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## Conclusions

### Driven by faith

In the nineteenth century, a proliferation of missionary training colleges aiming to produce specialised professionals drew most of their candidates from impoverished backgrounds on the European continent. Some of them may have been attracted by a monastic lifestyle of prayer, study, work and celibacy, or by the expectation that a short period of training would be followed by everlasting summers in exotic locations. The multiphased acceptance procedures for mission colleges and the discretionary selection principles for mission placements were quite efficient in weeding out young lads who were merely looking for a free fare to adventure. What the college directors were looking for, and mostly succeeded in obtaining, was total commitment, for life. This is reflected in the curriculum vitae that the candidates were required to submit for acceptance into the seminaries and before their departure into mission.

The mission movement itself, and the majority of its front-line of volunteers, was essentially driven by faith, by the deep-seated conviction in a common humanity united in God, capable of salvation of the soul and eternal life after death. Evangelical 'labourers in the vineyard of God' were required to enlist and convert non-believers. The equivalent secular humanist assumption is that there are basic human rights that justify, and even demand, interventions in families, organisations or nations, whether by persuasion, compulsion or force. These unshakeable and unquestionable assumptions, which underpinned the purpose in life of missionaries,

armoured them against external criticism. That they remained vulnerable to criticism from their own ranks shows in the moving letters of Pastors **Reuther** and **Hörlein**.

External criticism came from many quarters. Missionaries were often under suspicion of improper conduct, ranging from excessive physical punishment, improper dealings with minors, cohabiting, illegitimate children, molestation, crimping, embezzlement, to espionage. In most cases, determining the truth of the allegations is impossible on the basis of extant records, since rumour and innuendo surround the events and often the misdeeds themselves were not enunciated. One must be careful not to judge by the institutional policies that are now in place for dealing with suspected transgressions or by what now counts as improper conduct. Illegitimate children, extramarital affairs, cohabiting, miscegenation and homosexual relations have all disappeared from the modern register of ethical misdemeanours within less than a century. At the same time, new misdemeanours have appeared in the moral compass, including patronising Indigenous adults, corporal punishment, bullying and deprivation of liberty. It is this new moral compass that casts a long shadow on the mission histories.

In these shifting territories, there were also vast mismatches between Indigenous and Christian ethical standards. The missionaries accused Indigenous people of polygamy, abortion, infanticide and violence against women. Indigenous people accused missionaries of arranging wrong marriages, violations of avoidance rules, incarcerating children and violence against children. In other words, the contest was over the maintenance and erosion of cultural traditions and standards, typical of the colonising process. Yet missionaries thought of themselves as guardians against the worst excesses of colonisation, rather than as colonisers themselves, and were often amazed when Indigenous people treated them as just one of the 'bosses'. They understood themselves not as dominating the lives of others but as sacrificing (*sacer facium* – making holy) their own, as acting for a cause that was spiritual rather than material, that aimed for conversion rather than colonisation. Chapter 6 details that the missionary profession generally did not offer a brilliant career, or an attractive wage, or a secure retirement. The prime motivation of volunteers must have been faith, and not self-advancement.

## Gratitude and other cultural conventions

Against the backdrop of vast differences in ethics, expectations and self-definition, the missionaries highly prized any show of affection or gratitude from Indigenous people. Bishop **Gsell** was comforted by the lifelong support from Martina, the woman who had inspired his signature policy, and who during World War II at Channel Island expressed the ‘fervent wish’ to see him once more.<sup>1</sup> Fr **Lümmen** enjoyed even more support from Edith Little at Rossmoyne. Fr Wilhelm **Droste** was showered with letters from his ‘aunties’, ‘children’ and ‘friends’ at Beagle Bay and Broome, addressed to their Ibal (father) who had returned to Germany. After 20 years in the Kimberley, these affectionate letters must have been a great comfort to him two months before his death in December 1929. Another moving description is the great wailing that accompanied the arrest of the Pallottine Brethren at **Beagle Bay** in 1940. At that moment of removal under police guard, nobody knew what might happen to the missionaries who were arrested – a situation all too familiar to Indigenous people. Fr Francis Byrne describes how the Elders gathered on the grass in front of the mission house and wept:

As the missionaries, with their few personal belongings, were being loaded onto the truck and police vehicles, a mournful lament began in the Aboriginal camp. It was an eerie wail which seemed to permeate every building, every tree, every plant, every soul.<sup>2</sup>

There was also a great show of sorrow when Pastor F.W. Spieseke died at age 56 at **Ebenezer** in 1876, and some Aboriginal men walked all the way to Dimboola to buy his coffin.<sup>3</sup> When Pastor Carl **Strehlow** was carried off the mission, struck down with illness after nearly 30 years at Hermannsburg, the entire congregation accompanied him with a farewell song for a stretch of the way. For missionaries, such expressions of grief meant that they were accepted as an important part of the community, that there was gratitude for their efforts, and that there was some basic human affection.

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1 Frank Flynn, *Distant Horizons: Mission Impressions as Published in the Annals of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart*, Sacred Heart Monastery, Kensington, 1947, pp. 67, 74.

2 Francis Byrne, *A Hard Road: Brother Frank Nissl, 1888–1980: A Life of Service to the Aborigines of the Kimberleys*, Tara House, Nedlands, WA, 1989, p. 83.

3 Ebenezer Diary, 24 June 1876, microfilm, MF 171–73, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (AIATSIS).

But this is not necessarily what they meant for Indigenous people. When Brother Eberhard fell sick in 1882 at **Rapid Creek**, after only less than a year in the north, Fr Strele was very moved by the loud lamentations raised by Aboriginal people, who showed distress and continually inquired about his state. It is quite possible that this show of concern was primarily a way of averting blame and revenge killing in case Br Eberhard died.

To visit the dying was a widespread custom that deflected blame in Indigenous societies where death had to be accounted for. When Nathanael Pepper was told in 1877 that he only had days left to live, he sent for every inhabitant of **Ramahyuck** to come to his bedside.<sup>4</sup> It was much the same with Br **Krallmann** in 1951 at Beagle Bay:

His heart wanted to give up, he sat in front of his hut with the rosary – a simple room and hard bed. Friendly chat with each passing Blackfellow. The end was slowly approaching. Without invitation all the Blacks now came in long queues to say farewell. With his weak voice he had a good word for each of them. Everyone was crying. When it was over he told the Bishop [Raible] and Brothers who were present, ‘what a comfort to encounter such gratitude.’<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps these farewell rituals were also part of an increasingly syncretic middle ground where a shared platform of meaning was intuited from two very different sets of cultural connotation – absolution from blame and guilt in one culture, and devolution of responsibilities and material inheritance in the other. Perhaps there was a measure of gratitude – the missionaries certainly expected it. Gratitude would compensate for the hardships, difficulties and abstinences typical of a missionary life. But gratitude is not a currency that is traded between equals, and therefore the missionaries never saw enough of it to compensate for their sacrifices. This does not mean that Indigenous people failed to acknowledge the work of the missionaries. Their world was rapidly and uncontrollably changing, and they were in need of support and assistance under the onslaught of massive historical changes.

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4 Hagenauer, 17 March 1877, Annual Reports of the Central Board for Aborigines, B332/0 1861–1924, Victorian Archives Centre.

5 Handwritten manuscript in Worms, Ernst Alfred (Pater), P1 Nr 27, Zentralarchiv der Pallottinerprovinz (ZAPP), translated by Regina Ganter.

## Perspectives on mission history

Pat Grimshaw reports an Aboriginal woman as saying: ‘Only for the missionaries there wouldn’t be so many Aborigines walking around today. They’re the ones that saved the day for us’.<sup>6</sup> Missionary histories make similar claims. But, after all their efforts, it cannot be taken for granted that missions actually played a major role in the continued survival of Aboriginal people in Australia when few missions were able to provide an abode that lasted for more than a generation, and only between 5 and 7 per cent of Indigenous people had access to missions until after World War II.

In view of all the dysfunctions, it seems difficult to fashion a reconciliatory mission history that takes into honest account the intentions, processes and outcomes at play. The question of intentions has been the prerogative of histories written from within the churches that are bent on giving due credit for effort. A focus on the process tends to be the domain of Indigenous memories of mission life that are inclined to emphasise pain. The outcomes, finally, are more in the viewfinder of academic treatments that leverage critical analysis in the framework of empire and colonialism. This book has attempted to span these perspectives, not working deductively from a theory or model, but inductively sorting through a massive amount of detailed record. That it confined its scope to missions staffed by German-speaking and other Continental missionaries should not diminish that effort.

Indigenous accounts of missions are largely in the form of oral history, and without access to German materials. A community history of Mapoon focuses on the displacement from the old mission under the pressure of mining development and the disappointing lack of support from the church at that crucial moment. A collection of oral histories from Beagle Bay was produced under the editorship of Sister Brigida Nailon and Fr Francis Hügel. Their book, *Beagle Bay – This is Your Place*, contains hardly a trace of criticism of the mission period, but neither is the praise for the missionaries very liberal in the testimony of former mission residents. Others do make some acknowledgement of a certain indebtedness, and in church publications we find many Indigenous

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6 Patricia Grimshaw, *Creating a Nation 1788–1990*, McPhee-Gribble, Melbourne, 1994, p. 135.

voices that are positive about the mission past. Glenyse Ward placed her autobiography, *Wandering Girl*, under the banner of her character-forming mission childhood at Wandering Brook, with fond memories of the German Sisters and wistful references to the cloistered mission years. As an academic stepping well beyond oral and family history, Noel Pearson also squarely confronted the Lutheran background of his home community at Hopevale, and has since commented on the benefits his community derived from its mission.<sup>7</sup>

Anger and frustration speak from between the lines of many former missionaries or their descendants, who have found the mission efforts under the microscope of armchair critique from secular academics.<sup>8</sup> Ordained religious like Dr John Harris and Paul Albrecht also know how to wield an incisive knife of critique, but they share with the missionaries about whom they write a fundamental commitment to Christian faith and the bedrock of conviction that missions were intended for the benefit of Aboriginal people. Secular approaches, canvassed in the Preface, emphasise, on the contrary, that missions served the interests of colonising states.

That the empire-building of the different confessions was driven by faith is much less credible than the argument advanced here about individual motivations. Even Lutheran historians understand that the dogmatic disputes that delayed the formation of a Lutheran Church in Australia until 1966 owed more to personality clashes than to unbridgeable confessional differences.<sup>9</sup> The tensions described in Chapter 1 within the Catholic Church and between Protestant and Catholic mission

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7 Brigida Nailon and Francis Huegel (eds), *This is Your Place: Beagle Bay Mission 1890–1990*, Beagle Bay Community, Broome, 1990; Glenyse Ward, *Wandering Girl*, Magabala Books, Broome, 1988; Noel Pearson, 'Ngamu-ngadyarr, Muuri-bunggaga and Midha Mini in Guugu Yimidhirr History: Dingoes, Sheep and Mr Muni in Guugu Yimidhirr History: Hope Vale Lutheran Mission 1900–1950', Honours thesis, University of Sydney, 1986; Geoffrey Stephen Wharton, 'The Day They Burned Mapoon: A Study of the Closure of a Queensland Presbyterian Mission', Honours thesis, University of Queensland, 1996.

8 This is particularly evident in John Strehlow, *The Tale of Frieda Keysser: Frieda Keysser & Carl Strehlow: An Historical Biography. Volume 1, 1875–1910*, Wild Cat Press, London, 2011.

9 Th. Hebart, *The United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia (U.E.L.C.A.): Its History, Activities and Characteristics, 1838–1938*, (Trans. Johann J. Stolz), Lutheran Book Depot, Adelaide, 1938; F. Otto Theile, *One Hundred Years of the Lutheran Church in Queensland*, UELCA Qld. District, Brisbane, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1938 (facsimile reprint 1985); Everard Leske, *For Faith and Freedom: The Story of Lutherans and Lutheranism in Australia 1838–1996*, Open Book publishers, Adelaide, 1996; Everard Leske (ed.), *Hermannsburg: A Vision and Mission*, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1977.

endeavours have the character of a competitive carving of spheres of influence, also typical of the colonising process. All these mission empires eventually collapsed because they had no secure land tenure to buffer them against secular policy changes. Nobody could foresee that in the end the enormous productive activity on missions and the personal investments and leadership of missionaries would lead Aboriginal communities only into large-scale welfare dependence. Traditional lifestyles, leadership structures and access entitlements were successfully eroded to make room for a new age, but security of tenure for Indigenous communities in the new system was not achieved, a national calamity with which Australia is still wrestling.

## God was here before the missionaries!

The early Australian mission efforts seemed doomed from the beginning, and most of them were judged failures. The end of the mission era became a bitter contest between the aspirations of Indigenous people, the ambit claims of states, the emerging powers of the federal government and the mission societies. Despite all this, the emergence of ordained Indigenous pastors and priests and Indigenous churches with a strong following have achieved the aims of the mission movement. John Harris estimated that by the 1930s a greater proportion of black than white Australians were actively Christian, and a study by Noel Loos of the emergence of an Aboriginal Church affirms that Christianity is now an important part of contemporary Aboriginal culture.<sup>10</sup>

The emerging Indigenous churches in Australia devised their own syncretic adaptations, some of which were trialled as ‘inculturation’ in the final Catholic mission phase explored in Chapter 5. The Christian church became transformed with the addition of saints, icons, processions, bishops and other rituals, and the social hierarchies in Europe. Aboriginal people, too, located the gospel within their own frames of reference, including the allocation of a place in country to gospel stories. In the Kimberley missions, reports circulated about a figure of Christ in an

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10 John Harris, *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope*, Albatross Books, Sutherland, NSW, 1990, p. 659; Noel Loos, *White Christ Black Cross: The Emergence of a Black Church*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, p. 175.

intertidal creek,<sup>11</sup> at Hermannsburg (Ntaria) there are the Footprints of Jesus near the Finke River, and believers proclaim that ‘God was here before the missionaries’.<sup>12</sup>

These days, Aboriginal Christians do not perceive a conflict between participation in traditional ceremonies and church rituals, both of which ‘validate a spirit-filled universe’.<sup>13</sup> In the 1980s, anthropologist David Thompson found that at the former Anglican mission of Lockhart River ‘sincere Aboriginal Christians ... find a harmonious identity through being active participants to both Bora and Church’. They emphasised parallels and similarities, and to explain elements of bora to outsiders they used English terms like godparent, baptism or confession.<sup>14</sup> Translations have always involved a certain latitude in interpreting the gospel. For example, Fr Gribble discovered that his Pacific Island assistant Willie Ambryn promised the Yarrabah people a heaven with ‘no sickness, no pain, no sorrow, and no white people’.<sup>15</sup>

White bishops have been cautious about emerging forms of Aboriginal Christian spirituality. In 1972, Anglican Bishop of Carpentaria Donald Shearman felt that ‘only a few have a real commitment to Jesus Christ’.<sup>16</sup> Darwin’s Catholic Bishop F.X. Gsell boasted more than 700 names on his baptismal register in the 1940s, but when asked how many of the them were true believers, he reputedly said: ‘none. Their religion goes deeper than ours’.<sup>17</sup>

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11 A undated file note in Worms, Ernst Alfred (Pater), P1 Nr 27, ZAPP suggests that soon after his arrival in the north in December 1930, Fr Ernst Worms followed up the report of the figure of Christ. A scribbled note on re-used paper reads: ‘15 November, Br. Kasperek, self and Clem went by lorry to Ten Mile Mill to look at the curious stones. Found petrified trees, especially one as if sawed through twice. Didn’t see the so-called Figure of Christ (was already covered with water). Saw rabbit tracks for the first time. The name of the place is: –’. (Worms didn’t specify the name of the place.) In the original German: ‘Nov. 15th. Br. Kasp., ich, Clem. waren per lorry nach 10 Mile Mill, um nach den sonderbaren Steinen zu sehen. Fanden petrified Bäume besonders einer, wie zeimal durchgesägt. Die sogenannte Christus Figur sahen wir nicht. (Schon mit Wasser bedeckt). Sahen zum ersten Mal Rabbit-track. Der Platz heißt: –’.

12 *The Dream and the Dreaming*, 2003, ABC TV.

13 Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, p. 163.

14 David Thompson, *Bora is Like Church: Aboriginal Initiation and the Christian Church at Lockhart River, Queensland*, Australian Board of Missions, Sydney, 1985, Foreword.

15 Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, p. 146.

16 Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, p. 154.

17 Douglas Lockwood, *The Front Door: Darwin, 1869–1969*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1968, p. 116.

Noel Loos provides a detailed study of the emergence of an Indigenous church inside Anglicanism, which shows a parallel development to those covered in this study.<sup>18</sup> In the 1970s, Edward River and Lockhart River missions were ‘on the verge of introducing a language program’. Bishop Donald Shearman pronounced how important it was ‘to deliver the gospel in the language of the people’ after linguist Bruce Sommer had found in 1969 that at Kowanyama (Mitchell River) only about 58 per cent of English was understood. For example, the indistinct difference between the English ‘a’ and ‘e’ resulted in a blurring between ‘blessing’ and ‘blaspheming’. In various ways, the gospel was either misunderstood or reinterpreted in the framework of Indigenous understandings.<sup>19</sup> Gospel stories became identified with a place, and therefore with a clan that owned the story and became responsible for maintaining it and for performing its associated church rituals. At Kowanyama, God was identified as the mythic culture hero Poonchr who lived in the sky and occasionally visited the earth in human form. This is reminiscent of the invocation of ‘Mahmamorack’ in Nathanael Pepper’s hymn discussed in Chapter 5.

Loos mentions several syncretic adaptations, including the use of damper as holy host, the inclusion of the totemic sea eagle in the coat of arms of the James Noble Fellowship at Yarrabah, and, conversely, the incorporation of a traditional smoking ceremony in important church functions such as the General Synod and National Conference. Some traditional ceremonies fell away, such as increase ceremonies that became superfluous once local stores opened their doors, others were adjusted, such as mortuary rites that began to include Torres Strait music and dance for ‘house opening’ ceremonies after a death, and some church ceremonies became reinscribed, such as baptism to replace initiation and adult baptism bestowed on new arrivals to render them part of the community.<sup>20</sup> In the same way, it has been observed that Aboriginal people have transformed Lutheranism as much as Lutheranism transformed Indigenous people.<sup>21</sup>

18 Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*.

19 Australian Board of Missions, Board Minutes, 24–26 October 1972, Chairman’s Report; J. Taylor, ‘Goods and gods: A follow-up study of “Steel Axes for Stone Age Australians”’, in Swain and Rose, p. 447 cited in Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, pp. 159, 154.

20 Taylor, ‘Goods and Gods’, in Swain and Rose, p. 447 cited in Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, pp. 154, 168–72.

21 Jim Cox et al., Religion and non-Religion among Australian Aboriginal Peoples, Roundtable Discussion, Religion and Society Research Centre, University of Western Sydney, August 2014; see also Jim Cox and Adam Possamai (eds), *Religion and non-Religion among Australian Aboriginal Peoples*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2016.

Contrary to histories written from within the churches,<sup>22</sup> Loos emphasises that ‘the innovators have always been Aboriginal people’ and that such adaptations were achieved through struggle against centralised church structures.<sup>23</sup> The Aboriginal churches grew out of local initiatives, and were not a High Church decision.<sup>24</sup> Anglican Bishop Wood observed ‘a gradual emergence of Aboriginal congregations throughout Australia’, but Loos observes that this was not in the denominations to which they once belonged. In the fringe camps of galvanised iron shacks without running water, the Aborigines Inland Mission, the United Aborigines Mission and the Assembly of God attracted large followings.<sup>25</sup>

At the Anglican mission of Yarrabah, an important catalyst and role model was James Noble, who became the first Aboriginal deacon in the Anglican Church in 1925. He, along with several others, helped Rev. Ernest Gribble establish the Anglican missions at Yarrabah in 1898, the Roper River mission in 1908, the Forrest River mission and the Mitchell River mission. It took until 1970 for another Aboriginal person to be ordained in the Anglican Church.<sup>26</sup> Noble had a conversion experience at a place now called ‘Vision Creek’. By the 1980s, in the wake of the Christian renewal of the ‘born-again Christian’ movement of the late 1970s, visions became widespread at Yarrabah, with images of Jesus appearing in clouds, trees, children’s paintings or curtain folds, and Yarrabah’s Rev. Wayne Connolly observed that ‘our people are starting to see our Lord Jesus Christ in everything’.<sup>27</sup>

Grappling with problems of alcohol, drugs, gambling, domestic violence and sexual promiscuity, more and more Yarrabah people proclaimed how their lives were changed by a conversion experience.<sup>28</sup> In 1985,

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22 For example, Margaret Zucker, *From Patrons to Partners: A History of the Catholic Church in the Kimberley 1884–1984*, University of Notre Dame Press, Broome, 1994; Brigida Nailon, *Nothing Is Wasted in the Household of God: Vincent Pallotti’s Vision in Australia 1901–2001*, Spectrum Publications, Richmond, 2001.

23 Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, p. 159.

24 Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, p. 171.

25 Bishop Wood, *Church Scene*, 1992 cited in Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, pp. 172, 170.

26 Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, p. 146ff. In 1970 Patrick Brisbane was ordained and worked at Lockhart River and Cowal Creek in relative obscurity. In November 1973, Gumbuli Wurrumurra (Michael Gumbuli) was ordained at the former Church Mission Society (CMS) Roper River mission at Ngukurr. Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, p. 152.

27 Wayne Connolly, *National Boomerang*, August 1986, cited in Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, p. 164.

28 Loos mentions several of these conversions as reported in the church newsletters, *National Boomerang* and *Yaburru*.

Aboriginal Bishop Arthur Malcolm ordained nine Yarrabah residents as deacons, priests and Eucharistic assistants.<sup>29</sup> Ordained men with their wives were sent out from Yarrabah to Palm Island, Wyndham, Forrest River, Oenpelli, Cherbourg and Woobinda. By 1986, the mid-week meetings of the James Noble Fellowship at Yarrabah drew up to 250, and Sunday communion up to 170 participants. The Yarrabah church began to see itself as a 'mother church for Aboriginal people around Australia'.<sup>30</sup> Important networking occurred through workshops, conferences, ecumenical functions, fellowship meetings and clubs and societies such as the Mother's Union and Girls Friendly Society, and through the Nungalinya theological training college established in Darwin in 1973 and Wontulp-Bi-Buya in Cairns.<sup>31</sup>

The presence of indigenous ministers from the Pacific and Torres Strait Islands was also an important catalyst for the emergence of Indigenous churches. Unable to recruit sufficiently from its white congregations, the Uniting Church brought the 'Melanesian Brothers' from Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands in 1976, and the Anglican Church placed Torres Strait Islanders on its mainland communities.<sup>32</sup> But these worked under the direction of white bishops and white community administrators.

Loos observes that the Anglican Church rendered itself practically irrelevant by failing to offer leadership on issues that most affected Indigenous lives in the north. The Australian Council of Churches had resolved in 1965 to support land rights and compensation for lost land, but during the difficult land rights negotiations with the Queensland Government in the 1980s the church leaders remained aloof. The question of alcohol split the Yarrabah Anglican Church almost in half for many years, with a breakaway congregation (Juyuga Ministries formed in 1989) advocating

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29 Bishop Arthur Malcolm from Yarrabah attended Church Army College near Newcastle in 1952, then completed four years of theological training and graduated as a Church Army officer. He married Colleen, another church army officer, and in 1974 Bishop Lewis appointed these two to replace Rev. Cyril Brown, to develop an Indigenous ministry. Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, pp. 168, 163.

30 Wayne Connolly, *National Boomerang*, August 1986, cited in Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, p. 164.

31 Nungalinya college offered a one-year certificate of theology leading on to a Diploma of Theology, as well as courses in Community Development, Language Studies, Cultural Orientation and Theology, and drew many students from Queensland until Wontulp-Bi-Buya (the words for 'light' in Wik Mungkan and two Torres Strait languages) opened as a training college in Cairns supported by Uniting, Lutheran, Catholic and Anglican churches. Two of its graduates, James Leftwich and Saibo Mabo, are now bishops. Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, pp. 151–53.

32 Loos mentions William Namok, Poey Passi, Sailor Gabey, Tom Savage, and Kebisu and Kosia Ware as assistants from Torres Strait at Lockhart River.

complete abstinence. By 2007, the congregation had reconciled with almost all Yarrabah Christians abstaining from alcohol, and not accepting the authority of the Anglican Church on this question. Alcohol and church had become alternatives to each other.<sup>33</sup> The Indigenous church that emerged, with Aboriginal leadership of congregations, engages with questions of sacred sites protection, stolen generation, mandatory sentencing and reconciliation.

Formal emancipation within the churches developed under the impetus of indigenous churches observed in New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. Māori Christians had already taken control of their churches, and national Aboriginal bodies began to emerge inside the churches, showing themselves unwilling to accept white domination in their denominations. In Australia, an Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship was formed in 1971, and national Aboriginal bodies also developed in the Uniting Church in 1980 (Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress) and in the Catholic Church in September 1991 (the National Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council). Lagging behind other denominations and behind developments overseas, the Anglican Church tried to contain Aboriginal self-determination within the church by establishing Aboriginal bishoprics 'within the structure and ethos of the church'.<sup>34</sup> Finally, Yarrabah's Aboriginal Bishop Arthur Malcolm and the Aboriginal Administrator of Tranby college, Kevin Cook, established a National Aboriginal Anglican Council 'to celebrate Aboriginal culture, language and lifestyle within the Anglican church', which the General Synod formally adopted in February 1992.

Aboriginal churches now operate outside mainstream institutional church and mission structures, embrace place-based spirituality and kinship-based ministry.<sup>35</sup> These adaptations draw strength from the Old Testament, which belongs to the Torah and the Qur'an as much as to the Christian Bible, and which contains stories from deep in the dreaming of Western civilisation, like the story of the great flood and ark of Noah, which can be traced back as far as the legend of Gilgamesh, King of the Mesopotamian city of Uruk in about 2,500BCE.<sup>36</sup> David Thompson

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33 Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, pp. 168, 151.

34 Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, p. 173.

35 Steve Bevis in Jim Cox et al., Religion and non-Religion among Australian Aboriginal Peoples, Roundtable Discussion.

36 Joshua Cole and Carol Symes, *Western Civilisations. Vol. 1: Their History and their Culture*, Wiley/Norton, New York, 2013.

during fieldwork at Lockhart River in the 1970s found a high level of compatibility between Aboriginal and Christian world-views and rituals, but on the whole the traditional world view was ‘more akin to that of the early Israelites’.<sup>37</sup> At Yarrabah, Rev. Wayne Connolly likened the healing pool at King’s Beach to the cleansing pool at Jerusalem and pronounced that Aboriginal religion contained good spirits and evil spirits – Godhead and Angels – in short, Aboriginal people ‘had the gospel all the time’.<sup>38</sup>

This message is now so well embraced that it also finds expression in popular culture. Gurrumul Yunupingu’s 2015 *Gospel Album* in Yolngu and English is so redolent of ancient meanings, with the gradual introduction of Yolngu terms for sun, blood, death and rebirth, that it ‘defies translation’.<sup>39</sup> Seaman Dan, too, has several albums celebrating mission history and the gospel.

Among the foremost Indigenous theologians is Rev. Dr Djiniyini Gondarra from Galiwin’ku, a community that also experienced a strong Christian revival movement. The Elcho Island ‘adjustment movement’ led to the disclosure of much secret/sacred knowledge surrounding precolonial contact with Muslim Macassan visitors. Gondarra studied theology in Papua New Guinea to become a Uniting Church minister, taught at Nungalinya college in Darwin (partnered by the Catholic, Anglican and Uniting Churches) and rose to become a moderator of the Uniting Church. His reflections on Aboriginal theology – *Let my people go* – include a chapter entitled ‘Father you gave us the Dreaming’, which likens the relationship between Aboriginal religion and Christianity to that between the Old Testament and the New Testament, with Christianity as the fulfilment of Aboriginal religion. However, he critically engages with what he sees as the shortcomings of white Christian theology, such as its emphasis on individualism and lack of spiritualism.<sup>40</sup>

Initiatives like the ‘adjustment movement’ at Elcho Island under the leadership of Methodist Rev. Donald Shepherdson in the 1940s, the ‘inculturation’ pioneered by Catholic Fr Werner Kriener in the Kimberley

37 David Thompson, *Bona is Like Church*, Foreword; Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, p. 154.

38 Wayne Connolly addressing the Queensland Synod in 2003 and 2004, in Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, p. 166ff.

39 Nicholas Rothwell, ‘Gurrumul’s gospel songs reflect the legacy of Christian missions’, *The Australian*, 2 July 2015, Arts.

40 Gondarra, Djiniyini, *Series of Reflections of Aboriginal Theology: Four Reflections Based on Church Renewal, Christian Theology of the Land, Contextualization and Unity*, Bethel Presbytery, Northern Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia, Darwin, 1986.

in the 1970s, or the tentative incorporation of Aboriginal ritual on the Anglican missions described by Loos, 'were trying to graft on to the white Christianity an Aboriginal presence and input that had been deliberately excluded previously'.<sup>41</sup> Despite these efforts, White churches have not served Indigenous needs very well, with patronising attitudes perhaps too deeply embedded. An example is the history of the Catholic Church in the Kimberley commissioned by Bishop John Jobst. It is entitled *From Patrons to Partners* to flag a fundamental shift in relationships, but its photo captions belie this shift: white persons, including visitors, are invariably fully identified by name, while Aboriginal persons are typically identified as 'a member of the community'. Nevertheless, Indigenous people now overwhelmingly identify as Christian, though with a downward trend. In the 2006 census, 73 per cent of Indigenous respondents identified as Christians, 24 per cent as having no religion and only 1 per cent as adhering to an Aboriginal traditional religion.<sup>42</sup> By 2011, there was a 41 per cent increase in Indigenous atheism (outstripping the growth of atheism in the general population), though actual numbers reporting 'no religion' remained small at 1,230 Indigenous respondents. An almost equal number (1,142) of Indigenous respondents identified as Muslim.<sup>43</sup>

It must be concluded that the mission movement achieved its basic aims, of spreading Christianity and seeding Indigenous churches. According to Loos, the Anglican national Aboriginal body (now National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council [NATSIAC]) has its centre of gravity in the north (where the mission effort had been most intensive) and the only state not represented is Tasmania (which never had missions). With its brief to 'go into the world and make disciples of all nations', and Yarrabah's Rev. Lloyd Fourmile announcing that 'we must teach whites reconciliation to inspire them to commit to Christ',<sup>44</sup> the flow of evangelist teaching from white to black people is now reversed. The adoption in 1992 of the Christian principle of Reconciliation as a national policy agenda under the leadership of a former Catholic priest, Patrick Dodson, now known as the 'Father of Reconciliation', crowns the achievement of the mission movement.

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41 Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, p. 157.

42 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4713.0 – Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006.

43 Jim Cox et al., Religion and non-Religion among Australian Aboriginal Peoples, Roundtable Discussion.

44 Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, p. 166.

Indigenous–white relations have hardened in the wake of postcolonial rethinking, but a reappraisal of missions as players in the force field of interest between settlers, governments and Indigenous people is well underway. Individual missionaries are remembered with gratitude in their communities, and not necessarily placed in the framework of critical analysis. Loos sees the missionaries as ‘very ordinary people doing the best they could to spread the faith that had made their own lives significant’. Unlike the heroic apostles who brought Christianity to Europe, the Australian missionaries ‘have become the fringe dwellers of the Aboriginal past’, according to Loos, who observes that of former mission residents, ‘most express a magnanimity towards these ruthlessly loving cultural imperialists and an appreciation of the mission communities they brought into being as refuges’.<sup>45</sup> At the centenary of the Yarrabah mission in 1992, there was ‘not a black armband in sight’.<sup>46</sup> Indigenous communities draw strength from their faith, and when they turn around their lives as a result of visions, white people’s disbelief ‘doesn’t worry us’. Their faith allows them to ‘Stand up as equals, all made in the image of God’,<sup>47</sup> and no believer could argue against the emancipatory claim that ‘God was here before the missionaries!’

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45 Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, p. 157.

46 Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, p. 170.

47 Connolly, *National Boomerang*, 1986, cited in Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, p. 165; and NATSIAC document, 2000, cited in Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, p. 174.

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