'O Sin, Sin, what hast thou done!': Aboriginal people and convicts in evangelical humanitarian discourse in the Australian colonies, 1830–50[1]

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Abstract: *Much of the existing scholarship that compares attitudes towards Aboriginal people and convicts insufficiently discusses the significant discursive connections that linked these groups in early colonial Australia. This article is a sustained account of the many ways convicts and Aboriginal people were seen to be similar within the framework of evangelical humanitarianism between 1830 and 1850. This overlay was particularly significant considering the prominence of evangelicalism in the nineteenth-century British Empire and the substantial influence that humanitarians exercised over British colonial policy in this period. In particular, this article discusses three significant discursive connections. First, Aboriginal people and convicts were each viewed as both victims of sinful processes—colonisation and transportation respectively—and as sinners themselves, denounced for their perceived indolence, intemperance and sexual transgression. Second, believing that all belonged to a common humanity, evangelicals were fervently dedicated to the moral reformation and salvation of both groups. Third, in evangelical humanitarian discourse there were moments of explicit comparison in which the degradation of the convict was used to suggest the potential for Aboriginal redemption, and the trope of the 'savage' Aboriginal was used to excoriate European behaviour. Exploring the extensive connections between Aboriginal people and convicts thus complicates our understanding of the hierarchies of 'respectability' and 'civilisation' that were so important to early colonial Australian discourse.*

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1   This research was the result of an investigation carried out as part of his degree program, the research-intensive Bachelor of Philosophy (Honours)—Arts and Social Science. It was completed under the supervision of Professor Frank Bongiorno.

On 22 August 1832, the Church Missionary Society's (CMS) Reverend William Watson lamented the sight of convicts in chains by exclaiming, 'O Sin, Sin, what has thou done!'[2] Watson, who had been sent to the Wellington Valley Mission in New South Wales (NSW), was in the Australian colonies primarily to promote the civilisation and conversion of Aboriginal people, not convicts. Yet his concurrent interest in convict welfare reflected the close discursive connections that united these groups within evangelical thought.

The existing historiography has already explored a number of synoptic links between Aboriginal people and convicts. Scholars have examined the relationship between Aboriginal and convict 'stains',[3] compared European views towards Aboriginal people and convicts (as well as working-class people),[4] and noted the interest of evangelicals in preaching to and reforming both groups.[5] Yet, despite this acknowledgement of similarity, there has been a lack of sustained investigation into the multitudinous ways those similarities manifested. This article aims to address this problem by examining how evangelical humanitarian discourse represented Aboriginal people and convicts as intertwined within a framework of sin and salvation. Both groups were represented first as sinners who belonged to broader processes manifesting sin; second, as individuals capable of moral improvement and salvation; and third, as groups who had characteristics that could be compared and contrasted for rhetorical purposes. For Australia's early evangelicals, Aboriginal people

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2   William Watson, 'Reverend Watson's Journals', 1832–1835, Journal 1, 5, cited in *The Wellington Valley Project. Letters and Journals Relating to the Church Missionary Society Mission to Wellington Valley, NSW, 1830–45: A Critical Electronic Edition*, ed. Hilary Carey and David Roberts (2002), accessed at downloads.newcastle.edu.au/library/cultural%20collections/the-wellington-valley-project/ (accessed 30 March 2018).

3   Tom Griffiths, 'Past Silences: Aborigines and Convicts in Our History-Making', in *Pastiche I: Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Australia,* ed. Penny Russell and Richard White, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1994); David A Roberts, 'Beyond "the Stain": Rethinking the Nature and Impact of Anti-Transportation Movement', *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 14 (2012), 214.

4   For example, Christina Twomey, 'Vagrancy, Indolence and Ignorance: Race, Class and the Idea of Civilization in the Era of Aboriginal "Protection", Port Phillip 1835–49', in *Writing Colonial Histories: Comparative Perspectives,* ed. Tracey Banivanua Mar and Julie Evans, (Carlton, Victoria: University of Melbourne, Department of History, 2002); Anna Johnston, 'Antipodean Heathens: The London Missionary Society in Polynesia and Australia, 1800–50', in *Colonial Frontiers: Indigenous– European Encounters in Settler Societies,* ed. Lynette Russell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 75–76; Anne O'Brien, '"Kitchen Fragments and Garden Stuff": Poor Law Discourse and Indigenous People in Early Colonial New South Wales', *Australian Historical Studies* 39, no. 2 (2008): doi.org/10.1080/10314610802033148.

5   Stuart Piggin and Robert D Linder, *The Fountain of Public Prosperity: Evangelical Christians in Australian History, 1740–1914* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Press, 2018), 9; Alan Lester, 'British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire', *History Workshop Journal* 54 (2002), esp. 28 & 33.

and convicts were not two distant, unrelated groups, but rather together constituted a core part of the depraved world that they sought to reform and rectify.

This article focuses on evangelical discourse because of the prominent place that it occupied in the social and cultural life of the nineteenth-century British Empire. Early colonial Australia was plagued by anxieties about the status and respectability of its members, and the focus on public morality promoted by evangelicalism was, no doubt, a significant impetus.[6] Yet, caution should be exercised: the label 'evangelical' was used by multiple denominations and, as a movement, evangelicalism was riven with internal conflict and debate.[7] Boyd Hilton argues that evangelicalism was so 'frayed at the edges', so diffuse, that it was unclear who exactly was 'evangelical'.[8] Stuart Piggin and Robert Linder draw a similar conclusion, arguing that the difficulty of defining and isolating evangelicalism has even contributed to its under-recognition in Australian historiography.[9] The sources analysed here reflect this ambiguity. This analysis does not merely include those who might *strictly* be considered 'Evangelicals',[10] but rather it examines a broader corpus of Protestant writings that reflect the infusion of evangelical influence in British religious thought and ultimately Australian colonial society.

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6   On status and respectability, see Kirsten McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies: Sydney and Cape Town, 1820–1850* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004); Kirsty Reid, *Gender, Crime and Empire: Convicts, Settlers and the State in Early Colonial Australia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), esp. 75 & 77. On public morality and evangelicalism, see Ian Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), 97.

7   John Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers, and Finney* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 236; Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795–1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 9 & 10; David W Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 9.

8   Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 26.

9   Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 1; Piggin and Linder, *Fountain of Public Prosperity*, 18.

10   Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 26 & 30.

Nature of evangelicalism

Although evangelicalism was not internally homogeneous, it was sufficiently distinguishable to contribute to the delineation of an early nineteenth-century zeitgeist.[11] David Bebbington's influential definition pinpoints four characteristic elements: biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism and activism.[12] Thus, evangelicals were Protestants, who, believing in the natural depravity of 'man',[13] upheld the primacy of the Bible's teachings (biblicism). Only through belief in Christ's death (crucicentrism) could 'man' be saved.[14] Conversion to Christianity was essential and this conception of conversion made evangelicalism the 'vital religion'. To 'convert' involved *experiencing* the power of the Holy Spirit; to 'profess' religion, by contrast, was not sufficient.[15] Once converted, an individual's behaviour would be radically altered, motivated by the gratitude of their salvation: 'A converted character would work hard, save money and assist his neighbour. The line between those who had undergone the experience and those who had not was the sharpest in the world'.[16]

Activism was to follow—the dedicated, patient and laborious mission to spread the gospel.[17] This last element is particularly important to emphasise as it was part of the evangelicals' active engagement with the external world. The gospel was instrumental not only for the individual soul, 'but also for the renovation of society and culture'. In other words, it was not only evangelism, but also worldly reform that constituted 'their twin aims for the world'.[18] Indeed, in Watson's missionary instructions, he was told that, 'In connection with the preaching of the Gospel, you will not overlook its intimate bearing on the moral habits of a people'.[19]

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11   Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 33; Hilary Carey, *Believing in Australia: A Cultural History of Religions* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1996), xv.
12   Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 2–3.
13   Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, 20 & 22.
14   Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 8.
15   Piggin and Linder, *Fountain of Public Prosperity*, 24; Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, 21. For an example of contemporary use, see James Günther, 'Reverend Günther's Journals', 1837–40, Journal 3, 7, cited in *The Wellington Valley Project*.
16   Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 5 & 6.
17   Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 11.
18   Stuart Piggin, *Spirit, Word and World: Evangelical Christianity in Australia* (Brunswick East, Victoria: Acorn Press, 2012), xi & 4. See also Piggin and Linder, *Fountain of Public Prosperity*, 31; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 69 & 133.
19   William Watson, 'Watson's Instructions', 1831, cited in *The Wellington Valley Project*.

In turn, the evangelical project was bolstered by the belief that sin was widespread,[20] that individuals could engage in constant improvement towards greater Christian perfection,[21] and that this was true for *all* people—even 'criminals' and 'savages' shared 'one blood' and had souls that could be saved.[22] Through such fervent commitment to spreading the gospel and counteracting sin, evangelicals actively shaped their world.

By the period of 1830 to 1850, evangelicalism abounded in the British Empire. Its prominence reflected the growth of the numerous evangelical missionary organisations that were founded in the late eighteenth century.[23] Bebbington estimates this growth was so swift that by the 1850s well over one-third of Anglican clergymen were evangelical.[24] Thus, evangelicalism became the 'most influential current within organized religion in Victorian Britain' and the most common expression of Protestantism in Australia.[25] Moreover, as Hilary Carey argues, its influence extended far beyond a quantifiable number of adherents or clergymen—as preaching was such a core part of evangelicalism, many lay members carried out the role only the clergy would in non-evangelical churches, thus magnifying their impact.[26]

With this influence, evangelicals invigorated British humanitarianism and often dominated such causes.[27] This strength was epitomised by the evangelical William Wilberforce, who spearheaded the movement

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20 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 69.
21 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 60 & 64; Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, 22.
22 Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in Our Hearts* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 22; Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2011), 64; Piggin and Linder, *Fountain of Public Prosperity*, 177; James Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies* (London: Hamilton, Adams, 1843), xcv–xcvi.
23 Baptist Missionary Society (1792), (London) Missionary Society (1795), Edinburgh (Scottish) and Glasgow Missionary Societies (1796), and in 1799 the Society for Missions to Africa and the East (known as the Church Missionary Society from 1812). See Andrew Porter, *Religion Versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion 1700–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 40.
24 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 106.
25 Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 6; Piggin, *Spirit, Word and World*, xi.
26 Carey, *Believing in Australia*, 14.
27 Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, 57. Please note, some scholars have objected to the description of these evangelicals as 'humanitarian'. I use this term only to signify evangelical interest in issues relating to human moral and spiritual welfare. See Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 133; Claire McLisky, '"Due Observance of Justice, and the Protection of Their Rights": Philanthropy, Humanitarianism and Moral Purpose in the Aborigines Protection Society Circa 1837 and its Portrayal in Australian Historiography, 1883–2003', *Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies* 11 (2005).

to abolish slavery in the British Empire, a campaign that succeeded in 1833.[28] In the same decade, evangelical humanitarians exercised significant influence over colonial policy.[29] Lord Glenelg, an evangelical Anglican and a director of CMS,[30] held the position of Secretary of State for War and the Colonies from 1835 to 1839. His actions in office included the retrocession of annexed Xhosa land in the Cape Colony and the postponement of the colonisation of South Australia because of concerns about Indigenous welfare.[31] Other evangelical figures who expressed humanitarian sympathies in their abolitionist stance also had extensive power, including Sir James Stephen, permanent under-secretary of the Colonial Office from 1836 to 1847.[32]

Consequently, there was an 'overhaul' of British colonial policy between 1835 and 1840.[33] This manifested most significantly in the increased attention given to abuses of indigenous peoples across the Empire.[34] In 1837 the Aborigines Protection Society was founded by the evangelical Quaker Thomas Hodgkin,[35] with the evangelical Anglican TF Buxton as its president.[36] That same year, the 'Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Aboriginal Tribes' was published, with Buxton as the committee's chair,[37] which included among its recommendations the policy of appointing protectors of Aborigines—enacted in the Port

28   Stephen R Holmes, 'British (and European) Evangelical Theories', in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J Treier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 245–46.

29   Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770–1972* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 45.

30   Twomey, 'Vagrancy, Indolence and Ignorance', 95.

31   Lester, 'British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire', 29; Hannah Robert, '"Satisfying the Saints"—Colonial Entrepreneurs in the 1830s and 1840s and the Elasticity of Language', in *Writing Colonial Histories.*

32   Zoe Laidlaw, 'Integrating Metropolitan, Colonial and Imperial Histories—The Aborigines Select Committee of 1835–37', in *Writing Colonial Histories*, 83; David Stoneman, 'Anti-Transportation: The Statesmen's Perspective', *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 14 (2012), 253.

33   James Heartfield, *The Aborigines' Protection Society: Humanitarian Imperialism in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Canada, South Africa, and the Congo 1836–1909* (London: Hurst, 2011), 7.

34   Heartfield, *The Aborigines' Protection Society*, 3; Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 45.

35   For reference to Hodgkin's evangelical Quaker background, see Zoe Laidlaw, 'Heathens, Slaves and Aborigines: Thomas Hodgkin's Critique of Missions and Anti-Slavery', *History Workshop Journal* 64 (2007), 133: doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbm034.

36   Jessie Mitchell, *In Good Faith? Governing Indigenous Australia through God, Charity and Empire, 1825–1855* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2011), 27: doi.org/10.22459/GF.01.2011.

37   Laidlaw, 'Integrating Metropolitan, Colonial and Imperial Histories', 84.

Phillip District (now Victoria) in 1838.[38] This advocacy of indigenous rights culminated in 1840 in the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand.[39] Outside of indigenous rights, evangelicals also engaged substantially in law and prison reform, and were instrumental to the abolition of transportation.[40] The 'Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Transportation' (1838), for example, which recommended the abolition of transportation, was steeped in the language of depravity and sin so prominent in evangelical writing.[41]

In colonial Australia, evangelicalism had a strong presence from the outset. Anticipating the potential for spreading the gospel, men such as William Wilberforce were crucial in the appointment of the evangelical Reverend Richard Johnson as first chaplain to the colony, and Reverend Samuel Marsden as his assistant.[42] Evangelicalism's broader social influence was also reflected in a number of Australian governors. Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur, for example, brought a strong sense of evangelical humanitarianism to his project of convict reformation and Aboriginal conciliation in Van Diemen's Land.[43] The wives of governors Macquarie, Darling and Bourke came from evangelical backgrounds as well.[44] Moreover, although it was not until 1821 that an official missionary,

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38 Alan Lester and Fae Dussart, 'Trajectories of Protection: Protectorates of Aborigines in Early 19th Century Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand', *New Zealand Geographer* 64 (2008), 210: doi. org/10.1111/j.1745-7939.2008.00146.x; Elizabeth Elbourne, 'The Sin of the Settler: The 1835–36 Select Committee on Aborigines and Debates over Virtue and Conquest in the Early Nineteenth-Century British White Settler Empire', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 4, no. 3 (2003): doi.org/10.1353/cch.2004.0003.

39 Porter, *Religion Versus Empire?*, 154.

40 Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, 127; Reid, *Gender, Crime and Empire*, 224.

41 John Ritchie, 'Towards Ending an Unclean Thing: The Molesworth Committee and the Abolition of Transportation to New South Wales, 1837–40', *Australian Historical Studies* 17, no. 67 (1976), 150. Elbourne's 'Sin of the Settler' makes a broader point about the influence of evangelical Christian ideas in informing many debates about vice and virtue in this period.

42 Brian Dickey, 'Evangelical Anglicans Compared: Australia and Britain', in *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States*, ed. George A Rawlyk and Mark A Noll (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 220; John Harris, *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope*, 2nd edition (Sutherland, NSW: Albatross Books, 1994), 42.

43 Alan Lester and Fae Dussart, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance: Protecting Aborigines across the Nineteenth-Century British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 61: doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139022026.

44 Piggin, *Spirit, Word and World*, 20; Piggin and Linder, *Fountain of Public Prosperity*, 141; Frank Bongiorno, 'Bourke, Sir Richard', in *The Governors of New South Wales, 1788–2010*, ed. David Clune and Ken Turner (Annandale, NSW: Federation Press, 2009), 168.

Reverend William Walker, arrived in Australia to convert Aboriginal people, evangelicals nonetheless constituted the majority of missionaries in NSW.[45]

Throughout the 1840s, however, this humanitarianism waned in power.[46] In Australia, many attempts at the conversion of Aboriginal people were thought to have failed and by 1850, all of the original missions that were established had collapsed.[47] This was related to a broader disillusionment among humanitarians after 'the apparent failure of [slave] emancipation in the West Indies, and by their own ability to interpret indigenous resistance as specific evidence of irreclaimability'.[48] Moreover, Andrew Porter argues that Buxton's death in 1845 caused the movement to rapidly lose direction, and Brian Dickey suggests that the rise of Tractarianism in the 1830s placed evangelical Anglicanism on the defensive.[49] Some colonists also objected to humanitarian criticisms of colonisation, and rejected their initiatives, such as the protectorate.[50] Evangelicals were probably not popular among convicts either.[51] Nonetheless, the dominance of evangelical humanitarianism in the 1830s and its ongoing influence[52] had a significant role in the political and social life of colonial Australia as it approached self-government in the 1850s.

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45   Piggin, *Spirit, Word and World*, 21; Jean Woolmington, 'Early Christian Missions to the Australian Aborigines: A Study in Failure' (PhD Diss., University of New England, 1979), 154.

46   Mark McKenna, 'Transplanted to Savage Shores: Indigenous Australians and British Birthright in the Mid Nineteenth-Century Australian Colonies', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 13, no. 1 (2012): doi.org/10.1353/cch.2012.0009; McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies*, 157.

47   Harris, *One Blood*, 23; Woolmington, 'Early Christian Missions', 5; Meredith Lake, 'Samuel Marsden, Work and the Limits of Evangelical Humanitarianism', *History Australia* 7, no. 3 (2010), 57.16.

48   Alan Lester, 'Colonial Settlers and the Metropole: Racial Discourse in the Early 19th-Century Cape Colony, Australia and New Zealand', *Landscape Research* 27, no. 1 (2002), 45: doi. org/10.1080/01426390220110757; Andrew Porter, 'Introduction: Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth Century', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Porter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 23–24: doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198205654.003.0001.

49   Porter, *Religion Versus Empire*, 151; Dickey, 'Evangelical Anglicans Compared', 225.

50   Jessie Mitchell, '"The Galling Yoke of Slavery": Race and Separation in Colonial Port Phillip', *Journal of Australian Studies* 33, no. 2 (2009), 126: doi.org/10.1080/14443050902883355; McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies*, 123; Lester, 'Colonial Settlers and the Metropole'; and Leigh Boucher and Lynette Russell, 'Introduction: Colonial History, Postcolonial Theory and the "Aboriginal Problem" in Colonial Victoria', in *Settler Colonial Governance in Nineteenth-Century Victoria*, ed. Leigh Boucher and Lynette Russell (Acton, ACT: ANU Press, 2015), 12: doi.org/10.22459/SCGNCV.04.2015; Henry Reynolds, *The Law of the Land*, 2nd edition (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1992), 115.

51   Piggin, *Spirit, Word and World*, 8, 10.

52   Mitchell, '"The Galling Yoke of Slavery"', 126.

The period from 1830 to 1850, therefore, provides a revealing snapshot of the broad range of activity undertaken by evangelicals as they fought to achieve their humanitarian and religious goals. Indeed, these goals— Christianisation and civilisation—were intertwined and mutually supporting.[53] Evangelicals thought personal behaviour was a reflection of conversion: 'the "fruit of the Spirit" had to be seen to be genuine'.[54]

The consequent focus on spiritual *and* moral reformation not only led to the imposition of 'respectability' on the white population of the British Empire, but also reconceptualised empire as a civilising mission.[55] Evangelicals, therefore, helped to define a 'respectability' that became a 'hallmark of Victorian middle-class culture', centred around values such as 'discipline, chastity, sobriety and hard work'.[56] Later, Australian colonists would engage in an aggressive anti-transportation movement to attain such respectability.[57] Moreover, since evangelical missionaries preached, perhaps with even greater interest, to the indigenous peoples of the Empire, this desire to foster moral improvement also extended to them.[58] Indeed, it was thought that introducing Christianity and 'civilisation' was necessary to atone for the sins committed during the process of violent colonial expropriation, as well as being a part of Britain's obligation as a prosperous empire.[59] Thus, the evangelical was a paradoxical figure—they simultaneously criticised colonisation for its brutality but also 'rarely wavered in their support for British imperialism

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53 Harris, *One Blood*, 24 & 77–78; Woolmington, 'Early Christian Missions', 170.

54 Piggin and Linder, *Fountain of Public Prosperity*, 28.

55 Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, 88–89; Porter, *Religion Versus Empire?*, 198; Alan Lester, 'Race and Citizenship: Colonial Inclusions and Exclusions', in *The Victorian World*, ed. Martin Hewitt (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 381–82; Piggin and Linder, *Fountain of Public Prosperity*, 75.

56 Margot Finn, 'Victorianism at the Frontier: The White Settler Colonies', in *The Victorian World*, 663; Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, 67; Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, 14. See also Susan Thorne, '"The Conversion of Englishmen and the Conversion of the World Inseparable": Missionary Imperialism and the Language of Class in Early Industrial Britain', in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 239: doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520205406.003.0007; Woolmington, 'Early Christian Missions', 120.

57 Michael Sturma, *Vice in a Vicious Society: Crime and Convicts in Mid-Nineteenth Century New South Wales* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983), 51; Stefan Petrow, '"Convict-Phobia": Combating Vandiemonian Convicts in 1850s and 1860s Victoria', *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 14 (2012), 267.

58 Thorne, '"The Conversion of Englishmen"', 246; Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, 74; Timothy Larsen, 'Defining and Locating Evangelicalism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J Treier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1: doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521846986.001.

59 For example, Watson, 'Watson's Instructions'. See also Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, 88–89 & 90; Elbourne, 'Sin of the Settler'; Porter, 'Religion, Missionary Enthusiasm, and Empire', 232–33.

in its ideal forms'.[60] Driven to improve the moral wellbeing of both the 'unrespectable' convicts and 'uncivilised' Aboriginal people, both featured prominently in evangelical discourse.

Sinners in a broader process of sin

For evangelicals, both convicts and Aboriginal people represented broader systems and processes of sin. Convicts were a product of transportation, a system that evangelicals criticised for its cruelty and failure to reform individuals. Aboriginal people, and the apparently poor state of their welfare, reflected the dispossession, debasement and 'extermination' caused by European colonisation. Evangelicals believed in collective wrong, as much as they did collective atonement, and so these sinful processes were subject to extended condemnation.[61]

Transportation, in this way, became a target for evangelical critique. The highly influential Congregational anti-transportationist, Reverend John West, for example, decried the 'slave-holding interest' of convict masters, and wrote that 'no colonist can forget his shudder at the first spectacle of men in chains'.[62] Such an attack was particularly powerful because, as John Hirst argues, 'slavery' became 'a word of unrivalled potency' after abolition, particularly as it represented the respectable white man's degeneration through absolute power.[63] West's invocation of slavery thus associated the practice of transportation with this particularly egregious act of cruelty and evil. This sense of the immorality of transportation was further compounded by reports of severe corporal punishment, the seeming lack of mechanisms for reformation and access to religious instruction, and the belief that convictism often facilitated intercourse between convicts that worsened sin. Such harms, then, became the bedrock of opposition to transportation within evangelical discourse.

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60   Mitchell, *In Good Faith?*, 96. Evans et al. make a similar point regarding humanitarian governors, see Julie Evans, Patricia Grimshaw, David Philips and Shurlee Swain, *Equal Subjects, Unequal Rights: Indigenous Peoples in British Settler Colonies, 1830–1910* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 64.

61   Lake, 'Limits of Evangelical Humanitarianism', 57.3; Elbourne, 'Sin of the Settler'.

62   John West, *The History of Tasmania, Volume 2* (Launceston: Henry Dowling, 1852; reprint: Adelaide, Libraries Board of South Australia, 1966), 333–34. On West's influence, see Roberts, 'Beyond "the Stain"', 206.

63   John Hirst, *Convict Society and Its Enemies: A History of Early New South Wales* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1983), 22 & 23. See also Reid, *Gender and Empire*, Chapters 5 & 6; McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies*, 122.

The impact of European colonisation on Aboriginal people, however, was an equally abhorrent manifestation of colonial sin. Addressing the issue of Aboriginal welfare, West noted that European colonisers 'wantonly stained their hands with native blood'.[64] In a letter to NSW Governor, Sir Richard Bourke, the Quaker missionary James Backhouse warned that unless the condition of Aboriginal people was alleviated, the 'unmitigated guilt before God, of their extermination, will be fixed, irremediably, upon the British Nation and its Australian descendants'.[65] This notion of collective punishment for the sinful process of colonisation was echoed by Presbyterian clergyman John Dunmore Lang. In an 1838 sermon given in Sydney's Scots Church, Lang suggested that Australia's then drought was Godly punishment for both the cruel dispossession of Aboriginal Australians and the 'ignominious bondage' of transportation.[66] In this way, the two processes fundamental to the colony's establishment—colonisation that procured land, and transportation that helped extract profits from it—were themselves sinful.

As much as evangelicals recognised these sinful processes, however, they did not fail to condemn the depravity of individuals as well. Evangelicals saw no problem in constructing this 'dualistic image' of a convict as both the victim of transportation and agent of corruption, and the Aboriginal person as a victim of European colonisation, but also a person of uncivilised habits and beliefs.[67] In their criticisms of both groups as sinners whose behaviour represented their unconverted state, indolence and intemperance were of foremost concern. Meredith Lake goes so far as to suggest that the emphasis on indolence was so strong that the perceived failure of Aboriginal people to meet evangelical standards actually hindered humanitarian impulses of human equality.[68]

Indolence was condemned because of the centrality of hard work, forbearance and perseverance to the evangelical mentality. Such values were, after all, Godly—Adam was told that 'in toil you shall eat of it [the ground] all the days of your life', and the Bible also proclaims that

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64   West, *The History of Tasmania, Volume 2*, 69.
65   Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies*, cxxxiii.
66   As well as a failure to adhere to the Sabbath. See John Dunmore Lang, *National Sins, the Cause and Precursors of National Judgments: A Sermon, Preached in the Scots Church, Sydney, on Friday, November 2, 1838* (Sydney: James Tegg, 1838), 14, 17 & 21–22.
67   Reid, *Gender, Crime and Empire*, 222.
68   Lake, 'Limits of Evangelical Humanitarianism', 57.2.

'he who will not work must not eat'.[69] These values, with roots in the Calvinist doctrine of predestination in which virtue was evidence of being part of God's elect, 'found fertile ground among English evangelicals'.[70] Moreover, missionaries themselves were often required to toil for their own material support, as well as persist in the face of regular frustrations in their efforts to convert Aboriginal people. Their work required, as London Missionary Society (LMS) missionary Lancelot Threlkeld put it, 'daily exercise of faith, patience, and perseverance'.[71] Such values were congruent with both the evangelical belief that life on earth was preparation for judgement upon death, and the high standards of self-denial evangelicals upheld—promoting abstinence from amusements such as theatre, card games and dancing.[72]

Consequently, convicts and Aboriginal people shared the brunt of evangelical condemnation of indolence. Lang argued that convicts lived 'a life of idleness and luxurious indulgence' rather than 'honest industry'.[73] And Aboriginal people were similarly chastised. JCS Handt, a missionary at Wellington Valley, blamed an array of practices on idleness, noting that 'idleness was the principle [sic] cause of all these evils', was the reason for Aboriginal privation, and even the reason that they ate cabbage raw—being too lazy to dress it.[74] It was a common missionary complaint that Aboriginal people had 'a natural taste for a rambling, indolent life'.[75] In this manner, the commitment of evangelicals to values like hard work and forbearance united their perspectives on both convict and Aboriginal peoples.

The widespread problem of intemperance, or alcohol consumption, also featured heavily in evangelical discourse. Many key evangelical missionaries in early colonial Australia were heavily involved in the

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69   Gen. 3:17 cited in Woolmington, 'Early Christian Missions', 183; 2 Thess. 3:10 cited in Lake, 'Limits of Evangelical Humanitarianism', 57.7.

70   2 Thess. 3:10 cited in Lake, 'Limits of Evangelical Humanitarianism', 57.6.

71   LE Threlkeld, 'Annual Report of the Mission to the Aborigines: Lake Macquarie, for MDCCCXXXVI [1836]', in *Australian Reminiscences & Papers of L.E. Threlkeld, Missionary to the Aborigines, 1824–1859*, ed. Niel Gunson (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1974), 133.

72   Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, 28.

73   John Dunmore Lang, *Transportation and Colonization, or, the Causes of the Comparative Failure of the Transportation System in the Australian Colonies: With Suggestions for Ensuring Its Future Efficiency in Subserviency to Extensive Colonization* (London: A. J. Valpy, 1837), 66.

74   JCS Handt, 'Reverend Handt's Journals', 1832–35, Journal 11, p. 12 & Journal 4, pp. 8, 6, cited in *The Wellington Valley Project*.

75   Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 41.

temperance movement. Indeed, on one occasion, the clergymen Lang, John Saunders and William Cowper all proposed or seconded motions in the same meeting of the NSW Temperance Society.[76] For them, alcohol consumption was the cause of numerous problems. For instance, Lang argued that a significant reason for the failure of transportation hitherto 'has doubtless been the unlimited importation and consumption of ardent spirits in these colonies'.[77] Writing about the Lake Macquarie Mission, Threlkeld similarly noted that for Aboriginal people, alcohol 'tends to their destruction'.[78] This destruction, however, was not merely a force of its own making—Europeans were a significant cause of the problem. Threlkeld recorded an instance where, upon chastising an Aboriginal person for drunkenness, 'the reply was […] why do the Whites sell rum, but that they [Aboriginal people] might drink it? Gentlemen get drunk! Ladies get drunk!! And why should not they?'[79] The problem of intemperance, as with indolence, crossed racial boundaries and unified both convict (and sometimes simply white) subjects with Aboriginal ones.

Yet, indolence and intemperance were but the milder aspects of the litany of sinful allegations that evangelicals made against Aboriginal people and convicts. Focusing particularly on sexual transgressions and the role of women, these allegations encompassed claims of sodomy, prostitution, 'concubinage', infanticide and domestic violence. Sexual misconduct was a particular focus of evangelical denunciations of vice,[80] and scholars have emphasised how powerfully allegations of sodomy, in particular, and sexual scandal more broadly, influenced the anti-transportation movement.[81]

Within evangelical discourse, the sexual relationships between white men and Aboriginal women caused significant consternation. In such discussions, missionaries blamed multiple groups for sexual immorality. First, they blamed Aboriginal women: 'And now she is living in

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76   'Domestic Intelligence: New South Wales Temperance Society', *The Colonist*, 8 January 1835.
77   Lang, *Transportation and Colonization*, 76.
78   Threlkeld, 'Annual Report of the Mission to the Aborigines New South Wales, for MDCCCXXXVII [1837]', in *Australian Reminiscences & Papers of L.E. Threlkeld, Missionary to the Aborigines, 1824–1859*, 136.
79   Threlkeld, 'Annual Report of the Mission to the Aborigines: Lake Macquarie, for MDCCCXXXIX [1839]', in *Australian Reminiscences & Papers of L.E. Threlkeld, Missionary to the Aborigines, 1824–1859*, 159.
80   Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 134.
81   See Tim Causer, 'Anti-Transportation, "Unnatural Crime" and the "Horrors" of Norfolk Island', *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 14 (2012), 231; Reid, *Gender, Crime and Empire*, 5–6, 174, 175 & 231. For sexual scandal in general, see McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies*, 123.

the commission of a vice of which she was constantly told the evil consequences'.[82] Here, Watson suggests that the sin committed was at least partly the fault of the Aboriginal woman because *she* had somehow failed to obey warnings to the contrary.[83] Second, Aboriginal men were also blamed, condemned for 'lending his wives to White men'[84] and profiting from that exchange.[85] These characterisations of Aboriginal men were consistent with allegations that they violently abused their wives or kept them in severe subservience: 'The women of the aborigine are in a state of the most deplorable slavery'.[86] Finally, evangelicals also blamed white men—both convicts and those of a more respectable background. Threlkeld discussed 'the *un*-matrimonial state of the thousands of male prisoners […] [which] leads them by force, fraud, or bribery to withdraw the Aboriginal women from their own proper mates'.[87] He also blamed 'White Gentlemen whose taste, when in the Bush, leads them to keep Black Concubines', thus setting a bad example for convicts.[88] In a context where Europeans regarded men's treatment of women as an 'important measure of civilisation', these sexual transgressions added to the sense that the colonial frontier was rife with sin.[89] And the multiple attributions of blame strengthened the sense that this sin was mutually constituted by both convicts *and* Aboriginal people.

These allegations of sin were used by evangelicals to demand reform. Transportation was a cruel form of bonded labour and the brutality of Indigenous dispossession was no better. Worse, convicts and Aboriginal people themselves were grossly depraved, being indolent, intemperate and sexually unrestrained. Evangelicals, dedicated to activism, were committed to the extirpation of such sins, which were antithetical to the gospel code for living. As outward behaviour reflected inner belief, civilisation and respectability were necessarily entwined with Godly salvation. Thus,

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82   Watson, 'Reverend Watson's Journals', Journal 4, 15.
83   Similar point made in Woolmington, 'Early Christian Missions', 159.
84   Günther, 'Reverend Günther's Journals', Journal 2, 23.
85   William Watson, 'Reverend Watson's Journals', Journal 5, 12.
86   Christopher Eipper, *Statement of the Origin, Condition, and Prospects, of the German Mission to the Aborigines at Moreton Bay, Conducted under the Auspices of the Presbyterian Church in New South Wales* (Sydney: James Reading, 1841), 9.
87   Threlkeld, 'Annual Report of the Mission to the Aborigines New South Wales, for MDCCCXXXVII [1837]', 137.
88   Threlkeld, 'Annual Report of the Mission to the Aborigines: Lake Macquarie, for MDCCCXXXVIII [1838]', in *Australian Reminiscences & Papers of L.E. Threlkeld, Missionary to the Aborigines, 1824–1859*, 146.
89   Elbourne, 'Sin of the Settler'; John Gascoigne, *The Enlightenment and the Origins of European Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 149.

with its fixation on sin and immorality, evangelical discourse continually connected convict and Aboriginal transgressions in a broader attempt to promote the reformation of a 'depraved' colonial society.

Salvation and common humanity

The sin that was thought to stain the characters of both Aboriginal people and convicts marked these groups as particularly in need of salvation. Evangelicals firmly believed that all humans shared 'one blood': 'God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth'.[90] They believed, therefore, that all humans were capable of being saved, irrespective of the degree to which they were stained by sin.[91]

An annual report of the Aborigines Protection Society in 1839, for example, wrote that 'of the capacity of these [Aboriginal] people to become civilized there is no reasonable doubt'.[92] A report from the Wesleyan Missionary Society wrote similarly of Aboriginal people in Western Australia, where 'the work among the Aborigines […] afford most satisfactory evidence in favour of the Native mind, and its capacity for religious instruction'.[93] Backhouse expressed this idea by emphasising the importance of circumstance in shaping character, rather than an ineradicable essence: 'the untutored native of the woods would much sooner learn […] the arts of civilization, than the woman from civilized society would, by acquiring the arts belonging to savage life'.[94] There was, therefore, no insurmountable barrier in the evangelical worldview that prevented the correction of sin that they saw as so widespread in the colonies.

Sharing common humanity, however, did not absolve defects of character. Within the same paragraph, the Wesleyan Methodist missionary, Joseph Orton, simultaneously declared Aboriginal people to be 'in some respects

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90 Acts 17:26 cited in Piggin and Linder, *Fountain of Public Prosperity*, 177.
91 Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, 64; Porter, 'Religion, Missionary Enthusiasm, and Empire', 229; Harris, *One Blood*, 30.
92 Aborigines Protection Society, *Second Annual Report of the Aborigines Protection Society, Presented at the Meeting in Exeter Hall, May 21st, 1839. With Lists of Officers, Subscribers, Benefactors, and Honorary Members* (London: P White & Son, 1839), 13.
93 Wesleyan Missionary Society, *The Report of the Wesleyan-Methodist Missionary Society, for the Year Ending April, 1844: With an Appendix, and an Account of the Contributions Received from January 1, to December 31, 1843* (London: Printed by Thoms, Printers, 1844), 29.
94 Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies*, 174.

far below the brute creation' while also the 'fellow-men' of Europeans.[95] The Reverend Wilhelm Schmidt of the mission at Zion Hill (now Nundah, Brisbane) also maintained that although Aboriginal people 'are not in want of faculties', they were also the 'lowest in the scale of the human race' because, he believed, they lacked a concept of a divine being.[96] Evangelicals evidently did not perceive these positions as contradictory. Rather, their faith in the ultimate shared humanity of all could be expressed, ironically, through debasing language: 'however degraded, however wretched, however equal to the brute beasts they are in many respects, it is not impossible for the Almighty to change them'.[97] Such statements reflected a 'doubled discursive formation of the degraded, but salvageable, Aboriginal heathen'.[98]

This same notion of 'degraded, but salvageable' also applied to convicts. Rather than anything innate, the cause of convict depravity was often situational:

> it will be found, that most of the crimes which they have committed, were committed under the excitement of ardent spirits; and that, apart from this excitement, they are not commonly more depraved than the generality of their countrymen.[99]

Yet, again, attribution of common humanity did not preclude excoriation of character. The Wellington Valley missionary, James Günther, wrote that 'the idea of convicts, these wretched characters on a Christian mission, is […] revolting to my mind'.[100] Despite this, however, his comment that he wished missionaries to be a 'city on a hill' not only for 'a savage tribe' but also for 'a perverse generation of professing Christians', suggests his belief in the possibility of convict salvation too.[101] Although they were linked as sinners in broader processes of sin, convicts and Aboriginal people were also connected by the evangelical belief in a common humanity and the possibility for all to be saved.

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95   Joseph Orton, *Aborigines of Australia* (London: Thoms, 1836), 9 & 10.
96   New South Wales Legislative Council, *Report from the Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines with Appendix, Minutes of Evidence, and Replies to a Circular Letter* (Sydney: Printed by WW Davies, 1845).
97   Handt, 'Reverend Handt's Journals', Journal 9, 9.
98   Johnston, 'Antipodean Heathens', 75. See also Harris, *One Blood*, 30, 33.
99   Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies*, 157.
100 Günther, 'Reverend Günther's Journals', Journal 2, 9.
101 Günther, 'Reverend Günther's Journals', Journal 3, 7.

If, however, all were capable of progress towards 'civilisation', then all were also subject to the danger of regression. The very fact that evangelical conceptions of race were not fixed in biological essentialism[102] entailed a certain fluidity about one's salvation that allowed for 'backsliding'. Such ideas were congruent with Enlightenment stadial thought about human societies on a 'ladder of progress', which allowed for colonists to 'slide backwards down the path of social development if they did not attend to the need to keep the light of civilisation shining'.[103] Backsliding was also consistent with the social mobility and anxiety about status that characterised the Australian colonies.[104] Therefore, Hilton argues that despite evangelical doctrinal debates about Calvinist predestination, from 1815 onwards, 'both camps [supporting or rejecting Calvinist doctrine] were at one on the ever-present danger of backsliding'.[105] Evangelical writings were often dominated by a 'perpetual sense of accountability for every lapse from the highest standards of Christian behaviour', revealing an intense desire to avoid deviation and regression from ideal Christian virtue.[106]

The mutability of character these beliefs entailed gave power to the prominence of 'contamination' in evangelical discourse—the widely held view that poor moral examples could lead to the corruption of character. Thus, a new convict whose original transgressions had not been so abhorrent might be made more corrupt by 'old hands'—people who had been convicts for a longer time—and an otherwise relatively innocent Aboriginal person may become 'degraded by contact with a population of European extraction'.[107]

Inversely then, respectable characters could also lift those from barbarity to civility. This was, after all, one reason Lang agitated for greater free migration: he hoped that convicts would be 'encouraged by the good example of the reputable portion of the new community'.[108] Consequently, regression was well featured in evangelical descriptions of convict reform

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102 This contrasts to the latter half of the nineteenth century, see Lester, 'British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire', 44; 'Race and Citizenship: Colonial Inclusions and Exclusions'. See also Gascoigne, *The Enlightenment*, 164.
103 Penny Russell, *Savage or Civilised? Manners in Colonial Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2010), 30; Gascoigne, *The Enlightenment*, 151.
104 McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies*, 1.
105 Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 9.
106 Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, 22.
107 Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies*, 455 (old hands), 240 (extraction).
108 Lang, *Transportation and Colonization*, 59–60.

and Aboriginal civilisation—it was captured in the image of a newly pardoned convict squandering all his wealth immediately in a public house, and the Aboriginal people who 'left their clothes in the hut, and when called, on the morrow […] every individual had disappeared'.[109] In this way, evangelical discourse portrayed Aboriginal people and convicts as expressing the natural depravity of 'man'. Degraded because of their sin, salvageable because of common humanity, and capable of backsliding, both groups required salvation within the framework of evangelical discourse.

Explicit comparisons

At their most lucid, the discursive links between Aboriginal people and convicts were explicitly made. They were not only endowed the same characteristics—indolence and intemperance, for example—but were often given similar labels, such as 'savage'.[110] As Penny Russell argues, 'savage' did not merely evoke the dispossessed Aboriginal person, but encompassed figures like 'the foul-mouthed convict' or the 'brutish drunkard of the harsh frontier'.[111] There is, therefore, much to explore in the way that representations of Aboriginal people interacted with those of convicts, and vice versa, for rhetorical effect. As I argue here, the image of the morally degraded convict was used to signify the expansive possibility for Aboriginal redemption, while the trope of a primitive 'Aborigine' was used to chastise some Europeans (including, but not exclusively, convicts) for failing to meet particular moral standards.

In the former case, by demonstrating similarities between Aboriginal people and convicts, evangelicals suggested that race was not a barrier to salvation. As Backhouse explained, the unpleasant smell of Aboriginal people was:

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109 For convict image, see Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies*, 310; for Aboriginal image, see Threlkeld, 'Annual Report of the Mission to the Aborigines: Lake Macquarie, for MDCCCXXXVI [1836]', 133.

110 Russell, *Savage or Civilised?*, 50; Reid, *Gender, Crime and Empire*, 246.

111 Russell, *Savage or Civilised?*, 5.

much like what we have noticed among prisoners of filthy habits in N. S. Wales, and from this similarity I am disposed to attribute the unpleasant smell of Blacks, not to their colour, but to their want of personal cleanliness.[112]

For Backhouse, the fact that white prisoners were also in the habit of uncleanliness suggested that Aboriginal people were not ineradicably dirtier 'Others'. Moreover, Watson's comment that: '[a violent incident] has been referred to as a proof of savage character and want of intellect; but what is it when compared with the conduct of persons, who […] will insult the Majesty of Heaven?' suggests that claims of Aboriginal barbarity were insignificant in the face of European sin.[113] This similarity was also acknowledged by Wilhelm Schmidt in the 1845 'Report From the Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines'. When asked, 'Do you not think the mind of a savage is, to some extent, in the position of that of as [sic] ignorant white person?', he replied, 'I dare say it is'.[114] Such comparisons positioned Aboriginal people at, or sometimes even above the level of convicts, implying the possibility of their redemption.

By comparison, the trope of Aboriginal savagery could also be employed to exacerbate evangelical condemnation of convict character. Watson wrote of the 'wretched Europeans' on the frontier as 'depraved in their habits […] they differ from the aboriginal Natives in little more than the colour of their skin'.[115] Such a statement was an indictment of the European who had 'sunk' to the level of the depraved Aboriginal person. Other statements suggested Europeans were even worse. The CMS missionary, Günther, denounced 'our European neighbours [who] appear, with hardly any exceptions, more ungodly, if possible, than these Black heathens'.[116] These comparisons drew on images of the 'savage' to highlight the depths of European sin. Missionaries, therefore, concluded that the presence of such white savages would only be corrupting and harmful; William Porter from the Wellington Valley Mission declared: 'I do not hesitate to call it a great sin—They [convicts] pull down & destroy; whatever we attempt to build'.[117]

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112 Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies*, 516.
113 Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies*, 134–35.
114 New South Wales Legislative Council, *Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines*, 19.
115 Watson, 'Reverend Watson's Journals', Journal 10, 1.
116 James Günther, 'Reverend Günther's Journals', Journal 1, 26.
117 William Porter, 'Letter 5: Porter to Coates', 1841, cited in *The Wellington Valley Project*.

There was something very unsettling in these comparisons. The suggestion that white convicts could be as depraved as Aboriginal people insinuated that they and other sinful Europeans were an 'enemy within', which 'put the hierarchies of race and class under threat'.[118] Moreover, the suggestion that Aboriginal people were as capable of salvation as white Europeans who had strayed from a righteous path, also seems to shake traditional assumptions of hierarchy. Though the evangelical missionary claimed to civilise a barbaric Other, their explicit comparisons of that Other with certain Europeans upset notions of who was truly 'savage' and 'civilised', a dichotomy on which colonisation was justified.[119] Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that some Aboriginal people even explicitly believed their status was above convicts—a point that requires further research.[120]

Evangelical humanitarians were, therefore, radical in their own way. Their active attempt to spread the gospel and promote salvation made them willing to denounce white sin as much as Aboriginal 'savagery', and champion the possibility of Aboriginal salvation as much as white reformation. Separate though they were, and indeed perhaps because they were, comparisons between both groups were utilised in evangelical discourse to highlight the universality of their sin and their capacity for salvation.

Conclusion

Evangelical discourse, though diffuse, was one of the notable features that gave the early nineteenth-century British Empire its character. Although convicts (and emancipists) and Aboriginal people were often engaged in a struggle for land and survival, these two groups shared many similarities in the evangelical imagination. In the sin-obsessed worldview of evangelicalism, both groups represented the sinful processes of bonded labour and brutal colonialism respectively. While victims of such processes, they also represented personal vice in their indolence, intemperance and sexual transgressions. Though humanitarian faith was often tempered by strong claims of Aboriginal depravity, evangelicals in this period evidently championed the capacity for all to receive salvation. When the two groups

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118 Mitchell, *In Good Faith?*, 70 & 71; McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies*, 172.
119 Elbourne, 'Sin of the Settler'; Russell, *Savage or Civilised?*, 2.
120 For some examples see Günther, 'Reverend Günther's Journals', Journal 2, 22 & Journal 1, 34.

were subject to explicit comparison, the similarities of these 'branches of the great human family' were revealed—posing a significant challenge to the notion of a civilised European and a savage Aborigine.[121]

In many ways, Watson's lamentation, 'O Sin, Sin, What hast thou done', aptly captures the point of this article. Beyond the smaller links drawn by the existing literature, substantial discursive connections between Aboriginal people and convicts can be found in the early nineteenth century. Evangelical humanitarian discourse is an important point of entry into studying these connections because of its significant influence in this period. In the worldview of evangelical humanitarians, one in which sin was rife and moral reformation was urgent, we can begin to see how the discursive similarities of Aboriginal and convict groups played an important part in conceptions of respectability and civilisation in early nineteenth-century Australia.

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121 Aborigines Protection Society, *Third Annual Report of the Aborigines Protection Society, Presented at the Meeting in Exeter Hall, June 23rd, 1840. With Lists of Officers, Subscribers, Benefactors, and Honorary Members* (London: P White & Son, 1840), 9.