

## Chapter 7

### Civil Religion

The creation of a new society, in what was to the Europeans an empty space, posed the question of what values would form the basis of that society. The question was made more pressing in that the new society was made up principally of offenders against the laws of Great Britain. If the settlement proposed for Botany Bay was merely to be a prison administered by British officers, then military regulations would be sufficient. Nothing more would be required but authoritarianism and punitive violence. However the venture was to be more than this. It was not simply a very large version of Devil's Island. The very fact of the vast distance from England meant that most of those who were sent to Botany Bay would be unlikely to return. Consequently a new society had to be constructed and given a meaningful existence. The essential tasks were to make convicts into useful citizens in this new society, to give the society a set of values and to provide a sense of identity for the community. From the outset religion was seen in a utilitarian light as a means to assist in the process of moral reform. However orthodox religion could not provide a meaningful interpretation of the new society as a whole or establish an identity for it. The Christian faith had fractured into denominational groups and while the Anglican Church enjoyed a period of

monopoly, the rulers of the colony were clearly not committed to creating an evangelical culture. This need for a sense of community identity and values was filled by the establishment of a civil religion based upon the concepts of monarchy and empire, with the creation of Australia as a new beacon of civilisation and commerce. The value system was based on natural law rather than revealed religion. The development and significance of civil religion can be illustrated with reference to three elements in the colonial culture. The King's Birthday provided a focus for a cult of monarchy which incorporated the distant colonies in a metaphysical union with the Empire. The celebration of Christmas lost much of its overt religious meaning, but it acted as a focus of a civil faith by strengthening family and community ties and taking on the role of a harvest festival. The masonic and other lodges played a significant role in establishing concepts of civic and charitable service based on their belief in natural religion.

The concept of civil religion was promoted by Rousseau in his book *The Social Contract*, published in 1762. He believed that the dogmatic pronouncements of religious leaders tended to divide society rather than to create social cohesion. Thus to create a free and co-operative society it was necessary to have a new civil religion with a few simple articles of faith. Rousseau defined these as belief in

The existence of an omnipotent, intelligent, benevolent divinity that foresees and provides; the life to come; the happiness of the just; the punishment of sinners; the sanctity of the social contract and the law.[1]

1. Rousseau, J.J., *The Social Contract*, Harmondsworth, 1968, p. 186

The civil religion was to have only one “negative” doctrine and that was the rejection of intolerance, since it was one of the distinguishing features of the forms of religion which had been seen as socially divisive.

The colonial belief in the effectiveness of a benevolent Providence and in the concept of natural law met some of Rousseau’s requirements for a civic faith. There was also a degree of religious tolerance evident in the period up to the 1850s. While the religious life of Australia from the 1860s to the 1960s was marked by deep sectarian division between Catholics and Protestants, the colonial officials prior to this period were at pains to promote religious toleration in the face of clerical efforts to the contrary.

A significant contribution to the development of the idea of civil religion in England was provided by the work of the eighteenth-century Nonconformist hymn writer, Isaac Watts (1674-1748). In his *New Essay on Civic Power in Things Sacred*, published in 1739, Watts proposed the establishment of a civil religion to which all citizens must give their allegiance while being free to practise any denominational religion their conscience dictated. There would be both “gospel churches” and a “religion of England” without the existence of an established Church of England.[2] The civil religion would guarantee that the state and its officials acted justly and that citizens would be bound in loyalty to the state. The civil religion was seen as “a sort of natural religion ... which might be taught universally to all the people”.[3] Religious leaders were expected to give support to the civil religion on appropriate occasions by preaching sermons on the people’s duties of

2. Maclear, J.F., “Isaac Watts and the Idea of Public Religion”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. LIII, 1992, p. 26

3. *ibid.*, p.36

obedience and loyalty to the state. Civil religion was to exclude all elements of revealed religion and be based on the "simple truths of natural religion and ethics".[4] By way of promoting his concept of civil religion a number of Watts' hymns are of an unashamedly patriotic flavour. One proclaimed that God

... builds and guards the British Throne,  
And makes it gracious, like his own. [5]

It is perhaps significant to note that Watts' best known hymn has been sung regularly on that most sacred day of the Australian civil religion, Anzac Day:

Oh, God, our help in ages past,  
our hope for years to come  
our shelter from the stormy blast,  
and our eternal home.[6]

The debate over the existence and significance of civil religion since the eighteenth century has been promoted by an article by the American historian, Robert Bellah, which first appeared in 1967. By later analysing the language which was used in the inauguration addresses of President Kennedy and President Nixon, Bellah claimed to find a set of values which were acceptable to the majority of Americans and which related the United States to the pursuit of higher goals. In reply to his critics Bellah made

4. *ibid.*, p.42

5. *ibid.*, p. 42

6. *The Australian Hymn Book*, Sydney, 1983, p. 52

the point that whatever one's opinion on whether or not civil religion should or should not exist, the notion of civil religion is a useful analytical tool for the study of community values.[7]

Modern definitions of civil religion seek to place more emphasis on the importance of establishing a sense of identity and purpose within a community. One such definition proposes that civil religion is "the set of beliefs, rites and symbols which relate a person's role as a citizen and his society's place in space, time and history to the conditions of ultimate existence and meaning".[8] Civil religion can exist alongside traditional religion to provide answers to questions which traditional religion does not address. While the Bible provided a theological interpretation of the history of Israel, it provided no theodicy upon which to construct the idea of Australia. The values of denominational religion were not appropriate because of their divisiveness. A social contract had to be made of something more enduring.

In considering the nature of religion, Durkheim proposed that it was that set of doctrines and rituals which united a group of individuals into one single moral community.[9] While this is not the place to take up the anthropological and sociological debate, the idea is a handy one to use in attempting to examine the nature of civil religion which can create a sense of moral community where religious pluralism fails. In his discussion of what

7. Richey, R., & Jones, D., *American Civil Religion*, New York, 1974, p.257

8. Roberts, K.A., *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, Homewood, Illinois, 1984, p. 385

9. Bellah, R.N. & Hammond, P. E., *Varieties of Civil Religion*, New York, 1980, p.139

created the moral community in the United States in the latter eighteenth century, Phillip Hammond has identified the legal system as the defining factor of the "moral universe" by making decisions based on reasoning from common law principles:

Legal institutions are therefore called upon not only to secure order but to give it a uniformly accepted meaning as well. The result is a set of legal institutions with a decided religiomoral character. [10]

It may be objected that such sentiments were appropriate for the creation of such an august body as the U.S. Supreme Court, but of little consequence in a penal colony. David Neal is probably correct when he identifies the importance of what he calls "the rule of law ideology" in determining the nature of the society in the penal colony of New South Wales, but, as I have argued, his interpretation appears deficient in not recognising the foundation of that rule of law in the concepts of natural religion and natural justice. It was these ideas which underpinned the notion that even convicts were entitled to their day in court. As the discussion of natural justice has shown, the laws emanating from Divine Providence were deemed to be reflected in the laws of the King. Both God's laws and the King's laws could be appealed to against local tyranny, even if only in a spiritual sense. The authority of the colonial governors, the justice of the legal system and the laws of God were not guaranteed by the religious observance of the churches, but rather by the majesty of the British monarch. David Cannadine has highlighted the importance of civil religion for the stability of a state and the acceptance of authority. In the use of ceremonial connections can be made between

10. *ibid.*, p.153

the power of hierarchies on earth and the beliefs about celestial hierarchies and power. [11] Thus to discover the nature of civil religion in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land it is necessary to examine the connection between the earthly and heavenly powers which were relevant to the colonies.

While the task of establishing a penal colony may not have been one which lent itself to the contemplation of the founding of a new Jerusalem, there is, nevertheless, evidence to suggest that the convict outpost of New South Wales was linked in some minds to higher and greater purposes. Despite the vast distance between Great Britain and the newly established colony, the arrival of the first news of British action in the French Revolutionary War excited patriotic sentiments which reflected on the wider meaning of the penal settlement. David Collins believed that while the founding of the colony might be a distant and humble exercise, it could nevertheless be directed to the promotion of "the good, the glory and the aggrandisement of their country".[12] He continued by asking the question:

And why should the colonists of New South Wales be denied the merit of endeavouring to promote [English values] by establishing civilisation in a savage world; by animating the children of idleness and vice to habits of laborious and honest industry; and by showing the world that to Englishmen no difficulties are insuperable?.[13]

11. Cannadine, D., "Introduction: Divine Rites of Kings" in D. Cannadine [ed.], *Rituals of Royalty*, Cambridge, 1987, p.17
12. Collins, D., *An Account of the English Settlement in New South Wales*, Sydney, 1910, p. 54
13. *ibid.*

Here at least there was clearly a higher purpose envisaged than the removal and punishment of convicts. Here was a belief in a civilising purpose which would reflect the goodness and glory of Great Britain and be achieved through the moral transformation of the convict population.

While the English officers who were responsible for the foundation of the colony did not make declarations of purpose in the name of God like the founders of the United States, there is still to be found a strong sense that the task of creating a civilisation in Australia had a meaning which transcended the mundane brutalities of a convict settlement. The sentiments of civil religion were present even if the explicit declarations were not. The most useful way to illustrate the existence of such a religious sentiment is to examine the language used in relation to the celebration of significant events in colonial life. Apart from Christmas and New Year, holidays and public celebrations were associated with royal birthdays. In celebrating the birthday of the Prince of Wales in 1789, Collins used unambiguously religious language when he refers to "the glass that was consecrated on that occasion to His Royal Highness's name".[14] That this language was not simply a quirk of expression by Collins is shown by the fact that it was still being used in 1820 where it appears in a song for the 26 January celebration dinner, written by Michael Massey Robinson:

While the toast we select still enhances its flavour,  
And hallows the cup, "THE PRINCE REGENT FOR EVER" [15]

14. *ibid.*, p.62

15. Mackaness, G. [ed.] *Odes of Michael Massey Robinson, First Poet Laureate of Australia*, Sydney, 1946, p. 91



The words “consecrate” and “hallow” used in reference to the toast suggest something of a deeper significance than mere expressions of good will.

The arrival of news regarding George III’s recovery from a serious illness in 1790 prompted an address from the officers to Governor Phillip which declared their gratitude to “the Dispenser of all Good” for the King’s recovery. They said:

Actuated by the warmest wishes to promote the interests of our country, and the increasing splendour of his Majesty’s auspicious reign, all which can add to his domestic felicity must ever be regarded as sacred and inviolable.[16]

The terms “consecrated”, “hallows” and “sacred” are all terms more appropriate in referring to sacraments such as holy communion. It could be argued that these are terms of little meaning, but the fact that they are consistently used shows a cast of mind which sees something transcendent in the British monarchy. Even in a situation of considerable difficulty the King’s Birthday could not be allowed to pass without the expression of an appropriate sentiment, which included religious language. Despite being shipwrecked on Norfolk Island, John Hunter, was not lacking in appropriate sentiment for the King’s Birthday in 1790. The flag was raised and volleys were fired “as an acknowledgement that we Britons, who, however distant and distressed, revered our king and loved our country”. [17]

16. Cobley, J., *Sydney Cove, 1789 - 1790*, Sydney, 1963, p. 215

17. Hunter, J., *An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island*, Adelaide, 1968, p. 184

That the British monarchy was seen as an institution with more than common virtue is shown in the royal birthday odes produced by Robinson and published to mark the occasions in the *Sydney Gazette*. In his ode for the Queen's birthday in February 1811, Robinson provided a mixture of natural and civil religion which has no connection to any particularly Christian sentiments:

Lo! Nature wears a livelier Green,  
 To hail Augusta's peerless Queen,  
 And welcomes thro' the gladdened Earth,  
 The Morn that gave TRANSCENDENT VIRTUE Birth.[18]

As noted in the cases of religious conversion and the escape of the convict, Thomas Watling, nature reflects the human feelings of transcendence. Nature was seen as renovated in celebration of the transcendent virtue associated with the monarchy. Transcendent virtue links the laws of God to the laws of the monarchy.

The idea of transformed nature was also applied to the establishment of the penal settlement to give it a grand and transcendent interpretation which lifted it from an outpost of exile and misery to a blessed new civilisation. Robinson imagined that before the arrival of "Britannia's Sons", nature in Australia was sombre, forbidding and slumbering, except when

... some Straggler of the NATIVE RACE  
 In crude Canoe expos'd his sooty Face. [19]

18. Mackaness, *op.cit.*, p. 27

19. *ibid.*, p. 21

But with the arrival of “Britannia’s Sons” a profound and transcendent change occurred in nature:

Soon as their Footsteps press’d the yielding sand,  
 A sun more genial brighten’d on the Land:  
 Commerce and Arts enrich’d the social Soil,  
 Burst through the gloom and bade all Nature smile.[20]

This transforming of nature by the advent of British settlement was seen to be accompanied by a sense of social unity which was inspired by the opportunity of participation in the great venture of Australia. In his poem for 26 January 1824, Charles Tompson, Junior, declared enthusiastically,

This is the joy - inspiring day  
 That gave these blessings to our lot,  
 Then let us share the social rites,  
 Join hands, all malice be forgot!  
 The little star, once marked by none  
 Now shines a bright - a BLAZING SUN ! [21]

The fact that the colony was at a vast distance from Britain was also taken into account. The theme of unity regardless of distance couched in religious language appears in Robinson’s ode for the King’s Birthday in 1810:

Tho’ far from Albion’s hallow’d Coast

20. *ibid.*, p. 31

21. Tompson, C., *Wild Notes from the Lyre of a Native Minstrel*, Sydney, 1973, p. 68

OCEAN'S first PRIDE, and NATURE'S Boast  
 Whose Fame the sacred Bards of old  
 In Strains propheticall foretold:  
 Though, wafted by refluent Tides,  
 Your watery Waste her Sons divide,  
 Still shall the Muse prefer her tribute Lay,  
 And *Australasia* hail her GEORGE'S Natal Day. [22]

While Richard Johnson and the missionaries from Tahiti saw the colony of New South Wales as a godless outpost of iniquity, at least those in command of the settlement could perceive a higher purpose in terms of a sacred link to the British monarchy through which the civilising mission in the wilderness could be understood. The use of religious language suggests that there was a sense of transcendent value in the attempt to create a new society in New South Wales.

The ritual of the King's Birthday celebrations also exhibited features suggestive of civil religion. From 1788 the King's Birthday was marked with a holiday, "a day of remission from labour".[23] The flag was raised, salutes were fired and bonfires were lit. Extra rations were supplied to troops and convicts and the governor entertained the officers with as liberal a banquet as circumstances would permit. An important feature of the day was the granting of pardons to convicts and the reprieving of those under sentence of death, "that there might not be any exception to the happiness of this

22. Mackaness, *op.cit.*, p. 24

23. Stockdale, J., [ed.], *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay*, Melbourne, 1982, p. 64

day".[24] It was the one occasion when a sense of community could be effectively promoted, as Robinson advocated some years later:

Such is our MCNARCH'S mild Behest  
Such the pure Meed His Wisdom sends  
To bid the Din of Discord rest  
And Britons harmonise as Friends ! [25]

The establishment of social harmony was seen not as the work of clergymen acting as moral policemen, although they may have been deemed useful in that role, but as the function of the monarch. The social order was seen as having been established by Nature and upheld by the King. As Robinson put it:

Then let the Friends of Faction fly  
To desert Haurts and Shores untam'd  
No more to rend the social Tie  
Which Nature's earliest Efforts fram'd. [26]

Forgiveness of sins in the world to come was seen by the clergy as the province of God acting in Christ, but forgiveness in this world was the province of the governor acting as the dispenser of the King's grace. As an example, the General Orders for the King's birthday celebrations in 1803 provided for the conditional emancipation or free pardon of members of the New South Wales Corps under various sentences, the conditional emancipation of 67 convicts and the release of all convicts from gaol gangs

24. *ibid.*

25. Mackaness, *op.cit.*, p. 22

26. *ibid.*

as an act of “the Royal Grace”. [27] In informing the British Government of his actions in granting the releases, Governor King wrote,

I have always marked the birthday of our most gracious Sovereign by such extension of the Royal mercy ... I consider it incumbent on me to mark these events by a greater number of conditional emancipations.[28]

The forgiveness extended by the governors in the name of the King's grace demonstrates the use of religious language as a means of creating a sense of community in the colony and connecting it with the civil authority. Governor King also made the connection between the powers of earth and Heaven in the regulations given to Father Dixon, the first Catholic priest allowed to perform religious duties in the colony. He declared that Catholics would show “becoming gratitude” to the monarch for this act of religious toleration which “proceeds from the piety and benevolence of our most gracious sovereign, to whom ... we are (under Providence) indebted for the blessings we enjoy”. [29]

Lachlan Macquarie found himself a particular focus of the civil cult. In 1810 the first race meeting was held in Hyde Park under Macquarie's patronage. That this was to be a highly moral civic amusement was made clear by the forbidding of gaming, drunkenness, swearing, quarrelling and fighting. A song commemorating the races and Macquarie was written for one of the race week dinners, possibly by Robinson. The piece commenced

27. *Sydney Gazette*, 5 June 1803

28. King to Lord Hobart, 7 June 1803, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol.V., p.154

29. Order to Dixon, 19 April 1803, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol.V, p.98

with the idea of the “sports of the Chase” having a transcendent quality, by being associated with figures such as Nimrod. This was followed by the idea that the wasteland of “rude ages past” has been transformed by the advent of the “Beauty and Taste” of the Australian turf. The song ended with the concept of the roar of the crowd cheering the winners echoing from Heaven with praise and gratitude for Macquarie;

To him whose calm voice,  
 Makes his people rejoice -  
 That the Friend to Mankind is their  
 SOVEREIGN'S choice !  
 And long may his mild and beneficent sway  
 Enhance - whilst it sanctions the sports of the day ! [30]

Whether or not Robinson was the perpetrator of this piece, he had other poems in praise of Macquarie published in Sydney. Macquarie is described as “Humanity’s kind Son” in an ode for 1 January 1811, a day “sacred to mirth”. He is also eulogised as the benefactor of the wretched, the widow and the orphan. [31]

On 1 January 1820, Robinson again touched on the significant themes of civic unity and the greater purpose of the colony:

’Twas His - illustrious Chief ! - to awe  
 The lawless band with righteous law,

30. “First Sydney Races” in Ingleton, G.C. [ed.], *True Patriots All*, Sydney, 1988, p. 57

31. Mackaness, *op.cit.*, p.86

And with a Master's hand to draw  
 From discord, unison : ...  
 Brave Chief ! 'tis thy illustrious doom  
 To rear for these, a dearer home  
 And in a second rising Rome,  
 To rival Numa's fame ! [32]

Tompson also described Macquarie in religious terms, in two elegies written to commemorate Macquarie's death. Tompson has Nature as well as Australia in mourning, as "Grief's black ministers pervade the skies".[33] Macquarie's remains are described as "shrined" in his native land. [34] In reviewing Macquarie's achievements, Tompson reflected on the Native Institute at Blacktown. He saw missionary attempts to assist the Aborigines as a futile exercise and contrasted their failure with the success of Macquarie's scheme:

To thee, MACQUARIE, was the dictate giv'n  
 Thou wert the chosen Delegate of Heav'n  
 Thousands adore thee for th' angelic deed,  
 And for thy parted soul invoke the Christian's meed ! [35]

Tompson concluded his elegy on Macquarie's death with the departed Governor quaffing "immortal sweets that bloom in heaven" and the poet calling upon God to have rulers emulate the virtues of Macquarie:

32. *ibid.*, p. 87

33. Tompson, *op.cit.*, p. 39

34. *ibid.*

35. *ibid.*, p.46



Then stoop, kind Father, from that bright abode,  
Teach Rulers virtue - bid them dare be good. [36]

To what extent Macquarie saw himself as being delegated by Heaven is more difficult to determine. However, from the journals of his tours of inspection, there are clues that he did see his civic work in some religious light, although not one easily compatible with orthodox Christian theology. Macquarie's account of the establishment of Bathurst provides a useful example. The shooting of a very large black swan and a very large platypus in the Macquarie River were taken to be a "good omen of the future prosperity and plenty of the new country". [37] On Sunday, 7 May 1815, Macquarie mustered his party for prayer and Divine Service but commented, "previous thereto they were all mustered for the purpose of witnessing the christening of the new intended town" of Bathurst. [38] Macquarie employed the term christening on a number of occasions when he named towns. Again this may be taken as a meaningless expression for naming things but the context is important. Clifford Geertz has pointed out the religious significance of the royal progress.[39] While Macquarie's tours were not in the grand manner of a progress by a monarch such as Elizabeth I, they did achieve the same purpose in marking out the domain of the monarch. Thus it was appropriate to use the term "christening" and to look for omens, since to bring a place officially into His Majesty's domain was to confer some

36. *ibid.*, p. 41

37. Macquarie, L., *Journals of His Tours in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land 1810 - 1822*, Sydney, 1979, pp.99-100

38. *ibid.*, p. 101

39. Geertz, C., "Centres, Kings and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power" in Ben-David, J. & Clark, T. (ed.), *Culture and Its Creators*, Chicago, 1977, p. 153

transcendent quality upon it.

\* \* \*

Of course there were many in New South Wales who would not have shared the sentiments of Robinson and Tompson regarding Macquarie. It is significant that the two authors who enthusiastically supported him and elevated him to the proximity of God's right hand were from the emancipist section of the colonial society. Robinson had come to the colony as a convict while Tompson was the native-born son of convict parents. The only way the emancipists could gain a respectable standing in the new society was through the acceptance of ideas of civic unity and the promotion of Australia as a new social entity. The transformation of nature prefigures the transformed society which will rise as a "second Rome". The Christian faith could assist in the process but the driving force of the new society must be the virtues of the British monarchy and the virtues of the colonial governor. While a civil religion could provide a framework of meaning and purpose for the colony, it should not be supposed that it was accorded universal devotion. The lines written by John Grant while a convict on Norfolk Island on the occasion of the King's birthday in 1805 are a useful reminder that not all poets were as dedicated to the official faith as Robinson and Tompson:

But in the Realms of his, who can rejoice:  
 Is it his servant who his Law defies  
 Is it the supplicating convict's Voice  
 Or the brave Tar who for promotion tries?  
 Who tho' he sing: Britannia rules the Waves,

Must he, alas! confess: fair Freedom's Sons are Slaves. [40]

The celebration of royal birthdays and civic anniversaries played a significant role in creating a sense of identity and community in the colony and a sense of being part of a wider community of the British Empire. The colony did not regard itself as an isolated convict outpost. Naturally there were those such as the Irish who did not necessarily identify with the official sentiments and for whom the celebration of St Patrick's Day was an alternative focus of identity.

\* \* \*

The clergy were a supporting cast, charged with the task of exhorting good moral conduct and obedience to the civic authority as a means to the promotion of social harmony not individual salvation. In the instructions issued to the early governors of New South Wales the directions on the observance of religion were invariably linked to the maintenance of good order.[41]

The attempt by the Catholic priest, Father Thomas Walshe, to obtain permission from the British Government to accompany the Catholic convicts in the First Fleet, had been couched in terms of the utility of religion for maintaining civil order. He believed that if he were allowed to go "my endeavours to bring these unhappy people to a proper sense of their duties as subjects and citizens may be attended with some salutary

40. Hill-Reid, *op.cit.*, p. 213

41. Phillip's Instructions, 25 April 1787, *H.R.A.*, Series I, Vol.I, p.14

consequences". [42] Religious instruction could make the convicts useful to themselves and perhaps useful to their country. While the Colonial Office would have approved the sentiments, it did not approve of Catholic clergy joining the expedition to Botany Bay. This line of argument was still being used in the early 1830s in appeals to the British Government for more assistance to the Catholic Church in New South Wales. In his memoirs of life in the colony, Roger Therry quotes a letter written in 1833 claiming that "not only justice and humanity, but the well-being of the Colony, essentially depend on the maintenance of public morality".[43]

The role of the clergy in this civic religion was precisely as Watts had suggested, the preaching of appropriate sermons on loyalty and public duty. Collins records that on the occasion of the thanksgiving service for the recovery of George III, the Rev. Richard Johnson preached on a text from Proverbs, "By me kings reign" [44] Tench approved of the sermon as it was "suited to the occasion, at once so full of gratitude and solemnity".[45] Unfortunately the supposed Methodist sympathies of Johnson and Marsden made them less amenable to the task of preaching loyalty and attention to duty than the officials of the colony would have liked. Macquarie, for instance, took grave exception to Marsden's attempt to introduce psalm singing. For him, the only way in which the order of service as set out in the Book of Common Prayer could be altered was by reference to the "Supreme

42. T. Walshe to Lord Sydney 1787, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol.I, Part II, p.119

43. Therry, R., *Reminiscences of Thirty Years in New South Wales and Victoria*, Sydney, 1972, p.149

44. Copley, *op.cit.*, p. 213

45. Tench, W., *Sydney's First Four Years*, [ed. L.F. Fitzhardinge], Sydney, 1961, p. 170

Authority of our Church, and the Commands of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent", and certainly not by chaplains "originally of low Rank" and "much tinctured with Methodical and other Sectarian Principles".[46] It appears not to have occurred to Macquarie that christening towns and divining omens from a dead platypus was not in the spirit of the Book of Common Prayer. Nevertheless, Marsden could rise to the occasion when necessary and preach a sermon with appropriate civic sentiments. On the opening of St John's church at Parramatta in 1803 Marsden outlined the progress of religion, "averting to the many solid advantages that must necessarily derive to this colony, from a proper observance of the duties of Christianity and religious worship". [47]

If the clerics of Sydney and Parramatta were not entirely happy with the expectations of the colonial officials, the Rev. Robert Knopwood of Hobart seems to have delighted in his role as the following selection of extracts from his diary illustrates:

[7 May 1815 ] Performed D.V Service attended by Lieut. Govnr and all the officers. The sermon was 'Submission to Governors'. It was much liked by all the officers etc. [48]

[4 December 1831] . . . to Hollow Tree, read prayers and preached there, a very full congregation. The sermon was on The Duty of Children to their Parents. It was very much liked. [49]

46. Macquarie to Bathurst, 7 October 1814, in Woolmington, J. [ed.], *Religion in Early Australia*, Stanmore 1967, p.12

47. *Sydney Gazette*, 17 April 1803

48. Nicholls, M. [ed.], *The Diary of Reverend Robert Knopwood*, Hobart, 1977, p.203

49. *ibid.*, p. 591

[13 January 1834] This morn I rode to Grass Tree Hill and read prayers and preached to the road gang. The sermon was Duty and Submission Govmt.[50]

On the last occasion Knopwood omitted to note whether or not his sermon was "much liked" by the convicts in the road gang.

Knopwood could always be relied upon to produce an appropriate sermon on civic occasions. He recorded a report from the Hobart press of the ceremonies following the death of George III in 1820 in his diary,

The whole ceremony could not fail to leave a deep impression of the veneration and respect which were felt towards our lamented sovereign - an impression which was much strengthened by the discourse of the Revd. R.Knopwood, M.A., whose allusions to His late Majesty's private virtues were most appropriate to the melancholy occasion.[51]

Knopwood was not the only clergyman who knew how to produce a sermon which would meet the approval of the governor. While Macquarie noted his numerous attendances at church in the course of travels around New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, the only time he refers to the content of a sermon was in his journal entry for Sunday, 29 October 1820, where he noted that

50. *ibid.*, p. 625

51. *ibid.*, p. 339

the Revd. Mr Cartwright performed Divine Worship and gave a very excellent appropriate sermon, strongly impressing the justice, good policy and expediency of civilising the aborigines, or black natives of the country and settling them in townships.[52]

This was a policy of which Macquarie approved and had made some attempt to carry out in his experiment at Blacktown.

This same tendency to preach pleasing sermons for governors appears in the journal of Annabella Boswell in relation to the visit of Governor FitzRoy to Port Macquarie in 1847. She describes the scene with the preacher in the drawing-room and the crowd spilling out onto the verandah in the stifling heat. The clergyman, Mr Woodward, preached on the text, "And Joseph was Governor over the land". The sermon ended with the comment that although the Governor had come to the colony in "gloomy times", they were now beginning to brighten and that the colony could expect prosperity now that "a Joseph had risen among us". Annabella concluded that these remarks were "not in good taste". [53] If an educated young colonial lady could find such preaching offensive, how much more inappropriate must the sentiments have sounded in the ears of convicts who were served "appropriate" sermons each week as part of their punishment. It is hardly surprising that such themes delivered from the pulpit failed to elicit an enthusiastic response from convicts, even though they might be "very much liked" by the officials of the system.

52. Macquarie, *op.cit.*, p. 160

53. Morton, H. [ed.], *Annabella Boswell's Journal*, Sydney, 1981, p. 128

There was one point at which public ritual and the role of the clergy came together in the most dramatic way. That was on the occasion of public executions. Public executions have been described by Michael Sturma as a dramaturgic ritual involving the assertion of the power and authority of the state and the church in the secular and spiritual spheres.[54] There was a well developed if unwritten script for the performance of public executions and the condemned person could be judged on how well the occasion had turned out. Those prisoners who played their ideal expected role in the proceedings conducted themselves with fortitude and dignity and attended to the earnest ministrations of the clergy. They made a speech from the gallows which admitted the justice of the sentence passed on them, asked forgiveness from those who had been wronged and from God and forgave the hangman for the duty he was about to perform. The execution of Samuel Peyton in June 1788 was a model performance. The surgeon, John White, reported that Peyton addressed the assembled convicts in a "pathetic, eloquent and well directed speech" in which he acknowledged the justice of his sentence and "trusted that the ignominious death he was about to suffer would serve as a warning to those who saw and heard him".[55] After fervent prayer he asked for forgiveness and himself forgave "all mankind". Watkin Tench quoted with approval a letter supposedly written by Peyton to his mother in the condemned man placed all his hopes in "the promises of that Saviour who died for us all".[56] David Collins was equally impressed with another convict who "addressed his fellow convicts, warning them to avoid the paths that he had pursued" and claiming that he was "desirous of

54. Sturma, M., "Death and Ritual on the Gallows", *Omega*, Vol. 17 (1), 1986-7, p. 90

55. White, J., *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales*, Sydney, 1962, p.143

56. Tench, *op. cit.*, p. 62



death, declaring that he could not live without stealing".[57] Those who did not meet these standards of conduct were doubly condemned. Tench deplored the conduct of a young convict who met his death "with a hardiness and insensibility, which the grossest ignorance, and most deplorable want of feeling, alone could supply".[58]

Women posed some difficulty for the hangman as they appeared often to fail to act in the appropriate manner at the gallows. According to Jacob Nagle, the execution of Ann Davis in 1789 was a distressing sight. She had to be assisted to the gallows by two women because "she was so intoxicated in liquor that she could not stand without holding her up. It was dreadful to see her going to eternity out of this world in such a senseless, shocking manner".[59]

A similar situation was reported in the *Sydney Gazette* in 1808 where a woman fainted a number of times at the gallows as she "appeared more and more afflicted by the horror of her condition". However the occasion retained some sense of decorum as "the male sufferers behaved in a manner becoming their unhappy condition".[60] The most difficult situations arose when the condemned prisoners sought to disrupt the proceedings by upholding the Tyburn tradition of dying game or hard. In popular terms this was defined as dying without making any show of contrition or fear at the gallows. While the desire to die game can be seen as merely the final

57. Collins, *op.cit.*, p.140

58. Tench, *op.cit.*, p.59

59. Dann, J.C. [ed.], *The Nagle Journal*, New York, 1988, p. 110

60. *Sydney Gazette*, 19 June 1808

defiant act of an anti-social life or an attempt to uphold the supposed honour of thieves, it can also be seen as a final protest against a system which was perceived as unjust. Before receiving a reprieve from the gallows, John Grant wrote:

I am ask'd to forgive all my foes e'er I go  
 To that Country unknown whence no Trav'ler returns  
 But shall suffering Virtue her Favours bestow  
 Thus on Villainy? No! ... [61]

As a means of asserting the authority of the state and church, public executions were a phenomenon with diminishing effect. The more people were exposed to the spectacle of death, the less deterrent effect there was and the more sympathy there was for the victim. As the ex-convict, John Mortlock, noted in relation to public executions in the 1850s, "our minds are pervaded by a mixed feeling of forced sympathy and dread; the latter sentiment diminishing at each repetition of the sight". [62]

\* \* \*

While the celebration of Christmas was supposedly a celebration of the birth of Christ, it also played a significant role in community building and in reminding the residents of the Australian colonies that they remained part of a wider community, even if the members of that community of family and friends was half a world away.

61. Hill-Reid, W.S., *John Grant's Journey*, London, 1957, p.263.

62. Mortlock, J.F., *Experiences of a Convict*, London, 1965, p.141

The account of the celebration of Christmas on Norfolk Island in 1788 which was given by Governor King is almost the same as the form of celebration for the King's Birthday. The colours were raised at sunrise, extra rations were issued to the convicts, the officers dined with their commander and bonfires were lit. The only addition was the performance of divine service as part of the festivities.[63] Some relief for the convicts became part of the expected order for the celebration of Christmas. Even on board the convict transports the day was expected to bring some amelioration of conditions. A sense of disappointment was expressed by William Noah, a convict aboard the *Hillsborough*, at his poor Christmas dinner for 1798 as the ship struggled through a violent storm: "Gentlemen [acting] as Parsons read prayers and I must assure you it was a hard Tryal as most of us thought she must be lost we was only serv'd this Day with a Little rice and that at 9 in the Evening".[64]

Due to the fact that Christmas and the colonial wheat harvest time were at the same time, it was natural to link the the ideas of Christmas and prosperity in the early colonial period. In its first Christmas edition the *Sydney Gazette* wished its readers the compliments of the season, making specific reference to agriculture, commerce and the British monarchy, but not to the nativity. For farmers the editor hoped that "the season may prove an Increase of prosperity, and crowded Barns denote unceasing plenty". He extended a "hearty wish" that commerce and trade "may be attended

63 Hunter, *op.cit.*, p. 334

64. Noah, W., *Voyage to Sydney in the Ship Hillsborough 1798-1799*, Sydney, 1978, p. 21

with success” and then concluded with the comment that “to the Arms of a Parent Monarchy we echo the universal wishes of increasing resplendency”.<sup>[65]</sup> The theme was repeated in subsequent years. In 1808, for example, the *Gazette* expressed the wish that Christmas would be a “season of prosperity” for its readers.<sup>[66]</sup> The linkage of Christmas and harvest is also found in private letters and literature.

Writing about Christmas to his relations in England in 1844, John Cotton commented that he had drunk their health in a glass of toddy while the “sickle was amongst the corn” He reflected, “How different to the Christmas of olden times”.<sup>[67]</sup> Also in reflective mood Penelope Selby wrote to her family in England in 1848,

I have a fine lot of young ducks. The boys are very keen to have some on Xmas day ... I begin to think with all its troubles this is a better country than yours, no fear of famine ... The hay making will commence immediately after Christmas, and then the harvest time.<sup>[68]</sup>

In his novel, *The Emigrant Family*, Alexander Harris introduces his Christmas scene with the line, “At length came Christmas day and the harvest-home feast together”.<sup>[69]</sup>

65. *Sydney Gazette*, 25 December 1803

66. *ibid.*, 25 December 1808

67. J. Cotton to W. Cotton, May 1844, in Mackaness, G. [ed.], *The Correspondence of John Cotton*, Sydney, 1978, p.55

68. P. Selby to mother, 15 December 1848, in Frost, L., *No Place For a Nervous Lady*, Sydney, 1934, pp.176 - 177

69. Harris, *The Emigrant Family*; p. 94

Whatever sentiments may have been felt regarding the birth of Christ, the fact that harvest time and Christmas fell together created an inescapable link between the traditional Christmas celebration and the measure of the prosperity of the colony. If the civic religion looked to the ideas of progress and prosperity through the transforming of nature, Christmas celebrations were ideally suited to bolster this faith, even if it did little to strengthen the colonists in the faith of Jesus Christ.

During his period as governor of Van Diemen's Land, Sir William Denison attempted to use Christmas as a means of fostering community good will by the promotion of the Christmas tree, children's parties and Christmas sports and games. In 1847 he organised a Christmas dinner which included officials and leading citizens, the government farm workers and a party of Aborigines. Despite the fact that these different social groups had their different tables to sit at and that the Aborigines had been invited in the hope that they would allow their children to attend a school which Denison was attempting to set up for them, the occasion turned out to be a major community event, with sports following the Christmas dinner. Lady Denison noted,

We had asked all our own acquaintance to come down to look at our festivities; and the rest of the inhabitants of the township [New Norfolk] had asked themselves, and got in somehow or other in the bustle, the great object with all was to see the blacks, whose coming had created a great sensation.[70]

70. Denison, W., *Varieties of Vice-Regal Life*, Vol.1, London, 1870, p.70

Another of Denison's community building activities was shown in his becoming a member of the Odd Fellows Lodge in Hobart. This was an instance of a long association of colonial governors as members or patrons of masonic or Odd Fellows lodges. The early conflict between Governor King and the troublesome Sir Henry Browne Hayes over attempts to hold masonic meetings should not distract attention from the fact that colonial governors were usually supportive of lodges as they provided an avenue for the ritualised expression of civic virtues. In his guide to masonic ideas and practices written in the latter nineteenth century, Robert Macoy makes the point explicitly :

In the course of initiation, brotherly love, loyalty, and other virtues are inculcate in hieroglyphic symbols and the candidate is often reminded that there is an eye above, which observeth the workings of his heart. [71]

The mason was expected to be an example to others "in religious, in civil and in moral conduct, which are among the great principles of our noble institution". [72]

Lachlan Macquarie became a mason by joining a military lodge during his period in Bombay in the early 1790s. Macquarie's first biographer, M.H. Ellis, makes little of this association by suggesting that Macquarie was too much captivated by his future wife, Jane Jarvis to know what he was doing: "He was inducted into the local Lodge of Freemasons as one in a

71. Macoy, R., *A Dictionary of Freemasonry*, New York, 1989, p. 693

72. *ibid.*

dream".[73] Ellis only raises the matter of Macquarie being a longstanding member of the Craft in New South Wales in the context of one of his numerous personal conflicts. On this occasion it was with members of the Lodge No. 227 Social and Military Virtues.[74] However this particular lodge played no significant part in the establishing of freemasonry in the colonies as it was a regimental lodge which refused to initiate any free settlers or ex-convicts into it. In refusing to accept Samuel Clayton, a Past Master of a Dublin lodge on the grounds that he had been transported to the colony, the lodge wrote to the Grand Lodge of Ireland stating that "our Respectability both Military and Masonic, have ever rendered it necessary we should act, in these respects with more than ordinary Caution and Circumspection".[75]

With the establishment of the first non-military lodge in New South Wales in 1820, Lodge No. 260, the question of emancipists becoming members was an important issue. The incorporation of ex-convicts into the upper ranks of colonial society was a major policy objective of Macquarie and it may be speculated that his views had some influence upon the final decision of his brother masons in relation to emancipists. After local debate the question was referred to the Grand Lodge of Ireland which ruled that emancipists of good character could join. To satisfy the consciences of those masons who did not wish to associate with "Brethren who had once the misfortune of falling under the ash of the Law", Lodge No. 260 was allowed to grant dispensations to set up new lodges.[76] This arrangement allowed the colonial masonic movement to claim to unite "in one strong chain the

73. Ellis, M.H., *Lachlan Macquarie*, Sydney, 1970, p. 43

74. *ibid.*, p. 378

75. Cramp, K.R., & Mackaness, G., *A History of the Grand United Lodge of New South Wales*, Vol. I, Sydney, 1938, p. 29

76. *ibid.*, p. 37

poor man and the rich man; as well as keep all party distinctions from Masonic Walls in this infant Colony”,[77] even though the fallen brethren met elsewhere.

Although it had been achieved by a roundabout method freemasonry was a symbol of civic unity and used its various public gatherings and feast day church services to promote the ideals of unity and civic virtue. In 1817, for instance, the Rev. Robert Knopwood noted the appearance of masons in full dress present at the laying of the foundation stone of St David’s Church in Hobart [78] even though warrants were not issued for regular lodges in Hobart until the 1830s. The Odd Fellows also had a flair for turning out on civic occasions such as the farewell to Denison from Hobart when he was leaving to take up his new appointment in New South Wales. Lady Denison described the scene with the Odd Fellows leading the procession to the wharf followed by the Mayor and Corporation and then the members of the Legislative and Executive Councils. [79] The Masonic Ball was another occasion to display the civic face of the Craft. The ceremonial was of such a high order that Lady Denison thought that some of it should have been reserved for royalty.[80]

What was it about the lodges which attracted vice-regal membership or patronage? Firstly it was the promotion of civic virtue and morality. Masons were to practice the golden rule in their dealings with their neighbours and to practice every moral and social duty. They were advised that “Prudence

77. *ibid.*, p. 38

78. Nicholls, *op.cit.*, p.250

79. Denison, *op.cit.*, p.276

80. *ibid.*, pp. 365 - 367



should direct us; Temperance should chasten us; Fortitude support us; and Justice be the guide of all our actions".[81] Secondly lodges promoted loyalty to the British monarchy, which was the fountainhead of the civil religion. Masons were admonished to be "true to your Queen, and just to your country [and] to teach all within the sphere of your acquaintance to be loyal".[82] Lady Denison remarked upon the toast at the Masonic Ball : " 'The Queen and the Craft', which it seems is their custom to couple together"[83]

This emphasis on social virtues is a contrast to the conspiracy myths which had gathered around eighteenth-century masonic lodges. However there were still mysteries of potent power for those with a taste for such things. The Hobart newspaper editor, historian and masonic mystic, Henry Melville, believed that he had uncovered the keys to the understanding of ancient mysteries which would be of significance to leaders of government. In 1856 he came to Sydney to see the Premier and masonic brother, Stuart Donaldson, claiming that his secret mysteries could be of interest to someone who desired "to promote the welfare of your native or adopted land".[84] He also told Denison that his discoveries were of significance to the colony but he was not able fully to explain the secrets, "His Excellency not being one of our order".[85] When his discoveries were later published they turned out to be a jumble of Egyptian mythology, astrology and unorthodox Christianity in which Jesus and Mary were identified with Osiris

81. Macoy, *op.cit.*, p. 590

82. *ibid.*, p. 575

83. Denison, *op.cit.*, p. 356

84. Melville to Donaldson 15 December 1856, Letters of Donaldson Ministry, Mitchell Library MS A 731, pp.486-487

85. *ibid.*

and Isis. [86] Writing in a less esoteric mood, Melville identified the third feature of the masonic movement which was the promotion of friendship and helping of brothers in distress; "Any one possessing the document [of membership] is at once entitled to fellowship, and in the case of distress to assistance".[87] As Macoy put it, friendship was to extend from the "circle of private connections to the grand system of universal benevolence".[88] As the basis of this friendship was the agreement of all the brethren that regardless of their background they were all united "when, with one accord, they offered thanksgiving to the Grand Architect of the Universe". [89]

The practical application of this principle of mutual assistance can be seen in the variety of lodges which are listed in Sydney directories for the 1840s and 1850s. *Moore's Almanac* for 1852, for instance, lists six Masonic Lodges, numerous Odd-Fellows Lodges meeting in Sydney hotels, nine Manchester Unity groups and six branches of the Foresters' Society. A selection of the names leaves the reader in no doubt as to their benevolent purpose; Traveller's Home, Loyal Mariners Rest, Strangers Refuge Lodge, Fountain of Refuge and Unitec Brothers. [90]

The gold rushes gave new enthusiasm to the belief in the great destiny of Australia. One observer noted, "Our national character seems quite changed, - I suppose from the good humour of finding such quantities

86. Henricus,[Melville,H.] *The Lost Mysteries of Freemasonry*, Sydney, 1874, p.61

87. *ibid.*, p. 6

88. Macoy, *op.cit.*, p. 518

89. Henricus, *op.cit.*, p. 7

90. *Moore's Almanac*, Sydney 1852

of the 'root of all evil". [91] One editor urged the British Government to give up shooting Hottentots to pursue the mission of peace and prosperity in Australia by spending its money on emigration rather than war.[92] The *Sydney Morning Herald* declared that the wealth of Australia would "startle the whole civilised world". As a result not only would communications be dramatically improved but "Transportation will be put down. Our political freedom will be enlarged. Our country will be blessed!"[93] Another commentator saw the cities of Europe as passing away like Babylon and Ninevah while greater cities would rise in Australia to hail "the coming Millennium, when peace and plenty will bless the world".[94] These sentiments are in the same tradition as those of Charles Tompson. The "little star remarked by none" was now indeed "a blazing sun".

The question of what sort of society would emerge out of convict beginnings was a significant one for the residents of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land. Broughton's biographer, George Shaw, sees the bishop as playing a key role in establishing the foundations of Australian society. He makes the claim that

to the extent that Australia to day, and Australian life today, is rooted in the judaeo-christian tradition, and draws much of its harmony from being so, Broughton is to be reckoned among the

91. Mackaness, G. [ed.], *Australian Goldfields Their Discovery Progress and Prospects*, Sydney, 1956, p. 36
92. Mackaness, G. [ed.] *Murray's Guide to the Australian Gold Diggings*, Sydney, 1956, p. 10
93. Mackaness, G. [ed.], J.E. Erskine, *A Short Account of the Late Discoveries of Gold in Australia*, Sydney, 1957, p. 24
94. Mackaness, [ed.], *Murray's Guide* p. 9

true founders of Australia ... [creating] a civil society where formerly there was none. [95]

This view fails to take account of the attempts to create a society based on a civil faith which drew its inspiration from a transcendent view of the British monarchy and its agents in the colonies, such as Macquarie. It was a faith which saw a vision of progress, not in the evangelicalism of men like Broughton, but in the transforming of nature. The values which underpinned the attempt to create a new society were those which derived from natural religion and the ideals of natural justice rather than from any general application of the judaeo-christian ethic by Broughton and the religious establishment. Where the traditional Christian religious event of Christmas was observed, it was frequently used as an opportunity for community building and thus incorporated into the realm of a civil religion. The widespread popularity of masonic and other lodges provided a means of giving ritual expression to this civil faith and dressing civic responsibility, friendship and charity with transcendent meaning. The discovery of gold provided another opportunity to seek signs of a transcendent purpose for Australia. Robinson had written about building a new Rome. Gold inspired some civic prophets with visions of the millennium of peace and prosperity. Civil religion played a significant part in creating a meaning and purpose for Australia beyond that of a mere convict outpost and sheep run at the end of the world.

95. Shaw, G.P., "The Promotion of Civilisation", *Royal Australian Historical Society Journal*, Vol. 74, Pt. 2, 1988, p.108

## Chapter 8

### The Moral Order

In his study of the “moral enlightenment” in the period 1835 - 51 Michael Roe sees a number of political reforms, and indeed the nature of Australian society being determined by the impact of a “new faith”. He considers that while the heirs of Broughton “detest and decry all they see about them”, those who were to be the kindred spirits of Charles Harpur could take heart from the type of society which had been created in Australia.[1] Roe sees this process of moral enlightenment as stemming in the final analysis from the colonial experience encouraging a “true religion” as distinct from “traditional religion”, as the “frontier conditions strengthened the Protestant emphasis on the social ethic rather than sophisticated theology”. [2] Although he expresses his skepticism about the qualities of the bushman in relation to the “Australian legend” tradition, he sees the moral traits associated with this tradition as springing from the Australian experience.[3]

This vague and undefined “true religion” which developed in the colonial

1. Roe, M., *Quest for Authority in Eastern Australia*, Melbourne, 1965, p. 202
2. *ibid.*, p. 204
3. *ibid.*

context must be given some substance if the origin of the “moral enlightenment” is to be fully explained. Roe and other historians see the period of the 1830s and 1840s as the key period of determining the nature of the emerging Australian society. In his discussion of Broughton’s significance, G.P. Shaw claims that the period was one which “laid the foundations of the Australian state and set the rules for the place of religion, and the Church of England, in Australian civil society”.<sup>[4]</sup> While this is true in the legislative sense, the foundations of the society were laid by the values and the religious outlook of those who established the penal settlement. The “moral enlightenment” was not so much the product of debates over transforming a convict settlement into free society, as a working out of the values expounded, if not practised, from the beginning of the colony of New South Wales.

From reports of missionaries to the London Missionary Society in the 1790s it would seem that there was very little moral order to be found in New South Wales. William Henry complained of a population “hardened in sin” and indulging in “avarice, extortion, pride, blasphemy, drunkenness, Sabbath-breaking, fornication and adultery”.<sup>[5]</sup> Such reports would have merely confirmed the fears of those who believed that nothing of value could come of such a social experiment. When the proposal to send convicts to Botany Bay was made public, the ethics of the plan were debated in the English press. One correspondent, styling himself “A Plain Englishman”, wrote,

4. Shaw, G.P., “The Promotion of Civilisation”, *Royal Australian Historical Society Journal*, Vol. 74, Part 2, 1988, p. 101

5. McMahon, J., *Fragments of the Early History of Australia*, Melbourne, 1913, p. 297

For the honour of the Christian religion, for the honour of humanity and for the honour of my country, I very anxiously hope a scheme so injurious to the interests of mankind in general will not go forward.[6]

Another correspondent expressed his fears for the survival of the native inhabitants when confronted with the "most wicked and most abandoned wretches under Heaven".[7] However there was a more optimistic view of possible outcomes of the venture. There was from the beginning the view that moral reform could be effected but it was a reform based upon an appeal to factors other than religion. The clergy and religion could be useful adjuncts to reform but their contribution was seen in a purely utilitarian light as bringing convicts to a proper sense of their moral and religious duties.

In the great era of evangelical revival when conversion was encouraged by confronting people with the supposed enormity of their sins and pointing to the judgment to come, it is significant that one of the proponents of the scheme to transport convicts to New South Wales, James Matra, should take the opposite view on moral reform. He believed that "A man's intimate and hourly acquaintance with his guilt, of the frowns and severities of the world, tend ... to make him a determined and incorrigible villain".[8] Rather than holding their sins before the eyes of the convicts the government could, he believed, promote reform by placing them in a place beyond temptation

6. Quoted in Atkinson, A., "The Ethics of Conquest", *Aboriginal History*, Vol.6, No.2, 1982, p. 89

7. *ibid.*, p. 87

8. J.M. Matra's Proposal for the Settlement of New South Wales, 23 August 1783, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol.1, Part 2, p. 7

where they would have to work or starve. As a result the convicts would become useful and very possibly they would turn out to be “moral subjects of society”.<sup>[9]</sup>

Arthur Phillip took a similar view on reform. In a memorandum to the British Government written before his departure for Botany Bay in 1787, Phillip remarked that the convicts’ “happiness and misery is in their own hands”.<sup>[10]</sup> Good behaviour would be rewarded with the opportunity to work their own land, “which they will be put in possession of at the expiration of the time for which they are transported”.<sup>[11]</sup> Before the fleet sailed, Phillip was thinking about the creation of a post-convict society. He saw it as a place to be dominated by free settlers. He was reluctant to have convicts lay the “foundations of an Empire”. Apparently without sensing the irony, Phillip declared that New South Wales would have no slaves as “there can be no slavery in a free land”.<sup>[12]</sup> He had no illusions about the ability of state power to deter criminal behaviour.<sup>[13]</sup> Nor did he have any illusions about the prospects of reclaiming the virtue of convict women, suggesting that it would be best if the “most abandoned” were allowed to be prostitutes while others could be given encouragement to marry. This attitude was reflected in the case of a male convict found guilty of a sexual assault on a young girl and who was pardoned on condition that he be removed to Norfolk Island. It was thought that there was no need to make an example of him because “the chastity of the female part of the settlement had never been so rigid,

9. *ibid.*

10. Captain Phillip’s Memo, 1787 in Mackaness, G. [ed.], *Some Proposals for Establishing Colonies in the South Seas*, Sydney, 1943, p. 58

11. *ibid.*

12. *ibid.*, p. 61

13. *ibid.*



as to drive men to so desperate an act".[14] From the beginning Phillip held the view that an appeal to self-interest was the most effective way to involve the convicts in his empire-founding scheme. This view was supported by the Rev. Thomas Walshe in his attempt to have a Catholic priest included in the First Fleet company. He wrote to Lord Sydney arguing that a priest could make Irish convicts more "readily obey every order of their governors" and by bringing their Christian obligations before them, "make them useful to themselves, and perhaps afterwards to their country".[15] In the event, the Catholic convicts had to rely on the ministrations of the Rev. Richard Johnson. This apparently did not concern the authorities because they saw Johnson's job as simply to attend to the convicts' morals. [16]

The colony was founded on 26 January 1788, but it was 7 February before the reading of Phillip's commission to the assembled officers and convicts took place. The reading of the commission was followed by a speech from Phillip. The text was not preserved but the sentiments were reported by numerous witnesses. The marine sergeant, James Scott, noted that, "Relative to their Behaviour & Every Crime that Was Committed before he freely forgave".[17] The application of industry and good behaviour would see the convicts restored to a respectable position in society. Marriage was recommended as tending to promote their "future happiness and

14. Collins quoted in Cobley, J., *Sydney Cove 1789-1790*, Sydney, 1963, p. 94

15. Rev. T. Walshe to Lord Sydney, 1787, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol.1, Part 2, pp. 119-120

16. Collins, D., *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, Sydney, 1910, p.7

17. Scott, J., *Remarks on a Passage to Botany Bay 1787-1792*, Sydney, 1963, p. 36

comfort”. [18] The speech concluded with Phillip declaring his “earnest desire to promote the happiness of all who were under his government” and to make the colony “advantageous and honourable” to Britain. [19] The ceremony was concluded with a review of the troops, after which a dinner was held for the officers and general festivities were conducted. Apparently the chaplain of the colony was not invited to officiate at the founding ceremony. If he did, nobody thought to mention it. The first religious service had been held on 3 February 1788.

In addressing the convicts on Norfolk Island in 1789, Philip Gidley King expressed similar sentiments to those used by Phillip. He attempted to convince them of the advantages of being on the island “where nothing but industry was requisite to ensure them a happy and comfortable livelihood”. Their past behaviour could be wiped away by their future conduct. [20] The idea of appealing to the self-interest of the convicts as the best road to improved behaviour was also endorsed by the colonial Judge Advocate, David Collins. He believed that neither harsh punishment nor appeals to the heart would be likely to produce results:

The people who had degraded themselves sufficiently to wear the stigma of “convict” could not be supposed in general actuated by that nice sense of feeling which draws its truest satisfaction from self-approbation; they look for something more substantial,

18. White, J., *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales*, Sydney, 1962, p.144
19. Stockdale, J. [ed.], *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay*, Melbourne, 1982, p. 35
20. Hunter, J., *An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island*, Adelaide, 1968, p. 127

something more obvious to the external senses.[21]

While the speeches of Phillip and King to the convicts lack both the grandeur and the fame of the almost contemporary United States Declaration of Independence, there is a significant common element to be found in both. This is the concern with the pursuit of happiness. For the authors of the Declaration of Independence, the pursuit of happiness was one of the inalienable rights which proceeded from "the Laws of Nature and Nature's God".[22]

The reports of Phillip's speech do not include references to natural religion, but it has been clearly established that both natural law and Nature's God were significant elements in the thinking of the founders of the colony of New South Wales. Bold statements about "Liberty" were probably inappropriate for a gathering of convicts, but there was the expectation that "honest industry" would lead to the restoration of liberty. In his references to Phillip's intentions in *The Fatal Shore* Robert Hughes suggests that Phillip's comments about establishing a free society referred to some future time and that he claims that Phillip "thought of the convicts as slaves by their own fallen nature".[23] He then imposes this dubious interpretation upon Phillip's reported speech to the assembled convicts on 7 February 1788 to make Phillip sound like a schoolmaster laying down rules in a petulant and mean-spirited manner. Hughes refers only to threats and ignores the positive comments that all witnesses reported. He thus leaves his readers with

21. Collins, *op.cit.*, p. 127

22. Introductory paragraph, United States Declaration of Independence.

23. Hughes, R., *The Fatal Shore*, London, 1987, p. 68

the completely false impression that Phillip believed that only severe treatment would have any effect on the behaviour of the convicts.[24] This interpretation is consistent with Hughes' colourful opinion that the colony's foundation owed more to the ideas of the Marquis de Sade than to the Enlightenment,[25] but it is simply not consistent with the facts. The belief that through their own efforts and industry, the convicts might regain the place in society which they had lost displays a rejection of the idea of "fallen nature" and all that the term implies.

The colony may have been established as a place of punishment but it was also a place of redemption through self-help and self-interest, in which it was possible to find liberty, prosperity and happiness. That these ideals were not often achieved, especially in the early days of the colony, should not be allowed to disguise the nature of the founding values of the society. Phillip suffered his disappointments at the lack of enthusiasm with which the convicts greeted their new opportunities. In 1790 he lamented,

Experience, sir, has taught me how difficult it is to make men industrious who have passed their lives in habits of vice and indolence ... there are many who dread punishment less than they fear labour.[26]

Tench was less concerned with the rate of convict reform, noting that they were better behaved than he had anticipated: "To have expected

24. *ibid.*, p. 89

25. *ibid.*, p. 1

26. Phillip to W.W. Grenville, 17 July 1790, *H.R.A.*, Series I, Vol. I, p.195

sudden and complete re-formation of conduct, were romantic and chimerical".[27] Despite these disappointments, the idea that honest industry was the key to happiness was firmly ingrained in colonial thought.

In 1803 a correspondent to the *Sydney Gazette* declared that "human happiness depends less upon others than ourselves", and continued, "The labouring orders in this Colony are amply furnished with the materials requisite to contentment in the exercise of industry, and the consequent reward to all who are deserving".[28] Elizabeth Macarthur endorsed these ideas with the comment that, "It is not wealth, nor large possessions that entail happiness but health, industry, with the blessing of God affect much".[29] This attitude was still popular in the 1850s, as is shown by Elizabeth Murray's description of the arrival in Melbourne of one of her characters in the novel, *Ella Norman*, who was

strong in hope, in self-reliance - strong in his own integrity of purpose - strong in his belief in the effect of honesty, of honest industry, and in all those points the worldly religious hold out to the young and inexperienced as the sure means of temporal advancement.[30]

27. Tench, W., *Sydney's First Four Years*, [L.F. Fitzhardinge ed.], Sydney, 1961, p. 134

28. *Sydney Gazette*, 7 August 1803

29. E. Macarthur to Miss Kingdon, March 1816, in Macarthur Onslow, S.[ed.], *Some Early Records of the Macarthurs of Camden*, Sydney, 1914, p. 307

30. Murray, E., *Ella Norman*, Melbourne, 1985, pp. 102-103

The speech delivered by Phillip on 7 February 1788 set the leitmotiv for this worldly religion of happiness through self-help and honest industry. The debates on the nature of Australian society and the legislative outcomes of the 1830s and 1840s are a logical consequence of the establishment of these base values for the society. They were values derived from eighteenth-century ideas of natural law and natural religion and not from the realm of revealed religion. The convicts had transgressed against the laws of Britain and may have been hardened villains, but their redemption was in their own hands. They were not seen as tragic cases of fallen humanity, helpless but for saving grace in Christ. It is no co-incidence that leading advocates of the "moral enlightenment" such as Charles Harpur should be supporters of natural religion and severe critics of religious sectarianism. A brief examination of some of the areas of significant social debate, such as convict reform, marriage, education and teetotalism can expose the underlying values of "moral enlightenment" as being the logical consequences of Phillip's four ding values.

The debates over the prospects for convict reform can be seen in broad terms as a struggle between the ideas of out-door punishment and the concept of the reforming capacity of the penitentiary. The question of the role of religion in this debate runs more deeply than the issues of anti-clerical sentiment among convicts and matters of mock conversions which have been discussed by Grocott. It was a debate over fundamental social values in which natural law and natural religion stood against positive law and revealed religion.

In his study of the nineteenth-century penitentiary, Michael Ignatieff cites the case of a young man driven to suicide by the prolonged abuse which he suffered through solitary confinement, the hand crank and the straitjacket in the new penitentiary. In the out-door system he would have been simply reprimanded or whipped.[31] The case highlights the contrast between two concepts of justice. The out-door system delivered prompt if violent punishment while the penitentiary sought to reform the personality of the prisoner. Ignatieff characterised the penitentiary as the work of guilt ridden reformers who saw in the prisoners a reflection of their own sinfulness. For John Howard “the chained wretches at the bottom of the dungeon steps appeared as the representation of his own sin ... If God could save a sinner like himself, could he not save the sinners in prison?”[32] Thus the road to reform lay through the conversion of the criminal. The misguided prisoners must be corrected in a house of penitence where they had time to reflect upon their evil ways and be confronted with the saving grace of God. The filthy, populous confusion of the Fleet prison was to be replaced by the clean, ordered solitary confinement of the penitentiary. Howard’s new prison was “conceived as a machine for the social production of guilt”. [33] It was this reformed system which produced the two most monstrous symbols of the colonial convict system, the penitentiaries of Norfolk Island and Port Arthur, which were impressed upon Australian culture by Marcus Clarke’s novel, *For the Term of His Natural Life*. Of course it would be fatuous to lay the responsibility for the operation of the worst aspects of the convict system upon John Howard and his group of prison reformers. Both Port Arthur and

31. Ignatieff, M., *A Just Measure of Pain*, New York, 1978, p.208

32. *ibid.*, pp. 55-56

33. *ibid.*, p.213

Norfolk Island relied on convict labour outside the prison and were at times under the command of erratic and authoritarian military commandants. The essential point is that the prison reformers placed their emphasis on an appeal to the heart while the system of convict assignment and land grants encouraged reform through material self-interest.

Commenting on the effects of the Pentonville system, Roger Therry noted the degree to which those who had suffered “the silent system” and who came to the colony with tickets-of-leave were unfit for domestic and general service because of their “abstracted and eccentric habits”.<sup>[34]</sup> Those who had not gone mad came out well trained in reflection and, if they could read, with a disposition towards religious books.<sup>[35]</sup>

The British Government had proposed sending significant numbers of these ticket-of-leave exiles to New South Wales in the late 1840s but by the time of the arrival of the first exiles in 1849, the anti-transportation movement had become sufficiently influential to ensure that the scheme was short lived. The production of introspective eccentric readers of religious literature was not what Phillip had in mind as the end result of the founding of the colony of New South Wales. Such characters may have been reformed, but were they happy? They could contribute little to the building of a free society which would be a new Rome, a blazing star or the jewel in the crown of the British Empire.

In his study of the convict system, *Convict society and its Enemies*, John

34. Therry, R., *Reminiscences of Thirty Years' Residence in New South Wales and Victoria*, Sydney, 1972, p. 354

35. *ibid.*



Hirst argues that the image of the convict system has largely been determined by its enemies. The evidence given to the Molesworth Committee on Transportation painted a picture of a vicious and grossly immoral society in New South Wales. The residents of the colony were unable to make an effective case that the convict assignment system was cheap and effective as well as reformatory.[36] Hirst notes that Molesworth, like the other evangelical prison reformers, wanted more out of the prison system than self-interested alteration of behaviour. He required "the actual reformation of the inner man which required moral and religious instruction".[37] The emancipist, Dr William Bland, argued against the replacement of the assignment system by the labour gang and the penitentiary on the grounds that criminal behaviour was generated by social conditions. He believed that changed social conditions with the opportunity for honest labour were the key to reform and not the withdrawal of the criminal from social relations in a system of solitary confinement and silence.[38] This view was widely held in the convict colonies.

Phillip had been convinced that the example of a good master was a better means of reforming a convict than any amount of exhortation: "Precept has little effect, but example will do much ... we shall want some good characters to whom these people might look up".[39] John Macarthur was an advocate of setting up "a large body of respectable persons" with appropriate authority over the assigned convicts which would produce

36. Hirst, J., *Convict Society and Its Enemies*, Sydney, 1983, p. 201

37. *ibid.*, p. 202

38. *ibid.*, pp. 208-209

39. Phillip to Grenville, 5 November 1791, *H.R.A.*, Series I, Vol. I, p. 273

“some rational ground of hope, that a few of the unfortunate men, sent hither for their crimes might in time be completely reformed”.<sup>[40]</sup> Alexander Harris was particularly conscious of the reforming influence of a master upon an assigned convict: “it deserves serious consideration whether the power of superior *character* upon that below is not one of the greatest principles in the formation of reformatory discipline”.<sup>[41]</sup> Harris was critical of systems which over-punished convicts because they worked against reform by destroying the convict’s faith in “society and the availableness of rectitude to secure happiness”.<sup>[42]</sup> Reflecting on his own experience in the convict system, John Mortlock agreed that excessive punishment was a deterrence to reform rather than to crime, claiming that, “instead of awakening moral responsibility, it strengthens the Devil”.<sup>[43]</sup>

Mortlock was sent to Norfolk Island, but fortunately during the period when Captain John Maconochie was commandant of the penal station. Although he was working within the constraints of an established penitentiary and work gang system on the island, Maconochie introduced his own guiding principles of convict reform. He wanted to ensure that there was a direct relationship between effort and reward, such that “the fate of every man should be placed unreservedly in his own hands”.<sup>[44]</sup> Socialisation of the convicts was promoted. A Mark System was introduced to ensure that punishments and rewards were directly related to a convict’s

40. J. Macarthur to J.T. Bigge, 7 February 1821, Macarthur Onslow, *op.cit.*, pp. 348-349

41. Harris A., *Convicts and Settlers*, Sydney, 1953, p. 190

42. *ibid.*, p. 186

43. Mortlock, J.F., *Experiences of a Convict*, London, 1965, p. 67

44. Hughes, *op.cit.*, p. 500

behaviour. The process of socialisation was encouraged by activities such as the celebration of Queen Victoria's Birthday which sought to reconnect the convicts with a sense of identity as being an outpost of Empire rather than abandoned lost souls in an "Ocean Hell". The effects of this policy were noted by one observer who commented that, "Her Majesty reigned in their hearts and they all appeared to labour cheerfully in one large field of Reformation"[45] While the comment may be overly optimistic, it is significant that it was the civil ruler who was claimed to reign in the heart of the convict under Macnouchie's system, rather than the Christ of the evangelical prison reformers.

Macnouchie quickly came under attack for his ideas of convict reform and administration and was subsequently sacked by Governor Gipps. One of Macnouchie's numerous critics was Archdeacon McEnroe, who had been the Catholic priest on Norfolk Island at the time of Macnouchie's appointment. McEnroe shared the view that spiritual rather than mere outward reform was required. While admitting that Macnouchie's policies might have been good in theory, McEnroe condemned him for not paying "proper attention to the depths of human nature on which he is experimenting".[46] Human nature was regarded as utterly corrupt in orthodox Christian theology and consequently could only be saved by specific spiritual remedies, but for supporters of natural religion there remained in the human soul a spark of moral decency which needed to be re-kindled. If the appeal to self-interest was sufficient to make a person a moral member of society, spiritual conversion was not necessary.

45. *ibid.*, p. 503

46. Clarke, P., *Hell and Paradise*, Ringwood, 1986, p. 133

David Burn, the Van Diemen's Land farmer and dramatist, rejected ideas of spiritual reformation of convicts with the observation that since the world was full of unconvicted hypocrites it would be impossible to gauge the genuineness of supposed spiritual reform. The aim of moral rather than spiritual reform was sufficient for the convict system in his view: "If it succeeds in converting the housebreaker, the highwayman, the swindler, and other kinds of felons, into orderly and decorous citizens, has nothing been achieved?"[47] Like Bland, Burn saw reform as related to the social situation of the convict. He doubted that even the most "regenerated culprit" emerging from the "model prisons" of England could avoid being forced again into error by social circumstances such as high unemployment.[48] The writing of Roger Therry also reflects the idea that there is something in human nature which can operate to effect reform, even if it is not based upon a spiritual regeneration sought by the advocates of the penitentiary system:

Many persons, originally transported for crime, had displayed the recuperative energy that is in man, by which, though he sinks he but sinks to rise again, and resume the position that in early life he had forfeited ... It is obvious we cannot judge motives; and whether principle or self-interest be the cause of reformation, society is the gainer when a bad man is transformed into a well-conducted citizen.[49]

47. D. Burn, *Narrative of the Overland Journey of Sir John and Lady Franklin and Party from Hobart Town to Macquarie Harbour*, [ed. Mackaness, G.], Sydney, 1955, p. 36

48. *ibid.*, p. 37

49. Therry, *op.cit.*, p. 58

Thus there existed a strong tradition that self-interest was sufficient motivation for moral reform and that moral reform was sufficiently demonstrated by a person in the discharge of civic duties and the pursuit of domestic happiness. As Hirst has pointed out, the advocates of the assignment system, the ex-convicts and the native-born who were the principal advocates of this view of moral reform, were compelled to join the anti-transportation forces when the British Government decided to send ticket-of-leave Pentonville prisoners to the colony.[50] The rhetoric of the abolitionists highlighted the horror and brutality of the system and the stain of convictism upon the colonies. The examples of self-interested moral reform were disregarded.

However it is essential to recognise this theme in order to understand the wider social reform agenda. From the beginning of the colony it was apparent that achieving moral reform would entail the provision of education for the children of convicts. Collins reflected on the need for the creation of a public institution to educate colonial youth away from the influences of their convict parents and so ensure that their "propensities to evil" were corrected.[51] Governor King was of the same opinion, lamenting the "distressing prospect of the rising generation in this colony becoming the inheritors of their abandoned parents' profligate infamy".[52] Bligh was discouraged by the convicts' failure to accept the "rewards and blessings to them to do well" and looked to the following generations to exhibit "any

50. Hirst, *op.cit.*, p. 212

51. Collins, *op.cit.*, p. 366

52. King to Lt. W. Kent, 23 May 1800, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. VI, p. 87

advance to morality and virtue”.<sup>[53]</sup> Youth was also Macquarie’s hope as he noted the lack of progress being made by ex-convicts on the Nepean in 1815: “This is a melancholy and mortifying reflection, but I fear that there is no remedying these lazy habits during the existence of the present old generation”.<sup>[54]</sup> A series of letters to the editor of the *Sydney Gazette* in 1803 highlighted the belief that education was fundamental to moral reform. A contributor styling himself “An Inquisitive Observer” noted that, “It has long been admitted that Learning is a foe to vice and observation convinces us that ignorance is generally the companion of vice”.<sup>[55]</sup> Given the importance of education, the writer expresses his dismay at discovering what low wages were paid to colonial schoolmasters. Another correspondent, “Censor”, claimed that moral education could contribute substantially to domestic happiness, “Were we to make proper use of our reasoning facilities, many evils might be avoided, and the humble cottage prove a place of contentment”.<sup>[56]</sup> “Amicus” took a wider view, claiming that the development of educational facilities would destroy the bonds of ignorance, promote the public good, eradicate immorality and “lay in the mind the foundation of integrity, equanimity and justice”.<sup>[57]</sup>

There was a belief also in the moral value of self-education. In the guise of fiction, Alexander Harris related how in the 1830s he bought an assortment of books by chance at an auction. The lot included books on

53. Bligh to Lord Castlereagh, 31 October 1807, *H.R.A.*, Series I, Vol. VI, p. 148

54. Macquarie, L., *Journals of His Tours in New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land, 1810-1822*, Sydney, 1979, p.125

55. *Sydney Gazette*, 8 May 1803

56. *ibid.*, 17 July 1803

57. *ibid.*, 31 July 1803

mathematics, chemistry, astronomy, metaphysics and history as well as Hume's essays and works by Byron, Scott and Coleridge.[58] He immersed himself in these volumes and lent them to friends. He was particularly impressed with the "great and evident improvement" in the outlook of a female friend and concluded that a similar reading program would see the same benefits of improvement extended to "the whole body of Australian females".[59] He later set up his own small lending library for the benefit of the bush workers in the district where he was living. The same moral improvement was observed; "I did not lose a single volume: and the effect on the men's personal behaviour was markedly beneficial".[60] Maconochie also believed in the use of books to assist moral reform. He attempted to create a library on Norfolk Island which included works on engineering, crafts and trades, English, Scottish and Irish literature as well as books of a religious nature. He made a particular request for a copy of *Robinson Crusoe* as he believed that it would instil "energy, hopefulness in difficulty, regard & affection for our brethren in savage life &c." [61]

If happiness and contentment were to be found through honest industry, education was a necessary part of the reform process to provide both the technical knowledge for the application of industry and the basis for moral reform. The connection between education and success in the colonies was precisely put by William Denison in 1848. Reflecting on why some settlers succeeded while others failed he observed,

58. Harris, *op.cit.*, p. 91

59. *ibid.*, p. 103

60. *ibid.*, p. 189

61. Quoted in Hughes, *op.cit.*, p. 506

Their lot is cast in a country where nothing is required but steady, persevering industry, coupled with a slight knowledge of arithmetic to enable them to secure a competence, and perhaps wealth, for themselves and their children; but the absence of that little bit of arithmetic has made the prospect a delusion.[62]

A system of public education for colonial youth and the creation of Mechanics Institutes for adult education and self improvement were seen as factors which could guarantee both economic advancement, and consequently promote personal happiness. Just as the supporter of “moral enlightenment” and natural religion saw no essential role for the clergy in convict reform, so they saw no role for the clergy in a national education system. Charles Harpur, for instance, was a tireless critic of the claims of the churches to have a controlling interest in the education system:

it would seem that in Australia, we are still to be prevented of all efficient means for accelerating the march of knowledge, by the irrational bigots of Sectarian Cliques. A system of general education is offered to the country, and forthwith upstarts the parson to denounce it as improper for his people.[63]

The clergy were welcome, however, as lecturers at their local Mechanics Institute if they had scientific or technical knowledge to impart.

62. Denison, W., *Varieties of Vice-Regal Life*, London, 1870, p. 89

63. Ackland, M. [ed.], *Charles Harpur: Selected Poetry and Prose*, Ringwood, 1986, p. 27



The establishment of the Board of National Education by Governor FitzRoy in 1848 was any thing but a triumph for the forces of the “moral enlightenment” since it represented an expensive and inefficient compromise resulting in five education systems. There were government schools based on the Irish National System and four separate denominational systems provided with government funding. However the reformers’ faith in “true religion” was maintained by the establishment of the University of Sydney in 1850 on a non-denominational basis. The belief that education was the foundation of moral behaviour and that religion should be the handmaiden of morality and not vice versa was plainly stated in *Moore’s Almanac* for 1859:

The object of self education is to acquire moral elevation. All intellectual pursuits are to be subservient to this. Man’s moral life is his highest destiny. The moral life includes religion as its quickening power, and its great director. No religion can be fitted for man which occupies not this high position”. [64]

Of course the religion which made moral virtue its highest value was natural religion, since it was by living the moral life that the individual became acceptable to God, and not through “priestly rituals” or “superstitious beliefs”. The education which was necessary to support the application of honest industry was capable of conferring its own moral elevation without the interference of sectarian religion.

64. *Moore’s Almanac*, Sydney, 1859, p. 15

If moral reform could be achieved by self-interested honest industry supported by education then the way to prosperity and happiness was open. But like any pilgrim's progress, the road to the Australian paradise was also populated by demons. The most dangerous of these demons was thought to be the dæmon drink. This was a persistent theme in explaining why opportunities for honest industry, wealth and personal happiness were being lost. Collins complained that convict over-indulgence in alcohol made them "blind to their own advantage".[65] King complained that the cellars of everyone in the colony from the leading citizens to the worst of the convicts were "full of that fiery poison" and consequently "a strange relaxation seems to pervade every class and order of people".[66] Reflecting on the drinking habits of the colonial workers Louisa Meredith commented,

How different would be the state of almost everything in this Colony, were the greatest curse man ever created out of God's good gifts intoxicating liquor, less easily obtained by those who *ought* to be the industrious and prosperous, but alas! too generally *are* the idle and worthless part of the community.[67]

The success of those who *were* deemed to be sober citizens was held up as an example to confirm the view that prosperity and happiness were the result of abstaining from drink. Lang praised his free Scottish

65. Collins, *op.cit.*, p. 159

66. King to John King, 3 May 1800, *H.R.A.*, Series I, Vol. II, p. 505

67. Meredith, Mrs C., *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales*, Sydney, 1973, p. 77

mechanics who were brought to New South Wales in 1831 for their sober habits and claimed that they had brought about "a moral revolution" in the colony.[68]

If only the colonists, both free settlers and ex-convicts could be kept sober, it was thought that happiness and prosperity must be the inevitable result. Crime would also diminish because intemperance was regarded by moral reformers as "the parent of a tribe of crimes". William Woolls caught the mood of the times in his 1833 poem, *Australia: A Moral and Descriptive Poem*. Woolls began his piece in the tradition of the poems of Tompson and Robinson with heaven and nature rejoicing over the founding of a British colony. A goddess proclaimed from the clouds:

Rise, Rise Australia thus the fates decree,  
 Health and Content shall concentrate in thee ...  
 Knowledge will flourish, and in course of time  
 Learning and Art will grace the happy clime [70]

He contrasted these happy prospects with what he regarded as the sorry state into which the colony had fallen as a result of alcohol abuse. Nevertheless the situation could be redeemed:

"Advance Australia" - View the rising State

68. Lang, J.D., *Reminiscences of My Life and Times*, Melbourne, 1972, p. 114

69. Therry, *op.cit.*, p. 494

70. Gilbert, L., *William Woolls, "A Most Useful Colonist"*, Canberra, 1985, p. 10

Improvement's prospects never are too late; ...  
 And may this motto ripen in yourself,  
 "Knowledge is Power, and Temperance is Health!" [71]

While temperance may have later become one of the weapons in the armoury of the "wowers", it is incorrect to regard the temperance movement as springing essentially from the Christian denominations. The churches had long recognised drunkenness as a vice, but they clearly did not accept that abstaining from alcohol was the essence of salvation. In the face of claims by colonial teetotalists a variety of churchmen were in agreement that men had the "God-given right to the rational enjoyment of alcohol".[72] The temperance movement can be understood as another road to moral reform which essentially sought to bypass the Christian faith. It was not the result of supposed schemes by evangelical killjoys to deprive Catholic workers of their pleasures. Whatever the motives of the temperance advocates in later debates over drinking regulation and hotel trading hours, they should not be projected back onto the 1830s and 1840s.

The language of natural religion as well as its moral values are evident in the work of temperance advocates. Harpur wrote of temperance that it was "the essence of that spirit of moral enlightenment which is beginning to burst like sunrise over the long benighted earth".[73] At temperance meetings and festivals songs such as the

71. *ibid.*, p. 11

72. Roe, *op.cit.*, p. 181

73. *ibid.*, p.169

following were sung:

Let the Sun be thy nectar!  
 Drink deep of its beams:  
 Let the green sward of nature  
 Thy banquet hall be!  
 Fill thy spirit with sunlight -  
 'This richer than streams  
 Of the wine-flowing goblet,  
 And better for thee! [74]

In the colonial conditions prior to the gold rushes there was a widely held view that honest industry, education and sober habits would lead to happiness and prosperity. This was not a triumph of the Protestant work ethic, and, as Roe has pointed out, the moral enlightenment's impact on the churches was disruptive in a number of ways.[75] To the extent that the churches took up the cause of moral enlightenment, they were able to link themselves to popular social thinking, but Christianity was not an essential factor in the promotion of "true [natural] religion" of the advocates of moral reform. These advocates believed that convict reform, moral education, happiness and prosperity could all be achieved because in all people there was a God-given light of conscience and morality which could be developed by secular education, encouraged by the recognition of self-interest in morality and guarded by temperance. To the supporters of this moral enlightenment the clergy and their creeds

74. *ibid.*, p. 172

75. *ibid.*, p. 202

were regarded as unnecessary to the reformation of convicts, a menace to the development of a system of moral and general education and allies of dubious worth in the cause of temperance. In questions of sex and marriage the official policy and church doctrine were in agreement on the importance of promoting marriage. However colonial conditions with the imbalance of the sexes and the cultural values of the convicts and their guards put sexual morality on a utilitarian basis, giving rise to accusations of gross immorality levelled at colonial society by the clergy and missionaries.

The utilitarian approach to sexual morality was highlighted by Tench in his account of the landing of the convicts, in which he suggested that it would perhaps be wrong to attempt to prevent contact between male and female convicts:

To prevent their intercourse was impossible; and to palliate its evils only remained. Marriage was recommended, and such advantage held out to those who aimed at reformation, as have greatly contributed to the tranquillity of the settlement.[76]

This policy of promoting marriage proved a disappointment to some convicts who found that they did not receive the privileges which they expected and consequently sought to be returned to their single status.[77] A further problem was the doubt over the application of the Hardwicke Marriage Act to the colony. If it did not apply at Gretna Green,

76. Tench, *op.cit.*, p. 39

77. Collins, *op.cit.*, p. 21

it was reasonable to doubt that it would apply in Botany Bay. Collins reported that "it was the general sentiment among the convicts" that marriages performed by Johnson were not binding.[78] As a result Phillip was obliged to prevent anyone leaving the colony without proper provision being made for colonial wives and children.

Attitudes to marriage and sexual conduct cannot be understood without reference to the eighteenth-century context from which the convicts and their guards were drawn. To celebrate the King's Birthday in 1789, the first theatrical production in the colony was staged. It was a performance of *The Recruiting Officer* by George Farquhar, a comedy which makes light of attitudes to sex and marriage in the British army. The heroes of the play, Plume, Kite and Worthy, kept up a banter regarding the tradition of recruiting officers leaving behind sufficient pregnant women for their offspring to replace the number of men recruited, the desirability of trying out a young lady in bed before considering marriage and the payment of allowances to defacto wives even when they were "marry'd at the same time to two Lieutenants of Marines, and a Man of War's Boatswain".[79] Practises of popular military marriage involving jumping over a sword are characterised as "leap Rogue, follow Whore, the Drums beat a Ruff and so to bed; that's all, the Ceremony is concise".[80] The clergy and religion were also held up to ridicule with banter about what to do with parsons who had been recruited and with lines such as, "Then are you mad, or turning

78. *ibid.*, p. 114

79. Kenny, S. [ed.], *The Works of George Farquhar*, Vol. II, Oxford, 1988, p. 43

80. *ibid.*, p. 105

Quaker".[81] The group of officers enjoying this performance were hardly likely to impose any particularly rigid morality on the convicts or on themselves.

Tench's view that it would be wrong to attempt to prevent sexual relations between convicts; was later echoed by Bligh who thought that such an attempt would be as productive of bad results as persecutions for religious opinion.[82] Giving evidence before the Parliamentary Committee on Transportation, Bligh suggested that defacto relationships among convicts and ex-convicts were as stable as married relationships. Even so, the problem of men quitting the colony and leaving women and children behind, "just as men do in all other countries", remained an issue.[83] There is also evidence of the popular English divorce practice of wife sales. This method of divorce was increasingly popular in England in the 1790s and again at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. As far as the participants were concern this was a legitimate means of divorce although neither the legal system nor the churches saw it that way.[84] A case of wife sale was reported at Windsor, near Sydney, in 1811 where the husband led his wife to the market with a rope around her neck. He was paid sixteen pounds by his wife's new lover.[85] Those

81. *ibid.*, p. 44

82. King, "Present State of His Majesty's Settlements", 12 August 1806, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol.VI, p. 151

83. Evidence to Select Committee on Transportation, 1812, *British Parliamentary Papers, Crime and Punishment, Transportation*, Vol. I, Shannon, Ireland, 1969

84. Gillis, J.R., *For Better or Worse British Marriages 1600 to the Present*, Oxford, 1985, p. 212

85. Ingleton, G.C. [ed.], *True Patriots All*, Sydney, 1988, p. 58



involved were dealt with by the local magistrates including the Rev. Robert Cartwright. This was apparently not an isolated instance. Referring to the early nineteenth century Roger Therry commented:

Not only was undisguised concubinage thought no shame, but the sale of wives was not an infrequent practice. A present owner of broad acres and large herds in New South Wales is the offspring of a union strangely brought about by the purchase of a wife from her husband for four gallons of rum.[86]

There were practical advantages in marriage for convict women. With marriage they became virtually free since they were now officially under the authority of their husbands and not their former masters or mistresses, as long as the husband was either free or held a ticket-of-leave.[87] In the period from the 1820s to the 1840s male convicts wishing to marry stressed their sobriety and industrious habits as an encouragement to government officials to approve their marriage requests.[88] While it is to be expected that these applications were couched in language designed to appeal to official sentiment, they again underline the concept that personal happiness was to be found through industrious self-help and sober living. Questions of sexual morality and propriety were not a prime consideration. When a master sought to prevent the marriage of a pregnant convict servant on the grounds that it

86. Therry, *op.cit.*, p. 72

87. Atkinson, A., "Convicts and Courtship" in P. Grimshaw, C. McConville & E. McEwen [eds], *Families in Colonial Australia*, Sydney, 1985, p. 22

88. *ibid.*, p. 24

was an affront to “religion and moral principle”, the Governor, Sir George Gipps replied that he was not sure how preventing a marriage would serve either the cause of morality or religion.[89] Peter Cunningham noted during a visit to New South Wales in the 1820s that for Currency lads and lasses chastity was not considered “the *very first* of virtues” since their parents had not taught them to regard it as such and that its violation did nothing to “retard marriage”. [90] Therry suggested that it was not until the convict element was no longer the dominant group in colonial society that “marriage became universally to be regarded as an honourable estate”. In convict society “this ceremony was not regarded as an indispensable preliminary to the union of a man and a woman”. [91]

While the clergy were principally responsible for the celebration of marriage, ideas of Christian marriage took second place to social benefit and utility. The sexual ethics of the colony were well summed up in Collins’ memorable euphemism regarding the lack of rigidity of the convict women’s chastity. [92] Defacto relationships were no shame and marriages of convenience were common. The idea of the primacy of the social and utilitarian nature of marriage over any particular religious interest is expressed in a poem of the 1840s in support of Caroline Chisholm’s immigration scheme to redress the imbalance of the sexes in the Australian colonies:

89. *ibid.*, p. 30

90. Cunningham, P., *Two Years in New South Wales*, Sydney, 1966, p. 208

91. Therry, *op.cit.*, pp. 219-220

92. Cobley, *op.cit.*, p. 94

The Reverend Ebenezer, I'd not deny his dues,  
 For saving Patagorians, Eosjesmen and Zooloos;  
 But Mrs Chisholm's mission is what I far prefer;  
 For saving British natives I'd give the palm to her. [93]

There were those who believed that marriage should have nothing to do with religion at all. Civil marriage was introduced in the colony in 1856. *Moore's Almanac* for 1859 suggested that the colony's marriage laws "ought to be purely philosophical and based on the law of nature, without religious conditions of any kind whatever".[94] There is again the continuation of the theme of natural law which was a fundamental concept to the legal thinking of the late eighteenth century. The founding of the colony of New South Wales must be seen in a wider intellectual context than that of the clearing of English prison hulks and gaols. It was a contemporary event with the founding of the United States and the French Revolution and must be considered in the context of that intellectual climate.

In this brief survey of the significant issues of convict reform, education, temperance and marriage it has become apparent that there was a consistent moral order which did not require the support of any of the fundamental beliefs or concerns of the Christian faith. The clergy and the churches could play a supporting role in the process of moral reform but in the final analysis they were unnecessary to achieve the type of society envisaged by the founders of the colony and their successors of

93. Ingleton, *op.cit.*, p.275

94. *Moore's Almanac*, Sydney, 1859, p. 67

the "moral enlightenment". Happiness, not salvation, was the ultimate good. It was not the blood of Christ but rather honest industry and sobriety which could open the gate to happiness. To argue that religion was of little consequence in the period to the 1840s when free settlers with previous denominational affiliations began to dilute the population of convict origin can be valid as long as religion is seen in the narrow sense of orthodox denominations. However this argument fails to take into account the fundamental significance of natural religion in providing the basis upon which a meaningful moral order could be constructed. The colony was not Devil's Island on the grand scale where fallen humanity was to be punished and souls redeemed. It was founded in the expectation that the convicts could be made happy and moral through their own self-interested efforts. Grocott is probably correct in asserting that convicts and ex-convicts were not interested in "God the Father, or God the Son, or God the Holy Ghost",<sup>[95]</sup> but they were the potential beneficiaries of a society founded on a moral order drawn from "the laws of Nature and Nature's God".

95. Grocott, A., *Convicts, Clergymen and Churches*, Sydney, 1980, p.284