

# 6

## The trials of missionary life

Having explored the likely motivations of Indigenous people to seek an encounter with missionaries, we now ask the same question about the missionaries themselves. Beyond the strategic considerations of the various Churches explored in the earlier chapters, each individual made up their own mind about accepting the call into mission service, and few of them had Australia at the top of their list of desired destinations. What awaited them in Australia and why did they go?

### The missionary adventurer

Like the mail-outs of development organisations today, mission publications aimed at generating donations and arousing interest, particularly from young people in Europe. The large mission societies active in Australia had regular newsletters and publishing houses that released autobiographies and mission histories often commissioned for jubilees. These emphasised the small triumphs achieved on various missions and exoticised the encounter with foreign worlds. The lure of adventure was surely a factor in recruiting young men into denominational development aid.

In this type of literature, the founding of missions is cloaked in myths of individual enterprise, often a sole missionary striking out into the unknown. References to living ‘like a hermit’ and ‘going alone’ on closer inspection mean, at best, the absence of other white people,

and sometimes occlude the guidance of a local settler or his staff. First encounters with threatening 'wild blacks' are savoured, sometimes years later and with a twinkle in the eye (see **Schwarz**).

Mission life on the ground was of course much more mundane. In most mission locations, there was already a core of people with contact experience and a basic grasp of English. Exceptions were at Cooper's Creek, where the intended cultural intermediary of one of the parties died along the way and, at Drysdale River, where there was no pre-given 'middle ground' other than Fr Emo with his Filipino assistants. Even the Dampierland men were afraid to go to the Drysdale River, and a number of Aboriginal people were killed in the search for a suitable mission site in that area (see Nicholas **Emo**).

The lonely pioneer missionary figure arriving in the wilderness is particularly pronounced in the founding narratives of Mapoon, Hopevale and Bathurst Island, all places with long histories of contact. At **Mapoon**, Rev. Nicholas Hey refers to the night-time howling of the Indigenous people on the night of their arrival and omits to mention that he and Rev. John Ward arrived under police protection in a harbour long frequented by recruiters for the marine industries where English was spoken.

At Hopevale (**Cape Bedford**), the Aboriginal community annually celebrates Muni Day, named after the day of arrival of their missionary Georg Schwarz in September 1887. Pastor Johann Flierl established the mission a year earlier, but Schwarz stayed for 55 years and actually had a striking resemblance to Flierl, both featuring the same impressive beard, and possessing similar stature and facial features. When Schwarz first came to north Queensland he arrived two days earlier than expected at Cooktown, so that there was nobody to meet him. The story goes that with typical initiative, Schwarz hired a boat to take him to Cape Bedford mission, but was accidentally dropped at a beach just short of the Cape, and spent the night in a cave at the place that was later to become a mission site. In fact, Schwarz was accompanied by his colleague Pastor Georg Bamler, destined for the New Guinea mission, and the missionary in charge of Hopevale at the time, Pastor Georg Pfalzer, wrote that when he came to Cooktown to pick up Schwarz and Bamler, he found that the pair had checked into the most expensive hotel in town.<sup>1</sup> The most peculiar feature of this foundation narrative is that it is mirrored in the

1 Pfalzer to Deinzer, 20 September 1887, cited in Howard J. Pohlner, *Gangurru*, Lutheran Church of Australia, Adelaide, 1986, p. 40.

founding narrative of Simbang mission that Johann Flierl founded in New Guinea shortly after setting up Hopevale: there, too, we have the lonely missionary spending his first night in a cave.<sup>2</sup> Presumably these narrative displacements (Flierl/Schwarz, Hopevale/Simbang) are an effect of oral history.

Another strong founding myth surrounds the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) activities in the north. The Catholic mission staff surrounding Fr F.X. **Gsell** almost disappear from the mission histories of the MSC in the Northern Territory. This has something to do with the high staff turnover around the fixture of Fr Gsell. Moreover, at Issoudun, the difficulty of recovering the life stories of the MSC staff was explained with reference to the motto of their founding father Jules Chevalier, that missionaries should ‘embrace being unknown and to count for nothing’ (‘aime á être inconnu et compter pour rien’).<sup>3</sup> It is also an effect of the purpose of most of the mission’s history, reproduced for the 2006 centennial celebrations of Gsell’s arrival in Darwin and, in 2011, of his arrival at Bathurst Island.

Gsell’s autobiography and a book written by one of his lay assistants, Pat Ritchie, *North of the Never Never*, compete with each other for outback adventure and Aboriginal encounter stories, and tell some of the same stories in significantly different ways (see **Bathurst Island**). Pat Ritchie’s book includes the dubious image of a ‘giant turtle with her hatchlings’ and is clearly aimed at an audience for whom the outback is exotic and unknown.<sup>4</sup> In Ritchie’s narrative, humanitarian intervention and adventure, or anthroposophy and machismo, become powerfully entwined.

Missionaries were often faced with violence, not only witnessing violent encounters, but also exposed to threats directed against them personally, and sometimes they resorted to firearms. Even Nikolaus Wettengel, who was at Hermannsburg when it was well established (1901–06), felt threatened enough to keep a rifle in the house, because of talk that ‘the

---

2 Susanne Froehlich, pers. comm. 2012.

3 Interview with Frère Bailly, Issoudun, October 2014.

4 The book, *North of the Never Never*, was written in collaboration with Henry B. Raine, and published by Angus & Robertson in Sydney, 1934, and by the Catholic press Burns, Oates and Washbourne in London in 1935. It was also translated into French.

whites should get out of the area'.<sup>5</sup> Attacks by Aboriginal people were averted at **Stradbroke Island**, **Rapid Creek**, Uniya (**Daly River**), **Ebenezer**, Cooper's Creek (**Killalpaninna**) and Lake Condah. A few missionaries were actually attacked, like Eipper and Hausmann in separate incidents at Moreton Bay (see **Zion Hill**), the Benedictine staff at Drysdale River in September 1913 (see Emo) and the Presbyterian staff at Mornington Island in October 1918, where Pastor Robert Hall was killed (see **Hey**). Remarkably, these locations of actual violence do not coincide with the most colourful accounts of adventurous 'first contact' mentioned above. As if in role reversal, the more 'middle ground' contact sites have become the scene of adventure narrative, and the raw cultural encounters resulting in violence (like Drysdale River) have become obscured. Characteristic of fantasies, the potential for transgressions, but not actual violence, were the stuff of an interesting story.<sup>6</sup>

## The typical missionary career

Many of the German-speaking missionaries were from rural or working-class backgrounds, and they typically arrived at a very young age, freshly graduated from a mission college. A mission placement was their first step out into the world, and some lengthy travelogues of the journey to Australia survive.

Niel Gunson observed a dynamic of upward mobility of missionaries in Papua and New Guinea arising from the immersion in a settler society.<sup>7</sup> For non-Anglo-Saxon missionaries in Australia, this pattern is not so evident. Nicolas Hey at Mapoon enjoyed close relations with the government resident, but in a clearly filial role, and the Catholic Bishop Salvado and the Moravian Rev. Friedrich **Hagenauer** exerted a prominent influence on state legislation regarding Aboriginal people and served in secular capacities as protectors, but generally the non-Anglican mission societies sought to maintain independence and distance from the British colonial state apparatus. Of around 180 German-speaking missionaries and helpers in Australia, only a few occupied positions where they

5 Immanuel Synod, FRM Box 5, Correspondence Wettengel (transcriptions and translations) (henceforth Correspondence Wettengel), 19 September 1903, Lutheran Archives Australia (LAA).

6 Susanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770–1870*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 1997.

7 Cf. also Niel Gunson, *Messengers of Grace: Evangelical Missionaries in the South Seas 1797–1860*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1978.

superintended more than one mission at a time (the Moravians Hey and Hagenauer, and the Pallottines Walter, Droste and Bischofs), and only three German-speaking Catholics achieved episcopal status (Gsell, Raible, Jobst). A few missionaries gained a longlasting reputation while the remainder had at best a period as mission superior, or remained subordinate as Protestant lay helpers or Catholic Brothers.

## Wages

Protestant missionaries were subject to the micromanagement of a mission committee and were completely dependent on organisations chronically short of funds. The annual wage of an ordained Lutheran missionary in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was usually set at £25 for an assistant and £50 for a missionary in charge, with perhaps a small allowance for a married man or one with extra responsibilities such as station management and many children (e.g. **Reuther**). A lay assistant could expect around £15 to £20 per annum. These were survival rates and not the foundation for a career. In comparison, a government schoolteacher drew around £300.

Real inequalities were introduced when public service staff and religious collaborated on the same mission. At the end of the mission period, when the Northern Territory missions were forced to adopt a proper budget system and began to factor in wages, their budgets blew out and it became abundantly clear that the religious mission staff had been massively subsidising the public purse (see **Bathurst Island – Postwar Changes**). Catholic Sisters, Brothers and Fathers did not draw a wage but had more reliable institutions to support them in old age (see below).

## Employer provisions

Mission staff were instructed to ‘live together in love and faith’. If that idyllic concept collapsed, there was hardly any back-up provision. For someone who left their service or was dismissed there was no severance package and no legal redress. Staff might even have to struggle to have their personal possessions sent after them (**Siebert**), or be required to pay for the fares of their spouses out of pocket (**Wettengel**). The Catholic Pallottine Society was a legal entity that could be taken to court, whereas

the Protestant mission societies were associations of indistinct legal character and there were no employment contracts. When Bloomfield mission was given up, the mission committee minuted:

The Committee is also convinced that there can be no talk of its being obliged to see to the future maintenance of the two missionaries, and that whatever the Committee could and would do for them, would depend entirely on its good will.<sup>8</sup>

Goodwill was shown to the family of Johann **Flierl**, for whom a residence was made available in Tanunda on Flierl's retirement, but there was no legal obligation. At the time of Pastor Reuther's death in 1914, after 18 years of mission service and 8 years of independent farming, and including a Tanunda property inherited from his father-in-law, his whole estate was valued at £3,000. The financial disclosure of Fr **Schwarz** of Hopevale at the time of his interment in World War II shows that he and his wife owned two cottages in Cooktown, one of which was furnished and often accommodated Mary Schwarz during illness, and may have been part of Mary's inheritance from her Cooktown parents. Their joint savings were close to £300, representing about 10 per cent of his lifetime earnings. Their other assets were valued at £400, but Schwarz was still servicing several loans.<sup>9</sup> It hardly amounts to a resounding pecuniary attainment for 55 years of service. As Pastor Wettengel wrote, 'if I had aspired to wealth, I would have stayed at home'.<sup>10</sup>

The Protestant missionaries had been far removed from the lap of their natural families and estates in Germany, but they could not rely on retirement provisions, and leave provisions were more liberal for mission superiors than other staff. Hey's furlough worked out to 28 months in 28 years. Johann Flierl had one year's leave after his first 10 years, and two years leave a decade later. Protestant mission superiors generally could expect a year-long furlough after 10 years of service, but not reliably so. Pastor W.H. Schwarz at Hermannsburg had to hold out for 12 years without furlough. Pastor Georg Schwarz at Hopevale was granted his first furlough after 13 years, but was recalled before he could leave for Germany with his new wife in 1901 and finally took furlough in 1922. Pastor Poland, who was not a mission superior, waited 17 years for his first furlough. Most of the Protestant lay helpers were recruited from the

8 Immanuel Synod, Mission Committee Minutes, May 1900, LAA.

9 Schwarz, Report on Prisoner of War, MP1104/2, Q490, National Archives Australia.

10 Wettengel to Kaibel, 18 November 1901, Correspondence Wettengel, LAA.

southern Australian migrant communities, and, of these, only Hermann **Vogelsang** is recorded with a three-month furlough at Tanunda in 1905 after 40 years of service at Bethesda (Killalpaninna).

The Pallottines tried to afford at least one home visit for their Kimberley priests, and sometimes the Fathers saved the return fare by acting as the priest on a migrant ship (e.g. Hügel in 1961). The Catholic Brothers, however, usually did not return to Australia once they were repatriated to Germany (except **Wollseifer**), and we will return to their retirement provisions below.

## Housing

Accommodation was free and basic rations were also allocated, but living conditions on the missions were often primitive, particularly in the first years of each mission, not only for mission residents but also for staff. The missionaries themselves had to build or at least mastermind and supervise the building of their accommodation, and supplies of material were difficult to organise. Usually a beginning was made by the men, and the wives (or Catholic Sisters) were introduced later, once habitable accommodation could be provided. Lydia Günther sat down and wept when she arrived at **Wellington Valley** and was shown her new home, the mission house that had been unoccupied for six years. Whether it was in the 1840s or the 1940s, arriving in a new mission location was always uncomfortable. At the **Tardun** farm, the first Pallottine Brothers battled with heat, insects, snakes and rain seeping through the roof. The first Pallottines at **Rockhole** station found only the large open verandah of the station home inhabitable. The two mud-walled and unventilated rooms were only usable as chapel and storeroom.<sup>11</sup>

The mission house was normally the first substantial structure on a mission, and defined its centre. If possible, it became flanked with a church and a school. It often served as visitor accommodation and school building, and if an assistant missionary arrived it might have to be shared between two families. The mission house was not private property, and did not offer a private sphere. It was a household on public display, modelling standards of housewifery for the 'colony'.

11 The Brothers arrived at Rockhole Station in 1934. Alphonse Bleischwitz, 'Geschichte der australischen Mission', MS, B7d,r (18)d, Zentralarchiv der Pallottinerprovinz (ZAPP).

At **Beagle Bay**, the ‘colony’ for residents consisted of mudbrick single-roomed houses, and some such cottages were also occupied by the Pallottine Brothers lucky enough to get a room of their own. Eventually the staff residences at Beagle Bay ended up in worse condition than those of the mission residents, who were able to access federal building initiatives, and in 1975 the government health inspector condemned most of the buildings. By 1980, it was found that in the Kimberley the ‘standard of living quarters for missionaries in all of the missions is far below that of Aboriginal and public service housing’.<sup>12</sup>

The living conditions of the early Kimberley parish priests in the townships were hardly better than those on the remote missions. Daisy Bates described Emo’s Broome residence, later occupied by other Pallottines, as a shack. Fr Francis **Hügel** in Derby (1951–54) lived in a galvanised iron lean-to at the back of the church, which was also built from galvanised iron. Little wonder that some of the early Brethren embarked on extensive building programs. Fr White’s construction endeavours in Broome set the Kimberley mission budget back by years, and Fr Walter retreated very soon from Beagle Bay to Broome, and from Broome to his palatial family residence in Würzburg. Other Catholic mission superiors also embarked quickly on extensive overseas or southern voyages to raise funds, while many Protestants withdrew their families and themselves from remote mission for health reasons, which was the only honourable exit.

## Health

Service in mission was speckled with hardships, illness and trauma, including many accidents involved in building, maintaining and extending the missions. The narratives of the Pallottine Brothers include falling off horses and camels, getting attacked by bulls, accidents during well-digging and handling explosives, boating accidents (**Spangenberg, Herholz, Contemprée**) and getting caught up in cyclones on land and sea.

While introduced diseases decimated Indigenous people, conversely the Europeans were hard hit by the tropical diseases to which they had no resistance, like malaria and dengue fever. Pastor John Ward died of fever

---

12 Helen MacFarlane and John Foley, ‘Kimberley Mission Review – Analysis and Evaluation of Church and Government involvement in the Catholic Missions of the Kimberley’, ca 1981, p. 116, MS, State Records of Western Australia (SROWA).



four years after arriving in Mapoon, and the remaining staff also suffered from malaria, as did the Richters at **Aurukun**. Malaria also affected the staff on the eastern Cape York, on the Daly River, at Bathurst Island and in the Kimberley, and two Pallottine Brothers contracted Hansen's disease, a tropical form of leprosy (**Ratajski** and **Hanke**). In the dry centre, it was 'sandy blight' (trachoma) that afflicted the eyes of many newcomers (e.g. Wendlandt, Wettengel, Strehlow).

The Protestant missionaries had even more trouble than the Catholic Brethren because they were also responsible for their children and wives, and many of them blamed themselves for the illness and death of their family members.

The health risks were enormous, especially for child-bearing women. Young Mary Handt had no midwife for her first childbirth at **Wellington Valley** and became deranged with fear and pain. Twenty-six-year-old Amalie Bogisch died at Ebenezer within a few years of her arrival. At Cape Bedford mission, the five-month-old baby of Pastor **Poland** died in April 1892 as a direct result of a shortage of food.<sup>13</sup> At **Bloomfield**, Mrs Jesnowki died of consumption, Pastor **Bogner** left in 1894 because his wife suffered from malaria, but Pastor **Hörlein** stayed on. Hörlein's wife died from malaria in 1900, and he never forgave himself for bringing his wife into such a difficult and dangerous place. At **Hermannsburg** Pastor **Kempe** buried first a child and then his wife before he gave up in 1891, after his two confreres had already taken their family to the safety of South Australia. At Killalpaninna, Br Rüdiger buried his daughter in July 1892 and in 1900 he had to take his ailing wife south and came back to the mission by himself. Three-month-old Edwin Reuther died while Pastor Reuther was away for five weeks in October 1894, and Reuther, like Hörlein, never forgave himself and began to battle depression. Some of the pastors took to drink (Meyer, Flierl II) and Hörlein began to take opiates.

In terms of mental health, the letters of the Pallottines Br **Zach** and Br **Herholz** are interesting, Fr Vaccari's flight from Stradbroke Island is intriguing and Fr Nicholas Emo, too, eventually succumbed to self-doubt, depression and psychological self-flagellation. Pastor Reuther was candid about his 'head trouble', as he called it, and Hörlein's letters express

---

13 Wilhelm Poland, *Loose Leaves: Reminiscences of a Pioneer North Queensland Missionary*, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1988.

all the signs of clinical depression. However, a mental health assessment of mission work is impossible, because of the discretion exercised in the sources, the carefully screened access to them and also because living descendants of missionaries resent an allegation of suicide.

### *Daily life and rhythm*

The mission bell dictated the daily life rhythm of a mission. Not only the Indigenous residents, but the missionaries themselves were regimented by this pulse of activities. The Trappists at Beagle Bay rose at 2 am and retired at 8 pm. They chanted into the night at 3 am, 4.30 am, and again at 2 pm, and performed the Salve and Angelus at noon and 6 pm. In between, they held Mass at 4 am, read in Chapter at 10.30 am and performed night prayers around 6 pm. Their physical work was four hours in the morning and 3.5 hours in the afternoon. At least that is how they reported it. Even if they performed only a fraction of what they reported, it bespeaks an amazing discipline and expectations that seem beyond human capacity in a daily rhythm that scarcely leaves time to be spent alone.

Most extant daily mission schedules show an early rise at 5 am, and morning blessings. Kühn at **Point Pearce** held church services twice daily. Hey at Mapoon began each day with a religious service, led mid-week prayer meetings and on Sundays he held two services and Sunday school.<sup>14</sup> At Hermannsburg, Pastor Wettengel complained that he was supposed to act as a missionary to 50 Aboriginal children and as parish priest for the German staff, and that it took him three days to prepare a separate sermon in German.<sup>15</sup>

### *Paperwork*

Mission management also involved an endless stream of paperwork. Writing was part of the lifeline of a mission. There were mission diaries; records of births, deaths and marriages; correspondence with committees, government departments and colleagues; supply orders and entries for mission newsletters to write. On the Protestant missions, all financial and staffing decisions had to go through a mission committee. Missionaries reported to their mission committee and to the state government,

---

<sup>14</sup> J.N. Hey, *A Brief History of the Presbyterian Church's Mission Enterprise among the Australian Aborigines*, New Press, Sydney, 1931, p. 26.

<sup>15</sup> Wettengel to Kaibel, 18 November 1901, Correspondence Wettengel, LAA.

estimating the number of residents, number of Christians, number of schoolchildren, reporting progress and land improvements. The Mari Yamba missionary was asked to submit quarterly reports in two languages to his mission committee. Hagenauer in Victoria reported to three or four supervising bodies in different periods, Hörlein at Bloomfield recorded each meal doled out and members of work gangs allocated each day to justify the government subsidy. Schwarz at Hopevale was criticised for not reporting enough, and complained that ‘I can barely write five lines without being called away for this or that’.<sup>16</sup>

### Contribution to science

Pastor Hey at Mapoon complained in 1896 that ‘not a month passes where we don’t send 30 to 40 letters, often [answering] requests for beetles, plants, and so on’.<sup>17</sup> There was much call from scientists for detailed information and, if possible, specimens. At Beagle Bay, one of the French Trappists collected live birds, and one of the Pallottines sent crates of prepared birds to Limburg. The emerging science of anthropology leant heavily on the collaboration of missionaries for detailed information to support or refine various theories.<sup>18</sup> The armchair anthropologist Moritz von Leonhardi sent the Neuendettelsau missionaries a ‘much abbreviated’ questionnaire of 30 open-ended questions, such as ‘Are there any fables about stellar bodies? Are the stellar formations named? Are stellar bodies considered sentient?’ Pastor Reuther answered one of these questions with a 14-page essay on dreams, which was filed away with his other correspondence in Neuendettelsau instead of getting passed on to Leonhardi.<sup>19</sup>

16 Schwarz to Neuendettelsau, 21 August 1893, reprinted in Traugott Farnbacher and Christian Weber (eds), *Ein Zentrum fuer Weltmission – Neuendettelsau – Einführung, Zeittafeln, Dokumente, Namen 1842–2002*, Missonswerk der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Bayern, Neuendettelsau, 2002.

17 Hey to Roemig, 3 April 1896, North Australia, North Queensland, microfilm, MF 186, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (AIATSIS).

18 Leonhardi to Neuendettelsau, 1 May 1899, filed in 1.6. 35 Reuther, Georg, 1861–1912, Pers. Korresp. Vorl. Nr. 4.93/5, Archiv de Neuendettelsau.

19 Reuther, 1.6. 35 Reuther, Georg, 1861–1912, Pers. Korresp. Vorl. Nr. 4.93/5, Archiv de Neuendettelsau.

In many cases, the exchange with scientists backfired for the missionaries, such as when Carl Strehlow was drawn into a dispute with Baldwin Spencer over religious ideas among the Aranda.<sup>20</sup> Fr **Bischofs** at Beagle Bay naively filled in an overblown questionnaire for a body that claimed to be a German migration society just before World War I, and was accused of espionage. Fr Emo's drawings of rock art at Drysdale River are ascribed to the ornithologist Gerard Hill, and in several cases the work of missionaries was published under the name of an armchair scientist. Under the impact of scientific interest, missionaries began ethnographic and botanical collections, such as Reuther's vast collection acquired by the South Australian Museum. Ethnographic museum collections in Australia and Europe drew strongly on contributions from missionaries, and the mission houses at Issoudun, Limburg, Herrnhut, Neuendettelsau and Hermannsburg had extensive botanical and ethnographic collections. Several edited volumes have examined the contribution of missionaries to science.<sup>21</sup>

## Communal life

Missionaries had very little private sphere, and a minimum of private property or capital with which to improve the communal facilities provided for them. The remote mission workers had to rely on each other for economic, social and emotional support and, if one of them became ill, they were a drain on everyone else. In these small and isolated communities friction easily arose, whether over working hours (Bloomfield), over mission policy (Hermannsburg) or over personal incompatibilities. There was serious discord at Hermannsburg between Wettengel and Strehlow, at Killalpaninna between Reuther and Siebert, at Bloomfield between Hörlein and, first, Meyer and then Mack, and at Wellington Valley between Watson and, first, Handt and then Günther.

20 Walter Veit, 'Social anthropology versus cultural anthropology: Baldwin Walter Spencer and Carl Friedrich Theodor Strehlow in Central Australia', in Walter Veit (ed.), *The Struggle for Souls and Science: Constructing the Fifth Continent: German Missionaries and Scientists in Australia*, Occasional Paper No. 3, Strehlow Research Centre, Alice Springs, 2004, pp. 92–110; Anna Kenny, *The Aranda's Pepa: An introduction to Carl Strehlow's Masterpiece Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien (1907–1920)*, ANU Press, Canberra, 2013.

21 Reinhard Wendt, *Sammeln, Vernetzen, Auswerten: Missionare und ihr Beitrag zum Wandel europäischer Weltansicht*, Gunter Narr Verlag, Tübingen, 2001; Walter Veit (ed.), *The Struggle for Souls and Science – Constructing the Fifth Continent: German Missionaries and Scientists in Australia*, Occasional Paper No. 3, Strehlow Research Centre, Alice Springs, 2004; Susan Cochrane and Max Quanchi (eds), *Hunting the Collectors: Pacific Collections in Australian Museums, Art Galleries and Archives*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2014.

Flierl II could not work with Hörlein, Walter could not tolerate Emo in Broome, Gsell's confreres would rather be anywhere else but with him, and Schwarz and Poland created a strategic distance between their separate mission sites at Cape Bedford.

With practically everything in scarce supply, the staff jealously watched each other's privileges, such as working hours and the quality of goods from the mission store. At Bloomfield, it was about who got the better grade of flour and whose wife was more often incapable of contributing. Not everything that a mission had to offer was free of charge, either. At Killalpaninna, the staff paid school fees of £1 per child to send their own children to the school.

Their relative poverty created tensions, but it also created bonds. The women helped out if one of them fell ill and might even take in each other's children, and in retirement missionaries in many cases kept in contact with each other's families. Furnishings were circulated and we can see Anna Siebert wearing the same wedding dress as Pauli Reuther a few years earlier (both photographs were taken in Tanunda, and at that time villagers in Germany often hired out their wedding dress for a fee).

### *Separation of families*

The separation of children from their families was commonplace. A mission placement was always necessarily a separation from kith and kin and, in the interest of obtaining the best possible education, the children of missionaries were often sent far away to boarding colleges. Lutherans who sent their children for schooling into the Lutheran communities in South Australia and Germany paid for their children's education out of their own pocket. Pastor Reuther constantly pleaded for assistance and special indulgence to afford the off-mission schooling of his seven sons at Eudunda and Neuendettelsau.

The primary classrooms on Protestant missions catered for a mixed audience. At Ramahyuck mission under the Moravian Frederick Hagenauer in 1881, five of the 47 pupils in the government school were Hagenauer children between the ages of 6 and 14 (of whom two failed to pass the government inspector's test, while almost all Indigenous children,

including Samuel Pepper, passed).<sup>22</sup> The Schwarz children were educated at Cape Bedford Lutheran mission school where their mother was the government teacher.

The German-speaking Moravian missionaries normally schooled their children free of charge in the Moravian boarding school at Kleinwelka near Herrnhut. Rev. Hey, writing from Mapoon, mentioned how anxious his wife already was about the impending departure of their two youngest girls to Germany, and the director at Herrnhut attempted to show some sympathy:

I am touched by what you write about Sr Hey's difficulty in getting over the impending parting with her children. It is one of the hardest trials of missionary life, but not a monopoly of that service. Tell Sr. Hey she must not impair rest and health by brooding. The same afflictions are accomplished in her sisters, who are in the flesh. Sr Townley at Makkovik is sadly missing her girl and boy, left behind in England. I was over at Kleinwelka the other day, and saw the children there, over whom many a heartache has been dissolved in prayer from parents' lips. So pass on to your good wife the very human comfort that others have felt the same, along with the Divine comfort that the Heavenly Father knows what it is to part with a beloved and only begotten son on our behalf, and so to speak for the sake of Missions. May the Angel of the Covenant bless your lassies!<sup>23</sup>

Such separation from families led, among the children of missionaries, to a phenomenon dubbed 'third culture kids'. This term refers to the children of missionaries, military personnel and other expatriates who grow up between two cultures, languages and nations, feel displaced in both and are scarred by rootlessness and unresolved grief.<sup>24</sup> Missionary children often harbour a deep resentment against their parents who had time to

---

22 Ramahuck School Gippsland, Inspector's Register Book 1871–1874, MSF 10401, State Library of Victoria.

23 Th. Bauer, Head of Unitätsdirektion, Berthelsdorf to Hey, 24 December 1903, Missionsdirektion, Personalakten Mission, Nicolaus Hey, MD825, Archiv der Brüderunität (Herrnhut Archives). Presumably, 'sisters in the flesh' means actual siblings, as distinct from 'sister' as the usual address between Moravian women.

24 David Pollock and Ruth van Reken, *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up among Worlds*, Nicholas Brealey, London, 2001.

care for the children of strangers, but not for their own. Signs of such intergenerational strain appear in reminiscences such as John Strehlow's account of his father Ted Strehlow and grandfather Carl Strehlow.<sup>25</sup>

Missionaries were able to compensate for the pain of separation from their children by placing it in the framework of a higher purpose – obtaining the best possible education for their children and serving the greater glory of God. They expected the same sacrifice of the mission residents. However, the mission residents did not have the same ambit of choice.

## Commitment for life: The Pallottines

Neither did Catholic missionaries consider the separation of families as a major issue. Joining a Catholic society or order meant taking leave from one's natural family and a commitment for life, which raised its own challenges. Before they made their 'eternal profession', they entered a fixed-term profession of one or three years. The lifelong profession the Pallottines signed varied slightly over the years, but, as an example, Johann Graf in 1903 professed to the greater glory of God, to the honour of the blessed virgin and all angels and saints, and to the salvation of his own soul and the souls of those around him. He professed to dedicate his life to the imitation of the Lord Jesus Christ according to the rules of the society, in poverty, chastity and obedience dedicated to the communal life and never to accept any other honours than that of being a member of the society.<sup>26</sup>

Considering the impoverished background of many of the Brothers, entering the monastery was indeed an honour. When Br Franz **Nissl** decided to join the Pallottines, he had already lost both parents and had damaged a foot in an accident. He had spent his childhood in poverty, strict discipline and hard work, so a vow of poverty, chastity and obedience was hardly a lifestyle change, but the 'palatial Limburg monastery' certainly was. Nissl left for Limburg without informing his five siblings 'and for the first time in his life felt free'.<sup>27</sup>

25 John Strehlow, *The Tale of Frieda Keysser, Volume I: 1875–1910*, Wild Cat Press, London, 2011. Eric Flierl (pers. comm.) told a similar story about himself and his sister.

26 The Professformel signed by Johann Graf at Beagle Bay, 1903, in Graf, Johann (Br), P1 Nr 22, ZAPP.

27 Francis Byrne, *A Hard Road: Brother Frank Nissl 1888–1980: A Life of Service to the Aborigines of the Kimberleys*, Tara House, Nedlands, 1989.

Freedom hardly seems an apt description for the communal monastic life. The initial decision to join the society, and follow their faith, was for many Brethren their last free decision. For the remainder of their lives, the Brothers and Fathers were dependent on the provisions made for them and on the decisions their superiors made about them.

The Pallottine Brothers who worked in the first few years at Beagle Bay under the direction of Fr Georg Walter demonstrate this dependence (Zach, **Wesely**, **Sixt**, **Graf**, **Herrmann**). Walter was from a wealthy background and had little talent for getting on with the Brothers, but neither did Limburg dedicate their most promising Brothers to the Australian mission. The Brothers engaged in income-earning and productive activities, and therefore had very close contact with the mission residents. Br Rudolf Zach was a peculiar character and showed a preoccupation with death and dying. Every year he dedicated a lengthy homespun poem to his former superior Max Kugelmann to wish him a marvellous hour of death. Zach's morose descriptions of his emotional intimidation of Indigenous girls may well be the reason why he was recalled from mission service. (See Chapter 7 – 'Hitting children and child abuse', or Rudolf Zach for his anecdotes of domineering interactions and ghostly encounters with mission girls.)

Br Raimund Wesely asked for a copy of the Pallottine house rules a few months after his arrival at Beagle Bay to see for himself where it prescribed that one must wear the thick black habit during outdoor work in the tropics. In 1906, Wesely was sent home 'for reasons of health'. He was hoping for a placement at the Rome headquarters near the former Limburg superior Kugelmann, whom all the Brothers in Australia revered, and therefore expressed misgivings about returning to Limburg. To his utter dismay, he was told that he would be placed neither in Rome nor in Limburg, nor anywhere else with the Pallottines. He pleaded that he wanted to live and die as a son of Vincent Pallotti, and would rather lose everything than his beloved profession. Wesely finally succeeded in getting a placement at the Rocca Priora, the Pallottine house in Rome, but when he was offered the eternal profession he declined. In his case, the lure of adventure may have been greater than the call of the Spirit. Later, Wesely worked for the Franciscan Fathers in America and many years afterwards he wrote from California: 'Since I left your Society dear Father I have never omitted the prayers which are said in that Order and up to date I hold them dear and am sure many blessings have come to me'. The Limburg administration



was not impressed. Wesely's letter, accompanied by a money order to read some masses, was curtly annotated: 'Done'.<sup>28</sup> At Limburg, the shadow of a *persona non grata* tends to hang over those who left the society.

Br August Sixt, also in Fr Walter's team, was expelled from Beagle Bay after an argument during which he had slapped one of the Fathers (probably Walter). Sixt obstinately refused to repatriate to Germany and instead remained close to Beagle Bay. At first, he stayed with the Marcelino family, and then he set up a market garden and remained in contact with the mission and became one of its staunch supporters until his death. At the time of his expulsion, superior Fr Walter feared that Br Sixt may claim the back-payment of wages. The court case of an expelled convent Sister elsewhere in Australia had already shown that Australian courts would not uphold the voluntary relinquishment of wages in work contracts. This was in 1907, the year when the **Harvester judgment** granted males a basic wage and workers' rights ranked uppermost in the national conversation as the basic plank of a White Australian future. Perhaps for this same reason, Walter reluctantly recommended the admission of one of the other Brothers, Johann Graf, to the eternal profession of the society: 'Although the good man is hardly of any use to the mission society, his conduct and character are such that the Society can hardly refuse him the eternal profession after five years of work'.<sup>29</sup>

Br Alfons Herrmann also left the society during Walter's watch. He came to Beagle Bay mission in 1904 and left in 1907 due to 'poor health'. In 1911, Herrmann was posted to Cameroon where, during World War I, he joined a volunteer corps and took part in a daring operation that ended in his arrest and internment at Cotonou and Le Mans. He returned to Limburg in 1918 with an Iron Cross and malaria. No longer able to participate in the monastic routines, he left the society in 1921, and entered into lengthy negotiations about a pay-out, listing all the items that he had brought to the monastery 20 years earlier: four suits, six blue linen work suits, two woollen blankets, a dozen each of sheets, towels, serviettes, collars, cuffs and other personal wear. He also brought 500 Mark to Limburg and a gold watch, which he said he gave to the superior. Herrmann wanted to recoup 1,650 Mark and the society offered 1,000 Mark. As in most divorce proceedings, neither party was happy about the outcome.

28 Raimund Wesely file, ZAPP.

29 File note, Beagle Bay, 25, 6. 1902, in Johann Graf file, ZAPP.

To enter into a mission institution, candidates were supposed to join their wealth with that of the society. Fr Jean-Marie Janny, for example, brought 150,000 Francs to the Trappist monastery at Sept Fons at which his brother became Superior.<sup>30</sup> To the question about a financial contribution on the application form, Brother August Sixt answered that at the moment he had nothing, but after the death of his mother the Pallottine mission society in Limburg would get his 'entire fortune' ('mein ganzes Vermögen'), which presumably meant one-sixth of very little because he was one of six surviving siblings in an impoverished family.<sup>31</sup> Eventually, however, Sixt delivered on this promise. He financed a chapel for the sodality of the Children of Mary, the first Pallottine attempt at an Indigenous church in Australia in 1938, and, in 1954, he left his farm and cottage, actually his entire fortune, to the St John of God Sisters in whose care he died at the Beagle Bay mission, 57 years after his unlikely promise.

In 1949, Br Bernhard **Stracke** also faced the spectre of repatriation to Germany against his will. Like Sixt before him, he decided to leave the society and stay close by: 'I got a dispensation from my promises. I left the mission with practically nothing, touching forty'.<sup>32</sup> Stracke married a young woman who had grown up in the Beagle Bay mission dormitory. They raised a family in Broome and maintained close links with the Catholic community.

The case of Br Bernhard **Hoffmann**, also one of the pioneers of Beagle Bay, became a traumatic experience for the Limburg motherhouse in the attempt to make convivial financial provision for a dismissed Brother. Hoffmann was a competent master carpenter, who subsequently served in Cameroon where he was referred to as 'Sango Doktor' at Engelberg mission. But 'his apostolic completeness left much to be desired'. He went out drinking dressed in his habit, was seen smoking in the streets of Freising, sent his apprentices to fetch beer and secretly ordered illustrated books (of possibly dubious content), but was always treated leniently.<sup>33</sup> The crunch came in Limburg in 1926, when police intercepted his *poste restante* correspondence with a young woman, which gave rise to the suspicion of human trafficking ('Mädchenhandel' – no further details are

30 Brigida Nailon, *Emo and San Salvador*, Brigidine Sisters, Echuca, 2005, Vol. 1, p. 91.

31 Fragebogen, in Sixt, August (Br – Ex), P1 Nr 28, ZAPP.

32 Chris Jeffrey, an Interview with Bernhard Stracke, (age 73), 6 August 1981, Battye Library Oral History Programme, transcript, State Library of Western Australia.

33 Antonia Leugers, *Eine geistliche Unternehmensgeschichte: Die Limburger Pallottiner-Provinz 1892–1932*, EOS Verlag, St Ottilien, 2004, pp. 100, 144, 176.

available in the Limburg archives). The Pallottines managed to suppress prosecution and offered a generous severance package in return for his immediate voluntary resignation from the society in order to stifle negative publicity. A monthly pension of 100 Mark was probably paid for 26 years until Hoffmann took the society to court and achieved an increase to 120 Mark. Within a few years, Hoffmann requested another increase, based on the increased expense of the aged care home in which he now lived approaching 80, but in December 1952 the Provincial sent a stern and final refusal. The next month Hoffmann was dead.

This episode shows how symbiotic the relationship between the society and its members could become. Having invested all their future options, the members of the society felt that they had only the society to fall back on. Even if a member returned to Germany to be near his family, the Pallottine Society was still expected to pay for ambulance, hospital and funeral costs.

It was often difficult to find something to do for ageing Fathers and Brothers who could no longer be useful on missions. A Father might be placed as the assisting priest on a mission station, or become a resident priest in a hospital, where he himself could be cared for. In many cases, they would be repatriated to Limburg where some less strenuous occupation might be found for them; however, after a few decades in foreign mission, the reintegration into the uneventful collective routines of the motherhouse could be difficult.

A few managed to live out their lives on the mission. Br Johannes Graf, the man who was 'of hardly any use to the Society' in Walter's opinion in 1902, lived at Beagle Bay until January 1951. He invented a machine for the mission girls to make brooms out of sorghum (broomcorn) for sale in Broome. For many years, he was in charge of the 500 head of goats, the goat milking and the coconut and banana plantations. He also rang the 5 am mission gong, which was actually a hubcap suspended from his hut. Fr Ernst Worms describes Graf as:

A gaunt figure with sharp face behind which lurks roguishness, friendliness and piousness. Black beard tinged with grey. Gardener, goatherd, and philosopher besides ... He assiduously collected the cattle manure, especially from the goats, on an antediluvian wood cart with massive timber disks as wheels, pulled by the young boys with great commotion. His garden sat across several springs, very peculiar in this dry continent. He constantly adjusted the irrigation. Next to a permanent spring he had

built a small Lourdes grotto which he daily decorated with fresh flowers. Daily for forty years – the meaning of perseverance. ... Beneath the eucalypts, on the edge of a glade drawing down to the bay, lay a large tree trunk. 'That's Brother John's place', the children told me. There he prayed in undisturbed silence.<sup>34</sup>

Clearly some Brothers were able to carve out a little private space for themselves on the mission. Br Heinrich **Krallmann** also died at Beagle Bay in June 1951. He was a carpenter and inventive bush mechanic known for his well-digging and wool presses, always with the rosary by his side. One day Krallmann wanted all hands commandeered for the shearing, but Fr Hügel wanted to keep back one of the Brothers for other tasks, to which Krallmann retorted that in that case maybe Fr Hügel himself could help in the shearing shed. Fr Hügel relates, 'At the end of the day my good Br Heinrich came to me, kneeled down and asked for forgiveness'.<sup>35</sup> This incident speaks volumes about the oath of obedience and internal mission hierarchy.

Lifelong commitment, forbearing and melting oneself into the commune were the expectation. Sickness was the only honourable exit from mission service, and there was no provision for old age if one left a Catholic society. Some of the staff felt that they were letting down their families at home through their long absence. Fr Nicholas Emo, for example, became depressive after receiving news of the miserable condition of what were presumed to be his sister and niece.

Another curious case is that of Br Franz Herholz, who achieved dispensation from the Kimberley for health reasons. Herholz arrived home in the midst of the Depression and unemployment of 1933, only to find that after 10 years away he had no claim to public assistance or to a job assignment. His letters from Danzig describe that he was one of 17 siblings whose father had died and his mother had descended into debility. When they lost the family home and were over their ears in debt, one of the younger sons ran amok with a pistol, and the mother tried to drown herself in the river. With three operations behind him, Herholz was not capable of hard work and thought he could work as a water diviner. He sent a hundred begging letters to acquaintances in Germany and overseas, to which he received only three apologetic responses. Clearly

34 Handwritten MS (in German) in Worms, Ernst (Pater), P1 Nr 27, ZAPP.

35 P.F. Hügel, 'Memories of Br. Heinrich Krallmann' in Krallmann file, ZAPP.

unable to provide for himself, let alone help others in the family, Herholz still felt it was by the Lord's guidance that he was sent home to watch over his family. His Limburg superiors wisely decided to let this man go, in the interest of the Pallottine society, since 'congenital mental conditions were known to manifest more easily in a religious community'.<sup>36</sup>

Br Rudolf Wollseifer was sent back from the Kimberley to Limburg for what everyone thought should be a deserved rest, but he became torn with misgivings, expressed in a stream of letters, and achieved reposting to the Kimberley. This was an indulgent decision by the Limburg superiors. The St John of God Sisters who nursed Wollseifer at Beagle Bay were also tending to children, leprosy patients and any other medical conditions. They conducted the school and shouldered many other responsibilities. Wollseifer began to feel that he was being neglected and, on a strict diet for his intestinal troubles, that he was being starved to death, after he himself had created such a fruitful garden and had helped to grow the sheep and cattle herds to such bountiful numbers. In his last weeks, Wollseifer was attended by an old Nyul Nyul woman who prayed the rosary and sang with him.

Wollseifer had become a colourful institution at Beagle Bay. According to a description by Fr Ernst Worms, he inhabited a whitewashed cottage with cement floor and plain furniture, in which he suspended tobacco leaves for drying, mostly for his own consumption, since nobody else dared to smoke his 'cuckle-cuckle'. In his earlier days, he was always the first in church for the 5 am morning prayer, and sloshed barefoot along the path to his garden every day, from where he liked to distribute sugarcane as a treat for the children. On Sundays, he also played a trumpet 'mottled with verdigris'. Wollseifer loved music but hardly excelled at it:

He liked to play the reed organ to accompany the native Christians in the hymns during holy mass. But because he never studied organ-playing and harmony, the right hand would hold the proper melody whereas the left one would flit up and down the keyboard driven more by instinct and without always hitting on the right accompaniment. The pace was fairly idiosyncratic but because he always sang along himself with a loud voice, the song-loving blacks had become used to his peculiar rhythm. Thus hymn after hymn would drawl along in voluptuous length through the holy mass and right up to the blessing to the doubtful exaltation of the

---

36 File annotation, 6 February 1934, Herholz, Franz (Br – Ex), ZAPP.

choral-loving Br. Huegel [whose father was an opera singer in Leipzig] and testing the patience of the most reverend music connoisseur Bishop Raible. But it went on for years.<sup>37</sup>

Br Frank Nissl was also one of those who refused to retire. He celebrated his 80th birthday at Beagle Bay, and in retirement at Millgrove he still hammered away in the shed of his piggery at age 89.<sup>38</sup> He had spent much of his time in the bush working with mission residents, and Fr Byrne recollected about Nissl and his Indigenous aides:

Whenever I visited them in the bush, it was an uplifting experience. At night they would gather quite naturally to recite the Rosary and the Litany to Our Lady just as they would if they were back at the mission.<sup>39</sup>

Such Brothers refused to be relegated to the role of mere stock workers and saw themselves directly engaged in teaching and preaching.

The problem of retirement was eased after World War II, when priests who were naturalised and retired in Australia could qualify for a government pension. But the Catholic hierarchy was used to making decisions for and on behalf of subordinates, and its superiors were not required to indulge in consultation. Fr Alfons **Bleischwitz** was suddenly pensioned off as soon as he turned 65. He had 25 years of mission service at Balgo (1937–56) and Lombadina (1969–74), as well as a period as director of the Manly college (1956–69), and as parish priest in Wyndham (1974–84). He began to suffer from depression, describing himself as a lonely man, with nobody to talk to. He found Wyndham ‘rather depressing’, and reflected on the ‘sad experiences of the last 25 years’: ‘Where are we going – where is our religious discipline. Sometimes I think we have thrown everything away because it came from the past and hence it was outmodelled’. The Pallottines were no longer dominating the Catholic presence in the Kimberley, with a Redemptorist parish priest at Kununurra, a Carmelite in Broome and Jesuit students at Balgo, moreover church attendance was minimal: ‘Many [priests] find it hard to say mass every day if there are no people there’. The Limburg Provincial Ludwig Münz, who had himself served in Australia, tried to cheer Bleischwitz up and wrote tongue-in-cheek:

---

37 Handwritten MS (in German) in Worms, P1 Nr 27, ZAPP.

38 Byrne, *Hard Road*, p. 109.

39 Byrne, *Hard Road*, p. 110.

You might have great difficulty in spending all that [pension] money in Wyndham. There's only the pub to spend money in. Perhaps you will, at your age, become a RC (regular customer) at the pub.<sup>40</sup>

Bleischwitz yearned for the mission years and the inspiration obtained from the company of fellow religious, such as Frank Nissl, in whose honour he wrote a history of the Balgo mission during his last year in Wyndham. Who better to appreciate the small and large sacrifices made by such men than their own Brethren, particularly as public opinion was turning against them yet again.

## Motivation – driven by faith

Even the positive spin of mission newsletters did not promise a comfortable lifestyle. The publicity and recruitment machine made no secret that missionaries faced tropical diseases, natural disasters like floods, droughts and cyclones, and even hunger and starvation (e.g. Zion Hill, **Stradbroke Island**, Daly River, Cape Bedford, Bloomfield). It was clear that they would be remote from facilities such as hospitals, dental care or help for difficult childbirth. They knew they would not be well paid, not comfortably housed and not well supplied with luxuries. Self-advancement could simply not have been a strong motive for volunteering into missions. What drove so many young people into remote mission service?

Only a few academic historians like Katharine Massam and Christine Lockwood patiently engage with the expressions of faith in the mission records, and insist that faith needs, after all, to be taken seriously if we wish to understand what powered the mission movement. As shown in Chapters 1 and 2, Germany had a strong Awakening movement but no empire except for three short decades. The strong religious vocation inspiring these volunteers is reflected in the titles published by missionaries and their confessional historians, such as *My Life and God's Mission* (Johann Flierl), *Led by the Spirit* (John Lümmer), *For Faith and Freedom* (Everard Leske) and *Venture of Faith* (Philipp Scherer).

---

40 Ludwig Münz to Alphonse Bleischwitz, 14 October 1975, and Bleischwitz to Münz, 24 August 1976, in Bleischwitz, Alfons (Pater), P1 Nr 13, ZAPP.

This language of faith, together with the twentieth-century standard lexicon of cultural superiority, can be a taxing fare for today's secular researchers who are plumbing missionary records for historical evidence. Readers who are tempted to slash away expressions of faith that seem to thrive like a jungle of weeds around the hidden gems of historical data may find they are left with very little. A particularly illustrative (and relatively short) example is a letter from a missionary of the pietist Gossner Mission (*Gesellschaft zur Förderung der evangelischen Missionen unter den Heiden*) to New Zealand Bishop G.A. Selwyn requesting the Church of England instructions for his mission on the Chatham Islands in January 1845. To decipher such a handwritten letter to the point where one is relatively confident of having read it correctly can take a few days, but it is easily summarised in a couple of lines: Rev. Franz Schirmeister (who later came to Australia) apologises for his poor English (modelled in some respects on the King James Bible), insists on the common purpose of the Anglican and the Lutheran Church, and continually reiterates his task – the redemption of souls for the greater glory of God:

My Lord,

Not longer delay we to address our humblest supplications to Your Lordship, steadfastly convinced that Ye, by the love of Christ which dwelleth in You, full indulgence connive our infashioned and imperfect English expression, only regarding the holy interesses of the Kingdom of Christ.

Sent out by the “German Mission’s Society evangelical for spreading of Christianity among natives of heathen-lands” was pointed out us of the Lord Jesus this Island to workfield by wonderous guidances.

In deepest humbleness supplicate we Your Lordship trustfully; to protect the Mission’s work, also, among us; that we, called by the Church of Christ of Germany to be servants and witnesses of Christ Jesus among heathen, under the near and high protection of the Lord Bishop of the Church of Christ of England, may work, by God’s grace, the work of the Lord with so much the more confidence and the banner of the holy Cross might be planted in many hearts, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

May it please Your Lordship to deliver unto us the Liturgy and the Prayer-book of the Church of England.



Forgive us, where we have missed the expression and form of a strange tongue. The Spirit of Christ Himself may be our interpreter in the holiest matter, which concerneth the redemption of the souls, who are bought with a precious price.

Of Your Lordship's lowest servants, F. Schirmeister, German Missionary, in conjunction with four Mission's brethren.

The Prince of the High Anglican Church in New Zealand did not respond (perhaps he had as much trouble reading the letter as I did), so Schirmeister followed up with another note apologising for establishing a mission station so close to the Wesleyans, which he repeatedly asserts was done 'by wondrous guidances of the Lord Jesus', and reaffirming his task 'to save immortal souls by Christ and for Christ', 'so that by our weak labour, prayers and tears may be gathered for him his blood – gain out of our miserable heathen-brethren to their ever-lasting salvation, and the glory of God the Father'.<sup>41</sup>

It is tempting to dismiss the bulwark of scriptural references, expressions of faith and insistence on a common purpose in these letters as mere diplomatic noise. But, taken seriously – as one eventually must when this self-representation emerges again and again – the missionary task is the eternal salvation of as yet unconverted souls and not the material improvement of living conditions, while the ultimate purpose of achieving grace for humans is to serve the greater glory of God, and not, conversely, bringing Christianity to people in order to achieve something for them. The ultimate purpose of mission is not anthropocentric but spiritual, as Christine Lockwood is at pains to explain.

Much more is packaged into this lamentatious message. Non-Christians (heathens) are 'miserable', which means that they are deserving of pity (*misericordia*), and they are brothers, children of the same God, for whom Jesus shed his own blood, so that they must be gathered in to honour that sacrifice. The missionaries sensed that they were taking on an enormous task, a battle that could only be fought and never ultimately won. Therefore, they celebrated small victories, such as a request for baptism, a question about the gospel or a show of affection.

---

41 Letters by Franz Schirmeister at Chatham Island to Bishop Selwyn, 2 January 1845 and 14 April 1845, Gossner G1, 0813, Archiv der Gossner Mission, Evangelisches Landeskirchliches Archiv, Berlin.

## Conclusions

Interesting and challenging as the missionary life tended to be portrayed in autobiographies and mission publications, it was also full of hardships, trials, social isolation and criticism. It was not a secure or financially rewarding career, and required skills of adjustment, obedience and community adaptation. Those who were from better-off backgrounds, and from English-speaking ones, rose more easily through the ranks of colonial society. Even missionaries who took a keen interest in science and ethnography, discussed in Chapter 7, were generally treated as repositories of free information rather than as serious interlocutors.

To justify a life of economic dependence, lack of privacy and social isolation, the missionaries had only their faith to fall back on. They were exposed to diseases to which they had no resistance and their daily lives were regimented by the mission bell. There was no after-hours private life, so that their alcohol consumption and sexual conduct were matters for public comment and committee deliberation. The mission societies screened allegations of moral transgressions from public view to protect the reputation of development aid dependent on grassroots support, but sexual misconduct, or allegations of it, generally spelled the end of a mission, or at least of a mission career. Like eco-warriors throwing themselves before a high-powered whaling ship on the open ocean, missionaries were motivated by a set of ideas that had very wide currency, and they were ready to sacrifice for the cause.

This text is taken from *The Contest for Aboriginal Souls: European missionary agendas in Australia*, by Regina Ganter, published 2018 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.