

STUDY 5

MISSIONS AND MISSIONARIES

READING; ACTS 15.1-21

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."

The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to 1) abstain from food polluted by idols, 2) from sexual immorality, 3) from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."

SCHURMANN AND G TEICHELMANN ARRIVE

By 1838 Pastor Kavel and Angus had arranged for two German missionaries, C Schurmann¹ and G Teichlemann, to migrate to Adelaide because of their concern for the spiritual welfare of the Aboriginal people of the colony. These missionaries quickly set about to learn the language and began teaching in Kaurana. They taught first at Piltawodli on the northern banks of the Torrens River and after about two years, Schurmann moved to Pt Lincoln and, within another two years, in response to government pressure, the school was moved to Kintore Ave in an attempt to separate children from the influence of their elders. By doing this they inadvertently followed Governor Macquarie of NSW in 1810. A pattern that was to mark and sour European Aboriginal relationships for the rest of Australian history. Schurmann wrote in reference to the Aboriginal people, "*They listen with interestbut believe nothing of it.*"² Another two German missionaries H. Meyer and S. Klose, arrived in 1840 and they also immediately set about establishing or supervising schools³.

¹ more accurately spelt; Schuermann.

² Edwin A. Schurmann, *I'd Rather dig Potatoes*, 1987, 173.

³ Schools were formed to nurture the interests of the Aboriginal children as well as serving the interest of the white authorities. It gave the authorities greater control of the indigenous population and facilitated the distribution of food and blankets. They also served the interests of the missionaries by providing a structured teaching environment, and, as far as the authorities were concerned, schools enabled the children to be separated from the influences of their own culture and communities. On a more positive level, schools assisted the missionaries to learn the language of the children and to teach the Scriptures. This must always be kept in mind when assessing the impact of the Gospel among the Aboriginal people of the colony. When ever people learnt to read or write it could be almost guaranteed that they did so with the Lord's Prayer, Catechism of some form, the Ten Commandments, the Genesis record and the Gospels. This is on record for all of the missions mentioned below and can be safely said of all Christian missions in colonial Australia.

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Schools were an integral part of early colonial mission work and the same policy can be recognised in a comment of 1879 from missionary Kempe of Hermannsburg;

*"We have preferably concentrated ...on giving the children lessons in reading and writing, and recently have made a beginning with memory work and singing. ...We have also begun to gather the adults and to tell them the Bible stories from Genesis and some from the New Testament"*⁴.

Within two years the promised funds for the support of all four missionaries had dried up even as their reputation and admiration among the colonists grew. In 1842 a meeting was called in Adelaide and "THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MISSIONARY SOCIETY IN AID OF THE GERMAN MISSION TO THE ABORIGINES" was formed and committed not less than one hundred pounds to each missionary per year.⁵

Howard Beaumont was the first officially appointed chaplain to South Australia. With the help of the SOUTH AUSTRALIAN CHURCH SOCIETY, the SOCIETY FOR THE PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL and the SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE, Beaumont brought with him a prefabricated wooden church and parsonage in the hull of the Buffalo. He conducted his first service in January 1837 and became a well-known figure riding his horse 'Luther' on visits from Port Adelaide to Gawler, Echunga to Lyndoch valley, and Mount Barker to Encounter Bay. He was a foundation member of the BOARD OF ABORIGINAL PROTECTION.

At this point it is important to state that in 1837 a select committee of the British House of Commons was directed to;

"consider what measures might be adopted with regard to the native inhabitants of countries where British settlements are made ... in order to secure to them the due observance of Justice, and the protection of their rights, to promote the Spread of Civilization among them; and to lead them to the peaceful and voluntary reception of the Christian Religion".⁶

History seems to show that whilst the select committee may have considered what measures were needed to achieve these goals the goals were certainly never realised and in fact reaching these goals did not seem to be a high priority at all once the business of the colony got under way.

SOME EUROPEAN MISSIONARIES AND MISSIONS IN SA.

1838 C. Schurmann and G. Teichlemann (Adelaide, Luth).

1841 H. Meyer (Encounter Bay, Luth).

1840 S. Klose (Adelaide, Luth).

1841 Ladies 'guild' (Weslyan, Adelaide)⁷.

1850 M. Hale; Poonindie mission (Angl),

1859 G. Taplin Point McLeay (Raukkan, Ind)

1867 Jf. Gossling, JE. Jacob, HH. Vogelsang (Killalpaninna, Luth)⁸.

1866 G. Walder & H. Meissel (Kopperamanna, Mor).

1867 J. Kuhn (Moravian, Point Pearce).

1877 A.H. Kempe and W.F. Schwartz (Hermannsburg, Luth).

1901 C A Wiebusch Koonibba, Luth).

1901 D. & J. Matthews⁹ (Manunka, Mannum, Ind).

⁴ Everard Leske, Ed, Hermannsburg. A Vision and a Mission, 1977, 15.

⁵ E. H. Proeve and H. F. Proeve, A Work of Love and Sacrifice, 1952, 17.

⁶ Centenary History of South Australia, 1936, 18.

⁷ Aboriginal Adelaide. Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia, 48. From 1841 Wesleyan ladies made a concerted effort to minister to Aboriginal children.

⁸ EH Proeve, A Work of Love and Sacrifice, 1952 and A Scattered Homeless Flock, 1945, TH Hebart, The United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia, 1938, 74-76.

⁹ Daniel Matthews saw his first converts at Maloga Station Vic, in June 1877. Mavis Thorpe Clark, Pastor Doug: the story of an Aboriginal Leader, 1965, 18.

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1924 A. Lock (Oodnadatta, UAM) ¹⁰.
1925 Miss Folland Swan Reach UAM
1930c Umeewarra (Pt Augusta, Breth).
1938 C. Duguid, (Ernabella Pres).
1941 CofC conference authorised start of Aboriginal missions
1945 Southwell (Gerard UAM)

CHRISTIANISE OR CIVILISE

Time and again, the colonisers (including clergy and missionaries) found it almost impossible to understand their Christian faith other than as an expression of their culture; to proclaim one was to expect the other. It seems that almost universally, the missionaries argued unflinchingly, against the tide of culture, for the truth of Acts 17:26 but did not understand the importance of the Jerusalem decree recorded in Acts 15:23-29 and 21:25.

There is abundant evidence of the sincere and sacrificial concern for the spiritual welfare of the Aboriginal people from the very beginnings of colonisation in Australia and specifically in South Australia. However, it is also frequently recorded, that the missionaries themselves considered their efforts fruitless and within a few years most of the early missions were closed with no apparent church formed. No doubt there are many reasons for the disappointing results to their work not the least being the cultural myopia expressed in the very narrow, culturally biased, understanding of what it meant to be a Christian. And, as mentioned in a previous study, a lack of appreciation of the complexities of Aboriginal culture, and the Aboriginal people's general contentment with their lot prior to colonisation. But one cause of their failure which is very obvious with twenty twenty hindsight but which has not surfaced in any of my research is the unimaginable upheaval caused by massive immigration of aliens into their land in a very short time. Much has been said of the clash of cultures over the years but the speed of that clash is rarely written about.

So, laying aside as much our own cultural bias and 21st century values as we are able and choosing rather to assess the movement of nations in the light of God's revealed will and his program of reconciliation of all things, can it be said to, and by, the Aboriginal peoples of Australia *"How beautiful upon the Mountains are the feet of him (those) who bring good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things. Who says to Zion, Your God reigns."*¹¹ Can we say this? Yes, we can and we must. In fact, if we cannot be assured that race relations, and indeed, the entire history of colonisation in Australia, is under the direct oversight of the God and

¹⁰ Some of the positive long term fruits of UAM: early Colebrook Home.

Nancy Barnes was the first Aboriginal Kindergarten Union Graduate. In 1957 she became the first Kindergarten Director. In 1959 she was Director of the first Alice Springs Kindergarten and to admit Aboriginal children. In 1965 she was appointed to the SA Aboriginal Advisory Board and in 1983 Secretary of the Country Women's Association at Quorn. She was also the first contributor to the book Survival In Our Own Land. Nancy became an author and recounted the early history and later achievements of herself and other Colebrook children in the book Munyi's Daughter, A Spirited Brumby. Margaret Lawrie became the first matron of the Aboriginal Women's Home in Sussex Street.

Linda Lester, was also the first and only woman of Aboriginal descent from SA appointed to the WAAAF service.

Nellie Lester the first fully trained Aboriginal nurse and the first Matron of Aboriginal descent, when appointed to Gumeracha Hospital.

Amy Levai, the first primary school teacher of Aboriginal descent in South Australia in 1963. Served as UAM missionary for 3 years at Mt Margaret WA.

Lowitja O'Donoghue the first woman of Aboriginal descent to be accepted as a trainee at the Royal Adelaide Hospital in 1954. She spent three years nursing in India, became chairperson of ATSIC and was awarded the AM in 1976, a CBE in 1983 and Australian of the Year in 1985. She was the first Aboriginal to address the United Nations General Assembly.

George Tongerie won SA Aboriginal of the Year award in 1985.

Maude Tongerie, won a Gold Medal and Life Membership of the Aboriginal Community Centre in 1981.

Jeff Barnes was the first man of Aboriginal descent to join the RAAF in South Australia and the first to be appointed to the SA Aboriginal Advisory Board in 1964.

Jeff Barnes, George Tongerie, Ray Lester and Steve O'Donoghue won service honours, RAAF. Geoff O'Donoghue and Stephen Dodd won AIF honours and later served in Korea.

¹¹ Isaiah 52:7.

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Father of our Lord Jesus Christ then, on the basis of Isaiah 52, we have no gospel to proclaim. If we worship an impotent deity we can offer no comfort in the context of individual or national struggles. We proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom only on the basis that our Saviour is Lord and King. And that the god who loved the world so much that he sent his only son into the world to save it (John 3:16) must also be the faithful creator who remains faithful to his program of reconciliation of all things (1 Peter 4:19) and that he is therefore continuously seeking to secure a people for himself from among the people's of the world.

God's plan of salvation is universal and multi-ethnic and that's why the angels are prompted to sing a new song to the Lamb of God saying;

"You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. (Revelations 5:9).

This multi-ethnic focus of our evangelical concern must also be our focus as we, in our varying capacities, go into all the world and preach the Gospel (Matthew 28:19-20). The term 'all the world' has always included Aboriginal Australia and 'preach the Gospel' can only be the Gospel of the Kingdom; **our God reigns**.