CHAPTER SIX

“EVERY TRIUMPHANT DEATH” – CLOSURE IN A BRITISH COLONY

Events during the 1880s shook the foundations upon which the Moravian mission field in the colony of Victoria was based. Whispers of closure echoed from the late 1870s, became a persistent murmuring throughout the decade, and reached a crescendo at the end of the 1880s, leaving the Moravians unsure about their work and protective of the investments they had made. There was much public pressure in Victoria for the closure of the missions, as it was believed that the last ‘remnants’ of the Victorian Aborigines would soon die out. Meanwhile it was thought that ‘half-castes’—people of mixed descent—should make their own way in the world and not be a burden on the public purse. The Moravian missionaries, and in particular Friedrich Hagenauer, were involved in this debate. Although he was a Moravian Christian missionary, Hagenauer became involved in secular affairs. This was an incongruity given the Moravian Instructions that imposed a distinction between the activities of missionaries and the politics of the governing bodies under which they lived. In holding such positions, he laboured under many competing demands, some of which had an impact on his role as a missionary. This chapter follows Andrew Porter’s suggestion to historians to, “take not only theology but a good many other things as seriously as did most missionaries of the day,”¹ and Jane Samson’s caution to historians of missions not to “marginalize human spirituality and the role of religious belief in influencing attitudes and actions,”² and thus keeps Hagenauer’s profession of Christianity at the forefront when analysing his activities in Victorian Aboriginal affairs. In particular the chapter will examine how Hagenauer viewed the Government’s Aboriginal station, Coranderrk, as well as his contribution to the so-called ‘Half-Caste’ Act of 1886 (An Act to amend

an Act intituled [sic] “An Act to provide for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of Victoria” (No. DCCCCXII), which was to have such a devesting effect on Aboriginal people, while all the time maintaining his strong faith in divine providence.

Conflicts between the colonial ruler and the missionary: The Board for the Protection of Aborigines, mushrooming committees, and the Moravians

As servants of God before those of man, Moravians desired to attain a level of governmental support that would best facilitate their secular work in the missions without impinging on their spiritual work. History had taught them that this was best done at arms-length from secular administrations, as the Instructions stated, viz: “that they have no desire to intermeddle with the politics of the country in which they labour, but are solely intent on the fulfilment of their official duties.” Chapter Four established that this Instruction was duly followed when the Moravians arrived in the Colony of Victoria for the second missionary attempt, however, by the end of the century, Hagenauer was very directly meddling with the politics of the Colony, and had become an integral part of the governmental response to, and control over, indigenous affairs. Although the Moravian Church held fast to their abiding narrative of how missions should be established, and how missionaries should behave, once in the field the missionaries had to grapple with situations outside of the realms of Moravian experience. Yet, this was not a position held only by the Moravians, for as the historian of mission Andrew Porter has identified, many “missionaries have been constrained by local circumstances.” The uniqueness of the Moravian situation in southern Australia lay in the fact that the circumstances in which they found themselves compelled them into secular work, and their responses to this compulsion had resounding consequences for the greater control of indigenous affairs in colonial Australia. Despite such conflicts, there were common aims held by both government and missionaries, such as those of civilization and control of the natives.

3 August Gottlieb Spangenberg, Instructions for Missionaries of the Church of the Unitas Fratrum, or United Brethren, From the German, Second (Revised and Enlarged) ed. (London: Brethren's Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel among the Heathens, 1840), § 61, 68.