Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change
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INTRODUCTION

PEGGY BROCK

Religious belief is a difficult concept to research as Van Beek and Blakely point out in their Introduction to Religion in Africa,

Today’s students of religion focus on particular forms of religious expression and try to point out the consonances with other cultural and historical processes, while still trying to preserve the integrity of the religious experience-cum-expression … Thus, we study influences on religion and the influences by religion, realizing that directly studying religious phenomena per se is at least very difficult.¹

This difficulty is compounded when studying religious change as it is ultimately a very personal decision which is invisible to the observer who can only extrapolate from changed behavior, and statements, whether verbal or written, attesting to change.² An analysis of religious change tends to be more concerned with influences on religion and its consequences for the society in which it occurs, particularly where change is introduced from outside that society. Most of the following chapters investigate the introduction of Christianity to communities who had not previously encountered it, and people’s responses to this innovation. A few consider changes from one form of Christianity to another and one assesses changes within Islam in present-day Indonesia.

The introduction of Christianity to communities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries occurred within a complex globalizing context which frequently, but not inevitably, led to colonial interference. Sometimes the uptake of Christianity pre-dated formal colonialism, sometimes it followed colonialism, and in many communities it contin-

ued as an important religious influence long after colonial rule ended. It was not the simple imposition of a hegemonic regime as implied by the Comaroffs and others. The source of Christianity was not always Europe. Often those who brought Christian concepts to non-Christian societies came from the United States of America, Canada, Australia and other neo-Europes, that is, societies colonized by migrants from Europe. But these people did not monopolize Christian knowledge, or missionary zeal. Many of the people involved in the process of religious change were members of the societies being proselytized.

The introduction of new beliefs and religious ideas and rituals to communities did not always lead to religious change. Some scholars of religious change insist that there must be synchronicities between existing and introduced beliefs before a new religion can be assimilated; others investigate external pressures which predispose people to change. While both these approaches have explanatory power they do not adequately address religious change in all circumstances (or for that matter the resistance to change). The internal dynamics of receiving societies may well be a more important precondition for change. The chapters in this book take a number of different approaches in their analysis of change. Some contributors focus on the manner in which Christianity is introduced, some analyze the process of religious change, yet others consider the impact of the new religion on communities. Change is often triggered by agents outside the society such as foreign missionaries, but requires proponents within the community if it is to

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have an impact. As Peel noted in his study of religious change among
the Yoruba, “Christianity cannot possibly become Yoruba without
some Yoruba first becoming Christian.”

Those scholars who look for synchronicities between an introduced
religion such as Christianity and pre-existing religious beliefs and prac-
tices make an often unstated assumption that this is a precondition
for religious change. The corollary of this supposition is that some
societies or cultures will be more receptive to Christianity than cultures
which are judged incompatible with Christianity. Terence Ranger
has argued strongly against the proposition that some cultures are
not open to the possibility of religious change. He believes this posi-
tion is not sustainable, and that there are circumstances in which any
society may have a dynamic interaction with Christianity (or other
introduced religion). While some of the following chapters identify
cultural factors which facilitated the introduction of Christianity, their
authors assume that all societies have the potential for religious change.
The receiving community is the key to understanding the process of
change. Some communities and individuals were quick to interact
with and adopt new beliefs and forms, others did so more slowly,
and some not at all. But pre-existing cultural values are not a basis
for predicting a process. Societies which experienced, or anticipated
major social, political or economic upheavals might have been more
receptive to introduced concepts which offered new explanations of
creation, life, death and disaster, and control over, or escape from
catastrophes. But there have been societies and individuals who
experienced overwhelming trauma and continued to find fulfilment
in existing traditions, while others have incorporated the new with
no outside threats or inexplicable occurrences. This book does not
seek to provide a generalized explanation for religious change, but by

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7 Peel, 216.
8 Aram Yengoyan, “Religion, Morality, and Prophetic Traditions: Conversion
Among the Pitjantjatjara of Central Australia” in Conversion to Christianity. Historical
and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transition ed. Robert W. Hefner (Berkeley:
volume, take issue with Yengoyan’s view.
9 Terence Ranger, “Christianity and Indigenous Peoples: A Personal Overview”
Journal of Religious History 27 no. 3 (2003), 266.
10 Robert W. Hefner, “World Building and the Rationality of Conversion” in
Conversion to Christianity. Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transition ed.
considering diverse examples and using comparative methods it does set out to bring a better understanding of the many different aspects of change: the relationship between colonialism and the introduction and acceptance of Christianity; some of the social, political and material changes which accompanied the new religion; and the roles of outsiders and insiders in the process of change.

The introduction of Christianity to a wide range of societies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries confronts us with a semantic problem—how do we refer to these societies? Terms, such as natives and heathens, used by missionaries in a derogatory or patronizing way are not appropriate or useful, particularly when the assumptions which underpin them are being questioned. “Indigenous peoples” avoids these connotations and is a form of self-identification for many of the peoples who are the focus of this book—the people who became the subject of missionary activities, or who sought out Christianity in this period. Other terms which have been applied to similar societies in varied contexts would take the discussion along different discursive lines: “natives” or “tribal peoples” have associations with anthropological and colonial notions of small scale societies as primitive and unsophisticated; the “fourth world” comes from a discourse based on theories of development; “First Nations,” a term used in Canada, which has not been widely adopted outside Canada, is linked to demands for recognition as independent nations in a post-colonial world; and “aboriginal peoples” as a generalized label can be confused with the more specific Aboriginal people of Australia. “Indigenous peoples”, needless to say, carries its own political baggage, and does not necessarily apply equally well to all the societies discussed in this book. John Gordon in his chapter on syncretism in Islam and Christianity in Indonesia questions the application of the term to populations in Indonesia, and in a recent article Terence Ranger wonders whether it excludes Africans,

It would be ironic, after centuries in which “Bantu” and “Negro” Africans have been stigmatized as “cold” peoples without history, if we have now to see them as so “hot” and dynamic that studies of religious change amongst them cannot be used for comparison with truly “indigenous” peoples.¹¹

Indigenous in its broadest application means originating in or native

¹¹ Ranger, “Christianity and Indigenous Peoples,” 270.
to a region or country. Used in this way it applies to any language or cultural group which has lived for generations in one area, and distinguishes it from recent immigrants. But since the 1960s “Indigenous” has developed a more specific and exclusive meaning. It has come to be used to describe those peoples who are perceived and perceive themselves as not having been decolonized. Indigenous people claim pre-existing status, whereby they were established on their land before other peoples arrived. Another distinguishing feature is non-dominance, relating to their status as colonized people who are not in control of their own lives and communities, and are culturally different from the population which dominates them. These debates over the identity of indigenous peoples respond to late twentieth century, early twenty first century political conditions in which peoples such as Maori in New Zealand, Aborigines in Australia and First Nations in Canada fight to attain autonomy, if not self determination, from the settler societies within which they are encapsulated. The political claims of indigenous peoples in liberal democracies have been taken up by many other peoples around the world who are disempowered minorities within states dominated by other cultural groups. There are now estimated to be over 300 million indigenous people in 70 countries in the world today.

It can be argued that many peoples who are now free of colonial rule such as the Shona in Zimbabwe, Rarotongans in the Cook Islands or the Maisin in Papua New Guinea do not fall into the category: indigenous peoples. Yet in the period in which Christianity was intro-
duced to their societies, they were colonized or soon to be colonized peoples. There are, however, two chapters in this book which focus on the post-colonial eras in Indonesia and Zimbabwe which raise difficulties for our definitional category, yet illustrate that world religions such as Christianity and Islam are open to adaptation and change in post-colonial societies. Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe and reformist Islamic movements in Indonesia have been included to illustrate how religious change can be triggered by a wide range of factors, including the pressures of modernization, globalization and poverty; and that these movements have factors in common with religious change which occurred in non-Christian societies which became Christian in other eras and circumstances.

This book is comparative in its approach to religious change. In some chapters the comparative methodology is quite explicit (see chapters by Ranger, Gordon, Wagstrom and Brock). In Magowan’s chapter it is implicit, as she applies a theoretical framework developed by Harvey Whitehouse to analyze Christianity in Melanesia to her investigation of the relationship between Christianity and ancestral religion among the Yolngu in Arnhem Land northern Australia. At another level the study of religious change has comparisons embedded in its very approach. Change suggests that beliefs, rituals and spirituality existed in societies when new understandings were introduced which altered, modified, transformed or replaced pre-existing religions. Change can only be analyzed if the researcher is aware of the situation before, during and after a process of change. The chapters by Harkin and Van Gent clearly present the before situation, and then scrutinize how the mission regime which introduced religious change also modified or became integrated with non-religious behaviors and activities.

The advantage of comparative methodologies in the study of religious change is that the focus of research moves from the progenitors of change to those who process and experience it. In the case of missionized communities, where most of the evidence is generated by the missionaries and their organizations, a mission by mission study is not as likely to suggest lines of inquiry as a comparative approach which must take account of different responses by communities to the missionary presence. A comparative method may also help to disaggregate some of the factors which seem linked when only one case is investigated, such as the relationship between colonialism and the introduction of world religions into communities. A comparison of religious change
in the Cook Islands prior to formal colonization, and central Australia after British control was imposed illustrate that colonization did not necessarily facilitate religious change (see chapter by Brock).

Terence Ranger, as already indicated, engages with debates about whether there are some cultures which predispose societies to respond quickly to the introduction of world religions, while others react slowly or not at all. He challenges arguments which assert that hunter-gatherer societies and pastoralists were either incapable of, or resistant to, appropriating elements of Christianity. A methodology which considers different types of societies as they encounter Christianity can challenge or support such claims. The following chapters illustrate that a wide range of societies have responded to the possibilities of religious change. The factors which shape these responses include: pre-existing religious and cultural forms and beliefs; material incentives such as trade or other access to goods; social disruption caused by natural disasters such as floods, famines and hurricanes; upheavals resulting from war, land dispossession and colonial interference; and the internal dynamics of indigenous societies which favor change for a range of reasons. The personalities of the missionaries, or their religious denomination do not appear to be determinants of religious change. The involvement of indigenous agents in the process of change is essential, indicating it is difficult to impose change on communities from outside. Change can only occur with support from within the community.

Approaches to Religious Change

Many of the contributors to this book attended a conference on Indigenous Peoples and religious change in Perth, Western Australia in 2002. Some of the papers presented at that conference were published in a Special Issue of the *Journal of Religious History* in 2003. The stimulation of listening to each others’ papers inspired a number of us to go back to our research materials and rework them in response

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15 Special Issue on *Indigenous Peoples, Christianity, and Religious Change* ed. Peggy Brock *Journal of Religious History* 27 no. 3 (2003). The contributors to this volume were Terence Ranger, John Barker, Fiona Magowan, Diane Austin-Broos, Jacqueline Van Gent and Peggy Brock.
to the ideas and arguments presented at the conference. This book is the result.\(^{16}\)

It is difficult to develop an understanding of religious change with one set of analytical tools. We have used a variety of disciplinary and cross-disciplinary methods to elucidate our subject. Most of the contributors are either historians or anthropologists by training. A number of us have adopted cross-disciplinary methods in our research: anthropologists have turned to documentary evidence to investigate the historical context of change; historians have undertaken fieldwork to observe religious activities. One contributor, Bill Edwards, was a missionary for many years.

The book has been arranged in four parts, although there is overlap between them. The first two chapters by Ranger and Gordon discuss approaches to conceptualizing religious change. Terence Ranger revisits the question of whether some societies are predisposed to the possibility of Christianity, while others by their economic and cultural traditions are closed to such outside influences. He concludes, with reference to Magowan’s and Austin Broos’ Australian research, that indigenous peoples “can lay transforming hands and minds and dreams upon Christianity.” John Gordon presents an interesting counterpoint to most of the other chapters which consider religious change occurring when one tradition is influenced or replaced by an introduced world religion. He argues that anti-syncretic movements within Islam and Christianity in Indonesia have not precluded a degree of tolerance and curiosity leading to change as an adaptive, rather than regressive response to modernization.

The second group of essays consider early mission encounters in the Pacific, Australia and South Africa. Thor Wagstrom compares Maori and Xhosa responses to missionaries in the first half of the nineteenth century. He reflects on ways in which attempts were made to incorporate, not always successfully, Christian concepts, into indigenous societies. He also notes that Christianity was perceived to have some positive conceptual innovations such as the idea of resurrection and

\(^{16}\) Terence Ranger, John Barker, Fiona Magowan and Peggy Brock have written new papers for this volume. Jacqueline Van Gent did not have the opportunity to revisit her research. Thor Wagstrom and Bill Edwards did not attend the conference, but wrote their chapters after hearing of the conference and reading the published papers. John Gordon, David Maxwell and Michael Harkin who presented papers at the conference revised their papers for publication here.
millenarian expectations. Wagstrom argues that Maori and Xhosa had a range of responses to Christianity at different times—acceptance or rejection were the two extremes, more usual were attempts to engage with aspects of Christian doctrine and ritual which enhanced their lives. Barker and Brock consider the relationship between the outsider missionaries and the indigenous communities in which they established themselves. John Barker analyses the roles of the Anglican missionaries, the Melanesian teachers, and the students, boarders and worshippers among the Maisin of Collingwood Bay in Papua in the early twentieth century. He comes to similar conclusions to Wagstrom. The Maisin came to accept the church as an institution in their community with its own rules. But beyond the boundaries of the mission Maisin Christians maintained beliefs and rituals which continued to be meaningful and control social relationships, such as marriage arrangements, death rites and healing cults. Peggy Brock turns to sources generated by two indigenous Christians who became evangelists, Maretu a Rarotongan and Moses Tjalkabota an Arrernte from central Australia, to investigate their understandings of Christianity and their role in the process of religious change. Maretu’s and Tjalkabota’s narratives are juxtaposed against mission sources. Brock argues that while indigenous texts enable us to access their perspectives of Christianity, they tend to ignore the institutional nature of mission life and the wider political and economic context in which change occurred. Bill Edwards investigates religious change among the Pitjantjatjara, another central Australian Aboriginal language group. His chapter is informed by his own experience as a missionary at Ernabella Presbyterian (later Uniting Church) mission. He challenges the anthropologist Aram Yengoyan’s view that the Pitjantjatjara do “not have a ‘prior text’ that facilitates religious conversion.” Edwards presents evidence which strongly suggests that the Pitjantjatjara did respond to Christianity, not in a superficial or formulaic way, but through real commitment to Christianity as a system of spiritual beliefs and moral precepts. He ends his chapter noting recent movements by Pitjantjatjara away from mission Christianity as they engage with new forms of Christianity introduced from other Aboriginal communities, including the Yolngu. This leads us to the next section of this volume.

Magowan and Maxwell explore, based on observation and personal interaction with the communities they researched, what these Christian communities do and how they articulate their religious beliefs and observances. Fiona Magowan investigates how the Yolngu of
northern Australia transformed mission Christianity into a religion which unified previous forms of religiosity with the introduced religion. She draws on Harvey Whitehouse’s conceptual framework which distinguishes doctrinal from imagistic modes of religiosity to elucidate the cognitive dynamics between Yolngu traditional religious practices and Yolngu Christianity. Magowan concludes that the two religious domains became a “unified mode of spiritual thought and bodily feeling.” David Maxwell argues that many Zimbabweans have turned to Pentecostalism to escape the poverty, crime and high rates of unemployment in present-day Zimbabwe, drawing many from mission Christianity into a religion where the individual is called and the disempowered and vulnerable feel empowered. Maxwell gives a spirited and detailed description and analysis of Pentecostalist singing, preaching, testifying and praying.

The final two chapters explore how introduced Christianity, not only influenced indigenous peoples’ spiritual lives, but, inevitably, had an impact on associated life experiences and social life. Michael Harkin examines how architectural forms introduced by Methodist missionaries were experienced by the Heiltsuk in British Columbia in Canada. His analysis goes beyond structures to interrogate the ideologies behind them. Indigenous peoples not only adopted, adapted and transformed religious ideas, they applied similar strategies to introduced church and house architecture, as long houses were replaced by family homes neatly aligned along parallel streets. But these new homes accommodated Heiltsuk activities and social structures, subverting missionary expectations. Jacqueline Van Gent visits the mission environment which spawned the evangelist Moses Tjalkabota at Hermannsburg in central Australia. She considers changing concepts of embodiment and illness among the Western Arrernte at the Lutheran mission: the way bodies were conceptualized; what they represented within Arrernte society and the Lutheran church; and how these different understandings were negotiated by the Arrernte in response to corporal punishment, treatment of illness, mourning and death, ideas of cleanliness and many other aspects of life.

This book explores a range of societies in and around the Pacific and southern Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that encountered religions introduced from elsewhere, or fashioned their own responses to already established religious traditions. These changes observed through the responses of the receiving societies indicate that religious change is a creative dynamic, rather than a passive accep-
tance of new ideas, beliefs and practices. The variety of situations in which religious change occurs and the range of responses to introduced religion challenges those who maintain the process can be imposed from outside or predetermined by cultural factors. Maxwell’s analysis of Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe and Magowan’s and Edwards’ observations of adaptations of Christianity in Australia support the work of other scholars who have studied the evolving nature of religious change. While change is often triggered by the introduction of new understandings, it can only become entrenched within a community when it takes on meaning for individuals, and becomes embedded within the social and cultural life of the community. Yet most outsider missionaries and their sponsors believed that Christianization would fail unless they vigilantly policed new Christian societies, insisting on regular church services and their own moral standards. Few could accept that Christianity would evolve of its own momentum within indigenous societies. The essays in this volume suggest that indigenous individuals and societies accepted Christianity within their own timeframes, not necessarily at the time missionaries arrived in their communities. Some societies associated introduced Christianity with technological and other innovations, others did not. Those who maintained Christian communities beyond the mission era adapted and refined Christianity in response to economic and social pressures and their own cultural imperatives.
PART ONE

CONCEPTUALIZING RELIGIOUS CHANGE
CHRISTIANITY AND THE FIRST PEOPLES: SOME SECOND THOUGHTS

TERENCE RANGER

In this chapter I consider broad issues in an attempt to answer questions regarding the appropriation of Christianity. Are there limits to the possibility of the appropriation of Christianity by non-Western peoples? Are there cultures which cannot or have no need to appropriate Christian forms and ideas? Or to put it the other way round, are there characteristics of Christianity which make it incapable of penetrating some cultures or to offer them anything useful? The African peoples upon whom Adrian Hastings worked—and on whom I have worked myself—do not offer a test case for such questions. Among them appropriation of Christianity has been so extensive that the problematic is always not whether but how they have done it.2 But the so-called “First Peoples”—Native Americans, San, Australian Aborigines—have long offered examples for those who argue that there are cultures which cannot Christianize or which Christianity cannot penetrate.3 Indeed there has been a centuries-old and paradoxical sequence of such arguments and I want first to set it out.

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1 This chapter is based on a lecture presented by Terence Ranger as the First Adrian Hastings Memorial Lecture at the University of Leeds on November 6th, 2002.  
The Impossibility of Interaction between Christianity and Indigenous Religion

First in this sequence came Protestant missionaries themselves. Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Evangelicals, whether in North America or in South Africa or in Australia, denounced hunter-gatherer societies as incapable of revealed, or even of natural, religion. The most recent discussion of their responses which I have come across concerns South Africa, but similar analyses have been made of missionaries in North America and Australia. In a paper presented earlier this year, Jessica Dubow analyzed missionaries in the Eastern Cape with great subtlety and sophistication.4

Dubow quotes an axiom of Henri Lefebvre: “The adoption of another people’s gods always entails the adoption of their space.” Evangelical missionaries set up residential Mission Stations as sites of “ordered social permanency”, where migrants and nomads might be literally and morally “settled.” Missionaries believed that “nomads in prosperity and poverty [were] slaves of the landscape;” by not imposing on nature they submitted to it. Pastoralists with sheep and cattle might be converted. But hunter-gatherers were beyond hope. The Bushmen or San were “the barbaric negative of social community”: “a roving huntsman and nothing more … a beast of prey.” “Their assemblage”, wrote J.de Wet in 1838, “resembled more closely that of the fishes or birds of the air than of a society of men held together by common ties.” In 1888 the Methodist, Arthur Brigg wrote, “they lead a wild life, never building any habitations, but dwelling in caves and on the mountains, cultivating no fields and possessing neither flocks nor herds.”5 Dubow sums up, “Bushmen were categorically exiled beyond the moral field of Christianity… uncivilised and uncivilisable.” 6 The same despairing assumptions were shared by missionaries in eastern Australia—“their indigenous charges could [n]ever be “civilised” let alone brought to an awareness of God.”7

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6 Dubow, 6. Nomads, writes Dubow, were “enslaved to the landscape … mobility came to signify an irrational consciousness and a passively fettered economy” 8.
Robert Tonkinson, from whom I quote this summary of Australian missionary response, goes on to make a further point which leads me into the next stage of this sequence of argument,

Christianity met considerable resistance in Australia … in stark contrast to most of the South Pacific … Syncretistic movements were few and far between in Australia … [Aboriginal] “tradition” was a resource used as a bulwark against the invading religion rather than as a medium for syncretic engagement with it, and an increasing indigenisation of it.8

And indeed in the twentieth century many anthropologists came to argue that Australian Aborigines (or Native Americans or the San) possessed religious traditions which were so profound, complete and satisfactory that they did not need to appropriate anything from Christianity and could not be penetrated by it.

An extreme example of this approach comes from a study of an Australian Aboriginal people, though analogies to it can be found in Native American and San studies. This is Aram Yenyogan’s “Religion, Morality and Prophetic Traditions: Conversion among the Pitjantjatjara of Central Australia.” 9 Yenyogan argues that the Pitjantjatjara do “not have a ‘prior text’ that facilitates religious conversion.” Instead they have a prior text which underlies their whole social and collective life. “This prior text differs from the essential tenets of Christian dogma [so as] to make the religious conversion of individuals or groups a virtual impossibility.”10 He extends this to other Aboriginal societies where these have managed to avoid the destruction of their “tribal ethic.” He writes,

The Pitjantjatjara and other desert-dwelling Aborigines simply do not convert to Christianity … the “basic axioms” of the spiritual and sacred life are such that Christian doctrine simply does not provide the intellectual or spiritual underpinnings which relate to Aboriginal life. 11

It is an argument replicated in what was once an authoritative textbook, Richard Broome’s Aboriginal Australians. Missionaries never considered, wrote Broome, that “readings from the Bible might be meaningless to a people who were perfectly satisfied with their own religion.” Evangelism “was like writing on sand” and “there were

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8 Tonkinson, 187.
10 Hefner, 234.
11 Hefner, 244.
no significant amalgamations between Aboriginal religious ideas and Christianity [as there are in] indigenous Christian churches in Africa today.”12 In works like these the earlier missionary cultural contempt was stood upon its head.

The process entered a third stage with the emergence of “First Peoples” Theology. Since I have given a South African illustration of the first, missionary, stage and an Australian illustration of the second, anthropological one, I will cite a Native American example of First People Theology. It comes from George Tinker, speaking for a “Fourth World, oppressed by both the powerful nations and the so-called developing nations … What distinguishes us from our Third World relatives are deeper, more hidden, but no less deadly effects of colonialism … especially felt in the indigenous spiritual experience. Our struggle for liberation is within the context of this distinctive spirituality.” For Tinker, classical Christianity offers no way out. Nor does the radical critique of Liberation Theology. Native Americans find its “emphasis on the historical unsuitable … and Native American culture and spirituality imply political solutions that differ from those currently imposed by any socialist paradigm.” Indigenous peoples attain their consciousness and identity not from class but “in terms of their relationship to the land.” They “insist on being recognized as Peoples” rather than as classes.

Liberation Theology, says Tinker, argues that God reveals Himself in History. Native American theology is “dramatically different.” It argues out of its own spiritual experience “that God reveals God’s self in creation, in space or place, and not in time.” There is no priority of revelation; no chosen people. Revelation is here and now, with Native Americans called “to image ourselves as mere participants in the whole of creation, with respect for and reciprocity with all of creation, and not somehow apart from it and free to use it up at will.” Tinker’s is a total critique of the theological assumptions of nineteenth century missionaries. Christianity cannot make an impact on the First Peoples, he argues, until it abandons its insistence on the control and transformation of nature. It must cease emphasizing Time and come to understand how to deal with Place.13

13 George Tinker, “The Full Circle of Liberation: An American-Indian Theology
Once again there are Australian and Southern African analogues. Thus Lynne Hume asserts that “the central importance of ‘place’ and land to Aboriginal spirituality is just not present in Christianity, no matter how hard Aborigines (and others) might try to find it.”\textsuperscript{14} Many recent studies of the San insist that they possess a relationship with place which is incomprehensible to African agriculturalists, still less to European missionaries. So Sven Ouzman maintains that, foragers work with a system of signification which is in many ways maximally different from our own … forager oral discourse does not neatly correspond with our understanding of language. The present San communities of southern Africa, whose ancestors produced rock-art, have a language that is unparalleled in its complexity. The use of tone, register and between one and five “click” sounds enables them not only very precisely to denote words, objects, concepts and so forth, but also very precisely to express tones, textures, presentiments and ambiguous meaning fields. In this way the San approach what Wittgenstein called the “unspeakable” or the transcendent, something our language is largely incapable of.

Moreover, San construct themselves as part of the physical world and not as separate from it. They inter-penetrated their landscape. So, too, did “specific, though supernatural, beings that ran roughly parallel to the world of normal experience and were everywhere immanent.” San sacred spaces, writes Ouzman, were “physical and conceptual places at which the worlds of humans and the supernatural connected and inter-penetrated.”\textsuperscript{15} Neither in Australia nor in southern Africa, these writers maintain, can a Christian church or shrine come close to conveying the numinosity of sites such as these.\textsuperscript{16}

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\textsuperscript{15} Sven Ouzman, “Towards a mindscape of landscape: rock-art as expression of world-understanding,” in \textit{The Archaeology of Rock-Art} eds Christopher Chippindale and Paul S.C.Tacon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 30, 32, 34. Though Ouzman uses San rock sites as examples, he extends his argument to Aboriginal and North American landscapes.
\textsuperscript{16} Lynne Hume quotes Guboo Ted Thomas, for whom “sacredness, power and energy emanate from nature.” “I took representatives of the [Australian] Department of Forestry down to our valley and into our mountains,” he told her. “I could see in their eyes they had no clue as to what I was talking about. They wanted to see stained-glass windows or statues of angels…. Something that would make a place sacred.”, 136.
\end{flushright}
This sense of the *superiority* of indigenous spirituality leads on to the fourth and last development in this extraordinary dialectic. After the missionaries and the anthropologists and the third world theologians, come the New Agers, white refugees from nature-dominating Christianity. Bringing together elements from Aboriginal, Native American and San culture, the New Agers proclaim a global millennium in which humanity has rejoined the land. In 1988, Janice Newton analyzed the Aquarian festival at Nimbin, where white Australians promiscuously invoked “Aboriginality.” She cited the festival rhetoric, “The clans grow like plants in the morning sun. The totems are renewed, the dreaming flows out. The law is danced again … The land is my soul.”

In a recent paper, the South African anthropologist, David Coplan, describes a series of cave-shrines along the Lesotho/South African border. One of these shrines, Badimong, draws legitimacy from the presence there of San paintings. But in the early 1980s on land close to the cave-shrine “an unsuccessful white farmer with ‘green’ and ‘New Age’ spiritual interests converted his farm into a tourist lodge and centre for New Age events,” with an annual Easter festival. He remarks on the New Agers’ fondness for “North American tepees and tantric yoga massage” and on their visits to the San rock paintings.

For me this triumphal post-Christianity reaches its climax in the events organized by the so-called “Prophets Conference.” On 23 July, 2002 I received by email an invitation to join “Mayan Elder Hunbatz Men for the Re-encounter of Ancestral Wisdom” during the Spring Equinox in March 2003 for a week of teaching, ceremony and initiation at the ancient Mayan sacred sites,

The time has arrived for us the natives of the four cardinal points to begin teaching our wisdom, which comes from the cosmos, in the way it was taught to us by our ancestors who lived in harmony with our Mother Earth for many thousands of years.

I learnt with surprise that this was to be the fifth “gathering of indigenous priests and elders from the Americas”, though despite the warning that “the spring equinox in the Yucatan tends to book up” I did not reserve my place.

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My Reactions to the Four Arguments

I have reacted against all four of these very different assertions that interaction between Christianity and Indigenous Religions was neither necessary or possible. The original Protestant condemnation of hunter-gatherer society is typical of a missionary ethno-centrism which Hastings did much to undermine.19

But the counter-propositions of an anthropologist like Yengoyan, with his emphasis on the changeless self-sufficiency of Aboriginal culture, offended my historian’s sensibilities almost as deeply.20 After my first visit to Perth, Western Australia in 1992/3 I wrote a long comparison of Aboriginal and Khoisan Studies, showing how the Southern African work was becoming much more dynamic and trying to find ways of importing that dynamism into Aboriginal historiography.21 It seemed to me as a Southern Africanist who had dedicated his career to describing significant change amongst allegedly “a-historical” peoples, that it was positively dangerous for Aboriginals and their advocates to emphasize changeless essentialism. In 1993 I urged that the notion of “Aboriginality” could be extended to “include all sorts of vitalities and variations without ceasing to be ‘authentic.’” And I urged that Aboriginal Christians be viewed “as critical culture brokers in a process of dynamic and creative imagining” just as Hastings had always seen African Christians.22

My next visit to Perth was in February 2002 when I gave the keynote

20 See also Edwards this volume for a refutation of Yengoyan’s argument.
22 Ranger, “Aboriginal and Khoisan.” In 1993 I found that a historiography of Aboriginal Christianity had begun. This was represented by T.Swain and D.B.Rose eds Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions, Ethnographic and Historical Studies (Bedford Park, South Australia: Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1988). But I found that breakthrough though this book is, it still falls short of what I anticipate as an Africanist. The economic and social impact of mission is re-evaluated, but the ideological impact remains clouded. In 1993 I found only one work which revealed “the real stuff of dynamic interaction rather than the shadow play of unmodified ‘tradition.’” This was a collection on the Arrernte water-colorists of Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission in Central Australia, The Heritage of Namatjira, eds Jane Hardy, J.V.S.Megaw and M.R.Megaw, (William Heinemann Australia, Port Melbourne, 1992).
address to the conference on “Religious Change and Indigenous Peoples: Australia in an International Context.” I began once again with Yengoyan, remarking that “I might have accepted an argument that response to Christianity was improbable under certain circumstances but I could not accept that it was ‘impossible.’” Nor could I accept any idea of the completeness and changelessness of Aboriginal—or any other—society. By this time I was able to cite as my model John Peel’s masterly book on Christianity and the making of the Yoruba. As Peel remarks,

The pre-contact baseline of an indigenous society’s history is commonly presented in a highly static way, as a given structure or system of categories or way of life: if there are processes, they tend to by cyclical or normal to the system, its reproduction or expansion.

But in fact, any attempt to understand the impact of Christianity cannot,

start at the beginning, but has to plunge media res … We come in on people in the middle straits of something … The eventual focus of the narrative is more on the appropriation than the transmission of [the Christian] message. The process by which [a people] became Christian, or Christianity became a major element in [their] religious repertory, has thus to be placed in the prior development of [their] religion itself.

I also commented on Tinker’s Indigenous Theology and its emphasis on aboriginal space rather than Christian time. “Even Tinker,” I wrote, “seems to me to overstate the contrast and most speakers on ‘primal’ religions over-state it grossly.” Both indigenous religions and Christianity deal with time and space. I have also made the point that,

24 Peel, Religious Encounter, 24-25.
25 I have myself written about struggles over both space and time between High God rain-shrines and Protestant missionaries in the Matopos mountains of south-west Zimbabwe in Voices From the Rocks. Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), and about Christian attempts to re-shape African space (in ways very different from erecting stained-glass windows) in “Taking Hold of the Land: Holy Places and Pilgrimages in Twentieth Century Zimbabwe,” Past and Present 117 (November, 1987). I should emphasize that Tinker himself writes that “the issue is not whether time or space is missing in one culture or the other, but which is dominant. Of course, Native Americans have a temporal awareness. But it is subordinate to our sense of place.”
Throughout southern Africa, black Christians re-named holy mountains and set aside sacred wildernesses. There was a mixture of ideas of sacred landscape drawn from the early Church, from nineteenth century European peasant Christianity, and from Indigenous religion itself. It was not an intellectualized “inculturation” but a dynamic process of symbolic interaction and innovation. Of course, the African Christian affirmations of holy place were not the same as pre-Christian indigenous affirmations—that was the point of the contestation. But these affirmations were made in the same key.26

Here as elsewhere, I hoped against hope that what was true of the religious interactions of African agriculturalists would also prove to be true for Indigenous peoples in the narrower definition.27

As for the revived indigeneity of the New Age, I very much agree with Janice Newton that Aquarian celebrations in Australia—and elsewhere—represent “a false idealization of a tribal and aboriginal way of life.” It is, as she says, “a yearning of the liminal counter-culture to learn the secrets of aboriginal spirituality and to be embraced by the environment.”28 To my mind, New Age spirituality represents a sort of “cheap grace,” an indulgent appropriation by whites of hard-won and fiercely defended rites and values. It also represents a lazy and promiscuous essentialism in which bits and pieces from all and any so-called “Indigenous” religion can be brought together in an incongruous bricolage. The notion is that “primal” religion is one great, single, changeless system. As a historian I stand not only for cultural dynamism but for cultural—and religious—particularity. There is no such thing, in fact, as Indigenous Religion just as there is no such thing as African Religion.

On my second visit to Perth I was determined to discover dynamic appropriations of Christianity in the course of the development of particular indigenous religious histories. While I had rejected the argument of impossibility, I had to confront the argument of improbability.29

26 Ranger, “Christianity and Indigenous Peoples,” 263.
29 Ranger, “Christianity and Indigenous Peoples,” 266.
Since the 1970s I had been seeking to rebut those historians who stressed the incapacity of Native American societies to appropriate Christianity without a collapse of their own cultural systems. An evangelical monthly devoted to Christianity among Native Americans presented me with some startling statistics. Its advertisements claimed that the Church of the Nazarene “with the help of the Holy Spirit is restoring and redeeming aboriginal people around the world.” But its editorial noted that while “our missions abroad have often succeeded astonishingly, it is the opposite when we reflect on our missions to our own Native Americans.” It asserted that “of the hundreds of tribal societies not a single example exists of a truly indigenous, virile, church movement” by contrast to Africa where there are 10,000 “made-in-Africa denominations, encompassing 32 million people” and where “somehow the Gospel got loose from the missionary culture.” Statistics showed that only between three and eight percent of Native Americans claimed to be Christian and “in some native communities, it is far less than that.” For a Southern Africanist these are very small.

The editors explained the contrast simply. For missionaries in the United States,

it was unthinkable that these tribal peoples could survive and thrive without becoming like the colonists themselves in speech and dress and way of life. Overseas the tables are turned. There the culture of the missionary is in the minority. The distinct possibility is that instead of the individual “natives” being extracted into the missionary’s culture, selective features of the foreign culture are assimilated into the native culture.

The contrast here is not between essentialist, static Indigenous religions and dynamic African agriculturalist ones. It goes back to the early Evangelical missionary dismissal of the possibility of a hunter-gatherer Christianity. Native Americans faced expropriation, eviction, the theft of children, suppression of native rituals—all with missionary participation. In these circumstances, the editors asked, how could indigenous societies appropriate Christianity? In such circumstances,

one might ask, how else could “tradition” be employed except—in the words I have already quoted from Tonkinson—as “a bulwark against the invading religion?”

Adrian Hastings has written about nineteenth-century Southern Africa that “if Protestant missionaries seem to have been rather easily carried away by the “civilizational” model, it may be because they had so little of real missionary doctrine to fall back on.”32 In Africa, he argued, this was fairly soon replaced by missiological theories which paid respect to African cultures. In Australia, though, matters were more like the United States. One of Hastings’ Australian articles was published in *The Journal of Religious History* in October 2001—a special issue on “Religion and National Identity.”33 It contained an article on a nineteenth-century Western Australian Anglican divine, Reverend John Wollaston, who, “like other clergy, was a cultural transmitter of British values to Australian colonists … His institutional standard of religion also made it almost impossible to identify the religion of the Aborigines he encountered.”34 Even missionaries to the Aborigines found it hard to recognize “religion.” As in North America, missionaries in Australia were complicit in land alienation and the removal of Aboriginal children. In the other of his Australian papers Adrian Hastings made his only, but devastating, comment on “the relationship between native Australians, that is to say the Aborigines, and settler Australians.”

Here we are faced with just one more example of the long and frequently ruthless history of British settlement, particularly British settlement, and its endeavour to sponge out of sight the weaker inhabitants of any land they occupied … whether by actually killing them, driving them into obscure reserves or forcing an assimilation which across a generation or two would do away not with individuals but with their collective and distinct existence … It is painful to have to recognize that such policies could continue, especially through Child Welfare legislation, the denial of land rights, even the imposition of names, far into the 20th century. The White Australia policy involved the extra-ordinary

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conclusion that the original inhabitants of Australia could not be counted as Australians.35

The implications of all this for Aboriginal Christianity were profound. Peggy Brock, has been a pioneer of studies of Aboriginal religious change. One of her recent articles, comparing the “mission encounter” among two different Indigenous peoples—the communities of the north-west Pacific coast of British Columbia and the Aborigines of South-West Australia—brings out particularly clearly the difference between Aboriginal experience of Christianity and that even of other indigenous peoples. In both areas missionaries held that, “Christianity could not be attained until the indigenous peoples wore European clothes, lived in nuclear, monogamous families, worked regular hours and received wages.”36 But they had much greater success in British Columbia. Indigenous communities there had had pre-colonial experience of trading; there had been “a variety of prophets and prophetic movements [which] predicted the coming of the missionaries … many Native communities invited missionaries to join them” in already existing villages. From out of these Christian villages missionaries and native evangelists itinerated. Mass conversions and Pentecostal Camp Meetings took place.37

It was very different in the South west of Australia. There had been no previous outside contacts before the arrival of missionaries; there is no “evidence for Aboriginal spontaneous evangelism” or movements of prophecy; there were no existing villages and missionaries did not itinerate. There is no record of Aboriginal invitations to missionaries. There were no mass conversions. Missionaries arrived among the Aborigines simultaneously with the wave of colonial conquest, eviction and extermination. They settled apart from the surviving peoples and did not participate in their culture. To these points may be added the question of vernacular Bible translation which Hastings investigated in Africa in his work on ethnicity and nationality. In southern Africa

35 Adrian Hastings, “Constructing Nationhood: Between Ethnicity and Geography,” *Australian Historical Bulletin*, 91 (December 2000), 57. Hastings added the key contrast for an Africanist: “By force of numbers … the black populations of southern Africa proved resilient enough to survive invasion and eventually to recover control of their society … while the Aborigines were unable to do so.” But this conclusion overlooks the fate of hunter-gatherers in southern Africa.


37 Brock, 164.
missionaries virtually created great and self-conscious African peoples by privileging and systematizing one particular Bantu language, which became the language of vernacular Christianity. Nothing of the sort happened in Australia. Aboriginal languages were thought too many, too difficult and too limited in geographical scope to make a vernacular Christian literature possible.\(^{38}\) All this makes very clear the improbability of Aboriginal appropriation of Christianity. But it still did not undercut my (or Peggy Brock’s) belief in its possibility.\(^{39}\)

\[\text{Aboriginal Christianity in the Recent Past}\]

The papers at the Perth conference in 2002 and other recent papers have made much of the debate redundant. We no longer need to speculate about the possibility of a vigorous vernacular Christian movement because one has been taking place. We no longer need to wonder whether Christianity can respond to and reflect an Aboriginal sense of place because Revival Christianity is now being used not only to revive Aboriginal self-confidence but also to revive memories of a spiritualized landscape. It became clear, moreover, that the whole atmosphere of Australian anthropological and missiological studies had changed greatly in the ten years since I was last in Perth. Almost everyone has been having second thoughts. As Tonkinson sums it up in a recent article:

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\text{A more tolerant and syncretic approach to Aboriginal culture on the part of Christian denominations in Australia has enabled Aboriginal people to feel comfortable holding both Christian and “traditional” beliefs ... Anthropologists are increasingly involved in ... endeavouring to improve their understanding of the dynamics of conflict and its resolution ... within parameters that accept a certain amount of flexibility and}
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\(^{39}\) It must be emphasized that despite all the difficulties of the mission encounter with Aborigines which she records, Peggy Brock still regards it as an example of “the analyses of historians such as Ranger who have argued that there is a complex dialectical relationship between missionary and client population,” Brock, “Mission Encounters,”179.
dynamism in “tradition” … The upshot … has been a greatly increased level of debate about “tradition” and change among anthropologists … In recent decades an Aboriginal Christian evangelical movement swept across the nation and had much greater success in terms of converts than the earlier century and a half of effort … Discussion concerning “tradition” in Aboriginal Australia is no longer phased predominantly in terms that oppose it to Christianity.40

What has happened, to over-simplify greatly, is that the churches have withdrawn from controlling education, health and other social services which used to be provided at the central Mission Stations. These services are now controlled by the secular state and Mission Stations have lost most of their reason for existence. Aboriginal Christianity has been left largely in the hands of native evangelists and ministers. The mission past offers metaphors for a new vernacular Christianity—the sedentary Mission Station an image for “Hell”, and the free life of the bush as an image for “Heaven”. Vernacular translations of the Bible are being offered to Aboriginal Christians not in published book form but by means of locally available internet sites. Where missionary Christianity had established a presence—as at Hermannsburg among the Arrernte—its effect had been greatly to increase the intense localism of Aboriginal spirituality. The missionaries told the Arrernte what they had always known—that this was the Promised Land. But they cut them off from the old networks of ritual communication.41 The new Aboriginal Evangelical Christianity has managed to combine

40 Tonkinson, 184-187.
41 Diane Austin-Broos, “The Meaning of Pepe: God’s Law and the Western Arrernte” Journal of Religious History 27 no. 3 (2003): 311-329. “God’s law at Hermannsburg,” writes Austin-Broos, “was a localized law for a particular place practiced by familiars”, 314. She notes that when the “school-church” at Hermannsburg was dedicated in 1880 and named Bethlehem, the missionary Hermann Kempe, read from Genesis 28:10-22, where God promises always to be with Jacob at Bethel, “And Jacob awoke out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew not.” Austin-Broos notes that old women told her that this meant that “Arrernte country had always been God’s place and that missionaries were simply messengers sent to remind Western Arrernte,” 317. The same text was preached when the school closed in the 1990s but this time interpreted by the missionary preacher as meaning that, “all Christians, indigenous and non-indigenous alike, were under one God wherever they might be.” This was unacceptable to old Arrernte Christians. “Women said that Albrecht was wrong to propose that God’s law was everywhere. God had given his country to a particular people and they were Western Arrernte … The missionaries had come to lead the Arrernte in God’s law and now they were leaving, making it hard to teach the young.” God had told Jacob that “I will not leave the place” but now the missionaries were doing so, 318.
vernacular localism with a regional, national and even international outreach.

I want to conclude this chapter with an illustration of how the Aboriginal Revival is teaching us new things, and provoking second thoughts, about the appropriation of Christianity by a First People. In particular, I want to conclude by focusing on idioms of place and landscape. In doing so I draw particularly on the work of Fiona Magowan on the Yolngu of Northern Australia.

Magowan describes how the Methodist mission station was established among the Yolngu in 1942 and withdrawn in 1977, when “Yolngu welfare was transferred to the government.” There was a crisis of belief and morality. In 1979 the Yolngu minister, Rev, Djiniyini Gondarra, prayed for the descent of the Holy Spirit, “Suddenly everybody began to pray and there was great noise in the room … people were singing choruses and hymns where before there had been violent fighting.” This Revival is celebrated in March every year. It led to vernacular videos and cassettes and to a mini vernacular Bible. But by the early 1990s Yolngu Christians were again facing a crisis of “questioning the relationship between the foundations of their ancestral Law and their faith as Christians.” The minister’s brother, Dangatanga Gondarra, asked: “I’m a blood-washed, life-changed Christian. How can we, the church, grow and nurture our Aboriginal people?” There was a desire to evangelize among other Indigenous peoples. Then in 1991 Yolngu delegates received a prophecy at a Christian Convention in Central Australia—“You were a forgotten people, a forgotten race, my lost tribe but now your name has been lifted up and people all across the land know about you. I want to bless you. You are my singing angels to sing my praises.”

The prophecy led to the emergence of a Yolngu woman’s music ministry group claiming the title “the singing angels”; these women have performed in Sydney, Brisbane and even Germany. They sang and danced at the Third World Christian Gathering of Indigenous Peoples in March 2000 when “groups from all over the Pacific and the United States “took part in two weeks of indigenous worship meetings.”

42 Fiona Magowan, “Syncretism or Sychronicity? Remapping the Yolngu Feel of Place,” *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 12 (2001), 3; “Beyond Reasonable Doubt? A Dance of Uncertain Conviction in Northern Australia” Perth, 2000. This paper was revised and published as “‘It is God who Speaks in Thunder …’: Mediating
So far this brief narrative of Yolngu revivalism seems to have been set in the context of international Pentecostal and Evangelical idioms. And Magowan tells us that “youth groups from homelands throughout Galiwin’ku practise dance actions to American Gospel choruses on cassette … or even to cassettes from Ireland such as ‘Revival in Belfast’ or music from Israel.” But she also quotes the Yolngu Bible Translator, Maratja, introducing to the World Christian Gathering of Indigenous Peoples a group of church representatives “painted and adorned with ancestral designs and sacred feather armbands … whites stripes [as] ritual indications of the clouds bringing clans together at connected homelands to mourn.” Maratja explained,

This traditional costume was given to us as a present to wear here by the elders of our community … this is a big ceremony as we honour our Lord Jesus together as he has made us a people of this land. We are not here by mistake. It was through Him he made us all people. We wear this costume at funerals or special occasions only … This is the time that God has chosen. He wants his people here to discover how to contextualise the Gospel through the life and culture of the people. We have just been scratching at the surface, the tip of the iceberg and we haven’t gone down, we are beginning to explore.\(^\text{43}\)

The ritual decorations had been deliberately chosen to reflect pre-colonial ways of making contact between different Aboriginal language groups. But what interests me particularly here is the emphasis Magowan lays on Yolngu use of idioms of place—of landscape—in expressing both their own vernacular Christianity and their evangelical outreach. For them, she writes, “landscape is not a void, it is an ancestral body, a morally connective and connecting body that contains veiled multiple presences of people and ancestors that are continually binding the living to themselves.”\(^\text{44}\) Fittingly, then, the performance of the “Singing Angels” at the Sydney gathering was a landscape performance. Three women church members danced “the ritual actions of the first ancestral sisters journeying across the landscape from homeland to homeland” while the choir sang in the vernacular: “Lord, here I am, coming to you.”

Maratja told the convention that when he heard “our brothers

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\(^{43}\) Magowan, “Syncretism,” 286.

\(^{44}\) Magowan, “Beyond Reasonable Doubt,” 8.
and sisters of the First Nations from the United States of America” praying “it felt like the river was flowing from the throne of God and it’s still flowing.” He quoted Isaiah 43:18-21: “I will make you a road through the wilderness and give you streams of water there.” Then the senior Yolngu women sang a song of “water flowing and Yolngu giv[ing] it to Him in love, this pure, clean water.” The song combined an intense particularity of place, giving the vernacular name for every freshwater spring and stream and hole in the Yolngu landscape, with the sense that water flows across the world. They sang of the “everlasting water called Yalawirrtja”; “that freshwater of the deepest feelings called Barrwula.” The song was, says, Magowan. “a revelation of the heart worship of ancestral strings of belonging that tied these senior women to their homeland, their people and their Lord.”

It might be thought that these performances at the convention were self-conscious exercises in contextualization, unrepresentative of day to day Yolngu Christian practice and experience. But Magowan shows that Yolngu Christians not only use landscape traditions to express their understanding of Jesus. They also use their experience of Jesus to revive their understanding of the landscape. She quotes one of the women singers, Gudaltji, who has a vision of the divine landscape concealed beneath the desert surface—“a freshwater lake that God had made and beautiful clear water [and] lots of animals, just like the Garden of Eden.” Underneath a tree sat dead girls “singing all the new sons God had given them.” Magowan also quotes a male dream from 1998, “The two ancestral sisters [who birthed the Yolngu clans] came to me ... all painted up and dancing ... They were dancing at my uncle’s homeland, Dhambala, but then I saw a light and a cross and Jesus standing there. I realized that this was a sacred area and that it had always been sacred.” The man’s wife explained that “none of us knew that the area had been used for the fertility ritual, a long time ago.” Now Jesus had revealed it to them. A cross would be erected at the site and a youth rally held there. As Magowan writes, the Yolngu are “remapping ancestral properties with Christian belief.”

Diane Austin-Boos writes that Christianity among the Arrernte, where the Lutheran missionaries did manage to create an indigenous church, “is waiting to be re-constituted.” She suggests that this will have to be done by “making inter-regional connections” as the Yolngu

do. The Arrernte and other groups will have to break out of the static localism which missionary presence intensified and almost invented. They will have to discover the pre-colonial networks of migration and initiation; the old movements of ancestors through the landscape; and then to bring this renewed dynamism of time and place into a reconstituted Christianity.46

All this makes it clear that Australian Aborigines, in common with all other Indigenous peoples—and with all other peoples in the world—can lay hands and minds on Christianity. I make this as a historical rather than a missiological proposition. I have ended with a local case study which demonstrates that even the oppressed and despised First Peoples of colonial Australia can lay transforming hands and minds and dreams upon Christianity, and in so doing reveal new potentials within it. Maybe there really are eternities in this grain of Australian desert sand!

46 Austin-Boos.
By juxtaposing two historical periods—the early twentieth century and today; two world religions—Islam and Christianity; and two similar responses to the theological problem of what is often called syncretism, I set out in this chapter to make some points of relevance to the broad topic of religious change, while also commenting on the application of the term “indigenous” to Indonesian societies.

One of the difficulties I have with the intellectual analysis of deeply held beliefs is that the work of anthropologists, historians and even theologians ultimately comes up against the sheer power and utter mystery of belief itself. We can analyse belief from every conceivable disciplinary approach and angle, and in so doing add depth to our understanding of the social, political, economic and even spiritual aspects of belief, but we will always reach a point beyond which we can go no further in our analyses.

I first became aware of this as a university undergraduate in Georgia, an American state imbued with religiosity and, like Indonesia and southern Africa, filled with sacred places. Thomas Altizer, professor of theology at Emory University in Atlanta had, early in 1966, published a book with the provocative title Radical Theology and the Death of God.1 The idea that God was dead had stirred considerable debate, especially as Emory University was a private institution with Methodist connections. In an undergraduate political science tutorial at the University of Georgia that spring we were discussing the politics of the “God is dead” controversy. I naively suggested that Altizer should go on radio or TV to defend his ideas, as he had recently refused to do so after having been challenged by a fundamentalist preacher. The refusal looked like cowardice. The political science tutor responded

to my suggestion bluntly, “OK, so Altizer goes on TV and says ‘God is dead’; the preacher will reply, ‘No he’s not, I talked to Him this morning!’ End of debate.”

A more polished expression of this point can be found in the thought-provoking final paragraph of that anthropological classic *Nuer Religion* by E. E. Evans-Pritchard, who writes, “Though prayer and sacrifice are exterior actions, Nuer religion is ultimately an interior state. This state is externalised in rites which we can observe, but their meaning depends finally on an awareness of God and that men are dependent on him and must be resigned to his will. At this point the theologian takes over from the anthropologist.”

Ever mindful of the fact that anthropology must eventually run out of explanatory power, I nevertheless would like to comment as an anthropologist and Indonesianist on two themes that arise from the topic of this book. These are (1) the meaning of “indigenous”, and (2) Indonesian anti-syncretism and religious pluralism, the core of this chapter.

*The Meaning of Indigenous*

David Maybury-Lewis writes,

The very term *indigenous peoples* is confusing because most people in the world are “indigenous” to their countries in the sense of having been born in them and being descended from people who were born in them. Indigenous peoples are clearly native to their countries in this sense too, but they also make another claim, namely, that they were there first ... This criterion discriminates clearly enough between, for example, Native Americans and all those who came to the Americas after Columbus’s invasion ... There is no problem in distinguishing the Aborigines of Australia or the Maoris of New Zealand as “indigenous” ... but such distinctions are not easy to draw in Europe or Asia or Africa. In those continents, peoples have eddied this way and that ... leaving in place a mosaic of different peoples who dispute the land and sometimes dispute the claim to prior occupancy of it. Additional criteria must therefore be used to define indigenous peoples for the purpose of any general discussion.

Indigenous peoples maintain their own languages, which normally differ from those spoken by the mainstream population, and their own cultures, which invariably differ from the mainstream. They are conscious

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of their separate identities and normally struggle to retain these. The salient characteristic of indigenous peoples, then, is that they are marginal to or dominated by the states that claim jurisdiction over them.³

Using this definition, almost every ethnic group (language group) in Indonesia other than the Javanese could be termed indigenous. The identification of indigenous “traditions” (adat) has since the fall of Suharto’s New Order government become an increasingly potent political issue as regional governments have sought greater autonomy from Jakarta. Local/regional customs, including ancestral beliefs and rituals, have been used to support the case for regional autonomy.⁴ A countervailing tendency among both Muslims and Christians has been to declare their religions to be indigenous to Indonesia, in the sense that, although they may have originated elsewhere, their presence is not the result of colonial conquest.

While this arguably is the case for Islam, Christians, too, make this assertion. In eastern Indonesia, in particular, where there are majority Christian populations on the islands of Timor and Flores, among others, Christians frequently declare their religion to be indigenous on the grounds that it was brought to the archipelago before Islam and subsequently spread by local people. They point to early Nestorian Christianity in Sumatra before 1000 CE and use this argument to combat the common belief that Christianity is a missionary-introduced, Western religion with ties to the former colonial power.

There is some historical evidence for this claim. According to Webb, Sheik Abu Saleh al Armini in the early eleven hundreds wrote a book about the church and monasteries of Asia and Africa. For Indonesia he noted that,

Fanshur [in Sumatra] is a city that is well known because of the camphor wood that grows there; camphor drips from the trees. There are many churches and amongst them is the church of St. Mary, the sweet Virgin. The whole community of Christians there are of the school of thought of Nestorius.⁵

³ David Maybury-Lewis, “Note,” Cultural Survival Voices (Fall, 2001), 2.
⁵ R. A. F. Webb, Indonesian Christians and Their Political Parties (Townsville: James Cook University of North Queensland, 1978), 3-5.
For most of Indonesia’s approximately nine percent Christian population of more than 20 million people, Christianity is as Indonesian as Islam.

Indigeneity as a concept is, then, a contested term in Indonesia, much as it is in southern Africa,6 in distinct contrast to its application in, say, Australia and New Zealand where “indigenous” more clearly defines those who were there first.

**Syncretism / Anti-syncretism**

In 2001, Fiona Magowan and I edited a Special Issue of *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, “Beyond Syncretism: Indigenous Expressions of World Religions.”7 This title was deliberately chosen to signal our belief as anthropologists that it was time to focus on indigenous agency in the multiple world-wide encounters of indigenous peoples with world religions. The analytical meaning of the term “syncretism” and, indeed, whether the term should be used at all, are subjects of debates that go back decades, yet today still have life due to the tenacity with which people hold to the notion that one can define purity and authenticity. This is perhaps true even more so today in the constant mix and churn of global cultural flows and in the fierce politicisation of Islam as moderates struggle against extremists.

The purpose of the volume was to present evidence of syncretism “as an indication of indigenous creativity, agency and autonomy” and to explore the “middle ground of integration between cultural practice and faith in which the discourses of indigenous religious beliefs arise and are contested.” In so doing, the various authors hoped to move the understanding of the term syncretism even further from its earlier association with “cultural inauthenticity, pollution and even debasement” and to demonstrate that “indigenous adherents of world religions are continually reshaping their religious practices to express new forms of worship.” The editors noted that, in this highly mobile arena, “degrees of variation within world religions have increased.”8

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8 Gordon and Magowan, 253.
Graham Harvey takes a similar approach, repudiating the use of the term “syncretistic”, which to him “implies a God-like view of how religions should be rather than a human celebration of how they are.”\(^9\) This is good advice for the analyst who might otherwise be too eager to dismiss the “corrupt”, the “borrowed” and the “impure” as somehow inauthentic. It is, indeed, a useful corrective to acting in a God-like manner. Yet, from the standpoint of the believers who claim divine authority to purge the impure, the view on the ground is reversed. Indeed, their very purpose is to eliminate what they believe to be syncretic precisely because they believe it not to be God’s view of how religions should be.

While Christian-Muslim violence in Indonesia has been in the headlines over the past five or so years, less newsworthy but at least as significant is the violence between believers of different orientations within the same religion. With that in mind I now turn to two examples of anti-syncretism from Indonesia, one Muslim and contemporary, the other Christian and from the formative colonial period of the early twentieth century. The purpose of these examples is to provide a basis for an understanding of the anti-syncretic position taken in each and to suggest that such a position does not necessarily imply an intolerance of so-called “indigenous” beliefs nor does it mean a blind adherence to past interpretations of the meaning and history of either Islam or Christianity.

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\(^9\) See Ranger, 262.
In Indonesia today, the Islamic resurgence may be attributed to many factors. One of these, I believe, is the power of anti-syncretic positions within Islam. I will argue that these anti-syncretic positions are similar to the position espoused with great clarity by Hendrik Kraemer, a Dutch missionary-theologian who worked in Indonesia in the first half of last century, and that both are built upon the need to strike a balance between maintenance of core beliefs and adaptation to local circumstances.

Both Islam and Christianity have the capacity to combine a strong anti-syncretism with a degree of tolerance and curiosity, if not understanding, of other beliefs. Social scientists have frequently assumed that, in religious matters, a strongly anti-syncretic perspective is linked to fundamentalism, and fundamentalism is assumed to imply an intolerance of other beliefs. In the case of Hendrik Kraemer, and at least some of the prominent leaders of Islamic revival in Indonesia today, this assumption is wrong.

In the past two decades, the world has witnessed a rise in the fortunes of Islam. In the West, Islam’s growing power and influence has often been conveyed via highly charged, negative images. Even before the events of September 11, 2001, Islam was frequently associated with acts of terrorism and a stern fundamentalism that would confine women to the home; eliminate female educational achievement; and severely punish acts of petty crime and blasphemy. The cruel, unyielding face of Islam is everywhere to be seen, while the positive achievements of this universal religion are rarely noted.

The growing popularity of Islam in the closing decades of the twentieth century initially confounded observers. By the 1980s, social scientists began to realise that the long-held assumption that secularism and modernization were two faces of the same coin was possibly wrong. In 1987, Antoun and Hegland published an edited volume entitled *Religious Resurgence: Contemporary Cases in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism*. They noted that, “A major historical transformation seems to be occurring. The resurgence of religion is surely one of the symptoms or manifestations of this change, as well as one of the factors bringing about this change.”\(^{10}\) In her Introduction, Hegland continued, “We

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\(^{10}\) Richard T. Antoun and Mary Elaine Hegland, eds, *Religious Resurgence:*
are now faced with the challenge of explaining this apparent aberration—an increase in religiosity—given the assumption that modernization brings secularization in its wake.” Hegland argued that the use of religion to cope with social change had been theorised in the West as indicating “pathology and regression in religious movements,”

Because they can’t cope with the new and frightening requirements of modernization, the threats to their interests and traditional ways of life, and the breakdown of traditional social structure ... Muslims have sought comfort and protection through a defensive return to their religious practices and beliefs, or even through aggressively attacking intruders or those who threaten their old way of life, under the banner of Islam. In keeping with this theoretical approach, commonly found in explanations offered for the resurgence of interest in religion, are such words and phrases as “alienation,” “anomie,” “crisis” ... in the face of all of which Islam offers “solace, safety, and security.”

Hegland then suggested an alternative to this belief that “movements are a defensive and nonconstructive reaction to drastic change.” She argues that these movements might better be seen as both “cause and effect of change,” and as adaptive mechanisms through which “change is shaped and directed,”

With this interpretation, movements can be viewed as creative, innovative, and active responses to change and to the perceived needs of society, groups, and individuals. Movement participants seek not only to respond to change but also to bring about change through their own activity—to form a society better able to provide for human needs as well as address their own interests. Movement leaders and participants are seen, not as refugees retreating from frightening new circumstances, but as courageous, confident, and able people who actively seek to influence their lives and social environment according to their own ideals and aims, their conduct motivated by hope, optimism, and determination rather than by despair and defeat.

It is this optimistic perspective, I argue, that best explains certain elements of both contemporary Islamic reform movements and earlier

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Contemporary Cases in Islam, Christianity and Judaism (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1987), x.

11 Hegland, 2-3.

12 Hegland, 3 (citing Gerlach and Hine, p.xiv).
Christian missionizing in Indonesia. I turn now to an example of the latter.

**Hendrik Kraemer: Christian Anti-syncretist**

One of Indonesia’s most influential missionaries was Hendrik Kraemer, a Dutchman who graduated from Leiden University after studying Oriental Languages and Cultures. Kraemer went to the Indies in 1921 and quickly established a reputation as a keen thinker in the field of missionary theory and theology. By the time of his death, he was recognised internationally for his contributions as a missionary-theologian and for his work in understanding other cultures. The Netherlands Reformed Church (Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk) subsequently named its institute for missions, located near Leiden, after him.

Kraemer’s most enduring contribution was to the theology of missions, his stance on syncretism is particularly interesting. Despite being a firm opponent of syncretism, or relativism, Kraemer was a leader among Christian missionaries in understanding other religions. He was a perceptive and insightful observer of other social and religious practices. In the Introductory Note to *From Missionfield to Independent Church*, Visser ’t Hooft wrote,

...Kraemer has become known as the consistent opponent of syncretism or relativism in all their various forms. It was not sufficiently realised that he is at the same time a pioneer in understanding of and penetration into the world of the non-Christian religions. The real originality of his missionary attitude lies precisely in the dialectal combination of an uncompromising christocentric theology with patient, loving attention for the spiritual life of the people to whom the Gospel is to be brought. It is not too difficult to find men who refuse to deviate an inch from the affirmation that the revelation in Christ is unique and absolute. It is not too difficult to find others who show a profound understanding for the spiritual contents and structure of the religions of Asia and Africa. But there have not been many of whom these two things can be said at the same time and among these few Kraemer is the most lucid expositor of the dialectical tension of the genuine missionary approach.14

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According to Visser ‘t Hooft, Kraemer “considers that the real missionary is one who is completely bound to the Gospel, but who precisely for the sake of the Gospel seeks to enter as fully as possible into the spiritual life of the people to whom he is sent.”15 And Kraemer himself, commenting on the background to these reports, notes that the research led him to “fundamental theological thinking into the meaning of the Church and of Missions, and also into launching out in many attempts at what in the present time bears the name of Cultural Anthropology.”16 In later years, Kraemer further developed his argument that God, “works amongst the peoples and in the religions outside the Biblical realm of revelation” while emphasising that the “non-Christian religions are great human achievements.”17 This was a position that caused great controversy in mission circles in the 1930s. For Kraemer it was possible to espouse this position and be a missionary at the same time, provided one also believed in a christocentric theology.

In 1932 Kraemer submitted a report on the extraordinary Christian conversions that had occurred in Bali late in 1931. Bali, at that time, along with Aceh (because of its history of devout Islam) and Bantam formed special areas in which missionary work was prohibited. The prohibition in Bali dated back to the sensational murder in 1881 of the first missionary by his first convert. In 1930 the Missionary Alliance, having received permission to work among Chinese in Bali, sent a Chinese missionary. Though largely unsuccessful with Chinese, he managed to convert some of their Balinese wives. This led to the conversion of “a number of Balinese in the ancient district of Mengwi in South Bali.” They had asked for baptism “which was actually administered to them ... by the Rev. R.A. Jaffray who displayed a typically American lack of hesitation.”18 This event stimulated worldwide interest and led to an outcry from those who believed that the unique culture of Bali should be protected.

Kraemer sharply observed the debate between those who argued for

15 Visser ‘t Hooft, 2.
18 Kraemer, *From Missionfield to Independent Church*, 159.
further missionary efforts in Bali and those who adamantly condemned same. While praising the comments of a member of the Volksraad who “demonstrated the inconsistency of making the whole world a self-evident object of Western penetration ... while suddenly erecting artificial and forced barriers against this ... in Bali,” he recognised the reasons for the heat of this debate in,

the complex heritage of customs and institutions which had always satisfied the needs of the people. This island ... has proved to be a treasure house of ancient Javanese literature and Hindu-Javanese tradition ... To scholars this island has become, quite understandably and rightly so, a cherished treasure. To many artistically minded Europeans it has become a temple of adoration. To many overrefined, disharmonious and uprooted cultural cosmopolitans it has become a false idyll of undisturbed harmony of life ... These factors taken by themselves were sufficient to render the combination of Bali and missions a sensation.19

For Kraemer, the Bali controversy raised more profound questions of an anthropological nature, questions that long predate the literature on invention of tradition and *kastom* in the Pacific,

Is a culture a highest good in itself which should be artificially enclosed from the historical course of life, or is it a pattern of life which may either flourish or be broken in the course of the struggle imposed by the supra-rational guidance of history?20

Kraemer clearly believed culture was the latter, and his elaboration goes to a crucial point in the analysis of the appeal of universal religions, especially Islam and Christianity. Kraemer noted that “serious experts” on Bali, those who believed that neither Islam or Christianity would be successful there, often viewed Christian missions as a problem of opportunity rather than one of principle. He trenchantly replies to those experts as follows,

For they think that they have said everything when they have defined the spiritual life of mankind as a collection of cultures or blossomings of the human spirit which are essentially equivalent. Here lies a problem of fundamental importance: is religious life including its most sublime manifestations a cultural phenomenon or is it essentially an aspect of life which is *sui generis* and which cannot and should not be explained only and primarily as immanent? This philosophical-religious problem

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19 Kraemer, *From Missionfield to Independent Church*, 160.
20 Kraemer, *From Missionfield to Independent Church*, 161.
is a matter of life and death to all true religion. This is demonstrated by the fact that every living religion harbours the conviction of possessing Divine revelation ... Those who consider religion a cultural factor consequently remain stuck in a relativism which ignores the fundamental driving force of any strong religious life: the urge for truth and reality in regard to the Eternal.\textsuperscript{21}

Kraemer’s final blow to the critics of Christian conversion in Bali is his assessment that the “profoundly religious” life of the Balinese is a complete myth. While he admires the “remarkable socio-religious life” of the Balinese, he believes a life ruled by adat is not a life of profound religious belief.\textsuperscript{22}

Following his initial years of research in the East Indies, Kraemer spent the rest of his life refining his view of christocentric theology. This was a theology, as the name implies, that placed Christ at the centre of Christianity, and while this may seem self-evident, for Kraemer it was the subtle interpretations of its significance that mattered, “[It] is not Christian belief which is absolute, but the source and object of that belief: namely, God’s Self-revelation in Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{23} In his writings and lectures he persuasively argues this theme, contrasting the Christian revelation in the “Person of Jesus Christ” with, among others, the theosophists’ belief that all religions enshrine the same esoteric truth, or the Buddhist belief that salvation comes through deliverance from a state of ignorance, or the Muslim belief that the Book itself (the Koran) is the revelation.

In the Stone Lectures delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1958, and subsequently published as World Cultures and World Religions: The Coming Dialogue, Kraemer, pointedly contrasts Islam with Christianity in terms of the legalistic approach to Revelation of the former against the dynamic approach of the latter,

The peculiar difficulty of Islam, in the storm of the Western Invasion, is that ... its hard-core problem is theological and not philosophical ... The theological problem is ultimately how to switch over in a legitimate way from a thoroughly fundamentalist, legalistic apprehension of Revelation to a dynamic one. This is a problem full of dynamite ... It is understandable that, leaving aside some daring individual attempts to face it, it is generally avoided. Very conspicuous is this understand-

\textsuperscript{21} Kraemer, From Missionfield to Independent Church, 173.
\textsuperscript{22} Kraemer, From Missionfield to Independent Church, 175.
able reluctance in the general refusal to enter on the path of applying historical criticism to the Koran as it has been and is done to the Bible, with all attending upheavals.²⁴

For Kraemer, the vitality of Christianity arises from its self-critical capacity, while its stability is based on a christocentric theology. Islam, in contrast, he believed to be theologically stagnant.

It is precisely this dilemma that Muslim intellectuals face in Indonesia today. To oversimplify greatly, there is a struggle of immense proportions at present being waged between those Indonesian Muslims who take the Koran as the sole guide for all human activity and those who, for want of a better description, argue that the Koran cannot be used to judge aspects of modern life that were not anticipated when it was written. Hefner, for instance, quotes an Indonesian Muslim journalist who, in commenting on more conservative Muslims says, “[They] believe that if something is not approved in the Qur’an or Sunnah it is forbidden. But why should this be so? God made us with minds to inquire and explore. We feel that if something is not explicitly forbidden then it is acceptable to explore it.”²⁵ The latter view opens Islam to wider interpretation and injects the dynamism that Kraemer found lacking.

Islamic Revival in Indonesia Today

Turning now to Indonesian Islam, I will argue that one contemporary stream of belief is very similar to the position taken by Hendrik Kraemer in that its proponents espouse an Islam that, while firmly anti-syncretic (particularly in regard to “Javanism”), is by no means fundamentalist. I define fundamentalism here to mean “opposed to religious pluralism”, and I draw mainly on the work of Robert Hefner and Suzanne Brenner to make this point.

Brenner explores the modern practice of “veiling” among Islamic women in Java, a practice very unusual until recently, in marked contrast to Malaysia. She begins by asking, “What prompts young Muslim women to veil in a society where veiling is neither deeply

rooted in local tradition nor encouraged by a majority of the population?” She notes that “Most Muslim women [in Java] do not veil, and not all Muslim activists agree with the practice of veiling; some even oppose it strongly, arguing that the Qur’an calls for this covering style of dress only for prayer and that its adoption for daily wear is excessive.” She adds that, for some Indonesians, the wearing of the veil conveys an image of fundamentalist extremism that is “as culturally dissonant for them as it is for many Westerners.”26 The notion that women veil in the Middle East in order to be able to enter public, male spaces without being subjected to criticism or harassment does not apply to Javanese society, where women have “rarely been confined to ‘private’ or domestic spheres, nor is public space considered primarily a male domain.”27

Having established the psychological and economic disadvantages that a woman who wears the veil may encounter, Brenner asks why the practice is becoming more popular, especially among young, middle class, educated women. The answer appears to lie in the power of Islam as a modern alternative to both Westernisation and, simultaneously, the force of local custom (adat). “The significance of this rejection of Javanist tradition”, she writes, “should not be underestimated, for it challenges deeply ingrained patterns of ritual practice, personal belief, and interpersonal relationships. It is seen by many Javanese, especially of the older generation, as highly disruptive to the social and cosmological order.”28 In other words, veiling is a stand against syncretism.

While this movement is based on a modernist vision, it is a modernist vision with a religious core. The secularisation that others have associated with modernisation is reversed, “The assumption of Islamic activists in Java is that one can have modernisation and, indeed, rationalisation, without secularisation.”29 Javanese Muslim women wear the veil not to revive an indigenous past, but to distance themselves from local history in order to create a more perfect future.30 For many, this future is based more on broad democratisation and social justice than on a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam.

27 Brenner, 675.
28 Brenner, 680.
29 Brenner, 682.
30 Brenner, 690.
Hefner, in his analysis of the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI), a government-backed association for middle class, educated Muslims, argues that a powerful faction within Indonesia’s Muslim community believes in religious pluralism while simultaneously opposing any form of Islamic behaviour or belief that might be labelled syncretic. By the late 1990s, that religious pluralism had led to Indonesia’s having the largest pro-democracy movement in the Muslim world.

In a subsequent discussion of a dispute between two Muslim newspapers in Jakarta, Hefner locates the complex origins of the dispute in the differing approaches to religious pluralism of two movements within Indonesian reformist Islam. In the conservative camp is the DDII (Dewan Dakwah Muslimayah Indonesia) and its newsmagazine *Media Dakwah*. According to Hefner, *Media Dakwah’s* message is “adamantly anti-humanist and antiliberal.” In the liberal camp is the ICMI and its national newspaper *Republika*. *Republika* has sought since its founding to capture a national audience and has followed the successful formula of Indonesia’s largest and most influential newspaper, *Kompas*, the Catholic-owned publication that has built a foundation upon quality journalism, appeal to the growing middle-class and support for religious pluralism,

The best journalists among the Republika staff have walked a tight rope between demonstrations of respect for the government and maintaining the independence required to win readers and demonstrate that Muslims can be principled journalists. These reporters operate in an environment dominated by non-confessional newspapers. The success of these newspapers, Republika journalists have told me, owed much to their ability to demonstrate their independence, reach across religious lines, and address the fashions, controversies, and concerns of middle-class readers.

Supporters of *Media Dakwah*, in several demonstrations against *Republika* staff, denounced the cosmopolitan attitude of the newspaper and its promotion of liberal views of Islam. They even condemned the paper for wishing “Selamat Berhari Natal” (Merry Christmas) to Indonesia’s

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33 Hefner, “Print Islam”, 90.
34 Hefner, “Print Islam”, 96.
Christian community on the grounds that to do so was to recognise the legitimacy of Christian belief.

*Republika* is a liberal face of reformist Islam in Indonesia. Its promotion of religious pluralism made it the target of more conservative reformist Muslims. Yet, despite *Republika*’s support of religious pluralism, it was unwavering in its devotion to Islam, and in this regard represents a Muslim position similar to that taken by Hendrik Kraemer decades earlier. These examples from Brenner and Hefner illustrate the capacity of Indonesian Islam to modernise while simultaneously resisting secularisation and promoting religious and democratic pluralism.

**Conclusion**

I began this chapter by commenting on the similar uses of the term indigenous in Indonesia and Southern Africa and by noting the claims to indigeneity of both Muslims and Christians in Indonesia. I then briefly considered a recent volume devoted to the discussion of syncretism in the context of a globalizing world and a resurgence of interest in, and conflict between, the universal religions of Islam and Christianity. I presented examples drawing upon both Indonesian Christianity and Indonesian Islam to illustrate the proposition that anti-syncretic positions are not always incompatible with religious pluralism.

Universal religions usually spread at the expense of local religions. Yet, in doing so, they often accommodate degrees of local belief. The essential dilemma for them is how to do so while simultaneously maintaining their core beliefs. Hendrik Kraemer and today’s liberal reformist Indonesian Muslims both formulated similar responses to this problem. They positioned their respective religions as modern responses to modern problems, and, while maintaining strongly anti-syncretic stances, they acknowledged that other religions exist and are, indeed, worthy of understanding. Neither, however, yields ground on the question of *adat* (culture, tradition) as religion. As Kraemer noted, “A life ruled by *adat*, which is entirely wrapped up in religious forms, does not yet prove profound religiosity.”

While anthropologists and historians may eventually find this profound religiosity, we should perhaps follow Evans-Pritchard’s advice and ask the theologians to explain it.

35 Kraemer, *From Missionfield to Independent Church*, 175.
PART TWO

MISSION ENCOUNTERS
One premise of the larger volume to which this chapter contributes is that by comparing distinct cases of a more general phenomenon—in this case, the introduction and reception of Christianity into indigenous societies—it is possible to learn something that cannot be derived from examining a single instance of that phenomenon. Since the spread of Christian beliefs has been a global experience, and particularly so in the past five hundred years, any understanding of how Christianity has interacted with non-Christian societies must benefit from a comparative approach, if done carefully. At the same time, it must be understood that the encounter between religious traditions was unique in each location, and any comparative scholar should be cautious about making claims which overlook or minimize these differences.

The two indigenous communities that will be considered here are the Xhosa of the eastern Cape Colony frontier of southern Africa and the Maori of New Zealand. Protestant missionaries launched their work in Xhosa and Maori communities during the same approximate time period: roughly the first half of the nineteenth century. Although the history of missionary contact began earlier among the Xhosa (1799), sustained mission presence in Xhosaland dates from 1816, just two years after work began in New Zealand. In both cases, indigenous religious belief and behavior assumed a close interrelationship between the readily visible material world, and the invisible spiritual world.¹ To

call the invisible world “supernatural” could be misleading in that it was not seen as operating above and beyond the natural but, instead, as an extension of it. The more mundane, utilitarian aspect of these religious systems involved the manipulation of the visible and spiritual worlds in order to minimize discomfort and maximize security in a universe that otherwise might seem capricious. For Maori, the focus was on maintaining boundaries to protect the sacred (tapu) world from pollution. While individuals were aware of many actions that should be performed and others that should be avoided in the hope of easing their daily encounters with their spiritual environment, both Maori and Xhosa communities utilized experts (Xhosa: igqira/amagqira; Maori: tohunga) to help them understand and mediate with the spiritual world, which included deceased ancestors. Both Maori and Xhosa societies maintained broader religious concepts and traditions that had less practical application, but helped to create a sense of place temporally and spatially in the universe. These traditions included creation and origin stories which merged with genealogy and sacred geography. In both societies there was a belief in a supreme deity, though the origins and significance of this belief is in both cases unclear.2

Missionaries brought with them a religious tradition that differed in some significant ways from that familiar in either Xhosa or Maori communities. Christianity is universalistic in the sense that the meaningfulness of its message is not intended to be tied to a particular place or people but is meant to be applicable to all. Unlike Maori and Xhosa religious systems, it excludes its adherents from membership in other religious systems. While the effectiveness of many Maori or


Xhosa beliefs and rituals could be tested against experience, since their value is dependent on an observable outcome, Christian beliefs and rituals do not rely on tangible outcomes. The evangelical Christian missionaries of the early nineteenth century expected not material reward for their faithfulness—though they clearly subscribed to the providential view that God was watching over them—but rather an emotional satisfaction founded on the hope of a kind of salvation that would only be fully realized after death. While amaggira and tohunga were concerned with regulating human behavior so as not to offend the spiritual world and thereby cause personal and perhaps social calamity, Christianity had become concerned with regulating human behavior so as not to offend God. The system of ethics espoused by evangelical Christians was less tied to personal salvation than it was to social order, but it was understood that piety was an indication of godliness, and by extension, the mark of one who hoped for a less proximate, but eternal reward. Finally, the Christianity brought by missionaries had a tradition of prophecy to which it often referred, but it was generally associated with voices from the distant past speaking of things in the perhaps distant future, whereas Maori and Xhosa prophecy (i.e., divination and visions) was a continuing experience that dealt with immediate concerns. One gets the impression that in spite of their discrete cultural origins, a Maori and a Xhosa person would have understood each other’s spiritual worldview more easily than either could grasp the beliefs promoted by missionaries. What happens, then, when an exotic, universalistic, theistic, abstractly ethical religion enters into a community subscribing to a religious tradition focused primarily on the management of an immanent spiritual realm through the practice of exercises divined exclusively by specialists and aimed at garnering immediate, usually material results?

It is perhaps not surprising that in the earliest stages of contact, indigenous residents of New Zealand’s North Island and of the eastern Cape Colony frontier tended to make assumptions about missionaries based on their understandings of religious specialists found in their own societies. These specialists might be valued for their knowledge of practices used to treat physical ailments and to procure rain, or for an ability to divine the causes of personal or communal crises such as serious individual or epidemic illness. Divination was used whenever there was suspicion of malevolence on the part of spirits or mischievous humans. With little effective knowledge of native languages to help them in their mission to share their religious testimony, missionaries at
first could do little to counter the appearance that they were religious specialists of the same kind, looking for patronage.

Johannes Vanderkemp, of the London Missionary Society (LMS), was the earliest permanent missionary on the eastern Cape frontier. In May, 1800, soon after his arrival in the region, Vanderkemp wrote that the Xhosa showed,

> no desire for instruction, two or three instances excepted, nor have I been able to give them any especially with respect to the knowledge of Christ, the chief object of my mission, for want of knowledge of their language, which I find extremely difficult to learn, and not calculated to explain the mysteries of the gospel.³

Indeed, things looked bad when his life was threatened for “conspiracy” against the Xhosa “king of this country,” Ngqika. Vanderkemp’s fortunes quickly changed, however, and he soon found himself repeatedly subject to appeals from Ngqika and other prominent Xhosa for assistance in calling rain during the unusually dry year of 1800. By the missionary’s account, the Xhosa “acknowledged that their sorcerers could not do it.” Vanderkemp replied that he “could not give rain, as this depended upon God’s pleasure,” but he agreed to pray for rain, telling them, according to his report to his superiors, “Jesus Christ the Son of God, is king of heaven. I’ll speak to him, and it is he, who shall give rain! I can’t.” When heavy rains fell the following day, Vanderkemp’s success “was known over all the country,” though Xhosa remained “as superstitious with respect to the power of their magicians as ever.”⁴ Here, then, we have an example not only of Xhosa observers coaxing missionaries into familiar roles, but of a missionary reluctantly conforming to those expectations. A quarter-century later these tendencies persisted. Methodist missionary Stephen Kay recorded the story of a colleague’s seemingly successful efforts to procure rain in 1826, adding that Xhosa diviners were “not a little displeased at the people’s ascribing [the good rainfall] to the prayers of ‘God’s Men,’ rather than to their incantations.”⁵ While some mis-


⁴ Vanderkemp to [unknown], 28 December 1800, Quâkoubi, CWM-SA, 1/3/D, SOAS.

⁵ Stephen Kay, Journal, 6 March 1826, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society
sionaries, Kay included, resisted being put to the test in this way, others gleefully reported when their prayers for rain were successful and the indigenous rain-makers’ efforts were not.6

Vanderkemp was trained as a surgeon, and he recorded that he offered his medical services to Xhosa he encountered. It is not clear what impression his skills left, though he mentions that his treatment was refused on at least one occasion. It is worth noting that when Ngqika appealed to Vanderkemp for assistance regarding a “putrid fever” he was suffering, he expected only that the missionary would “pray earnestly to God for his recovery.” The chief had already consulted his diviners, who had identified five of his subjects as the cause of his illness through their “enchantments.” Perhaps impressed by the missionary’s recent success praying for rain, Ngqika seems to have been more interested in testing Vanderkemp’s divine influence than his medical skills.7

Healing was a crucial function of the Maori tohunga in New Zealand, and since drought was a less frequent concern there than in South Africa, it is in the role of healer that missionaries were most notably cast in the early years of contact. When Ngatiuru chief Te Ara fell ill in 1825 he implored missionaries to provide him with medicine and to pray for his recovery. The Methodist missionaries in residence did what they could—which may have resulted in more harm than good—and within a few months, Te Ara was dead. Some held the missionaries or their God responsible for Te Ara’s untimely death, and the Methodists lived in fear of retaliation for a brief period.8 Faith in the healing abilities of missionaries did not disappear, however, for later that year, James Stack, a Methodist lay missionary at Whangaroa, recorded in his journal that “Takka a chief brought a sick son into our yard to day who seems likely soon to fall a victim to his disorder.” The

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Archives, South Africa Correspondence (WMMS-SA), box 301, Special Collections, SOAS.


missionaries did what they could and sent him home. “Poor fellow,” Stack commented, “as though the recovery of his child depended solely upon us[,] as he went of our gate he said with great emphasis…‘If my son gets well I will give you a great reward.’” That Maori considered missionaries to have, in addition to medical expertise, the same skills of divination attributed to tohunga was clearly indicated when the supporters of a man “healed” by Methodist missionary John Whiteley “acknowledged that I had saved his life but they had been waiting and listening for me to say who had been the cause of his illness.” Since Whiteley did not do so, they eventually turned to a native tohunga to perform this service.

One role played by indigenous spiritual experts for which missionaries were particularly unsuited was preparation for war. Indeed, one of the reforms that missionaries were eager to carry into the indigenous societies in which they worked was the cessation of war. This did not exempt them from consideration by Maori as “war-doctors,” however, since rumors spread that the books they carried had the power to make one invulnerable to bullets and to confer super-human marksmanship. It became a significant observation among Maori during the wars of the 1860s that churchmen accompanied British and colonial soldiers on their campaigns against Maori. They assumed that there was no distinction between the role played by chaplains and that of the tohunga who ritually protected Maori combatants. The fact that missionaries refused to perform in this way for Maori cast doubt on their intentions but not their skills, and consequently Maori sometimes chose to appeal directly to Christ as a war-god.

Because Christian missionaries would not and could not take on their role as diviners, tohunga continued to figure prominently in Maori culture, even as Christianity spread in New Zealand. Bronwyn Elsmore has identified dozens of religious responses continuing into the twentieth century which incorporated aspects of Christian belief while holding on to the attributes of the tohunga, often under the Bibliically

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9 James Stack, Journal, 21 September 1825, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Archives, Australasia Correspondence: New Zealand (WMMS-NZ), box 524, SOAS.
10 John Whiteley, Journal, 21 March 1840, WMMS-NZ, box 525, SOAS.
11 Elsmore, Like Them That Dream, 33, 47.
12 Best, 86.
influenced title *poropiti* or “prophet.” In South Africa, too, argues Norman Etherington, “the doctrines of alien missionaries only partially satisfied African needs. They offered communion with an unseen Lord of the Universe, but not the myriad services of prophecy and healing which the old localized religions had given in abundance.” Etherington suggests that this lack within missionary Christianity was compensated for in the establishment of independent African churches in the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

Of course, missionaries did not see their reluctance to perform divination as a deficiency. They had not traveled to remote and often dangerous parts of the world in order to serve as healers and rain-makers. They had come out of a personal and cultural compulsion to spread a particular religious message. As others have pointed out, theirs was not only a religion of “the Word,” in the Christological sense, but also of “the word” in the sense of spoken and written communication, and while this would have its attractions for many who encountered mission Christianity for the first time, it also presented difficulties. Missionaries wasted little time in sharing the larger, evangelical message they brought about a God who created the universe and then returned in human form to redeem all humankind, in spite of its rebellious and sinful nature. Although they found audiences for their preaching, listening did not necessarily entail understanding, primarily because language continued to be a problem during the first decades of contact. Initial placements of missionaries were often either temporary or itinerant, and the rate of turnover meant that there was a continuing language deficiency among the mission teams. Interpreters were used as soon as they could be found, but they were necessarily imperfect media for preaching. While interpreters tended to be under-credited in missionary reports, their roles occasionally were noted. William Shaw, Methodist missionary on the eastern Cape frontier, recognized the problems of having to preach not only through an interpreter, but through a third, mediating language, in this case Dutch, with the result that “the Missionary…is sometimes tempted to infer that he may have done more harm than good!” After sev-

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14 Etherington, 89.
15 See, for example, Comaroff and Comaroff, 1, 213-214.
16 William Shaw, Journal, 4 July 1824, Wesleyville, WMMS-SA, box 300, SOAS.
eral years residence in New Zealand, John Hobbs reported that he and his Methodist colleagues could still only "hope [that] the time is approaching when we shall be able to preach in the Native tongue with fluency and accuracy."\textsuperscript{17} In the meantime, they had to make do with what they called "our broken language." His colleagues reported of a recent visit to a village near their station that "it was pleasing to witness the attention that [the Maori villagers] paid to what was said, though they told us they could not well understand the things of which we spoke, but should, by and by."\textsuperscript{18}

Problems with language aside, missionaries were met with a range of initial responses from ridicule to polite avoidance to uncommitted interest. One Methodist missionary in New Zealand was "pained" by the "levity and contempt that even the Children manifested[,] frequently interrupting Mr. Shepherd by asking impertinent questions."\textsuperscript{19} A contemporary colleague in South Africa commented that while a missionary preached to a Thembu audience, "Most were attentive and seemed interested, but some men at a distance danced, sung and threw themselves into singular attitudes."\textsuperscript{20} A fairly typical response was that the missionaries’ message was too difficult to understand for the listener. As one Xhosa man put it, "The Word is great, but it has gone in at one ear and out at the other: I do not distinctly recollect anything of what you told us. This shows how stupid us Caffres\textsuperscript{21} are!"\textsuperscript{22} Often they found ways to put off committing themselves, as when a Xhosa man told Archdeacon N. J. Merriman that "perhaps

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\textsuperscript{17} John Hobbs to Samuel Leigh, 7 April 1824, Whangaroa, WMMS-NZ, box 524, SOAS.

\textsuperscript{18} Nathaniel Turner, Journal, 26 October 1823, WMMS-NZ, box 524, SOAS; John White, journal, 30 June 1823, WMMS-NZ, box 524, SOAS.

\textsuperscript{19} William White, Journal, 19 July 1823, WMMS-NZ, box 524, SOAS.

\textsuperscript{20} J. Whitworth and William Shaw, Journal, 10 April 1825, WMMS-SA, box 301, SOAS.

\textsuperscript{21} In most contemporary documents, the term “Kaffir” (or “Caffre”) was used in reference to Xhosa and often more generally to Nguni (southern Bantu) people, and “Hottentot” was used where scholars now use “Khoi” or “Khoikhoi.” While “Kaffir” is an imprecise term in the larger context of history, the reference is usually clear in these documents and should be understood as being interchangeable with “Xhosa” unless otherwise noted. Although “Kaffir” is no longer accepted in polite or scholarly use, I have not altered the language of the original documents here.

\textsuperscript{22} Stephen Kay, Journal, 16 April 1826, quoted in Fast, 150.
[his children] might learn to be Christians, if he could not,” or when Maori responded with remarkable prescience to news of the acceptance of Christianity in Tahiti that “it would never be the case with them unless more White People would come and live amongst them.”

Maori and Xhosa audiences naturally looked for missionaries to provide proof of what they taught. This is particularly understandable if one recognizes that it was not so much faith that was required in Maori and Xhosa religious culture, but reverence, knowledge, and skill, all of which were ultimately applied toward external practice for the purpose of solving immediate problems and could therefore be evaluated as to their efficacy. Tohunga and igqira understood that they had to prove their value in order to receive the patronage they needed, and so it was natural that proof would be sought from missionaries as well. We have already seen how missionaries occasionally used healing and rainfall as opportunities to supply proof of their God’s power. It was harder to empirically support doctrines such as heaven, hell, and resurrection. John Philip wrote that when he told a Xhosa chief about the resurrection and second coming of Christ, the chief “turn[ed] suddenly round, [and] asked: ‘Where is the promise of his coming?’ He at the same time enumerated his ancestors for thirteen generations, naming each of them, and added: ‘Do we not see that since the fathers fell asleep all continued as they were?’” Philip’s account seamlessly integrates a passage from the New Testament by placing the text in the mouth of his respondent. Presumably, Philip is paraphrasing the response in a way that clearly associates the Xhosa chief with the “scoffers” who will reject the Gospel in the “last days,” as described in the Biblical passage. Aside from what this might say about Philip’s millenarian predisposition, it certainly suggests that he sensed skepticism on the part of Xhosa leaders about claims made by missionaries. Other accounts further illustrate the desire for proof. New Testament stories of miraculous healings naturally prompted responses such as that of one Maori man to James Stack: “If only one lame man

24 William White, Journal, 3 August 1823, WMMS-NZ, box 524, SOAS.
of ours was to be healed every person else would believe directly.”

It should be pointed out that missionaries were not averse to ascribing to God’s power any noteworthy positive experience, or to Satan’s influence anything negative. While this may be a simpler cosmological schema than that of the indigenous belief systems they encountered, it was ultimately less scrutable, since no missionary claimed to know the mind of God. It is not that their cosmology was wholly opposed to that of the Maori or Xhosa regarding divine or spiritual action in the world. Missionaries perceived miracles being worked around them on a regular basis, and this was because they assumed that God was active in the world. The real issue for Maori or Xhosa was whose perception of the spiritual world to trust—that of the indigenous specialist, or that of the exotic missionary. Sometimes evidence seemed to support traditional beliefs. When the ship Cossack was wrecked off the coast of New Zealand, Maori claimed that it was in consequence of one of the sailors violating tapu by climbing onto a sacred rock in the harbor in disregard of warnings from Maori on the shore. But for Maori and Xhosa, belief in the power of their own familiar spiritual agents and the belief in the power of the Christian God were not mutually exclusive. And if the power of the missionaries’ God were acknowledged, there was no assumption on the part of Maori that the results would be positive. An epidemic among Maori at Whangaroa in 1823, for example, was believed to be “in consequence of the Europeans[’] God being angry with them for having killed the People belonging to the ship Boyd.”

If Maori and Xhosa could accept that the missionaries’ God was real, it remained for them to determine what relevance this God had to their own world. There were significant conceptual obstacles complicating their ability to understanding how missionaries expected them to experience God. For example, consider the response some of William Shaw’s Xhosa audience gave to him after listening to a sermon: they agreed that “all that was said in the Sermon was true, and of great importance, but they asked ‘What can we do? We have long heard

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27 Samuel Leigh, Journal, 27 April 1823, WMMS-NZ, box 524, SOAS; Owens, 26.
28 William White, Journal, 13 July 1823, WMMS-NZ, box 524, SOAS.
with our ears, but our hearts are not changed.

The evangelical missionaries who left England and Europe for South Africa and New Zealand felt the imperative of a change of heart. Many of them had undergone emotional conversion experiences themselves, following the model of John Wesley, and going back to the Apostle Paul and the story of the conversion of 3000 at Pentecost. The first and most persistent message that missionaries preached—especially the Methodists, who were active in both New Zealand and South Africa—was that humans, though created by God, had fallen to sin and that individuals could be assured of salvation from eternal punishment for their innumerable and unbearable sins only by accepting Jesus Christ as their savior. The paradigmatic emotional experience of intense despair followed by profound relief that marked a classic conversion was the sign missionaries yearned for in their audiences. The anticipation was almost too much for John Whiteley, who had only recently arrived in New Zealand when he encountered a young Maori man who proudly spoke of having learned to read at the mission station,

"and now," said he, "there is something before me, to which others have attained, but which I cannot understand. My heart is like a book written in a foreign language. I cannot understand it."

The as-yet optimistic missionary concluded, “Surely divine light is shining into his dark heart.” It required a considerable journey, however, for Maori and Xhosa individuals to feel the weight of sin on their souls. The Augustinian notion of “original sin” and the dark view it engendered among Western Christians toward human nature and creation found no easy reception among people who saw little separation between the natural and divine realms and who saw neither as being more susceptible to good or evil impulses than the other. In evangelical Christianity misfortune arose from sin—something by which all were tainted from birth—and that could only be overcome by a personal experience of spiritual renewal. In Maori and Xhosa society, misfortune was more often seen as the result of some personal fault that could be self-corrected or of some exter-

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29 William Shaw, Journal, 23 March 1828, WMMS-SA, box 301, SOAS.
31 John Whiteley to General Secretaries, 23 June 1833, WMMS-NZ, box 524, SOAS.
nal malevolence. In the latter case, one looked to ways to protect oneself (with advice from an expert) from the various threats “out there”—whether human or spiritual—rather than looking internally for repentance and freedom from sin. The true convert, from the missionaries’ point of view, had to first be converted to an exotic way of looking at the world and at human nature in order to properly understand the soteriological problem to which Christianity was the solution. Because missionaries could not directly see the process of conversion and because Maori and Xhosa catechists, like catechists everywhere, seem to have become proficient at parroting appropriate responses to the missionaries’ examinations, doubts continued to nag about the depth of change in the hearts of many of those Maori and Xhosa who accepted Christianity early on.

One additional obstacle to conversion should not be ignored. Christian missionaries brought with them a sense of social propriety which they did not easily separate from their religious beliefs but which Maori and Xhosa audiences were usually reluctant to accept. In addition to ending war (and ritual cannibalism among Maori), the social reforms that missionaries wished to instigate included the elimination of polygamy, sodomy, pre-marital sex, and slavery. Furthermore, evangelical propriety demanded proper respect for the Sabbath and generally frowned on indigenous forms of entertainment such as dancing and gambling. Since missionaries prioritized the conversion of the leadership in the communities they visited, polygamy and slavery were particularly problematic issues, since these practices helped mark the prestige of leaders. Shaw recorded a discussion about polygamy between “an old counsellor” and one of his African catechists. When the old man heard that a Christian could not have more than one wife, he replied, “Ah then, the door is shut.” Maori chiefs were similarly reluctant to give up their “excess” wives.

It is clear, then, that any trend toward conversion would be dependent on motivations that did not prevail during the initial years of contact. In New Zealand, missionaries were disappointed in the level

32 For a similar, more elaborate discussion of the issues touched upon in this paragraph, with respect to Xhosaland, see Fast, “In at One Ear and Out at the Other.”

33 Shaw, Journal, 28 February 1828, WMMS-SA, box 301, SOAS.

34 See, for example, T. S. Grace, A Pioneer Missionary Among the Maoris (Palmerston North, N.Z.: Bennett, n.d.). 109; Elsmore, Like Them That Dream, 34, 87.
of interest they received from Maori until the mid-1830s. In South Africa, this period extended through the first half of the nineteenth century. And yet missionaries did find evidence of interest and even a few converts early on and so had some reason for hope. What attractions did mission Christianity have that could entice Maori or Xhosa listeners into taking the dramatic step of converting from one social, ethical, and religious order to another? The cynical approach assumes that the hope of social and/or economic advancement always motivated conversion, and this will be considered, but it is also worth mentioning what Christianity offered conceptually to the religious life of Xhosa and Maori communities.

One such message was that, at a future date, the dead would be resurrected. Maori, to a degree, and Xhosa, even more, believed that deceased ancestors, particularly recent or prominent ones, continued to be present in some sense and could influence the living, but the notion of a physical resurrection appears to have been unfamiliar to them. When James Read told the Xhosa that “all mankind would rise again from the dead, it caused uncommon joy…. They said they should like to see their grandfathers, and others whom they mentioned. Congo inquired when it would happen, and if it would be soon….”35 J. B. Peires has speculated that the reason that Xhosa audiences were so captivated by the message of resurrection is that it was a new concept to them and one which “filled a gap in Xhosa belief.” At the same time, Janet Hodgson adds that the concept of resurrection resonated with “ancient cosmological thought-patterns” of the Xhosa “and therefore acquired plausibility.”36 Both of these explanations are supported by Xhosa reactions, which indicate that the concept of resurrection was simultaneously novel and comprehensible. The idea that death was not final also seemed to strike a chord in New Zealand, especially following the death of the chief Te Ara, mentioned above. Five months later, James Stack reported that his listeners were “much surprized at what

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we said respecting the Ressurrection [sic]” and “wished to know if men would return to life and assume their former state of existence.” Stack responded by telling them “of the final separation of the wicked from the good which they did not appear to like very well.” Stack followed a great deal of speculation about the return of Te Ara and others from the spirit world. In both South Africa and New Zealand, the promise of resurrection would figure prominently in the prophetic movements that adapted Christianity to indigenous conditions during the early period of missionary presence (see below).

A related response to Christian teachings that was common among Maori and Xhosa was millenarian expectation. The missionaries themselves felt a degree of anticipation for the end of the world as they knew it and the establishment of a new world that would justify all they believed and valued. This anticipation was frequently heightened in their Maori and African followers. Janet Hodgson contends that the “typical response of the African to Christianity is to appropriate the apocalyptic expectation.” She cites J. S. Mbiti in arguing that the concept of a future dimension to history was alien to African thought until it was introduced by missionaries. Hodgson adopts Mbiti’s conclusion that “in Church life this discovery [of a ‘future history’] seems to create a strong expectation of the millennium.” One may hesitate at these generalizations, but in southern Africa, missionary Christianity does seem to have influenced existing practices of divination to become something more like Biblical eschatology.

Incidents in New Zealand demonstrate that the concept of the Millennium could have a strong effect on Maori as well. As early as 1831, it was fairly common for Maori to conclude from missionary messages that Christ would be returning in the very near future. In 1846, James Stack was “preaching a course of sermons on the second coming of our Lord, which had such an effect upon his imaginative hearers that they felt persuaded that the Judgement Day was very near.” In the excitement, Stack became convinced that he had received

37 James Stack, Journal, 25 September 1825, WMMS-NZ, box 524, SOAS.
38 Stack, Journal, 1 October 1825, and 4 December 1825, WMMS-NZ, box 524, SOAS; Owens, 75–76.
40 Some examples include Nxele, Ntsikana, and the Cattle-Killing Movement, mentioned below.
a direct revelation that he was a prophet sent “to proclaim that ‘The Lord is at hand’ and much more.” When Stack was removed from his position, his Maori congregation was left to make sense of what had happened, with the result that claims of revelation and the power of “speaking in tongues” continued. In this case, Stack’s enthusiasm and the positive response from his Maori congregation seem to have been mutually reinforcing.

Indigenous people quickly discovered, then, that there were compelling messages in the teachings brought by missionaries. At the same time, most did not feel at first that their own traditions were invalidated by these new ideas, in spite of what missionaries told them. Consequently, as Anglican missionary Thomas Grace put it, they “embraced Christianity, but without giving up their idolatry.”

Even those he had selected as native teachers to help him with the religious and secular education of Maori at Lake Taupo were “much more frightened of being bewitched and destroyed by some Native god than they [were] alarmed at the terrors of the holy law of God.”

In fact, even behaviors that could have been interpreted as Christian piety may have been motivated by traditional religious sensibilities. When Maori memorized prayers and passages from the Bible, they likely related them to *karakia*, the ritual incantations of their indigenous religious tradition. Grace noted that when there was the threat of war, Maori at Taupo would attend services three times daily for two or three weeks straight. Christian Maori may have tended toward hyper-orthodoxy as a result of a legalism inherited from the traditional concept of *tapu*.

Indigenous and Christian beliefs and practices can be accepted and used simultaneously and yet remain discrete—what we might call parallelism—or they can be integrated in a syncretic belief system. Both options were evident in New Zealand and the eastern Cape frontier in the range of intermediate stances between rejection of missionary Christianity and conformity to behavior expected by missionaries. Bronwyn Elsmore has done impressive work in identifying both the influence of Judeo-Christian traditions on non-Christian religious responses and the variety of these responses among Maori during the first century.

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42 Elsmore, *Mana From Heaven*, 86–89.
43 Grace, 54.
44 Grace, 27, 29.
45 Elsmore, *Mana From Heaven*, 45.
after the arrival of missionaries in New Zealand. In the eastern Cape region, attention tends to focus on two early, rival Xhosa prophets: Nxele, who prophesied the resurrection of dead Xhosa warriors and preached of a God for Africans who opposed the missionaries’ God; and Ntsikana, whose propensity for prophecy was apparently tamed under the tutelage of Joseph Williams, and who eventually led his followers to John Brownlee’s mission station, though not before his own death. In New Zealand, a series of prophetic resistance movements influenced by Christianity reached a climax in the Pai Marire religion of Te Ua Haumene and the more militant movement of Te Kooti, both in the 1860s. In South Africa, the tradition can be traced with faint connections from Nxele and Ntsikana through Mlanjeni, who inspired the frontier war of 1850, to Nongqawuse and Mhlakaza, whose prophecies of national cleansing and resurrection led to the disastrous Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-57. While these movements were often forms of resistance against the presence and influence of missionaries and of Europeans more generally, it is possible to detect the imprint of Christian teachings on them, mixed with indigenous beliefs and leadership.

It remains, then, to address the possibility of complete acceptance of Christianity by indigenous converts. While missionary accounts may well have been influenced by their own need for validation of their work, there is no reason to doubt that there were instances of genuine

46 Like Them That Dream is directed more at the first of these issues while Mana From Heaven addresses the latter.
conversion following the model expected by evangelicals. Missionaries—and especially the evangelicals among them—had faith in the converting power of preaching, based in part on their knowledge of revivals that had swept through parts of Britain and North America during the preceding century. Surely, the history of these revivals provided a frame of reference for William Woon, for example, who commented in his journal that while preaching one Sunday he,

> found a young man weeping under the word. At the close of the service I asked him why he wept? He said that my instruction made him weep. Another came and said that he had repented of his sins, turned to God, and was desirous to be baptized, as he should not like to die with a hingoa maori—i.e. New Zealand name.49

As the tide of interest in Christianity among Maori waxed in the later 1830s, preaching was more likely to have this effect, though it would be unwise to assume that this was ever the norm. One could rightly be skeptical about the depth of such conversions, especially considering the numbers of converts claimed by the 1840s. A simple tally of converts claimed by the various active denominations, juxtaposed with an estimate of the Maori population in 1840, leads James Belich to reflect, “Saving 103,700 souls out of much fewer than 70,000 was miraculous indeed.”50

Accounts left by missionaries, however, suggest that sincere converts were known. Conversion stories can be rather formulaic and are often short on the kind of biographical context that would be helpful to us in understanding this phenomenon. There is strong evidence, however, that social position was a significant factor in conversion. Mission communities attracted second-class citizens and social outcasts because these people were seeking an opportunity to build a new identity and to join a society in which they could participate and have influence. In other words, mission Christianity provided the potential for social mobility. At the same time, however, converting to Christianity was a personal commitment that threatened to sever all old familial and social ties.51 Mission stations, then, not only attracted, but also cre-

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50 Belich, 217-218.
ated marginalized people. Because there was much to lose for most members of indigenous societies in the early stages of mission contact, the first converts were few and sometimes far between. Those who had the least to lose—and probably the most to gain—by joining a new religious community made the greatest commitment, and were willing to profess a dramatic change in loyalties. These people often included women, servants, slaves, war captives, refugees, the dying, and the physically disabled or deformed.

For some Maori and Xhosa individuals—a small number, at first—Christianity or at least association with missionaries would resolve some kind of deep personal crisis in a way that brought the emotional relief and subsequent religious commitment that those involved could more confidently identify as conversion. In Xhosaland, the cultural resistance to Christianity persisted through the 1850s, and conversions were fewer and more individualized, but perhaps more profound. One illustrative case is that of a Xhosa man called “Hobo,” whose “happy death” Shaw reported in 1825. Having determined to seek treatment at the mission station for an illness, Hobo was climbing a hill when his condition forced him to stop, and he began to cough up blood. Abandoned by Xhosa witnesses, he was taken in and treated by missionaries. Between this episode and his death—a period of two years at most—Hobo became “a very constant attendant on the means of grace, never being absent but when his frequently severe afflictions prevented his attendance.” Shaw was convinced of the sincerity of Hobo’s conversion and commented that “he was always praying…[and] would not allow the Natives who visited him to speak about worldly affairs.” Approaching death is a marginalizing experience in any context, but the tendency of the Xhosa to abandon the apparently dying was frequently noted in the early years of the nineteenth century. While this fear of illness may have been a temporary response to recent bouts with epidemic disease, it created a new group of marginalized individuals at the same time that Christianity was being introduced.

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53 See, for example, Vanderkemp to “Fathers and Brethren,” 1 February 1801, Caffiraria, CWM-SA, 1/4/A, SOAS; and Stephen Kay, Journal, 12 December 1825, WMMS-SA, box 301, SOAS. Fast points out that the flight of Xhosa from those appearing to be dying was an attempt to avoid being polluted by proximity to death.
The missionaries, then, had not only given Hobo medical attention which may have extended his life but they also welcomed him into a new community in spite of his “dangerous” state. In fact, missionaries paid special attention to dying persons, because the imminence of death made conversion seem all the more urgent to them. As a consequence, deathbed conversions and baptisms, like that of Maori chief Moetara, were always noted with satisfaction.\(^{54}\) Harrison Wright has noted that many of the early Maori converts to Christianity had undergone periods of severe sickness just prior to their conversion.\(^{55}\)

While it may be difficult to prove that women as a group were especially susceptible to conversion, there were certainly instances of marginalized women who became converts. Stephen Kay, for example, was delighted to see the influence of his sermon on an “aged and nearly destitute” Xhosa widow. To his ironic, evangelical joy, Kay believed that his words had “cut her heart; and filled her with grief,” leaving him to exclaim, “what a mercy, that infinite Love stoops to such objects.”\(^{56}\) William Shrewsbury mentions receiving increased attention from people who had no surviving descendants. If age and poverty could marginalize, childlessness not only aggravated these conditions but—in a society in which the deceased were venerated by their survivors—raised additional concerns about one’s status after death.\(^{57}\)

Vanderkemp’s first convert in the Eastern Cape was a Khoi woman named Sarah. The Khoi, or Khoikhoi, were Africans indigenous to the Cape Colony and its eastern frontier, distinguishable from Xhosa and other Bantu-speaking Africans primarily by their language. By 1800, Khoi society independent of the colony and its settlers had largely ceased to exist. Like Sarah, most of the Khoi residents of the eastern Cape, prior to 1828, had status somewhere between contractual servant and serf. Sarah seems to have been attracted by Vanderkemp’s preaching, though there were certainly underlying factors that made her particularly receptive to his exhortations. She was

\(^{54}\) John Hobbs, Journal, 25 November 1839, WMMS-NZ, box 525, SOAS.


\(^{56}\) Stephen Kay, Journal, 18 December 1825, WMMS-SA, box 301, SOAS, emphasis in original.

\(^{57}\) Fast, 166-167.
apparently familiar with his message by the time she came to him and “complained, that she was in great anxiety, from the fear, that such a sinner as she found herself, could not be saved.” According to the evangelical model, this was the crucial first step toward conversion, and Vanderkemp was eager to see the process through. Unfortunately, there was little independence for Khoi servant women on the Cape frontier. Sarah confessed that she was afraid to speak to her husband about Christianity, and the drought that would make Vanderkemp valuable to Ngqika as a rainmaker was also driving the settlers—with whom he had been staying and among whose servants he had been evangelizing—to find greener pastures, taking their Khoi servants with them. Ngqika, perhaps hoping to encourage Vanderkemp to remain, “ordered the family of Sarah to continue” at his kraal, but to no avail. The fact that Vanderkemp’s first converts were not at liberty to remain with the missionary is an indication of their marginal status. At the same time, the fact that they wished to remain with Vanderkemp—in spite of the dire conditions that would be faced and the familial ties that would be severed—indicates the depth of their attachment to the missionary and his message.58

After his abortive attempt to settle among the Ngqika Xhosa, Vanderkemp and successive LMS missionaries focused their attention on the economically important but legally marginal Khoi laborers, in part because they were more receptive toward Christianity than Xhosa were. Aside from his experiences with servants like Sarah, Vanderkemp also encountered Khoi “evangelists” like Cupido. Cupido led nightly religious meetings with other Khoi servants, against the wishes of their masters, and he told the missionary that “he could find no rest but in and with Christ.” Vanderkemp considered him to be a “zealous Missionary,” though he had “enjoyed very little instruction except from the immediate teaching of the holy Ghost.”59 Since Cupido was as

yet unaffiliated with any mission station, his activities seem to have brought him little benefit beyond the intangible rewards that clearly animated him in Vanderkemp’s accounts. He illustrates the attractions that Christianity held for these marginalized people.

Another group that brought encouragement to missionaries on the eastern Cape frontier was the Mfengu. Mfengu were essentially refugees from the mfecane—the dispersion of dislocated remnants of Nguni communities in the wake of a complex of social, political, and environmental changes in Natal in the early nineteenth century. Like most Khoi residents of the eastern Cape, Mfengu were landless, and therefore had lost the essential feature around which social and political organization had historically been built. While Khoi had found service primarily among white settlers, Mfengu settled among Xhosa as “clients” until they found occasion to ally themselves with the Colony against the Xhosa. They were rewarded with land that had been taken from the Xhosa and were more willing than Xhosa to adopt European customs and practices, including Christianity. Mfengu associated themselves with the Wesleyans in particular, and this may, in fact, have hindered the work of the Wesleyan missionaries among Xhosa.

In New Zealand, dislocated Maori also proved to be a receptive audience for Christianity. In the early nineteenth century, northern Maori took many war captives from communities in the southern part of the North Island. Many of these slaves were trained by missionaries, who advocated for their emancipation. Freed slaves were not necessarily welcomed back to their home communities. Of the many slaves who were allowed by their captors to return to their southern homelands during the 1830s and 1840s, however, those who had been instructed by missionaries found themselves to have been redeemed as much socially as they presumably were spiritually. Because the southern

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60 T. R. H. Davenport provides a corrective to any of the more simplified interpretations of the causes of the mfecane, such as placing the blame entirely on Zulu or Ndebele expansion, in his *South Africa: A Modern History* (4th edition, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 12-18.


regions were the last to receive missionaries, at a time when interest in mission education was high, instructed Maori—many of them former slaves—were valued regardless of their status.63

Slavery was not practiced in Xhosa communities, nor were individuals sold outside the community to be slaves.64 Khoi and Mfengu residents of the eastern Cape seem to have not been able to overcome their diminished status as landless outsiders, from the Xhosa point of view, and so while they received Christianity fairly readily, this did not contribute to the evangelization of Xhosa in the same way that emancipated slaves brought Christianity southward to more remote Maori communities in the North Island. A rare comparable example from South Africa, however, is the Xhosa woman Wilhelmina, who sought refuge at a mission station in western Cape Colony after her people were dispossessed of their lands in the frontier war of 1811–1812. After indicating her “burning desire for the expansion of the Kingdom of God among her people,” she was allowed to return to the eastern frontier to establish a Xhosa mission in 1817, at about the time that LMS missionaries were reestablishing their presence among the western Xhosa.65 While the Christianized Khoi and Mfengu did not directly affect the larger Xhosa communities of the Eastern Cape and Transkei, it is worth noting that the two Xhosa chiefs who converted to Christianity early on were Kama and Dyani Tshatshu (Jan Tsatsu). Their chiefdoms, Gqunukhwebe and Ntinde, respectively, were at the western limits of Xhosaland and were most influenced by contact with and incorporation of the unattached Khoi people of the eastern frontier.66 Tshatshu had studied with Vanderkemp at Bethelsdorp and accompanied Joseph Williams to help establish the Kat River mission in 1816.67

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64 Monica Wilson, “The Nguni People,” in *Oxford History of South Africa*, vol. 1, 121


While initial responses to Christianity among Xhosa and among Maori were similar, by 1840 missionaries seemed to have achieved much broader influence in New Zealand than in Xhosaland. Many explanations have been offered for the dramatic rise in Maori interest in Christianity during the 1830s. Some of the factors that have been suggested as having affected this change include the disruptive effects of disease and Maori warfare, the increasing political and economic influence of the missionaries since the first decade of their residence in New Zealand, and the attainment of improved cultural understanding between Maori and missionaries combined with a concomitant altering of expectations. What is beyond dispute is that the desire for literacy was a major factor in drawing Maori interest in the first decades of mission work. Of course, the missionaries’ motivation for teaching literacy was to further the evangelization process, and the only literature which they provided was designed to instill Christian faith and virtue. Mission schools, whether conducted by missionaries at the mission stations or by “native teachers” at outstations, provided the best chance of facilitating that dual conversion to an evangelical worldview and a Christian faith that missionaries were working towards. But the demand for training and books far outstripped the missionaries’ ability to provide them before 1850. Missionary journeys into remote regions often elicited astonished reports of the demand for books and accounts of Maori who had memorized lengthy scriptural and liturgical passages to compensate for the lack of printed material. Literate Maori were apparently delighted to find that many Europeans were unable to read, and they were not above teasing their illiterate white neighbors.

On the eastern Cape frontier, there was an appreciation for education, but it did not match the intensity experienced in New Zealand. The establishment of mission schools seems to have fit into the sense of competition between Xhosa chiefs. The Rharhabe Xhosa chief


Ndlambe indicated as much when he acknowledged “with joy glit-
tening in his eyes” that “Gaika [Ngqika] has a School Enno [Nqeno] 
has a School Pato has a School and now Hlambi [Ndlambe] and 
Dooshani [Mdushane] will have a School. This is very great!”71 One 
of the best-known educational institutions in southern Africa was 
founded on the eastern Cape frontier by Methodists, at Lovedale. 
From 1841, Lovedale offered a seminary, which promoted not only 
African Christian leadership but also the growth of a Xhosa intel-
ligentsia. Early mission schools on the frontier attracted more Khoi 
and Mfengu students than Xhosa, however, and among traditional 
Xhosa, mission schools were seen as a cultural threat.72 Where mission 
education was accepted among the Xhosa, it was not valued enough 
to overcome the complications of a dispersed population and a dif-
fERENCE in work ethic, both of which hindered regular attendance, to 
the frustration of missionaries. Again, however, while the breadth of 
interest among Xhosa may not have been as great as among Maori, 
there were outstanding examples that fostered missionary hopes for 
greater success. They included William Kobe Ntsikana, John Knox 
Bokwe, and, of course, Tiyo Soga, who took advanced training in 
Scotland and became the first ordained Xhosa minister. The result, 
however, was a lasting rift in Xhosa society as Soga and other “school” 
Xhosa were alienated from the more traditional “red” Xhosa who 
were increasingly hostile to Christianity.73

A study of indigenous responses to missionary Christianity in the 
early nineteenth century, then, suggests that a full range of options 
existed at any given point, though which option prevailed varied 
over time. It was never simply a matter of rejection or conversion for 
Maori and Xhosa listeners. It was one issue to accept the missionaries 
themselves as being useful in some way—whether material, politi-
cal, or spiritual—and another to accept the teachings they brought. 
With regard to the latter, it was possible to accept isolated teachings 
and beliefs, such as the idea of an approachable supreme deity or of

71 William Shaw and J. Whitworth, Journal, 3–4 April 1825, WMMS-SA, box 
301, SOAS. For the sake of clarification, I have added current standard spellings of 
names, in square brackets.

72 Ashley, 37-38; Janet Hodgson, “A Battle For Sacred Power: Christian Begin-
nings Among the Xhosa,” Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural His-
tory ed. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (Berkeley: University of California 

73 Wilson, “Co-operation and Conflict: The Eastern Cape Frontier,” 265.
corporeal resurrection, or to go further and accept core doctrines of evangelical Christianity, such as the salvational importance of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the primary authority residing in the Bible. It was not uncommon for Maori and Xhosa to accept the Bible as truth but reject missionary interpretations of it. For those who accepted missionary teachings, perhaps the final stage of assimilation was identification with the traditions of a particular Christian denomination, such as Methodism, Anglicanism, or Catholicism.

If one examines indigenous responses over time, the range of options outlined above remains fairly constant, while the prevailing option or options will vary according to factors such as influence from the traditional political and social leadership, the size and status of the convert population, the degree of direct or indirect access to missionary teachings, and the material and social benefits of association with missionaries and their message. In the early stages of mission contact in both South Africa and New Zealand, these factors ensured that the prevailing option was rejection of Christianity, with allowances for conversion on the part of a few marginalized individuals and for the attempted incorporation of missionaries into existing belief systems as exotic but potentially useful spiritual experts. In time, the selective adoption of Christian messages, beliefs, and behaviors became prominent options in both New Zealand and Xhosalnd, though this adoption did not entail an acceptance of missionary Christianity as a system, which was often still rejected. During the 1830s, the prevailing option in much of New Zealand seems to have been acceptance of Christianity, or at least intentional association with Christianity and missionaries. This was not the case for the Xhosa at any time during the first half of the nineteenth century, or indeed for the remainder of the century. Monica Wilson has attributed the relative reluctance of Xhosa to accept Christianity to the experience of the many frontier wars.74 Maori had their military conflicts with colonizers, too, but these primarily occurred in the mid-1840s and 1860s, after the initial wave of interest in Christianity. Missionaries would eventually be tainted by perceived association with colonial expansion in New Zealand, as they were in southern Africa, but not before they had made an initial impression. In fact, prior to 1840, missionaries were

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more likely to have been associated with the end of Maori warfare than with colonial expansion, and in some areas this perception may have held until 1860. The longer and more substantial history of contact with colonizers in the Eastern Cape prior to the arrival of missionaries, as compared to New Zealand, may have made Xhosa more wary from the beginning.

One might compare the interest generated by Ntsikana and Nxele in the mid-1810s—prior to the frontier war of 1818-1819 and prior to a sustained missionary presence in Xhosaland—to that created by missionaries in New Zealand in the 1830s. Missionary societies in the eastern Cape in the 1810s did not have the resources to respond to Xhosa interest in Christianity. Consequently, this interest was channeled into the movements surrounding the two leading religious figures of the period—Ntsikana and Nxele—who were shaped by their own limited experiences with Christianity. Nxele and his large following turned against the colony and mission Christianity promoting the hostilities of 1818. A parallel response can be identified in the 1860s in New Zealand after conflict over land had turned many Maori against settlers and missionaries alike. Though military resistance was soon seen as futile in both contexts, religious resistance continued. Just as South Africa has seen the rise of numerous independent African churches since the 1870s, independent Maori churches have also developed, the most persistent of which have been Ringatu and Ratana.

It is apparent, then, that the options for indigenous audiences were never limited to simple acceptance or rejection of Christianity. Other responses have always been in evidence, which, to paraphrase one historian, might be understood as the “Maori [and Xhosa] conversion of Christianity.” The spectrum of early responses has been preserved in the more routinized, though far from fixed, range of attitudes toward Christianity today—a cultural record of the more dramatic period of religious encounter and change in the nineteenth century. Though missionaries preached in broken tongues of penitent hearts that seemed foreign to Maori and Xhosa listeners, it is clear that missionary Christianity left its mark on indigenous people, both individually and collectively, though not always in ways that missionaries would have chosen.

75 Elsmore, Like Them That Dream, 139-145, 167-171; Elsmore, Mana From Heaven, 226-237; 377-387; Mol, 31-35.
76 Belich, 219.
Early in the memoirs from which I have taken the title for this chapter, the Reverend Arthur Kent Chignell describes his ecstatic reaction to his first sighting of Uiaku village in 1907, “for the first time in New Guinea I saw what I had hoped and expected to see—large villages and crowds of natives, dressed beautifully in native fashion, and with nothing of the semi-civilised shabbiness that had offended me in Samarai.”

Seventy-five years later, approaching Uiaku from the ocean, I was also captivated by the simple thatched houses lining the beach, shaded by palms and surrounded by flowering bushes and crotons and, in the background, the rain forest sweeping up to the mountain wall of the Owen Stanley Range about 20 kilometers inland.

Like Chignell, however, I made my first landing not in the village proper but at the “mission station,” which would be my home for the next two years. Although he mentions the station only in passing,

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1 The archival research on which this chapter is largely based was carried out in the Michael Somare Library of the University of Papua New Guinea, Newton Theological College in Popondetta and the National Archives of Papua New Guinea in 1981-83. I thank the friendly and knowledgeable staffs of these institutions for their immense help and acknowledge with gratitude the permission I received from the Anglican Church of Papua New Guinea to consult its rich archives. My historical and ethnographic work with the Maisin has been supported over the years by several agencies, in particular the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. I am grateful to Anna-Karina Hermkens, who is currently conducting research in the eastern Maisin villages, for information on the local descendents of the Melanesian teachers. My thanks to Peggy Brock for involving me in her stimulating and important investigation of indigenous Christianity and for her helpful suggestions for this chapter. I am especially mindful of my debt and responsibility to the Maisin people, whose fascinating story has long engaged me. I dedicate this essay to the memory of my late Maisin “father” and “mother”—both pillars of the Uiaku church—Frank Davis Dodi and Rhoda Binami.

2 A. K. Chignell, *An Outpost in Papua* (London: Murray, 1911), 16. Samarai, off the eastern extremity of New Guinea, was then the second largest European settlement in Papua.
Chignell could not have missed the striking contrast it presented to the village with its large open field, barn-like church and classroom, staff residences and perimeter fence, a contrast that remains to this day.

After a short rest, Chignell traveled a further ten kilometers along the coast to the district mission station of Wanigela, the “outpost” of his book. The Uiaku station was an outpost of Wanigela, the first of a dozen or so smaller “out-stations” located in villages scattered across the large mission district of Collingwood Bay. This chapter concerns the early years of the Uiaku station, from the building of the station to the point at which the majority of the local population had accepted baptism. My aim is not to analyze Anglican motivations or practices, although these in their local guise form a key part of my narrative. My chief interest is in exploring the station as a space within which native people encountered, resisted, submitted to and appropriated the institutional, practical and ideological forms of mission Christianity that were presented to them. This chapter forms part of a long-term investigation into the evolution of a form of “vernacular Christianity” amongst the Maisin people of southern Collingwood Bay from the earliest encounters with Europeans in 1890 to the present. A close look at the workings of the early station reveals a great deal about the nature of Christianity presented to the Maisin and their response to it. But the Maisin are not the only or even main indigenous group I am concerned with here. My main focus is on the Melanesian and to a lesser extent Papuan converts who resided and worked on the Uiaku station: the non-Maisin natives who served as school teachers, preachers and exemplars of the new Christian way of life to the local population.

European observers and participants alike have long acknowledged the key role played by indigenous missionaries in the expansion of Christianity across the Pacific islands and, indeed, in most mission fields. Islanders from Polynesia and eastern Melanesia were the very first missionaries to live permanently amongst Papua New Guineans, beginning along the south coast in 1871. With the partial exception of some Roman Catholic orders, they made up the largest part of the

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staffs of the missions working in the area before and during the colonial period. Their commitment was at considerable personal cost through loss of life to malaria and other diseases, attacks by local peoples and sheer loneliness. Indigenous missionaries, mostly working in or close to local villages, undertook the bulk of the routine work of teaching and preaching. Most Papua New Guineans first heard the stories of the Bible in or near their own villages, sitting at the feet of missionaries who looked very much like themselves.

Almost everything we know about indigenous missionaries, including the crucial matter of their understanding of Christian doctrine, comes from the writings of the outsider missionaries who supervised their work. Unfortunately for the historian, these missionaries made only periodic visits to out-stations like Uiaku and, when they mentioned the local staff at all, it was usually to praise or criticize the diligence with which they were carrying out mission policy. The gulf between the clergy and indigenous staffs was made even greater by barriers of language and culture and compounded further by European assumptions of racial superiority. Given the paucity of evidence, historical accounts of indigenous missionaries in Papua New Guinea have tended to take two forms: broad surveys piecing together a general picture of the position and impact of native missionaries; and narratives of the experience of individuals who, either because they themselves wrote an autobiographical account, or were celebrated by mission propagandists, stand out in the record. These accounts are invaluable, but taken on their own they tend to create two opposed and somewhat exaggerated views of indigenous activities. The surveys tend to overemphasize the independence of islander evangelists in reinterpreting Christianity in terms of their own cultural backgrounds, and their effectiveness as agents of change because of their intimate association with local peoples. The biographical accounts, on the other hand, tend to present islander agents as pious models of Christianity, whose “simple” faith in the Gospels (and by extension in the authority of the mission) allows them to face the most severe threats and opposition from locals.

The evidence from Uiaku, while scant in some regards, is sufficient to attempt a different sort of analysis by viewing indigenous missionaries

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4 For examples of both types of analysis, see the contributions to Munro and Thornley, *Covenant Makers* as well as R. Crocombe and M. Crocombe, *Polynesian Missions in Melanesia* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1982).
in the context of their place of work. The Melanesians and Papuans who staffed the Uiaku station were neither free agents disseminating their own version of Christianity nor devoted servants slavishly replicating the basic routines and teachings of their missionary masters. They were middlemen whose survival depended equally upon satisfying the demands of the missionaries who paid their salaries and the local peoples who possessed the power to make their lives intolerable. Or, to put this another way, they formed one point of a triangular arrangement with clergy and local villagers within which was generated the localized expression of the Christian religion.

This chapter, then, explores the mission station at Uiaku as a space within which outsider missionaries, indigenous “teachers”\(^5\) and Maisin villagers met and negotiated a relationship which in time allowed the Maisin to accept the presence of the mission and to absorb its teachings and practices within the larger community. I proceed by examining the roles played on the station by each set of actors in turn. In this reconstruction I must depend most heavily upon the inadequate records left by only one set of the participants. Although we will never know the words of the sermons taught by the teachers or what went through a congregant’s mind as she first heard stories about the Christian god, the working assumption that teachers and Maisin were active participants along with the missionaries in the crucible of the mission station enables one to read between the lines of the records to detect the active presence of local Christians teaching the Word and the Maisin first hearing and responding to it.\(^6\) It has been possible to supplement the archival evidence with recollections by elderly Maisin I recorded in the early 1980s and, as importantly, my anthropological study of contemporary Maisin religion. In 1907, the station Chignell saw at Uiaku was a colonial intrusion into an indigenous society. Seventy-five years later, the station formed a central part of Maisin society, distinct from the hamlets that surrounded it but far from foreign or intrusive. It was the most visible manifestation of a localized Christianity which had appropriated introduced forms

\(^5\) For the sake of economy, from this point on I follow the old convention of referring to the European staff as “missionaries” and the non-Europeans as “teachers.” The “teachers” were, of course, themselves missionaries in the truest sense of being evangelists—indeed, more so than many Europeans.

like the church and school and invested them with local meaning. In the concluding section of my essay, I turn to the question of how the Maisin refashioned a colonial mission station into an expression of indigenous Christian identity.

*The Missionaries*°

Imagine what it must be for perhaps one white man with one or two (at the most) South Sea Islanders as his only companions and helpers, in a district containing 1,500 wild and untaught Papuans, and cut off by 70 miles of ocean (and a far longer savage coastline) from his nearest neighbours at the next Mission “station”°°

Almost seventeen years before Chignell’s arrival, the Reverend Albert Maclaren also felt an enormous thrill upon landing at Uiaku. Maclaren had come to Papua in June 1890 at the invitation of the Administrator of the new colony, William MacGregor, along with George Brown, the Secretary of the Australian Wesleyan Missionary Society. °° Since 1871, the London Missionary Society had been planting stations along the south coast of the Territory. More recently, Roman Catholic missionaries had begun to work inland from a base at Yule Islands on the central coast. Brown agreed to commence a mission in the Papuan islands at the eastern end of New Guinea; Maclaren committed the Anglicans to the long and still only partially explored northern coastline, up to the German border. Following their satisfactory meeting at Port Moresby, MacGregor took Brown and Maclaren on a tour of their new possessions. At the end of July, the *Merrie England* cruised past the tip of Cape Vogel into Collingwood Bay, the southern end of which had never been visited by Europeans.°°° Villagers on the

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°° *Missionary Notes* 80 (Sydney: Church of England, Australian Board of Missions, 1901), 80.

°° In 1884, Germany and Britain divided the eastern half of the island of New Guinea and surrounding islands into two protectorates. Four years later British New Guinea was formally annexed as a colony and MacGregor brought from Fiji to serve as the first Administrator. In 1906 Australia assumed control over the Territory which was then renamed Papua.

°°° The Bay itself was named and mapped from the north in 1874. J. Moresby, *Discoveries and Surveys in New Guinea and the D’entrecasteaux Islands* (London: Murray, 1876).
Cape warned them about the fierce “Maisina” warriors who had long terrorized the area. The initial meetings, however, were friendly if cautious. Maclaren wrote breathlessly in his journal of how, “All along I tried to explain, by putting head to head, and sitting down and pointing out to sea, that I was coming to live with them, and they all seemed pleased. In one village they kissed my hand, and at another I had my nose pulled twenty times.”

He was determined to establish a missionary presence, lured as much by the fierce reputation of the people as by the large population.

Unfortunately for Maclaren, the Australian church regarded the new enterprise with indifference, making it enormously difficult to raise funds or secure volunteers. The handful of missionaries who arrived to build the first station at Dogura, 120 kilometers east of the Maisin, lived in primitive conditions, their energy sapped by malnutrition and fever. Maclaren died within the first four months. In 1897, in response to MacGregor’s impatient threat to turn the coast over to another mission, the Australian bishops made New Guinea a diocese within the Province of Queensland and elected Montague John Stone-Wigg as its first bishop. Also suffering from poor health, Stone-Wigg proved a far more able fund-raiser, recruiter and organizer than the otherworldly Maclaren. His top priority was to cement the Anglican claim to the northern coast by placing stations in Collingwood Bay and on the Mambare River, near the German border, and then gradually filling the area between.

The Collingwood Bay mission was poorly planned. MacGregor had recommended the Maisin village of Sinapa as a base because of its good anchorage; but the area purchased for the station turned out to be a swamp. Stone-Wigg declared the site unsuitable and


12 Uiaku then as now was made up of two neighboring settlements straddling the Uiaku River, Uiaku proper and Ganjiga. The first reliable census, conducted in 1915, put the population at 595, easily the highest on the coast, yet lower than it would have been prior to 1890 when introduced diseases ravaged the population. See J. Barker, “Western Medicine and the Continuity of Belief: The Maisin of Collingwood Bay, Oro Province,” in A Continuing Trial of Treatment: Medical Pluralism in Papua New Guinea, eds Stephen Frankel and Gilbert Lewis (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), 69-93.

relocated the mission district headquarters to Wanigela, just north of the Maisin’s territory. Its first resident priest, Wilfred Abbot, had a short but dramatic tenure at Wanigela where he and an able New Hebridean teacher bullied the population into submission.\textsuperscript{14} He was dismissed late in 1900 after striking a teacher and running up a large bill for “medicinal” liquor. The Maisin became increasingly belligerent towards outsiders around this time, attacking some traders and threatening a prospecting party. Six months after setting up a government station at Tufi on the northern tip of the Bay, the Resident Magistrate let loose his police on Uiaku and Sinapa, destroying canoes, killing three men and wounding an unknown number of others. The Maisin leaders traveled to Tufi to make peace and agreed to the appointment of village constables and the end of raiding.\textsuperscript{15} Six months later, they agreed to allow the missionaries to settle at Uiaku.

The work of building a mission presence in Uiaku fell to Abbot’s replacement. Prior to his arrival in Papua from Australia in 1900, Percy John Money had trained as a draftsman and excelled as an athlete. A layman, he was sent to Wanigela to serve in a temporary capacity until a priest could be found. The district was enormous, encompassing seven language groups scattered in villages along more than 100 kilometers of coastline. Stone-Wigg instructed Money to concentrate on Wanigela and Uiaku. He was to construct new buildings, supervise the teachers, provide instruction for baptismal candidates and begin the work of translating church liturgies, prayers and hymns into the two languages. He was provided with few resources to accomplish these tasks and very little by way of instruction. Battling loneliness and recurrent bouts of malaria and dengue fever, which at times left him near blind, Money’s accomplishments over the next six years were little short of miraculous.\textsuperscript{16} He exceeded the bishop’s requests and

\textsuperscript{14} They made school and church attendance compulsory for both children and adults, whipped women for adultery, had villagers rearrange houses into plantation style row patterns and introduced a crude currency. Wetherell, \textit{Reluctant Mission}, 106-109.


\textsuperscript{16} Many years later, a visitor to Wanigela relayed a telling memory of Money’s days there, “Here too lived Percy Money, who through weeks of illness kept his gramophone records of comic songs going night and day, until he knew them by heart and his comrade missionaries almost went mad.” C. J. King, “Notes on a Trip from Dogura to Mamba and Back,” \textit{ABM Review} (15 February 1932), 187.
also managed to find time to write informative accounts of his work and local cultural practices for mission publications, took wonderful photographs and amassed a huge collection of artifacts. While he did not shy from condemning indigenous practices he considered unchristian, Money’s letters convey a genuine interest in the local cultures and empathy with the people.

The clan hamlets that made up Uiaku stretched narrowly along more than a kilometer of coast. Money chose a site for the station near the center, with village houses on three sides and a swamp behind. He found the Maisin language difficult to learn. The villagers were reluctant to provide materials or labor, although willing enough to take the tobacco, knives and cloth the missionary offered them. Money chose to be patient, joking with the villagers and participating in the work crews. “No doubt you think this is a strange course to adopt,” he wrote to mission supporters, “but it is preferable to bullying or force.” Progress was slow but steady. By the end of the year, Money had erected a residence for the teachers, a comfortable two story home for himself, and a workshop, kitchen and storage house. A little distance away he built a classroom with a capacity for 210 pupils and a massive barn-like church which could hold 550. Money envisioned building a large dormitory for male boarders and another for girls and a residence for female missionaries. The various buildings would be connected by neat paths lined with flower beds, with the whole enclosed by a fence to keep out pigs and unauthorized villagers. Another three and a half acres behind the mission would provide space for a playground and gardens for the boarders and teachers.

Money’s constructions at Uiaku and Wanigela, as revealed in his

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19 *Missionary Notes* 90 (1902), 41.

20 The size of the station made a deep impression on the Maisin’s neighbors. The Kubiri initially refused a teacher because they assumed that they would be required to construct a similarly grand station, despite their small population. H. Newton, *In Far New Guinea* (London: Seeley Service, 1914), 257.

photographs (see page 88), cleverly combined local construction materials and practices with simple European architectural styles. The results looked “native” to European eyes, but the station buildings differed significantly from village houses in function and appearance. In the villages, almost all activities occurred outside. The Maisin built their houses high off the ground, a man’s height and often more. A hearth for cooking meals lay below, on a low platform or verandah, or on the ground. A ladder led through the floor to a windowless sleeping chamber. On the station, most activities occurred within buildings, out of sight of the public. The neat alignment of station buildings bore no resemblance to the spatial patterns of the hamlets, where buildings were arranged around oval-shaped plaza of packed earth. The perimeter fence around the station also marked its distinctiveness—the Maisin built fences around gardens to protect them from marauding pigs, but marked the boundaries of clan hamlets with crotons and fruiting trees. We do not know what the Maisin thought of Money’s creation, they must have found the buildings discomforting, not just because of their odd shapes and functions, but the high walls of the classroom and church, constructed with sago thatch, would have made the interior of those buildings dark and hot, especially during the wet season.22

Money built a residence and classroom for a teacher in Sinapa in 1905 but he did not finish the Uiaku station due to poor health and his duties in Wanigela. He was unable to supervise the teachers at Uiaku closely, leaving them on their own for months at a time. After Chignell arrived in 1907, Money remained assigned to the district but spent much of his time away on furlough and recovering from illness. In 1910, he left the mission for good. Chignell continued to make regular visits to the Maisin stations, until he was replaced by the Reverend J. E. J. Fisher in 1914. Fisher was an energetic authoritarian, who fancied himself the “warden of the coast”. He made the moral reform of Wanigela and the preparation of the Maisin for baptism his highest priorities.23 In 1916, he baptized 164 Maisin, most at a massive ceremony on the river near the station.24 This burst of activity

22 In the 1920s and 1930s, the Maisin adopted Western-styled houses under pressure from the government which considered the old houses unhygienic. Walls are now made of vertical lines of sago rib, which allow more air and light.
was crowned with the appointment of a missionary to the Maisin in 1917. But the young A. P. Jennings was not temperamentally suited for his isolated post and fled Uiaku in 1920 after suffering a nervous breakdown.

Missionaries now considered Uiaku the most difficult posting in the diocese. It was, “A land of mosquitoes, of swamp and water,” uncomfortable and unhealthy. The large concentrated population cried for missionary attention, but the people were “extremists in every way.” The missionaries had held out hope that the “virility” and stubbornness of the people could be harnessed “directed to work for the Glory of God.”25 After the departure of Fisher and Jennings, the bishop wondered whether the Christians there had “been really converted.” There was one bright spot, however, “The School work is good.”26 That last observation is significant. While missionaries had come and gone, teachers had continuously resided and worked in the community. The Maisin negotiated their relationship with the

mission and gleaned their earliest understandings of Christianity from
the teachers rather than the clergy.

The Teachers

[The teachers] came with very little special preparation, but with a sense
of duty and loyalty, a real love for God, and a desire to give these
people the comfort and peace they themselves had found. They had
all the instincts and sympathies which enabled them to enter into the
life and thought of this race, to a far greater extent than white people
can ever hope to do.27

Money brought two teachers to Uiaku in 1903: Timothy Gori and
Willie Pettawa, who were assisted by Clement Qaitavora, a Papuan
convert from Taupota near Dogura.28 Clement left late the same
year after becoming involved in a fracas between Maisin and mem-

27 Newton, New Guinea: 255.
28 Teachers are referred to by their Christian names in this chapter, as these
were the names they preferred to use and the names by which the Maisin remember
them.
bers of his village who were passing through the area.\textsuperscript{29} Timothy soon followed, complaining that the Maisin language was too hard and asking to return to Neggela, his home in the Solomon Islands.\textsuperscript{30} Willie, who was originally from the Bank Islands in the (then) New Hebrides, contracted an illness and died in 1907. Samuel Siru, a native of Guadalcanal, occupied the new station at Sinapa from 1905 to 1911. Two Nggela brothers, Ambrose Darra and Benjamin Canae, arrived in 1907. “Bennie” moved to Sinapa in 1911, following Samuel’s removal to Wanigela. For the next twenty years, the brothers presented the official face of Christianity to the Maisin. From the mid-1920s, they were assisted and then replaced by better educated Papuan teacher-evangelists.

Who were these men? Between 1863 and 1904, Queensland imported an estimated 64,000 laborers from the New Hebrides and Solomon Islands to work on sugar plantations. Small mission schools had been set up to minister to the workers, preparing them for baptism and providing a rudimentary education. Stone-Wigg vigorously recruited among the Anglican converts. In all, 46 Melanesians joined the mission staff, the largest group of 25 arriving after the forced expulsion of Melanesians from Australia in 1905. By 1910, the Melanesians made up a full 70 percent of the Anglican staff in Papua.\textsuperscript{31} Hopes of personal advancement may have played a part in their decision to volunteer. Wetherell suggests that the teachers’ “elaborate dress in missionary photographs—waistcoats, watch chains, striped trousers, and straw hats—speak of a desire for a white man’s rank.”\textsuperscript{32} The yearly stipend of £25, paid quarterly, must have been attractive to men earning a typical £8 to £20 in Australia.\textsuperscript{33} But their decision to go to a new land with little chance of returning home, suggests strong religious convictions.

We know very little about the individuals who worked with the Maisin. Ambrose and Bennie had picked up some English while in Queensland, but Samuel knew only Pidgin English, which most of the

\textsuperscript{29} Wetherell, \textit{Reluctant Mission}, 278-279.
\textsuperscript{30} Wetherell, \textit{Reluctant Mission}, 57. Timothy continued to work for the mission until his death in 1931.
\textsuperscript{32} Wetherell, “the Bridegroom Cometh”, 57.
\textsuperscript{33} Wetherell, “the Bridegroom Cometh”, 58.
white missionaries refused to learn. The Bank Islands and Nggela were among the early successes of the Melanesian Mission of the Anglican church of New Zealand, with large scale conversion in the 1880s. Samuel was probably baptized in Australia, but the others may well have attended mission schools as children on their home islands.34

It was very common in Protestant missions of the day to employ large numbers of “South Sea Islanders” on their staffs. The London Missionary Society and Methodists in Papua recruited their teachers from long-established seminaries from their older mission fields in Polynesia and Fiji. The Melanesian teachers were very poorly educated compared to the Samoans and Fijians in Protestant areas. The mission added a little to the rudimentary academic skills acquired in Australia. Money writes of assisting newly arrived teachers as they struggled to learn Wedau, the language spoken around Dogura which the mission used in services and the classroom, and Maisin.35 Chignell for a time required teachers to attend weekly meetings at Wanigela to improve teaching techniques and to remedy the “silly nonsense imbibed from well-meaning people in Queensland.”36 The district priest was required to visit teachers once a month to serve Communion and assess and help them improve upon their duties. A handful of teachers demonstrated a marked aptitude for self-learning, but none of these worked in Collingwood Bay. With a weak grasp of basic literacy and numbers, infrequent coaching, and usually no books to work with, teachers relied upon rote learning, leading their charges in endless choruses of “A-B-C” and “1-2-3,” according to elderly Maisin in the early 1980s. This could degenerate to (or perhaps never rise above) nonsense. Chignell writes of one Wanigela class reciting: “‘Four fundle one penny,’ ‘Ten fardles t’ree penny,’ each formula repeated ten or twelve times over, as if to impress some foundation truths on those infant minds.”37

Anglican leaders insisted that the low educational standards in village schools were not important as Anglo-Catholics did not place as high a priority on an ability to read the Bible as Evangelical Protestants. Bishop Gerald Sharp, Stone-Wigg’s successor, wrote that the teachers

34 This is also suggested in Newton, New Guinea, 253.
36 Wetherell, Reluctant Mission, 113.
37 Chignell, Outpost: 57. See also Wetherell, Reluctant Mission, 112-114.
were first and foremost missionaries. Their main duty was to provide Sunday services, especially in outlying areas, pray for those in need, set a good example in their daily life and instruct all in the basic beliefs and rituals of the church. Even in the classroom, the teachers advanced the Christian cause far more by leading children in prayers, teaching hymns and relating bible stories than in teaching letters and numbers, which few villagers would ever have cause to use. “Some of our most valuable Mission teachers have been natives,” he concluded, “whose capability as school-teachers has been very small.”

It is especially unfortunate, then, that we possess very little information regarding preaching. Chignell suggests that, given a chance, some of the teachers would preach for hours, “without regard to times and seasons” and summarizes a humorously confused sermon. Ideally, district missionaries reviewed sermon outlines with their teachers, but it is likely in this as in the classroom, the teachers relied upon their own resources. Elderly Maisin in the 1980s did not recall the sermons they heard in their youth as being particularly long, but then they barely recalled anything about them at all, except that they were much as today—structured around the telling and retelling of a bible story, usually from the New Testament, from which a simple moral lesson was drawn. Papuan congregations heard little of the fire and brimstone or stern Old Testament morality favored by Polynesian pastors in Protestant areas.

Although never acknowledged, the greatest recommendation for the Melanesians in this chronically understaffed and desperately poor mission lay in their availability, relative inexpensiveness and expendability. Although missionaries received the same paltry cash allowance as the teachers, they cost the mission much more in the form of subsidized food and supplies, furloughs and medical evacuations. Some of the white staff spent their lives in Papua, but most left after a few years and had to be replaced. The teachers, in contrast, were required to provide for themselves from their pay and gardens; all but two died at their posts.

Teachers received their stipend from the district missionary and

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were required to purchase their goods from him as well. Chignell writes in *Outpost* of placing orders for shirts, gramophones and shotgun shells as well as consumables such as rice and tobacco requested by the teachers. The mission boat delivered goods monthly. These were then sold to the teachers with a small mark-up to cover transport. This would seem to be a recipe for resentment, but most of the teachers appear to have accepted the system. The missionary was also responsible for providing the teachers with stick tobacco, by now the common currency, and other goods to be exchanged with villagers for building materials and labor. Missionaries tended to be tight with their supplies, in part because they felt villagers should be willing to maintain station buildings at their own expense but perhaps also because they suspected that the teachers may have kept some of these consumables for themselves. Given the potential for resentment, it is surprising that only Samuel Siru openly complained about the inadequacies of his pay.

The missionaries reserved their most fulsome public praise for their teachers’ “native” qualities: their supposed ability to adapt quickly to local lifestyles; pick up vernaculars; win the trust of villagers who looked much like themselves; and, above all else, express church teachings with a simplicity and grace unencumbered by the complexities of “civilized” thought. Samuel in his early years in Sinapa was thought to be the very model of an effective “native” missionary. He seemed to learn Maisin easily and attracted a large number of students. This was due, Chignell thought, not to Samuel’s skills as an educator, which were slight, but to the fact that he was “intensely ‘native,’ and perhaps does more in his way, and with his slender equipment, than many a less enthusiastic teacher in the midst of the very latest educational paraphernalia.” Praise of this type, however, easily segued into ridicule and disapproval. A drawn out but not untypical vignette in *Outpost*, describes a Sunday visit to Uiaku where the missionary was driven

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41 Unlike Papuans, mission teachers were allowed shotgun licenses. Their ability to shoot birds and game added hugely to their popularity in the villages.

42 *Uiaku Logbook*, 3 November 1911, Anglican Archives, University of Papua New Guinea, Waigani. (Henceforth AA.) Chignell expressed some doubts about Samuel’s facility in Maisin: “He has picked up the language of the Sinapa people quickly, and talks with rapid volubility whenever any of them are about. It is only now and then that some demon of critical disbelief suggests that he may be talking ‘pidgin’ Sinapese, as unmeaning and dreadful as most of his English.” Chignell, *Outpost*, 65.

to distraction not only by a youth’s enthusiastic ringing of the station bell for close to an hour, but also by Ambrose’s relaxed concern as to when villagers would show up for the service. In the privacy of the mission logbooks, the missionaries frequently complained about the “lax” standards teachers maintained at their stations.

While senior clergy sometimes wrote of the teachers as “fellow missionaries,” the two groups do not appear to have mixed much. The teachers lived apart in their own houses on the district stations and even more so on out-stations like Sinapa and Uiaku. They met with the missionary for instruction, worship and administrative purposes, but rarely if ever for socializing. The missionaries wrote confidently of the simple faith of their teachers, but one has to wonder just how well they understood the ways these men perceived Christianity or spiritual matters in general. They seem to have made few inquiries and every now and then one comes across indications of worldviews somewhat at odds with conventional Christianity. A priest visiting Wanigela discovered that one of the teachers retained the totemic beliefs of his youth: “if he ate Shark, his flesh would waste away & he would have much sickness.” Chignell learned that Vivien Darra, Ambrose’s wife, had received traditional medical treatment for an illness during which several pieces of wood were “extracted” from her leg. He was surprised when the other teachers defended her decision.

The teachers must have suffered greatly from loneliness, compounded by their association with outsider missionaries, their specialized work on the station and the barriers of language and culture. Willie and Samuel appear to have made concerted efforts to involve themselves in Maisin life. In an early letter from Uiaku, Money relates that Willie had at his own initiative demanded to be shown the “charms” that Maisin said were responsible for causing deaths through sorcery. He convinced an unknown number of villagers to surrender them to Money on the station, who burned them and threw the ashes into the swamp. This was the first of several occasions, up to the present, where Maisin made use of the missionary presence in attempts to purge the villages.

44 Chignell, Outpost, 364-366.
45 Wetherell, Reluctant Mission, 116-119.
46 Wanigela Logbook, 16 July 1911, AA. John Hunt, the priest, informed the teacher that Europeans “did not eat Shark, because, sometimes it ate men, not because they were afraid of wasting sickness if they did so.”
47 Wanigela Logbook, 17 May 1912.
48 Missionary Notes 101 (1903).
of sorcery materials.\textsuperscript{49} He was also praised for showing “great nerve and courage in asserting discipline in the school of big strong lads, and in facing ebullitions of rage and passion amongst the villagers.”\textsuperscript{50} Left for long periods on his own, Willie became involved in sexual affairs on at least two occasions. In April 1907, he came to Money in a somewhat hysterical state, tearfully confessing his “sin” after Jesus appeared before him in a dream and told him that he would suffer for it.\textsuperscript{51} Willie may have also feared that he was a under attack by a sorcerer, for he was clearly quite ill at the time. Money sent him to Dogura where he died a month later.

None of the teachers asserted themselves more vigorously into Maisin society than Samuel at his little base in Sinapa. Chignell reports an incident in which Samuel proclaimed to frightened villagers that a tragic case in which three men died from fish poisoning came as retribution for avoiding church services.\textsuperscript{52} The missionaries complained about lax conditions at the station, but these had probably more to do with Samuel’s involvement with his Maisin neighbors than any bullying. He appears to have spent a good deal of his time draining the swamp near his house and planting coconuts and large gardens. Some of the food went to the Uiaaku station, but his hard work probably also produced goods which entered the local exchange networks. In 1909, he successfully negotiated with elders of the Virani clan for a bride. The mission insisted that Manua first spend time at Dogura “to learn some of the arts and graces that make for domestic comfort”\textsuperscript{53} and to prepare for baptism. Newton wrote a vivid description of her appearance on the day of her departure: her face had recently been tattooed and she was richly adorned in a manner befitting an important alliance (see photograph on page 98).\textsuperscript{54} After nearly two years in Dogura, accompanied by a male cousin, she became the second Maisin

\textsuperscript{49} J. Barker, “Encounters with Evil: The Historical Construction of Sorcery in Maisin Society, Papua New Guinea,” \textit{Oceania} 61 (1990): 139-155. It is possible that Willie had seen or heard of similar purges as they were common in the early stages of conversion in parts of the Solomons. It is also very clear that the Maisin needed little encouragement.
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Missionary Notes} 147 (1907), 48.
\textsuperscript{51} Money to Stone-Wigg, 5 April 1907, AA.
\textsuperscript{52} Chignell, \textit{Outpost}, 67-68.
\textsuperscript{53} Chignell, \textit{Outpost}, 66.
\textsuperscript{54} Newton, \textit{New Guinea}, 266.
to receive baptism, returning as “Sara.” The missionaries were at first pleased by the effect they thought Sara was having on Samuel’s work in Sinapa, but in 1911 decided to remove him to Wanigela where he could be more closely supervised. Samuel left the mission after being demoted to a workman by the Bishop following complaints about his work and accusations of stealing from the mission stores. He briefly worked at a trade store at Tufi before being sacked for “laziness” and returning to Sinapa in late 1913, where he died a year or two later.

Samuel and Sara had two children: Simon, who died a few months after his birth in 1912, and Mary, born in 1913. In 1916, the mission persuaded Sara to leave the man she was then living with and move to Wanigela with her baby. Sara’s brother later brought her home, where she remarried, leaving Mary behind in the missionaries’ care. Descendents of Sara and Mary today live in Konyasi village and Uiaku. While details are missing, it is likely that the mission assisted Ambrose in finding his bride, who came from the distant Orokavia area to the west. Tragically, Ambrose and Vivien’s first three children died in infancy. Ambrose himself was often sick. Towards the end of his life, his throat was so scarred from infections that he could scarcely speak. He died in Uiaku in 1927. Praising the teacher for his gentle ways and faithfulness, Newton’s obituary tells of how Ambrose on his last day of life “managed to get out to the verandah of his house to have a last look round the station, and at the church which he had built mostly with his own hands.” Vivien returned to her own people with the couple’s surviving daughter, only to perish with thousands of others in the volcanic eruption of Mt. Lamington in 1951. Bennie never married, remaining at Sinapa until his death in 1934.

In the early 1980s, only a handful of Maisin remembered Ambrose and Bennie. I heard that the two brothers wore pants, shirts and hats and had darker skins than the villagers. Bennie was more integrated into the local society. His verandah was often full of visitors. He delighted the people by joining in the annual grass-burning, shooting lots of wallabies and wild pigs with his shotgun. In 1919, Bennie was in trouble with the Resident Magistrate for hiding men in his house

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55 James Boege of Yuayu, who had attended classes in nearby Wanigela, was the first in 1908.
needed for patrols.\textsuperscript{57} There are fewer memories of Ambrose. Adelbert Sevaru told me that he often visited Ambrose to hear bible stories. He remembered fondly how the teacher encouraged him to hunt deep in the forest, without fear of spirits. Once when he was working on a plantation, Adelbert became sick and went blind. Ambrose, now deceased, appeared in a dream to show him the medicine that could cure his blindness. Maisin often have such dreams, but this is the only case I heard in which the specter was not a close relative or a biblical figure. Adelbert told me that Ambrose was the biggest influence on his life, after his mother.

By the mid-1920s, the era of the Melanesian teachers was coming to an end in Collingwood Bay and elsewhere. Many of them died from disease or loneliness, and survivors, like Ambrose and Bennie, were being replaced by the Papuan converts, themselves initially taught by the Melanesians. The Papuans had several advantages. They had grown up with mission routines and were more comfortable with enforcing them; the villagers themselves were more accustomed to the routines of the mission; the teachers were better trained, having received instruction directly from missionaries at district stations and Dogura. Importantly, it was easier for teachers to move when in difficult local situation. A Papuan could request another posting or quit and return to his home village. Nevertheless, the teachers remained professional strangers. The fences remained around the mission stations; the teachers continued to assert forms of authority with no counterparts in village life. The oral and documentary records reveal instances of tension between villagers and Papuan teachers: arguments over the placement of gardens; concerning discipline of children; and sexual affairs. These occasional conflicts reflect the increasingly ambiguous status of the teachers. They were not as foreign as Melanesians. The station had become familiar as most Maisin by then had spent time there as students and as worshippers.

\textsuperscript{57} Resident Magistrate North-eastern Division, Patrol Reports, 9-25 October 1919, G91-NAO, National Archives, Waigani. This event occurred during a period when the Maisin were actively resisting both the government and Jennings at Uiaku. Barker, “Optimistic Pragmatists,” 79-80.
Scholars and Boarders

[They] are well-washed and merry-hearted Mission boarders, and as unnaturally clean in their habits and regular in their lives as it is possible for small brown savages to be. Some day, they will go back to their wallowing, but it is good for them to have been trim and well-disciplined even for a part of their lives. The parents of such boys do not seem to mind.58

In a popular work describing the people on the northern Papuan coast and the Anglican missions among them, Henry Newton, later the third bishop, confesses that, “It is doubtful whether the Anglican Mission to New Guinea has had any definite theory as to how mission work should be carried on, any thought-out principles.”59 Newton’s statement was misleading, referring more to the social impact of the

mission than its operations. The ecclesiastical organization of a diocese mission provided the Anglicans with a very clear chain of command—the bishop possessed near autocratic authority over the layers of priests, deacons, lay-evangelists, teachers and laity. The Anglicans never suffered from the drawn out fights between district missionaries that complicated the work of the London Missionary Society on the south coast. The bishops allowed district missionaries a great deal of flexibility in the pace and scope of evangelization in the villages. But even here, there were definite expectations of how the work should proceed, many of which were codified by Bishop Sharp in 1917.60

Some religious services took place outside the stations. Every Sunday in Wanigela and for a time in Uiaku, the teachers trudged to nearby villages to conduct a simple service, known as taparoro in Wedauan, which consisted of a psalm, a reading, a hymn and the Lord’s Prayer.61 On Sundays, teachers added a sermon. Anyone could attend taparoro, but those who expressed an interest in baptism (known as “Hearers”) were required to attend classes in religious instruction. After a probationary period, Hearers entered the Catechuminate and for a period of two years or more attended weekly classes on the station at which they learned by heart the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer and such portions of the catechism as were available in the vernacular or Wedau, usually at the feet of the teachers. A week or more prior to baptism, the catechumen attended a daily class of instruction from the district missionary who made the final assessment as to their preparation. The newly baptized then entered a second probationary period lasting a few weeks to several months, depending on the traveling schedule of the bishop. Following two weeks of intensive daily preparation by the priest, the confirmation class was anointed with oil and blessed by the bishop. They were now full members of the church and enjoyed the privilege of sharing Communion.

An ability to read the gospels was not required for baptism, although some adults did learn, such as Daniel Taru from Yuayu, the third Maisin to receive baptism, who was about 40 years old in 1910.62 But the mission found most of its recruits among the children and adolescents

60 Sharp, *Rules and Methods*.
61 The Lord’s Prayer was recited only by the leader and Christians. Non-Christians remained silent until the phrase, “Lead us not into temptation,” to which they responded “Deliver us from evil.” Sharp, *Rules and Methods*, 12.
attending the station school. Money reported in 1907 that the Uiaku school had 73 girls and 100 boys in attendance, an impressive figure at a time when the total population numbered between 600 and 700.\textsuperscript{63} Attendance fluctuated greatly, depending on interest and the parents’ need for the children’s assistance in the gardens. Most years, the teachers reported a roll of around 70 students in Uiaku and 40 in Sinapa, although the numbers soared in Uiaku during Jennings’ tenure. The missionaries treated the figures with suspicion, probably with good reason. Still, the willingness of many Maisin parents to give up the labor of their children for five days a week for the best part of a year is quite remarkable. One can only speculate about their motivations. There was some element of coercion. The colonial administration made attendance in mission schools mandatory wherever they were available but the village constable in Uiaku appears to have been rarely employed to gather truant children. One imagines that the students came initially out of curiosity or were sent by their elders in hopes of curry+ning favor with the mission or its god. In the early years, the classes were all made up of adolescents, the period of the life cycle at which Maisin enjoyed the greatest personal freedom. But the classes became progressively younger, with most students starting around ten years of age from about 1910.

Students attended school anywhere from one to three years. Classes ran, officially at least, from around nine o’clock in the morning until noon. The teachers had little equipment to work with—usually a blackboard and some slates—and the children appear to have sat on logs rather than at desks. Instruction was mostly in the Wedau language and comprised, as we have seen, the rote recitation of lessons. With the assistance of pupil teachers, recruited from the brightest graduates who were paid a small fee, the teachers divided the students into separate classes. Religious instruction formed a key component. The teachers began each day with prayers, a hymn and the recitation of the Ten Commandments. Biblical stories and the singing of hymns punctuated the day, depending on the whims of the teacher and interests of the students.\textsuperscript{64} Even with such slender resources—both

\textsuperscript{63} Missionary Notes 148 (1907): 54.
\textsuperscript{64} Gertrude Robson, a lay missionary based at Wanigela, wrote an idyllic description of a school day in Uiaku. Her fellow missionaries, however, tended to be more critical. G. Robson, “When the Conch Shell Blows,” Occasional Papers of the New Guinea Mission 56 (1917), 19-20.
material and intellectual—visitors reported that the students did learn to read and write in Wedau and some basic maths. Of course, the main thing they gained was a familiarity with the forms of Christian worship and belief. Although candidates for baptism still attended a separate *giu* class, the classroom prepared young people for eventual membership in the church. Indeed, that was its main purpose as far as the missionaries were concerned.

At various times between 1903 and 1920, the Uiaku station also housed anywhere from five to 27 male boarders who lived either with the teacher or in their own dormitory. Boarders made a commitment to live on the station and abide by its rules. They cooked and shared their meals there, making use of food provided by the mission, although usually purchased locally. A boarder received a more intense experience of mission life than day schoolers. They attended morning and evening services as well as the school and were subjected to a much higher level of discipline as well as Christian instruction. Some of the boarders became very close to the mission staff. Jennings wrote, “without them I should be lonely indeed. Some of them spend the evening in a large room of my house looking at pictures and playing draughts, ludo, snakes and ladders, and that is almost the happiest time of the day for me.”65 The first large cohort of Maisin to receive baptism was made up mostly of adolescents who had lived for some years on the Uiaku station. Boarders also tended to be advanced as pupil teachers locally and given opportunities for further education at Wanigela and Dogura. The first three Maisin to be licensed as teacher-evangelists after attending St. Aiden’s College at Dogura all lived as boarders with Jennings. After Jennings’ departure, the more promising graduates of the Maisin schools continued their education as boarders at Wanigela.

The boarders provided the teachers and resident missionary, when there was one, with something at least as important as companionship—a ready source of labor. In principle, if not always practice, all stations followed similar schedules: After morning devotions at six in the morning, the boarders spent two hours tending to the upkeep of the station before breakfast and school. After dinner at one o’clock, they returned to work on the station or in the gardens, with some time off for recreation. They were expected to keep their dormitory “scru-

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65 *Occasional Papers* 59 (1919), 8.
pletely clean” and to be willing to serve as house-boys and cooks for the mission staff. Over the years, day students also took on afternoon work. Many elderly Maisin who attended school under Papuan evangelists in the 1920s and 1930s, recalled spending as much time fishing and gardening for the teachers as in the classroom. It is possible that the teachers and missionaries could have survived without their small armies of young workers, but it would have been made their situation very difficult. When the Maisin became impatient with Jennings, they used the expedient of refusing to sell him food for his boarders, most of whom were their own children, rather than confronting him directly. Jennings was forced to let his young companions go.

Discipline dominated station life, measured out in the adherence to schedules of work, worship, study and play; respectful obedience to the requirements of missionaries and teachers; and avoidance of personal “sin.” The missionaries assessed teachers in terms of their ability to maintain discipline and often found them wanting, especially in regards to punctuality and authority. All the same, the teachers, with the periodic prodding of missionaries, created on the station a regimen that had no equivalent in Maisin society and which required for its success a high degree of compliance from the young people who sat in the classrooms and lived in the dormitories. And to a large extent, they received it. But at times, they applied more forceful measures. In 1908, Ambrose dismissed three of his eight boarders who “are in the habit of sleeping off the station, of shirking afternoon work, and of absenting themselves from school & taparoro.” At other times, boarders were dismissed for stealing from the mission stores or punished for sleeping with village girls. Students who were late for, or missed school, were subjected to additional labor in the afternoon, usually pulling tall grass around the station for burning, or carrying sand for the floor of the church. The most severe infractions might be punished with a public belting or caning. However, such evidence that exists suggests that the Melanesian teachers rarely resorted to corporal punishment. Indeed, in the early days it might have been dangerous for them to do so, for there was no equivalent practice in

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68 Uiaku Logbook, 30 April, 1908.
69 Chignell, *Outpost*, 107-08. These punishments apparently were first devised by Money. Elderly Maisin remembered them well.
Maisin society. Europeans, however, were less constrained. Jennings gave his houseboy a good caning a few months after his arrival at Uiaku and suspended six Christian girls from Communion services for the sin of “fornication.” A few days later, two other boarders admitted to the sin and asked to be punished. Jennings complied and also ordered that the girls involved remove their ornaments and submit to having their heads shaved. One of Jennings’ former boarders told me of how he had been caught going around with a girl. Two older boys dragged him to Jennings’ house and held him down while the missionary hit him with a cane. He struggled free, jumped the fence and ran to his parents’ house. “It was then I gave up school,” he added, rather laconically I thought.

The elderly Maisin I interviewed in the 1980s remembered little of the lessons or the services they attended on the station as children. However they vividly recalled parading in formation into class, mending fences, cleaning classrooms, working in the teacher’s garden or fishing for him. They described in exquisite detail the punishments they received (from Papuan, however, not Melanesian teachers) for tardiness, slacking on the work details and skipping classes. They did not learn much, however, they said, quite simply, that the teachers were good men and their parents wanted them to go to the school and be baptized. The work was hard, but one man told me “It was good doing these things because later when we married we knew how to do this work well. [The teacher] made us into hard-working people.”

The Emergence of Maisin Christianity

The idea that slaving away in a teacher’s garden taught students how to work hard on their own is surprising. Yet reflects a common attitude among older Maisin in the early 1980s who likened the relationship between the people and the mission to that which ideally holds between a younger and old brother or a junior and senior clan. The young put their energies to work as warriors and dancers at feasts, but they tended to be impetuous. Their elders “take care of them” by calming down and challenging their energies through a mixture of good advice and threats of sorcery. In return for this gift, the young should listen with “respect” to their elders and give them gifts of food and

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70 Interview with Michael John Buro, Uiaku, 12 May 1983.
labor. In the same way, the people receive advice and the blessings of God in return for bringing their gifts of food and labor to the teachers and clergy and listening obediently to their lessons, sermons and commands. If the reciprocal circle held, everyone benefited. But too often youth or the people were impatient and elders or the missionaries self-serving and so the relationship became strained.

As I read the mission logs of the 1920s and 1930s, I saw evidence of this kind of attitude at work. Very large numbers of Maisin were baptized at regular intervals reflecting the cycle of school attendance in 1926, 1929, 1933 and 1937. People enthusiastically celebrated the patronal feast day of St. Thomas every December on the Uiaku station with feasting, dancing and long services. They built a massive new church in 1937 entirely at their own expense and, apparently, initiative. No one challenged the mission’s rules as they pertained to students and worshippers on the station. Yet in the village, Christians largely ignored the mission’s strictures on marriage, participation in death rites and involvement in the healing/fertility cults that swept through the region periodically at this time. People had become accustomed to the presence in their midst of a foreign institution but in a way that made sense to them—if not to the frustrated missionaries. We can only speculate on what villagers hoped or thought they were achieving by this relationship in the early stages. Following the Second World War, however, a number of young leaders made effective use of the people’s collective connection to the mission as a means of overcoming clan divisions and launching a cooperative movement meant to improve the material conditions of village life. The greatest achievement of the movement was the construction of the first iron-roofed church in the region—for Maisin a lasting symbol of what they could accomplish by bringing the village and the mission into a reciprocal balance.

71 I do not mean to suggest here or in the following paragraph that Christian ideas and practices did not influence individuals or village life in general. This occurred as a kind of parallel mode of conversion, gradually and to a large degree unconsciously. I discuss the two forms of conversion in J. Barker, “We Are ‘Ekelesia’: Conversion in Uiaku, Papua New Guinea,” in Christian Conversion: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation, ed. Robert Hefner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 199-230.

In 1914, Newton wrote that in time the mission would give way to a church that “is not to be a body distinct from the native life, but rather one that permeates the whole by its influence; not something foreign to, but an integral part of, native life.”\footnote{Newton, \textit{New Guinea}, 251.} The church did indeed become integral to Maisin society, although not quite the way Newton hoped. In 1981, when I first came to Uiaku to study Maisin Christianity, the station remained almost as distinct from the surrounding villages as it had when Money erected the first buildings—only the fence was gone. Maisin continued to speak of it as the “mission” and the teachers and priest as “missionaries” although the population had long been entirely Christian and the days of evangelization were over. The villagers referred to the activities occurring on the station as belonging to the “mission side” in contrast to “village side” activities organized in reference to the clans and remembered traditions. The separation was far from firm in practice, but real enough in people’s minds. But the “mission,” spatially and ideologically distinct as it appeared, was not a fossil from the missionary past, let alone a foreign imposition. It had long become an essential part of Maisin experience and society, as completely accepted by Maisin as any “village” traditions. It is likely that Christianity would have taken a very different local form had the mission been more interventionist. While memories of the Melanesian teachers has almost entirely faded away, this study suggests that their mediating presence played a large role in helping Maisin to accept the mission while retaining a strong sense of their autonomy from it.
The spread of Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from Europe and neo-Europes\(^1\) such as Australia, New Zealand and the USA to other regions of the world depended on complex networks of communication from the metropolitan centers of the churches and mission societies to missionaries out in the field. They in turn communicated their religious understandings wrapped in the cultural baggage of their home societies to local communities. The new Christians of these communities then conveyed the message as they understood it to their fellows, who assimilated it to their own circumstances. The missionary view of this process is well documented as missionaries responded to the instructions and expectations of their sponsors, reporting their activities in terms with which the home organizations and congregations could empathize. These reports tended to patronize those being evangelized, who were perceived to lack, not only Christian religious understandings, but the sophistications of civilized life. Those who accepted Christianity were assumed to be mired in an environment of temptations and threats to their newly acquired status. In missionary reports even the most trusted evangelists were presented as vulnerable to the negative influences of those among whom they lived. These reports gloss over the interdependence of outsider missionaries and their local associates, and largely ignore the autonomous lives and proselytizing of new Christian evangelists.

In this chapter I consider accounts of the introduction of Christianity to the Cook Islands and to central Australia written by outsider missionaries and new Christians who became preachers and teachers of the recently introduced religion. Christianity was introduced to Rarotonga in the Cook Islands in 1823. One of the first to accept Christian teachings was Maretu, who subsequently became an evangelist. He wrote an autobiography in his later years, which has been

translated, annotated and published by Marjorie Crocombe.² William Gill, a London Missionary Society missionary who lived on Rarotonga from 1839-1852 published a “mission history” of the Cook Islands in 1856.³ Both these books present a history of the introduction of Christianity to Rarotonga and elsewhere in the Cook Islands as coherent historical narratives.

Lutheran missionaries arrived in central Australia, where they established Hermannsburg mission, in 1877. A young Western Arrernte boy, Tjalkabota, responded positively to their teaching and in turn became a preacher and teacher. He dictated his life story as a first person account to the missionary F. W. Albrecht in the early 1950s a few years before his death. Albrecht’s son, Paul Albrecht, recently translated and published the text.⁴ None of the missionaries associated with Hermannsburg wrote a narrative history of Hermannsburg, although there are two official church histories of the mission celebrating its centenary and sesquicentenary in 1977 and 2002.⁵ Moses Tjalkabota’s story appears as an appendix in the second book. A counterpoint to Tjalkabota’s life story are the diaries, reports and correspondence of the missionaries stationed at Hermannsburg.

I have chosen these case studies as they form an instructive contrast in the history of colonialism and Christian evangelism. In many parts of the central and eastern south Pacific, Islanders’ earliest encounters with the world beyond their region was through traders and missionaries. The reports from James Cook’s voyages inspired the fledgling London Missionary Society to send its first boatload of missionaries to the Pacific in the Duff in 1797. Despite the failure of this first foray of Christians into unknown territory, it was quickly followed by others.

² Maretu, Cannibals and Converts, Radical Change in the Cook Islands translated and edited by Marjorie Tuainekore Crocombe (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1983).

³ William Gill, Gems from the Coral Islands; or, Incidents of Contrast Between Savage and Christian Life of the South Sea Islanders vol 2 (London: Ward and Co., 1956). The Cook Islands were known as the Hervey Islands at the time Gill wrote his book.


Indigenous Australians on the western periphery of the Pacific encountered formal colonization abruptly with the establishment of the British penal colony in 1788, which gradually extended its reach along the Pacific coast and inland. The first missions to Aboriginal people were not established for another 30 years. The settler society provided the parameters for the activities of the missionaries and Aboriginal responses to them, whether the settler society was already established in a region when missionaries appeared, or followed soon after, as in central Australia. In the Pacific the conditions under which religious change occurred were to a great extent under the control of the indigenous people. Christianity was introduced to Rarotonga, one of the Cook Islands, by Tahitian evangelists in 1823. An English missionary did not arrive until 1827 by which time many Rarotongans were professing Christianity, having built a ‘chapel 300 feet long’ and destroyed many of their own gods and sacred places. The missionaries, whether Islanders or Europeans, were dependent on their hosts for their food, accommodation and safety. Without their hospitality, or at least forbearance, Christian evangelism would not have been possible.

Central Australia was also an isolated region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the missionaries were not dependent on local indigenous groups for their survival. As with other Europeans in Australia, they did not negotiate with local Arrernte people over access to land for their mission station. They brought their own livestock and agricultural supplies with them, and then did what they could to attract Arrernte to their nascent village.

In the Pacific and central Australia, the spread of Christianity depended on local agents whose role is often obscured in mission records, although by no means obliterated. Maretu worked in Rarotonga with London Missionary Society missionaries, only establishing some autonomy when he was sent as an evangelist to the neighboring island of Mangaia and then to the outlying atolls of Manihiki and Rakahanga. He returned to Rarotonga where he was one of the stalwarts of the church. In central Australia Moses Tjalkabota became a teacher, preacher and itinerant evangelist traveling to Arrernte and

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6 John Harris, *One Blood. 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope* (Sutherland, NSW: Albatross Books, 1994), 49
7 Gill, 28.
neighboring communities. Both Maretu and Tjalkabota (christened Moses) are visible in missionary writings, but their own accounts make them central, rather than marginal characters in the process of religious change.

The case that Christianity was spread by Islanders in the Pacific does not need to be made anew. Mission statistics reflect the active involvement of local evangelists, and even missionary accounts acknowledge their work.8 But European missionaries employed by mission societies emphasize their own central role in transforming people “from barbarism to civilization, from heathenism to Christianity;”9 while marginalizing the work and dangers faced by their local associates. A reading of accounts left by local Christians brings new perspectives to the history of Christianity in the region. These communities were not under external political or economic pressure to reconsider their beliefs, moral universe, family structures or village organizations, and yet they did question many aspects of their lives following the introduction of Christianity.

In Australia the case that Aboriginal people were actively engaged with the spread of Christianity during the mission era is not widely accepted. This is partly because of the sources—there are very few first hand accounts by Aboriginal evangelists, and little acknowledgement in mission-generated records of indigenous activism. Most missions in Australia—Hermannsburg is an exception—did not have outreach programs utilizing indigenous evangelists, so their role in the dissemination of Christian ideas and practices was informal and overlooked by official missionaries.

Maretu was born in 1812 on the island of Rarotonga in the Cook Islands.10 His father, Tuaivi Morea, was a sub-chief and a warrior.

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10 Crocombe gives Maretu’s birth date as 1802 [Maretu, p.3], then goes on to say that he was eleven years old in 1823 when Christianity was introduced to the island. I have taken latter date to be the correct date, which suggests that Maretu was born in 1812.
They encountered Christianity in 1823 when the Tahitian missionary, Papeiha, was left on Rarotonga by the London Missionary Society (LMS). Papeiha is credited by both the LMS and Maretu with bringing Christianity to the island, his work was to be consolidated by John Williams and Charles Pitman who arrived in 1827. The London Missionary Society sent many other missionaries to help with the work, including Aaron Buzacott (1828-1857), William Gill (1839-1852), Henry Royle (1839-1876), George Gill (1845-1860), William Wyatt Gill (1852-1883) and James Chalmers (1867-1877). Pitman suffered from frequent bouts of ill health during his long sojourn on Rarotonga, and came to rely heavily on the young Maretu to assist him. For many years he prevented Maretu leaving the island to evangelize among non-Christian peoples, despite Maretu’s strong desire to do so. Eventually Pitman was prevailed upon to allow Maretu to go to Mangaia to investigate reports of tensions between the two Tahitian missionaries on the island, where he remained from 1839-1845. In 1854 he went for a brief visit to Manihiki, but because of the vagaries of transport in the Pacific, he stayed there and the adjoining atoll, Rakahanga, for nearly two years. In 1870 Maretu began writing his memoirs. He died in 1880.

Maretu’s writing is remarkably fresh and free of the heavy moral tone of many mission-generated documents. Nevertheless it is a Christian’s account of his life and times in which proselytizing and religious change are the prime foci reflected in the title of the book, Cannibals and Converts: Radical Change in the Cook Islands. The title suggests that Maretu had assimilated the mission message which lauds converts over the non-Christian cannibals, implying they are civilized beings in contrast to the savage cannibals. Yet Maretu’s text is not overtly judgmental. It gives an account of the societies in which he lived, and what occurred around him. He does not describe non-Christians as evil or barbaric, or contrast them with the good Christian. Christian beliefs and ways were more efficacious than the alternative. On Rakahanga,

In July [1855] a group was admitted as communicants, bringing the membership in Rakahanga to 80. Then other people wanted to be full members of the church; after attending service they all ardently desired to belong to God. They banished all the other gods within

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11 Maretu, Chronology.
12 Maretu, 101; Murray, 53.
13 Maretu, 180.
them. At that time some of the people still worshipped the frigate bird and a species of land crab. They now realised that these were useless. They discarded them...14

Maretu gives an historical account of the coming of Christianity, wars, cannibalism and the introduction of new skills, materials and ways of living. Crocombe, a Cook Islander herself, claims, “Maretu’s autobiography reveals much about the Cook Islands at a time when few other records are available... His narrative contains much of Rarotonga’s oral tradition of earlier times.” The narrative includes many reconstructed conversations, detailed descriptions of events and who participated in them. Crocombe’s translation of Maretu begins with a discussion of cannibalism on Rarotonga. She suggests that Maretu was probably asked to write it by the missionary Wyatt Gill.15 Nevertheless, Maretu retains a dispassionate tone as he explains the origins of cannibalism on Rarotonga. He describes the circumstances under which cannibalism was practiced; the tight restrictions on cannibalistic behaviour; and his own family’s involvement in the practice. This “ethnographic” approach is in stark contrast to the LMS missionary, William Gill’s brief summary of life on Rarotonga, “we see that the inhabitants of this lovely garden-island of the sea, were sunk in an abject state of naked, barbarous, savage heathenism.”16 The missionary-translator who wrote the life of Joel Bulu, a famous Tongan missionary in Fiji, is similarly scathing of Pacific Islander societies,

We lived at Nasali, the river between us and the town; and awful were the sights which we saw from day to day, for Rewa was then a great kingdom... the Notho people were fighting among themselves ... their bodies used to be thrown down on the flat opposite our houses, and there the children used to drag them up and down ... singing the Song of Death ... the Tokatoka men always cut out the tongue, the heart, etc., before they brought a dead body to Rewa. Men from Suva and other places were always eaten ... whole canoe-loads were often brought thence as goodwill offerings, at which times we looked on sights that made our hearts sick with a deadly sickness.17

Maretu’s autobiography is most significant as a history of new Christian evangelists’ activities in the Cook Islands; their relationships with

14 Maretu, 175.
15 Maretu, 25.
16 Gill, 13.
the people to whom they preached and the European missionaries who directed their activities. William Gill’s description of life in the Cook Islands and the introduction of Christianity, while not ignoring local evangelists’ work focuses on the European missionaries and their activities.\footnote{The contrasting of the savage with the Christian was a common aspect of missionary writing. Nicholas Thomas, \textit{Colonialism’s Culture. Anthropology, Travel and Government} (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994),126.} He acknowledges the work of the Tahitian “teachers”, especially Papeiha [Papehia], who in two and a half years introduced Christianity to most of Rarotonga,

Much pioneering work had been done, which could not have been done by missionaries; but now the people were prepared, and required instruction and discipline, which native teachers at that period were not able to give.\footnote{Gill, 30.}

Gill does not elaborate on why Tahitians were able to achieve what Europeans could not, but Buzacott argues these were “civilizing” trends, rather than religious change. After the arrival of Pitman and Williams in 1827, Papeiha, who remained on Rarotonga disappears from Gill’s narrative, while the missionaries consolidate, reorganize, baptize and introduce new laws to the island communities. Maretu is mentioned in passing five times in Gill’s book. He is described as “one of the most intelligent and efficient Rarotonga native pastors, to take oversight of its schools and churches, and the general interests of the people”, yet Gill tells very little about him or his activities.\footnote{Gill,133.}

In a biography of the missionary James Chalmers (who translated a shortened version of Maretu’s work\footnote{See Maretu, 15.}) Maretu is described as “good old Maretu, the finest specimen of a Christian and the best native teacher Rarotonga has yet produced.” He was “one of the finest fruits of Rev. C. Pitman’s labours” and he “laboured with much success in various lands.” Back in Rarotonga he took charge of the principal station where he had great influence among his people.\footnote{William Robson, \textit{James Chalmers Missionary and Explorer of Rarotonga and New Guinea} (Kilmarnock, Scotland: John Ritchie, nd), 35. Maretu is not mentioned in Buzacott’s edited memoirs, although a letter from Maretu to Buzacott’s wife is reproduced at the end of the book, 262.}

Maretu’s book is not a moral or religious sermon, but an account of Rarotonga at a time of great religious, social and political change.
His descriptive style is a contrast both to the European missionaries’ writings, and the writings of many new Christians. Arthur Wellington Clah, an independent evangelist on the Pacific coast of Canada often railed against the “old fashioned ways” of the non-Christians, and judged people as doing “right or wrong.” Moses Tjalkabota while unconcerned with people’s physical circumstances or way of life argued vehemently with them over their beliefs. There is only one instance where Maretu presents himself as an aggressive proselytizer, and that was in the early days in Rarotonga when he hurled war stones at his father’s marae (sacred ground or temple) which contained idols and then burned it down to save his father from a mortal illness.

Gill’s claim that European missionaries were required to bring discipline and instruction to local Christians implies that Islander evangelists were unable to do this. Yet the Tahitians originally sent to Rarotonga and later to Mangaia and elsewhere, not only convinced the local populations to consider Christian ideas and precepts, but persuaded them to reorganize their economic and social lives. Maretu’s father moved from his own village to the village where Papeiha was evangelizing and invited Papeiha to come to his village and burn his marae and idols. Most of the population moved to the village of Avura to attend classes run by Papeiha and another Tahitian, Rio, where the Rarotongans helped the two missionaries build a large church. Soon after a visiting missionary, Robert Bourne, baptized several hundred adults and children. Papeiha persuaded the people to wear clothes that covered their bodies, take on European hairstyles, and some men agreed to give up their polygamous marriages, retaining just one wife. Maretu’s description of these changes is dispassionate. He views them as necessary because life has changed, rather than the missionary assessment that the old ways were depraved or barbarous.

After the LMS missionaries, Pitman and Williams, arrived the people assembled at Avura to agree on a code of laws. Sub-districts were established with two policemen and two custodians in each. Maretu

23 Brock, “Two Indigenous Evangelists.”
24 Maretu, 200.
25 Maretu, 58. Maretu stepped in to destroy the marae and idols when Papeiha failed to do so, as mentioned above.
26 A thousand people according to Maretu. Other sources suggest it was about 300. Maretu, 67 footnote 120; Gill, 28.
27 Maretu, 69.
became a policeman. In 1833 Rarotongans began to be confirmed as members of the church, and Maretu and other members traveled around the island preaching, telling about the birth and death of Jesus. They persuaded people to attend classes and abandon their lands to move to the Christian villages of Avura and Ngatangiia. The following year Pitman made Maretu and another Islander his assistants. Maretu began teaching a group of young people in his home who soon wished “to take the Word of God to the lands of the heathen.” In Maretu’s mind and that of many other new Christians on Rarotonga, there was a small step between accepting Christian teachings themselves and wanting to spread these teachings to others.

Maretu’s opportunity to proselytize free of direct supervision occurred when he was sent to Mangaia. He faced a hostile reception from the chiefs who wanted a European missionary rather than an “old” Rarotongan. The Tahitian missionaries rightly feared he was a threat to their standing among the Mangaians But in his account Maretu overcomes adversity and he and his teachings are accepted by the people. Maretu’s new found autonomy on Mangaia is reflected in his narrative. He is now central to his own story. He describes his preaching and people’s acceptance of it; his instruction of locals in burning lime to build the church in which Maretu and Davida, a Tahitian missionary, baptized and accepted communicants. He heard for the first time that the LMS missionary, John Williams, had been killed “by the heathens” on Erromango in the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) when a ship finally arrived to return Maretu to Rarotonga.

William Gill and his wife accompanied Maretu back to Mangaia in 1841. Gill was impressed by the church he found there full of attentive listeners, “It was altogether a day of deep interest—one that we had little expected to experience among the people who had only been favored with a native teacher’s instruction.” Gill and his wife remained for five months before returning to Rarotonga. Maretu stayed on Mangaia until 1845. Nine years later Maretu was asked to go to the tiny island of Manihiki and its neighbor, Rakahanga. The Raka-

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28 Maretu, 82; Gill, 31.
29 Maretu, 87, 92.
30 Maretu, 128.
31 Maretu gives the date as June 1840, 129. Gill claims it was 1841, 133. John Williams was killed in November 1839.
32 Gill, 139. Italics as in original.
hangans moved their village to a new site under Maretu’s direction, carrying 45 houses, the school house and church across a lagoon to the site. Following mission policy they beautified the new village, and then decided to build a new church. The people from Manihiki were invited for the opening which was celebrated with feasting. Maretu then returned to Manihiki and showed the people how to burn lime to make a stone church. The Rakahangans then demanded one too. By the time Maretu left the atolls, “Three churches had been built, 150 people had been accepted as full church members, and 60 others had been baptized but not yet admitted as communicants.” All the adults and children could read the scriptures.33

Maretu’s account reverts to the third person as he describes the movements and activities of the missionaries back on Rarotonga. He concludes with the observation, “Only Jesus is now being worshipped on this island. There’s only one place of heathen worship (akapunga) left here on Rarotonga, that is untruth which is the hiding place of some people.” The final pages of Maretu’s book summarize the story of the introduction of Christianity to Rarotonga and Maretu’s role. He ends with the observation that he is the last of the original Christians still alive.34

Maretu’s autobiographical account reflects a modest man who was a decisive and active leader when given autonomy to act.35 But even in his own history he becomes a secondary figure when European missionaries were present. In William Gill’s history Maretu and other Islander missionaries are praised but virtually invisible in the narrative. Christianity is presented as a foreign ideology imposed by foreigners, rather than an ideology which became naturalised to Islander societies, as it was spread by Islanders themselves.

In a period when there were no colonial governments in the region, or threat of physical intimidation, Cook Islanders, not only called themselves Christians, but changed their clothing and hairstyles to introduced standards, adjusted their marriage patterns, revolutionized their living arrangements as they moved off their lands and the villages adjacent to them into centralized Christian villages. Many journeyed to other islands to evangelize, taking Christianity and their

33 Maretu, 181.
34 Maretu, 200-202.
35 This view is confirmed in Robson’s biography, “Yet to all appearance he was simply a happy old man who loved children and collected all sorts about him.” 35.
understandings of Christian living with them. In these societies change was introduced from across the ocean. They were small and vulnerable to natural disasters. People frequently moved villages, or even islands to escape the devastation of hurricanes, floods and famine. Their religious lives were similarly adaptable. The god represented by the Bible could supplement or replace existing gods, “When Papeiha opened the Bible and the pages fluttered, they said, ‘That is God himself fluttering when Papeiha turns the pages.’” Tuaivi, Maretu’s father recounted that, “God flashed in its covering and even though it was parcelled together [as a bound book] it still shone brightly.”

Central Australia presents a dramatic contrast to these island societies. It also threw up great environmental challenges to people living there. This semi-arid region is extremely hot in the summer months with temperatures sometimes falling below freezing during winter nights. Rainfall is erratic and droughts common. The Western Arrernte and other language groups in the region did not have villages, agriculture or domesticated animals, other than dogs. The Cook Islanders lived in villages, only moving when the weather or political pressures made it necessary. Central Australian people were much more mobile with huge spaces to traverse in contrast to the Islanders who lived on fertile strips of land hemmed in by the ocean and rocky outcrops and hills. While Islanders were protected from intruders, both hostile and friendly, by environmental barriers, the Arrernte were wary of strangers and vulnerable to unwanted interlopers. The Lutheran missionaries of the Hermannsburg mission society who came on to Arrernte land in the late 1870s were viewed with fear and suspicion. While Pacific Islanders confronted visitors to their islands on the beaches or even on the seas before they landed, the Arrernte observed the missionaries from a distance while remaining invisible to them. Moses Tjalkabota, who was a very young boy at the time, describes the wariness with which the Arrernte encountered the missionaries,

First up, we went to the hills afraid. We stayed there in the hills and made camp. Then when the men went hunting, they saw the tracks of the tangara [sheep] … the meat they were given from the tangara they

36 Maretu, 58. There are many other instances in the Pacific of Islanders’ fascination with the printed page.
37 There are Western, Southern and Central Arrernte dialects, as well as other languages found in the region.
buried. Also the flour they had been given. They did not eat it. Then they fed it to the dogs to see if they would die.  

Eventually a few men visited the mission while keeping the women and children hidden. After a period of making short visits to the mission Tjalkabota decided to stay and become a Christian. His parents tried to dissuade him (he was still a young boy), but in Tjalkabota’s narrative he was adamant, thereby rejecting his family in favor of the missionaries. He gives an account of a conversation he had with his father after he was baptized in which he accuses his father of being a heathen. His father cannot comprehend the meaning of the word making an equivalence between baptism and Arrernte initiation ceremonies (in which a boy is reborn as an adult), “No I am not a heathen. I am an iliara [initiated man], a Christian from long time ago. Anyway, what is a heathen?”

There is an interesting parallel here with Maretu’s destruction of his father’s marae and idols which made his father very angry. Nevertheless Maretu believed he saved his father’s life by his actions. In both these instances the son set himself up as more knowledgeable than the father. Christianity introduced a reversal of father/son or intergenerational relations. Both Maretu and Tjalkabota saw themselves as having a status and knowledge which put them outside normal social hierarchies.

Tjalkabota’s oral account may have inadvertently freed him from the restraints of recording his life in a westernized format. New Christian missionaries and evangelists who kept diaries or wrote autobiographies had no indigenous precedent for these activities as they came from non-literate societies. The only models were those of missionaries or traders. Tjalkabota grew up in an oral tradition. He then learnt to read and write as a child, but later as a result of his blindness became totally dependent on oral means of communication and his prodigious memory of the scriptures. His narrative does not conform to western chronology or modes of constructing an autobiography. Place rather than temporality structures the narrative. He describes his childhood and his family’s movements in search of food, and their travels to ceremonial and secular meetings which are of ethnographic interest,

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38 Tjalkabota, 242-243. He was born about 1873 (the records are not consistent regarding dates).
39 Tjalkabota, 259.
rather than written in the ethnographic style of Maretu’s description of pre-Christian life. Journeys and preaching provide the substance of Tjalkabota’s tale. He gives few details of his personal life. He mentions his marriage, but not the onset of his blindness. There are few references to his children, although he had many, all but one of whom died before he did. He, like Maretu, reconstructs conversations he had in which he tried to convince those who had not accepted Christianity that they were wrong. Moses articulates his disapproval of the old beliefs much more vehemently than Maretu. In his remembered conversations with those he was prozelitising he argued that existing beliefs and religious symbols had to be replaced by Christian ones; lies with truth.40 While Cook Islanders were open to the possibility of new, more powerful or effective gods, the Arrernte did not have gods or idols which could be adopted or rejected, or which competed with each other for spiritual authority. T. G. H. Strehlow has described Arrernte religion as personal mono-totemism existing within poly-totemistic communities where individuals have direct links with ancestral beings who created the known world. The strength of the relationship between Arrernte and their environment was not dependent on prayer or sacrifices, but on the supernatural beings who gave them life and the rituals which maintained the links with those beings.41 One can only speculate that the evangelism of Maretu and Moses Tjalkabota would have taken very different forms as they set out their ontological arguments in their attempts to convince their audiences to adopt Christianity.42

Tjalkabota moved to Hermannsburg mission as a child. He shepherded sheep, helped with building works and attended school spasmodically. He taught a number of the missionaries the Western Arrernte language. Even before he moved permanently to Hermannsburg, the young Tjalkabota was instructing others about Christianity, “Raueraka was ignorant of God’s word. I taught him the song,

42 Both men believed there was a possibility, and even a probability, that the people they evangelized would respond to their preaching, thus supporting Ranger’s proposition that pre-existing indigenous religions, whatever their form, did not preclude the possibility of religious change (see Ranger this volume).
Jesuai nauna pitjai [Jesus come to us]. Also the psalm, The Lord is my Shepherd. I taught him the Commandments too.” In 1910 the permanent missionary, Carl Strehlow, went on furlough to Germany for three years. O. Liebler replaced him, and according to Tjalkabota, he was the first to ask him to take formal classes preparing children for baptism. His role as teacher and preacher continued through the rest of his life. Tjalkabota went on his first evangelical trip away from Hermannsburg sometime after 1917. This journey initiated an outreach program by Arrernte evangelists and ministers to communities living away from the mission which continues into the present. The last third of Tjalkabota’s life story details his journeys to cattle stations, food ration depots and Alice Springs township preaching to Arrernte and neighboring peoples. His life at the mission is passed over, “I then stayed at Ntaria [Hermannsburg] for a quite a while. But then again I left.”

As already noted there are no published missionary accounts of Hermannsburg equivalent to William Gill’s book. The unpublished mission records include many reports, diaries, newspaper articles, correspondence and other writings by mission staff. Moses (the name used in all mission records) appears frequently. He is the most visible of the Arrernte in the written records, although a number of other evangelists are also noticed by mission staff. The period in which Moses was most appreciated and lauded was in the 1920s after the death of the long-term missionary Carl Strehlow in 1922, who was not replaced by F. W. Albrecht until 1926. Moses taught Albrecht Western Arrernte and advised and supported the new missionary in his first difficult years during one of the worst droughts on record. Heinrich,
the young teacher at Hermannsburg when Strehlow died; Riedel, the minister who made visits to the mission during the interregnum; and the young Albrecht on his arrival at Hermannsburg all were impressed by, one might even say in awe of, Tjalkabota’s capacities as a teacher, preacher and wise adviser. The young Albrecht on his arrival at Hermannsburg all were impressed by, one might even say in awe of, Tjalkabota’s capacities as a teacher, preacher and wise adviser.49 Heinrich reported that Moses’ evangelizing around central Australia had reaped amazing results following Strehlow’s death and that all the people over an extended region were ready to abandon the tjurunga (the Arrernte sacred objects) and accept the Christian God. He enthused that the most delightful hours of his life at Hermannsburg were spent with Moses preparing the Sunday sermon.50 Riedel and Albrecht, in his early years at Hermannsburg, make clear in their correspondence and reports how dependent they were on Moses and a few other Christian men to advise them, translate for them and teach them about the Arrernte. They observed Moses’ ability to explain Christian concepts and his use of biblical pictures to motivate his audience. Yet, while they relied on a few senior Christian men to impose Christian morality and disciplinary code, it is evident in the missionaries’ reports that these codes were subverted to some extent by these Arrernte Christians who made their own decisions about what social and cultural changes were appropriate, such as the continuation of initiation ceremonies, and corporal punishment for sexual relationships deemed inappropriate under Arrernte law.51

As Albrecht came to assert his authority, Moses became less prominent in the record. Rather than being lauded as a great preacher and teacher he became someone who complained and had to be manipulated into taking on tasks the missionary planned for him.52

In 1934 Albrecht returned from a trip visiting Arrernte evangelists located away from the mission. He was concerned they were not very effective, “I am of the opinion we need a ‘live-wire’ out there,

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49 One cannot surmise either from Tjalkabota or the mission records to what extent his close identification with Christianity and the mission compromised his position among the Arrernte, but this is not my concern in this paper.
50 Heinrich to Stolz 7 weeks before Pfingsten, 1923, Correspondence with Mission Station, 1923, 16B1/2, Lutheran Archives, Adelaide (hereafter LA).
51 Eg Riedel diary 30 November 1924, 16C5/6, LA; Albrecht to Riedel 7 September 1927, 16A5/6, LA.
52 Eg Albrecht to Riedel 10 May 1935, AA681, H2, Leske Collection, South Australian Museum (hereafter SAM); Albrecht to Riedel 26 January 1940, AA662, Albrecht-Burns Collection, SAM.
Moses would be the man for the work, if only the “flesh pots” here would not keep him.”53 The “flesh pots” were a hut on the mission, food rations and handouts of clothing once or twice a year! The following year Albrecht again complained about Moses’ liking for the “flesh pots” of the mission when he refused to go to Alice Springs as directed by Albrecht. Albrecht surmised Moses was upset because he had been promised a stone house, which had not been built. He only agreed to go to Alice Springs after Albrecht threatened to take away his “special privileges.”54

The institutionalized environment that constituted the mission bred an atmosphere where Aboriginal people, even those who cooperated with and promoted mission work, came to be regarded as inmates and the outsider missionary was the disciplinarian and controller of resources.55 Tjalkabota ignores the institutionalized aspects of his life and celebrates his autonomous existence as a Christian preacher and teacher. References to mission staff in his narrative act as chronological markers, rather than representations of authority.56 By emphasizing autonomy over institutionalized life, Tjalkabota brings some of his inner beliefs to the fore, while ignoring the limitations of life on the mission. The missionaries’ writings reveal many of the indignities, lack of autonomy and deprived circumstances of mission life. They also tell us something of the colonial setting of Aboriginal life in central Australia as they battle their own mission societies, government and local attitudes towards Aboriginal people. Mission records suggest that the Christian evangelists were sometimes challenged and undermined by those who had not accepted Christianity and maintained Arrernte beliefs. Tjalkabota presents these encounters as verbal interchanges in which he has the winning argument.

Maretu’s autobiography is also a success story. There are few dissenting voices and certainly none which prevail against the Christians.

53 “Our Finke Mission” Lutheran Herald 13 August 1934, 270. This is a reference to Exodus 16, 3.
54 Albrecht to Riedel 10 May 1935, AA681, H2, Leske Collection, SAM.
56 Chronology must be inferred from the references to mission personnel. It is possible to ascertain from mission records when staff referred to were at Hermannsburg and a rough chronology can be based on these records. It is also possible to identify some of the events mentioned by Tjalkabota in the written records.
While missionaries such as Gill and Murray who interpret their role as a fight against the forces of heathenism and barbarism, were always ready to see these negative forces reasserting themselves, Maretu’s familiarity with life in the Cook Islands allowed him to talk about people’s behavior and everyday events, rather than abstract forces which threaten to overwhelm. There is never a sense that he was fighting a war which could be lost. The principal chiefs—the *ariki* and *mataiapo*—were the focus of his evangelizing. Equally important were the building projects; the reorganization of village life; and the introduction of new laws, which were instituted while maintaining social and political hierarchies and cultural forms such as feasting to mark important events. Christianity led to a spatial reorganization of society, but not a political reordering. As Crocombe notes, “There were very few high chiefs (*ariki*)—only six in Rarotonga, yet the whole story is woven around them … Maretu and the other missionaries identified with the chiefs, worked through them to a large extent, and usually supported them.”

In central Australia (and for that matter elsewhere in Australia) the missionaries encountered non-hierarchical societies in which religious authority was vested in individuals with no tiered political structure. Introducing religious change therefore undermined the authority of the most influential men and women in Arrernte society. Most of these people probably remained outside the mission compound. The missionaries believed they were competing with them for religious influence and power. As a boy and young man Tjalkabota says he was intimidated and frightened by these elders. Later he verbally challenged them. The holders of religious authority had everything to lose in this encounter with the mission. Tjalkabota’s narrative is about intellectual confrontations, there is nothing about changing the way people organized their lives. He noted that when he first went to Hermannsburg the missionaries gave him clothes and told him to wash. He was astounded to see stone buildings for the first time (he still had his sight). By the time Tjalkabota had become an itinerant evangelist, most of the people he visited were living adjacent to homesteads on cattle stations or on reserves on the fringes of towns. The missionaries had built a church at Hermannsburg with Arrernte labor, but Moses and the other evangelists did not indicate any inter-

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57 Maretu, 11.
adapted in building churches in the outlying areas they visited. Preaching took place in the open as most Aboriginal people lived in makeshift accommodation whether on or off the mission. The mission struggled to accommodate and feed people, so the itinerant evangelists were discouraged from bringing people into Hermannsburg. In 1924, when Hermannsburg faced financial difficulties, the manager sent 80 people, including baptismal candidates, away from the mission.58

An analysis of the texts produced by Maretu and Tjalkabota in conjunction with the writings of the European missionaries who worked with them suggests that the introduction of Christianity to peoples in the Pacific and the lands on the Pacific rim did not follow a predictable pattern. Christianity was introduced to the Cook Islands by Tahitians sponsored by the LMS long before any colonial government exercised influence or control over Cook Islanders. Christians, like traders, came from across the ocean with new products as well as ideas. The missions operated their own ships, an important factor in a world dominated by huge expanses of water. Yet once on land the missionaries depended on Islanders to support them with food and accommodation. They were susceptible to attack, without being able to threaten retaliation. John Williams’ murder on Erromanga was an example of their vulnerability. They were also dependent on local Christians to undertake most of the evangelism in the islands. Maretu’s autobiography illustrates the role of new Christians in the spread of Christianity, although his book reflects his recognition of his position in the mission pecking order. When working on his own or with other Islanders he foregrounds his activities and leadership. When working in tandem with European missionaries he reverts to a third person account where he becomes a secondary figure.

Hermannsburg mission was established after the British had laid claim to central Australia but before there was a direct colonial presence there. It was not long, however, before the mission and the Arrernte were enmeshed in the violent colonial frontier where the government was represented by police officers in sympathy with colonial interests. The first encounters between missionaries and Arrernte reflected the pre-colonial situation, but the loss of Arrernte autonomy came very rapidly with a resulting dependence on the mission as a safe haven,

58 Heinrich to Stolz 14 August 1924, A5/6 FRM Correspondence 1924-1931, LA; Heinrich to Mission Friends Lutheran Herald, 5 January 1925.
source of food and shelter. The Lutherans were reliant on Tjalkabota and other evangelists to communicate their understandings of Christianity to their fellows and then take their religion beyond the perimeter of the mission to pastoral stations and towns, and communities further west still remote from direct colonial contact. The Lutherans recognized their debt to these evangelists, particularly at times when they were understaffed or reliant on inexperienced staff. But when there was an experienced missionary in control (during the long tenures of Carl Strehlow and F. W. Albrecht), the Arrernte role as evangelists faded from the written record and criticism of their conduct increased.

Maretu acknowledged his loss of authority in the presence of Europeans. Tjalkabota excluded them from his memoir, more concerned with: his travels as a youngster before he joined the mission; the early days of the mission when he was establishing himself as a preacher and teacher; and then his itinerant evangelizing free of supervision and control.

Indigenous-generated texts unveil the complexities of religious change as a process which occurred within indigenous societies, rather than an imposition from outside. Much of the teaching and preaching took place away from the supervision of the outsider missionaries who formalized, through scheduled church services, baptisms, confirmations and marriage ceremonies, what was happening informally. This study of texts from different sources once again challenges easy dichotomies of colonized/colonizer, Christian/non-Christian; and the notion that Christianization and “civilization” were similarly packaged by missionaries for delivery around the world. It confirms that the study of indigenous-generated texts bring new understandings to our analysis of cross cultural encounters and religious change, a point already made by Peel, White and Ranger among others. Yet these texts ignore important aspects of mission encounters and the historical context in which they occurred, as they reflect the social, political and personal standing of their authors within indigenous societies, and, of course, their Christian commitment.
Moses Tjalkabota (right standing) with wife, Sofia (centre) and another evangelist, Titus (left), with people living west of Hermannsburg, 1930.

*Lutheran Archives, Adelaide, South Australia.*
There has been a tendency by some historians, anthropologists and Indigenous writers to downplay the response of Aboriginal people in Australia to Christianity. This chapter examines the establishment of Ernabella mission in the north west of South Australia, and the response of the Pitjantjatjara to the introduction of Christianity.\(^\text{1}\) It challenges anthropologist Aram Yengoyan’s claim that “the religion of the economically and politically dispossessed society [the Pitjantjatjara] does not have a ‘prior text’ that facilitates religious conversion—that is, one that relates to prior texts in Western thought which do embrace Christianity.”\(^\text{2}\)

The Pitjantjatjara

The Pitjantjatjara occupied a large region in the far north-west of the state of South Australia and adjacent parts of Western Australia and the Northern Territory. This area included the Musgrave, Mann and Tomkinson Ranges, and extensive sandhill plains. The Pitjantjatjara were hunter-gatherers whose movements were governed largely by the availability of scattered water supplies. They attribute the beginnings of their existence and their way of life to the creative activities of the \textit{Tjukurpa}, glossed in English as the Dreaming.\(^\text{3}\) They believe that spirit beings who had lain dormant under the unformed substance of

\(^{1}\) I acknowledge my own interest and firsthand involvement with the Pitjantjatjara over 22 years. I have continued to have a close association with the Pitjantjatjara since leaving the Pitjantjatjara Lands 24 years ago.


the land, became animated and emerged on the surface of the earth. Most have both human and other species identities. As these ancestral beings moved across the surface of the land, their activities formed the hills, watercourses, sandhills, trees, caves and other features of the environment, as they metamorphosed into these objects, or in other ways left their imprint. Pitjantjatjara associated with particular areas of country, believe they are descended from these ancestor spirit beings and are responsible for preserving and passing on the stories and rituals related to their totemic being. The rituals include male initiations and increase ceremonies which ensure the continued supply of resources. The activities of the Dreaming ancestors provide the model for daily living and social cohesion. Through ritual the performers participate in the original acts of creation linking past and present. The emphasis is on social rather than on individual identity where everyday behaviors are determined by intricate kin networks.

The arid environment and distance from coastal areas protected the Pitjantjatjara from the impact of early colonial settlement in Australia. They remained isolated from outside influences until the mid-twentieth century.

**Evaluations of Aboriginal Christianity**

Richard Broome reflects the views of many historians when he states,

> Until the 1960s there were very few Aboriginal Christians converts. Also there were no significant amalgamations between Aboriginal religious ideas and Christianity to form a new religion along the lines of many indigenous-Christian churches in Africa today.

Broome ignores the creation of Aboriginal congregations in a variety of missions throughout Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the role of earlier Aboriginal pastors and evangelists such as Nathanael Pepper, Blind Moses Tjalkabota, James and David Unaipon, Mamoos and James Noble.

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7 See John Harris, *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity. A Story*
Tony Swain, who has written on Aboriginal religion, attributes the rise of a more positive response to Christianity to the introduction of the policies of self-determination in the late 1960s and early 1970s among groups such as the Warlpiri of Central Australia who convey Christian themes through traditional forms of ritual, art and song; and the Elcho Islanders who spearheaded a Christian revival movement in Arnhem Land.8

The American anthropologist, Aram Yengoyan, who did fieldwork among the Pitjantjaṭjarara from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, has presented the most detailed challenge to the proposition that Pitjantjaṭjarara people have undergone a process of Christian conversion over an extended period. In 1993, he wrote, “I discuss some of the ethnographic and theoretical debates on why the Pitjantjaṭjarara of the western desert of central Australia have not converted to Christianity.”9 I found this statement intriguing and challenging as I have baptized many Pitjantjaṭjarara people, trained church leaders, shared with Pitjantjaṭjarara Christians in deep discussions, prayed with them in times of sickness and death and sat with them in well attended Christian services and conventions. Some of the issues raised by Yengoyan are addressed in this chapter. Yengoyan’s proposition that the Pitjantjaṭjarara had no “prior text” is based on two main assumptions. The first is Burridge’s claim that the concept of individuality is “a hallmark of Christianity.”10 Yengoyan sees Christianity as a system of thought and action in which, “The individual becomes a distinct and responsible unit who has rights and bears responsibilities.”11 Yengoyan argues that the emphasis in Aboriginal societies is on a complex set of social relationships and structures which are inimical to such individual expression of religious faith and action,

In such a social context the dilemma for Christian conversion is not simply how to substitute one set of religious tenets for another but how to

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9 Yengoyan, 234.
10 Yengoyan, 235.
11 Yengoyan, 235.
develop new forms of individuality from the complex matrix of Aboriginal social rules through which all individuals are intricately related.  

Yengoyan’s second assumption is that the, “moral foundation of social actions are thought to be derived from the ancestral beings and events of the mythic past and present”, therefore, for the Pitjantjatjara, “salvation, damnation, and the future of each person are non-issues. It is not the future which is important but the message of the ancient past that lives in the present to determine what will happen.” Prayer is irrelevant because “betterment is insured by adhering more firmly to the eternal laws and by minimizing group and individual violations of correct social conduct.” This emphasis on the social collective and the overarching power of mythic tradition come together in Yengoyan’s assertion that for the Pitjantjatjara,

Knowledge is never a private matter, nor is it considered characteristic only of a particular individual. In fact, Pitjantjatjara have a marked fear of any form of personalized knowledge which does not have collective roots; socialization is linked to patterns of social interaction which strongly deny any attribution of special knowledge to any single individual.

Yengoyan concludes that for the Pitjantjatjara and Aboriginal people in general, “The Christian message is foreign because it is individualized, but the message is also nearly always based on what the future will reveal and what it will mean for the average person. Both revelations are cultural events which have no prior text in and no linkage to the Pitjantjatjara worldview; thus they stand outside the Pitjantjatjara creation of life.”

Yengoyan’s analysis “generally stresses the intellectualist aspect of why conversion did not occur among the Pitjantjatjara” Observation of the experiences of many Pitjantjatjara people over an extended period suggest that his conclusions rest on prior assumptions without taking sufficient account of the changes which have taken place in Pitjantjatjara society since the establishment of Ernabella Mission. Ingrid Slotte after observing Pitjantjatjara people attending a Christian meeting on Elcho Island in Arnhem Land, commented that “it cer-

12 Yengoyan, 236.
13 Yengoyan, 242, 248.
14 Yengoyan, 248.
15 Yengoyan, 242.
16 Yengoyan, 249.
17 Yengoyan, 234.
ertainly added to my feeling that Yengoyan’s chapter will not be the last word on Pitjantjatjara Christianity.”

Terence Ranger’s challenge to Yengoyan’s assertions is based on his knowledge of African Christian movements. While Ranger has previously struggled to find evidence from Australia which reflects the same kind of religious dynamism as he found in southern Africa, he questioned “the assertion that Christianity and ‘primal religions’ represent mutually exclusive cosmological spheres.”

He noted that “in some continents Christianity is a mark of indigenous identity rather than a denial of it.”

In this chapter I present evidence that many Pitjantjatjara people have responded positively to Christianity, and argue that Christianity has elements that resonate with Pitjantjatjara understandings about the world. Old Testament stories about kinship, desert journeys, rocks and waterholes have a ring of familiarity to Pitjantjatjara hearers. As the mission introduced sheep, goats and gardens, Pitjantjatjara preachers responded by focusing on parables which relate to shepherding and sowing seed. Meaning was given to unfamiliar concepts such as kings, feasts, treasure and vineyards by taking features from their own lives to convey the same messages. This preaching was undertaken in the context of dramatic challenges to the Pitjantjatjara worldview through innovations introduced from outside their society.

The Establishment of Ernabella Mission

Some Pitjantjatjara first heard of Jesus from Will Wade in 1927. Wade undertook an “explorative and evangelistic trip” on camels from Oodnadatta through the Pitjantjatjara lands of the Musgrave, Mann, Tomkinson and Deering Ranges. This expedition is remembered in Pitjantjatjara oral history. In 1962 Jacky Tjupuru showed me a depression in the ground near Aparanya spring north-west of


20 Ranger, 263.

21 Ranger, 263.

Amata, in which he said Wade had buried food for his return journey. He related that Wade told them a story about a baby and taught them a gospel song. Andy Tjilari, who was a small boy when he saw Wade’s camels, told me that the people named Wade, Aliluyanya, because he sang Hallelujah songs. Wade established the Warburton Range Mission in Western Australia in 1934 for the interdenominational United Aborigines Mission. Three years later the Presbyterian Church established Ernabella Mission on Yankunytjatjara traditional land in the Musgrave Ranges. Yankunytjatjara is a dialect closely related to Pitjantjatjara. Around this time there was a movement of Pitjantjatjaras east under pressure of a drought, and in response to the attractions of new foods and goods available at cattle stations being established on Yankunytjatjara land, as the Yankunytjatjaras also moved eastward. Prospectors and “doggers” were intruding on to land reserved for Aboriginal use and in 1934 the South Australian state government made four blocks of land (each 500 square miles/800 square kilometers) east of the Aboriginal Reserve available as leasehold for running stock. An Adelaide doctor, Charles Duguid, visited the region in 1935 to investigate reports of the abuse of Aboriginal women and workers. He was a Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in South Australia and President of the Aborigines Protection League and recommended that the church buy the leasehold to establish a medical mission which would act as a buffer between the Pitjantjatjara and the encroaching newcomers. He insisted, “There was to be no compulsion nor imposition of our way of life on the Aborigines, nor deliberate interference with tribal custom ... only people trained in some particular skill should be on the mission staff, and ... they must learn the tribal language.” Duguid emphasized that “Christian living should be exemplified by the white missionaries in their daily life and .... it be left to the aborigines to make the change if they judged our way better than theirs.”

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24 “Doggers” were men who collected dingo scalps to obtain a government bounty aimed at reducing the number of wild dogs preying on stock. They traded scalps with the local Aboriginal hunters.
26 Charles Duguid, “Ernabella: Origin and the First Ten Years,” Typescript, nd, 1. (copy held by author)
The Presbyterian Church purchased a pastoral lease and established Ernabella Mission in 1937. The sheep already established on the leasehold were retained and provided the Pitjantjatjara with training and employment in shepherding, well-sinking, fencing, shearing, building and gardening. A school based on a policy of vernacular education was opened in 1940. A health clinic was also established. From 1948, a craft industry provided employment for many of the women. It survives as the oldest continuing Aboriginal art centre in Australia.

Duguid’s policy became the guiding principle of the mission. The superintendent, Rev. J.R.B. Love, wrote in 1944: “I think we must acquiesce, for some years to come at least, and never seek to break the authority of their elders; but in due time to win the elders, too, to the way of Christ. I think I could work up enthusiasm and have a large number of men and women baptized soon. And what would be the good of that?” 27 Fifteen years passed from the establishment of Ernabella before the first baptisms, years during which solid foundations were laid through language learning, translation of gospels and hymns and instruction in Bible stories and a catechism. In 1944 a brush shelter was erected for use as a church. From 1949, services were held in a new school building. By the 1940s young people were attending classes; reading the Gospels which had been translated and printed in Pitjantjatjara; and conducting their own services when away from the mission. 28 Choir practices were another means of instruction. They were attended by 80 to 90 young people who were taught hymns in Pitjantjatjara. 29

Yengoyan argues that the Pitjantjatjara accepted the mission regime as it “helped articulate Aboriginal-White relations in a harmonious way,” 30 that they attended services because of an interest in the singing and ritual, rather than in the prospect of conversion; 31 and that their affirmation to Europeans of Christian belief was merely an act of social accommodation. 32 Yengoyan does not provide evidence to support his insistence that these outward behaviors did not represent a
commitment to Christianity as a system of spiritual beliefs and moral precepts.

In 1950, a group of 36 young Pitjantjatjara people attended a staff communion service where, it was reported, their “interest and attention were deep and sustained.”33 At the end of the year 34 people attended a two week Bible School. In the following year about 30 young people “took their stand for Christ … All were desirous of being baptized, but of course quite a lot of training and preparation was necessary.”34

In November 1952 four hundred people attended the dedication of a large church building. It was constructed of cement blocks made by Pitjantjatjara men. In the afternoon 20 young people made a confession of faith and were baptized. That evening the newly baptized Pitjantjatjara church members joined with staff in a Communion service.35 During the superintendent’s furlough the Pitjantjatjara became increasingly involved in holding services, “For the first time native men gave addresses in church services. Previously they had taken part in readings and prayers. Christian young women are taking active part in women’s meetings. Native services conducted by themselves are reported as having been held in camp and out on walkabout.”36

By 1957 forty three adults and seven infants had been baptized, most of the adults were graduates of the Ernabella school. Another 11 adults and 11 infants were baptized the following year out of a population of about 400. Changes in superintendents in 1957 and 1958 increased the opportunities for Pitjantjatjara men to take an active part in services—they read scriptures and prayed regularly at Sunday morning services and preached at most afternoon services.37 At Easter 1961 the leadership role of Pitjantjatjara people in the church was formalized with church members electing four men as church leaders. The Presbyterian Church authorized their recognition as Church Elders in 1965.

Until 1961, Ernabella was the only Aboriginal settlement in the area but as the population increased it placed pressure on scarce resources,

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34 “Ernabella News Letter” (June, 1951), 2.
35 “Ernabella News Letter” (December, 1952), 5
37 I commenced employment at Ernabella in May 1958 and became Superintendent later that year.
including water and firewood, so the government and church took steps to decentralize the population. The South Australian Aboriginal Protection Board established Musgrave Park (later re-named Amata) settlement on the north-west Aboriginal Reserve to the west of Ernabella. Six couples with traditional ties to land on the reserve, moved from Ernabella to the new settlement. Most of these adults had been baptized and they included two of the leading Christian women from Ernabella. As the population slowly increased, these Christian men and women commenced services and catechism classes. I visited Amata from Ernabella monthly to conduct sacraments, teach and provide support. Here was a group of Pitjantjatjara people who met in Christian services regularly without any direct supervision by a mission regime.

In the same year, the Presbyterian Board of Missions established Fregon, a cattle outstation approximately 50 kilometers south west of Ernabella. Fregon was administered from Ernabella with a staff of four supervising the settlement operations, cattle work, school and clinic. Families with traditional links to this sandhill country moved from Ernabella to Fregon with approximately 100 people living there in its early years. Some of those who had been baptized assisted the outstation overseer in the conduct of worship. One of the Ernabella Church leaders was invited by Fregon people to lead their worship and teach them. He remained there for several years in this role, and lives there again in retirement. During the 1960s Pitjantjatjara men and women were responsible for much of the leadership of worship and instruction of candidates for baptism at Amata and Fregon. The churches in all three centres grew steadily.

In 1968 the South Australian government established Indulkana Reserve, approximately 200 kilometers south-east of Ernabella. Changes in cattle management practices and wage structures for Aboriginal employees had reduced the demand for Aboriginal labor on cattle stations. Indulkana was established to provide social welfare, educational and health services for people who had resided on these stations. Most of them had visited Ernabella for social and ceremonial purposes, and a few Indulkana residents had attended the Ernabella school and received Christian instruction. I was invited to conduct services there and became a regular visitor to the community. In between visits Aboriginal men conducted services and catechism classes. Twenty-three adults were baptized at Indulkana in 1971. One man who took a major leadership role at Indulkana had spent his life on cattle stations and had never attended school. He asked one of the
church leaders to teach him to read and to instruct him from the Bible. He and two others were ordained as Church Elders in 1978. He remained a strong leader of the Indulkana church until his death in the early 1990s.

An Aboriginal population of approximately 80 lived at Everard Park cattle station midway between Indulkana and Fregon. In 1972 this station was purchased by the government and handed over to the Aboriginal community who renamed it Mimili. Residents requested Christian instruction from Ernabella. They quickly learned to conduct their own services and three Elders were ordained there in 1978. Between 1959 and 1972, 115 adults and 106 children were baptized on the Pitjantjatjara/Yangunytjatjara lands:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Infants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ernabella</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amata</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fregon</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indulkana</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
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The early 1970s was a period of significant change in Aboriginal affairs in Australia with a shift in government policies from assimilation to Aboriginal self-management. Under this policy direct government and mission administrative control of Aboriginal communities was withdrawn and replaced by a system in which Aboriginal communities became incorporated legal entities run by elected councils which employed their own staff and advisers. In 1972 a lay Superintendent was appointed to Ernabella, and on January 1st, 1974 Ernabella and Fregon were transferred to community control. By 1974 the responsibility for oversight of church life in the area was left in the hands of the Church Elders. Two Elders attended a six-week course at Aurukun mission in North Queensland with Elders from other Presbyterian missions. They were authorized to administer sacraments. Under this local leadership, the church membership increased dramatically with baptisms between late 1972 and August 1974 totalling 61 men, 61 women and 21 infants:

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<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Infants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ernabella</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amata</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fregon</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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This brought the number of baptisms since 1952 to 123 men, 176 women and 143 infants, an overall total of 442. Although populations tended to fluctuate as people moved from place to place, the following are approximate figures for the main centers at that time: Ernabella 350, Fregon 200, Amata 330, Indulkana 200 and Mimili 80. Adult baptisms continued through the 1970s.

At this time several outstation or homeland communities were established to the west of Amata, as people moved from the larger communities to settle near traditional sites. Wingelinna in Western Australia was established in 1975 and Pipalyatjara in the extreme north-west of South Australia in 1976. These communities served as supply bases for yet smaller homeland communities. From 1976-1980 I was the parish minister based at Amata, while providing support and training for the Elders and others who conducted services across the 600 kilometer-wide parish. By the end of this period, 28 Elders had been ordained and approximately 500 adults baptized. The total population in the region was about 1,600. In 1977 the Pitjantjatjara Parish became part of the Northern Synod of the newly formed Uniting Church in Australia.

This outline of the growth of the Pitjantjatjara Church presents figures which are at odds with Yengoyan’s statement, “In the middle 1980s, but even as far back as the middle 1960s, when I first worked in this area, the missionaries counted about eight or ten ‘true converts’, meaning individuals who had given their souls to the Christian church.” He concluded that “after nearly fifty years of church and missionizing activities, conversions were so few as to be nearly inconsequential.”

The styles of worship, teaching and evangelism at Ernabella reflected the Presbyterian tradition which emphasizes catechizing, a contrast to some missions which presented a more openly aggressive evangelistic front. In line with the early policies, there was no call for the Pitjantjatjara people to prove their allegiance to Christ by repudiating traditional ceremonies. The missionaries did not feel that it was their duty to decide for Aboriginal Christians issues related to possible

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40 Yengoyan, 243.
41 Yengoyan, 244.
conflicts between these traditions and Christian faith. It was left to Pitjantjatjara Christians to work through such issues as they grew to maturity in their Christian life.

Yengoyan’s claim that, “From the perspective of the Pitjantjatjara, however, conversion was manifested by the rejection of initiation rites”\textsuperscript{42} is not reflected in the lives of Christians in the region—those who were baptized and later ordained as Elders, continued their participation in traditional ceremonial life. Missionaries recognized that unless Pitjantjatjara youths went through initiation they would not be given status as men and would be unable to marry within their social system. We accepted that any modifications to this cultural system must come from within the society, as Christians grappled with any seeming inconsistencies between their traditions and their Christian faith, rather than being imposed by others. A climate of mutual respect encouraged many Pitjantjatjara to identify as Christians. When I was Mission Superintendent and Minister, I was invited to attend some ceremonies, including initiations. Pitjantjatjara Christians participated in these rituals and they saw no incongruity in me, a Christian minister, being present. They took me to, and explained, many Dreaming sites.

The Influence of Other Aboriginal Christian Movements

During these decades of mission activity at Ernabella, an observer who assumed that signs of genuine conversion must include: open repudiation of traditional practices; evident changes in the material lives of individuals; displays of emotional zeal and the use of religious language often associated with such change, might have been justified in concluding that such conversions had not taken place. During the 1970s and early 1980s the Pitjantjatjara church form of worship changed under the influence of religious developments in other Aboriginal communities.

The Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship was established in 1970 when Aboriginal Christians from Western Australia and states on the eastern seaboard, who had been trained in interdenominational missions, organized a convention at Port Augusta in January 1970 which was

\textsuperscript{42} Yengoyan, 243.
attended by 70 people.\textsuperscript{43} Two Pitjantjatjara church Elders attended the next convention in 1971. They reported enthusiastically on the convention and an increasing number of Pitjantjatjara people attended in following years. They brought back a more openly evangelistic style to their local churches. Several hundred people attended an Easter convention organized by the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship at Ernabella in 1976. Conventions were held at various communities in following years. Approximately 1000 people attended the 1978 convention at Amata. Following this I wrote: “A visitor from space arriving at Amata during Easter would have concluded that Christianity was a Black people’s religion and that they were finding it difficult to win White converts because of the seeming incompatibility of the White Australian culture with the Gospel.”\textsuperscript{44} There was a similar attendance at the 1980 convention held at Ernabella. By then local church elders and members played the major roles of organizing and speaking. Pitjantjatjara Christians, in their turn, began to influence some non-Aboriginal members of staff—a teacher was converted when he was challenged by his Pitjantjatjara assistant about his Christian faith. He is now an ordained minister of the Uniting Church.

Another important influence on the Pitjantjatjara was the Arnhem Land revival movement, which commenced on 14 March 1979 at Elcho Island, a former Methodist mission in north-east Arnhem Land.\textsuperscript{45} Church growth had been limited there, until a local man, Djinjinyini Gondarra, who was trained in Papua New Guinea was ordained as a minister. Gondarra and a local school deputy principal, Kevin Rurrarambu, led the movement which was characterized by nightly fellowship meetings, fervent singing, prayer and healing. Family disputes and inter-clan feuds decreased and social problems such as substance abuse were moderated.\textsuperscript{46} The movement spread to surrounding com-


\textsuperscript{46} Djinjinyini Gondarra, Series of Reflections of Aboriginal Theology (Darwin: Bethel Presbytery, Uniting Church in Australia, 1986), 9-10; Ian Keen, Knowledge and Secrecy in an Aboriginal Religion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 286.
munities in Arnhem Land and to an increasingly widening circle of Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia.47

As Aboriginal people influenced by this movement travelled through the Pitjantjatjara region in 1981, they brought a renewed emphasis on evangelism, prayer and a more enthusiastic style of Christian worship. Many Pitjantjatjara people responded by renewing their Christian commitment or by declaring an initial confession of Christian faith. Among those making this declaration were several older men and women. There were also two men in their 40s who lived in communities near the South Australian/Western Australian border, who were known for their gambling and drinking activities. It was alleged that they gambled to win pension money from old people and drove to distant outlets to purchase large supplies of alcohol. On their return journeys, much of the alcohol was distributed at communities such as Amata, where it often led to violent behavior. These two men were converted through this movement and became involved in its ministry, one of them became a member of the Bible translation team. They, and other Pitjantjatjara men and women, gave evidence in their lives of having undergone a lasting Christian conversion process.

Following my departure from the Pitjantjatjara lands in 1980, elders and other church members continued to conduct services in all centers and to organize occasional conventions throughout the region. Peter Nyaningu, a Pitjantjatjara Church Elder at Ernabella, commenced training at Nungalinya College in Darwin in 1978. He was ordained as Minister of the Pitjantjatjara Parish in 1983 and continued in this role until his retirement. He worked mostly at Ernabella, with elders and others undertaking most of the preaching and teaching at the other communities.

The growth of the charismatic movement in Australia in this period had some influence in the Pitjantjatjara area. Charismatic Christians made contact with Pitjantjatjara Christians in Alice Springs or other places and received invitations to visit communities. Some responded to these invitations and began movements separate from the Uniting Church structure. As the Uniting Church policy was to transfer control to local people who found it difficult to cope with these independent

and enthusiastic movements, divisions and tensions sometimes emerged between those attached to the older and more traditional styles of worship and those who embraced the newer styles, generally known as “singalong.”

This change was synchronous with a broad transformation in the social, political and economic structures of Pitjantjatjara society over the past two decades. Despite the granting of freehold title to their lands in 1981 and dramatic increases in funding for community enterprises, the Pitjantjatjara communities are now characterized by high levels of unemployment, low rates of school attendance, severe health problems, violence and other social problems related to substance abuse, including alcohol consumption and petrol sniffing. Pitjantjatjara Christians at times find some strength and solace in their Christian faith when facing these problems but are struggling to present a concerted and positive program to combat them. An associated problem is a change in demography over recent decades with many non-Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara people becoming members of the communities. Some are Aboriginal people from other areas who are attempting to establish a closer contact with “traditional” life while others are non-Aborigines who have established relationships with local people. These “outsiders” have knowledge and skills which enable them to gain employment. This however, tends to decrease employment opportunities for members of core Pitjantjatjara families. Commenting on these changes, Yengoyan suggests that “although the Pitjantjatjara are the controllers, they are in turn controlled by a legal and political structure which is imposed from the outside.”48

The last section of this chapter presents examples of the impact Christianity has had on the lives of many Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara.

_Pitjantjatjara Responses to Christianity_

One of the features of church life at Ernabella was the participation of local men and women in the preaching, prayer and teaching activities. This reflected traditional roles in ritual and the transmission of knowledge. Yengoyan’s observation that, “Pitjantjatjara never tell

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48 Yengoyan, 246.
each other that they are Christians even if they have leanings in that
direction,” is at odds with the open confession that many Pitjantjat-
jara people have made through their baptism and preaching.49 This
preaching often took place far from the surveillance of missionaries
and was not just an accommodation to please the missionaries. During
the 1960s when groups of Pitjantjatjara men, who were employed fruit
picking along the River Murray in South Australia and on timber
projects in the Northern Territory, were reported to be conducting
their own services and prayer meetings.50

The four men chosen as church leaders in 1961, Andy Tjilari, Eric
Apinya, Alec Minutjukur and Tony Tjamiwa, had been instructed
in Bible stories and Christian doctrine for many years and exhibited
deep understanding of the Christian gospel through their preaching.
They were joined by others such as Peter Nyaningu, Raymond Tjilya,
Bernard Tjalkurin, Henry Tjamumalya and Charlie Ilyatjari. Their
preaching in church services and camp meetings was complemented
by female leaders such as Nganyintja, Watulya, Anmanari, Yuminiya
and Manyiritjanu who conducted women’s meetings and taught Bible
stories to children. Nganyintja was one of the first school children at
Ernabella and one of the group baptised in 1952. She and her hus-
band Charlie Ilyatjari together with Henry Tjamumalya and his wife
Watulya became leaders of the Amata church.

Tony Tjamiwa, who worked at Ernabella as shearer, gardener,
water drilling assistant and butcher, became a gifted preacher with an
ability to relate the Bible stories to aspects of his own culture. In 1984
he was invited to become chairperson of the Mutitjulu community at
Uluru (Ayers Rock). Tjamiwa had important totemic connections with
Uluru, so it was appropriate for him to take a leadership role in the
community. The Mutitjulu people needed his help with land rights
issues when the government handed back control of this important reli-
gious site and tourist destination to the Pitjantjatjara. Tjamiwa led the
community effectively, combining Pitjantjatjara religious obligations,
secular leadership and his role as pastor, until his death in 2001.51

49 Yengoyan, 247.
Aborigines in the Economy eds Ian G. Sharp and Colin Tatz (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press,
1966), 122-123.
51 Barry Hill, The Rock: Travelling to Uluru, (St. Leonards NSW: Allen & Unwin,
1994), 256-268.
The ability of Pitjantjatjara church members to participate in preaching and teaching ministries was largely based on Ernabella’s vernacular language policy and the Bible translation work. In the early 1940s, the Rev. J.R.B. Love, who had experience in Aboriginal language work at Kunmunya Mission in Western Australia, and the first school teacher, Ron Trudinger, translated the Gospel of Mark with the assistance of Pitjantjatjara men. Trudinger, who was subsequently ordained and became superintendent of the mission, continued with the translation of the Gospel of John. These Pitjantjatjara gospels and a book of Old Testament stories were the basic resources for early preaching. During the 1960s, the other Gospels and some epistles were translated. These translations of individual scriptures were painstakingly copied, compiled and produced locally for distribution. In 1969, the Bible Society published a volume containing these sections of the New Testament. This was sold throughout the region and contributed to a growing knowledge of the stories of Jesus and the early church and the teaching of the epistles.

A teacher who had worked for the Education Department in the region took up this work in 1978 and established a Bible Translation Project. He, and following his marriage, his wife, worked closely with a team of Pitjantjatjara assistants who became increasingly enthusiastic about the program. As a result of this work, the Bible Society published a volume including all of the New Testament and several parts of the Old Testament, which was dedicated at Ernabella at Easter 2002. The principal translators had no doubt that the insights and depth of understanding brought to the task by their Pitjantjatjara co-translators sprang from a sincere belief in, and commitment to, their Christian faith.

Although the Pitjantjatjara emphasis on the living out of the Dreaming in contemporary life may appear to make prayer irrelevant because prayer implies that life can be changed, it is evident that prayer plays a significant part in the lives of Pitjantjatjara Christians. Prayer is not confined to petitions for change but includes praise, thanksgiving and confession. In earlier years many of the people prayed in services and their prayers included a range of imagery drawn from both the Christian scriptures and from their own environment—images of fire, wind, warmth, darkness and light. As social and health problems have increased in recent years Pitjantjatjara Christians often request prayer for those in need of healing. Prayer meetings are commonly held during times of stress. In 1963, a baby was seriously ill in Alice Springs
hospital and not expected to live. The mother asked a Minister in Alice Springs to baptize the baby, who noted the mother revealed a much better understanding of the meaning of baptism than most of the members of his congregation. The mother prayed for the child who recovered and is alive thirty-nine years later. A doctor who attended the sick child was so impressed by the mother’s faith that he began attending church.

A Pitjantjatjara woman who was baptized in 1959; attended school at Ernabella; worked in the school and craftrroom; and played a leading role in the Ngaatjatjarra/Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council in her later years, suffered from cancer in the 1980s. She died in an Adelaide hospital in 2002 far from her home, impressing her visitors in her final weeks with her strong Christian faith and prayer.

Yengoyan during his visits to Ernabella noted that a good proportion of the Ernabella community attended Sunday services, “but it was obvious that they were primarily interested in the music and choral singing and some of the ritual of the Presbyterian service.”52 Singing is central to Aboriginal social and ritual life and song certainly provided a positive point of contact between missionaries and Pitjantjatjara people. The first school children learned a range of hymns translated into Pitjantjatjara and mastered the skills of western part-singing. Aboriginal music does not distinguish between form and the content as does western music. While in the western church, Christian words were set to folk or other tunes, Aboriginal musical structures do not allow such an easy convergence. Pitjantjatjara song-cycles relate the travels and exploits of the ancestor spirit beings of the Dreaming. These beings themselves were believed to have performed rituals and sung the songs which they passed on to their human descendants. The songs are thus accepted as a legacy of the Dreaming. The ethnomusicologist Catherine Ellis referred to the interlocking of the melody and the text through the rhythmic segments of traditional Pitjantjatjara music.53 To avoid any confusion, Scottish Psalms and English hymns were translated and set to western tunes. This corpus of Christian hymnody is very much part of contemporary Pitjantjatjara life.

As Christmas and Easter pageants were introduced at Ernabella, a choir sang to accompany these performances. In 1954 the Ernabella

52 Yengoyan, 243.
53 Catherine Ellis, Aboriginal Music (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1985), 104.
Choir visited Adelaide on the occasion of the first royal visit by Queen Elizabeth. In 1966 a choir of 24 adult members, toured provincial centres in Victoria and South Australia and presented performances in Melbourne and Adelaide. The performances included traditional singing and dancing. In 1979, the Choir visited Fiji and Sydney. Recently there has been a resurgence of interest in the choir, as some of the original members are joined by sons and daughters—in 2004 the Pitjantjatjara Choir sang at the Adelaide Festival of Arts.

In 1971 a Christmas story set to traditional music was presented at Ernabella after ritual leaders gave their consent. Other Christian stories were treated in a similar way at Ernabella and Amata. In following years younger church members formed various gospel singing groups using guitars, and more recently they have composed their own gospel songs. These innovations have been introduced through dreams in a similar manner as changes in traditional ritual. This continuing interest and innovation suggests that Christianity has been incorporated into Pitjantjatjara life.

The Pitjantjatjara continued their traditional burial practices long after Ernabella mission was established. However, since 1973 there have been changes in burial practices. These changes again challenge Yengoyan’s claim that, “In retrospect, the influence of the Presbyterian mission and the process of Christianization had minimal impacts on the cultural and religious foundations of Pitjantjatjara society.” An important aspect of this change is that it was initiated by Pitjantjatjara people themselves without pressure from missionaries.

Pitjantjatjara burial practices were influenced by their beliefs about spirit and by environmental factors. Living in arid conditions with scattered food and water resources, most of their social living was in small groups. They had few resources to enable them to care for dead bodies. Thus, burial took place near the place of, and soon after, death. Where possible, the body was bound in a foetal position, a hole dug and the body placed on a layer of spinifex grass. The body was covered with sticks and rocks and a spear or digging stick placed in the hole to enable the spirit of the deceased person to escape and return to the spirit world. Objects associated with the dead person were

55 Yengoyan, 246.
burned or otherwise destroyed and the area vacated so that the spirit of the deceased could not harm others. Relatives wailed at morning and night to express their grief and to ward off evil spirits. Following decomposition, and when available resources enabled people to return to the site, a ceremony was held at which the grave was covered by earth. This ended the period of mourning. The deceased person’s name was not spoken.

These basic forms of ritual continued after the establishment of Ernabella Mission. There were more people around to participate in the burials and usually, a mission vehicle was used to transport the body to a site chosen by the people a few kilometers from the mission. A Pitjantjatjara Christian, or a staff member invited by the family, sometimes offered a prayer during this ceremony. Mission staff followed Pitjantjatjara protocols avoiding naming deceased people, and often helping families move camp following a death.

By the 1970s a population of approximately four hundred people had been living at Ernabella for over three decades. Burial practices suited to a mobile hunting and gathering society were no longer appropriate to sedentary life and emerging economic, social and political structures. A man who was a leader in the church community ran the Ernabella bakery as a family business. When his daughter died in 1972, he was expected to leave Ernabella for a lengthy period. He was given general approval for his family to move for a short time to a nearby water bore and was able to return to the bakery when the internal walls of the building had been repainted. A few months later, the mother of a Church Elder died. He expressed his grief in traditional manner, while acknowledging that his mother had had a premonition of death and had asked that she be buried close to the mission. This man with the support of the baker invited the people to attend a service in the church and selected a site for a cemetery.56 These two men who were aged approximately forty, must have sensed that the situation was ripe for change in this conservative society. Although some questioned this innovation it became accepted at Ernabella and spread quickly to

56 Archaeological research has confirmed that in some areas of Aboriginal Australia, where the environmental conditions enabled a more sedentary life-style, such as along the River Murray, cemetery-type burial patterns were instituted. Colin Pardoe, “The Cemetery as Symbol: The Distribution of Prehistoric Aboriginal Burial Grounds in Southeastern Australia,” in Archaeology of Aboriginal Australia: A Reader ed. Tim Murray (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 204.
other communities. In some instances, reference was made to dreams to explain the change. Dreams were accepted as a means of justifying changes in traditional Aboriginal religious practices.57

While cemetery burials became the norm at Ernabella and surrounding communities, the ritual to close the period of mourning continue. A few weeks after a burial a cement slab and head stone are erected, and a service, referred to as “the opening” is held. In a break from previous prohibitions, the name of the deceased is placed on the headstone and in recent years the name appears on orders of service. As the availability of refrigeration facilities enables the preservation of bodies for some time, funeral services have become significant events, with large attendances as people travel long distances to be present. The funeral service for Tony Tjamiwa held at Ernabella in 2001, was attended by well over a thousand people, including commonwealth parliamentarians, and several national parks staff. The widespread acceptance of these changes suggests Pitjantjatjara people have incorporated Christianity and Christian practices into their everyday lives.

Conclusion

I am not suggesting that all Pitjantjatjara people have responded positively to Christianity. Some Pitjantjatjaras have retained allegiance to their traditional system of beliefs and practices while resisting the call to commit to another system. Traditional ceremonies are still a central part of Pitjantjatjara life and all members of the society are expected to participate in them, although there are signs of resistance from some younger members of the community. Although Pitjantjatjara Christians have at times questioned some aspects of traditional ritual, they have continued to fulfill the obligations expected of them as members of totemic groups. In general, they see no conflict between their acceptance of these obligations and their commitment to the Christianity. Some Christians, with a tradition of logic and rational thought may see some incongruity in this. Descartes’ famous dictum *cogito ergo sum* “I think therefore I am” has influenced Western thought. However, the Pitjantjatjara bring to such issues a different set of assumptions and

57 Maddock, 111.
values. If Descartes had been Pitjantjatjara he may have concluded: *canto ergo sum* “I sing therefore I am.”

While the differing emphases on the social and individual in Pitjantjatjara and western societies are significant, the claim that this made it almost impossible for a Pitjantjatjara person to make an individual commitment to Christianity does not do justice to the Old Testament emphases on the corporate and the New Testament focus on the Body of Christ, or to the many stories of group conversions in the history of church missions, for example in parts of Oceania. The Pitjantjatjara interaction with Christianity has taken place in a period of widespread change: the introduction of new foods and ways of obtaining them; the establishment of new social and political structures; the learning of new musical forms including country and rock and roll bands; and involvement in new sports, principally Australian rules football. These changes have necessitated modifications to traditional Dreaming structures and values, which have created considerable tensions in the community. As the Dreaming provided the model for all aspects of Pitjantjatjara life it can be argued that as changes have been made in these other spheres of life, they are also possible in the “religious” sphere. Reference has been made above to dreams as validating changes in Aboriginal societies and in the acceptance of Christianity. This, of course, resonates with some Biblical stories. The denial of the possibility of Christian conversion in these societies reflects the too rigid application of anthropological models of unchanging societies to the Pitjantjatjara.

In a recent issue of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Richard Peace has explored the concept of conversion in missions. He identifies three types of Christian conversion: conversion through personal decision as expressed by evangelicals; conversion through socialization as expressed in mainline protestant churches; and conversion through liturgical acts as expressed in Catholic and Orthodox traditions. He concludes that “no single view captures fully the nature of conversion.” As the history presented earlier indicates, Pitjantjatjara people were taught and baptized in groups. There were individual,

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social and liturgical elements present in their response to the message and their entry into the church. While not assuming an equation between baptism and conversion, the evidence presented above suggests that many Pitjantjatjara people have made a sincere and informed response to the Christian message which can be interpreted as religious change.

A brush (spinifex grass) church, Amata, 1966.

*Bill Edwards Collection, Ara Iritja Archival Project, Marleston, South Australia.*
A bush camp church service, Kata-alu, 1978.
*Bill Edwards Collection, Ara Iritja Archival Project, Marleston, South Australia.*

An outdoor baptism service, Indulkana, 1972.
*Bill Edwards Collection, Ara Iritja Archival Project, Marleston, South Australia.*
PART THREE
TRANSFORMING CHRISTIANITY
Anthropologists have often highlighted the dominant, civilizing and Christianizing approaches of missionization in Aboriginal Australia that have radically altered traditional ways of life. In some analyses, colonizing regimes have been aligned with missionary intent, and spheres of Aboriginal religion and Christianity have been viewed as incommensurable due to contrasting notions of the sacred. While the contexts and historical conditions in which Aboriginal Christianity emerged were foreign to Australia’s inhabitants, more recently, there has been a re-reading of the Aboriginal landscape and spirituality along the lines of that occurring in southern Africa where “a dynamic process of symbolic interaction and innovation” has emerged with the introduction of Christianity.

In this paper, I question the extent to which Yolngu Christianity and ancestral religion in north east Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia can be said to be wholly exclusive religious domains. I draw upon Whitehouse’s work on doctrinal and imagistic modes of religiosity in order to explore the relationship between the cognitive dynamics of Yolngu religious practices. Whitehouse argues that although both doctrinal and imagistic modes of religiosity can

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3 See Terence Ranger, this volume.

4 Yolngu is the name for the people of the north east Arnhem Land region. It is the term they use to refer to themselves.
be found within the same religious context, they do not always converge but where they do they are the product of “multiple historically contingent causes.”5 Whitehouse also asserts that in Melanesia there is a definite tendency for doctrinal and imagistic modes of religiosity to interact rather than to become enmeshed whereas, in other parts of the world, they may be “so enmeshed that the analytical distinction seems to break down.”6 It is important to stress that the terms doctrinal, imagistic, interacting and enmeshed or unified are not used lightly here because each refers to a particular mode of religiosity and the way in which they relate to one another. Where doctrinal and imagistic modes of religiosity interact in Melanesia (as in missionary approaches to Christianity and ancestral rituals in Arnhem Land), this implies the maintenance of discrete boundaries between the two modalities, whereas in Yolngu Christianity the terms enmesh or unify imply a singular religious modality.

In Yolngu Christianity these two modes of religiosity do more than interact, they become part of one another because they have embodied simultaneity obfuscating the analytical distinction between them. This process of enmeshing or unification occurs because bodily states of heightened feeling are routinized in both ancestral and Christian domains. Of course, the historical contexts and social conditions of Yolngu enculturation to Christianity have radically differed from the processes of ancestral ritual transmission, yet, verbal and non verbal expressions of Yolngu Christians about their religious experiences in both domains are made in the same vein, unifying the two modalities. Thus, I consider how affective and sensory processes orient Yolngu Christian thought and bodily awareness across ancestral and Christian contexts.

Both the doctrinal and imagistic modes are associated with distinct patterns of “codification, transmission, cognitive processing and political association.”7 The doctrinal mode is characterized by frequently repeated rituals and teachings whereby ritual behavior becomes habituated through the ability to carry out procedures without reflection and the emphasis is on verbal transmission through oratory which opens

6 Whitehouse, Arguments and Icons, 149.
7 Whitehouse, Arguments and Icons, 1.
up the possibility for a standardized creed. Thus, doctrinal knowing is transmitted and codified for adherents in a structured, regulated body of belief, reinforced by ritual repetition over time. However, a problem identified in the doctrinal mode is the tendency towards the “tedium effect” as adherents get bored with the entrenched routine of ritual procedures resulting in the need to recreate constantly the excitement of spiritual revelation.

In contrast to doctrinal systems, the imagistic mode of religiosity is peculiar to certain small-scale or regionally-fragmented ritual traditions and cults that tend to process religious belief as “multivocal iconic imagery, encoded in memory as distinct episodes, and producing highly cohesive and particularistic social ties.” The imagistic mode is based on internal mental processes of inner rumination as well as extreme sensual and emotional stimulation.

Knowledge Transmission in a Missionary Domain

In the early days of Christianity in Arnhem Land the doctrinal mode of religiosity was prevalent and early missionary endeavors presented a contradiction between the ideal of free will and the intent to bring Gospel teachings to the region. Missions were established along the Arnhem Land coast, at Goulburn Island (1961), Milingimbi (1923), Yirrkala (1935), and Galiwin’ku (1942). The missionary, Theodor Webb, Methodist superintendent from 1926-1939 at Yirrkala, posited that “if Yolngu chose to live in a European way, it must be by choice” but the choices open to Yolngu at that time were ones continually influenced by relations of power and missionary modes of religious teaching. Nonetheless, Webb was a fair and just man and he mediated between the government and missionary agendas. When Yolngu massacred Japanese fishermen in Caledon Bay, the government planned a punitive expedition to which Webb strongly objected. Webb also believed that Christianity could and should be

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8 Harvey Whitehouse, “Cognition and Culture” (Inaugural Lecture, Queen’s University Belfast, 1 June, 2004).
9 Whitehouse, Arguments and Icons, 49.
10 Whitehouse, Arguments and Icons, 1.
11 Whitehouse, “Cognition”.
12 John Harris, One Blood (Sutherland: Albatross Books, 1990), 801.
introduced to Yolngu through the context of their culture. However, World War II also made Yolngu realize that the professed behavior of Christians preached by the missionaries was not the sole modus operandi of Europeans as “servicemen introduced alcohol on a large scale and petrol sniffing when alcohol ran out.”\(^\text{13}\) In viewing the strength of military power from the Air Force base at Milingimbi followed by machine-gunnings from the Japanese, Yolngu concluded that they could never say, “No!” to Europeans because they were too powerful. So, the ideal of “choice” was something of an illusion.\(^\text{14}\)

Over the years in different parts of Australia, missionaries have adopted radically different approaches to imparting religious doctrine, resulting in varying degrees of acceptance, rejection and adherence to Christianity. Furthermore, they have variously engaged in or distanced themselves from indigenous ritual forms and indigenous expressions of Christianity. The majority of missionaries in north east Arnhem Land presented a disciplined doctrinal system in which Yolngu could work and act with a sense of respect and dignity. This was not always the case in other parts of Australia where “corporal punishment and the withholding of food were not uncommon disciplinary measures.”\(^\text{15}\) In Hermannsburg, Pastor Albrecht reports how he gave a boy a hiding for staying away from the dormitory for four nights and although the Arrernte threatened him and then asked him to punish the children with three strokes at most, he refused.\(^\text{16}\) The kinds of punishments that some missionaries such as Albrecht meted out were foreign to Aboriginal belief and practice.\(^\text{17}\) Discipline was generally formal and often highly ritualized arising out of transgressions not only against a person but against the social body. Misdemeanors that required payback killings such as wife-stealing or murder constituted serious assaults on the social body and the strength of its relations. Like Arrernte, Yolngu engagements with the missionaries meant they also had to reconceptualize their world by responding and adapting to new ideology and practice.

\(^{13}\) John Blacket, *Fire in the Outback: the untold story of the Aboriginal revival movement that began on Elcho Island in 1979* (Sutherland, Albatross Books, 1997), 56.

\(^{14}\) Blacket, 56.


\(^{16}\) Albrecht 1927 cited in Van Gent, 333.

\(^{17}\) Other forms of punishment and payback spearings were a part of peace-making ceremonies in north east Arnhem Land and elsewhere.
that were passed on in unfamiliar ways. For example, when Ella and Harold Shepherdson set up the Galiwin’ku mission in 1942 approximately 700-800 Yolnu were present in the town. Morning prayer was held each day at 6.30am, five days a week and at 8am the bell rang to signal the start of work and school. This routinization meant that Christianity became the appropriate template for life and living in return for material benefits such as flour, sugar and other staples as well as clothes. The repetitive and formulaic structure of events also meant that Yolnu missionaries could instill codes of “proper behavior” and teach Methodism as a way of both thinking and acting. Yolnu learned a practical Christianity formulated as a Protestant work ethic underpinned by mutual respect and love.

Some missionaries began by learning the local language and translating select passages of Scripture and some hymns into a chosen dialect. They also taught English language, reading and writing with the aims of conveying the Gospel and the content of hymns, prayers and liturgy. However, for the older population who did not learn to read or speak English, the Scriptures retained their opacity. The first Yolnu Christians, Birrinydjawuy (Andrew) and Makarrwala (Harry), helped facilitate the doctrinal mode of religiosity in Arnhem Land. Their experience of living in Darwin meant that they understood something about European ways and they became vital to the work of the missionaries, Theodor Webb and Harold Shepherdson. Makarrwala’s son, Batangga, went to Galiwin’ku with the Shepherdsons and he and his elder brother, Wili Walalipa, were instrumental in assisting the Shepherdsons in training Yolnu children in Sunday School and providing interpretations of the Scriptures in Yolnu language in church. Their interpreting roles on Sunday were part of a broader doctrinal system of discipline and repetition that instilled an orderly structure and routine to everyday life. Yolnu were thus apparently being subjected to foreign regimes of work and bodily control.

However, the doctrinal mode of teaching introduced Yolnu to a lifestyle that was already partially inscribed in their relationships in the form of practical care. In the eyes of Yolnu, missionaries were practicing the very foundations of the ancestral law: the rule of *djagamirr*—caring for or looking after one another. This paradigm of care was manifest in the development of gardens, a sawmill and teaching trade skills; and these modes of learning were mirrored by the system of transmitting ancestral knowledge handed down by uncles or grandfathers, such as learning how to hunt or fish and how to paint or
make ritual objects. As in Christianity, ancestral practice went further than just learning “how to”, it was also a sign of relationship, of reciprocity and respect that meant each was beholden to the other and entangled in the web of Yolngu spiritual life itself. Whitehouse and Barker have argued that the abstracted and universalizing principles of Christianity do not make sense to another culture until there is some introduction to a corresponding reality. In Yolngu mission life, the principle of djägamirr converged between the ancestral and Christian realms, so this doctrinal aspect of religiosity partially reinforced existing Yolngu principles of sociality and relationality.

Whilst there was a degree of convergence between the ancestral and Christian domains there were also states of distinction. While, on Galiwin’ku, Rev. Harold Shepherdson was relatively successful in combining practical care with spiritual teaching and instilling a work ethic, there was still a cognitive divide between the Yolngu and balanda (white) domains. Harris reports that in Milingimbi Yolngu operated in two separate domains,

the balanda domain, or that of the cash economy and modern technology [which operated] mainly between 8.00am and 5.00pm Monday to Friday…and a Yolngu domain where the vernacular is always spoken, all the time; the Aboriginal worldview and social priorities reign.

This segregation meant that when the missionaries withdrew, their authority and material benefits were transferred to the government and distributed locally in weekly welfare checks, Yolngu church attendance declined. However, Yolngu did continue the model of church life. Today, the bell announces the two services held on the island at 10am and 7.30pm on Sundays. Morning prayer takes place at 6am on most weekdays and members of the Bible translation team lead lunchtime prayer meetings.

With the departure of the missionaries, Christianity was not rejected but the form of worship changed with regular prayer meetings being held around campfires with families gathered on sheets in a circle

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19 The Yolngu term balanda is derived from the Indonesian word for ‘Hollander’ following Dutch contact with the Arnhem Land coast.
in the dark. Scriptural images held great interest for Yolngu as they perceived many convergences between Christianity and the ancestral law: including the memorial feast for the dead imaging the Eucharist; the use of geometric forms of painting traditionally used for water and blood to depict Christ's blood;21 vernacular stories of a flood and a man called Noah and ideas about the Ark of the Covenant analogous to the sacred objects held by clan leaders.22

Transmission of Knowledge in the Ancestral Domain

Yolngu did not strive to place all Christian elements that did not cohere to the Ancestral Law into a hyper-logical system, although there was a “highly conscious use of sacred symbols.”23 Consequently, if Christian ideology was incomplete or contradictory, this could be accommodated in the schema for ancestral knowledge that was also partial, fragmentary and based on individual ascriptions to place and ancestral identity. Furthermore, what could not be understood was relegated to “the inside”, a Yolngu concept that relates the power of spiritual affect to degrees of secrecy. The more secret the information, the higher the levels of religious status and knowledge required before information can be revealed.24 The transmission and dissemination of Yolngu religious knowledge stands in stark contrast to Christian doctrine where all are equal in the eyes of God and have unrestricted access to that knowledge. In the ancestral domain, it is the fear of what is not known or the fear of revealing knowledge that one does not have the authority to tell that characterizes the imagistic mode. In Yolngu cosmology, aspects of the deepest knowledge of the ancestral law are held firstly by senior clan leaders and by a very few senior women. Younger men and women may know more but may not be able to show or to tell that they know and young women and children

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22 Djiniyini Gondarra, Father you Gave us the Dreaming (Casuarina: Nungalinya College, n.d.)
23 Bos, 4.
24 The state of being ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ with regard to knowledge of the ancestral law is relative to context and is derived from a continuum of restrictions pertaining to ritual knowledge and authority. See Howard Morphy, Ancestral Connections: Art and an Aboriginal System of Knowledge. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991).
generally hold “outside” levels of knowledge that are public for all to hear and to tell. Yolngu knowledge may be contrasted with Pomio Kivung of Papua New Guinea on whom Whitehouse, in part, bases his argument. The mainstream Pomio Kivung “experience of religious understanding tends to be focused on what one explicitly knows and can articulate, rather than on what one dimly conceptualises, profoundly fears, and cannot express logically.”\textsuperscript{25}

Restrictions upon knowledge then tie Yolngu together in a social network of obligation, expectation and power relating to the right to know, the right to show that one knows and the right to tell. This knowledge is founded on images, laws and actions of the ancestral world in which all animals, plants, and all living and non-living entities are related to humans. Yolngu order all these things into two halves or moieties known as Dhuwa and Yirritja to which each person belongs. The activities and travels of the Dhuwa and Yirritja ancestors fashioned the landscape and deposited humans at various places along their way. Consequently, the spiritual effects of the ancestors are still felt within the ground, waters and air. As in Baktaman religion, in Yolngu society, natural species “enter individually into larger ritual contexts, each of them as a separate more or less dense symbol carrying an aura of connotations.”\textsuperscript{26} Due to the levels of restriction placed upon “knowing” the characteristics, form and spiritual effects of the ancestors, Yolngu can experience ancestral revelations in a multiplicity of iconic ways. The very act of non-disclosure opens up the potential for multiple possibilities of imagining the impact of the ancestral environment in social and ritual contexts.

The complexity of disclosure and non-disclosure as a form of hierarchical knowledge in Yolngu life is made more intricate by the fact that the ancestral law is not only handed down as a set of rules but also as a series of images that are suggested in esoteric and polysemic song language and enacted in dance. While funerals are the common form of transmitting knowledge, rituals are never performed the same

\textsuperscript{25} Whitehouse, \textit{Arguments and Icons}, 63-64. While this is true for the mainstream Pomio Kivung, localised Kivung splinter groups also transmit religious knowledge in ways that more closely resemble the traditional Yolngu model (Whitehouse, pers.comm.).

\textsuperscript{26} Barth cited in Whitehouse, \textit{Arguments and Icons}, 64; Frederick Barth, \textit{Ritual and Knowledge Among the Baktaman of New Guinea}. (New Haven: Yale University Press 1975),189.
experience the spirit 165

way twice since each song series is egocentrically determined by the identity of the deceased. Consequently, repetition only goes so far as songs are ordered to take the spirit of the deceased to their homeland in a particular genealogical line. Yolngu knowledge provides an iconic template of song words and related dance such as the shark, crocodile, kangaroo or other ancestor at their particular homelands. While the form and shape of the song’s rhythm, melody and text will be recognized on each subsequent performance, its rendition will be unique to the context in which it is performed. Thus, Yolngu draw upon a polyvocal set of images that are intimately related to personhood and country and that necessitate the production and reproduction of immutable social webs of belonging.

The processes of transmission between missionization and ancestral cosmology reflect the distinction that Whitehouse makes between doctrinal and imagistic dynamics of religious experience and the discreteness between them suggests an apparent incommensurability. If this argument takes into account the question posed by Ranger as to whether there are limits to the possibility of the appropriation of Christianity by non-Western peoples, the process of transmission on its own would appear to support observations about the lack of fit between the two systems.27 Indeed, Yengoyan has argued that the Pitjantjatjara do not convert as “the ‘basic axioms’ of the spiritual and sacred life are such that Christian doctrine simply does not provide the intellectual or spiritual underpinnings which relate to Aboriginal life.”28 Yet in Arnhem Land this is not the case as Yolngu Christians have brought the two domains together in an embodied simultaneity.

To counter any essentializing tendency of an absolute separation between the two modes of religiosity, Whitehouse has also offered the qualification that “none of the features of our respective modes of religiosity is mutually exclusive because doctrinal systems tend to be replete with ritual imagery,” and “all ritual imagery is susceptible to interpretation in ways that are doctrine like.”29 Indeed, routine depends partly on the individual’s ability to organize the inner reflec-
tions of autobiographical and personal memories in their spiritual life. Consequently, there can be no hard and fast separation between the doctrinal and the imagistic, since “the encoding of religious and ritual representations in semantic memory always presupposes the prior formation of episodic memories.”30 Despite these qualifications, Whitehouse notes that in Melanesia they “tend to retain a certain discreteness with regard to the domains in which they operate, interacting rather than becoming thoroughly enmeshed.”31

Religious Processes of Unification

In the last part of this chapter, I explore how the flow of emotion from the ancestral to the Christian domains unites the doctrinal and imagistic modes through religious experiences based on Whitehouse’s concepts of memory.32 Rather than arbitrarily delineating features that might be considered either doctrinal or imagistic in this enmeshed form of religiosity, I argue that emotion is central to Yolngu experiences of ecology, spirituality and the body in both ancestral and Christian spheres. I avoid labeling this unified form of religiosity in order to view it from a plurality of perspectives for it is, “only by keeping alive a sense of the always varying, alternating ways in which experience is actually lived that we can avoid the epistemological trap of constructing a theory of knowledge out of one aspect or moment of experience and privileging it over all others.”33 As Jackson and Karp note, different schemas relating to the religious body “should be seen as descriptive of the varying ways human beings experience the world according to widely varying needs and interests.”34 Whitehouse also bases his distinction between doctrinal and imagistic modes partly on a dichotomy between “semantic” and “episodic” (or “autobiographical”) memory originally posited by psychologists.35 He argues that

30 Whitehouse, Arguments and Icons, 149.
31 Whitehouse, Arguments and Icons, 159.
32 Whitehouse, Arguments and Icons.
34 Jackson and Karp, 17.
Episodic memory is critical to internal cognitive processing in the imagistic mode as, “Episodic memory refers to mental representations of personally experienced events, conceptualized as unique episodes in one’s life.” Furthermore, the vast array of unique episodes that each person can recall, tend to have a distinctive emotional salience and/or set of sensory associations. In the imagistic mode emotions may run the gamut from joy to pain but what is significant about this form of religious cognition is that these emotional experiences “generate enduring autobiographical (‘or episodic’) memories of unique episodes.” The ability to remember is combined with “[often extreme] affective and sensory stimulation…in which enduring episodic memories are activated.”

Young men who participate in the Gunapi or Djungguwan revelatory rituals or the Ngulmark and Mandiyala initiation rituals experience physical pain and psychological trauma induced by senior leaders in order to instill respect for deep knowledge about ritual objects and the ancestral law. Yolngu women similarly develop their own body of episodic memory through a process of self-harm. While only senior women may show that they can cry for their deceased loved ones, younger and older women may cut themselves with sharp sticks and stones to show their sorrow and love for the deceased. However, attempts to curtail these practices have been made by ministers at funerals by leading the mourners in prayer and telling women that they may sing crying-songs for the deceased but should not hurt themselves. For some women, these traumatic episodes leave physical scars and the action of inducing pain and bodily harm is a means of showing love for the deceased mirroring the respect produced through pain in revelatory rituals for young men. Women’s emotional understanding of songs is

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36 Whitehouse, Arguments and Icons, 5.
developed through the heightened states of grief and feeling that are further structured through dancing at funerals. These songs are derived from men’s singing and they must know the images conjured by the song text to be able to respond accurately to rhythmic cues to change dance steps. The coherence of Biblical stories and their meanings were also fulfilled through intense and highly emotive religious experiences. The excitation expressed in singing, dancing and heightened states of praise meant women especially would shake and cry out to God. They also gave visions and prophecies in polyvocal images for the church. This form of worship was also embodied in Yolngu ancestral ways of thinking. These imagistic practices are, as Whitehouse notes, “codified in ritual choreography rather than as a body of teachings [and are] transmitted by groups of ritual participants rather than proselytizing individuals.”

The problem of embodying restricted knowledge and of intimating the possibility of not-knowing through the non-verbal mode of dance means that knowledge of the ancestral law spreads slowly amongst those who have the authority to know. However, as women become proficient in dancing so younger women may also listen to the corpus of song texts by sitting close to senior women, hearing the images that they visualize through song. These younger women are too “gora” “ashamed” or “embarrassed” to cry until they are recognized as being senior enough to have the right to show that they know the songs and have the authority to sing them.

Templates for these forms of ritual action are based on what Whitehouse terms “semantic memory”—a way of cognizing how to act in any given situation that may be reproduced on subsequent occasions. This form of memory is necessary for routinized behavior patterns to be established such as those evidenced in the doctrinal mode. While semantic memory refers to “mental representations of a general, propositional nature” Whitehouse further argues, per Cohen, that semantic memory is derived from episodic memories by generalizing and abstracting them. It is through the repeated development and accumulation of episodic memory that one can piece together the information required to act appropriately. In Yolngu Christianity,

40 Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons*, 158.
41 Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons*, 5-12
42 Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons*, 5.
Experiencing the Spirit

both these forms of memory interact bringing together the doctrinal and imagistic modes within one emotive and experiential religious mode. Although the form of Yolngu church services may sometimes take a doctrinal structure highlighting an “argument-centred religious discourse,” the spiritual effects of Yolngu religious engagement present a continuum across Christian and ancestral domains.

In Arnhem Land, Yolngu Christian leaders often reflect on their moral condition in relation to their ancestral identities, bodily discipline and spiritual ecology. Yolngu share a common concern for moral accountability to one another in the ancestral law that is felt through the landscape and seascape, represented in ritual songs and dances and ties people together in a mutual understanding of the spiritual fiber of Yolngu being. Knowing oneself as ancestrally bound to other people and places by spiritual essence (märr) begins with the knowledge that the fiber of the ancestral self is dreamt from the land and painted onto the ritual body in ochres of the earth that evoke the color of red clouds at sunset and the person’s lifeblood from the land. These color-pulses of moral fiber are also the life force of river veins and their märr echoes through the landscape in ritual song and is pounded into the earth in the feet of dancers. This flow of ancestral life-force between the living and the dead is shared between clans and manifest in the shapes and forms of different animals, communicating a common mode of religious understanding. One man, Djanggirrawuy, commented to John Rudder,

If he loses [a man dies] and passes away and lies back on his elbow likan ngaylil dipthun…like [a] broken branch, sing mayku (barrukala dharpa [paperbark tree]). Instead of saying, “He’s gone,” I sing the song that says, “he’s resting in peace,” and in that song mention the places and announce with my spirit where his spirit has gone…Next I sing guku [my spirit turning into guku (honeybee) and flying]. The song tells where

44 Whitehouse, Arguments and Icons, 170.
45 A series of publications edited by Harvey Whitehouse are currently underway to review the potential dynamics of modes of religiosity. In one of these publications authors argue that the two modes prefigure rather than exclude each other or are “embedded” in one another Whitehouse argues that both modes employ “cognitively optimal concepts” that explain particular kinds of religious thinking. Harvey Whitehouse “Toward a Comparative Anthropology of Religion” in Ritual and Memory: Toward a Comparative Anthropology of Religion eds H. Whitehouse and J. Laidlaw (California: Altamira Press, 2004), 179-184.
he’s started and then his journey as guku. Then sing mokay [spirit being named] Murayana. Same thing...After mokay, singing about “märr” called Yaliyali and Rajta...By singing the song, it’s like praying how much we love that mokay (dead person). Our love is long like the long string. It doesn’t help the mokay (dead person), it helps our beliefs. We perform in a special way making ceremony (bunggul) and song (manikay) so we feel comfort instead of hard feelings or jealousy.

As I have noted previously, these song images structure funeral rituals and provide the foundations for episodic memories to be recalled when mourners feel the agony of loss expressed in extreme states of grief. Yolngu feelings for the deceased are joined by the string of one’s spirit that flows into and through the land and men in particular can access märr through sacred objects, songs and dances. Reid reports how one man was able to invoke his own personal power to heal family members,

My own power is from my mother’s Dreaming, the Octopus Dreaming. The Octopus is really an Aborigine from a very long time ago [that is, a wangarr or totemic being]...When I concentrate hard I can bring up [mobilise] this power from the Octopus...when I do the Octopus dance...I can feel the power filling me. It is a personal power. It can be passed down as my father’s [as well as mother’s] was to me when he died, or from mother to daughter. These Octopus beings...protect me with this power. When two people tried to hurt me by pointing the bone the power told me it was going to happen...I can prevent any evil attacks. The marrnggitj’s [Yolngu healer’s] power for healing has the same name. It is called ganydjarr or mirritjal.47

When Yolngu participate in Christian worship some are acutely aware of the extension of bodily feelings and thoughts that they bring to the new context but they warn about the source of spiritual affect and intent. A Galiwin’ku church elder, the late George Dayngumbu commented,

When I dance in a ceremony, who am I singing about? God or somebody else? I challenge lots of young boys: “You’ve been baptised, changed your life, and you went to that ceremony, but you’ve still got that mark of Jesus. You went to that ceremony and you were washed with that blood, but that blood belongs to Jesus!” They know what’s going on, but they’re scared to say: [they’re] full of fear.48

47 Janice Reid, Sorcerers and Healing Spirits: Continuity and Change in an Aboriginal Medical System (NSW: Pergamon Press, 1983), 34.
48 Blacket, 248.
Despite warnings such as this by leaders, emotional states extend from one context to the next and underscore people’s relationships to spiritual powers. For example, fear is embedded in Yolngu cosmology arising from the power of healers, *marrngitj*, and sorcerers, *galka*. Warner notes,

> There is a kind of warfare between the forces which do good and those which do harm to man. The latter are related to an organized set of concrete techniques embodied in the person of the black magician, while an entirely different set gives practical expression, in the personality of the white magician, to those forces which control the effects of black magic.49

Fear in traditional contexts, often stems from the knowledge that retribution is related to transgressive acts such as inappropriate behavior at sacred sites.50 Certain ancestral sites can bring about sickness simply by virtue of being there, such as walking through a Yingapungapu ritual sculpture when the transgressor may lose his strength and his bones will break.51 Inappropriate invocation of ancestral power can also cause illness: one man said he had invoked the power of the octopus while dancing and kicking up the dirt with great energy. While the power itself is not dangerous, since it can be used for healing, it can cause harm if released without due ritual restraint.52 The power of sacred objects can also afflict people if handled by those without authority. In one instance when a young man returned to Galiwin’ku after drinking in Darwin, he removed a ritual object from the sacred shade in the *Ngärra* fertility ritual. The women and children screamed and ran away and the leader of the ceremony told me that he should be killed for his actions.

Appreciating the traditional context in which spiritual power operates is critical to understanding processes of spiritual embodiment and adaptation in the Christian context. Former Moderator of the Northern Territory Synod and minister on Galiwin’ku, Rev. Dr. Djiniyini Gondarra commented,

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50 While the power itself is morally neutral the purpose to which it is put can cause concern, Reid, 35.
52 Reid, 51.
God is revealing himself in different forms to particular clans—in terms that are important and meaningful to each one. To one group, he says: “I am the Warungul power!” Warungul is a very sharp spear used for spearing people, but Jesus is saying: “I am that now! It is no longer for spearing a man—that is a two edged sword for me” [i.e. God’s word]. To another, he has been revealing himself as a tongue of fire! That is very, very sacred! You cannot speak about that in public, but we have been using that during the revival...we’re talking the faith of Jesus and saying that “tongues of fire” is the Holy Spirit—stolen in the ceremony.  

In Yolngu reinterpretations it is not the mode of religious transmission that is central but the spiritual force seen to be involved in it and how these forces are experienced, invoked and embodied. It is not surprising then that in a Christian context, knowledge of the spiritual is essentially conveyed via participant-centered performance as much as it is in leader-centered teaching and Yolngu have developed a wide range of performance through which they dance out their faith to counter feelings of doubt or fear. Youth groups from various home-lands practice dance actions to American gospel choruses on cassette, Sydney’s Hillsong ministries, music from Israel or Ireland. Yet others have attended workshops in Brisbane to learn Christian dance with tambourines and streamers. The flow of these dances reveals knowledge and feelings about a spiritual relationship between the Holy Spirit, the individual and their accountability to God and one another. A late church elder and Council Chairman remarked,  

Because I’m a good musician, I’m not going to play in the ceremony and then go and play in the church! That’s not the way! As a group we sing to bring healing, to bless people, to give people strength through praising God—and the people can feel the singing. That’s why we formed the group Dhurrkay Praise. We sing praise [to God] for the sick people and a lot of people have been healed—without touching them...the children know by singing. We read the Bible in our mind—but the Yolngu way is to worship God...and sing to the Lord himself.  

The emphasis on feeling is an extension of ideas of spiritual affect emanating from an ancestral mode of religiosity. In ancestral performance Yolngu will speak of the feelings of spiritual presence as a cold wind on the skin that is felt in the heart and some may shiver in response. In a Christian context, the same feeling can occur when people are praying or laying on hands and they say that the power

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53 Blacket, 248.  
54 Blacket, 262.
of the Holy Spirit is conveyed through touch that feels very cold on the skin. Just as touch can mediate the power of the Holy Spirit, so too, the power of the Holy Spirit can counter feelings of fear through sound and movement. Speaking of how children have been used to bring prophetic messages to the congregation in Christian dances, one man commented,

> Many times the Lord has used them to bring a message to the church. One of the messages that came was through this song, Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus. It came at a time when a lot of people were very frightened and there were payback killings going on and rumours about that sort of thing and a lot of trouble in the community. The message of Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus was something that was given by God...It changed the focus from what the Devil was doing to what God was doing and it really made a difference in the community.55

Like the power of touch, the effects of prophetic dances are spoken of as clear, sweet sounds in the heart. Some say they “feel” a vibration as if coming from the ground. Consequently, the spiritual dialogue between Christianity and the ancestral law has manifested in a mixture of musical genres unifying religious knowledge and experience. These songs and dances use clapsticks and didjeridu to speak of Jesus in ancestral images, focusing mainly on the power of His blood, death and resurrection. This unification of feelingful performances of Christianity through ancestral understanding in Arnhem Land contrasts to Christian practices elsewhere in Australia. For example, regarding the United Aborigines Mission in Halls Creek, McDonald comments, “Present day missionaries wish there could be more Aboriginal cultural content in their church services, that didgeridoos and boomerang clapsticks could be introduced along with Aboriginal languages in singing, and that more of the Dreamtime stories were known.”56

Appreciating the bodily extensions of spiritual feeling from the ancestral realm to Christianity is particularly complex as Yolngu Christians hold a multiplicity of perspectives about their involvement in the tenets and requirements of the ancestral law. As funerals tend to take place with little time between them, everyone in the community is involved in ancestral singing or dancing in some regard. Thus, as Yolngu Christians believe in the assurance that Jesus protects and will participate in many aspects of funerals, they also hold a healthy

55 Interview with the author, fieldnotes, March 2000.
regard for abstaining from aspects of ancestral märr that lead to fear. Singing and dancing is an embodied modality of spiritual performativity through which individuals come to feel what might be considered acceptable or unacceptable engagement with different aspects of ancestral practice.

Conclusion

I have outlined how missionary Christianity brought new doctrinal modes of instruction that were foreign to Yolngu thinking whilst ancestral ritual highlighted imagistic modes of religiosity. However, I have also argued that these domains should not only be viewed as interacting whilst retaining discrete forms but that in Yolngu Christianity they become a unified mode of spiritual thought and bodily feeling. Yolngu Christianity brings the two domains of the ancestral law and Christianity together as extensions of bodily feeling and expression in the landscape and seascape whereby Yolngu have been able to reconcile the historically disjunctive nature of the two religious modalities.

In Yolngu Christianity both modes of religiosity are intimately intertwined. Yolngu have developed, adapted, codified and transformed missionary Christianity into a body-centered, affective and sensory spiritual practice that relates both to Christian doctrine and to the ancestral law. Fear of the spiritual effects of sorcery and the power of Jesus regulate embodied simultaneity between culture and the Gospel. As I have shown, spiritual attack is the potential to be gripped by fear and it is an ever-present danger. While fear can be manifest in the power of dangerous ancestral places, Yolngu Christians perceive the power of God in the land and sea bringing good and healing forces. As a person’s ancestral identity cannot be separated from the land and sea, a tension exists between personal sanctification in baptism and the nature of power in the body and in the landscape. In these contexts, religious modalities are conjoined by a continuity of “potent substances and energies of the body”\textsuperscript{57} where religious feeling is dialectically situated in relation to a wide range of spiritual and emotional effects that operate from ancestral performance to Christian worship.

This process stands in contrast to Melanesian forms of Christianity which operate in the doctrinal mode and “are largely denuded of any

\textsuperscript{57} MacDonald, 16.
full-blown imagistic dimensions.”58 The distinction between Melanesia and Arnhem Land perhaps lies partly in the historical context and approach by missionaries to Yolngu Christianity and partly in the ways in which Yolngu have extended concepts of the body, personhood and feeling from indigenous cosmology to Christianity.59 Thus, I have tried to avoid drawing hard and fast distinctions between doctrinal and imagistic modes of religiosity within Yolngu Christianity as it is in a flow of emotion that the sense of the spiritual self emerges. This is not to say that contradictions, distinctions and conflicts do not occur. However, the sense of the spiritual self is continually being assessed, renewed and reconsidered as Yolngu are continually in a process of reconstructing values and attitudes towards the world from experiences of the past to “the problems and exigencies which comprise their social [and spiritual] existence in the here and now.”60

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Peggy Brock for organizing the symposium, Religious Change and Indigenous People: Australia in an International Context, held at Edith Cowan University, February 2002 in which stimulating debate and intellectual exchanges inspired new ways of thinking about religious change. I am especially grateful to Hastings Donnan for his thoughtful and encouraging comments in preparing drafts of the paper and Harvey Whitehouse for his insights and enthusiasm in this article. I am also indebted to many Yolngu and balanda (non-Yolngu) who have shared their faith and religious understandings so generously. In particular: Gudaltji Maratja and Gapany; Djinijini and Gelung; Dangatanga and Bañdil; Mawunydjil and Nyimindja; Colin and Guthadjaka; the Gopuru miyalk; Yurranydjil and Djawut; Wanymuli; Ngandama; George (dec.) and Guymun and Mandjikay Praise; Muwarra; Manydjarri; Johnny; Margaret Miller; and all the Datjwuy families.

58 Whitehouse, Arguments and Icons, 159.
59 Yolngu Christianity is not unique in this regard as other charismatic forms of Christianity, such as Pentecostalism, may demonstrate a similar tendency (see chapter by Maxwell this volume).
60 Jackson and Karp, 28.
Many scholars are much exercised by the rise of born-again Christianity. This movement now accounts for about a quarter of a billion people world-wide, and tens of millions in Africa. Born-again adherents comprise a diverse coalition of Evangelicals, Charismatics and Pentecostals. All of these share a belief in the infallibility of scripture and stress the centrality of a conversion experience though Charismatics and Pentecostals place an additional emphasis on possessing the ‘Gifts of the Spirit’: divine healing, glossolalia, exorcism and prophecy. Indeed, it is usually the experience of these gifts that draws members out of historic churches into Charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity, away from what they retrospectively cast as a dry and dead faith into the life of the Spirit. Useful work has already been done on Pentecostal spirituality. Birgit Meyer has shed light on how biblical imagery associated with the diabolic has offered Ghanaians a space and a discourse for reflecting on the pitfalls of modernity. And Ruth Marshall has shown how Nigerian Born-agains have deployed biblical idioms of empowerment and status to reconstruct their social world. This chapter builds upon these insights but seeks to make spirituality the focus of analysis, engaging directly with the Pentecostal religious universe. Pentecostals are very religious people. Given the choice, they pass their free time in the assembly hall, the convention centre, the township cottage and the suburban home praying, studying the Bible and worshipping God. Drawing upon extensive fieldwork on a Zimbabwean-based Pentecostal movement this chapter considers what Pentecostals sing, preach, testify and pray about. The analysis centers on a lexicon of their key words, phrases and narratives, contextualized in neo-liberal Africa and shows how Pentecostalism, as a quintessential popular religion, aids those

struggling for survival in a harsh environment and is able to satisfy deeper existential passions in ways that other religions have not been able. Social scientists can, of course, only go so far in reconstructing religious experience at best coming to an understanding of its social significance. It is indeed not possible to make windows into believers’ souls. As John Gordon, referring to Evans-Pritchard, observes in his chapter in this volume, some things are better left to the theologian. Nevertheless the chapter demonstrates how religious ideas and images are central to Pentecostals’ understanding of themselves and their relation to the broader structures of society.

Analysis is based on a case study of one of Africa’s largest and most vital Pentecostal movements, Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa, (ZAOGA). A prayer band founded the movement. They were a group of zealous young artisans, who were expelled from the South African-derived Apostolic Faith Mission in 1959 following a struggle with missionaries. They subsequently joined the South African Assemblies of God led by Nicholas Bhengu, working closely with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. Once again, they were expelled and in 1967 they formed their own organisation, Assemblies of God, Africa (AOGA). The movement, which began in Highfields Township in Colonial Salisbury, expanded along migrant labor networks into other Zimbabwean towns and cities as well as into Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia. In the 1970s the leader, Ezekiel Guti, began to form relations with the American Bible belt while studying at Christ for the Nations Institute, Dallas, 1971. After Zimbabwean independence in 1980, the movement mushroomed on a transnational scale, establishing itself in other African countries such as Botswana, Zaire, South Africa, Rwanda, Ghana and Tanzania. In 1986 it began to evangelize the former metropolitan power by planting churches in Britain. In 1995 it had around 300,000-400,000 adherents in Zimbabwe alone.

Within Zimbabwe fieldwork was conducted in three different sites

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2 The phrase is associated Queen Elizabeth I in the context of her Settlement for the Church of England.

reflecting the sequential growth of the movement within the country. The first location was Highfields, a collection of what were formerly known as “townships”, now called high-density suburbs, where the movement began in the 1950s. The second site was City Assembly 1 in Baines Avenue in the northern part of Harare, bordering, the middle-class, low-density suburbs. The northern suburbs had been the exclusive domain of whites during settler rule but middle class blacks moved into them after independence in 1980. The third location was a collection of assemblies in the rural Northeast of the country in northern Nyanga District where ZAOGA had begun in the late 1980s, but only really taken hold in the 1990s.

_Pentecostalism in Neo-Liberal Zimbabwe: The Context_

The end of the Cold War did not bring about a cessation of external intervention in Africa, but rather a change in its nature. The economic ideology of privatization spread across the continent in the 1990s inaugurating a new era. Western-dominated international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund dictated financial policy, insisting that government revenue be used primarily to pay overseas debts, thereby elevating private initiative over public responsibility. In the face of Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAPs) State provision rapidly diminished. The Zimbabwean government was forced to privatize state-owned enterprises, while the population expanded with many young people migrating to towns and cities. By 1998 many Zimbabweans were only eating one meal a day. Nevertheless a few benefited from the changes. These elites were able to secure their families’ health and the future of their children’s education through the growing private sector. Other winners were those who ran private security companies. As poverty increased so did crime, and law and order could no longer be guaranteed by a retrenched police force. Hence multinationals and their elite employees increasingly paid for their own protection.

The decline in food security led to a large increase in child labor as

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poor, usually rural people put their children into the custody of their richer, usually urban relatives. These children often work as unpaid labor in exchange for food and accommodation. Some might end up assisting their parents and relatives working on commercial farms, mines and quarries. Orphans and those unable to cope with the demands of their hosts often opted for a life on the streets. By the mid 1990s growing unemployment and declining state provision for education meant that schooling was no longer the social lever it had once been. Once-prized exam certificates were increasingly worthless rather like Zimbabwe's currency. With no jobs many youth faced a future of being “just seated”. They had become a statistic, worse still a social problem, often viewed with suspicion by a state which was only too quick to brand them as “thugs”. The government of the ZANU/PF party became increasingly remote and detached from the lives of ordinary Zimbabweans, which was reflected in voter apathy.

The Word and The Lexicon

Most of the preaching I heard in ZAOGA was not expository. There was little detailed reflection on one specific passage, placing it in context and drawing out its significance through discussion of key words and phrases.6 Most preachers were untrained, and pastors who had been to the Bible College, were given a practical training in evangelism, demonology and deliverance and church management. They were taught Bible but with little critical argument. Sermons were usually a composite of passages and verses woven together with a limited commentary. Major points, and key words and phrases were repeated over and again, the preacher raising his or her voice to emphasize their significance. And there was a good deal of story telling. One pastor confidently explained that “in ZAOGA we don’t preach theology, but contemporary issues.” Indeed, because the vast majority of the preachers were “of the people”, not separated from their congregations by ethnic or class barriers and sharing the same neighborhoods, their sermons were extremely effective, summoning up ideas and images that sustained and inspired the faithful.7

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7 L. Gill, “‘Like a Veil to Cover Them’: Women and Pentecostal Movements in Le Paz,” *American Ethnologist* 17 no.3 (1990), 711.
Fearlessness and Security

City Assembly 1, Baines Avenue, 1 October 1995

By 10.30 the hall was full of about 100 smartly dressed people, in their twenties and thirties. The second service began with forty minutes of church business, all of which was about money. This was longer than usual but the biannual Period of Talents had just begun. During Talents, members buy, sell and make things in order to raise money for the church. Thus a woman discoursed at length about her own enterprise of gown-making. This was followed by a time of pledging as members made promises about how much they would raise. Members were then asked to pledge financial gifts for the pastor’s wedding and the Archbishop’s Christmas Gift.

The Church Secretary recorded these pledges in a book. Members were reminded that a new month had begun and tithes were due. A free-will offering was then taken up. There was a brief praise session, with vibrant singing mostly in ChiShona, and then the sermon began.

A young man preached for about 30 minutes on Esther 6. The context of the passage was the time of Exile when the Israelites were under Persian rule. The passage itself was the story of Esther and Mordecai’s triumph over Haman, who was bent on the destruction of the Jews. The story’s denouement is the execution of the evil Haman on the gallows he had intended for the murder of Mordecai. The story was read and then retold by the preacher with much gusto and good deal of licence. For the entertainment of his audience he pranced around the front of the hall waving his arms, injecting as much energy as possible into the story, particularly the execution. His interpretation was simple but very effective. He explained that Christians were descendants of the Jews, their history was the continuation of the Jewish story. Thus he concluded:

“God is on the side of Jews … As long as you are of Jewish origin, i.e. of a Christian background no one will touch you. Witches will come but they won’t touch you. The blood of Jesus is a durawall. God intervenes like a strong wrestler in touch wrestling”.

The image of wrestling evoked a good deal of laughter. The weekly bouts of the sport organized by the World Wrestling Federation (WWF) were shown regularly on Zimbabwean television and the likes of Hulk Hogan were enormously popular amongst Zimbabwean youth. Mention of the sport was made in a number of sermons, always to good effect, although some of the more thoughtful preachers were ambivalent about its effect on the peaceable Pentecostal temper. But far more profound was the equation of Christ’s blood with a durawall. As in many other cultures, blood is a potent image for Zimbabweans, associated with

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8 The citations come from transcriptions of tape-recorded events or from my field notes. It was possible to take accurate notes because Pentecostals attend services with pen and paper ready for inspiration from their brethren.
life, sacrifice and cleansing. Christian imagery resonates with all of these associations by linking blood with Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Pentecostals tend to focus on blood’s specific protective quality in their ongoing struggle with the Devil and his emissaries in this world. Thus a few months later in the pre-meeting prayer session at City 1 Assembly I overheard a young male polytechnic student praying the following words and phrases repeatedly like a plain chant:

\[ \text{Father we worship you. We thank you for your presence, your anointing, we worship you alleluia, we thank you [glossalalia] eli eli li elikai, eli e likai ….} \]
\[ \text{Holy, Holy, Holy art thou … we worship you. We thank you for your word which is going to change our lives … We thank you for your anointing... many people will come today with spiritual, financial, sickness problems we pray that you will help them. I pray God for your anointing … anointing…. anointing….} \]
\[ \text{We pray that this area will be a no-go area for demons, for spirits of criticism, spirits of reasoning … cover it with the blood of Jesus … the power of the blood.} \]

The equation of blood with a durawall powerfully evoked that protective quality, concretizing it in one of the most prescient images of the 1990s. Made from large concrete slabs and pillars, durawalls surround most factories and low density housing in Zimbabwe’s towns and cities providing them with rudimentary security. The level of protection is increased by security guards, stationed by their gates and regularly patrolling their perimeters, enhanced by the presence of live-in domestic servants often resident in shacks or cottages in the grounds of plush suburban homes. Many rank and file members of ZAOGA do these jobs, or at least started out doing them. The durawall also conjures up another potent, though more ambivalent image of survival for many of Harare’s urban dwellers. In the southern part of the city on the edge of the industrial area and high-density suburbs lies the Walled City. This market area surrounded by slabs of concrete wall is a place where Zimbabweans can buy and sell on the black market. Contained within are street kids, hawkers and petty entrepreneurs ready to help the visitor procure any item, including parts from his or her truck stolen the night before. As such it is a vital part of the informal economy providing many on the edge of starvation with the means to survive.

The image of security and protective barriers pervaded many ser-

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mons and was often imaginatively rooted in scripture. One visiting preacher at City 1 cited Job chapter 1, where Satan taunts God for protecting his servant by putting a hedge around him and his household. The preacher declared, “God builds a wall around believers as he built a wall around his people.” During the 1996 church anniversary celebrations the pastor at City 1 chose to speak on a God who, “endures with his people” taking as his text Psalm 46,

### Psalm 46

*God is our strength and refuge an ever-present help in trouble …
There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most high dwells.
God is within her, she will not fall …
The Lord almighty is with us;
The God of Jacob is our fortress.*

His commentary was brief but rousing, the audience urging him on to greater rhetorical heights with ululation and shouts of “YES” and “THAT’S RIGHT”. Beginning with the premise that, “the church is a refugee camp, a place where God protects his people,” he quickly moved to a more triumphal note. Drawing liberally from the Psalms, he pushed his audience to applause declaring, “Some trust in chariots and some trust in horses but we trust in the name of the Lord” [Psalm 20: 7]. The image of fortifications was most powerfully evoked in a special Youth Big Sunday at Highfields Revival Centre in October 1995, intended to draw together all the young people attending the 10 assemblies in the suburb.

### Psalms and Deuteronomy

*The formal service began with victory shouts that worked rather like a modern antiphon. The Master of Ceremony would exclaim, “There is Power in the name of … “ to which the audience would reply “JESUS!” The shouts would continue “All devils tremble in the name of … JESUS” “There’s deliverance in the name of … JESUS etc.*

*After a series of these shouts the Master of Ceremonies elaborated “Jesus is not a noun but a verb! We say rise up in Jesus name!” Then a preacher spoke about the “spirit of fear” prevalent amongst young people, “fear of—tsotsis [thieves], dogs, cats, fear of being kidnapped, fear of witches.” He cited Psalm 127, “Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand on guard in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves”. Then he referred to Deuteronomy 27 and 28 where Moses addresses the Israelites at the point of their entry into the Promised Land. The Israelites will be God’s people, they will have a land of milk and honey and enemies will flee them if they obey His commands. The preacher proceeded to tell an excited audience about their God-given Spirit of Power. “This is God’s Church. This is God’s Century. It must be kept pure. We have God given authority—the Spirit of power”.*

*As the audience shouted “famba!”—[lit “go for it!”]—he went on “what is the
secret of the man of God? [Archbishop Ezekiel Guti] prayer and a sinless life. God said to the man of God ‘fear not and sin not’ … If you have a spirit of power and a spirit of love … no girl can come and mess around with you. You will have a boundary… This is the century of God. Other churches are closing down. They have no youth …”.

Then in a final flurry he finished with the words: “Jesus Christ is all in all. If you are ill—Jesus Christ. If you are in need of money—Jesus Christ. If you need a job—Jesus Christ”.

In the above mini-sermon (and also the previous address on Psalm 46) God was the omnipotent security guard watching over an entire city. He gave his people a “spirit of power” created a protective boundary around them. Such a boundary not only provided security from physical threats such as robbery and kidnap but it also helped the believer remain pure, able to resist the temptations of the flesh. Moreover His name, like His blood protected and empowered. It was not merely a noun but a verb. The word JESUS had incantational power. It was prayed and spoken over and again like a mantra, willing God into action. The name itself was an answer to problems, if spoken with faith. As with the association with blood, names and naming have a particularly strong resonance in many parts of Africa. Parents chose names with a great deal of care. Often children are named after ancestors to receive their blessing and oversight. At other times they are named to signify events occurring around the time of birth, or to express a virtue or aspiration. Clan names have religious and symbolic connotations.10

The preponderance of images of refuge, security and protection in contemporary Pentecostal preaching in Zimbabwe do suggest that there is an element of escapism or flight from the world in this form of Christian religion. But this is only one theme in the rich collection of sermons I heard. As the citations suggest, there were more upbeat components in the Pentecostal lexicon: status and authority, victory and prosperity. Flight into the sanctuary of the Pentecostal community is often just the first stage of a conversion story. As the believer is remade he or she moves on to view themselves and society from a different perspective.

10 Bourdillon, 24-26.
The most popular sermon text, especially among women, was 1 Peter 2: 9, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.” Expanding on the passage the female pastor at Highfields Revival Centre told her audience to have confidence in themselves and to let go of their fears,

You are heirs to Kingdom of God, Children of God. You are a precious person because you are an heir to the Kingdom of God. As Christians you have an identity card as citizens of the Kingdom of God. You are not an ordinary person. You are not despised, because your identity is not a physical identity, like metal IDs we can lose. It is a spiritual identity. … We don’t know the power that is in us as Children of God. … The Bible says “By his scars we are healed”. As soon as I pronounce that, I am healed. A big truck has to stop because of the authority of a policeman given to him by the government. Our power is greater than that of a policeman or the government because our authority is from on high. … it is not from the government it is from on high. Sometimes you don’t come to church because you feel that you have no value or importance but let me say you are valuable and precious before God.

Notions of kinship and descent resonate with a Zimbabwean audience. They are still an important means by which wealth and authority are transferred between families and persons, though usually between men. Kinship is not only the language of “traditional” politics, it is also an important means of securing jobs, promotions and contracts in the workplace where resources are few and nepotism is rife. Moreover many Zimbabweans would have witnessed the coronation, or installation of a rural chief or headman, rituals which have become more elaborate and more significant in post-colonial Africa than the recent or distant past. New leadership rituals can be observed as the President and his entourage are ferried around the city in convoys of dark Mercedes accompanied by police and army vehicles, and feted at lavish state functions in the international hotels. Yet wealth, political authority and status are something that most ZAOGA members experience only at a distance. Some are unemployed or under-employed, others have poorly paid jobs. As the state retreats from its welfare provision it is often experienced through its mechanisms of control. Although the

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ID card has lost many of its associations with colonial pass laws; it is still popularly known by the colonial name, *stupa*. It is often checked at roadblocks, used in voter registration and elections, is necessary in most transactions with the state, and is often needed to get work. Like many Zimbabwean citizens, numerous ZAOGA members feel marginal to many of the economic and social activities that take place around them. Women and youth are most affected, the consequences directly translated onto their bodies.

While it is accepted that a husband may wander into adulterous liaisons, female infidelity is not viewed with the same fond indulgence. Still required to fulfill her sexual duties to an aberrant husband a wife is vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases, and worse still AIDS. Domestic violence against women is widespread. It accounts for over 60 percent of all murder cases which pass through the courts. This is in addition to the thousands of the women who suffer regular beatings, with figures as high as 32 to 42 percent in rural areas and small towns. Rape both within and outside the home is prevalent. But in response to these male crimes and incest the courts have been extremely lenient, considering theft of property more heinous. With unemployment high some women feel obliged to accept “carpet interviews” in order to secure work. In 1985 it was reported that sexual harassment at work was experienced by 11 percent to 25 percent of women. More generally single women are still stigmatized as prostitutes and those “caught” wearing mini skirts have been accused of inviting rape, or worse still assaulted. In spite of their low status and the ever-present threat of male violence, the most vulnerable of female professions—prostitution—has increased as single women desperate for any sort of income have taken to the streets for survival.¹³

Youth are vulnerable to similar ravages. Corporal punishment of children in the late 1990s was so commonplace that it is considered “normal”, occurring in schools (illegally) the courts, and the home. This has been matched by an increase in sexual abuse. Homelessness, insecure and overcrowded accommodation has induced not only more physical abuse but also emotional and sexual violence. A marked increase in rape cases involving minors has been reported in

the local press. Orphans living with relatives are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse, and even more so street children who are often forced to grant sexual favors in return for a warm place to sleep. While higher drop-out rates from schools has created a generation of bored and unfulfilled youth with the associated problems of early sexual relationships, teenage pregnancy, promiscuity, prostitution and forced marriage.\textsuperscript{14}

Numerous Zimbabweans enter ZAOGA assemblies with low self-esteem feeling wretched, despised and abused. But within the “safe” confines of the Pentecostal community they experience a revelation. They learn that they are not a “nobody but a somebody”. Even though they may not have “big things” they are nevertheless “special”. They are no longer just citizens of a state that has broken its promises and increasingly resorts to surveillance and control; they have new \textit{royal} identity as members of the Kingdom of God. And this new identity is not ascribed by means of a flimsy ID card that can be lost. Pentecostals are chosen people, called by name. More than that they are now holy, set apart, and clean. To ordinary Zimbabweans, the significance of being “called” cannot be understated. Unlike members of other mass movements, Pentecostals are not part of the great unwashed. They are not just proletarians, workers, or cadres. Neither are they “thugs”, a statistic or a potential social problem. They are given a name, told that they are “unique”, and assured that their projects count. At the very heart of their conversion comes the realization that they still have agency in their lives. The sociologist of religion, David Martin, puts it well, “For people to be addressed in evangelical language as persons is to be spoken to in terms that truly speak to their condition, confirming beyond the shadow of doubt their dignity, worth and significance.” More than that, the message of redemption, or “freedom from slavery”, and the promise of healing powerfully resonates amongst people caught up in every kind of abuse, violation and indebtedness.\textsuperscript{15}

As a royal people Pentecostals now have a new authority by which to live. They are protected and empowered by the blood and name of Jesus Christ. As citizens of the Kingdom of God they participate in new system of kinship which is not prone to the biases of age

\textsuperscript{14} R. Mupedziswa, \textit{Empowerment or Repression. ESAP and Children in Zimbabwe} (Gweru: Mambo and Silveira House, 1997).
and patriarchy. And they have a heavenly ID card that gives them more influence than agents of the state possess. When addressing a ZAOGA student group at the University of Zimbabwe the pastor at City 1 Assembly took as his texts Genesis 41:42 and Luke 15:22. The first text is the story of the Joseph being placed in charge of Egypt by Pharaoh; the second is the account of the reinstatement of the Prodigal Son by his father. In both stories the subject receives a ring to signify his new found authority and he is then dressed in fine linen robes. Having retold the stories with great gusto the pastor went on to say, “God has given us authority. I am above the ordinary people because of the ring, the ring of power of someone else’s name. God has given you authority. He says go and change.”

More than Conquerors: Mission in a Fallen World

With a new identity and authority Pentecostals are encouraged back into the world to lead victorious lives. In Bible studies and sermons the unredeemed state of being a victim was continually contrasted with the redeemed status of victor. At a Monday evening prayer meeting and Bible study at City 1 Assembly, a young man told those gathered, “We were victims of inheritance. But now we are no longer victims but conquerors. Greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world [1 John 4:4]. In Christ we are more than conquerors [Romans 8:37].” With a new found status they can now begin to dream dreams. In September 1995, I accompanied Steve Simango, the Archbishop’s son-in-law and itinerant speaker to Dzengesa, a high-density suburb in Seke, a large urban community outside of Harare. There, Simango preached to approximately 600 young people on the subject “Reaching your Destiny,”

we are still in the morning of our lives. I know God has put me on this planet earth for a purpose.” As a female pastor got up to wave her arms in support, shouting “alleluia”, he took his microphone and walked amongst the audience, most of whom looked impressed. He preached against a “slave mentality”, and an “inferiority complex”: “If you are good at Science don’t just settle to be a science teacher in Dzengesa six [a residential area] don’t just be a house girl. Daddy has plans for you. … The Devil is responsible for the genocide in Rwanda, the killings in South Africa, killings in Bosnia. The Devil is responsible for AIDS but Jesus says I have come that you have life in its fullness [John 6:6]. … Adolescents chill down. You are not the first to grow up. For young people the greatest problem is the flesh. Don’t give your body to the Devil. Bad friends. Your friends are thieves, liars and homos [homosexuals]—you thought it was only a problem of the West—it is also
The preacher was challenging attitudes that disempower a generation of youth across Central and Southern Africa. There is a shocking sense of self-loathing, inferiority and despair, which the pastors and leaders of ZAOGA call a “Third World Mentality.” This is an attitude of mind, which assumes blacks are morally and intellectually inferior to whites, and are incapable of prospering or running the institutions of the modern state. It is a mentality similar to that which Fanon identified in the era of decolonization, but pervades the recent post-colonial era in which the hopes of independence have failed. It is particularly acute in nations such as Zambia where the experience of economic, social and political malaise has been longer and more profound. By invoking the divine promise of “life in the fullness” the preacher dared his audience, particularly young women to view their destinies differently.

At other times ZAOGA members were exalted to see themselves as part of a larger enterprise, as part of a religious movement that counts. In October 1995 there was a Big Sunday celebration for assemblies in the northern suburbs held at the University of Zimbabwe. Overseer Christopher Chadoka, the third most powerful member of the church after Guti and his wife, addressed a gathering of about 350 people. He began by recounting how he had just purchased the former Dutch Reformed Church in Waterfalls on behalf of the movement, and was now also in search of a building in the city centre. Taking Numbers 13: 27-33 as his text he told the story of Israelite spies returning from Canaan to report a land of milk and honey but inhabited by the giant descendants of the Nephilim. He went on,

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Most of you will see giants but don’t forget the vision. A long time back it was said in the vision that we were going to get rich. We could not believe it. Some girls cannot believe that they will get married. They see it as a giant. Others can’t see how they will get a job. These problems in the home are just grasshoppers. I want to remind you today the organisation we are in is the vision of God. Anything is possible if it is the vision of God. We are going to face a lot of giants. We are going to face a lot of problems. We have to return to the vision. … How many churches can buy 17 trucks in one day and two lorries? If you look at our pastors you won’t see them with patches on their backs. They move in cars... which other churches have youth choirs? … Other churches only have old people in the choir and ... in our church we have youth in choir and the old sitting .... This is the royal family in the Kingdom of God.

A mixture of Old Testament promise and modernizing zeal, Chadoka’s address proved to be extremely popular. Many other sermons were rhetorically brilliant and their promises of security and empowerment, status and authority, victory and prosperity were very comforting to their audiences. But were they no more than that? Were the promises ever realized?

**Being of Good Character**

From the outset Pentecostals are taught to expect and seek change, and to expect an “experience of the sacred.”17 In services they are repeatedly told “you will never be the same again” or “you will go home transformed.” There is a constant emphasis on permanent internal revolution. And much of the agency for this personal transformation rests with the individual. The process begins with repentance, necessary both for cleansing and empowerment. The pastor at the rural Nyamasara Assembly informed his audience that it was impossible to “go to church a prostitute and come back home as a prostitute, or go to church a n’ganga [traditional healer] and come back home a n’ganga. He told them “you need to repent so that God will restore power in you.”

But repentance is only the first stage. There is a continued emphasis on holiness, or good character. Born-agains are exalted to live moral

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and disciplined lives. The demands made upon them are total and the push for sincerity is relentless. Speakers often chide their audiences into action rebuking them for coming late, being stingy in giving, forgetting their Bibles and lacking enthusiasm in prayer or singing. In Highfields Revival Centre a female deacon announced, “I have seen people sitting on benches at the back not the front. They don’t know whom they worship.” Moreover, there is a constant spotlight on the believer’s motives, which must remain pure.

And born-agains must be vigilant against the Devil and his agents. These evil forces are continually seeking ways of entering the Christian. The believer’s body is a temple, a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. But for God to dwell there it must be kept clean.  

Using emotive and powerful imagery, the preacher addressed the then widespread public debate about homosexuality and popular concern about family breakdown in the language of demonology. “Spirit” was used in two senses: first as a very real supernatural entity, which can possess a Christian, and secondly, as an idiom for excessive forces that control or create addictions in the believer’s life. Although there are a number of weapons in the Pentecostal armory against these forces, some of which will be discussed below, a good deal of emphasis is placed on self-control. The individual must do his or her utmost to remain pure because he or she is part of a collective in which personal failings can have corporate repercussions. A visiting speaker to City 1 Assembly told the gathering,

In scripture the Devil is a snake, a scorpion [Luke 10: 19] you must beware of such demonic forces. As you walk the streets you are thinking about sleeping with another woman. You should say “Out Satan”. If you open the door, demons can come in. The easiest way of transferring demons into people is sex, just as STD is transferred. The Devil puts people into churches who sleep with people to put devils in them ... We have counselled people who are homosexuals and lesbians ... in our boarding schools, and some are getting into Satanism. ... Some go to n’gangas when they are back in the reserves others go to false white garment prophets. Paul in Athens burnt books. These evil fetishes can act as a bridge for evil things coming in and out. ... Movies and TV are good things but can be turned into idols. The Devil makes good things bad. ... Some of you have the spirit of gossip, others the “spirit of rejection.”

Using emotive and powerful imagery, the preacher addressed the then widespread public debate about homosexuality and popular concern about family breakdown in the language of demonology. “Spirit” was used in two senses: first as a very real supernatural entity, which can possess a Christian, and secondly, as an idiom for excessive forces that control or create addictions in the believer’s life. Although there are a number of weapons in the Pentecostal armory against these forces, some of which will be discussed below, a good deal of emphasis is placed on self-control. The individual must do his or her utmost to remain pure because he or she is part of a collective in which personal failings can have corporate repercussions. A visiting speaker to City 1 Assembly told the gathering,

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You repent, you leave beer, you leave women, you become a Christian, but you remain with one thing—hating your brother. 1 John 3:10 tells us it is a disgraceful thing to hate your brother. We must not be like Cain, hating our brother through jealousy. As a prayer band, we don't want to go before God with someone who is unclean. We would talk, testify, after we would sing but we would not even sing properly. I will not allow anyone to gossip about a brother in the church. ... Don’t be like white guys in the northern suburbs. They would just meet at golf. They live in houses with a big wall and a small dog. “Mrs so and so” next door is in hospital but they would not know.

While Pentecostals build walls against the outside world, they tear them down between themselves to allow the free flow of the Holy Spirit and the construction of a holy community.

The Praying Community: Pentecostal Practice

Pentecostals are offered a pattern in scripture to help redirect their energies and aspirations. Much has been written on the way in which narratives not only represent but also constitute social actors. The Bible in particular provides a rich repertoire of inspiring, empowering stories and images through which believers can redefine themselves. 19 As we have seen preachers spend a good many hours retelling biblical stories in the contemporary context. But Pentecostals are also expected to study it during their personal devotions and in cell groups. It is a food which must be eaten [Revelation 10:10] and a weapon with which to fight the Devil [Ephesians 6]. More than that, certain scriptures such as those referring to Christ’s blood, his name, his resurrection have a sacred power in themselves. When spoken they can banish evil spirits, and ensure the success of a meeting or sermon. Thus Pentecostals immerse themselves in scripture. They look forward to reading the Bible, and memorize verses and passages to arm themselves against the Devil and his agents. By so doing their social life becomes “re-storied” in a manner that engenders positive change and meaning.

But more important still is the power of prayer. Pentecostals are “people who pray at all times.” They pray when they get up and go to bed, when they travel, at work in fellowship groups, when they sit down to eat a meal, when they enter each other’s homes, when

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they open a business but most of all when they are sick, possessed, or face great hardship. In prayer, their struggle for betterment is acted out both through and on the body. Although they seek to pray at all times, there are particular moments when they come together to pray: prayer meetings, prayer conventions, bible studies and ordinary church services. For those unfamiliar with the Pentecostal practice of prayer, first encounters can be quite shocking. A few do sit or kneel to pray quietly like those in the historic mission churches. More generally the whole body is thrown into the practice, often with great vigor. Many Pentecostals perambulate while praying, some encircle the room, others walk back and forth along an aisle, within an alcove or beside a wall. Some lie prostrate on the floor or under tables and chairs. Others pray facing a wall. Some jump up and down, others appear to be running on the spot in slow motion. A number seemed to borrow movements from the martial arts or professional sports, weaving them into their prayers. Fists are clenched, pounded into palms or used to punch the air. Arms are waved or rotated from side to side. Eyes are screwed tightly shut or remain wide open. All of the time there is a great cacophony of sounds as Pentecostals pray aloud together in a mixture of English, ChiShona, and tongues. Their prayers are interspersed with wails, howls, bursts of laughter and the repetition of sacred phrases.

At times it appears as if these meetings are no more than collections of individuals expressing private emotions in public. But these moments of individual expression are coordinated to convey a shared sense of prayer. Moreover, there were collective acts of prayer. The corporate dimension was most apparent at the annual Prayer Convention held each November. At one site—Braeside, a suburb near to the airport—groups of women holding hands formed themselves into circles. Moving inwards and outwards like a folk dance, they repeated the words “ngarkudswe Jesus [let Jesus be praised]” in a near hypnotic state. The following evening a large crowd gathered in a big tent besides the building. They linked arms and called down the Holy Spirit. Seconds later they were seized by uncontrollable fits of laughter. Bursting out of the sides of the tents they crawled on their hands and knees like spiritual drunkards, overcome with elation.

To the outsider such meetings can appear no more than spiritual anarchy, a collective breakdown of emotions. But it is usually a controlled breakdown. During moments of intensity, pastors and lay leaders were always vigilant. Some church members were led away to be
exorcised because they had exhibited a strange demonic behavior, “not in harmony” with the meeting. The life of prayer is ordered, and good Pentecostals are familiar with its conventions. This was most apparent in church services, which initially appeared spontaneous but worked to a set pattern. Prior to the formal proceedings there was always a pre-meeting period of prayer, lasting for twenty to thirty minutes. During this time, believers prayed that God would bind the Devil and that they may themselves be clean, so that the Holy Spirit would flow and God’s works would be accomplished. Within the service the level of intensity shifted constantly but was always heightened for the final crescendo. Halfway through the time of praise and worship the gathering entered a period of individual and collective effervescence, as prayers and tongues were offered to God interspersed with choruses. At times there were victory shouts. Stealing and Christianizing a refrain from ZANU/PF rallies the leader would shout “Pamberi ne [Forward with] …? ]” to which the audience would reply “JESUS”, waving their arms in solidarity. He then shouted “Pasi ne [down with] …?”—to which the audience responded “Satani [Satan]” gesturing downwards with their thumbs and then motioning to stamp on him with their feet. A dignified gesture from an elder or the commencement of a hymn acted to calm the pace of the service. The appearance of the preacher at the lectern signaled it was time for the sermon. The psychic pitch again rose as the preacher inspired, cajoled, and exalted his audience toward personal and collective transformation. At a well-chosen moment the lectern was moved to the side and the people rushed forward for prayer. At times almost everyone would present themselves for the laying on of hands. Some came in search of a blessing, others sought forgiveness or healing, and others still wanted deliverance from the evil spirits that bound them. In practice, deliverance and healing were not isolated events in the believer’s life, but a process. Evangelists on crusades encouraged new converts to come forward again and again to build up their faith. Likewise in ordinary meetings, regular church members would present themselves for prayer week in week out.

Some Pentecostals, particularly pastors well versed in scripture, were able to enunciate a theology that underpinned ecstatic behavior. Thus the exuberant use of the body was variously ascribed to,

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20 See also Gill, 713.
Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your strength [Mark 12.30]
Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my innermost being [Psalm 103:1]
All manner of prayer [Ephesians 6:18]

The loud intensity of prayer was explained by,

Shout for joy to the Lord [Psalm 98:4];
He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears [Hebrews 5:7];
They lifted their voices together [Acts 4:24];

Even for the more exotic practices biblical precedent could be found. Thus the scripture “the joy of the Lord is my strength” [Nehemiah 8.10] justified the manifestation of laughing spirits. And the furious rocking of the body in prayer was explained in terms of the scripture “from days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing” [Matthew 11:12].

Most Pentecostals however offered common sense or psychological explanations for their behavior. Prayer was a means of release. Problems were literally laughed or cried away. Being “bathed in the Spirit” healed emotional wounds. Arms were lifted in reverence, supplication and surrender to a transcendental God. More than that, prayer was warfare with the Devil. The body was contorted to will God into action. Likewise the body of the demon-possessed person shook as the evil spirit struggled to retain its host and the exorcists attempted to wrestle it free. A leading evangelist explained, “The Devil will not give you these people on a silver plate. It is a struggle.” Hence Pentecostals were most animated during moments of deliverance; deacons and elders rushed about in loud prayer, seeking a quickening of the Spirit. As those most gifted in exorcism and healing worked on the queues of supplicants, others stood behind them praying in tongues, powering the deliverance like an engine. Amplifying the glossalalia with a microphone enhanced the electrifying effect. Prior to every service at Highfields Revival Centre, a group of young zealots enter a shack beside the church for half an hour of vigorous prayer. The shack was aptly named the “power house.” Thus, as in other contexts in Southern Africa preachers and leaders work together with the assembly to build waves of “communal enthusiasm” as a social manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit. “The greater the euphoria, the greater the power.” The “tide of spiritual fervour” is eventually released, directed to the alleviation of individual suffering by means of divine healing and deliverance.21

21 Kiernon, 76.
Beyond the ecstatic there were other practices within the culture of the assembly, which acted on the believer’s life. Visitors to ZAOGA churches were met at the door and accompanied to their place by a smartly-dressed usher. Often their bags were carried for them. During the service they were asked to stand up, applauded and greeted in the name of Jesus Christ. All were made to feel welcome. The Master of Ceremony greeted pastors, preachers, elders and deacons by name and then each social category, boys, girls, mothers and fathers. And each new speaker often repeated these greetings. More importantly everyone was made to feel special. Boys were told they were handsome and girls were told they were beautiful. All were informed that they were “loved.” Each member of the audience could be asked to greet their neighbor and God with a “smile offering.” But the process of individuation went far deeper. Within the assembly and beyond, there was a multiplication of roles and offices. Each believer was given something useful to do and during the service anyone could exercise his or her gifts in singing, prayer, deliverance, preaching. Assemblies were caring and therapeutic communities. Pentecostals believe they can connect with anyone. People were taken for what and who they were, and testified about past lives with an unnerving frankness. Those who laid themselves bare were then ministered to by the laying on of hands. At times believers were called to embrace their neighbors in a born-again bear hug. With eyes shut tightly each petitioned loudly for the other’s needs. Pentecostalism is a quintessential religion of the body.

*The World Beyond Church: Redeeming the Body, Space and Time*

The body is not merely the site of struggles with the demonic; it is transformed in the process. As well as being redeemed, healed and delivered of evil spirits, believers are also re-clothed like Joseph and the Prodigal Son. Thus external transformation mirrors internal change. ZAOGA is well known for its hordes of smartly-dressed young pastors. It was an unwritten rule that they use their first “love offerings” to buy a new suit. Often there were collections for the up-keep of the pastor, given that his formal salary was so low. But the smart attire of ordinary assembly members was also striking. Everyone made an effort, from the most humble domestic servant to the most successful businessman. The latter may have augmented his fine suit with a large expensive watch which dangled obtrusively from his wrist. His
wife might have had the latest expensive hairdo, but even the poorest church member would be turned out in a clean, well-ironed shirt or blouse. Those sitting at the front—pastors, deacons and elders—made the most effort to look smart to set an example to others. Thus, most young men procured a suit by some means, often from the large informal market in second hand clothing located in downtown Harare.22 For the most marginal church members their bodies were one domain over which they had some agency.

Outside the church the believer was caught up in a believing community. He or she joined a cell group in their locality, participated in the movement’s associational life, and was assigned a pastor or elder who cared for them. The world beyond the assembly was also sacralised. Wherever its location, the Pentecostal home became a sanctuary. Filled with born-again kitsch, the believer was reminded of Christ and scriptural injunctions wherever he or she turned. There were numerous pictures of Christ often looking like a Swedish hippie with blue eyes and fair hair. There were Bible verses, cut out of polystyrene, embroidered onto mini-banners or engraved into cheap copper plate, hung on every wall. There were photographs of key religious events and framed Bible school diplomas and Talents certificates. Books were few and far between, but those found were usually devotional texts, commentaries, and manuals of spiritual warfare or godly prosperity. The airwaves were filled with Christian music from the radio and audiotapes. Alternatively ZAOGA members might have listened to the latest big sermon from Ezekiel Guti or the recent teachings from international born-again superstars, Benny Hinn, or John Avanzini. More prosperous Pentecostals could watch these on television and video. Even the motorcar was reclaimed for Christ with sticker-scriptures and pumping gospel music or taped sermons. The home was also a place of prayer, public and private. Much to the annoyance of neighbors, the smallest township cottage could be filled to the brim with young people, praying and praising God. Often standing, sometimes facing the wall with arms outstretched they cried out unreservedly. Finally, the home also became a site for business. The refrigerator in the high-density suburb would be jam-packed with Cokes for sale to thirsty neighbors, and a small stall might be placed in front of the home to sell firewood and vegetables to passers by. The lounge in the

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22 ZAOGA members are well-known for being key agents in that market.
large suburban home may have had a knitting machine or two for small-scale production of jumpers and cardigans.

The normal week was littered with religious meetings. On Monday there was the evening prayer meeting. On Tuesday cell group leaders were instructed on what to teach in the coming week. Wednesday evening was the first Bible study night. Thursday was the day of women’s meetings. On Friday evenings there was the second weekly Bible study and an all night prayer meeting. On Saturday there was an afternoon choir practice, followed by an evening youth service. There was also the opportunity for evangelism in the morning, when zealous young men and women, empowered by a night of prayer became warriors against Satan. Sunday was filled with two or three church services, which seemed to merge into a daylong event. All these meetings were supplemented by the various associations and ministries within ZAOGA that catered for youth, graduates, women, married couples and businessmen. Moreover, for the sake of variety there was a Pentecostal liturgical year with regular annual events such as the Anniversary, the Prayer Convention, the Deeper Life Conference, Youth Conventions, and the Pastors’ Conference. Thus the believer’s social life was re-modeled on the life of the church. There was little time to indulge in polluting worldly activities. Some of its best attractions such as music and film were Christianized, performed and controlled by born-again artists.

The Social Significance of Pentecostal Spirituality

A good deal has already been written about Born-again Christianity and its relation to politics, much of it pointing to its supposed tendencies to de-politicize issues and to focus believers’ hopes on otherworldly concern. With regard to the second issue it is more than apparent from the content of sermons and from the practice of contemporary Zimbabwean Pentecostalism that their religion is not an opiate. It engages fully with pressing matters of survival. Neither does a “theology of deliverance from demons” necessitate or necessarily mystify the violence, corruption and poverty that shape the believer’s existence. Rather it

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provides a language for discussing these forces, embodying them and breaking them down in ways that they can grasp and confront. The idioms of spirits and demons are in their own way no more mysterious or abstract than the language of structure and process deployed by social scientists.\(^{24}\) Moreover, it does not take too much imagination to grasp the politically destabilizing potential of some of the spiritual injunctions cited above. Refrains such as “fear God not man” or the assertion of primary loyalty to a Holy Nation where status and citizenship are redefined can as David Martin suggests, “divest systems of authority of their justification and turn law into a matter of inward judgement and sincerity, rather than external observance.” Likewise, the egalitarianism of the Holy Spirit and its distribution of “gifts” to all independent of age, gender and class, “subverts every principle of social honour, inherent status, and necessary mediation.”\(^{25}\)

Although Pentecostalism does have political import, and challenges western social scientists to rethink just what they mean by politics, in particular its relation to culture, Born-again religion is not chiefly about formal political change. As Adrian Hastings observed long ago, “for few churches are politics a primary concern. It is far more in terms of prayer that they understand themselves, hold their members and discover a future laced with hope.”\(^{26}\) What attracts adherents to the Born-again churches is their ability to “call” people as individuals. Material needs are addressed through the informal welfare networks of the assembly but preachers are concerned with probing the basic questions of what it means to be a person.\(^{27}\) In particular, they address existential concerns for wholeness, purity, meaning, and empowerment. Those who have abused, or taken moral shortcuts to survive or achieve some worldly solace are washed clean by Christ’s blood, able to embrace a future where their past is truly left behind. And those who have been victims of poverty and abuse are freed from shame and fear. Such liberation is not only achieved through the remaking of personal narratives, but the actual bodily experience

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\(^{24}\) And neither does it mean that some Pentecostals are not adept at using these sociological terms either. See Maxwell, “Catch the Cockerel.”


\(^{27}\) Maxwell, “Delivered”.

of the Pentecostal service. The experience of the Holy Spirit can be so profound that it literally wrenches lives out of downward spirals of abuse and self-loathing. These are, of course, only changes in states of being, but they are not to be taken lightly. Informants spoke repeatedly of the self-respect and feeling of empowerment they had gained from a “clean conscience” and sense of “moral victory.” Moreover, the binding of wounds is only the first stage of the born-again story. Once inside the assembly, believers’ horizons widen. They see people not too different from themselves, in leadership roles—speaking, singing, organizing and preaching. By example new converts come to discover gifts and talents they never knew they had. At the front, are members in smart suits and fine dresses, living examples of social and economic success actively inspiring the faithful on towards better things.

By transforming individuals Pentecostalism also transforms families. Because meaningful political change is often hard to bring about in contemporary Africa, the focus on improving the chances of social reproduction makes sense. Emphasis on character, especially that of the young male is crucial. The Pentecostal gospel of fidelity, hard work, teetotalism and a peaceful temper, re-socializes the young man, drawing him away from a world of violence and promiscuity into a more family orientated life. Money once spent on beer and gambling is reinvested in the home, particularly on education. Even more significantly the emphasis on the demonic can help the believer to reflect on mentalities that are perceived to lead to waste and decay. A female pastor at City 2 Assembly, in David Livingstone Avenue, told her audience: “We are priests for our families, breaking the traditions of our forefathers, saving our families from calamities: daughters not marrying, sickness, poverty.”

Conclusion

As popular religion Zimbabwean Pentecostalism addresses the needs of the faithful in concrete ways. At its heart it is a movement offering security rather than prosperity. These are of course opposite poles on the same continuum, but the distinction is important because most Zimbabweans are far removed from “name it and claim it” theology.
exemplified by the likes of Kenneth Hagin, and Kenneth and Gloria Copeland. Some gain material wellbeing, for others it remains an aspiration. For many, the novelty of being called by name is enough to pull them, along with their families, out of a downward spiral of poverty and self-loathing, or at least stop them from slipping over the edge. It also draws them out of the historic mission churches. Mission Christianity has usually taken popular form in townships and rural locations, founded in the most part by African evangelists and catechists, labor migrants and Bible women. Nevertheless, like any large social movement mission churches can become disengaged from their adherents through processes of institutionalization and secularization. In such instances a “crowd” church often prevails, characterized by large congregations that meet just once a week, allowing only a superficial practice of faith. Once in the protective and healing environment of the assembly the Pentecostal believer is equipped to face the world with a renewed vigor. While the movement’s relation to politics is ambiguous it certainly does create active independent citizens, a necessity for revitalizing African politics. Neither is Pentecostalism politically quiescent. Contemporary Pentecostals are not humble people, like their forebears. Anyone who has been proselytized by them knows that! In much of Africa and beyond they are on the offensive. Their leaders buy up real estate in city centers and build high-tech churches complete with air-conditioning, closed circuit TV and plush decor. Politicians treat them with respect, assiduously attend born-again conventions and appropriate the language of renewal, mindful of the growing born-again community. Other denominations have responded to the born-again upsurge. Anglicans, Catholics and Methodists have instituted charismatic renewal; “jazzed” up their worship style with the pervasive Hammond organ, and adopted evangelical church growth strategies to maintain numbers. In a continent where the state sector rapidly retreats and developmentalist promises have failed, Pentecostals perceive themselves as part of a movement that counts.

29 See Hastings.
30 See The African Synod: Zimbabwe Prepares (Harare: Pastoral Centre, 1991), 28; also Zimbabwe Project News Bulletin (October 1982), in which Bishop Hatendi accused the majority of black Anglicans of using the church as a social or cultural club. Of course, Pentecostal churches are also prone to the same processes of institutionalisation and secularisation. They are simply the most recent form of Christian religion.
31 Maxwell, “Catch the Cockerel.”
PART FOUR
ASSIMILATING CHANGE
THE HOUSE OF LONGING: MISSIONARY-LED CHANGES IN HEILTSUK DOMESTIC FORMS AND STRUCTURES

MICHAEL HARKIN

Christianity on the Ground: The Significance of Everyday Structures

This chapter will examine aspects of vernacular Christianity as it was experienced by the Heiltsuk of British Columbia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the medium of architecture and built space. Architecture may of course be viewed as a metaphor for cultural and religious change, and in fact was a common trope among missionaries for discussing what was, from their perspective, progress. Architecture may be seen as metaphorical in a second sense as well. For, like religion, it exists at two levels: of theory and of practice. The official doctrinal Christianity of, in this case, the Methodist church, exists apart from the pragmatic Christianity as it was experienced by both missionaries and native people. Similarly, architectural forms, whether indigenous or European, embody a specific ideology that is experienced locally in diverse ways. Ultimately, the two levels intersect in what Pierre Bourdieu called the “habitus,” the structuring of quotidian life by material and ideological forces.¹

The context of many native communities in British Columbia during this period was one characterized by an accommodation of exogenous ideological and material forms pragmatically if not formally associated with Christianity. The influx of a cash economy, English literacy, novel bodily practices, including biomedicine, and new gender ideologies were all aspects of a new habitual praxis that was organized around the central trope of Protestant Christian personal ethics.²

For the Heiltsuk and other native groups, this was a period of accommodation but also of creativity. It is worth noting that in the area of architecture, while the basic designs and specialists were brought in from metropolitan Canada, most of the work was done by indigenous craftsmen highly skilled in working with local materials. Church interiors often reflected their culture in decoration, although maintaining the standard ecclesiastical architecture. Moreover, new architectural designs and practices, such as frame construction, were quickly adopted and applied to secular structures, primarily houses. This innovation both reflected and promoted a model of society strongly influenced by the missionaries, but retaining a space, both literally and figuratively, for traditional culture.

**Housing and Dwelling**

The house is an entity both material and immaterial, providing shelter from the elements as well as a model of normative social organization. This is doubly true, as the physical form of the house constrains the size and internal organization of the residential group, but also provides symbolic connections with other orders of existence, such as cosmology and the body. Housing is not merely physical shelter, but what Heidegger calls dwelling, which entails a spatial shaping of the horizons of the lifeworld. The built environment, in both the instance of the individual structure, and more generally in the collectivity of similar structures, provides a backdrop against which all social action occurs, and by which it is constrained. More concretely, domestic space defines the person, both as member of a group and as an individual, by allotting a particular type and quantity of space

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to persons, either individually or collectively. Through constructing a “habitus” in Bourdieu’s terms, social space provides a template that structures and is in turn structured by social life.

A crucial distinction is whether such spaces are linked primarily to individuals or to groups—expressing a group identity or an individual one? As James S. Duncan has argued, house forms may be arrayed along a gamut running from collectivist to individualist. Certainly not all “tribal” societies are equally collectivist, nor are all groups within western society equally individualist. However, in broad terms, traditional Native American architectural forms construct society as composed of groups, of varying size, while western forms construct them as composed of individuals. Among the Nuu-chah-nulth of the west coast of Vancouver Island, the term aht as a lexical item means “house,” and as a suffix designates groups (“people of”). The transition between these two modalities is the subject of this paper.

Familiar examples from Native American architecture abound, such as the Iroquois longhouse, the Plains tepee, and the Pueblo villages that represent starkly different notions of identity, privacy, and agency from those familiar to urban and suburban Westerners. In the longhouse, the physical house is the realization of a cosmological template that defines the characteristics of constituent elements by their position in the larger structure. Thus, those who dwell by the eastern door are socially defined by their position, and have particular social, economic, and political duties to perform that derive from those roles. Space is thus intensional, and not mere extension; that is,
it imposes meaning upon elements located within. As was famously the case in the League of the Iroquois, the organization which ruled the Iroquoian peoples from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, that template was explicitly used as a model for the polity, with principles of complementary opposition and consensus rule embedded within it. In the case of the teepee, the universe was imagined as a circle rather than a rectangle, with the interior space capable of replicating the dome of heaven.

Such architectural macrocosm-microcosm relations are not unknown to the western world, primarily through the phenomenon of orientation of cathedrals, mosques, and other religious architecture. The fact that these examples are drawn exclusively from sacred architecture is both significant and misleading. It is significant because it suggests that religious change, as brought to Native Americans by missionaries, would entail architectural change. It is misleading, because it suggests that we view traditional indigenous architectural forms as primarily or even exclusively sacred, which is to impose Western notions of the necessary separations between sacred and profane, cosmological and quotidian, upon cultural systems for which such distinctions are at best contingent.

The Northwest Coast House

The notion of the house as more than simply architectural form has deep roots in European culture, as Claude Levi-Strauss has reminded us. For Levi-Strauss the model of the noble house, going back to classical times and especially prominent in the Middle Ages, is a useful means of understanding Northwest Coast social organization. There, the problem of the corporate group was both an empirical and theoretical one. Franz Boas struggled with the social organization of the Kwakwaka’wakw of British Columbia, which failed to follow any of the contemporary models of kinship derived from evolutionist anthropology (neither primitive horde nor gens). Boas received the scorn of Emile Durkheim by describing it as a clan (Durkheim told

13 Nabokov and Eastman, 164.
his nephew Marcel Mauss that Boas did not know what a clan is), and later settled on the Kwakwaka’wakw word, numaym, as a theoretically neutral descriptor. In fact, the form in question was a cognatic descent group, made more familiar to anthropology by Oceania ethnography in the 1950s and 1960s.

Levi-Strauss’ understanding of the phenomenon entailed not merely the rules of recruitment, which were, in any case, fuzzy and ill-defined, but the phenomenology of the group. What Levi-Strauss calls the “house” for the Kwakwaka’wakw is an ongoing corporate group which holds both material and immaterial property. The latter, including ceremonial paraphernalia, totemic crest designs, mythical narratives, and the like, is central in defining the member of the house as a moral person. In a sense, each house was its own cult within a larger sociological and ecclesiastical context, which Irving Goldman called the “ritual congregation.”

The use of religious terminology for describing such groups is deliberate and apt, except insofar as it causes us to imagine such entities as having only sacred or ritual functions. In fact, they were economic units as well, defined as contexts in which generalized reciprocity (sharing) pertained. However, the economic was never entirely separate from the religious. The act of obtaining fish or game was itself a small, everyday form of sacrifice, recognized in the aggregate during the sacred winter season. Sharing food with house members was a recognition of moral equivalency and a common substance.

“Houses” in this sense were organizational entities, but they were modeled on the physical house and its internal space. Descent groups might possess several actual houses, but one, that dwelt in by the chief, was the physical instantiation of the group. Houses were explicitly thought of as bodies with cosmological extensions. Houses were often imagined as a totemic animal, with the door-hole representing the

mouth. House fronts were painted and carved to represent the animal’s face. In many cases, the doors were augmented with “snapping jaw” mechanisms, manipulated by pulleys and levers that would give to the outside world the impression of consuming all who entered. \(^{20}\) Internally, the space was modeled on the body, with the “head,” the position of power, at the end furthest from the door. This space was divided into apartments occupied by a chief, his close relatives, and slaves, all but the latter organized in nuclear family units. The status of place was measured not merely in distance from the door, but in right versus left (viewed upon entering the door), with the former occupying the higher position. \(^{21}\) The house could be viewed as extending cosmologically, as the smokehole in the roof was said to be a means of reaching the Milky Way. The entire house was transformed during the winter season, when sacred dramas were held within. A screen was erected to divide the sanctum sanctorum of the backstage area, from the area where the uninitiated gathered to watch. As is the case with all ritual, a connection was established between the actions of humans and states of the cosmos. In particular, the forces of chaos and entropy had to be annually defeated, so that a morally-ordered universe, with the house as its model, could be re-established.

**The Person as House Member**

The notion of the person, in both juridical and phenomenological senses, was examined thoroughly by Marcel Mauss. \(^{22}\) Stripped of its evolutionist baggage, Mauss’s account of the Northwest Coast person is insightful, if incomplete. Mauss sees the person as filling a slot in an unchanging rank order, based upon the holding of a title name and ceremonial privileges. Together, these constitute a *persona*, a public identity that is essentially unchanged across generations. Notions of

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reincarnation, although not fully systematized, add to this sense of a changeless order into which specific individuals may be inserted. Similar to European aristocracies, where personal identity (including baptismal name) is subsumed under a collective identity (such as the Duke of York), the Kwakwaka’wakw nobility—a category which included most non-slave adults—derived all meaningful social attributes from that identity. Real property, political rights, and ceremonial privileges all flowed from it. A noble’s life career consists of a melding of private and public, personality and \textit{persona}.\footnote{By the nineteenth century, it had become common for nobles to hold a series of high positions. This was doubtless less common in the pre-contact era.}

This \textit{persona}, a term it is useful to remember, which derives from the Latin \textit{persona}, to speak through, as through a mask, was the most important possession of a house. “Possession” is not too strong a word here, as Northwest Coast thought typically maintained an equivalence between containing and possessing. Thus, a cedar storage box was usually decorated with a crest figure, which represented a watchful owner. Just as the crest contained and possessed ritual objects stored within, so the house, similarly decorated, contained and possessed the \textit{persona} and the persons within. As in any rank society, position was determined by birth and inheritance; in Northwest Coast society, a range of positive characteristics, and not mere positional status, was so determined.

There are, as I say, limitations to this approach toward understanding Northwest Coast society as lived reality. Especially during the nineteenth century, when new sources of wealth combined with high mortality from introduced disease to open this system up to social mobility, the deficiencies of this model of the social world were evident. Moreover, no ideal model is ever a perfect description of lived reality. However, as an ideal type, and one held in the minds of real social actors, such a model is valid. From this perspective, we can view the concept of the person in Kwakwaka’wakw and other Northwest Coast groups as a function of the concept of the house. The house defines and gives positive meaning to the persons within it—an idea similar to what, I think, Heidegger means by the horizonting quality of dwelling.
The Heiltsuk are a group that Boas considered to be northern Kwakwaka’wakw. Although they do not consider themselves such now, the Heiltsuk of the nineteenth century were quite similar to their southern neighbors. Certain differences— a slight matrilineal tilt in their cognatic descent system, a more dualistic winter ritual— are not significant in the present analysis. The Heiltsuk, if anything, came closer to Mauss’s ideal type of the Northwest Coast person than did the Kwakwaka’wakw, who were always more ideologically individualistic. The physical Heiltsuk house was a variant of the “bighouse,” a large rectangular plank house with a decorated front and a circular “door,” usually symbolized as a mouth. The poles and paintings on the front signified the crest(s), totemic symbols which represented the group, and which were thought in certain contexts to embody it. Crest figures were ancestors who descended to earth or were transformed into human form. House members were thought to share this essence. A reincarnation ideology underscored the notion of a changeless social order into and out of which individuals were cycled. When members died, they would be passed out of the house, not through the door-mouth, but through a specially cut passage, signifying several things at once: the passing through of the individual, as through the house’s digestive system; the temporary, but traumatic effects on the house itself; and the possibility of reincarnation.

The Heiltsuk house, like the Roman *domus*, was thus the center of a cult as well as of economic and social life, and was integrated into higher-level structures. Houses were organized within the village according to a template of rank. Higher-ranking houses were close to the center; with lower-ranking ones spread out on either side, along
an arc following the shoreline of a protected harbor. Usually, only one
tier of houses existed, arrayed along the beach for easy canoe access,
although in larger villages some lower ranking houses might constitute a
second tier. Within each village of 50 to 300 persons, one chief would
be the overall village leader. His house was, by definition, the highest
status one; all the other houses were, in a sense, both subordinate and
constituent to that of the chief. Thus, the model of the house itself was
extended to the level of the village, which was seen as a house-like
container of hierarchically structured internal space.

_Methodist Missionaries and the Idea of the House_

Against this backdrop, Methodist missionaries arrived on the scene
in 1880, carrying in their heads radically different models of person-
hood and the house. Indeed, one of the commonest themes in these
early missionary writings is horror at the “unsanitary” conditions of
the traditional big house. For “unsanitary” we can read “immoral,”
as the two concepts of physical and moral health were intertwined
and virtually inseparable among these missionaries who, after 1892,
were also trained physicians. The horror at the dark, smoky interiors,
and the potential vices (primarily if not exclusively in the missionary
minds) that could occur in such interiors lacking in the “privacy” that
was essential to the English bourgeois house (although not, to be sure,
of the cottages and tenements of the working classes, from which
many of the early missionaries themselves came) was pronounced. It
surpassed even the more predictable sorts of horror at practices
that were emblematic of savagery, such as cannibalism. This latter
was not ignored, but since the ritual forms of actual cannibalism were
probably no longer practiced, it served as a more abstract general
argument against both traditional rituals and the Roman Catholic
emphasis on the sacrament of communion. It was, however, the

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27 Harkin, _The Heiltsuk_; R.W. Large, “Correspondence”, _Missionary Bulletin_ 2
(1904): 129-37, United Church Archives, Toronto (hereafter UCA).
28 See John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, _Ethnography and the Historical Imagination_
(Boulder, CO: Westview, 1992), 279.
29 In more febrile moments, Protestant missionaries accused Roman Catholics
of encouraging, if not actually introducing, the practice of ritual cannibalism among
Northwest Coast natives through their over-eagerness to introduce the sacrament of
communion; see Jean Usher, _William Duncan of Metlakatla: A Victorian Missionary in_
horrors of the traditional house that especially exercised them. Houses and poor health, both physical and moral, were inextricably connected concepts, which led to a certain fatalism among many Europeans about the prospects for aboriginal communities.30

These missionaries were astutely aware that the house was more than its material form, that it represented the social order as a whole: an order the missionaries found resistant to their efforts.31 At the beginning, there was the simple question of the identification and what we might call the “location” of persons.32 Someone who attended services in the mission church or who expressed an interest in Christian teachings but then disappeared into the miasmic interior of a bighouse, in which forty kinsmen also lived, could not be so easily isolated and, in the end, converted. More than an instrumental problem, it was a prime example of the illness they were to treat: the moral person was inextricably entangled in a collective identity. This was incompatible with the moral individualism that Christianity, and especially pietistic forms of Protestantism, required. Extracting persons from the larger house was homologous with the process of baptizing and renaming them; each aided in the creation of an identifiable and localizable person, who could be held responsible for his or her moral deeds or (more likely) misdeeds. This new notion of the person emphasized individual agency, which entailed a wider range of both action and control. Thus, we cannot view this transformation as simply an increase in “freedom,” as the missionaries saw it, but rather a moral, social, and psychological separation of the individual from the traditional house. In place of traditional formal and informal social control mechanisms, missionaries constructed a disciplinary context, emphasizing observation of the person.

Michel Foucault has called this process “subjection,”33 by which

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30 Mary-Ellen Kelm, Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900-1950 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998); Perry, “From ‘the hot bed of vice,’” 593.
32 Comaroff and Comaroff, Ethnography and the Historical Imagination, 280.
he means the construction of subjects in multiple senses: psychological, political, discursive, and moral. This definition is overly broad, but it is useful as an entry point into Methodist praxis. The person must become subject, in the first instance, to an omniscient God, and second, to his or her own self-examination. This latter was fortified and augmented by the watchfulness of others, the pastor, certainly, but more importantly the subject’s peers. Thus, a social Panopticon could be achieved by the vigilance of each with respect to oneself and others. Such discipline went beyond what might strictly be thought of as theological or moral issues. Matters such as work habits, punctuality, the acquisition and maintenance of property, and cleanliness were part of the package of Methodism, and thus among the issues subject to monitoring.

Such monitoring could not occur easily within the bighouse. In part, this was simply because missionaries had limited access to its interior, and no means of observing from outside. More significant was the fact that life in the bighouse assumed a traditional tempo and shape, dictated by the reciprocal obligations of members of the house group, the material form of which was the bighouse. These social ramifications of the bighouse, more than any objective conditions, made it essentially opaque; it was semiotically inaccessible to the churchmen.

It was up to them to “lay the regular grid of civilization” upon this confused and confusing state of affairs.

The perception of unsanitary conditions of the bighouse were partly based on a naive sense of the disadvantages of a dirt floor and a smoky interior, but more on the lack of individual discipline that seemed to characterize such circumstances. That is, a large, mostly unpartitioned space, with moveable property stored in the middle seemed to the missionaries a sign of uncleanliness (recall that Mary Douglas has said that dirt is merely matter out of place) as well as confusion.

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37 Indeed discipline was quite strict in the traditional bighouse, with lower ranking persons and especially slaves responsible for the essential chores of gathering firewood and water, cooking and maintaining interiors. Once missionaries became more familiar with these communities, some of the darker suspicions of activities that took place in the bighouse dissipated.
This contrasts with the ideal bourgeois house in which there is a place for everything and everything is in its place. This was a sign of moral superiority because it represented a crystallized form of systematic labor, applied routinely.38

A reasonable antidote to such problems was the remaking of the built environment of the Heiltsuk, and through that, of the Heiltsuk person. Missionaries favored moving individuals and families out of the bighouse as quickly as possible, and moving them into Victorian clapboard houses, which were seen as better suited from many angles. All the failings of the bighouse—the dirt floor, the dark interior, the smokiness, the lack of privacy, the sheer number of residents—were overcome in the Victorian house. These houses were characterized by large windows, wooden floors, adequate ventilation, and separate rooms with closing doors between them. As one missionary, the wife of the physician, stated, the better houses were places where “everything is scrupulously clean, where there are blinds and curtains on the windows, paper on the walls, oilcloth on the floor, a well-polished stove, and neat furniture in the room.”39

Such spaces were eminently transparent to the missionaries. They could be entered and “read” according to a familiar schema. The overarching metaphor was cleanliness: a moral virtue of the highest order for Methodists. Indeed, as Heiltsuk women moved into these houses, they were given detailed instruction in their maintenance. This included an early lesson on how to make brooms from pine needles.40 As scholars of African missionization have pointed out, “domesticity” has been a key ideological tool in the transformation of missionized and colonized societies.41 This entailed, of course, a remaking of Heiltsuk society along gender lines, a topic which I have explored elsewhere.42

One pervasive problem with the bighouse that was more difficult to

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38 Of course, the Heiltsuk house was itself the product of organized labor, but not one that the missionaries could recognize.
39 Isabella Large, “Correspondence,” Missionary Bulletin 2 (1905), 591, UCA.
40 Tate, “Autosketch”, The Western Recorder 5(1929), UCA.
overcome was the fact that it was thought to remind people of their past as “savages,” and especially of the more objectionable practices such as cannibalism and child betrothal. The bighouse was not only a diacritic of savagery, but was thought to exercise a powerful psychological effect, a kind of nostalgia for the recent past. This could exert an effect even on those who had moved out. To counteract this nostalgia for the past, a nostalgia for the present, as Arjun Appadurai, following Frederic Jameson calls it, was put in place. 43 This is a form of longing for a way of life that is known only through simulacra, and which is expected to be realized at an unspecified point in the future. Appadurai is speaking of “third world” inhabitants and their imaginary relation with the west; this notion applies equally well to the Heiltsuk, who imagined an ideal, bourgeois, Anglo-Canadian life in its full materiality. This nostalgia was one of the key ideological tools of the missionaries. It coexisted with the more traditional Christian teleology. As time passed, and missionaries were drawn increasingly from the Canadian middle class, as opposed to the English working class, it came to predominate. As John and Jean Comaroff have argued, such simulacra referred to the internal “savages,” such as the Irish in Cabbagetown, Toronto, in this case, as much as to the “savages” of Bella Bella.44 In 1888, the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital heard evidence as to the dangers of physical and moral disease arising from such settings.45 Stated differently, such projects were conscious utopias that offered practical means by which the evolutionarily lower orders could be brought up the ladder: by hard work, better housing, and clean living. Just as the poor of London might be compared invidiously to the African “savage,” so were the Heiltsuk compared with the worst elements of Anglo-Canadian society: the drunks, criminals, and ne’er-do-wells. Such a rhetoric of progress and degradation represented an attempt to exercise hegemony over both subaltern populations simultaneously.46 As Paige Raibmon has

recently pointed out, this rhetoric provides the backdrop for the phe-
nomenon of aboriginal living space as spectacle, seen at the Chicago

This simulacrum of middle class life was constructed materially by
the Heiltsuks working under the direction of the missionary. In 1898
the village began to be moved from its historical site (originally near the
Hudson’s Bay Company Fort McLoughlin, which was abandoned in
1843) to a new site several miles north on Campbell Island. This site,
called “New Bella Bella,” was to replace the “Old Town,” which had
itself been an artifact of the fur trade. The new village was to be an
entirely modern affair, with a boardwalk, commercial wharf, church,
hospital and, above all, with no traditional houses. The old rank order
village plan was done away with or, rather, replaced by one in which
the institutions of modern life held the place of honor in the center of
the village. Individual houses, all in the late Victorian clapboard style,
were constructed according to design specifications, which prevented
anyone from having a house much larger or more ornate than his
neighbors. However, some compromises with traditional notions of
space were made. Most obviously, a large central room on the ground
floor provided space for social functions both approved—Christmas
parties—and not—more traditional feasts and even potlatches. This
was tolerated by the missionaries, who understood that some means
displaying the fruits of this new way of life was required.\footnote{Visitors to the Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec, have the opportunity
to see the large room of a Victorian-style house, complete with potlatch goods, jux-
taped with the traditional bighouse.}

Thus this simulacrum was, like Disneyland’s Main Street USA, a
fictitiously homogenous rendering of a complex social reality. A great
diversity of domestic forms existed, dependent upon social class, pri-
marily, but also upon factors such as ethnicity and region. Among
the Anglo-Canadian middle classes of the era, status differences were
finely marked, as they were not, at least originally, in the Bella Bella
plan. This emphasis on egalitarianism was, of course, an attempt to
counteract the persistent ideology of rank and hereditary privilege.
The missionaries, rather than attempting to produce a truly egalitarian
society (which, in any case, was not part of their social gospel, at least
not by the turn of the century) sought to channel such competitive
energies into more productive areas. The connection between work and wealth was familiar to Canadian Methodists, who produced a Weberian merchant class in the nineteenth century; by the twentieth century, the further link to consumption was made. Indeed, the missionary R.W. Large encouraged his parishioners to consume goods, including items that were not terribly useful, such as bicycles. With the advent of mail order catalogues around the turn of the century, the flow of goods increased dramatically, with fashion, rather than utility, dictating most purchases. A house furnished with new items purchased with the wages of honest labor was considered the pinnacle of civilization.

Such houses were the material form of disciplined labor, of the “commodification of time.” This was, as I have argued elsewhere, closely linked with the Methodist theological concept of discipline. As a form of social practice, it was well-suited to the training of an industrial proletariat. Although factory labor was not a possibility, given the remoteness from urban centers, work in the nearby fish canneries resembled it very closely. The temporal rhythm of the new village was regulated by church bells, school bells, and neighborly reminders of Women’s Auxiliary meetings.

It is difficult to overstate the significance of this set of transformations in Heiltsuk life. In a brief period of several years around the turn of the century, the Heiltsuk went from living in a sort of compromise between tradition and modernity, to a full-fledged embrace of the latter. Their world changed inalterably with the building of new Bella Bella. Census data show that in 1835 houses contained around thirty residents on average, while by 1914 the mean household size was 4.3. The domestic social unit, that with which one was intimately connected and which was characterized by generalized reciprocity,

49 The terrain of Bella Bella, with no paved roads and only a few hundred yards of boardwalk, was particularly unsuited to turn-of-the-century bicycles.
50 R.W. Large, Missionary Bulletin 6 (1909): 7-18, UCA.
51 Appadurai, 79; Thompson, 56-97.
52 Harkin, The Heiltsuks, 100-23.
53 Crosby, Correspondence, 159; Harkin, The Heiltsuks, 140-1; Rolf Knight, Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Indian Labour in British Columbia, 1858-1930 (Vancouver, BC: New Star Books), 1978, 78.
was reduced by a factor of eight. This provided units of feasible size for missionary control. Individuals within the group were more clearly locatable, and thus more definitely subjects to a variety of hegemonic structures.

At the same time, the very act of building a house was a profound symbolic action that was, in essence, the founding of a new social order. Previously restricted to chiefs, who derived the right to do so from genealogical and mythological legends, erecting a house signified a structuring of the cosmological and social worlds. The house provided the prototype for all other modes of classification. This embrace of modernity was thus accomplished within a traditional idiom, and by the actions of Heiltsuk individuals themselves, who, if we are to believe the missionaries, were the driving force behind the new town. The contradictory strains within this state of affairs are complex; I will attempt to tease them out in the conclusion.

Resistence

This radical restructuring of the Heiltsuk lifeworld was not unopposed. In the spring of 1898 a traditional chief protested the planned move in a direct way. Chief Charley, who was the rival of the main pro-missionary chief, Haemzid, pulled the survey stakes up from the soon-to-be construction site. Chief Charley claimed ownership in the land being surveyed, but clearly also opposed the wholesale transformation of Heiltsuk society and with it the influence of hereditary chiefs such as himself. The missionary at the time and his ecclesiastical superior put the matter down to a fit of childish pique, a common reading of all acts of native “disobedience.” However, a more balanced reading would view this as an act of “justified anger,” a moral and emotional state recognized in Heiltsuk ethnopsychology.

The Heiltsuk term closest to the English word “anger” is híl’álá. This word refers as well to a type of schadenfreude, a righteous pleasure in the misfortunes of immoral others. That is, for one to express híl’álá, the moral dimension must be present. The object of híl’álá must be guilty

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55 Alexander Sutherland, Correspondence to Chief Charley of Bella Bella, 10 Oct. 1898, UCA; Alexander Sutherland, Correspondence to Thomas Crosby 3 Oct. 1898, UCA; Alexander Sutherland, Correspondence to Dr. R.W. Large, 1 Nov. 1898, UCA.
of some wrongdoing. Moreover, a notion of retribution is implicit, since one experiences this emotion either observing another’s misfortune, or acting against that person. A further clue to the implicit schema of Heiltsuk anger is provided in the linguistic analysis of the word. *Híl’áłá* is derived from the root *hy*, which is also found in the word *yímás*, or chief. Since anger involves making a moral judgment against others, it follows that only those in a position to judge others may experience anger. Those persons in positions of authority in the society are the prototypical experiencers of *híl’áłá*, since they are able to judge everyone else. Others may hold *híl’áłá* only against those whom they have the right to judge. Certain members of society, notably slaves, would be denied anger altogether.

Chief Charley’s actions are thus seen properly as an example of *híl’áłá*. The missionaries were able to placate him, who probably knew that the move would proceed despite his objections. If in the end he cooperated, Chief Charley was successful in registering a moral objection to the creation of a community based upon alien founding principles, echoes of which argument can be heard a century later. This may be seen as a rather dramatic instance of resistance to the disciplinary regime, and the process of subjection, which the missionaries were about.

*New Subjectivities*

I have argued up to this point that missionaries were engaged in an effort to construct Heiltusk persons as subjects, from multiple points of view. Thus, the development of ideological individualism, which constitutes a new form of subjectivity, results as well in the subjection of these persons, that is the production and reproduction of religious, economic, and political subalterns. However, it is perhaps assuming too much to believe that these processes were homologous. That is, each was potentially different, in that the structures of political, economic, and religious power were differentially amenable to penetration. In fact, a certain degree of economic prosperity was available to

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56 Sutherland, Correspondence to Chief Charley, UCA; Sutherland, Correspondence to Dr. R. W. Large, UCA.
many, at least during periods of national prosperity. Full membership in the Methodist, and later United, Church was offered, and with it a moral and theological agency formally equivalent to that of Anglo-Canadian members. In addition, this sort of analysis assumes at one level that those undergoing such processes were hoodwinked, were merely passive victims in their own marginalization. It becomes part of the general history of colonialism, which is invariably emplotted as tragedy, to borrow Hayden White’s terminology.

One problem with such overbroad concepts as “subjection” is that they fail to distinguish among different orders of reality. One important distinction that needs to be made is between cultural models of the person and the psychological reality of the individual. Thus, it is not necessarily the case that missionaries presented something entirely new in their emphasis on the individual. While methodological, ideological, and other formal models of individualism may be culture-specific and are of limited use because of that, all societies everywhere are composed of individuals. Any psychologically developed adult is aware of his or her own identity in opposition to others. While Durkheim and his heirs would strongly deny this fact, it seems remarkably obvious from a careful reading of ethnography and history. Ideologically communal societies, such as the Heiltsuk, are fully capable of producing persons who act individually, including in novel ways. The mercantile acuity of Heiltsuk and other Northwest Coast people, in full evidence during the nineteenth century, and the frequent use of profits for personal rather than group ends, are examples of this. It is not then a question of a profound psychological relativism, in which some societies “have” individuals and others do not. Rather, it is a question of what Robert Levy calls the cultural “hypocognizing,” or under-developing, of a feature of individual psychology, in this case individual agency. That is, individual agency, while certainly a fact of life in traditional Heiltsuk life, was not well-developed as a viable psychological or philo-

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sophical concept. Rather, the results of human actions were almost always interpreted as being the result, instead, of cosmological and moral forces. A hunter was unsuccessful not due to lack of skill but to a failure to perform a ritual correctly or to be sufficiently pure to engage in a moral exchange with animals. A successful hunter was, by contrast, one who had mastered these matters. Moral transgressions, such as murder, were generally seen as producing group, rather than individual guilt. Feuds were structured on that premise. Even mistakes and accidents were seen not as individual failings but as malevolent actions on the part of others: hence the need for the “wiping away shame” potlatch.

This does not imply that, on the level of individual psychology, consciousness of individualism was absent. Indeed, this consciousness did at times strain against the constraints of a communalist social organization. Persons did experience a degree of freedom in leaving the bighouse and establishing a household. This was perhaps especially true for women, who, despite the limitations imposed on them in Victorian and Edwardian society, were nevertheless presented with new contexts in which to seek meaning and obtain power. The fact that missionaries provided such an alternative context at all was probably more important than the specific ideological contours of that context. However, the Heiltsuk were presented with a particularly crystalline form of theological and ideological individualism. This seemed to suit many of them very well indeed.

A problem with this argument, in terms of its viability if nothing else, is its similarity to those the missionaries themselves made, and thus laying it open to accusations of Christian triumphalism, as Terence

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62 This is a very complex matter in which it is necessary to oversimplify. Notions of individual agency did appear in mythological contexts, but these were characterized as exceptional. Because of their exceptional qualities, certain heroes were able to found new orders. The chief alone among normal humans inherited this quality, and even his ability to act was constrained by the originary actions of heroic ancestors.


65 The Tlingit in Alaska voluntarily converted to the Russian Orthodox Church, which gave much less theological weight to the individual moral person, Sergei Kan, *Memory Eternal: Tlingit Culture and Russian Orthodox Christianity through Two Centuries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999).
Ranger has called it. I am certainly not arguing that the bighouse was a slave house, and that anyone beneath the chief was in a servile position, or that women were forced to live lives of degradation. Such rhetoric, common in missionary writings, is unwarranted. For most people, life in such traditional contexts was for the most part rewarding. While our scholarly perceptions of this world are skewed toward high-ranking persons, we should not, for this reason alone, discount them. At the same time, life in the missionized society proved much less utopian than promised. Consumerism and other explicit forms of individualism may have satisfied the first generation or two of missionized Heiltsuks, but by the time of the Great Depression, which closed off many such avenues, the limitations of this mode of social life had begun to become apparent. The downside of market capitalism and theological individualism began to be felt in the form of unemployment, poverty, and the anomie that Durkheim identified at the heart of all social pathology.\footnote{Emile Durkheim, \textit{Suicide: A Study in Sociology}, trans. by John A. Spaulding (New York: Free Press, 1951).}

In fact, humans in no society are either herd animals or lone wolves. Just as the individualism of the Methodists appeared attractive to many nineteenth-century Heiltsuks and other native people, so the communalism of that lifeworld appears compelling to modern Heiltsuks and others, who apprehend it through nostalgia and invented tradition. This nostalgia for the past is not different in type from the nostalgia for the present experienced by the nineteenth-century Heiltsuks, who believed the missionaries would necessarily provide a better way of life.

Such dilemmas are insoluble and are at the heart of the human condition. Architectural forms, in alliance with ideological and theological ones, construct the lifeworld, but only incompletely. The Methodist attempt to reshape Heiltsuk society was both successful and unsuccessful. In the current era, the church plays a small and decreasing role in Bella Bella and other Native communities in Canada.\footnote{The United Church of Canada, successor to the Methodists, remains in Bella Bella, but plays a relatively small role, especially compared to the early to mid-twentieth century. Something similar has happened in other Native communities in Canada, whether they were missionized by Anglican, Roman Catholic, or United churches; see John Barker, “Tangled Reconciliations: The Anglican Church and the Nisga’a of British Columbia,” \textit{American Ethnologist} 25(1998): 433-451.} At the same time, nostalgia for the traditional past has produced a variety of
practices and architectural forms reminiscent of that past. Nevertheless, the missionary-led transformation of the Heiltsuk lifeworld was profound.

Conclusion: House Forms and Life Forms

I have argued here, along with many others, that architecture is not merely an inert physical setting for social life, but is in a fundamental sense constitutive of it. Notions of human agency derive from placement within an architectural-social structure, viz, a “house” or a “church.” In the very special context of missionization, when both of these structures were in flux, architectural change both reflected and furthered changes occurring in Heiltsuk society. And yet the story is more complex than the simple imposition of alien housing forms, which, under an imagined Benthamite mechanics, would then produce a new person and society. Rather, we find that for the natives as well as the missionaries, architecture was a means of imagining a new world: one which, for the latter, would be new and rich, but not unrecognizable. Many native people embraced the new frame houses, but stopped short of the whole package. The houses they built for themselves (with missionary help) were compromises: between the traditional lineage and clan society and the new nuclear family—with large interior spaces for feasts and other functions—as well as between the autonomy accorded the individual in Protestant ethics and the pastoral power retained by the missionary, epitomized in the obligatory large ground-floor windows allowing one to inspect the goings-on within. However, even with the large windows, the difference between a Christmas party and a modified potlatch were not always obvious, either to the missionary or the celebrants within.
CHANGING CONCEPTS OF EMBODIMENT AND ILLNESS AMONG THE WESTERN ARRERNTE AT HERMANNSBURG MISSION

JACQUELINE VAN GENT

Following the publication of Foucault’s theory of power, most historians interested in the body have studied it primarily as a site of subjugation and dominance. This approach has proved to be very valuable in exploring the everyday techniques of body control. Indeed, the mission system could be explained as a colonial extension of Foucault’s two classic regimes of power: the hospital, and the prison. In this colonial context, most scholars discussing religious change and its somatic manifestations for indigenous people have successfully applied Foucault’s paradigm to tease out the ways in which missionaries have reformed and disciplined indigenous bodies.¹

But an emphasis on power and subjugation does not fully explain indigenous understandings of the body. Western Arrernte perceptions of self and body emphasized a person’s spiritual and somatic interdependence with kin and ancestors. This body concept is difficult to grasp when relying on Foucault alone. More helpful are Thomas Csordas’ views of the body as embodiment of social and religious relationships.² The belief that the body is a reincarnation of an ancestor and the acknowledgement that witchcraft can result in somatic changes are two examples of this social embodiment among the Arrernte. This social character of self and body survived into the post-contact period, but it started to reflect the changed social and religious environment.


Arrernte people came to consider the missionary and the Christian God as affecting their bodily states.

This chapter argues that the interactions between Lutheran missionaries and indigenous people at Hermannsburg mission were shaped by body practices and discourse. These relationships could be symbolically re-ordered in discussing, for example, the state of the body and the causality of illness and death. Indigenous people responded to the hegemonic missionary discourse by implementing several strategies: the incorporation of new concepts into existing belief systems; resistance; and what Tim Rowse has called mediation—the ability to interpret social changes “according to their own view of the world.”\(^3\) These strategies were all at work during the period from the 1920s to the 1940s; a time of prolonged drought, famine and illness in central Australia. Sickness and illness constituted important tropes for missionaries and indigenes because both believed that the state of the body reflected the state of moral relationships. In this time of crisis and changed power relations, the mission pushed out beyond its immediate locality through the agency of Arrernte evangelists.\(^4\)

### Lutheran Views on Bodies, Healing and Death

Among the wide range of control mechanisms established at Hermannsburg mission in central Australia, the visible corporal change of the Arrernte was regarded by the missionary as proof that an internal spiritual change had occurred. Thus, in missionary literature the contrast between heathen and Christian was often constructed in relation to bodily matters. For Lutherans, the dichotomy of heathen and Christian bodies reflected the dichotomy of their respective moral states. As on other missions,\(^5\) the Lutheran missionaries at Hermanns-

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\(^3\) Rowse has coined this term specifically in regard to the indigenous reinterpretation of the rationing system at Hermannsburg mission, and I think it is a very useful concept to clarify indigenous responses in other areas as well. Tim Rowse, *White Flour, White Power: From Rations to Citizenship in Central Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press 1998), 81.


Hermannsburg regarded the modification of the indigenous body as one of their primary endeavors. Lutheran rhetoric and practice echoed the main themes that Richard Eves discusses so convincingly for Methodist missions in Papua New Guinea.\(^6\) At Hermannsburg, the constant scrutiny of daily moral practice applied not only to Christians but also to those who had enrolled in baptismal classes.

The concern with reforming the indigenous body produced the need to demarcate Christian and heathen bodies. This was reflected in spatial arrangements at the station, in church and in the regulation of marriages. Non-Christians were allocated a separate campsite, approximately three and a half kilometers away from the mission station at the site of the present-day Ntaria community. The seating arrangements in church not only divided men from women, but also the baptized from the unconverted, by placing non-Christians at the back of the church. Such separation of indigenous bodies was not confined to the church, it was especially important in sexual matters and marriage. The blessing of marital unions between Christians and non-Christians remained a widely debated issue for the Lutherans throughout the 1920s. Successive generations of missionaries did not always arrive at the same conclusions. There were also discussions about whether or not children of these unions could be baptized.\(^7\)

Punishment also aimed to discipline the indigenous body. Corporal punishment and the withholding of food were not uncommon. Children, in particular, were targeted for disciplinary measures. The dormitory system was part of the children’s daily lives at the mission and resistance to it could be punished with a thrashing,

Great turmoil this evening. Pastor Schaber locked the boys in. Reinhard had not been there for four nights, and now the mother had brought him back with force. But he screamed incredibly for about half an hour. Then we both went there and gave him a hiding. Before I left he had to promise me to keep quiet about it. But Clara had seen everything through the window. The boy had already previously behaved violently if he didn’t get his will. Suddenly the whole camp was in an uproar—I was accused of having beaten the boy to death. Wilfred came and demanded the key to the dormitory. We go over there and the dormi-
tory is surrounded by blacks who angrily demand entry. Then they come towards me and threaten me with their fists, demanding that I shall never touch their children again. A terrible sight! After Jakobus and others had examined the boy, I told them to come back the next day. I left under threats and insults, but I did not give in. Then Moses came in my house and expected me to say that I would at the most punish the children with three strokes, which I refused. 8

Corporal punishment was inflicted on adults and children alike, but it was the hitting of children that brought about open resistance. From the late 1920s the male members of the church council (most of them also evangelists) administered the corporal punishments. These were the same men who demanded more moderation from Albrecht in the example cited above. Although Albrecht refused this compromise in 1926, he realized in the following years that matters of discipline were better left to the council of old men. 9

The active involvement of Arrernte men in implementing the mission rules enabled them to exercise some degree of social control over Christians and non-Christians at the station. Their position enabled them also to negotiate forms of punishment with the missionary. In doing so, they took up the Lutheran discourse of heathen and Christian bodies, not only reinforced in daily habits of eating, marriage and disciplining but also in illness and healing.

Lutheran Healing

The Lutherans’ understanding of pastoral care included the duty to provide medical help for the bodies of people living on the station and those who came in to seek treatment. This had a spiritual dimension—the Lutherans imitating Christ, who healed sick bodies and raised the dead ones. Arrernte evangelists, when spreading the Christian message, took up this rhetoric. Returning from one proselytizing trip, the evangelist Moses brought 25 people from Alice Springs to Hermannsburg. On the following Sunday he gave a sermon in which he gave an account of his journey, emphasizing his preaching

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8 Albrecht diary, 28 March 1927, LA. Many of the mission records are written in German. I indicate when I quote from my translation (my translation).
9 F.W. Albrecht to Charles Duguid, 24 April 1935, correspondence Duguid-Albrecht, South Australian Museum (hereafter SAM). Albrecht wrote, “As a rule, all such offenders are handed over to the old men and they deal with them.”
and his visiting of the sick. “He spoke very detailed about how often he had preached at each place and how many people had come to listen to him. He had also visited the sick and spoken with them about eternity.”

Mission propaganda stressed that missionaries could overcome the distrust of indigenous people by healing their sick bodies. They noted where “heathens,” who were brought to the station for medical attention, had a changed attitude towards Christianity. Interestingly, none of these reported cases seemed to have resulted in a formal conversion. One story tells how a Luritja man, Talku, was brought in with severe wounds after raiding cattle on a station and was treated successfully by missionary Carl Strehlow. Talku did not become a Christian, but went on to become one of the main informants for Carl Strehlow’s ethnographic work.

Lutheran missionary identification of sickness stressed the condition of the visible body, not invisible ailments. The duty of the missionary, and of the family of the patient, was to care for the sick person in a specific physical way, which included the provision of appropriate food, medicine and shelter. Sick people constituted a separate category in the mission rationing system, receiving boiled peas, rice with meat or dripping. The sick body was understood as an individual with special rights within the mission system (visit of the missionary to the camp, provision of special food and medicine). This Lutheran approach to illness was undermined by Arrernte understandings of social obligations. The Arrernte shared the special rations for the sick with healthy kin. This behavior greatly annoyed the missionary who complained that the Arrernte did not look after the sick well enough because they left them without water or firewood and ate from the special meals provided for the sick.

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10 Albrecht to Riedel, 25 February 1927, Box 16 A5/6, folder “1927,” LA (my translation). Moses’ healing activities during proselytizing journeys were also reported in the following year, “In many cases Moses attended to the sick and prayed with them. At Henbury one sick person recovered again and Moses is quite convinced that God helped him and had heard his prayer.” Lutheran Herald, 10 September 1928, 298–299. Moses refers to Moses Tjalkabota, see chapter by Brock.
11 T.G.H. Strehlow, Songs of Central Australia (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971), xxii.
12 Albrecht to Friends of the Mission, 1 August 1929, LA. (Part of this letter was also published in Lutheran Herald, 14 October 1929, 332.)
13 Albrecht to Friends of the Mission, 1 August 1929, LA (my translation).
rect treatment of the sick body also had gender implications. Arrernte observances of traditional divisions of labor, such as male hunting trips, were criticized by the Lutherans as neglecting family responsibilities towards the sick person. These obligations within extended Arrernte families also contradicted the Lutheran notion of a husband being the principal carer for his wife. Even Christian men do not see anything wrong with leaving their sick wives to their fate and going hunting for a week or longer, glad to be away from the sick.¹⁴

There was really only one aspect of the Lutheran model of caring for the sick that was willingly applied by the Arrernte, and that was one which did not concern the body—prayer. Although the missionaries generally complained about the lack of indigenous interest in private prayer and devotion, they readily acknowledged that Christians and non-Christians did not object to praying for the sick. Lutheran missionaries only gradually realized that when the sick prayed in a Christian manner it was not an indication of religious change, but was additional to their own healing rituals. In 1926 Pastor Albrecht declared optimistically, “I heard repeatedly heathens saying that they pray to God. One sick man pointed with a beaming face above and said he is happy to know the “good God”. In general, people do not like to be regarded as heathens any more.”¹⁶ But 15 years later the missionary was more realistic about the use of prayers in the case of the sick, “There are quite a number at the Jay who are pleased to have the services on Sundays, and are glad if they are visited in times of sickness. However, there is no sign that any of them would come to a decision in his life to become a Christian.”¹⁷ Lutheran prayers for the sick reaffirmed rather than undermined Arrernte beliefs in the power of the word over the body.¹⁸

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¹⁵ Albrecht to Friends of the Mission, 1 August 1929, LA (my translation).
¹⁶ Annual Report Albrecht, B/A collection, AA 662, Box 2 of 6, SAM (my translation).
¹⁷ Albrecht to Riedel, 5 January 1945, B/A Collection AA662, Box 4 of 6, SAM.
The Arrernte concept of the body was the reverse of that of the missionaries. It emphasized the relatedness of ancestors with living human beings, which found its expression in theories of witchcraft and in healing practices. The somatic interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual was symbolized in Arrernte relationships with sacred objects such as the tjurunga, which were held to be the physical representation of the body of an ancestor. T. G. H. Strehlow, during his fieldwork in the early 1930s, noted incidents where desecration of tjurunga storehouses were punished by death. Even accidents that occurred when young men brought the objects from their storehouses in caves or in trees were seriously punished. Strehlow relates the story of a western Arrernte man who was speared to death after he dropped a tjurunga when taking it from the mountain cave. Another tjurunga, given to Strehlow in 1932, had been accidentally chipped when it was taken out of the cave. The man responsible was later speared to death. Strehlow reports that nobody was allowed to smooth the chipped edge because “the tjurunga was regarded as the actual changed body of a ragia ancestor; and the chipped edge hence represented an injury done to this personage.”

Furthermore, ancestors could sometimes reveal their embodiments in contemporary people, recognized by the Arrernte in specific physical

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21 Strehlow, “Geography,” 117.
similarities between men and their totems. A man from Hale River was reported to display his swollen joints as a sign of being the incarnation of his totem, the fierce native cat. This totemic connection was central to Arrernte social life. Norman Tindale’s ethnographic notes from 1929 recorded not only totemic affiliations of his informants, but also their knowledge of the totemic identities of their parents. This relational character of the body was central to Arrernte notions of the causes of illness. Bodily deformity and illness were perceived to result from the breaching of rules such as: food prohibitions; or the revelation of ritual knowledge to people who were not entitled to hear it. The latter could also affect the anthropologist’s fieldwork. T. G. H. Strehlow admitted that some of his informants fell ill because they revealed songs in the presence of uninitiated men.

Arrernte bodies were also open to the magical influence of other people. Charms, known as “singing”, could cause a spear to inflict a fatal wound. Spencer gives examples of men dying of wounds that they believed were caused by magic. Arrernte believed that magical objects could cause illness and death by invading the body. This sorcery was thought to be caused by someone who had been angered, and a “medicine man” had to be employed to remove the magical substance or object from the body of the victim. An Arrernte healer, according to Spencer, had to undergo a dramatic transformation of his own body through death and magical recreation, which transformed his body parts into magical healing stones. But the performance of healing rituals was not restricted to specialists. According to T. G. H. Strehlow, both men and women used healing charms. Strehlow lists verses that were sung by older women over females suffering high temperatures while the patient was anointed with fat and red ochre. Magic was implied in the healing process and the cooling of the fever-

23 Norman Tindale, Hermannsburg sociological data 1929, SAM.
25 Strehlow, Songs of Central Australia, 305.
26 Spencer and Gillen, The Native Tribes, 537.
27 Spencer and Gillen, The Native Tribes, 534.
28 Spencer and Gillen, The Northern Tribes, 479–481.
29 Strehlow, Songs of Central Australia, 650–653.
ish body was believed to emanate from ancestral places evoked in the healing song.\textsuperscript{30}

Witchcraft was a widely accepted explanation for illness. Missionary sources document the continuity of witchcraft beliefs in the post-contact area, described as rituals of “pointing the bone” or “singing.”\textsuperscript{31} Heinrich, the mission teacher, reported in 1923, “Rufus was very ill. Already since November he hasn’t been well. I could not find out what was wrong with him. He has lost weight and walks around like a bewitched black (one who has got the bone). He was so sick that I had little hope for him. Now he is feeling better.”\textsuperscript{32} Heinrich framed his diagnosis in Arrernte terms. Pointing the bone was an English expression commonly used to refer to witchcraft that resulted in somatic signs such as unexplained and rapid loss of weight and life force, indicators of malevolent magic.\textsuperscript{33}

Especially in periods of pandemic disease, witchcraft was frequently suspected to be the cause. As Strehlow observed,

> It is impossible to assess how frequently this type of magic was employed among the Central Australian tribes before the advent of the whites. Accusations of sorcery were raised frequently enough; for all sudden deaths and wasting diseases were blamed upon known and unknown medicine men and sorcerers; and ravaging epidemics such as the measles epidemic in 1899 and the influenza epidemic of 1940 were believed to have been caused by magic.\textsuperscript{34}

In 1940 a group of Pitjantjatjara men speared an Arrernte man to death because they believed that Arrernte magic\textsuperscript{35} was responsible for the death of several Pitjantjatjara people who had succumbed to influenza.\textsuperscript{36} This case ended in court, but other cases of magic were

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\textsuperscript{30} Strehlow, Songs of Central Australia, 650–653.

\textsuperscript{31} Spencer describes Arrernte magical sticks and the associated curses, specifically addressing body parts of the victim. See Spencer and Gillen, The Northern Tribes, 455–463.

\textsuperscript{32} H. A. Heinrich to J. Stolz, 29 January 1926, Box 16 A5/5, LA (my translation).

\textsuperscript{33} Carl Strehlow noted some of the curses of the Western Arrernte, designed to bring illness and death onto the victim. His son T. G. H. Strehlow suspected that these charms, which were the property of only a few sorcerers, had been given to his father by Loatjira, one of his main informants and an acknowledged ritual leader and healer. Strehlow, Aranda Traditions, 263.

\textsuperscript{34} Strehlow, Aranda Traditions, 264.

\textsuperscript{35} Strehlow, Aranda Traditions, 264 footnote 42.

\textsuperscript{36} Strehlow, “Geography,” 110.
said to have been defeated by the Christian word. Titus, an Arrernte evangelist, was reported to have prevented an avenging party from continuing revenge killings linked to the death of a ceremonial leader.37 The man had been a known healer and his sudden death during an initiation ceremony in 1926 was believed to be the result of witchcraft, which had to be avenged. According to mission sources, these hostilities had continued for several years before Titus ended them by preaching to the revenge party about Jesus, who had prayed for his enemies at the Cross.38 The missionary F. W. Albrecht asserted that the Gospel had defeated witchcraft and fears associated with it, “Since Titus stopped a retaliation party years ago by reminding them of the Gospel and Jesus, we had peace. They have never tried to kill one another again, and go now without any fear into the neighboring territories.”39

To the Arrernte, witchcraft was not an “expression of fear,”40 but a sign of disturbed social relationships resulting in illness and death. Droughts, pandemic diseases and high mortality, particularly among children, were interpreted as signs of crisis within the moral community. Diane Austin-Broos has shown that present-day Arrernte still consider sorcery as a possible cause of death at Hermannsburg and that, “In the case of the young they expect to find the logical reasons for death among the living and not in the will of God.”41 But as the historical records indicate, some of their parents and grandparents from the 1920s to the 1940s believed that both the malevolent magic of fellow Arrernte and the Christian God were potential causes of illness and death.

37 For a description of an Arrernte revenge party at Alice Springs in May 1901 see Spencer and Gillen, The Northern Tribes, 556–568.
38 Albrecht, “Das Evangelium im Kampf mit der Zauberei,” n.d, B/A Collection AA662, SAM. This must have been in the mid-1930s. Albrecht’s narrative places this incident after a meeting with elders in 1935, at which the men approached Albrecht to allow Titus to stay at their camp as an evangelist.
39 Albrecht to Riedel, 8 August 1940, AA662, Box 4, Albrecht papers, SAM (my translation).
40 The missionary discourse on Arrernte religion is dominated by the notion of witchcraft as an expression of existential fear. See Albrecht’s unpublished paper, “Das Evangelium im Kampf mit der Zauberei.”
Belief in the fundamental interconnection between spiritual and physical aspects of personhood continued in the post-contact period. Rather than displacing indigenous concepts of self, body and magic, Christianity added new elements. Arrernte explain strong emotions as being caused by hot blood, but magical words or songs can calm the body fluid. The power of the word “singing,” underlies love magic and healing (or harming) and can also cool down anger during fights. This magical power of words was also ascribed to Lutheran hymns. Teacher Heinrich reported in 1923 that,

Although Satan tries to disturb the peace on the station occasionally, it is surprising to see how Jesus is the best shepherd and protector. Recently there had been, for example, a fight between Rosa and Albertine. For some minutes there was some uproar but before I got there I heard them singing the hymn “Ach bleib mit deiner Gnade.” As soon as the fight started, some women had surrounded the fighters and sang the hymn. […] They told me that they stopped fighting now through singing, not anymore through “jabbajabba.” The singing had a good effect because the fighters threw away their digging stick and came to me to admitting “We both have sinned.”

Arrernte conceptions of the power of the word over the body were complemented by the equally important social positioning of bodies on country and in kinship systems. This system of identity construction included the Lutherans and their religion at Hermannsburg. Austin–Broos observes, “Christianity’s interiority is challenged by notions of kin on country, by a practice of located sociality. When Aranda [Arrernte] people talk about Christian social order, also understood as a Lutheran order, they also give sense to that order by seeking to locate it on country and in a particular language group.” Similarly, the Lutheran mission staff were incorporated into Arrernte society. So teacher Heinrich wrote to the Mission Board, “I find that the blacks trust me more since I discuss your letters with them in a brotherly way. While in the past they remained more or less strangers

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42 T. G. H. Strehlow gives examples of healing charms intended to cool the blood, Songs of Central Australia, 653.
43 Heinrich to Stolz, 1 February 1923, Box 16 B1/2, folder “Correspondence with mission station 1923,” LA (my translation).
44 Austin-Broos, “Right Way ’Til I Die,” 241.
to me, Moses is always a friend and adviser to me! Nathanael calls me younger brother and all women and children [call me] “ajua” (old man, father)."\(^{45}\)

The emphasis on Hermannsburg as a Christian place is evident in the way Christian Arrernte men spoke about bodily matters to the missionary. Aware of a Lutheran desire to distinguish between “heathen” and “Christian” bodies, Christian Arrernte men, who continued the old practice of circumcision, were careful to reassure the missionary that this was not done in any “heathen” way but only by Christian men,

It has also come to light that our Christians are still circumcising the young people. As Moses emphasized to Heinrich, this would happen without ceremonies and would be done by them and not by heathen.
I have asked Heinrich to get more information, while I remain in the background. Before my time teacher Heinrich had allowed them to do it if they would do it themselves and if they would regard it as a hygienic act, without heathen ceremonies and outside the context of their old heathen superstition.\(^ {46}\)

This demonstrates how skillfully Arrernte employed the missionaries’ discourse and concepts of bodies to avoid punishment. \(^ {47}\) It also shows how little the mission staff realized that, for the Arrernte, spiritual and bodily matters were intertwined and rituals were strongly linked to place.

The missionaries felt keenly that Arrernte should use their bodies and other signifiers to demonstrate their choice of Christianity over the old religion. This expectation was reinforced by publicly displaying sacred Arrernte objects. In 1923, teacher Heinrich confronted the catechumens by displaying tjurungas during baptismal classes and asked them to make a choice between traditional religion and Christianity.\(^ {48}\) Despite earlier missionaries’ optimism that the “tjurunga –cult” was “losing strength,” church reports continued to mention indigenous

\(^ {45}\) Heinrich to Stolz, 16 August 1923, Box 16 B1/2, folder “Correspondence with mission station 1923,” LA (my translation). This was at a time without a permanent missionary at the station when Heinrich assumed the role of missionary and teacher.

\(^ {46}\) Albrecht to Riedel, 7 September 1927, Box 16 A 5/6, folder “1927,” LA (my translation).

\(^ {47}\) The performance of ceremonies had been prohibited by the first missionaries.

\(^ {48}\) Heinrich to Stolz, Box 16 B 1/2, folder “Correspondence with mission station 1923,” LA (my translation).
religious activities throughout the 1920s and 1930s. These mission reports are corroborated by anthropologists’ contemporary studies of active ceremonial centers in the vicinity of Hermannsburg.49 The Lutherans argued that traditional ties of social obligations amongst kinship groups had to be destroyed in order for Christian Arrernte men to proselytize among other language groups. Links to place and kin were spectacularly undermined by the desecration of the Manangananga cave. The trigger for the incident was the kin support given by Christian Arrernte during a fight at the mission station. The missionary needed a visible proof of the willingness of the future evangelists to disregard their kinship obligations and traditional religion when proselytising to other language groups.

Manangananga was an important tjurunga storehouse and the center of the twin totem near Hermannsburg.50 In 1930 the missionary Albrecht, with at least tacit support from the Christian elders, including the traditional owner of the site, opened the cave in front of a gathering of Arrernte men, women and children and revealed the tjurunga hidden in the cave. At the time the missionary interpreted the event as the cornerstone in the process of religious change.51 The community continued to commemorate it for several years with public picnics and a church service at the cave on the anniversary of its opening. This desecration occurred following several years of drought which resulted in many Arrernte deaths, yet unlike previous thefts of sacred objects there were no revenge parties against those thought responsible. This contrasts with Strehlow’s reports of severe punishment of young men who were careless in the handling of sacred objects.52 Nonetheless, the sacrilege was remembered by Arrernte as the direct cause of illness in subsequent years. Albrecht himself acknowledged that people would

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49 Tindale field diary 1929, SAM; Strehlow field diaries 1932–34, SAM; Mountford field diary 1942, Mountford-Sheard Collection, State Library of South Australia.

50 This has already been noticed by missionary Carl Strehlow who reproduced a photograph of the entrance to the cave in his ethnography, but who never attempted the desecration of the place. Strehlow, Die Aranda- und Luritja-stämme, volume 2, (1908), 51.


52 T. G. H. Strehlow visited this place with the congregation. Strehlow Journal Book 1, 17 April 1932, SAM. According to Jones, the taboo was reinstated by the time Strehlow visited it again in 1955. Jones, 135–136.
attribute illness and death, resulting from the prolonged drought, to the hand-over of the *tjurungas*. One year after the Manangananga incident he wrote in his annual report,

I have repeatedly noticed how the many deaths during the drought are still remembered by our Christians. It seems that a great number of them still hold the opinion, even if not explicitly stated, that blacks who still possess their *tjurungas* live longer and are not as often sick as Christians. When all our praying did not help some remembered again how their fathers had once instructed them never to give away these old things, otherwise they would suffer misfortunes. Everyone who has lived through these difficult times will understand such thoughts. For most of our Christians the pain of losing a family member is too fresh to easily forget these things.

The desecration of Manangananga was part of a wider process of alienation of sacred objects as the result of contact history. Despite this process, Arrernte continued to regard any ritually incorrect transmission of objects and knowledge as an important cause of disease. In the 1960s, T. G. H. Strehlow noted that epidemics were still linked to religious crises and disturbances within the precontact moral communities,

Even in present-day Central Australia one of the commonest Aboriginal criticisms made of the new order introduced by Europeans is that the whole country has been economically ruined by the wholesale destruction of all the indigenous forms of ritual activities. Ever since Central Australia’s first major drought of 1927–29 the Aboriginal population has attributed the ensuing lengthy successions of poor and dry years to the disappearance of the older generations of ritually wise and traditionally educated elders who alone knew fully how to create rain and how to promote the increase of plants and animals. Derision has been heaped on their few and ill-trained successors, whose ritually faulty performances have been held responsible for their ineffectiveness in rendering the same communal services.

Lutheran critiques of Western Arrernte concepts of embodiment focused on the relational character of the person, that is, the close

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55 Strehlow, “Geography,”111.
association with kin and ancestors. Before there could be active Arrernte participation in evangelizing in central Australia, missionaries believed there must be a reform of indigenous ideas of personhood. Religious change must be embodied in change of identity, to mark clearly the difference between Christian and non-Christian groups. Baldwin Spencer noted this on a visit to the mission in 1926. He remarked that he could not see how “the blacks at Hermannsburg were more civilized than anywhere else.”

In mission-generated texts, indigenous people frame their relationships with each other within the Christian discourse of a strict dichotomy between Christian and heathen. Illness and bodily appearance were regular tropes of these narratives. Christian Arrernte men described naked, non-Christian neighboring people, who came to Hermannsburg with an Arrernte evangelist at Christmas time, as “ignorant people from the west.” On one occasion these Luritja men and women were paid by the visiting director of the Adelaide Conservatorium of Music for participating in the recording of their songs. Christian Arrernte refused to participate and rebuked the missionary for allowing the recording to take place in the mission precinct. In this way the Arrernte Christian elders reasserted their control of the mission space.

In Arrernte ontology, spiritual centers could cause illness in those who did not relate in the correct way to them. The Arrernte displayed some ambivalence over the influence of the mission locality on their bodies. We find competing views on whether or not it was advantageous to be at a Christian place during epidemics. In some cases the healing efforts of the Lutherans were rewarded with the adoption of Christian forms. During a severe outbreak of influenza in 1926 Luritja people treated at Hermannsburg responded by espousing

56 Spencer made this remark to teacher Heinrich during his stay at Hermannsburg. Heinrich to Stolz, 11 June 1923, Box 16 B 1/2, folder “Correspondence with mission station 1923,” LA (my translation).
57 Albrecht, “Hermannsburg Congregation—A Review 1926–1956,” B/A Collection AA662, Box 5 of 6, SAM.
58 The Luritja are a language group to the southwest of the Arrernte.
59 The non-Christians who participated in the recordings were paid.
60 This causality has also been noted for other Aboriginal groups. See, for example, the work of Janice Reid on Yolngu concepts of illness, Janice Reid, Sorcerers and Healing Spirits: Continuity and Change in an Aboriginal Medical System (Canberra: Australian National University Press, [first published 1983] 1989), 50.
a belief in Jesus,

Several Loritja [sic] people came in during this time. Some were completely naked and had such high temperature that they trembled in every limb. We gave them medicine and food. Because they speak a completely different language to our blacks, it is often difficult to communicate with them. But some of our Christians can understand them. They went repeatedly to them and told of the doctor who can heal them in body and soul.

Yesterday, that is on Sunday afternoon, Moses came to me and told me that he had preached to them and they had told him that they too now believed in Jesus. Obviously one cannot rely too much on this statement. Especially since it was made under the impression of experienced love.61

This narrative emphasizes that the missionary was only a third party to the interactions between Christian Arrernte and the Luritja visitors. Albrecht was merely informed by Moses Tjalkabota that he had been preaching and that the Luritja “now also believed in Jesus.” But the mission records do not show that any of these people actually joined baptismal classes as a consequence of their newly found belief. Respect for Arrernte Christianity, rather than formal conversion, was the Luritja response to Christian healing.

The argument that illness was God’s punishment for transgressing the spiritual order was used by both Christian and non-Christian Arrernte. The following narratives about the relationship between Moses, the head evangelist at Hermannsburg, and a man named Arabi show how both men refer to a Christian discourse when discussing Arabi’s illness, “Recently Moses told me that Arabi, this bad heathen, is sick. He [Arabi] told two of our Christians, that Jesus appeared to him and told him ‘Arabi, this is your punishment. You know the path that leads to me. You could have gone to the mission station and become a Christian. But you did not do so, and this illness is now your punishment.’”62

Arabi was a senior Arrernte man from Alice Springs, whom Albrecht had previously expelled from the station because he “enticed people to join corroborees.” Here an Arrernte religious leader who is afflicted by illness admitted that he was being punished for not accepting Christian

61 Albrecht to Friends of Mission, 25 September 1926, Box 16 A 5/3, LA (my translation).
62 Albrecht diary, 18 October 1926, LA (my translation).
teaching. There are, however, no records indicating that Arabi joined a baptism class. The missionary is peripheral to this account of Arabi’s dream. The incident was related to him by Christian Arrernte. Several months earlier Albrecht had complained that the Christian Arrernte were not asserting themselves against Arabi’s influence as Arabi enticed Christians from Hermannsburg to participate in a religious ceremony. Yet these religious demarcation lines were far more fluid. In times of illness, with its implied crisis within the moral or religious cosmos, the relation between the Christian God and Hermannsburg could also be interpreted in a negative way. Indeed, narratives about the body and illness could be used to voice resistance to the mission. During the scurvy epidemic in 1929, missionary Albrecht related the following story to his readers,

This illness is of course a big temptation for our Christians and a warning for the heathens. One Christian woman told me once, “jakkai, Krid-starinja inkaraka iluma (o dear, all the Christians are dying)”. Because we lost relatively higher numbers of Christians compared with the heathens, many asked why is it that the Christians are dying? Others mock about it. Old Mortona from Alice Springs told me, “If a man falls sick in Alice Springs, he will recover after some days. But here where it is God’s house and God’s word, they all have to die.” He said this to stress his demand to be sent back to his old place as soon as possible. … Mortona told teacher Heinrich that God doesn’t listen to us because we don’t pray the right way. Instead of using Aranda, we should pray in their pidgin English, maybe God would listen. Most of the heathen are convinced that the mission is bewitched and hence it is best to stay away.

Here we find the argument that Hermannsburg mission was a dangerous place. The high rates of illness and death at Hermannsburg were explained by traditional Arrernte ideas of witchcraft and the non-observance of the correct ritual. Mortona uses the outbreak of illness at the mission to criticize and undermine Christian religion by implying that Christians did not perform their religious rituals correctly. Instead, people in Alice Springs, like himself, would know how

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63 Albrecht diary, 1926, LA.
64 Heinrich to Stolz, 5 December 1925, Box 16 A 5/6, folder “Correspondence 1925,” LA (my translation).
65 Lutheran Herald, 14 October 1929, 331–332.
to conduct Christian rituals correctly (by praying in pidgin English) and thus recover from sickness.

Lutherans had clear ideas about death as a spiritually significant state of the body and about what constitutes a good Christian death. The individual’s expression of faith at the moment of death was carefully observed and stories of a good death became a favourite trope of the mission reports published in the *Lutheran Herald*. With low conversion numbers, these descriptions of faith were needed to restore readers’ confidence in the meaningfulness of the mission. Particular emphasis was given the frequent reciting of Lutheran hymns. So for example it was reported, “Some days ago one of the elders told me about Philipus’ death who had died during the influenza epidemic. During his illness he had still enjoyed singing, especially the song ‘Fort, fort mein Herz zum Himmel.’”

The Lutherans’ interest in the reporting of the death of Arrernte Christians echoes a general genre in Christian mission writing. Lutheran narratives do not report specifically on the death of children, although there are numerous examples of it. The emphasis is on the end of bodily suffering and the attachment to Christ in death,

Very touching was the death of a young girl who had been completely paralysed for several years. During the last weeks before her death she had to suffer a lot. But on her second last day here on earth all her pain disappeared and she looked forward to returning home. She told her family that the angels were ready to come and get her and Lord Jesus himself had come to tell her to follow. When the mother wanted to say something to her, she only replied: It is too late, I have to go now. And so she passed away in peace.

This desire for personal attachment to Christ was not only reported for “deserving” children but also for the first generation of Arrernte Christians who had been baptised in the 1880s. One of them was Ltalatumarinja, baptized as Petrus in 1888, aged 18 years. Petrus was described by the missionaries as a “serious, upright Christian” who maintained his belief in Jesus during the trying times of his

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66 Albrecht report, 17 May 1926, Box 16 A5/5, LA (my translation).
67 See, for example, discussion of this topic in Harkin, 105–107.
69 Albrecht report 1926, SA Museum, B/A Collection, AA662, Box 2 of 6 (my translation).
70 Hermannsburg Mission Chronicle, Register of Baptisms, March 1879–November 1932, LA.
son’s illness. The missionary emphasized this when reporting Petrus’ death, “When I visited him once, he told me how they are still very grateful to Jesus and thank him and they wished to stay with him and not to forsake Christ … One of our old Christians told me how Petrus had confided in him that he desires to see Jesus.”\(^71\) Another Christian, Andreas, while anticipating eventual union with Jesus, was not ready to join Him while his own children needed him, “When he [Andreas] visited me before he fell sick one evening, I asked him if he ever regretted to have been a Christian for so long. But he didn’t want to hear anything about that. During his illness he once told me how he had seen Jesus in his hut who had pointed to the above as if he wanted to take him along. But he had told Jesus that he still had to look after his two children.”\(^72\)

The Lutheran ideal of strong emotional ties between children and their parents forms a central theme in these accounts of Christian deaths. Missionaries also emphasized the parental grieving over the death of children. Albrecht tried to console Christian parents with a Lutheran theological interpretation of death as a temporal state and the resulting promise of a final rejoicing with their children in Christ,

On that evening we stood in front of the grave of the fourth child that had died within a very short time. The young parents had already lost one child and now the Lord had taken this one as well. When I visited them, and the child was already very weak, both had their eyes full of tears. When the mother came one week later to ask to receive the Holy Communion, I tried to comfort her and told her to be grateful to the Lord despite the loss. I comforted her by saying that the Lord had led her out of the darkness of heathendom. Now they do not need to stand in despair by the graveside but can hope to see their child again with Jesus.\(^73\)

Resurrection from the dead was not part of traditional Arrernte cosmology. Thus, the individuated nature of Lutheran notions of a

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\(^71\) Albrecht report 1926, B/A collection, AA662, Box 2 of 6, SAM (my translation).

\(^72\) Albrecht report 1926, B/A collection, AA662, Box 2 of 6, SAM (my translation).

personal body and identity was at once restricting and liberating in
giving meaning to death through the concept of salvation.\textsuperscript{74} In Arrernte
conceptions, “the dreaming aspect of a person’s being might return
to the conception side, but its moral personality (in European terms)
is finished.”\textsuperscript{75} According to Carl Strehlow, the Arrernte concept of
the afterlife was restricted to the journey of souls to the island of the
dead.\textsuperscript{76} There was no concept of personal rebirth. The dead were
only able to return as ghosts for a limited time.

The resurrection of the body became a central issue for religious
change; indeed it was often the central point in the sermons delivered
by Arrernte evangelists. Moses frequently turned to this topic. One
of his central theological messages was the equation of Jesus with life.
In 1926, Heinrich described to the Mission Board how Moses, when
preaching on the previous Sunday, had recounted to his audience
how the Holy Spirit had brought the Gospel to the Arrernte and how
the Arrernte had realized that “their \textit{tjurungas} had been wrong and
that they now believed in \textit{altjiira}, who is truly alive.”\textsuperscript{77} According to
Moses, Jesus alone enabled resurrection because he awoke the dead
from their sleep,

\begin{quote}
To Christians death is like a sleep because Jesus will return to awake
them. This is very certain because he himself has gone down this path
as the first human. But, my dear Alice Springs friends, all the others
will also arise one day to stand in front of the judge where they will be
met by the wrath of God. Therefore come today to Jesus when he is
still calling you.\textsuperscript{78}
\end{quote}

An Arrernte woman told her mother shortly before her death that
Jesus was now close and that she had seen two angels in her hut.\textsuperscript{79}
Knowing that her death was close, she made arrangements for her
burial and requested that Moses deliver the sermon.

The metaphor of sleep as a specific state of the body indicated that
the body did not disappear after death, but only entered another physi-
cal state. Moses recounted how this conflicting interpretation of death

\textsuperscript{74} Austin-Broos, “Right Way ‘Til I Die,” 227.
\textsuperscript{75} Austin-Broos, “Right Way ‘Til I Die,” 227.
\textsuperscript{76} Carl Strehlow, volume 1 (1907), 15–16.
\textsuperscript{77} Heinrich to Riedel, 11 June 1926, Box 16 B1/2, LA.
\textsuperscript{78} Heinrich to Riedel, 11 June 1926, Box 16 B1/2, LA.
\textsuperscript{79} Albrecht to Riedel, 25 February 1927, Box 16 A5/6, folder “1927,” LA (my
translation).
had caused friction between him and Arrernte elders. After observing the first European burial at Hermannsburg, the young people around Moses and the elders discussed death. The elders warned them not to look at a dead person or else the ghost would hurt them. “However, we said ‘But the Lord Jesus will raise the person on the Last Day.’”80 The old men would not have any of this, they insisted that the dead lie “decaying in the earth” and would not rise. Significantly, Moses commented that the young did not share the traditional view on death, but preferred to keep quiet in front of the elders. “Then we kept quiet, lest the old men become angry. Having denied the resurrection, their eyes became big, and we were afraid they would become angry.”81

Years later, when Moses preached to non-Christians about the resurrection of the dead on the Day of Judgement, the elders insisted that their version of the afterlife was not inferior to the Christian teachings. They asserted that the dead return as revengeful ghosts, until they are lifted up by a ngankara up into heaven where they stay. But Moses Tjalkabota replied, “But I don’t believe this. A ngankara cannot lift a spirit up into the sky. No way. Only Jesus can do this.” And he insisted that, “On the last day Jesus himself will raise us.”82

Conclusion

I have argued that the historical study of religious change among the Western Arrernte can benefit from a perspective of the body. The analysis of Lutheran body politics shows that missionary control at Hermannsburg extended to everyday bodily matters such as sexual relations, corporal punishment, and healing rituals. But I also argue that indigenous responses are grounded in a very different notion of the body that goes beyond the focus of Foucault. The discussion of Arrernte views of the embodied nature of social and spiritual relations requires a different theoretical approach. Indigenous interpretations of the rationing system, Christian prayers for the sick, or Jesus himself spring from a pre-contact system of meanings of which a person’s embodiment with kin and spirits is a vital part.

The impact of Lutheran theology and mission practice altered indig-

80 Tjalkabota, 256.
81 Tjalkabota, 257.
82 Tjalkabota, 299–300.
enous concepts of embodiment to some degree, but the key characteristics of Arrernte relatedness were maintained and even extended to incorporate Christian rituals. Although the Lutherans attempted to reinforce individualistic notions of the person, western Arrernte continued to perceive themselves as being interconnected with kin and ancestors. These links also shaped their somatic experiences. Thus, it is not surprising that illness was interpreted as an imbalance in these relations and healing rituals were aimed at restoring the appropriate relationship. Missionaries and the Christian God were incorporated in this net of social relations, and Christian rituals such as praying became slowly accepted as additional forms of curing.

The belief that illness is caused by disrupted social relations finds its expression in the practice of witchcraft. Arrernte and other indigenous people continued to voice suspicions of alleged witchcraft and to participate in resulting retaliations as a response to epidemics from the 1920s to the 1940s. Christian Arrernte at Hermannsburg, which was perceived to be a Christian place, did not stand outside this cultural logic. Christian and non-Christian Arrernte linked continued illness at the mission station to incorrect religious ritual performance. Yet religious change among the Arrernte was not profound enough to affect indigenous notions of person and body to the degree that John Barker observed among the Maisin.83 These more individualized notions of witchcraft seemed to be absent at Hermannsburg. However, Arrernte took on the idea of an individualized Christian death. The possibility of resurrection became the main focal point in the preaching of Arrernte evangelists who understood Jesus as a potent healer, able to awake them from death as if from a long sleep.

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