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BIGOTRY AND RELIGION IN AUSTRALIA

1865 - 1950

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CONTENTS

BIGOTRY AND RELIGION IN AUSTRALIA, 1865-1950

1		Bigotry and Religion in Australia, 1865-1950
3	Malcolm Campbell	In Memoriam Patrick O'Farrell
7	Patrick O'Farrell	Double Jeopardy: Catholic and Irish
13	Henrika Kuklick	Interpreting Aboriginal Religion: From nineteenth-century evolutionism to Durkheimian sociology
27	Mickey Dewar	You in Your Small Corner: The love song of Alfred J Dyer: early days of Church Mission Society missions to the Aborigines of Arnhem Land
41	Howard Morphy	Mutual Conversion?: The Methodist Church and the Yolŋu, with particular reference to Yirrkala
55	Rodney Gouttman	Was It Ever So?: Anti-Semitism in Australia 1860-1950?
67	Malcolm Campbell	A 'Successful Experiment' No More: The intensification of religious bigotry in eastern Australia, 1865-1885
79	Judith Godden	A 'Region of Indecency and Pruriency': Religious conflict, female communities and health care in colonial New South Wales
93	Anne Monsour	Religion Matters: The experience of Syrian/Lebanese Christians in Australia from the 1880s to 1947
107	Benjamin Penny	Taking Away Joss: Chinese religion and the Wesleyan Mission in Castlemaine, 1868

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BIGOTRY AND RELIGION IN AUSTRALIA, 1865-1950

The papers in this issue of *Humanities Research* are based on a conference convened by the Herbert and Valmae Freilich Foundation, which forms part of the Humanities Research Centre. Established in 1999, the Foundation exists to study bigotry in all its manifestations, wherever and whenever it occurs, or has occurred in the past. Being an Australian organisation the focus of the Foundation has naturally been on this country and its activities have addressed topical issues such as anti-discrimination law, contemporary xenophobia, and reconciliation. In the case of this collection of essays – and the conference that preceded it – we decided there was an opportunity to examine manifestations of bigotry on the basis of religion in the period from the latter part of the nineteenth century until the aftermath of the second world war. In this way we hoped to bring into clearer focus the situation in present-day Australian society, to trace important social changes, to provide historical contexts for current manifestations of religious prejudice, and to examine specific incidents or practices, or patterns of discrimination and prejudice, in our past.

The articles in this collection concern both prejudice directed against one religious group as in the case of anti-semitism as well as inter-religious bigotry, particularly in Australia the conflict between Protestant and Catholic Christians. They address specific incidents that took place under very particular local conditions and

patterns of discrimination over the broad sweep of time. They examine prejudice in face-to-face situations and in academic discourse. In other words, we have attempted to include as many different manifestations of the many tentacled beast that is religious bigotry as we have been able.

When planning this conference, one figure stood out as someone without whom the meeting would not be complete. That figure was Patrick O'Farrell, Professor Emeritus of the University of New South Wales, the doyen of historians of Irish Australia. Professor O'Farrell was keen to come to Canberra and wrote his presentation, 'Double Jeopardy: Catholic and Irish' for the occasion. Unfortunately, ill-health prevented him from attending but his paper was read and he graciously answered queries from those at the conference by email overnight. He was also keen to have his presentation published with others from the conference. Unfortunately he did not live to see the volume come to fruition but we are honoured to present his paper here in the form it was delivered. In addition, Malcolm Campbell of the University of Auckland kindly agreed to write an obituary for this issue of *Humanities Research* which we dedicate to Professor O'Farrell's memory.

IN MEMORIAM PATRICK O'FARRELL

MALCOLM CAMPBELL

Patrick O'Farrell, Emeritus Scientia Professor of History at the University of New South Wales, passed away on Christmas Day 2003. His death at the age of seventy, mourned by family, colleagues, and generations of his students, marked the loss of one of Australia's best historians.

Patrick O'Farrell was born in Grey-mouth, New Zealand, in 1933. His family background and childhood experiences on the West Coast are described in one of his finest books, *Vanished Kingdoms*. Educated at the local Marist Brothers College, Patrick took degrees from the University of New Zealand at Canterbury before moving to Australia in 1956 to undertake his PhD at the Australian National University. An historian with a strong interest in labour history, Patrick was appointed to a lectureship in the School of History at the University of New South Wales in 1959, and he remained at that institution until his retirement.

Despite his lifelong interest in the history of labour, Patrick O'Farrell is best remembered for his seminal works on the history of the Roman Catholic Church in Australia, his internationally respected contributions to Irish history, and his path-breaking research on the Irish in Australia. In 1968 he published *The Catholic Church in Australia: A Short History 1788-1967*, a book that was revised and republished in 1977 as *The Catholic Church*

and Community in Australia: A History. A further edition was published in 1985. In the mid-1960s and early 1970s Patrick spent terms as a visiting professor at Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin. His interest in Irish history resulted in two remarkably influential monographs on Ireland: *Ireland's English Question: Anglo-Irish Relations 1534-1970* (1971) and *England and Ireland Since 1800* (1975).

In 1977, Patrick suffered a stroke that left his right side paralysed. He recovered and with characteristic determination taught himself to write left-handed. After his recovery more books followed: *Letters from Irish Australia 1825-1929* (1987), the award-winning *The Irish in Australia* (1987), republished several times since, and *Vanished Kingdoms: Irish in Australia and New Zealand: A Personal Excursion* (1990). Patrick also wrote the history of his university *UNSW: A Portrait: The University of New South Wales 1949-1999* (1999). In June 2004 Patrick was a recipient of the Order of Australia.

My first encounter with Patrick was as a first-year student in 1981 when he gave a few lectures in the nineteenth-century Australian history course. I then enrolled for his course on the Irish in Australia as a third-year student. Patrick's course that semester was a wonderful example of research-based teaching and a model of why this nexus should be at the

heart of any university's mission. The lectures were memorable ones, based on pre-publication excerpts of *The Irish in Australia*, replete with the musings and dilemmas of the professional historian at work. The course also introduced me to Patrick's quirkier, more mischievous side when I was confronted with an examination question proposing that the entire course had been an extravagance, utilising sparse resources that could better have been devoted to doing something else. I thought it was bravely provocative and decided it was an obvious question to answer. Happily, I did well in the exam.

About this time I had been pondering enrolling for the Honours year in History and asked Patrick if he would be willing to supervise my dissertation. I soon realised I had made a good choice. Eschewing the feudalism fourth-year option, I also took his course on historiography, which was based on an idiosyncratic selection of texts including Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, Norman F. Dixon's *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, and the recent Australian 'oral history debate' in which Patrick himself had played a prominent role. Excited by newly-opened horizons I decided to undertake a PhD, a project Patrick supervised generously and rigorously but with characteristic candour along the way.

Patrick continued to work after his retirement: he once inquired saltily whether I imagined he now spent all his time sitting in the sun. I had no doubt that this was not, and never would be, the case. His attention was particularly committed to a project on sectarianism, a topic he had written about in previous works but had never received the sustained attention he felt it deserved. I believe he was therefore

pleased to be invited to speak at the Freilich Foundation's conference on religious bigotry, held in Canberra in December 2001. Unfortunately, a bout of ill-health prevented Patrick attending in person to deliver his paper.

In 'Double Jeopardy', Patrick O'Farrell explored in a new framework themes and issues which had arisen in his previous work on the Catholic Church and Irish Australians. As the paper shows, he was particularly concerned to historicise Australia's experience of sectarianism. The timing of European occupation of the continent, in between the American and French revolutions, cast the new society in a distinctive mould—'Australia emerges as the first post-American society, the first place where toleration was viewed as an operating principle rather than arrived at as a last-resort pragmatic necessity', he contends. The consequences were profound for Australia and its future. In the next two centuries Protestants and Roman Catholics in Australia engaged in a complex process, sometimes cooperatively, often maliciously, to establish a core-culture of tolerance. Patrick's paper suggests his deep concern that this common ground needed to be safeguarded from those unable or unwilling to subscribe to its values, not taken for granted.

As Patrick points out in this paper, he was sometimes typecast on account of his name by those who were poorly acquainted with him. In my experience he was intensely independent. Numerous examples could be cited of his censorious eye being cast over the behaviour of Australia's Irish, or the Catholic Church and its hierarchy, as well as their vociferous opponents. It is a fitting tribute that this volume, the product of a Freilich Founda-

tion conference on religious bigotry, includes this article in which the pre-eminent historian of the Catholic Church in Australia considers the origins and meaning of bigotry in the nation's experience.

DOUBLE JEOPARDY

CATHOLIC AND IRISH

PATRICK O'FARRELL

The term 'Anglo-Celtic' is commonly applied, especially by persons to which neither ethnicity applies, to describe the predominant present character of Australia's population. It is a grossly misleading, false and patronising contemporary convenience, one crassly present-oriented. Its use removes from consciousness and recognition a major conflict fundamental to any comprehension, not only of Australian history but of our present core culture. Mainstream contemporary Australia is not to be predicated as some sort of static, immutable monolith. It evolved, and evolves, under tension and stress, the product of two centuries of innumerable complex human transactions, accommodations, competing value systems, grudging concessions, tolerated diversities, all within sensed or instinctive social limits. And all under the umbrella of the development of the Western cultural tradition—the rule of law, political democracy and individual freedom, the secular state, toleration of diversity, economic capitalism, change and modernity. There was, in both Catholic and Protestant, Irish and English, Australia, a basic broad agreement on the practices and institutions embodying these: sectarian conflict was within implicit boundaries, about ways of sharing, controlling, operating, prioritising

generally accepted organisational and behavioural propositions, not about what such basic institutions and values actually were.

That Australian society should have achieved harmony and prosperity is no accident. Nor should it be taken for granted, as it so often is. The present is not immutable or immune from damage or destruction. It is itself a hard-won and relatively recent solution to the problem of a legacy of bitter and divisive religious differences between Protestants and Catholics. At least the terms 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' are less dismissive of the actualities of history: no conflatory term has been suggested to avoid that embarrassing unpleasantness. Religious difference and conflict have simply been moved well off any stage of contemporary attention or even comprehension.

The abandonment of personal religion has had profound disabling effects not only on interpreting the past, but on perceiving the constituent underlying assumptions operating in the present. Australia has recently battled its way out of the dangers associated with divisive religious mindsets into agreement on secular neutrality. What emerged was not the abolition of bigotry but its containment.

The achievement of a religiously reconciled Australia dates from the 1970s. The idea that Australia was riven by ethnic and religious conflict and division, embodied in destructive individual animosity and periods of extreme social fragility, is now not one easily accepted or even recognised. Why? Because Irish–English hostility has been subsumed—but only very recently, the 1980s, 1990s—into a sense of Australian commonality. And because religion as any thinkable influential social factor has been buried, both by dismissive secularism, and religion’s embrace of the whole paraphernalia of the politically correct: it is an irrelevance and an embarrassment now, a private aberration, and should always have been so.

That is not how things began, but they began in such a way as to lead, if only after protracted travail, to a happy eventual outcome. Australia was the first secular, state-controlled society established in modern times: in a sense what has happened has been a two-century painful exploration which has returned to its origins. Those origins were secular, but only in the sense of not being religious, not in the sense of being militantly anti-religious—an important distinction often blurred. Neutral, for the common good.

Consider what happened, and its radically formative consequences. Here was a state-controlled society before its time. Up until Australia’s foundation, it was axiomatic that Church and state were intimately linked. The ruler enforced the true religion. Until the 18th century, it was assumed that the state would, indeed must, discriminate between religious traditions. The idea that any other course was possible was first born in 17th century America and first given significance by

the American Constitution in 1787, in situations where religious monopoly proved impossible to enforce. Toleration first appeared, not as a desirable virtue, but as the only possible solution to intractable problems of religious difference. Australia emerges as the first post-American society, the first place where toleration was viewed as an operating principle rather than arrived at reluctantly as a last-resort pragmatic necessity: the contrast is crucial in terms of the way in which religion is culturally regarded. Australia is also a society subsequent to the French Revolution of 1789, but in it the role of religion was very different. Its disposition was militantly anti-religious, anything but neutral, and religion remained in French history central to social and political concern as a matter of vigorous and vehement conflict.

In Australia, the churches were cast—and cast themselves—in a suppliant and subservient role. Witness the Church of England’s unsuccessful attempt to claim the position of Established Church. Witness the Catholic Church’s bid for liberty and equality. Who was the arbiter in this, the determining authority? The state, in the person of the colonial governor. And what was the disposition of that state in regard to religious adherence? Neutrality. Seen religiously, the state had arrogated to itself the power to be above religion, to have authority superior to it—heresy indeed. But the state was acting for the best of reasons—not merely to avoid the disruption of civil society by endemic sectarian conflict, but to positively support all religion, which it did in NSW until 1862. This is the governmental and societal context, an atmosphere conducive to fair play, and an instinctive moderate mind-frame, which

mates and controls Australia's sectarian history.

About a quarter of Australia's population at any given time up to say the 1970s, was subject to denigration, hostility, prejudice and discrimination, both personal and public. The grounds were both religious and racial. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible to distinguish or separate these two grounds for bigotry, particularly as they were interwoven with a third, a socio-economic dimension of class difference and antagonism. The prevailing community image of the Catholic was not only that of a deluded, superstitious, priest-ridden, disloyal and dangerous Papist, loyal only to Rome. He was also a dirty pig-loving, ignorant, subhuman Irish rebel; and a member of the lower orders, with all their contemptible characteristics which made them both offensive and a menace. These stereotypes—and the counter-reaction of the persons so categorised—were built into historical experience and imported into Australia from Great Britain and Ireland from 1788 onward. They constituted not only obvious declared animus, but also what J. H. Newman called 'a stain on the imagination', cultural conditioning that lives strongly still. An illustration. I would like to write the hidden history of the flicker I see behind some people's eyes when I say my name. My most intense recollection of that was in Belfast in 1992 when my wife and I were introduced, on an official occasion, to two Unionist members of the Northern Ireland parliament. Their eyes showed me more about Irish sectarianism than any words ever could. About hatred, disdain, anticipation and the conviction that such feelings would be reciprocated.

Australian sectarianism derived from the legacy of 16th century events, that is, the English variant of the Protestant Reformation, and the English conquest of Ireland. These generated divisive issues both massive and potent—nationalism, political power, religious principle and belief, all seen in the context of fear. The Reformation divided Christendom into those who supported the authority and doctrines of the Papacy and the Roman Catholic Church, and those who violently rejected this, and supported independent national state churches, and/or the Bible-oriented teachings of the reformers. The English conquest of Ireland from 1534, sought to dispossess the Irish of their land and impose on the Catholic Irish, English government and Protestant religion. Very importantly for subsequent history, English propaganda sought to morally vindicate this invasion with an ideology of justifiable colonial subjection. So the Irish became, forever after, seditious Catholic barbarians, sub-human anthropoids, violent, dirty, ignorant, on whom it was a necessary duty to impose English rule, civilisation and religion. For their own good: their resistance proved their inferiority and primitive savagery.

Australia was heir to three centuries of bitter and violent religious and racial confrontation. The penal colony was not only a prison but embodied those sectarian assumptions in its structures and administration: its governance was British and Protestant. But the philosophy of the Enlightenment had weakened religion's intellectual hold, and the power and influence of the Church of England was in serious decline. Although the colony's derivation implied institutional sectarianism, practicality and common sense dictated that it

not be rigidly enforced: to impose it on the one-third of the convict population which was Irish Catholic raised major questions of colonial security and stability. Authority saw religion as a force supporting and encouraging social order, and clergy as moral policemen, in a sensitive prison situation. Some degree of recognition of Catholic worship was a practical necessity.

Provided Catholics played the game, were not too pushy. Which of course evangelical Anglicans thought they were. To which the government response was in Governor Bourke's 1836 Church Act, an attempt to arbitrate towards religious equality.

Up to this time, the hostility towards Catholicism was on religious grounds: it was idolatrous, inquisitorial, opposed to Bible reading, jesuitical, that it was doctrinally false and dangerous. This view endured. But from the 1840s it was massively supplemented by the other ingredient in the sectarian stew, anti-Irishism. Increasing numbers of Irish Catholic immigrants prompted the reaction summed up in the title of John Dunmore Lang's 1841 pamphlet *The Question of Questions: or is this Colony to be Transformed into a Province of Popedom?* This question was to be the enduring sectarian question, right down to Dr H. V. Evatt's denunciation of the Movement in 1954. It expressed a fear and suspicion of potential Irish Catholic threats to the future composition and character of Australian society. The influx and activities (often assertive and truculent) of Irish Catholics were a standing menace to the majority assumption that British Protestant values and outlook would prevail harmoniously in a racially homogenous Australian society.

Major issues of social organisation and control—immigration, education, political organisation and power, national loyalty—emerged from the 1840s. A more complex and sophisticated society grew from convict and pioneering beginnings. So too grew contention over what the present and future Australia would be, and who would control it. There were two over-arching world views in conflict, Protestant and Catholic, which would subsume all other considerations and engage passionate emotion, high principle, loyalty, tribalism, and a sense of history. That third world view, Enlightenment reason and scepticism, which promoted a secular society, was in abeyance, until the others had exhausted their aggressive dynamic in conflict. Sectarianism was the result and product of the idea that there should be one Australian identity, and that of a particular kind. To the extent that it expressed legitimate differences of belief and values, the Catholic-Protestant divide represented appropriately contending visions of truth: to the extent that these beliefs were made the vehicles of intolerance, ignorance, fear, discrimination, suspicion and mistrust they inflicted human damage and encouraged social malaise.

The central issue was always who should possess political power. The first colonial elections of 1843 saw rival Catholic and Protestant candidates, clerical involvement, Irish and Orange mobs rioting—and vehement press disapproval of Catholicism as selfish, menacing, and at odds with the rest of society. But Catholics demonstrated then as they did in Australia thereafter, that there was no such thing as a monolithic Catholic vote. They were split, even fragmented, and their votes could not be directed either by Catholic

clergy or by Irish nationalists. They voted on local issues and personalities, the ordinary range of political considerations. The Irish Catholic reaction to sectarian attack was always informed by the overriding wish to belong, assimilate, rather than stay apart. Catholics were never united politically, but Protestants always thought they were: it was a prejudice impervious to denial or contrary demonstration, feeding on itself and generating bigotry in return.

Bigotry in Australia was at its most publicly intense between 1880 and 1925. What were the major issues? Education. The education question was answered in a secular way by various colonial governments, ending with the NSW Act in 1880. The general expectation was that Catholic schools would die through lack of funding. Their continuance remained an enduring sectarian grievance: Catholics demanded state aid. Protestants saw them as socially divisive. Then there was Ireland, its turbulent history a great disruptor of colonial harmony. In 1883 the *Sydney Morning Herald* pronounced, '... an Irish Australian is a creature of whom we cannot possibly conceive. He is or he is not one of us ...' This is mild in comparison with the venom and fury associated with the prolonged storm centred on the 1916 Irish rebellion, the conscription referenda, and Archbishop Mannix. The Irish were malignantly dangerous, arrantly subversive, patently disloyal, however much they protested their Australian patriotism. No one thought to consider or ever grasp the fact that for Catholics in Australia Ireland was the medium, not the message. It was a convenient allegory, the language through which local points were made, a salutary example of the potential extremes to which tendencies within the Australian

commonality might develop. Ireland's history demonstrated the predicament of Australia's Catholics writ large. NSW topped this off with an aggressively Protestant anti-Catholic Nationalist government, defeated in 1925. The peace that followed was a standoff of exhaustion and segregation.

These sectarian years were the time when Australia's social fabric was put to the test. It held, but it is easy to overlook the very real dangers that it might not. In 1900, the main topic of public interest was not Federation (remember, only half those eligible bothered to vote) but a spectacular sectarian case. And that the Catholic-Labor alignment, so central to Australian political history, was a reflection not of economic determinism, but of the militantly anti-Catholic bigotry. Of the non-Labor parties: Catholics had nowhere else politically to go. The Catholic claim to loyalty to Australia in 1914-18 strained to the limit the sufferance of those who thought in terms of British Empire.

Why did Australia avoid those lapses into sectarian violence that marred the histories of other Western countries?

The basic reason lies in the pragmatic nature of its foundation and its continuance as an open society and economy. From the beginning, Irish Catholic convicts, when freed, could move to ownership, prosperity and respectability, a path followed by migrants thereafter. Pioneering circumstances in a vacant land rendered irrelevant old world divisions and hierarchies. Free immigrants experienced months of religious mix: the voyage out was an ecumenical experience. Bigotry and racial denunciation on arrival was objectionable, but had no practical bite: in colonies starved of labour, few employ-

ers had the luxury of being able to avoid Irish Catholic workers. When faced with the notice 'No Irish Need Apply' they went elsewhere, set up their own business or professional practice: here was a society of ample resource and choice—and space to move. The natural petty frictions, the transaction costs of daily living, inevitable in religious and cultural mix, were minimised by dispersal and a population constantly mobile. Distance and movement bred tolerance: in rural areas, St Patrick's Day was everybody's day.

It was the close living of cities that lent itself to tensions. Still, when urbanisation and industrialisation produced a working class, its Catholic elements found in the labour movement, not denominational separatism, but a way out and up within the general community.

Here developed a fluid society willing to make mutual adjustments, to teach itself to adapt to social interaction—so long as its elements played the rules, engaged in fair dealing, shared common purpose in getting and spending, and subscribed to behaviour patterns which promoted peace, security and prosperity for all. In this society it was religion itself which challenged the limits of tolerance. In so far as religion, both Catholic and Protestant, was tribal and troublemaking, it generated tension and conflict inimical to the co-operation necessary for social progress and a modern economy.

Sectarianism gave religion itself a bad name: it is the source of that distrust, suspicion, hostility, embarrassment, which is one side of Australia's religious coin. The responsibility of clergymen—and manipulative politicians—for generating and sustaining sectarian attitudes is very great. But they—at least the big names, Lang,

Parkes, Cardinal Moran, Archbishop Mannix, H. V. Evatt—had reputations very much larger than mere sectarians, claims to national greatness. Their potential for divisive provocation was curbed, not only by their own sense of proportion, but by the fact that the balance of popular consensus, the tolerance limits of the moral economy, was against it. The wish to belong together was stronger than any impulse to stay apart. Sectarianism came to be regarded as un-Australian.

INTERPRETING ABORIGINAL RELIGION

FROM NINETEENTH-CENTURY EVOLUTIONISM TO DURKHEIMIAN SOCIOLOGY

HENRIKA KUKLICK

I begin this paper with what may seem an unlikely starting point: the cordial relationship of the scientific polymath Herbert Spencer and the Liberal politician W. E. Gladstone. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, Spencer flattered the then-prime minister extravagantly, telling him that his Liberal Party programme was nothing less than the realisation of the ethical system that Spencer believed to be scientifically based.¹ And though the relationship surely mattered less to Gladstone than it did to Spencer, Gladstone would later indicate that he held Spencer in high regard.² Yet in 1873 and 1874, Gladstone and Spencer had conducted an epistolary feud, both in private correspondence and on the pages of the *Contemporary Review* (during the course of which Spencer's friends told him that he was being too much the gentleman, urging him to act to mobilise public support for his position).³ Gladstone initiated the feud, writing a letter to the *Contemporary* that was critical of the last chapter of a new edition of Spencer's *The Study of Sociology*, which the journal had printed in advance of the book's publication. Spencer retaliated by reprinting Gladstone's letter in the book, presenting it as the expression of 'anti-scientific' sentiment.⁴ But Glad-

stone would not allow Spencer to have the last word, and badgered Spencer until he eliminated his criticism and the reprinted letter from subsequent printings of *The Study of Sociology*; Spencer submitted three revisions of the offending portion of the book to the prime minister, finally producing an innocuous account of their dispute that met with Gladstone's approval.⁵

That Gladstone took such pains to censor a printed record of his debate with Spencer is remarkable, indicating just how seriously social scientific argument could be taken in the public discourse of the late nineteenth century. Of course, the internationally renowned Herbert Spencer was an extraordinary figure. Perhaps no other social scientist whose generalisations relied on evidence gathered among non-European peoples has ever achieved fame equivalent to his, although J. G. Frazer, a classicist-anthropologist more than thirty years Spencer's junior, arguably approximated it (on Frazer, more shortly). But Spencer and Gladstone's dispute became so intense because they were both certain of the immense importance of its subject—the role of God in human affairs.

In Gladstone's letter to the *Contemporary Review*, he had asserted that the force of 'Providence' could be seen in public

life, that God intervened in human affairs and raised up great men when the times required them. For Spencer, Gladstone's argument was fundamentally anti-scientific, suggesting that the steady operation of natural laws was occasionally suspended; as he stated in a draft portion of the text of *The Study of Sociology* that Gladstone managed to suppress, this view was

certainly incongruous with the conception entertained by scientific men; who daily add to the evidence, already overwhelming, that the Power manifested to us throughout the Universe, from the movements of stars to the unfolding of individual men and the formulation of public opinions, is a Power which, amid infinite multiformities and complexities, works in ways that are absolutely uniform.⁶

But note that Spencer had invoked the 'Power manifested to us throughout the Universe'. His dispute with Gladstone cannot be reduced to one episode in the supposedly long-standing conflict between science and religion. To be sure, the young Spencer had expressed hostility to religion. But no later than 1860, he proclaimed that he had to 'admit that there exist in the environment certain phenomena or conditions which have determined the growth of [religious] feeling', and that 'on the hypothesis of a development of lower forms into higher, the end towards which ... must be adaptation towards the requirements of existence; we are also forced to infer that this feeling is in some way conducive to human welfare'.⁷ Indeed, among members of the Victorian intelligentsia, there was broad agreement that

religion and science had to be reconciled; the issue was not whether they could be, but how they should be reconciled.⁸

My point is that the debate between Spencer and Gladstone highlights the extraordinary importance of religious considerations in late-nineteenth century life. Disputes about the character of the supreme being, the proper relationship of the religious sphere to other social spheres, and the types of ritual that should be permitted in religious worship were vital matters in consideration of the conduct of affairs of both the state and civil society—throughout the societies of Euroamerica and their colonies, hardly just in Britain. Moreover, whatever their differences, figures such as Gladstone and Spencer agreed that religion supported social order.

We should not be surprised, then, when we find that late-nineteenth century anthropologists devoted a considerable portion of their intellectual energies to analysis of religion, and that they believed that the spiritual quality of religious beliefs and practices found in any given society constituted an index to its overall character.⁹ Truly spiritual religion was among the highest of human achievements, along with the institution of monogamous marriage—developments that anthropologists believed were concomitant. Investigative efforts were driven by objectives: many anthropologists agreed that their enterprise was, as the Oxford professor E. B. Tylor was wont to say, a 'reformer's science', the findings of which would 'enable the great modern nations to understand themselves, to weigh in a just balance their own merits and defects, and even in some measure to forecast ... the possibilities of the future'.¹⁰ The concep-

tual scheme that was most clearly articulated by Anglophone anthropologists made reformist ambitions seem practicable in Tylor's day. That is, anthropologists assumed that all aspects of human evolution—physical, mental, moral, and material—were highly (though certainly not perfectly) correlated, and that progress from the most primitive of human conditions to the most advanced entailed negotiation of an ordered sequence of stages of evolution. Anthropologists' expertise would permit acceleration of the course of evolution, identifying so-called 'survivals' of earlier evolutionary phases of a people's history in order that these might be eradicated.

When they considered the development of religious institutions and beliefs in particular, evolutionist social thinkers including, but hardly limited to, Spencer and Tylor judged that progress meant recognition of the solely spiritual purpose of religion. As humans learned to understand the natural world scientifically, they ceased to expect the deity to respond to worshippers' special pleading for one desired outcome or another—jettisoning magical thinking—and they abandoned ritual *per se* because it was irrational. Indeed, though it was more implied than explicitly stated in evolutionists' accounts of the spiritual progress of humankind, a host of Christian beliefs and practices were evident 'survivals'. (We must remember that Spencer and Tylor were representatives of a population of social thinkers who came, for the most part, from dissenting religious backgrounds.¹¹)

If anthropologists' research programme was plotting the course of evolution, and accelerating evolutionary progress was their reformist mission, inform-

ation about the most primitive forms of humankind was vital to their tasks. This was why information about the peoples of Australia was so important for anthropologists, since it was axiomatic to many of them that the best, still-extant approximation of humankind in its most primordial condition was to be found in Australia, which had long been believed to be the home of archaic life forms of every description, a zoological garden of 'living fossils'.¹² I must stress that practitioners of anthropology were hardly unique. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, various types of scientists and other educated persons were accustomed to render judgments predicated on the assumption that Australian Aborigines were a baseline of humanity, that they were exemplars of humankind at its most primitive in every particular—in spiritual, behavioral, and physical terms.

I give just a few illustrations of diverse pronouncements made at this time that expressed this view. The German Darwinian biologist Ernst Haeckel, whose index to a people's level of evolutionary development was teeth, not religious practices, characterised Australian Aborigines as 'distinctly pithecoïd', the closest of living peoples to a link between humans and apes.¹³ The American psychologist John B. Watson, who sought to formulate covering laws that explained responses to stimuli among all living organisms, assumed that 'Aborigines' adaptive behavior was a limiting case of a mode of human responses, the simplest of human behavioral patterns, far less complex than Europeans'.¹⁴ And an American professor of theology, B. L. McElroy, objecting to some physicians' recommendations that

seriously defective newborn babies be euthanised, pointed to infanticide among Aborigines and argued that eugenicists were advocating a base morality, attempting 'to Australianize our Ethics'.¹⁵ Thus, J. G. Frazer was hardly alone when he proclaimed in 1899 that in Australia the 'scientific inquirer might reasonably expect to find the savage in his very lowest depths ... to mark the first blind gropings of our race after freedom and light'.¹⁶

Not only did the assumption that Australian Aborigines constituted 'living fossils' of early humankind have a long history, but it also, unhappily, proved remarkably persistent—and persistent in many quarters. Consider, for example, that in the post-World War II era, an eminent American physical anthropologist, William Howells, made this assumption in evaluating the significance of ancient skulls found in Java by Eugene DuBois. In his highly regarded *Mankind So Far*, Howells reasoned in nineteenth-century anthropological fashion, presuming that the living and the dead could be graded on a single scale of evolutionary development, pronouncing that the Java skulls resembled skulls found in Europe which dated to the Upper Paleolithic period, observing that they 'stand in relation to the living aborigines of Australia as the Upper Paleolithic Europeans do to living Europeans of the present day'.¹⁷

But the facile equation of Australian Aborigines with primitive humankind had long ceased to seem plausible to sociocultural anthropologists. By the era of World War I, these had disaggregated the physical, mental, moral, and material components of human evolution. And examination of Australian Aborigines' religion had played a prominent role in modifying their

position. For example, though R. R. Marrett, Reader in Social Anthropology at Oxford, stated in 1912 that Central Australian Aborigines were 'people with skulls inching toward the Neanderthal type', he had been persuaded by Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen's study of them that 'very plain living' did not preclude 'something that approached to high thinking', concluding that 'we must recognize in this case, as in others, what might be determined a differential evolution of culture, according to which some elements may advance, whilst others stand still, or even decay'.¹⁸ Marrett was among the last of a breed that also included such figures as Spencer, Tylor, and Frazer, an 'armchair' scholar who did no field research, but relied on reports sent from the field by others, such as those that had been sent from Australia by European observers for two centuries. Of special interest to us, however, are nineteenth-century reports from the field, many of them informed by knowledge of the uses to which they were being put by social theorists in Europe and America. The judgments rendered in these reports were not unanimous, and observers' occupational positions shaped their interests and opinions. While an Australian police trooper might consider whether Aborigines were naturally deceitful,¹⁹ a missionary was bound to ponder the quality of Aborigines' spirituality and morals. For example, in 1839, James Günther of the Church Missionary Society discerned belief in a high god in Aboriginal religion—and was the first European missionary to do so—though he did not see this as equivalent to Christian belief, conjecturing that Aborigines had once had a notion of the supreme being resembling the Christian god, but had degenerated and

lost their earlier revelation.²⁰ And in 1841, a German missionary in South Australia, who had had little success in making converts, reported that even though Aborigines had evidently the same mental aptitudes as Europeans, they had no religion whatsoever—not even ‘idolatry’—having neither ‘the idea of any being superior to themselves nor any kind of worship’; their morals were ‘in many instances almost upon a lower scale than the beasts’.²¹

Regardless, in the second half of the nineteenth century, there was evidence of a shift in opinion—which coincided with local investigators’ growth in confidence that their interpretations of Aborigines’ behavior, grounded in direct observation, were superior to those produced by arm-chair theorists. R. Brough Smyth, for one, criticised the stereotype of Aborigines as intellectually deficient, suggesting that they might have independently made progress toward the development of high civilisation had their country not been invaded by white settlers.²² In particular, missionaries’ representations of Aboriginal religion grew more sympathetic. The Congregationalist George Taplin, for example, was certainly determined to convert Aborigines, but he judged that they traditionally believed in a supreme being, who made the world and prescribed religious rituals—though he insisted that their conception of God was different from the Christian one.²³ And by the end of the century, such figures as the missionary-ethnographer Lorimer Fison and his collaborator A. W. Howitt were arguing that native Australians were neither degenerate nor frozen in a truly primitive condition, but had made evolutionary progress, and that their development of precursors of

the idea of god as the All-Father testified to the progress they had made independently—without guidance from any putatively superior race.²⁴ Indeed, it was arguably a missionary, Carl Strehlow, who first produced evidence that belied the stereotype of the Australian Aborigine as the quintessential primitive.²⁵

Certainly, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century ethnographic writers drew on this stereotype. Consider J. D. Woods’s judgment in 1879: ‘Without a history [the Aborigines] have no past; without a religion, they have no hope; and without habits of forethought or providence they can have no future’.²⁶ Decades later, W. Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen described the Arrernte of Central Australia as ‘naked, howling savages, who have no idea of permanent abodes, no clothing, no knowledge of any implements save those fashioned out of wood, bone, and stone, no idea whatever of the cultivation of crops, or of the laying in of a supply of food to tide over hard times, no word for any number beyond three, and no belief in anything like a supreme being’.²⁷ To be sure, Spencer and Gillen observed Aboriginal practices that seemed to be religious—their totem ceremonies. But as J. G. Frazer, who brokered the publication of their works, stated, these ceremonies represented magic, not ‘religion, in the sense of a propitiation or conciliation of the higher powers’; totemism was ‘thoroughly democratic’, premised on an ‘imaginary brotherhood’ joining humans with things, whereas ‘religion always implie[d] an inequality between the worshippers and the worshipped’.²⁸

Nevertheless, Spencer and Gillen’s first major work, *Native Tribes of Central Australia*, published in 1899, marked a turn-

ing point in the anthropological analysis of Australian peoples. Certainly, the quality of Spencer and Gillen's sympathy for Aborigines can be debated.²⁹ Consider that they judged the Arrernte way of life extraordinarily primitive, and by this token doomed to extinction—following the pattern observed 'in the case of tribe after tribe elsewhere in Australia'.³⁰ But consider that they insisted that it was 'necessary to put oneself into the mental attitude of the native'.³¹ Their intention to persuade their readers that they had been able to do this explains Spencer and Gillen's false (or, at least, hyperbolic) and oft-repeated claim that they had been able to observe all features of Aboriginal life—including secret ceremonies—because they were 'fully-initiated' members of the Arrernte population; their participation in Arrernte life fell far short of this, since they had not undergone the ceremonial ordeals that rendered males social adults, but their claim bespeaks their intention to describe the Arrernte sympathetically.³² Spencer and Gillen explained how Aborigines' remarkable survival skills—developed 'far beyond those of the average white man'—were applications of their 'mental powers along the lines which are of service to them in their daily life'. Moreover, their accounts contradicted long-established stereotypes in many particulars. Aborigines did not tolerate abuse of women and unregulated sexual behavior, but lived by a distinctive and rigorously enforced moral code, which should not be judged by a 'white man's standard'. If at least some Australian people practised 'group marriage'—a truly primitive mode of social organisation, allowing all men in one division of a population to have sexual relations with all women in another,

the existence of which had long been the subject of anthropologists' speculation—this practice provided the foundation for evolutionary advance, both because it led to the development of individual marriage and because it served 'to bind more or less closely groups of individuals who are mutually interested in one another's welfare', thus serving as 'one of the most powerful agents in the early stages of the upward development of the human race'. And though Aborigines were 'bound hand and foot by custom', they were not undeveloped because they were either degenerate or incapable of initiating progressive changes; indeed, they self-consciously adopted progressive recommendations suggested by the exceptionally talented persons among them.³³

And to interpret the meaning that *Native Tribe* came to have for social thinkers, we must also note its impact on J. G. Frazer, who was largely responsible not only for its publication but also for making it the basis of an international debate.³⁴ To Frazer, the book's most important feature was its discussion of totemism, which he had sought to understand for virtually his entire anthropological career; thanks to Spencer and Gillen, he believed, he had found what had heretofore eluded him—an explanation of the origin of totemism—as well as evidence explaining the relationship of totemism to religious beliefs and marital practices.³⁵ In the first edition (1890) of his *Golden Bough*, Frazer had understood Australian totem ceremonies as a truly primitive form of religion, noting that Aborigines believed their totems to be repositories of their souls, and describing their initiation rites as 'a simulation of death and resurrection', effecting 'an exchange of life or souls between the

man and his totem'.³⁶ As he told his publisher, George Macmillan, 'The resemblance of many of the savage customs and ideas to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity is striking'.³⁷ Learning of Spencer and Gillen's findings, Frazer decided that Australian totem ceremonies represented magic, not religion; thus, they denoted an even lower order of spiritual development than he had previously imagined. But in Frazer's new understanding of Australian beliefs, he had a new basis for finding in them a precursor to an irrational element that survived in modern Christianity: 'conceptional totemism'. That is, Spencer and Gillen had found people who were so primitive that they were ignorant of the most basic fact of life, of the process of procreation, imagining that totem spirits were themselves responsible for conception, lying in wait in their particular habitats for likely female candidates for impregnation.³⁸ Apparently, Aborigines regularly entertained fantasies of virgin births. And Frazer suggested that the very association of the divinity of Christ with a virgin birth represented a survival in Christianity of the truly primitive thinking that Spencer and Gillen had reported.³⁹ Thus, as measured by Frazer's standard of superior religiosity, Aborigines were certainly primitive. But by this standard, so were many persons in the so-called civilised world, at least insofar as their religious notions were concerned.

For social thinkers all over the world, Spencer and Gillen's work was a revelation.⁴⁰ And Frazer could not control the reception of *Native Tribes*, however vigorous and sustained was his campaign to do so (which included acting to discourage re-analysis of Spencer and Gillen's subjects by other anthropologists).⁴¹ In the inter-

national—and extremely heated—controversy it generated, Spencer and Gillen's empirical material was turned to various purposes by a congeries of theorists, Émile Durkheim and Sigmund Freud the most notable among them.⁴² As E. Sidney Hartland observed in his 1900 Presidential Address to the British Folk-Lore Society—which would soon issue a questionnaire on totemism designed to elicit evidence on the phenomenon from potential informants everywhere—the debate over totemism had attracted such widespread interest, and prompted so much discussion, that 'The quiet non-combatant student is astonished to find himself in the theatre of war, and hardly knows where to seek a bomb-proof burrow that he may hide his head from the shells of [disputants'] polemics'.⁴³

In Britain, Frazer faced various opponents. His chief antagonist was his erstwhile friend Andrew Lang. From 1900, when the second (Spencer and Gillen-influenced) edition of the *Golden Bough* appeared, to the time of his death in 1912, Lang waged sustained intellectual warfare against Frazer, accusing him of willful distortion of information about central Australian peoples. In sum, Lang argued that Frazer ought to have paid more attention to the findings of other authorities, particularly Carl Strehlow. Had Frazer done so, he would have recognised that 'conceptional totemism' was a secondary development; in the form of Australian totemism that Lang judged oldest, totemic affiliations were linked to rules of exogamy, which indicated knowledge of the biological facts of procreation. Equally important, while Lang agreed with Frazer that totemism was not initially a religious system, he believed that in time it became one, for 'certain low

savages are as monotheistic as some Christians'.⁴⁴ But many rejected Lang's assertion that Australian Aborigines had spontaneously developed a belief in high gods.⁴⁵ The Tylorian anthropological faction faulted Frazer's interpretation of totemism for reasons different from Lang's: totemism was just one social form, peculiar to specific peoples, but it had analogues among other peoples, all testifying to a universal pattern of social evolution; religious institutions developed because all humans were instinctive 'animists'—inclined to develop spiritual beliefs because their experiences of dreams and visions conduced to the notion that the world's animate and inanimate objects were inhabited by souls.⁴⁶

Lang's ideas were well received in the German-speaking world, however—and possibly gained some attention because Frazer had a large audience there.⁴⁷ One of Lang's most vicious attacks on Frazer was published in a special issue on totemism of the journal *Anthropos*,⁴⁸ which was founded by Father Wilhelm Schmidt, who was trained and worked in Germany and Austria. Schmidt was loosely allied with a number of anthropologists inclined to 'cultural-historical' explanations,⁴⁹ whose concerns included tracing the origin of religion among those whom German-speaking anthropologists called 'natural peoples' (as opposed to 'cultural peoples'). Cultural historicists valued information about Australian Aborigines because they agreed with British evolutionists that some contemporary primitives were akin to (if not identical to) the earliest humans.⁵⁰ But they saw 'natural peoples' as a pure form of humankind. Perhaps 'natural peoples' were not fully evolved members of the human species in physical terms,

but they were fully evolved in spiritual terms, 'capable' as Schmidt said, 'of receiving a real primitive revelation'—indeed, possessed of 'interior purity and nobility' that was not sustainable under conditions of growing material sophistication. Schmidt agreed with Frazer that totemism began in efforts to establish beneficial relations with animals and plants. Unlike Frazer, however, he saw totemism as the basis of genuine religion, for its primitive practitioner not only believed himself 'protected by the animals' but also 'humbl[ed] himself to them in prayer'. And he agreed with Lang that the most primitive of peoples had not required contact with Christian missionaries to develop 'knowledge of a Supreme Being as Creator, Protector of the world, and Lawgiver to man'. But consistent with the German sociocultural anthropological tradition, Schmidt and his colleagues did not believe that there was a single pattern of evolutionary development, found among peoples everywhere, and argued that totemism figured in only one of the culture complexes that had diffused over the globe through the migrations of peoples—and did not emerge until the bearers of this complex had progressed beyond the hunting and gathering stage.⁵¹

Schmidt was a committed internationalist, maintaining correspondence with anthropologists worldwide and publishing a truly international journal. And the views of the cultural historicists had a family resemblance to the American diffusionism associated with the school of the German-trained Franz Boas, which supplanted evolutionism as the dominant model in American anthropology in the early twentieth century. The rise of the German cultural historicists and the

American Boasians denoted an international intellectual convergence: while social thinkers in different countries approached the debate over totemism from different vantage points, they came to join in repudiation of the evolutionist paradigm. Perhaps the only social scientific controversy that has been truly international, the debate had begun in the expectation that understanding of the role that totemism played in the evolution of religion—and of human social life entire—would provide the key to explaining the developmental trajectory of humankind from the species' earliest days to its development of high civilisation. Instead, attempts to explain totemism helped to discredit the evolutionist paradigm, for it was impossible to resolve such questions as whether totemism was a truly primitive social form, or had antecedents, or whether it was a form of religion, and, if so, if there were forms of plant and animal worship that were not totemism.⁵² Participants in the debate became embroiled in controversies over methods and evidence, as well as theories. They were unable to decide which (if any) of anthropologists' informants had responded truthfully to fieldworkers' questions and fearful that researchers' interpretive biases contaminated their reports.⁵³ As Sigmund Freud observed, not only was 'the theory of totemism a matter of dispute' but there was also considerable confusion about 'the facts themselves. ... There [was] scarcely a statement which did not call for exceptions or contradictions'.⁵⁴ In sum, there were no generally accepted standards by which any of the issues raised in the study of totemism could be resolved.

If a consensus emerged in the debate over totemism, it was that totemism was neither a universal phenomenon nor one

that inevitably gave rise to a specific pattern of development, as Max Weber (among many) observed.⁵⁵ Perhaps, as Freud said, information about primitive peoples aided speculation about early humankind, but the first humans and contemporary primitives could not be equated. In *Totem and Taboo*, subtitled *On some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, Freud had used anthropological evidence (largely gleaned from Frazer's work) to construct an ingenious (and convoluted) argument that totemism was a source of religious belief and was grounded in the incest taboo that experience made instinctive. But though he believed that 'a well-preserved picture of an early stage of our own [mental] development' could be gained from knowledge about Australian peoples, as opposed to, say, Polynesians, because Aborigines were 'the most backward and miserable of savages', he recognised that each of the populations anthropologists had studied had its own 'long past history'.⁵⁶ Many social thinkers agreed with Bronislaw Malinowski that the attempt to discern different patterns of evolution was worthwhile. But, as the British psychologist-anthropologist W. H. R. Rivers stated, researchers had erred in equating the phenomenon of totemism entire with 'the nature of totemism as it exists among the aborigines of Australia'—'the chief reason' that discussion of the subject was plagued with 'doubt and difficulty'.⁵⁷

By 1914, then, the Boasian anthropologist John Swanton was able to dismiss the debate over totemism entire. It had been predicated on the 'cardinal error' that 'totemism [was] one concrete thing', denoting a 'social condition ... normal to and universal in primitive society'. Some peoples de-

veloped totemic complexes through processes of independent invention, while others acquired them by diffusion, imitating the habits of peoples with whom they came in contact. And where totemism was found it had no necessary relation to the various features diverse thinkers had postulated as essential to it—no inevitable association with exogamous norms of any description; with belief in ancestral connections joining humans and beasts; with taboos; with differences of social rank; with calculations of descent from mothers rather than fathers; with allocations of title to conduct specific sacred ceremonies to specific groups or, indeed, with the very foundations of religious belief entire. Thus, the evidence gathered in pursuit of generalisations about totemism led to the generalisation that evolutionary development did not follow a predictable course.⁵⁸

In the years immediately prior to World War I, then, social theorists whose goal had originally been calculation of the trajectory of human evolution began to articulate proto-functionalist arguments—analyses of the properties that all societies shared—at least when they considered religious phenomena. The title of Émile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (and subtitled *The Totemic System in Australia*), published in 1912, itself conveyed an emergent theoretical position. Largely based on the findings of Spencer and Gillen, whom Durkheim described as 'two remarkably astute observers', *Elementary Forms* presented totemism as the most primitive form of religion. But the primitive character of this religion meant that it was easy for the social scientist to analyse, presenting in stark outline the characteristics of religious beliefs and

practices that were found in all societies. All religions, said Durkheim, belonged to 'a species of delirium'—though he insisted that all religions were suffused with 'meaning and objective significance' that was grounded in experienced reality. That is, religious beliefs were not illusory for those who sustained them: they engendered intense emotions and had practical consequences.⁵⁹

For Durkheim, religion was not defined by belief in a deity or the supernatural. The essence of religion lay in the understanding that the world was divided into sacred and profane realms, and in the organisation of a moral community joined by beliefs and practices about the sacred. Perhaps desire to control the food supply inspired totem ceremonies, but these ceremonies became associated with the special realm of the sacred by virtue of their special, non-routine character, as well as in consequence of the emotional pleasures participants derived from them (which conduced to belief that they were practically effective). And totemism was just one expression of a general social pattern: all social groups mobilised around symbols of their collective unity, and the totem was the symbol of the clan, just as the flag was the symbol of the nation-state. Accepting Spencer and Gillen's assertion that Aboriginal peoples were ignorant of the mechanism of human reproduction, Durkheim understood totem ceremonies as both creation and expression of celebrants' feelings of kinship for one another—so that society itself was the object of their worship.⁶⁰ As he wrote in his own (unsigned) review of *Elementary Forms*, published in his journal, *L'Année sociologique*, 'religion thus understood appears as consisting above all of acts which have the object of perpetu-

ally making and remaking the soul of the collectivity and of individuals'.⁶¹

In 1909 Frazer took a position on the place of religion in society that was similar to Durkheim's. Durkheim and Frazer had to a degree defined their positions in opposition. Though Frazer established relationships with the Durkheimians and made sure that review copies of his works were sent to *L'Année sociologique*, over time Durkheim and members of his school grew highly critical of Frazer, so that Frazer considered himself misinterpreted by the Durkheimians—and took Durkheim to task for according Australian totemism the status of religion.⁶² Nevertheless, the argument Frazer made in his 1909 *Psyche's Task*, and repeated in 1910 at the conclusion of *Totemism and Exogamy*, bore a family resemblance to Durkheim's (as well as to Freud's): though religion was a 'superstition', it had generally had a positive effect on the development of human institutions.⁶³ Indeed, in *Totemism and Exogamy*, Frazer intimated that he doubted that evolutionary progress was marked by progression through a series of cultural stages, each exhibiting a coherent pattern of interdependent features.⁶⁴ But the next generation of social thinkers—and generations to follow—would read Durkheim, not Frazer.

And of Durkheim's works, *Elementary Forms* has been judged the most important. It is, indeed, the most sacred of foundational, classic social scientific texts, a work that is still read by both anthropologists and sociologists—as well as others.⁶⁵ And I think it extremely significant that the book's subtitle was dropped from its English and German translations (the first of which appeared shortly after its publication), if not from its French re-is-

sues. By this token, *Elementary Forms* ceased to be a work about Australian totemism. It became a theoretical text—a book understood as Durkheim wished it understood, as a book about the essential characteristics of religion, which were identical for peoples everywhere, regardless of the material circumstances in which they lived. Thus, the status accorded *Elementary Forms* denoted a fundamental change in social scientific opinion, which had been effected through consideration of Australian Aboriginal religion: religious beliefs were no longer to be examined in order to gauge their adherents' level of evolution. And, in general, qualitative judgments about the relative evolutionary levels of the worlds' peoples would subsequently disappear from polite social scientific conversation. The practical impact of changed social scientific opinion is another matter, of course—a subject for a different paper.

ENDNOTES

¹ Spencer to Gladstone, 17 June 1877, in Gladstone Papers, British Library (GP) 44454; Spencer to Gladstone, 21 June 1879 and 23 June 1882, GP 44460.

² Note Gladstone's letter to *The Times*, December 1896, in GP 44785.

³ Spencer to Gladstone, 14 January 1874, GP 44442.

⁴ Herbert Spencer, *An Autobiography*, Otto Zeller, Osnabrück, 1966 [1904], Vol. 2, p. 254.

⁵ See the proofs of December 1873, GP 44441, and 15 January 1874 and 20 January 1874, GP 44452.

⁶ See Gladstone's draft letter to Spencer, 12 June 1874, GP 44442; the quotation is from one of Spencer's proofs, and the underlinings are those Spencer inked onto the copy he sent to Gladstone in December 1873, GP 44441.

⁷ Herbert Spencer, 'Religion and science', in *First Principles*, New York, D. Appleton, 1892 [1860], p. 16.

- ⁸ Bernard Lightman, 'Victorian sciences and religions: Discordant harmonies', *Osiris*, Vol. 16, 2001, pp. 343–66.
- ⁹ George W. Stocking, Jr, *Victorian Anthropology*, New York, Free Press, 1987, pp. 190–97.
- ¹⁰ E. B. Tylor, 'Introduction', in Friedrich Ratzel, *The History of Mankind*, London, Macmillan, 1896, p. v.
- ¹¹ Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within. The Social History of British Anthropology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 72.
- ¹² Robert A. Stafford, 'Annexing the landscapes of the past', in John M. MacKenzie (ed.) *Imperialism and the Natural World*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1990, pp. 81–2.
- ¹³ Ernst Haeckel, *The Last Link. Our Present Knowledge of the Descent of Man*, London, Adam and Charles Black, 1898, pp. 17–18.
- ¹⁴ John B. Watson, 'Psychology as the behaviorist views it', *The Psychological Review*, Vol. 20, 1913, p. 168.
- ¹⁵ Quoted in Martin S. Pernick, *The Black Stork*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 59.
- ¹⁶ J. G. Frazer, 'The origin of totemism', *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 71, January–June, 1899, p. 648.
- ¹⁷ William Howells, *Mankind So Far*, Garden City, New York, Doubleday and Company, 1947, pp. 191–92.
- ¹⁸ R. R. Marett, *Anthropology*, London, Williams and Norgate, 1912, pp. 39, 121.
- ¹⁹ Samuel Gason, *The Dieyerie Tribe of Australian Aborigines*, edited by George Isaacs, Adelaide, W. C. Cox, Government Printer, 1874, p. 11.
- ²⁰ Hilary M. Carey, *Believing in Australia*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1996, pp. 29–30, 66–68.
- ²¹ B. T. (or C. G.) Tiechermann, *Illustrative and Explanatory Notes of the Manners, Customs, Habits, and Superstitions of the Natives of South Australia*, Committee of the South Australian Wesleyan Methodist Auxiliary Missionary Society for the German Mission to the Aborigines, 1841, Adelaide, pp. 5, 10.
- ²² R. Brough Smyth, *The Aborigines of Victoria*, Melbourne, John Ferres, Government Printer, 1878, Vol. 1, pp. liv, xxxiii, liv.
- ²³ Rev. George Taplin, 'The Narrinyeri', in *The Native Tribes of South Australia*, E. S. Wigg and Son, Adelaide, 1879, p. 55.
- ²⁴ See: Lorimer Fison, 1892, quoted in Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880–1939*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1997, p. 35; A. W. Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, Macmillan, London, 1904, p. 507.
- ²⁵ Moritz Freiherr von Leonhardi, 'Preface', in Carl Strehlow, *The Aranda and Lorita Tribes of Central Australia*, edited by von Leonhardi, Part 2, Municipal Ethnological Museum, Frankfurt am Main, 1908, unpublished translation by Hans D. Oberscheidt, 1991, in the possession of the Strehlow Research Center.
- ²⁶ J. D. Woods, 'Introduction', *The Native Tribes of South Australia*, op. cit., p. xxxviii.
- ²⁷ Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia* (hereafter *Northern Tribes*), Macmillan, London, 1904, p. xiv.
- ²⁸ J. G. Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, Macmillan, London, 1910, Vol. 4, pp. 5, 27; Frazer, 'The beginnings of religion and totemism among the Australian Aborigines', *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 84, 1905, p. 162; and see Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *Native Tribes of Central Australia* (hereafter *Native Tribes*), Macmillan, London, 1899, p. 170.
- ²⁹ For one discussion of this issue, see Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, Cassell, London, 1999, pp. 9, 11.
- ³⁰ Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *Across Australia*, Macmillan, London, 1912, p. 300.
- ³¹ *Native Tribes*, p. 48.
- ³² That Spencer and Gillen's 'fully initiated' status was a pretense—as Howitt's had also been—did not escape at least one critic; von Leonhardi, 'Preface', in Strehlow, op. cit., Part 3, 1910. And see *Native Tribes*, p. v.
- ³³ *Native Tribes*, pp. 25, 26, 46, 108–9; *Northern Tribes*, p. 74; *Native Tribes*, p. 11.
- ³⁴ See A. A. Goldenweiser, 'The views of Andrew Lang and J. G. Frazer and E. Durkheim on totemism', *Anthropos*, Vol. 11, 1916, p. 953; Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p. 260.
- ³⁵ J. G. Frazer to George Macmillan, 22 April 1898, Macmillan Papers, British Library (MP) 55135.
- ³⁶ J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Macmillan, London, 1890, Vol. 2, p. 343.
- ³⁷ J. G. Frazer to George Macmillan, 8 November 1889, MP 55134.
- ³⁸ J. G. Frazer, 'The beginnings of religion and totemism among the Australian Aborigines', *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 78, 1905, p. 455; and see *Native Tribes*, pp. 265, 356, 124.
- ³⁹ Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, Vol. 4, p. 63.
- ⁴⁰ For some early assessments of the importance of Spencer and Gillen's work, see reviews of *Native*

Tribes—H. Ling Roth, *Nature*, Vol. 59, 1899, pp. 511–2; W. W. Newell, *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, Vol. 13, 1900, pp. 72–5—reviews of *Northern Tribes*—C. H. R. (Charles Hercules Read), *Man*, Vol. 4, 1904, pp. 143–4; W. I. Thomas, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 10, 1905, 700–1; N. W. T. (Northcote W. Thomas), ‘The Spencer-Gillen expedition’, *Man*, Vol. 1, 1901, pp. 82–3; Bronislaw Malinowski, Review of *Across Australia*, *Folk-Lore*, Vol. 24, 1913, pp. 278–9; and see Steven Lukes, *Émile Durkheim*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1973, p. 452 fn., which quotes Marcel Mauss’s 1900 enthusiastic review of *Native Tribes* in *L’Année sociologique*.

⁴¹ Frazer acted to prevent the British Association for the Advancement of Science from sponsoring an expedition to Central Australia to check Spencer and Gillen’s findings; see J. L. Myres to J. G. Frazer, 14 March 1909, and Frazer to Myres, 16 March 1909, MS Myres 15, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

⁴² Spencer and Gillen’s evidence figured prominently in Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by Karen E. Fields, Free Press, New York, 1995 (orig. 1912), as well as in Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, translated by James Strachey, W. W. Norton, New York, 1950 (orig. 1913).

⁴³ E. Sidney Hartland, ‘Totemism and some recent discoveries’, *Folk-Lore*, Vol. 11, 1900, pp. 57–8; Folk-Lore Society, *Notes and Queries on Totemism*, David Nutt, London, 1901.

⁴⁴ Andrew Lang, ‘J. G. Frazer’s “Totemism and Exogamy”’, *Anthropos*, Vol. 5, 1910, pp. 1092–1108; Lang, 1898, quoted in George W. Stocking, Jr, *After Tylor*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1995, p. 59.

⁴⁵ See E. S. Hartland, ‘The “high gods” of Australia’, *Folk-Lore*, Vol. 9, 1898, pp. 290–329.

⁴⁶ See Edward B. Tylor, ‘Remarks on totemism, with especial reference to some modern theories respecting it’, *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 28, 1898, pp. 138–48; see also R. R. Marett, *Tylor*, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1936, p. 156, fn; Stocking, *After Tylor*, pp. 42–4.

⁴⁷ For Frazer’s cultivation of his German-speaking audience, see his letters to George Macmillan: 5 October 1890, MP 55134, 4 June 1898, MP 55135, 26 December 1902, MP 55135.

⁴⁸ Lang, loc. cit.

⁴⁹ Others included Bernhard Ankermann, Leo Frobenius, Fritz Graebner, and Father Wilhelm Koppers.

⁵⁰ Wilhelm Schmidt, *Primitive Revelation* (a compilation of Schmidt’s writings produced from 1912 on-

wards), B. Herder Book Company, London, 1939, pp. 108, 120.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 69, 107, 21, 121; and see pp. 100–5, 162, 214–5, 286.

⁵² F. B. Jevons, ‘The place of totemism in the evolution of religion’, *Folk-Lore*, Vol. 10, 1899, p. 371.

⁵³ See E. S. Hartland, ‘Australian gods: Rejoinder’, *Folk-Lore*, Vol. 10, 1899, p. 48; Lord Avebury (John Lubbock), *Marriage, Totemism and Religion*, Longmans, Green, London, 1911, p. 19; *Native Tribes*, p. 108.

⁵⁴ Freud, op. cit., pp. 3–4, fn., italics his; and see Bronislaw Malinowski, ‘Totemism and exogamy’, in *The Early Writings of Bronislaw Malinowski*, eds Robert J. Thornton and Peter Skalník, translated by Ludwik Krzyzanowski, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993 [1911], esp. p. 280, fn. 18.

⁵⁵ Cited in Brian Morris, *Anthropological Studies of Religion*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1987, p. 71.

⁵⁶ Freud, op. cit., p. 1 and see footnote on p. 4.

⁵⁷ W. H. R. Rivers, ‘The terminology of totemism’, *Anthropos*, Vol. 9, 1914, p. 640.

⁵⁸ John R. Swanton, ‘The social and the emotional element in totemism’, *Anthropos*, Vol. 9, 1914, p. 290; see also pp. 291–5, 297.

⁵⁹ Durkheim, op. cit., pp. 88, 85.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 55.

⁶¹ Quoted in Lukes, op. cit., p. 471.

⁶² See Durkheim, op. cit., p. 88; Robert Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer: His Life and Work*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, p. 165; Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, Vol. 4, p. 100. For Frazer’s efforts to reach a French audience, see J. G. Frazer to George Macmillan, 2 May 1901, and 26 December 1902, MP 55135; Frazer to Macmillan, 26 May 1906, MP 55136.

⁶³ See Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, Vol. 4, p. 169.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 59–60.

⁶⁵ Philip Smith and Jeffrey C. Alexander, ‘Durkheim’s religious revival’, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 102, 1996, pp. 585–91.

YOU IN YOUR SMALL CORNER

THE LOVE SONG OF ALFRED J DYER: EARLY DAYS OF CHURCH MISSION SOCIETY MISSIONS TO THE ABORIGINES OF ARNHEM LAND¹

MICKEY DEWAR

In this paper I use some of the personal accounts of two Anglican missionaries to the Arnhem Land area in the early twentieth century to gain an understanding into their perspectives and motivations. It is a story of love; the love that brought these missionaries to north Australia, and the relationship they shared.

Permanent European settlement of the Northern Territory took place more than three quarters of a century after the settlement of New South Wales. The townsite at Port Darwin was surveyed in 1869 and was 'the last of the colonial capitals to be established, and ... the only one to lie in the tropics'.² Settlers in the Northern Territory were both informed by experiences of other settlers elsewhere in Australia, and of the brief but consistent history of failure of European settlement in the region.³ There was a distinct parallel between the experiences of permanent European settlement and the role of Christian evangelical missionary work in the region. Missionary work in the Top End proceeded relatively late in Australian missionary history and similarly, followed a string of unsuccessful attempts.⁴

Elsewhere in Australia the experience of European settlement had accompanied

loss of life for Aboriginal people through usurpation of resources and spread of disease and so it was widely believed that Aboriginal people were dying out. Missionary work was a sacred obligation for Australian men and women of Christian good will to take up work to disseminate God's message to those who had not heard it, and might not ever have the opportunity to do so.

*The great question for Australia
was how to deal with the masses of
heathen who were within our borders ... it would not be long before
the last of the blackfellows turned
his face to mother earth, and gave
back his soul to God who gave it.
Any work ... might be merely
smoothing the pillow of a dying race;
but that pillow should be smoothed
...*⁵

There had been some nineteenth-century missionary activity on the north coast of the Northern Territory, but it had not been very enduring. Jesuit missionaries established a mission at Rapid Creek (now Darwin) in 1882 which was soon abandoned, and then later three separate stations at Daly River between 1886 and 1891

but by 1899 none were operational. Catholic missions in the Territory ceased temporarily until 1906 when Father Gsell (later Bishop) arrived to establish Our Lady Star of the Sea mission to the Tiwi at Bathurst Island. The Protestant missionaries in the Top End had not been any more successful. An Anglican mission station, 'Kalparloo' ('Coparlgo', 'Kapalgo'), was established in 1899 in the Alligator Rivers region⁶ but after a decade or so, little remained.⁷

The next attempt by the Anglicans was to prove more successful. The Bishop of Carpentaria, Gilbert White, suggested the Church Missionary Association of Victoria (CMS), the evangelical arm of the Anglican Church, found a mission on Roper River. In 1908 a party sailed from Melbourne for the Roper via Thursday Island, Yarrabah, Mapoon and Mitchell River missions and: 'Landed at Roper River ... homesick but full of love for the poor degraded blacks around us.'⁸

The missionaries had to build the mission from a completely (from their perspective at least) virgin site. They had to construct the dormitories, kitchen, church, outbuildings. They had to establish horticultural gardens for a food supply. They hoped to begin running cattle and at the same time intended the Roper site to function as a base for further evangelical missionary incursion into Arnhem Land.⁹ They called it, 'The Gospel of Work' and together with the 'Gospel of Love' this formed the two planks for their aim of 'protecting and uplifting ... the black race in Northern Australia'.¹⁰

But while the Aboriginal people were at home, secure in their physical, spiritual and cultural ways of life that had existed for time untold, life at Roper for the mis-

sionaries was isolated and difficult. Physically and emotionally the conditions were tough. At the same time, the vigour of Aboriginal people and culture was paradoxical to the missionaries. Their positive observations of the society they encountered contradicted the rhetoric. 'A Doomed Race ... Their days are numbered. They are a strong race, fine and active, and when working develop wonderfully'.¹¹ This was in something of a contrast to the personal experiences of the missionaries themselves; many of the journal entries and letters contain descriptions of physical ailments such as tropical ulcers, sores, fever and so on, suffered by the missionaries themselves.

Missionary society formed a tiny enclave in a world and people that they could only comprehend in terms of their own culture and experience. As the missionaries struggled to build a little outpost of empire at the Roper, their hopes lay with the children:

*In my class I have such nice little lads. They are called Campbell, Percy and Wilfred. We have great talks and songs together, and when I have coaxed them to have a good wash each day their little black bodies fairly shine. They sit around me with wonder and amazement in their eyes, while I read them Bible Stories and tell them about the dear Lord Jesus ... I wish we had a cricket set, we could have such grand games ...*¹²

The missionary numbers were small, their resources minimal and their knowledge of the people and environment in which they were working, very limited. As a consequence of their isolation, their

language, behaviour and custom took on an exaggerated formality, no doubt as a mechanism of mediating control between individuals, but also as a way of defining difference and cultural solidarity.

Into this scenario then, comes Miss Mary Crome (mostly called 'Katie') who arrived at the Roper to begin work on the mission just five years after the station had begun. At 39 years of age, Katie was mature and skilled; she had trained as a nurse and was an excellent seamstress who loved gardening. There are references to her acerbity of conversation, so perhaps she had been disappointed by her lack of lover or family. By evidence of her own account and others, she was skilled and practical, moral and supportive of women, particularly with regard to issues of domestic violence or health and child rearing.

Some years later, in 1915, Alf Dyer arrived at the mission. Alf was in his late twenties ten years younger than Katie. Like Katie, Alf had no problem with faith; he was called directly and literally by God; his difficulties only arose when communicating His directions to the Church authorities. Alf was called to serve first in Africa, then in northern Australia, but the CMS, perhaps wary of such witness, did not immediately respond to Alf's message. In all, he applied unsuccessfully at least four times before becoming accepted and it took many attempts before his final and successful ordination. After a considerable career in the field, he was made a lay reader at Christ Church in Darwin,¹³ deacon in 1927 and then ordained to the priesthood the following year.¹⁴ Dyer's faith and conviction in a direct call from God was never challenged by the CMS authorities, but it is clear that the hesitation they showed in appointing him, indic-

ated they suspected a certain erraticism of personality.

* * *

Katie had arrived in 1913 to the little hamlet on the low-lying banks of the crocodile-infested Roper River.¹⁵ Although remote, a police station at Roper Bar and pastoral leases adjacent to the mission lease meant that Europeans were not unknown in the district. The number of Aboriginal inhabitants at the mission station varied from a handful to number in hundreds depending on seasonality, cultural obligations, hunting, and other causes external to, and largely unrecognised by the missionaries. Amenities on the mission station were basic. The physical layout of the mission included the church, single room huts for accommodation, kitchen/dining facility and larger huts which were dormitories for children from the community who were fed and accommodated at the mission away from their families. In the five years of operation before Katie's arrival, the station had nearly faltered due to problems of infighting amongst staff. It was somewhat regenerated by the presence of a new Superintendent, Hubert Warren who had arrived only a little earlier than had Katie that same year.

Although it is reasonable to refer to Roper River as a community, it is apparent from descriptions that there were different social groupings who existed more or less independently. One section comprised the white mission staff. Their language was English. They lived in very basic accommodation on the mission station. Another discrete group were those Aboriginal people in a position of proximity and trust with the mission and staff. They were given 'Christian' names, Percy, Wilfred and so on. The missionaries addressed

them in English, although this was clearly not their first language. They did not seem to have been given accommodation at the mission and at this stage, were not necessarily converts to Christianity, although they did provide practical assistance to the mission staff on the day-to-day running of the mission and through mediation with the camp. The final group consisted of the 'camp' Aborigines. They did not usually come into the mission unless it was a holiday or celebration day of some kind (such as Christmas). They sometimes called into the mission or were brought in by their friends or family, when they were ill. Otherwise, missionary interaction with the 'camp' people took place in the camp.¹⁶ Missionaries visited the camp, usually with the children visiting families, but sometimes with each other, to provide access to Christian spiritual fellowship or medical assistance. The language spoken by the missionaries to the 'camp' people was pigeon English. There were at least three distinct groups within the mission, each with their own distinctive languages of interaction, accommodation and physical space. Much of the interaction was taken up with negotiating these boundaries.

But there were other bounded spaces evident; the world of Roper River was also spiritually delineated. In this period of missionary endeavour, religion for the missionaries was a force that directed not only beliefs, but also day-to-day activities. Although clearly practical, Katie's accounts are full of cooking, dressmaking, nursing and teaching basic literacy, the predominating sense of her personality is her extreme piety. She mediated every experience through her spiritual beliefs.

*Nov 23rd [1913] Seven weeks today since I arrived here and it has been such a quiet but blessed day. There is such a joy in being here to try to tell of Jesus and His wonderful love. If the children will only take in & really realise His love. My heart does ache for the poor old woman in the camp – so sad and desolate no idea of love & Jesus loves her & wants her [and] died for her... Mon Nov 24th Attended to the sick ones today. Poor Mary looks dreadfully ill & I don't know how to speak to her but I told her over and over again Jesus loved Mary and wanted her... The children are very lovable & so funny at times. I do want to have the great love & compassion for these people to love them into the kingdom to stretch out for them God made me faithful & true & have His way in me for them.*¹⁷

This is an area of surprising commonality between the two, both those ministering and those ministered to, that they were operating in a climate where God and the spiritual world was invested in every encounter with every animate and inanimate object. Aboriginal people as a result of their own encompassing spirituality, and this is indicated by their reluctance to engage with Christianity, were clearly aware of the implications of adopting another epistemology. Initially at least, the Christian missionaries appeared less aware¹⁸ and Katie often expressed disappointment at the failure to convert.

The physical and social structure was not fixed, however, since the whole point of the missionary operation was to convert Aboriginal people to Christianity and to settle people within a village-style com-

munity. Accordingly, there had to be some movements to enable this to occur. Like pieces around a chessboard there was one particular move that occurred in nearly every game play.

Thurs 8th [1913] This morning several of the smaller girls said they were going to run away. So after talking it over we decided if they were going, they were to be made to leave their things. Mr Joynt said he had found it [to] answer very well in the early days. They said they did not want to go but afterwards got together & talked it over & went. They are in the camp tonight. Poor little things I feel so sorry for them. It is just a bush hunger seems to come over them & they want to get away. How helpless one feels & can do nothing but pray that God will keep them & in His time & way bring them back here to learn to love & serve Him. Had the women for their reading lesson today expected they would have forgotten what they had learned but they had not & did very well. I do long for them to understand God's word ... ¹⁹

It is not useful here to enumerate the number of times this account is repeated in the writings of Katie Crome, but it was an ongoing problem for the missionaries. The above narration does explain a number of attitudinal values held by both the missionaries and the Aboriginal people. It was difficult for the missionaries to demonstrate the benefits of conversion to the children. Even the first stage of acceptance meant relinquishing family, social and community life and living in a dormitory. In addition, such a move left the

individual subject to missionary disciplines for infractions, and this could include deprivation of treats, or at a more severe level, head shaving, temporary confinement or being physically beaten. On the other hand, children became the focus for sustained interest by the missionaries, they received a more regular food supply and they gained access to material objects. When the attractions on either side are weighed in the balance, it is less surprising that the children moved between camp and mission so frequently. Katie spent much of her journal entries recording the departures and arrivals between camp and mission and correspondingly alternating between hope and disappointment:

Mon Jan 17th [1914] Have had a rather quiet day. My women went walkabout so was not able to give them their reading lesson. I was very tempted today to a lack of love... Tues Jan 18th [1914] Great excitement today Bet Bet and Katie came back ... ²⁰

Limits and boundaries were extremely important to maintain order and to separate the godly from the ungodly. 'Rightly or wrongly' as Dick Harris observed, 'We missionaries were always a "separate people".' ²¹ Not only was it necessary to maintain a daily routine, rung in by a bell before dawn calling people to work, but in order to demonstrate the difference between European and Aboriginal society. After one absconding, the Superintendent, Hubert Warren decided that the girls should be locked in the bathroom all day. Katie recorded, 'They did not seem very unhappy about it. It is hard to know what to do. They must be punished or we could not maintain discipline'. It must have been

extremely difficult to communicate either punishment or disapproval. The next day the girls absconded again, 'It was a great shock,' Katie wrote.²² Later she added, when several of the boys also ran away, 'They do not seem at all sorry for running away & did not want to come back'.²³

There is a strong indication that 'camp' was seen as undesirable and Katie and other staff appear to have successfully communicated this to some of the mission Aboriginal girls. After one absconding, Katie noted, 'They got the strap & are to be treated like camp girls for a week'.²⁴ For the mission staff, debating the issue of how to communicate the disapproval of the children's rejection of the mission was ongoing, complex and unsuccessful. Discussion generally focussed on methods of coercion. Interestingly there appears to have been little attempt to entice the children through access to material objects or food. As previously noted, in one instance the staff refused to let the children take some of the objects given to them by the mission when running away, but apart from that single incident, little additional incentive was provided. Presumably this was because the missionaries believed that the 'Gospel of Work' and Christian fellowship, would be incentive enough. This principle did not necessarily apply to adults although both Katie and Alf disapproved of either the supply of tobacco or withholding of food to encourage religious attendance. Katie wrote to Alf in 1923 that she could not tolerate working under a policy that refused a nursing mother tea, cocoa or milk on the basis that 'she was a camp woman ... & that she could not have any priviledges [sic]'.²⁵ Within the bounded spaces then, there were differing codes of behaviour for children and adults.

It was a tacit acknowledgement that there was little likelihood of Christian conversion when dealing with adults from the camp. Children simultaneously offered more hope and at the same time, could be physically removed from the camp.

But it was also difficult for the missionaries internally. The relentless proximity to their fellows and isolation from any other non-Aboriginal contact meant that they too were bounded within the geographical space of the station. In the period that Warren was Superintendent he organised a mechanism for escape. A small and basic accommodation was set up about sixteen kilometres away at a place they called Mission Gorge. The hut was some hours' walk from the main mission station and provided a holiday retreat from everyday mission life. At intervals, staff members and children, would relocate, perhaps for a week at a time, apart from the mission station and its routine. The children would run messages between the two residences and commodities were sent to those at Mission Gorge.

Katie found the whole experience of relocation from the mission space very pleasurable although, characteristically, she initially did not at first want to leave the main station. But the physical act of being away, once she had come to terms with the idea, thrilled Katie. On the first evening she walked to the top of the hill '& had a distant view of the Mission Stn'. The next afternoon they returned after preparing the fire for the next day to find two messengers from the main station with 'notes & tomatoes milk and berries etc. It was quite exciting & there are more messengers to follow'. Not only did the Mission Gorge hut offer another view of the mission, there were opportunities for notes

and messages and to act in ways that were not usual at the mission station. Katie went fishing and enthusiastically recorded catches of fish and a freshwater cray. She slept in the afternoon for three hours. Again, Katie went to the top of the hill to see the 'splendid view of the mission'. The missionaries themselves also needed to escape. They too oscillated between the station and another place. By the end of the first week, Katie was longing to be home. Yet when the party arrived with the girls and others on horseback, Katie wrote, 'It seemed more than I could stand & did not feel a bit glad to see them'.²⁶ Spatial boundaries, limitations and barriers seem to constrain Katie almost completely. So totally enmeshed was she within the boundaries, she could not understand how the Aboriginal people could resist them.

The other metaphor that defined interaction, was the duality of light and dark. This, like the notion of bounded space, was employed to delineate between the missionaries and their flock. Official reports, particularly of the early days of the Roper River mission, repeatedly used this metaphor. Within the writing that targeted the lay audience, the writers referred to the Aborigines as the 'Blacks', and used terms like 'spiritual darkness' or 'darkness and awful filthiness'.²⁷ The Christian Fellowship shared by the missionaries as part of their routine was called the 'Daily Light'. Insofar as this kind of generalisation can be made, institutional or official writing depicted a message of binary simplicity, of light (good, Christian and clean) and dark (bad, heathen and dirty).

The general assumption of the 'darkness' and 'superstition' of the Aboriginal people was probably widespread and not confined to the missionary experience.²⁸

The intimacy of the mission station and close contact with Aboriginal people, in fact, elicits a more complex response from individuals. Katie wrote of her first attendance at the birth of an Aboriginal baby:

*The baby arrived at about 11pm.
The 1st black baby I have ever seen
born – poor little thing such a little
girl & not very much different to a
white baby & in fact it does not look
quite as puffy & not showing red
[She] looks better than some white
ones.*²⁹

Katie could only express her response to the infant in terms of her colour or size. How universal is the assumption that darkness means dirt? Dyer reported a conversation following Katie working in the garden at Oenpelli, 'Is she a white lady? She makes her hands like ours.'³⁰ Was the comment about Katie dealing with colour or with the issue of what might be seen by the Aboriginal people as atypical work for a non-Aboriginal woman? Christian and heathen, light and dark, clean and dirty, white and black, mission and camp, male and female, child and adult: all these binary divisions served to distance and constrain the people within the community. That such images were prevalent in the official mission literature suggests that they would have been powerful predeterminates and predictive in the modes of contact.

Katie emerges as a practical loving person, whose chief outlet for that love was her spirituality. Part of the sadness and misunderstandings that arose in her relationship to the Aboriginal people, seem to have arisen because of their rejection of settled life at the mission and the Christian religion. Equally, she appeared,

at least in the early stages of her time at Roper, to be completely unaware that the Aboriginal people themselves had any religious or spiritual obligations that might make them reluctant converts or absentees from mission life. At the same time, Katie was not totally oblivious to the problems of transmission of the Christian message in an Aboriginal context. At one point, when an elderly woman called Maggie was dying she noted, 'Yesterday she [Maggie] told Ada she *saveyed* [sic] Jesus loves her. It is so hard to know because it has not brought any brightness or change in their lives'.³¹

Katie Crome achieved her own life change, however, after Alf Dyer's arrival at the Roper. There are hints that Katie was looking to give love when she arrived. She recorded the comparatively few social events of the mission station, the picnics and riding excursions with hopeful enthusiasm. Yet after describing a group of mission people going off on an excursion Katie wrote wistfully, 'Sometimes I feel very lonely but oh I would not have it different with all the disappointments. It is such a privilege.'³² Anglican historian John Harris notes: 'She particularly enjoyed being rowed down the river by Hubert Warren in his single days, but he was to marry another'.³³ So, as it turns out, was Katie.

The courtship between Alf Dyer and Katie Crome must have been difficult. The intricate social mechanisms employed to separate the missionaries from the Aborigines, also operated to separate male and female missionary staff. They did not, for example, address each other by their first name, on any occasion. Bishop of Carpentaria, Gilbert White, cosmopolitan and urbane, endeavored to convince female

staff that they were allowed into male quarters if any of the men required nursing, but without much success. Even between female staff formality was observed. In her private journal, Katie unfailingly referred to her colleagues as 'Miss Hill' and 'Miss Tinney'. That Aboriginal people associated with the mission were called by their 'first' names is another clue to the barriers and implied social status separating the groups.

Obstacles arose almost as soon as the couple had decided to spend their lives together. The bureaucracy of the CMS took over and they had to seek permission from the Board to marry. The Board was reluctant to give it because they advised Alf that Katie was too old. The couple were not allowed any time alone and another staff member was always required to be present as chaperon. At about the same time, Katie went south on furlough. The couple corresponded enthusiastically but because of the circumstances, the letters often took months to reach their destination. Their letters illustrate their love and passion but at the same time are excellent accounts of their daily life. Finally they were together at the same time and place, Roper River mission, and in May 1917 a day was scheduled for the marriage to take place. Unfortunately Warren woke up sick and asked Alf and Katie to put it off until he felt better. Alf went out to work in the garden but came in to lunch, where they had to eat the wedding breakfast, as the food would not keep. Just as they were eating, Warren walked in with a blanket over his head and said he would marry them. The ceremony took place outside, under a tree. Alf and Katie then rode to Mission Gorge and spent a week alone in the hut for their honeymoon.³⁴

Dick Harris who met them later in their lives described them as follows:

*Rev AJ and Mrs Dyer were a rather unique couple. Mr Dyer 'Alf' ... was a delightful personality and obviously a man of God – 46 years of age of slight built and medium height – a very close clipped head and fair complexion... Reckless to a degree, with a 'try anything once' attitude towards his practical work. Mrs Dyer ... or 'Katie' ... was a remarkable woman of God – trained as a seamstress and in midwifery – was scrupulous, meticulous and economical ... Mrs Dyer was ten years senior to her husband, whom she adored ... The Dyers did not enjoy robust health and the only way they could keep going was by taking three or four days complete rest in bed ...*³⁵

Alf Dyer was a kind of holy fool who appeared to blunder through life often at odds with people but speaking a kind of truth. At times he was a great advocate of corporal punishment for Aboriginal people who transgressed mission or secular law. He used to grimace and make funny faces or jump out and startle people as a joke. In the 1930s in an interview with southern journalists about a proposal for missionary involvement to investigate some deaths in Arnhem Land, possibly forestalling a punitive expedition, he outlined his strategy for defusing tension by taking a toy squeaker to make people laugh.³⁶ A person who had known him well described him to me in unflattering terms, stressing the irritating nature of his personality.³⁷ This was the man of Katie Crome's

dreams and the face of first CMS missionary contact at Groote Eylandt.

What metaphors did Alf Dyer use to make sense of his worldview? Like Katie, all his actions and beliefs were driven by a passionate conviction in Christianity. As eccentric a free spirit as Dyer appeared to be, he was nonetheless subject to the same kinds of stresses of mission life as the others. Dyer roamed freely through all spaces seemingly free from the liminal boundaries that constrained his fellows but sought solace in the high places. Dyer wrote: 'At Roper & Oenpelli I always loved to go to the Mt [Mountain] top to pray and watch the sun go down on your problems to sing some hymns, & watch the stars come out & think what a Father you had ...'³⁸ Connie Bush, who grew up on the CMS mission at Groote Eylandt told me that whenever they saw lights at night, some of the children might become afraid, but the older children would say, 'Don't be frightened; it's just Mr Dyer praying.'³⁹

Like the hill at Mission Gorge, climbing up offered both solitude and another perspective on mission life. About a kilometre away from Oenpelli mission is a rocky outcrop rising above the plains called Arrkuluk which is a sacred site for the Aboriginal people of the region. The focal point of the site is on the top of the hill and it is associated with a goose dreaming. The area around the base of the hill is still used for ceremonial activities.⁴⁰ This is the place where Dyer would climb to pray and gain a new perspective on things. He wrote:

Argoolook, a hill 600 feet high became my choice as it was near the station and easy to climb and the station lay at my feet. The difficulties seemed so little then and the

*Universe above so vast and God so Almighty, who calleth the stars by names. I put a big cross on the top of the rock and bolted it together with an iron bolt but lightning split it to pieces. I suppose the powers of darkness hate the cross, so I put up another with a wooden pin in and that was standing when I left*⁴¹

George Chaloupka, pre-eminent rock art expert recorded an image near the Oenpelli site of: 'A rock painting of a missionary with a sharp-featured face and upraised arm'. Dr Chaloupka said that this image has been identified as that of Dyer.⁴² Significantly though, he also adds that this portrait 'heralds ... the last era of contact' in rock art.⁴³ For this is the last period that Aboriginal people in the area continued to record contemporary events and images in rock art. The missionaries were more successful than they perhaps realised initially.

Attempts to convert Aboriginal people in Arnhem Land to Christianity by the CMS took place within an active program of evangelism for much of the twentieth century. In the initial years, however, the geographical, educational, philosophical and experiential differences between missionary field staff and the Board led to a highly individualised approach to the work. But in the process the missionaries became active agents for a settled village lifestyle. As the Berndts succinctly put it:

The basic intention was to change the socio-cultural systems and the individual lives of the people with whom they worked. It was not simply to Christianise them, because Christianisation was seen as inseparable from the trapping of the

*overall life-style in which the missionaries themselves lived ...*⁴⁴

In the push to evangelise and institute a village settlement lifestyle, both missionaries and Aborigines occupied a continually negotiated space, marked by mutual isolation. The repeated binary images used by the missionaries, both in their official and personal writing, of light and darkness, mission and camp, hills and plains, white and black, God and the devil, civilisation and nature, reveal an unconscious recognition of the disparity and mutual exclusiveness of the two groups. In the writings of both Katie Crome and Alf Dyer, it can be seen that each group had a completely separate agenda. Perhaps the most striking image of the encounters is that of Dyer, climbing to the top of Arrkuluk to look down on the mission from afar. In his prayers and meditations, he erected the cross with the iron support that was immediately struck by lightning. Dyer was completely unaware that the space, which he saw as God's alone, was already occupied and continues to be occupied by, the spiritual elements of the Aboriginal people he came to minister to.⁴⁵

No one could doubt the piety, sincerity and industry that Katie Crome and Alf Dyer brought to the people they ministered to. But they were also aware of the implications of the strong cultural agenda. As John Harris noted: 'Christian faith was not distinguished from Western lifestyle and CMS was, like the Catholic and Methodist missionary organisations, engaged in social change ...'⁴⁶ Although Dyer saw the introduction of work for payment as a benefit, he deplored that the wages were often spent on gambling or alcohol.⁴⁷ Dyer recognised the problem of introduced disease, but argued that this meant that

'our medical help' was therefore essential.⁴⁸ Without any apparent irony at all, he observed: 'I hope the Government does something to see they bank some of the money for a home & their old age ... What a difference modern man can make in the life of a native who never gambled & only drank water!'

The introduction of dormitory accommodation, weakening of the promise wife system, use of written and spoken English, village settlement and so on, were powerful determinants in the longer-term process to subsume the Arnhem Land Aboriginal people within an Anglo-economic and social model. These changes, implemented throughout the first half of the twentieth century, span the period covered in this paper. Alf and Katie served in Arnhem Land until the decade of the 1930s, when Katie became ill and they had to travel south to Sydney. After seventeen years of loving marriage, Katie died of cancer in 1940. Alf remarried in 1949. He died in 1968 as a result of a car accident.⁴⁹

Through the writings of individual missionaries, pictures of real people emerge with idiosyncrasies and feelings. What are less clear are the pictures of the individual Aboriginal people. It is a cliché to say that the two groups were worlds apart, but, in the early period at least, I think it is reasonable to assume that the missionaries and the Aborigines remained, at times well loved, but ultimately, alien to each other.

NOTES ON APPROACH

I returned to this topic of a history of missionary endeavour in Arnhem Land⁵⁰ after research on a number of unrelated

projects. Coming back to topics where you have done a lot of work can be both familiar and off-putting. In my earlier research I was looking for the big picture. Arnhem Land is a big geographical area and missionary incursion highly significant in terms of contact history. Previously I had been looking for issues of commonality, sweeping experiences, policies, legislation and major movements. For this paper I chose a more micro approach.

Arguably policy for missionary endeavour in Arnhem Land, particularly in the period prior to World War Two, was unformed and haphazard.⁵¹ The reality was that it was difficult to find individuals, with both adequate experience and appropriate religious conviction, to go to remote localities in Arnhem Land charged with the task of, not only conversion to Christian spirituality, but settled agrarian lifestyle as well. It was intended at Roper River station, for example, that the 'mission should be industrial and agricultural as well as educational and spiritual'.⁵² The missionaries might number five or six, in a larger community of, at times perhaps two hundred or more. The mechanism for the administration of the mission, often located in a southern capital, was administered by people who might never have even been to Arnhem Land or have any experience of the Aboriginal people who lived there. As Dick Harris noted: 'Our Society ... appoints men to the key position of Secretary to Aborigines Department who have no practical experience on the missions.'⁵³ The policy makers and the practitioners, were mostly worlds apart.

The Anglican Church has been at times defensive about the role of the missions in north Australia, seeing them as the target for 'ill informed and unwarranted criti-

cism'.⁵⁴ I did not want to look at the role of missions in north Australia as a whole, but rather to look closely at one or two, specifically the writings of Alf Dyer and Katie Crome. I doubt whether it is possible to then extrapolate this evidence into that of missionaries elsewhere or in other periods of work. But in the writing, particularly in their use of metaphor to describe their conditions, it is possible to see through Alf and Katie, aspects of the missionary worldview at that time.

I chose Alf Dyer and Katie Crome not simply because of their engaging eccentricity. These two form a useful study for a number of reasons. Firstly, they began work at the crucial first contact stage of missionary endeavour. Later missionary work would be less individually contemplative and more controlled in terms of transmission and persuasion to Christian settlement and spirituality. The second reason they are an interesting study is because they served at a number of sites controlled by the CMS in Arnhem Land. Another reason they provide a valuable perspective, is because Katie Crome came to missionary work of her own volition and not as partner for a male missionary and their writings represent an opportunity to examine their accounts from a cross-gender perspective. In addition, their views are well represented. Alf Dyer, particularly, wrote a great deal about his time in the field and whenever apart, they wrote long letters to each other that included a lot of information about their daily life. Finally, they provide evidence of the individual impact of missionary work, rather than attempting to generalise the cultural impact upon Aboriginal people as a whole.

ENDNOTES

¹ I am most grateful to the following people for assistance with the development of this paper: at the Church Missionary Society in Sydney, Canon Dr David Claydon, and in Darwin, the Reverend Barry Butler; at the Northern Territory Archives Service thanks to Search Room staff Francoise Barr and Kathy Flint; at the Northern Territory Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, thanks to Registrar Barry Renshaw. Thanks also to my colleagues at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Pina Giuliani, George Chaloupka and Peter Spillett. Finally, to Herbert and Valmae Freilich, the Freilich Foundation and the Humanities Research Centre, The Australian National University, for sponsoring the conference where this paper was first presented.

² Kathy De La Rue, *The Evolution of Darwin, 1869-1911*, Darwin, Charles Darwin University Press, 2004, p. 1.

³ De La Rue notes that the settlement started in 1869 that was to become the modern city of Darwin was the fifth attempt by Europeans to settle the north coast of Australia, *The Evolution of Darwin*, p. 1.

⁴ See for example J. Woolmington, *Early Christian missions to the Australian Aborigines – Study in failure*, PhD thesis, University of New England, 1979.

⁵ *Argus*, 22 November 1906, p. 8.

⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 10 May 1901; 28 June 1901.

⁷ When Baldwin Spencer visited the site in 1911, he did not note much apart from the name, W. Baldwin Spencer, 1928, *Wandering in Wild Australia*, London, MacMillan, 2 vols, p. 855.

⁸ R. D. Joynt, *Ten Years' Work at the Roper River Mission Station Northern Territory Australia*, Melbourne, Church Missionary Society, Victorian Branch, 1918, pp. 3, 7.

⁹ C. Sharp, 'Extracts from a letter from Mr. Sharp', *The Aborigine*, 3, 1909, p. 10.

¹⁰ R. D. Joynt, *Ten Years' Work at the Roper River Mission Station Northern Territory Australia*, Melbourne, Church Missionary Society, Victorian Branch, 1918, pp. 3, 7.

¹¹ R. D. Joynt, *Ten Years' Work at the Roper River Mission Station Northern Territory Australia*, Melbourne, Church Missionary Society, Victorian Branch, 1918, pp. 6, 7.

¹² R. D. Joynt, 'Extracts from Mr Joynt's letter, Roper River 27 July 1909', *The Aborigine*, 3, 1909, p. 11.

- ¹³ Peter Spillett, Christ Church Darwin, NT: An illustrated history from the days of early settlement, Darwin, Christ Church Rectory, n.d. c. 1960, pp. 24–5.
- ¹⁴ Biographical details on Alf Dyer and Mary Crome, excluding original sources cited separately are from Keith Cole, *Oenpelli Pioneer: A Biography of the Reverend Alfred John Dyer Pioneer Missionary Among the Aborigines in Arnhem Land and Founder of the Oenpelli Mission*, Melbourne, Church Missionary Historical Publications, 1972; and also Keith Cole, 'Dyer, Alfred John', pp. 84–86 and 'Crome (later Dyer) Mary Catherine' p. 69, David Carment, Robyn Maynard, Alan Powell (eds), *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography*, Darwin, Northern Territory University Press, Vol. 1, 96 pp.
- ¹⁵ The Roper Station was relocated to higher ground to, what has become known since 1968, Ngukurr following severe floods in 1940 when the community was inundated.
- ¹⁶ For example, Mary went 'across to the camp with Mr Warren' to check on the welfare of the people there and noted one baby who was not doing well. This baby was brought into the mission the next day 7–8 May 1914. Mary 'went over to the camp with medicine' 25 July 1914. On 9 August 1914, Mary attended the 'camp service' when Miss Tinney had a bad sore throat. Journal of Mary Crome, Northern Territory Archives Service (NTAS) NTRS 693/1.
- ¹⁷ Crome, op. cit., 23–24 November 1913.
- ¹⁸ This was not peculiar to Mary Crome though. 'It is probably true to say that most of the early missionaries did not recognize Aboriginal ritual and mythology as being religious. If they did, it was certainly not in the same way they categorized Christianity. Nevertheless, they regarded it as a force to be reckoned with ...' Ronald M. Berndt and Catherine H. Berndt, 'Body and soul: more than an episode!' in Tony Swain and Deborah Bird Rose (eds), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions: Ethnographic and Historical Studies*, Bedford Park, Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1988, p. 48.
- ¹⁹ Crome, op. cit., 8 [December 1913].
- ²⁰ Crome, op. cit., 17–18 January 1914.
- ²¹ Dick Harris, 'Rev Canon G. R. Harris CMS Missionary in Northern Australia 1929–65', NTAS NTRS 694, p. 86.
- ²² Crome, op. cit., 1–2 May 1914.
- ²³ Crome, op. cit., 4 May 1914.
- ²⁴ Crome, op. cit., 26 July 1914.
- ²⁵ Dyer, Rev. Alfred J., letter Mary Dyer to Alf Dyer, 17 March 1923, ms, NTAS NTRS 693.
- ²⁶ Crome, op. cit., 7–18 September 1914.
- ²⁷ See for example, *The Aborigine*, 1, 1908, p. 4; *The Aborigine*, 3, 1909, p. 11; R. D. Joynt, *Ten Years' Work at the Roper River Mission Station Northern Territory Australia*, Melbourne, Church Missionary Society, Victorian Branch, 1918.
- ²⁸ See for the example, the kind of observations in *The Australian Stone Age Men: A Black People Ask for a Fair Deal in a Fair Country*, n.d., anon, p. 9, 'Their Religion. It is a low form. They seem to worship the things God has created ... They know and fear the Devil Devil, and evil spirits. They are very superstitious; they use the magic bone which is sometimes called the death bone ... A person may be sung dead by one of his own tribe' in Cole, NTAS NTRS 694.
- ²⁹ Crome, op. cit., 15 January 1914.
- ³⁰ Alf Dyer, 'Early days at Oenpelli Mission, East Alligator River', NTAS, p. 27, NTRS 693/P1.
- ³¹ Crome, op. cit., 7 July 1914.
- ³² Crome, op. cit., 17 October 1914.
- ³³ John Harris, *One Blood*, Sutherland, NSW, Albattross Books, 1994, p. 713.
- ³⁴ Cole, op. cit., pp. 30–1.
- ³⁵ Dick Harris, op. cit., p. 23.
- ³⁶ Writer Andrew McMillan offers an interesting perspective on Dyer's comments: 'I can relate to his use of a tin squeaker. On a couple of occasions on the Warumpi Band's *Big name no blankets* tour in 1985 potential bloodshed was averted when I broke into a Janis Joplin-inspired falsetto 'Oh Lordy, won't you buy me a diesoline Toyota; All my friends have got Land Cruisers; And this old ute she's got a busted motor.' Laughing at a white loony certainly eased the tension among guys who were ready to tear each other apart'. Andrew McMillan, *An Intruder's Guide to East Arnhem Land*, Potts Point, Duffy and Snellgrove, 2001, p. 138.
- ³⁷ Between about 1984 and 1994 I undertook research on Arnhem Land and events which involved interviews with Fred Gray, founder of Umbakumba community on Groote Eylandt but who knew Dyer after they met in 1934. Fred Gray, a gentle serious man, found Alf Dyer to be highly eccentric and extremely annoying. This estimation is probably confirmed by the CMS's initial hesitation in accepting him for missionary work since he was so dedicated and qualified.
- ³⁸ Dyer, 'Description of first ...' p. 82.
- ³⁹ Connie Bush was brought up at Groote Eylandt. She was uncompromising in her condemnation of aspects of the mission administration of the 'Half-caste' station at Emerald River. She told me stories of systematic cruelty and abuse by some staff mem-

bers (although not the Warrens or the Dyers whom she adored), that are supported by other accounts of the Groote Eylandt station at the time. Typescript of interview with Connie Bush, 21 June 1987, and informal conversation with the author; see also Bill Harney's description of first meeting his wife to be. 'As I watched those children and girls playing about the mission, it seemed to me that a terrible thing that these people should have been taken away from their parents ... The first time I saw my wife, Linda, she and other girls were hauling on a rope, dragging a jinker that carried a log of cypress timber for the sawmill.' W. E. Harney, *North of 23°*, Sydney, Australasian Publishing Co, n.d., p. 155. Connie herself was not immune from the ideological construct of the missions though. In a letter to Mr and Mrs Dyer she, ever the feminist, wrote: 'We need your prayers, and those of your friends to make these people give up their evil ways, especially the little girls who are taken for wives.' Letter to Mr and Mrs Dyer, from Constance Turner, Groote Eylandt, 7 December 1938, quoted in 'The Story of Groote Eylandt', NTAS NTRS 693.

⁴⁰ Barry Renshaw, Registrar, Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, email to the author, 21 November 2001.

⁴¹ Dyer, 'Early days ...', Dick Harris also reported that he 'found myself, quite often, particularly on Saturday afternoon or Sundays, climbing Argulug, simply "to get away from things" and to spend an hour or so – and sometimes hours – as a quiet time'. Dick Harris, op. cit., p. 28.

⁴² George Chaloupka, pers. comm. 3 December 2001.

⁴³ George Chaloupka, *Journey in Time*, Chatswood, Reed Publishing, 1993, p. 203.

⁴⁴ Berndt and Berndt, op. cit., p. 45.

⁴⁵ It is difficult to understand exactly how missionaries such as Dyer or Mary Crome viewed the Aboriginal belief system. There was respect for objects associated with ritual, particularly funerary. Dyer went to some lengths to record Aboriginal creation stories, but they seem to have been accorded the kind of status Europeans would give to Grimm or other folk tales. He wrote: 'The old beliefs of the Aborigines in Animalism is no match for [the] Glory of God and His creative acts in creation and Redemption.' Dyer, 'Early Days ...', p. 27.

⁴⁶ John Harris, op. cit., p. 729.

⁴⁷ Alf Dyer, 'Description of first party to Groote Eylandt', NTAS, NTRS, 693/P1.

⁴⁸ Dyer, 'Early days ...', no page number.

⁴⁹ Keith Cole, 'Dyer, after John 1884–1968', in David Carment, Robyn Maynard, Alan Powell (eds),

Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography, Vol. 1, Darwin, NTU Press, 1990, p. 85.

⁵⁰ See for example: Mickey Dewar, 'Strange bedfellows: Europeans and Aborigines in Arnhem Land before World War II', MA (Hons) thesis, University of New England, 1989; Mickey Dewar, *The Black War in Arnhem Land*, Darwin, North Australian Research Unit Australian National University, 1992.

⁵¹ This is confirmed by Dick Harris's account. He joined Alf Dyer and Mary Crome at Oenpelli in 1929 and provides some of the best accounts of them and their lives. He noted, 'At the time [1929] there was no clearly defined "policy" for Aboriginal work, either Government or Mission', Dick Harris, op. cit., p. 18.

⁵² John Harris, op. cit., p. 701.

⁵³ Dick Harris, op. cit., p. 20.

⁵⁴ Keith Cole, *A History of Oenpelli*, Darwin, Nungalinga Publications, 1975, p. 18.

MUTUAL CONVERSION?

THE METHODIST CHURCH AND THE YOLŬ, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO YIRRKALA

HOWARD MORPHY

INTRODUCTION: BEGINNINGS AND BIASES

A history of the Methodist Overseas Mission in Arnhem Land has yet to be written. The resources for such a task are immensely rich, including archival sources and the writings of the missionaries themselves. While not possessing its own historian, as the Anglican missions do in the person of Reverend Keith Cole,¹ the Methodist Church produced a number of educated and passionate superintendents who wrote detailed accounts of their times and experiences. Yirrkala alone had at least three, in Wilbur Chaseling,² Harold Thornell³ and Edgar Wells⁴. This paper is very much a preliminary excursion into the arena; it is not a history or a case study but rather a proposition, supported by evidence from different sources and periods; an argument that comes, perhaps a little too intuitively, out of my own sense of the history of north east Arnhem Land. It is an argument that develops in a complementary manner to other, received, viewpoints that are in themselves undoubtedly oversimplified and open to challenge—the sense that the neighbouring Anglican and Catholic missions were less positive in their view of

Aboriginal religion and culture, and were more likely than the Methodist Church to introduce potentially destructive institutions such as the dormitory system and the banning of traditional ceremonial practices (see Mickey Dewar, this issue). Yet in most respects the Anglican and Catholic Churches have been equally strong in their advocacy of Aboriginal rights.

The title of my paper, 'mutual conversion', exaggerates the case but perhaps only a little. There were some intolerant Methodists, who viewed Aboriginal practices simply as heathen forms. There were missionary linguists who refused to translate Indigenous songs or document bark paintings — the sanctity of written YolŬ had to be preserved for the production of biblical texts. Religious tolerance applies more to some times and some individuals than others, but as encounters between Aborigines and missionaries go, that between the YolŬ and the Methodist Overseas Mission was a relatively fortunate one. If bigotry can be defined by its resistance to argument, by its failure to see the other point of view, by its antipathy to choice, then the Methodist Church in Arnhem Land provides a poor example. Indeed the case is not so much

an illustration of bigotry as of its opposite, which must involve tolerance and respect but may also include doubt and uncertainty.

The paper is very much a preliminary exercise; it is also partial, perhaps in two senses. It is partial in that I have not fully explored the documentary record. I depend too much on published materials, supported by recorded interviews with the protagonists. I need to do much more work in the archives. My account may also be partial in the second sense that I am biased by my relationship with the missionaries I have met and by the historical context of my own research. I first visited north east Arnhem Land in 1973 in the company of the Reverend Edgar Wells and his wife Anne. Edgar had applied to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies for a grant to redocument bark paintings collected by the founding missionary, the Reverend Wilbur Chaseling. The Institute gave him a grant on condition that I, a newly arrived researcher from England, was allowed to accompany him. We spent a week at Yirrkala and a week at Milingimbi. Yirrkala had been established in 1935 and Milingimbi, the first mission in the Yolŋu region, in 1926. Edgar Wells had spent 10 years as superintendent at Milingimbi and was stationed at Yirrkala during 1962 and 1963. Wells had worked closely with the people of Yirrkala to fight the granting of a lease to mine bauxite over their lands and played a significant role in the battle for land rights. I admired him for what he had done and we got on very well. However his return visit was also charged with tension. Some people had found Edgar a difficult man. At the time of the Yirrkala crisis he maintained strict control over his European staff,

censoring their correspondence and forbidding them to speak with government officials. He believed that the government and the mission were involved in a conspiracy to grant the mining lease and did not trust anybody.⁵ He was probably right about the conspiracy, but the way he handled the situation alienated him from some of his own staff. As a consequence he received a cool reception from the mission staff at Yirrkala, in direct contrast to his reception at Milingimbi and to the warmth with which he was received by Yolŋu at both places.

The other source of bias is in Yolŋu memories of the past. I have no direct data on what Yolŋu thought of the missionaries before my fieldwork began in the 1970s. My work in the Roper Valley suggests that people often create a golden age in contrast to the present which over-emphasises the harmonious state of relationships in the past.⁶ In the Roper Valley the period of the 1930s to the 1950s was portrayed as a Golden Age sandwiched between the killing times of the African and Asian Cold Storage Company and the confrontational relationship that developed in the 1960s, after equal award wages had been granted to Aboriginal workers on cattle stations. In the Arnhem Land case there was different bread in the sandwich. The time prior to the establishment of the mission was also a time of violence, involving both confrontation with outsiders and inter-clan warfare, and the 1970s brought the mining town and almost catastrophic disruption to Yolŋu life. It is quite likely that this biased oral accounts in the missionaries' favour.

THE DIALOGUE COMMENCES

In this paper I aim to outline the history of interactions between Yolŋu and missionaries, in particular highlighting discourse over religion and cultural values. My primary focus is on Yirrkala, the last mission to be established in eastern Arnhem Land. Mission stations had been gradually established along the Arnhem Land coast during the first half of the last century. They spread out from the areas of earliest European settlement towards those areas beyond the frontier. The Methodist Overseas Mission moved from the west to east along the north coast, from Goulburn Island to Milingimbi and Elcho Island, and the Church of England moved north from cattle country in the Roper Valley to Groote Island. A mission station or two in the region of Yirrkala and Caledon Bay were the next ones to be planned. The planning process was given added impetus by what has come to be known as the Caledon Bay killings.⁷ In the 1930s people from Caledon Bay and Blue Mud Bay killed a number of outsiders on their land, including the crew of a Japanese pearling lugger at Caledon Bay in 1933. A police party was sent out to investigate, and this led to the killing of one of the party, Constable McColl, on Woodah Island in the north of Blue Mud Bay. Originally there was pressure from the police to send in an expeditionary force to take control of the area and 'teach the blacks a lesson'.⁸ The Anglican Church led by the Reverend Warren of Groote Eylandt, together with the Methodists strongly resisted the idea and convinced the federal government to follow a very different course of action.⁹ The anthropologist Donald Thomson was sent to Arnhem Land

to uncover the concerns of the Yolŋu people and the Methodist Overseas Mission was given the go-ahead to establish a station at Yirrkala, overruling the claims of the Church Missionary Society.

It was decided to locate the settlement at Yirrkala, because it had an excellent permanent water supply and was in a sheltered location with apparent potential for developing gardens. The foundation missionary was Wilbur Chaseling, who arrived with his wife in 1935. The context of the founding of the mission was significant: Yolŋu had found the previous few years very stressful because of the increase in violent encounters with outsiders, the arrests of clan members and the threat posed by the police.¹⁰ At the same time there had been an increase in clan warfare, probably exacerbated by the encroachment of Europeans in the south and west. Yolŋu today recall that Wonggu and other clan leaders made a conscious decision to make peace with outsiders rather than continue hostilities, and the missionaries presented themselves as peacemakers. Chaseling was surprised by the speed with which Yolŋu moved to settle in the mission. When I interviewed Chaseling in 1973 about the early years of Yirrkala at one point he asked rhetorically:¹¹

Why did they come? For curiosity, medical benefits, and because we were a new type of people — not police, Macassans, pearlers, Japanese — a new type of person without guns, working for their benefit, curing little children suffering from yaws — within a few weeks the scales falling off.

Yolŋu moved to the mission station of their own free will and with no suggestion

that they had been conquered or had ceded any rights to outsiders. Equally important was the fact that the government had transferred effective authority to the missionaries, who became a *de facto* instrument of government, administering the region and introducing a system of local law. Their presence solved a major problem for the government; the area was pacified with no loss of life and administered with little cost to the budget. Yet although they carried out the functions of government the missionaries presented themselves as being independent of it. For most of the subsequent life of the mission the missionaries saw themselves operating as representatives of the Yolŋu people rather than of the central government. Indeed in Yolŋu discourse missionaries were opposed to government men and, interestingly, when the government sent Bill Grey, a patrol officer, to be their first permanent representative to the region in 1963, the missionaries insisted that he camp in a caravan outside the settlement. Grey was sent as a government representative in response to the protests by Yolŋu and missionaries over the bauxite mining proposals.¹²

The trajectory of the mission at Yirrkala was set by the earlier practice established at Goulburn Island and in particular at Milingimbi under the auspices of Theodore Webb. Webb showed a deep interest in Aboriginal culture. He had a number of motivations for this: he believed that effective missionisation could only occur with a background of cultural knowledge; he realised that craft production provided a potential source of external income; and he realised the need to inform the Mission's supporters in the southern States about the Yolŋu way of

life, both to gain support and rid them of misconceptions.¹³ All of these motivations however presupposed a respect for, or at least an understanding of the autonomous nature of, Aboriginal culture. By the time Chaseling was preparing to leave for his vocation, the Methodist Mission was encouraging their senior staff to learn some anthropology under Professor A. P. Elkin at Sydney University.

A number of the missionaries have written books on their life among the Yolŋu: Webb,¹⁴ Chaseling,¹⁵ Thornell¹⁶ and Anne Wells.¹⁷ The books combine lay ethnographic accounts of the Yolŋu way of life and semi-autobiographical accounts of mission life, but they also contain reflective passages that outline the main aims and aspirations of the missionaries. Two themes come across strongly and consistently, a Protestant work ethic and religious tolerance. Mickey Dewar¹⁸ has drawn attention to the former theme and I will only briefly allude to it here. There was a strong belief in the dignity of labour, linked to a quasi-evolutionary theory that it was necessary to lead Yolŋu from the state of hunting and gathering through agriculture to a broader participation in the Australian economy. This economic transformation was not seen as being incompatible with respect for Aboriginal culture, and indeed the intention was to build on the Indigenous skills base. These aims were explicit in Chaseling's and his successor Thornell's policies. In my interview with him Chaseling stated:

I started them painting craft within a week or so of arriving. I established the principle that I would give them nothing free - nothing except medicine. If they were to

get things they had to work. I sent things only to museums and charged them the price I paid plus freight - I sent tons of stuff down. I realised that we had to start some kind of industry and craft seemed the most obvious one, even if I had to burn some of the things produced at first I had to do it.¹⁹

Tolerance and understanding of Aboriginal culture combined with an agenda of economic development were developed as policies at the Yirrkala Synod of 1938. According to Thornell 'It was realised that sooner or later contact with our culture and economic way of life was inevitable'.²⁰ The policy was to prepare them without harming their culture: 'It was important to respect Aboriginal culture instead of destroying it, important to better understand the culture, and to learn and use the Aboriginal language. One other vital point was that there were to be no hand outs. Nothing would be given unless it was earned.'²¹

Chaseling's and Thornell's attitudes to Yolŋu religious practice were generally positive. In his book *Yulengor* published in 1957 with a preface by A. P. Elkin, Chaseling wrote:

(It) seemed only reasonable at Yirrkala to preserve Yulengor [Yolŋu] culture. To encourage the revival of old ceremonies, and to stimulate in the people an appreciation of their own social organization which often suffered from alien contact. It is unjust for any alien to come amongst primitive people for the purpose of upsetting their mode of life and converting them to thinking as he does.

In my interview with Chaseling he said:

I found close parallels between the Christian religion and Yolŋu religion. In fact when I first arrived I found that there was more for me to learn. I was able to gain insights into the significance of religion in its natural context and on the basis of their own beliefs I was able to begin to introduce the Christian gospel. To lead them one step at a time to the acceptance of the teachings of our Lord. I found it difficult at first - but they went away, talked among themselves and applied it.²²

Chaseling's words are echoed in those of another missionary, the Fijian Fuata Taito, based at Goulburn Island in the 1940s: 'Some of these customs could be used as a step towards Christianity, instead of our telling them it is foolish to follow customs'.²³ In much of the writings of Methodist missionaries of the time there is an often unspoken tension between using Indigenous religion as part of the process of conversion and recognising value in Aboriginal religious practice.

THE DISCOURSE DEVELOPS

Chaseling gave me an example of the religious discourse he conducted with Yolŋu elders. He drew an analogy between one of the sets of ancestral beings of the Dhuwa moiety—the Djan'kawu—and Christian cosmology:

You have your Djan'kawu and we have ours - ours was the God of the Old Testament - yours made mistakes and so did ours. Our God

sent Christ to show us what those mistakes were and the Wangarr [Ancestral Beings] sent you the balanda and the balanda [white people] can tell you the whole truth. For example our God of the Old Testament talked of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth — just like your Djan'kawu encouraged you to take revenge — kill one of twins, although there was plenty of food for everyone. Wangarr sent Jesus to teach you and your children that this is wrong - find a greater sense of independence, as I said you know the facts - go and work them out.²⁴

His arguments reflect a liberal Protestant theology that is in its own terms opposed to bigotry, allowing a degree of individual freedom to make decisions on the basis of knowledge and experience.

This interest went beyond what was necessary to convert Yolŋu to Christianity, and had from early on hints of syncretism or perhaps even religious pluralism that have subsequently come to characterise Yolŋu religious practice. In *Yulengor* Chaseling writes appreciatively about Aboriginal religion, arguing for continuity to be maintained. He argued that in order to win people's confidence there must be an appreciation of their religion as religion permeates all aspects of Aboriginal life, 'and determines even his methods of food gathering and cooking ... the simplest activities are linked to his highest beliefs and noblest aspirations.' The customs are linked together in a systematic way and cannot be tampered with without endangering the whole structure of life. 'An ef-

fective approach to the nomad can be made only on the basis of religion'.²⁵

While this certainly reflects Chaseling's approach at the time he also acknowledged that the passage of time influenced his attitudes. Writing to Ed Ruhe in 1965 about art production during his time at Yirrkala he said: 'I find this whole subject the more fascinating with the passing of years, much in the same way as I become more interested in the developing philosophy and theology of these people whom I knew so well in the Yirrkala area.'²⁶

The syncretic dimension, but also perhaps the retrospective romanticism, comes out clearly in the following passage from Thornell reflecting on a cultural performance he witnessed when he returned to Yirrkala in 1979, 30 years after he had left:

We were at Yirrkala on 6 July when the town celebrated National Aborigines day, and Aborigines of all ages, plus some white onlookers, gathered together in a clearing near the primary school for authentic native dancing to the beat of clap-sticks and the sound of the drone pipe. I was strongly reminded of the nightly singing around the campfire long ago. There isn't so much ceremonial dancing and singing now, especially among young people. It would be a great pity if it were allowed to die out, for it is a unique form of artistic expression. Among the young people of Yirrkala now there is a different kind of singing. Most nights they gather around a bonfire — to simulate the atmosphere of the tribal campfire — but instead of ceremonial singing

and dancing the young people sing hymns learnt on Church gatherings. There is an air of spontaneity about it ... a young man may read a passage from the Bible ... another may give an impromptu sermon. Yet there is nothing over emotional about it. After all spiritual things have been vital to the Aborigines from time beyond thought. The only difference is that these young people have chosen Christianity. I see no reason why Christianity and the traditional cultural songs and dances cannot exist together.²⁷

And indeed had Thornell's visit to the region been more prolonged he would have again heard 'the singing around the campfire' and realised that many Yolŋu shared his view on the co-existence of Christianity with Yolŋu religion. Daymbalipu Mununggurr, talking to Ian Dunlop in 1974 expressed the relationship in the following words: 'This time is a little bit different because there are two ways we see. One is the Christian way, one is our law, the Aboriginal law. These laws do not hate each other. We like to make a good law, leading to peaceful ways'.²⁸

This dialogue between Yolŋu religion and Christianity set in motion in the first years of missionisation has had a continuing impact over time. We do not have direct evidence of how Yolŋu responded to Chaseling and the role that they took in carrying the syncretic dialogue forward. We do not know what challenges there might have been to the positioning of Djan'kawu as an Old Testament figure. However there are hints in Chaseling's writings:

Several old men were talking together and invited me to join them. One of them said: 'We like those stories of Jesus that you tell us: He is white man's Junkgowa [Djan'kawu]. Our Junkgowa came from the Wangarr and we can see now that, in the same way, Jesus is the Whiteman's Junkgowa.'²⁹

However, the theological discourse that we can imagine occurring from the beginning has remained a strong component of Yolŋu culture. In 1982 Ian Dunlop filmed a fellowship meeting of young Yolŋu sitting talking, playing the guitar and drinking kava. Wuyuwa Mununggurr led the discussion with her husband Djoki Yunupingu.

She began by posing a question: 'What law does this sacred dilly bag hold, compared with the law of the Bible? What do they both represent, what do you see in these two?'

Djoki continued: 'They both have equal status, both are sacred they are both telling the same. The Bible tells us sacred stories and the same with the dilly bags, they tell us about the sacred law.'

Wuyuwa: 'True.'

Chorus of young people: 'Yes!'

Wuyuwa: 'When people dance or [the dilly bag] is brought out for other reasons, we only see the outside of the dilly bag, but it carries an "inside" story, it is just the same. Our law that it carries and the stories. The sacred dilly

bag carries them just like the Bible.' ³⁰

In this dialogue people are referring to the elaborately crafted and feather-decorated bags that are used in ceremonies and that often contain objects associated with the sacred life of particular clans. ³¹ These baskets are themselves associated with stories of the clan's ancestral heritage and are linked to particular people and places. 'Inside' refers both to the interior of the dilly bag and the pages inside the Bible and also to the inside level of spiritual knowledge which echoes Christian conceptions of inner truth. The discussion hints at the rich metaphorical nature of Yolŋu religious practice and the multiple possibilities of finding points of connection with Christianity.

The discourse between Yolŋu and Christian missionaries has produced a significant number of syncretic events, some initiated by Yolŋu leaders and theologians others encouraged by the missionaries themselves. The two best known manifestations of this are probably the Elcho Island Memorial of 1957 and the Yirrkala Church Panels of 1962. Both events involved the installation of major icons of Yolŋu religion in a Christian context. The Elcho Island Memorial was erected outside the church at Galiwinku (Elcho Island). It comprised a series of wooden sculptures based on the form of sacred objects belonging to the northern Yolŋu clans. The Yirrkala Church Panels were two masonite panels painted with designs from each of the clans represented at Yirrkala. These were placed on either side of the altar of the new Yirrkala Church. The events were very different ones, but they had in common the assertion that Yolŋu had objects of religious value that were equivalent to the icons of

Christianity and that these icons should have a role in the discourse between cultures.

The events that gave rise to the Elcho Island Memorial were led entirely by Yolŋu and had a complex set of motivations. ³² In addition to asserting the equivalent value of Yolŋu religious icons and outlining Yolŋu political objectives, the Memorial also implied or enacted a change in Yolŋu religious practice—a bringing out into the open of forms that had previously been restricted, and the sharing of those forms on a wider basis. It was part of the dialogue with Christianity that involved a shift from 'inside' to 'outside'—a modification of elements of Yolŋu religious practice to accommodate changing circumstances. ³³ The Memorial also had a political dimension; it asserted Yolŋu autonomy and rights, while acknowledging that those rights had to be incorporated in a wider political structure. While most Yirrkala clans refused to participate in the Elcho Island Memorial, partly through concern over the opening out of previously restricted objects, it can nonetheless be seen as contributing to the possibility of the Yirrkala Church Panels. The Yirrkala Panels also required the exhibition of religious art in a public space even if that space was the consecrated space for another 'local' religion. ³⁴

The Yirrkala Church Panels were explicitly syncretic and in continuity with the dialogue set in place by Chaseling. According to Edgar Wells, Narritjin Maymuru proposed the idea of the church panels to him, but Wells' own respect for Aboriginal religion may also have been a factor. He believed that all religions had the capacity to produce mystical insights that could increase understanding. This comes out

most clearly in a letter he wrote to his long-term correspondent Ed Ruhe in 1983:

You must know that there are moments of illumination when the mind expands under the force of new horizons ... it is the force of such encounters within the spiritual realm ... that has kept me within the [Christian] group. It is because I was able to minister to the Aborigines in this special way of causing a stretch ... of thought processes ... that men such as Djawa and Narritjin could expose little cracks of their own mountain ranges ... that made areas of understanding possible. They did not of course have to become Christians to receive this illumination — and this is where some of my companions in missionary activity part company with me.³⁵

The Church Panels were also a religious expression of a political aim in which both the Yolŋu and the missionaries concerned were united—the recognition of Yolŋu rights in land. The paintings were a response to the mineral explorations and to concerns over the possible granting of a mining lease over the bauxite reserves on the Gove Peninsula. They led directly to the Yirrkala Bark Petition that was sent to the Commonwealth parliament in the following year. Kim Beazley senior saw the panels in the Church, and suggested that this would be an appropriate way to petition parliament using the symbolic medium of Yolŋu religion and law. The Gove Land Rights case can be seen as a logical outcome of the dialogue that occurred.³⁶

MUTUAL DOUBTS

It is likely that from the very beginning Yolŋu and missionaries had moments of doubt, scepticism, and resistance to the dialogue that was developing. Missionaries and Yolŋu clearly differed among themselves and some missionaries were downright hostile to Yolŋu religious practice. Chaseling expressed his own uncertainty: he is unsure about this equivalence, in effect, between Wangarr and God but concludes that 'Wangarr is scarcely less vague in the nomads mind than the "Eternal" of the early pages of the bible.' But he lets it go since 'It enables Jesus to be accepted without doing damage to Yolŋu culture'.³⁷

There were, as Wells hints, missionaries who took a very different view from his own and who saw 'heathen' customs in Aboriginal religious practice. Some of the missionaries who followed Wells at Milingimbi were less tolerant of Aboriginal religious practice than he was.

One of the main contexts of potential conflict is in mortuary rituals, where both Yolŋu religious practice and Christianity come together in the disposal of the dead. Yolŋu mortuary rituals extended over a lengthy period and involved both a secondary stage, when the bones of the deceased were collected and carried around in a bark coffin for several months or even years, and a tertiary stage when the bones were placed in a hollow log coffin. Yolŋu mortuary practices offended the sensibilities of some missionaries, contradicted their pollution beliefs and, because of their extended nature, threatened to interrupt the economic life of the settlement. Over time Yolŋu mortuary rituals have evolved to incorporate both religions, with different

spaces or stages in the proceedings being allocated to each. Christian prayer and the viewing of the body are interspersed with Yolŋu ritual performance until the climax of the ceremony. The body is brought to the ceremonial ground and placed in the grave through Yolŋu performance, before being buried in a Christian ritual. Sometimes the divisions are less clear cut and some elements combine Christianity and Yolŋu practice in the same event. Not surprisingly it is in these events, in which the two beliefs systems directly confront each other, that conflict sometimes occurs. Certainly they generate mixed emotions.

When I visited Milingimbi with Edgar Wells, the community leader Djawa led us away one evening to talk to an old man, Dawarangelili. A central element of Yolŋu mortuary rituals was the painting of clan designs on the dead person's chest. Wells and the missionaries who had preceded him were perfectly happy to allow this practice. However one of the ministers who followed him had insisted that if people were to have a Christian burial then they could not be buried with a painted chest. Dawarangelili asked Wells to intervene and indeed poignantly stated that he had delayed dying because of his fear of being buried without the painting on his chest.

What Wells himself referred to as fundamentalism increased after the 1970s. At Yirrkala in 1975 the local minister almost literally threw the Church Panels into the street, wanting to rid the church of heathen idols.

The syncretic discourse between Yolŋu and Methodists has involved changes in Yolŋu religious practice that are at least as great as the concessions made by the missionaries. In north east Arnhem Land there

has been a gradual process of opening out of Indigenous religious practice, a reduction in the role of secrecy, without any sense that the icons of the religion—the paintings, songs, dances and sacred objects—have lost their power. The panels placed on either side of the altar in 1962 contained paintings that a few years previously had been used largely in restricted contexts, and appeared in public contexts in slightly modified form. Yolŋu and missionaries alike express doubts and anxiety in some of the same contexts—where Christian and Yolŋu religious practices come into potential conflict. There is anxiety over the opening out of Yolŋu religious practice, and there are questions of compatibility in shared contexts. The adjustments that have been made to the European colonial presence at times seem to have come at too great a cost. A recent case can be used to exemplify the kinds of issues that arise in the contemporary context, though it must be stressed that Yolŋu attitudes to Christianity are very diverse, reflecting a number of different religious orientations within eastern Arnhem Land that are linked to different movements in the wider Church.³⁸

Recently a Yolŋu person developed a serious eye infection and put it down to exposure to sacred religious objects at a burial ceremony. The person said that the funeral combined Christian and Yolŋu ritual and that they felt uncomfortable about the Yolŋu ritual inside the church. There was particular concern that a *wap-itja*, a ceremonial digging stick, was taken into the church—it made the person feel sick inside. The person felt that Yolŋu ritual was for outside and before the final internment. The person concerned argued that God had given the Yolŋu ancestors a

caretaker role but that they were under the more general spiritual authority of God. The person took a middle ground between those who see Yolŋu religion as incompatible with Christianity and those who see it as autonomous. Yolŋu religion is seen in this case as local representation of God's power. It was not that the digging stick was a restricted sacred object. It was more a matter of combining Yolŋu religious practice and Christianity in the same context, under the same roof. The person would have been quite happy if the events had followed one another sequentially separated in time and space: the digging stick in the camp, the prayers in the church. The fact that those boundaries appeared to have been crossed was believed to have made the person spiritually vulnerable, causing the illness.

CONCLUSION

The dialogue between practitioners of Yolŋu and Christian religion is an ongoing one. It has produced a society in which religion is as alive and central to the community as anywhere else in Australia, and more central than in most places. It is interesting that the dialogue has become, over time, less one of race than of religious belief. Yolŋu have become Christians yet simultaneously maintained much of their own religious practice. Indeed Yolŋu have themselves taken on the role of missionaries both as Christian ministers yet also as advocates for Yolŋu religion. Yolŋu religion has become part of an outgoing culture of persuasion that combines political, religious and spiritual objectives. Yolŋu continue to insert their religious values through cultural performances into Euro-Australian contexts—through participa-

tion in the Olympic opening ceremony, through the Bangara Dance Company and The National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA) Inc. and art exhibitions such as the *Saltwater Paintings*.³⁹ Yet Yolŋu are equally concerned internally with accommodating Christian dogma and belief within their local framework of religious action. The lack of dogmatism displayed by the Methodist Church in Northern Australia in the early days, the fact that bigotry (in the form of intolerance of Yolŋu religious practice) arrived relatively late, has created an environment in which continual adjustments can take place. It has resulted in a society in which religious pluralism is the norm, where Yolŋu religious practice articulates with different Christian orientations. Eastern Arnhem Land remains a deeply religious society in which Yolŋu and Christian religious forms are integrated within the same events, though often sequentially. Yet below the surface, both contemporary religious practices and interpretations of the missionary past are highly contested. The contested present reflects the contradictory history of Yolŋu-European engagement and the difficulties of the contemporary context of Yolŋu lives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- ¹² Grey himself was strongly supportive of Yolŋu rights and subsequently played a significant role in facilitating the outstation movement in eastern Arnhem Land that was in part a response to the encroachment of mining operations.
- ¹³ Theodor Webb, *Spears to Spades*, Sydney, Department of Overseas Mission, 1938.
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- ²¹ *ibid.*
- ²² Chaseling, *op. cit.*
- ²³ Fuata A. Taito, *The Aborigines of the North / by a Rotuman*, Sydney, Methodist Overseas Missions of Australasia, 1971.
- ²⁴ Morphy interview with Chaseling. This discourse is described in slightly different form in Chaseling *op. cit.*, p. 170–1.
- ²⁵ Quoted and summarised from Chaseling *op. cit.*, p. 170.
- ²⁶ Wilbur Chaseling to Ed Ruhe, 12 November 1965. Correspondence in the Kluge-Ruhe Centre archives, University of Virginia.
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- ³⁵ Edgar Wells to Ed Ruhe, May 3 1983. Correspondence in the Kluge-Ruhe Centre archives, University of Virginia.
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³⁸ For some relevant discussion of contemporary Yolŋu religious practice see Robert Bos, *Jesus and the dreaming: Religion and social change in Arnhem Land*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Queensland, St Lucia, 1988; and Fiona Magowan 'Syncretism or synchronicity? Remapping the Yolngu feeling of place', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 2001, pp. 275–90.

³⁹ The Saltwater Paintings were produced in the late 1990s in response to encroachments by non-Yolngu fishermen into the estuaries and intertidal zones of Yolngu clan lands. The collection is comprised of a set of paintings that map the relationships between people, ancestral beings and land along the eastern Arnhem Land coast. The paintings were acquired by the Australian National Maritime Museum and were published in Buku-Larrnggay Mulka (1999) *Saltwater: Yirrkala Bark Paintings of Sea Country*, Yirrkala and Sydney: Buku-Larrnggay Mulka in association with Jenny Isaacs Publishing.

WAS IT EVER SO?

ANTI-SEMITISM IN AUSTRALIA 1860–1950?

RODNEY GOUTTMAN

In her award-winning book, *Reading the Holocaust*, Inga Clendinnen insists that 'Australian anti-Semitism is a pathology of the periphery'.¹ Though this remains a popular view, this article will discuss the validity of this assertion for the years 1860–1950. It will be argued that while in this epoch the problem of anti-Semitism in Australia never approached the virulence experienced elsewhere, the fear that this odious prejudice could break out at any time also had a profound and defining effect on the behaviour of Australia's Jews. Though commentators have mentioned this phenomenon in passing, they rarely explain it and merely compare it to scenarios overseas, leaving one to conclude that Australia has always been a safe haven for Jews.² To leave the observation there is to provide few insights into the history of anti-Semitism in Australia and its impact on the public persona of Australian Jewry both on the individual and the communal levels.

AN ANTIPODEAN LIBERAL POLITY?

Australian historian Tim Rowse has written that:

Australian history falls within that period of the rise of European lib-

eralism and the struggle by the emergent working classes to advance that liberalism in a democratic direction ...³

He points out that Australia is one of the few nations in the world whose path along the way to liberal democracy has generally been linear and relatively non-violent.⁴ However, in the period of 1860 to 1950 the impact of the Protestant/Catholic divide was profoundly socially significant, the impact of the *White Australia Policy* culturally indelible, and the clash between Labor and Capital of immense political consequence.⁵ Then there was also the vexed 'Aboriginal Question'. From a discrete Jewish perspective, the issue was whether along her liberalist journey Australia had shed any 'old world' Judeophobia introduced in the process of Europeanisation of the land.⁶

If one is looking for historical bookends of the periods 1860's and 1950's, at least from the point of view of the eastern Australian, possibly at one extremity there is the exhaustion of the Gold Rush and the commencement of a hardening of Australian Anglo monoculturalism, and at the other, the beginning of the end of that hegemony under the effects of post-war reconstruction into a more pluralist vision of the nation.⁷

The Jewish presence in Australia began with the initial convict migrations, and free settlement subsequently established Jewish communal life.⁸ Colonial Jewry tended to take its religious cues from the 'mother country', England, a practice which had greatly declined by the early 1950s. That said, religious observance before World War Two had become increasingly attenuated. Geographical dispersion, the tyranny of distance, apathy, and the forces of assimilation all played their role.

Australian Jews not only prided themselves on their loyalty to Empire, King and Country, but were ever prepared to express it, and no less in wartime.⁹ On one hand, their social views were little different from those of their Gentile fellow citizens. On the other hand, from a communal perspective, their public loyalty was more intense, the motivation for which stemmed from three basic but linked causes. The first derived from the fact of being a miniscule minority in an ocean of others. Jewish history had taught them not to take the pacific nature of their Australian environment for granted. Second, was from gratitude for being able to live in a state of freedom denied many of their brethren elsewhere. Finally, as a prophylaxis against any current underlying anti-Semitism.

Until World War Two Australian Jewry was predominantly Anglo in custom and motivation. Non-Anglo, or 'foreign' Jews who arrived in Australia were required to assimilate immediately. During World War Two and certainly after, these 'foreign' Jews commenced a successful challenge to the Anglo dominance in communal affairs. Indeed, three seminal events contributed to this communal

change of mind—the formation of the *Executive Council of Australian Jewry* which gave Jews a national voice,¹⁰ the Holocaust, and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. In combination, they helped to forge a more assertive attitude in dealing with political authorities in matters of self interest. This was dramatically displayed in the years 1949–52, when the Jewish community emerged from the closet to publicly oppose the policy of the Robert Menzies led Liberal-Country Party Coalition Government to permit mass German migration to Australia.¹¹

MODELLING ANTI-SEMITISM

Though anti-Jewish hatred dates back to Biblical times, the actual term 'anti-Semitism' was devised by the German anti-Jewish provocateur, Wilhem Marr in 1879 to describe the violent anti-Jewish hostilities in his country. It very soon became the singular term to cover all aspects of anti-Jewish hatred.

Herbert A. Strauss has said that three models of enquiry used in the social sciences can be applied to researching the problem of anti-Semitism. The first is the cultural-anthropological approach, which can be used to probe the degree to which cultural stereotypes persist among various strata of a particular social structure. Then there is psychologically oriented research, to help discover what motivates hatred of Jewish people. Finally, building on the previous two, is an exploration of the historical circumstances which have led to wider social and political expressions of this prejudice.¹² Simon N. Herman reminds us that often a missing element in the study of anti-Semitism is its effect upon Jewish attitudes and behaviour both

towards the Gentiles among whom they live and within their own community.¹³ Further, Todd M. Endelman also notes that when examining the problem of anti-Semitism in a particular place, frequently absent is a discussion of its influence on 'the Jews themselves – their occupations, religious practices, social habits, and intellectual and cultural predilections'.¹⁴

The denigration of Judaism and the persecution of Jews over centuries of Western Christendom has been well documented.¹⁵ Even after the European Enlightenment took hold, and when the political and social hegemony of Christianity was replaced by secularism, much anti-Semitism was decanted into Left and Right political and cultural versions. The eminent historian J. L. Talmon recalls that when Jews were emancipated into Gentile society allegedly on an equal basis, the 'Jewish Problem' became even more difficult and complex, since Jews were then excoriated by both the Left and the Right:

... We are thus faced with a striking paradox: to the Conservatives the Jews are the symbol, beneficiary, finally the maker of the capitalist revolution, which was in their eyes a kind of preparation for the Socialist revolution; to the Socialists – the embodiment and pillar of that capitalism, which the revolution was rising to destroy.¹⁶

In various ways Jews were stereotyped as uncouth, immoral, insufferable, incapable of ethical behavior, and as a group, a danger to civil society. Ronald B. Sobel has argued that anti-Semitism is resilient because it is a 'disease and a virus embedded in the bloodstream of Western civilisa-

tion'.¹⁷ By that he means it is not manifest at every moment, but Jews have remained the ever present 'outsider', to be used as a scapegoat for any perceived fundamental social, cultural, and even political wrong or difficulty. These observations are pertinent if only because 'Western Civilization' is the very construct to which Australia has always claimed cultural allegiance.

THE AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE

John Levi has shown that anti-Jewish stereotypes arrived in Australia with the convicts, and were often garnished by the mainstream colonial press,¹⁸ thereby setting a media precedent which persisted throughout the period in question,¹⁹ and even to the present day. Negative cultural connotations of the word 'Jew' encouraged many Jews to avoid it as a descriptive term for themselves, and 'Hebrew Congregations' became the preferred name for their faith collectives.²⁰ Even in the liberally founded Province of South Australia which was characterised by inter-faith co-operation,²¹ Israel Getzler has stressed that Jews still had to campaign assiduously to win approval for the social and political rights accorded them.²²

When free settlement sparked Jewish communal life, later to be strengthened by the immigrations of the Gold Rush, it came with a level of wariness towards the Gentile. In part this was undoubtedly affected by its 'Exilic' condition as verified by historical experience, and in part by the fact of being a small and nervous minority. From the beginning of Jewish communal life there was an anxious looking over the shoulder to assure that nothing be done

which might upset their fellow citizens lest the fires of anti-Semitism be ignited.

Some Jewish scribes have argued that the esteem in which men such as General Sir John Monash and Sir Isaac Isaacs were generally held was a great social prophylactic against anti-Semitism in Australia. Indeed, another person of similar standing, Sir Zelman Cowen, tells the story—the truth of which he cannot verify—that in 1931 John Scullin, the Labor Prime Minister, presented the British authorities with only the above two names as candidates for the post of Governor General of Australia.²³ However, there is little evidence to suggest these gentlemen's fine reputation actually diminished the degree of social and cultural anti-Semitism even in their lifetime, let alone after. Monash himself suffered its sting before reaching the apex of his military career on the Western Front in World War One.²⁴ Jews were excluded from certain clubs, organisations, and stock exchanges. No doubt, this situation was one reason behind Isaacs's strong opposition to political Zionism.²⁵

That Jews have scaled the heights of many of the nation's elites even in the presence of cultural or social anti-Semitism, is not an unknown phenomenon in the West. Their very success has been a cause of jealousy that has fanned Jewish conspiracy theory. On the other hand there is the propensity of Jewish spokespeople during and since the time under examination, to proclaim how much Jews have contributed to all facets of Australian society. Though this claim can be empirically proved, the need to give it such a loud voice was, and still is, as much directed at Jews themselves as at Gentiles. It constitutes the raw evidence of worthy

citizenship that would protect against current and future anti-Jewish stereotyping.

As previously mentioned, there was always present a concern that Jews should say or do nothing in their business dealings, public life, or congregationally that might offend non-Jews, thus putting their social standing in jeopardy. Such concern was evident when, in 1921, the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation refused to bury a baptised Jew in the hallowed local Jewish cemetery,²⁶ and in Melbourne during World War Two when there was a communal controversy whether Jewish ex-servicemen should be buried in separate allotments or alongside their non-Jewish comrades.²⁷ In both cases there was a worry that misunderstandings might stir the anti-Semitic pot.

Anecdotes abound about Jewish exclusion from employment in particular professional offices, government departments, clubs, and large retail stores like David Jones in Sydney. There is no way to ascertain whether this was a prevailing attitude, as those likely to infringe in this way were unlikely to openly advertise their prejudices. On the other hand, the lack of proof does not mean it did not happen, and that when it did, it was not common knowledge. Anti-Semitism was indeed part of the mix of reasons for the great opposition in the early 1940s to the appointment of the late eminent legal academic, Professor Julius Stone, to the Law School of Sydney University.²⁸ However, victimisation in the area of employment on the basis of religion was never a Jewish monopoly, and compared to the bitter Protestant/Catholic divide, possibly paled into insignificance.²⁹

Hilary Rubinstein³⁰ and Suzanne Rutland³¹ have provided lists of agents of anti-Semitism—individuals, organisations, and media, both fringe and mainstream, in the period under discussion. Unhappily, individuals include such cultural luminaries as Marcus Clarke, Arthur Adams, Henry Lawson, P.R. ‘Inky’ Stephensen, and the Lindsay brothers.

Leftwing versions of old Christian anti-Jewish stereotypes entered the fledgling Australian labor movement, particularly strongly in the 1890s, under the influence of a transplanted British socialism and American populist and radical literature.³² Labor politician and activist, Frank Anstey, took up these themes in his caricature of the Jew as the arch bloodsucking capitalist in his two tracts, *The Kingdom of Shylock* published in 1917, and *Money Power* published in 1923.³³ Anti-Jewish animus also became standard in the early 1930s rhetoric of Jack T. Lang, when Labor Premier of New South Wales, and later as maverick federal politician in the 1940s.³⁴

Xenophobic nationalists and racists on the nationalist and racist Right also had their versions of the evil Jew. Such views were regularly featured in *The Bulletin* with its emblematic fat capitalist *John Bull Cohen*, *Smith’s Weekly*, and *The Truth*. In 1934, the imported Social Credit Movement began in Australia its main publication, *The New Times* which circulated excerpts from the notorious anti-Jewish fake, *The Politics of the Elders of Zion*.³⁵ This organisation spawned the *Australian League of Rights*, whose local guru and leader Eric Butler published his own version of that heinous polemic in Melbourne in 1946.³⁶ In the later half of the 1930’s there was a spread of pro-Nazi propa-

ganda, while in 1940,³⁷ just after the outbreak of World War Two, the small *Australia First Party* was formed with a decidedly anti-Jewish plank.³⁸

Jewish insecurity was no better displayed than in the patriotic rhetoric of Jewish religious and lay leaders during both world wars. Their preaching on fidelity to King, Country, and Empire, on some occasions was overreaching.³⁹ They sought to urge the maximum possible number of Jews into uniform. Performance to the highest level of bravery was demanded—if only to disprove current anti-Jewish stereotypes. Jewish support for the national war effort had to be total to demonstrate their worthiness as citizens. Not to do so, it was feared, would arouse latent anti-Semitism.⁴⁰ There were a few Jewish recruits in World War One who denied their religious affiliation because they feared anti-Semitism in the ranks. During World War Two anti-Semitic literature circulated at military bases in Victoria.⁴¹

Nothing, however, was felt likely to arouse anti-Jewish feelings more than the prospect of mass Jewish immigration to Australia. And this, in turn, aroused anxieties within Australia’s small and edgy Jewish communities. The first incident of note occurred in 1891, when the mere rumour of the possibility that a large number of Jews fleeing the pogroms of the Russian Empire might seek refuge in Australia was enough to set alarm bells ringing.⁴² In the aftermath of the Gold Rush, colonial xenophobia was fired by a vision of hordes of non-assimilable foreigners from the north swamping Australia and undermining its British way of life. With Federation, this xenophobia became entrenched in the *White Australia Policy*. That selfsame 1891

rumour sent a shiver down the back of a nervous, miniscule, and fragile Anglo-Australian Jewry. It was feared that such *en masse* immigration might well cause a gross anti-Semitic reaction that would prove detrimental to local Jewry. Any concerns for their desperate brethren were weakened by this fear. Australian policy was to reject any proposal to create enclaves of 'foreigners' anywhere in the nation, and this no less for Jews. For example, Labor Prime Minister, John Curtin, in 1944 when the evils of Nazism were already well-known, refused to accept a plan to settle large numbers of refugees in the Kimberley region of Western Australia despite the fact that the Premier of the state and other non-Jewish leaders supported the scheme.⁴³ Following the death of Curtin, the acting Prime Minister, Frank Forde, stated that this decision was taken on the recommendation of a bureaucratic committee on immigration that 'opposed segregated settlements of Alien communities'.⁴⁴

Indeed, the question of Australia taking large numbers of refugees became most poignant in the 1930s, when the Nazi juggernaut with its vicious anti-Jewish program began to roll and thousands of distressed Jews applied to enter Australia. Paul Bartrop has detailed official attitudes, particularly the all-important bureaucratic response to the *entrée* of these 'foreign' Jews, and the reactions of the Jewish community. He maps the negative outlook within the Ministry of the Interior—the department that had carriage of immigration—which on occasions bordered on anti-Semitism.⁴⁵ The fact was that as a group, only the Jews were singled out in the application forms to enter Australia. The so-called 'Jewish clauses'⁴⁶ —Forms

Nos.40 and 47—were a useful bureaucratic tool to determine which Jews were from Europe's east and west. If Jewish immigrants were to come, those from the latter were preferred because they were considered able to assimilate much more quickly. When these clauses were finally revoked only in 1953, bureaucrats were beside themselves as to how they would now be able to prevent those Jews they saw as unacceptable from arriving to settle.⁴⁷ It must be remembered that in July 1938, at the Evian Conference in France dealing with the burgeoning number of refugees from Nazism, the Australian representative's rationale for his country's refusal to accept any of them was that Australia did not have a racial problem and didn't want to introduce one.⁴⁸ It was a policy soon to be slightly eased under pressure from Great Britain and the United States of America, when permission was reluctantly given for 15,000 to enter, with some 8,000 actually doing so just before the outbreak of World War Two. Only some 5,000 of them were Jews.⁴⁹

Anglo Australian Jewry's apprehension that the presence of these Jewish émigrés might arouse anti-Semitism led to its demand that they quickly lose their outward signs of difference. English, not foreign tongues were to be used in public, and social and religious behaviour was not to attract the attention of the Gentile population. They were continually berated not to provide ammunition for those disposed towards anti-Semitism.⁵⁰

On the back of the Great Depression it was not difficult to mount an argument against the influx of 'foreign' Jews, whatever their reason for coming. David Mossenson speaks of anti-Semitism as being mild in Western Australia, and yet

causing much angst in its tiny Jewish community during an influx of 'foreign' Jews from 1937 to 1940, and during the post-World War Two years from 1947 to 1957.⁵¹ Freda Searle recalls the street and schoolyard anti-Semitism of the 1930s in the Melbourne suburb of Carlton where 'foreign' Jews tended to settle.⁵² Such sentiments still circulated there during World War Two.⁵³ The usual Jewish response was one of forbearance, one that had an extensive longevity. In 1871, the Reverend Rintel castigated his fellow Melbourne Jews for their unwillingness to challenge the anti-Semitism evident in their day.⁵⁴ John Levi recounts that a Jewish communal leader in 1907 was appalled by the sight of Jewish boys playing marbles in public on Sunday because it might upset their Christian neighbours.⁵⁵ Once World War Two broke out, Anglo-Jewish leaders felt unnecessarily compelled to advise their 'foreign' brethren to fully back the war effort as if they, who had already tasted Hitler's lash, did not understand where their duty lay.

Even with World War Two over and the Holocaust stamped on the world's psyche, barriers were still placed in the path of Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs) restricting the numbers who could seek refuge in Australia. That said, it is still a fact that Australia took in more per head of population than any other country other than Israel. Only a few years after the war, a poll was taken of local attitudes to people from other lands. It revealed that Germans against whom Australians had so recently fought were far more preferable to Jews who were rated only one level above the bottom category, 'blacks'.⁵⁶ Andrew Markus has written that it seems that the revelation of near genocide of

European Jewry had done nothing or very little to soften the attitude of the general community towards them.⁵⁷ A Jewish quota of 25% was applied to ships commandeered by the International Refugee Organisation to bring DPs from camps in war-torn Europe to Australia.⁵⁸

Some members of Australia's fledgling diplomatic corps also attempted to slow down, even to prevent, Jewish DP immigration. The anti-Semitic Australian Consul General in Shanghai, O.W.C. Fuhrman, specifically denied Jewish DP entry permits to Australia.⁵⁹ It is somewhat ironic that this gentleman was selected as Australia's first diplomatic emissary to the new Jewish State of Israel in 1950, and from there carried on his Judeophobia that included his desire to prevent DP emigration from Israel on grounds that the migrants might be communist agents.⁶⁰ As well, a dispatch from the Australian Mission in Delhi caused the Department of Immigration to deny entry to Australia of 'Jews of Middle East Origin' on the basis that they were likely to be 'colored'.⁶¹ Doubtless, the fact that the Jews of Palestine were proving increasingly troublesome to the British administration there exacerbated the hostile feelings of some acute Anglophile Australians towards Jews. It certainly upset the prominent Catholic political journalist and radio commentator. D.G.M. Jackson, a traditional Christian anti-Semite, who feared that Jewish success would usurp Christian influence in the Holy Land.⁶²

Support of political Zionism, the ideology which sought an autonomous Jewish homeland in Palestine, also caused divisions within the Australian Jewish corpus. Spiritual Zionism, the longing for the Zion and Jerusalem, had always played a central

role in Jewish religious liturgy. Anglo-Jewry, however, had no interest in beating a path to the harsh environs of the physical Zion. Political Zionism, however, did draw support from among the 'foreign' Jews. Anglo-Jews feared political Zionism might have their national allegiance to Australia questioned, and that they would be pinned with the white feather of treason—dual loyalty.⁶³ In the wake of the Holocaust this schism mended.

Even at the time when the full extent of the Holocaust was being revealed to the world, there were those Jews who feared that any social or cultural creation of a discrete Jewish nature might possibly incite anti-Semitism. The decision during World War Two to create a Jewish Red Cross group created controversy in the community for this reason.⁶⁴ In 1945, an editorial in the *Australian Jewish News* warned against the formation of a Jewish day school in Melbourne:

... There is anti-Semitism in Australia, and quite a lot. But it is partly imported merchandise, which goes together with Fascism, partly home made. But we can be assured that we will just strengthen these tendencies by bringing up our children in a "foreign" way which is so suspect in the average Australian.⁶⁵

Even the formation in Melbourne of Mount Scopus College which opened in 1949, caused the ageing and indomitable long-serving leader of Anglo-Jewry in that city, Rabbi Jacob Danglow of the St Kilda Synagogue, much heartache lest it might provide a pretext for some premier private schools to bar Jewish enrolment.⁶⁶

CONCLUSION

To date there has been no full-blown historical analysis of anti-Semitism in Australia which combines both qualitative and quantitative aspects. That social and cultural anti-Semitism existed in the period 1860–1950 is a fact. The question is whether it was of a nature meriting real concern. Anti-Semitism can be real, imagined or believed potential. These different aspects of the same problem have affected both individual and communal Jewish responses. The mere tabulation of anti-Semitic incidents alone tells us little about their emotional impact on Jewish lives. Relying on empirical data alone tells us little about how the ordinary Jew coped with anti-Semitism.

Whether as a result of actual incidents or the fear of its occurrence, anti-Semitism stamped Anglo-Australian Jewry in at least two connected ways. It affected their social behaviour and communal practice. And it also influenced how they related to 'foreign' Jews who settled in their midst. It was asserted that nothing should be seen, said, or done, that might incur the displeasure of the Gentile community to such a degree that it might arouse anti-Semitism and therefore put the social standing of Anglo-Australian Jewry in peril.

Jews have long had to wear the oft heard criticism of being over-sensitive to the possibility of anti-Semitism. They are accused of often seeing dangers that are not there. However, their Exilic history has taught them the fundamental lesson that their domicile in places considered safe for extensive periods of time cannot be guaranteed or taken for granted. No doubt, this 'wariness gene' also affected

Anglo-Australian Jewry. Not that anti-Semitism in Australia between 1860 and 1950 even approached the levels reached in Europe, England, and the United States of America. Nonetheless, communally, Anglo-Australian Jewry was ever looking over its shoulder to see 'what the Goyim (Gentiles) might think'.

During this period, Australian Jewry was a miniscule and nationally scattered minority, never reaching a size that posed a threat to anyone. On the other hand, despite the fact that Australia did progress down the liberal democratic path relatively peacefully, any anti-Semitism, real or imagined, placed Jews on edge. It forced advocacy in their interest to be conducted privately through personal contacts. This remained basically so until 1949 when the private path failed and with the Holocaust in mind, and somewhat buoyed by the establishment of the State of Israel, a more assertive Australian Jewry threw off the shackles of the past to publicly contest the perceived threat of mass German immigration.

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A 'SUCCESSFUL EXPERIMENT' NO MORE

THE INTENSIFICATION OF RELIGIOUS BIGOTRY IN EASTERN AUSTRALIA, 1865–1885

MALCOLM CAMPBELL

On Saint Patrick's Day 1859 the Yass solicitor George C. Allman addressed a banquet of the town's most prominent men and women. In his address, Allman, the son of a Protestant Irish settler, Captain Francis Allman, praised his town as a 'successful experiment', a place where people 'of all opinions, grades and religions may meet and remember that they belong to a common country'. His sentiments were echoed by the Reverend Patrick Bermingham, one of the town's two Roman Catholic priests, who described the evening's celebration as one 'calculated to make the inhabitants of the southern districts appreciate the sterling good qualities of each other without reference to race or creed'.¹

The experience of Yass in the 1850s was not unique. At this time, across much of southeastern Australia, the formation and 'working out' of new communities, and the interdependence of those who settled in them, produced striking levels of religious tolerance and inter-denominational cooperation. As Henry Haygarth observed in his account of life in the Australian Bush:

Few places can show so strange a mixture, and yet so complete a 'fusion', of the heterogeneous ma-

terials of its society, as the 'Bush' of Australia. It is curious to see men differing so entirely in birth, education, and habits, and in their whole moral and intellectual nature, thrown into such close contact, united by common interests, engaged under circumstances of perfect equality in the same pursuits, and mutually dependent on each other for all the good offices of civility and neighbourhood.²

Mary Durack made a similar point in her celebrated book *Kings in Grass Castles* when she wrote that her descendants 'had almost as many friends in the Scottish, English and Jewish sections of the community as among their own. Only the occasional visit of a Church dignitary, such as the pioneer Archbishop Polding, called for a more or less exclusive Irish gathering'.³

In the quarter of a century after 1860, however, a good deal of the amity and responsiveness that characterised inter-denominational relations in mid-nineteenth century colonial Australia diminished. In particular, controversies over education and the course and effect of Irish nationalist politics promoted a highly visible fis-

sion along religious lines, producing what the historian Mark Lyons described as a 'consolidation of sectarian subculture' in Australian life.⁴ In this paper, I wish to explore the intensification of religious bigotry in eastern Australia, addressing the questions why did religious bigotry take root so *strongly* in Australia at this particular time, and in what ways did the new sectarian hostility depart from previous patterns of inter-group relations?

i

Michael Hogan asserted in his book *The Sectarian Strand* '[t]he great sectarian political issue of the nineteenth century was undoubtedly that of education'.⁵ In the Australian colonies, the education question came to the forefront from the 1850s, as the inadequacies of the existing denominational system (state funding to churches to provide schools) became more and more apparent. Inadequate funding, poor facilities, the presence of large numbers of untrained teachers and low levels of pupil attendance prompted reformers to advocate a shift from the denominational system to one that was (in their terms) secular, compulsory, and free. As one advocate of reform asserted, 'this is with us not a question of sentiment but of political wisdom and prudence ... [S]uch education as is thought amply sufficient for the working classes in old countries, where men rarely change their social position, will not do for Australia'.⁶ Commencing in South Australia, successive colonial governments moved to diminish funding to denominational schools and exert greater state control over the provision and organisation of education. In New South Wales, Henry Parkes introduced his

Public Schools Act in 1866, arguing that reform was urgently required to improve the availability and quality of education. He also proposed (perhaps somewhat disingenuously) that his reforms would help alleviate 'jealousies and uncharitable feelings among the different sections of society'.⁷ Instead, Parkes's bill provoked new levels of sectarian controversy.

Australia's Roman Catholic bishops steadfastly denounced the mounting attacks on denominational education. At their 1862 Provincial Council the bishops criticised as 'persecuting sectarianism' the tide towards state-controlled education. The pressure of their opposition increased through the 1860s as the character of the Roman Catholic Church in Australia was recast. English Benedictine control gradually weakened as a succession of Irish bishops was appointed: James Quinn to Brisbane in 1859, his brother Matthew to Bathurst in 1866, Daniel Murphy to Hobart in 1866, William Lanigan in Goulburn in 1867, and the Quinns' cousin, Timothy O'Mahony, to Armidale in 1869. The arrival of these men, ardent supporters of Cardinal Paul Cullen, and deeply influenced by the transformation of the Irish Church following the 1850 Synod of Thurles, ensured not only impressive programs of church construction and parish formation but strident opposition to public schooling.⁸ Their presence fanned the sectarian embers in colonial life: Patrick O'Farrell observed, 'the new bishops were, from their arrival, notably—and censoriously—interested in colonial politics, and disposed towards the adoption of a belligerent Catholic sectarianism'.⁹

In 1869 the Provincial Council of the Australian Catholic bishops reaffirmed its

determination to oppose the introduction of secular education and to insist on the teaching of Roman Catholic doctrine in Catholic-run schools. Though Protestant leaders in the colonies were themselves far from acquiescent towards the principle of state-funded secular education, the unwavering Catholic position was easily and quickly represented by its opponents as one of exclusiveness and intransigence—as a demonstration of that Church's overriding commitment to Roman rather than Australian precepts. The issue came to a head most visibly in Victoria in 1872, when in a bitter election the government of the former Young Irelander, now moderate colonial Irishman, Charles Gavan Duffy, was defeated. The new Victorian government, emboldened with its success at the poll, moved to abolish state aid to denominational schools. The education controversy in Victoria foreshadowed conflicts that would occur across colonial Australia, though with varying degrees of intensity and bitterness. But, the general situation was clear: the worlds of Australia's Catholic and Protestant populations were becoming more separate and insular ones.¹⁰

ii

The bitter controversy over education in the 1860s coincided with increasing concerns throughout the British empire at the course of Irish affairs. In 1866 militant Irish nationalists in the United States launched two abortive invasions of Canada. The following year Fenians launched an unsuccessful rising on Irish soil. The nationalist organisation's plans in Britain, including an attempt to seize arms from Chester Castle, were foiled.

However, though Fenianism's failures in 1866–7 far outweighed its successes, the movement made its mark and attracted international attention in a series of dramatic events. The rescue of the movement's leader, Colonel Thomas Kelly, from a prison van in Manchester, the trial and execution of the men who staged the rescue, and the bombing of Clerkenwell prison in London instilled across the British empire an unprecedented fear of Irish insurgency.

Fenianism's impact was felt even in distant Australia. Through the latter half of 1867 the Australasian colonies watched with apprehension the rising tide of violence in the British Isles. It was hardly surprising, then, that the British government's decision to dispatch a contingent of Fenian prisoners to Western Australia aroused considerable alarm. Colonial complaints against the perpetuation of convict transportation in general, and of the threat posed by the Fenians in particular, proved ineffectual. In January 1868 sixty-two Fenian prisoners and 217 other convicts arrived in Western Australia aboard the *Hougoumont*. The rebels' presence incited considerable concern, especially among the population of the western colony. But isolation was not the only factor that aroused disquiet. The arrival of the Fenian prisoners was given particular poignancy by the coterminous visit to Australia of Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, first member of the British Royal family to tour the Australian colonies.¹¹

The prince arrived in South Australia on 31 October 1867 where he received an effusive welcome from the local population. His party subsequently moved on to Melbourne, in tone the most Irish of Australian cities in the nineteenth century.

Melbourne's Irish Catholic population showed a measure of defiance to the royal visit, rallying outside the city's Protestant Hall where a provocative illumination recalling the Battle of the Boyne had been erected. Shots were fired from the hall towards the protestors, and a Catholic youth was killed. A brawl ensued, and an Orangeman was arrested. Though this incident possessed no definite Fenian overtones, it provided a stark indication of sectarian tensions then on the increase throughout the Australian colonies and a chilling foretaste of the violence that would soon engulf the tour.¹²

From Victoria the prince travelled north to New South Wales where, as elsewhere in Australia, he was greeted with effusive displays of affection. The *Sydney Morning Herald* attempted to explain the colonial rapture when it wrote on 21 January 1868, 'there is in the colonies a large reservoir of loyalty long pent up. [The] colonies have had few opportunities to exhibit their love [and these] demonstrations in honour of Prince Alfred are its overflow'.¹³ Sydney's Roman Catholic newspaper, the *Freeman's Journal*, likewise wholeheartedly endorsed the royal visit, and made no attempt to disguise its relief that the prince's arrival in the city had proved incident-free. Its editorial comment, though, revealed a scarcely concealed nervousness about the days ahead, an air of fearful anticipation engendered at least in part by the shadow of Fenianism:

So far, at all events, we may congratulate ourselves that the royal visit has been marked by no incident distressing to anybody. *All things being taken into consideration our freedom from accident has been most remarkable.* No offensive display was

made by any body of men. The utmost good humour prevailed. Indeed, the police report shows that the city was more peaceable than ordinary ... of one thing we are quite sure, that there is not a man of any creed or nationality on earth who does not wish the Duke of Edinburgh a pleasant stay here and a safe voyage home.¹⁴

But the tour did not remain accident free for long. The prince agreed to attend a picnic to raise funds for a new sailors' home. On 11 March, while attending the event in the harbour-side suburb of Clontarf, an Irishman named Henry James O'Farrell shot Alfred in the back. The assassin was wrestled to the ground, arrested, and saved from the vengeful crowd.¹⁵ But even before the culprit had been publicly identified, all attention focussed on the assassin's nationality and his political motives.

As news of the assassination attempt spread, the *Freeman's Journal* feared the worst. Its weekly edition, forced to press before the gunman's identity could be confirmed, admitted 'the prayer which was fervently uttered by thousands of our countrymen on their learning of the sad affair was "Pray, God, that he is not an Irishman"'. Should the culprit indeed prove to be Irish, the newspaper avowed, 'then Irishmen must bow their heads in sorrow, and confess that the greatest reproach which has ever been cast on them, the deepest shame that has ever been coupled with the name of our people, has been attached to us here in the country where we have been so free and prosperous'.¹⁶ Too late for the newspaper's editor, but soon enough for the colony's Irish Catholic population, the awful truth was known: the culprit was indeed an Irish

Catholic and a Fenian connection was strongly suspected.

Despite O'Farrell's cry at the time of the shooting—'I'm a Fenian—God Save Ireland'—historians discount the possibility that the assassin was truly a Fenian. He was, in fact, an unbalanced young man, recently cast out from a seminary.¹⁷ But the prospect that he had Fenian connections, coupled with the recent arrival of the prisoners on Australian soil, incited a wave of anti-Irish, anti-Catholic hysteria the like of which had not been seen in the Australian colonies before. Local politicians, most notably Henry Parkes, inflamed passions with allegations of conspiracy with the result that the cloak of suspicion fell heavily upon the Irish Catholic population. Sleuths scoured the countryside, bounty hunters seeking payment in return for uncovering evidence of the diabolical Australian Fenian connection.¹⁸ The colonial parliament, mortified at the attempt on the life of the monarch's son, enacted a treason felony bill. The New South Wales premier, Cork-born Sir James Martin, declared in parliament that should Fenianism be found in the colony, 'it would be met with a vigour and determination which it had not encountered in the mother country'. Membership of the Loyal Orange Order in the colony doubled by the end of 1868 as outraged and fearful Protestants enlisted their support in defence of queen and country. Across the land, sectarian feelings escalated to levels scarcely imaginable a decade before.¹⁹

Roman Catholics responded to this sectarian upsurge in two ways. Most heeded the advice of the *Freeman's Journal*, to 'obey the law of the land and patiently wait till the good sense of the people returns'.²⁰ Underpinning this

counsel was a confident belief in the generally benign circumstances of colonial life and recognition of the presence of freedoms and liberties far exceeding those experienced in Ireland. Firm in those convictions, Irish Catholics cast their opponents as bigots, men and women out of touch with the true tenor of Australian life. As Melbourne's *Advocate* remarked welcoming the New Year in 1869, those who perpetuated sectarian division in the Australian colonies were 'out of date and out of place'. 'The wretched days [of] idiotic nervous no-popery are now passed for ever', it asserted all too prematurely, before prophesying better times ahead for Ireland. 'For the first time in history', wrote the *Advocate*, 'those who have an influence on English opinion seem to think that the wishes of Irishmen should count for something in the government of their native land'.²¹ In line with that optimism, most Irish Catholics initially eschewed open conflict with the Protestant majority.

However, a minority of Irish Catholics reacted to the sectarian taunts with a greater measure of defiance—or, at least, a show of fight. Most famously, drunken gold diggers in country New South Wales, worse for wear after the excitement of the St Patrick's Day races, yelled at local townspeople 'We're bloody Fenians! Come On! We'd soon kill a man as look at him!' Others joined in too, if less dramatically, more ambiguously, to assert and defend their own stake in Australian society. A Goulburn resident, Bartholomew Toomey, was brought before the magistrate's court after declaring that the shooting served the prince right for 'he had no business in the country'. Influenced by such incidents, the New South Wales governor, Lord Belmore, reported to the parliamentary

under-secretary for the colonies, 'rumours of a spirit of Fenianism [are] abroad, particularly in the country districts'.²² But concerns also existed about the likelihood of a radical nationalist presence in the towns and cities. W. A. Duncan, a prominent Scots-born member of Sydney's Catholic community, spoke publicly to deny the presence of organised Fenian groups, but admitted that 'there were a few hot-headed young men who could not keep quiet ... hot-headed youths who talked very foolishly'. Where once such expressions of bravado would have attracted little note, now they were sufficient to sound the alarm that violent Irish nationalist activity would surface in Australia, and served to intensify the fires of sectarian tension throughout the colonies.²³

Events across the Tasman Sea in New Zealand added further to the commotion. In 1867 a new arrival on the South Island's West Coast, John Manning, founded a newspaper, the *New Zealand Celt*. Manning's journal was provocative and uncompromising, and soon found a strong following among the large number of Irish immigrants on the region's goldfields. The population of single Irish men present on the West Coast proved especially receptive to the *Celt's* enthusiastic promotion of Irish national consciousness. In line with the affirmation of that new and assertive Irish identity, on 8 March 1868 the Irish in Hokitika staged a mock funeral for the Manchester martyrs. Led by a Roman Catholic priest, Father William Larkin, a funeral procession wound its way to the local cemetery where a Celtic cross was erected. This overt display by Irish gold miners caused consternation among local loyalists, and when news of the attempted assassination of Prince Alfred reached New

Zealand soon after, hostility was further aroused. Soon after, when Father Larkin made a provocative speech in which he expressed sympathy with Fenianism, local authorities reacted. Manning and five others were arrested. Rumours of Fenian activism in the West Coast mining community abounded, and the colony's Anglo-Irish governor, Sir George Bowen, dispatched troops to reinforce local volunteers. All Australasia then seemed vulnerable to the tentacles of radical Irish nationalism.²⁴

In both New Zealand and Australia, the Fenian threat was grossly inflated—in fact, as best one can tell, invented. But isolation, remoteness, and colonial fragility bred fear and paroxysm. By the late 1860s, Irish Catholics in Australia confronted more strident opposition and there existed for all groups a more hostile sectarian environment than had been present for several decades. In 1869, with the assassination attempt of the previous year still fresh in the colonial mind, renewed attacks were made on the level of Irish immigration to Australia. In a debate in the New South Wales parliament on administrative changes to the assisted immigration program, opponents of the Irish decried the threat posed to the colony by the twin evils of Romanism and Irish pauperism. Henry Parkes, who had exploited the O'Farrell affair to inflame sectarian passions, now advocated greater restriction on Irish entry to Australia, and quoted Charles Wentworth Dilke's observations on the allegedly deleterious effect the Catholic Irish were having upon American life to support the case for immigration restriction.

through drink, through gambling,
and other vices of homeless,

thrifless men, they are soon reduced to beggary; and moral as they are by nature, the Irish are nevertheless supplying America with that which she had never possessed before—a criminal and pauper class.²⁵

Though conditions in Australia and the United States were different in numerous ways, by 1870 the image of Australia's Irish was increasingly influenced by local (Australian) interpretations of the Irish experience in North America, not just by negative stereotypes of the Irish at home. And though the reaction of Australian Irish Catholics was in degree nothing so defiant or abrasive as that evinced by their American counterparts, they would exhibit a decidedly sharper, brusquer exterior to their opponents through the 1870s.

iii

Historians have debated the question which *group* was most responsible for the worsening climate of sectarianism in Australia in the late 1860s and 1870s. In his detailed study of developments in New South Wales, Mark Lyons identified the attitudes and desires of Australia's Irish Catholic population as the paramount cause of worsening relations: 'the real impediment to Catholic assimilation came from the Catholics themselves'. On Lyons's reading of events, the greater politicisation and heightened national consciousness present among Irish immigrants of the "'forties" generation', in conjunction with militant Catholic intransigence on matters such as religious education, terminated the more amicable inter-group relations that had characterised colonial life in the preceding decades. However, others have

strenuously contested Lyons's analysis. Michael Hogan, in a more wide-ranging study of sectarianism in Australia, argued with justification that Lyons's evidence was equally open to interpretation as demonstrating Protestant culpability for the deterioration in relations, and that the roots of sectarianism in Australia could be identified much sooner than the 1860s. This is of course true, but neither analysis establishes persuasively the specific forces that caused the flame of sectarian hatred to burn so bright in Australia at this time.

Other analysis has focussed on the role of specific issues and events in triggering change. Here the education question and the assassination attempt are identified as primary causes of an upsurge in religious bigotry. Yet, notwithstanding the importance of education and Irish affairs, these causal factors do not in themselves explain adequately the intensity of the sectarian escalation at this time.

Comparison with the eastern United States suggests a much more complicated picture, and provides important insights into the forces that drove Australian tempers to such fevered pitch. During the second quarter of the nineteenth century profound changes affected major American cities such as New York and Philadelphia as early industrialisation displaced the artisan system, urban concentrations expanded to new levels, and immigration reached new peaks. Together these developments engendered deep feelings of insecurity among the native-born population, especially those who Dale Knobel described as 'middling folk who wanted to get ahead and feared falling behind'. Unsurprisingly, in the midst of their unease, many of these Americans were attracted to fraternal organisations. The agendas of

many of these associations corresponded closely with evangelical Protestant concerns including liquor licensing, Sabbath closing and public education. In the 1840s, public education in particular emerged as a key site in American Nativists' struggle against what they understood to be the deleterious effects of mass immigration. Controversies arose in both New York and Philadelphia where Roman Catholic Church leaders demanded the right to have their preferred Douay bible used in public schools in place of the King James version. To Nativists, this Catholic demand for separate religious instruction provided confirmation of the group's suspect loyalty and isolation from Republican ideals, contested though these were. In Philadelphia, violent rioting broke out in 1844, its immediate triggers the issue of bible reading. However, as David Montgomery and others have shown, the roots of the crisis lay much deeper, in the conjunction of economic change, class insecurity and fraternal ideology.²⁶

Though aspects of the Australian scene undoubtedly differed from the United States, important similarities can be suggested between the two sectarian upsurges. In eastern Australia, the 1870s marked the beginning of a wave of major manufacturing expansion. Though statistical data for the decade are limited and imprecise, two major studies point to a virtual doubling in the numbers of Australians employed in manufacturing between 1870 and 1880. Growth was particularly strong in the number of persons engaged in the production of metals (468%), textiles (374%) and clothing (505%).²⁷ With this expansion in manufacturing employment came an increase in the proportion of the population resident

in the largest urban centres. Whereas in 1871, 46 per cent of the population of New South Wales were resident in urban areas, by 1881, 58 per cent of the colony's population lived in the major city or towns. Most of that increase occurred in the capital city, Sydney, where the population increased by nearly 300 per cent between 1861 and 1881 though the population of the colony had increased by only 114 per cent during the same period. In Victoria the proportion of the colonial population resident in urban areas had increased quite substantially in 1860s, and the population of Melbourne continued to increase in the 1870s though some decline occurred in the size of smaller urban centres. The population of smaller Australian cities also rose substantially: Adelaide, for example, doubled in size between 1861 and 1881.²⁸

In addition to economic change and early urban concentration, the more feverish sectarian atmosphere in Australia in the 1870s also coincided with significant growth in political movements espousing evangelical demands, a conjunction that occurred in the United States during its earlier period of sectarian animus. Doctrinal differences were subsumed as new, politically active, pan-Protestant organisations emerged. The Protestant Political Association, formed in 1872, provided a forum for Protestant mobilisation against the extent of Roman Catholic influence on colonial life. Social and fraternal organisations also experienced strong growth. Membership of the Orange Order, which had risen sharply in the immediate wake of the 1868 assassination attempt, increased at an extraordinary rate through the 1870s. According to one study, its membership in New South Wales rose

from fewer than 3,000 in 1869 to as many as 19,000 members in 1876, while the number of affiliated lodges rose from 28 to 130. By the late 1870s, Lyons estimated, as many as 15 per cent of Protestant males aged over sixteen years were members.²⁹ The expansion in the membership of the Orange Order was accompanied by a diminution in its Irish orientation. Gradually, the movement expanded to become one more reflective of Australian Protestantism at large than of its specific Irish antecedents. For its momentum it drew heavily on evangelical religion and its associated reform campaigns, such as temperance, rather than matters Irish. Though the Orange Order encompassed diverse denominations and social backgrounds, its cornerstone membership in 1870 was clear enough: lower middle-class and respectable working-class men of ambition, frustrated in their yearnings, and often insecure in disposition. Protestant fraternity offered such men security, ritual, prestige, connections, and the hope of social mobility. Some were fortunate to secure that upward movement too, if the gradual elevation in social status among the movement's leadership by the end of the 1870s is an accurate guide.³⁰

The mobilisation of Australia's Protestant population was matched by a new level of discipline and vigour among Australian Catholics, a phenomenon directly attributable to the arrival of Ireland's 'Devotional Revolution' on Australian shores. However, as Patrick O'Farrell argued persuasively, the Australian scene lent a particular urgency and purpose to the introduction of that model of religious reinvigoration. In colonial Australia, notorious for its apathy and indifference to religious matters, a strong institutional

framework—particularly one instilled with heavy Irish practice, tone and rhetoric—offered the best hope for the Roman Catholic Church to consolidate and strengthen its position.³¹ The new Irish bishops came to Australia determined to raise the level of devotion and to instil new vigour into the practice of Australian Catholicism. To this end, they were ready and willing to attack or confront their opponents.³² In the more heated, confrontational environment, cooler voices were drowned out. In November 1872 a new newspaper, the *Irishman*, was founded in Melbourne. Opposed to the maintenance of sectarian predilections and strongly resistant to party allegiances, the newspaper ceased publication within four months. Its blandness and neutrality appear to have won little support in these contentious years.³³

iv

By the early 1880s, it might be judged that George Allman's 'successful experiment' was at an end. In 1881 the essayist A. M. Topp argued in the *Melbourne Review* that Ireland's population was fundamentally different than that of other regions in the British Isles. Whereas the Welsh and Scots merged naturally with the English, he maintained, the Irish were irreconcilably set apart:

It is only with regard to them that the question of race becomes important. Only as to them can any doubt arise concerning the loyalty and benefit to the empire of any of the races that have acquired the English tongue and are allowed the rights and privileges conferred

on its people by the institutions of the English people.³⁴

To Topp, the prevalence of Roman Catholicism in Ireland was an evil and menacing by-product of Irish racial inferiority, a subordinate status that threatened to undermine the future of the whole of the empire in just the way it had been 'sapping the vitals of the great republic'.

Topp's explicit linkage of race and religion is demonstrative of the extent to which sectarian divisions were imprinted in Australian life by the early 1880s. When the Irish Parliamentary Party MP John Redmond and his brother William visited the Australian colonies in 1883 as delegates for the Irish National League they encountered an immensely hostile environment. Arrayed against the Irish delegates was a press that, in John Redmond's view, exceeded England's in its hostility to and ignorance of Irish affairs. The *Sydney Morning Herald* conducted a prolonged and bitter campaign against the Irish representatives, describing their rhetoric as inflammatory and out of place. 'If Mr Redmond does not succeed in provoking disorder in Sydney', it wrote in one editorial, 'it will be due not to the want of inflammable material thrown down, but to the orderliness and self-restraint of the population'. Unsurprisingly, the protestant press was particularly vociferous in its opposition, the *Protestant Standard* describing the delegates' mission as an attempt to 'white wash that blood-stained League'. 'He and his emissaries', it complained vituperatively, 'have stirred up strife in the United States; brought to the surface a body of people ready with dynamite to blow up and destroy public buildings, careless of life, prompted by malice, ready to supply arms for rebellion

and money for assassination; and then Mr Redmond crosses the sea to sow like abominable seed here'.³⁵ In reply to such charges, John Redmond strenuously denied that he was out to inflame sectarian or nationalist passions. Writing in Sydney's *Freeman's Journal* he declared that he 'viewed with thankfulness and pride the Irishmen of these colonies living in amity with their brethren of other nationalities, occupying the position of respected peaceable and loyal citizens of a great and free country'.³⁶ At least in the initial months of the tour, however, his energetic protestations did little to convince his critics to temper their attacks and bigotry remained rife.³⁷

Yet, weighed against this pessimistic assessment of the situation, at least three counterpoints should be raised. First, despite the rise in religious bigotry in the period 1865–1885 and its real and harmful consequences for peoples of all faiths, the Australian scene remained a mild one compared to other locations. Hilary Carey was correct when she wrote recently, 'Australians lived in a sectarian environment in the nineteenth century [however,] the sectarian tensions of colonial Australia remained a pale imitation of rival tensions in northern England, Ireland and Scotland or in other settler societies, including the United States'.³⁸ Second, at the end of the period in question some signs of a tempering of the sectarian strains were becoming evident. During the 1880s a fair deal of the heat generated by the question of Ireland's future dissipated, particularly following William Gladstone's acceptance of the principle of Home Rule. In succeeding years, an increasing number of Australians would acknowledge merit in Irish claims to Home Rule, at least so long as

those demands were couched in terms similar to the Australian colonies' own constitutional arrangements. And thirdly, as Andrew Markus and others have shown, the 1880s witnessed a sharp intensification of anti-Chinese sentiment in the Australian colonies and this facilitated further the positioning of Irish Catholics as privileged White insiders.³⁹

From the mid 1880s, therefore, the neutralising of Ireland as an immediate political issue and the pathway to White Australian nationhood went some way to alleviating the intensity of overt religious bigotry in Australia. But the power of bigotry in the late nineteenth century was at best dormant, never extinct. The education question had not been resolved, and it would remain for most of the next century a divisive issue in Australian life. And, when during World War One the contentious issue of Ireland's future again came to the fore, religious bigotry returned with full force to divide the nation and its people.

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¹³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21, 22 January 1868.

¹⁴ *Freeman's Journal*, 25 January 1868 (*italics mine*).

¹⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 March 1868; Lyons, *Aspects of Sectarianism*, pp. 89–100; Amos, *Fenians*, pp. 52–3; Robert Travers, *The Phantom Fenians of New South Wales*, Kenthurst, NSW, Kangaroo Press, 1986, pp. 19–26.

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A 'REGION OF INDECENCY AND PRURIENCY'

RELIGIOUS CONFLICT, FEMALE COMMUNITIES AND HEALTH CARE IN COLONIAL NEW SOUTH WALES

JUDITH GODDEN

The focus of this paper is on the religious conflict that nearly destroyed the attempt to introduce reformed nursing, as advocated by Florence Nightingale, into the colony of New South Wales. Religious conflict, arising from belief and bigotry and enflamed by images of medieval martyrs, had a major impact on the social and political life of the colony. Such conflict peaked in New South Wales during the 1860s-80s and especially in 1868, the year the Nightingale nurses arrived. Reforming nursing was far from the seemingly innocuous act it might appear. Nightingale nursing had a major impact on the health care system and challenged accepted notions of women's work. The influence of these founding years reverberates in modern nursing. Reforming nursing also exacerbated major anxieties about women's communities. These anxieties were revealed in a somewhat farcical public brawl in 1870 between the advocates and opponents of reformed nursing, Catholics, High Church Anglicans and Evangelical Protestants.

INTRODUCTION

On 5 March 1868, six nurses landed in Sydney. All had been trained at the Nightingale School of Nursing, St Thomas' Hospital, London, the training school set up by the Nightingale Fund to reform civilian nursing. The Nightingale Fund had been created during the Crimean War in appreciation of Florence Nightingale who headed the teams of nurses sent to succor the soldiers.

The New South Wales Government paid the six nurses' passages and guaranteed their salaries for three years. Lucy Osburn, as the newly appointed Lady Superintendent of the Sydney Infirmary and Dispensary (now Sydney Hospital), was in charge of the nurses. They had been selected by the Nightingale Fund and approved by Florence Nightingale herself to reform nursing at the Sydney Infirmary and to train nurses so that they would spread Nightingale nursing throughout the colony.¹ Their arrival was a significant event in the history of Australian health care. Effective nursing with an emphasis on hygiene and cleanliness was, and is, essential to health care.² The medical practitioners at Sydney Infirmary

were particularly aware of the importance of nursing to their increasingly effective medical practice, arising from advances such as the use of anaesthetics in surgery. For years they petitioned the hospital board to employ trained nurses.³ The arrival of Lucy Osburn as Lady Superintendent was also a major milestone in women's work. Nightingale style nursing was a major new avenue of work for upper working-class and lower middle-class women. Lucy Osburn's role as Lady Superintendent was also innovative; a public assertion of the right of upper middle-class women to retain their high status as 'ladies' while also being paid a salary.

The introduction of Nightingale nursing to the colony of New South Wales was also, as argued below, a significant event in Australian religious history. Nursing may sound innocuous but it was to significantly add to the religious tensions of the colony in the late nineteenth century. To the nineteenth century mind, morality arose from religious beliefs. As Nightingale nurses claimed to embody physical and moral purity⁴ inevitably they were assumed to be acting from religious motives. Suspicious colonials were soon asking, which religion?

COLONIAL BEGINNINGS

Colonial Secretary Henry Parkes was among those who warmly welcomed Osburn and her nurses on their arrival in Sydney on the 5 March 1868. Parkes had written the letter to Florence Nightingale asking for nurses to come to Sydney.⁵ He had recently borne the brunt of church opposition to his 1866 Public Schools Act and had been especially vilified as an enemy of Irish Catholics.⁶ He may have

hoped that the introduction of Nightingale nurses would reinforce, without controversy, an image of statesmanlike concern for social welfare. If so, his political judgment erred.

At first, Osburn and her nurses were a political triumph. Osburn was befriended by the colonial elite but the real public relations coup occurred a week after the nurses' arrival. At a dusty, overcrowded picnic in his honour, Australia's first British royal visitor, Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, was shot in an assassination attempt. He was taken to Government House where the royal naval surgeon extracted the bullet, and two of Osburn's nurses successfully nursed him back to health. The influential surgeon Alfred Roberts, who had attached a detailed memo in support of Parkes's proposal in that first letter to Florence Nightingale, was therefore denied a role in the drama. He somewhat sourly wrote to Nightingale about the resultant publicity for the nurses: 'our Sisters nursed him [the Prince], he was pleased and therefore our Sisters are fashionable folk'.⁷ Even the irreverent newspaper, the *Sydney Punch*, which was later to vehemently oppose Osburn, extended a public welcome to Osburn and her five nurses, hailing them as 'fair sisters of charity'.⁸ Such phraseology should have served as a warning.

The public relations honeymoon lasted little more than a year. Soon Osburn was the focus of enormous opposition. A range of difficulties, including badly built, vermin-infested hospital buildings, chronic ill health, social isolation and loneliness, exacerbated her position. By the end of her first three-year term, Osburn had aroused a sadly impressive number of opponents. She had alienated all but one of

the five nurses who had come out from Britain with her. She had aroused the enmity of Alfred Roberts, a major problem as he was a dominating force in Sydney medical circles and also corresponded with Florence Nightingale. Many members of the Infirmary's Board also regarded her with hostility. Finally, Osburn had the added problem of the withdrawal of support by Florence Nightingale and members of her circle. It is one of history's ironies that while historians have agreed that Osburn succeeded in founding Nightingale nursing in Sydney during her sixteen and a half year term, Nightingale did not think so.⁹ The religious conflict examined below was just one aspect of the conflict over nursing at Sydney Infirmary.

ODIUM THEOLOGICUM

Religious conflict was just one of the issues, but it was a crucial and very public issue. Florence Nightingale was deeply religious and very aware of the problems of religious conflict—of *odium theologicum*.¹⁰ Nightingale was particularly concerned that her nurses should not be caught up in Protestant fears about the gains made by a resurgent British Catholicism since the repeal of the Penal Code in Ireland and the 1829 Catholic Emancipation Act in England.¹¹ Fear of Catholicism meant that the number of Catholics admitted to the Nightingale School of Nursing was deliberately limited, with the result that the Nightingale Lady Superintendents, Matrons and Sisters, in London and in Sydney under Osburn, were all Protestants. In the early 1890s, Angelique Lucille Pringle was forced to resign as Matron of the Nightingale Training School and St Thomas' Hospital. Florence Nightingale

considered her as one of the best of her Matrons, the 'best and ablest woman I know' and called her 'Pearl' for her outstanding qualities. Such qualities were irrelevant when Pringle converted to Catholicism; there was no question that her conversion meant she had to resign.¹²

The potential for conflict between Protestants and Catholics intensified from the 1850s in Britain and Australia. From this decade the Catholic Church hardened its doctrinal line on a number of issues and benefited from a number of high profile converts including Cardinal Manning. Manning had been a member of the High Church wing of the Church of England, that part of the church that had most in common with Catholicism. With the example of Manning and others, there was good reason why Evangelicals feared High Church practices as leading to conversion to Catholicism. There was also good reason why many of Nightingale's nursing Superintendents and Matrons belonged to the High Church wing of the Church of England.

The attraction of Nightingale nursing for High Church women lies in the origins of nursing and its transformation in the nineteenth century. In the first half of the nineteenth century, there were broadly two different categories of nurses. The first category, and majority of nurses, were working-class men and women who nursed members of their own sex and learnt nursing through experience. The women amongst these nurses were, in part unfairly, permanently stigmatised by Charles Dickens in his 1844 novel, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, especially with his character Sairey Gamp. Gamp was working class, coarse and unfeeling, unskilled and prone to drink. The second category of nurses

were members of religious orders. From the 1840s, these included a number of Church of England Sisterhoods, inspired partly by the example of Pastor Fliedner in Germany and his revival of the order of Deaconesses.¹³ The primary inspiration for nursing sisterhoods, however, came from the much admired Catholic Sisters of Charity. A common cry of the day, including the *Times* in its reports which led to Florence Nightingale being sent out to the Crimean War, was: where are the Protestant Sisters of Charity?¹⁴

By the end of the century, there was a third category of nurse, the Nightingale nurse. In many ways they were the Protestant answer to the fame of the Sisters of Charity. These nurses were inspired by Florence Nightingale's role as the Lady of Lamp in the Crimean War during 1854-6. From 1860 they were trained at the Nightingale Fund financed School of Nursing, St Thomas' Hospital, London. Nightingale nursing essentially referred to orderly, disciplined, trained, female controlled nursing care which emphasised hygiene and moral, as well as physical, cleanliness. What made Nightingale nursing different, and so widely acceptable in a Protestant society, was that it offered a unique synthesis of the two previous types of nurse. Nightingale nursing was initially carried out by much the same type of women who had been stigmatised as Gamps but they were now under the control of Sisters who were ideally middle class and 'ladies', inspired by a vocation, not to religious life, but to nursing.¹⁵ Religion was explicitly used to inspire this sense of vocation. Henry Bonham Carter, Nightingale's trusted cousin and Secretary to the Nightingale Fund, for example, advised Nightingale in 1871 that the Probationers

at the Nightingale School of Nursing needed more bible classes 'to keep them above the mere scramble for a remunerative place'.¹⁶

Demanding the same dedication as professed sisters, Nightingale nursing inevitably shared many of the features of the religious Sisterhoods. This tendency was reinforced as Nightingale nursing superintendents, like Osburn, did their midwifery training at Kings' College Hospital, under the nursing control of St John's House, a Church of England Sisterhood.¹⁷ It was due to this arrangement that the *Protestant Standard* was able to repeat the accusation that Mary Jones, Superior of St John's House, was the model for Lucy Osburn's nursing style and not Florence Nightingale.¹⁸ Features in common to both groups included the title of Sister and living in tightly controlled communities. Both wore uniforms which, for nursing sisters, increasingly included the veil. Nightingale nursing and many of the sisterhoods, at least at this time, also had two recruitment streams—one for working-class women, the other for educated, middle-class women. For example, middle-class, educated women entered the Sisters of Charity as choir sisters; less educated working-class women became lay sisters. Similarly, middle-class, educated women entered the Nightingale Nursing School as Lady or Special Probationers (students) and became Sisters; in Sydney under Osburn they were called Sister Probationers. Less educated working-class women entered as Nurse Probationers and became, and stayed, Nurses.¹⁹

The most significant feature in common between Nightingale nurses and members of religious sisterhoods such as

the Catholic Sisters of Charity and the Anglican Sisters of St John's House, was that they were communities of women with a woman in charge. Nightingale insisted that the most important aspect of her reforms was that nurses were under the leadership of 'one female head'.²⁰ Nightingale nursing involved women who lived in and also resulted in a lowering of the age of nurses. Nurses who learnt from experience tended to be older and often widows. The Nightingale nurses, however, needed to be trained and so were younger. Ideally, the Nightingale nurse was between twenty-five to thirty-five years old; in practice both in England and in Sydney, the majority were in their early twenties.²¹ The idea of a female-controlled community, including young girls, led to all sorts of horrors in nineteenth-century minds, not excluding Catholic Archbishops (as the Sisters of Charity in Sydney discovered).²² The feminisation of religion was occurring but women were seen as more child-like, emotional, illogical and more easily influenced than men. A community of women, including young women, without male headship, was seen as inevitably leading away from rationality and true belief. For Evangelical Protestants the fear was that such potentially emotionally unstable communities were vulnerable to the ever-waiting enemy: Rome.

Lucy Osburn was one of the Nightingale nursing leaders who strongly identified with the High Church wing of the Church of England. It is highly likely that Nightingale, during one of her meetings with Osburn before she left for Sydney, advised her to avoid religious conflict by being discreet about her High Church beliefs. In early 1868, as Osburn's ship was nearing Sydney, Florence Nightingale

wrote to another new nursing Superintendent that 'Any expression of High Church views or exhibition of High Church practices would be injurious to the success of the Nursing'.²³ If Nightingale did not, by some unlikely chance, give a similar warning to Lucy Osburn before she left London, she was soon to do so in writing. As early as December 1868, nine months after Osburn arrived in Sydney, Nightingale's key adviser Henry Bonham Carter, knew enough to write to Nightingale that he feared Osburn was 'bent upon Sisterhood notions'. He had heard that she called herself 'the Lady Superior', following Mary Jones the Head of the St John's House Sisters, and had changed the nurses' uniform to be more like that of a religious sister. He advised that 'This is likely to do harm at Sydney where there is a good deal of party spirit R[oman].C[atholic]. & Protestant. Could you give her a hint to avoid this & keep the nursing as "secular" as possible in outward appearance.'²⁴ Nightingale's letter has not survived, but one of Osburn's letters at this time makes it clear she was replying to these concerns.²⁵

With hindsight, there was little chance that religious controversy could have been avoided. As Malcolm Campbell has demonstrated, religious bigotry intensified in eastern Australia during 1865–85. This bigotry was fuelled by the arrival in January 1868 of sixty-two Fenian (militant Irish nationalist) prisoners in Western Australia. Henry Parkes intensified public hysteria by claiming the would-be assassin of Prince Alfred as part of a Fenian conspiracy.²⁶ Of all years, 1868 was the worst possible time to introduce a nursing system that could be confused with a Catholic sisterhood. In addition, the only other

trained nurses in the colony were Sisters of Charity who had established St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney in 1857. As Osburn reported, there was the common belief in Sydney that Florence Nightingale was Catholic so it was logical to believe that she had instituted her system of nursing along Catholic lines.²⁷ The large and cumbersome Board of Sydney Infirmary could only make the conflict worse, as it did with most issues it dealt with. As with the majority of large Sydney charities at the time, the Infirmary Board was reputed to be militantly Evangelical but to gain government subsidies needed its governing body to be 'unsectarian'.²⁸ The Board therefore represented the range of major religions in Sydney. It included Father Dwyer, a Catholic Priest who clashed with Henry Parkes over the treatment of Prince Alfred's would-be assassin, and at least one Jewish member, Joseph Raphael. Raphael was rigidly conscientious in all his duties, a meticulous and highly skilled craftsman responsible for making Lucy Osburn's beautiful cedar office furniture that is still in the Nightingale Wing of Sydney Hospital today. He was also described, by one of his many opponents, as 'the foulest-mouthed man in Sydney'.²⁹ The Board was not a harmonious mix.

Nevertheless, Osburn did not take Nightingale's advice. She highlighted any similarity with Sisterhoods by wearing, as indicated in contemporary photographs, a large cross around her neck.³⁰ She wrote in terms of taking her 'vows' when she entered nursing at St Thomas' Hospital and, in her own words, was prejudiced in favour of religious sisterhoods.³¹ Her management style also made her vulnerable to accusations that she ran nursing

like a convent. Osburn had little concept of personal privacy or of other's rights and, for example, was severely criticised by Nightingale for opening the mail of one of the English Sisters. Osburn not only opened the Sister's letter, but she replied to it herself and did not tell the Sister she had done so for some time.³²

THE 1870 INQUIRY

Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that in 1870, just two and a half years after Osburn and the nurses arrived in Sydney, religious tensions resulted in a public inquiry.³³ The inquiry was not a small matter. Osburn was correct in judging it had the potential to destroy her work and result in her dismissal. Government-supported charities such as the Sydney Infirmary needed to demonstrate that they were unsectarian. If the charges against Osburn were proven, the government could be effectively accused of supporting sectarian practices. The inquiry was chaired by the highly respected clergyman, Alfred Stephen, and reported extensively in the papers. It took evidence for six weeks and investigated eighteen allegations made over almost one year by the Evangelical newspaper, the *Protestant Standard*. The allegations focused on favouritism by Lucy Osburn towards the hiring and treatment of Catholic staff and of alleged anti-Protestant activities, most notably an order to burn some Bibles.³⁴ The *Protestant Standard's* call for an inquiry was given greater resonance by being in the name of 'religious freedom'.³⁵

The seriousness of the inquiry and the mutual suspicion and fear fuelled by religious conflict is well illustrated in a letter from Lucy Osburn to Florence Nightingale,

written on 7 September 1870.³⁶ Lucy Osburn wrote that she initially dismissed the matter as yet another attempt at trouble-making by her staff: 'Blundell [one of the English Sisters] & the [Infirm] Chaplain had written the statements [for the *Protestant Standard*] I knew'. She made clear her disdain for the press: 'I looked upon the papers much in the same light as one looks upon mosquitoes on a hot day annoying but beneath notice'. She was to learn, however, that some mosquitoes carry a deadly bite. So too could those she considered beneath her. She had grown up in a world with people sharply delineated by status and class. Her world had taught her that as a Christian she was above a Jew; as an English daughter of a wine merchant, she was above publicans and colonial merchants; as a liberal she was above a radical; and as a 'lady' belonging to the Church of England, she was above vulgar dissenters. Then her fate, and the fate of nursing at Sydney Infirmary and all it involved, was in the hands of those very people. Her prejudices were clear in her descriptions, without naming them, of the inquiry members. Joseph Raphael dismissed as 'A violent loud spoken Jew'; another simply categorised as 'a retired publican' and William Alderson, the protectionist and wealthy employer, dismissed as 'a leather merchant good-natured [sic] & ignorant & always on the side of the people against the authorities'.³⁷ Then there was the man Osburn considered 'worst of all a sour-faced bigoted, harsh cruel-looking Presbyterian minister who appeared all the time as if he w[oul]d. like to flay me before burning me', Robert Lewers.³⁸ Osburn believed that Lewers had been deliberately elected Secretary to the Infirmary Board 'by the

Orange clubs ... to persecute me'.³⁹ Osburn did not view all the nine members of the inquiry as enemies, some she thought were indifferent and a few 'most sincere friends'.⁴⁰

In her letter to Nightingale about the inquiry, Osburn 'tried to laugh at the thing as an absurd farce but as I saw all my work of 3 years destroyed by it my laughing was often near to crying'.⁴¹ She had previously faced dismissal when members of the Nightingale Fund heard that she had written an indiscreet, gossipy letter about her conversations alone with the convalescent and handsome young Prince Alfred. Now for the second time in two years she faced disgrace, partly through her own actions.⁴²

Although the inquiry was so serious, Osburn found it hard not to be contemptuous of the proceedings when, as she wrote, 'I was called in myself ... the first thing I was treated to, [was] a fight between the Chairman & the Jew'.⁴³ She tried to explain why she had ordered Bibles to be burnt. The Chaplain had told her about old papers and books which he had found in one of the underground rooms of the Nightingale Wing, and that he had had the intact ones cleaned. He suggested that the rest, including portions of Bibles, be put in a box and 'must be destroyed as they were full of vermin'.⁴⁴ The justification for, and the effectiveness of, the new Nightingale nurses were their moral purity and physical cleanliness. As the embodiment of the new, cleaner Nightingale nurse, Osburn fought a never-ending fight against vermin in the badly built, decaying old building that housed the patients. She had slept in the building her first night in Sydney, when as she wrote, she 'never closed my eyes', the bugs were in

such numbers 'that I dare[d] not'.⁴⁵ She had described the paper on her bedroom wall moving with the numbers of bugs scuttling behind it. The only vermin-free building on the site was the freestanding Nightingale Wing, completed some months after she arrived, and home to her and the female staff. Her statement to Nightingale was surely a major understatement: 'I was horrified at the thought of bugs in the new house'.⁴⁶

She knew the religious politics of the day; her father had published a book about his fear of insidious Catholic influences.⁴⁷ It is improbable that as a child she had not learnt about Protestant martyrs who died in agony for printing and distributing bibles. It is equally likely that she knew that burning as opposed to burying books had a historic, symbolic horror. Most of those who gave evidence at the inquiry, including the Yardman asked to burn the material, the Chaplain and the Superintendent of the hospital all revealed their horror at burning rather than burying religious texts.⁴⁸ Yet, as she wrote, 'I told the yardman to burn the rest although the Chaplain had said torn spoilt portions of the Bible were among them'. She added that these portions were 'so full of bugs' but she must have known that was besides the point.⁴⁹ Why burn and not bury? She could only respond by complaining that her order to the yardman 'has now been magnified into a systematic & determined burning of Bibles on my part'.⁵⁰ Lucy Osburn had acted impulsively and thoughtlessly, as she would too many times, underestimating the reaction of others and the virulence of religious fears and suspicion.

In her letter to Nightingale she was determined to rise above the nuisance, the

mosquito bites of the press, the inquiry and the sectarian turmoil she had created, so her final comments stressed the farcical aspect of the inquiry. When they were hearing her evidence, she wrote, a dispute occurred between Father M. Dwyer and the Reverend Lewers: 'something turned up wh[ic]h. set the R[oman]. Cath[olic]. priest on to the Presbyterian minister & the bickering fighting sparring & temper shown were quite amusing, that about ended the séance nobody c[oul]d. calm down after the excitement to ask anything – so away I went'.⁵¹

Away she went but the cause of reformed nursing, and thus effective health care and a redefined occupation for women, was irrevocably tarnished with sectarian suspicion. Eventually the inquiry vindicated her: 'there has been no sectarian predilections manifested by the Lady Superintendent to affect the interests of the Institution'.⁵² The *Protestant Standard* consequently rejected the process as reflecting the 'very essence of Popery'.⁵³ The issues therefore lingered on and were partly resurrected in the 1873–4 Commission into Public Charities whose first report was on the Sydney Infirmary, and which again vindicated Osburn.⁵⁴ The issue again died down but simmered beneath the surface.

The sectarian passions evidenced during the inquiry are revealed by the stereotypical images that each side evoked. Osburn tried to keep her letter to Nightingale light but still her opponents appeared to her as in a nightmare of religious bigotry, with medieval images of flaying and burning.⁵⁵ In general, especially when writing to the august Florence Nightingale, Osburn's supporters were more moderate but still blamed evangelical nastiness.

Judge William Windeyer, who was a less than impartial chair of the 1873–4 Commission into Public Charities which inquired into Osburn's role at the Sydney Infirmary, informed Nightingale that Osburn's opponents were a 'clique of ignorant fanatics'.⁵⁶ Henry Bonham Carter quickly passed on the opinion of his wife's cousin, Elizabeth [Macarthur-] Onslow, who wrote that Osburn's problems came from 'ill natured attacks of the evangelical party'.⁵⁷

The *Freeman's Journal*, a Catholic paper, drew upon images of wronged, defenceless womanhood:

The victim is a lady – unmarried – and as far as we know without any other kind of protection from ruffianism than her sweet life and virtues afford. She can invoke no marital or fraternal horsewhip to vindicate ... has no support save that of a good generous public sympathy with a brave gentle life – and that feeling of scorn of libellers of women. As Catholics we can admire virtue wherever it is to be found, and as men we abominate the people who slander women.⁵⁸

One can almost hear the background violins and imagine the reporter's regret that Osburn was not also a poor Irish mother. Such writing, while typical of the *Freeman's Journal*, did Osburn few favours in her attempts to establish a public role for employed, middle-class women.

Neither Osburn nor her supporters, however, could match her opponents for hyperbole. Religious conflict, although played out in a remote Australian colony in 1870, relied on emotional images drawn largely from medieval Europe. The *Protest-*

ant Standard and *Sydney Punch* lead the religious charge against Lucy Osburn. There were a number of stock phrases used when describing Osburn and her nurses. The nurses' home was the 'Nightingale nunnery'; Osburn was the 'lady Abbess'; her policies were that of 'High Churchism and semi Popery' and the nursing students were referred to as 'novitiates'.⁵⁹ Osburn was criticised as 'aping the dress style and manners' of a head of a convent.⁶⁰ A nurse in uniform was described as being 'in all the splendour of the Gamp nunnery livery' and the nurses as living in a 'Misses Gamp nunnery'.⁶¹ The latter phrases were wonderfully economical insults inferring that the nurses were actually like Charles Dickens's stereotype of the pre-Nightingale nurse, Sairey Gamp, but dressed as nuns. The *Sydney Punch* claimed that the Nightingale wing had twenty rooms and was solely for four British nurses' accommodation.⁶² In reality there were six British nurses and the Nightingale wing accommodated all the other female staff as well as Osburn and her team. There was particular stress on the youthfulness of the nursing students with the *Sydney Punch* recommending that the Infirmary should 'return each silly would-be Nightingale to her mother, with a birch rod as a present'.⁶³ The following year it described Sydney Infirmary: 'a seminary of empty-headed girls ... so called "probationers" ... accepts as novitiates hysterical chits of eighteen, and inducts them under the specious film of maudlin sentimentality into a region in which indecency and pruriency may sate an unhealthy appetite'.⁶⁴ When the above was written, Osburn's Nurses' Register indicates that only one probationer entered when she was eighteen years old,

and the entry age of the rest ranged from nineteen to thirty-eight years old.⁶⁵

The opposition to Osburn was not just posed in terms of individual abuse but also of national pride and the defense of traditional Protestant values. The issue quickly transcended parochial issues such as nursing, patient care or women's work. Osburn's opponents, especially the Scottish Haldane Turriff, one of the Nightingale-trained Sisters who had accompanied Osburn to Sydney, defined themselves as stout-hearted defenders of Protestant independence against convent discipline and Catholic submission. The Scottish theme was picked up in the colonial parliament by another Scot, David Buchanan, a firebrand whose invective matched that of Joseph Raphael. Buchanan was reported as claiming, in one of his famed tirades, that the issue was religious liberty, the same issue that had caused the 'whole covenanting war in Scotland'. He warned 'when Scotland rose up', other nations had better beware. Osburn was guilty, he accused, of 'vulgar, insolent tyranny ... foul and gross tyranny'.⁶⁶

How easy it was to exploit religious emotions was revealed by the actions of another of the Nightingale-trained British Sisters, the English Annie Miller, who accused Osburn of not allowing her to attend her Congregational church. Annie Miller's complaint too became an issue of religious liberty and was raised in the colonial parliament and in the press.⁶⁷ Miller's case was finally discredited at the 1870 inquiry by her own minister and by the claim that it was she, not Osburn, who had placed a crucifix in one of the hospital's public rooms.⁶⁸ The extent to which religious issues were management issues is also revealed by Osburn's insistence that all the

Sisters and Nurses attend church service in the Infirmary's Boardroom on Sunday mornings rather than go to their own churches. Osburn was reported as stating the reason was that if they did go to church on Sunday mornings she would not know 'when I should see their faces again'.⁶⁹

Nightingale nursing with its emphasis on cleanliness, working from a vocation, and creating a female community, was a new concept in the colony. Religion complicated almost every attempt of Osburn to establish a stable foundation for the new nursing. How difficult any one issue could be is illustrated by the problems Osburn encountered over what to call her staff and herself. At both the 1870 inquiry and the 1873 Public Commission, there were objections to the 'Head Nurses', as the objectors called them, being called 'Sisters'. Although the title Sister was traditionally used in a number of English hospitals, many people in Sydney assumed it meant membership of a religious order. Osburn made it worse by using the Sisters' Christian names, for example, Sister Mary or Sister Annie, a practice that reminded her critics of convents. Then there was the vexed problem of Osburn's title. Nightingale fussed over trivial details regarding Osburn's coming to Australia and, for example, spent an enormous amount of energy deciding what books to present to each nurse, but she left important details to chance.⁷⁰ One of these details was Osburn's title—Nightingale referred to both Matron and Lady Superintendent. When Osburn arrived in Sydney, she discovered practical objections to both titles.⁷¹ So she unwisely adopted the title common to heads of religious sisterhoods, that of 'Lady Superior'. Osburn's title became a

matter of political bickering so that in 1870 a question and answer in the Legislative Assembly referred to her as 'the Head Nurse', 'the Superintending Nurse', and 'the Lady Superintendent'.⁷² Osburn's critics, such as the *Protestant Standard*, alleged that she also insisted on being called 'Your Ladyship'. This was denied and was probably a corruption of the habit of some on her staff to refer to her as 'the Lady'.⁷³ Eventually the virulence of opposition, and presumably Nightingale's warning, caused Osburn to abandon the title Lady Superior. She claimed indifference and that she then called herself by no title other than 'the nurse from England'.⁷⁴ Osburn's successors, less able to demand such high status, were called 'Matron'.

The impact of religious conflict on the attempt to reform the health care system of the colony by provided trained nursing, however, went far beyond short-term squabbles about titles. Two longer-term influences were on recruitment and management style. The controversy, and the belief that Osburn favoured Catholics, not surprisingly appears to have adversely affected recruitment especially of those stalwarts of Sydney philanthropy, Evangelical women.⁷⁵ No members of Sydney's leading Evangelical families put themselves forward to be trained by Lucy Osburn as a Sister. This lack of such committed, energetic women was a major loss for modern nursing's foundation years.

The issue of management style is more complex and needs to be shorn of the emotionalism and bigotry that motivated Osburn's opponents. It was with some justice that the *Protestant Standard* described Osburn as one who 'loves convent style, convent look, convent discipline

and convent subserviency'.⁷⁶ The subsequent management style of 'Nightingale' nursing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was quite unusual in terms of labour relations. It was a style that leaves historians so uncomfortable that even general surveys of women's and labour history can ignore nurses, one of the largest categories of women workers.⁷⁷ Nursing's management style owed much to domestic service but was justified by the need for a vocation. It was a highly personal style which could lead both to the warm memories many nurses have of the Nurses' Homes and to the endemic bullying which is a major problem in contemporary Australian nursing.⁷⁸ One example of just how different nursing was to other forms of work is revealed when we read that it was the duty of the night nurses at the end of their shift at Wollongong Hospital in the 1930s to report to the Matron while she was still in bed—'the last nurse had to prepare her bath'.⁷⁹ Similarly, the anxiety expressed even in the 1960s that Nurses' Homes resulted in 'a convent-like existence' can be too easily dismissed as mere homophobia or Protestant angst.⁸⁰ It may also have been an aspect of the enduring legacy of Nightingale-style nursing, and the religious prejudices of its founder in the Australian colonies, Lucy Osburn.

CONCLUSION

Religious belief and its ugly reverse side, bigotry, strongly influenced all aspects of social policies in New South Wales, especially during the 1860s to 1880s. Nursing reform was an essential part of the modernisation of health care in the colony. Nurses' claim to be motivated

by a vocation and to embody cleanliness associated it, in the popular mind, with religion and sectarian convictions. Osburn's religious beliefs, and the resultant controversy, adversely affected recruitment and was almost the undoing of reformed nursing in Sydney. There is substance to the claims that her management style was based on the convent and sisterhoods. It was, for both better and worse, a style that indelibly shaped Australian nursing, health care and women's work.

If nursing was strongly affected by religious controversy, then the reverse was also true. The religious controversy surrounding nursing preoccupied both the press and parliament for at least a year; it was the subject of the 1870 inquiry, explored in this paper, as well as a focus of the Commission into Public Charities in 1873. They resonated with fears about communities of women and medieval images of persecution. The nursing controversy is an important reminder how religious conflict had a pervasive impact on attempts to improve social welfare in the colony of New South Wales.

ENDNOTES

¹ Florence Nightingale (hereafter Nightingale) to Henry Parkes, 24 October 1866, Correspondence Florence Nightingale and the Colonial Government, Australian Joint Copying Project, Mitchell Library, Sydney. See also, *The Sydney Mail*, 22 February 1868.

² Carol Helmstadter, 'Old nurses and new', *Nursing History Review*, 1, 1993, pp. 43–70.

³ *New South Wales Legislative Assembly, Votes & Proceedings*, Vol. IV, 1866, Correspondence respecting David Gibson, p. 3.

⁴ Alison Bashford, *Purity and Pollution: Gender, Embodiment and Victorian Medicine*, New York and London, St Martin's Press and Macmillan, 1998.

⁵ Henry Parkes to Nightingale, 21 July 1866, BL ADDMSS 47757.

⁶ P. Davis, 'Henry Parkes' in C. Turney (ed.) *Pioneers of Australian Education*, Sydney University Press, 1969, pp. 173–74.

⁷ Alfred Roberts to Nightingale, 19 April 1868, BL ADDMSS 47757.

⁸ *Sydney Punch*, 14 March 1868.

⁹ Judith Godden, "'A lamentable failure?' The founding of Nightingale nursing in Australia, 1868–84', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 117, 2001, pp. 276–91.

¹⁰ Monica Baly, *Florence Nightingale and the Nursing Legacy*, 2nd ed., Philadelphia, BainBridgeBooks, 1998, p. 31.

¹¹ Sioban Nelson, *Say Little, Do Much. Nurses, Nuns, and Hospitals in the Nineteenth Century*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, p. 57.

¹² Baly, op. cit. pp. 181–82.

¹³ Carol Helmstadter, 'Robert Bentley Todd, Saint John's House, and the origins of the modern trained nurse', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, Vol 67, 1993, pp. 282–319.

¹⁴ See, for example, Nelson, op. cit., ch. 4.

¹⁵ Nelson, loc. cit.

¹⁶ Henry Bonham Carter to Nightingale, 24 June 1871, BL ADDMSS 47716.

¹⁷ Lucy Osburn (hereafter Osburn) to Nightingale, 30 October 1867, BL ADDMSS 47757.

¹⁸ *Protestant Standard*, 9 July 1870.

¹⁹ Osburn, *Nurses' Register*, Vol. 1, Sydney Hospital. My thanks to Sydney Hospital for permission to use this Register.

²⁰ For example, Nightingale to Henry Bonham Carter, 26 July 1867, BL ADDMSS 47714.

²¹ Commission into Public Charities, *New South Wales Legislative Assembly, Votes & Proceedings*, Vol. VI, 1873–4, Appendix A, Regulations as to the Training of Hospital Nurses under the Nightingale Fund; Christopher Maggs, 'Nurse recruitment to four provincial hospitals' in C. Davies, *Rewriting Nursing History*, London & Sydney, Croom Helm, 1980, pp. 18–40; Judith Godden, 'The Nightingale nursing probationers, Sydney Infirmary 1868–84', *Australian Society of the History of Medicine Conference*, Adelaide, April 2001.

²² Nelson, op. cit., pp. 80–9.

²³ Nightingale to Florence Lees, 20–23 February 1868, BL ADDMSS 47756.

²⁴ Henry Bonham Carter to Nightingale, 9 December 1868, BL ADDMSS 47716.

A 'Region of Indecency and Pruriency'

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- 33 Report of the Subcommittee to Inquire into the Allegations of the *Protestant Standard*, *New South Wales Legislative Assembly, Votes & Proceedings*, Vol. II, 1870.
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⁷⁵ Judith Godden, *Philanthropy and the woman's sphere*, PhD thesis, Macquarie University, 1983.

⁷⁶ *Protestant Standard*, 9 July 1870.

⁷⁷ For example, Charles Fox and Marilyn Lake (eds), *Australians at Work*, Ringwood, Victoria, McPhee Gribble, 1990. Beverley Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann*, Sydney, Thomas Nelson, 1975, is still one of the exceptions.

⁷⁸ D. Serghis, 'Study depicts widespread workplace bullying', *Australian Nursing Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 10, 1998, p. 9.

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RELIGION MATTERS

THE EXPERIENCE OF SYRIAN/LEBANESE CHRISTIANS IN AUSTRALIA FROM THE 1880S TO 1947

ANNE MONSOUR

Neither invited nor welcomed, people from the Middle East began arriving in Australia in noticeable numbers in the 1890s. Most were from modern Lebanon.¹ The dramatic increase in the number of Syrian/Lebanese arriving in Australia coincided with a period of economic decline, drought and high unemployment.² In these circumstances, non-Europeans were increasingly perceived as a threat, and anti-Chinese legislation was extended to all Asiatic and coloured persons.³ This broadening of legislative discrimination included Syrian/Lebanese, who, based on the location of their homeland, were officially classified as Asian. However, eventually, Syrian/Lebanese were treated differently to other Asians, and, by 1920, were granted access to citizenship. Although this change in status appears to be an act of tolerance, a close study of documentary sources suggests quite the opposite. Indeed, the evidence shows that Syrian/Lebanese were judged to be suitable candidates for citizenship because due to their physical appearance and religion they were considered more likely than other Asians to be assimilated.⁴ Hence, the experience of Syrian/Lebanese immigrants in Australia illustrates the fundamen-

al importance of race and religion in determining acceptability.

According to Samir Khalaf, there is 'virtual consensus' that in the 1890s there was a 'sharp and sudden' increase in emigration from Syria and Lebanon.⁵ The arrival of increasing numbers of Syrian/Lebanese in Australia in the last decade of the nineteenth century was part of this mass emigration from the Syria/Lebanon region, and these newcomers were soon recognised as a distinct, non-European group within Australian society. In 1892, for example, the article 'Syrians in the South: a Colony at Redfern', appeared in the *Illustrated Sydney News*.⁶ Syrians were described as 'Eastern immigrants' who entertained visitors in their homes 'with Arabic hospitality'.⁷ Patronisingly tolerant in tone, the article clearly differentiated between these immigrants, 'from the Eastern land, where life is more natural and less constrained by conventionalities than in the Western World', and 'their European neighbors', 'our own people'.⁸ References to *Syrians* as an identifiable group were appearing in Queensland newspapers by the late 1890s. In 1897, for example, newspaper reports regarding a set of Customs prosecution cases clearly identified the defendants as Syrians.⁹ In

February 1897, the *Bundaberg Mail*, referring to the issue of customs fraud, cited 'the nest of invoice-salting Syrians in Stanley Street', while an article in the *Worker* described Stanley Street, South Brisbane as 'Syrian town in verity'.¹⁰ The assertion in the *Brisbane Courier* in 1901 that the violent death of a Syrian/Lebanese hawker was the result of 'bad blood amongst the Syrian community' is further evidence of a discernible Syrian/Lebanese presence.¹¹

As well as providing evidence Syrian/Lebanese were identified as a specific minority group, early newspaper reports make it clear these immigrants were non-European and non-white. In May 1897, for example, the *Worker* agitated against a perceived 'influx of coloured labour', a category which clearly included Syrian/Lebanese:

Will the white people of Queensland suffer themselves to be ousted by Javanese, Syrians, Chinese or Japanese, and go down before the black, brown, and yellow invaders?¹²

An observation in the *Brisbane Courier* during February 1902, that the police court had been 'crowded with Syrians as well as Europeans' shows Syrian/Lebanese were considered to be distinct from Europeans.¹³ By describing Syrian/Lebanese as 'swarthy-skinned hawkers', the *Bundaberg Mail* intimated they were not white.¹⁴ Similarly, the *Worker* described them as yellow-skinned aliens whose deviant behaviour was keeping the South Brisbane magistrate in a job at great expense to the 'white taxpayer'.¹⁵ More specifically, the *Worker* accused Syrian/Le-

banese traders of eroding the livelihood of white traders:

Does it look like keeping Australia for the white man? We regard it as but another phase of "commercial morality" which not only permits wholesale firms to create white slaves, but carries the principle of sweating to an extent which allows the Syrians to grow fat on the life's blood of the white retailer.¹⁶

As most early newspaper references to Syrian/Lebanese occurred in a negative context, they tended to reinforce a perception that they were indeed, undesirable immigrants.

According to the *Illustrated Sydney News* in 1892, Syrians in Sydney were sometimes incorrectly called *Assyrians* and, to their detriment, were also 'frequently credited with the nationality of Afghans, Indians, Greeks, Italians, and other peoples'.¹⁷ This observation, made in the early days of Syrian/Lebanese settlement, illustrates an ongoing ambivalence regarding the identity of these immigrants. In 1906, for example, the *Bulletin* described Syrians as one of the three 'non-fusible Asiatic races', but argued that, unlike the Chinese, whose 'ways' were 'familiar to everyone', and the Indians, 'known to all by sight at least', Syrians, who were 'less distinctive in personal appearance and unmarked by peculiar dress', were less easily identified.¹⁸ This difficulty was ostensibly accentuated by the fact that, in further contrast to the Chinese and Indians, these Asiatics were Christian and white, and by migrated in family groups had indicated they were permanent settlers.¹⁹ Unwittingly, the *Bulletin's*

overtly hostile portrayal of Syrian/Lebanese immigrants actually isolated the distinguishing characteristics, appearance, religion, and migration in family groups, which eventually led to them being officially treated more leniently than other Asians.²⁰

As the percentages in Table 1 illustrate, from its inception, Syrian/Lebanese immigration did indeed include a significant proportion of women. In the most accessible official documents, women are frequently invisible and therefore, it is more difficult to quantify women than men. Married women, for example, did not apply separately for naturalisation because their citizenship status was determined by that of their husband.²¹ Therefore, it is likely that the number of women is underestimated. However, in each decade being studied, with the exception of the 1940s, at least a quarter of the Syrian/Lebanese immigrants arriving in Queensland were women. This is an important finding because it demonstrates that a significant proportion of these immigrants arrived in family groups. Significantly, this migration in family groups and the birth of at least eighty-six Syrian/Lebanese Queenslanders between 1887 and 1899, indicate the intention of the early immigrants was to be settlers not sojourners.²² The presence of women in the earliest days of migration was also important because, at a time when inter-racial marriage was feared, it meant Syrian/Lebanese men, unlike their Chinese and Indian counterparts were not seen as a threat to white women.²³

Table 1: Percentage of male and female Syrian/Lebanese immigrants arriving in Queensland

YEAR	% MALE	% FEMALE
1880–1889	81	19
1890–1899	71.5	28.5
1900–1909	68	32
1910–1919	66	34
1920–1929	71	29
1930–1939	55.5	44.5
1940–1949	87.5	12.5

Official records provide irrefutable evidence that skin colour was quite overtly a primary consideration in the treatment of non-Europeans. When reporting on an applicant for naturalisation, the police were routinely required to ascertain whether the applicant was coloured. Although in the majority of cases Syrian/Lebanese were reported to be white or not coloured, as the following examples show, some were perceived to be coloured or, at the least, not entirely white. George was considered to be ‘a coloured man, but not a full-blooded foreigner’; while Lutoof was described as a coloured man, probably of Syrian parentage.²⁴ Another applicant was reported to be ‘a coloured man, usually termed a Syrian’.²⁵ Fred was described as being of sallow complexion; Salim as being the ordinary colour of the Syrian, but not what would be termed a coloured man; and Richard as swarthy in complexion ‘but not darker than many natives of Europe or some individuals of the British race’.²⁶ In another case, it was noted that although the applicant was not coloured, he was very dark complexioned and swarthy like most southern Europeans.²⁷ While these examples demonstrate skin colour was definitely a consideration in the processing of naturalisation applications, they also indicate

significant confusion about whether Syrian/Lebanese were actually white or coloured. Apparently, Syrian/Lebanese did not fit easily into designated categories and this made their racial identity problematic.

While acknowledging the paucity of available statistics, it is generally agreed that, regardless of their destination, the majority of emigrants from Syria/Lebanon before 1950 were Christian.²⁸ Kemal Karpāt, whose work differs from other studies because it is based on Ottoman documentary sources, challenges this view. According to Karpāt, Turkish records suggest the number of Ottoman, and specifically Syrian emigrants, was higher than has previously been estimated; and so too was the proportion of Muslims.²⁹ Karpāt argues the proportion of Muslims was probably fifteen to twenty per cent of the total.³⁰ As early as 1892, for example, the Ottoman legation in Washington noted there were 'considerable numbers' of Muslims among the Syrian immigrants.³¹ In the case of Muslim immigrants, the general lack of reliable statistics is aggravated by the fact that the Muslims themselves often concealed their religious affiliation for two main reasons: the ban on Muslim emigration from Ottoman territories; and the perceived hostility to Muslims in their new countries:

... the report mentions the fact that in many cases Muslims preferred to pass as Christians – particularly as Armenians ... - in the hope of gaining easier acceptance in the U.S. and of avoiding trouble with the Ottoman government.³²

While Karpāt's work demonstrates how documentary research can challenge

commonly held views, with the exception of four people who were Druzes, the Syrian/Lebanese immigrants arriving in Queensland from the 1880s to 1947 were Maronite, Melkite and Orthodox Christians.³³

Religion has played a significant role in the history of Lebanon. Over an extended period, the mountains of Lebanon became home for a number of religious groups seeking refuge from persecution.³⁴ In the seventh century, for example, the Maronites, a schismatic Christian sect from Syria found sanctuary in the mountains of Lebanon.³⁵ Later, in the eleventh century, the Druzes, an offshoot of Shi'ism, also sought refuge in these mountains.³⁶ In the Lebanon region, geographical features and theological disputes combined to create a multi-religious yet religiously segregated society. For centuries, both the Christians and the Muslims have been divided into numerous and often hostile sects.³⁷ The Muslims are divided into three major sects: the Sunnis, the Shiites and the Druzes. The Christians include the Maronites, the Greek Orthodox, the Greek Catholics or Melkites, the Syrian Catholics, the Syrian Orthodox, the Chaldeans, the Orthodox and Catholic Armenians and the Protestants. Although the population of Lebanon is often simplistically characterised as being divided between Christians and Muslims, the reality is obviously more complex.

Under Ottoman rule, non-Muslims were organised in millets, religious minority communities with internal autonomy.³⁸ The millet system created 'separate and distinct civil societies predicated on sect (rite) and religion', and in effect, this organised a church into a nation-

ality.³⁹ Under this system, political structures and social organisation were inseparable from the religious group. Writing about Syrians in America in 1924, Philip Hitti argued a Syrian was born to his religion in the same way that an American was born to his nationality.⁴⁰ Consequently, for the Syrian/Lebanese, Church took the place of State.⁴¹ In their study of Syrian/Lebanese in the United States, Philip and Joseph Kayal conclude that Christian, Arabic-speaking Americans became 'Americans of Syrian and eventually, Lebanese ancestry' because they needed 'to have a relevant identity in western terms'.⁴² Similarly, in the Australian context, the acceptance of the term *Syrian* was merely a political expedience adopted when, as immigrants, a collective identity became necessary. In the same way, in Lebanon, these people are most likely to have identified themselves according to their religious sect (Melkite, Maronite or Orthodox) rather than as *Christians*. Consequently, the *Syrian/Christian* identity, constructed in the context of the emigration process, was merely a practical label. It was not how these immigrants usually identified or thought of themselves, and certainly did not signify the existence of a cohesive group.

If any of the early Syrian/Lebanese immigrants were in fact Muslim, this has not been evident in the sources on which this study is based. Early newspaper reports, for example, clearly identify Syrian/Lebanese immigrants as Christian.⁴³ Politicians and bureaucrats also identified Syrians as being mainly Christian. In 1909, for example, Egerton Batchelor, the Minister for External Affairs, noted that the religion of a Syrian was 'very often the same as ours'.⁴⁴ Similarly, the Chief Clerk of

the Department of External Affairs observed that Syrians 'all belong to the Christian faith'.⁴⁵ According to Atlee Hunt, the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, Syrians were 'practically all Christians being adherents either of the Greek Church or of a Church affiliated with the Roman Catholic'.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, some Ottoman immigrants were obviously Muslim. In 1922, for example, Mohammed, 'a Turk, born in Stamboul', was granted naturalisation.⁴⁷ As he had been an Australian resident for twenty-seven years, Mohammed had obviously arrived in the 1890s.⁴⁸ However, in 1922, a memorandum regarding Turkish residents in Australia included the following observation:

The number of Turks of Ottoman characteristics in Australia is negligible. There are no prominent members of the race and the true representatives of the Crescent – Mohammedan in religion and Turkish in national viewpoints – probably number not more than the fingers of one hand.⁴⁹

This observation is supported by specific figures which demonstrate that the majority of Turkish subjects in Australia were Syrian/Lebanese. In Victoria in 1922, for example, while the total number of people regarded as Turkish subjects was 160: 119 of these were Syrians; 3 were Armenians; 35 were Palestinian Jews; and only 3 were Ottoman Turks.⁵⁰

By the 1920s, the official perception of Syrian/Lebanese immigrants had shifted. Rather than being considered as undesirable aliens, they were now thought to be acceptable candidates for citizenship. The documentary evidence provides a

clear indication as to why politicians and bureaucrats became increasingly sympathetic towards the Syrian/Lebanese; and why, although officially Asian, they were eventually exempted from some of the legislative disqualification applied to non-Europeans. Although understood to be technically correct, the classification of Syrian/Lebanese as Asiatic was clearly problematic, and was, evidently, considered by some politicians and bureaucrats to be inaccurate. According to Atlee Hunt, since the *Immigration Restriction Act* had come into force in 1902, the question of how to deal with *Syrians* had caused the Department considerable difficulty.⁵¹ While there was 'unanimity respecting the black, brown and yellow races', Hunt pointed to a 'considerable divergence in decisions relating to the admission of Syrians'.⁵² In regards to the implementation of the *Immigration Restriction Act*, these doubts were important because Syrians were consequently granted special exception in their favour and, as a result, were the only Asians in Australia to add to their numbers by both natural increase and immigration.⁵³

During the Naturalization Bill debate in 1903, Senator Playford (South Australia) argued against the amendment precluding 'all aboriginal natives of Asia, Africa, or the Pacific Islands, except New Zealand' from applying for naturalisation, specifically because the term Asia included 'Syrians and others' whom he considered to be 'as white as we are'.⁵⁴ Playford did not disagree with the principle of excluding non-Europeans from naturalisation, but with the inflexibility of the clause that would not allow for people like the Syrian/Lebanese to be treated as exceptions to the rule:

... there were a few Syrians who lived in South Australia a considerable time, and who, as employers of labour were recognized as good citizens. They were quite as white as many of us are, and as I may remind honorable senators, they were of the same race as the great founder of Christianity.⁵⁵

Playford's view that Syrians should be considered white and were worthy of differential treatment was not shared by others. According to Senator Higgs (Queensland), Syrian/Lebanese were 'not desirable citizens' and their inclusion as citizens would be contrary to the popular desire 'to preserve Australia for the white races'.⁵⁶ Higgs was supported by Senator Pearce (Western Australia), who described Syrian/Lebanese as 'parasites' who competed unfairly with local, European traders.⁵⁷ The majority feeling in the Senate in 1903 was obviously that, as non-Europeans, Syrian/Lebanese were undesirable and should be disqualified from naturalisation. However, Senator Playford's perception of Syrian/Lebanese as being distinct from other Asians raised the problematic issue of their exact racial identity. His advocacy indicated doubts about the application of the geographic definition in the case of Syrian/Lebanese and foreshadowed an opinion which would eventually become Immigration Department policy.

It is apparent that by 1909, the Minister for External Affairs, Egerton Batchelor, had decided Syrians should be permitted naturalisation.⁵⁸ A letter from Batchelor to the Chief Secretary of the Australian Natives' Association provides an account of his personal views and also an outline of the debate regarding the status of Syri-

an/Lebanese residents.⁵⁹ In particular, Batchelor isolated race and religion as the key factors in favour of Syrian/Lebanese being accepted as citizens. Specifically, he believed there was nothing to fear 'from the inclusion' as citizens 'of Syrians – men of a race not far removed from our stock, and whose religion is often the same as ours'.⁶⁰ Furthermore, Batchelor questioned the use of the geographic definition to determine whether a Syrian was European or Asiatic:

Is there any logic in saying that men belonging to a family resident in one of the suburbs of Constantinople on the south shore of the Bosphorous, are not eligible for Australian citizenship, while their brothers who happen to be born in the city itself are fully qualified. The distinction imposed by our law is merely geographical. It is not racial nor religious. It has no scientific or rational basis whatever.⁶¹

Batchelor's views clearly influenced later deliberations regarding the status of Syrian/Lebanese as both their appearance and their religion were consistently raised as favourable characteristics.⁶²

In 1914, for example, the Chief Clerk of the Department of External Affairs noted:

The Department has from time to time granted authority to certain resident Syrians to bring their wives or other female relatives to Australia and some of those who have been brought to the Department subsequently were as fair-skinned as any woman to be met in our cities. So far as Syrian men

are concerned, they are dark, but not more so than the Italians, Spaniards and Greeks, and if it were not for the fact that the Syrians disclose their race on going on board ship on route to Australia, they would easily pass muster with nationals of the countries just mentioned.⁶³

In addition to being similar in appearance to southern Europeans, according to the Chief Clerk, 'all' these Syrians were also Christian.⁶⁴ Atlee Hunt, the Secretary of the Department, held similar views. In a 1914 memorandum to the Minister, Hunt argued that Syrian/Lebanese were more European than Asiatic in appearance:

They are of swarthy appearance, with dark hair and in most cases sallow complexions, but approximate far more closely to the European types than to those of India or parts of Asia further East. As far as general appearance goes they can not be distinguished from the people of Southern Spain, Italy or Greece and in fact are considerably lighter in complexion than the Turks.⁶⁵

Additionally, he noted that the Syrian/Lebanese immigrants were 'practically all Christians', belonging either to an Orthodox or Catholic Church.⁶⁶ When Hunt recommended changing naturalisation laws by dropping the racial disqualification in favour of ministerial discretion, Syrians were evidently the primary target of the proposed change:

The point has come up most conspicuously in the case of Syrians who are ineligible; though Turks

born in Europe are eligible. Many Syrians who we have been obliged to refuse are people of high character and substantial property.⁶⁷

Archival sources support the view that Syrian/Lebanese immigrants knew their physical appearance and Christian affiliations were favourable attributes in their bid for equitable treatment. Race and religion were repeatedly referred to by the immigrants and others advocating on their behalf. In 1903, Joseph was refused naturalisation because he was a single, Asiatic male.⁶⁸ In a letter to the Home Secretary, Joseph disputed the correctness of this classification:

Although I am termed an Asiatic Alien, I would respectfully point out that I am of the Christian Religion, the same as the rest of the people of Australia.⁶⁹

Similarly, Alf, who was able to read and write English, French and Arabic, informed Atlee Hunt that he was 'not an aboriginal native of Syria but a whit[e] man of good English education'.⁷⁰ Another Syrian/Lebanese immigrant, excluded from naturalisation because of his birthplace, responded with the following:

Sir, the External Department says that I am not eligible to become a subject of the King in the 'Commonwealth' of Australia on account of being born in Syria[.] I am a Christian and I think I am eligible to become a subject of the King ...⁷¹

Advocating on behalf of a Syrian/Lebanese client, solicitors described him as 'a sober steady man', who, like his father

before him, was a Roman Catholic.⁷² Marie's comments to Atlee Hunt in 1914, suggest she thought business success and being Christian would contribute positively to her family's acceptance as citizens:

My husband has been in business in Adelaide for over 20 years. May I add we are all born Roman Catholics.⁷³

In correspondence with the Department of External Affairs in 1904, Richard, who claimed to be a direct descendant of a European Crusader, alleged that modern Syrians were considered to be white or Caucasian and that at no time in history had they been considered coloured.⁷⁴ In another case, an applicant's solicitor argued that Syrians were not aboriginal natives of Asia but were a civilised Christian race and descendants of the European Crusaders.⁷⁵ Whether legitimate or not, the professed links with European Crusaders were evidently intended to imply Syrian/Lebanese were more European than Asian.

In his decade long bid for citizenship (1910-1920), Michael's arguments echoed those of other Syrian/Lebanese and the professionals and politicians advocating on their behalf.⁷⁶ Although he had spent almost all his life in Queensland, Michael had been born in Zahle, Lebanon and therefore, as an aboriginal native of Asia, was ineligible for naturalisation.⁷⁷ His case for naturalisation became even more unlikely when, as a Turkish subject, he became an enemy alien.⁷⁸ In correspondence with the Department, Michael questioned the validity of being classified 'an aboriginal native of Asia', citing an example from the United States in which, he claimed, it had been proven 'beyond a

shadow of a doubt' that Syrians were not Asiatic.⁷⁹ In common with others, he thought his success in business and status as a sole proprietor and employer would add to the suitability of his candidature.⁸⁰

After 1914, in response to his status as an enemy alien, Michael emphasised the distinction between Christian Syrians and Muslim Turks. In July 1918, for example, the first point he made in relation to his application for naturalisation was that he was 'a Christian born at Zahley, near Damascus, Palestine'.⁸¹ In a later letter, Michael repeatedly referred to his Christian faith and his antipathy to Turkish rule.⁸² Not only were his parents 'Christians of Lebanon (Palestine)', but:

Our sympathies have always been British and never Turkish: otherwise my parents would not have fled from the continued persecution of the Turks to this fair country, which I have learnt to call home.⁸³

Furthermore:

The atrocities committed by the Turks on our people just before the British occupation should convince you of the hatred existing between them. When have we, during the five centuries of Turkish oppression, sympathised with Turkey? Their continued massacres should be sufficient answer.⁸⁴

Advocating on Michael's behalf in 1916, the District Grand Secretary (Queensland Branch) of the Freemasons, noted that:

His parents fled from Palestine to escape from Turkish persecution they being Christians. They were naturalized here, became subjects of the British Crown, and are well known to be loyal.⁸⁵

In his communications with the Department, Michael made deliberate reference to the depth and authenticity of his Christian roots. He consistently described his country of origin as 'Lebanon, Palestine', not Lebanon, Syria. Furthermore, his claim that his parents fled from 'Lebanon, Palestine' when he was 'child in arms', has biblical overtones; as does the following:

It surely does not follow that a person born in a stable ceases to be a human being.⁸⁶

As Michael's case illustrates, during World War One, religious affiliation became increasingly important for Syrian/Lebanese as religion was used to distinguish between the predominately Christian Syrian/Lebanese and Turks, who were generally European but more likely to be Muslim. As enemy aliens, Syrians were required to register at their local police station and then to report at designated intervals during the war.⁸⁷ However, in January 1915, the Commonwealth Government recognised that Turkish subjects who were Greek, Armenian or Syrian were likely to be opposed to the Turkish regime.⁸⁸ That the government understood the position of Syrian/Lebanese is confirmed by Atlee Hunt's comments in 1916:

Syrians are technically Turks and our enemies, though they are recognized, at any rate those from the Mount Lebanon region, as

having no sympathy with Turkey and in consequence have received special concessions in the way of reporting carrying on business etc.⁸⁹

As a consequence of this understanding, District Commandants were given the discretion to exempt Turkish subjects who were Christian and 'well-known to be opposed to the Turkish regime' from certain requirements applying to enemy aliens.⁹⁰ In 1918, for example, Michael, a Syrian/Lebanese resident of Melbourne, was granted exemption from reporting every week to the police because he had:

... satisfied this Section that he, although a subject of Turkey, is a Syrian opposed to Turkish rule, and he is a Christian.⁹¹

In 1920, the *Nationality Act* removed the racial disqualification from the naturalisation laws.⁹² However, in the aftermath of the War and in the absence of the racial disqualification, religion remained an important indicator of acceptability. In 1921, for example, when Michael applied for naturalisation, it was requested that, in addition to the routine enquiries, the police also ascertain whether he was 'of the Christian or Mohammedan faith.'⁹³ When Assaf applied for citizenship, a similar request was made:

Confirmation as to place of birth is specifically desired As this man is a Syrian, his religion, Mohammedan or otherwise, should be shown on the report.⁹⁴

As, after 1920, the police consistently reported the religion of an applicant for naturalisation, it appears that the specific

request articulated in the two previous examples, became generalised. Although there was no specific question about religion on the standardised form, as an applicant's religion was invariably included in 'General Remarks', it would seem that those responsible for completing the forms had been instructed to include this information.

Indeed, sometimes an applicant's religion is the only comment recorded in this section. The only 'General Remark' about John, for example, was that he was 'of the Roman Catholic Faith'.⁹⁵ Similarly, Solomon was described as a Roman Catholic, and it was noted that all his family had been baptised in the Roman Catholic Church.⁹⁶ In another example, Joseph was described as 'well educated' and as 'a loyal and well respected citizen' who 'belongs to and regularly attends a Christian Church'.⁹⁷ As well as being Christian, Michael was also described as a 'good' and 'loyal citizen'.⁹⁸ That it had become necessary to report the religion of an applicant is particularly supported by examples in which the report had obviously been completed and the applicant's religion has been added later, sometimes by a different person.⁹⁹ The specified inclusion of an applicant's religion is further supported by examples in which the question is actually added to the form.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, on some applications the question: 'What is applicant's religion?', is added to the form as question '2a'.¹⁰¹

As well as demonstrating the role of religion in determining acceptability, the following example illustrates the improved status of Syrian/Lebanese after 1920. In 1922, not realising it was no longer critical, and obviously wanting to be recognised as European rather than Asian, George

applied for naturalisation as a Turkish national.¹⁰² Handwritten notes and various comments throughout the file indicate George's claim to be Turkish was questioned on the basis of his name and religion:

This man though he calls himself a Turk is, I think, really a Syrian, according to his name + religion. No Turk is a Roman Catholic...

...(2) Does the surname(M...) suggest Syrian origin?... (2) M...is more suggestive of Syria than Turkey

...Mr Fawaz says M... is a Syrian name.¹⁰³

The changed status of Syrian/Lebanese after the passing of the *Nationality Act* is clearly evident from the following remarks:

The fact of his being a Roman Catholic would lead one to believe that he is of Syrian descent, and, as such, could be accepted for naturalization.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, it is quite obvious why, despite falsely claiming Turkish nationality, George's application was successful:

I recommend that, as M... has married an English woman, is of good character, a Christian – in contradistinction to Turks, who are Mohammedans, and do not marry outside the Mussulman[sic] community – and may fairly be assumed to be of Syrian extraction, the application is approved.¹⁰⁵

Despite their Eastern origins, Syrian/Lebanese immigrants in Australia were,

in contrast to other Asians, eventually considered suitable candidates for citizenship. While, at an official level, they had gained qualified acceptance, to achieve this, Syrian/Lebanese immigrants denied their Eastern characteristics and insisted that they were, in fact, white and European. Furthermore, as being 'Christian' was obviously essential in their bid for naturalisation, they de-emphasised their Eastern Rites (Maronite, Melkite and Orthodox) and, contrary to their usual practice, described themselves simply as Christians. Hence, while the eventual acceptance of Syrian/Lebanese has the appearance of tolerance, viewed in the wider context, it was really a victory for prejudice and bigotry. Evidently, because of their appearance and religion, it was decided Syrian/Lebanese were more likely than other Asians to become totally assimilated. Using this evidence, it can be assumed that, if these first Middle Eastern immigrants had been predominately Muslim, the outcome regarding their acceptance as citizens would have been quite different.

ENDNOTES

¹ Before the political re-definition of the Middle East after World War One, the term Syrian, quite accurately, included all immigrants from the modern nations of Jordan, Palestine (Israel), Lebanon and Syria. As this study focuses on the immigrants who came from the area now known as Lebanon, they will be referred to as Syrian/Lebanese.

² F. G. Clarke, *Australia: A Concise Political and Social History*, Sydney, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992, pp. 158–68.

³ C. Y. Choi, *Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia*, Sydney, Sydney University Press, 1975, p. 27.

⁴ A. T. Yarwood, *Asian Migration to Australia: The Background to Exclusion 1896 – 1923*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1964, pp. 141–50.

- ⁵ S. Khalaf, 'The background and causes of Lebanese/Syrian immigration', in Eric J. Hooglund (ed.), *Crossing the Waters: Arabic-Speaking Immigrants to the United States before 1940*, Washington D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987, p. 18.
- ⁶ *Illustrated Sydney News*, 19 November 1892, p. 4.
- ⁷ *ibid.*
- ⁸ *ibid.*
- ⁹ The story was covered in the *Brisbane Courier*, *Queenslander*, *Capricornian*, and *Bundaberg Mail*.
- ¹⁰ *Bundaberg Mail*, 10 February 1897; *Worker*, February 1897, p. 2.
- ¹¹ *Brisbane Courier*, 'Man killed at Mount Cotton: a Syrian affray', 28 October 1901, p. 2.
- ¹² *Worker*, 15 May 1897, p. 2; *Worker*, 22 May 1897.
- ¹³ *Brisbane Courier*, 6 February 1902, p. 6.
- ¹⁴ *Bundaberg Mail*, 26 May 1897.
- ¹⁵ *Worker*, 29 May 1897, p. 2.
- ¹⁶ *Worker*, 20 February 1897, p. 2.
- ¹⁷ *Illustrated Sydney News*, 19 November 1892, p. 4.
- ¹⁸ *Bulletin*, 18 January 1906.
- ¹⁹ *ibid.*
- ²⁰ Yarwood, op. cit., pp. 141–50.
- ²¹ *Aliens Act of 1867*, (31 Vic. No. 28), Queensland.
- ²² Queensland Births 1885–1889, Register General's Office, Brisbane, 1989.
- ²³ Yarwood, op. cit., p. 144.
- ²⁴ Chief Secretary's Office, Brisbane to Department of External Affairs, 10 June 1909, A1/1, 09/13029, National Archives of Australia (NAA) (ACT); Chief Secretary's Office, Brisbane to Department of External Affairs, 16 February 1915, A1/1, 15/665, NAA (ACT).
- ²⁵ Chief Secretary's Office, Brisbane to Department of External Affairs, 31 August 1911, A1, 30/2416, NAA (ACT).
- ²⁶ Chief Secretary's Office, Brisbane to Department of External Affairs, 12 October 1909, A1/1, 21/3816, NAA (ACT); Chief Secretary's Office, Brisbane to Department of External Affairs, 27 January 1908, A659, 43/1/6000, NAA (ACT); Postmaster, Charters Towers to Department of External Affairs, 27 December 1905, A1/1, 05/8109, NAA (ACT).
- ²⁷ Chief Secretary's Office, Brisbane to Department of External Affairs, 20 October 1914, A1/1, 21/11220, NAA (ACT).
- ²⁸ This claim is made in almost every study of Syrian/Lebanese immigrants.
- ²⁹ K. H. Karpas, 'The Ottoman emigration to America 1860-1914', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17, 1985, p. 193.
- ³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 183.
- ³¹ *ibid.*, p. 182.
- ³² *ibid.*, pp. 182–83.
- ³³ In K. S. Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon*, Delmar, New York, Caravan Books, 1997, p. xviii, Salibi describes the Druzes as the 'followers of the Fatimid Caliph al Hakim (996-1021) who proclaimed his own divinity in the early eleventh century, deviating from traditional Isma'elite Shi'ism'.
- ³⁴ N. A. Zaideh, *Syria and Lebanon*, Beirut, Librairie Du Liban, 1968, pp. 34–5; Philip K. Hitti, *Lebanon in History: From the Earliest Times to the Present*, London, Macmillan, 1957, p. 8; Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1985, Carbondale & Edwardsville, 1985, pp. 22–3.
- ³⁵ J. McKay, *Phoenician Farewell: Three Generations of Lebanese Christians in Australia*, Ashwood House, Surry Hills, 1989, p. 27.
- ³⁶ Naff, op. cit., pp. 24, 42.
- ³⁷ E. J. Hooglund, 'Introduction', in Hooglund (ed.), op. cit., p. 4.
- ³⁸ W. J. Cahnman, 'Religion and nationality', *The American Journal of Sociology*, XLIX (July 1943–May 1944), pp. 524–29; Philip M. Kayal and Joseph M. Kayal, *The Syrian-Lebanese in America: A Study of Religion and Assimilation*, Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1975, p. 19.
- ³⁹ Kayal and Kayal, op. cit., p. 19; Cahnman, op. cit., p. 527.
- ⁴⁰ P. K. Hitti, *The Syrians in America*, New York, George H Doran, 1924, p. 34.
- ⁴¹ *ibid.*
- ⁴² Kayal and Kayal, op. cit., pp. 19–20.
- ⁴³ *Illustrated Sydney News*, 19 November 1892, p. 4; *Bulletin*, 18 January 1906.
- ⁴⁴ E. L. Batchelor to General Secretary, Australian Natives Association, Perth, 4 January 1911, 14/20363, A1/1 14/20363, NAA (ACT).
- ⁴⁵ Memorandum from the Chief Clerk, Department of External Affairs, 27 October 1914, 14/20363, A1/1 14/20363, NAA (ACT).
- ⁴⁶ Memorandum for the Minister from Atlee Hunt, Secretary Department of External affairs, 27 October 1914, 14/20363, A1/1 14/20363, NAA (ACT).

- 47 Memorandum no. 22/9133, Abraham & George M, Naturalization applications, 30 May 1922, A1/1, 1922/9133, NAA (ACT).
- 48 *ibid.*
- 49 Memorandum re Turkish Subjects in Australia, RSB/BD, Melbourne, 3 October 1922, A385, Box 1, NAA (ACT).
- 50 Turkish Subjects in Victoria, RSB/BD, Melbourne, 3 October 1922, A385, Box 1, NAA (ACT).
- 51 Memorandum no 20363, Atlee Hunt to the Minister, Department of External Affairs, 27 October 1914, A1/1, 14/20363, NAA (ACT).
- 52 *ibid.*
- 53 Yarwood, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
- 54 *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* (CPD), vol. 14, 9 July 1903, p. 1938.
- 55 *ibid.*, p. 1936.
- 56 *CPD*, vol. 14, 9 July 1903, pp. 1938–39.
- 57 *ibid.*, p. 1939.
- 58 Memorandum from the Chief Clerk, Department of External Affairs, 14/20363, A1/1, 14/20363, NAA (ACT).
- 59 E. L. Batchelor to the General Secretary, Australian Natives Association, Perth, 4 January 1911, 20363, A1/1, 14/20363, NAA (ACT).
- 60 *ibid.*
- 61 *ibid.*
- 62 See for example: Department of External Affairs, Commonwealth Naturalization: Inclusion of Syrians, 10 February 1915, 3100/1915, A/60060, 3rd Fisher Sept 14 - Oct 15, NAA (ACT).
- 63 Memorandum from the Chief Clerk, Department of External Affairs, 14/20363, A1/1 14/20363, NAA (ACT).
- 64 *ibid.*
- 65 *ibid.*
- 66 *ibid.*
- 67 Memorandum from Atlee Hunt to the Minister, Department External Affairs, 15 February 1915, 15/3101, A6006/1, 3rd Fisher Sept. 14 – Oct. 15, NAA (ACT).
- 68 Joseph A. to Home Secretary, 9 June 1903, Col/74(a), Queensland State Archives (QSA).
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- 70 Alf M. to Atlee Hunt, 17 August 1904, 04/6496, A1/1, 04/6496, NAA (ACT).
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- 76 Michael M., Naturalization application, A1/1, 30/1083, NAA (ACT).
- 77 *ibid.*
- 78 Legge to Military Commandant, Brisbane, Telegram, 5 November 1914, 1268.M/38, A/11954, QSA.
- 79 Michael M. to Department of Home & Territories, Melbourne, 16 October 1919, 14803, A1/1, 30/1083, NAA (ACT).
- 80 *ibid.*
- 81 Michael M. to Commonwealth Attorney General's Department, 11 July 1918, 8550, A1/1, 30/1083, NAA (ACT).
- 82 Michael M. to Department of Home & Territories, 16 October 1919, 14803, A1/1, 30/1083, NAA (ACT).
- 83 *ibid.*
- 84 *ibid.*
- 85 E. Austin Bell to Major Saunders Asst. G.S.O., Victoria Barracks, Brisbane, 13 January 1916, A1/1, 30/1083, NAA (ACT).
- 86 Michael M. to Department of Home & Territories, 16 October 1919, 14803, A1/1, 30/1083, NAA (ACT).
- 87 A. Batrouney and T. Batrouney, *The Lebanese in Australia*, Melbourne, Australasian Educa Press, 1985, pp. 27–29.
- 88 Major Wallace Brown, Commonwealth Military Services to Commissioner of Police, Brisbane, 22 January 1915, 1268M/38, A/11954, QSA.
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- 90 Major Wallace Brown, Commonwealth Military Services to Commissioner of Police, Brisbane, 22 January 1915, 1268M/38, A/11954, QSA.
- 91 Lieutenant, Intelligence Section, General Staff to Officer in Charge Police, North Carlton, 24 April 1918, MP16/1, 1918/575, NAA (Vic.)
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⁹³ John Gellibrand, Chief Commissioner of Police to Officer in Charge Police, Windsor, Victoria, 13 June 1921, MP16/1, 1918/575, NAA (Vic.).

⁹⁴ Inspector to Commissioner of Police, Adelaide, 12 September 1921, SA/580/2, D1915/0, SA580, NAA (SA).

⁹⁵ Report on Application for Naturalization by John M. N., A1/1, 21/24869, NAA (ACT).

⁹⁶ Report on Application for Naturalization by Solomon G., A1/1, 21/24875, NAA (ACT).

⁹⁷ Report on Application for Naturalization by Joseph M., A1, 21/1418, NAA (ACT).

⁹⁸ Report on the Application for Naturalization by Michael M., A1/1, 21/18552, NAA (ACT).

⁹⁹ In the following, the comment on religion is obviously written by a different person: Report on Application for Naturalization by Abraham M., A1/1, 21/15432, NAA (ACT); Report on Application for Naturalization by Massoud N., A1/1, 21/24130, NAA (ACT); Report on Application for Naturalization by Habib M., A1, 23/27431, NAA (ACT); Report on Application for Naturalization by John M., A1/1, 24/29587, NAA (ACT).

¹⁰⁰ Report on Application for Naturalization by Alfred M., A1/1, 24/20562, NAA (ACT).

¹⁰¹ Report on Application for Naturalization by Abraham M., A1/1, 25/7577, NAA (ACT); Report on Application for Naturalization by Jameel M., A1, 26/11274, NAA (ACT); Report on Application for Naturalization by Fuad M., A1/1, 26/4959, NAA (ACT); Report on Application for Naturalization by Peter M., A1/1, 26/14967, NAA (ACT).

¹⁰² Statutory Declaration, George M., 3 April 1922, A1/1, 22/9133, NAA (ACT).

¹⁰³ Handwritten notes, George M., Naturalization application, A1/1. 22/9133, NAA (ACT).

¹⁰⁴ Memorandum no. 22/9133, Home & Territories Department, 30 May 1922, A1/1, 22/9133, NAA (ACT).

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

TAKING AWAY JOSS

CHINESE RELIGION AND THE WESLEYAN MISSION IN CASTLEMAINE,
1868

BENJAMIN PENNY

On October 1, 1868 three Chinese men appeared before His Honour, Judge Forbes at the Castlemaine County Court in Victoria.¹ One Goon Cheum was the plaintiff in 'an action to recover the value of Chinese Temple taken down by the defendants', namely Hoa Ah Pang and Laong Oun Hung. Goon claimed seventeen pounds, ten shillings and sixpence. *The Mount Alexander Mail*, the local newspaper, reported the next day that Goon had claimed in court, 'On September 29 of last year I purchased from Hoa Ah Pang a temple and all its contents for £5'.² According to him, and several witnesses, Hoa had sold the temple fair and square, intending, as one witness said, to go to New Zealand. Subsequently, it was claimed that Hoa and others had pulled the temple down and taken it elsewhere.

The defence case rested, said their barrister Mr Leech, on credibility. Hoa, when called to the stand, said that he had not sold the temple but rather had let it for six months, for which he had been paid five pounds. The witnesses he produced were his co-defendant Laong Oun Hong, a Wesleyan minister, and The Rev. Mr Dubourg, and they corroborated his stance. *The Mount Alexander Mail* reported

that, 'His Honour ... give the verdict to the defendants, with £3 7s costs'.³

This is a minor case by any account but *The Mount Alexander Mail* does not tell the full story. The case gains greater significance because Hoa Ah Pang, the former temple keeper, had recently been converted to Christianity, Laong Oun Hung (who rendered his own name as Leong On Tong, as I will refer to him hereafter) was the Wesleyan catechist who had won his soul, and The Rev. Mr Dubourg was a Wesleyan minister in the mission to the Chinese of Castlemaine and other parts of Victoria. An examination of records from the Uniting Church archives enables us to place this strange little case in a wider context, that of the meeting of Chinese popular religion (by which I mean the religion of the masses of the Chinese people as opposed to orthodox Buddhism or Daoism) and Protestant Christianity on the goldfields, and in turn to relate it to the *locus classicus* of that encounter, China itself. What I will present takes the form of microhistory, but perhaps cases such as this enable us to ground our conclusions about cross-cultural encounters in the minutiae of quotidian experience and historical specificity.

THE WESLEYAN BACKGROUND

In *The Wesleyan Chronicle* for 20 October 1868 (three weeks after the case), a letter appeared from The Rev. Ed. King under the title 'Chinese Mission in Castle-maine – a Joss House Transformed into a House of Christian Worship'.⁴ King supervised the mission to the Chinese. His letter gives the following account of the same case from a rather different point of view:

Some few months since, Ah Pang, the keeper of a joss-house, was converted through the instrumentality of Leong-on-Tong. For about ten years he had kept a joss-house, but about nine months previous to his conversion he let his temple to an old man named Goon Chin, and became a gold-digger. Having embraced Christianity, he felt that he could not consistently continue the proprietorship of the temple, and resolved to present it to Leong-on-Tong, that it might be converted into a house of prayer.

He goes on:

Having given due notice to the tenant of his intention to resume possession of the building, on Monday July 20, a number of the Chinese Christians met in the house of their teacher, and from thence they proceeded to Five Flags, Campbell's Creek, where stood the idol house.

Hoa, as we shall see below, had established his temple around 1857. King then passes over the account to Leong On Tong. Leong continues:

About three months since, my countryman, Ah Pang, was converted to Christianity. Eleven years since he built a joss-house, but, on his conversion, he resolved to remove the idol temple to Moonlight Flat, for the use of the Christian Chinamen. Monday July 20, was the day appointed for its removal, and I, accompanied by nine of my countrymen, went, with two horses and drays, to Five Flags, and, as I expected great opposition from the Pagans living in that neighbourhood, I asked the Revs. E. King and C. Dubourg to be present on the occasion. We also secured the presence of a policeman. During the time the house was being taken down there were great excitement and angry threats, but the presence of the ministers and the policemen happily prevented a breach of the peace. The rain came down very fast; and Mr Dubourg for about two hours held joss under his arm. My county men expected every moment to see him fall down dead, or some judgement to come upon him.

The word 'joss' is a corruption of the Portuguese word 'deos', god, thus 'joss-house', the building in which the sacred images of Chinese religion are housed and worshipped.⁵ When Mr Dubourg is said to hold joss under his arm, he would appear to have been holding the sacred images from the temple. King continues:

As might be expected, the Pagans were much incensed at the dishonour done to their idol, and an incid-

ent which occurred a few days after will show the prevailing temper of their mind.

Leong-on-Tong was pursuing his labours amongst his countrymen, and had entered into a tent where nine or ten Chinese were gathered. Suddenly a man entered, and said, 'I have come to curse you for taking away joss. You preach Christian doctrine very good, but why you take away joss?' He was willing to tolerate Christianity, but demanded similar tolerance for Paganism.

These comments are both important and revealing, and in some ways also perplexing. Revealing as they demonstrate the attitudes of at least some of the Chinese men to the actions of Hoa and his new comrades. They were clearly not pleased at the removal of their house of worship and the desecration of their sacred images. More than this, King understood the offence given. The comments are important as they show the Chinese reacting to that offence in a serious and meaningful way rather than simply accepting the actions of what must clearly have appeared as the representatives of the colonial powers. If we can trust King's reportage this anonymous man had come to the place Leong was proselytising specifically to curse him.

Finally King's response to the statement, 'You preach Christian doctrine very good, but why you take away joss?' namely, 'He was willing to tolerate Christianity, but demanded similar tolerance for Paganism', is, I suggest, both remarkable and perplexing. It is remarkable as it acknowledges the open-minded attitudes of the Chinese man who distinguishes

between the evangelism of the missionaries *per se*, whom he appears to compliment if only for their mastery of technique, and their actions towards his own religion. It also sums up very neatly a position of mutual tolerance that has echoes of modern ecumenism and indeed multiculturalism. However, the question arises as to whether King endorses such a position or regards it as intrinsically ridiculous. Given that his very next sentence begins, 'At length Pagan anger and malevolence found vent in a legal prosecution ...' I suspect King was not a man before his time.

Once the temple was moved, emptied of its religious articles, and Goon Chin (as his name is rendered here) was evicted from both his workplace and his home, it reopened as a 'house of prayer'. King reported:

It was opened for Divine worship, Sunday, August 2. I first preached to the Europeans who were present, from Isa. xlv. 1, 4, and was followed by Leong-on-Tong, who spoke warmly to his assembled countrymen from Acts xvii, 30, 31.

These two texts both address the ancient transgression of idolatry, thus, King and Leong were echoing the cries of protestant missionaries in every mission field in the last half of the nineteenth century.⁶ The potency of idolatry as an accusation is clear especially in the mission to China.

THE CHINESE IN CASTLEMAINE

After the discovery of gold at Mount Alexander was made public in 1851, the population of Castlemaine and surrounding districts rose quickly. Among those

flooding to the diggings were Chinese men arriving in Melbourne, and then Robe in South Australia after the imposition of the entry tax in 1855. By 1858 the Chinese population of Victoria had peaked at some 40,000. According to the Annual Mineral Statistics submitted by Secretary of Mines in his Quarterly Reports of Mining Surveyors and Registers, the population of Chinese in the Castlemaine district in that year attained 9727 and dropped steadily after 1865. By 1868 when our case was heard in the Castlemaine county court there were 3080 Chinese living there.⁷

These population data should not, however, be viewed as absolutely reliable. In 1868 The Rev. William Young submitted his 'Report on the Conditions of the Chinese Population in Victoria' to the Victorian parliament. Figures in that report on the major Chinese settlements in Victoria were obtained from different local informants. In the case of Castlemaine, 'Statistics of Chinese Population, and particulars of their Employments, [were] furnished by the Chinese Interpreter James Ah Coy'.⁸ Ah Coy's report is most informative. At the level of absolute numbers he reports 'over 80' Chinese in the township itself, 50 at Mopoke, and 'over 300 Chinese miners near Mopoke gully', 150 miners at Barker's Creek, 150 miners at Golden Point, 170 miners at Diamond Gully, and 'In the vicinity of the township all around', there were 100 miners, 20 who worked in gardens, 30 market gardeners, 300 who were married with wives in China, seven married to European women, 20 Chinese children, five Chinese naturalised, 25 in hospital, five lepers, and 400 Chinese prisoners in Castlemaine gaol. Ignoring Ah Coy's endearingly idiosyncratic taxonomy (did any of those married have

an occupation?), these numbers are still more than 1000 short of the 3080 souls. Nonetheless, the picture given here is of a community that had passed beyond the first flush of gold fever with the beginnings of a commercial economy. Ah Coy reports that in Castlemaine there were:

- 1 Chinese street in the township,
- 5 Chinese stores,
- 1 butcher's shop,
- 1 eating-house,
- 5 opium shops,
- 5 gambling-houses,
- 2 barber's shops,
- 4 fishmongers and
- 3 druggists' shops.

In Ah Coy's report there is no 'joss-house' in Castlemaine itself or any of the local villages or camps.

Could this really have been the case?

CHINESE RELIGION IN CASTLEMAINE

Information garnered from rates records in the Borough of Castlemaine and United Shire of Mount Alexander tells a different story. These records refer to three temples in 1860, three in 1861, one in 1865, two in 1866, and four in 1868. They also refer to one in Campbell's Creek in 1875.⁹

However, we are not limited to rates records in this matter. The *Mount Alexander Mail* also noticed Chinese temples and related activities throughout the period. Between 1858 and 1876 there are references to temples 'on the left hand of the

Forest Creek Rd, a few hundred yards out of town' (31.5.58), 'on the side of the road, just beyond Somerville's Store [Campbell's Creek]' (10.11.58), at Clinker's Hill (16.5.59), in the township (11.2.67), Clinker's Hill (again, 22.5.71), Ten Foot Hill (26.4.72), and Duke St (24.1.76).

Now, by any account this points to a religiously active community. In addition, it should be noted that the *Mount Alexander Mail's* coverage of Chinese temples undergoes a marked, but perfectly understandable, change after 1859. The early reports clearly regard the simple existence of a Chinese temple, even temporary structures, as news in themselves. As the years go by, and presumably their readership becomes more used to seeing such things, the *Mail* only notes more serious events such as the opening of new and imposing structures, or else as sites for events not necessarily related to the temple itself – 'a hut near the Chinese joss-house by some means took fire, and in a few minutes was destroyed with its contents' (11.2.1867). Thus, we may safely conclude that the references to Chinese temples in and around Castlemaine referred to here are an underestimation of the true situation.

When the *Mail* reported on temples or on activities related to them, it adopted a notably neutral tone, concentrating on the fabric of the building and its ornaments as an object of curiosity—often in elegant description—rather than in what the temple meant. An 1858 article under the title 'Chinese worship' is a good example.¹⁰ In a rich description of the temple structure and decoration there is very little by way of judgement. While certain mildly negative words and phrases may be noted—the display objects are

'tawdry', mirrors are of 'Brummagem' pattern (that is of inferior, Birmingham style, possibly fake), the lamp burns 'feebly', the man in the temple 'muttered to himself',—there are, equally, references to the undoubted sacredness of the place—it is a 'shrine', he is a 'worshipper' who has 'devotions' and is presumed to be 'devout'. That is, the author is not dismissive of this building and these practices in the way that The Rev. King and Leong On Tong are in their use of terms such as 'pagan' and 'idol house', let alone in their actions. Nonetheless the article concludes, 'We cannot say what all this may mean, but however devout the individual worshipper may be, his countrymen in the contiguous tent are not affected thereby, but chatter on as loud and shrill as usual'. Here, I suspect, the author is drawing a distinction between the Chinese observances which could take place at any time an individual preferred and collective Christian worship on a Sunday when the Christian Sabbath was observed with decorum, at least ideally in the minds of the protestants.

This tone is consistent in the material from the *Mount Alexander Mail*, even as the content of the articles changes. Indeed, there is a kind of admiration in some of their reports, such as the series of seven articles over eighteen months related to the subscription for, and construction, opening and consecration of the temple at Ten Foot Hill in the early 1870s.¹¹ As far as the *Mail* is concerned, by this time the Chinese are a notable part of the Castlemaine community whose religious buildings and observances are objects of interest for the whole community and no longer simply worth reporting for novelty value.

This is not to say that the stance of the *Mail* was shared with their entire readership. A letter from 'Iconoclast' from 6 June 1859 spells out a different set of attitudes to Chinese religions. He says that he has gathered information from a 'respectable Chinese',—later he tells us this man is a Christian—that the Chinese in Bendigo and Castlemaine both intend to seek subscriptions for 'a joss-house of much larger size than the one now built'. His informant apparently 'regret[s] the increase of heathen temples in this country. He wonders why they are not prohibited by law, fearing that his countrymen will be encouraged in their idolatrous practices by a toleration, which will be construed to mean an indifference to every form of religion'. 'Toleration' is clearly a threatening and problematic idea, for 'Iconoclast' as much as it was for King, for whom 'indifference to every form of religion, 'probably implied a threatening latitude for Catholicism. 'Iconoclast' then bemoans the lack of success of the missions to the Chinese and concludes, 'So far, indeed, from the doctrines of Christ having successfully combated the dogmas of Kung-foo-tze [Confucius], it would almost seem as if the philosophy of the heathen sage were assuming the aggressive'.

Iconoclast goes on to bemoan the standard of the interpreters between the Chinese and the authorities and 'the necessity of obtaining honest and competent Anglo-Chinese linguists'. His criticisms focus in on James Ah Coy:

I am assured on good authority, that Ah Coy, the Castlemaine Interpreter is sometimes performing the ko-tow before the picture of Kwan-ti on Clunker's Hill, and yet this official calls himself Christian,

and swears on the Bible. He has a right to be an idolator if he likes, but at least let him avow the fact.

However, not 10 days after this letter the first of a series from J. M'Culloch Henley, Anglo-Chinese Linguist, appeared in the *Mail* explaining various aspects of Chinese popular religions and Buddhism in a comparatively learned way.¹² It is, of course entirely possible that 'Iconoclast' and J. M'Culloch Henley were one and the same, his first letter making the case for employment of someone just like the author of the latter sequence. Such a conclusion is buttressed by the ending of his first letter, on the Chinese God of War Guandi (Kwanti in his rendering), which echoes Iconoclast's sentiments very closely:

It is to be hoped that some steps will be taken to evangelise these heathens and teach them that the knowledge of the God of benevolence was superior to that of the sanguinary god Kwanti. If some steps in that direction do not be taken soon, we will have the horror of beholding the Chinese erecting temples to the gods of their native hills, more numerous to those erected to the "Unknown God".

Here we have an interesting religious variation on the general fear of being flooded by the yellow hordes from the north—that churches will be overrun by joss-houses.

WHO WAS HOA AH PANG?

It would be entirely predictable that our sources would be silent on Hoa Ah Pang before his encounter with the Wes-

leyans. Surprisingly this is not so—however, the only snippet of information we have about him is tantalising in its brevity. The *Mail* tells us in its 3 September 1862 issue that the day before in the Castlemaine Police Court, ‘Ah Leung sued Hu Ah Pang for 30s, which amount he had kindly lent defendant. The debt having been proved, a verdict was given for the amount’.¹³ Who Ah Leung was, why Hoa borrowed the money, if he made a habit of borrowing money and then not paying it back and any number of other questions are raised by this gnostic reference but cannot be answered.

Some other aspects of Hoa’s life can be elucidated from the statement read out at his baptism in the Wesleyan church, Castlemaine and preserved in *The Wesleyan Chronicle* for January 20, 1869 and the *Mission Notices* for that year.¹⁴ Hoa, whose baptismal name was Enoch, came from Foo Tow village in Lunning district, Canton province. His family were too poor to send him to school, and he says that when he came to Victoria he ‘brought idols with me, hoping they would take care of me, and keep me in health, and aid me to become more rich’. He, ‘came here to make money. I got a little and went home.’ He later returned with another idol ‘in whom I trusted for greater prosperity’. This new god proved popular with other miners who came to Hoa’s tent to worship him. Not letting the opportunity slip away, Hoa says that he, ‘first thought of building a temple, in order to make money’. Over eleven years, he ‘removed it to six different places, and made £2000 by the speculation’. I might pause to note here that for Hoa, as for most temple keepers, religion was a business. This makes it even more surprising that Ah Coy did not include

joss-houses in his list of Chinese businesses active in Castlemaine. So, obeying the proper narrative rules for this kind of document, Hoa then speaks of his progressive degradation, smoking opium and gambling all his money away. He then tells of his meeting Leong On Tong on the road, and his gradual acceptance of Christian doctrine. At his moment of true conversion, he describes his realisation in terms that are, by now familiar:

The Holy Spirit shined into my heart, and I understood that to worship images was to offend God, and to be the owner of a joss-house was a great sin.

It is clear that the conversion of Hoa Ah Pang was regarded by the mission as a great coup, demonstrating God’s great strength and power. He is singled out in this article for special mention from three other Chinese recipients of baptism by both its author, presumably King, and by Leong in his address reprinted from the ceremony.

I have not been able to find out anything more of Hoa Ah Pang, including whether he remained in Australia or returned to China, whether he remained a Christian or became a ‘backslider’, and what he did for a living after he had turned to the straight and narrow and given away his means of sustenance.

The situation is different for Leong On Tong.

LEONG ON TONG AND HIS VIEWS OF CHINESE RELIGION

Leong On Tong assumed the position of catechist for the Wesleyan mission in 1866. He had been converted himself while

in Australia, in Vaughan, by his predecessor but one as catechist, Leong Ah Toe (no family relationship is ever mentioned between the two). He was regarded as very successful and stayed in the position for thirteen years. In 1879 he was ordained and then was placed in charge of the Little Bourke Street chapel in Melbourne where he stayed until 1885. He then returned to China.

Fortunately, parts of Leong On Tong's journal survive. Unfortunately, that part of his journal dealing with July to October 1868 is lost, or perhaps better put, has not yet been found. It is a fascinating document, describing his daily work on the goldfields and the occasional translated and transcribed conversation, sometimes with temple keepers—undoubtedly tidied up—and the arguments he puts to them strongly echo the statements of Hoa Ah Pang in his baptismal statement: worshipping images is a sin against God, setting up a temple to allow others to worship images is thus a greater sin, images are nothing but paper and wood and therefore cannot protect you, buying incense and candles to worship the images is a waste of money, and so on.

Leong's views on idolatry were absolutely mainstream in protestant missions of the time across the world. One favourite biblical text on idolatry comes from Psalm 805, 15 and 16:

The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears but they hear not; neither is there any breath in their mouths.

On this logic the worship of idols is simple absurdity, with no possible rational justification. Missionaries in China and elsewhere, who belonged to the London Missionary Society, in fact encouraged their converts to hand over their sacred images as a sign of true conversion. The missionaries often sent these to the museum of the LMS in London. The 'Advertisement' on the first page of its catalogues speaks of 'the most valuable and impressive objects in this Collection are the numerous, and (in some instances) *horrible*, IDOLS, which having been imported from the South Sea Islands, from India, China, Africa; and among these especially which were actually given up by their former worshippers, from a full conviction of the folly and sin of idolatry - a conviction derived from the ministry of the Gospel by the Missionaries'.¹⁵

Idolatry, specifically in China, aroused deep emotion in a notable witness to its religion in this period. The Right Rev. Bishop C.R. Alford, Anglican Bishop of Victoria in Hong Kong from 1867 to 1872 published a pamphlet for the Church Missionary Society called *Idols: Idolatry: Idolators* in 1887. In it he writes from his own observations doing the rounds of Anglican missions from Hong Kong to Beijing, 1000 miles west up the Yangtze, and east to Yokohama:

I can tell you what I myself saw of the idolatry of China when, as Bishop of Victoria, it was my duty to visit the Missions ... I can testify that, though their language differed in every important Mission that I visited, as also their physical appearance and even their mental temperament, their social manners and customs also

to some extent, -everywhere the people were given to idolatry ... In fact, everywhere in heathen lands, and in everything purely native, as a rule, idolatry overshadows the people, like some pestilential cloud enveloping and defiling more or less the great mass of the population ... But I have said enough to show you that, notwithstanding all that can be written about the philosophy of the ancient religions of the East, idolatry, whatever name it may assume, holds the heathen nations fast bound in chains of sin, and wretchedness, and death, -a piteous sight that brought the Son of God from heaven to destroy these works of the devil, and that ought to stir to the bottom of his soul every soldier of the Cross to go forth in his Master's name and overcome the Evil One by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony.¹⁶

CONCLUSIONS

Two conclusions follow from what I have described: First, religion existed in the Chinese community in Castlemaine and it was an important part of the lives of many if not most of the Chinese who lived there. To make such a conclusion leads us to ponder why it was so completely written out of official documents—including documents based on information collected by Chinese people. Secondly, the events that led up to our minor case in Castlemaine County Court were part of a much larger encounter between Protestant mis-

sionaries and the followers of Chinese religions in China and also in the Chinese diaspora. Doubtless, little dramas like the one I have described were taking place across the Chinese world and in all likelihood the dynamic everywhere was much the same. On the one side were usually relatively poorly educated Chinese people whose religious observances were based profoundly on the primacy of efficacy—did worshipping this god produce results in the here and now?—and on the other were generally well educated Europeans who tried to convince them that the way they sought results was not only not efficacious but sinful—a notion entirely novel to Chinese religious traditions.

As we have seen, as far as we can tell from our sources, the Chinese were far from antagonistic to the missionaries—their religious world was plural. Religions based on efficacy are welcoming of efficacious novelties and the history of Chinese religions is one—to a large extent—of borrowings, absorption and acceptance. On the other hand, the religions of the book tend to be exclusivist and uncompromising so it comes as no surprise that the protestant missionaries on the goldfields were not tolerant of the religious practices of the Chinese.

What I think is perhaps more surprising is that this intolerance seems not to be more widespread. The *Mount Alexander Mail*, for instance, did not attack the Chinese for being pagans or heathens—but rather seems to have adopted the attitude that if they did not understand what was going on, they would refrain from criticism.

This is not to say that the Chinese in Castlemaine were not subject to bigoted criticism beyond the mission. They were

subject to all the usual accusations of immorality, profligacy and besottedness that the Chinese across Australia experienced. Indeed, one of the most striking pieces of anti-Chinese bigotry that survives in published form in this period comes from Castlemaine: the infamous 'Sketches of Chinese Character, Illustrative of their Moral and Physical Effect on the Rising Generation of Victoria', by 'Humanity' published in Castlemaine in 1878. In this short piece, it is the Chinese debauching young European women that most inflames our author:

Could I but write – and by Gods help I'll try – the scenes of that awful red, blood-red alley or lane off Forest-street, and publish it in England, it would never be believed that our Saxon and Norman girls could have sunk so low in crime as to consort with such a herd of Gorilla Devils, devilish and leprous in feature, and devilish they are in nature also.¹⁷

Taking a step back from the material discussed in this paper, the overriding impression of the encounter between the Chinese and Europeans on the goldfields is one of two communities largely living separate lives, in different languages, eating different food, in distinct places of residence, worshipping different gods in different ways. The missionary encounter was one of the very few sites where one community actively reached out to the other. While the missionaries I have discussed held opinions of Chinese religion (and by extension the non-Christian Chinese themselves) that are at best deeply prejudiced, nonetheless they are also one of the few groups that also reckon them

worthy of attention and effort. They also, almost uniquely, preserve the voices of members of this community—'you preach Christian doctrine very good but why you take away joss?'—even when those voices disagree with them.

To most Europeans, the Chinese were completely and irrevocably alien and I suspect that their hatred of the Chinese was based on those features of their lives the Europeans understood precisely because they were paralleled in their own lives: their mining practices, their use of prostitutes, their use of intoxicants, and the threat that they would take their land by sheer force of numbers. Religion was not such a focus of general bigotry towards the Chinese as it was simply beyond their understanding.

ENDNOTES

¹ The case is recorded in the Castlemaine County Court Register for Thursday, October 1, 1868, held in the Public Record Office of Victoria, VPRS 733/5. The spelling of the names of the Chinese participants in this narrative vary according to who transcribed them. However, as it is clear in all sources used which person is referred to, I have rendered the names as they appear in each source. A general survey of the missions to the Chinese in the Victorian goldfields has recently appeared the *Victorian Historical Journal*: Walter Phillips, 'Seeking souls in the diggings: Christian missions to the Chinese on the Victorian goldfields', (72, 1&2, September 2001, pp. 86–104). I would like to acknowledge Ian Welch who first brought my attention to this case.

² All references to the case are from *The Mount Alexander Mail* (hereafter, MAM), 2.10.1868.

³ The costs, according to the Court Register, were made up of defendant's costs of three pounds three shillings and sixpence, a two shilling government fee and a two shilling subpoena fee.

⁴ *The Wesleyan Chronicle* (hereafter, WC), 20.10.1868, p. 149.

⁵ It should be noted that Chinese religious images may also be painted on paper, and in discussions of Chinese religion in Australia from this period 'joss' are sometimes said to be stuck to walls or doors.

⁶ The King James version of the Isaiah text reads, 'Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, their idols upon the breasts, and upon the cattle; your carriages were heavy laden; they are a burden to the weary beast', and 'And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry , and will deliver you.' The Acts text reads, 'And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent; Because he hath appointed a day, in which the righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead'.

⁷ Figures from K. Cronin, *Colonial Casualties: Chinese in Early Victoria*, Melbourne, University of Melbourne Press, 1982, Table 5, p. 141.

⁸ I. McLaren, *The Chinese in Victoria: Official Reports and Documents*, Melbourne, Red Rooster Press, 1985, pp. 38–9.

⁹ I am indebted to the Castlemaine Historical Society Inc. for this information.

¹⁰ MAM 31.5.1858, p. 3.

¹¹ MAM 12.10.71, 24.4.72, 26.4.72, 7.6.73, 14.5.73, 15.5.73, 16.5.73.

¹² MAM 15.6.1859, 22.6.1859, 24.6.1859, 1.7.59, 8.7.1859.

¹³ MAM 3.9.1863, p. 2.

¹⁴ *The Wesleyan Chronicle* 20.1.1869, p. 11; *Mission Notices* 1867–71, pp. 143–4 (National Library of Australia, Ferguson Collection).

¹⁵ *Catalogue of the Missionary Museum, Austen Friars; including specimens of natural history, various idols of heathen nations, dresses, manufactures, domestic utensils, instruments of war, &c. &c. &c.*, London, W. Phillips, 1826, p. iii.

¹⁶ C. R. Alford, *Idols: Idolatry: Idolators*, London, Church Missionary Society, 1887, pp. 5–6.

¹⁷ 'Humanity', *Sketches of Chinese Character, Illustrative of their Moral and Physical Effect on the Rising Generation of Victoria*, Castlemaine, F. Y. Benham, Printer and Bookbinder, 1878, p. 3.

