

# Lazarus at Australia's Gateway

## The Christian Mission Enterprise in Eastern Cape York Peninsula

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I have always felt that the aboriginal was the Lazarus of Australia. Poor, ragged and sick with the sores which are often the result of contact with the diseases of the white man, hungry because he has been driven from the waterholes which (*sic*) alone he can obtain food, unable to defend himself against the wrongs which may be inflicted on him, he lies at the gate of Australia which is so rich, so comfortable and so well fed. (Rt. Rev. Gilbert White, first Bishop of Carpentaria 1927)

Bishop Gilbert White, the first Anglican Bishop of Carpentaria, was fond of the Lazarus image for Aborigines of northern Australia. He was appointed to the new diocese in 1900, and this energetic man was the founder of the Anglican missionary drive in far north Queensland. His views, while distinctively related to the Anglican position, nevertheless can be seen as an important reflection of the general Christian view on Aborigines around the turn of the century, and as such they not only influenced mission policy, but additionally shaped the mission enterprise in Cape York Peninsula. White was an Oxford graduate fresh to the colonies, but he was a man of undoubted energy who was in charge of an enormous diocese which included much of what is now the Northern Territory. He carried with him many of the orthodox evolutionist views on the "primitives", views which were at this time self-evident truths for an educated man. Aborigines could not handle "civilisation"; once touched and polluted by European contact, they were almost beyond reach of the evangelical spirit. White admitted later in his life that upon his arrival in the north he had cast covetous eyes upon the London Missionary Society and their Torres Strait Islander charges:

Physically, mentally and spiritually they are altogether of a higher type than the mainland Aborigines. They have even begun to

volunteer for work among their less-advanced cousins, the Aborigines of the mainland... They are strong, capable and intelligent, and live mainly by the cultivation of their gardens. (White 1927:26,41)

To labour with Aborigines was, for White, a less-rewarding task, with fewer immediate rewards and requiring a much greater input. The Christian message, if it were to flourish among the stonier fields of the Aboriginal mainland, would be far better directed towards the untouched savage as yet free from the permanently corrupting influence of Europeans. Those who had already felt this influence were, in the main, a lost cause:

It is hard to conceive of anything more unlovely or degraded than the dirty native who hangs about the Australian bush towns, clad in the filthy cast-off garments of bush civilisation, but the same native in his natural state is a very different being. (White 1927a:2)

Any attempt to understand current Aboriginal/Christian attitudes and practices must address the historical process which informs contemporary beliefs and practices. As Anderson (1984) observes, historians of this region have proposed the notion of "frontiers" to analyse the various sectors of European activity in the contact process (thus the pastoral "frontier" and the mining "frontier"), but he points out that this categorisation can obscure certain critical features of interaction. He suggests instead the concept of "intervention complex" to describe clusters of activities which not only created new sets of physical and social conditions, but "also intervened purposively in Aboriginal societies to impose a different world order on Aboriginal people" (Anderson 1984:161-162). For Aborigines of Cape York Peninsula, the Protestant missionary activities were interventionist precisely in this way. This article reviews first of all the general intervention history of Christian enterprise in the Peninsula, and then narrows its focus to examine the formation and development of one particular Anglican mission in the region, the Lockhart River Mission. Through an examination of this particular situation we are in a position to draw some general conclusions about the processes and results of Christian intervention in remote areas where Aboriginal people were coming under severe contact pressures from an intensifying frontier.

Protestant Christian views (or lack of them) towards Aborigines, particularly those held by the Anglican Church, have their origins in the long regime of Samuel Marsden, chaplain to the infant colony of New South Wales for over 40 years. Appointed as assistant chaplain in 1793, and arriving at Pt. Jackson the following year, Marsden had been sponsored and trained by the Elland Society, an association of Anglican clerics who were attempting to create a revival of evangelical fervour in the Church of England. He did much to assist the London Missionary Society with its evangelical endeavours in the South Pacific and involved himself directly in setting up missions to the Maoris in New Zealand (Yarwood 1977). But Marsden did little in terms of mission action for Aborigines in what was a critical period of European expansion and indigenous displacement. Yarwood observes:

As head of the Anglican establishment for decades, and agent for wealthy missionary societies, Marsden had a clear responsibility

towards the Aborigines and the consciences of his own people. That duty was ill-performed, partly because he judged the race to be incapable of taking the necessary step towards conversion, by adopting the white man's material values, partly too perhaps because of his identification with the invading pastoralists... (he) had sailed to the colony with the Evangelical's passionate longing to save souls. Frustrated by convicts and Aborigines, he turned to Polynesia and New Zealand... (Yarwood 1977:277-278)

Marsden's views on Aborigines and other indigenous peoples were based on the excessively simple and racist dogmas of his day, ones shared by the European settlers at large. Aboriginal capacities and culture were seen as extremely limited. Marsden, like the missionaries who followed him to the south Pacific and Australia, saw Polynesians as "higher" on the ladder of progress, as evinced by their gardens and settled village life. They were a more agreeable and malleable target for the Christian enterprise. The Anglican church, like other churches in Australia, accepted this dogma well into the 20th century, and its leaders engaged in the Aboriginal area with a great deal of reluctance. I focus upon this Anglican mission enterprise in eastern Cape York Peninsula to illustrate this point, and to explore its outcomes as part of a more general process of planned social change.

### **Early Missionising in Cape York**

It is doubtful whether any sort of Christian message would have reached the Aborigines in the frontier regions of Cape York Peninsula before 1867. In that year the Rev. F.C. Jagg, an Anglican, arrived at the remote outpost of Somerset at the northern tip of the Peninsula. Somerset was established only a short time earlier (1863) by the Jardine family as an attempt to set up a southern Singapore and as a justification for colonial claims over the distant northern lands. At the time of Jagg's arrival it contained a military detachment and a variety of Aboriginal remnant groups clinging to the settlement for survival under the Jardines' patronage. This was a dubious patronage at best, given the Jardine brothers' record of ruthless reprisals on bush-living Aborigines who interfered with cattle and property. Jagg was appalled at the licentious behaviour of the military and the visiting crews, particularly with regard to their treatment of the refugee Aborigines. His efforts to set up schools and church services for them met with resistance and interference at every turn. This mission attempt was abandoned in 1870, a significant factor being, according to Bayton, complete financial and spiritual disinterest by the Anglican Church authorities in the south (Bayton 1965:31-39).

The period from Jagg's withdrawal from Somerset until circa 1890 is an important one in the history of Aboriginal people in this region. Captain Banner had started fishing commercially for pearlshell in the Torres Strait in 1868, and both pearlshell and trepang (a seaslug) became the foundation of a very rapidly expanding marine extractive industry in the Strait and northern Peninsula waters. In 1871 shell gathered in this area was worth 25,000 pounds; in 1878 over 112,000 pounds, at a price of 400 pounds a ton. From 1874 onward, diving suits and apparatus were introduced, making accessible shell beds which had previously been too deep to exploit. by 1885 there were 195 vessels registered for the region, each with its

complement of workboats, divers and support crew (Cilento and Lack 1959:223-224).

By this time Thursday Island, with its better harbour, had replaced Somerset as the burgeoning capital of the north, and the marine-based exploitations brought in their wake rapid and often disruptive contacts with the coastal mainland Aboriginal peoples (see Chase 1980, 1981; G. Evans 1972). By the 1880s abduction, murder and attacks on coastal Aborigines by lugger captains desperate for cheap labour were commonplace, and this in turn provoked a growing series of retaliatory raids on isolated boats and camps. So serious were these developing conflicts that one official report saw the lugger industries close to paralysis and perhaps even destruction (Saville-Kent 1890). It was in response to such official reports, especially those of Douglas (1889-1893), Saville-Kent (1890), Meston (1896) and Roth (1899) that the early Protestant missions were created on the Peninsula mainland. Douglas called for a chain of mission stations right around the Peninsula, and Roth pressed for the creation of large Aboriginal reserve areas. But before these mission enterprises are discussed we need to return briefly to the 1860s and the burgeoning Christian interest in the Torres Strait.

The Torres Strait was seen as a natural westwards extension of the London Missionary Society's evangelical work. The Society was founded in 1795 as a non-denominational (but largely Congregational) and evangelical organisation, and its aims were the forthright extension of the Christian word to the non-European and heathen world. In the South Pacific, the zealous John Williams had established a LMS base in the Society Isles in 1817, and by 1834 he could boast that he had visited every island of importance within 2000 miles, leaving teachers to carry on the good work (Neill 1964:298). At Erromanga, in 1839, he was clubbed and speared to death, then "cooked and eaten in a cannibal feast" (*ibid*:301). His martyrdom, as it was popularly referred to, stimulated further LMS activity, and in the 1840s they had established bases in southern New Hebrides, New Caledonia and the Loyalties (Hilliard 1978:6).

The Rev. Samuel Macfarlane made an initial visit to the Torres Strait and southern New Guinea in 1870, calling in to Somerset on the way. He saw the New Guineans and the Islanders as a Melanesian outpost in need of LMS evangelisation, and towards this end he set up a base at Darnley Island with eight married evangelists from the Loyalty Islands. This was to be a theological college, from which trained Islanders could extend the Christian message into New Guinea in the name of the Society (Bayton 1965:43-51). He apparently saw no fertile ground among the Aborigines of Cape York Peninsula, and the LMS activities were limited to the Torres Strait Islands and New Guinea. By the 1870s, territorial competition in the south Pacific among the various missionising agencies (including the Anglican Church Missionary Society) had largely been resolved, and the Torres Strait was clearly recognised as a LMS precinct. By the 1880s, LMS inspired evangelical Christianity had established a firm foothold north of the Peninsula, with little interest being shown in the neighbouring mainland Aboriginal people.

## Protestantism in the Peninsula

K. Evans (1969) provides a detailed assessment of the early Protestant mission intervention among Aboriginal people in Cape York Peninsula, seeing the first

pioneering attempts as an outcome of Protestant evangelical puritanism which was a moral force in Queensland society, even if only in a nominal sense (*ibid*:12). In the late 1800s, as Evans observes, a particular view had coalesced concerning northern Aborigines — polygamy, “cannibalism” and other undesirable traits created a picture of Aboriginal society as an expression of animality, an innate bestiality which was morally repugnant and to be overcome (*ibid*:12-13). These views, based on the crude racist doctrine of Marsden’s time, but now supported by a distorted scientism, were widespread and dogmatic. Aborigines were even more firmly below Melanesian neighbours in the evolutionary ladder of “progress” (see Chase 1970; Chase and von Sturmer 1973).

It is perhaps not surprising that it was a marginal (in Australia) evangelical denomination which was first to answer the call to spiritual arms in the deteriorating frontier situation on the Peninsula’s coastline. They were certainly less establishment oriented than the Anglicans, and they were perhaps more used to adopting minority positions. A Lutheran, James Flierl, formed the first permanent mission outpost at Cape Bedford (later to become Hopevale Mission) north of Cooktown, in 1886. From the beginning, the Lutheran Church, then centred in South Australia, was, in Australia, “a mission-minded Church” (Hebart, quoted in Anderson 1984:189). They had already attempted to missionise Aborigines around the new town of Brisbane in 1837, an attempt which, though ending in failure, showed a more committed endeavour in the very early years than the establishment Anglican church. In 1887 the Lutherans opened another mission at Bloomfield River, to the south of Cooktown, though this was closed in 1902 due to lack of appropriate Aboriginal response.

The next effort was from the Moravians who opened the Presbyterian mission at Mapoon, in the northwest of the Peninsula in 1891. Ward, who pioneered this mission, commented later that the mission was created despite the views of the Queensland Presbyterian church on the worth of Aboriginal missionising. The Presbyterian authorities considered that “the men who were going to devote their lives to such despicable work are expected to be ne’er-do-wells” (Ward, quoted in Evans 1969:25). In the same year, the Rev. J.B. Gribble started a mission at Yarrabah, close to the southern Peninsula town of Cairns. His son (and successor) was to speak later of the apathy and disinterest of the Anglican church towards his father’s efforts, an attitude which had forced him to start the mission project entirely at his own cost (See K. Evans 1969:25; Bayton 1969).

In 1897, following reports from Archibald Meston and others to the Queensland government, the Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act was passed. This Act created protectors for Aborigines in Queensland, and gave the government wide powers to remove them to settlements, controlling their movements and their labour. It allowed missionaries to create the settlements and to control them not only as brokers for the divine word, but in a more secular sense, as representatives of the Queensland government. As a result, the Presbyterians extended their mission activities by setting up Weipa mission in 1898 and Aurukun Mission in 1904. The Anglicans also responded, but this was due not only to the legislation, but as well to the creation of the diocese of Carpentaria in 1900, and the appointment of the energetic Gilbert White as its first bishop.

## Bishop Gilbert White and the Anglican Commitment

At the turn of the century the Peninsula was no longer an unexplored wilderness. The collapse of the Palmer River goldfield in the 1870s forced prospectors to investigate northwards, and the explorations of the new Queensland government geologist, Robert Logan Jack, around 1880 brought new rushes to Coen, the Rocky River and the Wenlock River. Contact pressure fell mostly upon the eastern Peninsula where the trepang and pearlshell beds predominated. Pastoral properties clustered along the newly erected telegraph line to Somerset which went also towards the east, and the repeater stations along the line became depots for the notorious Native Police detachments. Aborigines of the eastern coastal Peninsula sector were thus being squeezed in a vice of frontier expansion: from the sea by the continuous coastal lugger operations, from the land by miners and pastoralists (Chase 1980:97-104; 1981). By 1900 these Aboriginal groups were considered to be irretrievably affected. Meston, in his report of 1896, considered Aborigines of the northeast coast around the Lockhart River to be destitute and corrupted (Meston 1896), Police Commissioner Parry-Okeden stated in 1897 that in this area there were no more "wild blacks" left because of the extensive contact. They spoke a "very good pigeon English" and were "more or less clothed" (Parry-Okeden 1897). The new Northern Protector W.E. Roth reported to the government in 1900 that, from Cape Grenville to Princess Charlotte Bay:

They know what drink is; they recognise and appreciate the monetary value of their women; they suffer markedly from venereal disease; they have picked up the vices of their visitors with the result that they are rapidly diminishing in numbers. (Roth 1899-1900:3)

"Wild blacks" or "myalls" were now only to be found along the southwest Carpentarian coast of the Peninsula, an area without any of the resources upon which the frontier extractive industries were based. The frontier European attitude to these "untamed blacks" was harsh, and it is reflected even as late as 1959 in an official Queensland government publication:

The *myall*, the Ishmael of the "scrub" or the savannah, learned to strike a vengeful blow from ambush and fade into the thickets; the white men learned to shoot at sight, without enquiry, any armed native who took a step behind them. (Cilento and Lack 1959:186)

This biblical metaphor no doubt provided some justification to the European settlers and entrepreneurs but, as we have seen, the newly appointed Bishop White drew upon another, the Lazarus image, in his immediate perceptions of the situation. White immediately proposed that the mission effort needed to be selective:

The only chance of preserving the remnant of a race which has done us no wrong and which has suffered deep injustice at our hands in the past, is to preserve (as far as may be) their natural conditions of life and to isolate them completely from contact with whites. (White, quoted in K. Evans 1969:33)

His first tasks were to offer support to Gribble's struggling Yarrabah mission, and to make an immediate reconnaissance along the southwest Peninsula coast to find a site for a new mission to the largely unaffected and bush-living Aborigines. At the Mitchell River he found a suitable situation. Here, they were "quite primitive savages, and largely untouched by disease or by contact with drink, opium and other evils of white civilisation:" (White 1927b:21). The new mission of Trubanaman was opened in 1905, with some assistance in the form of rations and initial building expenses from the Queensland government, and with an annual allowance of 150 pounds set by Protector Roth. White's instructions to the Anglican missionaries at both Trubanaman and Yarrabah were that only those cultural elements in complete antithesis to Christian doctrine were to be changed (Evans 1969:51). An early superintendent of Trubanaman, the Rev. Matthews, aimed at the "destruction of ignorance (and to) let in the Light which lighteth every man" (Matthews, quoted in K. Evans 1969:25).

The Anglican mission attempt was now firmly if somewhat narrowly established, though they were cautious about extending their effort; in the early years of White's reign, the Lutherans had invited the Anglicans to take over the collapsed Bloomfield mission, but this offer was refused. Further afield, in southern Queensland, the Anglican church took over the government Aboriginal station at Fraser Island near Maryborough in 1901 and E. Gribble was appointed superintendent. Within three years he ceased operations, transferring the inhabitants some 1200 km north to Yarrabah, where he succeeded his father, J.B. Gribble, as superintendent. A solid, if modest, base had been established around a sober evangelical philosophy best summed up by E. Gribble in 1933:

The aims of the Mission are the elevation and the evangelisation of the Aborigines by the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and by teaching them habits of industry. And this is done by gathering them into communities, surrounding them with Christian influences, protecting them from the evils too often associated with European service, getting them to take an interest in themselves as a race, and cultivating their self-respect. (Gribble 1933:30)

Before his retirement Bishop White was to achieve one of his desires. In 1915 the LMS handed over their Torres Strait activities to the Anglican church, and ever since that time the Torres Strait has been a major focal point of Anglican mission endeavour — in Anglican eyes far more important than the Aboriginal mainland with its less receptive and "less advanced" people.

Bishop White's successor, Stephen Davies, was responsible for the next period of Anglican mission expansion among Aborigines, the creation of the Lockhart River Mission on the northeast coast in 1924. This was followed by Edward River Mission, on the west coast, to the north of Trubanaman (now the Mitchell River Mission) in 1939. All the Protestant missions saw their task, as not just to evangelise, but to actually teach Aborigines the elements of Protestant virtuous living — hard work, a clean and settled village life routine, and the desirable pattern of monogamous nuclear family life. The foundation thus provided was thought to be the only successful pathway to future Aboriginal survival, to raise them several rungs up the

ladder of material and social progress, and to combine this with the reception of Christian doctrine.

The secular — if not always the spiritual — goals of these missions accorded well with the aims of the Queensland government as perceived by Northern Protector Roth and his successors. Aboriginal interaction with Europeans was to be controlled and guided through on-the-spot supervisors, and by the “collection” of Aboriginal people to concentration settlements. Roth, in particular, constantly pushed for the formation of protected areas in the Peninsula for these purposes, arguing for a policy of passive non-interference zones along the lines of those introduced in imperial India (Roth 1900:9-11). As the missions formed, the government created reserves (often very large) around them as buffer zones of control. Missionaries acted as government agents, and were empowered in this way both to prohibit entry by unauthorised people, and to prevent Aboriginal departure. The 1897 Act had given very wide powers of removal and control of Aborigines to its public servants and agents, but the government also required that any mission enterprise pay for itself and be free from major dependence on the taxpayer. Grants were small and often given grudgingly, a constant source of strain to the mission superintendents who had to rely instead on meagre support from their own organisations. This situation was eventually to be a major factor in the abandonment of mainland Anglican missions to the State government in the 1960s.

## The Lockhart River Area

As we have seen, the northeast coast had received a great deal of contact pressure from luggers, graziers and miners. A major location in this process was Lloyd Bay (into which the Lockhart River drains), the first major anchorage north of Princess Charlotte Bay. As well as being of importance to marine activities, it was a convenient jump-off point for miners working on the Wenlock and Pascoe Rivers, and it held great attractions for luggers searching for cheap boat labour. The resident Aboriginal people of the *Kuuku Ya'u* and *Umpila* language groups were intrepid seamen who in their traditional hunting activities used large outrigger canoes, to forage on the offshore reefs and islands (see Thomson 1933, 1934; Chase 1980, 1981). They were fluent in the creole English now well entrenched in the lugger industry, and they showed some willingness to engage in the new and exciting life offered by the lugger captains (Chase 1981).

The first official report on the Lloyd Bay area came from Roth's successor as Chief Protector, R.B. Howard, who visited Lloyd Bay in 1907 on a tour of inspection. He called for a government settlement and reserve area to be created in order to monitor the excesses of lugger recruitment. His suggestion, like Roth's earlier ones, was not acted upon. He visited the area again in 1908, noting that a European had commenced cutting sandalwood in the area. He saw this new activity as an ideal one for Aborigines, keeping them in their home territories and allowing for systematic and continuous protection in the region. The European, Hugh Gibley, had signed agreements for labour with Aborigines of the Pascoe River, Lloyd Bay and the Night Island areas, and he impressed Howard with his treatment of the Aborigines within his charge. Howard's 1910 visit found Gibley commanding a monopoly of all the Aboriginal labour in the region, employing over 100 people for both cutting the wood and shipping it to Thursday Island (Howard 1908, 1909, 1910). Howard continued to press for a settlement until his resignation in 1913, but without success.



There is little extant written information on Giblet, but he was well remembered by older Aborigines at Lockhart River in the 1970s. By all accounts he was an extraordinary man in his ability to command loyalty and respect among his charges. He had arrived to set up a base at Lloyd Bay in about 1908, and he rapidly established a monopoly over Aboriginal labour through an approach which did not offend their lifestyles. The well-known author Idriess met him just before the First World War and described him as the "sandalwood king" of Lloyd Bay, referring not only to his monopoly over the resource, but his position with regard to Aborigines. According to Idriess's account, Giblet developed a relationship with Aborigines which was highly satisfactory on both sides. People assembled at his Lloyd Bay camp at the beginning of the dry season, and were sent off with an overseer and horse teams to cut sandalwood and pack it back to the coast. As the wet season approached in December, all gathered at Lloyd Bay for a "Christmas Beano" and to perform "big native dances" (presumably initiation ceremonies). This was "settling up time", and "cases and cases of grog" were distributed, as well as money. The Aborigines were, according to Idriess, "willing serfs" (Idriess 1959:23-29).

Undoubtedly, for people who had been used to physical violence, broken promises from lugger captains, and a great deal of direct economic abuse, Giblet must have seemed a highly desirable patron-protector. Unwelcome luggers were chased away, and apparently one early approach by mission-minded visitors from Thursday Island was rejected forcibly. In the period of pioneering entrepreneurships, European "bosses" were not necessarily just one-way exploiters. They often operated under indigenous social rules in their dealings with Aborigines, and they could be trusted brokers between Aborigines and the potentially dangerous world of Europeans. Both sides could thus act as protectors with regard to their own particular domains, and for the Aborigines, the alternatives to these arrangements could be unpalatable (Anderson 1984:227-230).

## The Lockhart River Mission

The exact events which precipitated the establishment of this mission are now difficult to discover. Clearly the State government's concerns about the lugger excesses in the region were a major factor, and Giblet's presence and Aboriginal support would have been a stumbling block. Giblet's death in 1923 however allowed the Anglican mission to start in 1924 at the site of his old camp in Lloyd Bay, with a reserve gazetted for 340,000 acres (Bayton 1965:153). "J.D.", writing in the *A.B.M. Review* in 1924, gives some account of the establishment, noting that the east coast mission was under way "after much waiting", and following a visit made by "Torres Strait priests" some three years earlier — comments no doubt relating to Giblet's presence and discouragement. Bishop Stephen Davies stated in 1925 that the mission "was undertaken at the request of the Queensland Government to protect the natives from the inroads of diving boat-crews, and from illicit recruiting" (Davies 1925a:154). Elsewhere he remarked that it was started "in response to entreaties from some of the boys from the vicinity" (Davies 1928:52), in particular an Aboriginal man "Treacle" (*A.B.M. Review* 1930:146). In 1924 the advance mission party arrived in Lloyd Bay and was met by "King Fred" and "King Charlie" both wearing "kingplates". After dropping off stores and equipment, the mission boats departed, leaving the embryonic mission under the control of lay superintendent

Harold Rowan who was to remain in charge until the beginning of the Second World War.

Lockhart River was created in a different climate of church and state relationships from that existing at the beginning of the century. Since the arrival of Gilbert White and the start of Anglican missions, there had been disputes and conflict with the state government, and presumably with its Chief Protector in particular. No doubt White's forthright views on the unjust seizure of Aboriginal land in the continent and the destruction of Aboriginal culture endeared him neither to settler nor government official (see, for example, White 1910:92). As well, the government's pragmatic policy of letting missions fend largely for themselves financially must have been seen by the church as a dereliction of responsibility to a continuing, rather than a self-terminating problem in the future: "We are told that they are dying out, ... (that) it is plainly our duty to soothe, as it were, 'the pillow of a dying race'. But it has been proved that they need not of necessity be allowed to die out..." (Gribble 1910:69). Chief Protector Bleakley, writing in 1923 on church/state relations, observed:

I am happy to say a little better feeling exists now. ... As soon as the missions grasped the fact that the official policy was in future to be one of friendly advice rather than hostile criticism, a gratifying readiness was shown to fall in with the new plan and mould their policies to harmonise with that of the department. ... Missions are not now looked upon as psalm-singing institutions, but as places where the natives were trained on the lines of practical Christianity. ... If public funds are required to enable development work to be financed, then the public should be allowed to see what use is being made of their money. If a keen interest and sympathy can be aroused it will be sure to have its effect on political support. (Bleakley 1923:142)

As Rowan later pointed out, "a common accusation against missions is that the natives are taught to be lazy" (Rowan 1928:191). Bleakley's appointment in 1913 had brought a significant firming of government policy towards Aborigines in Queensland. He realised that they were not dying out, and he saw a need for action that went beyond mere maintenance; it was now a matter of redirecting them towards the elevated skills of civilisation. The laws were thus aimed at practical as well as moral ends, and were to be firmly administered, for: "not only is it in their interest to abide by them (the laws), but it is futile to resist them" (Bleakley 1914:3).

Lockhart River was thus one of the first mission enterprises to start under the new government-church agreements where practical training was a priority. The first stage was to move the inhabitants up the first rung of the civilisation ladder to the position occupied by the Melanesians: a settled village life, agriculture and a sober appreciation of the work ethic as a necessary adjunct — even a priority — to evangelisation. Rowan brought a Torres Strait Islander, Kemiso, with him to assist at Lockhart in some of these basic aims, and a feature of the mission thereafter was the use of Torres Strait people as assistants for both religious and work activities. Some of these remained for considerable periods, occupying favoured positions as foremen and lay preachers.

A report after the first twelve months sets out the bold new approach. The mission had been moved to a new site some miles to the south where the soil was better for cultivation. Cultivable land was critical, because "the system under which this mission has been opened is that the natives must maintain themselves and their children. Food may be procured by them from the store on one day a week, but only in return for produce of some sort" (Davies 1925b:52). An initial Government grant of 1,000 pounds had been consumed in setting up, and the Australian Board of Missions grant was 500 pounds. Rowan pushed his charges hard to keep the mission self-supporting and hard-working. The mission boat collected trepang, trochus shell, turtle shell and shark fins. On land, people gathered sandalwood, snakeskins and building timber, and the gardens produced pumpkins, sweet potatoes, tropical fruits, cotton, and even coffee. Women and girls made mats and baskets:

The scheme of the industrial side of things is that all able-bodied people shall work for themselves and receive the results of their labours. Nothing to sell means no food or goods. They won't starve, but will most likely be uncomfortably hungry for a few days, as hunting is not always attended with success. (Rowan 1928:192)

In 1928 the mission had about 300 inmates and it received 750 pounds from the Australian Board of Missions and 500 pounds from the Government as a reluctant special grant. It was proving difficult to obtain staff and to cover the costs of school and church instruction as well as maintaining the entire enterprise. By 1929 the mission was "seriously in debt" (Rowan 1929:65) and many of the optimistic goals set at the start were now being reviewed. It was now a situation of "great difficulty" — not just in terms of finances: schoolchildren as well as 25 older people now had to be fed two meals a day. Able-bodied men were now sent out into the lugger industry, and part of their wages put towards family maintenance and the purchase of capital equipment (Davies 1930:49-50).

Aboriginal reports of these times paint a picture of a stern administration under Rowan, with males eagerly seeking opportunities to escape the mission for a freer lifestyle on the luggers. Kylie Tennant, in her book on Lockhart River reports an Aboriginal recollection of Rowan from the 1960s: "'sit in his house in clean collar and white clothes while the people die', a man who never killed a beast for meat, no matter how hungry the people were, until he ran out himself" (Tennant 1959:28). The mission continued in penury throughout Rowan's regime. Disease was always a problem, and the Aborigines were not proving to be willing partners in the new practices of civilisation. They were "not naturally keen on agriculture, having previously worked more on fishing fleets or hung about mining centres" (Rowan 1933:149). But it was precisely their bush skills at hunting and gathering which helped the mission's precarious survival. By now a "dry season holiday" was an institution. At the end of the wet, around June, people were allowed to leave the mission in family groups to exploit the vegetable and meat harvests of this rich season. From the Aboriginal perspective this had the advantage of a free life in one's own country; from the superintendent's viewpoint there was a reduced dependency on mission stores for a couple of months. The Rowan era was also responsible for the gathering in of other east coast groups as far south as Princess Charlotte Bay, often by the practice of commandeering the children, and forcing their families to journey to the mission (see Chase 1980:116).

During the Second World War, when the Japanese invasion seemed imminent, the mission was abandoned and the Aborigines were instructed to live in bush camps. Here they were supplied intermittently with rations, and many made their way to the large American camps being established around the new wartime airfields inland from Lloyd Bay. Somewhere around 1944, when they had returned to the mission, an epidemic struck which was responsible for the deaths of about one-third of the Aboriginal mission population. Rowan had been succeeded in 1939 by the Rev. Nicholls, and he was later remembered with some anger for his actions when closing the mission early in the war. Before leaving, he confiscated all Aboriginal firearms (no doubt on Government instruction) and dumped them at sea. Clearly the process of enlightenment was not perceived as sufficiently advanced to prevent possible collaboration with an invading Japanese army.

Following the war, the mission struggled on with a series of superintendents. One, A. Briggs, reported in 1950 that "another and perhaps more serious bar to progress is the apathy of these people towards any efforts to improve their condition. This apathy will take some time to overcome" (Briggs 1950:44). By any reasonable measurement of the stated goals, the mission attempt at Lockhart River for 25 years seemed a failure. The long history of the application of colonial views on race, progress and control by church and state had ensured that outcome. Mission superintendent and government official were one and the same, from the mission inmate's perspective. They were all rulers with an extraordinary range of authorised powers to ensure their control over Aboriginal lives.

## The Christian Cooperative Movement

John Warby was a pearling lugger operator at Thursday Island after the war, and he had become a devout Anglican. He was approached by the Bishop of Carpentaria to take over Lockhart River. By 1950 the mission was seen to be in a desperate situation. It had a poor health record and was described by Kylie Tennant as being at the time, an "insanitary and poverty-stricken little pesthole" and the "worst mission of them all" (Tennant 1959:29). In addition, Protector O'Leary had reasserted the tough-minded policy for Aboriginal settlements. They were to be no burden upon the taxpayer, and must become self-sufficient. Only in this way could the new political philosophy of assimilation become a reality (O'Leary 1952:2). Warby accepted the challenge in 1950 and attacked the task with zeal, reorganising housing and dealing firstly with the hygiene problems. For the first (and last) time the settlement had a supervisor who led by example in the hard physical work, and who seemed willing to consider Aboriginal inputs to planning. By 1952 he could report that "for the first time for a number of years the birth rate has outnumbered the deaths" (Warby 1952). In 1953 he reported that all residents had embraced Christianity, and that a new village was being constructed with 65 houses. The mission lugger had been handed over to village councillors to train them in self-management (Warby 1953).

In 1954, Lockhart River was visited by the Rev. Alf Clint, Director of Cooperatives for the Australian Board of Missions. Clint was a Christian socialist with a background in unionism, and he believed that cooperatives established on firm socialist lines were a solution to indigenous problems. He had attempted to set these up in New Guinea for the church but without any real success (Tennant 1959:9-16). Lockhart

River, under Warby's committed guidance, was seen by Clint to be an ideal location for a cooperative attempt among Aborigines. In 1954 the Lockhart River Christian Cooperative was established, and in 1955 Warby expressed his enthusiasm for the future:

This year distinct changes in mission policy have brought about important and far-reaching results in the mission and in the lives of the people. The emphasis is now on the co-operate way of life in general and of business and education in particular. Steps have been taken to waken the people to the great future which lies before them.

...Summary of Methods to achieve our Aim;

1. By teaching the people to run their own cooperative business
2. By providing full employment for all able-bodied men within the mission
3. By creating a voluntary night school for adults and schoolchildren
4. By delegating responsibilities to as many people as possible...
5. By improving living conditions and material benefits
6. By fostering an active interest in activities based on the Church

(Warby 1955:54-55)

Trochus fishing, cattle raising and cotton growing were to provide the cooperative with funds, with members giving labour and money to own share capital. Men and women had equal votes and seven Aboriginal directors were appointed. Two luggers were rented from the Diocese of Carpentaria and a third purchased. All mission responsibilities were in the hands of two administrative councillors, four church councillors and three cattle councillors. A children's community centre was started, not as a reversion to the old dormitory system, but as part of a new social order of cooperative and healthy life: "Here the children are fed, bathed, their clothes laundered ... under the supervision of the nursing sister" (Warby 1955:56). Apart from Bible classes, practical evening courses were run on literacy, health, gardening, mechanics and business principles.

Not surprisingly, in the 1950s, the idea of socialism of any kind being introduced to Aborigines was somewhat alarming to the Queensland government. It is quite likely that the Director of Native Affairs, O'Leary, had Warby's 1955 report in mind when he stated that:

There is an inclination by many doubtlessly well-disposed advocates of aboriginal welfare to press for an education more advanced than is applicable now. The enthusiasm of such well-meaning people is sometimes inclined to cloud their better judgement or fails them to appreciate (*sic*) the human material with which they are dealing ... the educationalist ... must appreciate these fundamental deficiencies in a people that he is endeavouring to uplift. (O'Leary 1956:3)

Despite the enthusiasm, things did not go well for the cooperative. Warby's optimism was dimming by 1957. A small profit had been made, but two of the

luggers had foundered, one being totally lost. The market for trochus had collapsed, and evening classes had to close through lack of attendance. Staff shortages were critical, and lay-readers at the church were dropped because they were "unsuitable". Warby's 1958 report gave very little information on the progress of the cooperative and in 1959 Warby made his final report. The cooperative had failed socially and economically. Equipment had deteriorated, staff could not be replaced, and there was serious dispute among shareholders concerning the whereabouts of funds. Somewhat sadly, Warby reported that "it is recognised that the material aspects of this are, after all, the lesser part, and that the new way of life should be as firmly based on a strong spiritual foundation" (Warby 1959).

Warby's successor, J.T. Currie, found it necessary in 1961 to return control of the cooperative store to the Mission Board, and he noted the younger people were turbulent and in need of discipline. He formally closed the Christian Cooperative. Aboriginal recollections of the Warby period emphasise the good will and strenuous effort of John Warby. He had come closest to a "boss" in the old Gibley style and he represented a significant shift from the crude racial views which marked his predecessors. But he was unable to control internal conflict over the directors who had been voted into office through European encouragement and patronage. Not surprisingly, the nature of cooperative funding was poorly understood, and people thought that a big financial gain from shares was inevitable and assured. The money, so people said later, had been syphoned off — it had "gone another way" (see Chase 1980:123). Near the end of Warby's time these conflicts magnified into accusations of sorcery by one group against another, causing considerable community disruption. While Warby had not outlawed traditional initiation ceremonies (as Rowan had done earlier), Tennant's book makes it clear that they were not particularly encouraged. Old dances, songs and indeed language use were seen as no longer relevant to the assimilationist goals, and according to her, they were in the process of (wisely) being discarded by the community (Tennant 1959:74-80).

## The End of the Mission

A series of mission superintendents followed Warby between 1960 and 1964. Sometime in this period the Anglican bishop of Carpentaria held confidential talks with the Director of the Department of Native Affairs about transfer of control of Lockhart River to the State government. This had already taken place with the Anglican mission at Yarrabah, and it was intended also for Mitchell River and Edward River missions. The Anglican Church in Carpentaria was going out of the mission business; the apparent lack of success and the never-ending series of financial crises were apparently too much for the Diocese and the Board of Missions to sustain. The government's intention for Lockhart at least, was to transfer the entire population to the new administrative complex at Umagico (Bamaga), on the tip of the Peninsula, some 150 km to the north. After the government's takeover had been accomplished, this plan for dramatic relocation was passed on to the community residents, not so much for Aboriginal comment and opinion, but for information. Some agreed, but a significant proportion of the population objected strongly to being removed from their land, especially without consultation. With adverse publicity emerging over another enforced community removal on the west Peninsula coast (the Presbyterian Mapoon mission), the government capitulated and decided

to rebuild the Lockhart River community near Iron Range airstrip at Lloyd Bay, close to the old mission. Removal of inhabitants to this new site was completed by 1970. The few who had gone to Umagico slowly filtered back over the next ten years.

The Anglican church commitment to Lockhart River now consisted of a European priest to run church affairs in the community; all other services were under the control of Government officials. The priest's task was difficult; he had to overcome considerable resentment among Aborigines over the church's role in the hand-over to the government. It was only through a lengthy residence, a careful non-directive ministry, and a willingness to help people with practical problems, that he was able to build up an active congregation. His lack of positional power in the administration structure no doubt assisted him in his efforts.

## **The Mission Involvement in Historic Perspective**

This historical account provides us with one perspective on the Christian mission enterprise among Aboriginal people. Even within Cape York Peninsula other denominational missions had different patterns and outcomes. At Aurukun, for instance, the community had one missionary, the Rev. W. McKenzie, who stayed for over 40 years, and who, though renowned for his toughness in confrontations, nevertheless moulded the community into one which could present a highly independent stand against later threats. During disputes with the State government over mining and a "take-over" in the 1970s and 1980s, Aurukun showed the Queensland government a recalcitrant and aggressive face which won them some concessions. Lockhart River, on the other hand, had a series of superintendents who differed greatly in their abilities, interest and concern. The restrictive and harsh regime of Rowan, the original superintendent, did little to endear him to his charges. Rowan not only disallowed ceremonial performance, but is said to have punished Aboriginal children heard using the local Aboriginal languages. It was not until the arrival of the Rev. David Thompson, in the late 1960s, when the settlement was under State government control, that any Anglican appointee demonstrated an interest in the Aboriginal languages and the local ceremonies. By this time however, there was an indifferent, even at times hostile, bureaucratic response to traditional activities from the Government officials.

It is easy enough, of course, to show the Anglican church as part of the colonial mentality of the times, taking refuge in the rhetoric of crude evolutionism which has always played a significant part in the relations between black and white in Australia. But interactions such as these require more detailed consideration. Lockhart River, in the 1970s, was not simply a place where Aborigines viewed the past as a struggle between Christian epistemology and traditional beliefs; neither was this past seen as a battleground where church officials were constantly challenged over issues of power and authority. In the early 1970s, when I first visited the community, certain Christian beliefs were well-entrenched in the minds of adult residents, often syncretically amalgamated with distinctive Aboriginal modes of thought. Sorcery has always been a major channel through which conflict is formalised, and Christian ritual and substances were seen as additional and even more potent items in one's personal armoury against the actions of sorcerers, particularly in the more virulent forms acquired "up north" from Torres Strait Islanders. Crucifixes were worn for such purposes, along with a variety of other

charms, including Maori tikis (Chase 1980:257), and church attendance and "confessing to God" were undertaken when close family members were sick through sorcery. Rubbing the body with underarm sweat was a traditional ritual by ceremonial leaders to protect people from the potency of particularly powerful dances, songs and sites in this region, and holy water and "blessing oil" from the church was employed similarly on sick people, or on those thought to be under threat from sorcery. The Lockhart River inhabitant was usually equipped with a variety of traditional bush medicines and incantations, Christian prayers and materials as well as other alien paraphernalia (Asian ointments, pharmacological oddments, "Torres Strait medicine", and so on) to take some of the uncertainty out of a potentially hostile social and physical world.

Parallels were drawn between Bible stories and Aboriginal mythic events (the Flood for example) and Christianity was seen as outlining certain essential historic and moral truths. Past mission superintendents who were not liked were seen as not being really Christian, but rather as misusing Christianity for their own purposes. Europeans who had been particularly admired, even if they, like Giblet, were not professed Christians were seen as having Christian-like qualities in their ability to consider an Aboriginal viewpoint, to be concerned about Aboriginal welfare, and to be non-directive and generous — all qualities which the ideal European should possess. Being "Christian" therefore, appeared to have less to do with epistemology and more to do with certain articulated ideal qualities of social relationships between outsider and insider and between the powerful and the powerless. The substances of Anglican Christianity — the sacredness of the altar, the confessional and the sacramental fluids and wafers, were detached from individual priestly control, and authorised by Aboriginal tradition in a way parallel to the substances of Aboriginal ritual. Initiation ceremonies, known in the creole as "bora", are seen today by some residents as "like church", a view of "Aboriginal theology" which has been recently canvassed in a publication about Lockhart River by Rev. David Thompson (1982; see also Thompson, this volume).

I return now to the concept of intervention which opened this account. The Lockhart River region was the locus for three major intervention complexes over the last 100 years. First there was the complex of coastal/marine extractive industries which featured individual entrepreneurs operating in a largely undirected and uncontrolled frontier. The nature of the resources exploited meant that there was no pressure to remove Aborigines from their home territories. Rather the existence of small local populations along the coastline suited the purposes of these entrepreneurs in terms of exploitation. The second intervention complex, starting in 1924, was the Anglican mission, and while this was part of a larger formal church structure, the process of articulation with the local Aboriginal population was *via* the series of individual superintendents, each with their own approaches which, though highly idiosyncratic, nevertheless acted as agents for the state as much as for the church. While church and state bickered over the relative weightings of spiritual and temporal ends, there was no real dispute about either the primitiveness of Aboriginal culture and society or the necessity of enforced change. The third complex, dating from the 1960s, was direct bureaucratic control by the State government with the church formally powerless in the missions, and having to rely on the personal persuasive qualities of its staff for influence rather than administrative power.



We can note in this historical process the roles of the various intervention agents. The entrepreneur Giblet represented a new era: he was a free agent who relied on personal attraction and acknowledgement of Aboriginal modes of social operation to achieve his end, rather than the crude force common in the lugger industry. Giblet could be seen as entering a social contract with the various group leaders to obtain their allegiance, with the terms of reference for mutual benefits clearly understood by all parties. The mission superintendents, perhaps until Warby's period, had no such social contract and they would have denied the necessity for these kinds of agreements. Warby, on the other hand, attempted to operate from the basis of an accord, but he could not avoid the nature of his position: he represented the church, and beyond that, the State government, both of which cannot easily be reconciled with the notion of free agency.

A key factor in understanding the process is therefore the elements of individuality and power. "Bosses" are seen by Aborigines in terms of their individual qualities first and foremost and as valid representatives for wider authoritarian forces only in special instances. From the church superintendent's perspective, Aboriginal society was little more than a loose collection of individuals, to be evangelised as individuals and to be fitted for the future as individuals rather than groups. There was little knowledge of, or allowance for the existence of wider social processes as a locus for individuality from either perspective. European mission action was channelled inevitably into social practices unacceptable to the Aboriginal inmates. Crude and simplistic social engineering attempts by both church and state in places like Lockhart River were not only doomed to failure — they also left residues of a European experience which remain strongly embedded in the Aboriginal consciousness.

Lazarus, after all, was a fitting image for Bishop White and his followers to adopt at the time; the diseased beggar is the ultimate disconnected individual, lacking any form of social articulation with acceptable society, and able to be salvaged only by rising from a lowly state. But it would be instructive to discover what biblical metaphors Aborigines might apply in reverse to account for their own perceptions of the mission experience. Whatever form Christianity takes in the future in Aboriginal communities like Lockhart River, it is likely to be far removed from European expectations. It will certainly be shaped by a direct Aboriginal historical perspective of past mission experience, as well as distinctive indigenous views on morality and social purpose, elements also informed by the recent colonial experience.

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