

STUDY 7

SOME ORGANISATIONAL MINISTRIES

Aboriginal Inland Mission (AKA Australian Indigenous Ministries) and United Aborigines Mission (AKA UAM Ministries)

AIM is a non-denominational ministry which was formally constituted in September 1905. The organisation can trace its origins back to 1893 when a small group of concerned Christians from the CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOUR MOVEMENT and two Baptist congregations in Southern Sydney began meeting over a pic-nic lunch at La Perouse. The first missionary was Miss J Watson soon followed by Miss Reta Dixon. Within a week of ministry fourteen people came to the Lord. and seventy-six conversions within the first twelve months of the mission's operation¹.

The United Aborigines Mission formed out of AIM and hence also traces its origins back to 1893. Between them the *two organisations accounted for nearly half the missionaries of all denominations in the whole of Aboriginal Australia and ninety percent of those working in settled areas*².

However, although their dedication and sincerity is beyond doubt the fact remains that they offered the Aboriginal people a syncretised Christianity as they themselves saw it and in so doing were guilty of syncretism (just like their denominational missionary forebears). On their own web site AIM acknowledge that, *"With the benefit of hindsight, AIM would recognise that hurt was caused through continuing for too long with paternalistic attitudes.*³

Aboriginal Christian Ministry Training institutions⁴

- 1) Native Worker's Training College (1938, AIM, NSW)
- 2) Nungalinga est' (1973, UC, Angl, Cath, NT)
- 3) Gnowrangurup (1951, UAM, WA)
- 4) Bimbadeen (1979, AEF, NSW)
- 5) Bible College (AEF, 1928, WA)
- 6) Wontulp-bi-Buya est' (1990, Angl, Cath, Qu)

Taplan at Point Mcleay

There can be no doubting Taplan's sincerity and love of the Gospel. He said, *"on the first Sunday after my arrival I opened the largest room in my house for divine worship, and invited the blacks to attend. A good number came and listened with attention while I prayed and tried to address them in simple language from the text "The Lord is great God"*.⁵ It wasn't long before he saw fruits to his ministry. The first convert was Wauker⁶, then a young lad of twelve years old⁷, later two converts under Rev. James Reid working in conjunction with Taplan; Allan Jamblyn and James Unaipon. However, as soon as issues of culture encroached on the lives of the new converts in ways that Taplan deemed sinful he intervened and so squashed the ministry.

¹ John Ramsland, The Rainbow Beach Man, 2009, 294.

² John Harris, One Blood, 1990, 555ff.

³ AIM website

⁴ It is significant to note that Angas College of North Adelaide was the first significant missionary training institution in Australia. It was the harbinger of the bible college movement in Australia. However, between 1893 and 1912 Angus College saw 98 missionary trainees graduate but non of them went into Aboriginal mission work. Online, Faith Missions, Personality, and Leadership: William Lockhart Morton and Angas College

⁵ The Native Tribes of South Australia, 1879, facsimilie edit' 2009, 68.

⁶ The Native Tribes of South Australia, 1879, facsimilie edit' 2009, 77.

⁷ The Native Tribes of South Australia, 1879, facsimilie edit' 2009, 85.

First Fruits at Hermannsburg

In 1877, Seven teenagers were baptised after two years catechesis. Five of the youths were influenced by the witness of the other two; Kalimala and Tekua. Kalimala continued his own ministry to his people urging them to be faithful and he was largely responsible for the conversion of another twenty four people being baptised within two years of his own baptism. In 1894 when CTH Strehlow began his pastoral care these people still maintained their faith.⁸ One of these was Tjalkabota (Blind) Moses, mentioned above, and another was Nathanael a recognised Aboriginal Christian leader. Hermannsburg now has a strong church with Marcus Wheeler (an Arunda man) as the pastor.

Aboriginal Christian Conventions

The concept of Christian conventions in Aboriginal ministry can be traced back to an AIM initiative in 1907⁹.

One significant ministry that used the large scale meetings was that of the AIM Pastor William Bee Naden of NSW. Pastor Naden was an Aboriginal man who served from 1938 to the 1950's. He became one of the first eight Aboriginal Workers that AIM sent to administer the Gospel to their own people and he had a very successful ministry based at the Pilliga Mission in Northern NSW. From 1938 to 1939 AIM sent another one hundred Aboriginal missionaries into the field. In 1948 Pastor Naden began a new ministry in Gilgandra where his ministry became legendary. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people travelled long distances to hear him speak. He held regular open air services sometimes seven nights a week and again in the mornings and used the local Castlereagh River for baptisms. It was said at the time that a "true revival was taking place in Gilgandra." The warning in the western plains of NSW was, "Don't go to Gilgandra, or you'll get converted."

Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship and Christian Conventions

Max Hart has rightly understood the apparent fragmented origins of the growth of the indigenous church as one continuous work of the Holy Spirit. This is evident in the title of his book *"A Story of Fire, Continued"*. He records other wise disparate events as one continuous process across the nation. Aboriginal Christian leaders in WA said, *"We couldn't read the smoke signals from five thousand kilometers away in the eastern states, but they were also considering the same ideas over there."*¹⁰

The AEF was *"born of common frustration at the denial of their full equality with white Christians"*¹¹. The AEF and the convention phenomena grew simultaneously. The Port Augusta Convention began in January 1970 (at Stirling North) and that was the same time the AEF was formed. It was incorporated in August 1992. It began as an initiative of Aboriginal Church leaders who did not have the freedom to exercise their leadership within the established denominations¹². There are ample records to show that God was working constantly in the hearts of missionaries, mission administrators, and mission committee members as issues of Aboriginal leadership aspirations were raised and discussed. However, the turning point came in January 1971 at a meeting called by Aboriginal leaders with Rev Geoffrey Bingham as the study leader. The fruit of their deliberations enabled Aboriginal leaders to meet and share their experiences as members of mainstream churches. However, as long as they limited themselves

⁸ Everard Leske, Ed, *Hermannsburg, A Vision and a Mission*, 1977, 24.

⁹ John Ramsland, *The Rainbow Beach Man*, 2009, 295.

¹⁰ Max Hart, *A Story of Fire, Continued*, 1997, 3.

¹¹ John Harris, *One Blood*, 1990, 670.

¹² John Harris, *One Blood*, 1990, 669 - 670.

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to working within the mainstream churches only they would remain objects of missions rather than equal partners in the community of faith.

The formation of the AEF represented a breaking away from the bonds of the missionary overseers and the conventions at Port Augusta was an obvious expression of their newly won freedom. At their peak the conventions brought together over two thousand Aboriginal Christians from Across Australia. Even today, although the bi-annual Port Augusta convention is a mere shadow of its former self, it has spawned conventions across the APY lands of remote Northern South Australia as well as an annual convention in Alice Springs. Max Hart records some of the other conventions up to 1995, Amata 1978, Indulkana 1979, Mimili 1976, Fregon 1981, Kenmore 1981 and 1982, Indulkana 1995¹³.

Pastor Jack Braeside stated that the tribal people made a real contribution to the AEF because they were not tied to materialism nor did they have to rationalise everything. They accepted the truth of the Bible stories far more readily than their more sophisticated urban brothers and sisters. Their faith was more straightforward and they gave more Aboriginally to the meetings with their tribal ways, language and singing¹⁴. The tribal people from the western desert encouraged the traditional people from the west coast of SA.

Although a Christian Convention has been held in Katherine NT each year since 1966 the convention movement across Australia has really only grown since the Port Augusta Convention in 1982. Since then there are regular conventions in Alice Springs, Normanton, Ernabella, Amata, Condoblin and many other areas where Aboriginal Christian ministry is prominent.

The Revival Movement (to be considered in depth in study 8

Aboriginal Christian Fellowship (Charismatic)

As successful as the AEF was and although it sprang out of a frustration with the established 'baptistic' ethno-centric missions, it none-the-less reflected those same missions. It adopted their theology, pastoral practices and structures. An example of this tie was evident when the mainstream churches across Australia struggled with the issues of the Charismatic renewal movement. The fundamentalist Baptist churches banned the manifestation of the gifts in worship. These were the same churches from whom the Aboriginal missions had sprung. The AEF then followed their example and they too banned the charismatic gifts in worship¹⁵. The AEF leaders were forced to show their colors when the Brethren Mission of Umeewarra, on whose land the annual AEF convention was held, informed the leaders that if they wished to go in that direction then they would sever their ties (Brethren leaders of the day held a 'cessationist'¹⁶ view of the Gifts of the Spirit). A further repercussion occurred when the AEF pastors became involved in the Charismatic movement themselves and so had to leave the affiliation to form the 'Aboriginal Christian Fellowship' (ACF).

¹³ Max Hart, *A Story of Fire, Continued*, 1997, 24.

¹⁴ Max hart, *A Story of Fire, Continued*, 1997, 4.

¹⁵ Clause from motion presented at AEF AGM 1986 "*We should make it clear that they (christians who agree with the Charismatic Movement) should not teach their divisive doctrine on the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship platform, or cause division among the ranks of the fellowship*".

¹⁶ refers to the idea that the grace gifts primarily the gifts of tongues and interpretation of tongues referred to in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 were only given in the initial formative years of the church and have ceased to be valid ever since.

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God's covenantal promise in Exodus 34:6-7 is evident in the growth of the Aboriginal Church when his blessings flow from one generation to the next. He said;

"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

We see God's gracious actions in the passing of the Gospel from one generation to the next; for example a pastor Ozzie Cruze was a prominent AEF leader and was a grandson of Nathanael Pepper. Bishop Arthur Malcolm of Yarrabah, Queensland is a great nephew of James Noble. Sir Douglas Nicholls was a grandson of Eddie Atkinson.

THE UNITED ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER CHRISTIAN CONGRESS - DENISE CHAMPION

This ministry of the Uniting Church formed in 1982 but settled on its current name at a national conference on Elcho Island in 1983.

Act 16:20-21.

Hendrick Kraemer. Religion and the Christian Faith, 1956. Kraemer gives wise counsel to Western mission bodies on the issue of their financial obligations to fledgling churches. He explains that since the Western cultural structures which the West imports with its Gospel are portrayed as essential components of the Gospel therefore it has an obligation to provide Western support to maintain them. Kraemer also explains that, lack of financial stability and autonomy in so called, Third-World churches, must not be made a measure of spiritual maturity.