation in the fast closing day of his earthly existence.'¹² A Queensland Lutheran missionary, in an article in the *Lutheran Church News* (*Kirchliche Mitteilungen*) at the turn of the century wrote: 'All the mission can really achieve for them is a kind of Christian burial service, a kind of promising sunset glow, which cannot be followed by any bright dawn in this life here on earth.'¹³

By 1911 every mainland State had enacted special Aboriginal legislation with emphasis on 'protection' and the restriction of liberty. Only Tasmania made no special laws for the small number of largely unrecognised survivors with Aboriginal ancestry, most of whom still lived on the Bass Strait islands.

The Victorian government, the first to create a Protectorate, established a Central Board responsible for Aboriginal welfare in 1860 and then, in 1869, passed the *Act for the Protection and Management of Aboriginal Natives of Victoria* which brought into being the Board for the Protection of Aborigines.¹⁴ New South Wales appointed a Protector in 1881 and a Board for the Protection of Aborigines two years later, but its first comprehensive legislation was the *Aborigines Protection Act* of 1909.¹⁵ Queensland's *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* was passed in 1897.¹⁶ In Western Australia in 1905, as a direct result of pressure from Britain and from the anti-pastoralist lobby, the Western Australian parliament reluctantly passed its *Aborigines Act*, modelled on the 1897 Queensland Act.¹⁷ After a long history of various schemes of 'protection' and Protectors, South Australia was the last State to enact comprehensive legislation in the *Aborigines Acts* of 1910 (for South Australia's Northern Territory)¹⁸ and 1911 (for South Australia proper).¹⁹

This study is about Christian involvement in Aboriginal Australia, so space precludes a detailed consideration of the content of these Acts.²⁰ Suffice it to say that by 1911, white

Australians had decided that Aborigines needed the protection of the State, or at least that is what some legislators with humanitarian motives thought. In settled Australia, however, the Acts were carefully drafted to ensure a minimum of embarrassment and expense to governments by gathering Aboriginal people together and restricting them to a small number of reserves. Aboriginal people had proved themselves failures in society and could now be removed from it. Most people continued to believe the accepted dogma that they were still a doomed race.

In those States where there was still a pastoral frontier, in contact with 'full-blood' populations, those potentially useful in European employment were not to be removed to reserves. This was provided for in the 1897 Queensland Act and was later written into the Acts of Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory. Nobody seemed to know what to do about the remaining traditional Aboriginal people in minimal contact with Europeans. Most of them now lived only in the central desert regions and in Arnhem Land, areas of no use to pastoralists. The accepted wisdom was that it was only a matter of time before they, too, would die out. A growing body of opinion was that they should be sealed off in inviolable reserves, a view countenanced only because no-one knew of the mineral wealth in those places.

Missionary interaction with these people is discussed elsewhere in this book. In this chapter we will concern ourselves with the long and oppressive 'protection era' as it applied in the more settled regions of Australia and the role of the churches in it.

The rise of non-denominational missions

One of the most historically important missionary movements in Australia in the first half of the twentieth century was the rise of the so-called non-denominational missions. They replaced the nineteenth century denominational missions of southern Australia, of which the Catholic Benedictine mission at New Norcia was one of the very few which survived as a mission.²¹ Some disappeared altogether, eagerly taken over, like Poonindie, by surrounding pastoralists. Many became government settlements: Lake Tyers, for example, in 1907 and Point McLeay in 1916.

When Warangesda ceased to be a Church of England mission in 1886, it was to be the last mission in NSW run by a major denomination. Those Christians who criticise the non-denomina-

tional missions would do well to ask why their church did nothing at all for the past century?

The two great twentieth century non-denominational missionary societies specifically working amongst the dispossessed rural and urban Aborigines are the United Aborigines Mission (UAM) and the Aborigines Inland Mission (AIM). The latter should not be confused with the other AIM, the Presbyterian's Australian Inland Mission, which for most of its existence specifically did not work with Aboriginal people. The UAM and AIM had a common origin in the Christian Endeavour Union, at one time an immensely popular evangelical organisation for the deepening of Christian life. In 1889, H.E. Hockey and Christian Endeavourers from Sydney's Woollahra Baptist and Petersham Congregational churches began visiting Aboriginal people at La Perouse, an Aboriginal reserve on the southern side of Sydney on Botany Bay.²²

The Christian Endeavour Union began a full-time mission at La Perouse in 1894 and in 1895 formally constituted the La Perouse Aborigines' Mission. The first missionary was Miss J. Watson, soon followed by Retta Long (then Retta Dixon) who was to become the most important of these missionaries. The irony was not lost on these first missionaries at La Perouse that here were people, the oldest of whom were sons and daughters of those who had stood in fear and witnessed Cook's landing on 29 April 1770. Retta Long recorded her impressions:

I was destined to become acquainted, nearly a century and a quarter later, with a son of one who witnessed the landing of Captain Cook. Old Jimmy, who was near the century mark, was grandfather of the camp where I began my missionary service. Jimmy's 'old people' had graphically rehearsed, again and again, the story, which he passed on, of their scare of... the oncoming vessel – the forerunner of a civilisation which has well nigh destroyed a branch of the oldest stock of the human race. Jimmy lived to see a great city rising, less than a score of miles away, from whence civilisation's backwash had reached his camp, and the white man's gambling, drinking and immorality had done their deadly work.²³

As Retta Long tells her story, the corruption and debauchery seemed to her to be irredeemable. It was only when God revealed

to her that everyone, including herself, was beyond redemption and that God's grace was a free unmerited gift that she was able to believe that good could come of so much evil:

Within a week, fourteen souls were saved, some of them great sinners, who became powerful witnesses for the Lord who bought them. Born in the fire, they stood the test of the first stirring days of opposition and soon the transforming grace of God changed them so completely that many saw it and feared and trusted in the Lord.²⁴

At the request of Aboriginal people from elsewhere, and with confidence born of success, the little mission began to look further afield than La Perouse. In 1899 it was renamed the New South Wales Aborigines Mission (NSWAM).²⁵ From the NSWAM came eventually the two large mission organisations. During the next thirty years there were a number of divisions and regroupings, some amiable, but some quite bitterly brought about by doctrinal disputes.

In 1905, the NSWAM missionaries at Singleton broke away, forming the Aborigines Inland Mission (AIM). In 1910 the NSWAM extended its work outside NSW and renamed itself the Australian Aborigines Mission (AAM). This mission split on doctrinal grounds, but the two groups reunited in 1929 as the United Aborigines Mission (UAM).²⁶ By 1944, UAM, with eighty-three missionaries, had the largest number of missionaries of any organisation working with Aborigines. With AIM's sixty-two missionaries, the two organisations accounted for nearly half the missionaries of all denominations in the whole of Aboriginal Australia and ninety per cent of those working in settled areas.²⁷

Both UAM and AIM were 'faith missions' which in the final analysis means simply that the individual missionaries, rather than their societies, are responsible for organising their own support. Both missions called themselves 'interdenominational' which was true in the sense that they belonged to no particular denomination, but is misleading in the sense that their very strict, conservative evangelical doctrinal stance precluded many denominations.

An official description of the UAM could equally apply to both missions: 'The mission is an interdenominational body, a united

effort of evangelical Christians of all denominations to give the gospel to the Aborigines of Australia – a real union of Christian fellowship and activity.²⁸

The two missions, although similar in some ways, developed differently. The AIM, although it occasionally founded and ran institutions, generally speaking did not operate 'mission stations' as such. As an official AIM description states:

The work is strictly evangelistic in character – the salvation of the Aborigines and their rooting and grounding in the faith being the one aim of the mission, no industrial work is undertaken. Missionaries, money, time and strength are concentrated upon the purpose of bringing Australia's original people to the knowledge of Christ.²⁹

The AIM tended therefore to locate missionaries where numbers of Aboriginal people lived, usually where they were in poverty-stricken circumstances on the outskirts of country towns. As 'faith missionaries', they were often little better off than the Aborigines. The *Singleton Argus* described the conditions under which several women missionaries were living and working at St Clair in 1916:

The conditions prevailing at the settlement are better imagined than described. Hot, patched-up structures (comprising every sort, size and kind of old timber and sheet iron) without the least comfort are apparently considered sufficient for these self-sacrificing women. No wonder one died last year (typhoid I understand) and the surprise is that anyone, white or black, survives at all there.³⁰

One can only admire this level of self-sacrifice and identification with the lives of oppressed Aboriginal people. Many of these missionaries were greatly loved. They were dedicated and unassuming people. Few involved themselves in the wider issues of justice for a marginalised people. They faithfully preached salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ, but in some ways accepted the system which kept the Aborigines oppressed.

James Miller, an Aboriginal man whose older relatives remember the Singleton AIM missionaries with affection, wrote:

The missionaries accepted this poor state of things too readily. To them poverty was a test of their own faith in God, but to the Kooris (Aborigines) it meant they had to continue to rely on government and private charity. They could not become self-sufficient and had to stay a dependent society.³¹

Many Aboriginal people became Christians through the life and preaching of these missionaries. Like their nineteenth century missionary forbears, these missionaries were guilty of syncretism, of not clearly separating the gospel from a Western world view and way of life. Yet a very important point which Miller makes quite strongly is that Aboriginal culture was already in a state of change in the places where the AIM missionaries were located. The missionaries offered the Aborigines Christianity as they, the missionaries, saw it. Some Aborigines accepted it. They were not brow-beaten, but made conscious choices. Those who would claim that Christianity destroyed Aboriginal culture thereby denigrate Aboriginal people's intellect.

Miller continues:

Probably the AIM was no more successful in converting Kooris (Aborigines) to Christianity than the churches were in converting the white community. If it is said that Christianity destroyed Koori culture, then it can be said that Koori culture was not a strong culture and that Koori society in general was inferior. Such thinking depicts the Kooris to be the helpless victims of white brainwashing who abandoned everything that they ever believed in as soon as someone stood up and preached from an open Bible. This was not the case and such thinking degrades Koori society. Kooris were not helpless and Koori culture was not destroyed. No doubt every Koori at St Clair, whether they were converted to Christianity or not, gave Christianity a serious thought and their ultimate decision was an individual one.³²

Flo Grant, an Aboriginal Christian woman of southern NSW, also criticises the view that missionaries brainwashed Aborigines, turning them into mindless 'Jacky Jackies':

This concept puts Aboriginal people into the category of mindless creatures. . . and denies them the God-given ability to think

for themselves, despite the fact that they were a self-determining people well before white settlement came to their land.³³

What I have said of AIM missionaries could equally be said of UAM missionaries, particularly of those who worked as isolated missionaries in similar contexts. They were sincere and dedicated people with similar church backgrounds. The major difference between the two missions was that UAM became involved with institutions such as mission stations and children's homes far more than AIM did. Thus, whether UAM missionaries realised it or not, UAM became perceived as part of 'the system'. UAM was the mission society with the largest number of missionaries and institutions, so the fact cannot be avoided that when Aborigines speak of missionaries and institutional life, they are more often than not speaking of a UAM institution. It must also be remembered that Aboriginal people generally apply the term 'mission' both to church and government institutions.

It is easy to criticise the institutions run by UAM and similar organisations for their narrow-mindedness and regimentation. I have recently done so myself.³⁴ It needs to be said that institutions run by other organisations were equally repressive. One only has to read Glenyse Ward's account of her life at Wandering (WA) to see that quite recent Catholic missionaries were, in their way, just as restrictive and puritanical.³⁵ It is also far too easy to criticise those who, to the best of their ability and with sincere intentions, were trying to do something for Aborigines when others were doing nothing. I will illustrate this with a brief look at the beginnings of two UAM missions and a UAM home.

In 1921, Rod Schenk left the AIM in NSW to work at Laverton in Western Australia with the UAM (still the AAM at that point). What he found there horrified him: an oppressed and totally disillusioned group of Aboriginal people struggling to survive on garbage on the edge of a town from which they were daily driven away. Margaret Morgan writes:

Rod quickly found that the favourite haunt of the Aborigines was on the other side of the rubbish tip across Skull Creek. . . . On his second day in Laverton, Rod witnessed a spectacle he never forgot: Constable Hunter, mounted on horseback, charging down on groups of Aboriginal outcasts with stockwhip



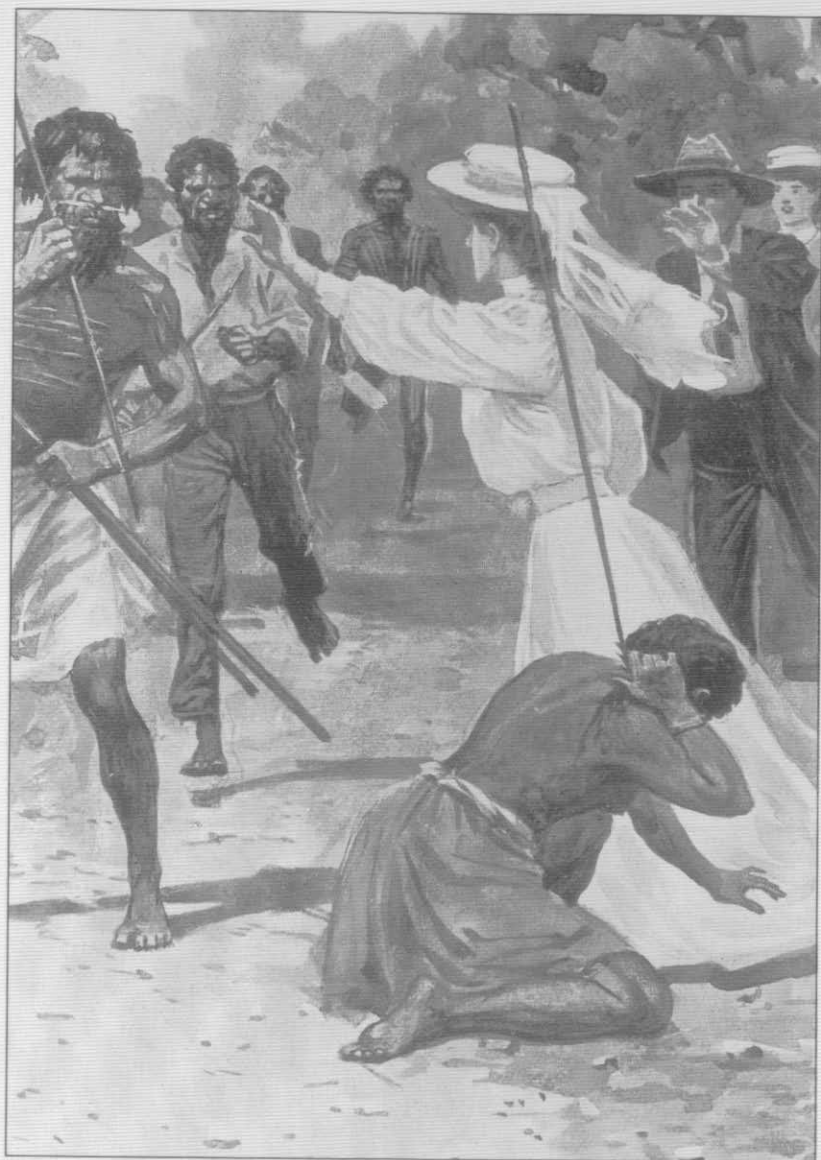
64. The first Mapoon missionaries. Back row: James Ward and Mrs Ward. Front row: Nicholas Hey and Mrs Hey. The first names of the wives, who were sisters, has proved extremely difficult to ascertain.

Acknowledgement: Ward, 1908, p. 26



65. The James Ward Memorial Church, about 1906

Acknowledgement: Ward, 1908, p. 262



66. 'A missionary heroine'. Artist's impression of Mrs Ward and Mapoon missionaries stopping a fight

Acknowledgement: E.C. Dawson, *Heroines of Missionary Adventure*, Seeley, Service and Co., London, 1917, p.328

flaying out in all directions. The sound of the crack of the whip, the whirls of dust, the screams of women and children, angry shouts of men, terror-stricken faces – that picture was printed indelibly on his memory. The [people] ran for their lives before the onslaught. Rod found out that it was a daily occurrence. Midday signalled the daily exodus of the Aborigines from Laverton town. If any were too slow or aged they suffered the sting and cut of the whip. Constable Hunter did not spare them.³⁶

Schenk could only afford a loaf of bread and a billy of tea a day which he took to the Aboriginal people at the garbage tip. He thought at first that he might be able to itinerate among the Wongutha Aborigines of the Laverton and Wiluna districts, but he was realistic enough to see that he would not survive. The Aboriginal people themselves were only just surviving. He concluded after a few weeks that they needed a safe environment, a place where they were welcome, a haven they could call their own.

Schenk, after much opposition, was able to lease the Mt Margaret Common, thirty-two kilometres south-east of Laverton. There he constructed a bough shelter and thus began the Mt Margaret mission which Schenk was to manage for the next thirty-three years.

Schenk was typical of almost all missionaries before him and many after him in that he held negative views of many aspects of Aboriginal culture, but believed strongly in the worth of Aboriginal people as individual human beings. 'The natives here are bound hand and foot by superstition,' he wrote. 'Satan is at the back of all these ceremonies.'³⁷ On the other hand, he wrote:

Those who teach the Aborigines very soon discover that they are no whit behind any other race in mental capacity, and that they can master the lessons that white children learn quite as quickly and completely as they can.³⁸

Schenk never lost an opportunity to preach the need for personal faith in Christ. Many responded and became Christians, responding, as has so often been the case, as much to the Christ-like compassion evident in Schenk's life as to his preaching.

Schenk was very concerned about Aboriginal people's material well-being. He tried, for example, to develop Aboriginal

economic self-sufficiency through goldmining and vigorously defended their rights to the minerals on their own reserve. Mt Margaret, however, grew into a large institution, larger than Schenk could ever have envisaged. It was one thing to identify with the poor, oppressed people of Laverton: it was another to manage a large mission whose residents had nowhere else to go. Schenk and his fellow-missionaries became responsible for a large institution and assumed the right to order and regulate it. They became agents of Westernising Aboriginal people but, in their view, this was the only choice they had. Schenk would have preferred to adopt a policy of 'leaving them as they are', but their situation was so drastic that such a course would have been a denial of justice.

As Schenk's daughter, Margaret Morgan, comments:

What changed [her father's] opinion was [the Aboriginal people's] dire economic conditions, with no voice in changing them - 'a minority in their own country'. . . My Aboriginal friends today are glad they were not left 'as they are' and that they were given a chance through education to express themselves in a white-dominated society.³⁹

It is easy to criticise Schenk and those like him. Those of us who do so should carefully ponder the question of what he should have done in Laverton in 1921, given the plight of the oppressed Aboriginal people. Should he have given up and returned to his original business career in NSW? People like Schenk have laid themselves open to criticism by a later generation simply because they did something for Aborigines when other agencies, particularly the Commonwealth and State governments, did very little and, in the case of people like those at Laverton, did nothing at all.

Those of us who are inclined to be critical could well modify our stance by considering who Schenk's critics were at the time and for what they criticised him. Laverton residents criticised him because they didn't want an Aboriginal community anywhere near them. Local pastoralists criticised him because he sought fair wages for Aboriginal workers. Some Christians criticised him because he was concerned about Aboriginal people's material welfare and not just the preaching of the gospel.

Perhaps his most severe critic was A.O. Neville, Western

Australia's one-time Chief Protector of Aborigines and later Commissioner of Native Affairs, whose plans to breed out Aboriginal blood until Australians could forget that they had ever existed were bitterly opposed by Schenk. Mt Margaret was a regimented, even at times a repressive place, but government settlements, like Neville's institution at Moore River, were much more so.

Schenk commenced his mission at Mt Margaret in poverty and against the wishes of the white residents. He acted out of the highest possible motives. Mt Margaret was not perfect. It was an imperfect solution to a problem which an apathetic community was glad to leave missionaries like Schenk to deal with. The fact that Aboriginal people had little choice but to live in the restricted environment of missions or, worse, the repressive government settlements is not a criticism of people like Schenk, but a criticism of governments and, indeed, of white Australians in general who had little interest in the fate of fringe-dwelling Aboriginal people.

To illustrate the beginnings of a UAM children's home, I have chosen the Colebrook Training Home at Quorn in South Australia. In 1924, the legendary Miss Annie Lock was on one of her many journeys carrying the gospel to her beloved Aboriginal people. In Oodnadatta she found herself in charge of Rita, a ten-year-old part-Aboriginal girl whose white 'owners' found her unsuitable to train as a domestic servant and were about to dump her at the Oodnadatta Afghan camp.⁴⁰ This was the unplanned beginning of what was to become the Colebrook home. Within a few months, Annie Lock was 'given' four more girls of Aboriginal mothers and white fathers. Living in the Oodnadatta boarding house, she tried to care for the children in a tin shed at the back, but white men tried to molest the girls sexually at night.

When T.E. Colebrook, the Australian President of UAM, learned of their plight he arranged for the NSW council to assist the newly-formed South Australian council financially. A cottage was purchased for £350 for Annie Lock and the children in Oodnadatta.⁴¹ Gerard wrote: 'The rescue work of the children, which had really been forced upon the missionaries, now began in real earnest, saving the young children from immediate death or worse.'⁴²

Annie Lock soon resumed her more usual ministry, going north alone to live among the Warlpiri people near Barrow Creek. Annie Lock was an eccentric person, unorthodox even by the

standards of her own mission, preferring to work alone among remote Aboriginal people, bringing the gospel and health care. Those who would categorise her as an overly religious do-gooder could ask, as we have done for Rod Schenk, who her contemporary critics were.

At the enquiry into the 1928 'Coniston Massace', Mounted Constable William Murray, who liked to be called 'the Scourge of the Myalls', was charged with multiple killings of Aboriginal people. Murray blamed Aboriginal assertiveness on Annie Lock. She 'caused trouble', he said, by preaching a doctrine of equality. The Board's report was critical of missionaries for not keeping Aboriginal people in their place.⁴³

Annie Lock was replaced at Oodnadatta by Miss Ruby Hyde. After two years, there were twelve children and UAM decided to relocate the home. A house was purchased in Quorn and named the Colebrook Training Home after the President of UAM. Miss V. Turner, one of the original trustees, explained their thinking:

The mission desired to give the half-caste children such a training as would help them to merge into the white population. This they were unable to do so long as the Home was in close proximity to an Aboriginal camp. Some of the little ones had relatives in the Oodnadatta camp and it was not possible to segregate them from their own people. The only way to do this was by taking them away. . . It was decided to remove the children to a place further south, where there were no Aborigines. Government authorities were not willing that the children come any nearer to Adelaide than Quorn.⁴⁴

On the surface, this appears a particularly racist statement, but again it must be placed in its context. It is true that governments and missions, including UAM, were often wrongfully involved in the forcible removal of children from their parents. This was not yet the case with regard to those children who were either genuinely orphaned or homeless, or were children given into the care of Annie Lock and Ruby Hyde by parents unable to cope, some by Aboriginal mothers, some by white fathers. Ruby Hyde and UAM may have misjudged the situation, but I don't think so. They genuinely felt that there was little future for these children, especially for the girls, in the mixed Aboriginal and Afghan fringe

camps, frequented nightly by dissolute whites in search of sexual gratification.

Of course there were better solutions, but these were only in the power of governments, not of Ruby Hyde. She simply wanted a future for these children with hope in it rather than despair. While cynical officialdom did not want the children anywhere near Adelaide. I make these points strongly because it is important to understand that UAM institutions like the Mt Margaret mission and the Colebrook Training Home were begun by compassionate missionaries who cared about the well-being of Aboriginal people and responded as best they could. They did not ask to become historically significant or to be written about like this. They made errors and they were often inadequate for the task, but they do not deserve to be blamed for the sins of a whole nation.

At Quorn, Ruby Hyde was joined by Delia Rutter. These two dedicated women became inseparable and ran the Colebrook Training Home at Quorn until 1952. Aboriginal people who grew up there between 1927 and 1952 recall these two women with respect and affection.

Nancy Barnes, born in 1927, is one of them. She says:

All in all I would have spent eleven years in Colebrook – from three to fourteen. I was one of the lucky ones breaking the ice. It [was] difficult, but it could have been worse. But that depends on the persons themselves – what they are willing to accept and willing to give.

We were inclined to be reminded that we were Aboriginal children at Colebrook. We were in the 'seen but not heard' era for children. While Colebrook was institutional, the two maiden women wanted it homely. But to control it, you had to have [the rule] 'seen and not heard'.

We were very fortunate in having these two women, Matron Hyde and Sister Rutter. They were dedicated, committed; they lived for the children, who became their family.⁴⁵

After 1952, the memories became more mixed. There was a succession of new staff, some of whom were less caring than Ruby Hyde and Delia Rutter. Added to this, the Home was becoming part of a system by which Aboriginal children were removed from their families for much less reason, perhaps just for being Aboriginal. As Faith Thomas who grew up at Colebrook says:

Colebrook started with Sister Hyde and Sister Rutter. They were Colebrook. Those kids went through hell on earth after they had gone. It takes away from the real Colebrook story because they were left with continual changes of staff. . . What we had was constant love and attention from the two ladies, although often we were short of food.⁴⁶

There is talk of sexual abuse under a particular superintendent. There is resentment among some that their links with family have been severed or damaged. There is also the suggestion that the kind of Christianity presented to them was unattractive and that this thwarted the aims of the mission in the first place.

Doris Thompson recalls Colebrook in the 1950s:

The upbringing at Colebrook was very, very strict. Being run by the United Aborigines Mission, the religion was very strict. Because of this, ninety per cent of the children that left the home turned against religion.

Once I did leave Colebrook it was really difficult to find my family and to find my own identity. I was living in between, not knowing my people. I think that [for] today's generation it is important for the kids to know their parents and the Aboriginal history. Unfortunately, I was taken away from my family. . .⁴⁷

Ken Hampton, an Aboriginal and an ordained Anglican minister, summed Colebrook up this way:

Colebrookites have a strong sense of identity and have maintained contact with each other over the years. Many, especially those who grew up with Matron Hyde and Sister Rutter, have made significant contributions towards overcoming the gulf of misunderstanding between our people and the rest of society.⁴⁸

A UAM mission was commenced in 1929 at Nepabunna in South Australia. By the early 1900s, the Adnyamathanha people of the Flinders Ranges had adapted to some degree to European ways. Death from conflict with the white settlers and from European diseases had considerably reduced their numbers. Although the survivors, acknowledging the inevitable, were gaining employment from pastoralists, they had not altogether lost their links with their land.

As more and more of their land was occupied by settlers, there were fewer places where they could live. By the 1920s, only one important camp site remained at Mt Serle. Nearby was a government camel station where rations were distributed to Aboriginal people. When the Greenwood family leased Mt Serle, rationing was discontinued and they lost this site as well. The people, numbering more than one hundred, then moved to Ram Paddock Gate on Burr Well Station, a site where traditional Aboriginal people had long ago sunk a well.⁴⁹

The lessees of Burr Well Station, Cole and Whyte temporarily tolerated the Aboriginal presence because it was a source of cheap labour. Ram Paddock Gate became a small village. The people built solid houses of stone, mud and timber, living on food purchased with their earnings, whatever native food they could obtain, and supplementing this with milk and meat from their own small herd of goats, donkeys and horses.⁵⁰

Their employment greatly diminished, however, when the economy began slipping towards the 1930s depression. Their hunting grounds having been already restricted, the community approached starvation. Disillusionment and powerlessness began to sap their vitality; easy answers were found by using the little money they could obtain to purchase alcohol. Mrs Jack Forbes, an English woman married to an Adnyamathanha man, became concerned about the deterioration in community morale and conduct and approached UAM.⁵¹

In 1929, a UAM missionary, Jim Page, came to live at Ram Paddock Gate, soon joined by Miss B. Loone, Harrie Green and Mr and Mrs Fred Eaton. Page immediately arranged for the supply of rations, thus averting the immediate starvation crisis.⁵²

Their presence angered the lessees, Cole and Whyte, as they did not want a permanent Aboriginal mission. UAM approached the South Australian government, pointing out that a portion of the land, including the Aboriginal well, should have been reserved when the land was subdivided for leasing. The government's reply was cynical in the extreme. As A.E. Gerard, writing a UAM history, recalled, the government took nine months to advise them that nothing could be done, but that the report would be reconsidered when the lease came up for review. UAM learnt elsewhere that this would be in seventy years' time.⁵³

Cole and Whyte began trying to force the community to move.

After exploring several alternatives, the missionaries were finally able to negotiate directly with Roy Thomas, the sympathetic lessee of nearby Mount McKinlay (Balcanoona) Station.⁵⁴ Thomas agreed to give them some land under several conditions, one of which was that the land was the property of UAM and was to revert to him if UAM ever left. It was rocky land with a shallow non-permanent waterhole. The Aboriginal name for it was *Nepabunna* ('flat rock'). UAM was encouraged by the symbolism of the 'Rock of Ages'.

The UAM missionaries thus gained considerable power because of their legal ownership of the land. The Adnyamathanha people, however, had great capacity to survive and had the skills of adaptation to changing circumstances. The major new dimensions to their lives were Christian teaching, Western education and a much more regimented life. The Adnyamathanha accepted these changes. Like many Aboriginal people, they believed the benefits of the mission outweighed its disadvantages.⁵⁵

At Nepabunna, missionary Jim Page committed suicide under still mysterious circumstances. His place was taken by Fred Eaton who was transferred back to Nebabunna in 1936. Eaton turned out to be a particularly passionate advocate of Aboriginal rights. He disputed the low wages that the few who still managed to find employment received on neighbouring properties. He fought against the system in which Aboriginal wages were taxed, but elderly Aboriginal people could not receive the aged pension. He applied for child endowment for Aboriginal mothers and was furious when one woman could get it who was a 'half-caste' and another could not because, although of mixed race, she was more than half Aboriginal.⁵⁶

The Aboriginal people knew Eaton defended them strongly and tried to please him, knowing also that their possession of Nebabunna depended upon the goodwill of UAM.⁵⁷ A number became Christians. Without in any way denying the reality of their conversion, it was also true that those tended to be the younger, more Europeanised members of the group. Christianity was seen as part of modernisation, part of the new, more Western lifestyle.

Eaton was not opposed to all aspects of Aboriginal culture, but what he opposed, he opposed very forcefully. The initiation of a young Adnyamathanha man was a two-stage procedure. The first stage included circumcision after which a boy became *Vad-*

napa. The second stage involved further mutilations of the back and other parts of the body, after which the young man became *Wilyeru*, a fully initiated man.⁵⁸ Eaton did not particularly object to the first ceremony, but strongly objected to the second.⁵⁹ This may partly have been due to the mutilations, but was also for much deeper reasons. In the *Wilyeru* ceremony, there was enactment of the activities of the ancestral being, *Witana*. Eaton associated *Witana* with Satan. This is probably because the Aboriginal people told him that *Witana* was the Devil.

The use of the term 'devil' or 'devil-devil' by Aborigines was discussed earlier. In this case, the anthropologist C.P. Mountford, who visited Nepabunna in Eaton's time, believed that when the missionaries began teaching about 'the Devil', the Adnyamathanha people, lacking any mythical being anywhere near as evil, nevertheless found some resemblance to *Witana* and told Eaton that *Witana* was the Devil.⁶⁰ Long before UAM came to the Flinders Ranges, the term 'devil' had entered Aboriginal Pidgin English as the label for any spiritual or mythical being. Mountford was probably wrong. What almost certainly happened was that the local people described *Witana* to Eaton as 'devil' by which they mean 'supernatural', 'mythical' or even simply 'religious', without any particular connotation of good or evil.

Eaton, having adopted the view that *Witana* was Satanic, refused the sacrament to any Christian person who attended a *Wilyeru* ceremony. Mountford said:

Fred McKenzie. . . could not explain the ban on *wilyeru* (initiated man). He said that he was a Christian and always used to attend the Christian (communion) meeting. On two occasions, however, when he attended the communion service, neither the cup of wine nor the bread was offered to him. On the first occasion he thought it was a mistake, but when the second time came, he knew it was intentional. He grieved about the incident for a long time, for he wanted to be a Christian, but decided. . . they didn't want him.⁶¹

It is my view that missionaries like Fred Eaton, despite the immense amount of good they did in championing the cause of Aboriginal people, actually thwarted their own Christian objectives by their lack of respect of Aboriginal integrity, intelligence and

spirituality. It was not up to Eaton to legislate on all matters of Aboriginal culture. It was up to Eaton to present the gospel: that is, to explain it, to live it and to assist Aboriginal Christians to develop the skill of applying Christian principles to their lifestyle and behaviour. It was, however, finally the responsibility of Aboriginal Christians to determine which Aboriginal cultural activities they were still free to engage in and which they were not.

The ceremonies, in fact, continued after Eaton's time until 1948. The decision to end them was taken by Aboriginal elders for a variety of reasons of which Christianity was only one – and perhaps not a particularly significant one at that. Alcohol was the major concern as drunken Aborigines were tainting cultural life and spoiling ceremonies. The destruction of cultural transmission by alcohol abuse is not something which can be blamed on the missionaries. The land was also a deep problem because, with closer white settlement, the people became less able to move around and fulfil their ceremonial obligations.⁶²

Today, Christianity remains an important part of the life of many Adnyamathanha people. In 1973 they gained formal ownership of Nepabunna. Eaton would probably have been surprised had he known that many strong Christians are now prominent in their people's efforts to record their cultural knowledge before it is lost forever. An important milestone in this was the publication of *Flinders Ranges Dreaming*, compiled by a Christian linguist, Dorothy Tunbridge.⁶³ At the launch of this book, a Christian Adnyamathanha man, Les Wilton, said they had regained their stories: 'God,' he said, 'has given them back to us.'⁶⁴

With all the reservations I have already expressed about criticising the actions of those who did something when no-one else did, there are two serious matters which must be addressed in any honest discussion of the work of the UAM missionaries. The first is their very negative attitude to virtually anything related to Aboriginal culture, in some cases even including languages. This will be discussed later in this book because this negativity was not restricted to the UAM.

The second is the manner in which the UAM eventually became part of a repressive system. This applied widely throughout Australia, but was especially evident in NSW, where large numbers of Aboriginal children were removed from their families on much slimmer pretexts than ever a white child was removed. They were

placed in homes often staffed by UAM missionaries even though these homes were generally funded and controlled by governments. It is very evident that no matter how compassionate particular missionaries might have been, they could not help but be perceived as part of the system of family destruction and as assenting to it.

We will now look at the repressive system of reserves and institutions in more detail.

Reserves and institutions

A clear perception of the nature of life in the reserves and institutions is critically important if we are to understand the background to Aboriginal people's attitudes and actions today. A very large proportion of Aboriginal people have spent part of their lives in institutions of one kind or another. In the closer-settled southern and eastern parts of Australia, institutional life was formative for almost all of the older generation of Aboriginal people alive today. It is, furthermore, very important to this book that we understand that Christian Aboriginal people grew up or lived in these places and that they have been deeply influenced by those experiences. For this reason, although I am describing life in reserves and institutions generally, I have endeavoured where possible to draw upon the accounts of Christian Aboriginal people like Margaret Tucker and Jimmie Barker.

Although there was a large variety of different institutions and reserves, the majority of them shared a common regime of restricted movement, regimentation and loss of freedom. Some were more oppressive than others, but almost all denied Aboriginal people any freedom of choice and therefore any real dignity.

Most of the surviving Christian missions, like Maloga (Cumeroogunga) and Warangesda in NSW, were taken over by the government and given secular administration late in the nineteenth or early in the twentieth century. About the same time, the Western Australian and Queensland governments opted for extensive settlements like Moore River and Cherbourg, to which large numbers of Aboriginal people were sent from all parts of the State. The NSW and Victorian governments created a network of more moderately sized government reserves generally designed to force Aboriginal people to live in a limited number of places, rather than to congregate in small numbers on the out-

skirts of most country towns. These reserves included Coranderrk, Framlingham and Lake Condah in Victoria and Brewarrina, Purfleet and Wallaga Lake in NSW. All of them functioned to a greater or lesser degree as de facto detention centres.

The larger reserves, often officially termed 'Aboriginal stations', had white management and supervisory staff. They dominated the lives of many Aboriginal people for over half-a-century. Although the administration was secular, some people saw work on the reserves as a Christian calling. This in no way guaranteed that their administration would be less oppressive. Indeed, the reverse was often the case. As an Aboriginal resident of Cumeroogunga pointed out, the managers found Aboriginal self-assertion unacceptable and strove to recreate the regime when sick and homeless people were more willing to accept the discipline of the missionaries in return for survival.

Ronald Morgan wrote the impressions of one Aborigine:

I have no intention of giving the details of every manager that has come to Cumeroogunga. For since the time of Mr Ferguson we have had fifteen managers of various types. We have had those who preferred to come with their Bible and those that favoured their bullets and batons, each one believing as he came that he would in his way achieve a revival and bring things back. . . to their former glory.⁶⁵

Places like Cumeroogunga simply changed administration from mission to government reserve and people found themselves part of a new system whether they liked it or not. Elsewhere, where there had been no missions, managed reserves ('stations') were simply created out of the places where large numbers of Aborigines had congregated, often on the fringes of country towns. Where the communities were small, unmanaged reserves were often set aside and people forced to live on them.

In Victoria, between the 1880s and the 1960s, most Aboriginal people lived on large managed reserves. In NSW, many lived on larger stations, but there was a significant number who lived on small, unmanaged reserves outside country towns. Nanima reserve, outside Wellington, exemplified what the whites considered the best site for an Aboriginal reserve: seven kilometres from town, past the rubbish tip, on the other side of the hill.

In the smaller reserves, there was often no permanent white staff, which meant that there was less daily regimentation and therefore some illusion of freedom. There is evidence that Aboriginal people preferred smaller reserves to the much more organised larger reserves. Aboriginal people were moved from reserve to reserve at the whim of the Aborigines Protection Board, in response to such proddings as complaints from shire councils or requests from pastoralists for more grazing land. Peter Read gives the following depressing picture:

An Aborigine born in 1900 at Yass, on the southern tablelands of NSW might, by old age, have lived in five officially designated Aboriginal reserves. To each of them he or she might have been forced, protesting, to go, and from each save the last he or she might have been forced, protesting, to leave.⁶⁶

The same kind of generalisation applied throughout settled Australia. In Western Australia, Jack Davis' award-winning plays portray the trauma of forced removals of his people from Northam, for obviously political motives.⁶⁷

Some reserves, particularly the more remote ones, were used as punishment centres. Uncooperative Aborigines were relegated to places such as Brewarrina (NSW), Palm Island (Qld) and Moore River (WA) from distant parts of the State. The threat of expulsion to such places was frequently used to exact reluctant compliance from independent-minded or self-assertive Aborigines on other reserves.⁶⁸ The usual agents of the expulsion process were the police and it is little wonder that the Aboriginal people felt that they were being treated as criminals. Authorities may have had euphemisms for what they did, but the language of the police raid is the only true description. Warrants were issued, Aboriginal people were arrested in dawn raids, forcibly removed, detained, transported with armed guards and eventually incarcerated in near-prison conditions.

In evidence to the 1934 Moseley Royal Commission in Western Australia, Dora Thompson recalled her arrest with her husband and four children at Mullewa in May 1930.⁶⁹ The warrant bore the signatures of the Minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs and of the Chief Protector, but gave no reason for the arrest.⁷⁰ She said:

They bundled us into the police car and didn't give us a chance to pack anything. . . We arrived at Mingenew at sundown. . . [they] then drove to the police station and wanted to lock us all up in a cell. The children were hanging around their father screaming and I rushed off to see if I could get help but. . . the policeman caught me and dragged me back to the cell. . . About a quarter-to-ten they started to the station. . . we were told to get into the train and the policeman got in with us and sat up in the train with us until we got to Mogumber at daybreak. . .⁷¹

On reserves, superintendents or managers had wide powers to control the lives of Aboriginal people under the Acts passed at the turn of the century. They had the right to enter dwellings, search and confiscate possessions, restrict movement, read mail, order medical inspection, expel to other reserves, break up families, jail or otherwise confine without trial, and generally to remove independence and the dignity of self-regulation.

Jimmie Barker was born in western Queensland in 1900, but grew up in north-western NSW. His family was moved from Milroy camp to Brewarrina reserve in 1912 when he was about twelve years old. He well remembered his first impressions of the manager's daily 'muster' of the boys:

We had to stand in two lines while the manager walked between us with a stockwhip in his hand. . . It was during this first morning with the manager and the boys that I realised that something different and unpleasant had come into our lives. We had no freedom; things were not right. . . We were often whipped by the manager and then had to do whatever he ordered. . . The manager's name was Scott and he ruled over all the people as an absolute dictator. When he rang the bell all the residents had to rush to see what he required. . . If a person did not answer, his punishment could be expulsion. . . The lesser punishment would be many lashes with the manager's stockwhip; he hit both adults and children indiscriminately when he was annoyed.⁷²

All of these places were oppressive because the system itself was oppressive. The competence and attitude of white staff varied. There are those who are remembered more kindly than others, but the indelible impression held by so many Aboriginal

people is one of repressive regimentation and loss of liberty.

Humane and compassionate staff were rare enough to be recalled as exceptions. The various Aborigines' Protection Boards had great difficulty in recruiting suitable people. Aboriginal people experienced a succession of managers, teachers, matrons and others, often untrained, mostly authoritarian, sometimes vindictive or worse. Tindale, in his investigation of reserves in 1940, found that the role of teacher was filled by untrained people with a huge variety of backgrounds, such as soldier, ship's mate, pastrycook, manager's daughter and so on.⁷³ As State Public Service Board reports later indicated, some 'teachers' were barely literate and when, as was often the case, teaching was only one of their tasks, many ignored their teaching duties completely.⁷⁴

Aboriginal people of Wallaga Lake on the NSW south coast remember the local sanitary carter who doubled as their school-teacher, hurrying in to his classroom duties with his foul-smelling truck parked outside with its load of human waste. Chicka Dixon, now a member of the Aboriginal Arts Board, recalls life at Wallaga Lake:

I was born and raised on a stinking, rotten, government mission station called Wallaga Lake. I was one of thirteen children. My father used to work one day a week for government rations. On Friday it would be an all-in go and by Sunday there would be no tucker, so you'd starve till Wednesday. And I mean starve. . . Then Wednesdays I had the opportunity of walking through the bush for three miles to help a white fellow kill at the slaughter yard. For this effort I was allowed to take all the guts home in a fifty-pound flour bag. It wasn't for me. It was for everyone on the mission. It was a matter of survival. This took place nine months of the year. Then three months of the year you were thrown into the pea paddock as a cheap form of labour.⁷⁵

Chicka Dixon's bitterness is understandable. Even more striking are Jimmie Barker's descriptions of life on Brewarrina reserve, because he found within himself the resources to forgive and to be at peace with the world. Those who mistreated and oppressed him and others like him do not deserve his forgiveness. Jimmie Barker's account of his life is compulsive reading.⁷⁶

There was a weekly issue of rations on Thursdays. We called it

'two, eight and a quarter'. It was given to all families, but not to the able-bodied single people, who had to work for three days before receiving any rations. For an adult the issue was two pounds of sugar, eight pounds of flour, a quarter-of-a-pound of tea and a little salt. There was no baking powder. . . no vegetables, meat or milk. How pleased we were when there had been heavy rain and we could gather wild spinach and thistle tops. . . We might catch fish, but that depended on our luck. It was a starvation diet and, as I look back, I realise that we were all suffering from malnutrition. The orphans, who lived in a dormitory, were given a plate of oatmeal each morning and two slices of bread with a cup of tea. At midday they received some watery soup and at night their meal was bread and tea.⁷⁷

Jimmie Barker recalled what it was like in the school at Brewarrina reserve, where teaching was one of the manager's responsibilities:

School started early in February and I shall never forget my first day. Billy and I sat together, both feeling very nervous. It was on this day that I learnt how unacceptable Aborigines are to other people. The manager told us straight out that we were just 'nothing'. He continued at some length, telling us that Australian blacks were recognised as the lowest type of humanity living today. He said that it was not much use trying to teach us and that he wanted to make it clear that it was a complete waste of time.

I had never before encountered the cruelty and brutality which surrounded us here, and it was a shock to find that this could occur. Mr Scott left the mission soon after we arrived and this manager-teacher was a man named Keogh. . . Mr Keogh used a heavy length of bush timber as a cane when we were in school. Outside he always used the stockwhip. He was unmerciful to both boys and girls. Sometimes he would lift a child off its feet by the ear. . .⁷⁸

Keogh forced the people to dig him a huge, deep pit into which he was to go to cool off underground, but he died before it was finished. His place was temporarily filled by a Brewarrina man named Arnold. Jimmie Barker looked back on Arnold as a kind man under whose control they had relief from brutality. Arnold was especially good to Jimmie and the other children, but his



67. Retta Dixon (Long)
Acknowledgement: Grace Collins.
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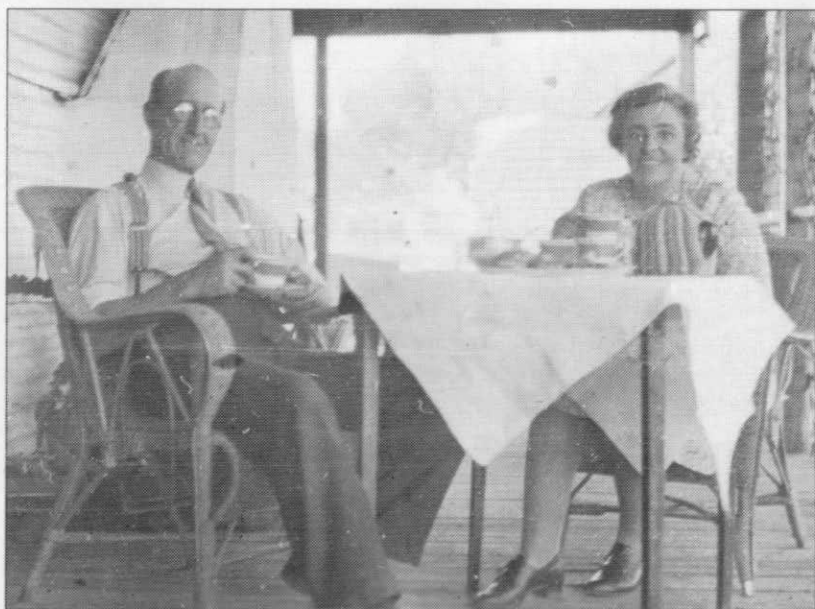


68. Ruby Hyde
Acknowledgement: Faith Thomas
and the Australian
Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
Reproduced with permission.



69. First mission at La Perouse, about 1930

Acknowledgement: Grace Collins. Reproduced with permission.



70. Rod and Mysie Schenk

Acknowledgement: Margaret Morgan. Reproduced with permission.

stay was regrettably short. His successor Evans was described in this way by Jimmie Barker:

Mr Evans was a cruel and dishonest man. The managers were armed with a baton, handcuffs and a revolver. These were supposed to be used if there was trouble, but Evans used them for his own amusement. . . our teaching was very spasmodic. . . Evans had little to teach us and punishing children was his main occupation. His favourite weapon was a piece of bush timber about three feet long and two inches wide. He was not fussy about how or where he hit us and after about five hits with this lump of wood a child could be quite badly injured. I have seen boys trying to protect their heads with their hands; he would then hit them in other places and they would fall to the ground with blood streaming from them. . . the crime the child had committed might have been to smudge his book. . .⁷⁹

Perhaps even worse than the physical violence was the psychological violence. At Brewarrina Reserve, Jimmie Barker learned inferiority:

I had to accept what Mr Keogh and his assistant (Mr Foster) told us. Mr Foster, the preacher, was there mainly for his preaching, but it meant that we had these two men hammering our inferiority into us all day and every day. . .

During my first lessons from these men, I learned that as I was black or partly coloured, there was no place in Australia for me; it gave me the firm idea that an Aboriginal, even if he was only slightly coloured, was mentally and physically inferior to all others. He was the lowest class known in the world, he was little better than an animal; in fact, dogs were sometimes to be preferred. As I was less than twelve years old, it was impossible to disbelieve men of authority who were much older.⁸⁰

Precisely the same kind of erroneous information was taught to white Australian children in schools throughout the continent, not just in Jimmie Barker's era but well into the 1960s.⁸¹ 'The black fellows form one of the lowest races of mankind in existence,' stated a Geography Reader in 1904.⁸² Half-a-century later, the *Oxford Junior Encyclopaedia* at my school told me that Aborigines were 'among the most backward people on earth'.⁸³

The Social Studies textbook I used as a teacher in 1965 had these identical words, with the additional information that they were usually called 'Abos'.⁸⁴ 'I should not like to be the child of one of these people. Would you?' Hornblow asked junior primary children in 1953.⁸⁵

The great Australian poet, Henry Lawson, immortalised this miseducation in his description of *The Old Bark School* with its Irish teacher at Eurunderee:

And Ireland! – that was known
from the coast-line to Athlone,
But little of the land that gave us birth;
Save that Captain Cook was killed
(and was very likely, grilled)
and 'our blacks are just the lowest race on earth'.

And a woodcut, in its place, of the same degraded race. . .⁸⁶

It was in the 1930s that the reserve system was at its most oppressive. Many whites suffered greatly in the depression, too, but even in this time of general government welfare assistance to the unemployed, Aboriginal people were still treated as if they were inferior to other welfare recipients. One old Aboriginal man told me that many times in his life magistrates 'by inspection' had determined whether he was 'half-caste' or 'full-blood'. He had always been able to predict the outcome as his category would invariably be that by which he qualified for the least assistance. When it was determined that half-castes would not receive rations on reserves, he was judged 'half-caste'. When it was determined that 'full-blood' Aborigines were not eligible for the full dole during the depression, he was judged 'full-blood'.

His wife, he told me, was a true 'half-caste' which had always been acknowledged to be so until she applied for child endowment for which a mother had to be at least half-European, after which she was classified three-quarters Aboriginal. In most States during the Depression, the meagre Aboriginal dole could only be claimed on an authorised reserve, so it was widely used to force people of Aboriginal descent onto reserves.

The following Western Australian ration dole from the Depression period could apply to any State:

The two doles (single man)⁸⁷

	White dole	Black dole		White dole	Black dole
Bread	3lb	—	Milk	1 tin	—
Butter	¾lb	—	Cheese	½lb	—
Sugar	1lb	1½lbs	Tea	¼lb	¼lb
Flour	—	8lbs	Soap	1 cake	—
Meat	4lbs	—	Tobacco	—	1 stick
Jam	¾lb	—			

Obviously it was thought that Aborigines could do without protein as long as they got a smoke.

To describe only the reserves is to present a very incomplete picture of Aboriginal life, because there was a wide variety of other institutions where many Aboriginal people spent at least part of their lives. There were the special Aboriginal prisons, the first of which was Western Australia's Rottnest Island where, between 1839 and 1903, thousands of Aborigines were incarcerated and over 500 died. Although some of the inmates committed serious crimes, many were imprisoned for the most trivial of offences, including absconding from domestic service or even from missions.

Another set of institutions were the infectious diseases hospitals, if these dehumanising places merited the designation of hospital. Many were simply escape-proof detention centres. The most infamous of these were the Western Australian 'Lock Hospitals', which for ten years were on Dorre and Bernier Islands. On these men's and women's islands, Aboriginal people suffering from venereal diseases and certain other contagious conditions were incarcerated, having been forcibly removed from their communities, usually by police. Life on these islands was a nightmare, especially for those who were the only representatives of their tribes, cramped together in makeshift dormitories or corrugated iron sheds.

In many parts of Australia there were similar high-security hospitals. Given the high incidence of infectious diseases among Aboriginal people, many spent time in these institutions. To Aboriginal people, they were yet another oppressive imposition. Aborigines fled medical inspection and dreaded treatment.⁸⁸ The institutions were all oppressive, but the Lock Hospitals were the worst. Daisy Bates called them 'Isles of the Dead':

Dorre and Bernier Islands: there is not in all my sad sojourn amongst the last sad people of the primitive Australian race, a memory one-half so tragic or harrowing, or a name that conjures up such a deplorable picture of misery and horror unalleviated as these two grim and barren islands off the West Australian coast that for a period, mercifully brief, were the tombs of the living dead.⁸⁹

In the Northern Territory, Aborigines suffering from contagious diseases were sent to Darwin where they were imprisoned in a lock-up in the Kahlín Aboriginal Compound. No Aborigines were permitted in the general hospital except for the half-caste maternity ward.⁹⁰ Xavier Herbert became manager of the Compound in 1927. In 1980, when giving evidence at the Finniss River land claim hearing, Herbert described the conditions in the Compound when he took over as 'hideous'. Worst of all was the plight of the women suffering from gonorrhoea. They were kept in an old building made of white-washed corrugated iron which, ironically, had once been the chapel:

This was occupied by six to ten women all fairly advanced in age. . . who were chained to posts. They had iron beds and they were chained to posts in it by the leg and they had been there for years like that. There was no treatment for them. . .⁹¹

Despite the horror of such places as these, the institutions which exerted the greatest influence on the lives of Aboriginal people were the children's homes. In all Australian States, quite different laws applied to Aboriginal people and the control of children was a particularly unjust example. Police, Protection Board officers and others had wide and arbitrary powers to remove children from Aboriginal parents. Often they were sent to distant institutions and, if taken when young, they had no knowledge of their ancestry and frequently lost contact with family.

This was the intention of officials, such as Commissioner Auber Octavius Neville in Western Australia, in his desire to 'breed out' the Aboriginal race. He hoped as recently as 1947 to discourage those of Aboriginal ancestry from 'going back to the black', but to encourage them instead to marry Europeans and 'be advanced to white status'.⁹² The process would be completed

when 'there were no more virile full-bloods remaining alive'.⁹³

The most widespread and long-lived system of children's homes was in NSW where from the 1880s to the 1960s thousands of children were institutionalised. At places like Cootamundra, Kinchela (Kempsey) and Bomaderry, generations of Aboriginal children grew up in regimented detention, separated from family and from their communities, destined to domestic service and to a lifelong readjustment which some did not achieve.⁹⁴

The trauma of separation from family is, for many Aboriginal people today, their most enduring and terrifying memory of childhood. Pastor Sir Douglas Nicholls well remembered the day his sister was taken from Cumerungunga:

The police came without warning except for. . . ensuring that the men had been sent over the sandhills to cut timber. Some of the girls eluded the police by swimming the Murray. Others were forced into the cars with mothers wailing.⁹⁵

Another who remembered well the trauma of separation was Margaret Tucker. She was born into a Christian Aboriginal family in southern NSW in 1904. The worst day of her life was when the police arrived unannounced at Moonahculla and walked into the classroom one day in 1915:

We started to cry. . . our school mates and the mothers too, when our mother, like an angel, came through the schoolroom door. Little Myrtle's auntie rushed in too. I thought: 'Everything will be right now. Mum won't let us go.' Myrtle was grabbed by her auntie. We had our arms round our mother and refused to let go. She still had her apron on, and must have run the whole one-and-a-half miles. . . As we hung onto our mother she said fiercely, 'They are my children and they are not going away with you.' The policeman. . . patted his handcuffs, which were in a leather case on his belt and which May and I thought was a revolver. 'Mrs Clements,' he said, 'I'll have to use this if you do not let us take these children now.'

Thinking that policeman would shoot Mother because she was trying to stop him, we screamed, 'We'll go with him, Mum, we'll go.' I cannot forget any detail of that moment; it stands out as though it were yesterday. . .

However, the policeman must have had a heart, because he al-

lowed my mother to come in the car with us as far as Deniliquin. . . Then the policeman sprang another shock. He said he had to go to the hospital to pick up Geraldine, who was to be taken as well. The horror on my mother's face and her heart-broken cry! . . . All my mother could say was, 'Oh, no, not my baby, please let me have her. I will look after her.'

As that policeman walked up the hospital path to get my little sister, May and Myrtle and I sobbed quietly. Mother got out of the car and stood waiting with a hopeless look. Her tears had run dry I guess. I thought to myself, I will gladly go, if they will only leave Geraldine with Mother. 'Mrs Clements, you can have your little girl. She left the hospital this morning,' said the policeman. Mother simply took the policeman's hand and kissed it and said, 'Thank you, thank you.'

Then we were taken to the police station. . . Mother followed him, thinking she could beg once more for us, only to rush out when she heard the car start up. My last memory of her for many years was her waving pathetically as we waved back and called out goodbye to her, but we were too far away for her to hear us.⁹⁶

In a very important and ongoing project, Peter Read and a number of Aboriginal people, including Coral Edwards, have been researching the details of the long protection era in NSW and its effect on Aboriginal people. Peter Read has pieced together this story of a typical family containing seven children and living on a reserve in 1950:⁹⁷

It was learned that an Inspector of the Aborigines Protection Board was to pay a visit. Both the children and parents knew from past experience that they might have to fight for the right to stay together.

What they did not know was that their names were already on the Inspector's blacklist as a family whose lifestyle did not match the manager's opinion of how Aboriginal families ought to live. Nor did they know that a magistrate's committal hearing was scheduled for the following week, nor that the local police had already been asked to prepare a charge sheet for each of the children as 'neglected and under incompetent guardianship'. Nor did they know that, far away in Cootamundra and Kempsey, the superintendents had been warned to prepare places for several more children.⁹⁸

The hearing – it was a mere formality – took place a few days later, after which the children were locked up and not allowed to return home in case their parents took them away. A week after the hearing, they were surreptitiously placed on a bus in the early hours of the morning and driven away. No-one knew they had gone, much less their destinations. No-one waved goodbye.

Suddenly bereft of her family, the mother went into a state of shock from which she never fully recovered. The father remained an alcoholic. For months they heard nothing of their children. Hearing a rumour that the older children had been placed as domestic servants in white homes in Sydney, the mother bought them Christmas presents and went to Sydney to find them. Given a wrong address, she turned up at a home in Woollahra, but her daughter had not been sent there. She tried unsuccessfully to find out more from the Aborigines Protection Board. Finally, she left the presents in Sydney and returned to the reserve:

The two-year period of the children's detainment came and went without comment from any white official. Then a little information trickled back about what had become of the children. One had died, but nobody knew where or when or how. (In the private files of the Board was the information that she had died of tuberculosis at Waterfall Sanitarium in 1953.) Two children, it was said, had married white people and raised their children as whites. . . (The Board's records noted this to be the case and recorded the details of the marriages.) Of the fourth child nothing was heard, beyond that she had been taken to the Bomaderry Children's Home until she was seven and then a white person from Victoria had taken her away. (That was where the Board's records ended, too.) Of the fifth child, nothing at all was known. He simply disappeared. (The Board's records contained no information; indeed, the only person who might have been able to help was the Superintendent of Bloomfield Mental Hospital, at Orange, who wrote to the Board enquiring about four Aboriginal people, all vague about their past lives, who had been admitted with histories of violence, but who now did not seem to want to leave).

One of the boys eventually came home, now twenty years old. He was alcoholic and refused to talk. . . The seventh child came home, too. All she would say was that she had a baby at the Ashfield Children's Home, which was taken away from her when

it was two weeks old. . . She married a local man and lived at the reserve.

As the children who had returned grew to their thirties, it became evident that they were maladjusted, unable to cope as normal adults. They had nightmares. They resented their parents, particularly their mother, accusing her of agreeing to their removal. They became alcoholics with periods of uncontrollable violence. They drank or gambled what little money they earned and remained what the Aborigines Protection Board called 'unassimilable'.⁹⁹

It is not known how many children had already been removed from their families before 1915, when the Aborigines Protection Board received clear powers to take Aboriginal children from their parents. Between 1916 and 1969, when the APB was finally disbanded, at least five thousand Aboriginal children were removed. Uninstitutionalised Aboriginal children were, in the Board's own words, 'a positive menace to the State'. The 1921 Board Report stated that 'the continuation of this policy of dissociating the children from camp life must eventually solve the Aboriginal problem'.¹⁰⁰

This policy was doggedly maintained by the staff of the various children's homes. James Miller, an Aboriginal from central NSW, has recorded the impressions of those of his relatives who spent time in the children's homes:

The effects of this institutional life varied according to how many years were spent in the home. My mother, for instance, knew twelve years of family life before she went into the homes, but my Aunt Jean was institutionalised as a baby and knew no family life. The scars for her were much deeper.

The main aim of the homes was to destroy the Koori [Aboriginal] identity of the inmates. As my mother summed it up, 'They were making us white - think white, look white, act white. That was the main standard of Cootamundra.' The staff at Cootamundra expressed their hopes openly to my Aunt Jean when they said to her: 'There is a good chance that you will marry a white man and your children will be lighter and they will be caught up with a white man and their children will be lighter until they are completely white and that's how the Aborigine blood will be bred out.'¹⁰¹

Miller's relatives recalled the harsh discipline, the regimentation of life. His mother told how 'the letters she received from her mother were all opened by the matron and parts were pencilled out'. She resented this censorship very bitterly.¹⁰² It was part of the attempt to brainwash the children, particularly to alienate them from their families. This strategy often had severe consequences. Some grew up, not just divorced from family, but divorced from society. Miller writes:

Naturally, because the girls were trained to be white, on leaving the homes they suffered an identity crisis when they eventually tried to return to their own people. As my mother said, 'I felt out of place for quite some time. . .' For my Aunt Jean, the crisis was more severe. As she expressed it, 'All our identity was with those children in the homes, not with white society or black society - not with grown-ups. All we knew were our little friends in the home. . .'.¹⁰³

Miller's uncles were institutionalised in the 1940s at the Kinchela Boys' Home near Kempsey. This home was, at times, notorious among Aboriginal people for the harshness of its administration and the dull emptiness of life there. The manager in 1933 was instructed by the Aborigines' Protection Board to stop from tying up the boys and stockwhipping them.¹⁰⁴ Despite this, Kinchela also provides evidence that the atmosphere at the homes depended greatly upon the personalities of the managers and staff. Miller's Uncle Ernie has very positive memories of the home and described life there as 'spot on':

The bloke running the home in those days was a bloke by the name of Rossiter. He treated all the boys at the home as though they were his sons. He spent that much money on the home. We lived right on the banks of the river and had a swimming pool there - a netted thing it was - but that wasn't good enough. Mr Rossiter got a big swimming pool put in the ground at the home, because he was worried that sharks would get us in the old pool with its torn net. This was government money he spent. He even had pictures in the hall on Saturday nights and he ran it. He ran the home perfectly. In the end, this bloke got the sack. I think it was because he did too much for the boys.¹⁰⁵

Ernie was one of the more fortunate ones, but the fact that Rossiter was kind to him does not change his bitterness about the system. He recalls his anger and fear at being taken away from his mother in the first place. He feels deep sympathy for his 'mate' who was at Kinchela before him when it was 'bad - very bad' and who has an identity crisis, knowing nothing of his own ancestry or family.¹⁰⁶

Throughout Australia, the crisis of total dislocation from family is a grief to many Aboriginal people who were taken away as infants. Jessie Coyne, now of Albany, WA, was taken from Carnarvon in 1922 when she was four years old and grew up, like so many others, mistakenly believing that her parents had not wanted her:

My last memory of Carnarvon was walking along the long jetty to the boat, which took me eventually to the Moore River native settlement, many hundreds of miles away from my family and home. I remember being very sad because my family did not come to see me or to take me home again. Over the years I thought they didn't want me and I began to think that I didn't care. . .

It was in the 1980s that I began to think once again of my lost family as I was still feeling bitter about them not wanting me. I wanted to know what I had missed out on and I wanted to see home again. I remember when I became a mother I used to think of Mum and whether she missed me like I missed her and whether she cared about me. . .¹⁰⁷

Missionaries and institutions

Because for a century the only institutions for Aborigines were missions staffed by missionaries, the labels 'mission' and 'missionary' entered Aboriginal vocabulary as designations for any kind of institution and those who supervised them, including the secular successors to missions and all government reserves. 'It was,' said Jimmie Barker, 'a type of Aboriginal slang.'¹⁰⁸

The unfortunate but inevitable consequence of this is that to many Aboriginal people 'mission is a dirty word', conjuring up negative memories of an oppressive regime. The Church cannot stand aloof from this stereotype, because one of the sad truths is that many people involved in the institutions either were, or considered themselves to be, missionaries.

One very obvious trend throughout the history of Christian missions in Aboriginal Australia is that, as missionaries gained increasing control over the lives of Aborigines, they either became more authoritarian, domineering people or the missions tended to attract this kind of person. Obviously, those missionaries who had no power over the Aborigines, but who wanted to attract and influence them, tried to be generous, interesting and attractive people. Somehow, having power over people's lives changed them. Aboriginal people, so often astute judges of character, usually differentiate between the missionaries who were excessively authoritarian and those who were not.

Missionaries were located in four main contexts in the settled southern regions. There were those who worked in the fringe camps or the small unmanaged reserves, those loosely attached to the large government reserves, those actually employed in reserves and those who were part of institutions run by a missionary society. Of these, the first two categories are more often remembered kindly than the second two categories.

Missionaries who lived and worked in or near the fringe camps or smaller reserves were often very impoverished themselves. We have already noted the squalid conditions under which both Aborigines and missionaries lived at St Clair in 1916.

Ella Simon was born of an Aboriginal mother and white father in Taree, NSW in 1902. She was raised by her grandmother at Purfleet, a small managed reserve near Taree. Ella Simon spoke of the first AIM missionary at Purfleet, Miss Oldrey:

If anyone came from Purfleet, they were 'black' and that was it. Even the white missionaries who came to live used to be called black. They were thought of as being even worse because they volunteered to live there. This sort of prejudice went on for years. . .

These early missionaries were brave as well as kind. . . The first one, Miss Oldrey, married and settled up here. . . She said she was often asked if she felt safe living among the Aborigines. . . The Board wasn't happy about missionaries being on their own on a mission. But she said she felt safer living among the Aborigines than with her own people. When she was coming back from town, there would always be about four of the men there to escort her back to the mission - to protect her from the whites! And, at night, she felt perfectly safe because she'd only

have to make a slight noise and someone would pop up or call out, 'You all right, Miss Oldrey?' She said they were such kind people and so considerate, they wouldn't see you in need of food or anything like that without trying to help.¹⁰⁹

Fifty years later, the conditions under which both the Aborigines and the missionaries lived were, in many cases, as bad as they had been early in the century at places like St Clair. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Patricia Harrison worked as a missionary in unmanaged reserves and unofficial Aboriginal camps in the New England region of northern NSW:

Some areas, like Walcha, had simple houses and no superintendent. Most places where we worked – Armidale, Guyra, Tingha etc. – had one or two houses which were generally badly overcrowded, while most people lived in shanties made of corrugated iron, bags and anything else available. In Armidale, the settlement was on the site of the old garbage dump. Conditions were appalling. . . . Generally there was no running water at all, no electricity and no sanitation of any kind – open cesspits were the rule. I well remember the great day when one tap was placed on Armidale reserve by the Council and several pit toilets were erected at Armidale and Guyra.¹¹⁰

Dehumanising as this seems, it was still, to the Aboriginal people, better than the regimented life of the managed reserves. At least they had some freedom. Patricia Harrison noted that during the shanty days, 'it was noticeable that the people who lived in these hovels valued their freedom and felt themselves to be better off than Aborigines who lived under the watchful eyes of superintendents, albeit in nicer homes.'¹¹¹

In places such as these, many Aboriginal people were grateful for the presence of a missionary family. Aboriginal shanty communities without a missionary often asked AIM missionaries elsewhere to find a missionary for them. It was evident to the Aborigines that these missionaries came very close to sharing their common life. The difference was that the missionaries had a choice. They could – and most of them obviously did – retire and go 'home'. The Aborigines had no such option. They were already home.

Many Aboriginal people became Christians. It was, for many,

a way out of drunkenness and despair. It gave them hope. One such was Bert Draper and later his wife Sarah. Bert Draper was converted as a young man about 1918 when Rod Schenk, before he went to Western Australia, was AIM missionary at Terry Hie Hie, near Moree.¹¹² Living a chequered and interesting life, working for forty-three years on the NSW railways in the north-west, Bert and Sarah Draper became two of the best known and best loved people in the district.

On his retirement, the AIM made Bert Draper a 'Native Helper'.¹¹³ He spent the rest of his life travelling around the Aboriginal communities preaching, teaching Sunday school or just talking to anybody and everybody. The Drapers are remembered for many things, including their generous support of the missionaries in Moree. Harry Kleinschmidt recalled:

Mr and Mrs Draper were very generous to us during our time in Moree. Mr Draper helped me to pay for the petrol used in our outreach trips. And many times when our cupboard was bare they helped us with food. . . Mrs Draper would come stumbling in through the door loaded up with a huge carton of groceries. She didn't know what a blessing she was to us.¹¹⁴

The large, organised reserves, like Cherbourg (Qld) and Moore River (WA) gradually became small townships, with Aboriginal 'residents' from a very wide area. At Moore River, living conditions were quite poor for most of the adult residents, with children being housed in dormitories. Conditions at Cherbourg were somewhat better, but this was at the cost of freedom and dignity. Missionaries lived outside the reserve, often in the case of AIM and other 'faith' missionaries under very impoverished circumstances.

Patricia Harrison, as a young woman, visited Cherbourg and Woorabinda before becoming a missionary herself:

Around 1958 I stayed with AIM missionaries near the 'missions' of Cherbourg and Woorabinda. Missionaries were not allowed to live on the reserves, so stayed a short distance away. . . The missionaries at the time were very poorly supported by church people – perhaps an indication of the general disregard for Aboriginal people. There seemed to be better support available for overseas missions. One young couple told me their support totalled £48 per year – very low even at that time, and they

would have had trouble surviving had it not been for gifts of food from Aboriginal Christians, whose homes, basic though they were, were often better than those of the missionaries. . . The (female) missionary I stayed with near Woorabinda served under very self-sacrificial conditions. We sat on kerosene drums and boxes and went regularly to the local dump to fossick for anything useful for the house. Water was pumped from the creek and there was never enough for a full bath, only for washing. There was no electricity and we made our own soap. The missionary had built part of her own road and washed in the backyard copper. She never complained, but went about her task with the utmost dedication.¹¹⁵

Patricia Harrison's observations on the conditions under which Aboriginal people lived at Cherbourg reveal the pressure on these missionaries in working under such an oppressive system:

The missionaries. . . rarely complained about conditions, knowing that their work there might be terminated. . . (and perhaps too, because their own living conditions were so simple). . . What troubled me most about these 'missions' was not the rather poor living conditions – since these were considerably better than those endured by many Aborigines I worked with in NSW – but the lack of personal freedoms. . . The paternalistic stance and lack of freedom on both [Cherbourg and Woorabinda] was striking. I was amazed to find that people could not leave the settlements without the permission of the superintendent, even to go to town – those who did could be arrested for 'absconding', and were sometimes sent to other settlements as punishment or put in the mission lockup.

The justification for this repression was that it was for the people's own good – to keep them away from drink etc. . . It was often said that. . . these missions were. . . 'penal settlements'. Certainly some residents were compelled to live there as a punishment for some misdemeanour or other, but many others had been moved there for government convenience and 'education', and of course many of the children were born there, so it is hard to see how they could be detained. . . for any kind of 'penal' reason.

Superintendents appeared to have a good deal of power and the well-being of the people depended to no small degree on the personality of the current 'boss'. . . Woorabinda residents especially

lived rather truncated lives, with nowhere much to go even when they had permission to leave the reserve. The kindly hospital sister told me she often sent patients to Rockhampton, even when, strictly speaking, it was unnecessary medically, because she felt sorry for them – they hardly ever had a chance to get away and see other places.¹¹⁶

Bertha Chambers is a Christian Aboriginal woman exactly my age, so she would have been attending the Church of England church at Cherbourg around the same time that Patricia Harrison was visiting her AIM missionary friends. Bertha Chambers recalled that church and Sunday school were the highlight of her week:

We were marched there and back, but we all loved it at church. It was on the outside and just for a while we were away from dormitory life. I especially remember Mr Atkins. He used to ride an old bike. He was kind to us. . .¹¹⁷

It was obvious to Aboriginal people that the missionaries were distinct from the supervisory staff, who were government employees. On the whole, AIM missionaries and clergy of the various denominations which maintained churches on the outskirts of places such as Cherbourg were held in particularly high esteem by the Aboriginal people. They provided a welcome, friendly contrast to the often harsh disciplinarians who controlled their lives. At a meeting welcoming some new missionaries to Purfleet reserve, Ella Simon heard the manager express his surprise that the people cared so much about the missionaries. She later wrote:

He said straight out that no-one in Purfleet cared if he had a drink of water or not, but when it came to missionaries it was a totally different matter and he couldn't understand it. We could. We knew just how kind the missionaries had been.¹¹⁸

In the two other missionary contexts, the employment of missionaries on reserve or institution staffs and the full responsibility by missionaries for certain institutions, I have not often encountered happy or positive memories of missionaries. There are, of course, exceptions, of whom Ruby Hyde and Delia Rutter at UAM's Colebrook Home were obvious examples.

Jimmie Barker well remembered the lessons he learned from 'Mr Foster, the preacher' at the Brewarrina reserve:

As we were told many times daily that white people despised the Aborigines, it had to be believed. I had to accept what Mr Keogh and his assistant, who was a preacher-schoolteacher, told us. Mr Keogh used to say that he could speak Hindustani and another foreign language, but he never wanted to hear a word of any Aboriginal language: they were all too dirty. This manager was the same as most of them; he was tough and never showed any kindness to us. Mr Foster, the preacher, was there mainly for his preaching, but it meant that we had these two men hammering our inferiority into us all day and every day.

... There were quite a number of backward children, and they were the ones to suffer most. I had my share of the cane for errors in my work, but not the severe thrashings that some of the others had. I shed many a silent tear for some of these poor children; maybe they were naughty outside, but they did not deserve that treatment in school. These two men were really tough and most of their successors were the same. It was hard to face such unpleasantness when young; those incidents have left their mark on me.¹¹⁹

He also remembered the AIM and other missionaries who visited the reserve. Although he became a Christian himself, Jimmie Barker found these missionaries' words and attitudes served to reinforce the insidious doctrine of Aboriginal worthlessness:

... Various preachers visited us and we were forced to listen to them. I remember one man who started his sermon by saying: 'I do not want to be thought a good fellow by you people. I have just come here to teach you heathens the way of Christ.' He taught us little and the example he set was not Christian. Before hearing what all these men said to us, I had always thought the world was wonderful. I had had no idea that we were lower and worse than everyone else.

... Many types of preachers came around to convert us. There were evangelists, Inland Mission and every type of missionary. They did not try to reach us carefully and gently; there was no discussion and we had to accept everything they told us. Our own religious beliefs were a subject of ridicule, and we were told that we were useless humans and must forget our Aboriginal



71. Aboriginal fringe camp, Oodnadatta, 1924
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 of Aboriginal Studies. Reproduced with permission.



72. Annie Lock's tin shed behind the Oodnadatta
 boarding house, 1924
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 of Aboriginal Studies. Reproduced with permission.



73. First Colebrook Home, Oodnadatta, 1925
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 of Aboriginal Studies. Reproduced with permission.



74. Poster of the type displayed in UAM homes and missions
 Acknowledgement: John Stanton and the University of Western Australia,
 Anthropology Research Museum. Reproduced with permission.



75. Children at the UAM Home, Bomaderry,
 probably in the 1920s
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religion and learn all they taught us. This was confusing, as there were a great number of preachers and it was seldom that two men would preach alike. We were forced to attend all services and listen to every preacher; if we did not our rations were stopped. We were willing to accept Christianity, but few of the preachers set any example of kindness; it was confusing to both the young and the old people. The preachers knew nothing of our beliefs or our religion. We had never worshipped an image or idol, yet the evils of idolatry were drummed into us. This was not a pleasant introduction to Christianity, although it became an important part of my life eventually. . . ¹²⁰

The more restricted institutions were sometimes run by churches or by mission societies such as UAM. Among these missionaries were people who acted with compassion and whom Aboriginal people recall with affection, but these people are often remembered as exceptions, as a ray of light among otherwise dark memories. I have spoken to hundreds of middle-aged and elderly Aboriginal people in widely separated parts of Australia and the memories of regimentation and oppression run as a common thread through the majority of their stories.

Many of these institutions were staffed by people with a conservative, fundamentalist theological outlook. I am not here criticising this theology, but I have no hesitation whatsoever in criticising the way in which such theology was so often associated with a harsh emphasis on a narrow set of strict behavioural principles, which were inculcated by many missionaries to the point where their behavioural demands obscured the Christ whom they thought they were preaching.

It is admirable to teach children of a Christ who loved them so much that he died for them and rose again to give them the hope of eternal life. It is another thing entirely to link this Christ to harsh discipline and narrow and trivial moral rules, to preach a gospel distinctly lacking in grace and to lead children to believe that a loving God destined them to a life of servitude and inferiority.

Jean Begg spent her early childhood in the UAM's Bomaderry Infants' Home. Her abiding impression is one of fear:

Bomaderry home was dominated with religion. We were cut off from the rest of the world - we barely saw anybody. I think

from birth till about eleven I must have saw about twelve grown-ups. If we saw someone wearing lipstick we had to pray, because it was considered they were worldly, wicked and sinful – that was the type of fear we grew up in. We were also brought up to think that Aborigines were dirty and bad.

I can remember one picture in the dining-room – a great big picture and it had this road with all these people on it and it had these Aborigine people in the front, drinking and playing cards and we were taught how wicked they were – sinful, evil. There was this narrow road with only a few people walking up it and they taught us 'wide is the road that leads to destruction and narrow is the way that leadeth unto the heavens'. The impression of all these Aborigine people drinking and gambling gave us fear and that fear is still impressed in my mind.

The kind of discipline was, as I said, fear. The kind of fear – it's hard to put down, but it's coming back to me. I can remember June my sister, when she was nine, wet the bed one day and the matron came and she got her and belted her until the blood come out of her back. . .

I remember in the night I was terrified to go into the dark, because we was taught that Jesus was nailed to the cross, to cleanse us from our sins, so that we won't be bad any more and we would know him by the nail prints in his hands and I remember being terrified of going into the dark. I was so scared that I would bump into Jesus and I would know him by the nail prints in his hands.

Besides that kind of religious fear, I had fear of Aborigines, knowing that they were evil, wicked. [I was] not understanding black, but only relating it to sin and drinking and cruelty.¹²¹

Not all Aboriginal people who passed through these institutions retain such negative impressions of religious indoctrination, yet the memories of so many to whom I have spoken are of an excessive emphasis on religious instruction. This applied even where the missionaries were remembered with warmth. Margaret Crompton spoke of life at the UAM's Colebrook Home:

They had a superintendent there, and his wife and family, that cared for. . . about fifty kids. . . The people that were running it were very religious and they sheltered the kids from the rest of the world. . . We weren't allowed to have much to do with the outside world. . . I think the superintendent and (the others)

saw themselves more from a religious point of view, where they were giving us a good Christian upbringing, rather than a good education and. . . preparing kids for the outside world. They didn't know very much about Aboriginal culture, or found out about our individual backgrounds or taught us about it, or anything like that. . .

All of us could read the Bible backwards just about. But when it came to tables and spelling and all that sort of thing, we didn't cope too well.¹²²

This all sprang not from the gospel of Christ, but from racism: conscious or unconscious, but still racism – the belief that the racial origin of these children predetermined for them a future with the same severe limitations as were thought to apply to 'low class' whites. The future of Aboriginal children was seen as *service to the white community*. They were trained in the majority of these institutions to be obedient, to be servile, to acquire only those skills which would fit them for life as a domestic or as a labourer.

Mrs Francis Garnett, missionary at Point Pearce, spoke not only for many missionaries, but for most of white Australia when she gave evidence to the South Australian Royal Commission on Aborigines in 1913:

The great need in dealing with the girls of the mission is that they be placed out to domestic service as they reach a suitable age. . . Personally I feel strongly that. . . compulsory systematic placing of them out is necessary. Some of them are fitted to take situations for a small sum just as they are. It would be an expensive thing to train them for cooking and dressmaking. I think that would be putting the government to needless expense, because there is such a demand for them as raw material. They can all wash dishes and scrub floors.¹²³

Although a large number of institutions were run by the UAM, there were other institutions run by churches, particularly the Catholic church. Aboriginal memories of these institutions also reveal an oppressive and demeaning system. Margaret Brunsahan, born at Kapunda, describes herself as having been 'legally kidnapped' in the 1940s and sent to a Catholic orphanage which she resented and therefore was unco-operative:

At the orphanage I was always told that I was bad, wicked. . . I was sent to the Catholic reformatory at twelve as cheeky and uncontrollable. . . I was locked in broom cupboards and made to kneel on split peas with my hands on my head. You thought it would cripple you for life, but it didn't cripple your tongue. . . I had very strong feelings. All I ever wanted was a home and family. . . They'd threaten you with being cracked, with going to a mental asylum. Kids were sent. . . The proof is still there. I was just lucky I got the reformatory. . . All the God-fearing people I met, all those Christians didn't practise what they preached. . .

There's a lot of pain in having fingers, legs broken. But it takes a lot longer to repair spirits, minds. That takes a whole lifetime. When you're adult and you can't accept that anybody loves you, that's because some other parts of you have been broken.¹²⁴

As a State ward, Margaret Brusnahan also spent some years as a foster-child in several white homes:

My sister and I lived for a while with one old woman who used to flog us unmerciful. She was very severe. You got served something meal after meal until you ate it. We used to say to each other, 'I'm beating you, because I'm eating Friday's meal and you're still on Thursday's.' One day Aileen threw up and the old woman stuffed that food down her neck, everything that she'd thrown up.

When you're a child you're always told to trust Welfare, police. Then all the Christian people who are looking after you turn into monsters. So where do you look? Who do you trust?¹²⁵

Aboriginal children taken from their parents became State wards. In many ways, their lives differed little from that of white State wards. The major difference was that Aboriginal children so frequently became State wards merely because they were Aboriginal. They may have come from materially impoverished homes, but they were often warm and loving homes which they missed bitterly. It was legally much easier to remove Aboriginal children from their parents than it was to remove white children. Aboriginal State wards were raised in institutions or were fostered out to white homes. The UAM and other missions and homes also tried to find foster homes for their wards.

Children's experiences in foster homes varied widely. Some, like Margaret Brusnahan, were treated inhumanely. Others remember their kindly guardians with great affection. Nellie and Christine Egan were removed from their parents when they were infant children and taken first to Fullarton Girls' Home and then Warrawee Home. Still less than ten years old, they were placed together in a foster home. Nellie Egan recalls that experience:

From what my foster mother tells me we were actually advertised - 'Home wanted for two Aboriginal girls'. They originally didn't want us - they wanted a teenage girl - but they decided to give it a go, and we stayed with them and grew up with them. It was a really contented sort of life. She was very English, very Victorian in her attitudes, middle class. They regularly attended ballet and classical music concerts. He was a Scotsman. They were in their fifties and only just married before they took us. As we were growing up, she used to read us lots of stories about Aboriginal culture. If we had problems at school and we'd come home and tell her, she'd say how wonderful our culture was and how we should be proud that we were Aboriginal kids. She was a very gentle woman.

It was really strange how we happened to go to them. She was artistic and she encouraged me to paint - she brought me my first set of paints. My sister was an outdoors type and she was Daddy's girl.

My sister had an argument with my foster mother. . . and said, 'You white people get paid for looking after us', and that nearly broke my foster mother's heart because she really loved us. We keep in touch and she loves our children who call her 'Grandma MacLennan'. Colour never seemed to come into it. My foster parents gave us a full life. . . ¹²⁶

On the other hand, to some foster-parents the wards were de facto servants, even at an early age. Lallie Lennon was 'fostered' at Wintinna Station at the age of nine:

I had to work very hard. As I was too small to reach the sink, I had to stand on a stool to wash up and polish the silver. Polishing the spoons hurt my hands. Because I was only little I couldn't comb my hair properly. It got knots in it, so they cut it off 'baldy' at the back and left a funny tuft on the front which they used to pull when they were telling me off. I was nine

then. I had to sleep by myself in a tent or the chook house. I even had to wipe the chooks' mess off me in the morning. I kept working there for a long time. The only way to get away from there was to get pregnant. Some other girls encouraged me, saying, 'You'll be there till you die'. When I did become pregnant, I did not know for a long time because no-one ever told me about things like that.¹²⁷

Lewis O'Brien spoke with insight of his days in institutions and foster homes:

Institutionalisation teaches you to suppress all emotions. You don't learn all the natural things you learn in ordinary life. In the end, what does it teach you – you don't do anything because you'll get whacked. You learn by these lessons of being slapped and hit and told you're a nasty little boy. . . . You can't say anything that is your own. You can't express an opinion. . . . When you're fostered out you're in the same realm. You've got no rights. . . . The brother and I got fostered to this family at Felixstowe and you could see that the bloke only got us to help him work his property. . . . What made it worse, that man was a wife-beater. She ran into us one night when he was belting her up and my brother, who was two years younger than me, expected me to help. I was only twelve. . . .¹²⁸

James Gray of the State Children's Council was asked at the 1913 Royal Commission how he determined the religious denomination of these children. Aboriginal children, who were treated as white wards, were arbitrarily assigned a religious denomination according to statistical norms. Gray's reply is on record:

We have a rule that every seventh child who comes to us without any religion is a Roman Catholic, the rest as Protestants. We make one-seventh of them Catholics because that is the proportion of Catholics to Protestants in the community.¹²⁹

By the 1950s, as the long era of removal and regimentation of Aboriginal children was coming to a close, many of the children's homes were, as far as institutions can be, reasonably pleasant and happy places. Compassionate and well-meaning staff generally

treated the children with kindness. I taught children from a UAM home at a Sunday school in a nearby church which they attended. They were happy, alert and affectionate children. They did not know then, and neither really did I, that life in the institution was diminishing their sense of home and family and identity. These children were about to enter a world beyond the protected environment of the institution. They were about to enter a world which would be harsh and unaccepting, without a confident knowledge of who they were.

Ken Hampton, the first person of Aboriginal descent to be ordained to the Church of England ministry in South Australia, wrote of the institutionalisation of children and its after-effects just before his death in September 1987:

Our children are no longer liable to be institutionalised in this way. But the effects of almost 150 years of such treatment have left deep scars on individuals and our society as a whole. Many of our people who were put into foster homes and institutions are still searching for their identity.¹³⁰

Life after the institutions

For many Aboriginal people in the reserves and institutions, Christianity may have offered them hope in the next life, but it did not offer them much hope in this. Acceptance with God may have been assured, but acceptance in a largely white Australia was much less certain.

In most of the reserves and institutions, many Aboriginal people learned inferiority, for inferiority is not an innate characteristic, but a low self-esteem learned from years of being treated differently. I know a number of Aboriginal activists whose decision to become politically active was related to their anger at their parents' and grandparents' acceptance of inferior status. Chicka Dixon, for example, often speaks of his anger when his mother would step into the gutter to allow white people to pass. Aborigines were not even counted in the population until 1967 and the rules white Australian society made for the descendants of the original inhabitants were very different from those which applied to everyone else. Their inferiority was enshrined in law.

As we have seen, it was presumed that the future of the young people who attended reserve schools or children's institu-

tions was to work in menial, low-paid positions arranged by a Protection Board or another similar authority. Girls were expected to go into domestic service anywhere in the State, boys into indentured labouring jobs. In both cases, their lives were not their own.

This is not to deny that some Aboriginal people in those years were successful in white terms. Some, with lighter skin, denied their Aboriginality and claimed to be Maori – or even to be Greek, Italian or of some other swarthy, southern European extraction. Some, while still maintaining their Aboriginality, gained recognition in the white world, but it was often with immense effort and at great cost. The stories of these people deserve a detailed study of their own. Christobel Mattingley and Ken Hampton's volume on South Australia provides an excellent model.¹³¹ Space in this book prevents us from attempting even the briefest survey. Suffice it to say that, deserving as the achievements of these people were, they always lived under the burden of having to prove themselves to a white world, in non-Aboriginal terms, in values not necessarily their own.

Instead, we will follow four Aboriginal Christian people whose early lives we have already encountered, out of the reserves and institutions and into the community and allow their early experiences to inform us of the kind of world they had to face.

We have already read Margaret Tucker's memories of being taken from her family in 1915 at the age of eleven. Four years later, in 1919, she was assigned as a servant to a Mrs Smith of the middle-class Sydney suburb of Cheltenham:

Winters and summers came and went. I was always scantily dressed in a thin blouse and skirt and underneath a hessian sugar-bag singlet that Mrs Smith had made. I had no other underclothing and my feet were bare. In winter the cold was unbearable.

. . . I would hide food under the house. It was handy, because Mrs Smith would give me the left-over porridge, when there was any, without milk or sugar, so the jam I'd hidden made a lot of difference. I feel awful when I think of those days and the thieving I was practising. God seemed far away, as did my mother, father, aunt and uncle and sisters – in fact, all my people.

. . . I used to look forward to the postman's whistle. . . I would always be praying that there would be a letter for me. . . one day he gave me a letter. . . I dared not open it before my mistress

saw it, but with a thrilling, happy expectation I took it to her. She had been watching through the window. She took the letter as I said happily, 'A letter from my mother'. . . I waited expectantly for my letter. That day passed, a week, a month, I had forgotten about food in my longing for that letter. I wept. I was too afraid to mention it. . . Oh God, how I prayed for that letter and hungered for news of home. . . It was like a disease.¹³²

As with the children in foster homes, the experience for some Aboriginal domestic servants and assigned labourers was better, for some far worse. Margaret Tucker was not one of those who was sexually abused. Her own experiences later included working for much saner and more compassionate people than Mrs Smith.

Another person with some positive memories is Hilda Bennett who grew up in the Children's Home at the Lutheran Koonibba mission, west of Ceduna:

I was twelve years old when I went into service. I never worked too long in any place. I went everywhere as a domestic - Eudunda, Balaklava, Clare. I worked at the Clare Hospital and the matron was wonderful. I've worked all my life ever since I was a child. I've worked for people.¹³³

We have also read of Jimmie Barker's boyhood on the Brewarrina Reserve. In 1915, at the age of fifteen, he was assigned to Robert Lindsay whose property was near Tottenham:

That night when I had finished the washing up, Mr Lindsay said he wanted to talk to me. He took me into a room where his wife was sitting and then closed the door behind us. He started by saying that his name was Jimmie, the same as mine. We could not have two people with this name on the station, so I was to be called Joe. He told me that I was apprenticed to him for four years and I must never try to run away. If I did, I should most certainly be brought back again each time, or be sent to jail if I tried it too often. I must not address anyone by their Christian name and must do everything I was asked to do. Any refusal or rudeness would be dealt with by him. He stressed that I must not raise my hands to anyone, even in self-defence. If any black touched a white man, he would be shot down.

He told me that I would be fed and clothed by him and my pay

would be two shillings a week. This money would be banked for me. He gave me a paper to sign and then sent me back to the stable. Once again, I moved the bed into the open [to avoid the rats]; I did this every night until it became too cold. As I had no blankets, I had to use discarded chaff bags when I needed additional warmth.¹³⁴

Jimmie Barker, with his characteristic lack of bitterness about his own treatment, felt that even when 'apprenticed' to Robert Lindsay, he was better off than many of his fellows:

. . . Many of the young apprentices had suffered from shocking treatment. Two boys were apprenticed to a man who lived three miles out of Brewarrina. This man was continually hitting and bashing the boys, who kept escaping to the mission. We saw them with black eyes, cuts, bruises and various horrible injuries. Their employer always forced them to return and their lives were miserable. . .

There was another case at Walgett, where the employer kept hitting his Aboriginal apprentice with sticks. The injuries to the boy were shocking and the scars can still be seen on his face. I felt that I had endured a lot during my apprenticeship, but it was not as bad as these other cases.¹³⁵

Speaking of the 1920s, Jimmie Barker wrote, 'it was not possible for an Aboriginal to have an ambition or to make much progress in the world. My wish was for a little security and freedom from trouble with white people. . . I found the attitude of white people to my colour a constant strain.'¹³⁶

Aboriginal people continue to suffer racial and class discrimination today, despite the fact that there have been vast improvements in such areas as working conditions and access to education. It is easy to forget how recently racial discrimination was enshrined in law, how recently Aboriginal inferiority was a policy, how recently their mistreatment was part of an accepted system.

We have already seen how Bertha Chambers, a Christian Aboriginal woman and my age, found the missionaries at Cherbourg friendly and attractive. A highly intelligent and thoughtful person, Bertha as a teenager in the 1950s was assigned as a domestic servant to Frank and Heather Young of Indooroopilly,

where her duties were as a nursemaid and housemaid. Bertha recalls the Youngs most warmly. 'They were nice to me,' she told me, 'and they took me everywhere with them.'¹³⁷

It still hurts, however, for Bertha to remember that she had to endure a discriminating system which labelled her as inferior. To leave Cherbourg and work she had to be issued with an *Exemption Certificate*, exempting her from the restrictions which normally applied to Aborigines. She had to carry it at all times.

'Our money was not our own,' she said. 'I don't even know how much I earned.' Bertha's earnings were held by the Board on her behalf. She had to seek permission to purchase anything. 'We had to go to the office in William Street, Brisbane. They didn't actually give us money but an order form,' Bertha explained. 'We had to take the form to McDonald and East's to buy what we needed - even underwear.'¹³⁸

In speaking to Bertha and people like her, I never cease to be impressed with their capacity to forgive, with their lack of bitterness. They have much for which to be angry, yet they remain accepting and compassionate people.

Ella Simon, who has warm memories of the first missionaries at Purfleet, became a fine Christian and a highly active and widely respected member of the Taree community. Her bitterest memory is of what happened after the death of her father, a white man whose relatives had disowned him and about whom nobody had ever cared except Ella. Ella was distraught that she had been unable to be by his bedside when he died:

At the hospital they also asked me about the funeral arrangements. How would I know? Where was the rest of his family? None of them had been near him.

So I said that I would make them, if I possibly could. I had to. I was the only member of the family there. So I went down and spoke to the undertaker about it. . . . We arranged that my father would be buried on a certain day at eleven o'clock in the morning. A feeling of being pleased that I was being useful at last came over me.

It wasn't until I got back home that night that grief suddenly hit me. He had passed away with nobody by his side after all those years of being kind to me. I hadn't even been able to return that kindness in his last days when he really needed somebody. He had always been such a lonely old fellow. It was terrible he

had to die so lonely as well.¹³⁹

On the day of the funeral, the AIM missionary from Purfleet drove Ella into town. She had made a wreath. Arriving at eleven o'clock in time for the funeral, they found the place deserted:

I found the undertaker around the back and asked him why. He said, 'I'm terribly sorry, but I had word from the family. They said they were coming up from Sydney and wouldn't get in until four o'clock. They said they would pay all the expenses for the funeral, too. . . on one condition.'

He hesitated then, and I demanded to know what condition. 'That you stay away, Ella!'

I almost cried out, 'But I'll only be standing there looking and I'm going with the missionary. Who's going to know I'm related?'

The undertaker sat there for a while, then said softly, 'They will, Ella. Look, they're going to pay. They've got the money. His nephew owns racehorses. So why don't you just let them pay?'

I said, 'I'll pay for funeral, then!' He shook his head.

'Ella,' he said, 'they've got more money than you. I won't let you pay out all this money. Look, if you want, I'll take you out to see the grave now. . . anything, to make it up to you.'

How could that make it up to me? I think that's the very first time I felt so desperately angry about prejudice that I was going to dig my toes in and fight. I just couldn't take this. He was my father, too. I was going to go whether they liked it or not. I went back to the car and told the missionary. . .¹⁴⁰

Rightly or wrongly, the missionary talked Ella out of going to the funeral. 'She had done everything she could for her father when he was alive. . . Going to the funeral would do nothing for him. . . She would only hurt herself. . .':

He was right, of course. Once I became more collected, I could see that. I didn't stay on there and I didn't come back for the funeral later that day. I only turned to the missionary and said, 'I've been hurt so much and for so long, I suppose this doesn't matter. I'll go home, thank you.'

One of the greatest trials of my life was to forgive these people for that. They had nothing to do with my father when he was living. And there I was, so much in his life over those last few

years and yet I wasn't deemed good enough to be allowed to go to his funeral. I had looked after him as best I could. I had told the authorities where to find these people so they could be notified of his death. I had shown the place where he had wanted to be buried. And more than all of that, I loved him; he was my father. It didn't make the slightest difference to them. I couldn't even stand by and just watch. It was still a secret that had to be kept from the world – something that was shameful, something whose very existence was distasteful.

I was so angry still that my first impulse was to let the cat out of the bag about it. But then it came back to me how my grandmother had drummed it into me that God made all people equal; colour is only skin deep and that the strong thing was to return forgiveness to those who hurt you. It took me a long time, I can tell you, but finally I did it. I can truly say that, with God's help, I have forgiven them a long time ago.¹⁴¹

They did not deserve her forgiveness.

Life outside the reserve or institution so often brought to Aboriginal people the experiences of humiliation, frustration, antagonism and rejection. Sometimes even the church rejected Christian Aboriginal people. Jimmie Barker was to discover the sad fact that not even his Christian faith made him acceptable to white Christians. It was acceptable for Aboriginal people like him to attend church services on Aboriginal reserves, but he was to find that churches in white communities would not offer him Christian fellowship. He was to learn that the Body of Christ was divided.

Assigned to Robert Lindsay, he had only two afternoons free in a year. He tried to attend a church:

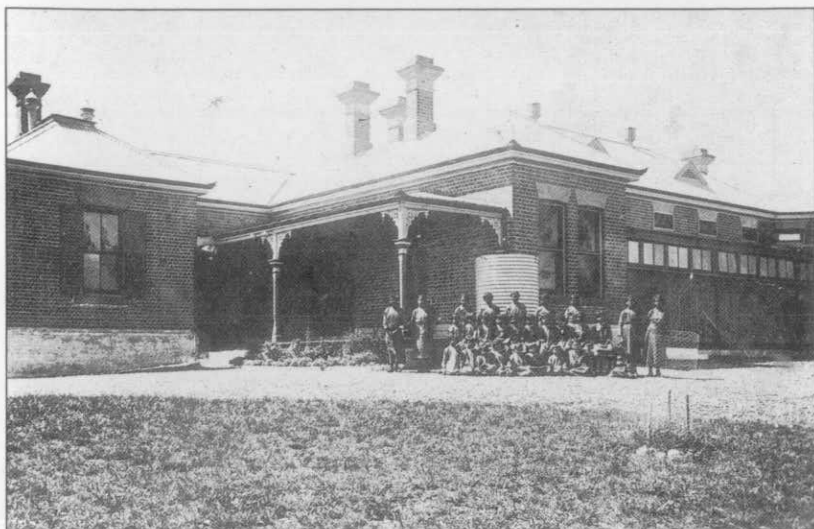
In that first year I can remember having only two Sunday afternoons off. On one of those days I was allowed to ride four miles to a bush church meeting. I sat alone on a long form. People moved away from me and all the congregation stared at me. I suspected it must be because of my dark skin. Several weeks later I went to my second meeting, and I realised then that it was not a place for someone of my colour. There was only one class of people and I was unwelcome.¹⁴²

ENDNOTES

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4. Meston, 1889: 1213
5. Bull, 1884: 72
6. *Vagabond Papers* (4th series, 1877), Melbourne
7. J. Gribble, 1884
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9. *West Australian Record*, 5 October 1893
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13. Missionary Poland in *Kirchliche Mitteilungen*, 30, 1898: 81
14. An Act to Provide for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of Victoria, Act No.349, 1869 (Victoria)
15. An Act to provide for the protection and care of Aborigines. . . , Act No.29, 1909 (NSW)
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17. Aborigines Act, Act No.14 of 1905 (5 Edw. VII, No.14), Proclaimed April 1906 (Western Australia)
18. An Act to Make Provision for the Better Protection and Control of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Northern Territory and for other Purposes: Act No. 1024, 1910 (South Australia)
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33. Flo Grant, *Wiradjuri Bawamarra*, December 1989, p.1
34. e.g. Harris, 1988c: 9-10

35. Ward, 1988
36. Morgan, 1986: 6-7
37. Schenk's Prayer Letters, August 1921, December 1930, cited in W. Smith, 1933: 67, 73
38. Schenk, 1935: 7
39. Margaret Morgan to John Harris, personal letter, 3 April 1990
40. V. Turner, 1937: 5
41. Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 211
42. Gerard, 1944: 11
43. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2, 3, 9 and 12, 31 January 1929
44. V. Turner, 1937: 35
45. Nancy Barnes, quoted in Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 213
46. Faith Thomas, quoted in Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 216
47. Doris Thomson, quoted in Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 217-218
48. Ken Hampton, quoted in Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 219
49. Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 227-228
50. Brock, 1988: 281
51. *Ibid*, p.280. Just who made the initial contacts is unclear. Gerard (1944: 20) says that UAM sent a Mr Sachse to the Flinders Ranges following a report from the Chief Protector, Mr F. Garnett, and that Mrs Forbes spoke to Sachse.
52. *Ibid*, p.281
53. Gerard, 1944: 21-22
54. Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 229
55. Brock, 1988: 284
56. *Ibid*
57. Mountford is incorrect in stating that this belief was 'wrongly' held by the Aborigines (see C.P. Mountford, Expeditions to the Flinders Ranges, June 1937, May 1939, H.L. Sheard Collection, Mortlock Library, SLSA).
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64. Dorothy Tunbridge, personal comment, May 1989
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93. *Ibid*, p.56
94. There are many documented cases of severe maladjustment. One of the best documented is the case of Jane King, sensitively described by Edwards, 1982.
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108. Mathews, 1977: 52
109. Simon, 1987: 17-18, 36-37
110. Patricia Harrison, letter to the author, July 1988
111. *Ibid*



76. The UAM Home at Cootamundra in the 1930s
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77. People of the Nepabunna mission in the early 1930s. The white
 men are Fred Eaton (l) and Jim Page (r)
 Acknowledgement: Faith Thomas and the Australian Institute
 of Aboriginal Studies. Reproduced with permission.



78. Ella Simon (bottom right) with the Aboriginal Christians of Taree, 1930s. Back row: (l to r) Frank Roberts Sr, Sam Leon, Elisa Leon, Joe Simon. Front row: Ada Leon, Mrs Roberts, Ella Simon

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79. Margaret Tucker, in later life, sharing Aboriginal culture with Aboriginal children in Ballarat

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127. Lallie Lennon, cited in Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 120
128. Lewis O'Brien, cited in Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 170-171
129. Royal Commission on the 'Aborigines', SAPP, 2, No.26, 1913, and SAPP, 2, No.21, 1916, p.122, para. 2544
130. Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 171
131. Mattingley and Hampton, 1988
132. Tucker, 1977: 112,114
133. Hilda Bennett, cited in Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 120
134. Mathews, 1977: 93
135. *Ibid*, p.136
136. *Ibid*, p.121
137. Bertha Chambers, personal comment, June 1988
138. *Ibid*
139. Simon, 1987: 21
140. *Ibid*, p.22
141. *Ibid*, p.23
142. Mathews, 1977: 94

10

The breaking of the bonds

The struggle for Aboriginal personhood in settled Australia

'AFTER THE DREAMING' is the title which W.E.H. Stanner gave to his Boyer Lectures on ABC radio in 1968. After a lifetime of work as an anthropologist, Stanner came to some vital conclusions:

Aborigines have always been looking for. . . a decent union of their lives with our own, but on terms that let them preserve their own identity; not their inclusion willy-nilly into our scheme of things and a false identity, but development within a new way of life that has the imprint of their own ideas.¹

There is a deep and abiding truth in this statement. What it is to be an Aboriginal person has changed over the last two hundred years, but not completely. Aboriginal culture has altered most drastically in those places where white settlement has been most intense, but even in the most urban of Aboriginal communities, there is still a sense of continuity with the remote traditional past, still a sense of shared history, still – even when distorted by squalor and despair – the preservation of an identity which is essentially Aboriginal and owes nothing at all to Western culture and society.

That there could possibly be such a thing as a new but distinctively Aboriginal identity first became evident late in the nineteenth century, but very few white Australians could see it.

The tide of Aboriginal death began to turn early in the twen-

tieth century. There were yet to be a few more massacres in the north and centre, and a few more epidemics in the south. It was, nevertheless, becoming obvious in the more closely settled States, where the destruction of Aboriginal society had been taking place for much longer, that Aboriginal people were *surviving*. Here and there, especially on the missions and ex-missions, the birthrate was rising. In such places people were less in need of protection and more in need of freedom, support and encouragement.

In some places of protection and survival, a generation had passed away and the next generation was already adult. They were not the same kind of people who had entered the missions, but they were not Europeans, not white Australians. It is true that they had suffered immense loss: loss of land because it had simply been taken; loss of freedom because that, too, was taken and they had had no other choice; loss of culture because its transmission had been thwarted under a drastically new regime, because oppression had sapped its vitality and because its guardians were now dead; loss of language because of the forced mixing of the tribes, because of the imposition of English and because the cultures which the languages encoded were damaged for ever.

The loss, though devastating, was not total. Furthermore, the vacuum of cultural loss was not filled simply with Western traditions and values. Cultures have the ability to absorb immense damage and to emerge, changed but still distinct. On the other hand, the impairment of a cultural identity means always an acute trauma which can lead to the disintegration of the community, placing it in a state of alienation and easy subjugation, incapable of acting for its own good.²

Despite this, the longer-lasting of the nineteenth century missions and the government stations which succeeded them provided places where a sense of cultural identity was not completely lost. Indeed, the more powerful expressions of Aboriginal cultural identity at the close of the nineteenth century were linked to places such as Lake Tyers, Cumeroogunga or Point Pearce which had existed long enough to develop their own traditions. What had replaced the old traditions and values were new but distinct unifying factors such as a common origin, a shared history, a collective experience of oppression and a corporate sense of distinctiveness – all key components of the new Aboriginality.

The ethnic character of the new Aboriginal community

The new Aboriginal communities, particularly in south-eastern Australia, were now essentially mixed-race communities,³ a factor which has been used so much against these people that it is essential to consider it in its proper perspective. The major initial injection of white blood was through casual liaison or prostitution, if the often-forced complicity of Aboriginal women and girls can be dignified by such labels. In the south-eastern region, this had taken place by the middle of the nineteenth century. On the missions, sexual exploitation by whites was very largely prevented, but many of the children were already of mixed ancestry. Given the small size of the communities involved, after several generations of intermarriage there were very few people who did not have some European ancestry.

Added to this, Aboriginal people of much of NSW and Victoria, generally lighter-skinned than their northern neighbours, have often been thought to be less Aboriginal than they actually were, a fact which did not help in the years when magistrates regularly determined a person's racial status 'by inspection'. Nevertheless, by the turn of the century most did have some degree of European ancestry. This did not generally arise through further marriage or liaison with whites, but mostly through marriage within an already mixed-race community.

From the 1880s until today there have always been attempts to treat differently the mixed-race and pure-blood Aboriginal people. These attempts have always failed to recognise that a person's Aboriginality has never simply been a matter of genetics. Culture and identification with a group are learned, not inherited.⁴ Very few part-Aboriginal people in 1900 had any knowledge at all of their white progenitor. They had been raised in an Aboriginal community by Aboriginal people. They had no reason whatsoever to feel any loyalty or family bond to the European side of their ancestry. They were Aboriginal people by upbringing, by affection and by identification, and they knew they were Aboriginal.

It is a cruel irony that just as the Aboriginal birthrate was beginning to exceed the death rate, and that just as a new but distinctly Aboriginal identity was emerging, repressive systems of forced 'protection' were being introduced. Even allowing for the immensity of past injury, the deep feelings of injustice which many Aboriginal people feel today may not have arisen had the new

identity, with its very real continuity with the old, been recognised and encouraged, and had Aboriginal people been given the means to fulfil their growing aspirations for themselves as independent and distinct communities.

This was not to be. The accepted dogma that Aboriginal people were inherently inferior and that they were a dying race could not be rapidly unlearned. Instead of providing Aboriginal people with the opportunities to consolidate and express a new but distinctive identity, white Australia forced them into a half-century of 'protection' and segregation on reserves. By 1911, every mainland State had enacted special legislation, not to give liberty but to restrict it, not to uplift but to oppress, not to release but to confine, not to accept but to deny.

The road to freedom and equality was to be long and hard and was to bring many to a state of despair before there was light at the end of the tunnel.

Aboriginal struggle for equality

The path to equality was not only to be long and hard; it was a path which Aboriginal people essentially had to journey themselves. Aboriginal people were not without their supporters, but the path to recognition and dignity was not, and still is not, a path down which anyone can walk on their behalf. Sixty years ago, W.K. Hancock pointed out that 'the Aboriginal race always possessed enthusiastic friends',⁵ but their friends have often not known what to do, or merely thought that they knew, with the inevitable result that their enthusiasms were sometimes misplaced.

There were, on the other hand, many times when the policies or benefits or rights or freedoms for which they argued were just and necessary, but fell upon deaf ears. On a few rare occasions their efforts met with limited success, but progress was disappointingly slow and the successes were far outnumbered by the defeats.

As early as 1859, Aboriginal people in Victoria had organised their own delegation to make direct representation to the government for rights to land.⁶ Between 1875 and 1883, Aborigines at the Coranderrk Reserve north of Melbourne waged a concerted campaign against the dismissal of the fair-minded manager John Green, the threatened re-allocation of Corranderrk to pastoral interests and the likely consequent removal of the Aboriginal people

to a distant new site. Their political astuteness and literary accomplishments amazed most Europeans. It was thought that their letters and petitions had been written by the Rev. Hamilton or other white sympathisers who supported Aboriginal rights and were antagonistic to the Board for the Protection of Aborigines. Detective Mahoney, planted as an undercover agent at Corranderrk, discovered that the writings were genuine, most of them the work of an Aboriginal man, Thomas Dunolly.⁷ The Melbourne *Leader* reported an 1882 Aboriginal deputation in detail:

Can these be black fellows? – there must surely be a mistake. Where are the dirty opossum rugs, the waddies and the spears? Where is the restless, furtive, hunted look about the eyes which we have been wont to regard as one of the most characteristic of Aboriginal features and as a sure index of the Aboriginal nature? Neither in facial expression nor in outward garb is there aught here to indicate the presence of the black fellows as we have hitherto known him. From each face there comes a calm, steadfast, civilised look; each of these manly figures is costumed in civilised and decent fashion; the attitude of each individual is not slouching but erect, as that of a self respecting man, conscious of his manhood. And how is it that these black fellows (for we must call them such notwithstanding their civilised appearance) are. . . interviewing a Minister of the Crown, within the precincts of Parliament, and presenting to the Minister a memorial?

Strange to say, too, the memorial has been actually concocted amongst themselves, has been actually written by one of their number and is actually signed by every adult male of the community, whose sentiments are embodied in the document. Another strange thing is that when these black fellows open their mouths it is not to give utterance to the yabber yabber which we associated with the black fellows' tongue, but to express themselves intelligibly in decent English speech. They are able to make us understand that they feel deeply the injustice with which they have been treated for many years. . .⁸

What was beginning to happen was that the education which young Aborigines were receiving was working. Not only had many become literate; they began to understand the system and the ways in which, powerless as they were, they might influence it.

Some of the missionaries were uneasy when this began to happen, seeing it as a means of circumventing their own authority. Like many of the great gifts bestowed by the missionaries, they did not recognise that they had given it. John Bulmer's comment about the Lake Tyers Aborigines is one example:

Many of them have a high estimate of their own importance. One woman who thought she was injured by not being allowed a railway pass writes to the Governor on the subject, and another interviews a member of Parliament and thus these half-educated fellows air their supposed grievances.⁹

Some Aborigines achieved a few minor victories here and there, but major victories were rare and, even then, were often short-lived. Victories were fewer in the 1890s. As the colonies were preoccupied with the movement towards federation, Aborigines were forgotten. The new Commonwealth initiated some important enquiries, mainly in the more remote regions, but World War I soon eclipsed local issues. In many ways this war was an important event in Aboriginal affairs, for they, too, took part in it.

A few Aboriginal people fought in the Boer War, but many more fought in World War I. Initially they were not supposed to, although the rigidity of regulations prohibiting Aboriginal enlistment varied. In January 1915, Captain J.L. Hardie of the Fourth Military District began enlisting people from the Point McLeay and Point Pearce missions in South Australia. His decision was reversed a few weeks later because 'white men object to sharing tents with blacks'.¹⁰

As the war escalated and conscription of European Australians proved difficult, military officialdom became less choosy. Aboriginal volunteers enlisted in the army from every State, including twenty descendants of the 'extinct' Aboriginal people of Tasmania. Those rejected from Point McLeay and Point Pearce were eventually accepted. Albon Varcoe and the Rigney brothers, Cyril and Gordon, were among those who did not return.¹¹ All around Australia, especially at the old missions, honour rolls still grace the walls of the churches. There are Aboriginal names inscribed on many war memorials.

I stood at the memorial at Lakes Entrance, Victoria, recently, honouring those men and women of courage and self-denial and

pondering the futility of war. My eye was drawn to Thorpe, H., with an asterisk beside it, which the monument told me meant 'Faithful unto Death'. How many passers-by, I wondered, knew or cared that Private Harry Thorpe MM was an Aboriginal man; that although forbidden to vote in parliamentary elections of his own country, he died in its service; that his Military Medal was awarded for 'conspicuous courage and leadership'.¹²

Compared to the size of the Aboriginal community at such places as St Clair (population eighty-one), the percentage of Aboriginal people who volunteered was disproportionately high.¹³ In Queensland, a particularly large number of men enlisted from Cherbourg (then called Barambah). Far to the north, Yarrabah men also answered the call. It was noted earlier that Ernest Gribble found it a matter of some pride that one of them, Jack Baker, 'lies buried near Jerusalem'.¹⁴ Lieutenant Colonel Michael Bruxner, an ex-serviceman and Country Party member of parliament, told the NSW parliament that 'from an examination of statistics, the percentage of enlistment from. . . Aborigines was higher than that of the white people themselves'.¹⁵

The war affected Aboriginal affairs in Australia in a number of ways. Those who enlisted tended to come from the missions and larger government settlements, but back home the situation at these places was difficult. Government funds were slashed. Missionaries of German nationality from the Catholic, Lutheran and Moravian missions were 'interned', either in Western Australia at the old Aboriginal prison on Rottnest Island or in New South Wales at the Liverpool Internment Camp.

Not everything was bad. In some areas, particularly the pastoral regions, white labour became impossible to obtain and so Aboriginal workers were in high demand. Aboriginal workers in parts of Western Australia, who had previously not been paid at all, in 1916 were earning as much as £2 a week plus rations, a good wage in those days.¹⁶ In the same State, in 1914, there were 3 319 Aborigines registered as 'indigents' or unemployed and eligible for government food rations. In 1918, there were only 820.¹⁷

After the war was over, it was not easy for employers to revert to the pre-war conditions and, to give them their due, there were some pastoralists who were glad not to. Aborigines in many places had experienced fairer treatment and were not about to ac-

cept readily a return to the old system. They found, however, that they had only been conceded a minor victory and that their war for equality was far from over.

In Western Australia in 1915, a wage-earning Aboriginal station hand, injured while mustering cattle, made history by becoming the first Aboriginal to apply for workers' compensation. In fairness to the Chief Protector, A.O. Neville, who has been deservedly criticised for his stern and racist measures designed to 'breed out' the Aboriginal race, it should be acknowledged that he strove to arrange the employment of Aboriginal people on equal conditions to whites. He supported the compensation claim, but the ruling, finally made by Alexander McCallum, Minister for Labour, revealed that real justice was still a long way off:

While it is correct that there is no doubt that the natives come under the Workers' Compensation Act, I am equally sure that parliament never intended that the schedule set out for compensation in that Act should apply to Aborigines. To seriously contend that the full provisions of the Act should apply equally with our own people appears to me too stupid to occupy a moment's consideration.¹⁸

Aboriginal people who returned from the war, and the relatives of soldiers killed or wounded, felt injustice particularly keenly. Just as voluntary enlistment had been high for many Aboriginal communities, so had death and injury. Overseas, the returned servicemen had experienced equality and even mateship. Colour didn't seem to matter in the trenches. Coming home to accept once more the bitter pill of inferior treatment was hard to take. Unlike their white counterparts, they were not considered suitable for soldier settler land grants. Many found it a very telling symbol that they could not get a beer on Anzac Day.

The expulsion of their children from school for having Aboriginal blood was particularly hard to accept. John Kickett complained to the WA Minister for Education even before the war was over. 'I am farming,' he wrote. 'I have 200 acres of land and trying to make a living out of it. . . I was taught at a State school and don't want to see my children degraded.'¹⁹ Two years later the local schoolteacher at Qualrading finally admitted the Kickett children, only to be overruled by the Director of Education.

John Kickett wrote to his local member of parliament:

I want a little fair play if you will be so kind enough to see on my beharfe [sic]. . . I have five of my people in France fighting. Since you were here for your election one has been killed which leaves four. . . As my people are fighting for our King and Country, Sir, I think they should have the liberty of going to any State school.²⁰

Aboriginal returned servicemen in NSW petitioned in 1919 for 'civic rights'. In every State of Australia, Aboriginal people began asserting what they believed were their rights. Thus began what has been called 'the cold war in the towns between black and white'.²¹ Aboriginal people, of whom it had so long been demanded that they adopt white values and attitudes, found that they were denied white privileges. Slowly the pressure on governments increased as Aboriginal people simply asked for access to the same facilities and benefits as other Australians. The Depression did not help. Many white Australians suffered badly, but in many places Aborigines were even worse off. They were still treated differentially, given less and denied more.

It may well have been the Depression which spurred Aboriginal people into united action and prompted the emergence of a strong Aboriginal leadership. It may well have been that just as it was beginning to seem that Aboriginal people might win some of their struggles for justice, the world economic downturn impoverished both governments and voluntary organisations. In the case of the Commonwealth and State governments, the low priority given to Aboriginal matters ensured that scarce funds would be allocated elsewhere.

Whatever the reason or combination of reasons, the 1930s saw the emergence of politically active Aboriginal people. Even more importantly, Aboriginal people began to unite in Aboriginal organisations which had much more power than isolated individuals. It is very significant indeed that these organisations included people of different backgrounds from widely separated communities.

The sense of a shared Aboriginality and a common destiny was the strength of these organisations. They mark the real beginning of the pan-Aboriginal consciousness which has distin-

guished much Aboriginal political activity since.

The key people in these organisations were very frequently people of strong Christian faith or, if not, at least mission-educated. This was a generation or more later than the era when John Bulmer and other missionaries were displeased that literate Aboriginal people were using their new skills to write to politicians. In the 1930s, there were still many, missionaries and otherwise, who disapproved of Aboriginal people becoming politically active. But there were many who did not and, as we shall see, missionaries and church dignitaries from a wide range of denominational backgrounds were among the 'enthusiastic friends' of the Aborigines in their now more organised struggle. There were some Aborigines who had learned their lessons well and some missionaries understood this.

The most influential movements were in Victoria and NSW. This is not to deny the dedicated efforts of Aboriginal people in all States. It is a very important theme which still awaits definitive research, all the more urgent now that so few people with personal knowledge are still living. I cannot begin to do justice to it here. The vacuum has been partly filled by Jack Horner's book on William Ferguson – important because it was written fifteen years ago while some of the main characters were still alive – and by Andrew Markus's recent little volume gathering together the papers of William Cooper. It would be both unjust and unbalanced not to acknowledge, even if briefly, the contribution of these two outstanding Christian men, William Cooper and William Ferguson, to whom Doug Nicholls always referred to affectionately as 'the two Wills', and those associated with them.

William Cooper was born near Echuca in 1861. One of Daniel and Janet Matthews' first pupils at the old Maloga school, he immediately impressed them with his intelligence and aptitude. He arrived at Maloga with his mother, Kitty, and his brothers and sisters on 4 August 1874. Only two days later on 6 August, Daniel Matthews wrote in his diary: 'The boy, Billy Cooper, shows great aptitude for learning. He has acquired a knowledge of the alphabet, capital and small letters in three days and then taught Bobby – capitals only – in one day.'²²

Cooper became a committed Christian. He spent some of his early adult life employed as a coachman for the prominent Melbourne businessman and politician, Sir John O'Shanassy, from

whom he began to learn how the political system worked.²³ He returned to Maloga in 1884 and became actively involved in agitation for land grants for Aborigines. In 1887, he was one of the group of Aborigines from southern NSW who petitioned the Governor for land for every Aboriginal man 'capable of and wishing to farm for himself'.²⁴ In his earliest surviving letter, Cooper made this appeal to his local member of parliament: 'As there have been no grants of land made to our tribe. . . I do trust that you will be successful in securing this small portion of a vast territory which is ours by Divine Right.'²⁵

His appeal was rejected. In 1896, blocks within what had by then become the Cumeroogunga Reserve were allotted to some people, but these were repossessed in 1907.²⁶ Cooper then worked as a shearer and agricultural labourer for the rest of his working life.

Cooper's sister, Ada Cooper, married Thomas James, the Mauritian Indian schoolteacher at Maloga. Thomas James, on his retirement to Melbourne in the 1920s, became politically active. He was widely thought to be a 'full-blooded Australian black'²⁷ and those who knew he was not kept his secret. He had, after all, thrown in his lot with the people of Maloga and they held him in high esteem. Indeed, Grandpa Thomas, as he was affectionately named, had become the spiritual leader of the Cumeroogunga people after the departure of Daniel Matthews. In 1929, Thomas James planned to lead Melbourne's mission-educated Aborigines on a deputation to the Prime Minister to request land, education, employment and the transfer of responsibility for Aboriginal matters from the States to the Commonwealth,²⁸ but the plan did not eventuate for some years.

Thomas James' son, Shadrach Livingston James, Cooper's nephew, became a well-known speaker and writer on Aboriginal issues. Shadrach wrote for the *Australian Intercollegian*,²⁹ spoke with politicians, gave newspaper interviews and, in 1929, addressed the Australian National Missionary Council:

. . . I can only express myself in crude and unpolished phrases. . . This massacre of my people has been going on for years and years. What have the whites done to help us in the past eighty years? There has never been a vigorous or decisive effort made to help us. Whatever efforts have been made to

help us have been by the missionaries. They are the only people who have attempted to lift us to citizenship. What do you propose to do with us in the future? Do you propose to keep us in a servile state until we disappear as a people? If you believe in the God you have taught us, as I know you do, you will help us.³⁰

William Cooper retired to Cumeroogunga about this time and, having experienced considerable freedom as a shearer, he found the petty interference in people's lives oppressive. He also found that as he had some European blood, he was ineligible for a pension if he remained at the government station.³¹ Objecting to these conditions he either left Cumeroogunga or was expelled, it is not clear which.³² Feeling the injustice of it all, Cooper moved to Melbourne, renting a house in Footscray where an impoverished Aboriginal community of about a hundred people included a high proportion from Cumeroogunga.³³

In Melbourne, Cooper became more aware of the actions being taken by groups of Aboriginal people throughout Australia. In November 1926, for example, part-Aboriginal people in the south-west of Western Australia had formed a union 'in order to obtain the protection of the same laws that govern white men' because they were 'tired of being robbed and shot down, or run into miserable compounds'.³⁴ In the words of one Aboriginal activist, Norman Harris, the objective was to 'get a vote. . . also one law for us all that is the same law that governs the whites, also justice and fair play'.³⁵

In March 1928, a deputation led by William Harris of Morawa representing the 'Aboriginal Union' spoke with Premier Collier in Perth. Harris said that Aborigines of the southern part of the State did not want to be owned body and soul by the Department; that they objected to being herded into the Moore River Reserve, which was a *de facto* prison; that they found it unjust that they were punished by white law, but not protected or given rights and freedoms under the same law.³⁶ Although Harris distinguished carefully between his group and tribal Aborigines, such efforts as his were the beginnings of group actions which would one day embrace all Aboriginal people.

Influenced by these actions and assisted by Thomas and Shadrach James, Cooper gradually emerged as the leader and

spokesman of Victorian Aborigines and indeed assumed the task of representing all Aboriginal people. He was one of the first to realise that despite the wide variety of contexts in which Aboriginal people lived – urban, rural or tribal – all suffered injustice and all should be included in government reforms. In the old Footscray house, with neither gas nor electricity, Cooper and his colleagues planned their campaign by an open fire with flickering candles on the mantelpiece.

Cooper was greatly helped by two 'enthusiastic' white friends. One was Helen Baillie, a fairly wealthy woman with radical trade union sympathies.³⁷ The other was Arthur Burdeu, a senior clerk in the Victorian railways and Victorian president of one of the railway employees' unions, who had become involved with Aboriginal people through his friendship with W.B. Payne, the Church of Christ lay preacher at Echuca and long-time ally of the Cumeroogunga people.³⁸

The main item of Cooper's strategy was to organise a petition to King George V, calling on him to intervene to prevent the extinction of the Aboriginal race and to grant Aborigines representation in federal parliament.³⁹ A well-drafted petition was widely circulated in most parts of Australia, despite considerable government opposition. It had 2 000 Aboriginal signatures by early 1935.⁴⁰

Cooper planned to have Australia-wide representation in a large Aboriginal delegation to federal parliament in 1935 but, due to lack of finance and obstructive tactics by State governments, he had to be satisfied with a small group from Victoria and NSW. They met Thomas Paterson, Minister for the Interior. It was a very dignified, elderly, white-haired Cooper who was the patriarch of the delegation, while Shadrach James, with his obvious gifts of oratory, did most of the speaking.⁴¹ Their strongest argument was that they were British subjects, but denied equality with white Australians. James said to the Minister:

This deputation has the honour to represent the Aboriginal population of Australia. We, on behalf of the descendants of the Aborigines, naturally are greatly concerned in everything affecting our people. We consider that it is one of the most pressing problems of the day, yet it does not seem to seriously trouble the mind of the government. Therefore, on behalf of the Aboriginal population of Australia, we appeal for a constructive

policy with better conditions than those existing and under which our people have to live. We respectfully remind the government that a strict injunction to the effect 'that the Aborigines and their descendants should be properly cared for' was included in the Commission issued to those who came overseas to Australia, and we trust the present government will take every lawful means to extend the protection to the native population, who are His Majesty's subjects. . . The Aborigines. . . are to be considered as much under safeguard of the laws as the white people under the British Flag.

Believing the British Empire to stand for justice, order, freedom and good government, we pledge ourselves as citizens of the British Commonwealth of Australia to maintain the heritage handed down to us by the Creator which we believe to be true, and we, therefore, with confidence desire moderation and forbearance to be exercised by all classes in their intercourse with native inhabitants, and that they will omit no opportunity of assisting to fulfil His Majesty's most gracious and benevolent intention to them by promoting advancement in civilisation under the blessing of Divine Providence.⁴²

They asked for Aboriginal representation in State and federal parliaments, a federal Department of Native Affairs, and State councils consisting of 'a social anthropologist, medical and educational advisors, a representative of the Aboriginal race, and at least one woman'.⁴³ These matters were discussed at the next Premier's Conference but, in the end, nothing came of it.⁴⁴

Although Cooper was using the title of the Australian Aborigines' League as early as 1932, he also spoke of the Real Australian Native Society and other organisations. It was in 1936 that Cooper formally founded the Australian Aborigines' League, which adopted a formal structure with a constitution, policy statement and office bearers. Full membership was restricted to persons 'possessing some degree of Aboriginal blood', but non-Aborigines could become associate members.⁴⁵ The Department of the Interior had the League investigated in 1938, but found nothing illegal or irregular. At that time, according to the report by Inspector R. Brown of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch, Cooper was secretary; his son, Lynch, was assistant secretary; Douglas Nicholls was treasurer and vice-president; Mrs N. Clark and Margaret Tucker were also vice-presidents. The only non-

Aboriginal council member was Alfred Burdeu, who was president. Helen Baillie was a life member.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, Cooper's counterpart in NSW, William Ferguson, was making similar moves. Ferguson's parents were William Ferguson Snr, a Scottish shearer and boundary rider, and Emily Ford, a part-Aboriginal woman from Toganmain Station. They were married by John Gribble at Jerilderie in 1879, just before he founded the Warangesda mission.⁴⁷ Not only did William Ferguson Snr legally marry his Aboriginal wife, itself an unusual act; he also cared very responsibly for his family. Although young William was born in 1882 at Darlington Point (Waddai) near Warangesda, he did not grow up on the mission. He attended school there, however, in 1895 and 1896, where he was taught well by 'Mr Shropshire. . . the only good teacher I ever had'.⁴⁸

Leaving school at fourteen, young William joined his father as a shearer. Perhaps his father's fame as a fist-fighter had something to do with the fact that 'Young Bill' experienced very little discrimination in the shearing sheds. The war helped as Aboriginal labour was in high demand and the Riverina shearing sheds were relatively tolerant places by comparison with, for example, the Queensland canefields where workers downed tools at the sight of a black face.⁴⁹

From his earliest working days, young William Ferguson belonged to the Australian Workers' Union and was always both a loyal and active member. He joined the Labor Party in 1915, largely due to the friendship and influence of Patrick McGarry, the good-humoured and popular Labor member for Murrumbidgee in the NSW Legislative Assembly. McGarry was still working as a fencer when he won his seat and always championed the poor, the unemployed and the Aborigines.⁵⁰

Ferguson married Margaret Gowans, a woman of similar background to himself - Scottish father and part-Aboriginal mother. They settled in Dubbo in 1924. Dubbo had a name for being one of those towns, like Coonabarabran, where discrimination against Aborigines was less evident and the Fergusons became accepted members of the community. True son of a true Scotsman, Ferguson was a staunch Presbyterian. He was also a sincere and active Christian. He was an elder of the Dubbo Presbyterian church and 'highly respected', according to the Rev. E.H. Vines.⁵¹ A later minister, the Rev. Gordon Graham, described Fer-

guson as 'one of those intelligent but uneducated people with a real thirst for knowledge'.⁵²

For many years, Ferguson worked hard for improved conditions for workers, both white and black, involving himself with various unions, the Labor Party and the Trades and Labor Council. The idea of working for justice for his Aboriginal people came slowly to Ferguson. He began to see, travelling around western NSW, how badly treated many of them were. He was angered in 1923 when all the talk was of the manner in which children of lighter caste were being singled out for removal from their families by the Aborigines' Protection Board, aware no doubt that he was one himself. He stated as early as 1923 that one day he would force an enquiry into the Board's activities.⁵³

Ferguson was a patient and methodical man. Based mostly in Dubbo, but occasionally living elsewhere, he spent years amassing a vast amount of information: poor schooling at Menindee; tuberculosis at Bulgandramine, where the manager regularly stopped rations for a fortnight as a punishment; shockingly low wages for Aboriginal timber-fellers at Pilliga; and so on. He kept up regular correspondence with like-minded people interstate, including Douglas Nicholls and William Cooper. He enlisted informants in every reserve, station, and township. For example, Archie Reed, the AIM 'native helper', was his informant at Bulgandramine, and Jimmie Barker wrote to him regularly from Brewarrina.⁵⁴

By 1937, Ferguson felt he had enough information and support to act. On 27 June, he called a public meeting in Dubbo to launch the Aborigines' Progressive Association. Charles Frost chaired the meeting. Ferguson spoke to the packed Masonic Hall, an audience made up mostly of Aboriginal people. He graphically described specific cases of gross injustice and called for the abolition of the Aborigines Protection Board. Charles Frost then read the following motion:

. . .that the meeting form an Aborigines' Progressive Association, with the object of advocating the abolition of the Aborigines Protection Board, and full citizen rights for Aborigines, with direct representation in parliament. . .⁵⁵

The motion was carried unanimously, with Ferguson elected

organising secretary.

For the remainder of the year, Ferguson travelled widely, inaugurating branches of the APA at Nanima, Gulargambone, Pilliga and place after place where Aboriginal people lived in any numbers. In Sydney, he was joined by leading Aborigines who were to play crucial roles in Aboriginal affairs for many years. One was the brilliant orator, John Patten, who had been taught by Thomas James at Cumerogunga School. In Sydney, he had been tutored in public speaking by Michael Sawtell, the colourful ex-Kimberley stockman who was now well-known for his health food shop, his theosophical ideas and his Sydney Domain speeches on his scheme for an inland sea. Patten himself was becoming somewhat of an institution as one of Sydney's most popular Domain speakers.⁵⁶

Another recruit was Pearl Gibbs, born in poverty in Sydney, but sent with her parents to a happy and tolerant sheep station near Byrock. Her experience there enabled her to obtain domestic positions in wealthy Sydney homes at Potts Point and Kings Cross in the 1920s but, along with other parlour maids and cooks, she lost her job in the Depression. She then turned her attention to assisting other unemployed Aborigines in Kings Cross, La Perouse and Nowra. During this time she gained a healthy distrust of Protection Board officials. Pearl Gibbs eagerly joined Ferguson's cause and he immediately conceived a brilliant role for her. At his suggestion, she applied for the position of cook at Brewarrina Aboriginal Station late in 1937. Thus, as Ferguson's plant, she reported first-hand on conditions at this the most hated of the reserves.⁵⁷

Ferguson addressed many key organisations including the NSW Labor Council and the Association for the Protection of Native Races. The Association's influential president, the Rev. William Morley, had been corresponding with him. Among Ferguson's other enthusiastic friends were several missionaries and mission board members, including Ernest Gribble, then living on Palm Island; Mary Bennett, of the UAM's Mount Margaret Mission in Western Australia; and Canon John Needham, chairman of the Australian Board of Missions.⁵⁸ Ferguson also began to learn how to use the press.

Ferguson's opportunity to embarrass the Aborigines Protection Board and force a parliamentary enquiry came when the

Board dismissed Roy Brain as manager of Brewarrina Station. Aborigines disliked Brain, but Ferguson and his friends saw an opportunity to use his dismissal for their own ends. They approached a political friend, Mark Davidson, Member for Cobar, who raised Brain's dismissal in parliament. Davidson cleverly manoeuvred the Chief Secretary into divulging the Board's management policy and this sparked an investigation.⁵⁹

The Select Committee of Inquiry on the Administration of the Aborigines sat from 17 November 1937 to 17 February 1938, but even then Ferguson had to criticise the Committee's bias in a newspaper article before the Committee began to seek Aboriginal evidence.⁶⁰ The picture of Aboriginal reserves which began to emerge was one of shocking living conditions. Some of the reserve staff interviewed were clearly humane, devoted and hard-working people. Such was Sister Ivy Pratt, worried about the prevalence of trachoma and her inability to prevent its spread in such unsanitary conditions. There was J.G. Danvers, an obviously decent man who, as a reserve manager, found his aim of uplifting the Aboriginal people frustrated by the Board itself. Yet it became clear that many managers and their staff were, at best, under-qualified or overworked or both, while some were quite incompetent, harsh and indifferent.⁶¹

The head office of the Board was obviously out of touch with what was happening on the reserves. Some managers had never seen the regulations under which they were supposed to operate. Housing conditions were such that one manager reported that there were three families to a hut. Managers and their wives gave evidence of the breakdown of hygiene measures which were primitive to start with ('It is difficult to get them to wash in the river in winter'); infrequent visits by health officers; rampant disease, including tuberculosis, venereal diseases, trachoma and whooping cough; malnutrition and high infant mortality; opposition by nearby towns to admitting Aborigines to hospitals; tension between managers and inmates; outbreaks of violence; and addiction to methylated spirits.⁶²

Yet despite the grim evidence which can still be read today, the inquiry folded in February 1938. Ferguson was furious: he had not yet produced his star witness, Pearl Gibbs, who was to tell the truth about Brewarrina. Jimmie Barker had not been interviewed, nor Jack Kinchela, Jack Patten and Archie Reed, nor had

Mrs Joan Kingsley-Strack, the well-to-do suburban housewife prepared to reveal the conditions under which Aboriginal girls worked as domestic servants. Many more, both Aboriginal and white, had been listed to appear. Why did the inquiry fold? The accepted explanation is indifference. Bored politicians and APB officials, it is said, just stopped turning up until there was no longer a quorum. The real reason was more sinister.

The Rev. J.W. Ferrier, who attended the inquiry on behalf of the Church Missionary Society, was in the Northern Territory shortly afterwards where he spoke with my father about it. My father recalled his assessment:

I was a Dubbo boy and I knew Ferguson a bit, so I was very interested in Ferrier's observations. He said that it was all contrived, that they were getting near the truth and the truth didn't look good for the government, so they decided to boycott the whole thing.⁶³

The growing discomfort of the NSW government at the damaging revelations was further increased when Aboriginal protests on 26 January 1938, the sesquicentenary of white settlement, received widespread publicity. This very significant protest will be discussed below.

This is not to say that no good came of the inquiry. The press was sympathetic and the Board was squirming under the adverse publicity given to its activities. Indeed, the inquiry awakened press interest to the extent that Sydney reporters and their chiefs-of-staff were prepared to give Aborigines a first-rate coverage for several years until they were crowded out by war news by 1942.

The young Sydney newspaper reporters, indignant at the closure of the inquiry, engineered a clever piece of adverse publicity for an increasingly embarrassed NSW government. When Mark Davidson told the press that his fellow politicians had advised him that they would not attend the scheduled session on 17 February, the reporters asked Davidson to fill the public gallery and promised that the press would turn up in full force.

Davidson and Ferguson had no difficulty filling the benches. At midday on the seventeenth, Pettitt, Ferguson, Brain, Davidson and Mrs Caroline Kelly (for the Association for the Protection of

Natives Races) were ready to give evidence as listed for the day. Davidson was there as chairman, but the rest of the committee seats were empty. The public benches were packed, not only with Aboriginal members of the Aborigines' Progressive Association, but with a truly remarkable cross section of the Aborigines' enthusiastic friends. Canon John Needham of the Australian Board of Missions was there, representing the National Missionary Council of Australia. The Rev. A.E. James and the Rev. R.C. Barlow represented the Methodist church, while the Rev. J. W. Ferrier and the Rev. (later Bishop) F.O. Hulme-Moir represented the Church Missionary Society. Women's organisations had been discovering that the oppression of women was linked to the oppression of all kinds of people and had become publicly supportive of the Aboriginal cause, so Mrs P.A. Cameron and Miss Grace Scobie of the Feminist Club, Miss Lilla Dow of the Younger Feminists, Mrs G. Blanks of the United Women's Association, Mrs T. Kelly of the United Association of Women and representatives of the Housewives' Association were there.⁶⁴

The meeting lasted fifteen minutes. Reporters wrote furiously and cameras clicked. Mrs Cameron, as President of the Feminist Club, read a letter of protest. Mark Davidson commented on the evidence so far received, recommending that a further wider inquiry be demanded. Everyone retired to the Feminist Club in King Street where Mrs Cameron chaired a combined meeting at which Brain, Ferguson and Mrs Kelly spoke. Ferguson was forthright: 'We must educate the minds of the white people, otherwise the thrusting back of my people, which began 150 years ago, will continue - until they are swept off the face of the earth.'⁶⁵

Mrs Cameron's comment to the press concerned the absent politicians:

The word has been spread around women's organisations that if we turned up today we would be given a prime example of how our parliamentarians go about their work. There is no doubt about that prophecy. They don't even attend the meetings. We were absolutely disgusted.⁶⁶

In Victoria, the ageing William Cooper continued to put pressure on the State and federal parliaments. After 1936, he found it increasingly hard to maintain optimism.⁶⁷ In the Annual Report

of the Australian Aborigines' League for that year, Cooper wrote:

Dear Fellow Members of the Dark Race,

It is with mixed feelings that I report for the year. At times I get very discouraged at the slow progress of our cause and at other times the evidence of improvement heartens me. The fact is that there is continued improvement all the time of late years, but the rate of progress is too slow. . . We have suffered enough, God knows, but surely the day of our deliverance is drawing nigh. I hope to live to see it. . .⁶⁸

By 1937, Cooper's despair was becoming more apparent in his writing. He had hoped in vain for something from the Premiers' Conference. In 1937, administrators of Aboriginal affairs from all States and territories met in Canberra. This was a very important conference, but its resolutions, although later to prove highly significant, seemed to Cooper at the time simply to be 'confirmation of our humiliation'.⁶⁹ Writing of his hopes for justice for his people he wrote, 'I am an old man. . . My hopes are not being realised.'⁷⁰ He told the *Melbourne Herald*, 'We are coming to the end of our tether.'⁷¹

On 20 September 1937, Arthur Burdeu, Cooper's loyal friend and supporter, wrote these words to Ernest Gribble who was by then on Palm Island, from where he did as much as he could to encourage Aboriginal people in their struggle for recognition and equality:

Mr Cooper does get depressed at the slow progress made and the result of the meeting of the chief Protectors. . . is most disheartening. These men never learn and never progress and when they adopt a resolution to consult America and South Africa for advice on the problem of the dark man [it] makes one wonder if the day will come when the dark man in Australia will have to walk off the footpath and keep off trams which contain white folk. Still, God is not dead. . .⁷²

Cooper had not really asked for a great deal. He asked simply for the rights other Australians enjoyed: equality, voting rights, education, parliamentary representation, the protection of the law. He spoke little of separate development or distinct Aboriginal culture, but his pride in his race and in his Christian belief always

underlay his writing. He wrote, for example, in the *Melbourne Herald* in 1937:

We are human. We may be uneducated by white standards: we are fully educated by our own. I do not know whether all colored people are the same, but we have a very high moral code and the principles of Christianity are part of our life.⁷³

Despite dwindling hopes, Cooper stubbornly presented his Royal Petition to the Commonwealth government in October 1937, demanding that it be forwarded to the new King, George VI. The government was slow to act, finally informing Cooper that they could not forward the petition on 'constitutional grounds'.⁷⁴ The petitioners were all subjects of the King, but none of them were citizens of the Australia which the Commonwealth parliament represented.

Ageing rapidly and ever more disillusioned, Cooper conceived the idea of a Day of Mourning on the sesquicentenary of white settlement, 26 January 1938. Ferguson and the NSW organisation agreed. A great deal of thought and planning went into this day. Although there were to be activities in both Sydney and Melbourne, both Victorian and NSW people agreed that the focus of publicity should be on Sydney where the first fleet re-enactment was to take place.

On the day, Sydney Aboriginal people were reinforced by key people from throughout NSW and Victoria. The irrepressible Helen Baillie drove William Cooper, Margaret Tucker and Doug Nicholls from Melbourne. Jack Patten, later to become Ferguson's rival in a leadership struggle, drove from the north coast bringing Bert Marr, the sympathetic UAM missionary, from Taree. Also from the north coast came Frank Roberts of Tuncester ('an earnest Christian and a responsible parent').⁷⁵ Other important leaders included Jack Kinchela from Coonabarabran, Tom Peckham from Dubbo and Jack Johnson from Bateman's Bay.

The Aboriginal people stood watching the procession from a space which some of their white friends had managed to organise for them, holding placards reading 'Aborigines Claim Citizenship Rights'. They did not go to the beach to watch the re-enactment of the arrival of the first fleet. They chose not to suffer the humiliation of watching a sad little group of Aborigines, trucked in from

Menindee, made to flee along the beach from the Great White Invaders, paid off and trucked back to Menindee the same day. Instead, in the afternoon they crowded into Sydney's Australian Hall.

We owe much of our knowledge of this meeting to Jack Patten who began publishing *The Australian Abo Call* a few months later, providing an account of the proceedings in the first issue. Jack Patten chaired the meeting, flanked by Ferguson, Nicholls, Cooper and Kinchela. Speakers included Patten, Ferguson, Nicholls, Pearl Gibbs and Tom Foster, the Aboriginal open-air preacher from La Perouse. A manifesto was circulated entitled 'Aborigines claim Citizenship Rights'.⁷⁶ They called for the end of the Aborigines Protection Board, for proper education, for laws to prevent the exploitation of Aboriginal labour in the outback, for an end to domestic service by Aboriginal girls – for an end, in fact, to all discrimination and injustice towards Aboriginal Australians.

The following resolution was carried unanimously, printed, and circulated throughout Australia:

We, representing the Aborigines of Australia, assembled in conference at the Australian Hall, Sydney on the 26th day of January, 1938, this being the 150th Anniversary of the white man's seizure of our country, hereby make protest against the callous treatment of our people by the white men during the past 150 years, and we appeal to the Australian nation of today to make new laws for the education and care of Aborigines, and we ask for a new policy which will raise our people to full citizen status and equality within the community.⁷⁷

Five days later, a delegation met Prime Minister Joseph Lyons, his wife Dame Enid Lyons and John McEwen, Minister for the Interior, at Parliament House, Canberra. The twenty member delegation included Cooper, Ferguson, Patten, Pearl Gibbs, Tom Foster and Helen Grosvenor. After speaking for some time, they handed over to the Prime Minister their 'Ten Points', a set of national aims for the recognition of Aboriginal people's just claims.⁷⁸

Interviewed later by a reporter, Enid Lyons said that the Aboriginal women's speeches in particular had moved her very much and that she hoped her husband could change 'these deplorable conditions'.⁷⁹ Prime Minister Lyons was fairly highly

regarded by Aboriginal people. At least he was prepared to listen to them, but most of his fellow government members were somewhat less sympathetic. With a Depression on their minds and another war looming, few were willing to risk white electoral unpopularity by espousing the Aboriginal cause.

Cooper and Ferguson had, in fact, gained a great deal, but both of them died disillusioned, thinking they had finally failed. As a direct result of their unrelenting pressure on State and federal governments, there had been several inquiries and conferences. The authorities did not reveal their weakening to the Aborigines, but a number of changes were quickly made which, although undramatic, were a step in the right direction. In particular, as we shall later see, the resolutions of the Canberra Conference of Aboriginal Authorities were to bring great changes, even though the visible effects were to be a long time emerging.

Old William Cooper despaired of seeing changes for the good. Legislation in Western Australia horrified him ('...we did not think it was possible for them to be worse. . . [but] they have been worsened').⁸⁰ Comparisons between Australian treatment of Aborigines and German treatment of Jews began to appear in his writing. The Western Australian Labor Party was 'out-Hitlering Hitler'.⁸¹ Dividing people genetically, the NSW government treated Aborigines as though they were 'an enemy people', to be placed in concentration camps.⁸²

By the time war broke out again in 1939, Cooper felt even more disenchanted and alienated. One of his sons had died in World War I. This was Cooper's comment on Patten's proposal that there be an Aboriginal regiment in World War II:

I am a father of a soldier who gave his life for his King on the battlefield and thousands of coloured men enlisted in the AIF. They will doubtless do so again, though on their return last time, that is those who survived, were pushed back to the bush to resume the status of Aborigines. . .

The Aboriginal now has no status, no rights, no land and, though the native is more loyal to the person of the King and the throne than is the average white, he has no country and nothing to fight for but the privilege of defending the land which was taken from him by the white race without compensation or even kindness. We submit that to put us in the trenches, until

we have something to fight for, is not right.⁸³

Defending the role of missions to the end, one of Cooper's last acts on behalf of his people was to appeal to the heads of churches to mark the Sunday before Australia Day as Aborigines' Day by preaching about Aborigines and praying for the success of missions and other efforts 'for the uplift of the dark people'. He convinced the National Missionary Council to promote an annual Aboriginal Sunday, the first of which was on 28 January 1940.

Cooper died in 1941 and was buried at Cumeroogunga.

William Ferguson was aged sixty at Cooper's death. He continued to be active in Aboriginal affairs, despite immense difficulties.

One major problem was how to maintain pressure upon governments without becoming too closely aligned with a particular political party. Ferguson managed to avoid too close an association with extreme groups, although he did accept help from both communist and right-wing elements, both of whom thought to use the Aborigines' Progressive Association to embarrass the government. Cooper's other big problem was the power struggle within Aboriginal organisations, one result of which was a serious falling out with Patten.

As many Aborigines have found, what seemed to be progress often proved empty. The resolutions of the Canberra conference, for example, were still not properly implemented decades later. Pressure on the NSW government did lead to an inquiry into the Aborigines Protection Board. A new, restructured board was renamed the Aborigines Welfare Board, and had to include an Aboriginal member. Ferguson was the first Aboriginal member of the board, joining it in August 1944. It seemed at the time to be a victory, but the victory proved hollow. The token Aboriginal board members had to fight constantly for a better life for Aborigines on the Board's reserves, with few achievements really discernible by Aborigines who lived on them. There were no dramatic changes, no instant improvements. Aborigines, seeing little hope for betterment, often distrusted the new Board as much as they had the old.

Ferguson grew weary of the fight and put his last great effort into gaining a seat in federal parliament, only possible because he had an exemption certificate, exempting him from the provisions of

the Aborigines Act. Bitterly disillusioned with his own Labor Party's failure of will to do anything significant for Aborigines, Ferguson believed that all political parties had betrayed Aboriginal people. Despite the fact that only a few Aboriginal people could vote – those who had significant white ancestry and had successfully sought exemption from the Aborigines' Acts – he stood as an Independent for the seat of Lawson which contained Dubbo.

On 8 December 1949, Ferguson delivered his last speech.⁸⁴

To all you people of Aboriginal blood, I say – Don't be fooled by the promises of Labor. They have had ample time to have amended those laws restricting our people, if they desired. I am fighting for your freedom: give me your number one vote.

Although Aborigines have to pay taxes, and are allowed to shoulder a rifle, slave conditions still exist in the Northern Territory and special laws in the States. Aborigines still live under laws only meant to control criminals and lunatics: they are not allowed ordinary human rights. . . I can promise you nothing but the will to work. . .⁸⁵

Ferguson collapsed as he left the platform. On 22 December, he heard from his Dubbo Base Hospital bed that he had polled only 388 votes. His bid to enter federal politics had failed. Two weeks later, on 4 January 1950, William Ferguson died.⁸⁶

Cooper and Ferguson were both strong Christians to the end of their lives. Not only had the political parties failed them; the institutional churches had also failed them. Great Christians like Ernest Gribble, Mary Bennett (UAM), John Needham (ABM) and Bert Marr (AIM) were a constant support, as were many other individual Christians, but the churches were not yet sufficiently convicted to speak out on their behalf. Both Cooper and Ferguson had believed they were speaking to an essentially Christian white community which would recognise that their claims were just and right in a decidedly Christian sense. In this, they were wrong.

Assimilation: a solution?

What occurred in the 1930s was an intellectual shift of great significance: the change from the idea that Aborigines were a dying race which should be protected, to the idea that Aborigines were not dying out at all and should be assimilated into the white

Australian community.

Assimilation, quite rightly, is widely condemned today as an inadequate, patronising, ethnocentric and, at its worst, racist set of assumptions. This is easy to do in retrospect with the experience of years of attempted implementation of assimilationist policies. At the time, it seemed to be what the Coopers and the Fergusons were asking for. Even more importantly, for many administrators and politicians, indeed for the whole white Australian community, it was an intellectual leap of immense proportions. It was what A.P. Elkin and others described at the time as a change from a 'negative' policy to a 'positive' policy.⁸⁷ That is, it marked an acceptance, at least among administrators and the majority of politicians, that a future for Aboriginal people was a thinking possibility.

'How slowly this idea came to us all,' wrote Stanner thirty years later, '...obvious and unadventurous as it may seem now.'⁸⁸

The most significant agents of change in the 1930s were Aboriginal people themselves like Cooper and Ferguson. They died disappointed because, as Stanner pointed out, 'another ten years had to pass before any effects became at all noticeable'.⁸⁹ In many parts of Australia it was much more than ten.

There were also a number of non-Aboriginal people and organisations who greatly influenced public opinion and government policy. These included missionaries, ex-missionaries and mission administrators such as Mary Bennett, John Needham and Hubert Warren; some of the more enlightened administrators such as J.W. Bleakley; and anthropologists such as Elkin and Arthur Capell of Sydney University, both of whom were Church of England clergymen. The organisations to which they belonged contributed by providing forums for such people to make public statements. Needham could write forthrightly in Australian Board of Missions publications and Elkin could use his position in the Association for the Protection of Native Races to promulgate his views.

The idea of assimilation was not all that new, particularly the assimilation of Aborigines of mixed descent. The idea in some form was affecting government policy as early as the 1880s in Victoria and the early 1900s in South Australia.⁹⁰ In Western Australia, with Aboriginal affairs in the hands of A.O. Neville for most of the first half of the twentieth century, there was an ex-

treme form of assimilation being peddled, which intended that the Aboriginal race should, by intermarriage, be bred out of existence.

Far ahead of government policy, mission policies had long been based on the concept of 'uplift' of the Aboriginal race, a phrase borrowed and used frequently by both Cooper and Ferguson. Missionaries had long regarded the future of Aboriginal people as absorption into the wider Australian community. Such a policy may seem racist today but, compared to the policies of those who believed Aboriginal people to be a dying race, it was enlightened.

Not only was it becoming obvious to everybody that the mixed-race Aboriginal people in the southern states were not about to die out, but missionaries in the more traditional tribal areas in the centre and north gradually awakened the realisation in the south that the full-blood Aborigines were not about to become extinct either. Pastor John Stolze said in 1921, 'Our Finke River Mission is no dying cause. . . the Aranda tribe amongst whom we labour is not dying out. . .'⁹¹ and a Methodist Mission Policy Statement of 1939 said, ' . . . A continuance of the tragedy which contact with civilisation has wrought for this race may be avoided. . . the frequently made statement that the Aborigines are a dying race is not necessarily true. . .'⁹²

The realisation that full-blood Aborigines were not now dying out in the north and centre, as they had done in the south, was an important factor in prompting policy changes for the part-Aboriginal population.

The concept of assimilation was, as we have seen, inherent in the writings of Cooper, Ferguson, David Unaipon and all the other southern Aboriginal people agitating for justice. They wanted to be treated like whites. They wanted an end to the denial of their equality. It was not distinctiveness for which they were struggling at this point. Equality with white Australians seemed a sufficient goal for those whose distinctiveness was already recognised and deemed inferior.

The writings of the Aborigines' 'enthusiastic friends' also took assimilation as the ultimate goal. Hardly anyone had yet stopped to think of equality in terms of equal rights to distinctive cultural development. It was hard enough to convince the wider Australian community that Aboriginal people were equal and could be like them. The idea that they could be equal but have a distinctive or

different destiny occurred to very few people. Even the Aborigines' most sympathetic protagonists saw assimilation as the ultimate mark of respect for Aboriginal equality with other Australians.

For example, in 1935 John Needham stated:

If the Aboriginal is to be uplifted and to take the place in the new life which faces him, it is essential that he should be taught and trained to habits of regular industry. . . . Seeing that the impact of white civilisation is bound to come, every effort should be made to prepare him for this and enable him to take a worthy place in the life of the Australian community.⁹³

Mary Bennett, referring to assimilation, said in 1930:

There would be an end of the unpaid labour and destitution, of doles and 'indigent camps', an end of parting people from their homeland, an end of parting parents and children, an end of the soulless institutionalism which we force on them when we deprive them of the wholesome human relationships which draw up humanity as light draws up plants. They would evolve gradually in their own way through the pastoral and agricultural stages of culture; and we should have the satisfaction of knowing that, though late, we have tried to do justice.⁹⁴

And A.P. Elkin in 1944 said:

This process cannot be avoided, and therefore both whites and mixed-bloods should be prepared and should prepare themselves for it. It implies:

- (1) The removal of prejudice, and the recognition and solution of the psychological and sociological problems involved.
- (2) The uplift of those living in unsatisfactory conditions on the outskirts of towns.
- (3) Preparation of those on government settlements for life in the general community.⁹⁵

Although Aboriginal people like Cooper, Ferguson, Patten and Gibbs did not notice it at the time, the policy of assimilation of part-Aborigines like themselves was formally adopted by State and federal governments at the 1937 Canberra Conference of Aboriginal Authorities. The resolution was clear:

Destiny of the Race: That this Conference believes that the destiny of the natives of Aboriginal origin, but not of the full-blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth, and it therefore recommends that all efforts be directed to that end.⁹⁶

This seems today to be derogatory and racist. At the time it was a landmark, albeit a landmark which the general public did not notice.

Resistance to assimilation

The idea that assimilation was the means to uplift Aboriginal people was held tenaciously by both Aboriginal activists and their non-Aboriginal sympathisers. These days, when Aboriginal people and their supporters are pressing for distinctive self-determination by Aboriginal communities and rejecting assimilation as an outmoded and racist policy, it is difficult to bear in mind that it was not always so.

The assimilationists were once the progressives. It was they who argued that the equality of Aboriginal people with the rest of Australians demanded that they be treated equally and be given equal access to education, health, social services, employment and all other benefits, institutions and responsibilities of citizenship. It was their detractors who wanted to deny Aborigines these benefits. It was their detractors who wished to perpetuate the notion that Aborigines were inferior. It was their detractors who tried to prevent Aborigines from sharing their suburbs, schools, hospitals, hotels, swimming pools, cinemas and even, in some cases, their churches.

Now that Aboriginal people have equality under the law with other Australians, it is easy to forget how recent this is. National memory is often very short. Aboriginal people over twenty-three years of age today were once denied even the right to vote, were once not even counted in the population. The powerlessness and despair still evident today in many Aboriginal communities is understandable if we remember how recent is their experience of an oppression which was enshrined in law. The aspirations of so many Aboriginal people to succeed, even in terms of white community expectations, were thwarted, not through lack of will or ability on their part, but because they were denied the opportu-

ties for no reason other than that they were Aboriginal.

In Brisbane recently I spoke to Connie Isaac, a thoughtful and sensitive woman who used to live in Cherbourg and once had high aspirations for a career of some kind. This was her experience:

About 1963, they sent me to Hornet Bank Station to work. They split us all up. They sent my children away to school in Melbourne. I never signed a contract. Someone else, maybe the superintendent, signed it. You had to stay where you were sent. It was too bad if you didn't like it. You couldn't leave. They'd send you to Palm Island – Punishment Island we used to call it, you know. I never got any money or maybe just a little bit and they'd send the rest to Cherbourg. You couldn't see your bankbook. If you asked, they might give you a piece of paper to buy a dress or something at the store and then they took that money out of your book. That's how the system worked.⁹⁷

The significance of this story is its date. The 1960s were good years for me. I married, became principal of an Aboriginal school in the Northern Territory and paid off a block of land. During the same years, Connie Isaac had to suffer considerable humiliation without most of the freedoms other Australians like me enjoyed and without even some of the freedoms which had by then been granted to Aboriginal people outside Queensland. She had to seek permission to purchase a dress for herself with her own money.

By the 1950s in South Australia, there were some young Aboriginal people completing high school. Virtually all of them were from the UAM's Colebrook home. They found, however, that they were often not able to further their education. Some of the girls, for example, wanted to be nurses, but they were not permitted to train as nurses *simply because* they were Aboriginal. They were allowed to work as nursing aides in country hospitals, but refused entry into the Royal Adelaide Hospital for full training.

Nancy Barnes remembers when it all changed. She was working at the time for that great supporter of Aboriginal progress, Dr Charles Duguid:

It was a real turning point. Three girls came into Doctor's office on North Terrace and said, 'We've just been down to the Royal

Adelaide Hospital to see if we can do our training and we're not allowed.'

As we were driving home, Doctor asked what the upset was. He was wild when I told him and jammed on the brakes. The Aboriginal Advancement League (of which Dr Duguid was chairman) had always made a platform available to the people. This time they booked the Adelaide Town Hall.⁹⁸

The protest meeting was well-attended by Aborigines and sympathetic whites. The publicity embarrassed the hospital authorities. A few days later the three girls, Grace Lester, Muriel Brumble and Faith Coulthard, were accepted at Royal Adelaide Hospital.⁹⁹

Ken Hampton, later to be ordained in the Anglican church, tried to join the navy in 1966:

They asked me what descendency of Aboriginal I was. And that was the days of being a mathematical problem to them. Was I a 'full-blood' or 'one-eighth' or 'a quarter'? It worked out I was 'one quarter'. So I told them, 'Look, I'm Aboriginal', because I thought, 'You can't be. . . part of each. You've got to be a distinct somebody.' And because I decided to be Aboriginal, I was told it was not their policy to take in people who were Aborigines into the navy or air force. Yet I had relations in the services during the war. . .¹⁰⁰

There were other lists which did not record his racial origin, so shortly afterwards Ken Hampton was called up for national service. He sent the papers back. Who would blame him?

This kind of discrimination was very real and very recent. It is easy to collect thousands of personal stories like these. It is essential for our understanding of Aboriginal adults today to realise that they have had to struggle for fair treatment, a struggle which they sometimes gave up. Even where the law was changed to grant them access to such benefits as education and health, community resistance was often very strong and very bitter.

This point needs to be clearly understood, for the Aboriginal struggle for recognition and equality in the Australian community cannot be divorced from their struggle for full acceptance in the Christian churches. I will illustrate it by looking at the fight for access to education in three Australian towns: Collarenebri and

North Lismore in New South Wales, and Carnarvon in Western Australia.

**'Clean, clad, and courteous':
schooling at Collarenebri and Lismore**

It was one thing for governments to change from a policy of protection and segregation to one of assimilation, but quite another to implement it. The battle had to be fought on many fronts. Hospital wards, swimming baths and hotel bars were among the most controversial sites. They were places where Ferguson fought for equality – and usually lost – to the end of his life. A strict teetotaler, he nevertheless saw hotel bars as a symbol of equality.

The main battle was fought in schools. It was really only in schools that Aboriginal and white people could actually be forced to mix. I will therefore illustrate the difficult task of changing from segregation to assimilation by outlining what occurred in two New South Wales Education Department schools. A very similar story can be told wherever there were mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations throughout Australia.

The 1937 Canberra Conference of Aboriginal Authorities had resolved as follows:

... efforts of all State authorities should be directed towards the education of children of mixed Aboriginal blood at white standards, and their subsequent employment under the same conditions as whites with a view to their taking their place in the white community on equal footing with the whites.¹⁰¹

In New South Wales 'mixed aboriginal blood' meant all Aboriginal people of the State. To give the State government its due, it did want to do something about Aboriginal people. Much of the political activity on behalf of Aboriginal people had taken place in NSW and the problem would not go away. The conference resolutions were accepted with surprisingly little objection and the government set about amending legislation. In 1938, the NSW Public Service Board recommended that the policy of assimilation be implemented in schools.¹⁰² In 1940, the Aborigines Protection Act was amended.¹⁰³ Almost overnight, the policy of segregation was changed to one of assimilation.

Legislation is one thing; enforcement is another. The Department of Education was about to commence integrating Aboriginal children into normal public schools, but it was going to do so in towns where segregation had been practised for generations and where resistance by the white community would be very strong.

One of the Department's earliest actions was the assumption of complete responsibility for all school buildings on Aboriginal reserves. A program of replacing untrained with trained teachers was also begun. This was relatively simple, but the actual integration of Aboriginal children into ordinary schools was a far more complex matter. The difficult road to desegregation can be clearly illustrated by examining events at two schools, Collarenebri in the north-west of New South Wales and North Lismore on the State's north coast. These two schools were crucial in the Department of Education's enforcement of assimilation: Collarenebri because it was the first school chosen to test the Department's ability to enforce the new policy, and North Lismore because a militant white community demonstrated the Department's susceptibility to political pressure.¹⁰⁴

Collarenebri was the first school chosen by the Department of Education to begin implementing the policy of assimilation, because there were significant numbers of Aboriginal children in the town but no Aboriginal school for them to attend and because Aboriginal parents had been actively seeking the enrolment of their children for many years.¹⁰⁵ Aboriginal children had first been excluded from Collarenebri in 1900. Parents attempted without success to enrol their children there in 1905, 1920 and on several subsequent occasions. Mrs F.W. Wood, wife of the local Presbyterian minister, commenced some classes for Aboriginal children in the 1920s¹⁰⁶ and there the matter rested until 1934 when poor health prevented her from continuing.

In an unusually militant move, Aboriginal parents attempted to enrol their children at the school again. They did not succeed and afterwards the local police asked them if they would prefer to live at Brewarrina, Moree or Pilliga. For seven years, the children again had no schooling. The matter was intensified by the closure of the Angeldool reserve and therefore its school, and the transfer of Aboriginal families to Collarenebri in 1936.¹⁰⁷

The Department of Education, now having assumed full responsibility for the education of Aboriginal children, saw the

situation at Collarenebri as urgent. Under the new policy, no more segregated schools were to be established, but it was significant for the successful implementation of this policy that B.C. Harkness, the Education Department's Chief Inspector, was a dedicated supporter of the concept of mixed schools.

In October 1940, Harkness wrote to J.H. Cartwright, the District Inspector responsible for Collarenebri, directing him to interview the prospective Aboriginal pupils and report 'the reasons, if any, why they should not be permitted to attend the Collarenebri Public School'.¹⁰⁸ Following his interviews, Cartwright reported that he was of the 'opinion that on the question of health, cleanliness and general conduct, there does not seem to be any valid reason for their exclusion from attendance at the Collarenebri P.S.'. ¹⁰⁹ Accordingly, the headmaster was instructed to enrol Aboriginal children in 1941.

The Collarenebri Parents and Citizens' Association reacted with a strongly worded protest and the local newspaper carried articles criticising the Education Department's plans to enrol Aboriginal children.¹¹⁰ At the beginning of the 1941 school year, fourteen Aboriginal children and thirty-six white children came to school and over sixty white children were kept at home. The headmaster was directed to adhere to his instructions, but to enforce the existing regulations for exclusion of children on health and cleanliness grounds. Obviously aware of this loophole, the Aboriginal parents took particular care. Some of them told me how they delivered the immaculate children to the school, slicking the boys' hair as they went through the gate. The headmaster reported that the children were 'scrupulously clean'. The government medical officer was called in and he too gave a clean bill of health. The children were 'clean, clad and courteous'.¹¹¹

During the first week of school, the headmaster administered reading, numeracy and other tests to each Aboriginal child and the effect of no schooling in the past seven years was obvious. This was now an educational problem as well as a racial one. Totally illiterate ten- and eleven-year-old children could hardly be placed in the first grade. The headmaster, inspector and chief inspector all agreed that a special class was necessary.

Depending on one's point of view, it could be regarded as either fortunate or unfortunate that accommodation at Collarenebri was overtaxed already. The headmaster suggested that

using the School of Arts hall next door to the school might be a good compromise.¹¹² The Department acted with remarkable rapidity. On Friday 7 February 1941, the decision was made to establish an 'annex'. By Monday 10 February, the hall had been hired, a teacher appointed and lessons commenced under one of the existing teachers until the new appointee arrived. The sixty white children who had been kept at home came back to school as soon as the Aboriginal children moved out of the main building.¹¹³

This annex was a very important symbol, but it symbolised different things to different parties. To Aboriginal people it was progress, a step towards educational equality. The Aborigines Welfare Board greeted the annex with genuine satisfaction. To the white residents, it symbolised their power to resist the Department's attempts at integration. To the Department of Education, it provided an unexpected solution to a difficult problem, a solution which might work elsewhere. Not only were the Aboriginal children being taught; they were being taught in a public school. In retrospect, the annex also symbolised the vulnerability of the Department to community pressure.¹¹⁴

Before continuing the story of Aboriginal children at Collarenebri school, it is necessary to consider events at North Lismore, events which affected the whole State, demonstrating the vulnerability of the Education Department to a pressure group operating through politicians. Lismore differed from Collarenebri in that there had been an Aboriginal reserve school at Tuncester, some eight kilometres outside the town. Accepting the right of Aboriginal children to education, the Department was able to take a firm stance in places like Collarenebri where there was no Aboriginal school. However, in towns where there was already an Aboriginal school, the existence of this alternative provision weakened the Department's position.¹¹⁵

In October 1942, C. Riley, secretary of the North Lismore Parents and Citizens' Association, wrote to the local NSW member of parliament, W. Frith, complaining about the attendance of Aboriginal children at North Lismore Public School, claiming among other things that they were a health threat and enclosing local newspaper cuttings making similar complaints. His letter indicated that white parents were considering withdrawing their children and enrolling them at East Lismore, even if they had to move house. Frith forwarded the letter to Clive Evatt, Minister for

Education in the NSW Labor government, expressing concern at a 'most serious and undesirable position'. The Minister asked the Director-General to take action.¹¹⁶

Very lengthy correspondence ensued between the Director-General, district inspector, headmaster and various officials of the Education Department and other organisations. Under political pressure, the Department reluctantly determined in 1943 that the twenty-two children with some Aboriginal ancestry should be excluded from the North Lismore school and be transported daily to and from Tuncester by rail. The accommodation at Tuncester was improved by shifting a disused school building from Mororo. All this took until the end of 1943 to complete. The Minister was able to provide the following reply to Frith early in 1944:

I refer to your personal representations on behalf of the Parents and Citizens' Association at North Lismore protesting against the attendance of Aboriginal children at the North Lismore Public School. I now desire to advise you that approval has been given for the exclusion of children of Aboriginal blood from the North Lismore school. . .¹¹⁷

Although he went on to say that 'arrangements have been made for the attendance of these children at the Aborigines School, Tuncester', it is obvious that during the next few years most of these children received minimal education, if any. Not only were Aboriginal parents, who had not been consulted, now given the problem of getting their children onto an early morning train, but on at least two days each week the train did not run due to wartime cutbacks.¹¹⁸

The fact that some fathers and elder brothers of excluded Aboriginal children were fighting overseas in defence, as one local clergyman put it, 'of our liberties and privileges' did not go unnoticed by fair-minded members of the community. The Lismore Sub-Branch of the Returned Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen's Imperial League, for example, wrote to the Minister for Education pleading the case for readmitting the child of a serviceman who had been expelled for having Aboriginal blood:

This Sub-Branch is of opinion that Mr Kapeen's outstanding war service, by participation in two world wars, warrants sym-

pathetic hearing being given to his desire. By virtue of such service Mr Kapeen has long enjoyed the full privileges of this Sub-Branch of Returned Soldier's League, and it is with feelings of sincere fraternity that I have been instructed to request that the application receive fullest consideration.¹¹⁹

This request was turned down, but the cases of a number of children continued to be raised individually with the Department by various groups, particularly the Aborigines Welfare Board.¹²⁰ A way was found late in 1944 to admit some of them. In 1943, by an amendment to the Aborigines Protection Act, Aborigines who satisfied certain strict requirements could qualify for Exemption Certificates. These certificates entitled the holders to a few privileges not allowed to other Aborigines, such as entry to hotels. The certificates had to be carried by the holders and were in force until 1963. Aborigines referred to them as 'dog licences'.¹²¹ The Department saw this as a means of allowing certain Aboriginal children to be enrolled in ordinary schools and a notice was placed in the *Education Gazette* which read in part:

The Department has decided that children of any Aborigine securing . . . an Exemption Certificate are to be admitted to the ordinary public school, notwithstanding the existence of any special school for Aborigines in the district or any decision for general exclusion of Aborigines from the public school concerned.¹²²

Some children were admitted to North Lismore under this regulation, but Exemption Certificates were not easy to obtain and a number of special cases were brought to the Department's attention such as an adopted Aboriginal child whose adoptive parents could not gain a certificate because they were white! Throughout the whole State there was such a wide variation in community reaction that the Department found it increasingly difficult to enforce its policies. The Department attempted to merge the public and Aboriginal schools at Kinchela Lower and was forced to bow reluctantly to white community opposition.

On the other hand, some schools such as Ulgundah Island and South West Rocks bypassed the Exemption Certificate regulation and admitted Aboriginal children, provided a medical

certificate was obtained. This certificate neutralised most community opposition and the Department assented to the practice for a few years. There were also schools such as Forster and Cowra where Aboriginal children were admitted without medical certificates and, indeed, had been for many years.¹²³

Cootamundra was another such town where the children from the UAM home were a significant group in the local schools. When the Director of the School Medical Services ruled in 1948 that there were no differences between the contagious diseases suffered by Aboriginal children and those suffered by other children, the practice of requiring a medical certificate was stopped. The following directive was issued in the *Education Gazette* that year:

In future a medical certificate will not be required for the enrolment of Aboriginal children in schools under this Department. . . A headmaster, however, who is of the opinion that there are circumstances in the home conditions which justify refusal or deferment, or is aware that substantial opposition exists in the community, should communicate all relevant facts to the district inspector of schools for Departmental decision.¹²⁴

In the light of these developments, the events in Collarenebri can be taken up again. Few problems occurred in Collarenebri until late in 1946, when the teacher of the annex resigned and was not replaced immediately. This quite unexpected event had a significant effect on the integration of Aboriginal children there. All the Aboriginal parents petitioned the Department to allow their children to attend the main building. What was most important at the time was that several Aboriginal families sought permission to enrol their children under the new Departmental regulations.

One family in particular had some light skinned children and one darker skinned child. When the inspector recommended that only the lighter skinned children be enrolled to avoid public protest, the Director-General of Education was not prepared to split the family and ordered the enrolment of all of them.

When they were admitted to the main building in 1947, an immediate public protest was called. It was, however, obvious that the first children admitted to the main building came from Aboriginal families who were most able to demonstrate white

society's values of health, cleanliness and living conditions. By 1947, opposition to them was much less and only twenty-two people attended the meeting. The protesters moved a motion condemning the Department's action, but they represented a minority of the town's residents and, even at the meeting, the motion was only carried by nine votes to seven with six abstentions.

A counter-petition from the local clergy and other sympathetic residents was forwarded. The inspector met with those who objected to the enrolment of Aboriginal children. The headmaster had very carefully enforced the Department's health regulations, so that the protesters finally could put forward no argument other than that the children had some 'Aboriginal blood'.¹²⁵ They had reached the real reason – race. All the other reasons were mere excuses.

Although another teacher was appointed to the annex, the next few years saw the gradual transfer of children to classes in the main building. Late in 1949, the *Daily Telegraph* claimed that white residents of Collarenebri were again planning to boycott the school if the Department closed the annex.¹²⁶ The inspector met with the Parents and Citizens' Association and explained the policy of gradual integration. There was an isolated letter of protest to which the Department replied coolly, citing La Perouse as a school where integration was being achieved.¹²⁷

There was, nevertheless, the educational welfare of the Aboriginal children to be considered. By 1949, under a trained Departmental teacher, the fifteen children in the annex were receiving the individual attention their educational disadvantage required and it seemed to the Department that to force the pace of integration at the expense of individual care was not justified. Although this may have been a rationalisation to delay the problem of totally integrating school classes, integration was soon forced by other considerations. At the beginning of 1951 there were only a few pupils remaining in the annex and there was an acute teacher shortage due to the post-war baby boom. The annex was closed and, by July 1951, all Aboriginal children were enrolled in normal classes in the main building. In ten years, Collarenebri had gone from active resistance to grudging acceptance of mixed schooling.

This process was typical of the Department's attempts, first to enrol unschooled Aboriginal children in normal schools and later to merge Aboriginal and normal schools. At Lismore,

Kempsey, Gulargambone, Condobolin and dozens of other places, the policy of assimilation became a 'hasten slowly' approach, mixed schooling being generally achieved fortuitously in much the same way as at Collarenebri. There continued, however, to be a few isolated pockets of resistance. In some towns where integration had been achieved in the primary school, educational and other grounds were sometimes adduced to prevent enrolment of older Aboriginal pupils. It is said that in 1949, Cootamundra and Casino high schools were the only high schools in NSW country towns which admitted Aboriginal pupils.¹²⁸

The principal of Dubbo High School, for example, first initiated the enrolment of Aboriginal children in 1964-1965, his predecessors having forced those reaching sixth class to remain on the reserve until they reached the legal school leaving age.¹²⁹ Similarly, 1964 was the first year in which it was possible for Aboriginal children to enter secondary classes at Lake Cargelligo.¹³⁰

It does not seem possible to ascertain when the last Aboriginal child was formally excluded from a NSW school merely for having Aboriginal ancestry. Very few if any such exclusions have occurred in the last twenty-five years, although the rigidity with which consecutive 'temporary' exclusion on health grounds has been enforced has varied widely from school to school.¹³¹ The possibility of exclusion on racial grounds existed theoretically until 1972 as the regulation requiring school principals to defer or refuse enrolment of Aboriginal children on the basis of 'substantial community opposition' was still in the Teachers' Handbook, despite the fact that the NSW Teachers' Federation had objected to the regulations in 1961 and again in 1967.¹³²

On 11 August 1972, a letter from David K. Baird of Queanbeyan, NSW was published in the *Australian*, quoting the relevant section of the Teachers' Handbook and claiming that it was 'a disgusting example of how little is being done towards progress in this area'.¹³³ Within the Department of Education, this press clipping was filed and forwarded for comment to Staff Inspector Falkenmire. Recognising that the section was 'offensive in import and did not faithfully reflect the policy of this Department', Falkenmire recommended that the whole section be withdrawn. The Director-General of Education approved the withdrawal on 23 August 1972.¹³⁴

In that year, the conditions under which Aboriginal children entered NSW schools finally became the same as that of all other children. This did not mean that their educational opportunities yet equalled that of the rest of the Australian community, but it was a beginning.

'We don't want niggers': schooling at Carnarvon

In the Gascoyne region of Western Australia, long-term residents still exhibited a strong distrust of missions for generations after John Gribble's departure in 1886. It was local opposition which forced Bishop Hale to open his mission near Wyndham rather than Carnarvon in 1897. No further attempts were made to establish a missionary presence in the region until the early 1940s when the plight of Aboriginal people near Carnarvon was brought to the attention of the new Federal Aborigines Mission Board of the Churches of Christ.¹³⁵

There was an important connection between Cumeroounga and Churches of Christ interest in missions to Aboriginal people. The old Maloga mission had belonged to no particular denomination, but to the idiosyncratic Daniel Matthews. Many of his protégés became committed Christians and, under their influence, a strong Christian tradition developed at Cumeroounga, the secular successor to Maloga. It was, however, not associated with a particular denomination.

An association of Cumeroounga people with the Churches of Christ came about through a Church of Christ lay preacher, W.B. Payne, a railway worker from Echuca. He took a keen interest in Cumeroounga, regularly assisting in church services there. Another Church of Christ railway worker, Arthur Burdeu, made friends with Payne, and through him became a lifetime friend and supporter of Aboriginal people, particularly, as we have seen, William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines' Advancement League in Melbourne. Cumeroounga people in Melbourne, although generally disdaining the white people's denominational barriers, usually attended the Churches of Christ.

Burdeu felt strongly that the churches in general, and his church in particular, were doing too little for Aboriginal people. In 1936, he submitted a motion to the Federal Conference of the Churches of Christ, seeking the formation of a federal committee to consider ways of working with Aboriginal people. After several

years of planning. Burdeu's motion resulted in the establishment of the Churches of Christ Federal Aborigines Mission Board in 1941.¹³⁶

The Churches of Christ began several missions to Aborigines in the 1940s. They opened a children's home at Norsemen in 1942, an urban mission in East Perth in 1943, and attempted to open a mission near Roebourne in 1944. Their efforts met with considerable opposition. They were refused a building permit in Perth and their plans for Roebourne were thwarted by the influential Pastoralists' Association ('A mission does little to add to the natives' real welfare and usefulness. . .').¹³⁷

The Churches of Christ appointed Pastor David Hammer to Carnarvon in 1945. He found living conditions for Aborigines deplorable. They lived outside the town on a squalid site called 'Yankeetown', one of the many ridiculous euphemisms, along with 'Dodge City' and 'Hollywood', coined throughout Australia for Aboriginal fringe camps. David Hammer records how, at Yankeetown, Aborigines lived in one-room humpies with 'a few sheets of rusty iron wired together for walls, no door or windows . . . no furniture except a rusty iron double bed for the whole family, a few heaps of blankets, a few heaps of mangy dogs, lying amongst the rusty tins used for cooking.'¹³⁸

Although the violent treatment of Aboriginal people which Gribble had opposed was now a thing of the past, there was still oppression and exploitation. On some of the cattle stations, Aboriginal workers were still locked into an oppressive system, living, in many cases, under conditions little better than at the Yankeetown fringe camp.

Hammer faced formidable opposition. For a start, the local member of the Legislative Assembly, Frank Wise, was not only Minister for Agriculture and Lands, but also Premier of Western Australia. After delaying for a year, Wise's Crown Lands Department offered Hammer some flood-prone land on the river bank. It was 'an insult to the Lord's work here,' wrote Hammer. 'Wise has no conscience in the matter.'¹³⁹

Almost certainly acting under instructions, the police at Carnarvon then declared the town a prohibited area. Aborigines were only permitted within the town boundaries on Mondays to shop and on Saturday evenings. As Hammer's mission permit restricted him to the town, the police regulations effectively barred

him from working for the Aboriginal people. Ignoring the conditions of his permit, Hammer began working in Yankeetown.¹⁴⁰

Hammer did not adopt the same confrontationist stance that Gribble had done. It has always been the escape route of embarrassed church historians to argue that Gribble's own stubborn pride and self-righteousness were his downfall,¹⁴¹ and the same view has been maintained recently, even by very sympathetic writers.¹⁴² Hammer and Gribble may well, by nature, have been different people, but times had changed. What was possible to achieve by quiet determination in 1946 was much less possible in 1885. Gribble and Hammer, faithful to the demands of the same gospel, both did what they had to do.

After touring the Gascoyne region, despite being generally well-received, Hammer was disturbed by the general attitude to Aborigines which he encountered. He concluded, however, that it was not the mission itself to which the pastoralists objected, but the possibility of losing their Aboriginal workforce.¹⁴³ Acting astutely, Hammer carefully phrased the objectives of the mission: to provide education and manual training for the children, to care for the sick and elderly, and to provide a healthy alternative to Yankeetown.¹⁴⁴

These aims, which implied the training of Aboriginal young people for station work, and the possible removal of a town eyesore, had the potential to appeal both to the pastoralists and townspeople. A meeting of Gascoyne pastoralists voted in favour of supporting the mission, an act which softened the attitude of the electorally sensitive Premier Wise.¹⁴⁵ When one station owner, G. Gordon Gooch, wrote in opposition to the mission in the local newspaper,¹⁴⁶ Hammer's response was cleverly diplomatic, praising the intelligence and fair-mindedness of the other pastoralists and stating his reluctance to believe that Gooch was less open-minded than they were.¹⁴⁷

While the pastoralists at least had a vested interest in maintaining an Aboriginal workforce, the town saw little value in Aboriginal people and generally resented their proximity. A mission was acceptable only if it took the Aborigines a long way from the town. Hammer wrote of the townspeople: 'They are neither friends to natives, or the Lord, or to us.'¹⁴⁸

Hammer conducted a Sunday school for Aboriginal children in the dry bed of the Gascoyne River. As he began to gain the con-

fidence of the parents, they asked him to commence a full-time day school. A few Aboriginal children had obtained some schooling, particularly at the Catholic school, but the fringe-dwelling life made such basic preparation for school as cleanliness and clothing a near impossibility. Furthermore, the new prohibition made entry into the town illegal, while the forced necessity to purchase food only on Mondays and to take it back to the fringe camp where storage facilities did not exist, meant that children were hungry for most of the week. It was only Hammer's hopes for a decent land grant for his mission that prevented him from speaking out, as Gribble had done, and he wasn't at all sure that he was right to stay silent:¹⁴⁹ 'I have kept fairly quiet, pending developments of mission land. . . but am not at all convinced that I am doing God's will in keeping quiet about an injustice like that, simply to help us in another matter.'¹⁵⁰

The government offered Hammer a mission site at Rocky Pool, 100 kilometres from Carnarvon. Always diplomatic, Hammer decided against raising a petition, hesitating to polarise opinion in the town and fearing the possible negative consequences of the resulting publicity.¹⁵¹

A sympathetic station owner suggested a seventy-acre block less than ten kilometres from town. It belonged to Mr Zeddi, a Roebourne kangaroo shooter. Hammer sought him out and bought the block before the townspeople could prevent the sale.¹⁵² At the time it seemed to be a great victory and in many ways it was. Hammer was not to know that even this distance of ten kilometres would be used in the future both to limit Aboriginal people's access to the town and to profit from their need to go there. According to the 1961 census, the population of Carnarvon was 1 809. In 1965, there were twenty-three licensed taxis,¹⁵³ a ratio of taxis to population matched only in other towns with large Aboriginal communities outside the town. In such places, the number of taxis increased rapidly as soon as Aboriginal people were permitted to receive social service benefits such as child endowment and the old age pension.

In May 1946, Hammer and his family pitched their tents on the mission block and commenced constructing the mission. Aboriginal people responded instantly and overwhelmingly. They wanted their children 'to have a chance': to attend school and, it was hoped, there to learn sufficient to rise above their present

squalid and demeaning lifestyle. School commenced almost immediately around the kitchen table.¹⁵⁴

The headmaster of the Carnarvon Primary School, a crowded two-teacher school, became an unexpected ally, offering to enrol some of the Aboriginal children. In February 1947, the six most promising of the mission children commenced attending the Carnarvon school. Carnarvon reacted like Collarenebri and like dozens of other towns throughout Australia in the 1940s. Some white parents withdrew their children. The Carnarvon RSL declared an immediate boycott of the school bus because it picked up Aborigines. As had been done to Gribble, a general boycott was extended to the mission itself.¹⁵⁵ Hammer commented: 'It was an agonising situation to find that when we came into town for supplies, people who had been warm and friendly just looked right past us, or crossed over to the other side of the street.'¹⁵⁶

An anti-mission petition was circulated and there was an angry protest meeting of the Carnarvon School Parents and Citizens' Association in March. Hammer attended the meeting. He countered hostile questions with quiet objectivity until finally the real cause for the town's anger was admitted: 'Mr Hammer has the answer for everything. But we want him to know that we just don't want niggers in our school.'¹⁵⁷

As had happened at Collarenebri, when all the spurious arguments against enrolling Aboriginal children in the school had been dismissed, there was only one reason left: racism.

This, however, was 1947. The Western Australian government, with some reluctance, had assented to the principle of assimilation ten years previously at the 1937 Canberra Conference of Aboriginal Authorities. Although slow to act upon this agreement, the Western Australian Department of Education had formally announced its policy only a few months previously: there was to be no racial discrimination in schools.¹⁵⁸ There was, therefore, no legal basis for the children's exclusion on racial grounds. Provided they were clean and free of infectious diseases, they could not be expelled. But this was the Premier's own electorate. He could not expel the Aboriginal children, but he could build and staff their own school ten kilometres away on the mission and oblige them to attend it. The funds were found with surprising rapidity and in 1948 Hammer was advised that the Aboriginal children had to leave the town school.¹⁵⁹

For the next seven years, the mission school proved to be a place of high academic and sporting achievement. Then in 1955, the citizens of Carnarvon wanted a high school. The small number of white children did not warrant such a facility. White parents approached the mission to enrol the middle primary and post-primary Aboriginal children at the town school. They needed the Aboriginal children to boost school enrolment and their earlier objections suddenly vanished.¹⁶⁰

Once the older Aboriginal and white children were attending school together, it was not long before it began to seem unnecessary to keep the younger Aboriginal children at the mission school. In 1959 the mission school closed and a hundred mission children were bussed daily to Carnarvon.¹⁶¹

The struggle for acceptance in the churches

Not only the world outside, but also the churches tended to act as if Aboriginal people were inferior. It was as if there were a kind of spiritual hierarchy operating on racial lines.

By the 1930s, there were second and third generation Aboriginal Christians in the southern regions of the continent. If they left the Aboriginal communities, with their tradition of strong evangelical Christian beliefs and practices, they were often surprised at the extent of godlessness in white Australian society generally. A worse shock, however, was that being Christians did not always make them any more acceptable to church members.

As early as 1842, astute observers of John Smithies' Wesleyan mission in Perth were suggesting that a Christian white society would not accept the mission converts.¹⁶² A century later, things had not greatly improved. In all but a very few churches, Aboriginal Christians were notable only by their absence. Jimmie Barker's experience, which I have already recounted, of suffering blatant rejection the first time he tried to attend a church outside the Aboriginal reserve was an experience shared by many Aboriginal people.¹⁶³

Charles Duguid told of a friend of his, a godly Aboriginal woman who was humiliated at the Methodist church in Alice Springs in 1934:

Discrimination against the Aborigines was deeply implanted in every aspect of life. At that time, the only church for white



80. Jimmie Barker in later life at Brewarrina
Acknowledgement: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
Reproduced with permission.

N.B.—The Director may, at any time, revoke any Exemption and thereupon the provisions of this Act shall apply to such aboriginal as if no Exemption had ever been granted.

"THE ABORIGINALS PRESERVATION AND PROTECTION ACT OF 1939."

CERTIFICATE OF EXEMPTION No. 142/55

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that Bertha Chambers
of Toowoomba
is hereby exempt from the Provisions of "The Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act of 1939" and the Regulations thereunder, subject to the conditions specified hereunder:—

(Date) 6th October, 1955

Richards
Deputy Director of Native Affairs.

A condition of the granting of this Certificate of Exemption is that such Certificate of Exemption shall, upon revocation, be delivered up to the Director.

81. Bertha Chambers' Exemption Certificate
Acknowledgement: Bertha Chambers. Reproduced with permission.



82. The nine Lake Tyers Aboriginal men who enlisted in the AIF

Acknowledgement:
The Aborigines
Friends Association,
South Australia.
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permission.



83. Their Honour Roll
Acknowledgement: John Harris

people in Alice Springs was the Methodist. An Aboriginal woman, Nana, who had worked as a housekeeper in Adelaide for many years and was a devout churchgoer, paid a visit to her home town of Alice Springs and went to this church. She was informed that it was not for natives, so rose and walked out. I had known Nana well for many years and knew how greatly she was respected by everyone who had had much to do with her.¹⁶⁴

This was nothing more or less than blatant racism. It denied the gospel of a Christ who died to redeem us all. Yet it was much more prevalent an attitude than is usually admitted. It was this attitude which horrified Charles Duguid when he encountered it in the Presbyterian church's Australian Inland Mission (the other AIM) which, as we have seen, was a mission to outback white people:

... I was introduced to the Padre of the Australian Inland Mission. Almost his first words were, 'I believe you are interested in the niggers?'

To hear this from the local leader of the mission maintained by my own church was staggering, but I asked only, 'Do you mean the Aborigines?'

'You can call them what you like. They've never been any good and never will be. The best they've a right to expect is a decent funeral.'¹⁶⁵

It is not being argued that no Christians in Alice Springs cared about Aboriginal people. Brother Percy Smith of the Anglican Bush Brotherhood and Mr E.E. Kramer, a missionary of the Aborigines' Friends Association, for example, were well-known in Alice Springs in the 1930s for their selfless efforts to assist Aboriginal people.

By the 1930s, such unashamedly racist attitudes as those of the Presbyterian padre whom Duguid met were not usually shared by the missionaries, mostly UAM and AIM (Aborigines Inland Mission), who worked in Aboriginal missions, reserves and fringe communities. They would hardly have chosen such a difficult life work if they held Aborigines in such low esteem. They were, however, frequently guilty of much subtler forms of discrimination, of a paternalism which would not acknowledge even very longstand-

ing Aboriginal Christians as their spiritual equals. 'We were always second-class Christians,' one Aboriginal man confided to me.

As potential Aboriginal Christian leaders began to emerge, their leadership was not usually recognised. They could be appreciated for their great 'help' to the missionaries, but rarely recognised as having a spiritual authority of their own.

This was the substance of a most startling claim which Tom Foster, a prominent Aboriginal Christian, made at the Day of Mourning meeting in Sydney on 26 January 1938. Foster, of La Perouse, the Sydney Aboriginal reserve, was an Aboriginal evangelist, well-known for his open-air preaching. He was bitter that he was always regarded as inferior to white evangelists, who would not see that evangelisation of Aboriginal people should be in the hands of Aboriginal Christian people themselves. He went so far as to group the white missionaries of the 1930s, by which he meant evangelists, with such other evils which oppressed Aboriginal people as the protection system and liquor:

The first is the Aborigines Protection Board, which has meted out the most callous treatment of our people and has forced us to do as the white man wishes. The second is the white missionary, who preaches to our people. The third is liquor. White men brought liquor for us and it has helped to destroy our people. We should stand shoulder to shoulder to destroy these three enemies.¹⁶⁶

What was Foster really saying? He was, in the context of the meeting, angered by those institutions which held Aboriginal people down, denied them their aspirations and relegated them to an inferior status. These were the State and the Church. To Aboriginal people of NSW, the face of the government was the Aborigines Protection Board. It was this organisation which ruled over Aboriginal people, determined where they should live, removed their children from them and generally denied them their dignity and freedom.

The other set of institutions which affected the lives of many Aboriginal people were the churches. There were many Christian people who would have been deeply hurt that 'white missionaries' should have been listed among those who oppressed Aboriginal people. Yet Foster spoke as a Christian. He perceived that the

missionaries, evangelists or other church workers with whom he came into contact held low aspirations for him and his people. They, too, deemed Aboriginal people to be inferior. Whereas the church should have been the one place where there was 'neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free', it was not. The church preserved this distinction of both race and class. Foster perceived this injustice and railed against it.

Foster was no doubt referring to the AIM or UAM missionary preachers who worked at La Perouse and other Aboriginal reserves, but they at least cared that Aboriginal people should hear the gospel. Far worse were the churches where Aboriginal people were even denied entry. There were also those churches, perhaps in the majority, which Aboriginal people had never tried to enter and which therefore could act as if the issue of acceptance of Aboriginal people was just not their problem.

It is now too late to ascertain whether or not personal animosities or ambitions fuelled Tom Foster's anger, but it is in any case irrelevant. His was not an isolated case. Aboriginal Christians have for many years felt the sting of rejection by white Christians and, in some places, still experience it today. If Tom Foster detected racial discrimination in the Christian churches, he was right to speak out. If the gospel he had been taught showed him one way to live and the churches or missions proclaimed another, his anger was justified.

Australia, in terms of the worldwide missionary activity of the Christian church, was a mission backwater. The tiny ripples which occurred hardly reached the attention of those preoccupied with the vast mission enterprise in regions like India and Africa. Tom Foster could not have known that in such places the issue of equality of races was bitterly dividing missions and churches. Acts of rejection such as those of Jimmie Barker by a church near Tottenham in 1915 or of Nana by the Methodist Church in Alice Springs in 1934 may seem to have been insignificant, highly localised little events, but they were not. Such actions were particularly widespread.

Certainly there were devoted and compassionate missionaries working in Aboriginal communities in remote and difficult places. In the cities there were the John Needhams and Arthur Burdeus, fine Christians, the 'enthusiastic friends' of the dispossessed Aboriginal people. We cannot measure the racial tolerance of the

whole Christian community by the compassionate or courageous actions of a few individual Christians. It is seen only in the degree to which the churches openly and publicly, by their life and action, demonstrate or fail to demonstrate their acceptance of people of all racial backgrounds.

There were still those in 1930 who justified the subordination of Aboriginal people, even in churches, on theological grounds. They still held, as the very first missionaries to Australia had done a century earlier, that Aborigines were degenerating from a much higher culture, the cursed descendants of Ham, doomed for ever to serve the white descendants of Shem. I have discussed this misguided thinking in the first chapter. It was this same erroneous interpretation of scripture which, in South Africa, partly undergirded the apartheid heresy. Indeed, apartheid in South Africa can be said to have commenced when white Christians complained that a coloured Christian had been given communion with them.¹⁶⁷ The belief that the Bible teaches that coloured races are inferior to white races has not entirely disappeared in Australia. People often report to me that they hear it in one form or another, but it is now rare in Australia to see it in print.

There are, however, Aboriginal Christian people to whom I have spoken who, like Jimmie Barker, recall being taught it. Some years ago, some elderly Aboriginal Christians in western NSW suggested to me that their black skin was a trial which God had ordained to test them. Other researchers have encountered the same view.¹⁶⁸ There are still some older Aboriginal Christians today who accept their descent from Ham.

An Aboriginal church elder at the Brethren mission at Doomadgee, north Queensland, recently explained it this way:

You know when Noah had three sons, he had Shem, Ham and Japheth. . . one of them was a black man, one. . . was a white man and one. . . was a yellow man. And you know, because the black man saw the shame of his father, God gave this command, he said 'From this time on. . . for all throughout life on earth, the dark man [will] come under the the white man'. And. . . men are trying to change this today, they're trying to break the word of God.¹⁶⁹

We should not, however, place too much stress on the in-

fluence of this bad theology, as if it were the sole explanation for the low level of acceptance of Aboriginal people by the churches. Most people did not think about it at all. Christians tended to accept the general standards of the rest of their community in this matter. To most it was a non-issue.

There is a sense in which it was a matter of numbers. In South Africa, whites were outnumbered by blacks, but in Australia the number of Aboriginal people was so small that the white population, particularly in the cities and very large towns, could ignore them altogether. It was the same in the churches. By the 1930s the proportion of Aboriginal people who were Christians was much higher than the proportion of white Australians who were Christians, yet their total numbers were too small for most churches to notice their need for acceptance. Unthreatened by large numbers of coloured people, white Australians reacted with apathy rather than active racism.

By the 1950s, there had not been a great deal of change in the settled parts of Australia. Aboriginal people were still largely absent from the mainline churches, still mainly expected to worship on the reserves, their Christian development still mainly the work of UAM and AIM missionaries.

Added to this, the reserves and town fringe camps where most Aboriginal people in the more settled regions lived were squalid, dehumanising places. 'Going to the dump was like going to Woolworths for us,' reminisced one Aboriginal person.¹⁷⁰ James Miller recalled his Singleton boyhood home in the 1950s: 'I lived in a humpy made of an ironbark sapling frame covered with hessian bags and kerosene tins. . . a short distance away lived my great grandmother. Her accommodation was an overturned water-tank. . .'¹⁷¹

Most of the factors were present which elsewhere in the world had often led to indigenous religious movements of a millennial nature in which an oppressed minority gives great emphasis to those parts of the Bible which seem to indicate an imminent intervention by God. The main factors are a distinctive group with a common experience of depression, poverty, poor education, powerlessness with authority in the hands of a socially superior group, and some previous Christian teaching. This scenario described most Aboriginal groups in south-eastern Australia. But only in one place, the north-east corner of NSW, was another important

set of factors present: a geographically and socially close-knit group of people with a distinct sense of identity.

The Bandjalang people of north-eastern NSW now live mainly in the coastal hinterland at communities such as Tabulam, Woodenbong and Baryulgil. They have retained their traditional culture to a greater extent than any other group in NSW, despite well over a century of contact with European settlers. Their earliest contacts were disastrous for them. Many were shot or poisoned by flour laced with strychnine. This led them to avoid contact with white settlers, a strategy made more possible in their case by the rugged, impenetrable terrain of most Bandjalang territory which, as we have seen, was a crucial survival factor elsewhere. Furthermore, after the initial European aggression, there were families like the Ogilvies of Yugilbar Station whose regime provided a reasonable degree of protection.

The result of these and other factors was that the Bandjalang people remained to some degree aloof from both Europeans and other Aboriginal groups and their culture loss was not as severe as elsewhere in the south of the continent. They could not, however, maintain their independence for ever. A network of townships grew up in the region and by the 1950s the Bandjalang people mostly lived in reserves and fringe camps. Despite this, they still maintained some of the positive features of Aboriginal culture, preserved by their chosen isolation.

I regularly visited Baryulgil in the early 1970s. While only the very oldest people had full control of their dialect of Bandjalang, even the youngest children knew and used a large register of Bandjalang words and phrases. It had even seemed, in the 1960s, that some Bible translation into Bandjalang was merited and the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) placed Helen and Brian Geytenbeeck at Woodenbong. After several years study they determined that the only potential readers were very elderly and rapidly dying and SIL's limited resources were better allocated elsewhere, but the fact that the possibility was considered for a NSW group was itself remarkable.

Christian missionary outreach to the Bandjalang had mainly been in the hands of the UAM and, by the 1950s, many Bandjalang people were Christians. The major Christian churches generally showed disinterest or even apathy towards the Bandjalang people. As always, there were exceptions such as the

Catholic church at Mallanganee and, from time to time, when there happened to be Anglican and Catholic priests sufficiently interested, services had been conducted on the reserves. The general attitude of white churchgoers was, however, quite clear to the Aboriginal people. There had already been problems in the Anglican church about sharing the common communion cup and in death segregation was still rigidly maintained in the cemeteries. Given the factors I have already outlined, it is in retrospect rather obvious that if an indigenous Christian movement were to arise at all in NSW, it would be among the Bandjalang people.

The beginnings of an indigenous movement were becoming evident in the mid-1950s. At this time, UAM was reducing the presence of white missionaries in the region, although the two events are probably not connected. A distinctive, local Christian consciousness was developing, particularly under the leadership of an elderly Aboriginal Christian, Dick Piety. It was certainly not a cargo cult of the Melanesian type, nor was it excessively millennial in character – although there was certainly a strong emphasis upon justice for the powerless (the Aborigines) and punishment for the oppressors (the whites).

Malcolm Calley has summarised this aspect of the indigenous theology, although his summary needs to be read with the knowledge that Calley was not sympathetic to Christianity:

White people are prosperous and powerful, like the Romans who crucified Christ; Aborigines, like Christ, are humble and poor. The humble (the Aborigines) are beloved of God; the powerful (the white people) are rejected by him. The former will go to Heaven, the latter to Hell. Aboriginal preachers dwell on the parable of Lazarus and Dives and derive obvious satisfaction from the reward of (black) Lazarus who looks down upon the torments of damned (white) Dives and refuses him a drink of water.¹⁷²

The indigenous movement soon became Pentecostal in character, with an emphasis upon charismatic leadership and expression. This was related as much to a growing alignment of the movement with independent churches as it was to the doctrinal nature of pentecostalism as such.

In order to express the movement's distinctiveness and its in-

dependent Aboriginal origins, it was important that it be clearly perceived as unrelated to the UAM or AIM missionaries, so this separation was consciously maintained. The movement was also kept distinct from the major Christian churches which had, after all, generally been unwelcoming.

There were, however, in the region some Assemblies of God churches. They were, of course, Pentecostal in character, although this was well before the modern charismatic movement began. Although the Bandjalang people did not formally become an Assemblies of God congregation, they found a higher level of acceptance by some of the Assemblies of God pastors, which certainly influenced them and led to their adopting much Pentecostal doctrine and practices. It is significant that there were white Pentecostals who tended to recognise the Aboriginal Christian leadership and respect its authority.

The issue of distinctly Aboriginal leadership was a much more distinctive feature of the movement than its actual pentecostalism or even its idiosyncratic theology. A sympathetic ex-missionary in the region described the significance of Aboriginal leadership to me in this way:

Although strongly influenced by Pentecostal churches and by various white evangelists, often of doubtful credentials, who came and went, this movement was very much an Aboriginal affair. Some of the key leaders were Victor and Chris Briggs, Frank and Pearl Connors, Mr and Mrs Harry Williams and a number of others. Some of these had earlier been stalwarts of the AIM and most had remarkable testimonies.

Unfortunately, the menfolk tended to die young, beaten by former years of drink, poor diet, boxing, imprisonment and so on, so a number of good leaders were prematurely lost. . . [Nevertheless], an important feature of the indigenous movement has been its emphasis on Aboriginal leadership – whites have often been welcomed, but on Aboriginal terms. In their own services, they could lead and play a role which would not be given them in white churches.¹⁷³

For people who previously had virtually no status, the religious movement provided an avenue to leadership, a place where a person could achieve status and authority and make decisions without reference to white outsiders.¹⁷⁴ The secular ad-

ministration of the reserve could exercise very little control over a person's religious life and, by maintaining independence of the UAM and AIM organisations, neither could the missionaries. Within this Aboriginal-led movement, there was a new social solidarity and a new self-respect. This same authority and confidence could then actually carry over into other spheres where previously an Aboriginal person felt powerless. As Calley reported:

From this position of strength the religious leader. . . may feel himself able to do what Aborigines never do: challenge the authority of white people openly. In a dispute with the station manager the Pentecostal man can count on the support of other pentecostals, who see him not as being engaged in a private dispute but as being persecuted for the sake of Christ.¹⁷⁵

The Bandjalang Aboriginal-led Pentecostal movement still continues today with its own distinctive brand of theological unorthodoxy. The widespread Australian charismatic revival has provided a 'respectable' movement with which they identify to some extent and within which they can find a degree of acceptance. The Bandjalang Pentecostals, however, have maintained their independence and avoided being taken over. Their independent Aboriginal leadership has been far too important a feature to give up lightly.

With rising awareness of Aboriginal people's needs, some of the mainline churches have recruited Aboriginal people to work for them from the Aboriginal Pentecostal movement. People like Frank Johnson, Una and Eva Walker, Don Brady, Frank Roberts Sr and Frank Roberts Jr have made important contributions to the Churches of Christ, the Uniting church and other major denominations. Thus the Bandjalang movement has not been entirely isolationist, but has benefited Aboriginal Christian development as a whole.

Aboriginal leadership and the autonomous Aboriginal churches

The perception among Aboriginal Christian people that they were 'second-class Christians' had become particularly widespread everywhere in Australia by the 1950s. Only in the most isolated missions, where tribal Aboriginal people were still effectively

shielded from the life of the wider Australian community, were Aboriginal people unaware that there was discrimination.

Aborigines who lived in the vicinity of white churches knew that many churches did not fully accept them and that their church involvement was mostly restricted to the reserves and missions where decision-making was still very largely in the hands of white missionaries. They knew that white mission boards made decisions on their behalf without involving or consulting them.

They would not have known that throughout the world this consciousness had come to non-Western Christians many times in mission and post-mission contexts. It had long been a bitter pill in South Africa, with a much greater mission time depth, where the restriction of black Christians to mission churches had long ago led to separate white and black churches.

In India, the question divided missionaries. 'Can Indian Christians be treated by us in every sense as equals without detriment to our [British] rule or loss of our prestige as the ruling race?' was a question continually being debated.¹⁷⁶ Herein lies the clue to understanding the intensity of feeling on this issue. It was one of class as much as of race – almost an issue, in Indian terms, of caste. White Christians recoiled from expressing an equality in Christ with people with whom most of them would never express equality socially. Andrews, writing in 1912, stated that 'English communicants have refused to sit and eat with Indian communicants, whose manners, conduct and breeding were, on their own confession, beyond reproach. I have heard such action warmly defended in India by English Christians on grounds of race prestige.'¹⁷⁷

This is not the place to discuss racism and classism in South Africa and India, but two points need to be made. First, wherever social class distinctions exist, particularly if they follow racial lines, the breaking down of these barriers is often a very difficult and heated issue in the churches. Second, the question of authority is crucial. To grant spiritual authority to someone of another class and race is to acknowledge that person's ultimate and absolute equality with oneself. This calls starkly into question the whole relationship between a person's own class and race and the class and race of the person on whom authority is being conferred, an intensely emotive issue if that person comes from an oppressed and powerless group.

These generalisations have been true for Aboriginal Christians for most of this century. They could be Christians at mission churches, but were unwelcome and made to feel inferior outside them. Because of the predominance of AIM and UAM missionaries in Aboriginal communities in settled Australia, most Christian Aboriginal people in the settled parts of Australia attended AIM and UAM mission churches.

Very few Aboriginal people attended Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian or any other of the churches usually located in Australian cities and country towns. The main exceptions were mostly found in those places where the churches worked in some way in institutions for Aboriginal people. Two examples were Cherbourg, where there were Anglican and Catholic churches as well as an AIM church, and Bishop Doody's Catholic diocesan mission at Moree. There were also a few places where an old mission influence survived, such as north-east Gippsland where the Lake Tyers mission left a heritage of Anglicanism.

There were, here and there in the major churches, outstanding individuals remembered by Aboriginal people for their Christian love and compassion. One such was Katherine Mary Clutterbuck, 'Sister Kate' of the Anglican Sisters of the Church. At the age of forty she came from England to Perth with twenty-two English orphans. In 1903, she started the Parkerville Children's Home. She was awarded an MBE, given a pension and forced, much against her will, to retire in 1933 at the age of seventy-two. Sister Kate then began a children's home of her own at Queen's Park where she gave life and hope to orphaned and needy part-Aboriginal children, and also encouraged and befriended Perth Aboriginal people, many of whom still remember her with great affection. Sister Kate died in 1946 at the age of eighty-five. The home she founded has been called 'Sister Kate's' ever since.

There were also a few exceptional churches like the Northcote Church of Christ in Melbourne, attended by many of the ex-Cumerogunga Aboriginal people, but such cases were rare, so rare as to be almost non-existent in the country towns near which most Aboriginal people, including Aboriginal Christians, lived. There were some clergy and other church workers in all the denominations who tried to help local Aboriginal people. Those who spring to mind include the Rev. and Mrs F.W. Wood of the Collarenebri Presbyterian Church, and Father P.A. Carmine of the

Catholic Church in Broken Hill and Bourke (where, incidentally, Mother Teresa of Calcutta sent six of her own Missionaries of Charity in 1965).

It was no guarantee at all that the concern which these isolated church workers felt for Aborigines would mean that their congregations were particularly accepting of Aboriginal worshippers. The clergy and others who showed an active concern for Aboriginal people were, in many ways, the exception that proves the rule and my original claim holds true that Aboriginal Christians were mostly associated with AIM and UAM congregations rather than the major denominational churches.

It was in these congregations that there was a growing unease among the more prominent Aboriginal Christians. Up to a point, AIM and UAM missions had encouraged the growth of Aboriginal responsibility within the churches. Over the years, many Aboriginal people had been given the status of 'native helper' and some of them functioned as *de facto* pastors, looking after Aboriginal Christians under the watchful eyes of a missionary.

I have not been able to determine beyond doubt who the first ordained Aboriginal person was in the southern regions. Nathanael Pepper was the first Aboriginal Christian *leader* in the 1860s and 1870s, but he was not ordained. James Noble was ordained in the Church of England church in 1925, but he was from a northern mission and not connected with the southern context at all. In fact, the excited welcome given to James Noble in the white southern churches contrasted strangely with the general lack of interest shown in Aboriginal Christians nearer home. It was easier to support distant missions in the north than to demonstrate acceptance of Aboriginal Christians in nearby reserves and fringe communities.

It is almost certain that the first southern Aboriginal person to be ordained was Eddy Atkinson, Doug Nicholls' uncle, who followed Thomas James as spiritual leader of Cumeroogunga. Like the other Maloga-Cumeroogunga Aboriginal Christians, Eddy Atkinson was 'non-denominational' until befriended by W.B. Payne of the Echuca Church of Christ. Eddy Atkinson was ordained in the Church of Christ towards the end of the 1920s in acknowledgement of his spiritual leadership at Cumeroogunga. He held a government license to 'marry and bury Aborigines'. His remarkable nephew, Doug Nicholls, later Sir Douglas Nicholls, sprinter,

boxer, footballer, preacher, political activist and, briefly, Governor of South Australia, was ordained as the Church of Christ pastor of Aboriginal people in Melbourne's Fitzroy in 1946.¹⁷⁸

For many years, Doug Nicholls was the only ordained Aboriginal person in any of the main Christian denominations, although within a few years of his ordination, AIM and UAM missions were ordaining Aboriginal people as pastors of their Aboriginal congregations. By the mid-1950s, AIM had set apart several men, including Bill Naden Sr at Gilgandra, Dan Kyle at Palm Island and Bobby Peters at Darlington Point.

AIM missionaries were aware that the AIM was not a church and that although Aboriginal Christians were meeting at mission or reserve churches under AIM auspices, they were not associated with recognised denominations. Some missionaries were more concerned about this than others. One town missionary told me that, while he welcomed Aboriginal local churches in isolated Aboriginal communities, he had a sense of awkwardness about 'AIM churches' for Aborigines in towns where there was already a white congregation attending a Baptist or other church which was the original home denomination of the AIM missionary.¹⁷⁹

His concern, which I shared, was the visible division between white and black Christians. We both understood that an Aboriginal church was sometimes necessary for the comfort and well-being of Aboriginal Christians, but we also well knew that part of the problem was that they were not always fully welcome in the white churches. If they were fully accepted into the total life of a local church, they would have much less need of a separate church. It was discrimination, no matter how subtle, which harmed their self-esteem, made it awkward for them to attend white churches and thus damaged the Body of Christ.

In the 1950s, AIM began organising annual Aboriginal Christian conventions in the eastern States. Such gatherings continue to be a strong tradition among Aboriginal Christians today. The major positive outcomes of these first conventions were that Aboriginal Christian people from widely separated communities came together, that they were helped by an awareness that they were part of something larger than their local mission and that they gave each other mutual encouragement.

There were other outcomes which the missionaries had not envisaged. Aboriginal Christians, particularly the better educated,

younger, potential Christian leaders, became much more aware of their common experience as members of Aboriginal mission churches. They shared a common concern that the Christian churches to which they belonged could not become mature churches until Aboriginal Christians were seen as equal partners rather than as objects of mission. The conventions provided a forum where these issues could be publicly raised.

It was at the 1957 convention in Cowra, NSW that several committed Christian young people, including Cecil Grant of Narrandera and David Kirk of Cherbourg, met each other for the first time. In the west, where AIM did not work, young Christian leaders associated with UAM and other missions, including Denzil Humphries and Jack Braeside, also began to meet.¹⁸⁰

In the eastern States, a movement towards increased acknowledgement of Aboriginal leadership became progressively more evident at the conventions, certainly helped by the organisational responsibility assumed by AIM's own Churches Guidance Committee. This was an Aboriginal advisory body set up by AIM, with David Kirk as chairman and Cecil Grant as secretary. The 1963 convention at Wellington, NSW was called rather ambiguously the 'All Coloured Convention', which was intended to mean not that all members were coloured but that all colours were represented. There were statements made by Aboriginal leaders at that conference about the general lack of recognition of their leadership. By the 1964 conference at Narrandera, NSW, the demand for responsibility to be given to Aboriginal people became even stronger.

The 1965 conference at Margate, Queensland was chaired by Edgerton Long, son of the founders of AIM and now director of the mission. The clash of opinions became so heated that Long, for the first time, asked the Aboriginal spokespeople to meet privately and bring their concerns back clearly to the convention. The Aboriginal people did so and returned to express a common discontent that, although AIM was a mission to and for Aboriginal people, Aborigines had no part in the real decision-making process. Some Aboriginal people believed that there were senior members of AIM who had said that no Aboriginal person would ever be part of the final decision-making body. Whether this was true or not, it was certainly the very clear perception of many Aboriginal Christian leaders that they were considered subordinate to the white missionaries.

On both sides of the continent, Aboriginal Christian leaders felt the necessity to form themselves into some kind of organisation. In Western Australia in December 1967, at a meeting at Orange Grove, Jack Braeside, Ben Mason, Cedric Jacobs, Sonny Graham, Denzil Humphries and other leading Aboriginal Christians formed the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship of Australia. A few weeks later in the east, after a meeting at Cherbourg, Queensland in January 1968, the name 'Australian Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship' began to be used.

In August the same year, 1968, Aboriginal Christians from both east and west met at Singleton, NSW, the Western Australian delegates including Denzil Humphries, Jack Braeside, Ben Mason, Russett Mitchell and a sympathetic white missionary, Noel Blyth of Wonggatha. The people who met at Singleton found themselves in substantial agreement regarding their common vision. They decided to endeavour to work within existing structures by influencing their respective missionary organisations.

Some Aboriginal leaders from both east and west met again in 1969 at Brookton, Western Australia. On this occasion David Kirk, Bill Bird, Cecil Grant, Geoff Higgins and Lemick Browning represented the eastern States. It was becoming evident to many of these leaders of the Aboriginal movement that it was not going to be possible to influence the missions and churches without a strong organisation as a power base. AIM and UAM white personnel were clearly bitterly divided. Many missionaries felt their positions were threatened.

I was in the Northern Territory in those years and some of the northern missionaries whom I knew adopted the attitude that the whole thing was fomented by southern stirrers who were not 'real Aborigines' anyway. On the other hand, some missionaries, including senior mission executives, expressed qualified support. Aboriginal leaders have told me that they were encouraged by the cautious but real interest shown by people like Howard Miles, Wesley Caddy, Arthur Collins and even Edgerton Long.

The 1969 Brookton meeting agreed that it was urgent that one Australia-wide organisation be formed. Aboriginal leaders called a major meeting for December 1970 and January 1971. They met halfway - in South Australia on a neutral site, the Brethren mission at Umeewarra near Port Augusta. Over seventy Aboriginal leaders came from all over Australia. It was to be a

time of Bible study and prayer as well as planning and debate. Geoff Bingham, principal of the Adelaide Bible Institute, was the study leader.

There was a spirit of quiet but confident expectation that what was happening was a movement of the Holy Spirit. So it was that in January 1971, the 'Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship of Australia' (AEF) was born. Aboriginal Christians, having been denied the opportunity fully to develop and express their firm calling as Christian leaders, believed they had now taken a step which would enable this development and recognition to occur. David Kirk was elected first president.

The road ahead was not going to be easy. The people who had joined together in forming the new AEF came from many different contexts and a wide variety of backgrounds. They had united in a common cause, born of their common frustration at the denial of their full equality with white Christians, yet their aspirations for what the AEF could achieve and the methods to be used were sometimes very different.

It was thought at the beginning that the AEF would be what its name implied - Aboriginal and evangelical, but also a fellowship, a group of like-minded people whose strength of purpose would achieve changes in the various organisations to which they belonged, influencing and working with missions and churches. This did not prove to be an easy task and, as one of the founders commented to me:

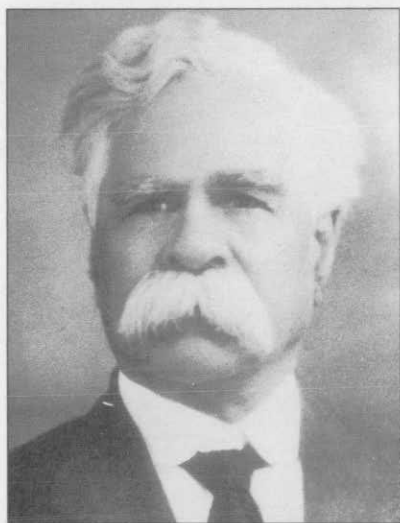
There was a backlash in some of the missions. The early years were hard. We felt we had to show them what we were made of. We were a bit anti-white, negative rather than constructive. I've had to repent some of my early attitudes but they came of frustration.¹⁸¹

The AEF members found that they differed regarding its future. As time went by and the AEF began to have finances and property, a tighter organisation and a stronger constitution became necessary. Some members were happy with this more formal, accountable organisation, while some of the original members left, feeling that the AEF had departed from its original vision, and was becoming bureaucratic. Many of these people became pastors of independent Aboriginal churches, something which only



84. The Ferguson family: William and Margaret Ferguson, son Duncan and daughter-in-law Blanche

Acknowledgement: Jack Horner. Reproduced with permission.



85. William Cooper

Acknowledgement: Alec Jackomos
and the Australian Institute
of Aboriginal Studies.

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86. Doug Nichols with Alec Jackomos

Acknowledgement: Alec Jackomos
and the Australian Institute
of Aboriginal Studies.

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87. Aboriginal Day of Mourning, 26 January 1938 (Sydney). l to r: William Ferguson, Jack Kinchella, Helen Grosvenor, Selena Patten, John Patten and the Patten children

Acknowledgement: Jack Horner. Reproduced with permission.



88. Australian Aborigines League, Interstate Committee meeting, 1949. l to r: Herbert Groves, Athol Lester, William Onus, William Ferguson, Aussie Davis

Acknowledgement: Jack Horner. Reproduced with permission.

really became possible because AEF's existence itself changed the climate. Although the AEF hierarchy would deny that it is a church or a denomination, it sometimes gives that impression when Aboriginal churches as widely separated geographically as Eden, NSW and Perth, WA call themselves 'AEF Churches'.

The AEF has struggled financially. It was born in poverty, many of its members feeling that churches and missions have been less generous than they could have been and that moneys long ago set aside for Aboriginal work should rightly be shared with the AEF.

AEF has never lost sight of its goal of training indigenous leadership. They operate two small colleges, one in Perth and one, Bimbadeen, in Cootamundra. In a strange twist of fate, Bimbadeen now occupies the old Cootamundra Children's Home to which so many young NSW Aboriginal people were consigned for so many years. The current president, Ossie Cruse of Eden, is a grandson of Nathanael Pepper. He has great faith in the importance of the continuing contribution the AEF is making to developing trained, competent Aboriginal Christian leaders. Many have indeed gone from working in the AEF to positions in Anglican, Uniting, Churches of Christ and Baptist churches.

The problems AEF has faced and is facing are unimportant compared to what AEF has achieved. Its great contribution was made in January 1971 when it declared to Australian Christians that Aboriginal Christian people were no longer willing to be kept in a subordinate position. It was a statement which needed to be made.

Beyond despair there is hope

In the present situation, particularly in the southern urban and rural regions, it is most difficult for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Christians to discern the way ahead. There are elements of hope, particularly among the growing Aboriginal churches, as well as elements of despair, as a disillusioned and frustrated Aboriginal community turns to violence, alcohol and drugs, while their politically active, angry young people increasingly reject any 'solutions' which fall short of real justice as they perceive it.

The situation of much of Aboriginal society in southern urban and rural Australia is intolerable. Aboriginal people still ex-

perience an infant mortality rate very much higher than the national average, a life expectancy twenty years shorter and by far the highest levels of unemployment of any group in Australia. Aboriginal people are the most imprisoned minority group in the Western world, with Aboriginal imprisonment many times greater than non-Aboriginal imprisonment rates. Aboriginal deaths in custody during the past ten years are already well over 100.

It is this last statistic of Aboriginal deaths in custody which above all things is bringing home to Australians the extent of the problem. Some of the deaths are certainly due to police neglect or even violence, but most are simply suicide. Both causes of death are equally unacceptable. A community which has so little to offer its young Aboriginal men that so many of them take their own lives is no more acceptable than a community in which the same young people die from police brutality.

It is a matter of both surprise and shame to me that the community is not more horrified than it is. 'My Aboriginal people in prison have been turned into mere statistics by people who don't understand them,' said Aboriginal pastor Ron Williams. So deeply troubled by the despair of so many of his people, he recently spoke in Perth of the terrible paradox of the awful attractiveness of jail to those Aboriginal people to whom it has become a way of life and the horror of jail for those young people who come to the realisation, in a jail cell, that this is all that life has to offer them.¹⁸²

Speaking of his own past, Ron Williams said:

Our men looked upon Fremantle jail as the high school and college. It was a place where you were accepted. Matter of fact, you were more accepted in jail than you were in the churches. This would be true today. A young man and a young woman I know cried to go back into jail. The young man said, 'People don't want me or like me outside. At least they want me inside and I have my friends back in jail.'

I heard about the big time crims and how friendly they were. Put it this way, the convicted white men were more eager to share with their black brothers their skills than the do-gooders and the educators on the outside of prisons.¹⁸³

I asked Ron Williams about those who suicided in jail. He said they were different. They were people of despair and hope-

lessness. They suddenly realised that this was all that lay before them. There was no ray of hope, just fear and guilt and a feeling of worthlessness. A few of them, he said, think there is only one thing left they can do for their people: die and create enough shock, enough publicity, to promote an enquiry. Most of them, he thought, did not even have this sense of purpose. Their death was a despairing purposelessness. It was easier to die than to live.¹⁸⁴

Eighty years ago, Gilbert White, Church of England Bishop of Carpentaria, speaking of the death of Aboriginal people, put it succinctly: 'When you deprive a man of every reason to live, it is little wonder that he dies.'¹⁸⁵

There is, of course, a spiritual dimension to the answer to this drastic problem. Ron Williams' faith is what gives his life meaning and it is only faith that will give meaning to the lives of these despairing Aboriginal victims of two hundred years of tragedy.

Faith is a crucial component of the answer, but it is still not all of the answer. It has long been the dilemma of Aboriginal people drawn to Christianity that faith may give hope for the next world, but it is hard to find it when there is so little hope in this world. Society itself needs healing. It is an uncaring society which has always told and continues to tell Aboriginal people in the depressed urban and rural communities that they are worthless.

Here is an ordinary example from an ordinary community of the way in which this message is given to ordinary Aboriginal people. In a normal Canberra suburb, the local school was about to billet a softball team from the Northern Territory. Families who were going to look after the children were given a list of the team members' names. The Aboriginal children were marked with an asterisk. At first I was angered by this until I discovered the reason. The previous year when the school had given hospitality to interstate children, there had also been an Aboriginal girl. When the family to whom she had been allocated simply by name met the girl and saw that she was Aboriginal, they refused to take her. The school principal marked the Aboriginal children on the next year's list to ensure, for their sakes, that this did not happen again.

We may want to dismiss this incident as trivial, but it is far from trivial. I purposely chose a seemingly minor incident be-

cause I suspect that it tells us a great deal. There was no way of fixing up the damage that had been done. It was not enough that another horrified and embarrassed family immediately took the girl home. It was not enough that she said, 'It doesn't matter - we're used to it.' She will remember it for the rest of her life. She will tell her family and friends about it. They will all learn from it.

Sally Morgan's life story contains many instances of racial discrimination. The most pointed occurred just after she became a Christian, when a deacon of the church she had chosen to attend asked her to end her friendship with his daughter.¹⁸⁶

There are white Australians who go to great lengths to ensure that Aboriginal people do not forget their inferiority. In the Victorian town of Bairnsdale last year stood one of Gippsland's last canoe trees, a dead tree with the huge scar from which some Aboriginal canoe-makers long ago stripped the bark. The local council, as a gesture to the many Aboriginal residents of the district, gave the land around the tree to the Aboriginal people for a community centre. That night, the tree was burned down. The destruction of that tree says far more than anything I could write.

I do not propose to try to discuss here the solution to the Aboriginal suicide rate. I used it as the best known and most glaring evidence of the result of a long, long injustice. The situation has now become highly complex and the solutions are neither easy nor cheap. What worries me most is the question of whether the Australian nation has the will to seek the real solutions and the strength of purpose to provide the necessary resources to achieve them over a long period of time.

It is not a question of guilt from the past. I am not guilty of the past mistreatment of Aboriginal people. It is not a matter of guilt, but of understanding. But if I understand why Aboriginal people are in the situation they are now in, if I understand why so many are still powerless and despairing, if I see so clearly their need, I am guilty if I do not respond. Besides, it should be the mark of my faith according to I John 3: 10: 'Here is the clear difference between God's children and the Devil's children. Anyone who does not do what is right or does not love his brother or sister is not God's child.'

There was, in Ron Williams' words, a terrible indictment of the church: 'You were more accepted in jail than you were in the churches.'¹⁸⁷

It is not within the power of the churches to find quick and satisfactory answers to the deep issue of justice for Aboriginal people in Australian society. It is, however, very much within their power to demonstrate racial equality beyond all shadow of doubt, so that it is obvious and clear to all. God demands this of us.

An Aboriginal poet, Kath Walker, said it powerfully:

Though baptised and blessed and Biblesd,
We are still tabooed and libelled.
You devout salvation sellers
Make us equals, not fringe dwellers.¹⁸⁸

It seems that one of the contexts where the Church is least able to demonstrate love and acceptance of Aboriginal people, even of Aboriginal Christians, is in those Australian country towns where a large oppressed Aboriginal community has co-existed with the white community since white settlement. Here there are generations of ingrained racism, old wounds and distrust.

I have spoken to many Christian clergy of all denominations in country towns in all States. Most cared about Aboriginal people, but most felt powerless to act. Once more is echoed in Australia the racism which has characterised Western Christianity in many, many places.

Despite the fact that in South Africa native Christians outnumbered European Christians, wrote Latimer Fuller in 1912, 'there is probably no European church. . . at the present time used for white people where the admission of the native congregation as a regular custom would not mean the immediate disappearance of the white congregation'.¹⁸⁹ Charles Duguid encountered an identical attitude in Alice Springs in 1934:

The minister of the Methodist Inland Mission called for a talk with me and said, 'My heart often bleeds for the native people, but if I interfered on their behalf the cattle stations would be closed to me.' He felt he had to choose between ministering to two utterly different flocks - the white and the black.¹⁹⁰

This same dilemma faces many clergy in country towns today. 'If I show an interest in the Aborigines, I offend the whites and if I identify with the whites, particularly the powerful whites in

this town, I am mistrusted by the Aborigines,' said a young minister in a Queensland country church.¹⁹¹

'When I mentioned Aborigines in a sermon in one of my churches,' an Anglican bishop of a country diocese told me, 'one of the congregation said, as he left, that Aborigines were not human.'¹⁹²

I have recently had the privilege of walking a little way with an Anglican minister in an Australian country town by reading the journal of his first few years of ministry there. He has asked not to be named – not to protect himself, but so as not to betray the trust of those many people, Aboriginal and white, whose words he has recorded. I have changed their names and omitted identifying places:

Betty, an elderly Aboriginal woman, was apprenticed as a young woman for twelve years, no holidays for 2/6d per week. Two shillings was put into the bank. . . The station was managed by a man called Smith. . . Betty said the work was hard and constant. . . Conditions were not good. . . but they were bearable except when Mrs Smith had been drinking.

This country belongs to Tom. It's his home. His ancestors have roamed here for centuries. He told me that his great grandmother was the only Aboriginal to escape [a certain] massacre at [a certain place] last century. Hence there is some quality in Tom which makes him cautious of the white community. . . he knows what they are capable of in moments of stress. . . I have enormous respect for him. . .

[I had a] long discussion with Sid Lincoln. He is a member of the radical political section of the Aboriginal Land Rights [movement]. . . I think a very dangerous man. He said to me that he hates all white people and if he had not liked me. . . 'You buried my grandfather. . . It was a lovely service. . . If I didn't like you I would've picked you up and thrown you through Mum's window.'

Tom and I took notes from some of the old [reserve ration] books . . . Later we visited Jane and I asked about the rations. She said, 'We hated having to ask for food. . . Without having the Certificate of Exemption, we were nothing. . . They were terrible days. . . so humiliating.'¹⁹³

Betty and Tom and Sid and Jane are typical of the different kinds of Aboriginal people throughout settled Australia, hurt by

their past, but also hurt by the present, struggling to know how to secure a decent future for their children and grandchildren. In their town there is an Aboriginal church which some of them attend and which the Anglican minister respects.

Knowing Aboriginal mistrust of the mainline churches, the high point for this minister was when his Aboriginal friend, Tom Myers, became a member of his parish council:

I have become fond of this race of people and I wouldn't do anything which would cut me off from their society. . . I have been accepted into a remarkable position of trust within the Aboriginal Christian community. I feel I can visit members of the [Aboriginal] church and they know I would never try and take any of their members away from their church. . .

I happen to believe their church is vital to the Aboriginals of this community. . . The fact remains that the Aboriginal people do not trust the Anglican or Catholic churches because of past experiences. I have witnessed [things] which fill me with shame. This is not politics, it is the church - Christian racist attitudes within the major Christian churches. . . My Aboriginal friend, Tom Myers, is a member of our Anglican Parish Council. . . It has not been easy for him. . . ¹⁹⁴

There are signs of hope.

In this unnamed town, the Anglican minister, sensitive, compassionate, struggling with the implications of the gospel for his situation, is a sign of hope. His Aboriginal friend, 'Tom Myers', risking being hurt, is a sign of hope, not so much in what the Anglican church can do for him, but in what he can do for it. The Aboriginal church in the same town is a sign of hope providing, for those who accept its fellowship, a place free of racial tension where faith can be nurtured. Even 'Sid Lincoln' is a sign of hope, as long as his anger does not destroy the very things he seeks, for his community needs people like him who do not accept their powerlessness and do not give up the struggle.

There are many other signs of hope throughout urban and rural Australia. I shall not try to list them all, nor even to be systematic, but just make an arbitrary selection, naming some signs of hope personally known to me.

Larry Walsh, an Aboriginal political activist now appointed as Aboriginal liaison officer for the Anglican church in Victoria, is a

sign of hope, as indeed was Archbishop David Penman and the Victorian Anglican Church for their courage in making this appointment and a number of other positive initiatives.¹⁹⁵ Jack Braeside, a founder of AEF, now appointed to minister to inner-city Aboriginal people in Sydney's Anglican parish of Redfern, is a sign of hope, not just because of his ministry there, but because it is an important step towards equality, a recognition of an Aboriginal person's spiritual gifts and leadership.

The young white Uniting Church women and men who took part in the 'About Face' program, travelling to north Australia to live in Aboriginal communities for a few weeks in 1988, are a sign of hope, not just because of what they might have experienced, but because they wanted to go in the first place, wanted to learn, wanted to understand.

Jean Phillips and all the other committed Christian Aboriginal women in Brisbane are a sign of hope, struggling to discern a Christian way as they help their angry and disillusioned people. Margaret Mary Flynn, the Sister Peg of *Sister Peg's Diary*,¹⁹⁶ is a sign of hope, not just because of her love and understanding of the Aboriginal people of Gnowangerup, Western Australia, but because, thank God – even though she is dead – there are many other Sister Pegs who demonstrate to a hurt and needy Aboriginal community that there are some white people who care, and care deeply.

Sister Pamela Barker and the Catholic Church's Aboriginal Apostolate Programme is a sign of hope, especially because of the Country Town Ministry Seminars. Held so far in places like Coonabarabran, NSW, and Echuca and Bairnsdale, Victoria, these seminars try to bring together ministers, priests and other church workers with local Aboriginal people. They are not a sign of hope simply for what they might yet have achieved, but because they show a willingness to try and bridge the gaps between white and Aboriginal Christians.¹⁹⁷

The Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship is a sign of hope because of its clear demonstration that indigenous, Aboriginal Christian leadership has already emerged, simply awaiting acknowledgement, awaiting release. The continuing life and work of the AEF is a persistent sign of hope, as are the Aboriginal churches and pastors outside the AEF – not only in the independent Aboriginal churches, but also in the mainline denominations.

An important sign of hope is the white Christian people who encourage and support the Aboriginal churches, particularly when they show themselves willing to sit under the authority and teaching of an Aboriginal pastor. For many Christian people in the major churches, this is still a difficulty, still the last surviving vestige of Christian imperialism. The Anglicans from throughout the Diocese of Gippsland, white and Aboriginal, who met together for reconciliation late in 1988 are a sign of hope.

The Aboriginal ministers themselves are signs of hope: Ron Williams with his deep understanding and immense concern for Aboriginal people in jail; Cecil Grant at the Albury Aboriginal Church and other pastors like him as they maintain their vision of racial equality and demonstrate their love of white Christians as well as for their Aboriginal fellow believers; and Ossie Cruse as he unerringly pursues his vision of the education and training of Aboriginal leadership. The places where this happens, such as in Perth, at 'Bimbadeen' at Cootamundra, and at Graham Paulson's little training centre at Nundah in Brisbane, are crucial. Struggling, they deserve much more support than the major churches give them.

A sign of hope was the 'National Gathering' of Christians to open the new Parliament House on Saturday 7 May 1988. This is how a reporter for the Christian magazine, *On Being*, saw it:

. . . 40,000 people journeyed to Canberra for the National Gathering in May. Aborigines came from the Northern Territory. Old ladies from Western Australia braved the Nullarbor for five days in buses. Church groups left Sydney at 5.30 a.m. to join the event by lunchtime. Convoys of cars sailed across Bass Strait and drove up through Victoria. . . They wore badges declaring, 'We opened new Parliament House with prayer', pre-empting the official opening by forty-eight hours. . . During the afternoon of Saturday 7 May they marched in long, snaking lines from three different directions to the new House. They surrounded it and, as one military-minded participant put it, 'unleashed a barrage of prayer and praise'.¹⁹⁸

The Australian secular press hardly noticed it. Many of the largest newspapers did not report it, yet 40 000 Christians, two days before the official opening of Parliament House, circled the

huge building and prayed for the nation. Only half of that number of people turned up for the real opening on Monday 9 May. At the Christian gathering, thousands of green and yellow balloons in Australia's colours were released bearing the words 'Justice', 'Mercy' and 'Compassion'.

Then there came the moment when Aboriginal Christians carried forward a cross made from the corral at Myall Creek, scene of the 1838 massacre. White Christian leaders asked forgiveness from God and Aboriginal Christians for Australia's past, for the past sins of arrogance, violence and injustice. In return, Aboriginal Christians forgave – including Neville Bonner, first Aboriginal senator and Charles Harris, Aboriginal minister of the Uniting church and leader of so many Aboriginal protests. An incense of gum-leaf smoke rose symbolically into the Australian sky as Aboriginal Christians moved through the crowd offering water, challenging white Christians to accept back from them the symbol of the water of life:

Jesus said. . . 'Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never thirst; the water that I shall give will become in the one who drinks it a spring of water welling up to eternal life' (John 4:13-14).

ENDNOTES

1. Stanner, 1968: 28
2. Leon-Portilla, 1974: 3
3. The emergence of the 'part-Aboriginal' communities - better termed the 'new Aboriginal communities' - is well discussed in Rowley 1972b: chs 1-4.
4. The past thirty years have seen a vast amount of literature discussing what 'culture' is. Major contributions include at the very least Goodenough, 1971 and Keesing, 1974. The culture of a group is a system of ideas and standards which the group possesses (Goodenough, 1971: 22). Cultures are all therefore 'products of human learning'.
5. Hancock, 1930: 33
6. Christie, 1979: 157
7. Detective Mahoney's report, 21 March 1882, cited in Christie, 1979: 188
8. *Leader* (Melbourne) Supplement, 15 July 1882, p.5
9. Bulmer Papers, Box 11, Paper 13, p.23, SMV
10. South Australian Government Record Group, 52/1/1915/1 cited in Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 267
11. Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 285
12. C.D. Clark, 1973: 23
13. For St Clair volunteers, see *Our Aim*, August 1917, p.4; November 1917, p.4; July 1918, p.4; October 1918, p.4
14. E. Gribble, 1933: 228
15. NSWLA, Debates, 4 May 1943, Vol CLXX, p.2835
16. Biskup, 1973: 109
17. *Ibid*
18. *Ibid*, p.110
19. Western Australian Department of Education, File 4259/1915, cited in Biskup, 1973: 154
20. *Ibid*
21. Stow, 1962: 61
22. Daniel Matthews' Diary, 6 August 1874, cited in Cato, 1976: 69
23. Markus, 1988: 7
24. *Ibid*
25. Goodall, 1982: 36
26. Markus, 1988: 7
27. *Sun* (Melbourne), 12 April 1929
28. *Herald* (Melbourne), 28 June 1929
29. James, 1929
30. *Sun* (Melbourne), 12 April 1929
31. Horner, 1974: 47
32. Markus (1988: 9) says Cooper 'left' Cumeroogunga; Parbury (1986: 106) says he was 'expelled'. More ambiguously, Horner (1974: 47)

says he was 'forced away'.

33. Markus, 1988: 9
34. *Sunday Times*, 26 November 1926
35. *West Australian*, 10 March 1928
36. *Ibid*
37. Markus, 1988: 10
38. Horner, 1974: 47
39. Markus, 1983
40. Markus, 1988: 9
41. *Ibid*
42. Department of the Interior, Correspondence files 'Welfare of
Aboriginals in the Northern Territory: Deputation to Minister, 23
January 1935, CRS A1, 35/3951, AA
43. *Ibid*
44. Franklin, 1976: 106
45. Markus, 1988: 11
46. Inspector R. Browne, 'Australian Aborigines League', Commonwealth
Investigation Branch report, December 1937, Department of the Inte-
rior, CRS A431, 45/1591, AA
47. Horner, 1974: 2-3
48. *Ibid*, p.4
49. *Ibid*. p.5
50. *Ibid*
51. Jack Horner, personal comment, February 1989
52. *Ibid*
53. Horner, 1974: 21
54. *Ibid*, pp.34-35
55. *Ibid*, p.37
56. *Ibid*, p.39
57. *Ibid*, pp.39-40
58. *Ibid*, p.37
59. Miller, 1985: 150-151
60. Franklin, 1976: 108
61. NSW Parliamentary Select Committee on the Administration of the
Aborigines Protection Board, Proceedings, NSWPP, 1938 - 1940, 7
62. Len Harris, personal comment, March 1988
63. Rowley, 1972b: 69-70
64. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 February 1938
65. William Ferguson, cited in Horner 1974: 55
66. P.A. Cameron, cited in Horner 1974: 55
67. Markus, 1988: 16
68. Australian Aborigines' League, Annual Report, 1936
69. W. Cooper to Prime Minister Lyons, 26 October 1937, cited in Markus,
1988: 18
70. W. Cooper, letters cited in Markus, 1988: 18
71. *Herald* (Melbourne), 7 August 1937

72. A. Burdeu to E. Gribble, 20 September 1937, Gribble Papers, ABM archives
73. *Herald* (Melbourne), 7 August 1937
74. Markus, 1988: 9, 17
75. Horner, 1974: 63-64
76. Patten and Ferguson, 1938
77. Horner, 1974: 63-64
78. *Australian Abo Call*, 1 (1), April 1938
79. Horner, 1974: 70
80. W. Cooper to Minister for Native Affairs, Perth, 17 July 1938, cited in Markus, 1988: 17
81. *Ibid*
82. W. Cooper to the Premier of NSW, 20 February 1939, cited in Markus, 1988: 107
83. W. Cooper to the Minister for the Interior, 3 January 1939, cited in Markus, 1988: 106
84. NADOC - 1938 to 1983, *Aboriginal Newsletter*, June/July 1983
85. Horner, 1974: 164-167
86. *Dubbo Liberal*, 8 December 1949
87. Stanner, 1968: 15
88. *Ibid*
89. *Ibid*, p.19
90. Reynolds, 1972b: 172
91. *Lutheran Herald*, 26 October 1921
92. Methodist Overseas Mission, Policy, 1939 (see, for example, 'Our Mission to the Aborigines', *Missionary Review*, 48 (7), January 1940, pp.14-15)
93. Needham, 1935: 167
94. Bennett, 1930: 140-141
95. Elkin, 1944: 51
96. *Aboriginal Welfare: Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities*, Canberra 1937, p.3
97. Connie Isaacs, personal comment, April 1988
98. Nancy Barnes, cited in Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 121
99. Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 121
100. Ken Hampton, cited in Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 267
101. *Aboriginal Welfare: Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities*, Canberra, 1937, p.3.
102. Select Committee on the Administration of the Aborigines Protection Board, 1938, *NSWPP*, 7, 1938 - 1939 - 1940, p.768
103. Harris, 1978b: 20
104. Fully discussed in Harris, 1978b
105. For much of the information on Collarenebri, I am indebted to the careful research in Fletcher, 1975.
106. White, C.A., 1951: 366
107. Horner, 1974: 118

108. Chief Inspector B.C. Harkness to Inspector J.H. Cartwright, 12 October 1940, NSW Ed. Dept File 46/59/8443
109. J.H. Cartwright to B.C. Harkness, 19 November 1940, NSW Ed. Dept File, 46/59/8443
110. *Gazette*, Collarenebri, 22 January 1941
111. The phrase 'clean, clad, and courteous' began to appear in Education Department parlance in the 1920s as the grounds for admission for a few Aboriginal children to schools where the community did not object. See Fletcher, 1973: 55
112. The 'School of Arts' is an institution in many country towns. Now not a school in any sense, but a public hall.
113. Fletcher, 1975: 32
114. *Ibid*, p.33
115. Harris, 1978b: 22
116. W. Frith to Clive Evatt, Minister for Education, enclosing letter from C. Riley, president of North Lismore P. and C. Assoc., and newspaper cuttings. Evatt forwarded them to Education Department for response, 28 October 1942. NSW Ed. Dept File 42/150/25115
117. Clive Evatt to W. Frith, 1 February 1944, NSW Ed. Dept. File P67/00385
118. O.R. Jones, Inspector of Schools, to Superintendent of Primary Education, 15 October 1945, NSW Ed. Dept. File 44/249/31932
119. W. Lang, Assistant Secretary, Lismore Sub-Branch, Returned Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen's Imperial League, to Minister for Education, 21 March 1944, NSW Ed. Dept. File 44/249/319
120. See, for example, correspondence between Major L. Austin, Aborigines Welfare Board Officer, Casino, the NSW Education Department, and the headmaster of Lismore North Public School. Discussed 8 November 1945, Ed. Dept. File 45/150/25031
121. Horner, 1974: 156, 161
122. *Education Gazette* (NSW Education Department), 2 October 1944, p.278
123. NSW Education Department, 'Policy concerning the education of Aboriginal children', 19 May 1949, File 49/302/62172
124. *Education Gazette*, (NSW Education Department.), 2 February 1948, p.43
125. Fletcher, 1975: 35
126. *Daily Telegraph*, Sydney, 6 November 1949
127. Fletcher, 1975: 36
128. Horner, 1974: 160
129. Betty Watts, *Aboriginal Futures: Review of Research and Developments and Related Policies in the Education of Aborigines*, Report commissioned by E.R.D.C., Canberra, 1981, p.8
130. *Ibid*
131. Harris, 1978b: 26
132. NSW Education Department Handbook: *Instruction and Information*

for the Guidance of Teachers, Sydney, 1972, para.5.1.3.4. Objections were filed on 21 June 1961, 7 October 1967, etc., Ed. Dept. File P67/00385

133. *Australian*, 11 August 1972
134. Director-General of Education to Staff Inspector Falkenmire, 23 August 1972, Ed. Dept. File P67/00385
135. For much of the information on the Churches of Christ mission in Carnarvon, I am indebted to Green, 1988.
136. M. Clark, 1956: 110
137. Biskup, 1973: 199-200
138. David Hammer to Maston Bell, Secretary, Churches of Christ, Federal Board of Missions, 24 October 1945, cited in Green, 1988: 168
139. *Ibid*
140. Green, 1988: 168
141. e.g. Moncrieff, 1957: 39; Hawtrey, 1949: 75-76
142. e.g. Green, 1988: 169
143. Green, 1988: 169
144. *Northern Times*, 4 January, 1946
145. Green, 1988: 169
146. *Northern Times*, 4 January, 1946
147. Green, 1988: 169
148. David Hammer, 4 January 1946, cited in Green, 1988: 169
149. Green, 1988: 170
150. David Hammer's Report to the Churches of Christ Federal Board of Missions, December, 1945, cited in Green, 1988: 170
151. Green, 1988: 170
152. *Ibid*
153. Rowley, 1972c: 74-75
154. Green, 1988: 170
155. *Ibid*
156. Hammer, 1976: 152
157. *Ibid*, p.154
158. *West Australian*, 28 August 1946
159. Green, 1988: 171
160. *Ibid*
161. *Ibid*
162. *Inquirer*, Perth, 16 November 1842
163. Mathews, 1977: 94
164. Duguid, 1972: 98-99
165. *Ibid*, pp.96-97
166. Tom Foster, cited in Horner, 1974: 67
167. Loff, 1983: 12
168. Rowley, 1972b: 246
169. Trigger, 1988: 228
170. Mattingley and Hampton, 1988: 269
171. Miller, 1985: 181

172. Calley, 1964: 52
173. Letter to author from an ex-missionary who wishes to remain anonymous, 6 July 1988
174. Calley, 1964: 56
175. *Ibid*
176. Andrews, 1912: 396
177. *Ibid*, p.400
178. M. Clark, 1972: 8
179. Personal comments from a retired missionary. He wishes to remain anonymous.
180. Several members of the AEF and ex-members have helped me to write about the origins of the AEF. All were frank and helpful. They preferred, however, not to be associated with any particular comment. Those who have provided information include Ossie Cruse, Cecil Grant, Lindsay Grant, Graham Paulson and David Kirk (deceased). I also referred to Jack Braeside's discussion in Hart, 1988: 3-8. Some of these people's memories differed slightly on minor details, but I have put together what I believe to be an accurate account of the origins of the AEF. I apologise for any mistakes.
181. Personal comment by an Aboriginal pastor who asked to remain anonymous.
182. Ron Williams, address to Aboriginality and Spirituality Workshop, Spring Forum, Perth, August 1988
183. *Ibid*
184. Ron Williams, personal comment, August 1988
185. White, 1909: 21
186. S. Morgan, 1987: 103
187. Ron Williams, address to Aboriginality and Spirituality Workshop, Spring Forum, Perth, August 1988
188. Walker, 1972
189. Fuller, 1912: 385
190. Duguid, 1972: 97
191. Personal comment, May 1988. He wishes to remain anonymous.
192. Personal comment, June 1988. He wishes to remain anonymous.
193. Personal journal loaned to me by its author, who wishes to remain anonymous.
194. *Ibid*
195. *Age* (Melbourne), 7 January 1988
196. Flynn, 1988
197. Wilson, 1988: 42-43
198. *On Being*, July 1988, p.16

89. First
Christian
service at
Roper River,
27 August 1908
Acknowledgement:
Keith Cole.
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permission.



90. James
and Angelina
Noble with
Roper River
children
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permission.



91. Bishop
Gilbert White
(seated)
with CMS
missionaries,
Roper River, 1914
l to r: C.M. Hill,
Hubert Warren,
W.G. Vizard,
Mary Crome
Acknowledgement:
Keith Cole.
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permission.





92. Aborigines assist the missionaries to unload the *Holly*,
founding of Groote Eylandt Mission, 1921

Acknowledgement: Keith Cole. Reproduced with permission.



93. The cross precedes the missionaries to Groote Eylandt:
cave painting, photographed in 1921

Acknowledgement: Keith Cole. Reproduced with permission.

Part D
Twentieth century:

*From mission to church in traditional
Aboriginal communities*

11

The reawakening of a vision

The Northern Territory Church of England missions

IN THE FIRST HALF of the twentieth century, there was a massive increase in missionary interest among the major churches. This resulted in the establishment of a large number of mission stations in traditional Aboriginal communities, especially in the north of the continent. As well, some of the missions in the centre and north established late last century continued into the twentieth century to become very significant places. These include the Lutheran mission at Hermannsburg (NT), the Church of England mission at Yarrabah (Qld), the Presbyterian missions at Mapoon and Weipa (Qld) and the Catholic Pallottine missions in the Kimberleys (WA).

The many important missions established early this century were almost all in the northern coastal regions. The Church of England, through the Church Missionary Society, established missions in the Northern Territory at Roper River (1908), Groote Eylandt (1921) and Oenpelli (1925); and, through the Australian Board of Missions, in Queensland at Mitchell River (1904), Lockhardt River (1924) and Edward River (1939). The Methodist church established missions in the Northern Territory at Goulburn Island (1916), Milingimbi (1921), Elcho Island (1922) and Yirrkala (1934). The Catholic Church established missions in the Northern Territory at Bathurst Island (1911) and Port Keats (1935), and in Western Australia at Kalumburu (1907) and Lombadina (1911). The Presbyterian Church established missions in Queensland at

Aurukun (1904) and Mornington Island (1914), in Western Australia at Port George IV/Kunmunya in 1911 and in South Australia at Ernabella in 1937.

Most of the missions arose from a renewed vision in the churches. There was a general sense, prompted perhaps by the federation of the colonies into the Commonwealth of Australia, that this new nation had grown wealthy at the expense of the original inhabitants and that the churches had generally failed even to endeavour to bring them the gospel. There was still a widespread belief that the Aborigines were a dying race needing protection, at least in the southern States, where the death rate still exceeded the birth rate even among the part-Aboriginal population. There was a feeling that the last of the 'real Aborigines' lived in the far north, particularly in Arnhem Land. There was a suspicion – not without reason – that they, too, were about to be exploited by ruthless whites and in imminent danger of the same fate as their southern counterparts.

In the space available in this single volume spanning two hundred years, it is impossible to do justice to any of these missions, let alone provide a balanced treatment of all of them. I have reluctantly adopted a case-study approach and decided to devote this chapter to one set of early twentieth century missions – the Church of England Church Missionary Society's Northern Territory missions during the period 1908–1940.

The Church of England was the first Protestant church to work formally among Aborigines in the Top End of the Northern Territory, although further south the Lutherans had founded their Hermannsburg mission in central Australia in 1877 (see Chapter 7). The first Church of England mission was commenced in 1899 at Kapalgo on the west bank of the South Alligator River, an initiative of a group of Adelaide people who organised 'The Northern Territory (Kaparlgoo) Native Industrial Mission'.¹ The mission was neither well-planned, nor adequately supported. One of the missionaries travelled between Adelaide and the mission by bicycle. The Kapalgo mission was abandoned before 1903.

The next Church of England initiative was commenced on the Roper River in 1908. Before looking at this important mission in some detail, it is necessary to understand the violent introduction to Europeans which the Roper River people experienced immediately prior to the mission.

Roper River and the mission

The pastoral frontier reached the Roper River region of what was then South Australia's Northern Territory in the late 1870s. The Overland Telegraph, stretching from Adelaide to Darwin, provided a guide for those who would enter the Northern Territory from the south. This did not change the waterless conditions which made droving sheep or cattle a horrendous task. Few drovers reached the Top End by this risky route.

The 'OT' also made it possible to reach the Top End from the east. Travelling westward around the Gulf of Carpentaria, travellers must eventually strike the telegraph line. This route began to be used in the mid-1870s and those who travelled it soon became aware of the pastoral potential of the valley of the Roper River. After many years, this original route was called the Old Coast Track.

The Aboriginal people of the Roper River region had encountered whites during the OT construction, when a base camp was set up on the river. When the graziers began droving thousands of cattle through their region they began to object, soon gaining themselves a reputation for fierce and concerted resistance to the European invasion.² Ronan writes:

That Old Coast Road was still the only feasible track between east and west. It was at a much later date, after the Murrumbidgee track was opened up, that the original road became known as the 'Insolvency Track' along which no-one travelled if he was game to go anywhere else. . . a graveyard for men, horses, cattle, money and enthusiasm. It was a place of treachery: treachery hidden in the towering grass of its swampy plains and the crocodile-infested reaches of its watercourses. From the first day of settlement, there had been unceasing guerilla warfare with the natives. It had been dirty fighting on both sides, but then guerilla warfare always is dirty. . .³

There was, nevertheless, a rush to lease sections of the region. Alfred Giles established Springvale Station near Katherine in 1879, and soon most of the land between Katherine and the Gulf was leased. Over the next five years, many more stations were established, including Elsey, Hodgson Downs and Urapunga. Some of the leases in the Roper River district itself proved difficult

to stock and, what is more to the point, most of those which were stocked were abandoned in the 1890s. Although there were economic reasons which partly accounted for their failure, the pastoralists generally blamed the Roper River Aboriginal people for spearing the cattle. As one said, 'The white man risked everything to make a place in the wilderness and the black robbed him of his just reward by killing his livestock, or harrassing it until its value was negligible.'⁴

It may well have seemed to the Roper River people that their resistance had succeeded. White people with their cattle had invaded and now the invaders had been driven out. Any such sense of success, however, was to be short-lived. In the four years from 1899 to 1903 all of the unleased and abandoned land of the region was acquired by the massive London-based Eastern and African Cold Storage Company, which also purchased several stocked and viable stations just outside the region, including Elsey Station.

In 1903, any hypothetical chance that there may have been for the preservation of the traditional pattern of interlocking Aboriginal communities drastically ended. Having no intention of allowing Aboriginal resistance to prevent them from carving out their huge pastoral empire, the company determined to exterminate all Aboriginal people of the region.⁵

Gangs of ten to fourteen men were employed to hunt out all Aboriginal inhabitants and shoot them on sight. A leader of one of these gangs, George Conway, was still alive in 1957 when Fred Bauer interviewed him in Mataranka. Conway described how he had been hired to lead hunting expeditions to Arnhem Land in 1905 or 1906. He said that his party alone had killed dozens of Aborigines.⁶

Eighty years later, few Aboriginal people remember the early years of this century, although there were some still living in the 1960s who described the atrocities to me. On the other hand, there are many living today whose close relatives were killed. These people know that not long before they were born, they lost grandparents or older brothers or uncles or aunts.

Barnabas Roberts was a child during the era of the Eastern and African Cold Storage Company's hunting gangs. His family was among those who sought refuge in the high country. He often used to share his memories of that traumatic period of his life:

O terrible days we used to had: we never walked around much 'mongst the plain country or groun'. We used to upla hill alla time to save our life. Our old people you know used to take us away from plain or river or billabong. Only night time they used to run down to get the lily, alla young men you know. Can't go daytime, frighten of white people.⁷

The next generation, children born in the early years of the mission, know well the stories their parents told them. Dinah Garadji is an elderly woman of the Warndarang group who lives at Ngukurr on the Roper River. On various occasions over the past few years, Dinah Garadji and her friends have told me what they know of conditions in the region in the first few years of this century, an era which they readily identify as immediately prior to the establishment of the Church of England mission in 1908.

Dinah Garadji's people, in those years, lived in fear of 'the white man'. While Barnabas Roberts' family took refuge in the hills, her group stayed as close to the coastal mangrove swamps and jungle thickets as possible. Relatively safe during the wet season, hidden by the tall monsoonal grass and protected by swampy regions which the white hunters' horses could not cross, they were in more danger in the dry season when the grass cover disappeared and the plains dried out sufficiently to enable the armed horsemen to negotiate them.

In the dry season, therefore, the people felt the most exposed, foraging mainly in the mangroves and staying as close to cover as possible. As the dry season progressed, they had to venture out onto the plains to hunt small game and dig for the roots and bulbs of the annual plants which were a staple food item in the Dry.

In 1983, Dinah Garadji described those times to me:

They used to hide their children. They hid them underneath the vines in the creek. Everybody used to hide there. The adults went out from time to time to search for food, but they were all afraid of the white men. My mother told me what happened once when all the old women were digging for nuts at Mangkatjarra. I'm sure you know about those nuts - they're good food. Well, they were digging and digging and not keeping watch when suddenly they became aware of a big mob of white men. They were really terrified.

One old woman - my grandfather's relation - was too old to run.

She showed them the nuts and ate one of them. 'It's good food,' she said. She spoke Warndarang because she was too old to know any Pidgin. 'It's good food,' she told them but they did not understand. A white man shot her there. They just regarded us Aboriginal people as animals.⁸

Within the Roper River region, eight 'tribes' of Aboriginal people spoke eight distinct languages – Alawa, Mara, Ngandi, Warndarang, Ngalakan, Rembarrnga, Nunggubuyu and Mangarayi. The situation today is that two of these languages, Warndarang and Ngandi, have no or very few speakers; three languages, Alawa, Mara and Ngalakan, have a small number of speakers; and three languages, Mangarayi, Rembarrnga and Nunggubuyu, have a larger number of speakers. This distribution of language loss fits precisely with what is known of the procedures of the hunting gangs.

At the 1981 Yutpundji-Djindiwirritj (Roper Bar) Land Claim, evidence was presented that, as a consequence of the activities of the armed gangs of the Eastern and African Cold Storage Company, those Ngalakan groups that once held estates on the perimeters of Elsey and Hodgson Downs stations, in what is Roper Valley Station today, are either extinct or represented by a handful of people.⁹ The clear inference is that to escape death at the hands of the hunting parties, it was necessary either to live under the patronage of station owners, like some of the Mangarayi people did at Elsey Station, or to retreat into the safety of the rugged and impenetrable rocky hill country of Arnhem Land.

Not every group had such choices. People along the valley of the Roper River itself did not have the option of falling back to mountain strongholds. Even with the permission of neighbouring groups, they could not impose on them forever or remain continuously absent from their own country, neglecting its ceremonial obligations. These were therefore the tribes which suffered the most. Larger numbers of Nunggubuyu and Rembarrnga speakers survived because they held more extensive lands containing some impenetrable hiding places. Some of the more westerly Mangarayi speakers survived because they were under the protection of Elsey Station.

The Old Coast Track, on reaching the Roper River region, passed first through Mara country, then Alawa country and

crossed the river at Roper Bar to enter Ngalakan country. When the hunting gangs rode out of Elsey Station, they would have followed the north bank of the Roper River through Ngalakan and into Warndarang country or turned north into Ngandi country. It was these tribes whose numbers were most drastically and tragically depleted. They became a hunted and dispossessed people with nowhere to go.

The plight of the Aboriginal people of this part of the Northern Territory did not remain completely unnoticed. Agencies of government were generally 'unofficially' aware of the large-scale killing of Aboriginal people in the northern parts of Australia, and they either condoned it or at least gave it tacit approval by ignoring it. In the Northern Territory itself, there was a conspiracy of silence. The police did not ask the settlers what they did and they were themselves often the perpetrators of atrocities which were not expected to be detailed in their reports. Similarly, the northern press was part of the conspiracy, adopting the view that the less they knew about it all the better and, even if they did know, it was not to be published.

In 1886, the *Northern Territory Times* wrote:

Our settlers in the Territory will doubtless take good care to deal with the natives, when they again offend, without the intervention of the police or the government. We trust that when occasion again arises there will be no necessity to argue about the tally of killed or wounded; private parties will be sent out and the natives will probably disperse. Beyond that statement the southern press will have little to fill its sensational columns with.¹⁰

The government and its various agencies were less successful at silencing the voice of the Christian churches. At the Church of England's Australian Church Congress in Melbourne in 1906, George Horsfall Frodsham, Bishop of North Queensland, was most outspoken:

We have an airy way of speaking about Australia being a white man's country. But Australia first of all was a black man's country and I have never heard that a black man invited us to take his property away from him. . . . A previous speaker at this Congress has said that the 'British were put by God into

Australia to preach the gospel to the heathen.' I have never heard a more complete condemnation of the stewardship of the Australian people. We have developed the country and we have civilised it, but we have certainly done very little to preach the gospel to the people we have dispossessed. The blacks have been shot and poisoned while they were wild and dangerous. They are now left to kill themselves with white vices where they have been 'tamed'. . . but very few have received at our hands either justice or consideration.¹¹

At this stage, apart from the Australian Board of Missions, most of the missionary outreach of the Church of England was controlled by the separate Church Missionary Associations (CMA) of Victoria and NSW.¹² In 1907, the Northern Territory was part of the Diocese of Carpentaria. Bishop Gilbert White of Carpentaria personally invited the CMA of Victoria to establish a mission somewhere on the Arnhem Land coast. Like Frodsham, White strongly believed that the Church had an obligation to right the wrongs an affluent Australia was inflicting upon the Aborigines:

I have always felt that the Aboriginal was the Lazarus of Australia. Poor, ragged and sick with sores which are often the result of contact with diseases of the white man, hungry because he has been driven from the waterholes [from] which alone he can obtain food, unable to defend himself against the wrongs which may be inflicted on him, he lies at the gate of Australia which is so rich, so comfortable and so well fed.¹³

A party led by Bishop White with the Rev. Arthur Ebbs of Victoria travelled from Thursday Island by the lugger *Francis Pritt* to explore the western side of the Gulf of Carpentaria.¹⁴ At the mouth of the Roper River they met Gajiyuma or 'Old Bob', a Mara elder who had piloted ships up the Roper during the overland telegraph construction.¹⁵ With his help, they surveyed the river by boat and on horseback, choosing a site 110 kilometres upstream from the mouth, at a place known to the local Aborigines as Mirlinbarrwarr.¹⁶

On their return, in August 1907, they reported favourably on the site they had selected. The Victorian Association determined to establish a mission. The government of South Australia granted a lease of 320 square kilometres with a frontage of sixteen

kilometres on the Roper River and promised financial aid. The CMA calculated that they would need to collect £1 000 to commence the mission. Despite the association's own financial crisis, the money was donated by June 1908.¹⁷

The key instigators of the mission were the two bishops: Frodsham, who challenged the church to do something about an intolerable situation; and White, who encouraged the establishment of the work within his own diocese. It is interesting to compare Frodsham's views, as expressed in his challenging address to the Church of England Congress and White's views as expressed in the same year in his paper to the Royal Geographical Society. The motivation and justifications for the northern mission were quite different when presented to Christian and secular audiences.

Frodsham spoke of being motivated by Christian imperatives alone. The Aborigines had been sorely oppressed. We had failed to bring them the gospel. We had better do something about it:

I think if the Lord Jesus came to Australia he would be moved with great compassion for those poor outcasts, lying by the wayside, robbed of their land, wounded by the lust and passion of a stronger race, and dying – yes, dying like rotten sheep – with no man to care for their bodies and souls.¹⁸

White, on the other hand, despite his genuine compassion, was much more utilitarian in an address to a secular audience. If we didn't occupy the north, the Asian hordes on our doorstep soon would. Europeans had generally not coped well, so the Aborigines should be trained to be useful. They were quite capable, White argued, of useful non-skilled or semi-skilled work. If we were to preserve Australia for ourselves, we had to train the Aborigines to develop the north:

Only by united efforts and mutual willingness to sacrifice our own interests and our own particular theories for the common good can we hope for long to preserve this continent as a whole *for ourselves and our children*. . . In regard to the human qualities of affection, kindness, unselfishness, love of parents and children, gratitude and willingness to learn, many of [the Aborigines] will compare not altogether unfavourably with an English agricultural labourer.¹⁹

From the outset it was intended that the mission should be industrial and agricultural as well as educational and spiritual, and so three men were sought who would fill the varying demands of the new mission. The three finally chosen were F.L.G. Huthnance, Rex Joynt and M.C. Sharpe, a stockman.²⁰ Huthnance was described by Ebbs as 'a man of character who has had farming experience, and was a valued teacher in the Victorian Education Department and who is now reading for holy orders. He is therefore, we think, just the man to carry through the industrial work of the mission.'²¹

Huthnance was ordained and made leader of the group. The South Australian government made Huthnance a Sub-Protector of Aborigines and from that moment on there was tension between the missionaries' duties to their mission and their task as they perceived it, and their duties to the government.²² The charge ('Instructions') to the missionaries, delivered on 10 July 1908 in St Paul's Cathedral Chapter House, Melbourne, seemed to make it abundantly clear that the objectives of the mission were to be both spiritual and practical. Indeed, we encounter once more the old phrase 'Christianity and civilisation':

'Ask of Me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.'

Brethren: We preface these instructions with a comprehensive promise from the word of God. We do this in order that all men may know the real purpose of your mission. You are being set apart for the special work of proclaiming the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Aborigines of Northern Australia and more particularly to those living in the vicinity of the Roper River. You are the ambassadors of Christ. We send you forth as his representatives. Teach Christ, preach Christ, live Christ, glorify Christ. This is our primary instruction to you. . .

In going to the Roper River of the Northern Territory you, my brethren, are entering upon a service of a distinctly national character. One of the most sacred obligations resting upon the people of this Commonwealth is to give the original possessors of this continent - the Aborigines - the benefits of our Christianity and civilisation. . . You are going on behalf of the people of Australia and specially as the honoured representatives of the Church of England in Australia. . . You are going to a service of great urgency. The Aborigines need to be properly protected,

properly taught various industries and adequately cared for.²³

The tenor of correspondence with the government strongly suggested a utilitarian set of objectives: the training of the Aborigines in industrial and agricultural skills as part of the government strategy for the development of the north.²⁴ The mission association agreed to a kind of dual authority, so 'that the head of the mission, when appointed, be allowed to be directly responsible to your government for the due administration within the mission reserve of any act dealing with the protection of the Aborigines.'²⁵

Huthnance, even before reaching the Roper River, wrote to the Premier of South Australia for clarification of his responsibilities. His queries did not relate to the training of Aborigines for work as such, but to their ultimate destiny as workers. Huthnance wanted to see them working for their own good, not merely as a servant class:

I beg to be informed as to the extent of the power given me as [a Sub-Protector], with copies of Acts dealing with such positions – as well as with the native problem generally – languages, etc. Is the mission station to be a kind of training ground for cheap servants to anyone who might apply for black labour? Or is it to be regarded as a permanent home for such natives as care to come in or are sent to us from time to time?

I ask the question because it is one which has given me no little anxiety. Our party do not care to devote their lives to training cheap labour, but gladly will rough it to promote a love of home and of labour on the part of our black people.²⁶

Apart from this highly important distinction, the missionaries saw industrial and agricultural training as closely related to the gospel. The instructions they were given sounded spiritual, but after all it depends on what is meant by the gospel. All of these early missionaries saw work and gospel as almost synonymous. They even referred to the 'gospel of work'.

The function of the mission, wrote Joynt, was:

...to protect the Aborigines from being: (1) Exploited. (2) Demoralised. (3) Killed.

The Roper River Mission stands for the protecting and uplifting

of the black race in Northern Australia, and the methods used to bring about that result are twofold: (1) The gospel of work. (2) The gospel of love.²⁷

Such European cultural traits as labour and cleanliness were not merely next to godliness – they *were* godliness:

Our work is of an industrial nature. Gardening, building, stock work, school, sewing, laundry, and raffia, cooking, housework, cleanliness, all taught under the influence of Christianity: the ideal, of course, being Christ-likeness.²⁸

It was, then, with these kinds of objectives, with these thoughts filling their minds, that the three missionaries left Melbourne on 13 July 1908. On their way to Roper River, via north Queensland, the founding party called at the Church of England mission at Yarrabah. Three Aboriginal Christians from Yarrabah agreed to join the team. These were James Noble, Angelina Noble and Horace Reid.²⁹ The party, now six in number, set out on the *Francis Pitt* from Thursday Island on 8 August 1908, arriving at the chosen site on the Roper River on 27 August. Their first act was to hold a communion service as a thanksgiving to God for all his mercies since 'leaving the homeland' and to mark the founding of the mission.³⁰

From the moment these first missionaries arrived, they were welcomed by the Aboriginal people of the immediate vicinity. In particular, they were encouraged by the acceptance and active support of Gajlyuma. He was an old and respected elder, not only in his own Mara tribe, but throughout the whole region. Soon nicknamed King Bob, Gajlyuma assumed responsibility for the people gathering at the mission. It is obvious that the local people perceived the newly-established mission as a sanctuary, within the protection of which they were safe from European violence.³¹ Barnabas Roberts, an Alawa man who came to the mission as a young boy when it first commenced, once said: 'If the missionaries hadn't come, my tribe would have been all shot down.'³²

In the 1960s, there were older people at Roper River who could still recall the atrocities and spoke about them. Max Hart visited the district in 1965 to gather data and obtained information from some of these people:

The older Aborigines at the mission still talk about these murders knowing that they were protected from them. One old lady actually contrasted the present day safety of her two little grand-daughters attending the CMS school with the unfortunate little victims whose brains had been knocked out against the rocks after their parents had been shot in those earlier years.³³

One of the first missionaries, Joynt, found ample evidence all around him of atrocities and murders. Not only did he obtain stories from Aboriginal people, but also from Europeans who boasted of their exploits. Joynt was told, for example, of a young boy who was flogged to death for running away and then his body hidden in the river to be eaten by crocodiles:

[Aborigines] are treated worse than animals, and sometimes even referred to as 'black animals' and terms even worse. . . In years gone by the natives have been shot down like game and hundreds killed in a spirit of revenge. I have met men that boast of shooting the poor unprotected black 'just for fun'.³⁴

Gajiyuma, or King Bob, was one of a number of Aboriginal leaders in different times and places who was astute enough to anticipate the inevitability of the total destruction of his people by hostile European forces unless he sought the protection of those Europeans he could trust. He saw in the mission the salvation of his people and he spent the last few months of his life gathering the scattered remnants into safety.

Dinah Garadji told me of his efforts:

My mother and her brothers and all the others went to the mission. That old man, Bob, was the one who told them. Everyone was still afraid of the white men and they were unsure of the missionaries – perhaps they, too, were going to shoot them! But that old man said, 'It's all right. They aren't going to shoot everyone! They are just schoolteachers! They will look after the children. All the children will be safe there.' Then he told my father's family and everybody else, too. He walked and walked everywhere. He told everybody that they did not have to be afraid any more. They all came to the old mission. A very big mob – in fact, everybody came.³⁵

Gajiyuma died in peace at the mission in February of the following year, 1909. Rex Joynt recorded his final words: 'Jesus been talking alonga me. Him been tell me no more be frightened to die. Me no more frightened feller.'³⁶

By Gajiyuma's death early in 1909, over 200 people had gathered at the mission. They were the remnants of the Mara, Warndarang, Alawa, Ngalakan and Ngandi tribes, the southernmost members of the Rembarrnga and Nunggubuyu tribes and some of the western members of the Mangarayi tribe.³⁷

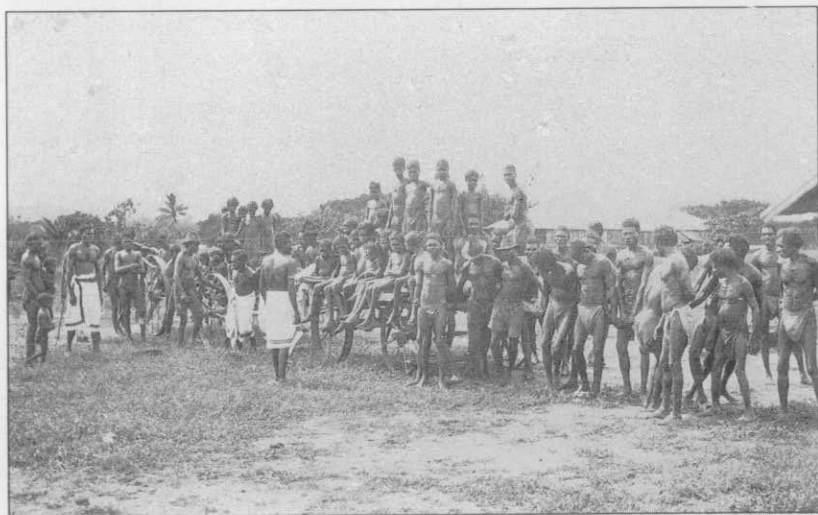
It is ironic that in the very year that the mission was founded, the Eastern and African Cold Storage Company was liquidated. Its error was in presuming that the failure of earlier pastoral efforts was entirely due to the spearing of cattle. It was only one of many factors, such as disease, unsuitable native grasses, remoteness and the economy – all of which combined in eastern Arnhem Land to make conventional cattle raising impossible.³⁸

The killing of Aboriginal people in the region, however, did not stop. It continued in many parts of the Northern Territory well into this century and within the living memory of many people. Some of the better smaller leases of land forfeited by the 'Eastern and African' were taken up by men like George Conway who had been members of the hunting parties. The presence of the mission, however, made open massacre less likely as it was now more public. Not only was there now a pro-Aboriginal group of Europeans actually resident in the area with government support and access to various authorities, but the mission itself provided a refuge. Aboriginal people now had somewhere to go.³⁹ A scattered and hunted people had found a home.

There were over 200 Aboriginal people at the mission within a few months, although by the middle of 1909 these numbers were fluctuating, but never falling below about seventy.⁴⁰ There are two main reasons for such fluctuations. One was the climate. Within two months of the establishment of the mission came the wet season, a time when movement was restricted and when the people were glad enough to stay near this new food supply. Seasonal population fluctuation is still typical of life in settled Aboriginal communities in the Top End of the Northern Territory today. They are good places to be in during the wet season, providing permanent shelter and easy access to European foods.



94. The wedding of Alf Dyer and Mary Crome
 Acknowledgement: Keith Cole. Reproduced with permission.



95. Aborigines report for work, Oenpelli Mission, 1920s
 Acknowledgement: Len Harris collection



96. The peace expedition: Hubert Warren gathering information
Acknowledgement: Keith Cole. Reproduced with permission.



97. Jalamar advising that Dagiar is expecting Warren
Acknowledgement: Keith Cole. Reproduced with permission.



98. Warren talks to Dagiar at the wreck of Trayner and Fagan's boat
Acknowledgement: Keith Cole. Reproduced with permission.

In the dry season, by contrast, hunting and foraging is possible over a wide area. The ease of movement and reliability of fair weather also means that ceremonies are normally scheduled for the dry season. Thus by about May of 1909 there was considerable movement in and out of the mission. The missionaries were worried because they did not understand the pattern. Ignorance of the relationship between ceremonial obligation and what the whites have come to term 'walkabout' has persistently and unfairly resulted in Aboriginal people being regarded as shiftless and unreliable.

The other reason for fluctuation was that the danger of being shot decreased markedly over the next few years, although it was a long time before it disappeared altogether. The establishment of the mission at the time of the demise of the Eastern and African Cold Storage Company was a happy coincidence because the mere presence of the mission acted as a deterrent to any further systematic or large-scale killing of Aboriginal people in the region, which may otherwise have transpired as George Conway and others took over the forfeited land.⁴¹

The missionaries saw their task as promoting both the spiritual and material welfare of the Aboriginal people. In particular, they believed both to be best advanced by the creation of a self-sustaining, settled village economy based on agriculture and cattle – a 'total institution'.⁴² In less than a year they had erected staff houses, a health clinic ('dispensary') and a school; cleared, fenced and partly planted seven acres of land for farming; and commenced stock work with the purchase of a herd of cattle from Urapunga Station.⁴³ The Aboriginal people were encouraged to assist in this work and many did, being rewarded with food and other goods.

Aside from building, agriculture and stockwork, Huthnance reported to the Victorian Church Mission Association in 1909 that they had commenced a number of other activities. The mission staff had been able '...to conduct a school for children, to hold a daily class for adults and to frequently gather people together for services'. For the children (which included teenagers), the mornings were taken up with formal lessons in school and the afternoons by practical work around the mission station.⁴⁴

That this busy schedule, with its obvious concentration on the creation of an economically viable agricultural and pastoral

community, was in accord with the Association's wishes is plain from the 'Instructions' to the Rev. Hubert Warren and Mr W.G. Vizard on their departure for Roper River on 11 March 1913. The Church Missionary Association's dream differed little from the Jesuit dream of the Paraguayan Reductions. The mission must not just be spiritual; it must be agricultural and industrial to train the Aborigines to live independently:

You are to give yourselves. . . to [the agricultural] branch of the mission which, we repeat, must be specially developed. . . and we wish most earnestly to warn you against the fatal mistake of doing the work yourselves instead of training the Aborigines to do it. . . The Committee. . . is convinced of the absolute necessity of encouraging industrial work amongst members of child races such as the Aborigines of Australia. . . so that men and women. . . may soon be placed in their own homes and upon their own plots of ground, and be so taught that they shall eventually be able to live independently of material help from the Association.⁴⁵

Warren arrived at Roper River to find a tense atmosphere between the missionaries. There had been many staff changes already. Huthnance had resigned in 1910, followed by Sharp a few months later. The Nobles, due to persistent ill health, had returned to Yarrabah in the same year, and Horace Reid had gone to Katherine.⁴⁶ These Aboriginal missionaries, particularly James Noble, are recalled with great affection and respect by Roper River people, who associate them very explicitly with the coming of the gospel.

The departures left Joynt as a lone missionary until May 1911, when Mr and Mrs O.C. Thomas, Miss C.M. Hill and Miss J. Tinney arrived, followed in November by the Rev. and Mrs R. Birch. Regrettably, these people did not manage to live and work together amicably. It was often the case on the remote tropical mission stations that heat, sickness and isolation made the Europeans tense, which led to pettiness and quarrelling. In this case, an already strained situation was aggravated by Thomas and Birch who disputed each other's authority.

Warren, during the months after his arrival, wrote in his diary such observations as 'much bickering among the staff at

meals today', 'damnable rows all day', or 'rotten scene at breakfast this morning'.⁴⁷

Birch and Thomas, their differences apparently unresolvable, soon left and Warren was asked to become superintendent. Under his sincere leadership, the staff of Roper River mission became much less stressed and a stable mission environment developed. When Bishop White visited a year later, the improved atmosphere was obvious.⁴⁸ Reporting to the Church Missionary Association in Victoria, White referred to staff problems in the past and then went on to say:

It is undeniable that very considerable friction has existed amongst members of the staff in the past and this fact has much hindered the work of the mission, besides causing much adverse criticism throughout the Territory when these dissensions became generally known. I believe that this friction no longer exists. . . . Taking the mission generally, I am much more hopeful than I was on my last visit. You have a good superintendent and staff and, though there are many difficulties, they are now clearly recognised by the staff who will do their best to meet them.⁴⁹

Miss Elsie Masson visited the mission in 1913 at the request of the Northern Territory administration. Although it is important to be cautious of comments made by very short-term visitors, Masson's observations provide one of the few independent descriptions we have:

The mission owns two hundred square miles on the banks of the Roper River and very largely supports itself, killing its own cattle for meat, growing its own vegetables and milking its own goats. The work is done by black boys under the direction of the white men, and the girls learn simple housework and cooking. Morning is spent in school, where the children are taught to read, write and do simple arithmetic. But this part of the education progresses slowly; they read aloud, but do not understand what they read. . . .⁵⁰

An important feature of mission life and organisation was the dormitory system. Early in the mission's development, a system was introduced in which the children were boarded in dormitories.

Boys and girls dormitories had been constructed by the time Elsie Masson visited in 1913. Rough, makeshift, temporary constructions, they were nevertheless already in use. Although it was not absolutely obligatory for children to live in the dormitories, it was a generally accepted understanding that long-term members of the mission community should allow their children to live in them. It was also expected that children would advise the missionaries before going away from the mission with their families.

It is very important to distinguish between this kind of dormitory system, where parents were still camped nearby or, if not, were able to seek permission to take their children away for a period, and the system in use elsewhere, particularly in institutions in the southern States, where Aboriginal children were removed, often forcibly, from distant homes and raised without seeing or even knowing their families.

Elsie Masson was present at a church service one Sunday. We therefore have a rare glimpse of what went on, albeit from her limited perspective:

Church was held in the enclosure, round which were grouped the rough mission dwellings made of bark, of branches of trees, and of loosely fitting iron. . . In the centre stood the head missionary, dressed in white; opposite him, the rest of the mission staff and the strangers in rough bush clothes or ship's uniform. To each side were the mission children, girls in neat cotton dresses, and plump little boys clad only in sarongs made of flour bags, looking demurely down at their hymn-books and occasionally stealing a sly glance in the direction of the newcomers. In one corner crouched a few myall blacks - those who did not belong to the mission, but who were encamped nearby and were temporarily working there at herding goats or digging in return for tucker and tobacco. In the midst of this orthodox Christian service, some of the blacks sat with their hands over their eyes so that they might not see those of their relatives on the opposite benches whom they were forbidden by Aboriginal law ever to behold.

They all joined in the hymns, singing in sweet tuneful voices. The words they knew by heart, though their meaning was far beyond their comprehension; nor could they even read them, although they kept their eyes fixed on their hymn-books in grave imitation of the missionaries. They listened eagerly to the ser-

mon and vied with each other in answering questions. Their answers were as often right as wrong, yet it was obvious to the spectators that no real thought, but anxiety to please and aptitude to imitate were what guided them.⁵¹

Although Aboriginal children may well have been more interested in pleasing the teacher than getting the answers right, this is not a matter of intelligence, but of the social function of questioning in Aboriginal society.⁵² Similarly, Masson's observation that the children 'read. . . but do not understand' accords with the normal progress by which literacy is acquired in a foreign language. The ability to turn written symbols into sounds is acquired much more rapidly than the ability to comprehend their meaning.

The Roper River missionaries, like virtually all missionaries, found the Aboriginal children rapid learners. Furthermore, even though the missionaries insisted strongly on the necessity for clear evidence of conversion to the Christian faith before baptism, they had already judged three young Aboriginal men ready for baptism before Elsie Masson's visit. On 11 May 1913, Whitsunday, three Aboriginal men, David Walker, James Campbell and Henry Huddestone, were baptised by immersion in the Roper River.⁵³

The use of European first names and surnames by Aboriginal people has often led European Australians to misconstrue their ancestry. Aboriginal people throughout Australia who took European names did so for a variety of reasons. Some 'exchanged' names with a European friend, but most took names to overcome a cross-cultural problem. Aboriginal people's names function differently from European Australian's names. There are restrictions on who can know and use them and how or when they are to be used. They cannot be used casually. In ordinary circumstances, Aborigines normally use relationship terms - 'brother' or 'aunt' - or even vague terms like 'countryman'.

All this became too awkward in contact with Europeans, who insisted on the perpetual use of names, so Aboriginal people happily accepted or took European first names and, later, surnames, often those of missionaries or stockmen they liked. At places like Roper River, the people continued to have, as well as European names, multiple Aboriginal names which were used in the traditional manner. At some places, like Groote Eylandt, Aboriginal surnames have been invented, the Groote Eylandters choosing a

totem name with only a few syllables because of frustration at the perpetual inability of the Europeans to pronounce their many-syllabled clan names.

The missionaries

Exceptionally tall and lean, Hubert Warren soon acquired from the Aborigines the nickname 'long fella cobberlilli', long lizard. A man of boisterous good humour, he was known for his open friendly nature and infectious laugh. Among other qualities, he was a remarkably skilled natural mechanic, said to have built the first motor cycle in Melbourne.⁵⁴ This natural ability proved an indispensable attribute in the survival of the remote mission stations.

Arriving at Roper River at the age of twenty-eight, Warren was young, strong and seemingly tireless. He was to play a crucial role in the development of the Northern Territory CMS missions for the next twenty years. Warren's hard work, enthusiasm and emphasis on 'things practical' never changed. Many years later, Captain (later Sir) Hubert Wilkins, the noted Arctic and Antarctic explorer, spent several months in Arnhem Land with Warren. He described his first encounter with him at a mission sawmill:

The screaming of a fast-running saw had been audible. . . for some time. . . Tying up the boat to the pier, we approached the sawmill. We were met by the tall, spare form of the mission superintendent, the Rev.H.E. Warren. He was clad in blue overalls and sprinkled with sweet-smelling pine dust. A black boy and two half-castes were his helpers. Tanned from fifteen long years of northern residence, his hands scarred with toil, one realised that here was a man with the zeal of a Christian martyr and with a practical capacity rarely exceeded. . .⁵⁵

One problem Warren shared with many enthusiastic and dedicated hard-working people was that he preferred doing things himself to the awkwardness of getting others to do them. Thus Bishop Henry Newton could describe Warren as 'a man of single-eyed devotion and self-sacrifice', but that 'if he lacks anything it is chiefly firmness as a ruler. He is almost too considerate. He should be more autocratic.'⁵⁶

On leave in Sydney in 1915, Warren married Ellie May Potter,

a schoolteacher whom he had met some years earlier. A strong but gentle person, Ellie Warren was a perfect partner for Hubert. In the difficult years which lay ahead, she was to share with him his dreams, his hopes and aspirations, his disappointments and frustrations. Bishop Newton wrote:

Mrs Warren, it seems to me, though not officially a member of the staff, is one of the most valuable persons on the mission. She has a very real soothing influence and she is a most excellent teacher. She is a trained teacher and an experienced one. I was tremendously struck with the lessons she gave in school on the Saturday. Her methods were new to me and different from what I had ever seen. She is a good disciplinarian, yet very gentle and patient and painstaking.⁵⁷

This quiet, gentle woman epitomised those countless missionary wives, largely unrecognised, their work mostly unrecorded, who contributed at least as much to the life of the missions as their husbands did. Ellie Warren uncomplainingly endured isolation, heat, illness and lack of facilities to create home life for her husband and family, often a much harder task than the more public responsibilities of the missionaries. With her husband, she quietly laid in a tiny grave their little two-year-old daughter, Josephine, who died at Roper River in 1921 of what they called 'Mediterranean fever', a strain of influenza so-called because it was thought to have been brought back to Australia when the defence forces returned from World War I.

Mary Catherine Crome arrived in Roper River in August 1913, a few months after Warren. At 39, she was one of the older missionaries. Working in Melbourne as a nurse, she had been challenged to offer for missionary work in north Australia while a member of All Saints Church, Northcote.⁵⁸ Mary Crome was a devout person, with a deep and lifelong desire to be God's instrument in the conversion of people to Christ. Her diary is full of her assessments of the spiritual status of the people she met and of her obviously sincere personal desire for their conversion.⁵⁹ When, for example, the crew of a supply ship stayed for a Sunday service at the mission, she wrote: 'Oh that those men might come to Jesus and prove that love, the love that is unchanging, everlasting, that reaches out to the veriest sinner and meets every need.'⁶⁰

Scrupulous about daily Bible reading and prayer, Mary Crome held her own services on Sunday if none were available. A woman of slight build, her photographs depict her as rather severe, with her hair parted in the middle and tightly pulled back. She was certainly a strong-willed person, but she was also kindly and thoughtful. She stoically endured the many discomforts of life at the remote Roper River mission. With a rigid attitude to dress, she found the Wet most distressing and was often ill at that time of the year. She was frustrated by the long mail delays and the late arrival of supplies, and was often lonely and homesick during her first few years. The isolation of the mission is well illustrated by the fact that she did not hear of Australia's entry in World War I until 21 August 1914, nearly three weeks after the event.⁶¹

She amused herself walking, riding, fishing, canoeing and playing the organ. She particularly enjoyed being rowed down the river by Hubert Warren in his single days, but he was to marry another. Her diary reveals that she was able to have fun with the children, that the children were happy and that under Warren the mission atmosphere could be quite congenial:

We had a great picnic today. God did answer prayer. Everything went off beautifully. Miss Hill, Mr Joynt and myself rode on horseback. The dray was loaded with the provisions and several of the very small children. The rest walked. I do not know what we looked like. Mr Warren took photos of us starting out. As soon as we got to the ground, Mr Joynt returned and Mr Warren and Mr Vizard came over. It was very warm and the children did not at first even want to play games, but just lived in the billabong.

After dinner at which they all had bread, meat, tomatoes, cakes and tea, by way of a treat we had our lunch. It was simply lovely sitting in the shade and looking across the billabong to the bluff shaped hill rising straight up from the water. We played games, the favourite one being all sitting in a ring with a big piece of string, on which was a ring passed from one to the other, the one caught with it having to go into the centre and all singing round songs to it. . .

Fill the gap was the next favourite and, except in colour, they might have been white children down south. They had some nuts etc. and we had afternoon tea, after which we gave them their tea and then Mr Warren had a service on the bank of the

billabong and we all came home in the moonlight a very tired but happy company.⁶²

Something of life in the dormitories can be glimpsed through Mary Crome's diary. There was a fairly rigid daily routine. The girls in her care had to clean, cook, iron, sew and so on. Clearly, this was intended to equip them to help run the mission itself, but it is also clear that the girls were not considered servants and that the missionaries shared fairly in the menial work. Mary Crome often refers to large amounts of washing, ironing, sewing and mending she had to do.⁶³ It is evident from her record of the girls' complaints that they knew if they were being treated unfairly and said so, such as the occasion when they declared they were not prepared to carry everyone else's firewood.

Children were punished by the missionaries for offences such as stealing, disobedience, rudeness and for sexual acts. Punishments included being scolded, deprived of privileges, served plainer food, 'given the strap' or confined for a day, all of which sound harsh but were much like the treatment of white children in 1913 and, in some cases, less severe than the manner in which some missionaries corrected their own children, for whom they had a higher standard.

The worst punishment was temporary expulsion and the fact that this procedure worked at all is an indication that either the children did generally prefer mission life or that at the very least their parents wanted them to live at the mission. Had the children been forcibly retained against their or their parents' wills, expulsion would have been a favour, not a punishment. Children did abscond from time to time, but seem also to have almost invariably returned.

There was also a punishment called 'being treated like a camp person for a week'.⁶⁴ It is difficult to assess how severe a punishment this was or what it entailed, but it needs to be balanced against Mary Crome's very genuine concern for the 'camp people', the Aborigines loosely associated with the mission who camped at the edge of the compound. Mary Crome obviously shared the authoritarian attitudes of her generation, but she also impresses as a kindly person. She did everything she possibly could for 'the camp people', caring for the ill and injured, and constantly lamenting her powerlessness to do more for them.

She also went out of her way to demonstrate interest in the health and well-being of the other missionaries and seems, in turn, to have been treated very thoughtfully by them. On the whole, however, despite picnics, birthday parties and various outings, the missionaries were generally reserved with each other, did not use Christian names, and were prudish in the relationships between the men and the women. When Bishop White visited the mission in 1914, he found it hard to convince the women that it was not improper to enter the men's quarters when they were sick to treat their illnesses.⁶⁵

Mary Crome was very fond of the children in her charge and, as time went by, made some effort to understand them. At first she was mystified as to why any child would want to run away from what seemed to her to be the obvious advantages of mission life. She did come to wonder if the freedoms of life outside might sometimes seem more attractive than the regimented dormitories: 'The idea of the bush is so attractive to them, it must be very irksome. The routines and the rules. . . are almost like those of the Medes and Persians – unalterable.'⁶⁶

It was particularly the older girls who ran away. The missionaries did not seem to grapple at this stage with the fact that the girls might have been obliged to leave the mission temporarily. The missionaries did not therefore try to adapt their routines to allow such a possibility, although they did not refuse parental requests to take children away. Mary Crome recorded Vizard's comments about the girls when he ' . . . wanted to know could we make the conditions easier for the girls so they would not run away. It is not the work – it is the craving for the bush and I think, too, they want to get married and they do not understand our ways – nor we their thinking.'⁶⁷

Life was to change dramatically for Mary Crome with the arrival at Roper River mission of Alfred John Dyer in June 1915. Alf Dyer felt called to the ministry from his childhood years, but he worked as a shop assistant in Melbourne from 1900, when he was sixteen, to 1911. Towards the end of these years, he began to sense his calling as a missionary. Visions and hearing God's voice were a common feature of his spiritual experience. In 1910, he heard God ask him to give up his interest in shooting. 'Yes, Lord, I will be for peace,' he replied and, selling his guns, gave the proceeds to missionary work.⁶⁸

Shortly afterwards, while dressing a shop window, Dyer saw a vision which led him to offer for missionary service with CMA in Africa. His offer was refused, so he commenced training for the ministry, working in a number of Victorian parishes and studying part-time. He found academic work difficult, particularly Greek which he failed many times. He continued to offer himself to CMA for work in Africa and twice more was told that he was not acceptable for ordination and missionary service because of his poor academic achievement.

A clergyman associated with CMA suggested to Dyer that he might be more acceptable as a missionary in north Australia than in Africa. Dyer then offered himself to CMS for Roper River and was refused on two more occasions. Still believing in his call to missionary service, he accepted an offer to work in the Diocese of Wangaratta with the possibility of future ordination.⁶⁹

While looking after the church at Bethanga, he spent long periods alone in prayer in the mountains. One evening in the rectory he saw a vision and next morning received a telegram from the Victorian CMA, offering him a missionary position at Roper River and suggesting he meet Hubert Warren on Albury Station. Warren thought Dyer well suited to the work. He was accepted by the CMA and left for Roper River almost immediately, arriving there in July 1915.⁷⁰

Dyer was not particularly skilled or well-trained in anything at all, but he was very willing to learn. The gifts he brought to the mission were loyalty, dedication and tenacity of purpose. He was also a courageous person, sometimes foolishly so. A close friendship grew between Dyer and Warren. Dyer's natural practical inclination became supported by real practical experience and knowledge.

At Roper River, Alf Dyer fell in love with Mary Crome whom he called 'Katie' from her middle name. Courtship was not easy at the Roper River mission. Dyer spent many hours praying alone up in the hills. There were strict rules on social relationships between the male and the female missionaries. They were not allowed to walk alone together or to kiss each other. All their talking had to be done in the company of others. Consent for their marriage had to be obtained from the CMA in Melbourne.⁷¹ Before they were married, Mary Crome took her scheduled furlough in Melbourne. She returned in May 1917 and, on the 24th, they

were married. Alf Dyer recorded the event:

I awoke in the morning and said to myself, 'This is my wedding morning.' But the Rev. Warren was ill with fever. I went in to see him and he said, 'There is no chance of the wedding today.' I replied, 'Another day will do. I hope you will soon be better.' And I went in and put on my bluiies and cossack boots for the garden. . . As I was coming to lunch, the ladies said that they had decided to eat all the good things that they had prepared, as there was no ice. I was asked to put on my white coat to hide my bluiies.

As we were eating, in walked Mr Warren with a blanket over his head and said, 'I am going to marry you.' So we had our wedding breakfast before we were married. The bride got dressed in twenty minutes, and self in less. The buggy with the stores had to be got ready. The service, the vows, cutting the cake were all carried out. The ceremony was held under a tree where St Catherine's Church later was built. Then with good wishes for all, we mounted our horses to ride to the Mission Gorge about seven miles away where we have a hut for staff holidays. . . where we could be a real Adam and Eve. We were quite alone.⁷²

Alf and Mary Dyer were to spend another seventeen years on CMS missions in north Australia. They were instrumental in the establishment of the new Groote Eylandt mission and, particularly, the Oenpelli mission. The beginnings of both of these missions owe a great deal to Dyer's tenacity, optimism and plain hard work. He seemed to gain the greatest pleasure solving the numerous and inevitable practical problems which arose in simply keeping the missions going. It would be unfair, however, to claim that he neglected the spiritual aspect of the work. Dyer was ordained deacon in Darwin in 1927 and priested in Sydney in 1928.

The *Church Mission Gleaner* recorded:

It was a solemn and impressive service and we rejoice to know that the little band of workers at Oenpelli will now have the blessed and holy privilege of gathering round the Lord's Table, in remembrance of his death and passion until he come.⁷³

It is, nevertheless, true that Dyer was preoccupied with the physical development of the missions, particularly Oenpelli, where

he and Mary Dyer spent most of their time. Dyer had a dream that all the Aborigines of the north would finally settle at Oenpelli, forming the nucleus of an Arnhem Land State in which he would have some considerable importance. He genuinely felt that a huge Aboriginal State would be the only way of protecting the Aborigines from mistreatment and exploitation.

It was, of course, an impossible dream. It was typical of Dyer that his own reminiscences of Oenpelli should emphasise the practical achievements:

My wife and I had landed on this spot on the Alligator River from a little launch, with nothing but a few stores and the promises of God, and our income never exceeded £100 a year. We now left behind many people whom we had taught to read and write, and to love the better things as Christ himself taught. Besides this we left 1 500 cattle, 200 horses, mules and donkeys, all kinds of machinery, a tractor, a sawmill, water-pumps etc., etc. Most of these things came in direct answer to prayer, for he never failed us in any of his promises.⁷⁴

Mission expansion in the 1920s

The second mission established by CMS in the north was at Emerald River on Groote Eylandt. Roper River mission had always been intended to be the first of a network of missions, a plan evident as early as the 'Instructions' to Hubert Warren in 1913:

You are to remember that the mission station at the Roper was deliberately established to be the basis for extension work. The staff is expected to constantly pray over, and be making preparations for the establishment of one or more outstations in the near future. . . We have an urgent extension responsibility to those other sheep, especially those to the north of the Roper River, and we shall look forward to receiving recommendations from the staff on this important matter without unnecessary delay.⁷⁵

Warren took his instruction very seriously. In 1915, the CMA supplied him with a six-metre clinker-built craft, powered by both engine and sail. Naming it the *Evangel*, he made several exploratory trips during the next two years. On the first of these, in April 1916, he was accompanied by Rex Joynt and three Roper

River Aboriginal men, Umbariri, Saltwater Jack and Dennis Bourke. They sailed first to Rose River where a fourth Aboriginal man, Rupert, agreed to go with them and then continued via Bickerton Island to Groote Eylandt. Warren wrote:

We could not find a landing on account of coral reefs, so coasted down three miles and landed close to good water in a billabong. The first act on landing was to kneel down and pray that all the people of the island might know the love of Christ before we left the work, and that Jesus would be a partner with us in all the work connected with the island.⁷⁶

Groote Eylandt people had had very little contact with Europeans, the women and children having had none at all. Warren and his party continued south to the Angurugu River, where they met people with whom they could converse through Rupert. The next day being Sunday, they held a service which the same Groote Eylandt people attended. The nature of their previous contacts with Europeans was obvious when Warren tried to photograph them. When he produced his camera tripod, they fled, taking it to be a gun. Warren and the others tried hard to re-establish contact, but the Groote Eylandters kept their distance.

Warren said:

This was a sad ending to our plans, for we were truly grateful to God for opening the way of the first meeting so clearly and for the friendly spirit shown, but now we feel we have hindered it all by an accident. Still we will go again as soon as we can and next time we will be able (D.V.) to stay on the island much longer.⁷⁷

On the second voyage in November and December 1916, Warren took Dyer as well as his Aboriginal crew, now including Daniel Daniels who was later to captain the *Evangel* and its larger successor, the *Holly*.⁷⁸ At Rose River, they once again felt welcome and conducted a church service which a number of local Aboriginal people attended.⁷⁹ Warren agreed to establish a mission there one day, but the Numbulwar mission did not actually eventuate until 1952. The Aboriginal people, however, remained in contact with both the Roper and Groote Eylandt missions.

Warren's party then went on to Bickerton Island, where they again conducted a service attended by forty Bickerton Islanders. They could not have foreseen how important the Bickerton Island clans were to be at the Groote Eylandt missions. From Bickerton they sailed to Woodah Island and thence to Groote, exploring most of its coastline, taking turns in naming the various features which, of course, already had Aboriginal names. It was Alf Dyer's turn when they entered a small river on the south east coast.

Warren recorded the following in his diary:

Anchored at 10.00, and walked up the creek some three or four miles - miles of the best grass we have seen; fresh-water creek is running strong, and waterfalls with a drop of six feet. Permanent water, flats easy of cultivation and irrigation by natural fall and, we believe, would grow almost anything. Yams growing wild in profusion. Both Dyer and self agree that this is by far the best place we have seen in our whole trip. Here is ample water, water power, natural irrigation and very best timber for building, all within two miles of the sea. . . Mr Dyer suggests that this place be called the Emerald Creek.⁸⁰

Warren and Dyer both agreed that the Emerald River was the best site for the proposed new mission. The Victorian CMS accepted their recommendation, although the mission was not begun until 1921. It was not until then that the Groote Eylandters, after getting to know Warren, told him that when he landed on Groote on his second trip, they were about to kill him but hesitated when they saw he was unarmed. When they met him and discerned what kind of person he was, they decided to let him live.⁸¹

Warren's third trip to Groote Eylandt in the little *Evangel* was in August and September 1917. On this occasion they set up camp near the Emerald River waterfalls, cleared some land, built a log hut and planted fruit trees and vegetables. They conducted a service for thirty-six Groote Eylandt Aborigines who repeatedly told them, through Aboriginal interpreters, that they wanted them to return and live there permanently. Warren and his party found this extremely encouraging.⁸²

Through these and other journeys, Warren became widely known to Aboriginal people throughout the western Gulf of Carpentaria. Aware that his contact was mostly with men, Warren's

wife Ellie accompanied him to Rose River. He was pleased to see how the Rose River women gradually accepted her.

Ellie wrote of it in her diary:

Friday 19th April, 1918. . . we arrived at Rose River in the early afternoon. . . At our approach all the children and some of the women ran bush, and the other women huddled together, some hiding their faces with paper bark, others with their hands, but all peeping out now and again at me for they had never seen a white woman before. How I wished I could speak to them in their own language.

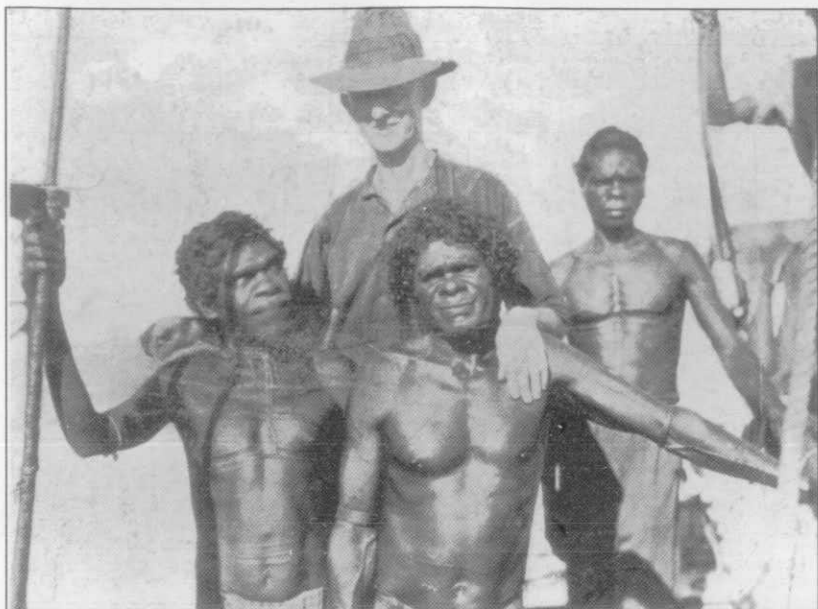
Saturday, 20th April. . . Spent the evening with the camp people. . . The women examined me more carefully as though to see whether I were really flesh and blood, feeling my hands, face and hair. . .⁸³

Back at the Roper River mission, a large flood in 1916 inundated the whole site. The *Evangel*, drawing less than a metre, was used to rescue stranded people and ferry them and some belongings to safety. Although physical damage and stock loss were high, Warren thankfully recorded that 'we did not lose a single life, and we had over fifty children under our care to move with all their belongings. God managed it all for us in a wonderful way.'⁸⁴

Bishop Henry Newton, who had succeeded Bishop White, visited Roper in 1916 and again in 1918 when he baptised Minimiri as Caleb and dedicated the newly-completed St Catherine's Church. He reported in glowing terms on the work of the Warrens and the efforts of the staff in rebuilding after the floods, and also believed that the spiritual life of the mission was strong.⁸⁵

In 1919, Miss L.G. Cross and Mr H. Leslie Perriman, two people who were to play an important role in the CMS missions, arrived at Roper. In the same year, returning from leave, Warren made an historic overland trip, driving a Ford car from Melbourne to Roper, manufacturing a new sump near Borroloola from a kerosene tin. It was the first car Roper River Aboriginal people had seen. Amazed that it 'ran along quick fella no horse', they weren't so certain there was no horse when they thought it ate the grass which had become caught in the radiator.⁸⁶

Joy and sorrow marked 1920 at Roper River. On Whitsunday, there were six more baptisms, including Umbariri, baptised



99. Alf Dyer with Dagiar (centre) and Meerara (l)

Acknowledgement: Len Harris collection



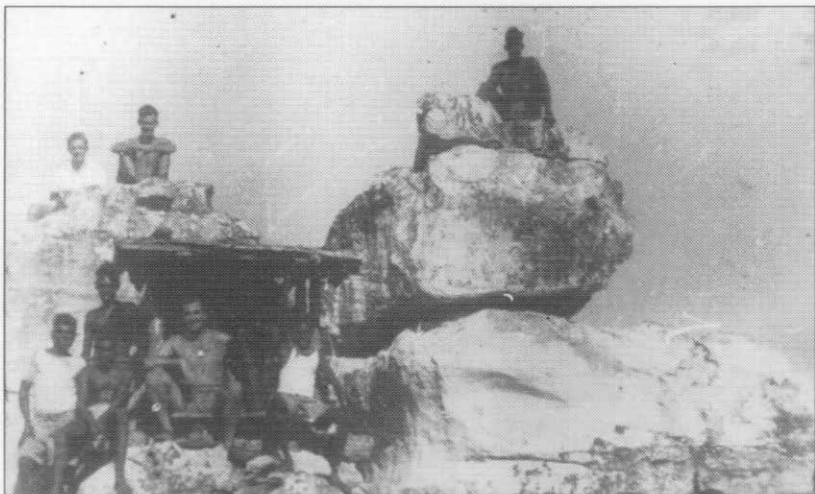
100. Some of the CMS Harrises. l to r: Margarita, Len,
Nell holding Wilfred, Dick and young Jimmie

Acknowledgement: Len Harris collection



101. Dakalara's funeral. Len Harris does his best to honour a great man

Acknowledgement: Len Harris collection



102. The war brings new comradeship. Len Harris photographs Groote Eylandters and Air Force men at his lookout on Castle Rock

Acknowledgement: Len Harris collection

as Joshua. Dinah, unable to attend the Sunday baptism as she was giving birth to a son, was baptised later as Elizabeth. Both Joshua and Dinah became outstanding Christian leaders. An exciting event in 1920 was the arrival of the *Holly*, a forty-five foot ketch, to support the planned new mission on Groote Eylandt. The year was marred by a severe epidemic of 'Mediterranean fever'. Many children died, including Josephine Warren. This time of grief brought Hubert and Ellie Warren and the Aborigines closer together in their common experience of personal loss.⁸⁷

By this time, half of the permanent residents at Roper River mission were of mixed ancestry - 'half-castes'. People of part-Aboriginal descent have always tended to identify with the Aboriginal side of their ancestry. This is not surprising, considering that the majority of the first generation were ignored by their white fathers and raised by Aboriginal mothers. Even in the early days at Roper River, the missionaries disliked the derogatory connotations of 'half-caste' and experimented with other terms, including 'Euralian'. Len Harris, for example, used this term in his diary.⁸⁸

In those years, because it was generally presumed that part-Aboriginal people had a different destiny from full Aboriginal people, both missions and governments thought it necessary to distinguish 'full-blood' Aborigines from 'half-castes' so the term 'half-caste' stuck. It has entered general Aboriginal usage today in the north, but is regarded as offensive by Aboriginal people of mixed ancestry in the southern states. Although I do not prefer the term, I have little choice but to use it in this context.

The plight of children of mixed ancestry was of considerable concern to the Commonwealth government. In his 1913 Report, Baldwin Spencer had suggested that they should be dealt with in the same fashion as full-blood Aborigines:

I think it may be said that though the half-castes belong neither to the Aboriginal nor to the whites, yet on the whole they have more leaning towards the former. Certainly this is the case in regard to females. One thing is certain and that is that the white population as a whole will never mix with half-castes. . . The best and kindest thing is to place them on reserves along with the natives, train them in the same schools and encourage them to marry amongst themselves.⁸⁹

Many other whites, however, felt that their European blood demanded different treatment. The government implemented a policy of removing half-castes from 'the degradation of the blacks' camps'. They were often removed forcibly, sometimes removed with their Aboriginal mothers as well, and were sent to missions or special 'compounds' in Darwin or Alice Springs.⁹⁰ CMS agreed with this procedure and accepted half-caste children if they were sent to Roper River by the government. In 1918, Bishop Newton strongly urged CMS to organise the segregation of Aborigines and half-castes:

It is important that the half-caste children be treated and dealt with separately and distinct from Aborigines. There must be a separate establishment for half-caste children, and their teaching and training, next of course to religion. The tendency of the half-caste is to sink to the level of Aborigines. I would suggest that as soon as possible an establishment be formed on Groote Eylandt for the half-caste children and that it be quite distinct from any work among the Aborigines on the island.⁹¹

As plans were being formulated for the formal commencement of the Groote Eylandt mission, Warren began considering the Bishop's suggestion, but did not implement it immediately.

In 1920, Groote Eylandt was proclaimed by the Commonwealth government as an Aboriginal reserve and CMS decided to make the new mission its headquarters, administering both Groote and Roper from there. Between June and September 1921, the Groote Eylandt work was begun at the Emerald River mission by Warren, Dyer, Mr and Mrs Forbes and Norman Tindale of the Museum of South Australia. Dyer and Perriman were then placed in charge, with Warren as head of both missions. Warren wrote:

On the 1st August we commenced definite work on the present site, and by the end of the month had created a house, jetty, garden, goat yard, and put a weir in the creek. . . . As we were unanimously agreed, it would not be advisable to build further until we knew more of the conditions here in the wet season. . . .⁹²

These words were prophetic. The tiny Emerald River mission was completely destroyed by a cyclone and tidal wave at Easter

1923. Undaunted, Warren, Joynt, Perriman and others spent much of 1923 and 1924 rebuilding the mission a kilometre upstream and seven metres above river level, where it remained until 1943.

During the early construction years, there was a friendly relationship with the Groote Eylandters, who took great care of the mission property when the missionaries were absent from time to time at Roper River. The elders Tiamandu and Dukalara were particularly responsible.⁹³

Warren wrote:

The Groote Island men here are much interested in all our doings. About 100 visit us from time to time, and all more or less get a teaching, but of course in English so far, and through one, two or even three interpreters. But we are all making progress with the languages, three of which it will probably be necessary to learn.

On Sundays we hold full Morning Prayer, an address and Even-song, and when I am present Holy Communion every second Sunday, besides shortened Morning Prayer daily. Mrs Warren had a little school class here for a few days when she was with us, but it does not seem quite necessary until we can get hold of the children.⁹⁴

Warren was still grappling with the question of whether or not to make the Emerald River mission a half-caste mission:

At present we are undecided about shifting the half-castes from the Roper here. We have not met a woman on this island and the men will neither bring them here nor take us to them, although we have tried to get them to take Mrs Warren or Mrs Dyer; and until we can gain their confidence to this extent, I do not feel justified in bringing any of our girls over permanently, but I earnestly seek the Lord's guidance in the matter and will do just as he makes clear.

One thing we are convinced, and that is there is a great chance for a half-caste settlement here, where the people might easily become self-supporting and out of the way of meddling whites, if they so desired it; and we cannot say that about any other place we have seen in the Northern Territory. Please pray definitely that we may have God's guidance on these matters.⁹⁵

At Roper River, the half-castes were exhibiting the kind of development for which the missionaries had been hoping and praying. In 1922, five of them were confirmed by the new Bishop, S.H. Davies. Together with Elizabeth (Dinah), they were the first Roper River confirmees. Warren wrote, 'It was worth years of work and prayer to kneel with six of our own children in the Lord at his Table on St Matthew's Day, when they made their first communion.'⁹⁶

Two of the confirmees, Timothy Hampton and Sarah Johnson, were married in 1924 in St Catherine's Roper River by Rex Joynt, who had by then been ordained. Alf Dyer gave the bride away and two of the other confirmees, Esther and Naomi, were bridesmaids. The bridal party wore white gowns with poinsettia flowers and orange blossoms. The newlyweds were toasted in cocoa. 'It was the first time I had tasted it,' said Constance Bush, 'and I liked it very much.' After their marriage, the mission employed the Hamptons. Later in the year, Timothy Hampton took Evensong, the first Aboriginal person at Roper to lead a church service.⁹⁷

Warren decided in September 1924 that it was time to implement CMS policy and transferred the thirty-five half-castes from Roper River to the Emerald River mission on Groote Eylandt. For many, this meant separation from their mothers, who had settled and married at Roper. Although the missionaries later organised visits to their mothers, the experience is recalled by many as traumatic. Constance Bush is one who remembers:

When we left the Roper River mission in September 1924 to go to Groote Eylandt, I cried and cried because I was being separated from my mother. As the *Holly* was leaving the jetty everyone was singing, 'God be with you till we meet again', but I just cried for my mother. She was the only person I really knew in the world.⁹⁸

Constance and the other girls were under the care of Miss Cross and Miss E.I.M. Dove whose instructions were to make the community self-supporting as soon as possible. The boys worked with Warren and the other male missionaries at logging, carpentry and gardening. Both boys and girls had formal schooling as well. The self-sufficiency principle was important. The pros and cons of

the decision to create a 'half-caste mission' can be (and certainly were) debated, but having embarked on that course it was important for the young people's own future and dignity that they not grow up as institutional people supported by donations from the southern church.

Over the next few years, much effort was put into the construction of the mission complex and its various supporting facilities, while ever in the missionaries' minds was the objective of the self-sufficient village. The ingenious Warren salvaged the paddle wheel of the *Young Australia*, wrecked long ago in the Roper River, brought it to Groote on the *Holly* and installed it in the Emerald River to generate electricity.⁹⁹ Land was cleared, tropical crops planted and houses constructed, including small cottages for the half-caste couples who married.

During these years, work with the Groote Eylandters themselves was incidental to the half-caste mission. The local people had learnt to value the medical skill of some of the missionaries. Some camped semi-permanently in the vicinity of the mission where they bartered for European goods and were given some Christian teaching. Ellie Warren was able to establish a rapport with the Aboriginal women through her baby son, David, who was welcomed by them as he had been born on the island. The main work of the missionaries, however, was with the half-castes.

Whereas one of the reasons for the separation of the half-castes from their families was to protect the girls from unprincipled white men, the missionaries also felt it necessary to segregate them from the Groote Eylandt Aborigines. Unaware at this stage of the Groote Eylandters' rigid adherence to their own strict marriage code, they wished to ensure that no men 'cast covetous eyes on the girls'.

An assessment of the Emerald River mission was made by Dr John Bleakley, Protector of Aborigines in Queensland, who was appointed by the Commonwealth government to inspect and report on all the Northern Territory missions. His report was significant for a number of reasons, not the least because it was a presumably objective report from someone who was not a missionary:

The inmates of this station are all half-castes. . . The number is thirty-four, being fifteen males and nineteen females, of which sixteen are children still attending school. The island also car-

ries a full-blood population of 200, who visit the mission for medical treatment and for purposes of trade and religious instruction, but are not allowed intercourse with the half-castes. The mission intends, however, to open a second station in the northern portion of the island for the care of these people. The general appearance of the station is pleasing and uplifting. . . The staff of this institution appear to be admirably suited for the work.¹⁰⁰

The young mixed-race people developed into a particularly confident, resourceful, close-knit group. They never quite became the nucleus of the self-sufficient village, for changing mission policy and World War II destroyed that idea, but they became an outstanding and impressive body of people. They faced an unpredictable future in a complex world with a confidence instilled in them by the missionaries and, in most cases, undergirded by Christian faith.

As an objective visitor, Sir Hubert Wilkins was impressed:

Schooled by high- and noble-minded people, they have acquired a gentle and respectful manner which compares more than favourably with that of children of the same age in more civilised localities.

Their enthusiasm for innovation shows an active mentality. . . The rarity of character seen in these children is remarkable. . . The problem of their future life is difficult to solve. . . Their struggles within themselves and with themselves awakened my sympathy. Their simplicity yet depth of understanding was remarkable and to know them was in itself an education.¹⁰¹

In 1924, the Commonwealth government offered CMS the Oenpelli cattle station and the associated Aboriginal reserve. Oenpelli is 250 kilometres east of Darwin, twelve kilometres east of the East Alligator River on the western edge of Arnhem Land and now borders the Kakadu National Park. The name 'Oenpelli' is an early European attempt to pronounce the Aboriginal name *Unbalanj* (*Gunbalanya*).¹⁰²

In the 1890s, Paddy Cahill began buffalo shooting in the region, the widespread buffalo having descended from those brought to Port Essington by the British in the 1840s. Cahill took out a pastoral lease in 1906 and developed a cattle enterprise.

The Commonwealth government purchased Oenpelli from Cahill in 1916 as part of a large pastoral development plan, but the whole project ground to a halt in 1919 when political and industrial agitation closed Lord Vestey's meatworks in Darwin.

The government decided to rid themselves of Oenpelli. It was now losing money and had been sarcastically labelled 'Owin-plenty' in parliamentary debates. Furthermore, the government well knew that Aboriginal settlements were much more cheaply run by Christian missions than by the government itself, due to the high level of commitment and self-denial of the missionaries.¹⁰³

There had been an informal agreement that the churches would not compete with each other in the Top End of the Northern Territory. The Church of England was to work in eastern Arnhem Land and the Gulf, the Methodists in the north and the Catholics in the west. Oenpelli was offered to the Methodist and Catholic missions as well as the Anglicans. The Catholics declined, citing the relative success of their island mission on Bathurst Island and the failure of their mainland efforts at Daly River Jesuit Mission. The Methodists also felt that they should continue their concentration on island missions. Urged by Bishop Davies, CMS agreed to accept Oenpelli in 1925.

The Aborigines living at Oenpelli before it became a mission were Kakadu (Gakgudju) people. With the arrival of the mission and perhaps even before, when Paddy Cahill sold Oenpelli to the government, the Kakadu people began to move out. They had had a personal association with Cahill and preferred to seek a similar life in the buffalo shooters camps and cattle stations further west. As part of quite a widespread westward shift, the Gunwinggu (Kunwinjku) people replaced them, continuing to be the resident group at Oenpelli today.¹⁰⁴

Responsibility for commencing the new mission was allotted to Alf and Mary Dyer. Given the nature of the task, Alf Dyer was a perfect choice. Oenpelli was a run-down cattle and buffalo enterprise which needed someone self-reliant and hard-working enough to restore the buildings and equipment and re-establish Oenpelli as an operating enterprise. Although CMS certainly saw their main objective as spiritual, the means to achieve this were practical. Christian faith was not distinguished from Western life-style and CMS was, like the Catholic and Methodist missionary

organisations, engaged in social change, a policy with which the running of a cattle enterprise was quite consistent.

The Dyers travelled to Oenpelli by the only means available – by lugger from Darwin to the mouth of the East Alligator River and by boat up the river for seventy-five kilometres. They began the mission on 25 October 1925, and immediately set about creating their vision of the self-supporting pastoral complex. In the midst of the cattle work, repairs and renovations, Alf and Mary Dyer also found time to carry out some educational and medical work. They were cut off from the rest of the world except for mail which came by lugger, sometimes only once a year. The CMS report for 1926 stated that the Dyers were working 'in the face of heavy obstacles, deprivations and discouragements. Cattle tending, agriculture, teaching, dispensary work, all in extraordinary detail, had been attempted. Mails have been scarce, food supplies have been low, fever has taken toll, the wireless set has been tantalizingly ineffective, but Mr and Mrs Dyer have been of good cheer.'¹⁰⁵

During the next few years, other missionaries joined the Dyers at Oenpelli. Among them was G.R. ('Dick') Harris who was to play a very important role in the future life of Oenpelli. As always, CMS found difficulty in recruiting ordained clergy for the relatively unattractive north Australian missions. The absence of a priest also concerned Bishop Davies who solved the problem by ordaining Alf Dyer a deacon in 1927 and arranging for him to be ordained as a priest while on leave in Sydney in 1928.¹⁰⁶

Returning to Oenpelli, Alf Dyer dreamed of something far greater than a self-sufficient village. He envisaged a self-supporting, self-governing Arnhem Land State with Oenpelli as its capital. It was a grandiose scheme, as unwise as it was impossible, but the vision drove Dyer even harder as he strove to turn Oenpelli into a really successful and important place.

In 1928, Bleakley visited Oenpelli as part of his inspection of the mission stations. His report was positive:

Ten acres of ground, on the shore of a beautiful lagoon, are under cultivation with maize, potatoes, cassava, pumpkins and other tropical fruits and foods, all for home consumption. Native game and fish are fairly plentiful. . . . The country in this reserve offers good possibilities for successful industrial development of the mission by cattle raising and agriculture. The stock

number 1 800 cattle, 80 horses and 200 goats.

Mr Dyer's dream of the whole of the native population of Arnhem Land eventually gathering at Oenpelli is hardly likely to be realised for many years to come, but this station, with its central position and natural resources, offers every promise of playing an important part in the work of the betterment of the natives of this part of the Territory.

The officers of the mission are of the right type. . . The teaching of the children in school is on the right lines, aiming at cultivating their thinking powers. Their knowledge of English is fairly good and they seemed bright and intelligent. Though somewhat early to commence any definite vocational training, the young boys are learning garden work and to be generally useful, and the girls household duties, sewing, cooking, gardening, etc.

A number of houses of bush timber, bark walls, and iron roofs have been erected for staff accommodation, and five cottages of similar construction for use of young Aboriginal married couples, the first of a properly planned village, the plan being to establish the educated children, as they mature and marry, in settled homes on small garden plots. Those already settled appear to be successfully adapting themselves to the new life.¹⁰⁷

It was, in its way, the Jesuit Paraguayan Reductions on the Daly River all over again. Bleakley was not particularly interested in spiritual matters, so it is interesting to add to his report the comments of the Rev. J.W. Ferrier, General Secretary of CMS for NSW, after his visit to Oenpelli the previous year:

In the early morning the whole of the little community meets in the 'chapel'. There is a leader taking the simple service of praise and prayer and instruction. . . There is a daily opportunity for prayer in Mr Dyer's room each afternoon at two o'clock, and it was good to meet and have in remembrance the missionary needs of the work and the spiritual needs of the church. The gathering at night in the shed in the middle of the yard is wonderful. There the whole community gathers, and the versatile Mr Dyer leads the singing on his harmonium. . . Thus the whole work seems to be steeped in prayer.

The definite effort in the educational work finds expression for the children in an afternoon class taken by Mrs Dyer from two to four. . . It seemed to me difficult to realise that this work had been going on for less than two years and yet already there was

this wonderful growth of thirty boys and girls learning their letters and figures. . . It is gratifying to know that the stock work is giving an excellent opportunity to the older lads and those of the men who are engaged in it, at once a vocation suitable to the black and capable of being used as a stepping stone to higher things. We are very fortunate in having such an efficient and painstaking overseer as Mr Thorne.

The Rev. A.J. Dyer is quite a keen gardener. In this work he has been ably seconded by Mr Ivin, who it is hoped will take the burden more and more from Mr Dyer's shoulders. Mrs Thorne's medical work, and Mrs Dyer's also before Mrs Thorne came, has meant much to these poor people. . . Mrs Thorne is patiently and systematically treating some of the boys who are thought to have leprosy. This is a most trying part of the work.¹⁰⁸

Leprosy was indeed a major health problem in western Arnhem Land. It does not seem to have been particularly common before the nineteenth century and perhaps not present at all. Other tropical diseases are easily confused with leprosy. It appeared in epidemic proportions in western Arnhem Land in the late nineteenth century. Its origin is unknown, but it seems more likely to have been brought by Macassan traders or by the Chinese who came to the gold rush than by Europeans. Leprosy killed off several tribes between Darwin and Arnhem Land around the turn of the century and around sixty per cent of the Oenpelli people contracted the disease.

The government's initial action was to isolate lepers on Mud Island in Darwin Harbour under shocking conditions with no shelter whatsoever and little food. Eventually, however, the East Arm Leprosarium provided a more humane environment. Even today, Aborigines remember the compassion towards the lepers shown by missionaries like Alf Dyer. Constance Bush said to me, 'Mr Dyer was a real Christian man. He never treated anyone any different to anyone else. Even if there was a leper full of sores he would go and put his arm around him and drink from the same cup.'¹⁰⁹

By 1930, the Oenpelli missionaries were greatly encouraged by the obvious signs of a developing Christian faith among many of the Gunwinggu people. The 100 people who attended the first Christmas service in 1925 had doubled to 200 in 1930.¹¹⁰ 'The whole work is most encouraging,' wrote Dyer. 'About forty have expressed a desire for baptism.'¹¹¹

Thus by the end of the 1920s, three CMS missions had been established, although the Roper River work had been scaled down to concentrate on Groote Eylandt and Oenpelli. Much had been achieved in the visible construction of the mission complexes and spiritually there was every reason to be hopeful. Aboriginal people were associating themselves with the missions by choice, not coercion.

The Australian nation owes a debt to these and other missionaries in the north. Thus far, the treatment of Aboriginal people generally had been appallingly bad. The missionaries, despite their faults, provided a buffer between the Aborigines and those who would exploit them, as well as a much gentler introduction to Western society.

Difficulties and reorganisation in the 1930s

Back in the south, however, at the end of the 1920s, CMS was becoming concerned at the way in which the half-caste work had begun to overshadow the original objective of the evangelisation of the Aboriginal people of the region. Staff was concentrated on Groote Eylandt and there was the feeling that Roper River was being neglected.

Warren's leave in Melbourne in 1928 coincided with the arrival of the Rev. F.T. Thornburgh from England as General Secretary of the Victorian CMS. It was decided that he should accompany Warren back to the north 'as a messenger of goodwill', acquainting himself with the missions. Far from bearing 'goodwill', Thornburgh returned to Melbourne to make a scathing report on the work in the north. Although Thornburgh quite accurately noted the precedence the half-caste work was taking over the original objectives of the mission, many of his criticisms were due to his total ignorance of the difficulties of life in the Australian outback. Although Warren was able to satisfy the Victorian committee that many of the criticisms were undeserved, he was now placed on the defensive.¹¹²

Thornburgh pressed the committee for a complete policy change. When these changes were made public in February 1929, they reversed the previous concentration on the half-castes which was now said to be 'quite subsidiary to the real and original efforts of the Society'. Warren was given 'a year's leave of absence and... invited to confer with the Executive concerning his future'.¹¹³

All this came as a staggering blow to Warren who was bitterly disappointed that, after such dedicated hard work in which he believed he was obeying his instructions, he was now to be virtually pensioned off. Warren wrote a lengthy defence of his work, describing the great hardships they had surmounted, the achievements of the missions despite incredible difficulties and his frequent and unsuccessful requests for additional staff. He said he was close to wanting to retire in any case, but that it was bitter that it should happen like this.

The committee was in a dilemma, wanting to honour Warren's long and dedicated service but also to respond to the policy urgings of Thornburgh. Finally they published two statements, one an appreciation of Warren's work and the other a statement of confidence in the new general secretary. Warren was exonerated, but the painful affair brought the problems of the northern missions into clearer perspective.¹¹⁴

In 1928 to enable Joynt, the only missionary then at the Roper River mission, to take overdue leave, two young men, Kenneth Griffiths and Keith Langford Smith volunteered to run the Roper River mission for a year. Langford Smith's impression of the mission was that it was in a dilapidated condition and that Joynt seemed to be past caring.¹¹⁵ He told this anecdote:

'What's this?' said Ken, examining a queer, highly smelling mass, hanging from a hook in the kitchen.

'Oh, that's bacon. It's a bit old. We only put a piece in the soup occasionally.'

'How old do you reckon it to be?'

'It was fresh the Christmas before last; I think it was. Came up in one of the presentation boxes from south. No - wait a minute. I think it must have been the Christmas before that. I forget now.'¹¹⁶

Langford Smith's anecdote was rather unfair, as he was observing not so much a dispirited attitude as a quiet acceptance of the privations of an isolated mission life when compared to the city life to which Langford Smith was accustomed. The two young men had gone to the north, like the young men of the Overland Telegraph, with a sense of adventure, seeking excitement, even danger. They were to discover, as Langford Smith observed, that

the challenges to survival on the isolated mission station were much more mundane:

I had come to the mission an inexperienced city youth expecting to meet all sorts of difficulties and dangers, wild men and wild animals. I soon found that the devil launched his attack, not in the form of a raging lion, but impersonated in cockroaches, weevils, white ants and the sinister trivialities of life. . . ¹¹⁷

These, of course, were the demoralising problems which Thornburgh failed to understand. CMS was desperate for staff at Roper River, so Langford Smith remained there as a missionary after his year had expired. He became a controversial figure. Still in his early twenties, his youthful enthusiasm and recklessness were a constant anxiety to the rather staid CMS committee in Victoria. Despite this, in the absence of anyone else, he was made superintendent when the Warrens finally left, this time of their own accord, in July 1931. ¹¹⁸

Langford Smith purchased a Gypsy Moth aeroplane which he named *Sky Pilot* and began exploring the feasibility of air connections between the missions and the use of aeroplanes to reach Aborigines in even more remote localities. ¹¹⁹ His vision was sound, even prophetic, given the indispensability of aircraft in Arnhem Land today, but in 1931 it all seemed too technologically advanced and risky for his colleagues and the committees in the south.

Langford Smith was a cheerful, enthusiastic, outgoing person whose frequent flippancy and disregard for authority tended to grate on the other missionaries, whom he in turn regarded as quaint and old-fashioned. He called Dyer 'The Rev. Adolphus' whom he described this way:

. . . a good man. . . simple, good-humoured, credulous. He lived in a world of his own. The men he met pulled his leg unmercifully, but he never seemed to realise it. The mission was his world; whatever happened outside this 'world' was only of interest to him in so far as it affected his mission and the work he loved. . .

'The Mission was very different in my time,' he told me, as he shook his head sadly. Of course there had been a big staff in those days, but the blacks were better Christians, the garden

grew bigger vegetables, and 'even the river was not so muddy', his wife added.¹²⁰

On the other hand, Langford Smith rapidly developed a close relationship with the Aboriginal people with whom he was very popular. He speedily acquired some facility in Mara, one of the Roper River languages, and tried to understand Aboriginal culture. He was really the first of the early CMS missionaries in north Australia to state clearly the importance of cultural understanding. In 1932, he said that three things were absolutely essential to an Aboriginal mission:

1. A knowledge of the native language.
2. A knowledge of Aboriginal laws and customs.
3. A knowledge of Aboriginal beliefs, myths which form the psychological background which is very real to him.¹²¹

The Roper River mission and Langford Smith, however, came under severe criticism from both the Victorian CMS and the government. Allegations were made under privilege in the Northern Territory Legislative Council that the mission was in a neglected state, that the government grant was being wasted and that Langford Smith was guilty of immoral behaviour with Aboriginal women. A government Board of Inquiry was set up, taking evidence at the mission for seventeen days in May 1933.¹²²

As a consequence, CMS dismissed Langford Smith, while the government withdrew the subsidy from the Roper River mission and recommended its closure. Mystery still surrounds the whole event. The criticisms of the mission were probably justified, for work there had been neglected and it could well have seemed that the purposes for which the subsidy was given were not being fulfilled.

The moral criticisms of Langford Smith were, on the other hand, quite likely mistaken impressions, hearsay or even pure fabrication. Neither the evidence presented to the inquiry, nor its final report were ever made public despite legal representations by Langford Smith and his father, Canon L.E. Langford Smith. Furthermore, the evidence and report are still missing today. They are not on the government files where they properly should be.¹²³

Canon Langford Smith was most critical of CMS for having, in desperation, appointed his son, then 'little more than a boy', in charge of a mission station, given him minimal help and then

deserted and humiliated him as a result of unfounded innuendo. CMS responded by publicly stating in a Sydney newspaper that there was no charge of moral misconduct against Langford Smith.¹²⁴ But he remained dismissed.

The CMS debated the Board of Inquiry recommendation to close the mission, but finally did not adopt that course. They felt strongly that the mission reserve would revert to pastoral leases which would mean 'the beginning of the end for the blacks'.¹²⁵ Instead, they transferred some missionaries there from Groote Eylandt, placing Mr S.C. Port in charge of the Roper River mission and leaving the Rev. E. Wynne Evans in charge of the Emerald River mission on Groote.

In accordance with the new policy of concentration on the local people, Wynne Evans transferred the remaining fourteen half-caste local children of school age to Roper River. From there, it was intended to send them to Darwin and Alice Springs. The government, however, afraid of the unlikely possibility that some of them may have contracted leprosy, refused to allow them to be moved further than Roper, so there they remained. Of the adult half-castes, some remained on Groote to assist the missionaries while some were sent to Roper to assist there.

Mr and Mrs Port soon revived the run-down mission which then gained a new lease of life. They were particularly helped by the older half-castes who had been transferred from Groote, including Richard and Margaret Hall, Marie Burke and Constance Bush. In fact, it could well be said that the half-castes were indispensable and that neither the Groote Eylandt nor Roper River missions would have survived without them. In Victoria, Thornburgh was replaced by the Rev. R.C.M. Long who visited Roper in 1937 and made a glowing report:

Roper shows a remarkable transformation from its condition four years ago. Every vestige of the old dilapidated buildings has now been removed, some new ones erected and the substantial mission house so improved that it is now a well laid out, neat and attractive station. . . . One was struck by the earnestness and happiness of the Roper River people as they went about their ordinary duties and gathered for their various assemblies during the day. The leadership and example of some well-trained half-castes such as Marie and Constance – grown

women now – must be a great help to Mr & Mrs Port. . .¹²⁶

It was very clear from Long's writings that the concept of the self-supporting village was still a key feature of CMS policy for Roper and the other missions:

On the station there are seventy-five Aborigines, mostly children, young people and eighteen half-castes; so constant endeavour must be made to grow as much foodstuffs as possible. In addition to the produce of the garden, it must be remembered that there are over one thousand head of cattle, besides some hundreds of goats (for meat and milk) and other livestock including horses, pigs and fowls. . . Whilst our work among these people is primarily evangelistic. . . we have also to try to lead them away from their nomadic food-hunting stage of culture, when they can live happily in village communities and produce their own food supply. . . This training takes infinite patience, for it is no use trying to advance too quickly. . .¹²⁷

All this worry over the material neglect of the Roper River mission station and the effort put into its repair proved finally to be pointless. In January 1940, the whole of the Roper River mission was destroyed in an immense flood, including all of the buildings and crops, and also the *Holly*, on which seven Aboriginal men, as well as Philip Taylor and Leslie Perriman, narrowly escaped drowning.

'Down, but not out', the missionaries were assisted by the Aborigines in selecting a new site on a hill about ten kilometres upstream. There, under appallingly difficult conditions, the missionaries and the Aborigines rebuilt the Roper River mission. This is where the Aboriginal community of Ngukurr is today. Strangely, disasters like the flood had their positive consequences, particularly in improved relationships, as the missionaries and the Aborigines endured hardship and strenuous labour in working towards a common goal in which all of them took pride. The new Roper River mission became something more than the property of the missionaries.

Despite the sad loss of Wynne Evans in an accident on Groote Eylandt, the change from a half-caste mission to a mission for the Groote Eylandters was not particularly difficult. Most of the missionaries had been there a few years and had already ad-

103. Theodore
and Eva Webb

Acknowledgement:

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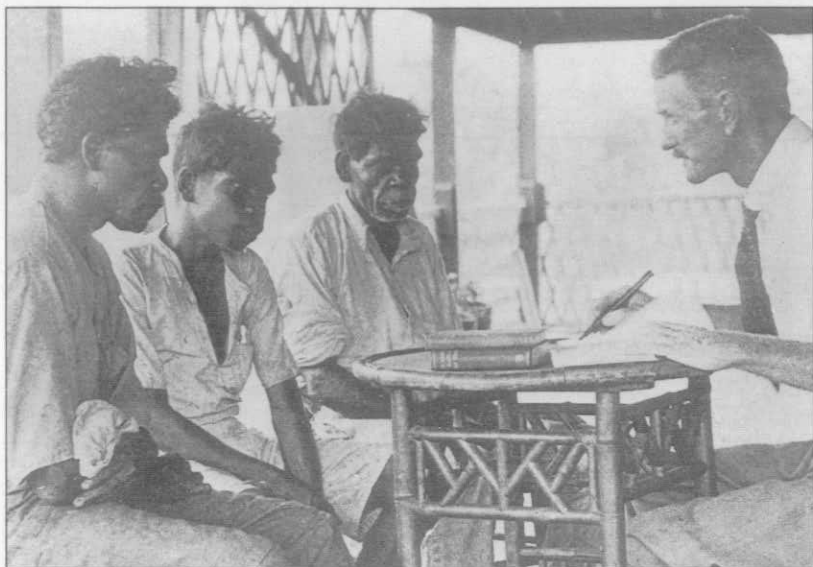


104. Edgar Wells
farewelling Aboriginal
people going south

Acknowledgement: Edgar Wells.

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105. Njimandum, Barungga and Woondoonmoi, with Bob Love, translating Luke into Worora

Acknowledgement: Uniting Church of Australia Archives, NSW.

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baia^{me} gīr yarai, gille, mirri, taon ellibu gimobi.

baia^{me} yalwu^{ga} murruba ; baia^{me} minnaminnabul
gummilda, minnaminnabul wīnu^{ga}ulda.

baia^{me} gīr kānu^{go} kubba, kūnial, maian, tulu,
yindal, beran, boiyoi gimobi.

baia^{me} gīr yārāman, būrumo, bundar, mūte, dūli,
dīnoun, buralga, biloela, millimumul, gulamboli, kobado,
mullion, guiya, nūrai, gundoba, burulu, mu^{gin}, kānu^{go}

106. Part of William Ridley's *Gurre Kamilaroi*, first Christian materials in an Aboriginal language. It reads:

'God (*Baime*) made the sun, moon, stars, etc.'

Acknowledgement: Ridley, 1856, p.7

justed to life on the island. Many Aboriginal people had already chosen to align themselves with the mission, despite the fact that the missionaries thus far had not urged them to do so. Gradually the missionaries introduced schooling for the children, extended their medical care, and provided Christian teaching.

A significant event in 1938 for Groote Eylandt was the construction of a flying boat base in the lagoon at the north-east corner of the island by the Department of Civil Aviation. This was to provide an overnight and refuelling stop for overseas passengers on Qantas, overcoming the problem of the impossibly long leg of the journey from Darwin to north Queensland. This was the origin of the Aboriginal community at Umbakumba. Aborigines were to be employed in the construction, but CMS was concerned for their welfare. Unable to spare a missionary to accompany them, CMS asked the colourful trepanger and pearler, Fred Gray, if he would set up a base in the lagoon. Fred Gray was sympathetic to the mission, frequently moored his lugger in the lagoon and was well-known to the Aborigines. After the construction, Fred Gray settled there permanently.

One of the most important factors in the acceptance of the mission was the leadership given by two highly respected elders, Dukalara and Tiamandu. They were men of stature throughout the region, men of dignity and considerable presence who commanded the respect of Aborigines and missionaries alike.¹²⁸

Dukalara died in 1939, well over eighty years of age. Many of the older Aborigines, and the missionaries who knew him, believe he was the first Aboriginal Christian on Groote Eylandt. Before his death he had said he was going to 'that good country bla Jesus'. Although Dukalara was never baptised, my father, Len Harris, willingly gave him a Christian burial, honouring a great man as best he could, with a procession of schoolchildren and a coffin draped with the Australian flag on the back of the mission truck. The ceremony was accepted as appropriate by his people. He had always brought the children to the daily chapel services.¹²⁹

Arrowsmith wrote of Dukalara:

He was a wonderfully dignified man, tall and handsome. Every morning he came down from the camp to service in the chapel. . . . He sat right in front with the children and by a

chapel post; always there was the dignity and the reverence, the slightly inclined head as he listened to the message. . . ¹³⁰

At Oenpelli, Alf Dyer baptised the first converts on Christmas Day 1933: Ruth Nellie, Joseph Garmard, Elizabeth Garabamba, Samuel Mangudja, Philip Nagel and Lazarus Arawindju. The morning baptismal service was memorable for more than one reason. It was interrupted by Keith Langford Smith's aeroplane crashing near the church. Langford Smith and his passenger were miraculously unhurt. They were extricated from the wreckage and the baptism resumed in the afternoon.

The following year, Mary Dyer became ill and so Alf and Mary Dyer left the mission and returned south late in 1934, both sick and worn out from immense effort and self-sacrifice. G.R. (Dick) Harris became superintendent of Oenpelli. An experienced pastoralist, Dick Harris was able to consolidate and expand the cattle industry at Oenpelli. Although remembered as one of the more authoritarian of the missionaries, he did not allow his strict approach to the necessity for work and social change to overshadow his genuine concern for the teaching of the gospel. He always saw evangelism as the mission's major task so that steady growth in the spiritual activities of the mission was evident over the next few years. On 2 July 1939, Len Harris, now chaplain to all three missions, baptised eight people at Oenpelli.¹³¹

So by 1940, the three missions were all seeing signs of progress in their spiritual aims. Indeed, in each of the three Aboriginal communities which have developed from these missions, the 1930s 'old mission time' is looked back upon as the happy years. True, Roper River mission was about to be destroyed but, far more than the other missions, Roper had become home for the oppressed people who had gathered at it and by 1940 many adults had been born there. Its reconstruction mattered as much to the Aborigines as it did to the missionaries. The Emerald River mission on Groote Eylandt was also shortly to be moved north to the Angurugu river.

All of the missions, however, were to reduce their activities drastically when Japan entered World War II in 1942. When the war was over a new era was beginning, although only a few of the missionaries discerned it.

We cannot, however, leave the Church of England missions of

the 1930s without describing the single most important event which occurred there in that era: the peace expedition of 1933 and 1934.

The peace expedition

In the closing months of 1933 and the first few months of 1934, CMS and its northern missions became household words throughout Australia. This was due to their widely publicised peace expedition which, although tragic, greatly benefited Aboriginal people throughout Australia by focussing attention on the injustices which they still suffered.

On 17 September 1932, five Japanese were killed by Aborigines at Caledon Bay on the Arnhem Land coast.¹³² Aboriginal men involved said that the Japanese had assaulted Aboriginal women. Groote Eylandt people have told me that Japanese interference with women was not uncommon in the 1930s. Japanese ostensibly engaged in fishing in the Gulf of Carpentaria were in fact mapping the Australian coastline and the Japanese forces later possessed maps superior to the Australians. Older Aboriginal people have also told me of their confusion when Aborigines were at first arrested and punished for aggression towards Japanese and then, a few years later, enlisted to help detect and capture the same people.

There was one Japanese survivor of the massacre. He was not with those who were killed and the fact that he was spared lends weight to the claim that only those who interfered with the women were speared. In a remarkable lone trek, the survivor reached Darwin where he told the authorities of the killing of his fellows.

An armed party of four police officers and several Aboriginal trackers was despatched from Darwin to investigate the matter. Travelling via the Emerald River mission, Groote Eylandt, they went to Woodah Island where they believed the Aboriginal people of Caledon Bay were then residing. During their investigation, Constable A.S. McColl was killed with a shovel-nosed spear. According to the official report by the party leader, Constable Morey, the police saw some Aborigines on the island and pursued them, during which McColl became separated from the main party, was ambushed in thick scrub and killed.¹³³ The police changed this story later, but the Woodah Island Aborigines, as we shall see, had

a very different story indeed.

Sensationalism took over and exaggerated stories began to appear in the southern press, including rumours of an imminent uprising of Aboriginal people. This hysteria suited the Northern Territory authorities who had decided to mount a punitive expedition to Woodah Island. Indeed, there was good reason to suspect that the whole idea of an Aboriginal uprising was invented by those who planned the expedition. There were those who believed that the Caledon Bay Aborigines, not having been 'shot up' yet, were too sure of themselves.

On 2 September 1933, banner headlines in southern newspapers proclaimed 'Government prepared for punitive expedition against Aborigines', 'Massacre of whites in north feared' and 'Lesson must be given'. Articles went on to claim that there was a likelihood of a general massacre of missionaries and other whites unless immediate action was taken against the tribe which had killed McColl.¹³⁴ There were even suggestions that white Australians generally might be in danger of widespread Aboriginal uprisings in rural areas.

The possibility of punitive actions by the police aroused strong protests from Christians and from Christian organisations in the south, particularly those organisations which had some dealings with Aboriginal people. CMS made a direct offer to the Commonwealth government, both in Melbourne and Canberra: suspend the punitive expedition and CMS would send a peaceful expedition into the area to persuade the killers to give themselves up voluntarily:

Because it is recognised that, apart from our specific missionary aims, we as a Society have the following social aims in our work:

1. To serve the ends of justice, law and order in the community.
2. To cultivate in the Aboriginal mind a sense of security, fair treatment and of our recognition of their right (within just bounds) to live out their own lives in their own way.
3. To establish a mutual understanding, respect and goodwill between the black and white races, the Church Missionary Society desires to approach the government with the following proposal:

That with the view to showing to the Aborigines the purpose and aims of the government, and with the further view to the proper

execution of justice in connection with the recent happenings, a small party of experienced missionaries, unarmed, should be invited to approach the natives, thus to seek a better mutual understanding between the parties concerned; and that the government be requested to take no action pending the result of the embassy.¹³⁵

The Commonwealth government found itself in a dilemma. Police and other authorities in the north were pressing urgently for immediate punitive action but this, the government well knew, would bring international condemnation. Churches and other groups were strongly critical of the suggestion of a punitive expedition, while the newspaper columns were full of letters debating the pros and cons of police action. The Minister for the Interior, J.A. Perkins, finally agreed to the CMS proposal. His statements were widely publicised in the press. The *Hobart Mercury* reported:

He believed that the Church Missionary Society had undertaken a task fraught with grave danger to the lives of those who went with the expedition. Because of this, he had discussed the proposal with the utmost care with representatives of the Society in Melbourne before finally approving of the venture. The proposal had originated with the Society, but before finally approving of it he had given the fullest opportunity for reconsideration. He had offered to provide a police escort, but that also had been refused, the missionaries preferring to go unarmed and unprotected. He had been informed that the party would set out whether the Ministry approved of its action or not.¹³⁶

CMS invited Hubert Warren, now Rector of Cullenswood, Tasmania, to lead the expedition and called for volunteers. The first was Alf Dyer, still a missionary at Oenpelli, who initially volunteered to go alone on horseback. Characteristically, Dyer had gone to pray for guidance in the hills and had received in response Esther 4:14: 'If you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will arise from another quarter. . . and who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this.'¹³⁷

The other volunteer whom they accepted was Donald Fowler, who heard that the expedition needed a radio operator. Previously

having been in the Royal Australian Navy, Fowler was experienced and, as well, had been present at an RAN punitive expedition against Malaita in the Solomon Islands:

I once saw the navy land for a punitive expedition to punish a native village. I was sickened with the bloodshed, so when I read an appeal for a wireless man for the peace trip, I felt I would like to see what they could do.¹³⁸

In the north, Constable Victor Hall remained on Groote Eylandt instead of accompanying the other police back to Darwin. He convinced the missionaries that they were in real danger and in turn the superintendent, Port, advised CMS in Victoria by telegram that 'Constable McColl had, in fact, been ambushed, that the Caledon Bay tribes were dangerous and that they could visit the mission with hostile intentions'.¹³⁹ Although it was later discovered that Port had no information other than that which was fed to him by Constable Hall, it is to the credit of CMS that his telegram served only to strengthen their resolve to seek a peaceful solution.

What had now become known as the 'peace expedition' caught the imagination of the Australian public and had also been widely reported overseas. The tension and excitement was further heightened when it was later learnt that two beachcombers, Frank Traynor and W. Fagan, had also been killed on Woodah Island. Warren became an instant celebrity and was featured prominently in national newspapers.¹⁴⁰ The *Melbourne Herald* of 2 November headed a feature on him 'Mission Leader Pictures Jungle Meeting'. The newspaper went on to ask:

When, three weeks hence, he should sight the furthest pickets of that most numerous and truculent of Northern Australian tribes, what would be the manner of his overtures to them? What form would this proposed method of pacification take?¹⁴¹

Warren replied that he would not stupidly rush in among a large group of hostile Aborigines, but that he did not expect to encounter hostility anyway. He expected to be able to use friendly Aboriginal people to speak to the Woodah Island people and that they would remember and trust him:

If they remember what they have heard of me, that my work had always been that of a friend of the black man, well and good. In the happy event I shall be able to do what I have done before among Aborigines who have not been in contact with white men. I shall say in effect: 'Gentlemen, I am your guest. See, I have no weapons. I want to talk to you about the white man, what his law is and what he can do to help you.'¹⁴²

CMS found no difficulty raising the £1 000 needed to finance the expedition. Warren and Fowler were given an emotional farewell from St Columb's, Hawthorn, on 3 November, when Archbishop Head was the preacher. The next day they went by train to Sydney. 'Photographers and pressmen by the dozen everywhere,' wrote Warren.¹⁴³ The *Sydney Morning Herald* of 6 November said Warren had no fears about the outcome:

My wife and I worked among the natives for twenty years; my children were born in their midst. We propose to go among them unarmed, relying on the power of God to bring peace and goodwill, brotherhood and good fellowship between them and their white brethren in the north.

Our mission marks a new departure in the manner of dealing with the few remaining Aborigines in Australia. It is a practical demonstration of the Church's missionary ideals. I believe our mission will point the way to a solution of this native problem. It marks a definite effort on the part of a Christian nation to deal with its native races in a Christian way.¹⁴⁴

That evening, Warren and Fowler were given a large civic reception by the Lord Mayor of Sydney, Alderman R.C. Hagon. At the reception, Bishop S.J. Kirby said the expedition would carry no weapons but a pocket knife, going out in the spirit of Christ, a spirit of love. Warren replied:

To us it is a glorious expedition because our church has listened to her responsibilities, and has again begun to demonstrate to the world that there are other ways than force by which men can be brought to realise what is fitting.¹⁴⁵

Warren went on to say that the expedition would not arrest or coerce anybody at Caledon Bay. He would talk to the Aborigines,

ascertain the killers of the Japanese, McColl, Fagan and Traynor, and suggest that if they gave themselves up willingly they would be treated fairly and prevent their people being harmed. Immediately after the reception, Warren and Fowler boarded a ship for Thursday Island.

At Oenpelli, Dyer's radio broke down. He had no knowledge of the publicity the expedition was receiving and did not even know Warren was leading it. He decided to go to Darwin and then to Thursday Island on the presumption that the expedition might set out from there. In Darwin, he was amazed to find he was a celebrity. A newspaper reporter asked him how he would handle hostile Aborigines. He replied that if the Aborigines greeted him with spears, he would 'act the goat', playing a tin whistle and dancing to make them laugh and thus 'disarm their hostility'.¹⁴⁶ He was, of course, being flippant, but his comments were eagerly reported in the press. There was an element of truth, as his ability to cause laughter had defused some awkward situations in the past.

Dyer, thus far having been shielded from the publicity, found that there was another side to it. Those who wanted what some government officials called a 'display of force'¹⁴⁷ showed active antagonism to Dyer. Many thought he was mad to go into such danger unarmed. For a period, the Methodist missionaries also misunderstood the concept of the peace expedition. CMS had originally hoped to have a Methodist missionary in the party and had invited the Rev. Theodor Webb from Milingimbi. Webb, however, thinking that the expedition was suicidal and, more seriously, that CMS had been duped into doing police work, declined the invitation.¹⁴⁸ When Webb understood the peaceful intentions of the missionaries, he withdrew his condemnation of their expedition, but still stated that he believed it would fail or require, at the very least, two years presence in the Caledon Bay region to gain the confidence of the people.¹⁴⁹

Dyer travelled from Darwin by ship to Thursday Island where he met up with Warren and Fowler. Fowler was initially disappointed with Dyer. He had pictured 'the man whom the CMS had to restrain from going overland on horseback, entirely unaccompanied, to quieten the Caledon Bay Aborigines' as 'a man of giant physique'. Instead he found a 'thin, malaria-riddled scrap of humanity', albeit with a 'twinkle in his eye'.¹⁵⁰

The remarkably skilful half-caste skipper of the *Holly*, Harold Hamilton, brought the small vessel from Groote and transported the three men to the Emerald River mission. There they found to their amazement that the mission appeared as if it were under seige. A police contingent had been sent to join Constable Hall. They were using one of the mission huts as their headquarters, surrounding it with barbed wire entanglements and guarding it with police dogs. Movement on the mission was restricted and anyone permitted to leave the mission area was accompanied by armed police.¹⁵¹ There seemed to be an air of apprehension, according to Dyer, but Warren saw it entirely differently. He sensed that it was all a subterfuge, intended to create the impression of danger and to enable the police to mount an immediate punitive raid should the barely-tolerated peace expedition fail.¹⁵²

Warren, as expedition leader, found he was not short of volunteers from among the Aboriginal people of both Groote and Roper. He finally chose Yarraminnie and Barney from Roper; Mulkarawada and Langipiunga from Groote; and Jalamar and David who were also on Groote, but were related to and well-known to the Caledon Bay people. Together with Harold Hamilton and the three missionaries, the peace expedition numbered nine people. They left Groote on the *Holly* on 5 December. Offered guns by the police, Warren said that they would not even take their normal hunting rifle, lest they be misunderstood. They would take, said Warren, '... nothing offensive beyond medical supplies and love and faith in God. These will be, I believe, sufficient to overcome all difficulties and bring our work to success.'¹⁵³

Arriving at Caledon Bay the next afternoon, they were concerned at the sight of a lugger with a broken mast. Recognising the lugger as belonging to a friend, Fred Gray the trepanger, they thought that there may have been trouble and that the lugger had been looted.¹⁵⁴ Warren, nevertheless, went ashore in a small boat accompanied only by Jalama and David. Several Aborigines confronted them on the beach, watching their every movement and keeping total silence despite every attempt to converse with them. The uneasy stand-off ended suddenly when Jalama was recognised. With shouts of delight, the landing party was welcomed. It was explained to them that they had at first been thought to have been police.¹⁵⁵

The situation was made even clearer when the Caledon Bay

men took Warren along the beach to see Fred Gray and his white assistants. Trepaning in the region, they had lost a mast in a storm and had come into the Bay for repairs two days earlier. Gray said he had no fear of the Caledon Bay people, who would not harm anyone who did not harm or pose a threat to them. Gray, on sighting the *Holly*, had presumed it was carrying police seeking to make arrests.

With him were Yama, Wadjung and Micky who had been involved in the incident with the Japanese. Gray had advised them that they would be better off surrendering voluntarily and this they tried to do. That was why they came down to the beach to meet Warren, but acted so cautiously.¹⁵⁶ Gray was very surprised to learn that the Caledon Bay people were suspected of murdering McColl. He had, he said, great admiration for their senior elder, Wonga.

For two weeks the peace expedition used Caledon Bay as their headquarters, ranging up and down the coast and stopping wherever people or smoke were seen. They gave themselves as much exposure as they could, ensuring that they and the *Holly* and their peaceful intentions were as widely known as possible. Every Aboriginal person they met was interviewed. They bartered, talked, gave gifts, showed 'magic lantern' pictures and even played football.¹⁵⁷ On the Sunday, they held a service on the beach at Caledon Bay, where Dyer produced, of all things, his portable organ. Even more surprising was that some of the Aborigines knew some Sankey hymns, having learnt them at the Methodist mission at Milngimbi.

Although they discovered that many people were away at Ourindi at a big corroboree, they obtained a great deal of information. Those involved in or who witnessed the Japanese incident emphatically declared that these Japanese had persistently mistreated the women on previous occasions and had attacked the men, firing guns at them, before they were forced to spear them. They also heard versions of the killing of McColl and of Traynor and Fagan, but not from eyewitnesses.

In fact they learned, as Fred Gray had already suspected, that those who killed the three white men were not Caledon Bay Aborigines at all, but from Blue Mud Bay, and that the people pursued by the police on Woodah Island had nothing to do with the killing of the Japanese. The missionaries were, however, given

names of witnesses and it was alleged that the actual killer of McColl was a man named Daglar.¹⁵⁸

On Woodah Island, they were shown McColl's grave. They dug up his remains, packed them in a box, returning to Groote on 20 December and handed over McColl's remains to Constable Morey. After spending Christmas at Groote, they sailed to Roper, arriving on 1 January 1934. There they found several members of the Caledon Bay tribe who agreed to scour the country to the north and by word of mouth and smoke signals to summon all the people of the region to Ourindi to talk to Warren.¹⁵⁹

Before this historic meeting actually took place, the Peace Expedition met up with Daglar himself at Blue Mud Bay. A man of obvious strength and intelligence, he had the tight curly hair typical of his group and the pointed 'Macassan' beard. Daglar frankly admitted to killing McColl. Daglar related how the police had landed on Woodah Island and, heavily armed, had set about scouring the scrub. They had come across the women – itself an unpardonable breach of the moral code – and had chased them, taking four of them captive, including Japparri, Daglar's youngest wife. They had held the women for two days. The Aboriginal men had no way of knowing why the women were taken and could only presume it was for sexual purposes.

It is still said today on Groote Eylandt by descendants of eyewitnesses that the police used the women prisoners sexually. When the police went to try and capture some men, McColl was left in charge of the women. According to Daglar, three of them escaped. Daglar found McColl sexually assaulting the fourth woman, his wife Japparri, whereupon he speared him and released her.

As the meeting day at Ourindi was fast approaching, Warren told Daglar he would return in five days time and the peace expedition left for Ourindi to meet the whole of the Caledon Bay tribe. On 23 January the meeting took place of the peace expedition and the tribe, which some sensational columnists had claimed were threatening the white population of Australia! There were only fifty-seven rather nervous men. As a sign of trust, they invited Warren to glimpse the women and children, whom he did not count. The elder, Wonga, asked Warren if a mission could be established in his country.¹⁶⁰ They exhibited a real desire for peace.

Warren was by now suffering severely from a poisoned leg, but insisted on keeping his promise to Dagiar. Returning to Blue Mud Bay, the peace expedition was immediately welcomed. People fully and openly discussed not just the killing of McColl but also of Traynor and Fagan, which they said took place many months before McColl. These two men, it was claimed, had duped the tribe by bargaining for two women for a night and then detaining them on their lugger and trying to take them away. Dagiar and a number of other men managed to board the lugger to take the women back. The white men resisted them and a fight ensued. Fagan was killed and thrown overboard. Traynor escaped from the lugger and was killed on the beach.

Warren was in such agony that the expedition cut short the visit. Returning to Groote on 27 January, Warren had to be wheeled to the mission in a cart. The meagre medical resources of the mission were inadequate, so he was taken on the *Holly* across the Gulf to Burketown hospital.¹⁶¹

Warren believed the Aboriginal accounts of events in and near Caledon Bay, particularly as he had heard substantially the same accounts from different people at different times and places. He was confident the Aborigines would be treated fairly in court. Although he hoped some way could be found for an enquiry to sit at Caledon Bay itself, he wrote to his wife from hospital that he doubted if this would be agreed to:

We have done the work we have come to do, although not yet completed. We have met every native concerned in the killings and made friends with them – their wives and families – been received with open arms on every side and now, with CMS consent, intend to go back and start a home among them. I have had my photo taken in among all the killers and we have had no offer of violence whatever. Our difficulty will be to get the government to deal with justice on the spot either through us or through a travelling court. But I have not worked this out fully yet.¹⁶²

After Warren had recovered somewhat, the peace expedition returned to Woodah Island where once more Dagiar and the others told their stories, this time very clearly through Groote Eylandt Aborigines acting as interpreters. They expressed their willingness

to go to Darwin to explain their case provided the mission cared for the women and children. While still at Woodah Island, Fowler received a radio message giving permission for the missionaries to take Daglar and the others to Darwin to court. Warren noted in his journal the undertaking that the Aborigines would not be arrested in Darwin.

They were, nevertheless, uneasy that the missionaries might still be thought to have arrested the Aborigines. Fred Gray solved this problem by volunteering to take them to Darwin himself. One missionary, Alf Dyer, went with them, to keep faith with the Aborigines whom they had promised to look after. Gray's lugger having been wrecked, the mission cutter *Oituli* was hired for the purpose. Warren, his leg still troubling him, returned south, as did Fowler, their mission accomplished. They travelled to Thursday Island on the *Holly*, arriving on 5 April.

There, Warren wrote his official report to CMS:

We desire also to humbly submit that this expedition has been definitely and very distinctly led and guided by the hand of Almighty God in such a way that we are compelled to acknowledge him as the director of the whole expedition, and we confess to divine intervention in many difficult and sometimes dangerous situations. If the work of this expedition has been done satisfactorily, it is surely because of the good hand of our God upon us, and we humbly pray that that which has been accomplished already may be followed up by permanent settlement of Christian men and women among the Aborigines of Arnhem Land, by which means alone we believe our work will be brought to a satisfactory conclusion.¹⁶³

Warren arrived in Sydney on 21 April where he was given a hero's welcome, followed by an even more spectacular welcome a few days later in Melbourne. Already, however, there was most disturbing news from the north.

When the *Oituli* arrived in Darwin, Dyer expected that he would be responsible for the Caledon Bay men until the authorities wished to try to interview them. Instead, the police immediately arrested the men and took them away screaming to the police cells where they were kept in irons. Still in chains, they were taken to court the next day to be formally charged. In court

they were almost demented with terror, understanding nothing and believing that they were about to be executed on the spot. Dyer wrote, 'Their screams and struggles were pitiable and the position was all the worse in that nobody knew a word of their language, nor could they speak a word of English.'¹⁶⁴

The men were all remanded in custody until August. Given no bail, they were forced to spend four months in jail, still not comprehending what was happening despite Dyer's best efforts to explain to them with his very limited knowledge of their language and their limited knowledge of his. The Caledon Bay men felt betrayed, as did Dyer himself, who along with Warren, Fowler and CMS, had trusted that there would be fair and humane treatment.

When the news of what had happened to the Aborigines reached the outside world, great public indignation was aroused. The missionaries were 'hotly accused of having treacherously betrayed the Aborigines into the hands of their enemies by promises of friendship and protection'.¹⁶⁵ In Darwin, Dyer received literally hundreds of hostile and abusive letters from all over Australia. Grieved and with nowhere else to turn, Dyer took the letters to the little stone Church of England church, Christ Church, Darwin, which has since been destroyed by Cyclone Tracy. An evangelical clergyman to his bootstraps, Dyer laid the letters not on the altar but on the litany desk, like King Hezekiah, 'to cast them upon the Lord'.¹⁶⁶

When the trials finally did take place, they could be best described as a mockery of British justice, but entirely consistent with the social attitudes of pre-war Darwin and its police force. Space, regrettably, does not allow a description here, but most of the details are available elsewhere.¹⁶⁷ Only the most token of efforts were made to assist the prisoners even to comprehend the proceedings, let alone clearly present their versions of events, and Judge Wells adopted a particularly severe attitude. At the first trial, the three Aborigines accused of the murder of the Japanese were sentenced to twenty years imprisonment with hard labour, despite the fact that it was admitted by the court that the Japanese had provoked them.

This extremely harsh sentence and Judge Wells' scathing remarks at the conclusion of the trial immediately brought strong protests from missionary organisations throughout Australia. A strongly worded protest from CMS was followed by further protests

from the National Missionary Council and other groups, strongly objecting to the attitude of the Judge, the severity of the sentence, and uncalled-for comments on the activities of missionaries.¹⁶⁸

At the second trial, Dagiar and Merara were surprisingly acquitted of the murder of Fagan and Traynor through insufficient evidence, the court accepting that there was conflicting evidence as to whether or not Traynor and Fagan were abducting the women and as to who actually started the fight.¹⁶⁹ Dagiar was remanded in custody and charged with the murder of Constable McColl.

The third trial, in which Dagiar was tried for the murder of McColl, was conducted very badly. Even Judge Wells was extremely critical of the police and the prosecution. They could have obtained better interpreters, he said, as evidence had to pass through several interpreters and several languages before being heard in English. More significantly, Wells was amazed that the only possible witnesses to McColl's death, the woman Japparri and the police trackers left with McColl, were not called as witnesses. Newspapers generally took this to imply that the police had something to hide and that they did not want these people to be cross-examined.

The most serious aspect of all was that all officials concerned in the case, including Judge Wells and W.J.P. Fitzgerald, supposedly representing Dagiar, appeared most anxious that there be no slur on the good name of a police officer. Dagiar at no time spoke in his own defence, nor was he even questioned in court. Judge Wells in his summing up told the all-white jury that to find a verdict other than guilty would malign a dead policeman.

Although strongly criticising the Crown case, the jury brought down a verdict of guilty on 6 August. Judge Wells stated that Aborigines had to be shown that they could not murder a policeman and get off with a jail term. He sentenced Dagiar to death. Again the judgment provoked widespread protest from the churches, the press and individuals throughout Australia. The peace expedition came in for criticism as well. It was said that a grave indiscretion had been committed by the arrest of the Caledon Bay natives. 'Missionaries should not be policemen.'¹⁷⁰

This evoked a detailed response from Warren:

In view of the accusation still being made that the expedition

was engaged in doing police work, I wish once again to state that before the expedition left Melbourne, it definitely refused either to arrest or apprehend any of the natives or pave the way for future operations by the police against the Caledon Bay blacks. This resolution the expedition definitely adhered to and the natives now in Darwin went there of their own free will, but on our advice and at their own request to have the matter settled. Having heard their simple unvarnished story, we had no hesitation in advising them to tell it to the government, being confident that under the new ordinance which was being framed to meet such emergencies, they would be treated humanely and sympathetically.

They went to Darwin on Mr Gray's ship at his invitation, he too being anxious to do all in his power to bring about a better understanding with these people. The Rev. A.J. Dyer accompanied him as a passenger in order to keep our promise to the natives that we would stand by them and speak on their behalf. Although we requested that Mr Dyer should have charge of the men while in Darwin until called upon for trial, they were placed in prison for three months before their trial took place.

It is possible that the sentence of death passed on Takiar (Dagiar) may be commuted, but a long term of imprisonment for these men, such as has been passed on the three found guilty of the killing of the Japanese, will not do anything to help either the prisoners or their tribes.¹⁷¹

Such was the public outcry about Dagiar's sentence that CMS was able to convince the Commonwealth government to appeal against the sentence. At the appeal in the High Court, the original proceedings were declared a mistrial. Dagiar's conviction was quashed.

Dagiar was released from Darwin Prison.¹⁷² Shortly afterwards he disappeared and no trace of him was ever found. A persistent belief among Aboriginal people is that he was killed by the police.

The true facts of this whole case will probably never be known. Those who might have known something of Dagiar's death are now dead themselves. Twenty years after the trial, Constable Victor Hall, one of the police involved, wrote a partly fictitious account of the events. His conclusion is the only part he admits to be fanciful. In it, he describes how Dagiar tried to

Woxto ba kauwallo mankulla unnoa tara tuguunbilliko guranto
geen kinba,

2. Yanti bo gearun kin bara gukulla, unnoa tara nakillikan
kurri-kurri kabirug gatun mankillikan wiyellikanne koba.

107. The beginning of the Gospel of Luke in Awabakal, translated by
Lancelot Threlkeld and Biraban, 1830 (not published until 1892)

2. Hikkai korn puntir Jesusangk yaral
yonguldye. Yarnin ile inangk Jesuse :
Rabbi, ngurn nglemin inde ellin teacherowe;
puntir inde Godanmant; tarn ile korn ennin
harnakar miracalar lun inde ennir ungunuk
Jehovah nowaiy al yan lewin.

108. The Gospel of John, chapter 3, verse 2, in Narrinyeri, translated
by George Taplin and his Narrinyeri informants, 1864

1. Jendrangundruja ngaiana jenia morla ngamalkananto,
mina ngaiana ngarana wonti, ngangau ngaiana kekiljeriati.

2. Ngangau naupini jaura, angelali matja kaukaubana,
ngurunguru ngananani, ja dankarana ja delkina pratjanali
kalala taluku maninani,

3. Worderu ngaiana mindrinanto, ngaiana jenipara murla
pirna wata ngundranani? Ninapini ngopera Kapara muntali
kaukaubana wonti, ja ngadani tanali, nunkangundru matja
ngarana, ngaianangu morlalu kurana wonti.

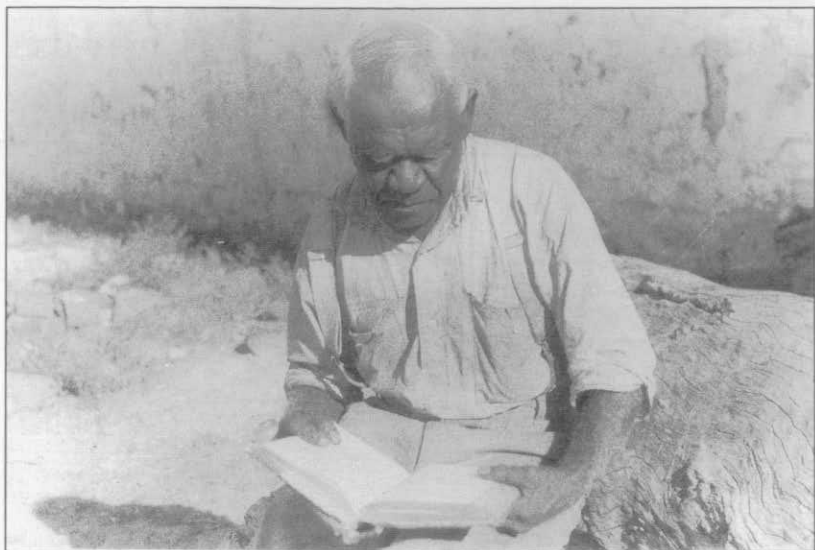
109. Hebrews, chapter 2, verses 1 to 3, in Dieri, translated by Carl
Strehlow, J.G. Reuther and Aboriginal informants, 1897

2. Ge wiri-wiri kauwi:nu tjo:lba:daia nanja,
Wai, walan?nara naiananga kanadjanuru man-
nale nunminum, Aua kalumba nundjananga pitja
brar njenuru;

3. Nala-nala iarun jero:l gejiri bundul' danja,
Brar wurinuru kalumba Inaiuri ananga, Tjuwalja
anangaia tjadanuru irandju.

110. The Gospel of Mark, chapter 1, verses 2 and 3, in Worora,
translated by Bob Love, Njimandum,
Barungga and Wondoonmoi, 1930

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111. Johannes, one of the last readers of Dieri,
studies the Dieri New Testament.

Acknowledgement: Lutheran Archives, South Australia.

Reproduced with permission.



112. Grace and Bidigainj, Len Harris's co-translators

Acknowledgement: Len Harris collection

return across Arnhem Land to his own country and was followed, stalked and killed in a fierce duel by 'Big Pat', Constable McColl's faithful black tracker. Hall called his book *Dreamtime Justice*.¹⁷³

Some limited justice did come of it all. The focus of national attention on the trial did lead to reforms in the way in which trials involving Aboriginal people were conducted. It was only, however, a beginning. Many question whether Aboriginal people have yet received justice before the courts.

Conclusions

The missionaries in north Australia have frequently been criticised as ethnocentric, even racist people, petty dictators intent on forcing Aborigines into European lifestyles. Some of this criticism came from government officials, perhaps the strongest critic being the Northern Territory's Chief Protector, Dr C.E. Cook, in 1938:

Unfortunately, there are amongst missionary personnel individuals of low intelligence and poor capacity who find missionary work an avenue of employment agreeable to them. It offers them a livelihood which their personal ability and merit could not elsewhere obtain, it affords the idle and incompetent a safe and comfortable existence and it places persons of subject mentality into positions of authority which only too often are exploited by their vanity to establish them as autocrats whose administration, inspired by personal advantage, marred by indolence and unguided by intelligence, has a disastrous effect upon the welfare and morals of native peoples.¹⁷⁴

This is a very wide-sweeping statement. Although it may have been partly true in some cases, it is a pity that Cook did not describe other kinds of people 'amongst missionary personnel'. His letters give the distinct impression that he tended to view all missionaries as defective. Perhaps Cook did not realise that the attitude of many of the Protectors also left much to be desired.

Those who genuinely tried to protect Aborigines usually did not hold office for long: the Northern Territory's Robert Morice was a prime example, a man the *South Australian Register* said was 'got rid of for doing his duty in defence of the blacks'.¹⁷⁵ Some Protectors simply wanted the status, lacking any kind of vision, indeed even lacking interest. The Government Resident of the

Northern Territory described the office of Protector in 1899 as 'only one in name'.¹⁷⁶ Many Protectors' annual reports ran only to four or five lines. One Protector officially admitted that he had 'very little to attend to', busying himself only with the question of decent clothes to cover female Aboriginal nudity and the problem of Aboriginal dogs in Darwin.¹⁷⁷ The truth is that the Protectors were rarely any more enthusiastic than the governments which employed them, a fact which official reports sometimes even acknowledged:

The Aboriginal inhabitants of [Northern Territory] had been practically uncared for. A few Protectors had been nominated, whose duty was to distribute rations of food and occasional blankets to the natives. Certain reserves had been proclaimed, but no overseers for those reserves had been appointed and, except by way of small subsidies paid to two mission stations, the government had done nothing for the uplifting of the natives who were under its care.¹⁷⁸

Not only did many Protectors do very little of positive value, but some indulged in the practice of criticising missionaries even though no-one else was doing anything at all. The missionaries, however, were certainly not faultless and some criticisms were well-deserved. They were individuals and there was much variation among them. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the opinions and reflections of Aborigines themselves. Theodor Webb, Hubert Warren and Len Harris, for example, are remembered with respect as people of good humour and compassion. There are others who are remembered less favourably. 'He was a hard man,' said Harry Huddlestone of Roper River, describing one of the old CMS missionaries. Lazarus Lamilami in his book recalled the strictness of the regime under Watson at the Methodist mission at Goulburn Island.

My own observation is that Aboriginal people have little respect, indeed little memory, of missionaries who did not stay long enough to get to know them. Of those who remained for a sufficient time, they remember those who liked to joke, those who sometimes treated them as equals and were not totally obsessed with work. Many women missionaries are remembered for their acts of kindness. There is much evidence that the most effective

evangelism was the example of Christlikeness in the lives of certain missionaries. Aboriginal people were quick to understand what true Christian behaviour was and quick to recognise the presence or absence of true Christian compassion in the lives of the missionaries. Christian Aboriginal people often recall the quiet informal witness of missionaries they liked more clearly than the disciplined Bible teaching or formal church services.

To Constance Bush, the most Christian thing about Alf Dyer was his kindness to the lepers. Yulki Nunggumajbarr recently wrote of Len Harris's death:

When I heard, I was sad because I knew the old man when I was a little girl at Angurugu. . . How we used to work with him in the garden, growing melons, sweet potatoes, peanuts. The old man showed us lots of things growing in the garden. But not that only. He was sowing seed to other people, spreading the good news, the word of God. . . I know the songs he used to sing. . . ¹⁷⁹

The missionaries whom Aboriginal people remember with less respect or affection were those who acted mostly as if Aborigines were inferior, those whose disciplinary measures were harsh or unjust, those who showed little real practical compassion, those who were obsessed with physical work and tried to drive Aborigines to emulate them, and those who perpetually criticised Aboriginal cultural practices.

It is, as I have said, easy to criticise missionaries when they alone were prepared to show interest, even if it was sometimes misguided interest, in Aboriginal welfare. But not all their interest was misguided. In many cases they provided real protection from death and from exploitation. They provided, for many Aboriginal people, a safe environment in which they could have a more humane introduction to white Australian society. Those with medical knowledge provided healing which was widely appreciated by sick and injured Aborigines. Indeed, Aborigines frequently complained if a missionary with medical knowledge was replaced with someone lacking it.

Many missionaries struggled with few resources to provide Aborigines with some Western education and there are articulate and knowledgeable Aboriginal spokespeople today who owe much

to teachers who believed in their educability against the thrust of current scientific opinion. Missionary farmers, mechanics, nurses and builders, although they never did create the self-supporting villages of which they dreamed, gave Aboriginal people real skills of survival in a world which was changing around them.

The missionaries believed in the Christian gospel. True, many of them called their teaching the 'gospel of work' and confused faith in Christ with social change and an idealised form of European lifestyle, but Christ was nevertheless real to them. Many Aboriginal people did accept the Christian message, many of them adults and not merely dormitory children brainwashed by the missionaries as some critics would have it. There are those who suggest that there was a Christian attack on Aboriginal belief systems, in which Aboriginal people were readily browbeaten out of their original views. Such claims belittle Aboriginal people's intelligence and cultural integrity. The fact that Aboriginal people gave intelligent thought to the Christian message and made conscious decisions to accept or reject it has been strongly stated by several recent Aboriginal writers.¹⁸⁰

From the very earliest days, missionaries recorded Aboriginal people giving deep thought to complex theological questions, although not all missionaries realised that that was what they were doing. Many Aborigines asked, for example, why, if God was stronger than Satan, he did not restrain him or destroy him? One nineteenth century writer ridiculed this question,¹⁸¹ not perceiving that, couched in philosophical terms, it was the same question with which theologians have always grappled: the paradox of an omnipotent God and the existence of evil.¹⁸²

It is unfair and simplistic to criticise everything done by these missionaries of the pre-war years in north Australia as if, somehow, life for Aboriginal people would have been better without them. It would not have been. Apathetic governments were tacitly supported by an apathetic nation which ignored the destruction of Aboriginal people, ignored the huge cost Aborigines were paying for the affluence of the Australian nation. The missionary societies received pathetically small government subsidies, but were mostly supported by voluntary donations from concerned Christians.

On the other hand, these missionary organisations generally accepted the current dogma that Aboriginal people would either

die out or be absorbed eventually into European Australian society. They saw their task not only as bringing the gospel, but also as bringing immense social change. For this reason, the deepest criticisms of the Christian community should be of the mission policies rather than the missionaries themselves.

The Christian community was often far ahead of the rest of the community in its thinking, holding a higher view of the worth of Aboriginal people, but it still fell short of demonstrating a belief in racial equality. To be intellectually and morally ahead of the rest is not good enough if God's standard of thinking is yet higher.

The mission societies were consciously engaged in social engineering and they sought the kind of missionaries who would carry out their policies. The mission societies wanted to establish settled agriculturally or pastorally productive communities and they appointed the kind of missionaries who would work well at this task. In emphasising productive work and practical mechanical, farming and building skills, the missionaries were simply doing what they had been appointed to do.

Given my generalisation – for which I believe there is irrefutable evidence – that Aborigines would have been worse off without these northern missions, it is difficult to see what kind of missionaries would have fared better. Academics or theologians, if that was all they were, would be hardly likely to have endured the harsh conditions, nor would they have necessarily possessed the resources to cope. Only the practical skills of people like Leslie Perriman, Hubert Warren and Dick Harris enabled the missions to survive at all.

ENDNOTES

1. Diocese of Adelaide, *Year Book*, 1901 - 1902, pp.101-102
2. e.g. Newland, 1887: 31-32; Willshire, 1896: 7; Waters, 1913: 102
3. Ronan, 1962: 104
4. Linklater and Tapp, 1968: 74
5. Bauer, 1964: 157
6. Merlan, 1978: 87
7. Barnabas Roberts in Sutton and Hercus, 1986: 66
8. Dinah Garadji, personal comment, 20 November 1983
9. Morphy and Morphy, 1981: 14
10. *Northern Territory Times*, 20 February 1886
11. Report of the Australian Church Congress held at Melbourne, 19 to 21 November, 1906, p.119
12. Cole 1971a: 15-17. Before 1916, there were separate Church of England mission associations in the colonies of Victoria and New South Wales. An Australian association was formed in 1916, renamed the Church Missionary Society of Australia (CMS).
13. White, 1927: 19
14. For a full account of this journey, see White, 1918: 95-157.
15. Harris, 1986a: 229, 234
16. Cole, 1985a: 61
17. *Ibid*
18. Report of the Australian Church Congress held at Melbourne 19 to 21 November 1906, p.121
19. White, 1907: 17-18
20. Cole, 1985a: 61
21. CRS, A.3, NT, 14/7500, pt.1, AA
22. Ingoldsby, 1977: 13
23. A copy of these Instructions is in the files of the Lands Branch, Department of the Northern Territory, correspondence file, Mission Lease series ML9, Roper River Mission, AA.
24. Ingoldsby, 1977: 14
25. Bishop Frodsham to Minister controlling the Northern Territory, 29 November 1906, CRS, A659, 41/1118 Part 2
26. CRS, A.3, NT, 14/7500, pt.1, AA
27. Joynt, 1918: 7
28. *Ibid*, pp.7-8
29. E. Gribble, 1933: 108
30. Cole, 1968: 5
31. For similar comment see Hart, 1970: 152; Bern, 1974: 80; Sandefur, 1979: 13; Harris and Sandefur, 1983: 253.
32. Barnabas Roberts to John Sandefur (Sandefur 1979: 13)
33. Hart, 1970: 152
34. Joynt, 1918: 7
35. Dinah Garadji, personal comment, 1982

36. Joynt, 1918: 21 (There are various versions of Gajiyuma's last words, e.g. Higgins, 1981: 22; Cole, 1985: 64)
37. Harris, 1986a: 235
38. Bauer, 1964: 157-158
39. Harris, 1986a: 236
40. Church Mission Association of Victoria, Annual Report, 1909: 8-9
41. Harris, 1986a: 237
42. Bern, 1974: 80
43. Cole, 1968: 6
44. Harris, 1986a: 237
45. Church Missionary Association of Victoria, General Council Minutes, 11 March 1913, cited in Cole, 1977: 182
46. Cole, 1985a: 65
47. Warren's diary, 1913, cited in Cole 1971c: 10
48. Cole, 1971c: 11
49. Church Mission Association of Victoria, 'Report on the Roper River Mission by the Bishop of Carpentaria', June 1914, cited in Cole, 1981c: 11-12
50. Masson, 1915: 140
51. *Ibid*, pp.139-140
52. Harris and Harris, 1988: 74-75
53. *Church Missionary Gleaner*, August 1913, p.111
54. Cole, 1971c: 3-7
55. Wilkins, 1928: 221
56. Cole, 1971c: 17
57. Bishop Henry Newton, cited in Cole, 1971c: 13
58. Ingoldsby, 1977: 44
59. Mary Crome's diary, severely damaged in Cyclone Tracy, Darwin 1974, is now with Alf Dyer's papers, MS2545, ML
60. *Ibid*
61. Ingoldsby, 1977: 45
62. Mary Crome's diary (see note 59)
63. Ingoldsby, 1977: 46
64. Mary Crome's diary (see note 59)
65. *Ibid*
66. *Ibid*
67. *Ibid*
68. Cole, 1972b: 10
69. *Ibid*, pp.13-14
70. *Ibid*, pp.17-18
71. *Ibid*, p.28
72. Alf Dyer, cited in Cole, 1972b: 31
73. *Church Missionary Gleaner*, June 1928, p.10
74. Alf Dyer, cited in Cole 1972b: 93
75. Church Mission Association of Victoria, General Council minutes, 11 March 1913, cited in Cole, 1985a: 66

76. Warren, cited in Cole, 1971c: 21-22
77. *Ibid*, p.22
78. Cole, 1985a: 72
79. Cole, 1971c: 23
80. Warren's diary, 11 December 1916, published in Warren, 1918
81. Cole, 1971c: 26
82. *Ibid*, p.27
83. Ellie Warren's diary, cited in Cole 1971c: 28
84. *Church Missionary Gleaner*, March 1916, p.486
85. Bishop of Carpentaria to Secretary, Victorian CMS, 12 August 1918, cited in Cole, 1985a: 69
86. Cole, 1971c: 33
87. *Ibid*, pp.34-35
88. Len Harris' diary, in the possession of the author
89. Cole, 1979: 122
90. Cole, 1985a: 70
91. Bishop Newton to Secretary, Victorian CMS, 12 August 1918, cited in Cole, 1985a: 70
92. Warren, cited in Cole, 1971b: 20
93. Cole, 1985a: 89-90
94. Warren, cited in Cole, 1971c: 44
95. *Church Missionary Gleaner*, July 1922, p.328
96. *Ibid*, December 1922, pp.3-4
97. Cole, 1985a: 72
98. Constance Bush, cited in Cole 1972a: 54
99. Cole, 1985a: 92
100. Bleakley, 1929: 23-24
101. G.W. Wilkins, cited in Cole 1971: 55, 57
102. Cole, 1975: 8-17
103. See, for example, Bleakley, 1929.
104. The older spellings, 'Kakadu' and 'Gunwinggu', will be retained in recognition of their historical importance and widespread use in the literature.
105. Church Missionary Society Annual Report, 1926
106. Cole, 1972: 62-68
107. Bleakley, 1979: 20-21
108. Ferrier's Report to CMS, cited in Cole, 1972: 65-66
109. Constance Bush, personal comment
110. Cole, 1985a: 124
111. *Church Missionary Gleaner*, April 1932, pp.16-17
112. Cole, 1971c: 64
113. General Committee of CMS, 4 February 1929, cited in Cole, 1971c: 65
114. Cole, 1971c: 73-74
115. Ingoldsby, 1977: 51
116. Langford Smith, 1935: 56
117. Langford Smith, 1936: 10

118. Cole, 1985a: 73
119. The accounts of these explorations are in Langford Smith, 1935 and 1936.
120. Langford Smith, 1936: 10
121. *Church Missionary Gleaner*, July 1932, pp.12-13
122. Cole, 1985a: 74
123. CRS A659, 41/1118 and CRS A1/34/1141, AA (NT), contain all correspondence relating to the Board of Inquiry. Evidence and final report are missing.
124. *Sun* (Sydney), 5 June 1935
125. Cole, 1971c: 76
126. Victorian CMS, report of R.C.M. Long to General Council, 8 November 1937
127. *Open Door*, November 1939, pp.6-7
128. Len Harris, personal comment
129. *Ibid*
130. Arrowsmith, 1948: 102
131. Len Harris papers, in possession of the author (For a brief explanation of the 'CMS Harrises', see ch. 12, note 82.)
132. Berndt and Berndt 1954: 133; Cole, 1971c: 80; Fowler, 1985: 1
133. *Herald* (Melbourne), 29 August 1933
134. *Ibid*, 2 September 1933
135. CMS Victoria, cited in Cole, 1971c: 81
136. *Hobart Town Mercury*, 19 October 1933
137. Dyer n.d.: 5
138. Donald Fowler, cited in Arrowsmith, 1948: 89-90
139. Port to CMS, cited in Fowler, 1985: 4
140. e.g. *Argus* (Melbourne), 2 November 1933
141. *Herald* (Melbourne), 2 November 1933
142. *Ibid*
143. Hubert Warren to Ellie Warren, cited in Cole, 1971c: 85
144. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 November 1933
145. Cole, 1971c: 86
146. Cole, 1972: 78
147. *Herald* (Melbourne), 5 September 1933
148. *Sun* (Sydney), 3 October 1933
149. *Herald* (Melbourne), 4 October 1933
150. Fowler, 1985: 19
151. *Ibid*, p.26
152. Cole, 1972b: 79
153. Cole, 1971c: 90
154. Fowler, 1985: 39
155. Cole, 1971c: 90
156. *Ibid*
157. *Ibid*, pp.91-92
158. Daglar, variously spelt Tuklar, Tarkiera etc.

159. Cole, 1971c: 93-94
160. *Ibid*, pp.95-96
161. *Ibid*, p.97
162. Hubert Warren to Ellie Warren, cited in Cole, 1971c: 97
163. Peace Expedition Report, cited in Cole, 1971c:101
164. Cole, 1972b: 90-91
165. *Ibid*, p.91
166. Dyer, n.d.: 67
167. Particularly Berndt and Berndt, 1954: 123ff.
168. Cole, 1971c: 105
169. *Ibid*
170. *Ibid*
171. *Ibid*, pp.105-6
172. Considerable mystery and contradiction surrounds the disappearance of Daglar. There seems little reason to doubt Alf Dyer's account of Daglar's release and later disappearance (Dyer n.d.: 76-77). If it is true, as many Aborigines and others believe, that Daglar was killed by the police, it is even more likely that he would have been released first. On the other hand, Fowler, probably writing before he had heard details from Dyer, stated that Daglar 'mysteriously escaped' (Fowler, 1985: 137). Berndt and Berndt (1954 :112) also suggest that Daglar 'escaped'. Daglar's defence counsel claimed in the *Townsville Bulletin*, 11 August 1936, that Daglar ran away while the police, having formally released him, were taking him from the jail to the Aboriginal compound.
173. Hall, 1962. There are other fictional and semi-fictional accounts such as Idriess 1935.
174. C.E. Cook, 'Aboriginal Missions', CRS, F1, 44/193, pt.1, (1938), AA
175. *Register*, 23 December 1885, p.4
176. SAPP, 2, No.77, 1899, p.2
177. SAPP, 2, No.28, 1889, p.26
178. The Northern Territory of Australia - a report on operations since the transfer of government, Dept of External Affairs, 1913, p.10
179. Yulki Nungumajbarr to Margarita Harris, October 1988, in possession of the author
180. e.g. Miller, 1985: 127; Flo Grant, *Wiradjuri Bawumarra*, December 1989, p.1
181. Eden, n.d.: 70
182. Len Harris told me that the question of whether God was more powerful than the forces of evil was the religious question he was most frequently asked by Aboriginal people in the 1930s and 1940s.

12

The emergence of a new age

World War II, traditional Aboriginal society and missions

BY THE MIDDLE YEARS of this century, missions of many Christian denominations were spread throughout the regions where traditional or semi-traditional Aboriginal people still lived in their tribal lands. The major areas involved were the north-west of Western Australia, the Top End of the Northern Territory, north Queensland and central Australia – which included parts of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

While all of these regions have their own particular relevance to this study, it was in the Northern Territory and in the Arnhem Land missions in particular that the decisions and events took place which most significantly affected missionary enterprise throughout traditional Aboriginal Australia. This was due to the coincidence of three major factors.

The first was the war, which drastically affected the Top End of the Northern Territory and brought it unprecedented publicity; the second was that the Northern Territory was the responsibility of the Commonwealth of Australia, and therefore the arena where its Aboriginal policies could be tried out; the third was that two great missionary societies, the Methodist Overseas Mission and the Church Missionary Society of the Church of England, had extensive mission networks in Arnhem Land and there made very sincere efforts to develop mission policies which responded to Aboriginal people's needs.

The situation before the war

In the north and centre of Australia up to World War II, Aboriginal people still retained, although in varying degrees, traditional tribal structures, languages and activities, while some of them still occupied their traditional lands, although they occupied them much more precariously than they realised. Except for a few places like Arnhem Land or the central desert regions, the situation of Aboriginal people in remote parts of Australia in the 1930s was not unlike that of NSW or Victorian Aborigines a century earlier.

To Stanner, the comparison was obvious:

In 1932, I went to a remote place in the Northern Territory to study some little-known tribes. It was a broken-down settlement which might well have been the Illawarra or the Hawkesbury of a hundred years or so before. There was an exiguous scatter of farmers, cattlemen and miners with leaseholds over lands still lived on by the remnants of the local tribes, which nevertheless still felt that they had an ancient and unbroken title to the lands.¹

The political agitation on their behalf in the south during the 1930s by people like William Cooper and William Ferguson and the consequent Commonwealth legislation was to affect them greatly, but they were unaware of it at the time and certainly, in the 1930s, would have perceived no change. Despite the fact that they did not know about it, their southern part-Aboriginal compatriots had not forgotten them. Their destiny eventually became an important element of the petitions and manifestos of the politically-active southern Aborigines, but whether the tribal people would have agreed or not with these aspirations on their behalf is a moot point. They may well, had they known, disagreed with William Cooper's demand that 'primitive Aborigines' be given possession of adequate reserves 'until such time as [they] are civilised',² but they would no doubt have heartily endorsed the plea of the 1938 Manifesto for the scrapping of the protection policy 'before this cruel system gets our 36 000 nomadic brothers and sisters of north Australia into its charitable clutches'.³

Although the future of the traditional or partly traditional Aboriginal people of the more remote parts of the continent also troubled the consciences of some white urban Australians from

time to time, the way ahead seemed elusive. As Stanner eloquently put it, 'some sort of new spirit was in the making, but it did not discern at all well where to go'.⁴ The white southern conscience was mainly stirred when there were reports from time to time of atrocities. Things were probably not much worse than they had ever been on the frontier of white settlement, but there was now more evidence that 'intolerable things were happening in the lonely places'.⁵ People in the south now heard more about them and heard more quickly. Public opinion was instrumental in bringing about the trials and inquiries which followed the last two reported massacres of Aboriginal people in 1926 (Forrest River) and 1928 (Coniston), but Aboriginal people in the north and centre would not have noticed that life, as a result, was much different in the 1930s.

Aboriginal people speak of other massacres. There is evidence that police shot a large number of Aborigines in the north of South Australia in the 1940s,⁶ and that police also shot twenty Aborigines near Kalumburu in the Kimberleys in 1944.⁷ I have heard as well, from Aboriginal people, rumours of much more recent killings, particularly unexplained disappearances. Aborigines died of drinking poisoned flagons of wine in Alice Springs in 1983.

It is sometimes said that 1934 marked some kind of 'turning point' in Commonwealth Aboriginal policies because of the publicity accorded to the peace expedition, and the trial and disappearance of Daglar. Stanner disagreed: 'I cannot say that I recall anything about that year that suggests a sudden access of public virtue or a new vision at all widely shared. It seems to have been just another year on the old plateau of complacency.'⁸

Certainly Prime Minister Lyons, even after the Daglar affair, saw little reason to change existing policy, yet there was some softening of official attitudes. The Commonwealth government more than the State governments was aware of its vulnerability to negative press reports of the treatment of Aborigines in the Northern Territory, a Commonwealth responsibility since 1911. Indeed, it was sensitive to *any* bad publicity regarding the treatment of Aborigines, even in the various States. As early as 1899, the Belgian Consul in London had used the Northern Territory Government Resident's reports to silence British criticism of the treatment of African natives in the Belgian Congo.

Proud of its membership in the new League of Nations, the Australian Commonwealth, which had not even recognised Aborigines as part of the Commonwealth in its constitution, now wished to show the world that it cared about them – or perhaps to hide from the world that it did not. Australia had another 'Territory', having been given responsibility for the Trust Territory of New Guinea, taken from the Germans in World War I. Australia wanted to demonstrate that it could be trusted to administer a trust territory and that old-fashioned colonialism was a thing of the past. Publicity about the mistreatment or neglect of Aborigines in Australia's Northern Territory, or even in the States, tended to raise questions about how Australia's Department of Territories could claim to have such progressive policies in one territory and still condone violence and exploitation in another.

Overseas reporting of the events of 1934 did embarrass the Commonwealth government, making some politicians, who were otherwise completely indifferent to the needs of Aboriginal people, somewhat more willing to co-operate in the policy-changing initiatives of the late 1930s. These policy changes were to be applied to a very diverse group of people. Politicians' views of what should be done about the most traditional, least Europeanised Aborigines were not hard to predict.

The historian, W.K. Hancock, in his brief but insightful comments on the Aborigines in his book *Australia*, had already made his prediction in 1930:

It might still be possible to save a remnant of the race upon well-policed local reserves in central and northern Australia. This would cost hard thought and hard cash. Australian democracy is genuinely benevolent, but is preoccupied with its own affairs. From time to time it remembers the primitive people whom it has dispossessed and sheds over their predestined passing an economical tear.⁹

Hancock was right. At the 1937 Conference of Commonwealth and States Aboriginal Authorities, which was discussed in the previous chapter, 'full-blood natives' were divided into three groups: the detribalised living near towns, the 'semi-civilised' living on pastoral properties and the 'uncivilised' living in the tribal state. Their future was to be quite apart from the rest of the

Aboriginal population who it was expected would merge with the general white population and disappear: 'The destiny of the natives of Aboriginal origin, but not of the full-blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth.'¹⁰

Nothing much, it was thought, could be done for the detribalised adults living in town fringe camps, but their children were to be educated 'to white standard', although it was to be ensured that they would not be brought into 'economic or social conflict with the white community'. The 'semi-civilised', attached to pastoral properties, were to be given 'benevolent supervision' with small local reserves where the unemployable could 'live as nearly as possible a normal tribal life and unobjectionable tribal ceremonies may continue', and to which employees could go 'when unemployed'. The uncivilised were to be kept on 'inviolable reserves', although this really meant that they were simply to be retained on them, with contact only with approved whites.¹¹

The first substantial reserves to be set up were in north Queensland around the turn of the century, with a tacit agreement that missions could work in them – although as discussed in earlier chapters, in Queensland the reserves rapidly became places to which uncooperative Aborigines could be exiled from elsewhere, rather than simply places where traditional life was protected.

There never really were any 'inviolable reserves', but with intentions somewhat approaching such an idea, many reserves were created in the first decades of this century. In 1920, the Commonwealth, Western Australian and South Australian governments cooperated in setting up the Central Australian Reserve, not a controversial act in that the land was considered useless. Also in the 1920s, Western Australia's northern reserves were created in the Kimberleys. Part of what is now Arnhem Land was made a reserve by the Commonwealth in 1920, as was the Daly River in 1923. Under pressure from the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science in 1926, and also in response to the Bleakley Report of 1928, the Commonwealth created the full Arnhem Land Reserve in 1931. No-one at the time thought it had much commercial value.

Much well-respected expert opinion supported the 'inviolable reserve' strategy. Frederic Wood Jones, Professor of Anatomy at the University of Melbourne, was most forthright in his book *Australia's Vanishing Race*. Full-blood Aborigines were 'inadap-

table to a civilised environment'.¹² Their only chance of survival was total isolation. Jones called strongly for land rights although Aboriginal people today would dispute much of his reasoning:

Those earnest people who are engaged in attempting to prepare the native for civilisation and for the acceptance of Christian doctrines should go about the business with their eyes open. They should realise that though their efforts are well-intentioned, they can have but one end, for even if we admit it to be euthanasia, we must realise that it is inevitably death. No solution will ever be found for the problem of the uncontaminated native save that of preserving him from contamination by establishment of inviolate reserves for his sole occupation. Moreover, since all ceremonial and tribal life depends upon the integrity of certain topographical features connected with the totemic beliefs of the people, these reserves must be established in the traditional hunting-grounds of the tribes concerned.

Australia has fallen far behind in the matter of administering the affairs of its backward race. It has never instituted a proper survey as to the numbers, conditions and needs of the remainder of the people. This survey is long overdue. Nor has Australia ever created a department of native affairs which alone could deal with the many problems involved. It is much to be hoped that, before it is too late, a more enlightened policy will prevail and that Australia's vanishing race will cease to vanish and, at long-last, redeem Australia's reputation in this matter of dealing with the people upon whose ancestral hunting-grounds she grows her wheat and her wool.¹³

Many white Australians acted as if they agreed with Jones, but they were nowhere near as high-minded. Most did not believe or want to believe that Aboriginal people would survive at all. The town and 'semi-civilised' full-bloods would be elevated to the point where they disappeared and a part-Aboriginal population, which could be absorbed into the community, took their place.

For the 'uncivilised' tribal people it was just a matter of time. Nature would take its course and they would eventually die out: no matter what was done, Aborigines would disappear. The real problem was how to absorb the part-Aboriginal people into the general population.¹⁴ Rowley writes, 'As a result, the remaining frontier situations tended to be seen as pre-institutional and pre-

ALAWU-INJUN NA-JOHN WANJAINJINJUN
Story of John giving of
BAPTISM. (1-8)

Baptism

1. Anawulwulur anambalaman analawu

Beginning

good

story

na - Jesus Christ na - God Naniwajuv.

Jesus Christ

God. Son of

our minimum

2. Nundju Isiah narunggalju niwararanc

As I search high, one he wrote

αναυβίβα, Βαγγάνα, γανυλαργανδji

book

Behold

7 sand

^bajawimim^mut nawuw^mut niraqana, aniqadwumant^a

(True) do - E

messenger he going ahead he will prepare

manadi-njige. 3. Nidjandjuz jagila nidad

road you

Voice

one he calling out

a. ju. loid, nubunagama/angana manadi

brush

you breathe

road



114. Dedication of the Kriol Bible portions.

Harry Huddleston points it out to his relations

Acknowledgement: Summer Institute of Linguistics. Reproduced with permission.

Rebaleishan 1

¹²Brom deya aibin tenim miselp blanga luk hubin tok langa mi en aibin luk sebenbala goldinwan lempsten bin jandap deya, ¹³en rait deya la midul la detlot goldinwan lempsten wanbala men bin jandap. Det men bin werrimon brabli longwan kout. Det kout bin godan raitdan langa im fut, en det men bin abum goldinwan belt raidaran langa im briskit du. ¹⁴Ola heya blanga im bin brabli waitwan, en det dubala ai blanga im bin brabli shainiwan jis laiga laibliwan faiya, ¹⁵en im fut dubala bin luk jis laiga redwan aiyan weya dei hotinimap langa faiya.

115. Revelation chapter 1, verses 12 to 15 in Kriol

Acknowledgement: Text from Bible Society in Australia.

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miscegenation, rather than arising from the last stand of a very stubborn Aboriginal cultural minority.¹⁵

Not quite everybody in government was as cynical. John McEwen, Minister for the Interior from 1937 to 1939 in the Lyons government, took the policies to heart. He saw in them elements of real progress and set about developing positive policies for the administration of Aboriginal people in the Commonwealth's Northern Territory. Furthermore, McEwen made genuine attempts to understand Aboriginal people in the only way he thought available. Doing what some missionary societies had already started doing, he sought anthropological advice.

Elkin had become prominent and outspoken in Aboriginal affairs and now, in his own words, provided 'systematised knowledge of the essentials of native social and cultural life, and of the principles operating in the contact situation'.¹⁶ Elkin was a different expert from Jones. An anatomist, Jones was still convinced of the nineteenth century evolutionary model. Aborigines were less evolved, inadaptible. Elkin, on the other hand, was a social anthropologist, one of the emerging new breed. Aborigines were adaptable. They could take their place in the Australian community. Like Cooper and Ferguson and the mixed-race Aboriginal activists of the southern states, Elkin saw the future of the Aboriginal race as equality, albeit an equality gained by adopting white Australian culture.

Early in 1939, McEwen made a statement in the House of Representatives about the future of Aborigines in the Northern Territory. The government's aim would be 'the raising of their status so as to entitle them by right and by qualification to the ordinary rights of citizenship, and to enable them and help them to share with us the opportunities that are available in their native land'.¹⁷ Facilities were to be upgraded and Aboriginal material needs met. All Aborigines outside reserves were to be assisted to achieve a settled lifestyle and to understand white Australian law and authority. Missionary work was to be supported to provide 'stability of character to replace that which has been lost by the destruction of their ancient philosophy and moral code'. Aborigines living tribally on reserves were to be left alone and protected until the others had achieved obvious progress. The whole was to be supervised by district officers and patrol officers in the New Guinea style.¹⁸

It may all seem unprogressive, even ethnocentric today. In 1939 it was revolutionary and McEwen intended by it to set a high standard for the States. But the world was on the brink of a war which was to occupy almost totally all government initiative and resources. Later in 1939, McEwen complained bitterly in parliament that the Aborigines were 'being starved of funds'. 'The federal grant for Aborigines has been reduced because of defence needs,' said Minister for Defence, Sir Henry Gullett.¹⁹ It was a convenient excuse.

It is highly likely that vested interests, particularly the pastoral interests, would never have allowed McEwen's 'New Deal' to become reality, but we will never really know. World War II came to Australia's north and changed it for ever.

World War II

On 1 September 1939, the German army attacked Poland. Britain declared war on Germany two days later. Dutifully, Prime Minister Robert Menzies therefore declared Australia to be at war. It was a sobering thought to Australians who remembered the carnage of a little over twenty years before.

Although Australian effort was initially concentrated in Europe, where fighting was actually taking place, there was an uneasy suspicion that Japan, an ally in World War I, would probably be an enemy this time. Defence of the whole South-East Asian/Australasian region rested almost entirely on the British base at Singapore, but only the 8th Division of the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) was deployed against the potential Japanese threat. Most of the division was sent to Malaya, but Darwin was still thought to be strategically important, both as an advance base for operations to the north and as a fallback position if such became necessary. Two battalions were stationed in Darwin to move forward to Timor and Ambon if war broke out in the Asia/Pacific region.

It did. On 7 December 1941, Japan almost simultaneously attacked Malaya and Pearl Harbour. After nearly a year of boredom in Darwin, the battalions moved north, gaining the action they craved and its bitter consequence, being drastically defeated in February 1942 as the Japanese advance swept over Singapore and south into the South-East Asian archipelago.

Uncertainty over Japan's intentions and the remarkable

speed of the Japanese advance found Darwin unprepared to be what logically should have seemed Japan's next target. When Japan entered the war, a general evacuation of women, children and the aged from Darwin was commenced. By 18 January 1942, 2 200 women and children had 'gone south'.²⁰ Sixty-three women remained, mainly those in essential services, such as nurses and telephonists, and a few stubborn family members, including the wife and daughters of the postmaster, Hurtle Bald.²¹

In the south, the various missionary societies faced a difficult dilemma. Were missionaries' lives at risk? Was this a sufficient reason to close missions? The answers were not easy to reach. All the coastal Methodist, Catholic, Church of England and Presbyterian mission stations of the north-west of Western Australia across the Northern Territory to north Queensland were considered vulnerable. The Catholic, Methodist and Church of England island missions were particularly exposed, lying between the advancing Japanese forces and the Australian mainland.

The rapid escalation of the war made the decisions easier. By mid-January 1942, the Japanese were in Ambon and New Guinea and were bombing Port Moresby. It was generally accepted that it was only a matter of time before Singapore fell. A flying boat had been sunk just a few hundred miles away in Koepang. An invasion of north Australia seemed imminent. The decision was taken to evacuate all missionary women and their children.

My mother and I and Miss Edith Anderson were evacuated from Groote Eylandt, leaving my father, Len Harris, to be the sole Church of England minister on all the CMS mission stations and, for a long time, the only missionary at all on Groote. Aboriginal men picked us up in a small boat from the Emerald River mission. 'You just sit in the back and pray,' they told my mother.

They took us around to the Umbakumba lagoon, where the RAAF had begun to use the short-lived Qantas seaplane facility. A Sunderland flying boat carrying wounded Australian soldiers from Ambon was diverted to pick us up. Flying low to avoid detection as we crossed the Gulf, the plane took us to Townsville and the long trip south to Sydney on trains crammed with wounded evacuees from the indescribable horror to the north.

A few days after we left my father, a ship of the Royal Australian Navy called at Groote Eylandt. The captain commissioned my father as a petty officer in the navy so that he could be

entrusted with the radio codes, gave him a pedal-operated radio transmitter and made him a coast-watcher, responsible for reporting any Japanese air or sea activity in the region. A few days later, the ship was sunk by the Japanese.

Early in the morning of 19 February, 350 kilometres north-west of Darwin, four Japanese aircraft carriers launched eighty-one medium bombers, seventy-one dive bombers and thirty-six Zero fighters.²² This armada passed over the Catholic mission on Bathurst Island at 9.30 a.m. Father John McGrath, on his coast-watch radio, warned Darwin Coast Radio. The Darwin radio operator, Lou Cornock, passed the message immediately to RAAF Operations. It was 9.37 a.m. Just why no action was taken is the subject of an endless amount of speculation and myth. 'A dismal mix,' wrote Powell, 'of inexperience, poor inter-service communication, personal antagonisms and plain inertia left the town and the massed shipping without warning.'²³ The general alarm was sounded at 9.58 a.m., just as the bombs began to fall.

The destruction was immense. The twenty-one minutes between the radio message and the alarm could have made all the difference. Planes could have been in the air. The fifty-five ships in the harbour could have been moving. Waterside workers could have taken shelter. Eighty men died on the US destroyer *Peary*, her guns still firing as the water closed over them. Twenty-two wharf labourers were killed. The post office was struck directly and Hurtle Bald, his wife and daughters and all the telephonists and post office staff died. The 'all clear' was sounded at 10.40 a.m. One hour and twenty minutes later, fifty-four Japanese heavy bombers totally destroyed the RAAF base.²⁴

All told, 243 people were killed in Darwin that day. Fearing the effect on Australian morale, the Commonwealth government announced to the southern newspapers that the death toll was seventeen. Between 19 February 1942 and 12 November 1943, Darwin was bombed sixty-four times. Also attacked were Adelaide River, Katherine, Wyndham and, most disastrously, Broome, where sixteen flying boats full of Australian women and children evacuated from Indonesia were destroyed on 3 March 1942.

The Catholic mission on Bathurst Island lay directly in the path of Japanese attacks. The mission was strafed on the way to the first attack on Darwin, on the way back and on all sixty-three subsequent occasions. Miraculously, there was no loss of life 'ex-

cept for four fowls', wrote Father M. Sims,²⁵ but the church and convent were badly damaged. The Methodist mission at Milingimbi was also attacked. A Methodist missionary from Croker Island, the Rev. Leonard Kentish, was on a boat sunk near Elcho Island by a Japanese seaplane. He was taken from the water by the Japanese and beheaded on 5 February 1943 in the Aru Islands, although this was not ascertained until after the war.

The missions became concerned about what would happen to their mixed-race charges in the event of a Japanese invasion of the north, a concern which was not without good reason, given the light complexion of many of them. The Northern Territory missions evacuated all part-Aboriginal people to Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne. The Catholic and Lutheran German missionaries found themselves under suspicion together with much of the Australian German community. Lutheran mission schools were closed and missionary movements restricted. The German Palatine missionaries in the north-west were initially arrested and then confined to their mission – guarded, somewhat ludicrously, by Australian army chaplains.

Len Harris was deeply concerned about the Aboriginal people living on the mission, whom the Japanese could regard as hostile if the mission were ever attacked. There were many people, including some who had cruelly mistreated Aborigines, who publicly or privately wondered whether or not the Aborigines had good reason to side with the enemy. These were not Len Harris's concerns. He was worried about their safety.

He called the elders together and told them that this was not their war, that there was no need for them to get caught up in it, and that they had best 'go bush' until it was all over and not remain at risk on the mission site. This had already happened at Bathurst Island where the Catholic mission was such a regular target for passing Japanese war planes. The Groote Eylandters told my father that they would go away and make up their own minds on this matter. Their reply, the next day, said more about the missionaries than anything else could have done:

We have thought about what you said. Long ago, the Macassans came and some of us went to their country. They only wanted to gather trepang and trade with us and each year they went away. The Japanese have been coming here for a long

time. They came ashore for water or food and they sometimes looked for women. Then you people came. You have been good to us. You have stayed here. We are on your side now. We will stay at the mission.²⁶

Len Harris built a look out on top of Castle Rock. Few Japanese planes passed over Groote Eylandt, but there were a number of small Japanese ships in western Gulf waters. At Ngukurr, old Agnes liked to tell the story of the Japanese ship which she and her boys saw while they were camped at the mouth of the Limnen River. The Japanese captain gave them gifts and asked them, in good Pidgin English, where the Roper River mission was. 'We no more savvy Roper River mission,' they told him.

Groote Eylandt people received intelligence on shipping movements by smoke signals relayed from island to island or from the nearby coast. Len Harris reported this information to Darwin by pedal radio. Only on one occasion did a confrontation seem likely. According to smoke signals, a Japanese ship landed men on nearby Bickerton Island. The Groote Eylandters hid my father in a cave on Central Hill and made elaborate preparations to ambush the Japanese should they attempt to reach the mission. Nothing happened. They left Bickerton and sailed north. The Groote Eylandt men, my father said, were quite disappointed.

Army, naval or air force bases were eventually set up near most of the island missions. There were army bases, for example, on Melville Island and Milingimbi, naval and air force units on Bathurst Island and a radar station on Goulburn Island. On Groote Eylandt, Len Harris and the Aboriginal men constructed an airstrip on which the RAAF later established a base.

The missionaries believed they were assisting the war effort and they certainly were, although those who were coast-watchers did not really see themselves as actually serving in a war zone in the armed forces. A bemused Len Harris, for example, discovering his status as an ex-serviceman, collected his medals in 1975 thirty years after the war had ended. Despite the missionaries' willingness to assist their nation in every way possible, they found the presence of servicemen near the mission a difficult problem. They disapproved of alcohol being given to the Aborigines, but their strongest criticism was of the exploitation of Aboriginal women.

It was not only the missionaries who were concerned about

this. Separation of servicemen from Aboriginal women was at least part of the reason why all Darwin Aborigines were moved to organised camps a long way from Darwin at such places as Maranboy, Mataranka and Katherine. Paradoxically, many of these camps later ended up being close to large army installations as troop numbers rapidly built up after the bombing of Darwin. It is difficult to estimate the number of service men and women in the north. Well over 100 000 Australian and United States service personnel served in the Northern Territory at some time during the war. The most accurate count is usually the number requiring to be fed. In February 1944, the listed ration strength of the Northern Territory forces was 63 390.²⁷

There were, at first, fears that Aboriginal people might collaborate with the Japanese, which was one of the other reasons why the Darwin Aboriginal people were moved inland. Some sensational speculation in the southern press amounted to near-hysteria. Japanese infiltrators were 'garnishing their faces with burnt cork' and mingling with the Aborigines, according to a *Sydney Morning Herald* report in 1942.²⁸ Such fears proved groundless.

In 1945, there were at least 662 Aboriginal men and sixty-three Aboriginal women formally employed by the army, although some estimates double these figures. Thousands of others were more casually associated with the armed forces in many different ways. The men employed by the army worked mainly in the large military camps as labourers, doing everything from chopping firewood and working the army farms to handling ammunition and servicing weapons. Some worked as drivers or on engine maintenance. The women worked mainly in the military hospitals or served in the Australian Women's Army Service hostels.²⁹ There were many Aboriginal people who saw much more active service. Notable among them were the entirely Aboriginal 56 Port Craft Company and the Northern Territory Special Reconnaissance Unit. Eighty Melville and Bathurst Islanders crewed the small boats of 56 Port Craft Company, running supplies to anti-aircraft batteries, searchlight posts and coastal artillery defences.³⁰

Donald Thomson, well-known to Arnhem Land Aborigines from his various peace expeditions in the late 1930s and his role in obtaining the release from jail of Aborigines convicted of killing Japanese, was now a squadron leader in the RAAF. In late 1941,

he was seconded to form and command the Northern Territory Special Reconnaissance Unit, a task he carried out with energy and ingenuity. Among his first recruits were Natjialma, Mau and Ngarkalya whom he had released from prison five years earlier.

'It took some time to convince these people that they could really kill Japanese who landed in this territory without. . . being visited by another punitive expedition,' Thomson wryly commented.³¹ Bill Harney wrote in 1944: ' . . . as coast-watchers and trackers of lost airmen they have given invaluable service. Today over thirty-one people have been rescued by these natives, not forgetting six Japanese prisoners taken up in the first few months of the war.'³²

Only a few Aboriginal men from the more tribal central and north Australian Aboriginal communities were actually permitted to enlist for overseas service. Tim Japangardi of Yuendumu was one. On the other hand, there were very few Aboriginal people who were not directly affected by the war. Many Aboriginal people were formally employed for at least some of the war period. Many thousands of Aboriginal people were associated casually with the military camps. Many came out of the bush to take advantage of the availability of European goods or just to be part of this new and exciting era. There were army, air force or naval bases on or near all the island missions.

When the war ended in August 1945, Australia's north had passed a point of no return. Things could not go back to the way they had been.

The aftermath of the war

It was in the Northern Territory that Aboriginal people were most affected by the war and, immediately after it, that new government and mission policies began to emerge. What happened in the Northern Territory, therefore, was important for all the remote central and northern Aboriginal communities.

The Rev. J.W. Burton, Secretary of the Methodist Overseas Mission, wrote these predictions in 1944:

The war will be cataclysmic in many of its effects and will ruthlessly destroy much that is of proved worth in the life of the Aboriginal. Doubtless, much harm will be done; there will be a loosening of moral sanctions, a clearance of social custom and

maybe a great revolt against tribal authority. . . [but there will be] a greater sense of self-dependence. The individual will come to the front and there will be a stronger accent on personality.³³

People in the north like Burton had no way of knowing that the war would end in 1945. Many of them felt it would last a very long time and this no doubt coloured their expectation of the extent to which the war would affect Aboriginal people. The missionaries felt that an important feature of their isolated mission stations was that Aboriginal people were protected there, shielded from those destructive influences such as liquor and immoral white behaviour, which had so damaged Aboriginal society elsewhere. Their immediate concern was that close contact with military personnel would be morally corrupting and socially destructive. The Rev. Theodor Webb, a long-serving Methodist missionary, expressed his deep concern in 1944:

One thinks with dread of the almost inevitable result to the Aborigines whose contact with civilisation has been so slight; of the presence of defence posts of various kinds all through those northern areas: for this can do no other than contribute to the dislocation and breakdown of their tribal organisation and life.³⁴

The Church Missionary Society was so worried by the proximity of the RAAF base to the Emerald River mission on Groote Eylandt that the decision to move it to the present site on the Angurugu River was taken as early as 1943. Len Harris recently recalled his feelings:

I'd thought for some time that we'd have to move the mission eventually. The Bickerton Islanders were an important part of the mission and they traditionally came up the Angurugu River rather than the Emerald. I don't think the Groote Islanders liked them so far south so often. We also needed better land, but I have to admit the decision was prompted by the bad behaviour of the RAAF men. I regretted building them the airstrip sometimes, or at least building it so close to the mission. The older schoolgirls were very flattered by their gifts and the attention they got. . .³⁵

The war ended sooner than was expected. The small army,

air force or naval bases near the island missions were withdrawn and the servicemen departed, leaving behind a lifetime supply of metal for spearheads and other local uses.

The huge military bases in the north were dismantled and the military personnel went home. In the vicinity of these camps, life for Aboriginal people did not revert to 'normal', it did not go back to what it had been. Some kind of critical point had been reached from which, for many Aboriginal people, there was no return. After the departure of the military, many of them, particularly those who had simply been attracted to military compounds in the first place, elected to remain in what was left of the camps.³⁶ Going back to the bush, for some, seemed now to be a boring alternative. 'No beer longa bush,' Pigeon Rankin explained to me.³⁷

Some of the Aborigines who had been formally employed by the army returned to the missions, cattle stations and other centres of employment. Many had been 'employed' before, but employment in the army had been different. They had been uniformed and fed – and not just flour, sugar and tea, but the same high protein diet as everyone else in the army. They had experienced, as well, 'mateship' – that is, a much higher level of acceptance than they ever had before. If they had dependants with them, these too had been clothed and fed. There had been free health care, free entertainment and even some effort at education for the children.

Some of these privileges extended to the non-employed Aboriginal people who gathered near the camps, where Aboriginal people themselves noticed that the birthrate was higher and the infant mortality rate was lower. This was reported by Sergeant W.C. Duffy, responsible for 'Native Personnel' in April 1945: '[There is] found among the natives under Army care an ever increasing number of births – the birthrate exceeding the deathrate. As explained by some tribal elders, this is accounted for by a certain sense of security that these natives feel.'³⁸

They had also been paid. True, it was a paltry ten pence a day – about one twentieth of a soldier's wage – but it was pay.³⁹ They actually received their five shillings a week.⁴⁰ For many this was a new experience and not one they were about to give up. Just as in the southern States, where Aboriginal returned servicemen were a significant force in demanding better employment conditions, Aboriginal people who had been employed by the army

had learned that flour, sugar and tea were not enough.

The initial response of V.G. Carrington, Director of the Native Affairs Branch, was to see the 'problem' as one of how to return to 'normality', to pre-war attitudes and conditions:

These contacts have created a problem not existing before the war and which will require sympathetic treatment to restore to the native his proper and normal perspective and an appreciation that the benefits bestowed by the Service occupation were only transient and could not be perpetuated after the war.⁴¹

As the confusion after the war began to clear and the authorities started to receive reliable reports on what was happening, it became evident that the Aboriginal people were not going to return to their 'proper and normal perspective', that a new era was beginning.

A patrol officer in Arnhem Land noted the new attitudes:

The war has brought about big changes in economic life and has tended to accelerate contact with our culture. Natives throughout Arnhem Land reserve, many of whom have worked with the Services during the war, now desire to participate in our economic and social life and, unless the latter activities are advanced and attractions made in the reserve, the Native Affairs Branch will be unable to cope with the already ever-increasing drift from the reserve to Darwin and other settlements along the north-south highway.⁴²

Not only was there a 'drift from the reserves', but Aboriginal people who returned to the cattle stations now had an employment precedent. Ronald and Catherine Berndt observed this in 1946:

While the Aborigine is satisfied with very little in return for his labour, there is a certain standard below which it is not wise to fall. This is particularly true at present, when the Army compounds have set a precedent in the distribution of food to workers, dependants and old people; in the establishment of regular working hours; and in the setting up of showers, with washing and sanitation facilities.⁴³

Rowley went so far as to state that the end of the war marked the end of the process of destruction of Aboriginal society.⁴⁴ It is wrong to imagine that nothing destructive has been done to Aboriginal society since 1945. However, the old forces of destruction were considerably reduced, if not eliminated altogether, and destruction, where it occurred, was to have a new face.

Many would argue, with good reason, that the policy of assimilation was a major feature of this new kind of destructive force. We have seen, however, that what we now label 'assimilation' was very much like those things for which Ferguson, Cooper and the southern Aboriginal activists were fighting. We have also seen that it may well be an unfortunate truth that the idea of assimilation was a necessary intellectual leap for those who believed the Aboriginal race to be doomed to extinction, a leap which they had to make before they could ever begin to imagine a unique, Aboriginal-determined destiny.

The concept of assimilation was certainly part of the pre-war McEwen 'New Deal' for the Aborigines, although in saying so it also needs to be said that McEwen's policies were progressive beyond their time, calling for an end to all restrictive and discriminatory policies, the removal of all barriers to full citizen rights and, most remarkably, the education of the general community out of its intolerant and racist attitudes.⁴⁵ McEwen's 'New Deal' lapsed because of the war, but was probably too enlightened to have ever been fully implemented. After the war, the Commonwealth government would have preferred everything to go back to where it had been, but too many things had changed.

The missions had, perhaps unknown to themselves, passed a test in the eyes of the Australian public. The war had tested their competence to face a new and challenging situation and had demonstrated that mission policies had been successful. Mission Aborigines had shown themselves to be quite capable of becoming competent army and civilian workers. They had therefore been shown to be more capable of taking part in European civilisation than most white Australians, except for the missionaries, had been prepared to believe.⁴⁶

Certainly, after the war, there was a much increased interest in Aboriginal missions, with a rapid rise in government subsidies, building grants and salaries of teaching and health staff. The Rev. F.A. Taito of the Methodist mission believed that this new-found

support was due to the 'loyalty, bravery, courage and friendship' shown by the Aborigines during the war,⁴⁷ but those more realistically-minded suggest that in the period immediately following the war, the Commonwealth government was concerned about northern vulnerability and wanted an increased presence there.

The most important step taken was the assumption by the Commonwealth government of responsibility for initiatives in Aboriginal development. Such things had previously been left to missions with small government subsidies, but after the war there rapidly arose a network of government Aboriginal settlements. It is probably true that there was at first a humanitarian motive for government involvement. After the military withdrawal, something had to be done for the large numbers of Aboriginal people who remained in the disused camps. There were many children and, without the army services for its Aboriginal fringe communities, the camps became squalid and unsanitary. There were urgent health problems and the need to provide education for these children was also becoming evident.

Although it is undeniable that very soon after the war the Commonwealth government began considering its responsibility for the provision of services to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, it is highly likely that when the government did act with surprising rapidity in 1950, the response was due at least in part to international embarrassment. This, as we have seen, had happened before and there are Aboriginal people today who know full well that international criticism of Australian policies is often the best way to get them changed.

In June 1946, a group calling itself the Committee for the Defence of Native Rights complained about poor Aboriginal employment conditions in Western Australia to the newly-formed United Nations Commission for the Treatment of National Minorities. The matter was not actually raised in parliament until 25 November 1947 and, on 3 December, Prime Minister Ben Chifley admitted that the criticisms had been made to the United Nations Commission.⁴⁸ Several retired Commonwealth public servants have told me that this criticism prompted the Prime Minister to inquire about the progress of departmental inquiries into health and education for Aborigines in the Northern Territory, but that much more action followed the direct criticism of Australia in the United Nations two years later.

Australia had been among those nations which had condemned oppressive Soviet action in eastern Europe. In August 1949, the Czech newspaper *Svobodne Slovo* reported that there was slavery in Australia.⁴⁹ In October 1949, Australia took the initiative in bringing religious persecution in eastern Europe to the attention of the United Nations.⁵⁰ A few days later, Mr Vishinsky, representing the Soviet bloc at the United Nations, strongly condemned Australia's treatment of the Aborigines, mentioning particularly the neglect of children.

On 13 October 1949, the Minister for External Affairs, Dr H.V. Evatt, was questioned regarding 'Mr Vishinsky's attack on the Australian delegation at Lake Success'. Evatt responded:

I assume that the honorable gentleman's question relates to an attack upon Australia of a rather old pattern which was brought forward because of the raising of the issue of religious persecution in eastern Europe, especially in Roumania, Hungary and Bulgaria. The answer of Mr Vishinsky, speaking on behalf of the Soviet group, has been that the Australian government has something to be ashamed of in connexion with its treatment of the Aboriginal population of this country.

Whatever may have happened in relation to the treatment of Aborigines in the early days of Australia's history, the fact is that for many years there has been substantially a new deal for the Aboriginal population of this country. The Minister for the Interior has done an excellent job in that connexion and Australia has nothing to be ashamed of. The treatment of Australian Aborigines has very little to do with religious persecution in eastern Europe. It may be compared with the flowers that bloom in the spring. It has nothing to do with the case. These are tactics to which the Australian delegation is accustomed. Mr Vishinsky is an experienced advocate in certain types of cases. Australia has defended religious freedom, and its efforts have been supported by Catholic and Protestant churches throughout the world. Doubtless the instructions that Mr Vishinsky has received from his Government are, 'We have no case. Abuse the other side.'⁵¹

The Commonwealth government was more embarrassed than its public rebuttals indicate, but any connection between this embarrassment and private influence brought to bear upon officers of

Commonwealth and State departments of health, education and Aboriginal affairs is not well-documented, although the relevant press clippings and Hansard quotes appeared on many files dealing with Aboriginal matters.⁵² I have been assured, however, that the unofficial pressure was considerable.

The Commonwealth's Office of Education immediately recruited five teachers and arranged a special six-week 'crash course'. Temporary school accommodation was rapidly organised and classes commenced for 153 pupils at Bagot (Darwin), Amoon-guna (Alice Springs), Delissaville and Yuendumu early in 1950.⁵³ The Commonwealth of Australia could now claim to have an 'education system' for Aboriginal children.

The Commonwealth government, anxious also to exert its influence on State policies for Aborigines, called a native welfare conference in Canberra in 1951, later to be considered the inaugural meeting of the Australian Council of Native Welfare, consisting of the responsible ministers of the Commonwealth and States. In his speech reporting on the conference to the Commonwealth parliament, Paul Hasluck emphasised that the conference was 'the inheritor' of the 1937 Canberra conference. It represented, he said, a pooling of experience of those 'actively engaged in native administration in Australia' in order 'to seek agreement among them on the objectives of native policy and the methods by which those objectives may best be served'.⁵⁴

The key word at the conference was 'assimilation' and the concept was extended to include full-blood Aborigines:

Assimilation is the objective of native welfare measures. Assimilation means, in practical terms, that, in the course of time, it is expected that all persons of Aboriginal blood or mixed blood in Australia will live like white Australians do. The acceptance of this policy governs all other aspects of native affairs administration.⁵⁵

Aborigines were conceived as being on the march to citizenship, and to that kind of 'assimilation' which each of the ministerial participants in the Council of Native Welfare defined to suit his own views or that of his Government.⁵⁶ Hasluck then enthusiastically set about providing an example to the States of positive action. To give him his due, he had a commendably

progressive, even revolutionary vision. He considered that all existing Aboriginal Acts were based on wrong premises. All people defined as Aborigines came under such legislation with the possibility that those who merited it could be exempted from the Act's provisions. Hasluck proposed to turn the whole system around. In the Northern Territory, he advocated a situation in which all Aborigines would be citizens, but that special laws would provide for those who still needed protection.

The intentions may have been good, but the first major step, the Northern Territory Welfare Ordinance, 1953, had results in many ways diametrically opposed to Hasluck's intentions. It turned out to be one of the last big efforts to use authoritarian legislation to control the processes of social change (the other being the Queensland legislation of 1965-1966).⁵⁷

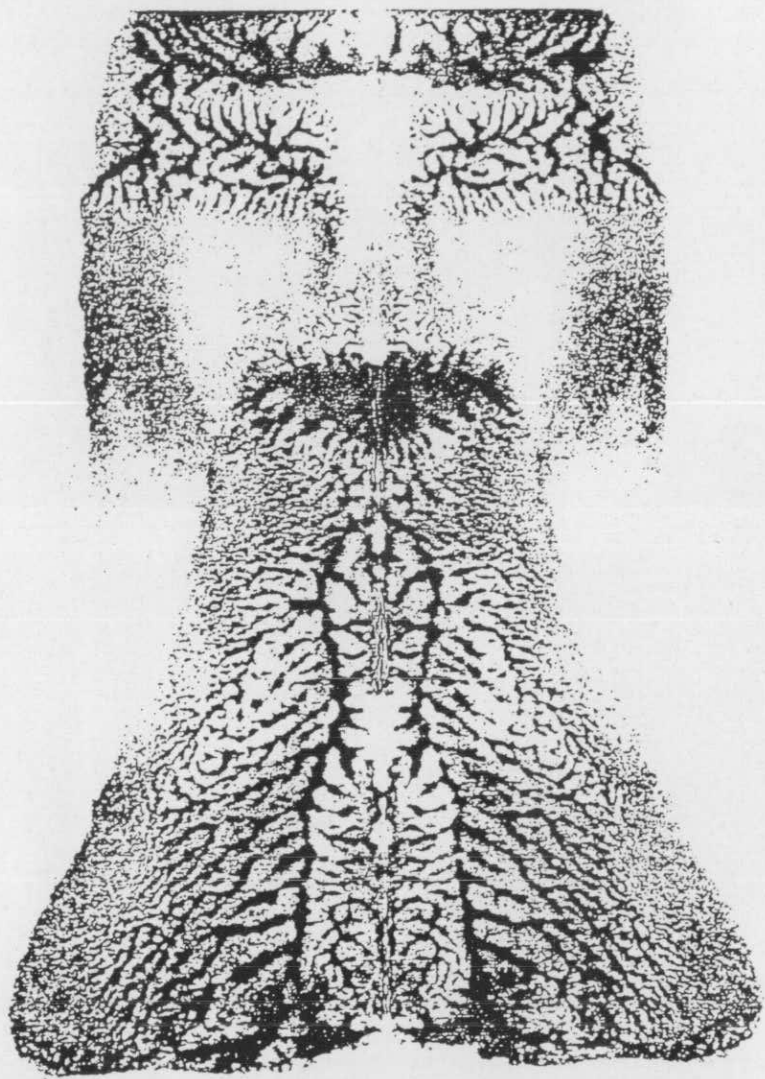
The wording of the ordinance was ingenious. The words 'native' and 'Aboriginal' were not used as categories. A new category of 'ward' was established to replace the category 'Aboriginal'. By very careful wording, 'wards' were defined, without using the word 'Aboriginal', in such a way that only full-blood Aborigines could be wards. This was achieved by defining wards in terms of the Northern Territory's electoral regulations.

Under the ordinance, the new director of welfare had immense powers over wards. They had to stay where he put them. He was their guardian as if they were children. He had power over any property they might possess. Thus the ordinance was a somewhat devious way of freeing half-castes, but regimenting full-blood Aborigines with the kind of long-standing restraints familiar throughout Australia. It was training before rights, a system which had failed monotonously for decades.⁵⁸

No new institutions or structures were introduced of the type within which Aboriginal decision-making might develop. The changes were in terminology and policy. The result was simply that the same kind of officials managed the same people in the same way, but it was now for the purpose of 'assimilation', not 'protection'.⁵⁹ As a new deal for Aborigines it failed miserably but, mercifully, the ordinance only lasted a decade. Its withdrawal was tantamount to an admission that it was wrong.

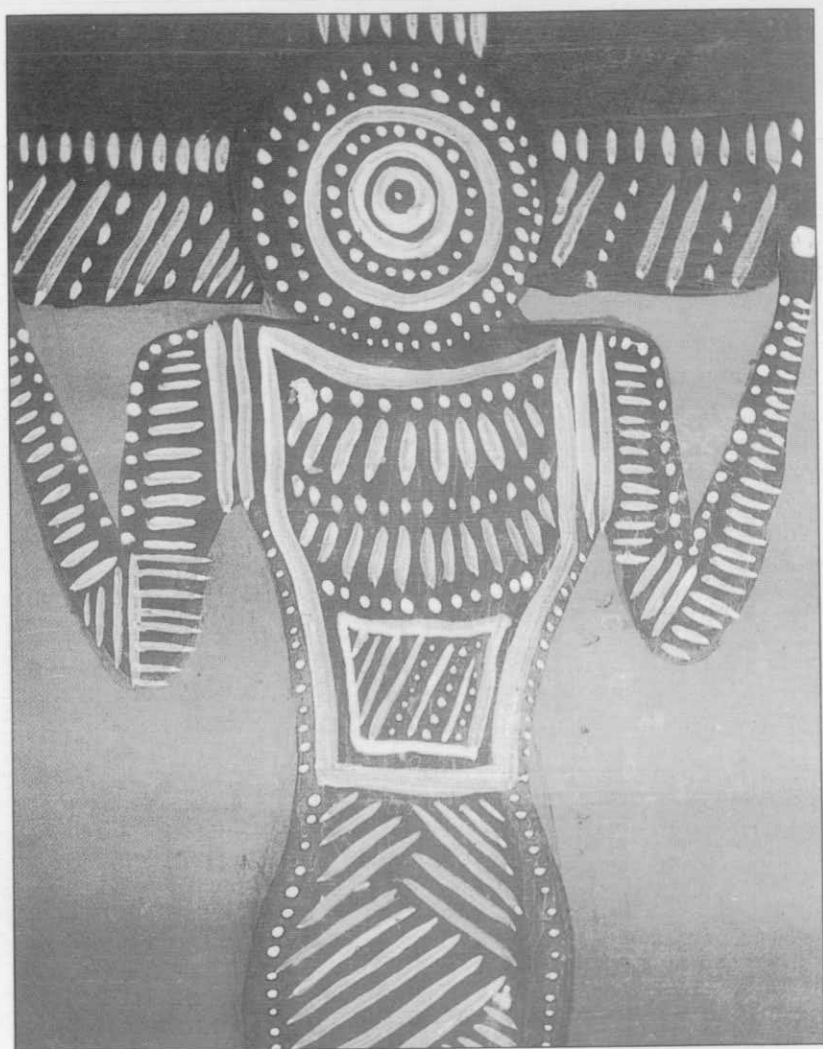
Changes in mission policy

There is a sense in which the missionaries had always believed in



116. The head of Christ, as seen in this
'butterfly painting' at Yarrabah

Acknowledgement: John Lewis. Reproduced with permission.



117. Crucifixion painting by Miriam Rose Ungunmirr-Bauman. Pain and stress lines cover Jesus' whole body. Infinite score lines on Jesus' arms and the cross symbolise the number of people for whom he is about to die. In the very centre of his head, Jesus knows exactly what he is doing. On the outside of his head, his thoughts still move out in every direction to the people of the world.

Acknowledgement: The artist and the Bible Society in Australia.

Reproduced with permission.

a process not unlike assimilation. For a century at least, the missionaries in Australia had held strongly, often courageously, to the principle that Aborigines were fully human and fully equal to themselves in the sight of God. They had, as we have seen, held at the same time the view that Aboriginal people were socially and culturally inferior. It is one of the sad paradoxes of Australian history that the missionaries, so often the lone champions of the worth of Aboriginal people, felt that the only way to demonstrate the equality of Aboriginal people to an apathetic or even hostile public was to prove that they could be educated to adopt European lifestyles.

This commitment to education, in the more remote missions, normally found its expression in the attempt to found a self-supporting mission village, as opposed to the more rigid institutional form which missionary efforts usually took when missionaries in the vicinity of white settlement chose to establish schools or orphanages. Time and time again in the long history of missions to the Aborigines, these remote mission villages were sites of protection where Aboriginal people survived.

With the exception of Roper River, missions established in the twentieth century did not generally have to provide immediate physical protection. Nevertheless, they were places of survival, places of protection, which provided a gentler introduction to Western society and time for Aboriginal people to make adjustments. Bleakley's description of the Anglican mission at Mitchell River, north Queensland in the years before the war could have been said of the Catholic mission on Bathurst Island, the Methodist mission at Milingimbi or any of dozens of missions from the north-west of Western Australia, through the Northern Territory to north Queensland:

[The mission] followed the now recognised rule of segregation from alien influences. Continuity of policy and control, study of native culture and language, development of settled village life, religious and secular education and training in productive industries with the aim of self-dependence.⁶⁰

These missions provided a focal point within the large reserves where partly-settled Aboriginal communities developed. This gave Aboriginal people the breathing space they needed to prepare

themselves to face the onslaught of Western 'civilisation'.⁶¹ Rowley saw this as the major contribution of the missions:

These missions saw their social and educational function as preparing the people, by their efforts in tuition and conversion, to participate in European society. In practice their great material achievement was to present, within the tribal lands, enough of the counter-attractions needed in food supplies, clothes, steel and other industrial goods to keep people there. By so doing they made possible an interim process of adjustment based on Aboriginal decisions for Aboriginal purposes.⁶²

If we can take the commencement of the Roper River mission – the first twentieth century mission in the Northern Territory – as a guide, humanitarian concern was a major driving force in the establishment of these missions. Such was the thrust of Bishop George Frodsham's impassioned plea to the Australian Church Congress in 1906 which led directly to the Roper River mission. The Aborigines were being mistreated and neglected and the Church should do something about it.⁶³ As a result, 'protection' certainly was a basic policy, at least for Roper River where Aboriginal people were being hunted down and shot.⁶⁴

With regard to ongoing policies for this and other missions, although these were not at first clearly documented, they were quite implicit in the instructions given to individual missionaries as they departed, and in significant correspondence between missionaries and their southern headquarters. Missionaries in 1908 were told that they were to bring to the Aborigines 'the benefits of our Christianity and civilisation', especially 'the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ', but also the benefits of education and work.⁶⁵ In 1913, missionaries were instructed that Aborigines were to be trained to live independently, to become agriculturally self-supporting within the mission village.⁶⁶

These principles were reiterated as recently as 1939:

Whilst our work among these people is primarily evangelistic, we have also to try to lead them away from their nomadic food hunting stage of culture when they can live happily in village communities and produce their own food supply. . .⁶⁷

During the 1930s, a lot of rethinking of policies had been taking place in both the Church of England and Methodist missionary societies. There were several reasons for this. The peace expedition of 1934 and the subsequent trials had brought the work of the missions very much into the public arena. The Commonwealth government was also grappling with the issue of the 'uncivilised' Aborigines of its Northern Territory and the future role of missions was an integral aspect of any future planning. Furthermore, both missionary societies had at least begun, albeit embryonically, to think in anthropological and sociological terms.

CMS, for example, formed a Committee for Aborigines in 1937. Membership included mostly experienced missionaries and mission administrators, but also included an anthropologist, Professor A.P. Elkin, and a linguist, Dr Arthur Capell, both of Sydney University and both ordained Church of England clergy. As Australia's most distinguished anthropologist and linguist, and as Christians with an interest in missions, it is not surprising that Elkin and Capell also acted as advisors to the Methodist mission.

In the 1930s, a small but increasing number of missionaries were showing more than a casual interest in Aboriginal language and culture. The most outstanding was the Catholic missionary, Father Ernest Worms of the Kimberleys, who was a trained anthropologist, although he naturally had no influence on Methodist and Church of England mission policy development. On the Methodist missions, Theodor Webb and Wilbur Chaseling studied Aboriginal culture at depth and published much of their research. On the Church of England missions, people like Leslie Perriman and Alfred Dyer were certainly interested, but lacked both the time and training to turn their interest into useful research.

Keith Langford Smith was unfairly dismissed before his interest in Aboriginal language and culture led to anything significant. Late in the 1930s, Nell Harris and Len Harris began to show an interest in Aboriginal languages. CMS had always encouraged the work of anthropologists such as N.B. Tindale and F.G. Rose, and the Methodists had adopted the same attitude.

More important than all this at the time was the undeniable fact that the CMS and MOM administrators were very interested in and concerned about the future of Aboriginal people in general, not just those associated with their northern missions. Various

members of the Church of England and Methodist committees were outspoken critics of government policies. They were associated in positive and supportive ways with the politically active southern Aboriginal people and were counted among their 'enthusiastic friends'. Senior members of both societies supported William Ferguson and his Aboriginal colleagues by attending the NSW Select Committee of Inquiry on the Administration of the Aborigines in 1937-1938.

One of those who attended was the Rev. J.W. Ferrier, secretary of CMS's Committee for Aborigines. Ferrier later told my father that he had been very much influenced by the views of Ferguson, Patten, Onus and the other NSW Aboriginal activists.⁶⁸ This is a very important point indeed, because Ferrier's and others' aspirations for Aboriginal people in the north were patterned on the aspirations which southern Aboriginal people held for themselves and for their northern compatriots.

Although the war drastically affected the life of the mission stations, it actually enhanced the development of policy as, throughout the war years, experienced northern missionaries, evacuated south, were available to take part in the process. There was considerable cooperation between CMS and MOM and, as we have seen, people like Elkin served on committees of both missions. As a result there is a great deal of similarity between the policy documents, the wording in many places being identical.⁶⁹ I shall therefore quote directly from one of the policy documents only, the CMS Constitution and Policy, which was adopted on 1 June 1944.

The document opened with its assumptions, called 'The Basis of the Work of the Mission'. As one would hope and expect, these begin with a set of spiritual assumptions:

The Society recognises:

- (a) The claims of the Aborigines in north Australia to receive the benefits of the gospel of Christ and fellowship in his Church;
- (b) The responsibilities undertaken by the CMS in 1908 and the record of faithful service on the part of our missionaries to this day;
- (c) Our resources in Christ, both in things spiritual and in things material, which are inherent in the gospel message and the exercise of prayer; and

(d) The obligations to uphold the traditions and principles of the Society, both in the personal witness of our missionaries and in the methods adopted in pursuance of our aims.⁷⁰

CMS then went on to list some very significant assumptions about the 'present condition and future destiny' of Aboriginal people: that they were not a 'dying race'; that their 'cultural backwardness' was due only to geographical isolation, not inferiority; that they were capable of development; that their destiny was to take their place in 'general Australian life'; that a transition period would require the development of self-supporting communities in isolation from whites.⁷¹ Under the heading 'General Policy and Methods', the document listed mission aims:

(a) The central aim of the mission is to win the Aborigines and half-castes to a saving knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

(b) The Society, by its living agents, will seek to lead converts into the privilege of full membership of the Church of England.

(d) Direct evangelism must always be the central and fundamental method of work.

(e) Educational work, both for children and adults, will be used as fully as possible, both as an aid to the teaching of the gospel, and as essential to full growth in character and development of personality.

(f) Medical work will constitute an essential and important feature in the operations of the mission. Medical help shall be rendered where and when necessary as circumstances will permit, without discrimination as to colour. . .

(g) Agricultural and industrial training will form an essential part of the educational work: to induce the Aborigines to be provident and self-supporting; to develop greater self-respect; to lead them towards effective citizenship of the Commonwealth; and pureness of life as members of the kingdom of God.

In all these matters the purpose is to develop the personal character of the Aborigines:

i. By not allowing them to become debased by dependence upon the mission, but rather encouraging their acceptance of responsibility for their own life and development;

ii. By aiming to elevate the status of women in the community;

iii. By encouraging and fitting them to engage in social and religious services amongst their own people.⁷²

As a matter of definite policy, the document went on specifically to mention Aboriginal languages and culture:

All missionaries shall, in general, study a suitable native language, and native social customs and laws, for it is an essential part of the policy of the Society that the natives shall not be cut off from their own tribal life, but rather that the mission shall aim at the far more difficult task of helping these natives to build up the kingdom of God on the basis of their old tribal organisation and customs, where these are not opposed to Christianity. It shall be a general guiding principle that things evil in the manners and customs of the tribes shall be discountenanced, and any worthy elements in tribal life tending to social cohesion, discipline and moral uplift, shall be preserved as a foundation upon which the ethical principles and wholesome truths of the gospel are to be built. Great care must be taken not to adopt a merely negative attitude to things the missionary regards as evil.⁷³

It is easy to criticise this CMS policy statement and the parallel MOM statement. It is easy to label the policies paternalistic. The Aborigines were 'backward', so that the mission organisations, representing the best of white society, had to make decisions on their behalf, to decide their destiny for them. It is quite surprising, for example, that MOM, in many ways ahead of CMS in anthropological understanding, should have chosen to prefix its policy statement about the gospel with a statement about Aboriginal backwardness: 'Despite the very primitive stage of development which characterises these Aborigines, they are capable of accepting the teaching of Jesus. . .'.⁷⁴

In making such criticisms, it is easy to overlook the remarkably positive, progressive features of these 1944 policies, all the more remarkable in the light of the widespread low view of the worth and destiny of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people were not inherently inferior, nor were their culture and languages. The purpose of the missions was not to sever Aborigines from their tribal life, but to help them to know and live the gospel in the context of their own society.

This was a far higher aim than Australian mission societies had ever expressed before, but policy and practice are not always the same.

Putting policy into practice

It would be wrong to take these new policies, significant as they were, as marking some boundary, as if missionaries were more culture-destructive before 1944 and less so afterwards. What happened on the mission field was very dependent upon the particular missionaries concerned and this applied as much after 1944 as it did before.

Those who criticise the early north Australian missions for their destruction of Aboriginal culture often credit the missions with more success than they ever actually had. There is also always the big question, too frequently avoided by missions critics, of whether Aboriginal culture would have survived better if there had been no missions. For Aboriginal culture to have undergone less change, the underlying assumption would have to be that, in the absence of missions, Aboriginal people would have remained unmolested in their 'inviolable reserves'.

There is no evidence that such protective isolation could ever have been more than a pipe dream, nor is there evidence that Aboriginal people wanted it and would have remained aloof from white society. All evidence points the other way. All evidence points to the fact that white society would not have left Aboriginal people alone. The war is, of course, an obvious major proof of this assertion, but even without the war it is unrealistic to imagine that Aboriginal people could ever have been shielded from exploitation by pearlers, miners, nearby pastoralists, Japanese fishermen or even from the gentler exploitation by anthropologists and other researchers or by health authorities.

All evidence also points to the fact that Aboriginal people would not have accepted the restrictions. From long before European settlement, Aboriginal people have shown an intelligent interest in interacting with other people, in acquiring foreign goods or learning new technologies. Australia's history is full of Aboriginal people endeavouring to come close to European society and perpetually being removed from it. It is unrealistic to imagine that Aboriginal people would have willingly observed the artificial boundaries of their 'inviolable reserves'.

In assessing the influence of these missions, an important factor is that they were on very large reserves and Aboriginal people were free to come and go as they pleased. They were very different from old southern missions like Poonindie or Maloga, on

little pieces of land excised from surrounding farms, which eventually became places where Aboriginal people were obliged to live. These northern missions became centres around which some settlement developed, but they had nothing like the degree of control over the lives of the people that the older southern missions had.

Those who credit the pre-war missions with such immense influence would do well to examine the available statistics of mission residents and converts and compare them with the reserve populations. Only a very small number of Aboriginal people lived permanently at any of the missions. This is not to say that the missions had no influence. Most Aboriginal people in the reserves visited the missions from time to time, but this was very largely on their own terms.

In 1939, there were seventy-five full-blood Aboriginal residents of Roper River and ninety-three at Oenpelli. Only fourteen people had been baptised by 1939 at Oenpelli and less than ten at Roper River.⁷⁵ As distinct from the part-Aborigines, no Groote Eylandters were baptised before 1949. In 1937 at the Emerald River mission, an 'exceptionally large congregation' gathered at the memorial service to Ernest Wynne Evans who had been accidentally shot. The congregation, which consisted of 'staff, half-castes, station and bush Aborigines, numbered 105, made up of sixty-nine Aboriginal men, ten Aboriginal women, twenty-four half-caste boys and girls, and eleven staff workers and half-caste helpers'.⁷⁶

At this time there were approximately 6 000 Aboriginal people living in the Arnhem Land reserve. Less than twenty per cent were permanently or semi-permanently associated with the various missions, most of the remainder visiting only casually, some not at all. The missionaries did exert great influence over the small number of Christian Aboriginals and also had considerable power over those who chose mission life.

There were, however, only a very small number of missionaries. Most missions operated for most of the time with a staff of three or four, sometimes even less. Rowley therefore overstated the missionaries' power and success when he discussed their role as agents of government plans for social change:

It was. . . much easier and cheaper (for governments) to delegate difficult functions to the missionaries, who were ready to assume them. It was also easier where former nomads had 'sat

down' and come to regard living off the land as a hardship, to drift into the institutional situation where the mission set up, legally or otherwise, a theocracy on the reserve, so that eventually it controlled the people by controlling the assets and especially the stores and rations.⁷⁷

The missionaries would have been flattered to think they had a 'theocracy on the reserve'. It may well have been what they would have liked to achieve, but the reality was far from it.

Although it was a very important step for the Aboriginal committees of CMS and MOM to develop enlightened policies about the recognition of Aboriginal language and culture, it was another matter entirely to achieve the same attitudes at the mission stations themselves. The onus was still upon the missionaries in the field to recognise those aspects of Aboriginal culture which were 'worthy' and those which were 'evil'. Such a requirement raises all sorts of questions about the ability of missionaries, even with adequate training and the necessary will, to discern that which Aboriginal Christians alone were ultimately capable of discerning.

Some missionaries held such strong views about what was 'evil' that they were prepared to confront Aboriginal people directly, even physically. Dick Harris was one. During the relocation of the Groote Eylandt mission to its present site at Angurugu, he ruled that all spears had to be left at the mission house. One morning an Aboriginal man, Killa Killa, demanded his spears back. Dick Harris refused as he had heard rumours of a fight. Killa Killa said he would simply take his own property and walked up the steps to the mission house.

Dick Harris recorded what followed:

I met him at the top of the steps with a straight right to the face. He simply shook his head, drew back like one drawing a bow and gave me a hard one on the jaw. I was dazed, but it was he or I for it, so I grappled with him and we rolled on the ground. We wrestled for a bit and I eventually got him in a vice-like grip from behind and around his arms, he on his knees. From this 'hold' I banged his head from side to side on a stringbark tree till he was prepared to call it a day. He then went away without his spears.⁷⁸

It is easy to pass judgment on Dick Harris's action: on the

fact that he had no right to act as he did in refusing this man his property; on the fact that he acted with superiority; on the fact that he resorted to violence. In real life, judgments of 'right' and 'wrong' are not so simple. A few days later, Dick Harris was absent at Roper River. Another missionary gave Killa Killa his spears. He and other men went to the beach at the mouth of the river to fight. Killa Killa was killed.⁷⁹ In this unfortunate story, who was 'right', who was 'wrong'?

It is worth noting at this juncture that surprisingly little violence has ever been perpetrated against any missionaries. A few, like the first Forrest River missionaries, were attacked before Aboriginal people detected that they were not aggressive but, once Aboriginal people understood that the missionaries were not a physical danger to them, they did not harm them. Aboriginal people, after accepting the presence of a mission, also usually accepted that the missionaries had authority in 'mission business'. Aboriginal people also compartmentalised what was their own business and, often naively, expected missionaries not to trespass into matters which did not concern them.

There are only a very few exceptions. The attack on Gottfried Hausmann, one of the Moreton Bay Lutheran missionaries in 1845, is perhaps the most notorious, but he was probably no longer a missionary by then. On Milingimbi, a missionary once judged that it was improper for a man to enter the church still having some ceremonial symbols painted on him. The missionary endeavoured to remove the paint forcibly (I believe with a hose). The man returned to the church and speared the missionary, although not fatally.⁸⁰

Some of the most heated confrontations between missionaries and Aborigines occurred over issues such as the withholding of food rations which Aboriginal people had come to understand as a non-negotiable right. Serious confrontations occurred in 1950 over tobacco. Aboriginal people in the north had smoked since long before European settlement, perhaps learning the habit from the Macassans. In 1950, when tobacco became part of the government ration issue, CMS missionaries at Angurugu, Roper River and Oenpelli refused to issue it. Although a compromise was reached with the government that tobacco would not be issued free but be sold instead in the mission store, six missionaries actually resigned.⁸¹

The only case I have been able to locate of a missionary being killed by an Aboriginal was over tobacco. The Rev. Robert Hall, founder of the Presbyterian mission on Mornington Island, was speared in 1918 by an Aboriginal man from the mainland whose request for tobacco had been refused.⁸²

There were, on the other hand, missionaries who felt that their colleagues who acted confrontationally, aggressively restraining people from what they judged to be sinful, could be a hindrance to the gospel. This had been John Bulmer's discovery long ago. How were Aboriginal people to experience the reality of the gospel of love when all that was preached to them was the extent of their sin?

My father, Len Harris, felt strongly this way.⁸³ He felt that Aborigines interpreted missionaries' negative attitudes to various issues as personal dislike and that the Aborigines needed to glimpse the love of Christ in missionaries in order to see the beauty and desirability of the gospel. He once wrote of a fellow missionary:

[She] has strong views against polygamy and child wifery and has seized many opportunities to talk to the natives about it. This has meant that some of the natives do not want to come up to the mission any more, not even to the dispensary. . . . They see her and therefore the mission as unfriendly.⁸⁴

Child marriage and polygamy (or, more strictly, polygyny) were cultural practices which missionaries of all denominations tried to change by one method or another. The most famous case was that of Bishop Gsell of the Catholic mission on Bathurst Island. The 'bishop with 150 wives' purchased young promised girls to prevent child marriage and multiple wives.⁸⁵

To Dick Harris and the Groote Eylandt missionaries, the situation in the late 1940s seemed crucial. Not only were they against polygamy and child marriage in principle, but there had arisen a social situation which they regarded as most undesirable and were prepared to confront. Many of the older men had up to six wives, while the younger men, even some middle-aged men, had none. The old men maintained this system by the force of their authority, but had also begun resorting to taking their young promised wives to live with them at an ever earlier age, thus

'cornering' all the girls. Some were taken as young as four or five years old, although it was understood that they were not usually sexual partners until puberty. Furthermore, the younger women frequently ran away to their more youthful lovers, which resulted in constant feuding, injury and death.

The missionaries regarded the situation as intolerable and one which had to be rectified. They organised wife redistribution, paying some compensation to those old men who relinquished a wife, usually young and childless, to a younger man. The younger men and women were obviously very much in favour of the system and the partnerships were carefully determined according to traditional patterns – that is, the marriages were all between couples who could have married in the normal course of events if, for example, the old husband had died. Most of the older men also cooperated, so Dick Harris was satisfied that the community was acting democratically. In a few cases, physical force was used to remove a young wife from an uncooperative older man.

This was, once more, a situation upon which it is difficult to pass judgment. What is more to the point, Aboriginal people are divided on the issue. Unlike the marriages arranged by some earlier southern missionaries, no kinship law was broken. Those Aboriginal people who benefited generally feel the action was justified. All those older men who were forced to comply are now dead, but their children by their first wives remember their fathers' hurt and bitterness is still felt.

On the other hand, there were a number of missionaries who suspected that the situation had arisen because of improved health and a rising birthrate. In previous years, it seems highly likely that women considerably outnumbered men on Groote Eylandt for a number of reasons and that the system coped adequately with the needs of a small population. It can be argued that the traditional marriage system could not cope with a sudden population increase.

Another reason why it is hard to pass judgment is that the missionaries genuinely saw their action as an emancipation of oppressed women. Dick Harris saw that women's freedom was a result of the gospel. He told the Aboriginal people: 'Wherever the gospel has been preached throughout the world, women have gained their freedom and, if we are allowed to continue here, your women will gain their freedom, too. If you do not like that, you

had better tell us to go away.'⁸⁶

Critics of wife redistribution – and there were many in government and elsewhere – generally argued that it was not right to impose Christian values on non-Christians. It was certainly true that most of the people who relinquished wives were not Christians, but this is not a simple issue. It is the same argument raised against Christian attempts to impose Christian values, or indeed any values, on modern Australian society.

Wife redistribution or some kind of control of marriages was carried out on most mission stations of most denominations. I treated the Groote Eylandt case because it was a very clear example and because it illustrates the truth that, although missionaries did try to change Aboriginal culture by quite forceful means, many Aboriginal people eagerly supported the changes.

During this post-war era, a period of tight mission control was followed by a period in which Aboriginal people began to be more and more involved in their own affairs. Although the war had reduced the isolation of the missions, they were still relatively remote immediately after the war. Missionaries still felt able to think and plan in terms of the isolated, self-supporting Christian village, shielded from the destructive forces of European society. For a brief period, not much more than a decade after the war, missionaries had more power over Aboriginal communities than they had had before the war and also more power than they were ever to have again.

In the 1950s, mission schools and hospitals, especially on the Protestant mission stations, began to be staffed by government officers. Gradually missionaries became outnumbered. Gradually, Aboriginal people came under the influence of non-missionaries. Improved transport, particularly air travel, also reduced the isolation. Visitors came to the mission stations more frequently and, far more importantly, Aboriginal people began to travel to European centres and learn of a European world quite unlike the isolated life of the missions.

All these influences, however, were to pale into insignificance beside the effect of mining operations. Mining and the associated mining townships propelled Aboriginal people into confrontation with the most powerful forces of Western society – politics, profits and aggressive commercialism.

Townships such as Gove in eastern Arnhem Land, Alyangula

on Groote Eylandt and Jabiru in western Arnhem Land sprang up almost overnight adjacent to Aboriginal communities. Jabiru changed life for the people of Oenpelli more than the mission had ever done, and the same can be said of Gove and the Yirrkala people, and of the north Queensland mining centres. On Groote Eylandt, the extension of TV from Alyangula, the mining town, to Angurugu, the Aboriginal community, brought propaganda and mind-manipulation far more persuasive and culture-destructive than the actions of missionaries who for fifty years, despite many mistakes, had not only preached the gospel but struggled to protect Aboriginal people from forces that would destroy them.

I recall sitting one day at Angurugu with my father's old friend, my other 'father', Old Charlie Galiawa, not long before he died, watching the activity of the little township from the fire by which he always sat. He was the last to have seen the Macassan traders; he had seen the first missionaries and had become their friend; he had seen 'Old Mission', the war, the new mission, the miners and their European township just up the road.

Things were very different now, Old Charlie said. Life, as he knew it, had changed forever. He spoke of the Macassans, of the excitement of their arrival each year. He spoke of the first white people, the missionaries – especially those whom he respected, those whom he counted as friends. He spoke of the wife redistribution and his sorrow, but life had been good, too, and Groote Eylandt had been a happy place. All that was before the mine, before the white town, before grog.

Now life was complicated. There were always decisions about mining developments, elections, liquor permits, community discipline, fishing rights and a hundred other complex matters. Things were unstable, changes were happening too fast. People were disorientated. But younger leaders were emerging, Old Charlie said, who understood white society better than he did.






The missionaries had not tried simply to shield Aboriginal people from Western society. They had also fervently hoped that they were preparing them to cope with it. The emergence of strong, mission-educated leaders in the 1960s and 1970s is evidence that their preparation had not been in vain.

ENDNOTES

1. Stanner, 1968: 12
2. Australian Aborigines' League, Constitution, section 8 (reprinted in Markus, 1988: 40-43)
3. 1938 Manifesto: Patten and Ferguson, 1938
4. Stanner, 1968: 15
5. *Ibid*, p.19
6. Rowley, 1972a: 204, based on information supplied by R.M. Berndt
7. Roberts, 1981: 89
8. Stanner, 1968: 19
9. Hancock, 1930: 33
10. *Aboriginal Welfare: Initial Conference of Commonwealth and States Aboriginal Authorities* (April 1937), Canberra, 1937, p.21
11. *Ibid*, p.34ff.
12. Jones, 1934: 29
13. *Ibid*
14. Rowley, 1972a: 321
15. *Ibid*
16. Elkin, 1951: 184
17. 'The Northern Territory of Australia: Commonwealth Government's Policy with Respect to Aborigines.' Issued by the Hon. J. McEwen, Minister for the Interior, Canberra, February 1939
18. *Ibid*
19. McEwen and Gullett, cited in Franklin, 1976: 125
20. Powell, 1982: 197
21. Lockwood, 1975: 17
22. Powell, 1982: 197
23. *Ibid*
24. Lockwood, 1969: 256
25. Sims, 1975
26. Len Harris, personal comment, 1987
27. Powell, 1988: 168
28. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 March 1942
29. Powell, 1982: 214-215
30. Morris, 1965: 8-9
31. Report: Northern Territory Special Reconnaissance Unit, April 1943, 741/5/9, p.42, AWM
32. Bill Harney, cited in Swann, 1976: 78
33. J. Burton, 1944: 3
34. Webb, 1944: 4
35. Len Harris, personal comment, July 1988
36. J. Harris, 1986a: 315
37. Pigeon Rankin, personal comment at Bamyili (Barunga), 1969
38. Sgt. W.C. Duffy, Report, Administration of Native Affairs, April 1945, 419/27/6, AWM

39. A normal soldier's pay rate in 1939 was eight shillings per day for a volunteer and five shillings per day for a conscript, two shillings per day for active service in a war zone and three shillings per day married allowance with one shilling per day extra per child. Thus an average volunteer, married with one child, would have received fourteen shillings per day. By 1945, this had risen and would have been closer to eighteen shillings per day compared with the Aboriginal wage of ten pence per day.
40. Brigadier Dollery's proposal to increase pay rates and to raise an Aboriginal Company on normal army conditions in 1943 was pigeon-holed for two years and then dismissed as unnecessary because the war was over (Hall, 1979: 104).
41. Carrington, Director for Native Affairs, 1946, cited in Swann, 1976: 80
42. Patrol Officer Kyle Little, reporting on the post-war situation in Arnhem Land, 1946 - 1949, cited in Hiatt, 1965
43. Berndt and Berndt, 1946: 11
44. Rowley, 1972a: 337
45. 'The Northern Territory of Australia: Commonwealth Government's Policy with Respect to Aborigines.' Statement of policy by the Hon. J. McEwen, Minister for the Interior, H. of R., *Debates*, 158, 8 December 1938, pp.2979-2987
46. Swann, 1976: 82
47. Taito, n.d.: 34
48. 'United Nations: Minorities of Nationals', Answers to Questions. Reply by Mr Chifley, H. of R., *Debates*, 195, 3 December 1947, p.3141
49. Reported in several Australian newspapers, e.g. *Daily News* (Perth), 8 August 1949
50. 'Freedom of Worship.' Response by H.V. Evatt to Mr Adermann, H. of R., *Debates*, 205, 12 October 1949, p.1253
51. 'Freedom of Worship.' Response by H.V. Evatt to Mr Williams, H. of R., *Debates*, 205, 13 October 1949, p.1395
52. e.g. Western Australian Department of Native Affairs, File 252/1949, cited in Biskup, 1973: 301n17
53. Watts, B.H. and Gallacher, J.D., Report on an Investigation into the Curriculum and Teaching Methods used in Aboriginal Schools in the Northern Territory, to the Hon. C.E. Barnes, Minister for Territories, Commonwealth of Australia, 1964, p.33
54. Hasluck, 1953: 13-19
55. *Ibid*
56. Rowley, 1972c: 297
57. *Ibid*, p.296
58. *Ibid*
59. *Ibid*
60. Bleakley, 1961: 116
61. Cole, 1977: 197
62. Rowley, 1972a: 246-247

Explanation of symbols:

person 
 baby 
 human tracks 
 donkey tracks 
 camel tracks 

The story:

top: God ('three persons') sends an angel to Mary and Joseph in Nazareth.
middle: Donkey and human tracks mark the path to Bethlehem where Jesus is born. The star shines.

right: (bottom) Three wise people travel on camels (right) via Herod to Bethlehem, returning to their country by another route.

left: Angels appear to shepherds around their campfire. They visit the Christ child (human tracks).

lower middle: Baby Jesus is shown to Simeon in the temple.

bottom centre: Mary, Joseph and Jesus flee from Bethlehem to Egypt (donkey and human tracks), returning eventually to Nazareth.



119. Lutheran clergy, Hermannsburg. The first two Aranda people ordained by the Lutheran Church are Peter Bulla (second from l) and Conrad Raberaba (front row, fifth from l)

Acknowledgement: Lutheran Archives, South Australia.

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120. Lazarus Lamilami and his wife Ilidjili

Acknowledgement: Uniting Church of Australia Archives, NSW.

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63. George Frodsham's speech, see Cole, 1968: 5
64. Joynt, 1918: 7
65. Instructions to the first Roper River missionaries (July 1908). A copy is on the files of the Lands Branch, Department of the Northern Territory, correspondence file, Mission Lease series ML9, Roper River Mission, AA (NT).
66. Farewell charge to H.E. Warren and W.G. Vizard, Church Mission Association of Victoria, General Council Minutes, 11 March 1913, cited in Cole, 1977: 182
67. CMS *Open Door*, November 1939
68. Len Harris, personal comment, May 1988
69. Original documents are available from mission and other archives. Summary of Methodist Overseas Mission's 'Revised Statement of District Policy' is in Elkin, 1944: 107-109. Full text is in *Missionary Review*, 5 April 1944, pp.10-11. Substantial sections of the Church Missionary Society's 'Constitution and Policy' are reproduced in Cole, 1985: 43-44
70. My quotations are from the full document, CMS 'Constitution and Policy', personal copy issued to Len Harris.
71. *Ibid*, p.1
72. *Ibid*
73. *Ibid*, pp.2-3
74. Methodist Overseas Mission 'Revised Statement of District Policy'. See note 68 above
75. Cole, 1977: 192-193
76. *Ibid*
77. Rowley, 1972a: 251
78. Dick Harris, cited in Cole, 1980: 52
79. *Ibid*, 52-53
80. I have heard various versions of this event in which minor features do not always agree.
81. Cole, 1985: 99-100
82. I do not know the precise circumstances of this.
83. There is often confusion about who the many 'CMS Harrises' were. By far the longest-serving were G.R. (Dick) Harris and his wife, Nell. They came to north Australia in 1929 and left there in 1965. Dick's brother Jim and his wife Topsy were also missionaries in the north for some years, as was Dick's sister, Kate. My father, Len Harris, and my mother, Margarita (Margery), first went to Groote Eylandt in 1939, but were not related to Dick. There have been a number of other more recent CMS Harrises, only some of whom were relatives of Dick.
84. Len Harris, draft of a letter to J.W. Ferrier, CMS, 5 April 1940, in the possession of the author.
85. The full story is told in Gsell, 1956
86. Dick Harris, cited in Cole, 1980: 52

13

The voices of freedom and hope

The 'new look' traditional culture and the church

NOTHING CONCERNING ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS polarises Australians as much as the issue of Aboriginal land rights.¹ Particularly is this so when the land in question has economic potential, especially for mining.

Against its value to Europeans is its value to Aborigines. Over the years, many missionaries have argued for Aboriginal land rights, but it was Edgar Wells, the Methodist missionary, whose lone championing of the rights of the Yirrkala people to their own land launched the Australian church into the land rights debate. He spoke these words in 1963:

It is very cold comfort to tell an Aboriginal that he may still walk over land that once was his own, but that by a mysterious process has been acquired by someone else; and that, as the original owner, he can hunt across it until the new owner needs it bit by bit for special sale upon which it is to be removed in very large boats. Insult is added to injury in a final humiliation when he is offered money to shovel away his own sense of spiritual security, as certain places certainly represent to him still.²

Mining, land rights and the church

Throughout the last two hundred years, there has been deep discussion of Aboriginal land rights. Missionaries and other

Christian people, representing churches or simply themselves as individuals, have constantly been involved in the discussion. Throughout the nineteenth century, the most outspoken supporters of land rights were missionaries. Those Europeans who cared most about Aborigines and who were the most grieved by the manner in which they were being destroyed, were the ones who saw most clearly that land was crucial to Aboriginal well-being and survival.

In the early twentieth century, too, there were missionaries who argued for various forms of land rights. Rod Schenk of the UAM at Mt Margaret was notable among these, defending the land rights of the Wongutha people, particularly their right to develop mining and the extraction of minerals on their own land.

One of the ironies of the history of Aboriginal land rights is that when, early this century, 'inviolable reserves' were created, such as the Arnhem Land Reserve, governments could give the impression of being both generous and enlightened because neither Arnhem Land nor the Central Desert were thought to have any appreciable commercial value. When such immensely valuable minerals as the ores of aluminium, manganese and uranium were discovered in Arnhem Land, the reserves suddenly became much less 'inviolable'. Of course they never had been, but it was pretended that they were. At best they had only ever been a buffer area for Aboriginal people to cope with Western society while there was no other purpose for the land.

The modern land rights movement and the involvement of the church can be said to have begun with the Methodists in the 1960s. Before looking at the church's involvement in this issue, let me provide an all-too-brief history of Methodist work in the north to this time.

After the failure of John Smithies' Wesleyan mission in Perth in 1855, the Methodist Church did not engage directly in missionary work among Aboriginal people until 1916. Even then, the prompting came from other churches and from the Commonwealth government. The Rev. James Watson was sent to north-east Arnhem Land to select a mission site in 1915. 'Strange that the Methodist Church should have neglected such an interesting people all these years,' he wrote. 'I wonder why?'³ It has been pointed out recently that Watson's question has not yet been answered.⁴

Watson chose Goulburn Island, founding the first Methodist mission station there in 1916. Aborigines long afterwards recalled their dismay that the mission was located on an important ceremonial ground.⁵ The Goulburn Islanders, nevertheless, showed great forbearance and accepted the presence of the mission. An important feature of the Goulburn Island mission was that there was a Pacific Islander missionary, Mosesi Mansio of Rotuma. Although Mansio died a few months later, he was the first in a long line of Pacific Island missionaries who were to play a crucial role in the Methodist missions. There are still Pacific Islanders working in the Uniting Church in the Northern Territory today.

An attempt was made in 1921 to open a mission on Milingimbi Island, but it was moved after a few months to Elcho Island. Two years later, to the dismay of the missionaries, the Naptha Petroleum Company was permitted to begin drilling the oil-bearing shale on the island.⁶ A strong policy of the Methodist mission was the initial total separation of the races to prevent white corruption of the Aborigines and to allow time for social change and development. They therefore shifted their mission back to Milingimbi. The mining company withdrew shortly afterwards, but a mission was not recommenced on Elcho Island until 1942, although a mission was opened on the mainland at Yirrkala in 1934.

Like the Church of England missionaries, the Methodists believed that 'civilisation' went hand in hand with the gospel. The Aborigines were to be shielded from corrupting influences and taught a settled village life on a mission which gave them sanctuary, health care, cleanliness, an orderly home life and a regulated food supply.⁷

Watson left in 1926 and was succeeded by the Rev. T. Theodor Webb as superintendent of the Methodist missions. Webb was one of those many missionaries whose views of Aboriginal culture changed as he came to know and understand Aboriginal society. At first, Webb saw Aboriginal life as particularly primitive and crude. In this he was following not only the perception of white Australians generally, but also the stated opinion of the General Secretary of his own Methodist missionary society, the Rev. John Burton, who described Aborigines as 'the lowest humans on our planet'.⁸

Webb, however, was a long-serving missionary and by the

time he left Milingimbi in 1939, his views had changed. He became a keen observer of Aboriginal life and a prolific writer whose writing shows the development of a deepening respect for the integrity and complexity of Aboriginal culture. He gathered information on a wide range of subjects, including kinship, ceremony, totemism and social structure.⁹ He shared this interest with his wife Eva, who also wrote on Aboriginal subjects.¹⁰ Webb became very interested in Aboriginal languages and began using them in school and church in small ways.¹¹ He regretted at the end that he had not concentrated more on languages.¹²

Webb was among the earliest missionaries to seek the advice of an anthropologist, the American W. Lloyd Warner. Although Webb always believed that Aborigines must eventually choose to live a European way of life, he was one of the first to emphasise that it should be a *choice*. That is, he came to respect Aboriginal people's intelligence and to believe that his task was not to force Aboriginal people into European ways, but to convince Aboriginal people that these changes were best for them: 'In endeavouring to do this, we must enable the Aborigine to understand in what ways the new is superior to the old. . . In short, we must secure, not merely the consent of his will, but the approval of his intelligence.'¹³

Like all the northern missions, the Methodist missions were affected by the war, but these missions were the furthest north and drastically affected by actually being situated in a war zone. Milingimbi mission was bombed by the Japanese in 1942 and, as described earlier, one missionary was taken prisoner and executed. The war effectively ended one era and ushered in another. After the war, the missions were to be never quite the same again.

World War II led to an opening up of the Arnhem Land Reserve to mineral exploration. The war, having caused a shortage of iron, had prompted the development of commercially viable techniques for the extraction of aluminium from its ores and many large international mining companies were anxious to find and exploit bauxite deposits. Prospectors discovered this aluminium ore in Arnhem Land in 1951. Without delay, the Northern Territory's Director of Native Welfare, F.H. Moy, introduced a Bill into the Legislative Council of the Northern Territory, legalising mining in the Arnhem Land Reserve.¹⁴ The reserves were not 'inviolable' after all.¹⁵

The extent of the bauxite deposits was not then known but, as mineral exploration proceeded, it became evident that a vast deposit was located at the Yirrkala Methodist mission. Two hundred square miles of north-east Arnhem Land around the Yirrkala mission had been held as a mission lease by the Methodist Overseas Mission Board.¹⁶ When this mission lease expired in 1957, the Commonwealth government did not see fit to renew it, changing it to a 'Special Purpose Lease' which could be taken away for other purposes, such as mining.¹⁷ In other words, the legal ground was being prepared for mining to begin.¹⁸ It is interesting to compare the reluctance of the government to renew mission leases with the ease with which the same government could grant mining leases of up to 100 years.

In 1958, a formal agreement was reached between the Methodist board and the Northern Territory administration that reserve land could be transferred from mission control for mining purposes. Although it was in no way a secret agreement, it was not made particularly public. The government was represented by Roger Nott and the Methodists by the Rev. Cecil Gribble, General Secretary of the Methodist Overseas Mission (not, apparently, a relative of John and Ernest Gribble), and the Rev. Gordon Symons, Chairman of the Mission's northern Australian district, previously superintendent of the Yirrkala mission. No Aboriginal people were consulted, nor was any mention made of the arrangement at the Methodist synod.¹⁹

Shortly after this, the Rev. Edgar Wells and his wife Ann arrived at Yirrkala. Edgar and Ann Wells had studied anthropology under Elkin²⁰ before becoming missionaries at Milingimbi from 1950 to 1960.²¹ Edgar Wells has been described as 'a softly spoken man, with hair greying at the temples. . . One felt that it would require a tremendous amount to make him lose his patience'.²² Ann Wells has been described as 'a very bright and happy person. . . a woman of character and determination dedicated to the work of the place'.²³ Both had a great commitment to Aboriginal people and a deep interest in their culture and, in return, were very highly regarded by Aboriginal people.

In 1961, Edgar Wells was elected as Queensland representative of the Methodist Overseas Mission Board,²⁴ and he and Ann left Milingimbi. A year later, however, they were challenged to go to Yirrkala as the current superintendent was retiring. They

accepted the challenge, returning north in January 1962. Edgar Wells later described their motives:

My acceptance of the appointment was a quite deliberate decision made with all the old-fashioned values associated with a sense of 'call'. However, included in the theology of our response were certain sociological interpretations which we shared. We had come to believe that in the search for wholeness in the Aboriginal community, a place for Jesus of Nazareth as a person of social and political sorrows must be found. Further, we shared a view that the decisions being made for the Aborigines of Arnhem Land by government, church and State Welfare departments did not reflect the Aboriginal scale of values existing in either the person of an Aborigine or in the association of the clan as a group within the inherited totemic land areas.²⁵

Not long after the Wells' arrival in Yirrkala, local Aboriginal people expressed their anxiety to him about mining exploration taking place in the area. It seemed to intensify towards the end of 1962. Aboriginal people became very disturbed by a survey peg on Bremner Island, a place of 'important mythological associations'.²⁶ Having received no information whatsoever from government or mission officials regarding any mining proposals, Wells wrote to Arthur Calwell, Leader of the Opposition, in January 1963, asking that Yirrkala Aborigines receive protection.

A month later, on 18 February 1963, the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, announced that a fifty-million-dollar mining project was to go ahead in Arnhem Land and that mining leases had been granted, following the excision of a large portion of the Yirrkala Aboriginal Reserve.²⁷ The project had been allocated to the Gove Bauxite Corporation which represented overseas mining interests, at this point the Pechiney company of France.²⁸ The plan included a township of 3 000 people adjacent to the mine.

As *Nation* commented:

The remarkable feature of the move by the French aluminium giant, Pechiney Compagnie de Produits Chimiques et Electrometallurgiques, is not its entry into Australian mining: it is the speed of its decision and the size of the projected operations.²⁹

On the same day as the announcement, S.B. Dickinson of the Gove Bauxite Corporation attended a meeting of the Methodist Overseas Mission Board at which a 'rubber stamp' ratification was given to the agreement to mine. No Aboriginal person was present at the meeting. No Aboriginal people were informed afterwards.³⁰

Wells subsequently received Calwell's reply, assuring him that action would be taken and enclosing a map of the mining lease. Wells was shocked to see that it reduced the Yirrkala mission to two square miles and that it enclosed many of the Yirrkala people's important cultural sites within the mine area. When a later decision further reduced the mission land to half-a-square mile,³¹ Wells took immediate action. On 20 February 1963, he sent this identical telegram to nine leading newspapers, individuals and organisations:

583 semi-nomads now squeezed by the bauxite land grab into half a square mile stop original holding 200 square miles stop impossible to house population in approved homes within area stop. . . loss of cultivated and grazing lands means we must eat the cattle before the miners arrive and import basic food crops afterwards. Signature Wells, Superintendent.³²

The new half square mile mission restriction effectively divided the mission compound. Wells sent another telegram to Harry Geise, the Director of Welfare in the Northern Territory responsible for Aboriginal 'wards' under the Welfare Ordinance: 'The half-mile boundary makes it impossible to farm stop necessary houses or grow beef stop would suggest two miles as minimum. Signature Wells.'³³

Wells' moves attracted great media interest. Anthropologists such as Berndt and Elkin became involved. Aboriginal organisations in the south began to speak out. Questions were raised in federal parliament.³⁴ The focus of attention rapidly became the fact that Yirrkala Aborigines had not been consulted. Many Methodists, including members of the Methodist Annual Conference in May 1963, became concerned about the complicity of the Board. J.D. Jago, Convenor of the Methodist Commission on Aboriginal Affairs, wrote to the *Methodist Spectator*:

Sir, The people who will be most affected by the bauxite mining

on the Gove Peninsula are the Aborigines there. In all the negotiations between the Federal Government, the Pechiney Aluminium Company of France and the Methodist Overseas Mission Board, the Aborigines have not been consulted at all. . . The Annual Conference Commission on Aboriginal Affairs is quite unhappy about this fundamental issue of non-consultation with the Aborigines themselves and is currently trying to find out all of the facts of the case in order to make a full statement.³⁵

The Methodist Board's public stance was that it could have taken no other path. Berndt wrote both to Cecil Gribble and Gordon Symons. Gribble responded that 'it seemed impossible to oppose the mining grant, because too much was involved'.³⁶ Symons' reply was that 'in many ways the interests of the Mission and of the Aborigines have been safeguarded and it is hoped that many advantages will accrue to the Aborigines from the development'.³⁷ Writing both to Berndt and to Wells, Gribble said that in cooperating with the mining company, the mission should seriously consider shifting a long way south to Caledon Bay.³⁸

Although the Methodist Board, through Gribble, spoke in clichés about 'bringing strength and hope to the Aborigines' and protecting 'our work and the people as the new situation emerged',³⁹ it became evident that these words meant different things to different people. There was an ever-widening gap between the official line of Gribble and Symons, and the views of Wells and the Yirrkala Aborigines. Indeed, it was later revealed that when Gribble spoke of 'the interests of the mission' he was under great pressure to remove the mission a long way away, the site where the mission stood, according to the mining company, being 'vitally needed for the industry'.⁴⁰ This was, of course, at the height of Comalco's difficulties in Cape York with the refusal of Mapoon people to leave their home. The Gove Bauxite Corporation wanted no such problem.

Edgar and Ann Wells both felt very strongly that forcing Yirrkala people from their traditional lands would be most detrimental to them, but that if it were inevitable that some mining was to go ahead, Yirrkala people should be involved fully and as equal partners in all negotiations. A change of immense significance was about to occur. Under the old mission lease,

although the missionaries acted authoritatively in the mission village itself, Aboriginal people still felt totally in control of the land within the mission lease which contained their important sites. Under a mining lease, they would have no such power.

Thus Wells could speak of a loss of Aboriginal control:

It is our understanding that the goodwill of the Aboriginal people towards both the advocacy of the Christian gospel and the future of Aboriginal citizenship within the areas of country allotted to them would be significantly determined by Aboriginal response to the nature of any agreement which transferred reserve land away from Aboriginal control. With Mrs Wells, I appreciated the regard with which Aboriginal people viewed the ancient inherited symbols, some of which were locked up in land that was under threat. We believed that if some of the survival values inherent in the totemic associations with typical site values could be transferred into continuing forms of economic sustenance for the Aboriginal people, arrangements for a negotiated transfer of leases would be possible.

But for this to take place the Aboriginal people would have to be equal partners to the negotiations, not merely informed of the result of negotiations on their behalf. . . We came to believe that unless some Aboriginal leaders retained control of their traditional totemic land, not only would the accumulated wisdom of the people be threatened, but their very survival would be at risk.⁴¹

By April 1963, the disharmony between Wells and Gribble came to a head. Gribble completely excluded Wells from any decisions and denied him any further information on negotiations with the mining company. Mining officials were told that Wells need not be contacted as he had no power to make decisions about the mission.⁴²

Meanwhile, questions had been raised in federal parliament. Paul Hasluck, Minister for Territories, defended the mining initiatives. Ironically, Hasluck defended mining on the principle of 'assimilation'. Now that assimilation was policy, 'inviolable reserves' were no longer good for Aborigines. The coming of industry, he felt, would greatly assist their transition into 'normal Australian' life:

The Arnhem Land Reserve on which the bauxite has been dis-

covered was created in 1931 at a time when official policy for these Aborigines who were still tribal nomads was to protect them from contact with other Australians by keeping them apart on inviolable reserves. In the present generation considerable changes have taken place. Under the policy of assimilation, the intention is that the Aborigines should have the opportunity of living without any limit on their exercise of their Australian citizenship and on equal terms with other Australians. . .

One of the emerging problems on all settlements and missions today is how best to help the transition from a sheltered life on a mission to a full life in the general Australian community at the normal Australian standards. At the heart of this task is the difficulty of providing gainful occupations. . . the coming of industry to Arnhem Land can represent a valuable opportunity for an advancing people and need not be a source of any harm.⁴³

The legal process continued until, on 8 May 1963, it was Wells' 'melancholy duty' to read to the Yirrkala Aboriginal people the announcement in the *Commonwealth Gazette* that 140 square miles of their territory had been proclaimed a mining lease.⁴⁴

Around this time, quite unprompted by Wells or any other Europeans, Yirrkala Aboriginal people began meeting more formally and putting their thoughts on paper. Few people were particularly literate in English and the notes, sent to Edgar Wells, were typed on an old typewriter which a departing missionary had given to Wandjuk, the son of Mawalan, a noted artist and important clan elder. Here are samples:

This is the word of Mawalan. . . Yirrkala belong to Yulnu. . . To think we like to be working with the M. company? But we don't want, because we want to get some bush yam. . . Because we are yindi jal and also we want part Wirrwa. Bapa Mr Wells because there is the very import place we dont [want them] to be pushing us. . . [we want] keeping on stay here. That all my words to Father Rev. Wells and Brother Mr Tuffin. From Mawalan writing by Jalalingba.

16th March 1963:

This is our country what we are talking about the Caledon Bay and Trial Bay. And Gindall Bay. And Blue Mud Bay. Because we have sacred places around those places.⁴⁵

The Aboriginal people, in the belief that their law applied more strongly to their land than did white law, erected notices at all the important sacred sites, including Cape Arnhem, Bremer Island, Melville Bay and, significantly, the old church site. They then wrote to Harry Geise:

To Mr H.E. Giese, Welfare Branch Mr Giese who looking after for all the Aborigines in the NT. We want to help us belong to this country Yirrkala, please Mr Giese? Because the mining company will be here soon. All the Aborigines in Yirrkala are wondering about this country. What we are going to do Mr Giese? You think us a funny? or you think us good people. You going to help us Mr Giese? or no. These mining people will be chasing us to other place, we don't like that. . . If the mining people like to use this country, alright they will stay away from the mission, Mr Giese? This is the word from Narrijin and all the Aborigines in Yirrkala mission, says this. Thankyou, Mr Giese. Goodbye.⁴⁶

Geise replied as follows:

Dear Narijan,

I have received your letter telling me of your worries about the mining people going into your tribal country on Gove Peninsula. Firstly I want to tell you that I only want to help you and all the other Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. I would not allow anything to happen that would harm you and am only interested in doing things that will help you people to learn how to live and work in the same way and side by side with the white man. Now you might think that because the government has let the mining people go into Gove it does not look as though I am helping you; but I am certain that as the mining work goes on and gets bigger, that you Aboriginal people at Yirrkala are going to benefit in a lot of ways. . .

It would take a lot of writing to tell you my reasons for thinking that the Gove mining will be a big benefit to you and your people. But I am sending Ted Evans out there soon to explain to you all about the mining company, what they can do and what they cannot do, and how you people are going to get a lot of help from the mine being in your tribal country. . .

Yours sincerely,

(H.C. Giese) Director of Welfare.⁴⁷

A later letter to Geise and to Hasluck was particularly revealing, for it demonstrated that the Yirrkala people were not opposed to all mining on the land as such. They were angered that they had not been consulted, they were afraid their important places would be damaged, they were mystified that the Methodist Board was not trying to stop the mining on the mission lease, and they wanted just and fair compensation for what was mined.

In June 1963, Gribble visited Yirrkala to open the new church. Discovering in discussion with Aboriginal people that they were not totally opposed to all mining, he felt justified in his action. It was the old paternalism emerging with a new face under the guise of assimilation: Aborigines were not yet really capable of making decisions for themselves; the Methodist Board had known all along really what was best for them and could act on their behalf.

Gribble and Wells expressed opposing views at a meeting of Yirrkala staff. 'We must learn to live with the idea of mining in the reserve,' said Gribble. 'After all, it is our capitalist way of doing things.'⁴⁸

Wells replied, 'The history of mining in the colonial empire leads me to believe that under no circumstances can the mining industry be trusted to secure any but their own interests.'⁴⁹

At about this time, two federal parliamentarians, Kim Beazley and Gordon Bryant, took action. Both had had sympathetic dealings with Aboriginal people in the past and Bryant chaired the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement. Beazley introduced a motion in the federal parliament calling for recognition of Aboriginal land.

Beazley and Bryant visited Yirrkala in July 1963. The Aborigines wanted to petition the prime minister. It was in the new Yirrkala church, with its impressive Aboriginal paintings in the sanctuary, that Beazley conceived the idea that the petition be a bark painting. He suggested this to the people.

After the politicians had returned to Canberra, the Aborigines discovered yet another set of survey pegs in new locations. When Bryant telegraphed one of the leaders, Djalalingba, offering to represent them, Djalalingba (and eleven other signatories) accepted Bryant's offer.⁵⁰

The bark petition was drawn up by a group of Aboriginal artists and signed by representatives of a variety of clans. In form it

was a painted sheet of bark with a typed petition in their own language in the centre. Wells was meticulously careful to have no part whatsoever in the drawing up or later handling of the petition which subsequently proved to have been wise.

The lengthy wording, which I shall here only summarise, listed all the clans, complained that the Yirrkala people had not been consulted in the destiny of their own land, stated that much of the area was sacred or hunting and gathering land ('from time immemorial: we were all born here') and asked that arrangements would not be made with mining companies which would harm the livelihood, traditions and independence of the Yirrkala people.⁵¹

The petition was received in parliament on 14 August 1963. Hasluck immediately opposed its presence. It was improper, he said, because it contained only twelve signatures and some of them were minors.⁵² This was technically true. Only literate young people's signatures had been used. Hearing of the rejection, the Yirrkala people prepared a second petition overnight with as many signatures as they could obtain in one night, 100 or so witnessed thumbprints.

The petition received immense publicity, not only in Australia but overseas. Several members of parliament alleged that the petition was the work of Wells or other missionaries 'guilty of agitation'.⁵³ This was an old ploy, at least as old as the political activity of the Corranderrk Aborigines in Victoria in the 1870s when no-one believed them capable of writing letters and when police, sent to investigate, found the Aboriginal authorship genuine.⁵⁴ It is still a ploy used today to accuse 'white stirrers' of fabricating or fomenting Aboriginal political protest. Even if sometimes Aboriginal people do seek advice or gain help, this is no different to the ghost-written speeches of any white politician who, presumably, briefs the writer and later checks the contents. It is insulting to Aborigines to presume, when materials have been written on their behalf, that they did not instruct the writer or understand the contents. But in the Yirrkala case, it was all their own work.

As a result of the petition, Beazley moved that a select committee be appointed to enquire into the grievances of the Yirrkala Aborigines. Again, international embarrassment played a part and the motion was accepted on 12 September 1963. The Select Committee was formed almost immediately. Members, together with

parliamentary staff and Hansard reporters, travelled to Darwin and Yirrkala where they interviewed many witnesses, including Wells and ten Aboriginal women and men.⁵⁵

The committee accepted Aboriginal evidence in the Gumatj language. Members were impressed with the intellectual competence of the Aboriginal witnesses and their grasp of the issues when giving evidence in their own languages through a translator, rather than in English, which they did not speak well at that type of formal level. The Select Committee found that the Yirrkala people had not been consulted at all in matters drastically affecting their future. While accepting the inevitability of mining and of an associated mining town of some kind, the committee recommended that Yirrkala people be consulted as soon as possible about important sites. These were not only 'sacred' in the sense of having historical or mythological import, but sites of traditional importance such as pigment sources for bark painting.

The committee recommended several types of compensation and royalties be paid to the Yirrkala Aborigines, irrespective of whether or not they legally owned the land under the laws of the Northern Territory. The committee also recommended a large number of other actions aimed at limiting and controlling European activity in the area. One of the most important was that there be a House of Representatives Standing Committee to monitor events at Yirrkala for at least ten years.⁵⁶

Within a few days of the release of the committee's findings, Wells received this notice: 'The Board, after giving the fullest consideration to this matter, has decided that a change in stationing must be made and that as from January 1st, 1964, you shall become the Superintendent of the Milingimbi Station. . .'⁵⁷

Before the hearing, Gribble had already written to Wells stating that the Methodist Board was 'greatly disturbed' about 'the general supervision of the work at Yirrkala'.⁵⁸ Wells saw no grounds for such a complaint other than that he had sided with the Aborigines and disagreed with his Board. He regarded the transfer as a disciplinary action and refused it.

Because the Yirrkala issue was still newsworthy, Wells' transfer and refusal received much media attention.⁵⁹ The Board then dismissed Wells altogether. Gribble gave the following response to media claims that Wells had been victimised: 'Although the Board thought that Mr Wells' judgment on the mining lease at Yirrkala

was at fault, disagreements between the Board and Mr Wells are over domestic matters.⁶⁰

It soon became evident that Gribble could not admit the real reason for Wells' transfer and subsequent dismissal. Discrimination against a person for testifying to a Senate committee was a criminal offence. Gribble and the Board nevertheless stuck to their decision and the Wells were sent south.

Shortly afterwards, Cecil Gribble was awarded the OBE for, among other things, 'work for the advancement of the Aboriginal people of Australia'.⁶¹ Many Methodists felt most uneasy, even angry about the whole affair, particularly when it became more public that the Methodist Church held investments in Queensland Mines.⁶² Later, Gordon Symons received the same award. Wells, however, was more pleased with the testimony of Wandjak, the owner of the old typewriter, who said in reference to the land dispute: 'The Wells were the only missionaries who really wanted to help the Aborigines'.⁶³

In the short term, the Yirrkala people's bark petition achieved little. Select Committee reports have no authority unless their recommendations are acted upon by parliament. Two years after the report was tabled in parliament, no decision had been reached upon its recommendations. Then in November 1965, the Commonwealth government announced that it would not set up a standing committee to monitor the consequences of mining on Aboriginal communities. This cut the link between the people of Yirrkala and the parliament of the nation of which they were not yet citizens.

It was a decision of far-reaching importance, as Rowley points out, for economic development issues were retained by the Commonwealth:

As negotiations with investigating companies were not referred to the legislative council, but were handled in Canberra as a matter of national policy, it may be inferred that economic development is a matter for the highest authority: its possible effect on Aborigines is not.⁶⁴

In the long term, the Yirrkala bark petition was of great significance. It was, like the peace expedition and the Aboriginal contribution to the war, an attention-focusing episode which



121. Aringari Wurramara, escorted to his ordination
by clan dancers, carries the Wurramara dilly-bag
Acknowledgement: Julie Waddy. Reproduced with permission.



122. Nancy Dick being ordained at Kowanyama, 29 November 1987
Acknowledgement: Nungalinya College, Darwin.
Reproduced with permission.



123. Aboriginal people at Emily Gap for a baptism, 1988
Acknowledgement: Carmel Sears. Reproduced with permission.

brought Aboriginal affairs to the consciousness of the white Australian public. It prepared people for the next two events to gain national and international publicity for Aboriginal land rights. The first of these events was the strike by members of the Gurindji tribe working in the pastoral industry on Lord Vestey's Wave Hill Station in 1966. The second was the Aboriginal Embassy, set up on the lawns of Parliament House, Canberra in 1972.⁶⁵

I have provided a reasonably detailed description of the Yirrkala dispute of the early 1960s because it illustrates all of the issues very clearly for those who are prepared to see them, especially the dilemma for the church. The Yirrkala controversy marked a kind of turning point for missions. Before that, it could be reasonably said that most missionaries in traditional Aboriginal communities did not think in terms of Aboriginal autonomy over their own land. They saw themselves as both guardians and mentors, not only bringing the gospel, but protecting Aboriginal people on their isolated mission reserves and, at the same time, training them to cope, eventually, with the Western world. They did not fear mining or other economic development for its own sake: after all, 'it's our capitalist way of doing things,' said Cecil Gribble.⁶⁶ Their apprehension was only that such development would end mission isolation and bring Aboriginal people into contact with the evils of white society before they were 'ready'.

The changes were not instantaneous or dramatic but, after the Yirrkala controversy, an increasing number of missionaries began to see that the role of protector, no matter how benevolent or well-intentioned, was outdated. Indeed, the missionaries no longer had the power to do it. The only way that Aboriginal people could have any measure of protection was for Aboriginal people themselves to have control over their own land.

Many Australians began to perceive that the forced development of land which had previously, however loosely, been designated 'Aboriginal', was the new, more sophisticated face of the same old racism. Aboriginal people were massacred or pushed aside in the past because they stood in the way of white progress. The moral justification was that Aboriginal people were inferior and doomed to extinction in the face of a superior race. In a later period where such violence was frowned upon, the same logic still applied: Aboriginal people were 'backward' or 'primitive' and so they were 'the white man's burden', people to be institutionalised

or otherwise cared for, people on whose behalf decisions had to be made because they were too backward to make them themselves.

Forced development of land which mattered to Aboriginal people went ahead under the same logic. The Western concept of progress has historically been that the essential human task is to conquer nature. It is assumed that all people must want to conquer nature, so that those who have not done so must be unable to. Therefore they are 'inferior' or 'backward' and should have 'development' imposed upon them.⁶⁷ From the Yirrkala controversy onward, this has been part of the rhetoric of the developers.

'I only want to help you,' Harry Geise told Yirrkala Aborigines; 'you might think that it does not look as though I am helping you, but I am. . .'.⁶⁸

The only other moral justification possible is that development creates 'the greatest good for the greatest number of people'. Even though Aboriginal people may not want their land developed or may not want some parts of it developed, its development can be justified because a larger number of people than them will supposedly benefit from the development. This is a convenient moral logic to apply when the minority have something the majority want. It may seem to be 'democratic', but it is not, simply because of that, Christian.

This is what many missionaries and other church officials, prompted by a more aware Christian community, began to glimpse. Perhaps the gospel might require them to assume a new kind of 'protection', protecting the rightful interests of an oppressed and less powerful minority. Thus began the involvement of the churches in Aboriginal land rights.

The Presbyterian missionaries had given in easily at Mapoon as shown earlier. At first they had hoped that Comalco would provide employment for Mapoon people, as well as compensation which could be used to develop the Mapoon township. When it became clear that Comalco had no intention of paying anything to Aboriginal people, the missionaries took upon themselves the task of 'assisting' the people to move. When many of the people would not move, the missionaries left them. It was an action which many Presbyterian people soon came to detest.

These actions could be justified under the policy of assimilation. Aboriginal people were not seen as having a distinct future of their own. The mining operations forced a move which, it was

thought, would only serve to hasten their absorption into the wider Australian society. This could be countenanced because, finally, assimilation was ethnocide. It was, as we have seen, a great intellectual leap for many white people in the 1930s and 1940s to accept that Aboriginal people were capable of assimilation. It is a leap many have not taken yet. But as a policy it did not go far enough. It was yet another leap to the concept that Aboriginal people could determine their own future.

The Church of England CMS missionaries, it seems, were smarter than the others, at least at first. They may not have been any more supportive of Aboriginal autonomy, but they did have the interests of the Aborigines in mind. CMS head office officials, now based in Sydney, showed more wisdom in operating within the system than the Methodists at first did and saw what was happening early enough to act. They could not legally claim rights to minerals either for CMS or the Aborigines, but they could claim prospecting rights.

On behalf of Groote Eylandt Aborigines, CMS negotiated an exploration licence for their island. As a result, anyone wishing to undertake mineral exploration had to do so by negotiation with the holders of the licence. In 1964, Broken Hill Proprietary Limited (BHP) commenced mining manganese on Groote Eylandt through their wholly-owned subsidiary, Groote Eylandt Mining Company (GEMCO). BHP agreed to pay to the holders of the licence a one-and-a-quarter per cent royalty. Now that other royalties and benefits have been made mandatory by federal legislation, GEMCO pays the one-and-a-quarter per cent in addition to the statutory royalty.

BHP, through GEMCO, has gained a name as the only mining company to have shown it could work effectively with Aborigines. There are cynics who argue that, as the Aborigines held the exploration licence, BHP could do little else but accede to some of the Aboriginal people's wishes. I lived on Groote Eylandt in the 1970s and I am not so cynical. It is not that there were never any problems or confrontations, but it seemed apparent to me, both from observation and from discussion with Aboriginal elders and company officials, that GEMCO had made and was making a genuine effort to assist the Groote Eylandters.

Unlike other mining companies, GEMCO successfully employed Aboriginal people in virtually every area of their opera-

tion. The company regarded many Aboriginal people as superior to non-Aborigines in operating heavy earth-moving equipment such as Caterpillar D9 bulldozers and 988 loaders, articulated road-hauling units and so on. The company also showed willingness to assist Aboriginal community development beyond the strict requirement of their agreement. It was my distinct impression that, as an Australian company, BHP was prepared to make more effort than largely foreign-owned companies to listen to what Aboriginal people had to say.

The Presbyterians having deserted Mapoon to Comalco and the Anglicans having negotiated successfully on Groote Eylandt with BHP, it was left to the Methodists to be the group who engaged most strongly in the struggle for Aboriginal land rights in the decade following the original Yirrkala controversy. This was no more than an historical accident. Anglicans, Catholics and Methodists had already agreed not to compete for converts and the Top End of the Northern Territory had been partitioned. Yirrkala was Methodist and that was where the bauxite happened to be.

The Gove Bauxite Corporation (Pechiney) did not go ahead with its plans for Yirrkala. By the mid 1960s, the Commonwealth government was negotiating with other companies and the fate of the Yirrkala people was again in the balance. In 1969, eighty square miles of Arnhem Land around the Yirrkala mission were leased to Nabalco, a company owned seventy per cent by Alusuisse (Swiss Aluminium) and thirty per cent by Gove Aluminium, which was owned in turn by CSR, Peko-Wallsend, AMP and smaller shareholders.⁶⁹ The lease expires in the year 2053.

By 1969, however, the Methodist Overseas Mission was becoming much more responsive to Aboriginal people. The Rev. H.L. Perkins replaced Cecil Gribble as chairman of the board and he did not hesitate to make his views public:

If the mission of God has to do with the systems of men, as well as the men themselves, our responsibility in mission is to seek to change the patterns of exploitation and the claims of domination which are involved in policies such as these. The structures of power which express the racist society are structures from which we Christians generally derive benefit because we belong to that society.

The Methodist Mission Board. . . is an example of a racist struc-

ture. It has a membership of thirty from around Australia, but only one member from each of the overseas or Aboriginal churches to which it related in mission. It was racist so long as it claimed decision-making power in regard to Aboriginal, Pacific or Niuginian churches. The result of Mission Board activity in the past had been to suggest that white Australian church people had an inherent superiority in the gospel, a right of decision-making on behalf of others, a control of access to resources.

The gospel teaches us that in Christ differences between people become diversities and are meant for the enrichment of mankind. To use these differences to set up some scale of values into which different people are slotted is a denial of the gospel. . .

Any denial of the mandate to struggle for justice, for the redistribution of power which justice requires, for change in the structure which preserves iniquities of power in both Church and society – this is the insidious heresy swamping the Church today, insidious because it moves under the guise of the spiritual, dangerous because it supports the deepening slide into suppression.⁷⁰

A number of Methodist clergy and laypeople were so convicted of their Christian duty to support the Aboriginal people of Yirrkala in their quest to be able to make decisions about the future of their land, that they offered personally to finance an appeal. So was mounted a world-famous court case: *Millirrump, Mungurrawuy and Daymbalipu versus Nabalco Pty Ltd and the Commonwealth of Australia*.

'It seemed to us,' they said in their affidavit to the Supreme Court, 'that nothing could stop the mining company or any other white man who wanted our country.'⁷¹ In March 1971, exactly two years after proceedings commenced, Judge J. Blackburn in a 222-page judgment, ruled against the Aborigines. Despite precedents from other former British colonies, Australian law, said the judge, is 'without regard to any communal native title'.⁷²

The next mission to be involved in controversy with a mining company was the Presbyterian mission at Aurukun. The mineral exploration rights of the Aurukun region were held by Tipperary Corporation, an American company. The Presbyterian mission, anxious now to avoid a repetition of Mapoon, had obtained an un-

dertaking that the company would not mine without consultation and were further reassured by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's opposition to foreign-controlled companies taking Australian resources.

Tipperary, however, sold controlling interests to Pechiney of France and Billiton of Dutch Shell. About the same time the Whitlam government lost the December 1975 election. Within ten days of Whitlam's demise, the consortium moved in despite Aboriginal protest. Exploiting the political vacuum between Whitlam and the next election, the Premier of Queensland, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, gave the consortium a mining lease of 736-square miles until the year 2038 under extremely favourable conditions.

At the same time, the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches were negotiating the formation of the Uniting Church in Australia. The newly-formed Uniting Church, now responsible for the Aurukun mission, found one of its first real challenges in identifying with the Aurukun people's struggle for justice. Supported by the church and funded by the Aboriginal Legal Services, the Aurukun people challenged the mining lease legislation. Aurukun won its case in the Queensland Supreme Court. The Queensland government appealed to the Privy Council in England. There, across the other side of the world, five Aurukun Aboriginal elders were present when the Aurukun case was lost before four English Lords and Sir Henry Gibbs of the High Court of Queensland.⁷³

I have only outlined briefly the mining or land rights controversies in which missions were most directly involved. It was an historical accident that the Methodists and their successors, the Uniting church, happened to be responsible for the missions where bauxite was discovered. I do not believe that, by the 1970s, either of the other Christian churches with large mission responsibilities in the north – the Anglicans and Catholics – would have acted much differently. It was, to its credit, the Uniting Church which bore the burden and it has been the Uniting Church which has borne the brunt of the criticism. The cover of the *Bulletin* of 25 January 1983 depicted 'The Radical Left's New Power Bases'. These were *Choice Magazine*, the ABC program *Doubletake*, and the Uniting Church.

This is not the place to enter into a full discussion of Aboriginal land rights. Whereas churches played a key role in the

land rights cases of the 1960s and 1970s, they have played a less direct role more recently for no reason other than that Aboriginal people have demonstrated that they are capable of acting for themselves. Churches have, however, generally shown themselves publicly to be in favour of Aboriginal people's aspirations for control over the land which they have traditionally regarded as their own.

Aboriginal land rights is still one of the most divisive issues in the Australian community. Its opponents still use the same old arguments which should long ago have been laid to rest. One common argument is based on the concept of Aboriginal 'primitiveness'. Whatever the concept means, it is generally adduced to support the idea that 'primitive' people, lacking sophisticated titles to their land, do not own it as really as a person who holds a legal document. P.W. Nichols as recently as 1979 could still regard Aboriginal land ownership as akin to the fashion in which animals own land:

In no realistic sense is [the Aboriginal] control 'ownership' or even 'habitation'. The Aborigines' use of 'his' land is much closer to that of the wild beasts than that of other non-agricultural hunting and gathering people. None of the characteristics associated with ownership - occupation, temporary or permanent, exclusive occupation and title - are possessed by Aborigines living in traditional style.⁷⁴

Here again, in modern guise, is the beast-like Aboriginal and the nineteenth century scale of humanity which places Australian Aborigines lower than other 'non-agricultural hunting and gathering people'. In one form or another this view of Aboriginal people regularly appears in the writings and speeches of the more outspoken opponents of Aboriginal land rights. It is important to them to maintain this doctrine of the scale of humanity because it justifies the actions of 'the superior race'. The doctrine may be more subtly expressed, without the dated phrases, but it is essentially the same doctrine.

It is important to this line of argument that Aboriginal people be seen as not having to be treated as our equals. They were 'at such a primitive state of development that no treaty with them was possible', said Hugh Morgan in 1988.⁷⁵ To acknowledge an

equality is to open the door of the mind to admit the possibility that they might have owned the land. To people like Sir Charles Court, such ownership is anathema:

The land of Western Australia does not belong to the Aborigines. The idea that Aborigines, because of their having lived in this land before the days of white settlement, have some prior title to the land. . . is not consistent with any idea of fairness or common humanity.⁷⁶

It is difficult to see how it could be argued that Aborigines have generally been treated with 'fairness and common humanity'. Certainly the great nineteenth century missionaries did not think so. People who mistreated or exploited Aboriginal people in the past always justified their actions by reference to the inherent inferiority of Aboriginal people. That is why the missionaries, despite their own sometimes low view of Aboriginal society, challenged the false doctrine that Aborigines were inherently inferior by stressing our equality with Aboriginal people in God's sight.

It is not surprising, therefore, that modern antagonists of land rights find it necessary to invoke Aboriginal inequality. It seems that those who do not believe that Aborigines ever owned anything, and therefore did not lose anything as a result of settlement, do not understand that some people could simply believe that Aborigines lost a great deal and that the Christian concept of justice calls us to do something positive about it.

I am one of those people and the research I have done for this book, particularly the reading of missionary journals, correspondence and reports, only confirms me in my view. Yet I find continually that land rights opponents do not, or do not want to, understand this position. They want to impute all sorts of motives to people like myself which we just do not hold. I suspect that this is a technique devised to shift attention from the real questions of how we should act with justice in the world.

The common claim is that land rights is a trendy (even '1970s') bandwagon, fuelled by a sense of guilt. It is even said that there is a 'guilt industry'.⁷⁷ I do not have a sense of personal guilt at all, but I believe that Christians must strive to right injustice and that injustice has been done to many Aboriginal people. The closest I come to what some want to call 'personal guilt' is the

feeling that, because the injustices happened in my country and because the consequences are still very evident today, I have a heightened sense of duty to do something about them. I do not in any way feel that I need to expiate guilt.

One leap of moral logic which we should not make is to argue that because we are not personally guilty, actions in the past do not matter or, if they do, that it is too late to redress the injustices of the past. It is not sufficient to argue, as has recently been done, that because 'the history of virtually every nation has involved conquest and violence', those acts of conquest are retrospectively legitimised by the later achievements of the State.⁷⁸

No doubt James Cook when he took possession of eastern Australia in the name of his king, acted legally according to British law. No doubt he was a man of honour, integrity and courage who deserves our admiration. I suspect, however, that he had absolutely no idea of the extent to which British settlement would destroy the life and culture of the people whom he considered to be 'far more happier than we Europeans'.⁷⁹ Much of that destruction was neither accidental nor unavoidable. Many early settlers were guilty of the massacre and abuse of Aboriginal people.

Furthermore, there were those in authority who knew the European settlers were guilty and were ashamed. According to Governor George Arthur, it was a fatal error not to have negotiated a treaty with the Aboriginal Tasmanians.⁸⁰ 'I could not have believed,' wrote Governor Thomas Davey, 'that British subjects would have so ignominiously stained the honour of their country.'⁸¹

Christians must believe with all their mind and heart and strength that God is a God of righteousness and justice and that he demands of them that they display his nature in how they behave in the world. This may well require Christians to reflect seriously upon past injustices and to accept a responsibility to right them. This does not mean they are personally guilty although for want of a better term I know that many have referred to guilt in a corporate, national or historical sense. Nevertheless, Frank Bellet's joke in the *Bulletin* early in 1988,⁸² taken up rather gleefully by Hugh Morgan,⁸³ was in poor taste and misleading when he likened guilt feelings about past mistreatment of Aborigines to a person trying to confess and be forgiven for his grandfather's acts of adultery.

Bellet was careful to choose what is sometimes called a victimless crime. If my grandfather had, say, killed some people whose children were now impoverished, I may feel that as a result of his act, a situation of injustice exists. I may feel a deep sense of regret, and I may feel an obligation to try and redress the wrongs of the past, particularly if I have benefited from my grandfather's wealth. I would not inherit my grandfather's guilt for his act of murder. That is theologically wrong. But I can certainly be guilty of perpetuating a situation of injustice. It is true that some Christian preachers and writers have used the term 'guilt' imprecisely – even, I acknowledge, incorrectly. I am more concerned that there seems to be an anxiety in some people not just to correct their imprecision, but to deny that a situation of injustice exists and to deny that we might have a moral responsibility to do something about it.

Other motives of which those supporting Aboriginal pleas for justice have been accused are that the 'land-grab' is a radical plot to set up a black State, or to divide Australia, or to undermine Australia's defences, or to damage the pastoral and mining industries, or to sabotage the Australian economy.⁸⁴ None of these apply to me, nor to anyone I know personally.

Another favourite accusation is the 'communist plot', a favourite because generations of conservative politicians have found it a useful scare tactic. I am certainly not a communist or a Marxist: I think that communism as a system has just as poor a record in the treatment of minority groups as has capitalism. Communist trade unionists supported Ferguson and Cooper and other Aboriginal activists in the 1930s, and have publicly supported various Aboriginal causes ever since. Sometimes their support has been genuine; sometimes it has been a technique to embarrass the government. Either way, their presence has been a useful excuse for others to dismiss those who support Aboriginal people as unpatriotic, communist sympathisers.

It is important to consider what Aboriginal Christians say about land rights. There has been publicity given recently to the statement made by some Christian Aboriginal people that their land rights are in heaven. All Christians would have to agree with such a statement, but does it change anything? There are missionaries today from the more conservative evangelical missions who are opposed to land rights on what they believe are biblical

grounds. One example is the Aborigines Bible Fellowship of Western Australia, formed from the small Australian Aborigines Evangelical Mission and some missionaries who left the United Aborigines Mission. I am not about to criticise the work of ABF. This mission sincerely supports Aboriginal Christian leadership, and I have heard Aboriginal people speak highly of some ABF missionaries who, they said, were the only European people in some towns who ever spoke to them or cared about them.

Some ABF missionaries represent the conservative pole of Christian attitudes to Aboriginal land rights. An editorial in a recent issue of the ABF newsletter, *In Fellowship*, was headed 'Land Rights or God's Earth' and the thrust of the editorial was that these were contradictory.⁸⁵ The old arguments against land rights were all there: all Australia is legally held by the Crown, land rights divide the nation, most land rights activity is communist-inspired and after all the Scandinavians raided the British Isles.

Christians would agree with the editor's assertion that the most important thing for all Australians is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christians should also agree with his statement that 'the Christian answer is the proclamation and acceptance of the gospel and the Lord's ethics for all people'. On the other hand, these words don't mean the same thing to him that they do to me.

I am sure the editor and I understand exactly the same things by 'the proclamation and acceptance of the gospel', but what are the 'Lord's ethics'? They were summarised by Jesus himself as loving God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves. To me, this demands that I be not blind to injustice, and it demands that I struggle for God's justice and righteousness to be evident on God's earth. It certainly does not say to me that Aboriginal people have less right to land than mining companies or pastoralists or anyone else. It certainly does not say that in the sight of God 'the Crown' owns land more rightly than Aborigines did in 1769.

I fully understand that many Aboriginal people, especially those not living on their ancestral lands, feel little hope of ever having possession of the land of their mothers and fathers. I fully understand that many Aboriginal Christians have set aside any such aspirations, and I respect them for it. To have Christ is more important than all the land in the world. But this does not

change the fact that God requires justice to be done about land today.

When such Aboriginal people say, 'my land rights are in heaven', they are faithfully and humbly acknowledging a deep Christian truth. But let no-one who may be likely to profit from the weakening of Aboriginal land rights resolve, or even profit from some Aboriginal people's rejection of land rights altogether take pleasure in such a statement. Aboriginal land rights are, finally, in heaven but so are everybody else's. So are the pastoralists', so are the mining executives', so are the conservationists', so are mine. An acknowledgement by Aboriginal Christians that all their hopes are in the hands of God does not change by one iota the question of who should have land rights here and now.

The editor of *In Fellowship* stated that 'most tribal Aborigines are not interested in land rights'.⁸⁶ This is no doubt true of some Aboriginal people known to the editor, and I in no way doubt his integrity, but I suspect that he does not have enough information to be able to generalise about what 'most tribal Aborigines' think. My own experience, for example, in the Aboriginal communities in which I have lived, has been quite different. Furthermore, it has been my observation that traditional Aboriginal people who become Christians become more convinced of land rights, not less, as they accept the Christian duty to live responsibly in the world. This has been particularly evident in churches where traditional Aboriginal people have become part of the decision-making process. The one I am personally familiar with is the Anglican synod in the Northern Territory.

The most important and widespread view of land which I have heard from Aboriginal Christians is stewardship of land. They see that by act of creation God has ownership. 'The whole earth is mine,' says God (Exodus 19:5). 'Every animal of the forest is mine' (Psalm 50:10). 'The mineral resources – silver and gold – are mine' (Haggai 2:8). They see that Adam was instructed to look after the land, to be in charge of it, to be responsible for the animals and plants (Genesis 1: 26-29). They see that God is always reminding us that we are tenants in God's creation.

In the 1985 synod of the Anglican Church in the Northern Territory, an elderly Aboriginal deaconess, Dinah Garadji, stood and with great courage presented this truth to us powerfully and beautifully. She spoke of the land of her mother and her

grandfather and her ancestors before them. She asked how pieces of paper drawn up a long way away by people who had never lived in her 'country' could possibly change the true history of those to whom God long ago had given the land. She wept for the land and for the animals and for her children's children.

'How can we obey God if they take away our land?' she asked. 'How can we be good stewards of it if we only half own it and someone else can make the decisions about it? Are the mining companies the Christians? Are we Christian Aborigines against God because we know this is our land?'

At the 1986 Northern Territory synod, Aboriginal land rights were again an important item of discussion. 'Now that I have become a Christian,' one Aboriginal member asked, 'does this simply mean that I must stop being responsible for my land and hand it over to the government or a mining company?' He was voicing a perplexity which many Aboriginal Christians feel in these circumstances. If they, as Christians, believe they are stewards of the land on which they live, can they be forced to abrogate their responsibility by relinquishing effective control of their land to agencies which are probably not Christian at all?

The synod passed a number of motions the content of which came from the Aboriginal members. Part of one motion read as follows: 'This synod supports the belief expressed by Aboriginal members of the synod that God gave Aboriginal people their land and it is their Christian responsibility to care for it.'⁸⁷

This strong conviction, brought to the synod by Aboriginal Christians, is a far cry from the claim by Hugh Morgan, Executive Director of Western Mining, that 'for a Christian Aborigine, land rights. . . is a symbolic step back to the world of paganism, superstition, fear and darkness'.⁸⁸ He then went on to mention 'infanticide, cannibalism and cruel initiation rites'. This is simply yet another attempt to exploit a general community ignorance of Aboriginal culture and to raise yet again the spectre of the primitive savage. Even more serious is the implication that mining development is somehow particularly Christian.

Christian leaders and commentators did well to criticise this attempt to invoke Christianity for personal or corporate financial advantage. *Southern Cross* stated:

Jesus drove the money changers from the temple because they

dared to use the face of religion for their own economic advantage. To bandy about the world 'Christianity' for economic gain demands a similar response. If secular society is able to see through such sham and hypocrisy, how much more keenly aware should Christ's own people be.⁸⁹

On 7 February 1988, a bicentenary service was held in St Andrew's Anglican Cathedral, Sydney, commemorating the first Christian service held in Australia. On behalf of Australian Anglicans, and in the presence of all the Australian diocesan bishops, the Primate of Australia, Archbishop Sir John Grindrod, expressed sorrow and regret for the past mistreatment of Aborigines, addressing his words to the first Aboriginal bishop, Arthur Malcolm of Yarrabah:

My Brother in Christ:

We have come together to give thanks to Almighty God for his protection and provision for this nation during the last two hundred years of European settlement. You and I and all of us in this cathedral recognise clearly that your people, the Aboriginal people, were here on this land before any of the people from Europe arrived.

When the European people did come, much misunderstanding took place which caused great suffering to your people, and is still, even today, having its effect. This has caused a grave breakdown in the culture and lifestyle of your people.

May I express on behalf of all non-Aboriginal people of our church our profound sorrow for the suffering that your people have had to endure, with its violence and hurt. We humbly ask God's forgiveness; and we seek your forgiveness as a leader of your people, for the actions of the past and those causing hurt at the present time.

We have longed to share with your people the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We confess our endeavour has often fallen short of his love. We want to walk together with you, sharing and learning together, accepting and respecting each other. Help us to listen to you. Help us to learn from you. We assure you of our continued support in working with you and others for Aboriginal rights, harmonious relationships, and the recognition of the unique contribution which the Aboriginal people are making in the life of the church and for the benefit of all Australians.

Please accept our sorrow for the past and the seeking of your forgiveness. May God give all of us grace to contribute together to the progress of this nation and its harmony and peace.
My Brother, I ask that you pray for us all.

Bishop Arthur Malcolm then responded on behalf of Aboriginal people of the Anglican church:

My Brother in Christ:

I stand before you representing my people from within the Anglican Communion. For a long time we have been hurting; our spirits have felt crushed by the wrong actions that took place between my ancestors and yours. Much suffering has been the result, but it is through the message of Jesus Christ that we have learned to forgive. We have received his forgiveness, and now in turn we must also forgive.

On behalf of my people, I accept your seeking of our forgiveness, and thank you for your apology. Please forgive us, too, for our people also engaged in fighting with yours and so caused some suffering on your side, too. It is our desire to be treated as the saved children of God, who have been given the same ability as you have. I believe that we are to work and live side by side in a way that enables God to take hold of each one's contributions and blend them together to enrich and mature us as a people who belong to this nation of Australia.

I would like to lead us all in prayer:

*Dear God, You have forgiven us our sins; please enable us to forgive each other. Lord Jesus, bring healing and reconciliation to this nation, and make us a people who will walk and live together in lasting acceptance and respect for each other. In Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.*⁹⁰

Bible translation and Aboriginal languages

Given the predominance of evangelical missionaries and missionary societies in the long history of the Christian church in Aboriginal Australia, one of the most surprising and most shameful deficiencies has been the long failure to translate the Bible into the languages of the people.

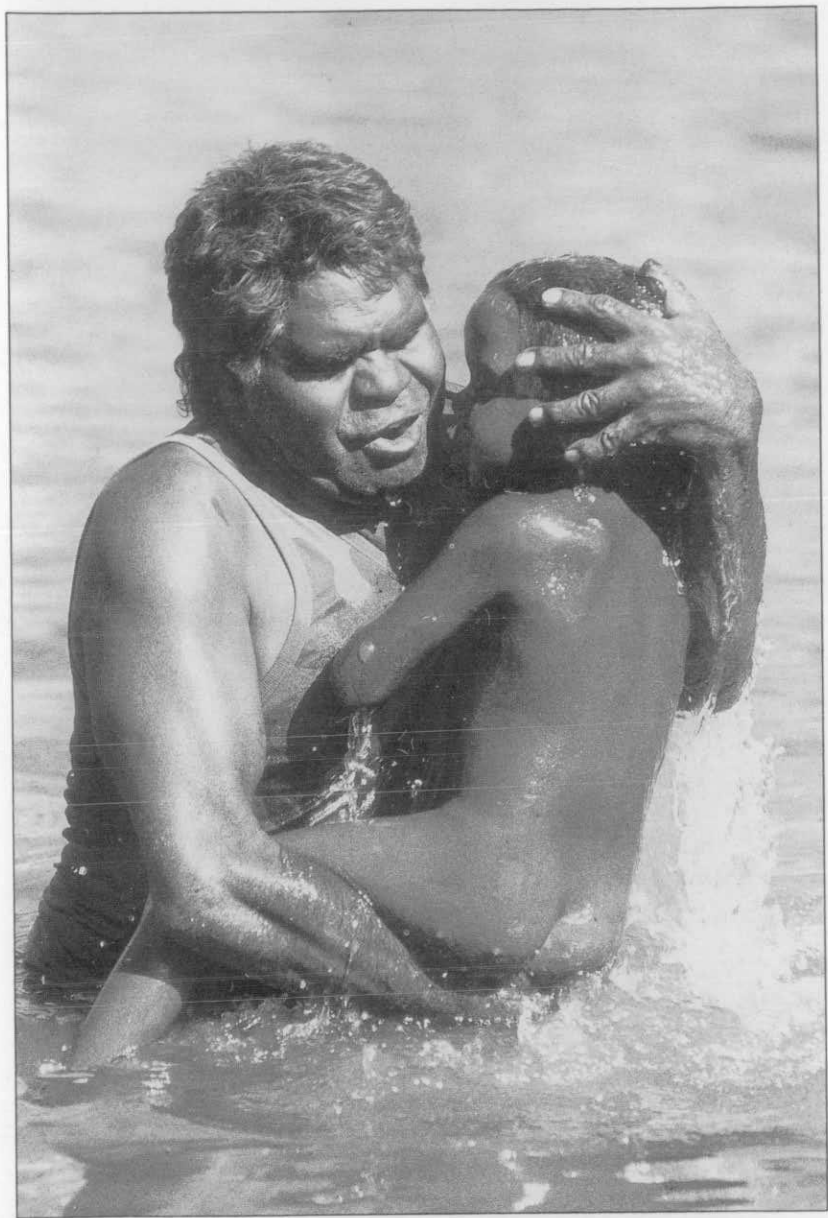
The main reason for this was that missionaries eventually accepted the widespread view that Aboriginal people did not have a distinct cultural and linguistic destiny. Their future, if they had

one at all, was to become a servant class or, at best, peasant farmers. Thus missionary strategy was not seen as bringing the gospel to a community of people, but as linking the gospel to the Europeanisation of the children. The very first missionary, the Wesleyan William Walker, concluded that 'traversing the woods' with the Aborigines would be useless and that he should concentrate on teaching the children.⁹¹ Thus the onus was on the children to learn English, not on Walker to learn an Aboriginal language. This general opinion was to prove very persistent. There were, however, some notable exceptions, and most of the very earliest missionaries attempted some Bible translation.

The first missionary to translate any of the Bible into an Aboriginal language was Lancelot Threlkeld, the Congregational missionary at Lake Macquarie, NSW. Threlkeld firmly believed that the gospel should not be preached in English. Although, like other missionaries, he linked the work ethic to the gospel, his 'system' was remarkably progressive: 'With respect to seeing my system, it can be seen and known in two minutes, namely, first obtain the language, then preach the gospel, then urge them from gospel motives to be industrious at the same time being a servant to them to win them to that which is right.'⁹²

Threlkeld, with the aid of Biraban, an Awabakal man who was also known by the English name M'Gill, began learning the Awabakal language of Lake Macquarie as early as 1824.⁹³ He always admired Biraban's intelligence. Threlkeld published some notes on the Awabakal language in 1827.⁹⁴ With Biraban's help, he completed the Gospel of Luke in Awabakal in 1830,⁹⁵ revising it in 1831. In the preface Threlkeld stated:

This translation of the Gospel of Luke into the language of the Aborigines was made by me with the assistance of the intelligent Aboriginal, M'Gill. . . Thrice I wrote it, and he and I went through it sentence by sentence, and word for word, while I explained to him carefully the meaning as we proceeded. M'Gill spoke the English language fluently. The third revision was completed in 1831. I then proceeded with the Gospel of Mark, a selection of prayers from the Book of Common Prayer, with which to commence public worship with a few surviving blacks; I prepared a spelling book; I had also commenced the Gospel of Matthew, when the mission was brought to its final close.⁹⁶



124. Alec Mimi Tjucker baptises a young child at Emily Gap, 1988
Acknowledgement: Carmel Sears. Reproduced with permission.



125. Hamilton Morris and Kevin Jurra sing at the Central Australian Christian Convention near Alice Springs, 1987

Acknowledgement: Carmel Sears. Reproduced with permission.

Threlkeld's translations were not published in his lifetime, because so few Awabakal people survived. Threlkeld did use them, however, in the 1830s to enable him to speak of Christ to the few remaining people in the Awabakal language. Threlkeld's Gospel of Luke in Awabakal was published in 1892, long after his death, more as a curiosity than anything else, in a volume of his linguistic writings.⁹⁷ Threlkeld stated:

Circumstances, which no human power could control, brought the mission to a final termination on December 31 1841, when the mission ceased, not from any want of support from the Government, nor from any inclination on my part to retire from the work, but solely from the sad fact that the Aborigines themselves had then become almost extinct, for I had actually outlived a very large majority of the blacks, more especially of those with whom I had been associated for seventeen years. . . Under such circumstances, the translation of the Gospel by St Luke can only be now a work of curiosity, a record of the language of the tribe that once existed and would have, otherwise, been numbered with those nations and their forgotten languages and peoples with their unknown tongues who have passed away from this globe and are buried in oblivion.⁹⁸

When Threlkeld first began, with obvious zeal, the task of Bible translation, there were Church of England clergy, like Charles Wilton, who were ashamed and embarrassed that 'the only attempt to form a written tongue for the Aborigines has been undertaken by a Dissenter'.⁹⁹ Encouraged by them, William Watson, the CMS missionary at Wellington in the 1830s, translated some parts of John's Gospel into Wiradjuri:

After dinner, I read over some of my translation of the scriptures. So interested did they appear that they came and sat down with me, one after another, and paid the greatest attention; they said they understood what I read. When I gave over reading, some of them said: 'Kurrandirung myengoo! Kurrandirung myengoo! - Book for black fellows! Book for black fellows!'. . . So true is the saying, How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And it may be added - without a preacher able to address them through the medium of a language with which

they are familiar.¹⁰⁰

Watson, however, did not complete his Wiradjuri translation of John nor, as far as I can ascertain, did his colleague James Gunther complete his independent translation of Luke. The Wellington mission closed in 1843. Not only had there been conflict between the missionaries, but the proximity of white settlement provided far too much opposition to the mission, so it joined all the other mission failures of the first half of the nineteenth century. It was the last effort in NSW of any of the great nineteenth century missionary societies.

In 1833 and 1834, Thomas Wilkinson briefly held the post of catechist to the last surviving, exiled Tasmanian Aborigines on Flinders Island. Wilkinson translated the first four chapters of Genesis into a Tasmanian dialect, an act which led Governor George Arthur to express anger and amazement that anyone could have 'acted so imprudently'.¹⁰¹ Wilkinson was dismissed shortly afterwards and the Tasmanians were taught by rote a catechism in simplified English. It was, wrote an historian recently, 'the garbled verbage of fools'.¹⁰² The Bible, had Wilkinson remained to translate it, would not have been the 'garbled verbage of fools', but even its message may have been difficult to discern in the absence of living Christian faith in the lives of the Europeans who supposedly believed it.

The Lutheran missionary, K. Wilhelm Schmidt, at the Nundah Presbyterian Mission in Moreton Bay (now Brisbane), translated some Bible verses into a local language in 1842, but this mission lasted only a few years.¹⁰³ At the nearby Catholic mission on Stradbroke Island, the Passionist Fathers found that they could converse in the local language after six months 'on the ordinary matters of everyday life',¹⁰⁴ but that they did not have enough command of the language to converse on spiritual matters:

You see, then, our poor islanders are still very far from the holy ideas of faith. The means of inculcating them would be to preach readily to them in their native tongue. Their language is difficult. . . [which] makes it hard for us to express an opinion in regard to their conversion, for we are not yet able to explain the truths of faith to them in their own tongue in a way that would bring results. . .¹⁰⁵

This mission, too, survived only from 1843 to 1847. Far to the north, at Port Essington, the lonely, shipwrecked Catholic priest, Angelo Confalonieri, arrived in 1846, lived with the Iwaidja people, translated a catechism into Iwaidja and died of malaria in 1848.

During the 1840s the South Australian Lutheran missionaries Clamor Schurmann, Christian Teichelmann and Heinrich Meyer showed great interest in Aboriginal languages in Adelaide, Encounter Bay and Port Lincoln. They published descriptions of several languages and they used Aboriginal languages in their preaching and teaching. It does not appear that they actually undertook any formal translation of Bible passages or, if they did, none survive. They were certainly the kind of people who would have done so, but by 1853 they had all left due to lack of financial support.

In the same era in Western Australia, the Church of England was involved only in schools and orphanages. John Smithies' Wesleyan mission operated through the 1840s, to dwindle and close in 1855. Smithies believed that Aboriginal languages were incapable of fully expressing the gospel. They were useful for making friends with the Aborigines, to 'gain access to their hearts and feelings', but for little more.¹⁰⁶ Dom Rosendo Salvado began building his Benedictine monastery at New Norcia late in the 1840s but, despite his love of the Aboriginal people, he was never deeply interested in their languages.

Thus, by the middle of the nineteenth century, there had been only a very few sporadic attempts to translate some verses of scripture into Aboriginal languages. Only one full Gospel had been translated into any language – Threlkeld's Gospel of Luke in Awabakal – and the group who spoke it had all but disappeared.

Most of the great missionaries of the second half of the nineteenth century were not interested in Bible translation, despite their long association with Aboriginal people and their generally high regard for them. Indeed, there was never to be another translation of any book of the Bible into a language of NSW, Victoria or Tasmania.

The one missionary who, given a chance, would have undertaken translation, was William Ridley. He learned Aboriginal languages rapidly. 'It was almost as though a black fellow spoke,' observed young Tom Petrie.¹⁰⁷ He chose to work in northern NSW

among the Kamilaroi people and took a lifelong interest in their language. In a surprisingly modern manner, he linked adult literacy to Bible translation, preparing his small booklet *Gurre Kamilaroi* (Kamilaroi Sayings) designed both to teach people to read and to provide elementary Bible knowledge.¹⁰⁸ As this booklet was published in 1856, it contains the first Christian materials and Bible stories to be published in an Aboriginal language. Ridley, however, was denied his dream of a culture-conscious mission with Kamilaroi as the language of its Christian expression. The Presbyterian church could not find the funds to support him.

Missionaries like John Gribble at Warengesda, Matthew Hale at Poonindie and Daniel and Janet Matthews at Maloga were mostly preoccupied with rescuing Aboriginal people from lives of oppression and misery. Often the members of their missions came from different linguistic backgrounds, although to make much of this point would be to imply that they really did want to translate the Bible, but could not. Essentially these missionaries saw themselves as offering 'civilisation' alongside the gospel. It was unashamedly European civilisation and its language was to be English.

John Bulmer was proud of his skill in Maraura at Yelta. 'I had not been there many weeks before I could make myself understood by them,' he wrote. 'After I had been there six months I was told I was nearly a black fellow.'¹⁰⁹ Yet in Bulmer's nearly half-a-century at Lake Tyers, despite his sometimes detailed notes on Aboriginal culture, he did not translate any of the Bible into a dialect of Kurnai. It seems that people like Bulmer saw no future for Aboriginal languages.

The majority of nineteenth century missionaries generally seem to have failed even to see the merit of Bible translation for the generation among which they worked. The first conversion at the Moravian Wimmera mission happened directly as a result of translating John chapter 10 and the convert, Nathanael Pepper, went on to become an outstanding Christian leader. Yet William Spieseke and Frederick Hagenauer, although they may have used Aboriginal languages in the early days of their preaching, did not ever proceed to translate a book of the Bible.

A curious exception was George Taplin at Point McLeay in South Australia. Taplin translated some Bible selections from Genesis, Exodus and the Gospels of Matthew and John into Nar-

rindjeri (Narrinyeri) very early in his work at the Point McLeay mission. It was published in 1864, the first published portions of scripture in an Aboriginal language. Taplin seems to have been reluctant to use it, even finding it demeaning.¹¹⁰ His work was characterised by a very authoritarian, regimented approach to the children and young people and by confrontation with the older people. Despite his observation of the respect older people had for the word of God in their own language, it was not something to which he gave, finally, much attention. Yet, long after Taplin died, the Narrinyeri portions were reprinted in 1926 for the last remaining speakers. They were recently reprinted yet again at the peoples' request, a symbol to Point McLeay Christians, even if they have lost their language, that God speaks to them in the language of their hearts.

A group who showed deep interest in Aboriginal languages were the Jesuits in the Top End of the Northern Territory from 1882 to 1899. Both at their Darwin mission and later at their Daly River missions they gave a very high priority to the use of Aboriginal languages. They used Larakia in Darwin, but after the Darwin mission closed they concentrated on the Malak Malak language of the Daly River. So sophisticated did they find this language that they felt it exceeded the precision and expressive power of their own languages as well as the classical languages, an exceptional degree of praise for the much-maligned Aboriginal languages, even by today's standards. The Jesuits, however, despite translating hymns, catechisms and other religious materials, did not translate the Bible. This is not surprising, given the attitude of nineteenth century Catholicism to the supremacy of the Latin scriptures. What is surprising is the widespread lack of interest in Bible translation by Protestant churches.

The only group in the late nineteenth century who did place great emphasis on the translation of the Bible were the Lutherans associated with the central Australian missions of the Lutheran church of South Australia. Indeed, the Lutherans were the only missionaries to translate any whole book of the Bible into an Aboriginal language in the hundred year period which followed Lancelot Threlkeld's translation of Luke into Awabakal.

The first central Australian Lutheran mission was Bethesda at Cooper's Creek (SA) among the Dieri (Diyari) people. There, in the 1890s, Carl Strehlow and J.G. Reuther translated the whole of

the New Testament into Dieri. It was published in 1897, the first New Testament in an Australian language, 109 years after the first European settlement.¹¹¹ It became the book of a Christian Dieri community but, dispossessed of their land and ravaged by European diseases, the Dieri people rapidly decreased. In 1911, deaths outnumbered births by fifteen to one. Today there are only twelve elderly speakers of Dieri remaining. The Dieri scriptures are now high-priced curiosities in the catalogues of rare book-sellers.

Long before the demise of the Dieri people, Carl Strehlow was transferred to Hermannsburg, the Lutheran Finke River mission. A skilled linguist with a lifelong interest in Aboriginal languages and culture, Strehlow found the Aranda (Arrente) language well able to express complex abstract spiritual concepts. Working at Hermannsburg from 1894 until his death in 1922, Strehlow's lasting contribution to the Aranda people was his Bible translations. Portions of his translations were published in his substantial *Aranda Service Book*. No entire books were published until after his death. His Gospel of Luke was published in 1925 and all four Gospels in 1927. Although Carl Strehlow had finished the New Testament by his death, it was completely revised by his son, Theodore, and published by the Bible Society in 1956 (twelve years, incidentally, after the receipt of the manuscript). The Old Testament is still being translated today.

Elsewhere, there was little interest in Bible translation. UAM missionaries like Rod Schenk at Mt Margaret used Aboriginal languages informally, while his colleague at Ooldea, Harrie Green, translated choruses and Bible verses. Yet they were not convinced about Bible translation. Aboriginal people, to them, were destined to merge into an English-speaking society.

What could be called the modern era of Bible translation did not begin until the late 1950s, when missionary societies like CMS and MOM were sufficiently interested to appoint missionaries specifically as linguists to work on Aboriginal languages and to undertake Bible translation. In the meantime, however, there were a small number of outstanding missionaries whose belief in the absolute necessity for the Bible in the language of the people gave them a zeal to translate it with very little encouragement and even, in some cases, opposition.

The first of these was the Rev. J.R.B. Love. As a young

schoolteacher, Bob Love was appointed to work among the Worora people at the Presbyterian mission at Kunmunya in the coastal northwest of Western Australia in 1914.¹¹² Love had had an interest in Aborigines throughout his youth and young adulthood. A born linguist, he had a sense of idiom, and very early evidenced a deep interest in how the Worora people expressed things:

To speak of the heart as the seat of the emotions would not convey sense to a Worora man. Like Hebrew, which speaks of 'bowels of compassion', Worora speaks of the belly as the seat of gentle affections. A man of good disposition has a good belly. If he is righteously indignant, his belly is hot. The pancreas is regarded as the seat of anger and the nodules in the mesentery are supposed to be the seat of laughter. The ear is the home of the intellect, and one does not lay up memories in the heart, but in the ear.¹¹³

During World War I, Bob Love served with the Imperial Camel Brigade in Libya, was injured, awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal and Military Cross and repatriated home. After the war, Love completed studies for ordination. He then worked at Mapoon where he married Margaret Holinger in the James Ward Memorial Church in 1923. Four years later, in 1927, the Loves volunteered to go to the ailing Kunmunya mission.¹¹⁴

Bob Love was delighted to renew acquaintance with the Worora people and to continue his research into their language and culture begun a decade previously. He immediately set about increasing his knowledge of the Worora language and commenced Bible translation. By 1929, with the assistance of Njimandum, Barungga and Wondoonmoi, he had translated the Gospel of Mark, which the Bible Society published in 1930.¹¹⁵ In 1929, one of his Aboriginal co-translators, Njimandum, was the first person to be baptised in the Kunmunya church.¹¹⁶ Their translation of the Gospel of Luke was published in 1943.

Like all Bible translators, Love experienced the frustration of the time and effort it often took to find a word or phrase in Worora to translate a particular concept. Such problems have frequently suggested to the ignorant that Aboriginal languages were deficient. Almost invariably the problem is with the translator who cannot explain a concept to people whose English competence is low.

Translators often struggle with seemingly trivial words and sometimes discover the way to translate them with pure serendipity. Take Bob Love's experience, for instance:

The word for 'beginning' eluded us for long. . . I had been out with some of the lads, shooting pigeons. In our hunting we had followed a stream of water right up to its source, where a spring gushed out from under a rock. This suggested a line of approach for the hunt for the word 'beginning'.

Next language day I told my team what we had done. I sketched a map of the stream, naming the place, and following up the course to the place where it sprang from under the rock. I asked, 'What is this?'

Quick as a flash, Wondoonmoi put his finger on the source of the stream and said 'Wundjanguru'. He then ran his finger along the course of the stream till, at the place where it debouched into the sea, he said 'Umindjunguru'.

A great discovery! Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end!¹¹⁷

It is almost invariably the case that Bible translators, because of their knowledge of the local language and their respect for it, also come to know and respect local culture, for language and culture are inseparable. Love, after watching an Aboriginal ceremony which included washing and the offering of water to drink, wrote, 'I had been witnessing rites akin to the most sacred observances of the Christian faith.'¹¹⁸ Love, like many translators, also discovered that the act of translation itself added to the meaning of the Bible in the world. Aborigines thus, he wrote, 'contribute to this continual growth in meaning that the Bible experiences with each new translation'.¹¹⁹

The Loves moved to Ernabella in 1941, where Bob Love became superintendent. Here he continued his enthusiasm for Bible translation, cooperating with R.M. Trudinger and several Aboriginal co-translators in the translation of the Gospel of Mark into Pitjantjatjara, which the Bible Society published in 1949.

The other two great Bible translators of this period – in fact the only other Bible translators – were the CMS missionaries, Nell Harris and Len Harris. Arriving at Oenpelli as Dick Harris' wife in 1933, Nell Harris felt that Bible translation was urgent. This was not a view which the earlier missionaries had shared. People like

Alf Dyer not only lacked the competence, but were too busy surviving the immense problems of their isolated mission stations.

For Dyer, it was daunting enough to discover that there was more than one language spoken on the mission:

If you drew a circle of 100 miles radius round the station you would find you had from five to ten languages amongst the people. We actually started school with eleven scholars speaking five different languages. We had not time to study a language, so for us there was only one way out; we taught them English, not pidgin English but proper English. When I started daily Services, they were given by interpretation into the three best-known languages; nearly all who attended could speak at least three languages; one man I knew spoke seven.¹²⁰

Nell Harris did not let this deter her. She and Len Harris were the first missionaries to realise that Aboriginal people were naturally multilingual. They realised that there were languages common to all the people of a region and that even though a language spoken by all members of a speech community may not strictly be a particular person's 'first language' or 'mother tongue', it is part of that person's language repertoire. Nell Harris deduced that the best-known *lingua franca* at Oenpelli was Gunwinggu (Kunwinjku). With the help of Arthur Capell of the University of Sydney and several Aboriginal co-translators, she translated the Gospel of Mark and the First Epistle of John during the 1930s. The Bible Society published them in 1942.

At the Roper River and Groote Eylandt missions, Len Harris was convinced that the people needed the Bible in their own language. Earlier missionaries, like E.C. Lousada, had collected words, but none had attempted Bible translation. So, as well as being superintendent, chaplain, medical officer, airstrip builder, coast-watcher and everything else, he began translating it. He discovered that Nunggubuyu was understood widely throughout the region; at Roper River and on the east Arnhem Land coast as well as on Groote Eylandt. With Grace, Joshua and Bidigainj he set about translating the Gospel of Mark and the Epistle of James. Len Harris, too, had to struggle to explain the concepts for which his Nunggubuyu was as inadequate as their English. One particularly difficult word was 'hallowed' in the Lord's Prayer:

Grace had just had a baby boy and I had baptised him Winston. 'Why did you call him Winston?' I asked. She told me that I kept telling them about the war and Winston Churchill and that she wanted to name her baby after an important man. It suddenly struck me how to get Grace to say something which might mean 'hallowed'.

'If you wanted someone important,' I asked, 'why didn't you call him Jesus?' Grace was astonished.

'That name belong Jesus all by himself,' she said.

'How do you say *that* in Nunggubuyu?' I asked with relief.¹²¹

Len Harris, Grace, Bidigainj and Joshua finished Mark's Gospel in 1945. Soon afterwards, Len Harris read it in the evenings by the campfires beside the Roper River. He did not know that a great Aboriginal leader, Madi, was in the audience. When the reading was completed, Madi walked 170 kilometres to Numbulwar (Rose River) to fetch his own people:

Four canoe loads of them came down the coast and up the Roper River to the mission, a journey which took them two weeks. When they arrived I got a message – an order, really – from Madi to come and read them that 'Anambalaman Analawu' – good story. So every night for several nights I read to them by the campfires. On the last night, Madi explained that he had always thought Jesus was only the white man's God. 'Now I know,' said Madi, 'that Jesus can speak Nunggubuyu.'¹²²

After this, finding he had a few weeks to spare, Len Harris asked Grace if there was another part of the Bible she would like to have translated:

'Let's do Genesis,' she said. I told her it was a very big book, but she said she only wanted the first three chapters. 'They are about the beginning of things,' she said. 'You have seen our dances of how the fish came, how the kangaroo came. . . we are interested in the beginning of things.'

So we translated the first three chapters of Genesis and I read them to the people one afternoon. They were very keenly interested. Next morning, everyone was bleary eyed. I asked Grace if she had slept. 'None of us slept,' she said. 'We talked all night. I told you we were very interested in the beginnings of things.'¹²³

It was with deep regret that Len Harris, for reasons of family health, was forced to return south after the war. It was with even more regret that he learned that the missionaries who followed him were not particularly interested in Aboriginal languages. Although the Bible Society published the little volume containing Mark and James in 1948, it was little used. Missionaries considered themselves too busy to learn languages and so the translation was allowed to gather dust.

The same applied even to Nell Harris' contemporaries at Oenpelli. The Gunwinggu and Nunggubuyu translations were not used by the missionaries because they couldn't read them and because other matters always seemed so much more important than serious language learning. Yet a few Aboriginal people had copies and treasured them. Thirty years later, when Len Harris returned to Groote Eylandt, the people he had known who were still living gathered and he read to them from his original translation. Old people wept. 'It is the language of our fathers,' they said.

Len Harris was not the only one angered at the indifference of missionaries to the significance of the Bible in the language of the people. Theodor Webb of the Methodist mission, for all his deep interest in Aboriginal culture, had never had time to undertake translation work. He was frustrated that his fellow missionaries and his mission board seemed indifferent. MOM policy was no more than writing on a piece of paper. 'Why don't the missionaries just go and preach the gospel to the Aborigines?' Webb was often asked by southern supporters.¹²⁴

Webb knew more than anyone that the gospel in English was in the language of foreigners and often incomprehensible. The parables, for example, chosen by Jesus to make his message clear to ordinary people, dealt with worlds unknown to the Aborigines. To tell Aboriginal people to build their house on the rock instead of the sand was to tell them you were crazy. Who would erect their bark shelter on cold hard rock when they could put it on soft warm sand?¹²⁵ Webb realised that to impart the full, deep meaning of the gospel was a long slow process of learning the local language, and understanding the social organisation of the tribes and their world view. A vastly different culture had to be studied in depth. But there was never enough time. Even in his last year at Milingimbi, Webb had to plough, harrow, log, fence, build, repair boats and perform a myriad of other tasks. There was a

constant staff shortage. Webb asked:

Why is it that there is not and never has been a single one of us with a real knowledge of an Aboriginal tongue? Why has there been not a Gospel translated into the tongue of the people? . . . Is it supposed that these things, which are recognised as of first importance on other fields, are unnecessary here? Is it that the board has struck in us such a lot of duds that we are incapable of accomplishing them? Or is it that the policy of the board has rendered it impossible for us to really attempt them?¹²⁶

After the war, interest in Bible translation slowly emerged. Bobe Love's efforts in Pitjantjatjara and the continuing Lutheran use of Aranda influenced people like UAM's Wilf Douglas to give a new priority to language work. The major step forward, however, was to occur in Arnhem Land. CMS, like MOM, had words on paper about language and culture. In the field, however, there were still senior missionaries who thought they had got along in English or in Pidgin English and who influenced new missionaries away from their short-lived resolutions to learn languages. Despite their words, the mission boards, who could easily have rectified this by the appointment of linguists, lacked the vision or the will to do so.

In 1951, Beulah Lowe was appointed by MOM as a schoolteacher to Milingimbi. In 1952 Judith Stokes was appointed by CMS as a schoolteacher to Angurugu (Groote Eylandt). Both of these women came with an interest in languages derived simply from having studied French and Latin. Beulah Lowe encountered discouragement, even before she left Sydney: 'Before I went up north I was looking forward to learning the language. I was told that it would be no trouble at all to learn an Aboriginal language. "They have very few words," someone told me. "They have no real language at all to speak of," said another.'¹²⁷ Both women found that their schoolteaching was greatly enhanced by learning and using some of the local language. Both started formal language learning, but their mission boards, despite their written policies, only barely tolerated their enthusiasms. 'I was told I could only work on translation in my spare time,' said Judith Stokes.¹²⁸

It was not for another six years or so that Beulah Lowe and Judith Stokes were released from other duties to devote themsel-

ves fully to Bible translation. They were to become the first, and in many ways the greatest, of the modern Australian Bible translators. Working on the Gupapuyngu languages of Milingimbi, Beulah Lowe and her Aboriginal co-translators worked initially on the Gospel of Mark, so frequently translated first because it is the shortest Gospel. It was published in 1967. Beulah Lowe continued working as a translator in a wide range of duties, including interpreting for court cases, bilingual education, hymn writing and, of course, Bible translation until ill health forced her to retire in 1977.

Judith Stokes spent the remainder of her working life on the unique and complex Anindilyakwa language of Groote Eylandt. She retired at the end of 1989 after nearly forty years there. The work of the Anindilyakwa translation team has long been of immense significance to the Groote Eylandt church. A 'mini-Bible' containing Genesis, Jonah, Luke, Ephesians, I Timothy and James will be published in 1990, just after Judith Stokes retires. Also on Groote Eylandt, another talented linguist, Julie Waddy, has been working on recording the vast local biological knowledge, a task requested by the community to ensure that the knowledge is not lost.

The Rev. Earl Hughes was appointed in 1956 to Numbulwar, the community where the language on which Len Harris had worked, Nunggubuyu, was the mother tongue. Hughes set about compiling a dictionary. 'It's not *real* work,' commented one of the older generation of missionaries. Today at Numbulwar, Michael and Margaret Hore, Langayina and Anne are working on the New Testament. Some portions have already been translated. 'Because of Len Harris' translation long ago,' said Michael Hore, 'Numbulwar people have a very positive attitude to Bible translation.'¹²⁹ Working as part of the Nunggubuyu team, Langayina, a Ridharrngu man, is making his own translation of the New Testament into his own language, a close relative of Nunggubuyu.

Throughout Australia, there are now thirty translation programs. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) and the Bible Society in Australia continue to be key organisations in this task. A new phenomenon is Bible translation on Catholic missions like Bathurst Island, where the new Catholic enthusiasm for the use of the Bible is evidenced in an interest in having the Bible in the language of Aboriginal Catholics. There are now Aboriginal Christian

churches in many of the places where translation is taking place, which is quite different from the old translation context where the people had not yet heard the gospel at all. Thus the Aboriginal churches are involved in their own translation programs.

Although the most urgent translation priority is always one of the Gospels in order that Christ's life and words be in the language of the people, there is a deep significance to Aboriginal people in the Old Testament as its stories are now coming alive to them in translation. They read of the patriarchs, nomads who journeyed around the land setting up rocks or other signs, creating 'sacred sites' like Bethel, Peniel and Shechem. They read, too, of a law like their own 'Old Testament', a strict law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. They read also a law which was, finally, powerless to save and was fulfilled only in the person of Christ.

There is one very special, unique Bible translation project in the north: the Kriol Bible translation program.

We have seen how the Roper River mission began after widespread massacre of Aboriginal people in the valley of the Roper River, and how the mission provided a refuge for people of eight tribes. Although this undoubtedly saved their lives, it created an unprecedented mix of languages. The multilingual adults could understand each other, but the young children, growing up on the mission, could not. Using human language-inventing skills (the human language 'bioprogram'), the young people invented their own language from raw materials available to them such as Pidgin English, English, Aboriginal languages and innate language. With them it grew up into the language of adulthood, a full Creole language capable of expressing all that languages need to express.¹³⁰

Although Kriol began at Roper River, a similar but slower process occurred elsewhere, particularly on the cattle stations and in the army camps after World War II. There was a coalascing, so that Kriol is now the mother tongue of many thousands of people and is well understood by at least 30 000.

John Sandefur of the Summer Institute of Linguistics began working as a linguist at Roper River in 1973, concentrating at first on the grammar and dictionary, developing Kriol orthography and surveying its geographical distribution. There was opposition from those Europeans who regarded it as improper, a language not fit for the gospel. There were also Aboriginal people who, after years

of being denigrated, had themselves become ashamed of it. This was no different to dozens of other languages throughout the world which have been thought to be unfit for the gospel. English was one such language, said to be neither good Saxon nor good French and the language of unsophisticated people.¹³¹

Over a ten-year-period, the Kriol-speaking people developed a pride in their language. It was their own, part of their distinct identity, and the mirror of their history. By 1983, translation of Genesis was complete and a 'pastiche' Gospel, because no single Gospel is complete in itself. Another major book was to be included in the first publication. The Christian Aboriginal people's choice was clear and immediate. It was to be Revelation. It is a book of dreaming, so important a communication medium to Aboriginal people. It is also a book which speaks of the righting of injustice and the removal of oppression. It speaks in dream imagery of a God who will set history right.¹³²

The book of selections, called *Holi Baibul*, was published and released early in 1985. There were concurrent celebrations at Ngukurr, Barunga, Darwin, and in the Kimberleys. T-shirts designed for the occasion showed a Bible and a map of *Kriol Kantri* (Kriol Country). The slogan read *dubala brom God* - 'both from God'.

In March 1989, the last verse of the New Testament was finished by the translation team of John and Joy Sandefur and the Aboriginal translators William and Marjorie Hall, and Ishmael and Irene Andrews. It will be published, together with some of the Old Testament, in 1990. The translation team hopes to finish the whole Bible before the end of the century. It will probably be the first full Bible for any group of Aboriginal Australians.

A few years ago, there was a large Aboriginal festival at Angurugu on Groote Eylandt. Aboriginal people from all around the Gulf and beyond came to dance and sing and join the joyful expression of their Aboriginality. The Christians among them also gathered from time to time at St Andrew's Church and shared in singing and giving testimonies and joining in a joyful expression of their common fellowship in Christ. When it came to the Numbulwar people's turn, there was only a small number of people who happened to be there. They at first sang a hymn in English, but everyone then asked them to sing in Nunggubuyu. They hesitated and then said they knew 'Amazing Grace' in Nunggubuyu. And so

they sang, repeating the one word:

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, . .

It was truly and completely and perfectly in Nunggubuyu. Everyone in the audience knew exactly what they had done. 'Sing it again,' someone called out and they did, and we all joined in. I remembered my father and Madi, both of whom have now passed away, and Madi's prophetic words by a campfire long ago: 'Now I know that Jesus can speak Nunggubuyu.'

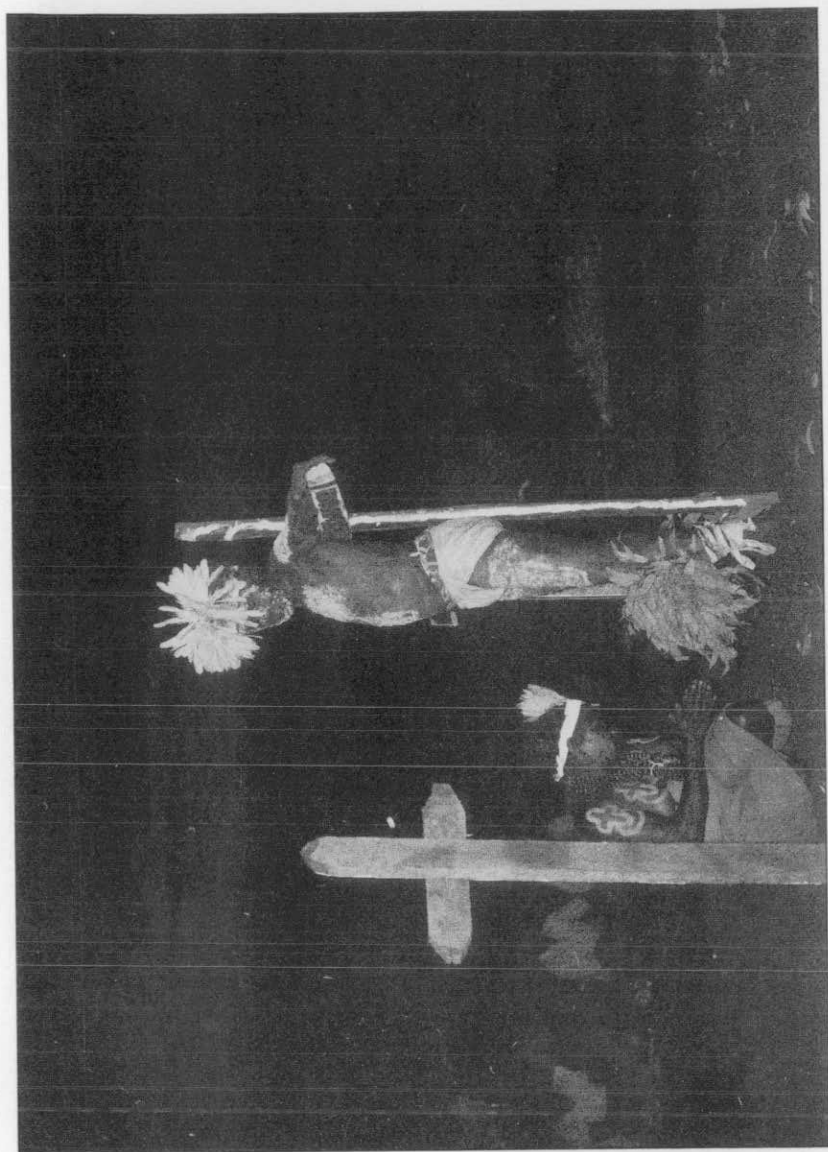
An indigenous Aboriginal church?

The proportion of Christians among Aboriginal people is higher than it is among non-Aboriginal Australians. Many Aboriginal people believed the gospel and accepted Christianity, and many continue to do so. There are now, as well, Aboriginal families with several generations of Christians.

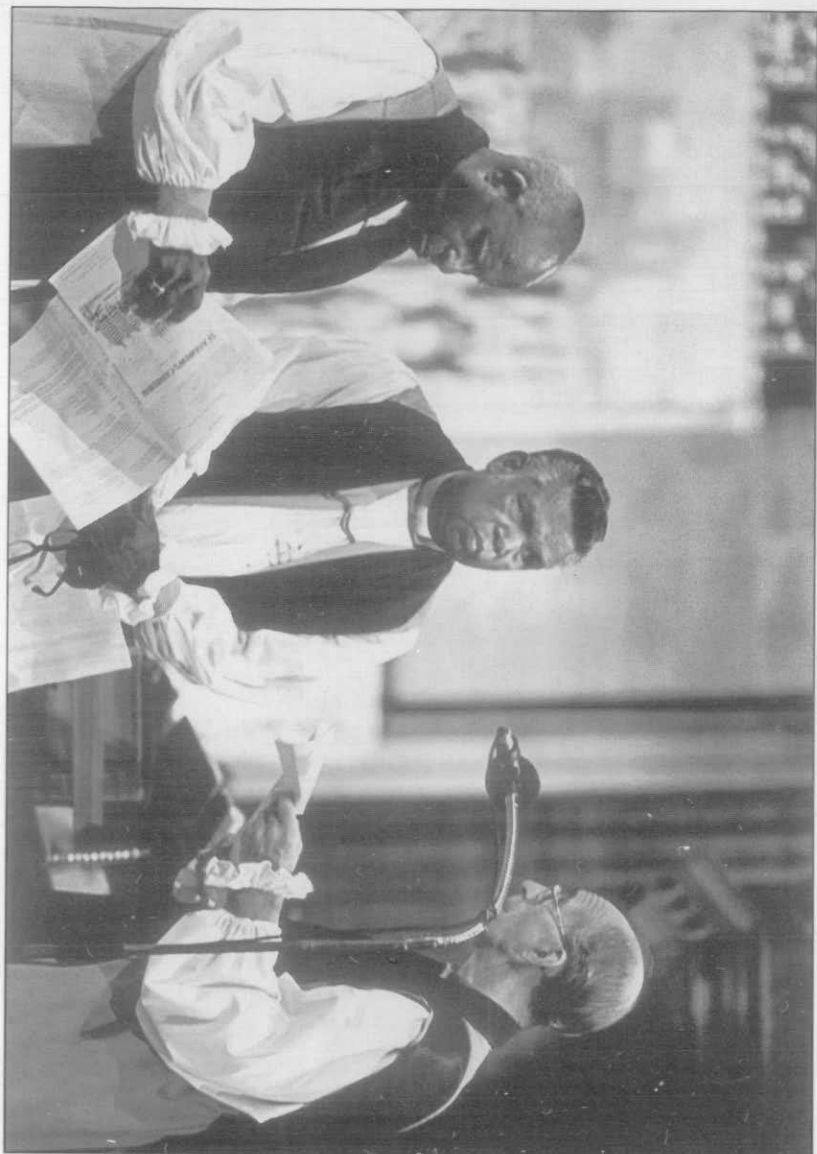
Very few Aborigines in the past rejected Christianity in an absolute sense: that is, very few Aboriginal people thought Christianity was fake or that the missionaries were lying. Those who made a conscious rejection of Christianity mainly rejected its relevance to them as Aborigines. They did not regard the Christian God as false. They saw God, rather, as the God of the white people. In response to Aboriginal questions about the colour of God, missionaries from the very earliest of days assured Aboriginal people that 'God was neither black nor white'.¹³³ Yet the missionaries' insistence upon European ways often counteracted their preaching, for if they preached a God who required Aborigines to turn away even from that which was good in their culture and embrace Western culture in its totality, it is not surprising that many Aboriginal people should have rejected such a God.

It is also true that Aboriginal people judged the preaching of the missionaries by the witness of white society. An old Aboriginal man at Roper River once told Len Harris that some Aborigines thought the Christian God was a weak God because white people so flagrantly broke his laws and remained unpunished.¹³⁴

From this and many other such anecdotes it is evident that Aboriginal people thought very seriously about the gospel when it



126. A Warlpiri Easter *purlapa* (corroboree), Easter 1984,
performed by Barney Jampijinpa (Jesus),
Rosie Nangala (Mary) and the Warlpiri dancers
Acknowledgement: Tony Swain. Reproduced with permission.



127. On behalf of the Anglican Church, Archbishop Grindrod expresses the sorrow of his church about the past mistreatment of Aborigines, to Aboriginal Bishop Arthur Malcolm
Acknowledgement: Ramon Williams. Reproduced with permission.

was presented to them. As I have said already, those who criticise missionaries by accusing them of brainwashing the Aborigines are guilty of denigrating the Aborigines more than the missionaries, as if Aboriginal people were lacking in intelligence, will or discernment and as if their law was so insignificant that they could easily set it aside. Aboriginal people gave Christianity a great deal of thoughtful attention. A possible exception to my generalisation that Aborigines were not brainwashed by missionaries is in those places where there was a dormitory system. It is important to realise, however, that it was never as rigid on the remote missions in traditional communities, where children were never completely out of touch with their parents, as it was in the southern orphanages and children's homes. Even those who grew up in those regimented southern institutions rarely give the impression of having been brainwashed, but of having made conscious choices in their later lives.

The most celebrated case of what has been said to be a rejection of Christianity was the withdrawal of the Apostolic Church of Australia, a small fundamentalist evangelical church, from Jigalong, WA in 1969 after having conducted a mission there since 1945. There had been no male converts, but a few teenage girls had joined the Apostolic church.

Jigalong gained considerable publicity in the 1960s over the imprisonment and caning of girls for trivial offences by the missionaries of the Apostolic church. Its fame as a place where Christianity had been consciously rejected arose, however, as a result of Robert Tonkinson's book, *The Jigalong Mob: Aboriginal Victors of the Desert Crusade*.¹³⁵ The title was enough. Most people who have pointed out to me the rejection of Christianity at Jigalong have not read the book.

In the book, 'the rejection of Christianity' is part of a chapter heading, but it is evident on reading the book that not even Tonkinson believed that that was exactly what happened. Certainly, the Jigalong people questioned the truth of certain aspects of the gospel, but essentially they came to the conclusion that Jesus was for Christians, not for them and not even for the non-Christian whites they knew who did not keep the Christian 'law'.

What the Jigalong people rejected was the distorted or incomplete version of the gospel as presented by these missionaries. Aboriginal people at Jigalong would most certainly have judged the

gospel, not just by the preaching of the missionaries, but by their lives. What they really rejected was the missionaries. Tonkinson writes:

The Aborigines are also disinterested in Christianity because it seems to prohibit smoking, swearing, drinking, sex, dancing and having fun. Also, judging by the behaviour of most of the missionaries, Christianity appears to lack values such as generosity, love, compassion, tolerance, and selflessness, all of which are important in Aboriginal culture. The irony is, of course, that these prime Aboriginal values have much in common with many in Christianity, but the local missionaries have failed to convey this similarity.¹³⁶

Tonkinson returned to Jigalong twenty years later in the 1980s. Interestingly, he has revised his views. He no longer agrees with his own assessments in the 1960s and has been honest enough to say so,¹³⁷ which I respect as evidence of his academic integrity.

Several things had happened since the 1960s. The first was that the Jigalong people encountered some Christians who were not the same as the Apostolic church missionaries. Prominent among these were SIL linguists engaged in Bible translation, Jim and Marjorie Marsh and later, Bill and Audrey Langlands. These linguists were not only undomineering, they were interested in the local Martu Wangka language. The Jigalong people found difficulty in categorising them. They were not 'white fella' (like most white people) nor were they 'Christian' (like the Apostolic missionaries). A number of people responded to the unassuming quiet Christian witness of these people.¹³⁸

A second event was the influence of the Aboriginal 'evangelist mob' from Warburton. The 'team' was all Aboriginal and many Jigalong people responded positively to the preaching, some dramatically giving up alcohol. One of the more significant features was that those who became Christians felt that they were the ones best fitted to discern the relationship between Christianity and Aboriginal culture.¹³⁹ They felt that simplistic prohibitions could no longer be forced upon them by missionaries who knew nothing of their culture.

The Warburton Aborigines' evangelistic outreach was part of

the Aboriginal Christian revival, the 'Black Crusade' of the last decade. In March 1979, an exuberant Christian revival movement commenced among Aboriginal people at Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island). The revival was led by the Rev. Djiniyini Gondarra of the Uniting church and the main evangelist was Kevin Rurrumbu Dhurrkay. This movement spread throughout Arnhem Land, was transported to Warburton, Western Australia, and thence throughout the goldfields and Kimberley regions.

In August 1982, a gathering at Mt Margaret attracted more than 2 000 Aboriginal people.¹⁴⁰ 'Miracle Days at Mt Margaret' proclaimed the UAM *Messenger*.¹⁴¹ The UAM saw the revival as the fruit of their long and faithful work.¹⁴² In many ways, it was a genuine 'revival', which means that people who already had a knowledge of Christian things were called to a deeper renewal and commitment. Yet there was another sense in which it was independent of the UAM, because a key feature – perhaps the key feature – was that the revival was completely led by Aboriginal people.

The importance of the witness of Aboriginal Christians is evident in the testimony of many who have turned from alcoholism and despair to meaningful lives of service to their own people. Jacky McLean tells his own story:

It is really hard for white people to reach out. . . to Aboriginals themselves. People look at the colour. . . but with black talking to black, people come to know the Lord.

. . . When I was in the boys' home at Warburton mission, I used to go to Sunday school. . . when I left school I lived a really hard life. . . People couldn't recognise me, I changed so badly. I used to steal cars and money, break into the store and the church. People didn't like me. . . I used to escape from jail.

When Kevin and Alfred came down from Elcho Island the Spirit of the Lord really spoke to me and I came back to the Lord. . . I was able. . . to be a church leader in my own community and to do something for my own people . . .¹⁴³

This revival, which still continues ten years after it began, is one of the signs of an Aboriginal church emerging and coming of age. Aboriginal leadership and responsibility for evangelism is one of the marks of the end of missions and the beginning of churches.

There have been other revivals, too. As well as Galiwin'ku, another centre of a rather different kind of revival is Yarrabah. The old Yarrabah mission became a government reserve in 1960. The 1960s and 1970s were dark years. Back in 1893, on seeing some drunken Aborigines, Ernest Gribble prophetically noted in his diary that alcohol was 'a terrible evil which is only just beginning to grow on these natives'.¹⁴⁴ Gribble was right and until very recently the problems of alcohol and violence seemed insurmountable.

There was, nevertheless, a small but faithful group of Christians, led by an Aboriginal Church Army evangelist, Rev. Arthur Malcolm, a great-nephew of James Noble. The situation was grim when, in the 1980s, God gave to the Yarrabah people a very special gift. They began to see frequent visions.

Occasional visions had been part of the religious experience of Yarrabah people back in Ernest Gribble's time.¹⁴⁵ The 1980s visions became both common and full of deep significance. Perhaps the most dramatic is in a 'butterfly painting' made by a small boy in kindergarten on 14 June 1983 by putting red, blue and yellow paint on a piece of cardboard and folding it in half. On opening the painting, a remarkably clear head believed by many to be the head of Christ was revealed, with crown of thorns and hands folded in prayer.¹⁴⁶

This and many other visions, mostly of Christ, are a very important manifestation of the renewal that is taking place at Yarrabah. There are Europeans, including some clergy, who scoff, but the Bishop of North Queensland, John Lewis, sees the visions as 'extremely significant and in keeping with a very ancient tradition in the church'.¹⁴⁷

There are three or four hundred deeply committed Christians now in a total population of about 1 500 Aboriginal people. Bishop Lewis has been quick to recognise leaders among these new Christians. Many have been ordained as deacons and priests, with training being undertaken under Arthur Malcolm and his wife. There is a great impact on the Yarrabah community. It is not just an impact of numbers, but of quality and sincerity and the obvious miracles of changed lives. It is especially striking that most of the core group, especially the priests and deacons, were, by their own definition, previously alcoholics and drug addicts. Their conversion has been total and lasting.¹⁴⁸

It would be unrealistic to pretend that all the problems, challenges and dilemmas faced by Yarrabah are close to being solved. But the evidence of God's working in the lives of damaged people is very evident. Margaret Patterson gives her own testimony:

My main problem was drinking. When I used to get my cheque every fortnight, I put my children aside. My friends always came first. We used to go down to the canteen, where I would spend all my money. After the canteen closed I would look around for more grog. . . The next day, when I was sober, I had no more money for my children.

One day. . . I went up to the rectory to see Father Wayne and Val. . . They told me about Jesus. . . I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour. . . only one person can help you, and that is Jesus.¹⁴⁹

The Yarrabah priests and deacons unite in the James Noble Fellowship. They believe that Yarrabah is the mother church to Aboriginal people in the north and throughout Australia. Several Yarrabah priests are serving elsewhere in Australia. In 1985, Arthur Malcolm was consecrated bishop, the first Aboriginal bishop. Because of the part played by James Noble in north Queensland, in the Northern Territory and in the north-west, Aboriginal Christians in the Anglican church in those places see Arthur Malcolm as the symbol that they have come of age. A Yarrabah resident said, 'The seeds that the missionaries sowed many years ago have now been watered by our own priests and deacons.'¹⁵⁰

The difficulties which face the Yarrabah community are still enormous. Christians are deeply divided as to whether alcohol is sinful or allowable in moderation. There is still a long and difficult road ahead. But God is present in his people and there is therefore hope.

This truth can be seen in many, many traditional Aboriginal communities where missionaries have worked. The translation of the Bible into Aboriginal languages, the emergence and recognition of Aboriginal Christian leaders and the Aboriginal-led revival have all come together as a powerful indigenous force. The effect is being felt in many places. On Groote Eylandt, for example, the church has struggled for many years and the powers of evil in the form of petrol-sniffing and other self-destructive actions have

seemed at times to be near-victorious. In March 1988, Bishop Malcolm accompanied the Archbishop of Canterbury on a visit to Groote Eylandt. Bishop Malcolm remained behind for a teaching and preaching program, particularly challenging the young petrol-sniffers to commit their lives to Christ. On 24 May, 108 people were baptised in the Angurugu River.

The common thread that runs through the changed lives of so many of the previous examples is the impact of the gospel when proclaimed in the lives or preaching of Aboriginal Christians themselves. This thread has run through the whole of this book. It is in the story of Nathanael Pepper at the old Moravian mission in Victoria, in James Unaipon at Point McLeay and in 'Blind' Moses at Hermannsburg.

The surprising thing to me is that it has taken so long for so many compassionate, zealous, well-intentioned white missionaries to glimpse this truth. Some are still surprised. In his little book, *Fire in the Spinifex*, Ian Lindsay tells the wonderful story of revival in central Australia. Why did the revival happen, he asked, when God 'knew there would be a shortage of missionaries'? The missionaries had laboured for fifty years. 'Why then this timing of the Lord? . . . Why did God wait until He knew that there would soon be no permanent staff at Warburton mission?' Lindsay asks.¹⁵¹

The truth is that the gospel was at last being proclaimed by Aboriginal Christians. They had, for so long, been made to feel second-class Christians. The gospel was still the possession of the white Christians. They were the givers: Aborigines were the receivers. This has now changed and revival should not come as a surprise. We should expect it. The missionaries, however imperfect, brought the gospel. People responded, but real growth in the Christian community had to wait until Aboriginal people themselves assumed responsibility for evangelisation.

Countless books and papers on the climax of the church's mission in the world have used the phrase 'from mission to church' in their titles. It is hard to find a better phrase to describe that transition which marks the end of subordination and the beginning of autonomy.

While ever the Christian presence in a community is seen as a foreign mission, the local Christians are clients, they are objects of mission, they are seen as not yet able to make decisions about themselves. They need the presence of the missionaries to preach,

to teach and to guide their lives. In becoming a church, a particular level of Christian maturity is reached where the local Christian community becomes self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating.

Henry Venn, one of the leading founders of CMS in England at the end of the eighteenth century, said that the main goal of missionary activity would be self-euthanasia. Missionaries should so work that an indigenous church is planted which doesn't need them any more. The missionaries should do themselves out of a job.

This ideal has been difficult to reach, for it has proven an immensely difficult task for missionary societies which have worked for generations in an area, or for missionaries who have given most of their working lives to a mission, to decide that they are no longer necessary. Speaking of CMS missionaries in Africa, an African bishop visiting Groote Eylandt said that the missionaries did not know when to go home. The missionaries in Africa, he said, had obeyed Christ's command. They had preached the gospel. A church had arisen and they should have gone home victorious long before they did.

The missionaries all too often feel that the local people are 'not ready yet'. The problem is the set of standards by which they judge, for if people are not given responsibility for themselves and not allowed to make their own mistakes, they will forever be seen as unready. But once the break has happened, once the local people have been released and empowered to become a church rather than objects of mission, then the missionary societies, as representatives of the wider church, can enter into a new relationship. Then the missionary society can serve the local church, rather than run it, providing the personnel or support that the local church requests.

The new relationship is not one of domination and subservience, but one of partnership. Barry and Lois Downes, missionaries with the Australian Baptist Missionary Society (ABMS) in Alice Springs, recently spoke to me of this:

One of the strengths of the ABMS approach is that we actually have cut-off dates on all our centres where missionaries are working. The dates are negotiable, but they are real dates and they serve to remind us all that we are missionaries, not locals,

and guests in someone else's country. We have a job to do for the Lord and we should expect that job to finish.¹⁵²

In Australia, as in so many parts of the world, such a transition has not proved easy. Long-serving missionaries have often found great difficulty in entering a new relationship in which they no longer were in charge of decision-making. Yet many have shown themselves well able to make this transition.

Lance and Gwen Tremlett were long-time CMS missionaries on Groote Eylandt where Lance became mission superintendent. Now that such a mission authority structure no longer exists, the Tremletts have willingly undergone training and now serve as literacy workers in the Kriol literacy program associated with the Kriol Bible translation. Theirs is now a very different role but a crucial one.

In north Queensland, Alan and Phillipa Rushbrook at Kowinyama typify the new style of missionary. As lay people, they work as community development officers alongside the Aboriginal deacon, the Rev. Nancy Dick, assisting the local Aboriginal people to define the goals of their community and to develop strategies and structures to achieve them. They are jointly supported by the Anglican Diocese of Carpentaria, and World Vision.

The transition from mission to church is never easy and the failures are not only on the part of the missionaries. Aboriginal Christian leaders have sometimes failed themselves and their church. But there has also been healing and there is much evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in what is taking place in many parts of the continent.

As it was in the southern missions in urban and rural Aboriginal contexts, so it was in the traditional communities of the north and centre. There was reluctance to recognise indigenous Christian leadership. I do not mean that the missions did not give responsibilities to Aboriginal Christians. The Lutherans long ago formalised the position of evangelist, and other missions had roles such as 'native helper', 'lay reader' and so on. The contribution of Aboriginal leaders who served in these positions was great. But they were always below the missionaries. In many cases their lives were under much greater scrutiny than white Christian leaders. Every little lapse was written down and the subject of discussion. They knew without any doubt that until Aboriginal

leaders were fully ordained to the position and status and function of white clergy, they were considered still unsuitable or unready.

I believe there is a connection between the failure to lay emphasis on Bible translation and the failure to give recognition to Aboriginal leadership. Both spring from a lack of a real conviction that Aboriginal people would ever truly own the gospel; both spring from the doubt that Aboriginal people and their languages would ever have a distinct future of their own. Furthermore, for as long as access even to part of the Bible is only through the language of the missionary, Aboriginal people remain clients, objects of mission, dependent, for at least part of their knowledge of the Bible, upon the presence of the missionary. Indeed, the English language itself is not just the language of the missionary: it is also the language of oppression.

The first ordained Aboriginal person was James Noble, but he was an exception. His ordination was a mark of his own personal quality. He was not a symbol that the Yarrabah or Forrest River missions had come of age. He was the personal protégé of Ernest Gribble and a great Christian leader, but it is also significant that he was only ordained to the first of the three Anglican orders of deacon, priest and bishop. He was never made a priest. He was never Ernest Gribble's equal. Despite this, it is most significant that of the first missionaries to Roper River, it is the Aboriginal man, James Noble, whom Roper River people most closely identify with bringing the gospel.

It was to be a long time after James Noble before any Aboriginal Christians from traditional communities were ordained. It is not surprising that this should first have taken place in the community where Bible translation had the greatest time depth. At Hermannsburg, the gospel had been translated into Aranda around the turn of this century. In 1964, the Lutheran Church ordained Conrad Raberaba and Peter Bulla at Hermannsburg. It had taken nearly one hundred years from the commencement of the mission to acknowledge that any Aranda Christian leader was ready for ordination.

The next person to be ordained was Lazarus Lamilami of the Croker Island Methodist mission in 1966. The Methodist missions began training local preachers in the mid-1960s. Some of the missionaries have told me that this was in part hastened by the land rights controversy at Yirrkala which had emphasised to the

mission that Aboriginal leadership was emerging in the secular world and that the church should not lag behind. Lazarus Lamilami was a product of this local training as was the next ordinand, Philip Magurlnir.

The Presbyterian missions did not, as far as I can ascertain, ordain an Aboriginal person. Church elders had important roles and there were Aboriginal elders, although their remoteness from presbyteries made it difficult for them to fit in to church structures.¹⁵³ The Presbyterian Church had a traditional association of ministry with a high level of scholarship and academic stature. This militated against acceptance of Aboriginal Christian leaders for ordination.

There was, however, one outstanding case of church development among the Presbyterian missions. This was Ernabella in the north of South Australia. The Adelaide surgeon and Aboriginal supporter, Charles Duguid, was disturbed by injustices perpetrated against the Pitjantjatjara people. His revelations were an embarrassment to the Presbyterian Church, so in 1937 he was able to persuade the Presbyterian assembly to purchase a sheep station to provide a buffer between traditional Pitjantjatjara people and encroaching white settlement. The plan was to preserve as much Aboriginal language and culture as possible and, in this, Duguid was fortunate in having the support of Bob Love of Kunmunya, who moved to Ernabella. 'There was to be no compulsion or imposition of our way of life on the Aborigines, nor deliberate interference with tribal custom. . . only people trained in some particular skill should be on the mission staff, and. . . they must learn the tribal language.'¹⁵⁴

There was a school in which Pitjantjatjara literacy was the basis of the curriculum. Gospels, hymns and a catechism were translated into Pitjantjatjara, but there was no coercion to attend church or Bible studies which were held in the local language. In the 1950s, large numbers of people sought baptism and by the 1960s a strong indigenous Christian leadership was emerging.

In the 1960s, outstations were created at places like Amata and Fregon. Christian couples moved to these places and to other nearby settlements including Finke and Indulkuna. Christians were also involved in the 1970s movement to traditional homeland centres such as Pipalyatjara.¹⁵⁵ A structure emerged more like the home church movement – some would say more like the New

Testament model – with large numbers of small congregations and thirty Aboriginal men and women as elders who had oversight of the congregations. By 1980, church membership was about 500. There is an annual gathering each Easter attended by over 1 000 people.¹⁵⁶

Ernabella parish eventually became part of the Uniting church after Presbyterian churches entered the union. The symbolism of equality and authority which the ordained ministry provides was considered necessary. Peter Nyaningu, after attending Nungalinya College in Darwin, was ordained in 1983.

After the Methodists, the next church to ordain Aboriginal people was the Anglican Church. The Anglican missions, both CMS in the Northern Territory and ABM in north Queensland, were very slow in taking the important step of ordaining Aboriginal Christian leaders. There have long been godly Christian elders who should have been ordained. James Japanma and Barnabas Roberts of Roper River were two outstanding examples. Several young men were sent south from CMS missions to Bible colleges or even to theological colleges, but they were never ordained. Many of these men became bitter and disillusioned. It must be said that the problem was not exclusively that of the missionary societies. The bishops of the dioceses in which the missions were located were also unenthusiastic.

In 1953, the Bishop of Carpentaria visited CMS mission stations in Arnhem Land to consider the pressing need for an ordained Aboriginal ministry. He identified four young men whom he thought suitable. His requirement, however, was six years training in a theological college. The men were daunted by such a frightening concept and even CMS had doubts about what would happen to their wives and children. The whole thing fell through which was most disappointing, given that the men were already engaged in evangelising their own people.¹⁵⁷ It was to be twenty years before the first ordination in the Northern Territory.

The problem was partly related to the fear that Aboriginal people were unready and that they would need lengthy and concentrated training if ever they were to be fit for the task. The problem was also related to an inadequate model of the ministry or priesthood. The Anglican church's own model is that it is the ministry of word and sacrament, but much more has since accrued to it. Clergy are parish administrators. To be ordained,

Aboriginal Christian leaders had to fit into the Western model of the church administrator. They had to show themselves capable of dealing with synods, keeping the finances, handling correspondence, producing parish papers and all the other myriad tasks which fill a clergy day. They did not show themselves capable of these things, so none were ordained.

Ministry was also, regrettably, tied up with power. The white clergy whom Aboriginal people knew often also doubled as senior missionaries or superintendents. They were bosses. This concept still causes difficulties, for it is improper for the church to have one model of ministry for white clergy and another for Aborigines.

To the best of my knowledge, the first Aboriginal person to be ordained to the Anglican priesthood was Patrick Brisbane, ordained deacon on 21 January 1969 at Bamaga, north Queensland, by Bishop Eric Hawkey of Carpentaria, and ordained priest on 29 November 1970 at the cathedral on Thursday Island. After a brief ministry in New Guinea, where he was sent to gain experience, Patrick Brisbane died. His deaconing was not widely publicised, with the result that many thought that the first Aboriginal person to be deaconed in the Anglican Church after James Noble was Alan Polgen, ordained in Perth on 2 February 1969.¹⁵⁸

The first Aboriginal to be ordained in the Anglican Church in the Northern Territory was Michael Gumbuli Wurramara, deaconed on 3 November 1973 and priested the next day by Bishop Ken Mason of the new Diocese of the Northern Territory. Keith Cole recorded his feelings: 'Europeans and Aborigines from all over Arnhem Land came by car and plane to share in the historic occasion. For the first time among many visits to the various communities I experienced a new sense of freedom and dignity. . . They were all excited about what was happening.'¹⁵⁹

It was to be another ten years before any more Aboriginal people were ordained in the Northern Territory. In many ways, Michael Gumbuli was a kind of test case and there was a great deal of pressure upon him to live up to European expectations of the role of the minister.

During those ten years, however, several important events were to occur. The first of these was the change in government policy from assimilation to self-determination. The right of Aboriginal people to choose their own future became the cornerstone of Aboriginal affairs policies of both the short-lived

Whitlam Labor government, 1972–1975, and the Liberal and National Country Party government which followed it. Phrases such as 'self-management' and 'self-determination' replaced 'assimilation' in the policies of both government and opposition. The Liberal and National Country Party Policy of 1975 was typical:

The Liberal and National Country Parties are committed to the principle that all Aborigines and Islanders should be as free as other Australians to determine their own varied futures. . . We recognise the fundamental rights of Aborigines to retain their racial identity and traditional lifestyle. . . We will, within the limits of available finances, fund programs which develop Aboriginal self-sufficiency and which represent initiatives that Aborigines themselves believe will enhance their dignity, self-respect and self-reliance.¹⁶⁰

The second major event was the Aboriginal revival, beginning at Galiwin'ku in 1979. This rapidly spread throughout the Uniting Church and Anglican communities of Arnhem Land. Church attendance rose rapidly and an increasing number of Aboriginal men re-identified with the Church.

The third major event was the contribution of Nungalinya College. During the 1960s, CMS and MOM established a joint training committee to plan a combined approach to training Aboriginal leadership. The Aborigines Inland Mission and the Baptist mission were invited to participate,¹⁶¹ but they did not finally agree to cooperate. Western denominational boundaries have been forced upon Aboriginal Christians. This was an opportunity to redress that wrong, but this only happened for the Arnhem Land people where Anglican and Methodist missions had been.

The Anglican and Uniting churches proceeded with their vision. The result was that late in 1973, Nungalinya College formally came into being. Named by the Larakia people on whose lands the Darwin college is situated, Nungalinya is the name of a rock, 'Old Man Rock', which can be seen at low tide from the beach near the college. The Omega symbol, reminiscent of the large round rock in front of the college, became the symbol of Nungalinya College, expressing its hopes that in Christ was the 'end', the culmination of all things.

So it was that by the early 1980s three things had come together: a growing consciousness among Aboriginal people that they could and should take responsibility for their own affairs, a revival movement in the Aboriginal churches, and the opportunity for Christian leadership training.

Soon after his consecration as the second Anglican Bishop of the Northern Territory, Bishop Clyde Wood called a conference at Numbulwar in December 1983. Michael Gumbuli chaired the meeting which was attended by Aboriginal representatives of the five Arnhem Land parishes, and representatives of the Diocese, Nungalinya College and CMS. The conference was the real beginning of a commitment to Aboriginal ministry in the Anglican church in the Northern Territory. The Rev. Percy Leske later gave his impressions:

December 1983 was a real watershed in the history of the Arnhem Land Aboriginal parishes. It was a time of coming to grips with the issues of Christian leadership and pastoral responsibility for the Aboriginals in their communities. Almost overnight the Aboriginals . . . indicated that no European replacements were required from the south for vacancies in the church. Ministry belonged to them. They would now accept the responsibility as they were the only ones really equipped to minister to their own people. . .

As the Aboriginal groups shared they learned from one another, broadening their horizons about the meaning and implementation of being obedient servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. The participants gained a creative vision of the desire to make Christ known. They were encouraged to discover that they had the gifts given by God's Spirit to equip them for ministry, and that these needed to be used responsibly in their churches. God was enabling them to provide a total ministry which would be significantly effective, as no barriers of language or culture existed for them in preaching the gospel.¹⁶²

After some training in Nungalinya College in Darwin, Aboriginal Christian leaders, recognised and chosen by their communities, began to receive formal and positive acceptance by the Anglican Church of their leadership and vocation. In May 1984, Dinah Garadj and Betty Roberts, elderly widows from Roper River, were ordained as deaconesses.

In February 1985, three Aboriginal men were ordained to the priesthood. Aringari Wurramara was ordained at St Andrew's, Angurugu, Jock Wuragwagwa on the sandhills above St Mary's, Umbakumba, and Rupert Nungamajbar at the Church of the Holy Spirit, Numbulwar. At each of their ordinations, the ordinands were led to the ceremony by singing and traditional dancing.

Aringari Wurramara, surrounded by the dancing Wurramara and Wurramarrba clans, walked with great dignity down the road to the church, wearing a white cassock. Around his neck hung a string dilly bag containing items of significance to his clan. It was the gift of the Wurramara clan to provide for him a truly Aboriginal way of carrying out of his community that which would have tied him to their traditional rituals, that he might walk back into his community bringing a different blessing as minister and pastor of his people.

The emergence of this strong, committed Aboriginal Christian leadership in most mission or ex-mission contexts is of supreme importance. Without it Aboriginal ministry is incomplete and the church has not yet become incarnate within Aboriginal communities. Pope Paul VI, in his *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 'The Evangelisation of the World', expressed most powerfully that the proof of conversion is that the converted in turn evangelise others:

The person who has been evangelised goes on to evangelise others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelisation: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn.¹⁶³

As we have already seen, the fact that Aboriginal people have themselves become confident bearers of the gospel has itself been a powerful force in conversion and renewal. Yet I am only too conscious of the temptation to triumphalism, the temptation to ignore the very real problems and tragedies. The pressure on these Aboriginal leaders is very great.

They are often called, far more than white clergy, to minister for the rest of their lives in the close communities of their relatives and clans with all the personal tensions that implies. They are often over-used by outside churches and Christian organisations desperate to include Aboriginal people in their programs. Many of

them have found the demands of their work lead to neglect of their families. There has also been real opposition and confrontation by forces of evil. Many have died so young and so unexpectedly that it does not appear entirely coincidental: Patrick Brisbane, Stephen Giblett and Jock Wuragwagwa, to name just a few.

Yet there is also much evidence of their growing strength, of their assurance in their calling. As these Aboriginal Christian leaders gain confidence, an Aboriginal style of worship is emerging, more consistent with Aboriginal world view and custom. Some of the distinguishing features are a non-European notion of time; forceful, biblical preaching; more shared leadership; a great love of movement and singing; and an emphasis on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The incorporation of traditional Aboriginal forms of art, music, movement, drama and other indigenous expressions is increasing. Some Aboriginal Christian leaders, having grown up on those missions where cultural activities were frowned upon, or even banned, have only slowly begun to accept their freedom to decide for themselves that which the gospel affirms in their culture and that which it challenges. This, of course, serves to emphasise the supreme importance of Bible translation. While ever the Bible was mediated through non-Aborigines and not in the language of the people, true freedom in Christ was stifled.

One of the last freedoms to be accorded to Aboriginal Christians was the freedom to use their Christian judgment with regard to their own forms of expression. Djiniyini Gondarra has recently discussed this very issue:

First, you look at yourself as a Christian. You live by faith in Christ: you're a new person in Christ; you're not bound by the law but by grace.

Then you look at your old ceremony. You see elements that contradict the biblical gospel, and you are ready to give those up.

But you also see elements where the gospel will speak, and you encourage that. You look for the way ceremonies can become new places of worship, places to communicate the gospel.

We don't go to a lot of ceremonies; many of them contradict our faith. We're not happy not to attend them - and we have to sacrifice, even suffer.

But as an Aboriginal person I can see the places where our ceremonies can be baptised and given a new meaning. Some



128. Kenneth Ken and David Penman embrace at the
National Gathering, 1988

Acknowledgement: Ramon Williams. Reproduced with permission.



129. The cross made from sliprails of Myall Creek stands above the crowd at the National Gathering, 1988

Acknowledgement: Ramon Williams. Reproduced with permission.

people think Aboriginal Christians don't know how to do this, but we know how to go about it.¹⁶⁴

Often, when Aboriginal Christians were doing this in contexts outside the missionaries' control, they were criticised, but there were always those missionaries who slowly began to see this as a mark of Christian maturity rather than immaturity. Paul Albrecht at Hermannsburg claimed that Aboriginal people made mature Christian judgments when they retained the *tjurunga*, carved slabs of rock or wood, for certain purposes. Christians who no longer saw the *tjurunga* as sacred objects which actually linked them to totemic beings, could still respect the *tjurunga* as cultural artifacts essential for social purposes such as determining land boundaries.¹⁶⁵

Perhaps the most striking use of Aboriginal cultural expression in the Christian context has been associated with the Baptist missions in central Australia among the Warlpiri, Gurindji and Alyawarra people. At places like Lajamanu, Yuendumu and Kalkaringi, a vibrant, distinctively Aboriginal Christian church is emerging, typified by Christian *purlapas* (corroborees), Christian iconographs and indigenous music, notably the use of the old 'law song' as a medium for credal statements.

There have long been Aboriginal Christians in Catholic missions and churches who have used traditional forms to express Christian truths. At Daly River in the Northern Territory, Miriam-Rose Ungunmirr's beautiful stations of the cross is a fine example.¹⁶⁶ At Balgo Hills in Western Australia, a Kukatja man, Matthew Gill, has produced Aboriginal Stations of the Cross based on his traditional bush-turkey dreaming.¹⁶⁷

Yet of all the major Christian churches involved in mission, it is the Catholic church which has found most difficulty in recognising and empowering Aboriginal Christian leaders. It is clearly the celibacy tradition which is the major stumbling block. There is therefore a barrier to equality of ministry which is still, it would seem, insurmountable. There are only two Aboriginal deacons. There was an Aboriginal priest. Pat Dodson was ordained to the priesthood in Broome in 1975. He has since left the ministry and is chairman of the Federation of Aboriginal Land Councils.

There are, however, a growing number of Catholic priests like Martin Wilson and Brian McCoy who are embarrassed at the

'Great White Father' image of the white priest and who are earnestly and creatively seeking solutions.¹⁶⁸

A particularly important initiative has been the Nelen Yubu Missiological Unit at Daly River, established in the hope that it might become a 'think-tank', resource centre and training facility for Aboriginal ministry. As its founder, Martin Wilson, commented, the vision has not really come to pass,¹⁶⁹ but NYMU continues to make an important contribution. Especially valuable has been the opportunity the journal *Nelen Yubu* provides for disseminating new ideas and initiatives in mission.

It is my view that NYMU needs a truly ecumenical involvement. There has been a continuing low key relationship with Nungalinya College, but the Catholic Church has not had the benefit of the equal partnership that the Anglican and Uniting churches have experienced.

In 1983, Nungalinya College commenced an extension in north Queensland, Wontulp-Bi-Buya. In a different Catholic diocese under different bishops, Wontulp-Bi-Buya has received the support of the Catholic Church, as well as the Uniting and Anglican churches. This is a very healthy arrangement, for all can benefit from each other. Experience has shown that Aboriginal Christian leaders have gained from their fellowship with Aboriginal Christian people of other denominational backgrounds.

They have been encouraged by the common Christian commitment of people from mission backgrounds other than their own, but they have not lost the distinctiveness of the churches which have arisen in their own communities based on the traditions their particular missionaries brought. This was the concern of the AIM and Baptist missions which did not join Nungalinya at the beginning. I believe that Aboriginal people from their mission communities would have benefited greatly and would have also brought their own gifts and experiences and understanding to assist Aboriginal Christians from different mission contexts.

While a distinctive Aboriginal church is emerging, Aboriginal Christians value the style and tradition of the churches which brought them the gospel. Nungalinya certainly has not destroyed that distinct heritage. If anything it has enhanced it. Anglican Aboriginal Christians can be Anglican in a distinctively Aboriginal way. Uniting Church Aboriginal Christians can be Uniting Church in a distinctively Aboriginal way.

The beginnings of a truly distinctive Uniting Church Aboriginal leadership date back to 1974 when Aboriginal Christian leaders, missionaries and the then Methodist officials met to reflect upon the past and future of the Uniting church Arnhem Land churches. The Aboriginal people looked back with gratitude on the missionaries who had brought them the gospel. They now feel that they should take over, controlling the direction, style and pace of change in their communities. They produced a document, *Free to Decide*, which saw a future in which Aboriginal and white staff work together side by side under Aboriginal authority. This document marked the end of mission and the true emergence of the indigenous church.¹⁷⁰

A particularly significant initiative of Aboriginal Christian leaders in the Uniting Church has been the creation of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Congress. In August 1982 at Crystal Creek in north Queensland, Aboriginal Christian leaders and Uniting Church officials met together. They proposed an Aboriginal Congress within the Uniting Church. An Aboriginal pastor, the Rev. Charles Harris, became chairman of the committee and was released from parish duties to share the vision of the Congress with Aboriginal people throughout Australia.

At that inaugural meeting the embryonic Congress affirmed its allegiance to Christ.¹⁷¹

[The Congress] acknowledges the Lordship of Jesus Christ and is his servant. The Aboriginal church will seek to promote his Lordship over all things, seeing to be obedient to him at all times, living in love (*agape*) which he shares with us. We know ourselves to belong to him as *doulos* or bond slaves or servants; as such we know ourselves to be given to the world in order that his love will be shared with those who are oppressed, in bondage, poverty, prison, blindness and sin.¹⁷²

There was widespread discussion among Aboriginal Christians associated with the Uniting Church throughout Australia. A large national gathering was held at Galiwin'ku in August 1983, attended by Uniting Church Aboriginal people from around Australia, together with interested Aboriginal friends and supporters from other churches. At a follow-up conference at Ballina, NSW in August 1984 and in May 1985, the proposal that there be

an Aboriginal and Islander Congress within the Uniting Church was brought to the national assembly. Robert Bos provides the following record of the highlights:

In May 1985, a group of Christian Aboriginal leaders addressed the fourth National Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia. They likened themselves to the Israelites standing on the shores of the Red Sea, waiting to see what would happen next. As an observer put it later, 'the Assembly parted the waters and cheered them through'. The Uniting Aboriginal and Island Christian Congress was formally established. The key resolutions were not passed with a show of hands, nor even on the voices, but with resounding applause and the singing of the Doxology, 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow'.¹⁷³

Charles Harris was elected first national President of the Congress. He later explained the primary aim of the Congress in these terms:

The primary aim of the Congress is evangelism. Aboriginal and Islander Christians want to respond to the command of Jesus to 'Go and make disciples'.

Yes, we want them to know Jesus as Lord and Saviour. And yes, we are concerned about housing, employment training, community development, alcohol rehabilitation, land rights, health and youth work.¹⁷⁴

Many Aboriginal Christians believe that these Aboriginal movements have a significance for the Australian church as a whole, not just the Aboriginal Christians. The Aboriginal Revival, the Aboriginal Congress, the spiritual renewal at Yarrabah, the Aboriginal enthusiasm for the word of God, the Aboriginal search for authentic cultural means of expressing the gospel, the ecumenical feeling among Aboriginal Christians – these and many more things are marks of a church coming of age. This means that Aboriginal Christian people, the Aboriginal Christian church, are partners, not clients. As equal partners, we must be as willing to learn from them, to be taught by them as they have been to learn from us.

It has been very easy for Western Christians to act as if somehow God came to Australia with the first fleet. God was

present here in Australia as God was and is and will be in all of creation. Few of the early missionaries perceived that Aboriginal people believed that they inhabited a spiritual world; few perceived that they were a God-seeking people. Rather than being devoid of religion, they were possibly the most religious of people.

Christians believe that Christ was born, died and rose again for all humankind, including Aboriginal people. The missionaries believed that, and believed it against the tide of popular and scientific opinion.

Yet Aborigines did not live in some remote corner of the earth where the Spirit of God did not dwell. Those of us recent arrivals who see the handiwork of God in the gold of the wattle, the red of the desert, the blue of the sky, in parrot and kangaroo and kookaburra are acknowledging that God was here before us. So few European Christians, until recently, recognised that God was here and that he was discernible to Aboriginal people – that they, in their way, were reaching out for him.

Aboriginal people needed to hear of Christ who died to fulfil the longings of their culture as much as he did to fulfil the longings of mine. They needed to hear of Christ, but this message – as Paul pointed out in Acts 17 – was not being brought into a totally godless vacuum.

There were a few, a very few early missionaries who recognised Aboriginal spirituality. One was William Ridley. Aborigines, he said, did not lack the great and good qualities which other cultures recognised. He spoke particularly of their courage, compassion, patience, love of drama and the poetic, their sense of dramatic tragedy and satirical fiction, their reverence of the departed, their stoical contempt of pain. Above all, he observed what he called *a thirst for religious mystery*.¹⁷⁵

This is the longing which Christ came to fulfil, the thirst which Christ alone can truly quench, recorded in Jesus' timeless words in John 4:14:

Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never thirst; the water that I shall give will become a spring of water, welling up to eternal life.

* * *

Epilogue

The last time I visited Roper River, a crowded church sang Kriol songs to 'Scripture in Song' tunes. To the tune of 'Majesty, Majesty', they were singing, from the Kriol *Holi Baibul*, Revelation 1:12-18:

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me
and I saw seven golden lampstands
and in the midst of the lampstands was one like the son of
man,
clothed with a long robe
and with a golden girdle round his chest;
his head and his hair were white as snow. . .
his eyes were like a flame of fire;
his feet were like burnished bronze
and his voice was like the sound of many waters;
in his right hand he held seven stars. . .
and his face was like the sun shining. . .
When I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead.
But he laid his right hand upon me, saying,
'Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last.
I am the living one.
I was dead but behold, I am alive for ever and for ever.

Truly, it was the stuff of dreams, the prophetic word of the fulfilment of all their longings in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was their joyful and confident expression of faith in a God who holds in his hands the destiny of the whole earth, a God who will – finally and for all time – end injustice and set history right.

ENDNOTES

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47. Geise to Narijan, cited in Wells, 1982: 71-72
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Abbreviations

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ABM	Australian Board of Missions
AASR	Australian Association for the Study of Religion
ACC	Australian Council of Churches
AIAS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies
AIM	Aborigines Inland Mission
AJCP	Australian Joint Copying Project
ANUP	Australian National University Press
AWM	Australian War Memorial
BHCSP	British House of Commons Sessional Papers
BL	Battye Library
BT	Bonwick Transcripts
CMS	Church Missionary Society
CSO	Colonial Secretary's Office
CO	Colonial Office
CPP	Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers
CRS	Commonwealth Record Series
CUP	Cambridge University Press
DL	Dixson Library
GRG	Government Records Group
GRS	Government Record Series
H of A	House of Assembly
H of R	House of Representatives
HRA	Historical Records of Australia
HRNSW	Historical Records of New South Wales
LMS	London Missionary Society

LPL	Lambeth Palace Library (London)
ML	Mitchell Library
MS	Manuscript
MUP	Melbourne University Press
NL/NLA	National Library of Australia
NSWLC	New South Wales Legislative Council
NSWPD	New South Wales Parliamentary Debates
NSWPP	New South Wales Parliamentary Papers
NSWUP	NSW University Press
OUP	Oxford University Press
SAGP	South Australian Government Printer
SLSA	State Library of South Australia
SLV	State Library of Victoria
SMV	State Museum of Victoria
SPCG	Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge
SPG	Society for the Propagation of the Gospel
SUP	Sydney University Press
UAM	United Aborigines Mission
UCA	Uniting Church of Australia
UQP	University of Queensland Press
UWAP	University of Western Australia Press
VCC	Victorian Council of Churches
VLC	Victorian Legislative Council
V & P	Votes and Proceedings
WALC	Western Australian Legislative Council
WAP	Western Australian Parliament
WAPD	Western Australian Parliamentary Debates

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Index

**Bold lettering indicates an Index heading with sub-headings;
bold numbering indicates a major entry in the text.**

Abaroo, 41

Aboriginal Christians

baptism of, 50, 55, 63, 65-67,
112-113, 195, 225, 264,
276-277, 301, 347, 364, 366,
388, 402-403, 439, 467,
477-478, 495, 508, 513, 519,
726, 733, 734, 790, 837, 856
conversion of, 50-51, 64-67, 71,
129, 133, 161, 164, 193, 202,
208, 214-215, 216, 246, 275,
276-277, 278, 347, 354,
361-362, 364, 388, 402-403,
409, 415, 439, 467, 471, 477,
495, 507, 513, 519, 555, 557,
566, 587, 660, 679, 700, 726,
733, 751-752, 790, 834, 847,
848-852, 856
evangelising others, 51, 193-194,
215, 364, 410, **848-852**, 861
leadership, 202, 350, 364, 410,
507-508, 520, 567, 487, 597,
655-656, 661-663, 663-671,
796, 825, 833, **848-866**
ordination, 410, 520, 496, 597,
666
socially unacceptable, 234, 268,
278-279, 345, 597, 600-603,

654-659, 663, 667, 668, 672

Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship,

663-671, 678-679

Aboriginal stations

see settlements and reserves

Aboriginal women

prostitution, 106, 112, 132, 151,
163, 169, 223, 236, 274, 320,
401, 402, 414, 417, 442, 464,
467, 472, 531, 610
sexually abused, 58, 89, 110,
115, 130, 131, 137, 148-149,
153, 163, 169, 223-224,
235-246, 259, 274, 313,
319-320, 327, 365, 395, 396,
400-401, 414, 417, 505, 610,
775

Aborigines

birthrate, 149-150, 153, 235,
243-244, 259, 388, 408, 478,
491, 509, 550, 609, 610, 671,
688, 836
British subjects, 155, 259-260,
314, 318, 336, 418, 421-423,
631
citizenship denied, 304, 597,
629, 631, 764, 778, 782, 814
death from diseases, 39, 40, 54,

- 57, 62, 75, 123, 130-131, 149, 153, 169, 175, 208, 235, 243-245, 259, 262, 276-277, 278, 281, 301, 303, 320, 327, 343, 351, 356, 358, 363, 412, 417, 478, 550, 564, 609, 836
- deaths in custody, 672
- despair, 57, 92, 97-98, 149-151, 153, 169, 244, 345
- 'doomed by God', 93, 174-176, 181-184, 221, 327, 437, 551, 815
- exploitation and oppression of, 223, 417-418, 424-425, 429-430, 433, 483, 487, 491, 558-559, 625, 633, 638, 650-651, 656, 676, 822
- extinction of, 54-55, 121, 124, 129, 149, 153, 175, 244, 327-328, 351, 370, 389, 395, 415, 433, 472, 550, 620, 815, 831
- feuding between, 121-122, 123, 126, 199-200, 209, 277, 408
- food resources lost, 146-149, 217, 231, 256, 317-318, 320, 340, 358, 565
- fringe dwellers, 145, 170-172, 320, 345, 407, 442, 531, 549, 558-559, 562, 659-660, 765
- infanticide, 535-536, 538, 539
- guerilla fighters, 37, 256-257, 689
- humanity of, **22-35**, 43-44, 49, 75, 116, 124, 137, 272, 343, 352-353, 399, 435, 472, 479, 534, 783, 822, 867
- immortality, 28, 32-35, 343
- infant mortality, *see* birthrate
- intelligence acknowledged, 60, 105, 124-125, 222, 233, 263, 274-275, 304, 392, 402, 559, 705, 803, 813
- killed by Europeans, 24, 27, 28, 35, 37-39, 44, 54, 85, 86-89, 101-102, 106, 115-117, 112-113, 120, 123, 130, 131, 137, **146-154**, 165, 166, 172, 191, 194, 197-199, 208, 231, 234, 235, 256-259, 272, 303, 313, 317, 318-329, **329-337**, 385, 394-395, 296-39, 409, 432, 433, 472, 481-482, 486, 511, 513-516, 550, 564, 609, 660, 676, 689, 690-693, 698-699, 700-701, 735-736, 748, 763, 823, 844
- killing of Europeans, 37, 197, 234, 239, 256-259, 313, 317, 318, 329, 331, 332, 333, 337, 514, 689, 735, 743-744, 792-793
- kindness and courtesy, 136, 292, 233, 286, 323, 411, 439, 512
- mixed race, 201, 213, 216-217, 264, 303-304, 352, 446, 496-497, 550, 562, 576, 610-611, 623, 717-718, 719, 720-722, 727, 731, 732, 764-765, 766-767, 771, 782, 787, 790
- moral people, 220, 236, 305
- oppression of, *see* Aborigines exploitation
- physical appearance, 273, 304-305, 317, 320, 391-392, 532-534
- political activism, 177-178, 490-499, 611-633, 641
- population decline, 54-55, 86, 121, 130, 131, 199, 243-244, 259, 320, 327, 342, 351, 388, 404, 478, 491, 550, 688, 831, 836
- questioning missionaries, 59, 135, 234, 401, 752, 846-848
- rejection of European values, 73-75, 136, 279, 437
- religious world view, 232, 322, 866-867
- resistance to settlers, 88, 101-102, 145, 165, 240,

- 256-259, 317, 329, 370, 386,
481, 483, 689-690
respect for missionaries, 196,
201, 210, 329-330, 395, 509,
585, 587, 589, 738, 796, 804
retaliation against Europeans,
37, 197, 199, 234, 239,
256-259, 358
stereotypes, 152-154
torture of, 54, 89, 118, 418
Aborigines Bible Fellowship (WA),
824-826
Aborigines' Friends' Association,
355-369, 655
Aborigines Inland Mission,
554-568, **584-591**, 602, 638,
655, 657, 659, 662, 664-668,
859, 864
Aborigines' Progressive Association
623-624, 627, 632
Aborigines' Protection Association
(NSW), 226-227, 499
Aborigines' Protection Society (BRIT.),
229, 316
Aborigines' Welfare Board (NSW), 632
Aboriginality, New, 353, 608-611
Adams, Tom, 354-355
Adelaide schools, 324-328, 341-342,
344
Agnes (ROPER RIVER), 772
Albrecht, Friedrich W., 406-407
Albrecht, Paul, 409, 864
alcohol, 54, 55, 106, 130-132, 149,
155, 169-171, 175, 220, 236,
259, 320, 365, 407, 412, 417,
458, 472, 531, 538, 554, 565,
568, 772, 775, 796, 848, 849,
850-851
Allen, George, 356
Amand, 471
Ambrym, Willie, 501-502, 503
Anabia, Caprio, 442-443
Anabia, Mrs C., 442-443
Andrews, Ishmael and Irene, 845
Anglican, *see* Church of England
Angas, George Fife, 320-321, 324,
355, 356
Anne (NUMBULWAR), 843
anthropologists, 232, 406-409, 608,
785, 789, 803, 804, 806,
847-848
Apostolic Church of Australia,
847-848
Arawindju, Lazarus, 733
Armstrong, Francis, 260, 277
Arndell, Sarah (Threlkeld), 52
Arnold, Mr (BREWARRINA), 574
Arrowsmith, H.M., 733
Arthur, Charles, 90
Arthur, George, 86, 89, 90, 97, 100,
823, 832
Assemblies of God, 662
assimilation, 579, **633-654**, 752,
764, 766, 767, 778, 781-782,
787, 808, 858
Association for the Protection of
Native Races, 624, 626, 634
Atkins, Mr (CHERBOURG), 589
Atkins, T., 100
Atkinson, Eddy, 666
Atkinson, Kerin, 228
Auricht, J.E., 383
Australian Aborigines' League, 621,
628, 649
Australian Aborigines Mission (AAM),
555
Australian Baptist Missionary
Society, 853, 859, 863-864
Australian Board of Missions, 500,
504, 507, 516-517, 634, 694,
857
Australian Inland Mission, 372-373,
554, 655
Backhouse, James and Walker,
George, 55, 60, 136, 261
Baptist Church, 123, 430, 863
Baillie, Helen, 620-621, 629,
Baird, D.K., 648
Baker, Jack, 511, 614
Baker, John, 360-361, 365
Bald, Hurtle, 770

- Balfour, J.D., 532
 Baptist Missionary Society, 40
 Barker, Collet, 313, 460-461
 Barker, Frederic, 232
 Barker, Jimmie, 568, 574-575,
 590-591, 599-600, 603, 623,
 625 654, 657
 Parker, Pamela, 678
 Barkley, Henry, 190
 Barlow, Christopher, 519
 Barlow, George, 501, 519
 Barlow, Jimmy, 208
 Barlow, R.C., 627
 Barnes, Nancy, 563, 638
 Barney (ROPER RIVER), 741
 Barrington, George, 535
 Barry, Alfred, 499
 Barunga, 837
 Basle Mission Institute, 56, 61
 Bates, Daisy, 444, 577
 Bath, James, 42
 Baxter, Annie, 242-243
 Bayini, 459
 Beasley, Insp., 396
 Beazley, Kim, 811, 812
 Bedford, William, 90
 Bellenger, George, 227-228
 Bellet, Frank, 823-824
 Benedictine Order, 109, **281-306**,
 445-446, 448, 553
 Bennelong (SYDNEY), 50-51
 Bennelong, Thomas Walker Coke,
 50-51
 Bennett, George, 51, 77
 Bennett, Hilda, 599
 Bennet, Mary, 624, 633, 634-635
 Berndt, Catherine, 777
 Berndt, R., 480, 777, 806, 807
 Bible Society, 368, 374, 406, 835,
 836, 839, 840-841, 843
 Bible translation, 52-55, 60, 70,
 94-95, 106, 543, 192-193,
 232, 367-368, 374, 388-389,
 393, 405-406, 439, 660, **829-**
 846, 848, 851, 854-855, 862
 Bidigainj, 839-840
 Billy Black, 66
 Bimbadeen, 671, 679
 Bingham, Geoff, 669-670
 Binnahan, 533
 Biraban (McGill), 53, 55, 830
 Birch, R., 702-703
 Bird, Bill, 668-671
 Bjelke-Petersen, J., 820
 Black, Neil, 118, 238
 Black War (TASMANIA), 85, 90-91
 Blackburn, J., 819
 Blake, William, 31
 Blanks, Mrs G., 627
 Bleakley, John, 721, 724, 765, 783
 Blyth, Noel, 668-671
 Boer War, 613
 Bogtsch, Paul, 196-197
 Bolt, Ben, 215
 Bonner, Neville, 680
 Bonwick, James, 39, 86, 88, 95, 97,
 126, 150
 Bony, *see* Pepper, Phillip
 Bos, Robert, 865
 Bourke, Dennis, 713
 Bourke, Richard, 118, 119, 182
 Bowen, John, 87
 Brady, Don, 663
 Brady, John, 113, 282-295,
 (endnote 145), 461
 Braeside, Jack, 668-671, 678
 Brain, Roy, 625, 626-627
 Breeze, Anne, *see* Camfield, Anne
 Breton, W.H., 532, 537
 Briggs, Victor and Chris, 662
 Brisbane, 46, 48
 Brisbane, Patrick, 858, 861
 Broughton, William, 42-53, 56, 64,
 67, 75, 148-149, 183-184
 Brown, John, 314-315
 Browning, Lemick, 668-671
 Brownrigg, H.W., 442
 Brumbie, Muriel, 639
 Brusnahan, Margaret, 594
 Bruxner, Michael, 614
 Bryant, Gordon, 811
 Buckley, William, 117, 118

- Bulla, Peter, 855
 Bulmer, Caroline, 206-207, 209, 216, 219
 Bulmer, Frank, 217-218
 Bulmer, John, 135, 165-173, 189-190, 197, 200, **205-220**, 236, 534, 536-537, 543, 613, 617, 793, 834
 Bulmer, Mrs (Miss Stocks), 168-169, 241
 Bumberrah, King Tommy, 215
 Bunting, Jabez, 120
 Burdeu, Arthur, 620-621, 628, 649, 666
 Burgess, Lockier, 270
 Burke and Wills, 384-385
 Burke, Marie, 731
 Burton, J.W., 774-775, 802
 Burton, William, 55-74, 118
 Bush Brotherhood (Anglican), 655
 Bush, Constance, 720, 726, 731
 Bush, George, 425
 Bybee, Alick, 508
- Caddy, Wesley, 669
 Cahill, Paddy, 722-723
 Caleb, *see* Minimiri
 Caley, George, 42
 Callope, Jack, 497
 Calwell, Arthur, 805-806
 Cameron, P.A., 627
 Camfield, Anne, 184, 189, 195, 261, **262-271**, 273, 277, 536
 Camfield, Henry, 263-264, 266, 270
 Campbell, Archibald, 162
 Campbell, James, 705
 cannibalism, 386, 536-539
 Capell, Arthur, 634, 785, 839
 Captain (WA), 483
 Carey, William, 31, 40
 Carley, David, 184, 422-423
 Carpenter, W.P., 414
 Carrington, V.C., 776-777
 Cartwright, J.H., 642
 Cartwright, Robert, 32, 46
- Catholic church, 40, 86, 109, **281-306**, 430, **431-450**, 558, 651, 660, 722, 832-833, 835, 843, 863-864
 'chain of being', 24, 43
 Chambers, Bertha, 589, 601
 Chase, S. Lloyd, 164, 174, 190, 191, 195
 Chaseling, Wilbur, 785
 Chifley, Ben, 779
- children**
 orphans cared for by
 missionaries, 266-267, 273, 303-304, 536, 560-561
 forcible removal, 62, 266-267, 562-563, **568-584**, 704, 709, 717-718
- children's homes**
 Bomaderry, 579, 581, 592
 Colebrook, 561-564, 590, 593, 638
 Cootamundra, 579-583, 646, 671
 Kinchella (Kempsey), 579-581, 583-584
 Norseman, 649
- Christian Endeavour Union, 554
 Christian, George, 508
 church, indigenous, 661, 846-868
 Church Mission Association, 218-219, 694-695, 710-711
 Church Missionary Society, 40, 49, 56-71, 73, 76, 89-90, 340, 520, 688, 689-753, 761, 775, 784-785, 786-788, 791, 836, 842, 853, 854, 857, 859
 Church of England, 86, 162, 164, 197, 206, 232, 259-262, 270, 277, **339-355**, 415-431, 499-522, 660-661, 666, 676-678, 688, **689-753**, 802, 831, 854, 859, 864
 Churches of Christ, 430, 649-654, 663, 666
 Cistercian (Trappist) Order, 440-44, 462
 civilisation, *see* gospel and

- civilisation
- Clark, Bessy (Pinnano-Bathae), 98
- Clark, Elizabeth, 95-98
- Clark, George, 49-59, 531
- Clark, Robert, 94-98
- Clements, Theresa, 228
- Cochrane (WELLINGTON), 64-65, 135
- Cock, Robert, 316
- Coke, Thomas, *see* Bennelong,
Thomas Walker Coke
- Cole, Keith, 858
- Cole and Whyte, 565
- Colebrook, T.E., 561
- Collins, Arthur, 669
- Collins, David, 89, 117
- colonial society**
- brutality, 36, 87, 261
- immorality, 36, 39, 59, 114,
122-123, 137, 234, **236-246**,
500
- Colonisation Commissioners (SA),
314-315, 316
- Conaci, Francis, 292-293, 294-295
- Confalonieri, Angelo, 283, 291, 293,
461, 833
- Congregational Church, 231,
346-357, 365, 411, 820
- Coniston massacre, 404, 561-562,
763
- Connors, Pearl and Frank, 662
- Conrath Fr., 474
- Constitution, Australian, 304-305,
549, 597, 764
- convicts, 17, 18, 36-39, 87, 262,
313, 330, 421-423
- Conwillan, Samuel, 349-350
- Conway, George, 690, 700
- Cook, C.E., 749
- Cook, James, 17, 22, 23, 31, 40, 74,
460, 481, 554, 823
- Cooper, Ada, 226, 618
- Cooper, Emma, 215
- Cooper, John, 215
- Cooper, William, 223, 227, 518,
617-633, 634, 635, 762, 767,
824
- Coppo, Ernest, 449
- Corney, 191-192
- Coulthard, Faith, 639
- Court, Charles, 821-822
- Cowper, William, 63, 77
- Coyne, Jessie, 584
- Crome, Mary, *see* Dyer, Mary
- Crook, William Pascoe, 117, 542
- Crompton, Margaret, 593
- Cross, L.G., 716, 720
- Crow, Susannah, 224
- Crowther, Charles, 417
- Cruse, Ossie, 671, 679
- Cunningham, Peter, 24
- Curr, E.M., 481-482, 539
- Dagliar, **742-753**, 763
- Dalrymple, George, 481
- Daly, Xavier, 440
- Daniels, Daniel, 714
- Danvers, J.G. 625
- Davey, Thomas, 88, 823
- David (CALEDON BAY), 741
- Davidson, Mark, 625, 626-627
- Davies, Stephen, 723, 724
- Davis, Durambo, 230
- Davis, Jack, 571
- Dawes, William, 37, 38
- Dawson, James, 24
- Dawson, Robert, 538
- degeneration theory, 29, 43-44, 72,
399, 494
- Dhurrkay, Kevin Rrurrambu, 849
- Dibby (WA), 483
- Dick, Nancy, 854
- Dirimera, John, 292-293, 294-295
- dispossession, 75, 88, 101-102,
115-117, 120-123, 137-138,
145, **146-154**, 221, 231,
256-258, 322, 385-386, 389,
432, 435, 472, 518, 549, 564,
631, 695, 800, 836
- Dixon, Chicka, 573, 597
- Dixon, Retta (Long), 554
- Djalalingba, 811
- Dodson, Pat, 863

- Doege, Louis, 103
 Dorre and Bernier Islands, *see* Lock Hospitals
 Douglas, John, 487
 Douglas, Insp., 515
 Douglas, Witt, 842
 Dove, E.I.M., 720
 Dove, Thomas, 30, 94
 Dow, Lilla, 627
 Downer, John, 397
 Downes, Barry and Lois, 854
 Doyle family, 519
 Draper, Bert, 587
 Draper, Sarah, 587
 Dredge, James, 77, 118, 148, 155-157, 159, 176
 Dresden Missionary Society, *see* Evangelical Lutheran Missionary Society
 Droste, William, 448
 Duffy, W.C., 776
 Duguid, Charles, 373, 625, 638, 654, 856
 Dukalara, 719, 733
 Duncan, W.A., 184, 432, 551
 Dunolly, Thomas, 612
 Durack, Mary, 398, 440, 447, 449
 Dwyer, Patrick, 337
 Dyer, Alf, **710-753**, 785, 838-839
 Dyer, Mary, **707-713**, 723-727, 734
 dying race, **551-553**, 611, 633, 688, 752, 766, 787
 Earl, George Windsor, 461
 Eaton, Fred, 565
 Ebbs, Arthur, 694, 696
 Eberhard, G., 462
 Edwards, Alfred, 519
 Edwards, Coral, 580
 Egan, Nellie, 595
 Eipper, Christopher, 77, 103-109, 111, 542
 Elder, Alexander, 184, 343
 Elkin, A.P., 232, 516-517, 634-635, 767, 785, 786, 804, 806
 Ellerman, Horatio, 190-191, 192
 Embley, Mr (MAPOON), 489
 Emma (DARWIN), 535
 Emo, Nicholas, 432, 440-449
 Encounter Bay, 317, 325, 328-330, 346, 356, 357, 383, 833
 'Encounter Bay Bob', 320
 English language, 70, 167, 326, 393, 612, 830, 834, 841-842, 855
 'enlightened colonialism', 180-184
 Erskine, George, 48
 Evangelical Lutheran Missionary Society (Dresden), 320, 326, 327, 337
 Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELSA), 387, 389-390, 403, 406
 Evans, Mr (BREWARRINA), 574
 Evatt, Clive, 643-644
 Evatt, H.V., 780
 evolution, 25, 26, 407, 540, 765-767
 Exemption Certificate, 601, 632, 645, 676, 782
 Eyre, Edward, 319, 541
 Fagan, W., 738, 739, 742, 743-744
 Federal Aborigines Mission Board (Churches of Christ), 649
 Ferdinand II, King, 293
 Ferguson, William, 617-633, 634, 635, 640, 649, 762, 767, 785, 824
 Ferguson, William (Senior), 622
 Ferrier, John W., 626, 725, 786
 Field, Barron, 31
 Filipinos, 441-449
 Filmer, Garth, 499
 Fisher, J.H., 315-316, 339
 Fison, Lorimer, 539
 Fitzgerald, Charles, 264
 Fitzgerald, W.J.P., 747
 Fleury, Fr., 474
 Flierl, Johannes, 388, 484
 Flinders Island, 92-97
 Flinders, Matthew, 459, 481
 Flower, Bessy, 203, 268-269

- Flynn, Margaret, 678
 Foelsche, Paul, 148
 Fonteinne, Leandre, 283-285
 Forbes, Mr and Mrs (NT), 718
 Forbes, Mrs Jack, 565
 Ford, Emily, 622
 Forrest River massacres, 513-516,
 763
 Forrest, John, 302, 304
 Foster, Tom, 629, 656-657
 Foster, Mr (BREWARRINA), 574-575,
 589-591
 Fowler, Donald, 737-753
 Foxton, Justin, 505
 Francis, Rev. (Moravian), 195
 Franz, Friedrich, 103
 Fraser, Eliza, 536
 Fred (WELLINGTON), 65-66, 193
 Freeman, J.J., 72
 Frith, W., 643
 Frodsham, George, 693-695, 784
 frontier, 87, 101-102, 145, 148,
 235-239, 255, 270, **381-382**,
 385-386, 388-389, 387, 392,
 394, 404, 689
 Frost, Charles, 623
- Gajiyuma, 694, 698, 699, 700
 Galiawa, 796
 Garabamba, Elizabeth, 733
 Garadji, Dinah, 146-147, 691-692,
 699-700, 716, 826-827, 860
 Garmard, Joseph, 733
 Garnett, Francis, 593
 Gawler, George, 318, 325, 328-330
 Geise, Harry, 806, 810-811
 George, Walter, 444
 Geytenbeck, Helen and Brian, 660
 Gibbs, Pearl, 624-625, 630, 635
 Giblett, Stephen, 861
 Gibney, Matthew, 184, **431-449**,
 462, 551
 Gilbert, Humphrey, 96
 Giles, Alfred, 236, 389, 689
 Gill, Matthew, 863
 Gillen, F.H., 407-409
- Gipps, George, 54, 67, 107, 109,
 132, 155, 159
 Giustiniani, Louis, 184, 261, 262,
 271
 Glenelg, Lord (Charles Grant), 155,
 161, 180, 261, 314-315
 Goessling, J.F., 384-386
 Gondarra, Djiniyini, 848-849, 862
 Gooch, Gordon, 651
 Goodwin, Thomas, 164-173
 Goold, James, 432
 Gormon, John, 283-285
 gospel and civilisation, 22, 42-43,
 53, **71-77**, 105, 106, 125,
 154-155, 156, 159, 168,
 201-202, 210, 264, 271-272,
 301, 338-339, 349, 351, 359,
 373, 382, 477, 506, 557,
 696-698, 723, 784, 802, 834
 Gossner Mission (Berlin), 103, 108
 Gowans, Margaret, 622
 Grace (ROPER RIVER), 543, 839-840
 Graham, Sonny, 668-671
 Grant, Cecil, 668-671, 679
 Grant, Flo, 557
 Gray, Fred, 733, 741-742, 744-745
 Gray, James, 596
 Green, Harrie, 564, 836
 Green, John, 221, 611-612
 Grey, George, 318-319
 Gribble, Cecil, 804, 807, 808, 811,
 813-814
 Gribble, Ernest, 428, **502-518**,
 519-522, 536, 614, 624, 628,
 633, 850, 855
 Gribble, John Brown, 184, 189,
 225, 229, 245, **411-431**,
 448-449, 500-502, 520-521,
 551, 622, 649, 650-651, 652,
 834
 Gribble, Mary, 413, 415, 423, 424,
 430
 Griffith, Charles, 74
 Griffiths, Kenneth, 728-730
 Grindrod, John, 828-829
 Griver, Martin, 432

- Grosvenor, Helen, 630
 Gsell, Francis Xavier, 480, 793
 guilt, 674, 680, **822-824**, 828-829
 Gullett, Henry, 768
 Gunn, Jeannie (Mrs Aeneas), 239, 458
 Gunson, Neil, 55
 Gunther, James, 61-71, 133, 134, 135, 193, 531
 Gunther, Lydia, 61-62
 Hack, Stephen, 241, 317
 Hackett, Winthrop, 424-426
 Hagenauer, Frederick, 189, **190-205**, 226, 268-269, 485-486, 488, 834
 Hagon, R.C., 739
 Hale, Harold, 511
 Hale, Matthew, 161, 172, 183, 189, 245, 263-264, 268-269, 280, **339-355**, 649, 834
 half-caste, *see* Aborigines mixed race
 Hall, Richard and Margaret, 731
 Hall, Robert, 792
 Hall, Victor, 738, 740, 748
 Hall, William and Marjorie, 845
 Ham, curse of, 29, 30, 32, 43, 47, 72, 134, 152-153, 399, 401-402, 658
 Ham, John, 124
 Hamilton, George, 73, 535
 Hamilton, Harold, 740
 Hamilton, William, 34
 Hammer, David, 649-654
 Hammond, Octavius, 351
 Hampton, Ken, 564, 597, 598, 639
 Hampton, Timothy, 720
 Hancock, W.K., 611, 769
 Handt, Johann, 56-61, 104
 Hanner, William, 206
 Hardey, Joseph, 271, 277
 Hardie, J.L., 613
 Harkness, B.C., 642
 Harms, Ludwig, 384, 391
 Harney, Bill, 237, 774
 Harper, John, 29, 48
 Harris, Charles, 680, 865-866
 Harris, George, 228
 Harris, G.R. (Dick), 724, 734, 753, 791-792, 793-794, 838
 Harris, Len, 626, 717, 733, 734, 750-751, 769, 771-772, 775, 785, 793, 838-841, 847
 Harris, Margarita, 769
 Harris, Nell, 785, 838, 841
 Harris, Norman, 619
 Harris, William, 619
 Harrison, Patricia, 587-589
 Harry (Marsden adoptee), 41-42
 Hart, Max, 698-699
 Hart, Steve, 412
 Hartenstein, Wilhelm, 103
 Hartmann, Adolphus, 196
 Harvey, J.B., 330-331
 Hasluck, Paul, 85, 781, 808
 Hassall, Elizabeth, 47
 Hausmann, John, 103, 108, 109, 231
 Hawkey, Eric, 859
 Hawson, Frank, 331
 Hay, Frederick (William), 513-514
 Heidenreich, G.A., 390-403, 406
 Henry, William, 31, 43-44, 531
 Herbert, Xavier, 239, 578
 Hermannsburg Missionary Society, 384, 390-391
 Hey, J. Nicholas, **487-496**, 552
 Hickson, Robert, 178-179
 Higgins, Geoff, 668-671
 Hill, C.M., 702, 708
 Hill, Ernestine, 238
 Hill, Richard, 46
 Hill, Samuel, 90
 Hindmarsh, John, 314-315, 339
 history, distortion of, 84-85
 Hockey, H.E., 554
 Holden, Robert, 169, 172
 Holinger, Margaret, *see* Love, Margaret
 Hollermann, Heinrich, 391
 Homann, E., 384-387
 Hore, Michael and Margaret, 843

- Horner, Jack, 617
 Howe, Capt., 218-219
 Howitt, A.W., 539
 Howitt, William, 152-153, 180-181
 Huddleston, Harry, 750
 Huddleston, Henry, 705
 Hudson, Jerry, 487
 Hughes, Earl, 843
 Hull, William, 30
 Hulme, Moir, F.O., 627
 Humphries, Denzil, 668-671
 Hunter, John, 36, 38
 Hurst, Benjamin, 120-123, 130,
 134, 243-244
 Huthnance, F.L.G., 696-697, 702
 Hutt, John, 261, 282
 Hyde, Ruby, 562-563, 590

 Immanuel Synod (Lutheran), 387,
 389, 404, 484
 Ingram, William, 355
 Innes, James, 301
Inquirer, 419-431
 Irwin, Frederick, 258-261, 289
 Isaac, Connie, 637-638

 Jacob (COOPER'S CREEK), 384-386,
 388
 Jacobs, Cedric, 668-671
 Jaensh, G., 388
 Jago, J.D., 807
 Jalamar, 741
 Jamblyn, Allan, 364
 James, A.E., 627
 James, Shadrach Livingston, 618,
 620-621
 James, Thomas Shadrach, 226-228,
 618, 624, 666
 Janny, Ambrose, 440-441
 Jansz, Willem, 17, 459, 480
 Jany, Jean Marie, 440
 Japangardi, Tim, 774
 Japanma, James, 857
 Japparri, 743, 747
 Jardine, Frank, 486
 Jemmy (SYDNEY), 50

 Jaymunda, 512
 Jesuit Order, 435, 439, **462-480**,
 835
 Jigalong, 847-848
 Jimmy, Jean, 498
 Jobst, John, 450
 Johannes (HERMANNSBURG), 402
 Johnson, Frank, 663
 Johnson, Jack, 629
 Johnson, Mary, 41
 Johnson, Richard, 17, 37, 40, 43, 72
 Johnson, Sarah, 720
 Johnston, Kerr, 221
 Jones, Abraham, 261, 262
 Jones, David, 107
 Jones, F.W., 765
 Jorgenson, Jorgen, 91
 Joshua, *see* Umbariri
 Joynt, Rex, 696, 697-698, 699, 700,
 708, 713, 718, 727
 Juergens, Heinrich, 391

 Kalimala (Andreas), 402
 Katchewan, Pompo, 501-502, 503
 Kavel, A.L.C., 320
 Keats, William and James, 257
 Keene, Theophilus, 163
 Kelly, Caroline, 626
 Kelly, Mrs. T., 627
 Kelly, Ned, 412, 433
 Kelly, William, 441
 Kempe, A.H., 390-403
 Kempe, Dorothea, 391-403
 Kennedy, Lachlan, 486-487, 496
 Kentish, Leonard, 771
 Keogh, Mr. (BREWARRINA), 574-575,
 590
 Khourabene, 533
 Kickett, John, 615-616
 Killa Killa, 791-792
 Kinchela, Jack, 625, 629, 630
 King, George, 262
 Kingsley-Strack, Joan, 626
 Kirby, S.V., 739
 Kirk, David, 668-671
 Kirsten, Fr., 479

- Kleinschmidt, Harry, 587
 Klose, S., 325-328, 341, 346
 'Knife' (Bard), 437-438
 Knopwood, Robert, 89
 Koch, W., 386
 Koolamurinea, 463
 Kramer, Carl, 162, 196-197, 203,
 268-269, 385
 Kramer, E.E., 655
 Kriol, 844-845, 854, 867-868
 Kropinyeri, William, 364, 365
 Kulkynne massacre, 172
 Kyle, Dan, 667

 Lamilami, Lazarus, 750, 856
 land rights, 93, 115-117, 231, 313-
 316, 409, 434-435, 506, 509,
 676, 765-766, **800-829**, 855
 Lane, Henry, 472
 Lang, John Dunmore, 35, 67, 103,
 104, 137, 182, 229, 541
 Langayina, 844
 Langford Smith, Keith, 728-730,
 733-734, 785
 Langford Smith, L.E., 730
 Langhorne, George, 56, 118-119
 Langiplunga, 741
 Langlands, Bill and Audrey, 848
 Lanney, William, 98-99
 La Perouse Aborigines' Mission,
 554-555
 La Trobe, Charles Joseph, 122, 125,
 159, 160-162, 164, 180, 191
 Lawson, Henry, 575
 Legislative Council of NSW, Select
 Committee on the Condition of
 the Aborigines (1845), 114-116
 Leigh, Samuel, 29, 46-47
 Lencioni, Maurice, 109, 113
 Lennon, Lallie, 595-596
 Leo XIII, Pope, 435, 440
 Lester, Grace, 639
 Lewis, John, 850
 Lindsay, Ian, 852
 Lindsay, Robert, 599-600, 603
 literacy, vernacular, 231, 273-274,
 324, 465, 834, 856
 Lloyd, E., 532, 534
 Lloyd, George, 532-533
 Lloyd, Warner, W., 803
 Lock, Annie, 561-562
 Lock hospitals, 577-578
 London Missionary Society, 40, 44,
 51-55, 76, 77, 131
 Long, Edgerton, 668, 669
 Long, R.C.M., 731
 Long, Retta, *see* Dixon, Retta
 Loone, B., 564
 Loos, Noel, 85
 Louisa (MALOGA), 223
 Lousada, E.C., 839
 Love, J.R.B. (Bob), 543, 836-838,
 856
 Love, Margaret, 837
 Lowe, Beulah, 842-843
 Lowe, William, 280
 Lumbulumbia, 514
 Lutheran Church, 320-328, 346,
 382-410, 484, 485, 835-836
 Lutheran schism (SA), 383, 387,
 389, 403
 Lyons, Edith, 630
 Lyons, Joseph, 630-631, 763

 Macarthur, Elizabeth, 74
 Macassans, 240-242, 459, 792, 796
 McColl, A.S., 734-753
 McCoy, Brian, 863
 Macdonnel, Richard, 351, 356
 McDougall, William, 206, 208, 214
 McCallam, Alexander, 615
 McEwen, John, 630, 767, 778
 McGarry, Patrick, 622
 McGill, *see* Biraban
 McGrath, E., 480
 McGrath, John, 770
 Mackillop, Donald, 462, 466-467
 Macquarie, Lachlan, 39, 44-46
 Madi, 840, 846
 McFarlane, Allen, 365
 McKenzie, Fred, 567
 Magurnir, Philip, 855

- Mahoney, Det., 612
 Maitland, Alexander, 300
 Major (WA), 483
 Malcolm, Arthur, 828-829, 850-852
 Mamoots, 495
 Mangudja, Samuel, 733
 Mansell, Edward, 98
 Mansell, Julia, 98
 Mansio, Mosesi, 803
 Markus, Andrew, 85
 Marr, Bert, 629, 633
 marriages, Aboriginal, 46, 195, 203,
 211-212, 268, 276, 280, 540
 Marschner, Fr., 469, 474
 Marsden, Elizabeth, 41-42
 Marsden, Samuel, 22, 41-42, 48-51,
 52, 53, 56, 73-77
 Marsh, Jim and Marjorie, 848
 McLean, Jacky, 849
 McMillan, Angus, 197-198
 McNab, Duncan, 432, **434-439**, 462
 Marshall, Jane Christian, 67
 Mason, Ben, 668-671
 Mason, Ken, 858
 Masson, Elsie, 458, 703-705
 Mathew, John, 539
 Mathews, R.H., 539
 Matthews, Daniel, 184, 189-190,
 220-228, 229, 236-237, 413,
 431, 499, 551, 617, 618, 649,
 834
 Matthews, Janet, 189-190,
 220-228, 229, 617, 834
 Matthews, Lillie, 183-184
 Mawalan, 810
 Meischel, 383
 Meissel, Gottlieb, 385
 Melbourne Church of England
 Mission, 164-173, 205-220
 Melville Island, 460
 Menmumy, 504, 507, 508
 Menzies, Robert, 768, 805
 Merara, 743-744, 746
 Merri Creek School, 123-126, 161
 Methodist Church, 86, 411, 430,
 538, 635, 722, **801-814**, 820,
 864
 Methodist Inland Mission, 675
 Methodist Overseas Mission, 761,
 774, 784-785, 786-788, 791,
 801-814, 836, 841, 855, 859
 Meyer, C.A., 388
 Meyer, Friederike, **328-330**
 Meyer, Heinrich, 325, **328-330**,
 357, 359, 833
 Meyrick, Henry, 198-199
 Midgegoroo, 256-257
 Miles, Howard, 669
 Miller, James, 557, 582-584, 659
 Millett, Edward, 533
 Millett, Janet, 267, 533, 534
 Minimiri, 716
 mining, 497, 553, 559, 795, 800-829
missions
 failures, early, 21, 44, 114-117,
 122, 123, 125-126, **126-138**,
 161-162, 165, 236, 255, 281,
 470, 832
 in the war zone, **768-779**
 segregation on, 337, 342, 344,
 402, 506, 562, 787, 795, 802,
 815
 survival places, 196, 204, 209,
 210, 219, 226, **235-246**, 297,
 395, 399, 409, 414, 509, 513,
 549, 609, 698-701, 751, 783,
 784, 844
 'total institutions', 167, 201, 208,
 209, 225, 298-299, 341, 344,
 350, 362-363, 368-369, 414,
 438, 468, 472, 489-490, 701-
 702, 703, 721, 724-725, 731-
 732, 751, 783, 795, 802, 841
missionaries
 Aboriginal culture, attitude to,
 60, 107, 111, 125, 137,
 210-214, 226, 232, 274,
 304-305, 331-332, 339,
 358-359, 361-362, 365, 367,
 391-392, 399, 476, 494-495,
 509-510, 512, **530-543**,
 566-568, 729-730, 783,

- 787-788, 788-796, 802-803,
804-805, 829-846, 856, 862
- Aboriginal religion, attitude to,
274-275, 366, 493, 512,
540-543, 566-567
- affection for Aborigines, 62,
136-137, 194, 218, 220-221,
224, 226, 267, 274, 287, 333,
479, 531, 534, 710, 738, 750,
825
- agricultural attempts, 58-59,
105, 133, 134, 167, 171, 207,
225, 279-280, 289-290,
297-300, 336, 339, 341, 344,
439, 464, 468-469, 474, 478,
493, 698, 702, 713, 715, 724,
731-732, 750-751, 752, 787,
841
- authoritarian approach, 196,
201, 209, 227, 366, 373, 395,
398-399, 493, 510, 512, 513,
570, 709, 734, 749, 835
- children, concentration on, 105,
112, 159, 342, 362, 393-394,
402, 476, 830
- compassion of, 58, 136-137, 221,
267, 286, 362, 412, 447, 505,
531, 556, 559, 588-589, 695,
726, 750, 789, 825
- confronting injustice, 33-35, 54,
54, 121, 303-304, 327,
333-336, 341, 449, 411, 416,
449, 500, 501, 513-516, 566,
785, 804-814
- degeneration theory, *see* separate
entry
- despondency, 54-55, 127, 128,
328, 329, 338, 403, 443, 467,
468
- Europeanising Aborigines, 44-46,
71-77, 167, 171, 210, 232,
261, 336, 341, 366, 368-369,
399-400, 468, 495, 566,
696-698, 702, 748-749, 751,
783, 784, 834, 846
- evangelistic zeal, 69, 206,
234-235, 325, 343, 351,
383-384, 399, 413, 415, 436,
486, 500, 556, 707, 734, 787
- gospel and civilisation, *see*
separate entry
- gospel, presented incompletely,
59, 207, 215-216
- itineration attempts, 47, 69, 120,
136, 230, 287, 332, 364, 830
- opposition to abuse of women,
58, 223-224, **235-246**, 327
- paternalism, *see* separate entry
- personal disputes, 48, 52, 60-62,
113, 120, 217, 226, 295-296,
702-703
- selection and training, 56, 61,
103, 108, 162, 315, 461, 541
- 'settling' the Aborigines, 47, 70,
134, 167, 210, 287, 336, 339,
478
- sin and judgment, emphasis
upon, 59, 114, 171, 207,
215-216, 399-400, 402, 494
- social distance, 135-136, 492
- treating the sick, 57, 227, 362,
447, 490, 512, 531, 561, 732,
750, 751
- use of Aboriginal languages, 60,
106, 111-112, 120, 167-168,
192, 230-235, 273-274, 284,
287, 306, 321-322, 326, 329,
360, 367-368, 374, 392-393,
399, 405, 409, 439, 461, 465,
468, 475-476, 660, 729, 787,
701, 803, **829-846**, 855, 856
- work ethic, insistence upon, 171,
210, 224-225, 280, 344-345,
363, 386, 394, 489, 506,
697-698, 751
- mission stations**
- Angurugu, *see* Groote Eylandt
- Apsley, 64, 67-68
- Aurukun, 493, 688, 819-820
- Bathurst Island, 687, 723,
770-771, 783, 793, 843
- Beagle Bay, 440-449

- Bethesda (Q), 109
 Bethesda (SA), 269, **382-389**,
 390, 402, 431, 835-836
 Bloomfield, 404, 484, 505
 Buntingdale (Geelong), 76,
 120-123, 130-131, 161
 Carnarvon (Church of Christ),
 649-654
 Cooper's Creek, *see* Bethesda (SA)
 Croker Island, 771, 855
 Daly River, **465-480**, 722, 835,
 863
 Doomadgee, 658
 Ebenezer (Wimmera), **190-197**,
 200, 214, 244, 268, 834
 Edward River, 687
 Elcho Island, 687, 771, 802, 848
 Emerald River, *see* Groote
 Eylandt
 Ernabella, 373, 688, 838,
 856-857
 Forrest River, 511-517, 855
 Gascoyne, 417-431, 499, 500,
 501
 Goulburn Island, 687, 772,
 801-802
 Groote Eylandt, 687, 727, 731,
 733, 734, 735, 769, 771-772,
 790, 791, 792, 793-795, 796,
 839, 841, 842-843, 845-846,
 851-852, 853, 861
 Hermannsburg, 388, **289-410**,
 431, 472, 550, 687, 688, 836,
 852, 855, 863
 Hopevale, 484
 Kalumburu, 434, 688, 763
 Kapalogo, 688
 Killalpaninna, *see* Bethesda (SA)
 Kopperamanna, 385, 386
 Koonibba, 599
 Kowanyama, 687, 783, 854
 Kunmunya, 836
 Lake Boga, 162-164, 180, 190,
 236, 244
 Lake Condah, 214, 217, 244, 569
 Lake Hindmarsh, *see* Ebenezer
 Lake Macquarie, 51-55, 129,
 131, 830
 Lake Tyers, 169, 200, 204,
 205-220, 235, 244, 406, 431,
 549, 554, 609, 613, 834
 Lockhardt River, 687
 Lombadina, 445-449, 688
 Lutheran mission, Moreton Bay,
 see Nundah
 Maloga, **220-228**, 235, 237, 244,
 415, 431, 499, 569, 617-618,
 649, 666, 789, 834
 Manunka (Mannum), 228
 Mapoon, **485-499**, 552, 687, 807
 Mari Yamba, 484
 Milingimbi, 687, 740, 742, 770,
 772, 783, 792, 802, 803, 804,
 813, 842-843
 Mission of St. Michael and All
 Angels, *see* Forrest River
 Mitchell River, *see* Kowanyama
 Mt Margaret, **558-561**, 624, 800,
 849
 Mornington Island, 688, 792
 Nepabunna, 564-568
 New Norcia, **281-306**, 406, 433,
 434, 553
 Ngukurr, *see* Roper River
 Numbulwar, 840, 843, 845-846,
 860
 Nundah, **103-109**, 131-132, 231,
 484, 792, 832
 Oenpelli, 687, 712, 722, 734,
 737, 739, 790, 792, 795,
 838-839, 841
 Passionist Mission, *see*
 Stradbroke Island
 Perth (Wesleyan Mission), 161,
 245, 268, **271-281**, 341, 347,
 654, 801, 833
 Point McLeay, 354, 370-372,
 373-374, 396, 431, 554, 613
 Point Pearce, 372, 609, 613
 Poonindie, 161, 169, 172, 245,
 264, 269-270, 328, **339-355**,
 431, 532, 549, 789, 834

- Port Keats, 687
 Ramahyuck, **200-206**, 214, 217,
 244, 268, 406
 Rapid Creek (Darwin), 236,
462-467, 835
 Roper River, 146, 520, 687, 688,
689-706, 772, 783, 784, 790,
 792, 839-840, 844-845, 846,
 855, 860, 867-868
 St. Josephs, *see* Rapid Creek
 Stradbroke Island, **109-117**,
 131-132, 432, 832
 Umbulgari, *see* Forrest River
 Umeewarra, 669-670
 Uniya, *see* Daly River
 Warangesda, 225-226, **413-416**,
 500, 502, 549, 563, 569, 834
 Welpa, 493, 687
 Wellington, 33, **56-72**, 132-134,
 237, 280, 531, 831-832
 Wimmera, *see* Ebenezer
 Yarrabah, 484, **499-522**, 614,
 687, 698, 849-851, 855
 Yelta, **164-173**, 180, 200, 205,
 208, 236, 241, 352, 834
 Yirrkala, 687, 795, 800,
804-814, 855
 Mitchell, Francis (Fanny), 262
 Mitchell, Russett, 668-671
 Mitchell, William, 261
 Montague, George, 28
 Moorhouse, Matthew, 240, 316,
 319, 328, 330, 331, 339, 341
 Moran, Patrick, 440, 461, 471, 477
 Moravian Church, 160, 162, 190,
 197, 385, 485
 Moreton Bay Aborigines Friends
 Society, 231
 Morey, Constable, 735, 742
 Morgan, Bagot, 227
 Morgan, Sally, 674
 Morgan, Hugh, 538, 821, 823, 827
 Morice, Robert, 749
 Morley, William, 624
 Morrell, James, 101-102, 148
 Moses, 'Blind', 410, 853
 Morgan, Robert, 569
 Mountford, C.P., 567
 Moy, F.H., 803
 Mulgrave, P.A., 90
 Mulkarawada, 741
 Munro, Hugo, 100
 Myall Creek massacre, 24, 27, 35,
 85, 156, 680
 nakedness, 31, 367, 495, **530-535**,
 538
 Naden, Bill, 667
 Nagel, Phillip, 733
 Nana, 654-655, 657
 Nawbaree, 41
 Nanwitchero, 167
 National Missionary Council, 627,
 632, 746
 Native Institution (Albany), 264-271,
 277
 Native Institution (Parramatta),
 44-50, 76
 Native Institution (Mt Eliza), 260
 native police, 482-483
 Needham, John, 516, 624, 627,
 633, 634-635, 657
 Nelen Yubu Missiological Unit,
 863-864
 Nellie, Ruth, 733
 Nelson, Eliza, 415
 Neubauer, Fr, 462, 465
 Neuendetteslau Missionary Society,
 484
 Neville, Auber Octavius, 513, 560,
 579, 615, 634
 New South Wales Aborigines
 Mission (NSWAM), 555
 Newton, Henry, 706, 716, 718
 Nicholls, Douglas, 579, 617, 621,
 623, 629, 630, 660
 Nichols, P.W., 821
 Nippy (WA), 483
 Niquet, Peter, 103
 Njimandum, 837
 Noble, Angelina, 512-513, 516,
519-522, 698, 702

- Noble, James, 508, 512-513,
514-515, 516, 517, **519-522**,
698, 702, 850-851, 855
'noble savage', 22, 23
Nott, Roger, 804
Nummalta, 333
Nungalinya College, 857, 859-860,
864
Nungamajbar, Rubert, 860
Nungamajbarr, Yulki, 750-751
Nyaningu, Peter, 857
- O'Brien, Antonio, 447
O'Brien, J., 462, 466
O'Brien, Lewis, 596
Ogilvie family, 660
O'Halloran, Thomas, 319, 339
O'Shannassy, John, 618
Olbrecht, August, 103
Old Bob, *see* Gajtyuma
Old Charlie, *see* Gallawa
Oldfield, Roger, 537
Oldrey, Miss (PURFLEET), 585
Old Zachary, 471
Onslow, Alexander, 425
Onus, William, 786
Oomah, 512
Ophel, J.A., 363
Orton, Joseph, 30, 49, 118, 120,
183
Overheu, Leonard, 513-514
Overland Telegraph, 389, 463, 689,
694, 728
- Pacific Islanders (as missionaries),
538, 802
Page, Jim, 565-566
Pallottine Order, 441-450, 480
Parker, Edward, 77, 155-157, 158,
159, 174-176, 177, 539
Parkes, Henry, 413
Parkin Trust, 373
Parry, Henry, 271, 416-431, 520
Parry, L., 520
Passionist Fathers, 109-114, 129,
134, 832
- pastoralists, attitude to missions**
antagonistic, 58, 163-164, 223,
290, 359, 360-361, 365, 393,
414, **417-431**, 565, 650
sympathetic, 162, 165, 170-171,
173-174, 238, 285, 287, 419,
565, 624, 651
paternalism, 513, 549-603, 609,
788, 811, 815-816
Paterson, Thomas, 620
Patten, Jack, 625, 629, 630, 635
Patten, John, 624, 786
Patterson, Margaret, 851
Paul IV, Pope, 861
Paulson, Graham, 679
Payne, W.B., 620, 649, 666
peace expedition, **734-753**, 763
Peacock, Edward, 123-125
Peckham, Tom, 629
Peel, Thomas, 258
Peg, Sister, *see* Flynn, Margaret
Pemulwy, 37
Penman, David, 678
Penny, Richard, 318
Pentecostalism, 661-663
Pepper, Nathanael, 192-195, 200,
202-203, 268, 666, 671, 834,
852
Pepper, Phillip (Bony), 191-192,
194, 195, 196
Pepper, Phillip (present day), 219
Perkins, J.A., 737
Perriman, H. Leslie, 716, 718, 732,
753, 785
Perry, Charles, 162, 164, 173
Pesciaroli, Luigi, 109, 113-114
Peter, Rachel, 498
Peters, Bobby, 667
Petric, Tom, 230, 833
Peyrere, Isaac de la, 33-34
'Philanthropus', *see* Robert
Cartwright
Phillip, Arthur, 36-38, 460
Phillips, Jean, 678
Piety, Dick, 661
Pigeon (WA), 483

- Pinjarra, Battle of, 85, 248-259, 260
 Pius IX, Pope, 293, 297
 Plunkett, John, 27
 Polding, John Bede, 32, 109, 113,
 114-117, 131, 243, 282, 296,
 432, 462
 Polgen, Alan, 858
 police, 184, 322-335, 339, 361,
 385-386, 395-398, 407,
 417-418, 423, 436, 482-483,
 488, 505, 513-516, 519,
 571-572, 578, 579-581, 641,
 650, 693, **734-753**, 763, *see*
 also native police
 Port Essington, 291-293, 460-461,
 722, 833
 Port Lincoln, 325, 330-339, 340,
 342-355, 383, 833
 Port Phillip - Bourke's Experiment,
 118-119, 260
 Port, S.C., 731, 738
 Port Victoria, *see* Port Essington
 Porter, William, 61-64
 Potter, Ellie, *see* Warren, Ellie
 Pratt, Ivy, 625
 Presbyterian church, 86, 102, 197,
 206, 229-232, 369-373, 385,
 484, **485-499**, 641, 820, 834,
 855-856
 Protection Acts, 201, 214, 217,
 302-303, 550-553
Protection Boards,
 NSW, 570, 580-582, 623-627,
 632, 656
 Victoria, 201, 214, 216-219, 220
 WA, 302-303, 443
 protectionism, 154-160, 161, 506,
 549-603, 610-611, 782, 784,
 789, 815
 Protectors, 93, 96, 148, 150,
 154-160, 161, 180, 227, 240,
 244, 302, 314-317, 319, 322,
 328, 329, 330-332, 346, 415,
 464, 493, 505, 539, 560, 571,
 615, 628, 696, 749
 Puertollano, Thomas, 445, 447
 Punalta, 332
 Raberaba, Conrad, 855
 Raffles Bay, 460
 Rankin, Pigeon, 776
 Read, Peter, 571, 580
 Reed, Archie, 623, 625
 Reeves, William, 505-506
 Reid, Horace, 698, 702
 Regan and St. Jack (constables),
 514-516
 Reid, James, 364, 367, 371
 Renan, Ernest, 33
 reserves, 158, 176-180, 208, 231,
 435, 511, 553, 468, 569-603,
 625, 632, 659, 765-766, 789,
 801, 803-814
 Reuther, J.G., 388, 836
 revival, 848-851, 859, 861
 Reynolds, Henry, 25, 85, 101-102
 Ridley, William, 34, 71, 147,
 189-190, **229-235**, 539, 543,
 833-834, 867
 Rigney, Cyril and Gordon, 613
 Riley, C., 643
 Riley, Charles, 426, 430
 Rita (OODNADATTA), 560
 Divers, Charles, 219
 Roberts, Barnabas, 146, 690-691,
 698, 858
 Roberts, Betty, 861
 Roberts, Frank, 629, 663
 Robinson, George Augustus, 91-93,
 155-160, 542
 Rode, Augustus, 103, 132
 Rodriguez, Filomeno, 444
 Roe, Septimus, 258
 Rooney, Bernard, 306
 Rose, F.G., 785
 Ross, Robert, 107
 Rossiter, Mr (KINCHELLA), 583
 Roth, W.E., 429-430, 539
 Rottnest Island Prison, 145, 259,
 435, 577, 614
 Rowley, C.B., 85, 415, 777, 783,
 790-791, 814

Rusden, G.W., 136, 173, 174
 Rushbrook, Alan and Phillipa, 854
 Russell, Jemima, 371-372
 Rutter, Delia, 562-563, 590
 Ryan, Lyndall, 85

St John of God sisters, 447-449

Sacred Congregation for the
 Propagation of the Faith, 109,
 113, 283, 297, 435

Sacred Heart missionaries, 480

Salesian Order, 449-450

Saltwater Jack, 713

Salvado, Rosendo, 189, **281-306**,
 432, 461, 536, 833

Salvation Army, 373

Sandefur, John, 844-845

Sandefur, Joy, 845

Sarah, *see* Walker, Sarah

Saunders, John, 35, 107, 184

Sawtell, Michael, 624

Schenk, Rod, 558-561, 800, 836

Schmidt, K. William, 29, 71, 74,
 103-109, 114, 127, 132, 134,
 136, 832

Schneider, Moritz, 103

Shoknekt, C.H.M., 387

schools and education, 44-50, 60,
 76, 105-106, 120, 123-126,
 134-135, 156, 168, 171, 178,
 191, 194, 207, 223, 226, 262,
 267, 268-269, 273-274, 289,
 299, 323-325, 329, 338, 341,
 344-345, 360, 362, 393, 402,
 442-443, 465, 493, 503-504,
 513, 574-575, 640-654, 703,
 732, 751, 765, 779, 781, 783,
 787, 795

Shropshire, Mr (WARANGESDA), 622

Schulze, Louis, 391, 534

Schurmann, Clamor, **321-328**,
330-339, 341, 344, 383, 384,
 434, 533, 833

Schurmann, Wilhelmina, 337-338

Schwarz, W.F., 390-403

Schwarz, Wilhelmine, 391, 403

Scobie, Grace, 627

Scott, James, 90

Scott, Mr (BREWARRINA), 572

Scott, Thomas, 41, 48, 56

Scully, John, 285, 287

Searcy, Alfred, 242

Select Committees on the Aborigines,

Britain (1837), 77, 154

NSW (1845), 114, 131, 136, 243

SA (1860), 360-361

Victoria (1861), 176-177

self-determination, 635, 637, 859

Serra, Joseph, 287-296 (endnote
 145), 461

settlements and reserves

(government), 568-584

Acheron, 178-180

Brewarrina, 569, 571, 572,

574-575, 624

Cherbourg, 569, 587-589, 614,
 637-638

Coranderrk, 214, 221, 569, 612,
 812

Cumeroogunga, 226-8, 554, 568,
 569, 609, 618-619, 649, 666

Framlingham, 214, 217, 569

Kahlin, 577-578

Moore River, 569, 571, 584, 587

Nanima, 570

Palm Island, 517, 571, 628, 638,
 667

Purfleet, 569, 585, 589, 601

Tuncester, 629, 643, 644

Wallaga Lake, 569, 573

Woorabinda, 587-589

Sharpe, M.C., 969, 702

Shaw, Joseph, 169

Shelley, William, 44

Shenton, George, 184, 277, 279

Short, Augustus, 263-264, 280,
 340, 342, 344, 347, 352-3,
 355, 532

Shuttleworth, Kay, 124

Siewwright, Charles, 155-157

Simon, Ella, 585, 589, 601-603

- Simpson, Martin, 429
 skincolour, 31, 658, 846
 Smillie, William, 326
 Smith, Henrietta, *see* Smith of
 Dunesk Bequest
 Smith of Dunesk Bequest, 369-373
 Smith, Percy, 655
 Smith, William Sammerez, 504
 Smithies, John, 34, 161, 245,
 271-281, 341, 343, 347, 349,
 530, 654, 801, 833
 Snell, Joseph, 109, 110-111, 113
 Social Darwinism, 540
 Society for the Propagation of
 Christian Knowledge, 40
 Society for the Propagation of the
 Gospel, 40, 263-265, 344, 349
 Sowden, William, 242, 532
 Spencer, Baldwin, 85, 403-404,
 406-409, 539, 550, 717
 Spiesecke, F. William, 162-164,
 190-196, 834
 Stanley, Lord Edward, 21, 71, 128
 Stanner, W.E.N., 26, 608, 634,
 762-763
 Stapley, Alfred, 363
 Stephen, James, 314-315
 Stirling, James, 255, 258
 Stoeble, J.H., 196
 Stokes, John Lort, 182, 481
 Stokes, Judith, 842-843
 Stolz, J.J., 405, 635
 Stone, E.A., 425
 Stowe, Thomas, 322
 Strehlow, Carl, 388, 404-408,
 835-836
 Strehlow, Theodore, 405, 836
 Strele, Anton, 462, 466, 476
 Strzelecki, Count Paul, 182-183
 Stuart, John McDonall, 382-383
 Sturt, Charles, 313
 Summer Institute of Linguistics,
 843, 844-845, 848
 Sumner, John, 366
 Susannah, *see* Crow, Susannah
 Swann, C. Henry, 396
 Sweatman, John, 461
 Sydney Herald, 35
 Symons, Gordon, 804, 807
 Tachon, Alphonse, 440
 Tager, Andrew, 162-164
 Taito, F.A., 778
 Takan-Arro, 347
 Tallyho, 191-192
 Tanda, Martha, 349-350
 Taplin, C. Eaton, 396
 Taplin, George, **356-369**, 370, 372,
 373-374, 539, 835-836
 Taplin, Martha, 356-357, 359-360
 Tasmania, 86-100
Tasmanian Aborigines, 86-100
 killing of, 86-89
 massacre of at Risdon Cove, 87,
 89
 exile of, 86, 92-100, 150
 despair, 92, 97-98, 150
 on Flinders Island, 92-97
 at Oyster Cove, 97-100, 150
 Taylor, Phillip, 732
 Tedbury, 37
 Teddy (EBENEZER), 192
 Teichmann, Christian, 319,
 321-328, 341, 346, 833
 Tekua (Thomas), 402
 Tench, Watkin, 23, 24, 37, 38, 184,
 535
 Terry, John, 46, 50
 Thomas, Corporal, 442, 445
 Thomas, Faith, 563
 Thomas, Jocelyn, 90
 Thomas, Mesac, 414-415, 416, 423,
 430, 499
 Thomas, O.C., 702-703
 Thomas, Roy, 565
 Thomas, William, 124, 135,
 155-158, 159, 176-180, 205,
 434
 Thomson, Donald, 773
 Thompson, Dora, 571-572
 Thompson, Doris, 564
 Thomson, Alexander, 162

- Thornburgh, F.T., 727-728, 729, 731
 Thornton, George, 227, 415, 550
 Thorpe, Harry, 614
 Thorpe, R.C., 238-239
 Threlkeld, Lancelot, 25, 33, 34, 51-55, 77, 107, 127, 129, 230, 231, 243-244, 534, 537, 539, 830, 833, 835
 Tiamandu, 718, 733
 Tindale, Norman, 572, 718, 785
 Tinney, J., 702
 Todbrook, 350
 Tonkinson, Robert, 847-848
 Tootle, Dennis, 283-285
 Torrens, Robert, 314
 Tozer, Horace, 500
 Traynor, E. 738, 739, 742, 743-744
 Treacy, William, 438-439
 Tremlett, Lance and Gwen, 854
Tribes and language groups
 Adnyamathanha, 564-568
 Agaquilla, 468
 Alawa, 692, 698, 700
 Alyawarra, 863
 Anindilyakwa, 714-716, 718-719, 732-734, 843
 Aranda (Arrente), 389-410, 836, 855
 Awabakal, 52-55, 830, 833, 835
 Banjang, 659-663
 Bard, 437-439
 Bindal, 101
 Bongo Bongo, 476
 Bralakalung, 200
 Dharawal, 37
 Dharuk, 37
 Dieri, 382-389, 835-836
 Djeradj, 476
 Gumatj, 804, 814
 Gunwinggu (Kunwinjku), 723-726, 732-734, 839-841
 Gupapuyngu, 842-843
 Gurindji, 815, 863
 Iwaidja, 461, 833
 Jurn, 101
 Kakadu (Gagudju), 723
 Kameraigal, 37
 Kamilaroi, 231-232, 833-834
 Kaurna, 322-328, 342
 Kukatja, 863
 Kurnai, 197-220
 Loritja, 404
 Larrakia, 242, 462-467, 835, 859
 Malak Malak, 468-476, 835
 Mangarayi, 692, 700
 Mara, 692, 698, 700, 729
 Maraura, 834
 Martu Wangka, 848
 Narrinyeri (Ngarrinyeri), 357-369, 834
 Nawu, 330, 332
 Ngalakan, 692-693, 700
 Ngandi, 692-693, 700
 Nimanboor, 448
 Nunggubuyu, 543, 692, 839-841, 845-846
 Nyul Nyul, 441
 Pankala, 346-347
 Pitjantjatjara, 838, 856
 Raminyeri, 329
 Rembarrnga, 692, 700
 Ridharrngu, 843
 Tasmanian, *see* Tasmanian Aborigines
 Tatungalung, 200
 Tiwi, 460
 Warlpiri (Wailbiri), 404, 561, 863
 Warndarang, 692-693, 700
 Wiradjuri, 57-71, 414-415, 543, 831
 Wongutha, 559-560
 Woolna, 463-467
 Woolwonga, 468
 Worora, 836
 Wotjabaluk, 191
 Yarra, 121, 178
 Trimmer, Ellen, 264, 270
 Tristan (Marsden adoptee), 42
 Trower, Gerard, 511, 512, 520
 Trudinger, R.M., 838
 Truganini, 92, 95, 99, 100

- Tucker, Margaret, 569, 579,
 598-599, 621, 629
 Tuckfield, Francis, 76, 120-123,
 127, 131, 134, 152, 200
 Tuckfield, Sarah, 120
 Tuendemann, August, 391
 Tuitpurro, 323
 Tulaba, *see* McDougall, William
 Tunbridge, Dorothy, 568
 Tyerman, Daniel, 51, 77
 Tyson, James, 501
 Uhr, D'Arcy, 483
 Ullathorne, William, 46, 282
 Umbariri, 713, 716, 839-840
 Umbakumba, 733, 769, 860
 Unaipon, David, 367, 635
 Unaipon, James, 364, 367, 852
 United Aborigines Mission (UAM),
 553-568, 590, 591-593, 594,
 595, 624, 646, 655, 657, 659,
 660-663, 664-668, 800, 825,
 849
 Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
 Congress, 865-866
 Uniting Church, 663-671, 678, 820,
 848-849, 859, 864-866
 Upumara, Benedict, 290-291, 292
 Urquhart, Dominic, 294

 Vaccari, Raymund, 109, 110-111,
 113-114
 Varcoe, Alban, 613
 venereal disease, 39, 58, 62, 107,
 130, 131, 149-150, 153, 175,
 236-238, 241-245, 327, 412,
 417, 487, 577-578, 625
 Venn, Henry, 72, 853
 Vines, E.H., 622
 Vizard, W.G., 702, 710
 Vogan, Arthur, J., 184, 429
 Vogelsang, 384-387, 388
 Von Mueller, Baron, 500

 Waddy, Julie, 843
 Wagner, Gottfried, 103
 Waldeck, Frederick and Fredericka,
 261, 277
 Walder, Heinrich, 385
 Walker, Colin, 228
 Walker, David, 705
 Walker, Kath, 675
 Walker, Sarah, 224
 Walker, Una and Eva, 663
 Walker, William, **47-51**, 830
 Walsh, Larry, 678
 Wandjuk, 809, 814
 Wanganeen, James, 350, 364
 Warburton, 849
 Ward, Arthur, 495
 Ward, Glenyse, 558
 Ward, James, 487-493
 Ward, Mrs J., 488-496
 Warnedeckan, Rachel, 195,
 202-203, 268
 Warren, Ellie, 706-707, 715-716,
 717, 721
 Warren, Hubert, 634, 702-753
 Warrung, James, 349-350
 Watson, Ann, 57, 62, 64, 69
 Watson, James, 750, 801-802
 Watson, William, 33, **56-71**, 75, 76,
 127, 133, 134, 237, 531, 831
 Wattewattipinna, 322
 Waukeri, 361-362
 Webb, Eva Mary, 803
 Webb, Theodor, 740, 750, 775, 785,
 802-803, 841-842
 Wells, Ann, 804-814
 Wells, Edgar, 800, **804-814**
 Wells, Ellen, 264
 Wells, Judge, 746-747
 Wesleyan Missionary Society, 29,
 40, 47-51, 76, 119-123,
 271-281
West Australian, 419-431
 Western Australian Missionary
 Society, 261
 Westgarth, William, 182
 Wettengel, N., 406
 White, Gilbert, 673, 694-695, 703,
 710, 716
 Whitlam, Gough, 819-820

- Widowson, Henry, 86
Wilberforce, William, 40, 42, 271
Wilkey, William, 242, 535
Wilkins, Hubert, 706, 716, 718
Wilkinson, Thomas, 94, 832
Williams, Mr and Mrs Harry, 662
Williams, Ron, 672, 674, 679
Willshire, William H., 236, 396-398, 472, 551
Wilson, Edward, 174, 184
Wilson, Martin, 863-864
Wilton, Charles, 831
Wilton, Les, 568
Wimmera, Willie, 191, 194
Windeyer, Richard, 114
Wirrup, 350
Wise, Frank, 650
Wittenoom, John, 260
Wobart, Eliza, 277
Wollaston, John, 262, 263-266, 269
Wondoonmoi, 837
Wonga, 742, 743
Wontulp-Bi-Buya, 864
Wood, Clyde, 860
Wood, Mrs F.W., 641
Woodley, Jubilee, 497
Woolmington, Jean, 126
Worgan, George, 37, 39, 241, 533
World Vision, 854
World War I, 388, 406, 448, 449, 511, 613-616, 707, 708, 838
World War II, 406, 450, 497, 722, 761, 762, **768-782**, 803, 844
Worms, Ernest Alfred, 450, 785
Wotzke, Mr and Mrs F., 387
Wowinda, Fred, 171-172, 352, 354
Wright, Judith, 150-151
Wurramara, Aringari, 860-861
Wurragwagwa, Jock, 860, 861
Wurramara, Michael Gumbuli, 858, 860
Wyatt, William, 315-316, 322
Wybalenna, *see* Flinders Island
Wynne Evans, C., 731, 732
Wyreup, John, 275-276
Yagan, 256-257
Yamba, 333
Yarrold, Alfred, 506
Yirrkalá Petition, 804-814
Young, Frank and Heather, 601
Young, Henry, 343-344
Young Robert, 122
Yutalta, 332
Zillmann, John, 103

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Dr John Harris is Director of the Zadok Institute for Christianity and Society. John spent many years as a teacher and school principal in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. He is a well-known writer on Aboriginal culture, language and education and, more recently, on the development of a Christian perspective on other contemporary Australian issues. He was awarded his Ph.D. for research into the rise of new Aboriginal languages.

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