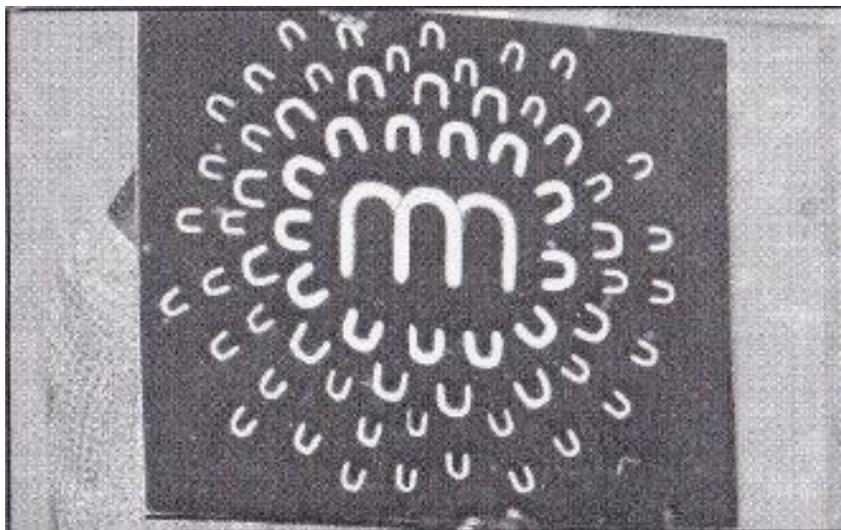


**Making their gospel known: the work and legacy of the
Aboriginal Inland Mission 1905-1938**



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¹ Front cover image from *The AIM*, September 1990, p4. Tennant Creek AIM group, 'Richard Davies... Richard Driver, David Duggie, Billy Spratt, Tasman Casson and Sunny Curtis... explained how they used pictures with traditional Aboriginal symbols to present Christian teaching'. This shows how far the AIM has come in terms of its missionary style.

Making their gospel known: the work and legacy of the Aboriginal Inland Mission 1905-1938

Introduction

‘There is not a static sameness either in the Bible or in our cultures. There is truth in all... There is both unity and diversity. My way is not superior to your way. Yet we in the Aboriginal churches are often under pressure from the white church to conform’.²

These are the words of Cecil Grant, an Aboriginal pastor first converted to Christianity by the Aboriginal Inland Mission. His words speak of the reciprocity of human relationships, but point to the ways these relationships have been limited by prejudice and power. Christianity has been a transformative tool for the oppressed throughout history, but also a tool wielded by the oppressor. In missionary activities, as well as in society more broadly, Christians of all different denominations have contributed to the disadvantages suffered by the first Australians. In the words of respected Aboriginal Christian scholar Anne Pattel-Gray, for white Christians during the traumatic era of dispossession and assimilation policies it was often the case that, ‘shameful silence or active participation was... the order of the day’.³

The early history of the Aboriginal Inland Mission (AIM), between its foundation in 1905 and the creation of its first Indigenous training college by 1938, is a story of contrast and shades of grey. It is a story of dedicated missionaries who cared deeply about spreading a Christian message, and who gave their time, money, and resources with a generous spirit.

² Cecil Grant as quoted in Anne Pattel-Gray and John Brown, eds., *Indigenous Australians: A Dialogue About the Word Becoming Flesh in Aboriginal Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), p. 30.

³ Anne Pattel-Gray, *Through Aboriginal Eyes: The Cry from the Wilderness* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), p. 87.

However, it is also a story marked by their inability to be receptive to the culture and voices of Indigenous people. There were blessings in the way the AIM functioned including their respect for Aboriginal people as fellow human beings, their interest in tackling educational neglect, and the optimistic aspects of their worship and doctrine. However, this period was circumscribed by the blindness of missionaries to their own bias and participation in the attempts to erase Aboriginal culture. A lack of reciprocity in terms of spirituality and education was compounded by the power imbalance that allowed the AIM to intervene in Aboriginal life. While AIM missionaries stood up to incidents of racism in broader society, subtle forms of racism and paternalism existed both in AIM theology, and in their operations.

The word 'mission' is a problematic one in Aboriginal history. It comes with a smorgasbord of connotations that are often hurtful and difficult. At the same time, missionary history incorporates a spectrum of vastly different individual experiences. To characterise all missionaries in black and white terms, is neither responsible nor fair. Such characterisation also does a disservice to Aboriginal people, by assuming that they only played a passive role in the spread of Christianity. This thesis will explore the mixture of ideas that inspired the AIM, as well as the missionaries who joined it. Through a case study of the AIM in community at Singleton, this thesis will demonstrate that missionaries occupied an ambiguous position in the promotion of Aboriginal welfare. It will also look at the ways in which Aboriginal people used the AIM for different purposes, including as a network tool to improve their political or personal agency. The history of AIM is a Janus faced history of gifts and curses, evading simple praise or condemnation. For while the AIM was circumscribed by its context, it nevertheless provided a space for the emergence of Indigenous leadership and theology, the legacy of which survives today through genealogical and oral inheritance.

Literature Review

Missionaries occupy an important place in Australian history. However, due to the tensions that exist around their role in Aboriginal dispossession, complex research has often been neglected. In particular, the history of evangelical missionaries, and the evangelical roots of Indigenous Christianity, has been underwritten. Partly this is a consequence of the notable absence of Aboriginal voices within the contemporary historical record, making it difficult to make assertions, but also by default creating the idea that nothing was happening. This thesis attempts to reclaim some of this missing history by critiquing the work of the Aboriginal Inland Mission, focussing in particular on a localised early history of its operations in Singleton, its ideological and theological foundations, and the question of whether it fostered Indigenous leadership and networking. It will also examine the socio-political landscape, and investigate whether AIM missionaries were beneficial or detrimental to the interests of Aboriginal people in Australian society. It attempts to look at the AIM in an integrated way, bringing together the various histories of government policy, Australian church activity, Aboriginal leadership, and Indigenous Christianity. It is hoped that this work will add to the body of knowledge about each, while also examining the ways in which they intersect.

It is necessary to read between the lines of the AIM's publications, in order to ascertain their role in the everyday lives of Aboriginal people. On the whole, this role was mixed. The AIM's leading missionary, Retta Long's three short publications *Providential Channels*, *In The Way of His Steps* and *Aboriginaldom*, indicate that she cared deeply for the

Aboriginal people with whom she worked.⁴ Yet both within her words and in AIM publications as a whole, Aboriginal people were characterised in patronising and infantilised language.⁵ These two elements show the overarching tension between the AIM's basic respect for Aboriginal people, and their desire to influence Aboriginal behaviour (often in subtly damaging ways).

The records and material of the AIM show an enthusiasm for evangelisation, and a generally positive outlook towards the future of Aboriginal people, although this was always mitigated with a pre-millennial fear about the necessity of saving souls.⁶ The AIM believed in and attempted to effect improvement in the lives of Aboriginal people. However, this was always figured in terms of a Christian, European ideal. The AIM was socially conservative, and did not offer political challenge to government policy. Correspondence between the AIM and the Aboriginal Protection Board (APB) reveals that the AIM's presence on reserves and mission stations was beneficial to the APB as they provided a last resort for matters of education and housing, allowing the APB to claim it was providing these in at least nominal terms.⁷ The AIM was keen to stay on good terms with them in order to maintain their

⁴ Retta Long, *Providential Channels* (Sydney: AIM, 1935); Retta Long, *In the Way of His Steps* (Lawson: Mission Publications Australia, 1936); Retta Long, *Australian Aboriginaldom* (Ryde: F S Pacey & Sons, 1950?).

⁵ Publications this thesis will refer to include "The AIM," (Enfield, NSW: The Mission, Feb 1967- July/Aug 1998). W Arnold. Long, *Bobbie Peters : A Chosen Vessel : A Story of a Deformed Half-Caste Aboriginal Native Worker, Who Was Made Meat for the Master's Use* (Melbourne: S. John Bacon, 1944). G. M. Higgins, *The Man from the Pines : A Brief Life Story of Pastor W. B. Naden, a Much-Loved Aboriginal Worker of the Aborigines Inland Mission of Australia* (Lawson, NSW: Mission Publications Australia, 1976). G. M. Higgins, *I'll Die at My Post: A Brief Life Story of Bert Draper, an Outstanding Aboriginal Christian* (Enfield: Mission Publications Australia, 1978).

⁶ 'Their day is quickly passing, Too soon it will be done, O tell them of the Saviour, Before the set of sun', Tasmanian Council Aboriginal Inland Mission, *AIM Hymn Book* (Lawson, NSW?: Mission Publications of Australia, 196-?), p. 24. 'God has paid the price to set us free from sin, but to make this freedom our own we must be converted', prepared by the staff Aboriginal Inland Mission of Australia, *What We Believe: Studies on the Main Teachings of the Bible* (Lawson, NSW: Mission Publications of Australia, 1980?), p. 54.

⁷ Australian Indigenous Ministries, "Australian Indigenous Ministries Records, 1903-1998," (Sydney: Mitchell Library, 1903-1998). Australian Indigenous Ministries, "Australian Indigenous Ministries - Further Records,

evangelical options. Occasionally, the views of the AIM missionaries, particularly their idea of a duty of care towards Aboriginal people, conflicted with the views of the APB. In general, however, the two seemed to promote the same protectionist rhetoric. For example, the AIM's anxiety to provide children with housing and education shored up assimilation and segregationist policy.

The AIM's participation in, or opposition to, the NSW and Queensland governments' various policies of segregation and assimilation can be found in the AIM's correspondence, as well as the Aboriginal Protection Board's reports.⁸ Save for Brett Vickers' biographical study of the missionaries in charge the AIM's Singleton Orphan home which operated between 1904-1915 under AIM control and then until 1923 under the APB, has not figured large in the history of Aboriginal child removal, perhaps because the Retta Dixon Home in Darwin, opened later, conducted more clearly controversial activity by the AIM.⁹ The Singleton home is interesting because it occupied the transitional period at the beginning of the APB's operations, and the changes in assimilation policy can be seen in the changes in the home itself.¹⁰ Heather Goodall and Ann Curthoys have provided useful critiques of other contemporary changes to Aboriginal policy, particularly in relation to land access, work, and other rights.¹¹

1904-1930," (Sydney: Mitchell Library, 1904-1930). Correspondence records the APB requesting mission buildings and assistance in the teaching of Aboriginal children.

⁸ "New South Wales: Protector's Board Reports," (Canberra: AIATSIS Library, 1907-1937).

⁹ Barbara Cummings, *Take This Child: From the Kahlin Compound to the Retta Dixon Home* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1981).

¹⁰ Histories of child removal inform this thesis, including the very useful concise history in Peter Read, *The Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children in New South Wales, 1883-1960* (Sydney: Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, 1981).

¹¹ Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in NSW, 1770-1972* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2008). Ann Curthoys, "Good Christians and Useful Workers: Aborigines, Church and State in

Fiedler, Harris, Porter, Piggin, Cruickshank and Longworth have all written on the theological momentum behind faith missions in Australia, as well as globally.¹² They have identified the ways that faith missions differentiated themselves in missionary history by running on, as Porter put it, 'lean administrations' and living as much as possible in the same, often impoverished, conditions as the local people.¹³ Longworth discussed the ways that the AIM looked to the tradition of faith missions begun by Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission.¹⁴ At a time when many Australian women were going overseas to serve with the CIM, Retta Dixon, founder of the AIM, adopted the same philosophy to tackle the poverty facing people in her own country. The emphasis on personal relationships with communities, as well as the enthusiasm and willingness to live side by side with them, was characteristic of the AIM as a missionary agency, and followed in the faith mission model.

Another positive feature of the AIM, in the tradition of faith missions, was its feminine dynamism. In the early years of its work the AIM employed an overwhelming number of young people, particularly young women. Among this generation of young

NSW 1870-1883," in *What Rough Beast? The State and Social Order in Aboriginal History*, ed. Sydney Labour History Group (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1982), pp. 33-34.

¹² Klaus Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions: From Hudson Taylor to Present Day Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1994). Andrew Porter, "Missions and Empire, C. 1873-1914," in *World Christianities: C. 1815-1944*, ed. Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley, *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Joanna Cruickshank, "Race, History and the Australian Faith Missions," *Itinerario* 34, no. 3 (2010). Alison Longworth, "'Upon Past Ebenezers We Built Our Jehovah-Jireh': The Vision of the Australian Aborigines' Mission and Its Heritage in the China Inland Mission," *Journal of Religious History* 31, no. 2 (June 2007). Stuart Piggin and Allan Davidson, "Christianity in Australasia and the Pacific," in *World Christianities: c. 1815-1944*, ed. Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley, *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Kevin Ward, "Christianity, Colonialism and Missions," in *World Christianities: C. 1914-2000*, ed. Hugh McLeod, *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Denominational history of the Baptist church in Australia was also seen as relevant, particularly to an understanding of Retta Dixon Long's background. See Roger G Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Philadelphia, Chicago and L.A.: The Judson Press, 1950). Philip J Hughes, *The Baptists in Australia* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1996).

¹³ Porter, "Missions and Empire, C. 1873-1914," p. 561.

¹⁴ Longworth, "'Upon Past Ebenezers We Built Our Jehovah-Jireh': The Vision of the Australian Aborigines' Mission and Its Heritage in the China Inland Mission."

Australian evangelicals, many were connected to the rising popularity of non-Conformist congregations, and groups like the Christian Endeavour Society. Writings by CE founder Francis E Clark reveal a mobile and passionate new evangelistic workforce, dominated by women, largely unrecognised by traditional denominations.¹⁵ Alison Longworth, Rhonda Semple, and Anne O'Brien have all observed that there was a large increase of women on the missionary field during the early twentieth century, particularly through the rise of faith missions.¹⁶ They note that missionary activity was equated, along with Sunday School leadership and pastoral care, as an allowable form of work in the feminine sphere. In their biographies of missionaries Jennie Smith and Elizabeth McKenzie Hatton, Christine Brett Vickers and John Maynard emphasise that strong women were drawn to the AIM, seeing it as a chance to use their gifts for the benefit of others.¹⁷ Local histories of La Perouse and Singleton show that these female missionaries formed bonds with Aboriginal people, and that the high proportion of women continued when the Aboriginal ministry was founded.¹⁸

¹⁵ Francis E Clark, "The Christian Endeavour Society: What It Is! How It Works!." (Melbourne: National Christian Endeavour Union of Australia and New Zealand, 1936), <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.aus-vn4835329>>., as accessed 15/09/2011. Francis E Clark, *Christian Endeavour in All Lands: A Record of Twenty Five Years of Progress* (Boston, Mass.: The United Society of Christian Endeavour, 1906).

¹⁶ Anne O'Brien, *Gods Willing Workers: Women and Religion in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2005). Longworth, "'Upon Past Ebenezers We Built Our Jehovah-Jireh": The Vision of the Australian Aborigines' Mission and Its Heritage in the China Inland Mission.", 2007. Rhonda Anne Semple, *Missionary Women: Gender, Professionalism and the Victorian Idea of Christian Mission* (Woodbridge, UK & Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell Press, 2003), p. 3.

¹⁷ John Maynard, "'Light in the Darkness": Elizabeth Mckenzie Hatton," in *Uncommon Ground: White Women in Aboriginal History*, ed. Anna Cole, Victoria Haskins, and Fiona Paisley (Canberra Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005). Christine Brett Vickers, "'Mother of the Home": Jennie Parsons Smith," in *Uncommon Ground: White Women in Australian History*, ed. Victoria Haskins, Anna Cole, and Fiona Paisley (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005).

¹⁸ Local histories including Greg Blyton, Deidre Heitmyer, and John Maynard, eds., *Wannin Thanbarran: A History of Aboriginal and European Contact in Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter Valley* (Newcastle: U Mulliko Centre for Indigenous Higher Education, University of Sydney, Project of Muswellbrook Shire Council Aboriginal Reconciliation Committee, 2004). Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, ed. *La Perouse: The Place, the People, and the Sea, a Collection of Writing by Members of the Aboriginal Community* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1988). Jack Brook, *Shut out from the World: The Hawkesbury Aborigines Reserve and Mission, 1889-1946* (Berowra Heights: Deerubbin Press, 1994). Heather Goodall and Alison Cadzow, *Rivers and Resilience: Aboriginal People on Sydney's St Georges River* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2009).

The AIM also fits into a broader evangelical desire to transform and Christianise society. Much of the insight into the history of evangelical Christianity in Australia comes from Piggin and Bebbington, who have both written on the impacts of revivalism and Protestant reformism.¹⁹ What emerges from their writing is that too often the religious element of mission work can be lost in analysing the spread of European colonisation. Anthropological studies by Djenidi and Bell that have touched on Australian faith missions, claim that missionary intervention had ambiguous impacts, including creating a rupture in some kinship relationships, as well as encouraging the abandonment of traditional beliefs and culture.²⁰ Similarly, while missionaries were often appreciated for their friendship and compassion, Jack Miller has pointed out that the demands of conversion, in particular the need to tithe a tenth of all income, provided more of an obstacle than a blessing in the lives of Aboriginal people.²¹ Local histories of La Perouse and Singleton show the way that missionaries added to the wider societal aim to ‘civilise’ Aboriginal people.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to critique the AIM too harshly, considering the attitudes in wider white society at the time. As Harris contends in his seminal study of missions in Australia, those who criticise the non-denominational missions should ask what other

¹⁹ David Bebbington, "The Growth of Voluntary Religion," in *World Christianities: C. 1815-1944*, ed. Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley, *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (Cambridge, UK

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Stuart Piggin, *Evangelical Christianity in Australia: Spirit, Word, and World* (Melbourne & New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

²⁰ Valerie Djenidi, "State and Church Involvement in Aboriginal Reserves, Missions and Stations in NSW, 1900-1975 and a Translation into French of Custodians of the Soil" (University of Newcastle, 2009). James Harle Bell, "La Perouse Aborigines: A Study of Their Group Life and Assimilation into Modern Australian Society." (University of Sydney, 1960).

²¹ Jack Miller, *Koori, a Will to Win : The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia* (London, Melbourne & Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1985).

denominations or secular organisations did to assist Aboriginal people at the same historical moment.²²

The AIM fits into a developing history of Indigenous Christianity. The AIM's Aboriginal missionaries were a vital part of the mission from its early history onwards, as cemented by the establishment of a Bible College in 1938. Indeed, its history seems to challenge the notion that 'until the 1960s there were very few Aboriginal Christian converts'.²³ Anne Pattel-Gray argues that some Aboriginal people absorbed conservative Christianity uncritically, however she also notes that evangelical missions were among the first to empower Aboriginal leaders.²⁴ This made the AIM radical for its time, when Indigenous leadership was not permitted in other areas of society.

The historiography of missions has tended to sideline or undermine the spiritual element that has seen a continued tradition of Aboriginal Christianity up to the present day. Those leaders who were first empowered through the AIM's college when it opened to students in 1938 began a lineage of Indigenous Christianity. There is a visible absence of Aboriginal people in written records of these earlier years, but continued familial links, as well as conversation, and speeches like that given by Pastor Ray Minnecon, bear witness to

²² John. Harris, *One Blood : 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity : A Story of Hope* (Sutherland, NSW: Albatross Books, 1990), p. 554.

²³ Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians: Black Responses to White Dominance, 1788-2001* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2001), p. 119. Broome makes a number of excellent points about the role of missionaries, however I don't agree with this particular argument.

²⁴ Pattel-Gray, *Through Aboriginal Eyes: The Cry from the Wilderness*. Anne Pattel-Gray, "Australian Indigenous Religions: Aboriginal Christianity," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion* (USA: Macmillan Reference, 2004). Pattel-Gray and Brown, eds., *Indigenous Australians: A Dialogue About the Word Becoming Flesh in Aboriginal Churches*.

the influence of these earlier Aboriginal leaders.²⁵ For these Aboriginal people, who written history has tended to neglect, Christianity was a means of liberation rather than oppression, and the AIM was the first site of a genealogy of dissent.

The cross-section of historical literature makes clear that the AIM had both conservative and radical elements. This tension is always present in the very nature of evangelism and even more so when evangelism becomes tied up with colonisation. Ultimately, the AIM tried more than most contemporary white agencies and individuals to benefit Aboriginal people. However, they did so without full attentiveness, and were caught up in larger movements of prejudice and dispossession.

²⁵ Pattel-Gray and Brown, eds., *Indigenous Australians: A Dialogue About the Word Becoming Flesh in Aboriginal Churches*. Rev Ray Minnecon, 'The Indigenous Church: Towards A Better Future', Inaugural Lecture to Honour the Work of Pastor Cecil Grant, OAM, Wongamar, at the Centre for Christianity and Culture, Canberra, April 18th 2008, pp2-4.

CHAPTER ONE: ‘Our God is Able’, the ethos and background of the Aboriginal Inland Mission.

Founded in 1905 the Aboriginal Inland Mission (AIM), an evangelical, faith mission, impacted the lives of many Aboriginal people and communities. The first stage of its development, under its founding director Retta Long (nee Dixon) coincided with the creation of the Aboriginal Protection Board in NSW, and the introduction of a new type of Christian mission. After the failure of a number of missions in the mid-nineteenth century, as well as the transferral of state power from Britain, the pre-War period saw the re-distribution of land and introduction of a new generation of missionaries.²⁶ AIM missionaries visited and lived with Aboriginal people on the newly created ‘reserves’ and ‘mission stations’, often in the same conditions of poverty. The main focus for the AIM was on conversion and church building, in accordance with a religious and missionary tradition that was generally conservative.

A brief history of AIM, 1905-1938 -

The Aboriginal Inland Mission was officially launched on August 1, 1905, in Singleton. Its first Public Inaugural Meeting was held on September 11, 1905 in the Methodist Church.²⁷ On the 11 January, 1906, Retta Dixon married Leonard W. Long.²⁸ The two had originally met as fellow Christian Endeavourers on the committee of the La Perouse

²⁶ For more on this see Curthoys, "Good Christians and Useful Workers: Aborigines, Church and State in NSW 1870-1883."

²⁷ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p10 & p12.

²⁸ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p13. Retta Dixon Long recorded that the service was taken by Dr Porter, who had also been the person to baptize her and that there were many Aboriginal people in attendance.

Mission where Retta Dixon first began her time as a missionary.²⁹ Together, they became co-directors of their new venture, the AIM, up until Leonard Long's death in 1928.³⁰

The AIM had a simple structure made up of an Advisory Committee that would collect and distribute mission support, as well as decide on the entrance of new missionaries, and a Missionary Council that was responsible for work in the field.³¹ In the early days of the mission the AIM concentrated on evangelising to the APB reserves at St Clair and Karuah. By the end of its first year the AIM was still relatively small, with only ten missionary agents, including three 'native workers'.³² 'Native' or 'Indigenous workers' were classed by the AIM in four different offices: pastors, missionaries, local assistants and deacons and deaconesses.³³

The AIM featured its 'native workers' conspicuously in published material, with Retta Long proudly claiming that, within 9 months of the AIM commencing operations, four converts from the community at Karuah had come to offer their services, and that three single men were chosen to go out as mission workers and build a mission house at St Clair.³⁴ Among them was Alec Russell, who according to Retta Long, was converted by the AIM at the age of 15 years and 11 months, and continued as a Native Worker for nine years.³⁵ This

²⁹Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 8. Heather Radi, "Long, Margaret Jane (Retta) (1878–1956)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*(2000), <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/long-margaret-jane-retta-10857/text19271>>. As accessed 15 Sept 2011.

³⁰ Radi, "Long, Margaret Jane (Retta) (1878–1956)." <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/long-margaret-jane-retta-10857/text19271>>.

³¹ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 10.

³² Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 14..

³³ Aborigines Inland Mission of Australia, *Constitution of the Aborigines' Inland Mission of Australia : With Its Principles, Practice and by-Laws*. (Sydney: The Mission, 1935), p13..

³⁴ Long, *Providential Channels*, p. 37.

³⁵ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 17.

balance of Aboriginal participants in the evangelisation structure of the mission would continue to be a feature of the AIM. In 1924 the AIM introduced a 'native ministry'.³⁶ By 1935, the AIM claimed to have fifty missionaries, twenty associates (generally those who did not directly evangelise but contributed to field work in some way), and thirty-six 'native workers'.³⁷ In no capacity were 'native workers' involved in the organisational activities of the AIM, but it is nevertheless important to note that the AIM sought and, at least on a localised level, encouraged Indigenous leadership.

In the first ten years of the AIM's history, work was mainly concentrated on the NSW reserves. The centres included Karuah, Walcha, Brungle, Cummeragunga, Yass, Moonah Cullah, Gulargambone, Terry Hie Hie, St Clair, Redbournebury, Singleton and the Singleton 'Orphan Home'.³⁸ The 'Orphan Home' was opened on August 14, 1907, with ownership transferred to the APB in 1918. It eventually closed in 1923.³⁹ The home was the sole institution run by the AIM during the pre-War period, when they professed to have little interest in 'industrial' mission work.⁴⁰ The AIM judged its progress by the numbers of conversions, locations and workers it had accumulated.

From 1909 onwards AIM were granted permission by the Queensland Government to carry out missionary work in Queensland, beginning in 1911 with three missionaries going to

³⁶ Harry Ashmore, Fred Barber, Eddie Atkinson, Lily Kina, Mary Duncan, Tottie Lacey and Charlie Simeon claimed as some of the first Indigenous pastors of the AIM. Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 30.

³⁷ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 51.

³⁸ Long, *Providential Channels*, p. 57.

³⁹ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 18. Brett Vickers, "'Mother of the Home': Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 45..

⁴⁰ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 13.

Herberton.⁴¹ Retta Long claimed that in AIM's 30-year history up to 1935, there were 11,000 Aboriginal people under its 'spiritual care', 35 centres (presumably those with established churches or permanent missionaries), 100 outposts and 106 'agents at work'.⁴² As Harris has noted, in the middle of the twentieth century, the evangelical AIM and United Aborigines Mission (UAM) made up 'nearly half the missionaries of all denominations in the whole of Aboriginal Australia and ninety per cent of those working in settled areas'.⁴³ The AIM certainly attempted to reach as many places and people as possible. Following a survey trip by AIM missionary G. W. Taylor, a centre was established in the Northern Territory.⁴⁴ In 1937, the AIM set up a Bible Training College at Pindimar (Port Stephens).⁴⁵ This marked the broad reach that the AIM had achieved over the pre-War period, and its success in converting a number of Aboriginal people.

AIM Missionaries – who were they?

The outstanding personality in the AIM was Retta Long, who together with her husband, and later three of her children (Egerton, Arnold and Grace) took primary responsibilities within the organisation.⁴⁶ Margaret Jane 'Retta' Dixon was born on 5 April

⁴¹ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 17.

⁴² Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 51.

⁴³ Harris, *One Blood : 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity : A Story of Hope*, p. 555.

⁴⁴ Cummings, *Take This Child: From the Kahlin Compound to the Retta Dixon Home*, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Radi, "Long, Margaret Jane (Retta) (1878–1956)." <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/long-margaret-jane-retta-10857/text19271>>. The premises was bought in 1937, but the first two students did not enter until 1938 which is why this has been chosen as the end date of this thesis – the time at which training officially commenced for Aboriginal people to become evangelisers of their own people.

⁴⁶ Retta and Leonard Long had three daughters and four sons. Egerton Long was Director of the Bible College from 1948 onwards, and in 1953 took the Directorship of the AIM upon the death of his mother. Grace assisted in many roles including the AIM's publications, the Singleton Home, and on various stations, before she married Arthur Collins, who was to become the General Secretary of the AIM. Arnold and Grace ran Mission Headquarters in 1937 while Retta was overseas. Radi, "Long, Margaret Jane (Retta) (1878–1956)." <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/long-margaret-jane-retta-10857/text19271>>. 'Head Office', *The Aim*, July 1978, p2.

1878 at Ultimo, Sydney, as the youngest of three children.⁴⁷ She became a baptised member of Petersham Baptist Church at the age of 13.⁴⁸ She claimed to have first accepted Christ after hearing the charismatic revivalist Rev W. G. Taylor at Chippendale Methodist Church, and by the age of ten had found her vocation, writing in her bible 'Retta Dixon- called to be a missionary'.⁴⁹ She first became involved in Aboriginal issues as a member of the missionary committee for Petersham Christian Endeavour Society.⁵⁰

Christian Endeavour societies from Woollahra Baptist church, and Retta Dixon's Petersham Baptist church, in association with H. E. Hockey began visiting the Aboriginal community at La Perouse in 1889.⁵¹ On the 22 August, 1895 they formally constituted the La Perouse Aboriginal mission.⁵² On September 17, 1897, at the fresh age of 19, Retta Dixon was elected as the resident missionary to La Perouse for a period of twelve months, and was installed on 19 November 1897.⁵³ Retta Dixon's work as a missionary at La Perouse in the

⁴⁷ Radi, "Long, Margaret Jane (Retta) (1878–1956)." <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/long-margaret-jane-retta-10857/text19271>>.

⁴⁸ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 8.

⁵⁰ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 8.

⁵¹ United Aborigines Mission, *Cut out without Hands or the Miracle of the United Aborigines* (Melbourne: United Aborigines' Mission, 195-?), p. 6. Harris, *One Blood : 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity : A Story of Hope*, p. 554.

⁵² Harris, *One Blood : 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity : A Story of Hope*, p. 554. A. E. Gerard, *United Aborigines' Mission (of Australia) Established 1894: An Outline of the History of the Mission Particularly in South Australia: Coming of Age of the United Aborigines Mission (S.A.) Incorporated* (Adelaide: The Mission, 194-?), p. 3.

⁵³ Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, ed. *La Perouse: The Place, the People, and the Sea, a Collection of Writing by Members of the Aboriginal Community*, p. 33. Retta was probably not the first choice for the committee. The Aborigines Protection Association had advised appointing Patty Swift, an Aboriginal member of the missionary band at Cummeragunja, as the first resident missionary at La Perouse. However after months of waiting for the Aborigines Protection Board to approve the building of the mission house, the La Perouse mission committee decided against Swift's appointment. Longworth has argued that among the factors influencing this decision was the APB's fear that establishing a resident missionary would encourage more

1890s introduced her to the pattern of mission that she would incorporate into AIM – the stationing of individual missionaries on Aboriginal reserves and the aim of church planting in those locations. Later, under the auspices of what was first named the NSW Aboriginal Mission (NSWAM), Retta Dixon began a travelling missionary lifestyle, visiting camps across the state, along with Aboriginal assistants.⁵⁴ The connections she made during this time allowed her to see a model of a networking mission that she could apply herself.

The first working missionaries of the AIM aside from Retta and Leonard Long were Mabel Timbury, Mr and Mrs Harrington, Margaret Bagnall and a Miss Ayers.⁵⁵ Miss Bagnall was the first missionary accepted to the AIM on October 21, 1906.⁵⁶ She later went on to teach at Moonacullah, but was replaced in 1911 when it was found that her enthusiasm was not accompanied by teaching experience or discipline.⁵⁷ Mabel Timbury was the first matron of the Singleton home, and her experience there likely contributed to her appointment at the Cootamundra home in 1913, from which she was transferred in 1915.⁵⁸ Both cases are revealing of the fact that missionaries often brought more passion than experience to the field. ‘Qualifications?’ answered an editorial in *Our Aim*, ‘A love for Christ, an implicit faith

Aboriginal people to make permanent residence in the city, and also that it did not want to foster Aboriginal leadership. Longworth, "'Upon Past Ebenezers We Built Our Jehovah-Jireh": The Vision of the Australian Aborigines' Mission and Its Heritage in the China Inland Mission," p.172.

⁵⁴ Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, ed. *La Perouse: The Place, the People, and the Sea, a Collection of Writing by Members of the Aboriginal Community*, p. 33.

⁵⁵ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 14.

⁵⁶ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 13.

⁵⁷ J. J. Fletcher, *Clean, Clad and Courteous*, (1989), p87, as quoted in Djenidi, "State and Church Involvement in Aboriginal Reserves, Missions and Stations in NSW, 1900-1975 and a Translation into French of Custodians of the Soil", p. 79.

⁵⁸ Don Elphick, *NSW Aboriginal Homes, Missions, Stations, Reserves, Schools and Staff Movements*, (2005), p. 3, p. 42, as quoted in Djenidi, "State and Church Involvement in Aboriginal Reserves, Missions and Stations in NSW, 1900-1975 and a Translation into French of Custodians of the Soil", p. 79.

in God, a deep sense of call, a trained mind and a disciplined life'.⁵⁹ The meaning of 'trained' was left open to interpretation, since a biblical qualification was not required. Candidates were required to pass a medical exam and to fill out an application form which asked basic questions about their faith convictions, views on doctrine, their profession and whether they had any dependents.⁶⁰ While health problems did bar some people from employment, the doctrinal and personal requirements were lax with the main emphasis being on ensuring the applicant's heart was in the right place. In 1922 it was recorded of a particular missionary that,

'Instances were cited of Miss D- [sic] inclination to take her own course instead of following instruction. On the other hand Mrs Long had observed and been much impressed with her easy way of approaching the dark people in conversation and her affectionate manner with the children.'⁶¹

Missionaries were often young, sometimes immigrants to Australia, and often had little or no prior knowledge of Aboriginal people besides that gained through word of mouth.⁶² Many of them spent a probationary period in the Singleton Home, where they could be kept under the supervision of more senior missionaries. One of them, Emma Jackson, wrote on her resignation in June 1913, that during her six years she had learned many things including, 'the knowledge gained of the natives themselves... I have found many of them to be possessed of splendid qualities which the majority do not ascribe to them'.⁶³

⁵⁹ *Our Aim*, 1967, 1, no 5, p1.

⁶⁰ Correspondence from and regarding AIM staff including applications for AIM missionary service, 'Aboriginal Indigenous Ministries Further Records, 1904-1930', Mitchell Library, MLMSS 7244. Views on doctrine asked candidates to elucidate the following points, 'Inspiration of the Scriptures... The Trinity... The Fall of Man and his need of regeneration... The Atonement... The resurrection of the Body... The Eternal Salvation of the Redeemed... [and] The Everlasting Punishment of the Lost'.

⁶¹ 14th September 1922 Meeting, Minute Book, AIM, (starting July 13th, 1922), 'Aboriginal Indigenous Ministries – Records, 1903-1998', Mitchell Library, MSS 7167, Box 1.

⁶² Brett Vickers, "'Mother of the Home": Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 39.

⁶³ As quoted in Brett Vickers, "'Mother of the Home": Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 39.

One couple, Jennie and George Smith, exhibited the passion for service common to evangelical missionaries. They travelled to Australia from England after being inspired during a lecture tour by Maloga missionary Daniel Matthews.⁶⁴ After a number of difficult years working together and separately on different mission stations for Matthews, they joined the AIM and were responsible for running the Singleton home from 1910 onwards.⁶⁵ Coming from a working class background, they valued hard graft and respectability, and it was this that they encouraged in the home's Aboriginal children. As Brett Vickers put it, '[they] had scant regard for Aboriginal culture, and indeed, much of the work done at the home appeared structured around the maintenance of an "English family home". But... [they] offered what they knew'.⁶⁶ The one thing common to the calling of AIM missionaries, was their belief that the circumstances for Aboriginal people could be improved, though their attempts at affecting this can be questioned.

Most AIM missionaries did not enter with a political agenda, rather they came from positions of Christian enthusiasm. One exception to this was Elizabeth McKenzie Hatton, who had worked for a number of years with Kanaka communities in Queensland and the Australian Aborigines Mission (AAM) before joining the AIM in order to facilitate her desire to open a women's home in Sydney.⁶⁷ She originally exhibited the common tendency of missionaries to infantilise Aboriginal people, saying of prospective girls for the home that,

⁶⁴ Brett Vickers, "'Mother of the Home": Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 33.

⁶⁵ Brett Vickers, "'Mother of the Home": Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 31, pp. 33-38.

⁶⁶ Brett Vickers, "'Mother of the Home": Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 32.

⁶⁷ Maynard, "'Light in the Darkness": Elizabeth Mckenzie Hatton," p. 6.

‘some of us cry out with longing and ask to be allowed to *save* them’.⁶⁸ However, as she became involved with the Aboriginal community in Sydney her understanding changed and she was drawn into a clash with the AIM, when she attempted to use the property as headquarters for the Australia Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA).⁶⁹ The AIM, which acted apolitically in no small part due to the fear of refusal of access to mission stations and reserves by the APB, severed all connections with the home and with McKenzie Hatton. She continued her affiliation with the AAPA and went on supporting and advocating for change to Aboriginal policy.⁷⁰ The AIM’s reluctance to encourage her reveals that it was more concerned with bringing personal Christian transformation than with attempting social change for the Aboriginal people to whom it ministered.



A majority of AIM missionary recruits were young, single women.⁷¹ Anne O’Brien found that between 1905 and 1968, the AIM had 243 women working on the field.⁷² This reflected the similarly female dominated staffing of the China Inland Mission, a model of ‘faith’ missions that had

⁶⁸ Maynard, ""Light in the Darkness": Elizabeth Mckenzie Hatton," p. 6.

⁶⁹ Maynard, ""Light in the Darkness": Elizabeth Mckenzie Hatton," p. 14.

⁷⁰ Maynard, ""Light in the Darkness": Elizabeth Mckenzie Hatton," p. 18.

⁷¹ Correspondence from and regarding AIM staff including applications for AIM missionary service, ‘Australian Indigenous Ministries - Further Records, 1904-1930’, Mitchell Library, MLMSS 7244.

⁷² O’Brien, *Gods Willing Workers: Women and Religion in Australia*, p. 125. Image from the 1927 AIM Missionary conference shows the high ratio of women compared to men in the field. From Australian Indigenous Ministries’ Collection, Mitchell Library, digital order number a731026. Also printed in *The AIM*, (September 1975), p. 4.

inspired Retta Long.⁷³ These women often cited Sunday School leadership as their main training for missionary work.⁷⁴ They were quite often working women, with professions ranging from dressmaker, to hosiery assistant, laundress or housekeeper.⁷⁵ They came with little money themselves, which made them sympathetic to Aboriginal circumstances, but also meant that they were likely to continue to live on a shoestring. The employment of single women became difficult when the APB decided in 1910 that they should not be permitted to live by themselves on reserves.⁷⁶ The AIM worked around the rule by having female missionaries live in pairs. Even so, the presence of single female missionaries at a time when women did not have the same freedom of movement or interaction as they do today caused controversy. For example, the manager at Bulgandramine wrote to the APB on June 28, 1932 that:

‘Since my arrival here a very awkward situation has arisen – in that the house is occupied by a Miss Byron of the AIM. As a result there is no separation or privacy whatever.... as the walls are built of hessian... In the event of Mrs Smith having to visit a doctor... it leaves Miss Byron and myself alone... and here again a very awkward situation arises from a moral standpoint as far as the natives are concerned who readily lend themselves to scandal’.⁷⁷

The growing incorporation, and leadership, of women in Christian mission activities was a feature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rhonda Semple, for instance, has recorded that, ‘during the period 1865-1910, the number of women on the

⁷³ As per the footnote in Brett Vickers, "'Mother of the Home": Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 49.

⁷⁴ Years of Sunday School experience cited for instance in the applications by Margaret Ackland (1907), Elsie Dietrich, Lavinia Burgess. Correspondence from and regarding AIM staff including applications for AIM missionary service, ‘Australian Indigenous Ministries - Further Records, 1904-1930’, Mitchell Library, MLMSS 7244.

⁷⁵ Correspondence from and regarding AIM staff including applications for AIM missionary service, ‘Australian Indigenous Ministries - Further Records, 1904-1930’, Mitchell Library, MLMSS 7244. Men were also from working class backgrounds with professions such as ‘wood machinist’ and ‘grocers assistant’.

⁷⁶ "Our Aborigines," *Sydney Morning Herald* 27 January 1912, p. 9. ‘Our Aborigines’.

⁷⁷ L. H. Smith, Letter to the APB, (June 28th, 1932), ‘Aboriginal Indigenous Ministries – records 1903-1998’, Mitchell Library, MSSML 7167, Box 7.

mission field grew exponentially and lay workers, both male and female, came to outnumber the ordained clerics who had dominated missions throughout the nineteenth century'.⁷⁸ The growth of evangelical missionary activity, linked to a non-conformist church tradition, meant that the AIM's lay missionaries were part of a global trend.

What was the doctrine of the AIM?

Religious ideas -

The idea that the AIM was 'non-denominational' was a short hand for its constituents, who on the whole came from non-conformist Congregational, Baptist, Presbyterian and Wesleyan (or Methodist) traditions.⁷⁹ The AIM was exclusively Protestant, generally conservative, and evangelical in nature. The founding religious tenets were common to non-conformist tradition: independence of individual churches, the primacy of the bible, and the stress on personal salvation.

Between 1773 and 1853 global non-conformist congregations had swelled in numbers.⁸⁰ These disparate congregations were linked by a common spirit of evangelism.⁸¹ They shared four main ideas in common: firstly a devotion, often literal, to the primacy of the Bible, secondly the Calvinistic stress on the crucified Christ as the 'fulcrum of their theology', thirdly the urgency for conversion, and lastly the importance of activism within the

⁷⁸ Semple, *Missionary Women: Gender, Professionalism and the Victorian Idea of Christian Mission*, p. 3. See also Ward, "Christianity, Colonialism and Missions," p. 77. 'By the early twentieth century, the majority of missionaries were women: wives, single women, or, in the case of Catholics, members of a wide variety of religious orders'.

⁷⁹ The exception to this largely being a few missionaries who came from a Church of England background.

⁸⁰ Bebbington, "The Growth of Voluntary Religion," p. 53.

⁸¹ Bebbington, "The Growth of Voluntary Religion," p. 57.

community.⁸² Non-conformist churches, particularly Congregationalists, Baptists and Methodists, often assigned teaching, pastoral visiting and missionary roles to women, which partly accounts for why they dominate the records of the AIM.⁸³

While individuals or churches differed on particular points of theology (such as for example, adult baptism), inter-denominationalism was possible, especially in the early days of the non-conformist churches in Australia. For example, it was not uncommon in a certain location for the first Baptists to worship with Congregationalists or Methodists.⁸⁴ The principles of non-conformist tradition are reflected in the AIM's mission to build: 'New Testament' Churches, with missionaries who had 'absolute faith in the Deity of the Three Persons of the Trinity, and the full inspiration and authority of the Old and New Testaments'.⁸⁵ AIM missionaries did not require theological certification of any kind beyond an oral interview that would determine if they had 'sound' doctrine. This reflected the non-conformist church model, which was democratic and anti-hierarchical, based instead on using the gifts of the willing; as one statement in the AIM's publication put it: 'We need no pope or priest to stand between us and Him. Old and young, white or Aboriginal, mature or inexperienced, we are all on the same spiritual level'.⁸⁶

⁸² Bebbington, "The Growth of Voluntary Religion," p. 57.

⁸³ David Bebbington, in Gilley and Stanley, p60.

⁸⁴ Philip J Hughes, 'The Baptists in Australia', (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1996), p12.

⁸⁵ Principles and Practice of the Field Council of the Aborigines Inland Mission of Australia, (Enfield: MPA, 1963), Article 7 (b), p7, and Retta Dixon Long, 'In the Way of His Steps', 1936, p10.

⁸⁶ *Our Aim*, November, 1989, p1.

The AIM was also inspired by the Methodist revivalism of the mid-19th century, which led to the conversion of a young Retta Dixon by William G. Taylor (founder of the Christian Methodist Mission). In NSW, Methodism grew from 10,008 people in 1861 to 23,682 by 1871.⁸⁷ The holiness movement, or 'Christian perfectionism', based on John Wesley's *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, inspired the preaching of revivalists who called for the experience of sanctification, or 'baptism in the Holy Ghost'.⁸⁸ Taylor's energetic passion for Christian revival (between 1879-82 he preached 463 sermons in the Taree region, conducted 350 class meetings, baptised 130 children and travelled nearly 15,000 miles) must have had an influence on Retta Long.⁸⁹ The *Christian Advocate* reported of the conversions that took place at Taylor's revival meetings in Sydney in 1864 that, 'Mr Taylor invited all those who were convinced of their sin and seeking pardon to assemble around the communion rail... Twenty-seven that evening gave their names in as having been made happy through faith in the saviour'.⁹⁰ Taylor also held open air meetings with one in Hyde Park reported to have drawn a crowd of 10,000.⁹¹ Calls to conversion and open air revival meetings were two features of the AIM's worship.

⁸⁷ Barry Chant, "The Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Origins of the Australian Pentecostal Movement," in *Reviving Australia: Essays in the History and Experience of Revival and Revivalism in Australian Christianity*, ed. Mark Hutchinson and Stuart Piggin (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1994), p. 97.

⁸⁸ Chant, "The Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Origins of the Australian Pentecostal Movement," p. 99.

⁸⁹ Chant, "The Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Origins of the Australian Pentecostal Movement," p. 101.

⁹⁰ *Christian Advocate* (August 13, 1864), as quoted in Robert Evans, *Early Evangelical Revivals in Australia: A Study of Surviving Published Materials About Evangelical Revivals in Australia up to 1880* (Adelaide: Openbook Publishers, 2000), p. 42.

⁹¹ *Christian Advocate* (September 8, 1864), as quoted in Evans, *Early Evangelical Revivals in Australia: A Study of Surviving Published Materials About Evangelical Revivals in Australia up to 1880*, p. 45.

The AIM emerged in what Stuart Piggin has argued was the ‘high noon of Australian Protestantism’⁹². The evangelising impulse of Australian Protestantism was exhibited in its desire to reform areas of society to reflect Christian morals and justice. This included tackling poverty, intemperance and gambling, all of which were seen to detrimentally affect Aboriginal people in particular.⁹³ Retta Long wrote of some early conversions at Singleton that, ‘the members of the Singleton Church were plucked from the burning. Many of them had been drunkards, profligate, degraded, some of them beggars – all of them outcasts’.⁹⁴ The Baptist and Wesleyan traditions that influenced Retta Long encouraged sobriety. The renunciation of worldly pursuits and interests such as alcohol, gambling, and even dancing was common among Baptist communities in Australia.⁹⁵ Detractors mockingly labelled this form of Protestant reformism as ‘wowserism’.⁹⁶ Henry Lawson poetically lambasted the strict nature of such doctrine at work in Australia: ‘We must not kiss in the gardens. We must not sing in the street. We must not jump with a joyous shout. When a long-lost friend we meet... For this is the Wowser’s land’.⁹⁷

Yet this characterisation ignores the fact that as much as evangelicals were forbidding in the most dangerous language, of particular human behaviours, they were also optimistic and joyful about the potential of people and society. This meant that while racial science was starting to posit pessimistic ideas of Aboriginal people as a separate species to white people,

⁹² Piggin, *Evangelical Christianity in Australia: Spirit, Word, and World*, p. 49.

⁹³ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 14.

⁹⁴ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 14.

⁹⁵ Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, p. 36.

⁹⁶ Piggin, *Evangelical Christianity in Australia: Spirit, Word, and World*, p. 52.

⁹⁷ Henry Lawson as quoted in Piggin, *Evangelical Christianity in Australia: Spirit, Word, and World*, p. 52.

evangelicals were making a strong and positive assessment of the equality of God's creation and the ability of God to alleviate the circumstances of poverty and disease. The AIM's ethos gives some credence to Bebbington's argument that, 'evangelical missions exhibited a paradoxical blend between evangelistic zeal, simple Biblicism and Enlightenment motifs of progress, liberty, civilisation and the unity of humanity'.⁹⁸ The AIM repeatedly denounced white social ills as a primary problem in Aboriginal relations, and Retta Dixon derided the 'mistaken' notion that ranked Aboriginal people in the 'lowest place in the human scale'.⁹⁹ As she put it, 'Yes, truly, there was nothing worthy in the Aborigines of Australia. They were utterly bankrupt, beyond human aid, sunk in the horrible pit. Nor was there any more in me, or in any other child of Adam's race'.¹⁰⁰ The AIM preached conversion for all humanity, without discrimination.

The Calvinistic basis of the AIM's doctrine stressed the total depravity of humankind and sole salvation through Christ, emphasising the need for Christian revival and conversion. The potential for eternal damnation was confirmed in the AIM's biblical understanding: 'We are told that hell is a place where fire is always burning'.¹⁰¹ Therefore as much as the AIM was positive about Aboriginal people and their potential, it was also uncompromising that 'only God can change a person's life' and that 'to make this freedom our own we must be converted'.¹⁰² The AIM's missionary agenda was first and foremost about preaching a doctrine of conversion to Aboriginal communities. While concerned with alleviating the

⁹⁸ Bebbington, "The Growth of Voluntary Religion," p. 444.

⁹⁹ Long, *Providential Channels*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ Long, *Providential Channels*, p. 14.

¹⁰¹ Aboriginal Inland Mission of Australia, *What We Believe: Studies on the Main Teachings of the Bible*, p. 48.

¹⁰² Aboriginal Inland Mission of Australia, *What We Believe: Studies on the Main Teachings of the Bible*, p. 39.

problems that Aboriginal people faced, evangelisation was the first and foremost priority. In this context AIM distanced itself from any kind of political underpinnings, stating that, ‘The work is strictly evangelistic in character – the salvation of the Aborigines and their rooting and grounding in the faith... no industrial work is undertaken’.¹⁰³

The AIM operated solely on its own terms of evangelisation. Although respectful of Aboriginal people as human beings, the AIM retained an agenda that prompted the replacement of traditional Aboriginal life with a Christian ideal. One of AIM’s hymns distilled this missionary call: ‘Go to dark Australians and the Gospel preach. Find the lonely half-caste and of Jesus teach. Go and seek the lost sheep bring them one by one. Tell these needy people what the Lord hath done.’¹⁰⁴ AIM missionaries were filled with the conviction that the Aboriginal people, who in their eyes had not known the Christian message until colonisation, should and could be brought to Christ.

Missionary ideas

There were a number of missionary organisations that influenced the AIM, but the most important were probably the Christian Endeavour Society and the China Inland Mission (as representative of evangelical ‘faith’ missions as a whole).

As already noted in regard to the La Perouse Mission, Retta Dixon, and many others associated with the AIM, first became involved in missionary activities through their membership of Christian Endeavour Societies in their various denominations. The Young People’s Society of Christian Endeavour was a nondenominational, evangelical society

¹⁰³ AIM constitution, as quoted in Harris, *One Blood : 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity : A Story of Hope*, p. 556.

¹⁰⁴ Aboriginal Inland Mission, *AIM Hymn Book*, p. 25.

formed by Congregational minister Frances E. Clark in Portland Maine in 1881.¹⁰⁵ It spread rapidly and globally across the English-speaking world. Part of Christian Endeavour's success was its ability to interest and motivate young people within the church who had moved past the stage of childhood but were not yet classed as adult. Christian Endeavour focussed on empowering these young people in the direction of love and service, with the ultimate aim of 'the evangelisation of the world for Christ'.¹⁰⁶ The idea was to create 'a generation of working Christians' by sending them 'upon a hundred errands for Christ'.¹⁰⁷

For Retta Dixon, the errands Christian Endeavour required of her included being asked as a member of her society's Missionary Committee to find out what missionary work was being carried out among Aboriginal Australians. This request led her to the involvement with La Perouse Mission, and then on to starting her own mission with the AIM. Francis Clark wrote of his own visit to Australia and spoke in proud, though prejudicial, terms of how:

'Nothing has ever impressed me more with the inherent power of the religion of Christ to lift up the lowest and most degraded than the society that I visited at La Perouse, near Sydney. This is composed wholly of "blackfellows", so called, the aborigines of Australia who are said to be the lowest upon the face of the earth... Yet here in La Perouse is a genuine and vigorous Christian Endeavour society, officered by blackfellows, and conducted by them entirely, under the supervision of their beloved Christian Endeavour missionary'.¹⁰⁸

The democratic ideals of Christian Endeavour Societies, which were meant to be self-sustaining, can be found in the tenets of the AIM. Young Christian Endeavour members

¹⁰⁵ Clark, *Christian Endeavour in All Lands: A Record of Twenty Five Years of Progress*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁶ Clark, "The Christian Endeavour Society: What It Is! How It Works!." <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.us-vn4835329>>.

¹⁰⁷ Clark, "The Christian Endeavour Society: What It Is! How It Works!.", p3

¹⁰⁸ Clark, *Christian Endeavour in All Lands: A Record of Twenty Five Years of Progress*, p. 443.

signed up to a pledge that cemented their commitment and nurtured a sense of responsibility. This pledge asked for the regular attendance of members at prayer meetings, the monthly renewal of a belief in Jesus Christ, the observance of the Sabbath and the commitment to working for others in the community.¹⁰⁹ Abiding by these rules influenced the organisational structure of the AIM, with its emphasis on regular prayer meetings, and rules for active church members.

Another way that Christian Endeavour inspired the nature of the AIM was through the incorporation of women. Harriet Clark, wife of the founder, became an inaugural member of Christian Endeavour, on the condition that it would conduct missionary activity.¹¹⁰ Alison Longworth has argued that Christian Endeavour was innovative in its encouragement of female leadership. She stated that although Harriet Clark was initially hesitant about the expectation that all Christian Endeavour members would take an active part in every meeting because 'she had never known women to speak publicly in that way', Christian Endeavour would come to have a history of female leadership'.¹¹¹ Likewise, AIM was notable for its high proportion of female missionaries.

The AIM also modelled itself on the missionary ideas behind 'faith' missions like the China Inland Mission, established by J. Hudson Taylor in 1865.¹¹² As Longworth has

¹⁰⁹ 'the root idea is consecration – to God first, and then to one another... this is participation by giving', 'For Christ and the Church'. Clark, "The Christian Endeavour Society: What It Is! How It Works!." p. 5, p. 11. The guidelines also point out that a 'Look-Out Committee' should be formed to check if active members are away from their monthly 'Consecration Meeting', and if so why, so that 'No month need ever go by without the minister knowing the religious state of his young people', p11.

¹¹⁰ Longworth, "'Upon Past Ebenezer We Built Our Jehovah-Jireh": The Vision of the Australian Aborigines' Mission and Its Heritage in the China Inland Mission," p. 171.

¹¹¹ Longworth, "'Upon Past Ebenezer We Built Our Jehovah-Jireh": The Vision of the Australian Aborigines' Mission and Its Heritage in the China Inland Mission," p. 171.

¹¹² Porter, "Missions and Empire, C. 1873-1914," p. 561.

pointed out, 'these ... were based on the three principles outlined by Taylor in *China's Spiritual Need and Claims*, first published in 1865'.¹¹³ The three principles of Taylor's CIM were that: firstly, missionaries hold a similar Evangelical theology to Taylor (although with no denominational restrictions); secondly, that missionaries have no stipend and avoid entering into debt; and thirdly that there was to be no solicitation of funds.¹¹⁴ This meant that the AIM would not actively seek donations, but rather rely on prayer and works. In other words, individual missionaries were responsible for generating their own income, rather than the organisation paying them. Funds were sought by indirect means, such as through the AIM's publication subscribers, Prayer Bands, Auxiliary groups and freewill offering boxes.¹¹⁵

The idea behind 'faith' missions, like the China Inland Mission, was that they were neither complex nor bureaucratic. As described earlier, the AIM had a similarly simple organisational structure, with decisions about missionary candidates, strategy and expenditure deferred to the committees if necessary, but firstly to the director.¹¹⁶ Retta Long wrote that she kept up a weekly correspondence with each missionary, until the workers numbered over 40 and it became impractical.¹¹⁷ This personalised networking mode of operation, allowed missionaries to better integrate with the communities where they worked, rather than operating a more distanced, institutionalised style of mission. Yet it also made greater

¹¹³ Longworth, "'Upon Past Ebenezer We Built Our Jehovah-Jireh': The Vision of the Australian Aborigines' Mission and Its Heritage in the China Inland Mission," p. 175.

¹¹⁴ Longworth, "'Upon Past Ebenezer We Built Our Jehovah-Jireh': The Vision of the Australian Aborigines' Mission and Its Heritage in the China Inland Mission," p. 177.

¹¹⁵ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 22.

¹¹⁶ Porter, "Missions and Empire, C. 1873-1914," p. 561.

¹¹⁷ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 30.

demands on individual missionaries, who often lacked access to financial or organisational support.

Life as an AIM missionary

As commendable as the financial ethos was it is perhaps not surprising that many AIM missionaries lived on the poverty line alongside Aboriginal people. The AIM accorded with the words of A.B. Simpson, who wrote that missionaries needed to be able to ‘live simply, endure hardship, deny themselves, put up with every discomfort... of climate, hard work, inclemency of the weather and physical pressure’.¹¹⁸ A letter in Singleton’s local paper the *Singleton Argus* in 1916 described the St Clair mission: ‘the conditions prevailing... are better imagined than described. Hot patched-up structures... without the least comfort are apparently considered sufficient’.¹¹⁹ Some missionaries found they were not adapted to the difficult circumstances, and in the records it is common to find that individual missionaries only lasted a year or two in particular places before moving on or leaving altogether.¹²⁰ In the most extreme and tragic case, Julie Dodimead died in service as a missionary at Singleton, after contracting ‘enteric fever’ (or typhoid).¹²¹

While the difficult lifestyle allowed missionaries to experience and sympathise with Aboriginal people, the AIM has been criticised for not doing more to advocate a change to these circumstances. James Miller for instance, while acknowledging the respect the AIM

¹¹⁸ A. B. Simpson, ‘The type of missionaries we want’, (April 1, 1892), as quoted in *The Aim*, May, 1976, p3.

¹¹⁹ Mrs Agnes Mackay, Letter, *Singleton Argus*, (January 1916), as quoted in Miller, *Koori, a Will to Win : The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia*, p. 128.

¹²⁰ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 18. ‘Australian Indigenous Ministries – records, 1903-1998’, Mitchell Library, MLMSS 7167, Box 1.

¹²¹ "Family Notices," *Sydney Morning Herald* 29 January 1915.

gave to the Aboriginal community, wrote that, ‘by sharing that poverty the missionaries tended to accept it’.¹²² The missionaries after all could always leave should life become too hard, while Aboriginal people did not have that option. Such a livelihood was likely the best demonstration of their faith at work, but while perhaps spiritually rich it did not lead to the material and social change that could truly improve the lives of Aboriginal people.

As it had such a minimal budget, the AIM depended on the exertion and creativity of its workers to maintain the progress of evangelisation across such an ambitious geographical area. Retta Long wrote that in 1918, her husband visited all the stations in NSW, ‘with the minimum of expense, carrying heavy loads from the railway and never incurring the fare of a cab’.¹²³ AIM missionaries were inventive when it came to cheap modes of transportation, as well as calling on the hospitality of the communities they visited. Grace Collins, daughter of Retta Long and an AIM missionary herself commented that, ‘There was a mobility about the missionaries in those early days’.¹²⁴

Individual missionaries were remembered by both missionaries and Aboriginal people for their vehicles: Mr Shenk who ‘scoured’ the North West of NSW (11 camps) on his motorbike, Miss Campbell and her old car ‘Barbara’, Miss Smith who travelled through NSW by horse and buggy with ‘only a girl to accompany her’. Similarly Miss Presnell and Miss Cavanagh were remembered for driving a horse and sulky. On one occasion, while teaching Mrs Saunders, a Woorabinda woman, to read, ‘the horse bolted’.¹²⁵ Miller wrote that

¹²² Miller, *Koori, a Will to Win : The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia*, p. 128.

¹²³ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 29.

¹²⁴ Grace Collins, “‘I Remember When’”, From the Sydney Annual Meeting’, *The A.I.M.*, September 1975, p5.

¹²⁵ Collins, “‘I Remember When’”, (1975), *The AIM*, p5 and Wes Caddy, ‘Memories from Aboriginal Christians: Grateful to God’, *The AIM*, (September 1975), p4. Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 24.

his Grandfather Jack Miller, who was ‘among the first Kooris to be converted to Christianity’ in Singleton, ‘transported the missionaries between Singleton and St Clair in the mission buggy’.¹²⁶ Jack was heavily involved in mission activities, holding prayer meetings in his house, leading outdoor and indoor church services, and being on the welcoming committee for new missionaries.¹²⁷ AIM missionaries often claimed pioneering characteristics but they could not work in isolation, and without the assistance and networking of the Aboriginal people they would not have got far.

The AIM was founded at a time when Aboriginal people were being increasingly forced to the fringes of society. AIM missionaries were filled with enough evangelistic zeal to accept similar living conditions, and while their methods can be criticised, they were at least attempting to do something for Aboriginal people, while other denominations and charitable organisations abstained from the effort. The next chapter will explore in more detail the positive and negative consequences of the AIM’s intervention in Aboriginal life.

¹²⁶ Miller, *Kooris, a Will to Win : The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia*, p. 125.

¹²⁷ Miller, *Kooris, a Will to Win : The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia*, p. 125.

CHAPTER TWO: Tilling the field – the AIM’s role at Singleton

As Retta Long was leaving to become a missionary, a Christian lady remarked to her, “I hope you will do some good, but I am sure you will not; no one has ever done any good with our Aborigines yet”¹²⁸. The sentiment reflected the belief among white society that Aboriginal people were a lost cause. Yet in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, attempts to do ‘good’ for the Aboriginal population took on their most organised form to date. The interventions of the Aboriginal Protection Board, land distribution, and missionary groups like the Aboriginal Inland Mission, all attempted to manage the existence of Aboriginal people. This process included dispossession, and erosion of culture, and had a resounding effect on Aboriginal people throughout the country. The operations of the AIM demonstrate the ambiguous role missionaries played in this process: on the one hand living in, and attempting to foster, community, and on the other hand exacerbating the break-up of traditional Aboriginal life. This chapter examines the AIM as it operated in community, focussing on its early work in Singleton, in order to examine whether its missionary activities were a help or a hindrance to the Aboriginal community.

Reserves and missionaries –

The situation for Aboriginal people at the turn of the century was profoundly depressing. White demands for land were increasing, as settlement moved more persistently out of urban centres. Some Aboriginal people were forced off their land entirely. Without

¹²⁸ Long, *Providential Channels*, p. 14.

their traditional homes, makeshift camps cropped up outside urban centres, troubling white sensibilities.¹²⁹

The reserve system was expanded in the late decades of the nineteenth century, and at first it appeared that Aboriginal people would be left with a degree of autonomy. Indeed, in the period 1860-1890 new reserves were created in response to high demand from Aboriginal people for land, the majority located in the areas chosen by Aboriginal people themselves.¹³⁰ Heather Goodall found that most of the new reserves (27 out of the 32 created after 1860) were the result of Aborigines' demand for reoccupation of their land.¹³¹ For instance, the La Perouse reserve was permanently established by the Aboriginal Protection Board in 1883, however Aboriginal people had always spent time there, travelling up from the south coast for the fish. Similarly, the first permanent Aboriginal settlement in 1880 was located on land generally accepted to have been granted to Queen Emma Timbery.¹³² The Aboriginal Protection Board simply formalised the recognition of long existing sites of Aboriginal occupation.

George Thornton, the first Protector of Aborigines in NSW stated in 1881 that, 'I have every hope and expect great success from granting reserves of from 10 to 40 acres of

¹²⁹ 'notably those who migrated from the south coast in the 1860s and 1870s, impoverished and angry, they camped around the shores of Port Jackson, drinking, begging and demanding fishing boats and land, to the great irritation of the NSW government and the Sydney population'. Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in NSW, 1770-1972*, p. 75.

¹³⁰ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in NSW, 1770-1972*, pp. 84-87.

¹³¹ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in NSW, 1770-1972*, pp. 84-87.

¹³² Gloria Ardler, as quoted in Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, ed. *La Perouse: The Place, the People, and the Sea, a Collection of Writing by Members of the Aboriginal Community*, p. 5.

land for the uses of the Aborigines in their own district'.¹³³ In the Upper Hunter Valley this led to the establishment of Aboriginal people on reserves at Carroona and St Clair (which would later become Mt Olive Station under the Aboriginal Protection Board).¹³⁴ Aboriginal people had been camping at St Clair since the 1850s, and had begun growing crops.¹³⁵ The establishment of a reserve was the government formalisation of what Aboriginal people had already claimed for themselves.

It seems that even in the late 1880s, a large number of Aboriginal people had managed to sustain self-sufficiency and economic independence.¹³⁶ However hostility toward the Aboriginal presence in proximity to white communities would grow over the coming decades, as well as the pressure to release agricultural land to white farmers. Aboriginal people were seen as a good source of labour and motivated by anxiety over an increasing 'half-caste' population the intervention of the APB became ever more intrusive. Missionaries attempted to assist in the circumstances of deprivation that came to Aboriginal people however they also participated in regulatory policies.

Singleton -

The local history of Indigenous people in Singleton is reflective of the reality of dispossession that was affecting Aboriginal people across the country. As noted, the mid to

¹³³ Blyton, Heitmyer, and Maynard, eds., *Wannin Thanbarran: A History of Aboriginal and European Contact in Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter Valley*, p. 51.

¹³⁴ Blyton, Heitmyer, and Maynard, eds., *Wannin Thanbarran: A History of Aboriginal and European Contact in Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter Valley*, p. 57.

¹³⁵ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in NSW, 1770-1972*, p. 83.

¹³⁶ 'around 1880, 81 per cent [Aboriginal people] economically independent'. Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in NSW, 1770-1972*, p. 86.

late nineteenth century saw the rapid expansion of European colonisation in the Hunter Valley, with small towns emerging in places which had previously been occupied by Aboriginal communities. While there is evidence of traditional ceremonies in the mid-nineteenth century (for example one at Bulga in 1852), it appears that the opportunity to practice Aboriginal culture was gradually eroded during this period.¹³⁷ It was a time of intense trauma and disenfranchisement for the people of the area whose land, food sources, and traditions were all made increasingly inaccessible by European settlement.¹³⁸ This is the context in which the AIM was formed, and its role must always be seen relationally to this.

The first missionary to operate in the area was Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld, a Congregational minister who was sympathetic to the Aboriginal people, particularly as frontier violence encompassed the Singleton area.¹³⁹ Following the surveying of the area in the early nineteenth century, and the issuing of Crown Land grants, the contest over land became increasingly violent. Threlkeld wrote on the 4th of September 1826 that,

‘Alas!... we are in a state of warfare up the country here – two stockmen have been speared in retaliation for the 4 natives who were deliberately shot without any trial or form whatever. Martial law is the cry of the Settlers and there are many who are grieved that a man is come to seek the welfare of the Aborigines’.¹⁴⁰

His words reveal how missionaries were often socially isolated from local white communities by preaching more positive views towards Aboriginal people. The dwindling

¹³⁷ Blyton, Heitmyer, and Maynard, eds., *Wannin Thanbarran: A History of Aboriginal and European Contact in Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter Valley*, p. 9.

¹³⁸ Blyton, Heitmyer, and Maynard, eds., *Wannin Thanbarran: A History of Aboriginal and European Contact in Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter Valley*, pp. 26-27.

¹³⁹ Niel Gunson, "Threlkeld, Lancelot Edward (1788–1859)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (1967), <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/threlkeld-lancelot-edward-2734>>. Accessed 15 September 2011.

¹⁴⁰ Blyton, Heitmyer, and Maynard, eds., *Wannin Thanbarran: A History of Aboriginal and European Contact in Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter Valley*, p. 17.

food supply meant that the Aboriginal community was forced to seek out the European cattle, sheep and crops, which brought swift and excessive retribution.¹⁴¹ By the mid-nineteenth century the Aboriginal community in the Singleton area reflected the colonial reality across the state with the population dropping, and traditional life becoming impossible to continue.¹⁴²

The shift to a permanent, sedentary location transformed the lives of Aboriginal communities in the area. James Miller, in his family and tribal history of the area, argued that because of this cultural shift at the end of the nineteenth century, Aboriginal people became more responsive to missionary efforts than earlier in history. Writing about the limited success of the AIM at St Clair he stated that, 'Conversion was easier for the AIM [than Rev Threlkeld] because the Kooris were by 1900 more sedentary, they had adopted more of the white man's work ethic, and very little, if any, of the old religion was being practiced'.¹⁴³ The AIM was part of a wider process of European intervention into the autonomy of Aboriginal people in the area.

¹⁴¹ Blyton, Heitmyer, and Maynard, eds., *Wannin Thanbarran: A History of Aboriginal and European Contact in Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter Valley*, p. 26.

¹⁴² Blyton, Heitmyer, and Maynard, eds., *Wannin Thanbarran: A History of Aboriginal and European Contact in Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter Valley*, p. 27.

¹⁴³ Miller, *Koori, a Will to Win : The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia*, p. 120.

The mission to St Clair was originally begun in 1903 by a group of local Christians from around Singleton.¹⁴⁴ While

evangelisation was one of the main purposes of the mission, some parts of the white community also saw it as a good way of encouraging the segregation of the white and Aboriginal communities. The *Singleton Argus*



reported that, 'it is to be hoped that the mission will also prove effective in keeping our coloured brothers and sisters out of town, where they have been accustomed at times to make night hideous'.¹⁴⁵ This deliberate attempt to sanitise white settlements from contact with Aboriginal communities, forced them, and the missionaries who worked on them, to the margins of society.

Certainly AIM missionaries were sympathetic towards Aboriginal people in the face of hostility and racism from locals. They encouraged Aboriginal agricultural activity, in accordance with the APB's desire that Aboriginal people cultivate reserved land. Local Wonnarua families successfully grew and harvested tobacco, maize and a variety of vegetables on the reserve's 60 acres of land.¹⁴⁶ This was in opposition to the white

¹⁴⁴ Blyton, Heitmyer, and Maynard, eds., *Wannin Thanbarran: A History of Aboriginal and European Contact in Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter Valley*, pp. 57-58. Image 'First AIM Station, St Clair NSW, 1903', *The AIM*, (August 1986), p. 1.

¹⁴⁵ Singleton Argus, as quoted in Miller, *Koori, a Will to Win : The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia*, p. 120.

¹⁴⁶ 'A Mr Billy Bonnor was reputed to have planted 4232 cabbages, while my great-grandfather Jack Miller was well known for the melons that he grew'. Miller, *Koori, a Will to Win : The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia*, p. 125. 'St Clair near Singleton was farming land worked independently by the Philips, Murphy and other Wonnarua families'. Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in NSW, 1770-1972*, p. 142. 'Aboriginal people quickly adapted and combined European farming with traditional means of subsistence. They successfully grew and harvested a variety of vegetables, including corn, potatoes and cabbages... it is apparent that St Clair was the centre of Aboriginal life in the first half of the century'.

community who made repeated requests to the APB that the land at St Clair be revoked.¹⁴⁷ Miller argued that this was because whites wished to use Aboriginal people as ‘a cheap form of labour’.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, cases such as that of an eighty year old woman forced to take on domestic work away from the reserve in Singleton from ‘6am till 2pm... and longer, at the rate of 2/6 [shillings]’, seem to disprove the missionary’s contention that all of the Aboriginal people were maintaining a subsistence livelihood under their direction on the reserve.¹⁴⁹

Nevertheless in the ten years that St Clair was under the responsibility of the AIM there was a degree of freedom that was stemmed after their departure in 1916 when the APB appointed a manager.¹⁵⁰ Events at the new mission station ‘Mount Olive’ show how tenuous Aboriginal land grants were after this time. Goodall found that, ‘rising conflict between residents and manager... [resulted in] expulsions, and prosecutions, which effectively disrupted farming’.¹⁵¹ In consequence the station was ultimately closed in 1923, and the land leased to the white farmers who had been clamouring for years. While the AIM’s period in charge was also problematic for Aboriginal people in terms of autonomy, land access and education, the latter changes show that in some ways the missionaries offered a barrier to a worse set of circumstances.

Blyton, Heitmyer, and Maynard, eds., *Wannin Thanbarran: A History of Aboriginal and European Contact in Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter Valley*, p. 57.

¹⁴⁷ Miller, *Koori, a Will to Win : The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia*, p. 125.

¹⁴⁸ Miller, *Koori, a Will to Win : The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia*, p. 125.

¹⁴⁹ *Singleton Argus*, as quoted in Miller, *Koori, a Will to Win : The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia*, p. 128. Miller further argues that the fact that converts were expected to tithe a tenth of their income did not help with the circumstances of poverty.

¹⁵⁰ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in NSW, 1770-1972*, p. 142.

¹⁵¹ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in NSW, 1770-1972*, p. 142.

Energetic evangelists –

The AIM was open about its own motivations, creating a reciprocal arrangement with the APB on the grounds that they were able to evangelise to the Aboriginal people on reserves like St Clair and Karuah. AIM missionaries were enthusiastic about conversion and went about it in two ways: firstly through personal relationships, and secondly through the attempt to institute a Christian way of life. This meant that their actions could be on one hand empathetic and friendly, and on the other hand somewhat patronising and restrictive.

Both missionaries and Aboriginal people could benefit from relationship with each other. In her time before beginning the AIM in 1905 in Singleton, Retta Long's associations with the La Perouse and the NSWAM formed in her in a lifelong commitment to Aboriginal communities, based in no small part to personal interactions. In La Perouse she met Emma Foster, who accompanied her on trips across New South Wales.¹⁵² Iris Williams, Emma Foster's daughter, recounted that:

'Miss Dixon took my mother to Bellbrook in 1903 for a holiday... After Miss Dixon married and went away [in 1905] my mother was very lonely. She wanted to go back to Bellbrook. Another missionary Miss Pain went to Bellbrook around 1907 and so Mum went back with her. They worked together. Miss Pain was very sick and Mum used to nurse her'.¹⁵³

Close bonds could form between missionaries and the Aboriginal communities they entered. When, as in the case of Sackville Reach, a missionary who had been visiting or

¹⁵² Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, ed. *La Perouse: The Place, the People, and the Sea, a Collection of Writing by Members of the Aboriginal Community*, p. 33.

¹⁵³ Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, ed. *La Perouse: The Place, the People, and the Sea, a Collection of Writing by Members of the Aboriginal Community*, p. 33.

stationed for some while decided to move on, their assumed place in the community was brought into sharp focus.¹⁵⁴ As Jack Brook writes, 'It is likely that Retta Dixon was not only a religious leader but a staunch, trusted friend'.¹⁵⁵ For her own part, Retta Long confessed how, 'with an agony which only God knew, I tore myself away from La Perouse and all the camps on the Coast with their 1,300 Aborigines personally known to me'.¹⁵⁶ .

Janet Matthews wrote of the departure of George and Jennie Smith from Manunka, before they moved to Singleton that, 'I could not advise [a successor] to go... I knew the natives would prefer the former overseer'.¹⁵⁷ This statement reveals how particular missionaries, through a mixture of personality and empathy, could be viewed as friends by at least some of the Aboriginal people to whom they ministered. Miss Bagnall one of the earliest AIM missionaries, stayed at St Clair throughout her life and was 'fondly remembered' by people there.¹⁵⁸ Merv Pattemore, an AIM missionary, argued that 'missionaries were always accepted wherever they went'.¹⁵⁹ Yet, as much as they might have been respectfully received, not all missionaries were successful. It was very much a matter of individual interactions and decisions. AIM missionary to St Clair Miss Partridge, wrote in

¹⁵⁴ 'After receiving four years of almost continuous service from Miss Dixon, the Sackville Reach Aborigines Reserve community had complete confidence in their missionary. Her departure was surely a time of sadness and loss'. Brook, *Shut out from the World: The Hawkesbury Aborigines Reserve and Mission, 1889-1946*, p. 48.

¹⁵⁵ Brook, *Shut out from the World: The Hawkesbury Aborigines Reserve and Mission, 1889-1946*, p. 48.

¹⁵⁶ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 9.

¹⁵⁷ Janet Matthews, as quoted in Brett Vickers, "'Mother of the Home": Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 37.

¹⁵⁸ Miller, *Koori, a Will to Win : The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia*, pp. 123-24.

¹⁵⁹ *The Aim*, Sep Oct 1992, p5.

1915 that there were 'little visible results' of their attempts at Christianising the local people.¹⁶⁰

The focus of missionary attention was on maintaining their concept of moral order in Aboriginal communities. Missionaries discouraged visits of Aboriginal people from other parts of the State, mainly because of the immoral influence they might have.¹⁶¹ For example, Retta Dixon recalled one night while missionary for the NSWAM at La Perouse when, 'A large number of strange Aborigines had congregated on the Reserve, from other camps where there was no Gospel witness. They were sinful in every sense of the word'.¹⁶² As such, she refused to help them secure the use of the local hall to hold a dance, and in response she claimed, 'they threatened to burn down the Mission building, and attempted to carry this out by placing a smouldering chaff bag under my house'.¹⁶³ A 'friendly' Aboriginal woman helped point out the fire, but it was no wonder that Retta Dixon felt threatened enough by such incidents to return home. It is apparent that missionaries were often isolated and alien to the communities in which they ministered and lived.

The energy for evangelism that missionaries brought with them had positive effects for some. Aboriginal converts to the AIM often mentioned the role missionaries had in getting them to give up alcohol. This of course was also something desired by the APB, who used missionaries as a method of regulating alcohol, prostitution and begging. Miller points

¹⁶⁰ Miller, *Koori, a Will to Win : The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia*, p. 127.

¹⁶¹ Bell, "La Perouse Aborigines: A Study of Their Group Life and Assimilation into Modern Australian Society.", p. 331.

¹⁶² Long, *Providential Channels*, p. 15.

¹⁶³ Long, *Providential Channels*, p. 16.

out that following the stationing of AIM Missionaries, 1911 Singleton statistics show that there were 140 arrests for drunkenness, but that none of these were Aboriginal.¹⁶⁴ He writes that, ‘certainly some of the alcoholics, such as my great uncle Herbert, were converted to Christianity and gave the drink away’.¹⁶⁵

Christian expectations put restrictions on all areas of life for Aboriginal people at St Clair. The focus for the AIM was on providing the regular timetabling of services, as well as instituting a Christian moral code. As early as 1903, a report was given to the NSWAM that, ‘the services have been well attended... The appearance in Dress is improving’.¹⁶⁶ The AIM tried to change behaviour in accordance to a Christian, European ideal. This was not as strict as the method Daniel Matthews had used at Maloga, which caused dissent among the Aboriginal people there.¹⁶⁷ However a similar routine was instituted for converts, which included a morning prayer and night service each day, the observance of Sunday as a holy day, and the renunciation of all vices. The relative benevolence or strictures of this Christian imposition on Aboriginal life can be debated. Valerie Djenidi has argued that:

‘One of the aims of such an over-structured way of life was to ensure easier manipulation of the soul... The strict timetables imposed on the Aboriginal people aimed at better controlling their waking life. Such a technique is reminiscent of timetables in prisons and other all encompassing institutions.’¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Miller, *Koori, a Will to Win : The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia*, p. 126.

¹⁶⁵ Miller, *Koori, a Will to Win : The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia*, p. 126.

¹⁶⁶ B Bartrop (Secretary), ‘Report of Work to August 27, 1903), New South Wales Aboriginal Mission, Minute Book, (30/04/1903 to 05/07/1905), ‘Australian Indigenous Ministries’ – records, 1903-1998’, Mitchell Library, MSS 7167, Box 1.

¹⁶⁷ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in NSW, 1770-1972*, p. 82.

¹⁶⁸ Djenidi, "State and Church Involvement in Aboriginal Reserves, Missions and Stations in NSW, 1900-1975 and a Translation into French of Custodians of the Soil", pp. 50-51.

The stationing of AIM missionaries on reserves which were already created to exert some control over Aboriginal movements was part of a broader process to remove the aspects of Aboriginal culture that were disconcerting to white people.

Further adding to this was the attitude of AIM missionaries towards Aboriginal people. While certainly more empathetic and respectful than many others in the white community, there was a general tendency to infantilise the people with whom they worked. During her early work in Singleton for instance, Retta Long recounted that:

‘we found some La Perouse identities who had once been Christians, but being removed from all good influence, no man caring for their souls, they had drifted... They had also carried from thence a Bible and often they would gather around one of their number who could read a little and listen to the Word. They told us they sometimes cried when they thought of the missionary and little Church at La Perouse and longed for “someone to come and tell them more about Jesus”’.¹⁶⁹

When writing to friends about the Singleton home, Retta Long’s language was similarly maternalistic stating that she needed prayers and assistance, ‘to do the impossible, and to provide us with a house, in which to carry out His command to train little, dark children for Him’.¹⁷⁰ It was a subtler form of prejudice, but the attitudes nonetheless helped to shore up policies of segregation and assimilation.

¹⁶⁹ ‘Report of work to August 27, 1903’, New South Wales Aboriginal Mission, Minute Book, (30/04/1903 to 05/07/1905), ‘Australian Indigenous Ministries – records, 1903-1998’, Mitchell Library, MSS 7167/ Box 1.

¹⁷⁰ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 30.

Assimilation policy and the AIM –

From 1909 onwards, the liberties of Aboriginal people became entirely curtailed by expansive legislative reform.¹⁷¹ Government and missionaries came together under the goal of better assimilating the growing mixed-race population. The policy of child removal to government and Church run homes was carried out with an utter disregard towards the autonomy and rights of Aboriginal people. The AIM only ran one such institution in NSW, a children's home in Singleton, but it also ran the Retta Dixon Home in Darwin during the post-War period, which was subject to the inquiry into the Stolen Generations. The running of such institutions was the most conspicuous attempt to assimilate Aboriginal people into a European way of life. While the AIM's intentions in running the Singleton Home were benevolent, they nevertheless participated in this process.

Singleton Home -

A year after the St Clair mission first came under the control of the AIM they opened a home for orphaned girls, located in George St Singleton.¹⁷² The building was a convict-built mansion of 14 rooms.¹⁷³ It was opened on August 14, 1906, under the supervision of Miss Timbury.¹⁷⁴ The original impetus for the home was the death of an Aboriginal woman,

¹⁷¹ *Aborigines Protection Act 1909* gave the Board for the Protection of Aborigines statutory powers in relation to all reserves. Duty of the Board to provide for the custody, maintenance and education of the children of 'aborigines'. Board may apprentice 'the child of any aborigine or the neglected child of any person apparently having an admixture of aboriginal blood in his veins' subject to the Apprentices Act 1901. *Aborigines Protection Amending Act 1915* removed the requirement that an Aboriginal child had to be found to be neglected before the Board could remove him/her. *Aboriginal Protection Act*, 25. *Aboriginal Protection Amending Act*, 2. AITSIS Library.

¹⁷² Blyton, Heitmyer, and Maynard, eds., *Wannin Thanbarran: A History of Aboriginal and European Contact in Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter Valley*, p. 57.

¹⁷³ Brett Vickers, "'Mother of the Home': Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 38.

¹⁷⁴ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 13.

Bella Kermode from La Perouse, who died of consumption while in Singleton, leaving two



daughters Harriet Pitman and Lily Kermode orphaned.¹⁷⁵ The AIM responded to this genuine case of neglect by opening the home, however in the later years of its history the circumstances by which children were sent to the home were more dubious. The APB

approved the creation of the home, and noted that they would be ‘happy to assist... in endeavouring to obtain suitable situations for the children on their attaining the proper age’.¹⁷⁶ As such, while the original purpose may have been a response to homelessness, the AIM quickly became caught up in assimilation efforts relating to apprenticeships of Aboriginal youth.

As time went on the reasons given for admissions to the home ranged from children related to local families who boarded for their education, to children who stayed because their parents were dead or otherwise unable to care for them.¹⁷⁷ The fact that the home was the only place that Aboriginal children could receive satisfactory education was another method by which the Aboriginal community could be managed. It meant that many parents were either forced to send their children away from home, or had to move onto the reserve to

¹⁷⁵ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 13. Miller, *Koori, a Will to Win : The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia*, p. 124. Image ‘AIM Childrens Home, Singleton c. 1908’, ‘Australian Indigenous Ministries - pictorial collection - album and miscellaneous photos, 1908-ca.1960s’, Mitchell Library, PXA 773/ Box 8, digital order no. a128600.

¹⁷⁶ APB, Letter to L. Long, (2 August 1905), Correspondence about Singleton home, ‘Aboriginal Inland Mission - further records, 1904-1930’, Mitchell Library, ML MSS 7244, Box 1.

¹⁷⁷ Mrs Little, Letter to L Long, requesting for her children to be sent to the home from Barambah Mission because she is worried about the gambling there, and ‘shall send assistance from time to time’. Correspondence about Singleton Home, ‘Aboriginal Inland Mission - further records, 1904-1930’, Mitchell Library, ML MSS 7244, Box 1.

remain close to them. In the early days of the Singleton home it seems a majority of the children came from local families and were able to stay in contact with their community.¹⁷⁸ Later when the 1909 legislation came in, faced with the APB's new requirement that children should be sent from the reserves to earn their living, Christine Brett Vickers argued that 'it may be that some local Aboriginal parents used the home as a way of complying and remaining close to their children'.¹⁷⁹ When the APB starting asserting more influence, eventually taking over control of the premises children were sent to Singleton following removal from distant communities.

From 1910, the home was obliged by the board to take in boys as well as girls, and they were removed to the home from all over the state under the *Aboriginal Protection Act 1909* (NSW).¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, in 1915, the APB approved the removal of children on the basis of racial criteria (the lighter skinned children most usually taken away) to be 'educated and fitted... with the object of assisting the boys to become capable station labourers and the girls useful domestic servants'.¹⁸¹ On the whole the AIM seems to have complied with the APB's changes. When they did voice dissent it landed them in hot water. George Smith, who with his wife Jennie took over the management of the home after Miss Timbury, protested to the local police about the APB's policy of placing young children in service.¹⁸² He praised the success of the home children at school, and expressed particular dismay at the

¹⁷⁸ Brett Vickers, "'Mother of the Home': Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 40.

¹⁷⁹ Brett Vickers, "'Mother of the Home': Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 41.

¹⁸⁰ Brett Vickers, "'Mother of the Home': Jennie Parsons Smith," pp. 31-32.

¹⁸¹ *Course of Instruction for Aborigines Schools*, as quoted in Brett Vickers, "'Mother of the Home': Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 43.

¹⁸² Brett Vickers, "'Mother of the Home': Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 43.

removal of a 12 year old boy taken into service: ‘Sorry in one sense George Perry is being put out to service, he is not yet 13... It is simple child labor’.¹⁸³ In response, the relevant APB employee replied that, ‘I was under the impression that he was 14’ but that regardless, ‘I take exception to Mr Smith’s remarks’.¹⁸⁴ Later, when the APB took charge, Mr Smith wrote to his son that, ‘with government money comes government control, and they didn’t know the blackfellow as missionaries did’.¹⁸⁵

Jennie Smith had ‘very English ways’, according to one of the Aboriginal girls who grew up in the home, and taught all the girls, ‘to sew, knit and crochet, as well as manage a household’.¹⁸⁶ As such, while teaching and mothering in the way she knew, Jennie Smith and other AIM missionaries who came to work at the home long term or on probation, had a role in the attempt to assimilate Aboriginal children. While not as overt as the APB’s intervention in the home, the structure of life encouraged assimilation both by the promotion of European culture and by removal from their communities.

The Singleton Home operated from 1905, under the nominal control of the AIM, until it was bought by the APB in September, 1918.¹⁸⁷ Brett Vickers has argued that this was because, ‘it needed the premises for a boys institution’ and that ‘the Smiths, hoping to stave off this eventuality – they did not want the home, run for years on “family” lines, to be turned

¹⁸³ Brett Vickers, ""Mother of the Home": Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 43.

¹⁸⁴ APB, Letter to L. Long, 30 March 1914, in correspondence about Singleton Home, ‘Aboriginal Inland Mission - further records, 1904-1930’, Mitchell Library, ML MSS 7244, Box 1.

¹⁸⁵ Brett Vickers, ""Mother of the Home": Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 30.

¹⁸⁶ Pansy Hickey, as quoted in Brett Vickers, ""Mother of the Home": Jennie Parsons Smith," pp. 38-39.

¹⁸⁷ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 21.

into an institution for boys – decided to remain as board employees’.¹⁸⁸ The home did not last long under the APB. Already struggling financially, the conditions worsened, and George Smith’s conflict with the board accelerated. Ultimately he was dismissed, without investigation, for ‘improper conduct’.¹⁸⁹ The home eventually closed in December 1923.¹⁹⁰ The dismay of Retta Long over the loss of the home, as well as her perceived betrayal by the Smiths (who had left the AIM to work for the APB), showed the very personal way in which AIM missionaries engaged with their work.¹⁹¹ It also exemplifies the degree of control the APB had on the viability of missionary work and the degree of access they were permitted. The decision to buy up the home corresponded with a growing State-wide trend of the government stepping in to take up formal management of reserves and institutions. The experiences of the AIM home show both the emphasis on assimilation that was coming to dominate ideas about Aboriginal people, and also the way that the AIM was required to follow the lead of government.

Education and racism –

The home, as well as the AIM’s intervention in the St Clair Aboriginal community, incited dissent among some of the local community when they started encouraging the attendance of the children at the public school in town. Retta Long recorded that:

‘Accusations were brought against us and our people... Our dark people’s children attended the public school and we used on Sunday morning a hall which was used as a

¹⁸⁸ Brett Vickers, ""Mother of the Home": Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 44.

¹⁸⁹ Brett Vickers, ""Mother of the Home": Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 45.

¹⁹⁰ Brett Vickers, ""Mother of the Home": Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 45.

¹⁹¹ Brett Vickers, ""Mother of the Home": Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 45.

private school during the week. Some very cruel, unwarranted remarks were made. The minister exclaimed, "I would rather bury my child than she should sit on a seat in school occupied by an Aboriginal on Sunday". A church officer announced that, "I would rather take my child and put her in a coffin and bury her, than that she should sit next to an Aboriginal at school".¹⁹²

The casual racism of these sentiments would continue to occupy local debate throughout the AIM's operations in Singleton. It showed the way that AIM missionaries occupied a liminal role on the edges of both white and Aboriginal communities.

Education was one of the primary concerns of AIM missionaries. Retta Long wrote in *Our AIM* that, 'we are thankful that such erroneous ideas [doubting the educational ability of Aboriginal people] can be unquestionably discredited... for the colonist... without the intelligence and sagacity of the blacks, could never have weathered the discouragement of early pioneering'.¹⁹³ Education was seen to be central both to moral development and respectability, and hence fiercely defended by some of the AIM missionaries. It was only after the APB took control of Singleton home in September 1918, that the manager of Mount Olive Mission Station T. H. Austin, together with the Parents and Citizens Association of Singleton Public School succeeded in campaigning for the exclusion of the home children from the local school.¹⁹⁴

The APB was able to use the AIM's interest in education to avoid contentious situations. In 1915, for instance, they wrote to request the use of a missionary building at Karuah as a school: 'sixteen... Aboriginal children of school age at Karuah and Soldier's

¹⁹² Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 50.

¹⁹³ *Our AIM*, May 1917, p7.

¹⁹⁴ Brett Vickers, "'Mother of the Home": Jennie Parsons Smith," pp. 44-45.

Point are being deprived of a school education, the white people objecting to the Aborigines attending the same school'.¹⁹⁵ This response came following the AIM's request at the end of the previous year to allow the children to attend the public school.¹⁹⁶ Similarly, earlier in 1908 at Karuah, and in 1911 at St Clair, the Board wrote to say that they would pay AIM missionaries a small wage to teach the Aboriginal children there.¹⁹⁷

This communication reveals that the AIM represented an avenue of escape for the APB, where they could be seen to be administering a duty of care towards Aboriginal children, while avoiding the backlash from local communities. The AIM, to its credit, showed a constant interest in educating Aboriginal children in the face of this pessimistic climate. It was not a great solution. AIM missionaries were not trained teachers and had a vested interest in promoting their own beliefs towards the children.

The intervention of the AIM in the Singleton area marked new attempts to convert and civilise the Aboriginal people both there, and across the state. AIM missionaries lived in sympathy with the Aboriginal people, in the face of racism from the local white community. However, this sympathy often came with a disenfranchising attitude of paternalism. Control of the reserves, as well as the Singleton children's home, showed the way that the AIM

¹⁹⁵ APB, Letter to Mr Long, (22 Jan 1915), correspondence about Singleton Home, 'Aboriginal Inland Mission - further records, 1904-1930', Mitchell Library, ML MSS 7244, Box 1.

¹⁹⁶ APB, Letter advising the receipt of a request about children attending the local school, correspondence about Singleton Home, 'Aboriginal Inland Mission - further records, 1904-1930', Mitchell Library, ML MSS 7244, Box 1.

¹⁹⁷ Permission granted for Miss Ayers to teach Karuah children at a rate of 25 pounds per annum. APB, Letter, (26 March 1908), and '[Miss Annie Green] for the position of Teacher of the Subsidised School at St Clair... has been approved... Payment of subsidy will be made at the rate of ... 3 [pounds] per pupil per annum... three hours a day only', P. Board (Undersecretary), Department of Public Instruction, Letter, (12 Feb 1912),. Correspondence with APB, 'Aboriginal Inland Mission - further records, 1904-1930', Mitchell Library, ML MSS 7244, Box 1.

participated with the APB in policies of segregation and assimilation. Each experience during this time is fundamentally individual, and therefore it is difficult to generalise to what degree the AIM was a detriment or a benefit in the Singleton region. This is particularly the case since little written historical evidence remains of what Aboriginal people themselves felt about the interference. Yet ultimately, it seems that while the AIM was at St Clair, there were a few more options open to Aboriginal people than in the years following, and that for some Aboriginal people positive relationships were gained through the mission. The following chapter will examine the lasting effects of the AIM on those Aboriginal people who were converted, and the degree to which Aboriginal people were able to create agency for themselves through involvement with the AIM.

CHAPTER THREE: A new thing sprung up – Aboriginal spirituality, leadership and networking

The AIM operated during a time of growing disenfranchisement and dispossession for Aboriginal people. Its silence on political matters, and participation in damaging government policies, mar the history of the positive work it attempted to carry out. Aside from isolated examples this was true of almost all white Christian organisations at the time. The idea that God came with white settlement in 1770, limited the perception of missionaries to the facts of existing Aboriginal religious expression. Yet considering the restrictions of the period, 1905-1938, the AIM was radical in providing space and voice for Aboriginal leadership and spirituality.

Aboriginal people found a degree of agency through their involvement with the AIM. While it did restrict some areas of life for converts, Aboriginal people were also able to use the AIM to fulfil their own purposes. There were converts whose connection to the AIM enabled them to take up leadership and pastoral roles in their community. There were Aboriginal leaders who grew up in the conservative atmosphere, but were able to use the AIM's networks to further their involvement in protest movements. There were also those who stayed true to their evangelical heritage but sought to create a more distinctly Aboriginal led experience. Still others became important figures in the history of Indigenous Christianity in Australia. Such examples show that in the AIM the first signs of the development of an Indigenous form of liberation theology can be found, with some

Aboriginal people finding value and use in Christianity as a means of resistance and strength. This chapter considers the long-term effects of the AIM's attempts at conversion, the ways that Aboriginal people used the mission for their own causes, and the origins of a lineage of dissent.

The Indigenous way of life and the evangelical Christian worldview -

The AIM's biblically literal and European religious worldview that meant it had limited tolerance, or even consciousness, of Indigenous culture. Nor did it often consider the inclusion of Indigenous ideas, except on a nominal basis. The timetabling of life on the Singleton reserve, gives some indication of the way that the AIM operated more broadly across Eastern and North Australia. While traditional life was becoming increasingly curtailed by regulations on movements and land, many Aboriginal people continued activities that were problematic to the conservative Christian outlook of the AIM. On the whole, the AIM encouraged the renunciation of many traditional recreational and social activities when one became born again as a Christian.

What did conversion mean?

Missionaries from the AIM disapproved of anything that conflicted with their particular view of Christian living, for example the observation of the Sabbath. In her early days as a missionary, Retta Long found on her return to La Perouse after a month's absence that, 'the faith of some had been overthrown, and, on my first Sunday at home, our men went

a-fishing'.¹⁹⁸ An activity that was likely a source of livelihood for the local people was considered by the missionary as a case of 'backsliding', tantamount to a rejection of God.¹⁹⁹ For Aboriginal converts, the missionary timetable posed a difficult challenge to the continuation of traditional practices.

While AIM missionaries were on the whole respectful of Aboriginal people, there was a clear message that following Christ meant, at least in public, the rejection of traditional life. Missionary Merv Pattemore, has expressed the opinion for instance that, 'the Christian gospel does cut across the Aboriginal beliefs. Some of the people want to walk both ways... No man can serve two masters'.²⁰⁰ While missionaries had respect for Aboriginal Australians as people, this did not necessarily extend to culture. In her interpretation of Aboriginal culture, Retta Long wrote that Aboriginal converts tended to withdraw themselves from Corroborrees as a consequence of adopting Christianity. She depicted it as a 'remarkable fact' and that, 'should he at any time revert to it, his light is soon dimmed and he becomes a most unhappy man', ultimately then, 'we cannot but believe that there is something sinister behind those of a ceremonial nature'.²⁰¹ This view played into the racist assumption that non-Christian customs were a form of savagery alien from God. The AIM certainly did not encourage the continuation of Aboriginal cultural practices or beliefs, and on the whole saw them as incompatible with Christianity.

¹⁹⁸ Long, *Providential Channels*, p. 21.

¹⁹⁹ Long, *Providential Channels*, p. 21.

²⁰⁰ *The Aim*, Sep-Oct, 1995, p5.

²⁰¹ Long, *Australian Aboriginaldom*, p. 36.

Yet it should be noted that the AIM began its ministry at a time when traditional lifestyles had already been curtailed in many critical ways by government regulation and white settlement. Cecil Grant, a Wiradjuri man who was converted into the AIM, argued that missionaries were not responsible for the destruction of traditional life:

‘Ceremony was ended for us not by the missionaries but by invasion. I opposed those who wanted to bring back the ceremonies. We saw the love of God in the missionaries. We saw the horrible things that the police did’.²⁰²

Similarly June Barker, whose father Duncan Ferguson was an AIM Aboriginal missionary, said that, ‘People blame early missionaries coming to this country and brainwashing Aboriginal people and losing their culture through this new religion but I don’t look on it that way’. She viewed Christianity as a force for good in her family’s life.²⁰³ It was recognised that comparatively speaking, AIM missionaries had a genuine interest in improving the circumstances of Aboriginal people, at least on a personal basis. The decision of conversion was more often linked to alcohol than framed as a choice between culture and Christianity.²⁰⁴ Echoing the evangelical reformism in society more broadly, the main focus for missionaries, and requirement of converts, was the rejection of drinking, gambling, smoking, and other forms of entertainment. The difficulty for Retta Dixon, and other missionaries who were not able to maintain a permanent presence in a particular community was that in their absence converts could feel excluded from community life and entertainment, without the church to occupy their time.

²⁰² Cecil Grant as quoted in Pattel-Gray and Brown, eds., *Indigenous Australians: A Dialogue About the Word Becoming Flesh in Aboriginal Churches*, p. 30.

²⁰³ Rob Willis and June Barker, "June Barker Interviewed by Rob Willis in the Bringing Them Home after the Apology Oral History Project [Sound Recording],"(2010), <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn4939761>>, accessed 15 September 2011.

²⁰⁴ Willis and Barker, "June Barker Interviewed by Rob Willis in the Bringing Them Home after the Apology Oral History Project [Sound Recording]." <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn4939761>> .

Involvement with Christian missions like the AIM offered some Aboriginal people places to socialise, as well as catering for gatherings for the sick or deceased.²⁰⁵ For example, Clara Mason recalls that her Nana, Bella Clark, ‘married Wesley Simms at La Perouse in the little old church... Nana had religious beliefs like most Kooris have and liked going to church, even though she couldn’t hear very well’.²⁰⁶ Singing and revivals were a chance for Aboriginal people to meet and have fun together, and when times were hard this could be a way of restoring optimism. Ella Simon recalled a particular occasion during her own faith missionary work (in the vein of the AIM’s Aboriginal Workers):

‘once at Lismore, where we were asked to hold a series of meetings to preach the Gospel... we had over a hundred people to cater for and it was pouring rain. I even had to get breakfast for them all under these conditions... We fed them and we prayed with them for a purpose in life, a better way of living, a better way of dressing, better health, better hygiene. And we could see that it made a difference to them’.²⁰⁷

Similarly, Patricia Davis-Hirst recalled Christian Conventions at Purfleet stating that, ‘the whole village would be ringing with laughter, wonderful music, and singing... the locals were still on a high weeks later’.²⁰⁸ The positive nurturing of hope and dignity somewhat mitigates the cultural ignorance of the AIM’s early history. Aboriginal people were able to make the best of these situations, and choose for themselves which aspects were important.

²⁰⁵ Bell, "La Perouse Aborigines: A Study of Their Group Life and Assimilation into Modern Australian Society.", p. 338.

²⁰⁶ Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, ed. *La Perouse: The Place, the People, and the Sea, a Collection of Writing by Members of the Aboriginal Community*, p. 49.

²⁰⁷ Ella Simon worked with the United Aborigines Mission (UAM) rather than the AIM, however the manner of evangelism/revival meetings was likely very similar. Ella Simon, *Through My Eyes* (Blackburn: Collins Dove, 1987), p. 143.

²⁰⁸ O'Brien, *Gods Willing Workers: Women and Religion in Australia*, p. 155.

Missionary competition -

Next to conversion, church building was the area in which AIM missionaries put the most energy. As Church historian Fiedler writes, the main interest of faith missions like AIM was to ‘reach the unreached, those who had never heard of Jesus’.²⁰⁹ The AIM therefore put great enthusiasm into encouraging local people to build churches on their various mission stations and reserves. The keen interest of faith missions like the AIM and United Aborigines Mission (UAM) in building churches enabled them to establish a permanent evangelistic presence in communities, but also differentiated them as specifically Aboriginal churches. Anthropologist Bell noted in his study of the La Perouse community that by the 1960s no-one, ‘participates in white churches or belongs to any of the major white denominations. The exclusive Aboriginal churches are the UAM and the Pentecostal Church’.²¹⁰

In the main the AIM offered its buildings because Aboriginal people were, ‘not fully welcome in the white churches’, as demonstrated by the earlier debate in Singleton over children’s schooling.²¹¹ Of course there was a secondary purpose of evangelism. Barbara Cummings, who grew up in the Retta Dixon home, argues that the AIM ‘adopted a segregationist approach believing that its members should be discouraged from participating in European-attended church services because they “prefer their separate types of

²⁰⁹ Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions: From Hudson Taylor to Present Day Africa*, p. 392.

²¹⁰ Bell, "La Perouse Aborigines: A Study of Their Group Life and Assimilation into Modern Australian Society.", p. 342. This is perhaps a generalisation at least in earlier years, since Iris Williams wrote about how her Aunt Liza Foster’s church was at Newtown, ‘and the white people would come out to her home from Newtown too’, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, ed. *La Perouse: The Place, the People, and the Sea, a Collection of Writing by Members of the Aboriginal Community*, p. 51.

²¹¹ Harris, *One Blood : 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity : A Story of Hope*, p. 667.

worship””.²¹² This puts a different spin on the AIM’s claim that they wished to establish Indigenous churches that were appropriate to context. There was an element of power involved in the idea that the AIM ran some of the only churches in which Indigenous people were welcome.

The knowledge of their power to influence potential Aboriginal converts can be seen in the way in which different denominations and missions competed with one another. In 1907, the APB wrote to the AIM refusing their request to establish a mission house and church at Padman Creek citing as their reason that, ‘from reports obtained from the local police, it would appear that the Aborigines in the locality profess the Roman Catholic religion’.²¹³ Later in 1940, the Chief Secretary’s office of the APB responded to a request from Retta Long regarding the use of a building for services on the Boggabilla station. He contended that:

‘On receipt of your list of adherents of the Aboriginal Inland Mission resident at Boggabilla, the names were checked with the list submitted by the Manager and it was found that every person on your list had designated himself/herself as belonging to the Church of England... under the circumstances the Board feels it must offer every facility to the local Church of England minister’.²¹⁴

The threat of other denominations poaching Church members caused some contention among correspondence with the APB. Retta Long wrote back refuting a complaint to the APB that Miss Abbott, an AIM missionary teaching at the Aboriginal School in Yass

²¹² Cummings, *Take This Child: From the Kahlin Compound to the Retta Dixon Home*, p. 7.

²¹³ APB, Letter, (23rd May, 1907), Correspondence with APB, ‘Aboriginal Inland Mission - further records, 1904-1930’, Mitchell Library, ML MSS 7244, Box 1.

²¹⁴ Chief Secretary’s Office APB, Letter, (29th November 1940), correspondence with APB, ‘Australian Indigenous Ministries – records, 1903-1998’, Mitchell Library, MSS ML 7167, Box 7.

‘object[ed] to children of faiths leaving the room whilst she conducts her lessons, and... that [she] shook a book’ in the face of the teacher, Ms Herbert.²¹⁵ While these are just a few anecdotes, it appears that tensions existed between the various mission groups. Aboriginal people often associated with more than one Christian group, probably for social reasons, representing an obvious threat to the influence of particular denominations.

Tensions between mission agencies were recognised, and occasionally challenged as detracting from the original purpose of their work. The AIM’s split away from the parent missionary body of the NSWAM was not without contention. Retta and Leonard Long’s former missionary colleagues from Christian Endeavour, who were associated with UAM and the Australian Aborigines Mission (which is what NSWAM became), criticized the way that the establishment of the AIM caused division. Telfer, a missionary and historian for the UAM, wrote that:

‘For years the work of God amongst this people went on undisturbed by internal friction; but there came a day when the Evil One succeeded in creating discord, which led to the retirement of Miss Dixon, and the establishment of work now controlled by that lady and her husband (Mr. and Mrs. Long) under the name of the AIM or Australian Inland Mission... Personally, we think, more satisfactory results could have been accomplished by a united body; but certainly the Australian Aborigines’ Mission cannot be blamed for the divided labours.’²¹⁶

Similarly, although less direct, Gerard recorded the opinion about the various different missions that, ‘We still believe we must unite to make the impact and speak with the

²¹⁵ APB, Letter, (8 April 1941),), correspondence with APB, ‘Australian Indigenous Ministries – records, 1903-1998’, Mitchell Library, MLMSS 7167, Box 7.

²¹⁶ E. J. Telfer, *Amongst Australian Aborigines: Forty Years of Missionary Work : The Story of the United Aborigines’ Mission* (Sydney: E.J. Telfer, 1939), p. 44.

authority necessary to bring results in the political sphere'.²¹⁷ In 1906, and again in the late 1920s, efforts were made to bring the UAM and AIM together, but these were not successful. Retta Long recorded that '1920 was a year of severe trial, chiefly through a campaign of slander launched by our adversary the devil'.²¹⁸ During this year three of the AIM's missionary recruits jumped ship to the UAM.²¹⁹ Whether this was what Retta Long was referring to is ambiguous, but it was nonetheless true that the missions of the early twentieth century were often trying to do the same work in a small though widespread field.

Denominational divisions likely affected the development of an independent, evangelical Aboriginal church. Bell's study of La Perouse in the 1960s found that by that time the legacy of missionary intervention had resulted in unfriendly relations between the members of the Pentecostal and UAM churches. He claimed that, 'kinship solidarity, and the solidarity of the group at large are weakened by the existence of the two opposing churches'.²²⁰ It was ultimately up to Aboriginal people to bridge these differences. The AIM itself made no moves towards unity with other missionary groups.

²¹⁷ Gerard, *United Aborigines' Mission (of Australia) Established 1894: An Outline of the History of the Mission Particularly in South Australia: Coming of Age of the United Aborigines Mission (S.A.) Incorporated* p. 5.

²¹⁸ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 14.

²¹⁹ Mary Belshaw, Rod Schenk and Harry Preston all defected. Christine Brett, "We Have Grown to Love Her The Aborigines Inland Mission, Aboriginal people and the New South Wales Aborigines' Protection Board, 1905-1920.", (2004), p13, as quoted in Djenidi, "State and Church Involvement in Aboriginal Reserves, Missions and Stations in NSW, 1900-1975 and a Translation into French of Custodians of the Soil", p. 80.

²²⁰ Bell, "La Perouse Aborigines: A Study of Their Group Life and Assimilation into Modern Australian Society.", p. 349.

Indigenous beliefs in conflict with AIM theology -

The tendency to be inward focussed, and not particularly co-operative, extended to the AIM's evangelism which largely ignored Aboriginal beliefs rather than searching for a common language. This was partly due to racial bias, but also the conviction of theological belief that did not leave room for even an awareness of other spiritual ideas. The furthest Retta Long went in acknowledging any kind of value to Aboriginal spirituality was when she wrote of similarities she had discerned that pointed to a nascent Christianity:

'A belief in a Supreme Being is widely held by the Aborigines... They all speak His name with reverence and teach the children to fear Him... Some have traced in what the Aborigines believe in regard to the Supreme Being three at least of the attributes of the God of the Bible – Eternity, Omnipotence and Goodness'.²²¹

Her words were likely meant to dispel the commentary that argued that Aboriginal people were incapable of being converted, but beyond that there is no sign of an interest in understanding Aboriginal expressions of spirituality. It was up to the Aboriginal workers of the AIM to do the work of translating between Christianity and culture, though in many cases the shaming of traditional culture involved in conversion meant that it was eschewed altogether. What did remain of custom and spirituality amongst converts was hidden from view. Breward contends that, 'Even missionaries fluent in local languages missed seeing important parts of Aboriginal culture'²²² and that practices remained important in community though they were not spoken about with missionaries.

²²¹ Long, *Australian Aboriginaldom*, p. 11.

²²² Ian Breward, *A History of the Christian Churches in Australasia*, Oxford History of the Christian Church (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 293.

The desire of the AIM to create ‘Native Workers’ allowed for the possibility of Aboriginal people interpreting Christian scripture in a way more compatible with their culture. Rita Huggins remembered that, ‘our spiritual life and white religion existed together somehow. It’s a strange thing but we had a spirit in common’.²²³ Cecil Grant, an Aboriginal Pastor first converted through the AIM, commented that, ‘all my teaching has come from my traditional and contemporary Christian cultural mothers and fathers’.²²⁴ Yet, at least formally, the theology was meant to be strictly European. More recently, referring to the World Council of Churches visit to Australia and subsequent report in 1981 titled, ‘Justice for Aboriginal Australians’, the AIM responded that:

‘there is an even deeper reason for rejecting the WCC team report... It reveals an alarming move towards syncretism. An Aboriginal leader is quoted as saying that, “the role of the Christian Pastor is to water the plant of faith”, which (supposedly) is already in the heart of animistic Aborigines. The WCC team earnestly recommended that Aboriginal Christians be encouraged to “develop a theology relating to their own culture”. What a fine muddle of darkness and light would result!’²²⁵

The comment is revealing in that it shows that while the AIM was respectful and encouraging of Aboriginal people, their ethos was essentially conservative and bound by a white understanding of culture that remained unchanged over time. Pastor Nero Timothy, in discussing his conversion, divorced himself from traditional culture:

‘Before, we didn’t know about God. We used to teaching in wrong way. We didn’t know anything about God in our own life... wrong teaching from our old grandfather... Funny sort of thing he was telling us – become debil [sic] and worshipping every kind of tree. I belong to that tree... and that sort of thing... I used

²²³ O'Brien, *Gods Willing Workers: Women and Religion in Australia*, p. 152.

²²⁴ Cecil Grant, as quoted in Pattel-Gray and Brown, eds., *Indigenous Australians: A Dialogue About the Word Becoming Flesh in Aboriginal Churches*, p. 29.

²²⁵ Howard Miles, ‘Justice?’, *Our Aim*, October 1981, p2.

to be very happy and proud about it... I didn't know that Jesus died. I didn't know that God love me.'²²⁶

Similarly David Kirk wrote that, 'Aboriginal culture in its traditional form is a perversion of what is taught in scripture, according to Romans chapter 1'.²²⁷ These words reveal a deep spiritual commitment, but also show the way that the AIM's theology could incite an internalisation of colonising narratives, such as the inherent inferiority of Aboriginal culture. However, this was not the exclusive experience.²²⁸ It was recalled of Pastor Duncan Ferguson that he did not affiliate with one particular denomination, rather he 'found out for himself' by reading the Bible what he believed, and even within his conservative Christianity, David Kirk pointed out for instance that, 'the gospel is neither black nor white, Eastern nor Western'.²²⁹ This idea of the colour-blindness of God shows that Aboriginal people were able to use Christianity as a voice of liberation. Theology is ultimately a personal matter, and Aboriginal people chose to interpret Christian teachings in different ways, despite the formal opinions of missionaries.

Not only did the AIM's theology encourage the rejection of traditional beliefs, it also steered away from addressing the social realities faced by Aboriginal people. While oppressed peoples have found a language of liberation in Christianity using it as in the case of Martin Luther King Jr., to challenge injustice, the established (usually) white churches have

²²⁶ Pastor Nero Timothy, as quoted in *Our Aim*, June, 1984, pp4-5.

²²⁷ *The Aim*, October, 1981, p2.

²²⁸ Cecil Grant stated that, 'To me the Jesus that is very much in my culture is the real Jesus, not the white Western one', as quoted in Pattel-Gray and Brown, eds., *Indigenous Australians: A Dialogue About the Word Becoming Flesh in Aboriginal Churches*, p. 29.

²²⁹ Willis and Barker, "June Barker Interviewed by Rob Willis in the Bringing Them Home after the Apology Oral History Project [Sound Recording]." *The Aim*, October 1981, p3.

not been so ready to embrace its political implications. Anne Pattel-Gray neatly summarized that faith missions in Australia had a tendency to, 'to spiritualize away all the political, social and economic issues'.²³⁰ Rev Bill Bird, an AIM Aboriginal missionary, wrote that, 'when I was young, a missionary said to us, "Don't worry about the social needs, the important thing is to save the Aboriginal soul and get them ready for heaven"'.²³¹ Coming from the position of white privilege, the AIM's theological focus on conversion, and keeping souls 'safe from hell' in the afterlife did not seek to challenge the social conditions that were problematic in the present.²³²

However, Aboriginal Christian leaders came from a radically different perspective. Pastor Don Brady was a prominent Aboriginal church leader.²³³ Born in Palm Island, he was one of the first to be educated at the AIM's Bible College in Singleton, and subsequently became a Methodist minister in Queensland.²³⁴ A former alcoholic, he became known as the 'punching parson' for his ministry in Brisbane where he took homeless, addicted people off the streets, often needing to knock them out before settling them in shelters.²³⁵ His Christian vocation was altered when he spent time in the United States under the Churchill scholarship, stating that, 'I heard a call, "Don arise, you are going to do a new thing"'.²³⁶ When he

²³⁰ Pattel-Gray, "Australian Indigenous Religions: Aboriginal Christianity," p. 677.

²³¹ Rev Bill Bird, as quoted in Max Hart, *A Story of Fire, Continued: Aboriginal Christianity* (Blackwood: New Creation Publications, 1997), p. 224.

²³² Aboriginal Inland Mission of Australia, *What We Believe: Studies on the Main Teachings of the Bible*, p. 49.

²³³ Pattel-Gray, *Through Aboriginal Eyes: The Cry from the Wilderness*, p. 84.

²³⁴ Pattel-Gray, "Australian Indigenous Religions: Aboriginal Christianity," p. 676.

²³⁵ Ysola Best, "Brady, Donald (Don) (1926-1984)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*(2007), <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/brady-donald-don-12246/text21971>>, accessed 23 September 2011.

returned to Australia he began to speak out on issues of justice. Pattel-Gray has argued that he was a catalyst for an emerging Black church:

‘Brady revealed to Aboriginal Christians that the God of justice, who freed the Israelites from the bondage of Egyptian rule, also was with the Aboriginal people as they struggled for freedom from Western oppression, racist laws and imperialism’.²³⁷

His example shows the development of a theology of dissent that would be passed down within the Indigenous Christian community. Brady was involved in the land rights movement and often questioned government policies towards Aboriginal people. However, this put him in conflict with his more conservative AIM counterparts and as a sad consequence he was ultimately dismissed from the Methodist church for his political stance.²³⁸ His example shows that the AIM was successful in nurturing Christian faith among Aboriginal people, but that it did not have the answers for the immediate needs of Aboriginal disadvantage. Aboriginal people themselves were required to preach this message.

Indigenous leadership and the Church:

Infantilisation and dramatic intervention -

To some degree the AIM recognized and encouraged Aboriginal people to be involved in preaching and conversion. The constitution noted that, ‘Missionaries should be

²³⁶ Pattel-Gray, "Australian Indigenous Religions: Aboriginal Christianity," p. 676. ‘a new thing’ seems to allude to Isaiah 43: 19, ‘I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.’ Isaiah was a prophet sent to preach the message of God, so Don Brady can be seen as being ‘called’ in the same sense, Isaiah as a whole speaks of the liberating power of God to bring a new creation to people in bondage and poverty, and as such Don Brady’s allusion indicates the beginning of an Aboriginal theology of liberation.

²³⁷ Pattel-Gray, "Australian Indigenous Religions: Aboriginal Christianity," p. 676.

²³⁸ Pattel-Gray, *Through Aboriginal Eyes: The Cry from the Wilderness*, p. 84.

on the look-out for Native Christians showing an aptitude as leaders and having at least twelve months' consistent living behind them'.²³⁹ This perceived 'aptitude' could be couched in patronising ways that again stressed the difference in Aboriginal people once Christianised. In describing Bert Draper's teaching and preaching for instance it was noted that his:

'illustrations were simple and to the point. Once when speaking about the experiences of the Israelites on their trip from Egypt to Canaan he said, "There were black snakes... and many other kinds of snakes. Which reminds me of this reserve. People here are bitten with all kinds of sin. There is the grog snake... the gambling snake, the swearing snake, the lying snake, and many others'.'²⁴⁰

In a number of cases, as above, conversion was linked to giving up addictive behaviours. The story of Bobbie Peters, for instance, tells that he was drinking in a hotel one day when he saw the AIM 'Native worker':

'Then the thought flashed through his mind, "Now why can't I be like that man? He is never troubled with drink or gambling and here I am, wasting my life with these things". He staggered up to the Native Pastor, put his hand on his shoulder and said, "Will you pray for me, Eddie?" "I always pray for you brother", was the reply. "But will you pray for me now? Here?" "Alright I will," and before a jeering crowd outside the hotel they dropped to their knees in prayer... a miracle happened, the drunkard arose sober'.²⁴¹

These stories are illustrative of a number of aspects of the AIM. Firstly, they are typical of evangelical testimonials that emphasise the drama of conversion as well as the humbling weakness of humanity before God. The sorry state in which the converted person

²³⁹ H.C. Gowans, *Constitution of the Aborigines' Inland Mission of Australia : With Its Principles, Practice and by-Laws* (Sydney: The Mission, 1935), Article 12, p. 12.

²⁴⁰ Higgins, *I'll Die at My Post: A Brief Life Story of Bert Draper, an Outstanding Aboriginal Christian*, pp. 24-25.

²⁴¹ Long, *Bobbie Peters : A Chosen Vessel : A Story of a Deformed Half-Caste Aboriginal Native Worker, Who Was Made Meat for the Master's Use*, p. 89.

is first found is described in detail. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of Bobbie Peters 'Hunch-Back Native Pastor'.²⁴² W. Long wrote that he was:

'a weak deformed hunchback; not one born in affluent circumstance, but one of the "common folk"... a member of the despised dark race of Australia's Aborigines, not a life-long Christian, but a seemingly hopeless inebriate apprehended by Christ the mighty Redeemer when actually in a staggering drunken condition'.²⁴³

As well as fitting the transformational testimonial tradition, this choice of language also suggests the incapacity of Aboriginal individuals to create an independent life without Christian intervention, and therefore appealed to the AIM's sponsors, the main audience for these self-published biographies. By stressing the importance of Native Ministry, as well as Christian conversion, these stories acted as justification for funding the AIM's work.

Training college -

The AIM did profess an interest in fostering Aboriginal leadership and in doing so it made way for Aboriginal people who pioneered activity which continues to the present day. Don Brady, and other Aboriginal leaders who emerged from the AIM, were first equipped through contact with missionaries and then through training at the Pindimar, and then Singleton Bible Colleges. The formation 'Native ministry' seems to have been particularly important to Retta Long, who travelled with Aboriginal 'helpers' from the beginning of her work as a missionary.²⁴⁴ In her biographical entry on Retta Long, Heather Radi writes that,

²⁴² Long, *Bobbie Peters : A Chosen Vessel : A Story of a Deformed Half-Caste Aboriginal Native Worker, Who Was Made Meat for the Master's Use*, p. 89.

²⁴³ Long, *Bobbie Peters : A Chosen Vessel : A Story of a Deformed Half-Caste Aboriginal Native Worker, Who Was Made Meat for the Master's Use*, p. 5.

²⁴⁴ See Brook, *Shut out from the World: The Hawkesbury Aborigines Reserve and Mission, 1889-1946*.

‘she spent years pursuing the goal’ of offering ministry training.²⁴⁵ The first Aboriginal man to be ordained in Australia, Eddie Atkinson, was originally converted by the AIM.²⁴⁶ In the 1930s, the AIM held large open air rallies and conventions, with altar calls and donations to encourage the idea of Aboriginal leadership.²⁴⁷ Annual conventions at Goolagong and Long Gully drew hundreds of Aboriginal people from many different places.²⁴⁸

In 1938, the first two Aboriginal students entered the AIM Native Workers Training College originally established at Pindimar, near Port Stephens, and moved to Singleton in 1945.²⁴⁹ The institute trained its students in basic theology and biblical literacy.²⁵⁰ At the same time Retta Long created the Australian Aboriginal Missionary Movement, with Mr and Mrs Sid Ridgeway, originally converted at Karuah, as its ‘central officers’.²⁵¹ According to Radi, the AAMM was meant to be ‘an autonomous Aboriginal organization for funding the

²⁴⁵ Radi, "Long, Margaret Jane (Retta) (1878–1956)." <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/long-margaret-jane-retta-10857/text19271>>.

²⁴⁶ O'Brien, *Gods Willing Workers: Women and Religion in Australia*, pp. 154-55. See also Eddie Atkinson converted at Cummeragunja by Miss McAuley, Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 24.

²⁴⁷ Radi, "Long, Margaret Jane (Retta) (1878–1956)." <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/long-margaret-jane-retta-10857/text19271>>. I have doubts about about this.

²⁴⁸ O'Brien, *Gods Willing Workers: Women and Religion in Australia*, p. 144.

²⁴⁹ Radi, "Long, Margaret Jane (Retta) (1878–1956)." <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/long-margaret-jane-retta-10857/text19271>>.

²⁵⁰ Interestingly, the AIM point out themselves that Arthur Collins, who was in charge of the ‘establishment of a Native Workers Training College’ in Pindimar, ‘had never done a formal Bible Training Course himself (apart from some evening studies at SMBC). Arthur was kept busy for and giving all the lectures’, *Our Aim*, July, 1978.

²⁵¹ Heather Radi, "Ridgeway, Sidney William (1895–1959)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*(2005), <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/ridgeway-sidney-william-13170/text23837>>, accessed 23 September 2011. Sidney Ridgeway had been one of the AIM’s first converts, assisting in the building of the church at Karuah. He was also politically active, being a foundation executive member of the AAPA.

training of and paying stipends to Aboriginal evangelists'.²⁵² This was a radical idea considering the time. By 1939 it had fourteen branches and had raised over a thousand pounds, however unfortunately its success was short lived, with the AIM finding it was difficult to channel the money through the Ridgeways to where it was most needed.²⁵³ This represented not so much a lack of faith in autonomous Indigenous activities, as the fact that the AIM struggled to manage the disparate strands of its work because of its simplified organisational structure. There was a clear intent by 1938 to see the work of the AIM given into the hands of Aboriginal people.

The first student at the College was Ralph Naden, son of another AIM Indigenous worker Pastor William Bee Naden, from Condobolin.²⁵⁴ This shows the way that family links were important to the origins and continuation of Indigenous Christianity.²⁵⁵ It appears that there was a rapid acceleration of Indigenous participation and leadership in the years following 1937, with the AIM claiming that, '1938 was a great year... After the Annual Meeting on November 6th, seven Native workers left to minister to their own people... By 1939, 100 native workers had gone out'.²⁵⁶ The AIM Training College was first run by

²⁵² Radi, "Ridgeway, Sidney William (1895–1959)." <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/ridgeway-sidney-william-13170/text23837>>.

²⁵³ Radi, "Ridgeway, Sidney William (1895–1959)." <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/ridgeway-sidney-william-13170/text23837>>.

²⁵⁴ Higgins, *The Man from the Pines : A Brief Life Story of Pastor W. B. Naden, a Much-Loved Aboriginal Worker of the Aborigines Inland Mission of Australia*, pp. 7-8.

²⁵⁵ Notably the Naden family continue to be active in Christian organisations. See for instance Robyn Walton, 'Don't Go To Gilgandra or you will get converted: a story of the Aboriginal Naden Family', *Coo-ee Calls*, no. 3, (January 2008), pp. 1-10, <<http://www.chr.org.au/fpbooks/otherarticles/ralphnaden.html>>, as accessed 1 October 2011.

²⁵⁶ Higgins, *The Man from the Pines : A Brief Life Story of Pastor W. B. Naden, a Much-Loved Aboriginal Worker of the Aborigines Inland Mission of Australia*, p. 9.

Arthur Collins and his wife Grace, the daughter of Retta and Leonard Long.²⁵⁷ This was despite the fact that Arthur, 'had never done a formal Bible Training Course himself (apart from some evening studies at SMBC)... [yet he] was kept busy preparing for and giving all the lectures to the little group of students'.²⁵⁸ The AIM required no more formal theological training from their Aboriginal workers than they did from white missionaries. Aboriginal Christians who began at the AIM College were not therefore necessarily the best equipped for ministry, and some sought further avenues of study in response.

Who were the Indigenous leaders in the AIM?

The extent to which the AIM nurtured the full capacity of Aboriginal leadership and theology can be debated, but it is nonetheless true that the 'native workers' of the AIM were vital to the way it was able to permeate Aboriginal communities. Often they were more successful than their white contemporaries. David Kirk, eventual founder of the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship, began by working as an AIM missionary. His work in Cherbourg was notable because it was 'built from nothing under the previous white missionary, to the point where the church became the dominant social institution in the area'.²⁵⁹ Duncan Ferguson was recalled to have taken more funerals than any white missionary in the Cumeragunga area where he served, including burying those who passed away in Bathurst jail.²⁶⁰ These Indigenous leaders also conducted enthusiastic itinerant work and were able to

²⁵⁷ 'Bible Training: 1938-1948', *The AIM*, July 1978, p3.

²⁵⁸ 'Bible Training: 1938-1948', *The AIM*, July 1978, p3.

²⁵⁹ Pattel-Gray, "Australian Indigenous Religions: Aboriginal Christianity," p. 677.

²⁶⁰ Willis and Barker, "June Barker Interviewed by Rob Willis in the Bringing Them Home after the Apology Oral History Project [Sound Recording]."

mobilise large groups of people. Pastor W. B. Naden, along with another AIM native missionary Henry Solomon, began an 'outreach ministry' in Gilgandra in 1938, travelling in an 'old red truck' and leading revival rallies.²⁶¹ The AIM claimed that this led to Gilgandra being dubbed "'The Holy Land... [where] all they do is sing and play guitars'".²⁶² These evangelists typify the way that Aboriginal people were able to take ownership of Christianity, beginning the work of changing Christianity for the benefit of Aboriginal people, rather than for their assimilation into white society; or to use the words of Anglican Bishop James Leftwich, through the work of Aboriginal-led ministry, 'we have become the Mission Force rather than the Mission Field'.²⁶³

The first large wave of Aboriginal people to be accepted to their 'native ministry' by the AIM was in 1924. Those recorded were Harry Ashmore, Fred Barber, Eddie Atkinson, Lily Kina, Mary Duncan, Tottie Lacey and Charlie Simeon, as well as 30 others as Sunday School teachers.²⁶⁴ It is notable that Retta Long records a balance of female and male Aboriginal workers.²⁶⁵ Lily Kina impressed the AIM when she went to work on Stradbroke Island. Retta Long wrote that, 'so efficiently did she conduct that work that in 1927 she was

²⁶¹ Higgins, *The Man from the Pines : A Brief Life Story of Pastor W. B. Naden, a Much-Loved Aboriginal Worker of the Aborigines Inland Mission of Australia*, pp. 16-17.

²⁶² Higgins, *The Man from the Pines : A Brief Life Story of Pastor W. B. Naden, a Much-Loved Aboriginal Worker of the Aborigines Inland Mission of Australia*, p. 20.

²⁶³ Bishop James Leftwich, Christian faith and Culture 'Hearts are Burning' forums, Lights of Australia Talks, NATSIEC (in assoc. with National Council of Churches in Australia), 2005, <<http://www.ncca.org.au/departments/natsiec/resources/theology/150-light-of-australia-talks>> , as accessed 3 October 2011, p1.

²⁶⁴ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 30.

²⁶⁵ O'Brien, *Gods Willing Workers: Women and Religion in Australia*, p. 154.

advanced to Native Missionary and in that year her twelfth child was born'.²⁶⁶ The encouragement of the gifts of Aboriginal women corresponds with the prominence of female missionaries in the AIM structure as a whole, although mostly these women were not in positions of power. In broader terms, leadership in administrative and operational capacities within the AIM remained out of the hands of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal leaders in this period, 1905-1938, were limited by their context, however their example enabled the beginnings of a lineage of dissent, as can be seen in the ways they responded to political events.

Networking, Indigenous politics and the AIM:

The limited capacity of the AIM to cater for Aboriginal leadership and social activism led Aboriginal people to organise their own avenues of expression outside of the mission. However, the AIM networks offered a useful way of organising groups of like-minded people. Both political and Christian circles used the connections forged through evangelical activities.

Social justice movements:

The establishment of churches and networks by non-denominational missions like AIM, provided avenues of social interaction and community. Some Aboriginal people used these channels as a way to forge links with others and mobilise to protest social issues. Ellen

²⁶⁶ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 34.

and Hugh Anderson were involved with the AIM in the Salt Pan Creek area of Sydney, with Hugh considered an Aboriginal missionary by the AIM.²⁶⁷ Goodall and Cadzow argued that:

‘rather than this affiliation with missionaries leading to a submissive attitude, The Andersons regarded Christian networks as a means to link up the Aboriginal people in many parts of the State who were protesting about the increasingly oppressive Protection Board regime’.²⁶⁸

The launch of the AAPA was assisted, as shown earlier, by an AIM missionary at the time, Elizabeth McKenzie Hatton, and the first meeting was attended by 200 local Aboriginal people, many with links to the AIM.²⁶⁹ Christian newspapers like ‘War Cry’ were used to spread the APAA’s message protesting the APB, and the church network as a whole was used as a way to communicate with dispersed groups.²⁷⁰

AIM Aboriginal missionary Eddie Atkinson, together with his wife Ellen, supported the protests of Jack Patten, William Ferguson, William Cooper and other progressive Aboriginal leaders, particularly during the Depression years.²⁷¹ When the Aboriginal settlement at Cummeroogunga was dismantled under pressure from White farmers, Eddie, Ellen and other Aboriginal residents protested the move.²⁷² Pastor Don Brady, as already

²⁶⁷ Goodall and Cadzow, *Rivers and Resilience: Aboriginal People on Sydney’s St Georges River*, p. 142.

²⁶⁸ Goodall and Cadzow, *Rivers and Resilience: Aboriginal People on Sydney’s St Georges River*, p. 142.

²⁶⁹ Goodall and Cadzow, *Rivers and Resilience: Aboriginal People on Sydney’s St Georges River*, p. 142.

²⁷⁰ Goodall and Cadzow, *Rivers and Resilience: Aboriginal People on Sydney’s St Georges River*, p. 145.

²⁷¹ Isobel White, "Atkinson, Edwin (1888–1952)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*(1993), <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/atkinson-edwin-9993/text16515>>, accessed 24 September 2011.

²⁷² ‘In 1939 the remaining inhabitants, including Eddy and Ellen, crossed the Murray River in protest and camped at Barmah, Victoria’, White, "Atkinson, Edwin (1888–1952)." <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/atkinson-edwin-9993/text16515>> .

mentioned, was influential in the development of an Aboriginal Christian language of liberation, pointing out Christ's identification with the poor and speaking out in protests about the *Queensland Protection Act*.²⁷³ Aboriginal people were therefore able to use the establishment of missionary groups in Aboriginal communities as a means of social interaction and agency.

AIM Indigenous leaders and the future Indigenous church -

The lack of Indigenous presence in the power structure of the AIM, despite its professed aim of building Indigenous churches on their own terms, began to disillusion some of the enthusiastic leaders who had been drawn in by the establishment of the AIM's Training College in 1937. The Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship, formed in the late 1960s, was the result of Aboriginal leaders influenced by organisations including the AIM, who wanted to take ownership of the lack of progress in forming a Black Christian movement. In his history of the AEF, Max Hart wrote that it, 'was formed as a result of the Christian missions', and they recognised the role that missionaries had in 'protecting Aborigines'.²⁷⁴ However, others associated with the AEF pointed out that, 'I would like to see the missions gradually contributing to [the formation of Aboriginal fellowships] and phasing out their own work. They should be handing over to Aborigines'.²⁷⁵

²⁷³ Best, "Brady, Donald (Don) (1926-1984)." <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/brady-donald-don-12246/text21971>>.

²⁷⁴ Hart, *A Story of Fire, Continued: Aboriginal Christianity*, p. 1.

²⁷⁵ Jack Braeside, as quoted in Hart, *A Story of Fire, Continued: Aboriginal Christianity*, p. 5.

Certainly Retta Long, in the early days of the mission noted with enthusiasm the numbers of Aboriginal missionaries and ‘helpers’. Yet it is doubtful that the early missionaries ever conceived of handing over control to Aboriginal converts. In the mid-1960s Pastor David Kirk was asked to be Deputy Principal at Singleton Bible College, however he was becoming increasingly aware of the lack of Aboriginal participation in the decision making structure of the AIM.²⁷⁶ Similarly, Rev Bill Bird recorded that ‘even when I became a missionary, I wasn’t given the status of a full-fledge missionary. I was only a second-rate missionary, because I wasn’t given... executive positions’.²⁷⁷ The limits of the AIM’s Indigenous training structure, led Kirk and Bird to seek the formation of an evangelical alliance solely run by Aboriginal leaders.²⁷⁸ Together with other AIM Aboriginal leaders such as Cecil Grant, and those from other missions including Jack Braeside, the AEF was launched in 1970.²⁷⁹

In response to these moves for Indigenous leadership, a 1968 editorial in *Our Aim* acknowledged that, ‘it could well be that within a few years we will have more Aboriginal missionaries and pastors than white ones associated with the Mission’.²⁸⁰ The problem for the AEF was that, despite the attempts to encourage Aboriginal independence and leadership, it was still reliant on funds from the missions, like AIM and UAM, who had inspired it.²⁸¹

²⁷⁶ Pattel-Gray, "Australian Indigenous Religions: Aboriginal Christianity," p. 677.

²⁷⁷ As quoted in Hart, *A Story of Fire, Continued: Aboriginal Christianity*, p. 226.

²⁷⁸ Pattel-Gray, "Australian Indigenous Religions: Aboriginal Christianity," p. 677.

²⁷⁹ Hart, *A Story of Fire, Continued: Aboriginal Christianity*, p. 4.

²⁸⁰ *Our Aim*, 2, no 6, July 1968, p2.

²⁸¹ Bill Bird as quoted in Hart, *A Story of Fire, Continued: Aboriginal Christianity*, p. 224.

Conflicts between conservative and radical elements of the AEF, together with the missionary influence, confined its role in creating an independent church. However, it continued to represent evangelical Indigenous Christians, combining to join people together for revivals and social gatherings, and nurturing the future generations of Aboriginal Christian leaders.²⁸²

Aboriginal people were far from passive in the history of the AIM. It was their ministry and leadership that in many cases accounted for its success in communities across Eastern and Northern Australia, and indeed for its continuation into the present. Aboriginal people also used missionary networks such as the AIM to mobilise on issues of social justice. The conservatism of the AIM forced some Aboriginal people out of the mission, and particularly early in their history they did not listen to Aboriginal ideas when it came to doctrine. However, Aboriginal leaders were responsible for much activity on a local level, particularly after the formation of the Bible College in the late 1930s. The cases of Don Brady, Cecil Grant, David Kirk and many others, show how Aboriginal people were able to use their own spiritual experience of Christianity as a liberating rather than an oppressive force in their lives and the lives of others.

²⁸² Hart, *A Story of Fire, Continued: Aboriginal Christianity*, p. 224.

Conclusion

We'll give them what you can't give

Teach them how to really live.

Teach them how to live they said²⁸³.

What would places like Singleton have looked and been like for Aboriginal people if the AIM had not existed? It is all too easy to imagine either an idyllic portrait of continued traditional life, or a tragedy of even worse dispossession and colonisation. In all these images we land back at the complicated reality of the exchange between missionaries and Aboriginal people. These exchanges took many forms, including personal relationships, evangelisation, assistance in Government policy, and ranged from empathy to racism, from the internalisation of colonisation, to resistance to missionaries and Government.

There is no doubt that the vast majority of AIM missionaries were well intentioned. They were also, however, complicit in the process of disempowering Aboriginal people. Their failure to recognise and advocate for the value of Aboriginal self-governance and culture, meant that the exchange was an unequal one. Missionaries would freely give of themselves and their ideas, but not be receptive in the same way. As such there was a failure inherent in their evangelism, which refused to learn and listen in the same way that it demanded its own transmission. The fundamental obstacle that remained in the path of the AIM between 1905 and 1938 was a lack of reciprocity in their relationships with Aboriginal people. As Rev Bill Bird, neatly remarked: 'Europeans need to be aware of themselves as

²⁸³ Took the Children Away lyrics, Archie Roach, as quoted in Tony McCarthy, 'Stolen Lives', *TIME*, (Monday, September 4th 2000), < <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2054556,00.html>>, as accessed 10 July 2011.

persons of a non-Aboriginal culture... so that they do not present the gospel message as part of their culture; it is not their culture, it is something God has given to the world'.²⁸⁴ A blindness of perspective limited the AIM from entering into full communion with Aboriginal people in both spiritual and practical terms during this period.

This is not to say that conversion was a bad experience overall for those evangelised by the AIM. Indeed the sentiment is often found that without the missionaries, things would have been a lot worse. June Barker remarked that if her father had not accepted the Christian way of life she would not be sitting being interviewed, rather she might have gone the way of other girls her age whose lives were cut short by drugs and alcohol.²⁸⁵ As discussed, testimonies put out by the AIM about Aboriginal conversions stressed the way that the intervention of religion saved lives from being given up to addiction. Christian living offered stability and optimism about personal transformation, at a time when these things were becoming increasingly cut off to people in other areas of society.

Yet there is fatalism inherent in the idea that Aboriginal people required Christian conversion in order to free themselves from problems. The Christianity of the AIM emphasised the incapacity of individuals to live a good life without following in the way of Jesus. It promoted a very personal religious experience, which appealed to people because it emphasised equality and the ability to access the spiritual regardless of education or background, however it did not empower them to challenge the larger systems of dominance that were keeping them in situations of poverty. Goodall and Cadzow have pointed out that the Andersons, who became involved with the AIM in the Salt Pan area of Sydney,

²⁸⁴ Bill Bird, in Hart, *A Story of Fire, Continued: Aboriginal Christianity*, p. 223.

²⁸⁵ Willis and Barker, "June Barker Interviewed by Rob Willis in the Bringing Them Home after the Apology Oral History Project [Sound Recording]."

sympathised with the AIM, but that they, 'did not believe in a subservient Christianity, but instead one which fostered defiance'.²⁸⁶ However the involvement of AIM members in the AAPA, other kinds of social activism, and more radical forms of Christian theology usually caused a distancing by the AIM rather than encouragement or assistance.

Furthermore through conversion Aboriginal people often eschewed traditional culture, adding to the wider promotion of assimilation into white society. The adoption of a Christian way of life often meant adhering to a timetable that was incompatible with traditional activities, as seen at La Perouse where fishing could no longer be undertaken on a Sunday. While worship was meant to adapt to local situations, the doctrine and hymns were of European extraction. Children in the AIM's Singleton home were brought up in accordance with European values of respectability, and were trained in domestic skills so that they could later be sent into apprenticeships served in white society. All these things, considered of benefit to Aboriginal people by AIM missionaries, actually added to an increasing severance from the independently determined lifestyle practised before colonisation.

The complicity of the AIM in damaging government policies such as child removal taints its role in Aboriginal community. While some missionaries, such as George Smith, questioned the wisdom of particular incidents of government intervention, the AIM as a whole did not get politically involved in advocating for Aboriginal rights. It saw its role primarily in offering 'spiritual care' to Aboriginal people, and the Singleton home, opened somewhat by accident, was the only deviance from this objective in their operations up to 1938.²⁸⁷ Missionaries lived in similar material conditions to Aboriginal people, sharing in

²⁸⁶ Goodall and Cadzow, *Rivers and Resilience: Aboriginal People on Sydney's St Georges River*, p. 114.

²⁸⁷ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 21.

their poverty and attempting to aid them, as in the case of a Mr Buckley at Walgett who 'helped the people considerably in building their new home' when they were forced to move from the Namoi camp to the Barwon reserve.²⁸⁸ Yet in this there was no urgency to try and transform these situations politically as well as spiritually.

This lack of political involvement was partly a result of its evangelical, conservative philosophy and partly because of the backgrounds of individual missionaries who on the whole were European and working class, with limited education. Retta Long wrote in 1909 that, 'our missionaries would seek to work in harmony with officials of the department and aid them in the work they have undertaken'.²⁸⁹ There is no real indication that the AIM saw government policy as anything but an attempt to do good for Aboriginal people, demonstrating that they echoed the paternalistic attitudes at work more broadly. Even in more recent times this conservatism is evident in retrospective opinion on government policy, with an article in *The Aim* recording that, 'in the early days segregation had been introduced as a means of protecting the people... It had been meant for their good, but the overall results were bad'.²⁹⁰ The reforming impulse of evangelical Christianity promoted legislative intervention to prevent the spread of vices like alcohol in society as a whole, but particularly among Aboriginal people who were perceived as vulnerable.

Then there is the fact that many missionaries were not equipped to provide assistance in protesting Aboriginal conditions. While there were a few missionaries such as Retta Long, or Elizabeth McKenzie Hatton, who had the status and eloquence to advocate for change

²⁸⁸ Long, *In the Way of His Steps*, p. 21.

²⁸⁹ Retta Long, as quoted in Brett Vickers, "'Mother of the Home': Jennie Parsons Smith," p. 43.

²⁹⁰ *The Aim*, Jan-Feb, 1994, p6.

from a higher social position, they were the exception to the vast majority of AIM employees. Jean Woolmington proposed the idea that missionary recruits who had little education or means were actually considered to have an advantage in attempts at evangelisation, and this accounts for their acceptance. She wrote that: 'The London Missionary Society for instance, felt that a "godly mechanic" or an uneducated man would have a greater rapport with "savage" people', and that people of "humbler circumstances" would be more readily able to cope with conditions and less likely to quit without a profession to fall back on.'²⁹¹ While AIM missionaries can be criticised for not trying to mobilise change for Aboriginal people from below, the fragility of their own circumstances, and the risks they took to go out on the field in the first place, makes it clear why they concentrated primarily on the object of evangelisation to which they felt they had been divinely called.

The AIM was founded and impassioned by a number of remarkable women. Given the lean structure of the AIM, its lack of funds, and the pressures put on missionaries by being isolated from general society, many of them displayed impressive fortitude and compassion in their work. Joan Proctor, an AIM missionary during the mid-1930s, recalled that, 'we really did the work more or less of a minister'.²⁹² Women like Retta Long, Jennie Smith and Elizabeth McKenzie Hatton, to name a few, showed that missionaries had a genuine caring for Aboriginal people, though this could be manifested in different ways, some more useful than others. Some were particularly charismatic individuals who formed close bonds with communities, such as Retta Long who recorded her sadness at having to leave the communities at La Perouse, and later Singleton when she moved the headquarters to Sydney. There is a record from 1915 of a petition showing residents at Moonah Cullah

²⁹¹ Jean Woolmington, "'Humble Artisans" and "Untutored Savages", *Journal of Australian Studies* 9, no. 8 (1985): p. 51.

²⁹² Joan Proctor, as quoted in O'Brien, *Gods Willing Workers: Women and Religion in Australia*, p. 149.

wished to retain the services of AIM missionary Miss Crebbin as ‘she is always a great help to us both in sickness and spiritual work’.²⁹³ The problem therefore was that missionaries did not very often have longevity in the places to which they were sent. This could mean that AIM churches were established, and members recruited, only to be left to fend for themselves once the missionary had moved on, or in the case of Singleton, when the missionaries were replaced by secular management. One can ask whether, given this, it was worth the missionaries coming at all, however it is an almost impossible question to answer since for some individuals their influence was positive, while for others it was just another case of European interference.

It may not have been radical in terms of Aboriginal rights, but the AIM did harbour a relative respect for Aboriginal people absent in much of broader society. It spoke out persistently on the matter of education, despite community racism about Aboriginal children in schools and derision over their likelihood of possessing an equal level of intelligence. In the Singleton and Karuah areas, the AIM pushed for the inclusion of Aboriginal children in public schools, and provided missionary buildings and staff as a last resort to the APB when it appeared they were in danger of not receiving any education at all.²⁹⁴ Some Aboriginal people and AIM missionaries formed friendships, and as Jack Miller wrote, regardless of their overall philosophy and actions, ‘the missionaries were [certainly] the first whites to treat Kooris in the Singleton area with respect’.²⁹⁵ Since they lived among Aboriginal people it would have been difficult for missionaries to escape the awareness that they were no different on human terms to themselves, and respect can only carry so far without reciprocity in

²⁹³ Petition, (12th Oct 1915), ‘Australian Indigenous Ministries - further records, 1904-1930’, Mitchell Library, ML MSS 7244, Box 1.

²⁹⁴ See chapter two for specific references.

²⁹⁵ Miller, *Koori, a Will to Win : The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia*, p. 126.

relationships. However the AIM's willingness to recognise the equality of Aboriginal people was unusual and meant that dialogue was more open to their involvement.

Aboriginal leadership was considered important from the foundation of the AIM onwards and it provided people with training and experience they would not have had otherwise. It was something unique to Christian organisations, as it was not until much later that opportunities for leadership recognised by white society became available to Indigenous people in the secular arena. AIM 'Native workers', 'helpers', and 'missionaries' ministered to their communities on their own initiative and were afforded dignity and respect by doing so. It also allowed them to move and network with Aboriginal people outside of their original communities. This empowerment led some to become involved in protest movements, and others to find community within a broader network of Indigenous evangelicals. Missionaries, both white and Aboriginal, served the community at important times by performing funerals and weddings, and this value should be noted when considering what communities might have looked like without the AIM. The AIM, despite being run at a primary level exclusively by white people, was aware and accepting of the need for Aboriginal people to lead and run Christian fellowships on at the grassroots. These roles were open as often to Aboriginal women as to men, showing that the AIM encouraged everyone in the exercise of their spiritual gifts, a positive message for potential converts.

Many of the characteristics of the AIM between 1905 and 1938 worked both for and against it. It was unapologetically evangelistic, with missionaries who were often young, idealistic, compassionate but not necessarily skilled or educated. They had good intentions but that is not enough to ignore the ways in which their actions exacerbated ideas of assimilation and segregation. The missing piece in their attempt to bring salvation was an

openness to the opinions and needs of the Aboriginal people who they hoped to minister among. While their religious beliefs recognised the equality of Aboriginal people within God's creation, their operations came from an almost exclusively Eurocentric viewpoint. The promotion of Aboriginal leadership within the organisation allowed for some appropriation and continuation of traditional culture alongside Christianity, but this was never officially sanctioned, and the tendency was more to encourage a moving away from culture after conversion. The AIM needed to listen more to Aboriginal people on their own terms, and while the opening of a training college at the end of this period, in 1938, marked a stepping stone to its ethos of making one body in Christ, it was nevertheless complicit in an overall system of intimate and systematic dispossession during this era of Australian history.

This uncovered history reveals that for Aboriginal people, connection to the AIM meant that they were able to use the networks and teaching to build a genealogy of Christian dissent that has its living inheritance today. Aboriginal people were able to reinterpret their Christianisation as a voice of agency. As Pastor Cecil Grant wrote, 'Jesus is a tribal man, He was of the tribe of Judah... He suffered rejection... He also knew the pain of dispossession'.²⁹⁶ The legacy of these earlier Aboriginal Christians can be seen in Rev Ray Minnecon's words to honour the work of Cecil Grant, when he said that as a young man he was inspired by Cecil Grant's conviction that to resist destruction it was essential to develop a new instrument in the form of an Indigenous church.²⁹⁷ While this is a vision that still waits to be achieved, the AIM was an origin for the legacy of a leadership seeking change. Despite its faults, the AIM nonetheless enabled the beginnings of Aboriginal Christianity in Australia.

²⁹⁶ Cecil Grant as quoted in Hart, *A Story of Fire, Continued: Aboriginal Christianity*, p. 234.

²⁹⁷ Minnecon, 'The Indigenous Church: Towards A Better Future', pp2-4. Rev Ray Minnecon has served as the director of the indigenous programme at World Vision, showing how this latterly inspired generation of Aboriginal church leaders are still working to effect social change.

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