

Anglican Missions to Aborigines

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Introduction

Despite repeated instructions from the British Colonial Government concerning their welfare, large numbers of Aboriginal people were massacred or dispossessed of their traditional lands by the ever expanding white invasion. Efforts to form small reservations and appoint protectors for them met with only very limited success. The few church missions such as the Church Missionary Society Wellington Valley Mission (1832-1842) did not last long. The result was that by 1850 Aboriginal populations, except those in inaccessible parts of the continent, had been decimated by bullets and poison, alcohol and imported diseases. By this time a growing number of Aboriginal people of mixed descent had emerged, despised by Europeans and often also rejected by other Aboriginal people.

The second phase of missionary effort among Aborigines lasted for more than a century after 1850. These missions were concerned both with traditional Aborigines living in remote areas, and with Aborigines scattered throughout country towns and on pastoral properties. During this time the Anglican Church, together with other churches and the Government, established missions and settlements in most States of the continent. They were formed initially "to smooth the pillow of a dying race". They became places of refuge and protection from the continuing onslaught of the hostile white population. As Aboriginal numbers increased instead of declining, these missions and settlements became centres for the processes of assimilation, whereby Aborigines and "part-Aborigines" would be absorbed into the culture and life-style of white Australians. This policy of "beneficent cultural genocide" was seen as the ultimate solution to the "Aboriginal problem" in Australia (Cole 1979: Chapters 8 and 9).

Since the 1967 Referendum and the legislation of the 1970s, Aborigines, now defined as people of Aboriginal descent who identify as Aborigines, have gained a new sense of dignity and identity through full citizenship rights and policies of self-determination and self-management. The former missions have now become autonomous Aboriginal communities, and the spiritual ministry to the people is increasingly being undertaken by Aboriginal clergy and their lay helpers

New South Wales

New South Wales has had very few mission stations of any church since 1850. The early destruction of most traditional Aboriginal communities has resulted in groups of Aboriginal people with mixed ancestry living on the fringes of country towns, or in make-shift shelters along river banks. Recently a large number have migrated to Sydney where they live in poor quality housing in some of the inner suburbs.

The main Anglican mission in the State was that started by the Rev. J.B. Gribble at Warangesda in the south-west of NSW in 1880. Gribble left in 1885 to start the Mount Dalgety Mission in Western Australia. Warangesda was later taken over by the Government and continued until 1927. During that time the spiritual welfare of the people was provided by the Anglican Church (Needham 1935:99-101).

Some Anglican clergy have ministered to individual Aboriginal people and groups residing in their parishes, but these efforts have been comparatively rare. Generally speaking Anglican congregations have not welcomed Aborigines in their churches, and conversely Aborigines have not felt comfortable worshipping in formal places established by the white invader.

Victoria

Early missionary work in Victoria (known at the time as the Port Phillip District) did not prosper. George Langhorne's mission for the Yarra River Aborigines lasted only two years. The Buntingdale Wesleyan Mission on the Barwon River near Geelong continued from 1838 until 1848 and was more successful (Cole 1982:27).

The British Select Committee Report of 1837 led to the formation of the Protectorate which operated from 1838 until 1850 from four centres. Two protectors, Thomas and Sievwright were keen Methodists, and a third, The Rev. E.S. Parker, was an Anglican clergyman. The Protectorate was abandoned in 1850 due to poor administration and settler antagonism.

The situation changed during the next decade. From that time a number of missions and Government stations began, caring for the scattered remnants of the various Aboriginal communities. The main centres were:

The Lake Boga Moravian Mission (1851-1856) in north-western Victoria.

The Anglican Yelta Mission (1855-1869) situated opposite Wentworth at the junction of the Murray and Darling Rivers. The mission was started by the Melbourne Church of England Mission to the Aborigines of Victoria with Messrs J.T.H. Goodwin and John Bulmer as the founders. They engaged in medical, educational, agricultural and evangelistic work. Aboriginal attendance at the mission fell dramatically in the 1860s when a hotel was opened at Wentworth, leading to the station's closure in 1869 (Massola 1970:13-30).

The Moravian Ebenezer Mission (1859-1904) at Antwerp north of Dimboola in the Western District supported by the Presbyterian Church (Massola 1970:31-62).

The Moravian Ramahyuck Mission (1862-1908) in East Gippsland where the Rev. F.H. Hagenauer laboured for 44 years (Massola 1970:63-93).

The Framlingham Station (1865-1889) north of Warrnambool in the Western District administered by the Government.

The Anglican Lake Condah Mission (1867-1919) in the Western District near Heywood, begun by the Church of England Mission to the Aborigines. The Rev. J.H.

Stahle, supported by the Victorian CMS, had a long ministry there from 1875 until 1913 (Cole 1984:*passim*).

The Coranderrk Station (1863-1924) near Healesville, administered by the Government (Massola 1975:*passim*).

The Anglican Lake Tyers Mission/Station/Community (from 1861) in East Gippsland was started by the Church of England Mission to the Aborigines in Victoria. The Rev. John Bulmer, supported by the Victorian CMS, had an extensive ministry there from 1860 until 1907. Lake Tyers then became the responsibility of the Government with an Anglican Chaplain. In 1926 the Government closed all other existing Aboriginal stations and transferred their inhabitants to Lake Tyers. In 1965 Lake Tyers and Framlingham became permanent Aboriginal reserves. In the 1970s and the 1980s Aboriginal groups, with Government support, have established co-operatives throughout the State as centres for social intercourse, medical services and legal aid. The Victorian Health Service at Fitzroy, an inner Melbourne suburb, is a centre for Aborigines living in the capital.

Contemporary Anglican support for Victorian Aborigines is expressed through the Victorian CMS encouragement of a Chaplain, first at Nowa Nowa near Lake Tyers, and now at Bairnsdale, the centre of a large Aboriginal population. Individual Anglicans are also involved in a general way as they support Aboriginal aspirations for self-determination and land rights, and through their involvement with the co-ops. Generally speaking, however, Victorian Anglicans and their Church can boast little of their care and concern for the original inhabitants of the State, whom they dispossessed, and against whom so many acts of genocide were perpetrated (Cole 1982a:*passim*).

South Australia

The permanent settlement of South Australia in 1836 was based on free but planned immigration, and protection of Aborigines was undertaken from the start. A Native Location was set aside in Adelaide and a Protector appointed. Despite this and other similar efforts in various places in the growing Colony, many Aborigines were deprived of their land and their numbers decreased rapidly.

The main Anglican mission in South Australia was situated at Poonindie, 15 km north of Port Lincoln on the Eyre Peninsula. Archdeacon (later Bishop) M.B. Hale with the help of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel started the mission in 1850. Poonindie developed into a largely self-sufficient community and continued until 1895. It was one of their success stories in the sad chronicles of modern Aboriginal history (Robin 1976:41-57).

The Anglican Church also supported an Aboriginal Home at Mount Gambier from 1854 until 1867. More recently it has had, through the Bush Church Aid Society, a limited involvement with Aboriginal people, mainly through its Flying Medical Service (handed over to the Royal Flying Doctor Service in 1968), and its hospitals at Ceduna, Penong, Cook, and Koonibba (Lutheran) and its medical centre at Coober Pedy.

Western Australia

The European invasion of Western Australia, as elsewhere in Australia, had disastrous consequences for the Aborigines. Those living in the South-West felt the full force of

the impact and large populations were decimated. The same pattern of dispossession and genocide took place in the goldfields of the Kalgoorlie area, with the pastoral expansion into the Pilbara and the Kimberley, and with the pearling industry on the coast at Broome and its environs. In the more remote desert and mountain areas, a number of groups survived, maintaining much of their traditional culture.

The continued ill-treatment of Aborigines forced the Western Australian Government to instigate laws for their protection and welfare. This began with the Aborigines Protection Act of 1886 and continued down to the Native Welfare Act of 1954. In every case the measures came far too late to prevent the rapid decline of Aboriginal people in accessible areas.

The Anglican Church, together with the others, was involved in Aboriginal welfare in the early days of the Colony. The short-lived Mount Eliza Institution on the Swan River in Perth from 1834 to 1838 was the result of concerned Christian endeavour. Captain F.C. Irwin, an Anglican layperson, was responsible for the foundation of the Western Australian Missionary Society formed for Aboriginal protection and evangelisation. The society was able to arrange for the appointment of Dr. Louis Giustiniani, a Moravian sent out by the Church of England, to work in the Guildford area. His sympathy with the Aborigines and the fact that he was not British so antagonised the settlers that he was forced to leave in 1838. The SPG replaced him with the Rev. John Mitchell, who arrived in 1838 and established a mission school at Middle Swan. Unfortunately this project was but short-lived. From 1841 to 1849 the Rev. George King ran a school for Aboriginal children at Fremantle, and during this period ten children were baptised.

In 1852 Mrs. Camfield started an Aboriginal training institution at Albany. This institution was transferred to Perth in 1859 and from there to the Swan River in 1876. Canon D.J. Garland developed the work here with a separate home for girls and infant boys, the older boys being cared for at an orphanage established for white boys. The number of Aboriginal children educated and maintained there up to 1900 was estimated to be in the hundreds. They received industrial training leading to "useful employment". The children here were transferred to the Moore River Government Settlement near Mogumber, 150 km north of Perth, which started in 1918. An Anglican Chaplain was appointed to care for their spiritual needs.

In 1885 the Rev. J.B. Gribble tried to start an Anglican Mission near Mount Dalgety on the Gascoyne River to the north of Sharks Bay. Outspoken against the pastoralists, he was forced to give up his attempt in 1887, and so he went to Queensland where he founded the Yarrabah Mission. The Mount Dalgety Mission site was exchanged in 1897 for an Aboriginal Reserve of the same size at Forrest River in the Kimberley region.

This Forrest River Mission, now known as Oombulgurri (Umbulgari) was the only Anglican mission of note in later times in Western Australia. Following an unsuccessful attempt in 1897, the Mission eventually started in 1913 under the leadership of the Rev. W.H. Robins, supported by the Australian Board of Missions. James Noble and his wife from the Yarrabah Mission served at Forrest River with great acceptance for a number of years. He was made deacon in 1925, the first ordained Aboriginal person in the Anglican Church in Australia. After varying fortunes the Mission was closed in 1968 and the people transferred to Wyndham. The next five years witnessed a disintegration of the community through unemployment, poor living conditions and alcohol. The people returned to Umbulgari

with government help in 1973, and re-established their community. In 1986 the Rev. Leslie Baird from Yarrabah became the first full-time Aboriginal priest to minister there.

Other than the Umbulgari Mission the Anglican Church in Western Australia has done little for Aborigines during this century. In more recent times individual Anglicans have supported Aborigines in their aspirations for recognition and land rights. Bishop Michael Challen, the Assistant Bishop of Perth, is at the forefront in raising public awareness of Aboriginal issues, and of continuing injustice to the Aboriginal people.

Queensland

Two decades of dispossession and genocide in Queensland before 1859 led to a rapid decline of Aboriginal populations, except for those in the far north of the Colony. The continuing plight of Aborigines led to the appointment of a Select Committee in 1861, resulting in the appointment of protectors, and small reserves with ration stations, to which numbers of Aborigines were moved. Continuing attempts to segregate them, allegedly for their protection, in the 1870s were not successful. The camps at Goonebery, Carroby and Tullaboi near Mackay lasted for only three or four years. Local committees did what they could at Bowen and Townsville. In 1877 Thomas Petrie established an Aboriginal home on Bribie Island.

The failure of these measures led to the important Act of 1897 which aimed to provide better care for Aborigines. With the underlying philosophy of protection and paternalism, the legislation established large reserves, protectors, the segregation of Aborigines from towns, the prohibition of opium and alcohol, and the encouragement of Christian missions. This Act became the pattern for the Western Australian Act of 1905, and the South Australian Acts of 1910 and 1911, and the basis for Commonwealth initiatives when it took responsibility for the Northern Territory in 1911. A guiding hand in the later development of this policy was J.W. Bleakley, who was the Chief Protector of Aborigines from 1913 until 1940.

The first Anglican mission in North Queensland was situated at the military station of Somerset on the tip of Cape York Peninsula. It lasted only for the two years of 1867 and 1868. The London Missionary Society established its headquarters there in 1872 in their very successful mission to the Torres Strait Islanders and inhabitants of New Guinea. This extensive LMS work was handed over to the Anglican Church in 1915.

Mission work among the Kanakas, the South Sea Islanders brought to Queensland from 1860 until 1900, had been in existence for many years. The Rev. Albert Maclaren greatly assisted about two thousand Kanakas in his parish at Mackay, and Archdeacon Francis Pritt established a mission for them on the Herbert River in North Queensland. When the Government was forced to retain those Kanakas who did not wish to be repatriated in 1901, they were settled on the South Sea Island Reserve at Wag on Moa Island, 50 km north of Thursday Island. A mission was started among them in 1908 by Deaconess Florence Buchanan. St. Paul's Mission on Moa Island commenced in 1915. Since 1917 St. Paul's Theological College has been the training centre for the Torres Strait Island clergy, except during the war years.

Mission activity in the Diocese of Carpentaria, created in 1900 and supported by the ABM, has been:

The Mitchell River Mission (now Kowanyama), situated on the south-western side of York Peninsula, began in 1904 following three years of visits, including those by the Rev. Ernest Gribble and James Noble from Yarrabah. The site was changed from the river delta in 1917 during the long service of the superintendent, J.W. Chapman. The present Aboriginal community has outgrown this large mission.

The Cowal Creek Mission on the northern end of Cape York was started in 1923, when a lay missionary was appointed there. It was run as part of the Torres Strait Mission, but was later handed over to the Government. Since 1949 the Anglican Church has also ministered at Bamaga.

The Lockhardt River Mission was first situated at Lloyd Bay on the eastern side of Cape York in 1924. In 1925 it was transferred to a beach site at the Lockhardt River estuary, and later to a situation near the Iron Range airstrip. The mission has developed into an important Aboriginal community.

The Edward River Mission, situated on the west coast of Cape York to the north of Kowanyama began in 1939 after a number of abortive attempts during the previous fourteen years. This mission was always very isolated, and is now the centre of an Aboriginal community.

A very important aspect of mission work in the diocese of Carpentaria has been the use of boats to transport people and supplies throughout the Torres Strait and along the coasts of Cape York. These vessels were supplied and financed by the ABM, the officers and crew usually being Torres Strait Islanders. Transport by aeroplane has been a feature of modern times.

Another feature of Anglican mission work in Carpentaria has been the large number of Torres Strait Islanders who have been ordained. Two were made deacon in 1919, and by 1930 there were six Island clergy and a further seventeen by 1965. These figures contrast sharply with the fact that no Aboriginal person was ordained priest during this period.

The main Anglican mission work outside the Diocese of Carpentaria has been at Yarrabah. This was the first permanent Anglican Mission in Queensland. It was founded in 1892 at Everrabo, south of Cairns and was known originally as the Bellenden Ker Aboriginal Mission. The Rev. J.B. Gribble started the Mission with ABM support after his unsuccessful attempt in Western Australia. He died two years later, and his work was continued by his son, the Rev. Ernest Gribble. One outstanding Aboriginal person from Yarrabah was the Rev. James Noble, who was of the greatest help to Gribble, not only at Yarrabah, but also at the founding of the Roper River Mission (NT) in 1908, and at the Forrest River Mission (Umbulgari) from 1914 until 1932. As mentioned above he was ordained deacon on 13 September 1925, the first Aboriginal person to receive Anglican orders. On his return to Queensland he helped Gribble at the Palm Island Government Settlement. After a year or so there he returned to Yarrabah where he died in 1941 (Higgins 1981: *passim*). Bishop Arthur Malcom, the first Aboriginal Anglican to be consecrated Bishop, has ministered for many years at Yarrabah which, in the 1980s, has experienced spiritual revival.

The Anglican Church in Queensland has not engaged in large mission activity, except at Yarrabah and the missions in the Diocese of Carpentaria. Individual Anglicans have made contact with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, and ministered to their spiritual needs on government settlements and in the large towns. The contemporary ministry of Canon John Warby at Rockhampton is, for example, of significance.

Northern Territory

The forty-eight years of the South Australian administration of its Northern Territory from 1863 until 1911 saw the frontiers of white occupation extend right to its northern boundary of the Arafura Sea. This white invasion had a disastrous effect on the Aborigines throughout the Territory. Those living in the towns, Darwin, and on the fringes of the remote areas of Arnhem Land were decimated by deliberate acts of genocide or by white disease. Those who chose to move to pastoral properties lived in feudal conditions; while those who drifted to the towns succumbed to opium, alcohol and introduced disease.

The Commonwealth government's desire for a better deal for Aborigines from 1911 onwards, when it took over responsibility for the Northern Territory, did little to ameliorate their plight. Its policies and actions were similar to those of Queensland. The most prominent feature was the provision of large remote areas for establishing Aboriginal Reserves, in particular that of Arnhem Land in 1931. A new deal for Aboriginal advancement was put forward in the 1950s when the Government and missions embarked on a vigorous policy of assimilation. By means of education and health services, the Reserve Aborigines were being prepared, it was thought, to take their place in the wider Australian community. They weren't. The dramatic policy of self-determination, introduced in 1973, gave some Aborigines of the Territory inalienable legal rights to their traditional lands, and the opportunity to take responsibility for the management of their own affairs.

Kapalgo Mission was the first Anglican mission in the Territory. It was established on the South Alligator river in Arnhem Land by a group of Adelaide Anglicans in 1899, but lasted only a few years (Cole 1985b:39-40). Through the CMS the Anglican Church was next deeply involved with the establishment and development of five missions in Arnhem Land, at the mission headquarters, and in the co-operative venture with the Uniting Church at Nungalinga College, in Darwin, and at St. Mary's, Alice Springs (Cole 1985b: Chs 4-9).

The CMS founded the *Roper River Mission* (now Ngukurr) in 1908. The Society experienced difficulties of finance and staffing in the 1930s. The Mission was completely destroyed by a cyclonic flood in 1940 and was rebuilt ten kilometres upstream. It prospered in the 1950s and 1960s with Government subsidies, becoming a Government Settlement in 1968. Since that time the Anglican Church has continued to minister to the community's spiritual needs through missionary clergy, and since 1974, through the Rev. Michael Gumbuli Wurramara, the first Anglican Aboriginal clergyman in Arnhem Land. A feature of church life at Roper has been the itinerant missionary outreach to Aborigines living on the surrounding cattle stations, by Aboriginal Lay Readers including James Japanma and Barnabas Roberts, and in later years by Gumbuli Wurramara.

The CMS started the *Emerald River Mission* on Groote Eylandt in 1921 for Aboriginal children, so that they could be isolated from white interference experienced on the mainland. In the 1930s mission policy changed to being directed towards the welfare of the Aborigines of the Island. The mission was transferred to Angurugu in 1943, and developed quickly during the "welfare era" of the 1950s and 1960s. BHP began the mining of manganese on the Island in the 1960s, and has provided a means of employment, social contact and alcohol for the Aborigines of Angurugu, and for some from Numbulwar on the mainland. In 1982 Angurugu became a self-governing

Aboriginal community, and since 1985 has had its own Aboriginal minister, the Rev. Aringari Wurramara.

Umbakuma, the second main Aboriginal community of Groote Eylandt was started by Fred Gray in 1938. The CMS administered Umbakumba from 1958 until 1966, when it was handed over to the Government. From that time the Anglican Church has ministered to the spiritual needs of the community through CMS clergy, supported by a group of dedicated Aboriginal women. The town received its first Aboriginal minister with the ordination of the Rev. Jock Wurragwagwa in 1985.

Oenpelli became a CMS mission in 1925, following previous occupation of the site first by Paddy Cahill, a buffalo hunter, and subsequently by the Government administrators of the agricultural station there. Over the years the Mission developed a viable cattle industry which unfortunately came to a halt in 1982 because of financial problems. The community became involved in a controversy over uranium mining at Nabarlek, 30 km away, and also at other places in the Alligator River area. Oenpelli, like other missions, is now a self-governing Aboriginal community. The Anglican Church continues to minister to the spiritual needs of the people there. It was unable to supply a local candidate for the 1985 ordinations, but since then has been ministered to by Aboriginal clergy from Yarrabah in Queensland.

Numbulwar, situated on the eastern coast of Arnhem Land nearly opposite Groote Eylandt, was started by the CMS in 1952. This is a smaller community and until recent times has been free from the debilitating effects of alcohol abuse and Western intrusion. As in other communities however, petrol sniffing by children has been a problem. The Anglican church has maintained a constant ministry throughout the community's history, a ministry now undertaken by the Rev. Rupert Nungamajbar.

These five Anglican communities are now parishes within the Diocese of the Northern Territory which came into being in 1968. The CMS has ceased to have any executive role, providing missionaries when requested, mainly for theological and linguistic work. In common with most Aboriginal communities in North Australia, Aborigines in these five parishes have experienced an Aboriginal initiated revival movement, which co-incident with Aboriginal self-management in the civic life of these communities.

Since the implementation of policies of self-determination and land rights in the 1970s, a number of Aborigines living in the former missions and settlements have moved back permanently or temporarily to their traditional homelands. Services are frequently held in these places and co-exist with aspects of traditional Aboriginal religion.

In Darwin, the CMS office and compound in Bagot Road played an important role in servicing the Arnhem Land Missions, and provided accommodation for missionaries and Aborigines in transit. The plans to decentralise CMS control from Sydney to the field in 1962 were not fully implemented. A Field Superintendent was appointed, a co-ordinating role which continued until 1978. The Diocese of the Northern Territory was formed in 1968, with Anglican European and Aboriginal ministry now coming under the one ecclesiastical supervision. In 1981 the CMS Regional Committee for Aborigines in Sydney ceased to function, and the last vestiges of CMS executive authority for Aboriginal work in the Territory disappeared. The spiritual work of the five Arnhem Land parishes is now the direct responsibility of the Diocese under the leadership of the Bishop.

Nungalinya College, Darwin commenced in 1973 with an Anglican, the Rev. Dr. Keith Cole, as the Founding Principal. From 1966 the CMS and the Methodist Overseas Missions had held a number of co-operative courses and teaching programmes for their staff and Aboriginal people in Arnhem Land. The success of these joint ventures led to the establishment of the College by the Anglican and Uniting Churches. Since that time the College has been of fundamental importance for the training of Aboriginal clergy and lay people for communities in North and Central Australia, including Western Australia and North Queensland.

The Anglican Church in the Northern Territory has also been responsible for St. Mary's Home for Aboriginal Children at Alice Springs. St. Mary's was founded in 1946 by Deaconess Eileen Heath to cater for children of Aboriginal descent sent into the town for educational purposes. The hostel complemented the already existing St. John's Hostel started in 1941. Family group homes in cottages now replace the former dormitory system. Two Aboriginal schools, Kormilda College near Darwin and Yirara College near Alice Springs are vocational and transitional schools for Aboriginal children wishing to participate in secondary education. The Anglican Church through staff and visits has had some influence on the students of these places.

Reflections

Anglican missionary activity among Aboriginal people took place mainly from the 1850s, after the frontiers of white invasion had extended throughout the entire continent. Prior to this time the instructions of the British Colonial Government regarding the welfare of the "natives of Australia" were not or could not be enforced. As a result large populations of Aboriginal people were dispossessed of their tribal lands and were eliminated by acts of wholesale genocide.

The Missions of the various churches prevented their final destruction. Their initial efforts were seen as "smoothing the pillow of a dying race". The missionaries had their faults with attitudes of racial superiority and paternalism. They believed that the only future for Aborigines lay in enticing them away from their nomadic form of life and settling them in communities reflecting white cultural values. In the early days they had little understanding of formal anthropology and cross-cultural communication. They and the mission societies supporting them were greatly influenced by Government attitudes and policies of segregation and ultimate assimilation. Yet despite their shortcomings, they were men and women who acted on their compassion, at a time when almost all other white people were unconcerned. They provided health and healing and hygiene through their medical services, and also trained Aboriginal personnel to take over much of the work. They brought an understanding of European knowledge through their educational work, teaching the young to become teachers for their own people. They encouraged young men and women to become self-supporting. They engaged in various pastoral and agricultural enterprises. They tried to shield people from the devastations of alcohol. Until recently they had a profound influence in the overall welfare of Aboriginal people, especially those living in the more remote places.

The evangelistic efforts of the missionaries had varied results. From early mission days they encouraged Aboriginal Christians to grow in their faith, to share their faith with others, and to share in the ministry of the Church as lay readers and

eventually as clergy. They adopted an ambivalent attitude towards Aboriginal traditional religion, but united in condemning acts contrary to accepted Christian standards or denigrating human dignity.

Aborigines and Christianity

A large number of Aborigines who have lived in Anglican or other church missions have not become Christians in the deeper sense of full commitment to Christ. Most have been baptised. On the other hand, as among white people throughout the land, there is a smaller number of (predominantly female) committed and dedicated Christian Aboriginal people. They have become more active and more vocal in witnessing to their faith in recent times, due largely to the Revival Movement which has touched most groups throughout the nation. Aboriginal leadership in former mission communities has also provided the freedom and means to do this.

Christianity is as real for Aboriginal people as it is for any other ethnic group. Aborigines are now beginning to develop their own theology, their own liturgy, and to some extent their own organisation. They themselves are grappling with the complex issue of the relationship between Christianity and their former traditional religion. Their beliefs are no less Christian because of these activities. Rather, their understanding of the faith is deeper and more meaningful for them because of these efforts. They demonstrate clearly that Christianity can embrace all nationalities and cultures, reflecting the apocalyptic vision in Revelation 5 of the redeemed "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" who sing the praises of Christ the Lamb, who by his blood "ransomed men for God".

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