



UAM Ministries

April - June 2000

Prayer Meetings

VICTORIA

First Monday:
LADIES AUXILIARY 1.30pm
To be advised

Third Sunday:
Federal Prayer Meeting
Bimonthly 3.00 pm
Details: Phone: Federal Office
(03) 9841 6029

Third Tuesday:
2.00 pm
Mrs H. Green
24 Pitt Street Ringwood

Second Thursday:
7.45 pm
Williamstown Gospel Mission
8-10 Electra Street Williamstown

Prayer Convener:
Mr Ron Smith
(03) 9726 0949
0411 462 061

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Second Saturday:
Bimonthly 2.30 pm
Jan - Nov
Miss M Wiley
Unit 9, James Evans Court
122 St Bernards Road
Magill

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Second Thursday:
2.30 pm

Head Office:

23 Pine Way, East Doncaster, Victoria 3109.

Phone: (03) 9841 6029 Fax: (03) 9841 6033

Email address: uam@uam.org.au

**Postal address: PO Box 1071, East Doncaster,
Vic 3109**

President: Mr C. Jones

Vice-President: Mr B. Challoner

Secretary: Mr B. Hammen

Prayer Convenor: Mr R. Smith

Editor: Mr C. Jones, email: editor@uam.org.au

Queensland:

Mr. S. P. Walker, 99 Waverley Road, Camp Hill
4152

New Zealand:

Mr G. Scott, PO Box 52, Paeroa

British Isles:

Mr R. Hughes, 110 Gowing Road, Norwich,
Norfolk NR6 6UH England

For mailing: Add 'UAM Ministries'
before given address.

NEW SOUTH WALES:

North Nowra, Unit 3

3/207 Illaroo Rd 2541

Adams, Miss A.

Orient Point, 25 Orsova Ave 2540

Berry, Mr & Mrs P.

Walgett, 47 Namoi Street 2832

Mitchell, Mr & Mrs M.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA:

Vacant

WESTERN AUSTRALIA:

KIMBERLEY:

Kununurra (PO Box 38) 6743

C/- Shedley, Mr & Mrs D.

Halls Creek (PO Box 17) 6770

Bates, Pastor & Mrs J.

Fitzroy Crossing (PO Box 13) 6765

Cranwell, Mr & Mrs G.

Wyndham 6740

In association with The Peoples Church

SOUTHERN:

Gnowangerup,

7 Macdonald Street 6335

Way, Mr & Mrs L.

DESERT DISTRICT:

Leonora 6438

Vacant

Messenger



UAM MINISTRIES

Published quarterly at the
Head Office of the Mission
23 Pine Way, East Doncaster, Vic 3109
Subscription: \$10.00 per year post free

Magazine by Image Is Everything
Telephone: (03) 9408 5192
Web site: www.imageiseverything.com.au
E-mail: admin@imageiseverything.com.au



President's Comments

NEW MINISTRY CHALLENGES

The first work which was to later become known as the UAM began in 1894 when some young Christians in Sydney gave expression to their concern for the Aboriginal people by beginning a Christian witness to them at LaPerouse on the banks of Botany bay. This concern was driven by their conviction that the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ was for all mankind.

Many in the secular world at that time embraced a Darwinian world view which categorised the Australian Aborigine as a sub human species destined to die out in the process of evolution. Liberal theology of the latter part of the 1800's which had a profound influence in many of the Christian Denominations also accepted this evolutionary view of mankind.

Many of the Government policies developed in subsequent years were based on these views. One of those policies, of forcibly removing children of mixed race from their Aboriginal parents to be brought up for integration into white Australian society, has serious ramifications in our society today. This policy was opposed by the UAM. Despite this opposition many Aboriginal Children who were taken from their parents by Government authorities under these policies were placed in the care of the UAM run homes.

It is unfortunate that many of the people affected in the past by the Government policies on Aboriginal children now do not differentiate between the role of the Government as representatives of the wider community and the very separate work of the Mission as a response of the evangelical community to the needs of the day.

From the beginning of its history, those working in UAM have considered the Australian Aborigine as equal with the rest of mankind, descendants from our common forefather, Adam who, the Bible says, was created in the likeness and image of God. Repudiating the evolutionary view of man, they considered the Australian Aboriginal equally the objects of God's love in the plan of Salvation. In their eyes the need for a Saviour to bring about reconciliation with God the creator was equally shared by all people groups on earth, regardless of race.

Throughout the history of UAM our workers have been concerned for the whole person. Their broader concern led to the establishment of children's homes for the care and nurture of children in need, schools, hospitals, community stores, transport and language work, all at a time when governments were either unable or unwilling to provide these services to the Aboriginal people.

Times have long now changed and the services of Education, Health care and Community services are all provided by Government bodies. Other services are now the responsibility of Communities themselves and some services are provided commercially. But spiritual ministry continues to be an area of both need and opportunity. As is the case within the wider Australian community, ministry opportunities are continually presenting themselves.

One area of special need today is in the field of counselling. Many Aboriginal families today are struggling with the after effects of the policies and practices of the forced removal of children from their parents. The 1997 report "Bringing Them Home" documents the legacy of this policy and highlights the need for a positive and compassionate response from the wider community, including the Christian church.

This is a specialised area and one which requires our attention. Here is an area of ministry which is not currently being addressed in any significant way by the evangelical church. Aching hearts are now calling to us to not turn our backs and walk away.

In order for us to carry out our mission to the Aboriginal people in such we need workers who are skilled in cross cultural communication and spiritual ministries, especially Christian counselling. With formal training and solid experience such people have abundant opportunity for challenging ministry opportunities right here today.

Christopher Jones
President

Otto's Visit

Just a Friendly Visit

There was excitement in the Hammen household. A phone call came from New Zealand from my brother Otto who was holidaying in that country. He had decided to come over to Melbourne to visit us for a month before returning to Germany. During his 4 weeks in New Zealand it had rained almost every day during which tents had to be put up each evening and then taken down again each morning. Dinner was cooked on a campfire.

Then, in the middle of February, Otto came to Melbourne. The weather was very hot. He arrived around noon, still wearing his heavy water proof coat over a woolen jumper. We told him it was hot weather outside the terminal, but in all the excitement and the cool of the terminal building, he kept his coat and jumper on and walked outside. What a warm reception he received! It was 40 degrees Celsius. Otto soon adjusted to the warmer climate and even seemed to enjoy it.

After he settled in we decided to take him to the new Melbourne Aquarium. How anyone could visit there without being struck by the magnificent sea creatures, that the Lord has made, would be puzzling indeed. The colours, and the graceful way each one moves only the Lord could do it. What a wonderful mind our God has.

The Aquarium had an atmosphere of peace and tranquility. But as is often the case, anything which glorifies the Lord seems to be the target of the enemy.

Most of us have heard by now of the outbreak of Legionnaires Disease in the cooling towers at the Aquarium. It has been reported that three people have died, and as I write this, ninety have contracted this deadly disease.

Although not a committed Christian, Otto came each Lord's day with us to church and followed the sermon by reading from the German bible. He was impressed by the warm friendliness of the Christians, both at church, and at the Mission house at Pine Way. Those working at the UAM headquarters made him welcome, and Otto found pleasure in helping to mow the lawns, and doing odd maintenance jobs.

Although not a committed Christian, the friendly attitude of the Christians and their joy during his visit to Australia did make an impression on him and he spoke of it. He has now heard the gospel and been challenged as to where he will spend eternity.

Dear reader, do you know where you will spend eternity? Unless we see ourselves as God sees us, we will never see that we need to be saved. All of us have a sin problem. God says so in Romans 3:23 "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." It is our sin which has cut us off from God and will keep us out of heaven. Christ came down from heaven to take our place dying on the cross. He took our punishment in order to set us free from the consequences of our sin. He has done it all for us. Why not receive Him now and thank Him?

Bill Hammen

News Update

NEWS UPDATES

WALGETT

Matt and Jan Mitchell are now settled back in Walgett and with the start of a new school term they are back into the swing of their various ministries.

James is back with his friends at school and enjoying being home after such a long break. James undertook distance education with his school in Walgett for the time he was away.

HALLS CREEK

As of early April, Jonathan and Kathleen have been on long service leave and will return to Halls Creek at the end of June. They plan to spend time in Perth and in Kalgoorlie visiting Jonathan's mother who is in a nursing home there.

GERALDTON

Glyne and Pam Cranwell report that work is proceeding well on their new house and are expecting it to be completed by the end of June. The small AEF fellowship is praying for more men to come and strengthen the work and take responsibility in worship. Glyne is doing all the preaching at the moment and leads the mid week prayer and bible study in their temporary home.

ORIENT POINT

Friday and Sunday nights see much activity with Koories from young children to teenagers joining with the Berry's in activities which provide opportunity to discuss spiritual issues. Friday night see's Scott on the drums and Mark on guitar as the young ones enjoy a somewhat noisy time together.

NORTH NOWRA

Alicia Adams continues to see some of the children (now adults, some with their own children) who she worked with in the Home and continues to give her love and care to them. Visits to the Rose Mumbler Village provide opportunity to talk with elderly Aboriginal residents there.

PT AUGUSTA

Willy and Vera report that even though the speaker didn't turn up, the Easter meetings and Nepabunna went well. People came up from Pt Augusta and Sunday school saw 17 local youngsters joining in. There are continuing opportunities in the northern areas of Copley, Nepabunna and Marree. Willy and Vera are limited in the work they can do because of health problems.

MELBOURNE

Our prayer convenor is kept busy with the preparation of the prayer notes and keeping prayer partners informed.

Mrs Marian Green had a fall in March and this necessitated an operation on her hip. She is making very good progress and is keen to get back on her feet.

Members of the council are keen to participate in deputation opportunities so if you would like someone to come and speak at your Church or fellowship group please contact us at the office.

MPA

Three new commercial printers have been employed at MPA in the move to a more commercial operation while the missionaries there continue to receive their missionary allowance and appreciate your continued prayer support.

A Heart to try and help other people

The following article was a paper Dr Stewart Gill of Ridley College presented at the Third Annual Conference of the Centre of Applied Christian Ethics on 31 October 1998. It is reproduced here with the permission of the author. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the UAM.

"A Heart to Try and Help Other People" Australian Aboriginal Missions

*"Missionaries who did have involvement with us did have a heart to try and help other people. I myself and all the people who went through Colebrook here we appreciated the missionaries and the lives that they gave up for us. People who gave up their life through UAM (United Aborigines Mission) to me and most of us who went to Colebrook we thank God for them... We did have trauma being taken away from our families but I believe whatever happens whether it is good or bad there is some purpose in it. To most of us that UAM gave us a chance to live a better way of life I guess. It gave us a chance to be able to hear the Gospel and the teachings we have had have given us a different life. If we had been left out there we would have been different people."*¹

Introduction

The recent National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families has highlighted once again the role played by missionary agencies as instruments of government policy in aboriginal affairs.² To think of the encounter between Christianity and the Aborigines is almost inevitably to conjure up a picture of dominant missionaries gathering Aborigines around them, collecting them into mission stations, and forcing on them a strange religion and an alien culture. This picture captures an element of painful reality, but it is unfair not only to the missionaries but to the Aborigines: recognising only the former as actors, it reduces the latter to the role of passive recipients.

Not many years ago missionaries who introduced Christianity to the Aborigines were almost universally regarded, at least by other white people, as selfless benefactors who offered improvement and salvation to Aborigines sometimes reluctant to accept them. Today, largely because Aborigines have succeeded in making their opinions more widely known the missionaries are almost universally dismissed as unwitting destroyers of a culture they seldom took the trouble to understand.

In this paper I aim to tell the story of the encounter between Christianity and the Aborigines over the span of time since 1788 to the present. Obviously because of limitations of time we are not able to cover all aspects of the encounter in detail.³ My intention is not to justify or to condemn either missionaries or Aborigines, but rather to bring into focus both the nobility and the ambiguity that have often marked the encounter.

In particular I will provide some illustrations of the typical pattern of missionary activity that emerged during the nineteenth century and trace the origins of outspoken discontent in traditional missionary approaches in the twentieth century, looking in passing at the parts played by missionaries and Aborigines as well as by commercial interests and governments. This will be looked at under three main headings:

- 1 The Age of Encounter
- 2 The Age of Missions
- 3 Coming of Age But Slowly

A Heart to try and help other people

1 The Age of Encounter

The first recorded official missionary to Aborigines within the present boundaries of Australia arrived in 1821. The Reverend ~William Walker survived five years in constant conflict with the Reverend Samuel Marsden. When Christian missionaries began to arrive the British presence had already had profound effects upon the Aboriginal way of life. Aboriginal societies often appeared proud and fierce to the British settlers who encountered them, proved extraordinarily fragile when confronted with an advanced technology. No matter how adaptable they may have been to changes over millenia, they were not geared to cope with radically new and aggressive approaches to nature. Changing such a society in one respect set in motion a train of unpredictable consequences. To such subtleties the early missionaries were almost totally insensitive. The absence of a science of ethnology, an understanding of cultural differences, gave an ample excuse for this neglect, but the unfortunate result was that little effort was made to preserve what was precious in the old or even to ease the transition to the new.

For most of the nineteenth century the various attempts at missionary work amongst Australian Aborigines was a dismal failure. Most settlers believed that they were a waste of time. The missionaries for their part believed that the Aborigines could hope to survive contact with the colonisers only by adopting their religion and civilisation. No missionary began his or her work without any other expectation. For the first half of the nineteenth century most Australian settlers saw no need for missionary work amongst the Aborigines and when it was attempted it was usually without any cultural sensitivity.

The near-identification of Christian with European values suggested the extension of these judgments to all aspects of native culture. To say that Aborigines were capable of Christian faith was to say in effect that they were capable of European civilisation, a proposition which missionaries constantly defended in the face of an opinion wide spread among both scholars and the general public in the late nineteenth century that they were inherently incapable of it. To say that the Aborigines needed Christian faith was, by the same logic, to suggest that they needed to adopt a European manner of life and thus pass a negative verdict on the whole of their traditional culture.

Besides these considerations which applied indifferently to all cultures outside Christendom, there were others that pertained particularly to the Aborigines. Non-literate societies were a puzzle to most people from a European background, whether missionary-minded or sceptical, who regarded them as inferior and as incapable of surviving contact with an advanced culture. By the mid-nineteenth century Aborigines were seen not merely as primitive and barbarous but as imminently threatened by extinction. That many of the early missionaries should be more concerned to preserve them than their culture was only natural, especially since their culture was regarded as a major hindrance to their survival.

Early missionaries thus felt themselves impelled by a triple compulsion. The very fact that the Aborigines were not Christians entitled them to the blessings of the gospel and of European achievement. The white ~Australian's perception of the relative poverty of Aboriginal culture made their need all the greater. The missionaries perceived that there was a crisis of survival and that this provided an additional urgency to the task.

In view of this diagnosis the programme of evangelisation and civilisation was not only logical but virtually inevitable, for its elements were seen as two sides of a coin. Missionaries would often argue as to which should precede the other but there was seldom any suggestion that one could ultimately stand without the other. To people who reasoned thus it made sense that or a pair of trousers on a boy a dress upon a girl's back was a token of his or her growth in grace. This is clearly demonstrated in many of the missionary reports from the nineteenth century. For example:

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One of the first acts of reform I adopted in collecting and bringing them into the Government reserves and villages was to induce them to marry according to British laws. This they objected to at first, telling me they had been 'married enough'. By judicious and firm action, I then locked the store door, refusing the food unless they obeyed. After a few days of conference and empty stomachs, a deputation waited upon me with the information that they were willing to get married. Through taking this stand I was enabled to put a stop to their illicit and unhappy relationships, and so brought in joy and contentment ...⁴

The first necessary step towards the implementation of this programme was the establishment of effective communication with the Aborigines. Once elementary tools of communication had been devised, the next step was to persuade Aborigines of the truth of Christianity. The missionaries soon caught on that in South Australia and the West that to be effective there was a need to meet the Aboriginal on his or her own ground and mission stations developed at meeting, places. It was also soon realised that while evangelistic meetings were useful that permanent results would only come about from systematic teaching. In most cases, in days before translation was the norm and since Christianity was a religion of the book the Aborigines had to be taught to read and write. This served a dual purpose: first, it was a form of pre-evangelism; second, through the conveyance of skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic it enable the Aborigines to hold their own in a society dominated by White Australians. It sought in other words to instil habits of mind that would impart a genuinely Christian and civilised character.

2 The Age of Missions

It soon became obvious that the greatest obstacle to the introduction of a systematic programme of education was the Aboriginal habit of moving about. Missionaries soon saw that only in a settled community could there be the regular teaching and worship that was essential to conversion and Christian growth. Only there could one have a mission school with a bell calling the children to classes each morning,. So long as they maintained a migratory pattern, Aborigines would not acquire the skills or adopt the attitudes of White civilisation.

Despite its advantages settlement did not prove to be a cure-all. Aborigines continued to slip away to the woods on occasion and returned with many lessons unlearned. Attendance at school was often irregular although it is often noted that the Mission schools had more success than the later government enterprises. The alcohol problem did not abate. Some of the missionaries soon decided that they must secure some measure of social control if their work was to be effective. Gradually, in the pursuit of the twin aims of christianisation and civilisation, the missionaries assumed the role of protectors.

These considerations go far to accounting for the eventual concentration on boarding schools. The point at which this programme most consistently broke down was where the children unlearned the lessons of "civilisation" taught in the schools. The best solution appeared to be to retain them for as long as possible within an environment where missionary influence would be undiluted. The residential school with its combination of character formation, elementary education, and the inculcation of habits of industry, represented the missionary programme of christianisation and civilisation in its most fully developed form. It ensured over a significant proportion of the lives of those entrusted to it a maximum of stability and control.

Despite differences between missionaries from different periods, over the past hundred years the approach to the Aborigines exhibited remarkable consistency. While many of its features have little appeal today for the mass of Australians, given the goals of the missionaries and the assumptions about social dynamics which they shared with most other Europeans of their times, their methods were for the most part logical and even inevitable. The residential school scarcely needed to be invented because circumstances conspired to suggest them. The motives that led missionaries to adopt such programs inspired them as they inspired few others to devote their lives to the welfare of the Aborigines, live in their

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communities, share their hardships, and stand up on occasions for their rights. Despite this basic consistency of purpose, however, the enterprise was marked by a number of ambiguities which the missionaries were not always able to resolve. Some of these were the result of circumstances over which they had no control. Others arose out of their own pursuit of objectives that sometimes proved incompatible in practice.

One of the most perplexing problems faced by the missionaries derived from their own ambivalence towards white society. On the one hand, their identification of white values as Christian made acculturation an inescapable part of their programme. On the other, their perception of white Australia as still corrupted by sin suggested a need to protect the Aborigines from the influence of undesirable whites. Premature or excessive contacts with whites proved demoralising to Aborigines, while measures of apartheid merely postponed the issue. Failure to make a decisive choice for either option had the effect of creating a sort of missionary half-world that isolated its inhabitants both from Australian society and from traditional ways. Over the past century a considerable measure of acculturation took place on mission stations, but the wardship that was originally designed as a temporary measure to ease the Aborigines over the period of transition became virtually a permanent state. All Aboriginal missionaries shared this dilemma with governments, which had no greater success in resolving it.

Holding their religious and humanitarian efforts in tandem gave the missionaries difficulty from the outset. Their commitment to "civilisation" implied a disinterested concern for material and cultural welfare of the Aborigines, whereas their desire to propagate Christianity made them in many ways highly interested parties. The missionaries would have admitted no inconsistency, for to their minds Christ was the greatest gift they had to offer and the one that alone could give meaning to secular progress. Any success in christianisation, they therefore reasoned, would ultimately prove a boon to the Aborigines.

Missionaries went among the Aborigines to help and to give, but how were they to do so without in effect sometimes buying favour or at least being seen to do so. Never far out of sight in many of the missionary reports is the figure of the "rice Christian", usually identified as the product of another mission. It must be admitted that a few missionaries deliberately used the time-honoured device of giving or withholding rewards as a means of securing Indian support. The basic problem was not that missionaries were unscrupulous but that it is in the nature of generosity to create a sense of obligation, a sense which among the Aborigines was very highly developed. Aborigines might be pardoned for thinking sometimes that they were being bought, and outsiders did not hesitate to draw cynical conclusions.

The availability of forms of power even more direct than material inducements further compromised missionary attempts to persuade Aborigines to their views. Although governments never sought to compel conversion, the existence of the authority of the state helped to give visibility and weight to the missionary presence. While the role of the missionary as a protector did not give them the power to compel adult Aborigines to their faith it could be used to nip indigenous movements in the bud, to regulate community morals, and to bring children within the range of missionary influence. Such help was often of considerable immediate advantage to the missionaries, but they paid a price for it. It complicated their task of discriminating between specifically Christian goals and those of whites in general. It often identified them, in Aboriginal eyes, with a white authority-structure standing over them. It was a formidable obstacle to the effective devolution of authority.

Even with meagre resources of some missions, like the UAM, the missionary still appeared rich in resources and power which along with the superior confidence of the white combined to bring missionaries and Aborigines together on unequal terms. Intent on changing the Aborigines' way of life and convinced that they knew what was best for them, missionaries sometimes found it difficult to listen to what Aborigines had to say and even, on occasion, to hear it.

At the root of this breakdown of communication was incompatibility between the control that the

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missionaries deemed necessary for the implementation of their programme and the rapport with the Aborigines that alone could evoke a spontaneously positive response. When Aborigines were offered for their free decision a programme in which they could see the promise of individual and social renewal, as happened at the UAM mission station at Mt Margaret, they showed themselves capable of not merely co-operation but initiative. When the missionaries made residential education the focal point of their strategy, virtually abandoning the attempt to convince adult Aborigines of the advantages of Christian citizenship in favour of pre-empting their children for indoctrination into it, they invited the alienation of the people they were trying, to serve. They perceived by some as no longer collaborators with Aborigines in an attempt to overcome adverse conditions but collaborators with government in an attempt to remake them regardless of their desires.

To point out ambiguities and even contradictions in the approach of missionaries to the Aborigines is not to suggest that they might have adopted a radically different programme with better results. The options available to them were limited both by circumstances and by the limits of imagination which they shared with other whites.

The resources and power of which they were able to avail themselves were given factors in the situation. They accepted them as part of the workings of divine providence and would have considered themselves poor stewards if they had failed to take advantage of them. Methods for which they are criticised today, such as incentives and punishments and strictly supervised education, were based on methods dealing with groups resisting assimilation that were considered advanced in their times. Their achievements and mistakes were those of whites of their times.

Reading through the reports of many missionaries, one marvels that they so seldom paused to ask whether their methods were congruous with the goals they ultimately hoped to achieve. It was not long after the middle of the nineteenth century that Henry Venn made the obvious point that missionaries should eventually make themselves unnecessary by nurturing into existence "self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating" Christian communities. This was re-emphasised by Roland Allen in the early twentieth century and eventually taken up by some of the missionaries amongst the Aborigines from the 1940s onwards. The institutions that the missions set up, however admirable in other ways, were scarcely designed to bring about this result. They were, rather, ones which only the missionaries could run and which, in the end, only governments could pay for. In this lack of vision the older missionaries were by no means alone.

3 Coming of Age But Slowly

With a few exceptions the for most of the nineteenth century the involvement of the Australian churches was very slight. As the twentieth century progressed this situation has changed. However, by the 1980s it was becoming obvious that the great days of Aboriginal missions had passed, especially as many institutions closed down. There was also a sense of this in the process of routinization that inevitably set in when the mission was unable to find satisfactory replacements for methods that seemed increasingly obsolete. Even more serious was the absence of a vision of an exciting future to which the missions might be leading.

Signs of significant change of missionary attitude began to appear only with the loss of confidence in the superiority of White methods and culture. Although this sense of disillusionment is by no means universally felt, it has affected Aboriginal missions to the point where old slogans linking christianisation and civilisation have almost completely lost currency. Churches and missionary agencies have become increasingly aware that it must take into account not only the needs but the wishes of the Aborigines, and not only their future but their past.

After almost two centuries of exhortation by white mentors the Aborigines began in the 1960s to speak vocally for themselves and there was the beginnings of a process of "coming of age" which is still

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~underway. They had their opportunity, in part, because of the federal government as they were encouraged to participate fully in Australian society. The timing of the revival of Aboriginal consciousness rightly suggests an association with the protest movements of the 1960s. Oppressed social and ethnic groups were demanding recognition all over the world, and Aboriginal leaders began to see parallels with their own predicament elsewhere in the world. A common rhetoric pervaded all these movements, and devices such as marches and sit-ins that had been used effectively by blacks in North America were borrowed by Aboriginal radicals. Like other forms of colonial protest, Aboriginal resurgence was aided and perhaps made possible by a Western crisis of conscience that followed two disastrous world wars and the explosion of the first atomic bombs. In the immediate Australian experience was the disaster of Vietnam which undermined the mythical image of the triumphant superiority of the Anzac 'digger' dragged up each 25 April. The resulting loss of face made claims for the superiority of the Western way of life seem less credible to white Australian intellectuals. Especially when many of the same were turning to Eastern religions for inspiration and Aborigines began to wonder why they had accepted so uncritically the missionaries' low estimate of native religion.

Although in part a response to outside stimuli, the aggressive Aboriginal self-consciousness of the last two decades has also drawn upon deep roots in the past. This developing self-awareness, sometimes cherished almost as a guilty secret, received validation from the researches of anthropologists. Aborigines acquired knowledge of legal and parliamentary procedures as they pressed land claims. Awareness of this long-continued struggle to maintain a distinctive identity imparted to Aboriginal protest an orientation different in several important respects from civil-rights movements elsewhere in the world. Its aim could not be an integrated society for assimilation had been the white ~man's chief weapon in what the Aborigines came to term 'cultural genocide'. The main appeal has been for the preservation of Aboriginality, which calls for the reassertion or the recovery of Aboriginal tradition. Since religion was an integral part of Aboriginal culture, a return to spiritual roots was an important element in resurgence.

Christian missionary activity, as one of the most conspicuous expressions of European presence, has provided critics with an obvious target. Missionaries in general have been accused of disrupting Aboriginal social patterns in order to fulfil their own needs, of fragmenting Aboriginal communities and setting up sectarian organisations, and of adopting a condescending and paternalistic attitude that has led them to impose programs on Aborigines without consultation. Former institutions have been attacked by some disgruntled Graduates for their authoritarian discipline and what has been perceived by some as heavy-handed indoctrination. The most serious charge in recent days has been that of complicity in the Australian government's taking, of Aboriginal children.

Disillusionment with traditional mission groups has doubtless also been a significant factor in the spread of Pentecostalism and charismatic and other recent movements some of which allow more outlets for native initiative. The Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship and its more recent sister organisation, the Aboriginal Evangelical Churches, have allowed for further development of indigenous leadership.

It would be unrealistic to accept criticisms made in the heat of long-repressed anger as the mature judgment on the contribution of the missions to the Aborigines of today. There has been a natural tendency, on the one hand, to exaggerate example of missionary insensitivity and, on the other, to idealise the state of the Aboriginal societies to which the missionaries came. The myth of the noble missionary seeking to reclaim degraded barbarians has been replaced, in many quarters, by the myth of the noble savage spoiled by interfering missionaries. A close examination of the recent literature of Aboriginal protest, however, reveals a surprising number of exceptions to the general indictment. Missionaries are complimented for their genuine concern for Aborigines, especially their dogged determination to not accept the general view that Aborigines were doomed to extinction, their recognition of the urgency of taking action to preserve Aboriginal communities, and their willingness to resist the pressures of white society. Moreover, it is admitted by some that missionary agencies offered the most promising medium of moulding a more favourable public opinion among whites and that their resources and expertise was of great service to the Aboriginal cause.

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Conclusion

If the problems of Aborigines today are by no means all the fault of missions, the fact remains that Aborigines looked to the missions for a sense of belonging as they did not look to the government or commercial interests. When they now lump all three together as elements of a single oppressive presence, they include the missions with a particular sense of disappointment and betrayal. On them as on no others they pinned hopes of reintegration that have not been fulfilled.

Estimates of the effects of Christian missions on Aboriginal life are likely to depend, in the final analysis, on whether they are distinguished from the total impact of the white presence or included as an integral part of it. If reckoned as a distinct entity, they may well be seen as mitigating some of its harmful effects. If lumped in, they will almost certainly be condemned for their complicity in undermining the bases of Aboriginal society. Since missionaries were at once emissaries of Christ and associates of Caesar, there is no basis on which one can make unambiguous judgement between these alternatives.

Stewart Gill

1 Interview with S Gill SA 003 - 3/3/96. UAM Archives

2 *Bringing Them Home*, Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families. Commonwealth of Australia, 1997.

3 The reader is referred to J Harris, *One Blood* Albatross Books, Sutherland, 1990.

4 D Matthews, 'Native Tribes of the Upper -Murray', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, South Australia*, sessions 1898-9 to 1900-1, Vol IV, pp. 48-9.

Opportunities to Serve

Opportunities to Serve in the Outback of Australia

"We would like to place suitably trained and experienced workers in some places almost immediately"

Some of the areas where possibilities exist for ministry are:

**Kimberly Western Australia
Gold Fields and Great Victoria Desert
Western Australia
Northern New South Wales
South Australia**

Please pray that God will call those He would have to serve in these or other areas. Has God called you to some sphere of service for Him among the Australian Aborigines? If you believe so then we would be happy to begin discussions with you. Please contact our office by phoning and leaving a message or writing or by sending an email to us. Refer to the Directory on page 2 for contact details.