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Body and Soul

More than an Episode!

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Our personal attitudes toward missionary endeavours have undoubtedly been influenced by the course of our own experiences. Only on rare occasions have we carried out anthropological research in an area that was not directly or indirectly affected by missionary activity. (For one example, see R. and C. Berndt 1987.) Throughout our professional careers of over 40 years, in almost all of our field research we have been under the shadow of one mission or another. In the circumstances we learnt to take that as a necessary given, part of the overall frame in which we had to work. Conversely, there were, and are few Aborigines who have not been exposed in some degree, at first hand or otherwise, to some form of proselytization.

The amount of published and unpublished material on Christian missions, general and specific, even in regard to areas and situations we know personally, is so immense that all we can do here is to summarize what we see as some of the main points. One central feature, however, is unmistakable: while the structures that were developed and the procedures that were adopted differed according to their particular sectarian persuasions and the personal perspectives of the missionaries, their aims remained more or less constant. The basic intention was to change the socio-cultural systems *and* the individual lives of the people with whom they worked. It was not simply to Christianize them, because Christianization was seen as inseparable from the trappings of the overall life-style in which the missionaries themselves lived; they merely rejected or opposed some aspects of it, in favour of other aspects they promoted as being morally and religiously 'right'. One distinction that was emphasized quite early in the piece was between the spiritual component (the *soul*) and material welfare needs (or 'practical' Christianity, as it was called: that is, the *body*). However, any such demarcation mostly became blurred in the course of everyday mission activities.

This consistent, continuous approach by missionaries, on both fronts (spiritual and material), was largely in contrast to other forms of contact, that were in the main

non-institutionalized, haphazard and undirected — except when they were guided by the implementation of governmental policies; even then, there was, more often than not, a gap between policy statements and their implementation. Moreover, governmental policies also coincided at times with mission ones and, until recent years, were left to mission personnel to interpret and implement. In terms of process, such social action on the part of missionaries was and is quite complex. We shall focus here on results at the receiving end (involving Aborigines); and those results too have been multiple and varied. It is important to recognize that missionaries are purveyors of a particular kind (or kinds) of Christianity that is markedly different from what it is within the matrix of Western European cultures, even though in that context Christianity is perhaps equally distant now from secular European traditions. All along the line of transmitting Christian ideas and messages, various diverse cultural and sub-cultural filters tend to distort them. Trans-cultural conveyance of these has, as the evidence from Aboriginal Australia so amply demonstrates, caused considerable difficulties and, interestingly, reduced or altered their impact.

On the receiving end there has often been, in our experience, confusion on the part of Aborigines who have struggled to comprehend the messages. Some have tried to adapt incoming views of a non-Aboriginal (in this case, 'Christian') nature in order to Aboriginalize them, with varying degrees of effectiveness. Others have tried to compartmentalize, or separate out, such alien ideas from those of a traditional Aboriginal kind, in a process that leaves limited linkages between them but enables Aboriginal people to utilize each for different purposes. Or the result can be a belief in the increasing 'irrelevance' of both religions, and a growing attraction to secularization. The whole question of acceptance or rejection on the part of Aborigines, especially in traditional and modified-traditional situations, was probably less dependent on how Christianity was being presented, than on the socio-economic and political imperatives. In other words, the development of opportunism was facilitated, and much rested on what they could get out of the system.

Although it is easy for anthropologists to take a negative attitude toward mission activity, the matter is not at all straightforward (see C. Berndt 1958:38-43). Particularly during early periods of Aboriginal-European contact, mission stations were virtually the only refuge-places for Aborigines trying to escape from the depredations of the new settlers and their expanding townships. The writings of Salvado, Taplin, Threlkeld and many others make that quite clear. Without the protective authority of missionaries, the Aboriginal population would have been reduced even more savagely than it was. Population recovery as far as full-Aborigines were concerned was first recorded in the early 1950s on the mission settlements of north-eastern Arnhem Land, Bathurst Island, and a few others. Arnhem Land in the 1940s and early 1950s did not yet present a case of large-scale European intrusion, mainly because most of it was an official Aboriginal reserve — although that did not prevent the massive invasion that came later, with mining 'developments'. Nevertheless, if mission stations had not been established along the coast, the area would have been radically denuded of people during and immediately after World War II, partly because of the attractions of Darwin and adjacent settlements. That is what had happened earlier to the people who occupied the 'buffalo plains', east of Darwin to the East Alligator River. Moreover, the Arnhem Land missions, along with Hermannsburg (in the 1940s), made possible the emergence of the outstation movement, which is generally believed to have begun much later.

Protection of Aborigines by missions was a real issue, because the State governments, even with their welfare programs, were unable to serve that purpose. For one thing, they were inadequately staffed, and police 'protectors' were more concerned to protect European settlers from Aborigines. Of course, the enforced assumption of a wider administrative and social welfare role by missionaries and mission bodies inevitably meant that they acquired considerable power over the lives and destinies of Aborigines. It is only in recent years that this power has been clipped and redistributed in other directions.

Also, missions were responsible for establishing the first Aboriginal schools. During the earlier period, most teaching concentrated on two aspects. One was Christianity. The other was preparing children for menial employment in adulthood: domestic work for girls, outside labouring for boys. However, while most of such schooling was confined to those orientations, when we commenced our anthropological research it was in the process of changing to a more flexible approach — especially at Ernabella and Hermannsburg, and on the Catholic and Methodist stations in northern Australia.

Anthropologically speaking, the heritage of mission endeavour had a further positive face — but one that, depending on the way we look at it, made the Aboriginal population more vulnerable to evangelization. We refer to the considerable amount of linguistic and ethnographic information recorded by early missionaries: for example, by Taplin, Carl Strehlow, Reuther, Worms and many others. Selective and prejudiced as some of this material is by present-day standards, it provides base-line data without which all of us, and not least Aborigines, would be much poorer. The greater the degree of knowledge that missionaries had of such material, the more possibilities there were for them to systematize and to focus their own religious teaching, and to undermine traditional Aboriginal beliefs and behaviour.

This was especially the case with the United Aborigines' Mission in the Western Desert. Initially, its missionaries regarded everything associated with traditional Aboriginal society and culture, including language, as 'belonging to the devil'. Wilf Douglas, who held a different and less negative view, was able to persuade this mission body to get at least some of its staff to learn a Western Desert dialect. This actually placed in its hands (and through its mouth) a powerful tool that enabled Christian indoctrination to proceed more effectively. In the north, on the Methodist stations, language work (before the advent of the Summer Institute of Linguistics) was concentrated initially on the translation of hymns. Several members of this mission body had been exposed to courses in Anthropology given at the University of Sydney. This knowledge was utilized to further specifically mission aims. However, in general terms, even up to the present day, mission use of anthropological information has been limited, and mainly at the personal level.

Whether or not an anthropologist is sympathetically inclined to missionization, the fact remains that what he or she publishes may conceivably add to the cultural vulnerability of the people concerned. This point was perhaps more relevant in the immediate past than it is today. Elkin (1938:152-5), for instance, was Rector of Morpeth (see R. and C. Berndt, eds. 1965:6-7) before he 'saw the light' and became, eventually, a Professor of Anthropology. He was vitally concerned with the relationship between Anthropology and mission activities (see his first paper on this topic in 1930). His contention was that the more missionaries knew about Aboriginal traditional living, the more understanding they would be in their dealings with the

people. Be this as it may, it was probably his influence that eventually led to the more receptive present-day attitudes of many missionaries toward Aboriginal religion.

We turn now to two comprehensive dimensions of mission impact on Aboriginal society.

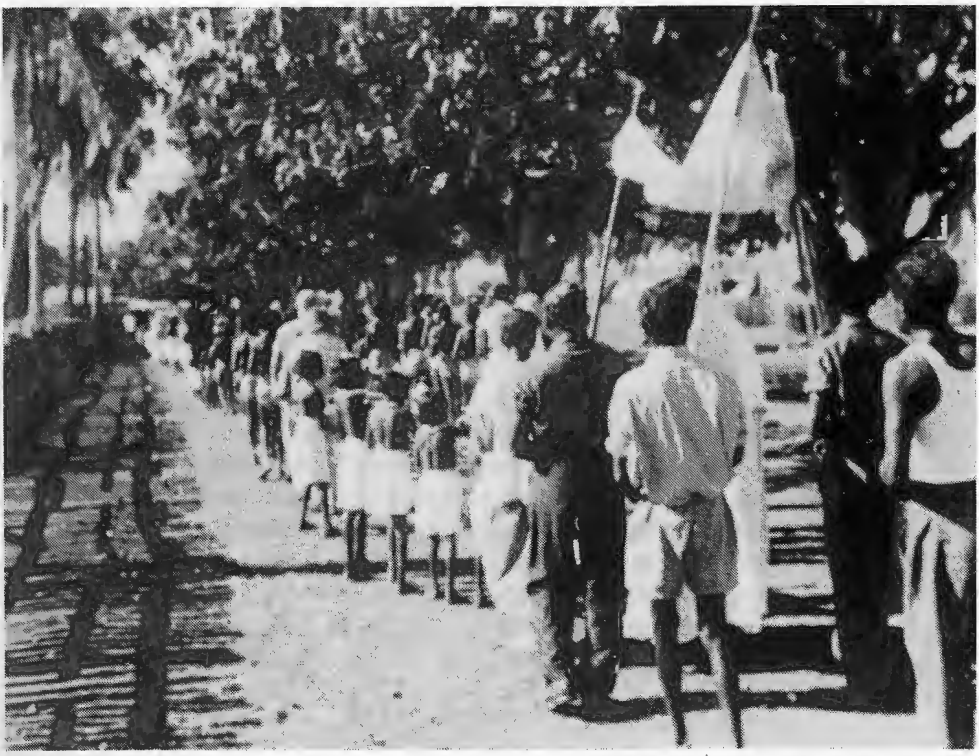
Traditional religion

It is probably true to say that most of the early missionaries did not recognize Aboriginal ritual and mythology as being religious. If they did, it was certainly not in the same way that they categorized Christianity. Nevertheless, they regarded it as a force to be reckoned with—although in some cases as being contra-Christianity, associated with the forces of evil and with magic and sorcery and, consequently, something that had to be opposed. One line of attack was directed at male initiation, which, according to Taplin (in Woods 1879:18), was a 'barbarous ordeal', involving 'licentious behaviour'. It was also said to entice youths away from the continuity of mission schooling. At Ooldea in 1941 the missionary might call in the police to break up a ceremony or ritual or to resolve a disturbance. By 1948, the rite of circumcision had been declared illegal unless the youths concerned were consenting parties. At Milingimbi (in the mid-1960s) one mission superintendent was reported to have dispersed people attending a camp ceremony by hosing them down. At Elcho Island, where during the early years of the mission traditional ritual had been tolerated, and held within the precincts of the settlement, by the 1960s much of it was officially relegated to a nearby island or to the mainland.

Other missionaries attempted to ignore manifestations of Aboriginal religion, or confined their opposition mainly to words from the church pulpit. For instance, a Fijian missionary at Yirrkalla in 1946-47 was fond of speaking against what he conceived to be the local practice of cannibalism. Aboriginal church-goers were amused, for no such custom existed in north-eastern Arnhem Land, and puzzled as to why he thought they should be harangued about it. In general, Church services offered a better platform for persuasion than direct confrontation, especially when the missionary concerned had some fluency in the local language, or where non-attendance by Aborigines was associated with negative sanctions. At Ooldea (in 1941), people who came to church were afterward rewarded with rations that were not given to 'malingerers'. At Oenpelli (in 1950), discs were handed out to Aborigines who attended church services, and these were later exchanged for food at the local store. By the mid-1960s, after this practice was discontinued, adult church attendance was drastically reduced except for some professed Christians, and children who were housed in the dormitories. In spite of the pressures that were being directly and indirectly exerted by missionaries, much of traditional religious ritual continued uninterruptedly, either openly or secretly.

The situation was, of course, much more complex than this. In the 1940s, the chairman of the Methodist Overseas Mission could state frankly to us that he believed there had been no real converts during his régime. However, it was obvious that a number of Aborigines did regard themselves as being Christians — but that did not mean that they were opposed to their own traditional Aboriginal religion. A case in point was Lazarus Lamilami, a Goulburn Island man, who was ordained in the Methodist Church in 1967: he retained his intense interest in all aspects of his traditional culture. There is ample evidence that conversions occurred during the

early days of missionary activity: at Point McLeay, for instance, James Unaipon and later his son, David Unaipon, virtually cut themselves off from 'traditional custom' (Taplin in Woods 1879:95). In later years, many Aborigines have turned to the Christian religion and held varying attitudes toward their traditional local religion.



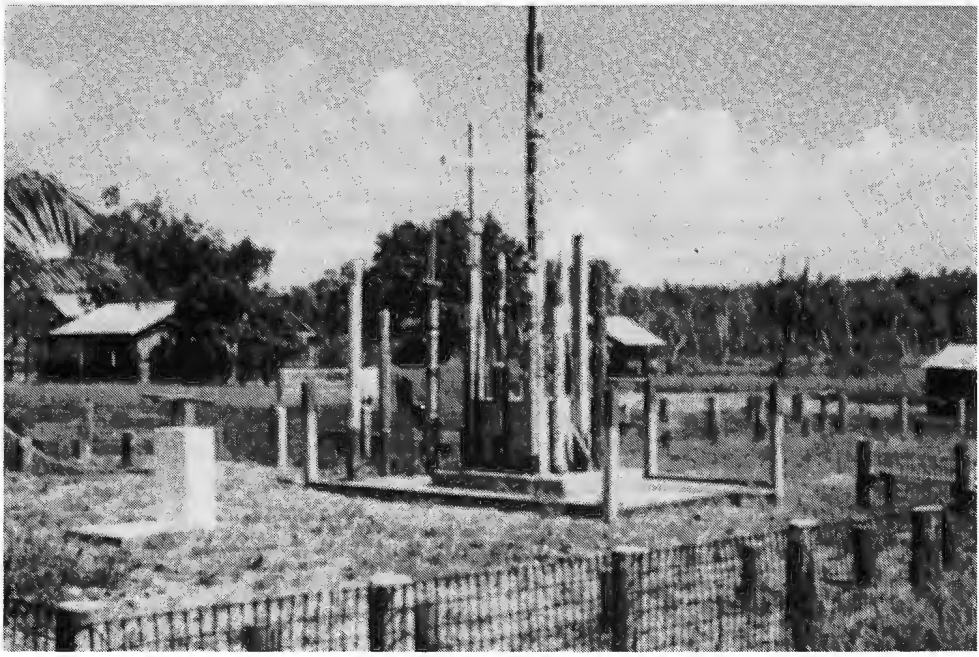
1. The first "Christ the King" (Christus Rex) Procession at Bathurst Island, 1947. Fr. McGrath M.S.C. walks under the canopy held by four men.

There have been missionaries who have tried to come to terms with Aboriginal belief and practice. Father McGrath at the Bathurst Island Catholic mission in the late 1940s and early 1950s is a good example. He was in the habit of discussing religious matters in Tiwi with the Pagans (as contrasted with the Christians) living in their camps near the settlement's beach. He would exchange ideas along the lines of 'We have this. Do you have anything like it?' The Rev. Ellemor at Milingimbi attended sections of the Kunapipi rituals (see R. Berndt 1951), as did the Rev. Shepherdson at Elcho Island. Chaseling (1957:167-73), while he wrote of a 'stone age religion', regarded mythic deities such as the Djanggau ('Junkgowa') as prophets whose religion was 'incomplete' until the coming of Jesus.

Children, and the aged (those approaching death), were possibly the most vulnerable to evangelical persuasion. Taplin (in Woods 1879:19), for instance, was ready to admit that mortuary rites demonstrated reverence for the dead. But it was not long before he was able to persuade the people to desist from smoke-drying their dead and to bury them instead. In north-eastern Arnhem Land, it was several years after the establishment of the mission station at Yirrkalla in 1934 that mortuary-

platform disposal of the dead and subsequent bone collection gave way to Christian burial — although in this case in conjunction with traditional ritual, and the arrangement of a sand structure over and around the grave, that topographically symbolized the deceased's mythic associations.

Inevitably, after a prolonged period of virtual mission autonomy, most people living on the settlements evinced signs of some Christian influence. For example, by the mid-1940s Bathurst Island mission station had been functioning for nearly 40 years. Most of the young people had, by them, been brought up in the convent or the boys' dormitory and were at least nominally Christian. There was sufficient time for the Pagans to be distinguished from the converted and to be regarded as the protectors of their traditional heritage. On the other hand, a measure of the impression Christian teaching had made on some of the Nuglugwongga (Daly River) people when the Jesuit Catholic Mission was operating in 1887-99, is revealed in a series of Aboriginalized biblical stories one of us recorded in 1945-46 (R. Berndt 1952:81-95), in which Adam and Riva (Eve) were driven from the Garden of Eden after having stolen an apple. This story purports to explain why Europeans inherited the wealth of the garden and Aborigines remained in the bush, in a state of poverty. When recording dreams at Yirrkalla in 1946-47, one of us was able to obtain a number relating to God and Jesus as well as to mission teaching (see R. Berndt 1980:289-91). A crucial point was the degree to which such teaching impinged on traditional thinking, and the extent to which alien aspects were integrated with it. It is not possible to explore this here, except to say that, speaking generally, such a mixture became more apparent over the years as mission pressures were increased. We might ask, then, whether mission teaching has been instrumental in bringing



2. The Elcho Island Memorial, 1961

about changes in *ideas* rather than in actions.

The penultimate expression of attempted syncretism is symbolized in the now well-known Arnhem Land adjustment movement that came into being late in 1957 (R. Berndt 1962). To provide a visible, tangible focus for this, a memorial was set up near the old mission church at Elcho Island. A small, open enclosure held a display of formerly secret-sacred religious emblems that were being made public for the first time: the central traditional post had a Christian cross at its apex. We need not go into the reasons for this movement's establishment, or its aims. It is sufficient to say that in this context it emphasized traditional religious equality with Christianity, and had wide socio-political implications. As Maddock (1974:7-8) pointed out, the undoubted stimulus for Aborigines was to put their relations with Europeans on a new footing. This was a particularly significant development, that has no exact parallel elsewhere in Aboriginal Australia. There are certainly other indications, both earlier and later, of a measure of rapprochement being achieved, but none that has been treated so articulately, and is so revealing in its recognition of mission influence and of its wider potentials.

By this time, in Arnhem Land, symbolic representations of Aboriginal religion were moving into the Christian churches at Milingimbi and Elcho Island in the form of Aboriginal designs. At Yirrkalla in 1963 a large screen of mythic paintings in ochres, one belonging to each of the two local moieties, was placed on either side of the church altar (see Wells 1971). This was not, of course, Aboriginalization of Christian religion. The Elcho movement was incipiently that; but because it remained separate from the 'orthodox' Methodist church, its focus was increasingly on secular matters.

A more apparent form of indigenization of Christianity was the preparation of a set of acrylic paintings of the Stations of the Cross, by Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, for the re-established Daly river Catholic mission in 1961 (see M.-R. Ungunmerr-Baumann 1984). These signal an important innovative departure. While the paintings are stylistically Aboriginal, their subject matter is that of representations of Christ. Such images of God/Christ must undoubtedly have been drawn or painted by Aborigines long before that date; but we know of no other examples being directly placed in a church before. We are reminded that at Ooldea in 1941 we asked children at the local mission school to draw what they thought God and/or Jesus looked like. When the missionary discovered what the children were doing at our request he was angry, and accused us of being sacrilegious. At Milingimbi, the chairman of the Methodist group of missions told us that he had once arranged a Christmas enactment of the nativity by Aborigines for the edification of a visiting delegation from the Sydney Central Office, but the birth scene was so realistic that commendation turned to condemnation and the religious play was abandoned. However, much has changed since those days. In the Catholic church at Balgo (mid-1980s) in the south-eastern Kimberley, large banners are displayed, each relating to a Christian topic — for instance, to the festivals of Christmas and Easter, the Prodigal Son, and so on, along with 'assembly banners' on traditional mythological themes.

Such examples, however, do not represent syncretism *per se*. There would seem to be no place, or not yet, for material of this kind as far as the Lutherans, Presbyterians and Anglicans are concerned. With the Catholics and Methodists there was at least limited acceptance of Aboriginal ideology; among the Methodists there was more scope for an interchange of ideas, and more flexibility for cross-religious adaptation.

3. Balgo Catholic Church alter (southeastern Kimberly) with traditional style painting depicting Christian motifs (1985)

Probably this was one of the reasons why what has been called the Fellowship emerged in north-eastern Arnhem Land, based on evangelical Methodism. The meetings we attended at Elcho Island in 1979 combined elements of the traditional Aboriginal belief system with 'orthodox' Christianity. But they also included aberrant forms, not necessarily supported by the Uniting Church, such as the 'laying on of hands', healing, 'speaking in tongues', and at certain points members of the congregation were enjoined to touch and clasp one another in fellowship. Such meetings, conducted mostly in the local language (dialects), allowed time for long diatribes reminiscent of the orations of the founder of the Elcho Island movement. Many of these dealt with topical issues such as local government, what the Department of Aboriginal Affairs should do, Aboriginal land rights and politics, as well as the inevitable soul-searching, along with references to traditional mythology. The leaders were both men and women. When the Fellowship spread more widely, it appeared in the eastern goldfields of Western Australia, and at the Warburton Range community (formerly a mission station); but in that case, it assumed very much of a fundamentalist form with little evidence of syncretism.

The Jinimin (Jesus) movement reported by Petri and Petri-Odermann (1970:258-63, and this volume) comes closer to that. However, Balgo (originally a Catholic mission, now only minimally so) is one place where the *djuluru* combined Christian and European secular elements with traditional mythology and ritual. This 'cult' was said to have 'travelled' from Perth into the Pilbara, and by 1981 had reached not only Balgo but also Yuendumu. As far as we know, it was not specifically stimulated by missionaries but was designed by Aborigines, who set it within the context of the Dreaming, providing a meaningful interpretative frame to cope with changing ideas and circumstances.

Christianity left an indelible mark on many Aboriginal people who were drawn within its encompassing influence. It did not necessarily achieve the results many missionaries had anticipated. There is no hard-and-fast evaluative procedure that could enable us to gauge the degree of influence on individual Aborigines. Nevertheless, there is sufficient information to indicate that some missionaries were critical of how Christianity was taught and presented. Bishop Gsell, for instance, wrote (1956:61): ' ...I am certain that it would be better for them (Aborigines) to remain faithful to their ancestral faith than to exchange it for that Christianity [he was referring to some Europeans who professed to be Christians]. Sincere paganism is better then false Christianity'. Another pioneer missionary, the Rev. T.T. Webb (1938:54-5), who served in Arnhem Land, warned missionaries 'to distinguish between what is essentially part of the Christian revelation ...and what belongs merely to our own cultural forms'.

Social Welfare

In spite of the conceptual contrast between the 'spiritual' and the 'material' ('soul' and 'body') in the realm of practical affairs the one was inexorably linked to the other. There is no doubt that Christianity was the hand-maiden of Europeanization; in the circumstances it could hardly have been otherwise. The establishment of a mission station within what usually became an Aboriginal community meant that it was structurally part of that community: sustained interaction was taking place between mission staff and Aborigines. That was facilitated when (if) missionaries came to know something about the local language; but even when interaction and communication were at a minimum, their very presence in the area and their way of life, complete with tangible and intangible trappings of the society from which they were drawn, could be likened to the planting of a living 'slice' of Europeanization among the local inhabitants. All of this immediately highlighted differences between Aborigines and missionaries, as well as a multitude of other problems. Initially, it was often no more than 'clothing the naked' and well-meaning attempts to rectify conditions that missionaries regarded as being 'social ills' when measured against European standards. Most missionaries, except for some Fijians along the northern coast, were of European descent and represented some facets of European (or European-Australian) culture.

A prerequisite to Christian conversion was changing the prevailing life-style of the people with whom missionaries came in contact. As far as they were concerned, traditional marriage was marred by polygyny, infant betrothal and old men marrying young girls or young women. Some missionaries — for example, on the Methodist stations in Arnhem Land — took a more realistic view of polygyny and did not insist on a man's discarding all but one wife before he could hope to be accepted into the church. Nevertheless, in most cases monogamy was a strict condition of church membership. At Bathurst Island in 1940-50, that was the basis of the dichotomy between the Pagans and others (the Christians). Infant betrothal in particular, but also betrothal arrangements in general, seem to have raised the ire of many missionaries. They condemned what was then current practice, especially where there was an age-disparity between the pair concerned: girls, they insisted, should mate with youths of their own peer group, there should be personal choice of a spouse, and arranged marriages were unnatural. Opposition to the 'promise system',

as it was called, was a source of considerable worry within various Aboriginal communities. Moreover, it continued to be so until quite recently in north-eastern Arnhem Land. And in western Arnhem Land, an Aboriginal commentary from Oenpelli mentioning this subject made the point that some older men were persuaded (if not forced) to relinquish claims to their promised wives (see C. and R. Berndt 1951:29).

One interesting feature was, and to some extent still is, what we could call mission views on the status of Aboriginal women. They were regarded by missionaries and by most members of the wider Australian society as being subordinate to their menfolk (see C. Berndt 1981:156), and were generally believed to be ill-treated. An extreme view of a few years ago appeared in a pamphlet issued by the Aborigines' Friends' Association (1938:10): 'In the wild camps of the Petermanns and Musgraves, and other haunts, the women are crudely deflowered, beaten and terrorized, lent to strangers and enslaved in scores of unseemly ways. Their men are circumcised and subincised; old men are, contrary to nature, mated to young women, all of which factors enter into this question of racial decline'. This opinion was, of course, quite contrary to all reliable anthropological information. However, the general flavour of it seems to have captured the imagination of missionaries who set their sights on transforming this believed-in situation. In a sense, although they were misguided, in this respect missionaries were concerned about raising the status of women long before there was an awareness of this issue (in different terms) in their own society. There was, and probably still is, much more concentration on Aboriginal women and girls than on men and boys; and much more on young men than on old men. The almost universal mission use of female domestic help was one manifestation of this. Consequently, women were exposed more directly to European ways (and to the pressures of Christianity) than men were, and more consistently so. On the Catholic missions, it was the girls who were more 'religiously' placed in the convents and zealously guarded, and for whom marriages were arranged to young men of their own age-group. The future of the people, it was said, rested on women, more than on men. In traditional Aboriginal areas, interference with customary marriage and betrothal alignments, with many Christian marriages going contrary to prescribed local conventions, caused social upset and often outbreaks of fighting. Occasionally girls, locked at nights in their dormitories, were either abducted by aggrieved betrothed husbands, or themselves managed to run away.

The focus of mission interest has invariably, as we have said, been directed at the young rather than the old, who were often regarded as being 'steeped in superstition'. A dormitory system was almost universally in use until recent years (except, for instance, among the Methodists, whose policy was to 'work through the family'), and should be seen in relation to some form of teaching. Missions established schools long before any State educational authority considered it worth their while to do so. In fact, for the greater part of the history of missionization in Australia, Aboriginal education has been in mission hands: and in many cases that influence continues. However, as one missionary (Bennett 1935:42) wrote of the Mt. Margaret (Western Australia) school, it 'is as yet more of a pious aspiration than an achievement, but the children, by their diligence and keenness, are showing results far in advance of anything that could reasonably be looked for from short-term classes conducted by an amateur'. Such a statement could be replicated for many mission schools. Most of them up to the mid-1950s taught solely in English, and concentrated on Christian

religious and elementary secular subjects, with little or no attention being paid to the life of the children themselves. Schenk's *Educability* was, in the late 1930s, a landmark at a time when it was generally accepted that Aborigines did not or could not respond to formal education. Ernabella Presbyterian mission also provided an interesting experiment, but one that was short-lived. It was consciously liberal and did not overtly oppose traditional culture. In 1944, its special school (under the control of the South Australian Education Department) was attended by children who were not obliged to wear European clothing, were taught in their own language, and were exposed to a wide range of European music as well as formal subjects. English was introduced later because of a public outcry that the children were being segregated and discriminated against in not having access to the resources of the wider society (See R. and C. Berndt 1951:191-3).

Such examples, however, were a far cry from more recently re-organized mission schools, particularly where bilingual teaching and literacy programs have been introduced. The main criticism of early Aboriginal schooling was that it did not prepare children for the inevitably changing circumstances of their people, and ignored their traditional heritage. Many of the teachers were inadequately trained, and not in a position to cope with such cross-cultural situations.

From firsthand accounts, there would seem to have been little direct opposition on the part of Aboriginal parents to their children entering such schools: parents often saw economic advantages in their doing so. On the other hand, where schooling and the dormitory system separated them from their children, difficulties could arise. Further, close association with their teachers, and the nature of their schooling, lured children away from the beliefs, values and ideas of their parents and encouraged resistance to traditional authority, especially in the sphere of initiation, betrothal and so on. Evading initiation meant that barriers were erected against their acceptance into religious rituals and the traditional learning processes that were involved in these. This had far-reaching implications. The gap between generations, with older people antagonized by the behaviour of the young, made many of them refuse to pass on the wealth of information they possessed. And that meant a break with crucial aspects of traditional living.

The issue of health was, of course, of major concern to all missionaries. Equally important was the employment of Aborigines who were ill-prepared to enter the external workforce. It was apposite that Webb called his little book (1938) *Spears to Spades*. As missions expanded their activities, many of these stations became fairly large settlements. More jobs were available to local Aborigines who, consequently, received recompense — initially in commodities and food, later in wages that could be spent at a mission store. As a sedentary existence became a matter of habit (and of necessity), food-collecting in the surrounding bush became less regular and in some cases was relegated to being a holiday affair or a Saturday excursion, or a pleasant way of spending a Sunday afternoon. In northern coastal regions, where the people had a partially indigenous marine economy, the situation did not appreciably change and was integrated with the introduced one. Changes in diet were apparent, and often had deleterious effects on the people. Increasingly, in general terms, local residents became economically dependent on the mission, and on external resources rather than on local ones. This, in turn, was linked structurally with the Church and with what it symbolized.

From the commencement of mission endeavour, missionaries, while reacting against various aspects of traditional Aboriginal life, were not hesitant about capitalizing on local products. Taplin, for instance, in the 1860s encouraged Point McLeay women to sell their baskets and mats to local European settlers. On the north coast, at a much later date, women on the Methodist stations developed, with the help of missionaries, an industry of basket- and mat-making that had its commercial outlets in the eastern and southern capitals. Before the advent of commercial bark painting in the same areas, in the early 1950s, traditional ritual items and other indigenous objects were being brought into the Methodist Darwin office and sold to museums and collectors. Nearly every mission was able to develop an external market for locally made objects. At Ooldea in 1941 it was 'witch doctors' magic sticks', pointing bones, 'murderers' feather-foot sandals', sacred boards and carved wooden creatures. At Goulburn Island, it was buffalo horn and tortoise-shell objects and small stuffed crocodiles. Economic independence was the aim.

However, while the network of mission influence appeared superficially to be 'complete' it was, in fact, far from that. We mention only three pressures that were in themselves mission-generated. Firstly, there were insufficient opportunities for internal employment as a mission population grew. Therefore some Aborigines, of necessity, had to seek employment outside, in the wider society. Although there were many exceptions, on the whole mission-trained Aborigines were ill-equipped to cope with the external tasks that were available to them. Secondly, government subsidies, the distribution of rations (and, later, Social Welfare benefits), while requiring accountability on the part of the missions, also divided authority and responsibility, and provided opportunities for external inspection and critical assessment. By the 1950s, state and federal instrumentalities were taking a closer look at missions. Thirdly, mission teaching, not least within a socio-politico-evangelical context, had instilled ideas that were antithetical to Aborigines who still adhered to their traditional background. That position has only partially been redressed through the upsurge of interest in recent years by Aborigines and Europeans in 'the Aboriginal heritage'. What is incorporated in that span of interest is highly selective, and does not necessarily bear a close similarity to traditional backgrounds. Nevertheless, new ideas in the young have not only turned inward to criticism of the mission, its organization and its aims, but have provided an impetus for them to seek their fortunes in the other side of European living, to experience for themselves what they had been told or heard about. These three features, more than anything else, have opened the missions' doors; and, what is significant, this was a two-way process that could not be stemmed. The writing was, of course, on the wall long before that time — for those able and willing to read it.

The overview we have given is by no means complete. So much more could be said about almost every aspect we have mentioned. However, from what we *have* said, some general comments can be made. Before we do so, a few additional points need to be raised. It should be emphasized that we are writing primarily from an anthropological perspective, taking into account what we have personally seen of missionization and its impact on Aborigines at the receiving end. Over the years we have, in the course of our field research met many missionaries, some of whom we have liked, some not. Inevitably, to repeat, our attitudes have been coloured by our own experiences. While we have no criticism of Christianity *per se*, mainly because of its concern for humanity and the contributions it has made to European civilization,

we do criticize the ways in which many missionaries have gone about their tasks of evangelization. These have often been insensitive, and undertaken with little consideration of the Aboriginal societies and cultures and the implications for the people themselves. The results of missionization have been far-reaching.

Given the prevailing social conditions, and the nature of European attitudes toward Aborigines in the wider context of Australian living, from first European settlement until World War II and in some cases beyond, it would have been a sorry state of affairs for Aborigines if missionaries had not been present, or mission stations not been established. There is no question in our minds but that missionaries were an ameliorative influence during the long years of traumatic contact between Aborigines and non-Aborigines. Protection over those years was a necessary circumstance, and paternalism (or maternalism) cannot fairly, over that time, be regarded as a dirty word. Having said that, we should say also that many missionaries undoubtedly abused their position. They did not always demonstrate that essence of humility which was/is a basic tenet of the Christian faith. They assumed almost total control over Aborigines within their spheres of contact, providing themselves with a mantle of authority that should have had no place in their activities. Protectionalism went too far in the majority of cases; consultation with Aborigines was at a minimum. What we often heard from missionaries, when we raised the issue of personal and social responsibility on the part of Aborigines, was that Aborigines were not yet ready for it: and the implication was that they never would be. Time has caught up with them in that respect.

Without being overtly aware of what they were doing, missionaries were avowedly assimilationists. Seeking conversion in Christian terms meant that this was dependent on 'giving up the old ways', adopting a manner of living that replicated or resembled one of European style. Christianity was and is so irrevocably interwoven with Europeanization that no other course was possible. Separation of the 'soul' from the 'body' was wellnigh impossible, except conceptually, and not in practice. From an Aboriginal viewpoint, Christianity was/is essentially mundane, emphasizing materialistic trappings, often quite unintentionally, at the expense of the spiritual. On the other hand, Aboriginal traditional religion was both spiritual and utilitarian, the one aspect being complementary to the other. Missionaries did not capitalize on this combination in the past, and have only recently begun to do so.

Without question, mission bodies and missionaries were concerned with both the 'body' and the 'soul'. Their answer to the first was to re-model the society and culture of the people with whom they worked. Their answer to the second was to assume that the Aboriginal 'soul' was 'evil', or at least misguided, and that it had to be replaced or modified by something that was categorized as 'good' in their terms. Of course the situation was not as simplistic as that. The fact that missionaries on the whole were ostensibly humane, made them obliged to take into account issues of social welfare. Without that emphasis, it is doubtful whether they could have carried out any form of evangelization.

Between the 'body' and the 'soul' was something else — the 'mind'. We mean by this, a human being's receptivity to 'ideas'. In our view, it is in the dimension of ideas that the main contribution of missionary endeavour rests. Christianity presented to Aborigines a range of propositions that were not necessarily articulated in the traditional frame of Aboriginal thinking: or, if they were, it provided an opportunity for re-triggering them. This process was reinforced through the schools — even

though these left much to be desired — and across the pulpit. They provided the possibility of a new momentum that was not always recognized by Aborigines or by missionaries. Nevertheless, those ideas that were accepted gave Aborigines an extra 'skin' to protect themselves against the inroads of impersonal and unsympathetic alien contacts.

Mission activity today has changed radically from what it was in earlier periods, and indeed what it was until World War II. Much more consideration is placed on the surviving background of traditional Aboriginal culture, along with more interest in understanding Aboriginal religion, and recognizing it as a significant way of looking at people in nature, both physically and spiritually. However, considerable damage was done in the past by missionaries who did not acknowledge Aboriginal religion *as* a religion and did their best to dismantle and destroy it. What they were doing was to destroy the essence of Aboriginal religiosity. Once that was damaged it was not easy, and in many cases impossible, to graft on, or substitute, another form of religion. That state of affairs encouraged secularization, social and personal expediency, and materialism.

The withdrawal of mission control in most areas, and the development of Aboriginal councils to administer Aboriginal communities, along with lip-service being paid to self-determination, have by no means eradicated evangelization of the more formal kind. The story does not terminate there — although it does for us. 'New' evangelists today are not necessarily categorized as missionaries, but often come in the guise of advisers and government officials, among many others. They are just as intent on changing what remains of Aboriginal society and culture. Whether that is a good thing or a bad thing is another matter.

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