CULTURE IN A CRUCIBLE

Brigida Nairon csb

The whole work of inculturation lies in the permanent effort of Christians to revive the event of Jesus Christ and to adjust it to their social and cultural context.\(^1\) In the African Church, ideas about inculturation are expressed as vital to its life,

... the gospel does not adapt itself to cultures, nor do cultures adapt themselves to the gospel. They meet, clash and test each other mutually, like gold and fire in the crucible. It is this ‘encounter-confrontation-test’ which brings about the cultural ‘new creation’ in which the gospel is appropriated as a power of redemption and recreation...\(^2\)

Anne Pattel-Gray pleads to the reader to be open to hear the pain of the indigenous people. In Through Aboriginal Eyes: The Cry from the Wilderness, she alleges that:

If you look back over the history, you will see the churches played a major role in the denial of the indigenous people’s rights.\(^3\)

Because of western colonisation there is difficulty in reviving and adjusting the event of Jesus Christ in an Aboriginal context. Colonisation arose in the 14th Century, when Europeans saw themselves at the apex of civilisation and European nations which ‘discovered’ another land had the right to colonise it. Quincentenary celebrations of Christopher Columbus’ arrival in America marked a time to mourn for those who suffered, struggled and died because of it.\(^4\) In the same way, Bicentennial commemorations in Australia caused Aborigines to mourn over the violence of dispossession and consequent loss of culture.

The issue of alleged complicity of missionaries in the destruction of Aboriginal society is popular in some academic circles. ‘Missionary activity’ has been described as:

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another agent which the dominant European culture employed to destroy traditional forms of Aboriginal life... 5

and it has been deduced that:

... In most British colonies the Christian mission was the partner of government and of business interests. Colonial domination served the joint interests of government, gain and God. 6

Various authors in Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions have raised other issues. 7

But in its early origins, the Church wore the garb of Western Asia, and the Scriptures could be read in this context in many places where other cultures have cast their mould over western streams of tradition. Anne Pattel-Gray writes hopefully of a new track which has been cut to build a new community for full participation by both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. 8 Indigenisation and contextualisation in Aboriginal theological reflection is the restatement of the Jesus event in their lives. 9

In more recent times, other historians have become aware of another perspective about missionaries, and they have opened up another dimension of reality.

Colonisation is both destructive and creative of peoples... complex human relations and historical forces re-made indigenous people into the Aborigines. 10

Conceding that missionaries are 'men and women whom historians have recently belittled and condemned more than they have attempted to understand', Bain Attwood notes the lack of scholars who have examined patterns of acculturation and accommodation between Aborigines and Europeans, but he does not extend his definition of missionaries much beyond the prevailing model. 11 In many cases, close bonds of loyalty and affection developed in paternalistic situations. Institutions such as paternalism and Aboriginal assertions of kinship reciprocity concerning land uncover a dual consciousness. In such cases inculcation can be viewed as an innovative process.

So where does an individual missionary stand in relation to such contradictions? Bain Attwood explored the difficulty of surveying general historical forces to give a personal slant to a larger impersonal whole. 12 Henry Reynolds saw philanthropic individuals as often lonely figures, attracting derision as they stood out against colonial opinion.
Humanitarian opposition to the destruction of Aboriginal society has yet to receive the attention that it deserves...13

According to Kenelm Burridge, the impulse to mission does not spring from the intellect within a rationalised world and only by dedication and love, by ignoring the given in reasonable possibility, can ‘mission’ be effected,

Pioneers in the potentials of human being, move today as they have moved in the past into those realms of endeavour that experience born of the purely socio-cultural tells them are futile, dangerous, impolitic, or even impossible. That is why they are missionaries.14

Their lives of sacrifice bear fruit both in projects of social justice, and in the realm of meaning brought about by Christian belief.

That they were Christians who pioneered all or most of the social services now in secular hands is not wholly irrelevant. Christian missionaries were, and to some extent remain, the progenitors of all aid and development programmes anywhere. Yet although Christians in whatever sect or denomination have to suffer passing or more persistent scepticism which develops into secularization or even secularism, Christianity itself has a resilience and, indeed, an attraction which, if not wholly immune to socio-cultural analysis, ultimately escapes secular rationalisation.15

From the perspective of the isolation of Kimberley missions, efforts made by the Catholic missionaries in terms of personnel and money were heroic. The Catholic Church fought for basic human rights.

A series of remarkable documents have collected in church and state archives which demonstrate Fr Duncan McNab’s radical commitment to the civil rights of Australian Aborigines.16

He was the pioneer priest of the Kimberley, and before he went there he planted the missionary seed in the heart of Rome itself. Born in Scotland, he had arrived in Melbourne aboard the Chariot of Fame 29 July 1867, in the company of Archbishop John Bede Polding.17 Firmly entrenched in Catholic tradition, he explained his goals in the late 1870’s as follows:

(I had) gone to Queensland for the purpose of labouring for the civilization and conversion of the Aborigines: that I should render to him [Bishop James Quinn] reasonable obedience while I remained in his Diocese: that if I were not allowed to devote myself exclusively to the Blacks I should return whence I came.18
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His cousin, Mother Mary MacKillop rsj, described him as she saw him in Maryborough, Queensland:

He devotes himself entirely to the cause of the Aborigines and has become quite a patriarch in appearance. His mission is painful and dangerous.¹⁹

Health problems forced him to leave.²⁰ Carrying a reference from Archbishop James Goold, he sailed from Melbourne in the Kent August 1879 on a trip which took him through Egypt, southern Europe, the British Isles and the United States.²¹His goal was to raise awareness of, and money for his work in the ecclesiastical network in Europe, and to lobby the Colonial Office in London to bring pressure on Queensland’s administrators to give basic human rights to Aborigines, especially with regard to land.²²

For Catholics, the old Code of Canon Law spelt out that the universal care of missions to non-Catholics was reserved to the Apostolic See. It was important to be sent. Missionary orders and congregations saw themselves as having a mandate from Rome.²³ Pope Leo XIII’s Rerum Novarum (1891) committed the Church to the defence of the rights of the working class and the bettering of their condition. The dignity of each person was of paramount importance. He affirmed that the State should intervene where necessary to ensure that justice was done, and since the poor are in a weaker position than the wealthy the State should take special care to protect them (RN 37).²⁴

Leo presented the Church as a supporter and protector of civil authority. He affirmed that obedience to legitimate authority is obedience to God.²⁵ He was a brave man to make such a statement in the world of his time, and he may have been limited by the patterns of thought which he took for granted.²⁶ The document includes women only under generic statements regarding the dignity of ‘man’, or under the category of family. Workers were men. Women as wives and mothers were economically dependent.²⁷

The document assumed that man, in this case, white Western man, was normative.²⁸

But the Kimberley mission was founded in a place where the norm was in flux. The men were Colonists, Asians, or Aborigines. There were few European women. Aboriginal women were used and discarded. Numbers of deserted half-caste children continued to rise. Starvation
was becoming the norm where before there had been no shortage of food. Locke Hospitals for venereal diseases, such as that on Bernier Island provided for a few women. Unpaid domestic positions on pastoral holdings, or fending for themselves and their children because their men were taken away to work on pearling boats, or because their men were imprisoned or in chain gangs making roads became the lot of the majority of women. Women and children were lucky if they could find ration depots for subsistence diets.

Apart from an expression of sympathy by John Forrest for ‘these poor old decrepit Natives, almost dead, wandering about our streets with nowhere to go’ and a suggestion that a home of some sort might be made for them, there is no indication in the vital debates of 1887, 1888, and 1889 of any provision which colonists thought should be made for the Aborigines. If there was any theory it was, ‘that the Natives were best when left alone!’ The chief concern was with the reputation of settlers and white interests. Would too much land be alienated for Natives? Could the colony get its Constitution without yielding on this point? A debate on a resolution expressing the opinion that ‘strong and prompt measures’ should be taken to protect the Kimberley settlers from the ‘treacherous hostility of the Aborigines’ revealed that the Aborigines were still regarded as a nuisance to be mitigated. The whole tenor of the complaint was simply that the authorities did not punish them severely enough for sheep stealing and pilfering. The Church was the only voice raised to express concern that Natives deprived of their land, and consequently their sustenance, were being deprived of basic human rights and the Church would play a role in trying to support a small group of those so unjustly displaced.

In 1887 Bishop Gibney requested Propaganda Fide in Rome to have Benedictine monks sent to the Kimberley, and Cardinal Moran personally placed the request in Rome. On Leo XIII’s name day, the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide placed the request before the Holy Father. The Abbot of Sept-Fons was present with other dignitaries. The Pope asked him to send missionaries from the Abbey of Sept Fons. Two years later, Abbot Ambrose was in Rome to ask permission to discontinue a mission in New Caledonia. With the agreement of the Abbot of Sept Fons, Abbot Ambrose was directed to contact Cardinal Moran and Bishop Gibney.
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Bishop Gibney notified the West Australian Government that he planned to start a mission in the North West with Church commitment on a large scale. The Government promised land, but after travelling over the gazetted Aboriginal Reserve, the Bishop took out a pastoral lease on 100,000 acres of land to the north of the Reserve. When he returned to Perth late in 1890, Bishop Gibney announced in the Cathedral:

The Mission has been started and with the zeal of the Trappists it will serve Aboriginal welfare. Pray often for the new Mission and the Missionaries. You do not, and cannot know all that has to be suffered to commence and carry through such a task in the wilderness. Never forget that the Black, despite his wild nature, is a human being with an immortal soul and it is our duty to improve his sad situation.32

Human concern for other human beings trapped in a social situation brought about by colonisation was a concern for Bishop Gibney, who had left in 1863 for Australia to carry the comfort of the faith to Irish immigrants.33

French documents from the Trappist Abbey of Sept Fons, which were obtained by Bishop Jobst when visiting the monastery in 1982, are a valuable source of information about the motivation of the Trappist missionaries over a ten year period. Fr Alphonse Tachon wrote that he was determined to learn the language of the place to have Catechism and prayers in their language. But he also believed the Aborigines had to be fed, clothed, and given tobacco, or the missionaries, who had so much to do, would get nowhere.34

He believed that it was in his capacity as a missionary, that he would also become the teacher, the cook, and many other things. In his opinion, it would not be with money that they could do good here, but through humility, sweetness, patience, penance, prayer, and love.35

Fr Alphonse had written home that in Goodenough Bay where Fr McNab had been, there was the possibility of a promising mission because of the numerous children, for nearly every woman had a little child which she carried on her hip. At Beagle Bay there were fewer and all had been in contact with Englishmen. Many of the youth were still on pearling boats.

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There was great love between the parents and children. Polygamy was practised, and each old man usually had four wives, some of whom
were very young girls. The women were often sisters. He saw this as a big obstacle for conversion to Catholicism. Men, women and children were nearly all completely naked. They had only a little bit of material as big as a hand, which they attached with a cord made out of their sleek hair. They were well formed with slender limbs and had deep set eyes which gave them a hard appearance.

At Beagle Bay, Felix Gnobodnor was the keeper of the songs, and the corroboree maker. It was he who brought in a big bag of game every day. Sometimes there was a kangaroo in the morning and two emus in the evening. In the beginning he had at least two wives to help him in this task, but this was incompatible with Christianity. Despite the fact that Fr Alphonse wanted to avoid destroying the Aboriginal culture, some of the customs had to go. But a deep spiritual relationship formed between himself and Felix. Because of this, it was possible to extend the Aboriginal infrastructure of the community. Fr Alphonse was concerned to promote Aboriginal welfare. Felix was concerned to provide a bridge between the two cultures. A dialogue was taking place, a reciprocal process. The permanent religious change which occurred at Beagle Bay can be traced to this cultural exchange between Felix, the decision maker for the Aboriginal community, and Fr Alphonse, the representative of the Catholic presence. Aboriginal religious practice allowed for the exchange of ideas and ceremonies, but cultural practices were lost in the exchange.

If religious conversion occurred, Alphonse Tachon did not see that it was possible for the Aboriginal community to retain its identity, by adding to, rather than replacing traditional religious practices, and the relationship between Felix and Fr Alphonse did not prevent conflict. Remi Balagai, his nephew, related:

Everybody told me, ‘You follow our Law. Proper we finish you Malulu, you can go back to the mission. You must be man like first man and you will follow our Law’... Fr Alphonse preached in the church ‘Stop that Malulu’... They said, ‘That is our Law, we old fellows we keep to our Law, we got to stick to that Law till we’re dead, but all them boys can follow Christian.’

But Felix accepted the new Law. He made his own choice by selective adaptation from the ideas proposed by Fr Alphonse. As an Aboriginal leader, it was appropriate for Felix to seek to increase his participation in, and his ownership of new rituals. Since Aboriginal culture did
not separate religious beliefs from other social domains, Felix could not change his world view, but he chose to encourage the Nyulnyul and the Djabber Djabber tribes to come with him to share the Church presence.37

This is Your Place, Beagle Bay Mission, 1890-1990 is a collection of forty-seven Aboriginal oral sources. Some of the informants were born before the turn of the century. The story is that the mission enabled a remnant of the Aborigines to survive, and have large families. Remi Balagai, who was born in 1883, and did not pass away until 1972, gave most of the information about his uncle Felix, who died in 1930. Women related to Felix were his nieces, Leonie Witzie, and Fidelis Victor.

‘Women’s history’ cannot be the history of women only, as an understanding of their historical experience has to be seen within the broader circumstances of history.38

Felix’s grand-daughter, Magdalen Williams, cherished tradition and was prepared to pass on her memories. Some of them demonstrate that the new Law was like the second horse in the buggy which was to pull a small remnant of the Aboriginal people to a new life very different from the old ways.

We, Vera Dan, Teresa and myself were colony girls. I was born 1921 and went into the dormitory when 6 or 7 years old. Bella and Fidelis looked after me. Mum died 1928, don’t know what, no doctors or anything. Teresa born 1918 (big flu 1919)—her mum died 1960’s.

My Grandfather Felix told us: ‘I got nothing to give you but—I give you this land. This is your place.’ Felix said, ‘Ibal Galbogjar (Heavenly Father) is there to look after you when I go.’ There were two groups of Nyulnyul tribe at Beagle Bay—one group was from the bush, one was from the coastal people, for example, Fidelis was from the bush people, Remi was from the coastal people. Carnot Bay was a place that the Nyulnyul tribe would meet together because Grandfather Felix was the one they would go to for Corroborees from all round, Nimambor people. When those people would come, that was before the Christians came, and Grandfather would lay his rules for them, then they would come. Felix’s corroborees always had a meaning the people would understand.

When the first missionaries came, they taught them about one God. Before that they knew there was a mighty spirit over them. They would sit on the beach and sing and pray for a catch. They had a trust in the ‘Galjobin Ibal’ and they would chant as soon as the tide would go out, and they would find the fish and turtles. So when Christianity came out it wasn’t hard to
believe. He said to the people, 'Finish now—end of old tribal law.' That was forgotten. My father didn't go through with it or Flora's. 'Gunju place', sacred place, but our people didn't know to say. Along where those houses were built, they used to have camps. When Christianity came out—Felix said to his people, 'We must have one law and not other law: tribal way of running away with woman (spearing in leg), we finish with that' . . .

My husband, Lawrence Williams, and myself, Magdalen and my five children, Johanna, Albert, Cecelia, Philomena, and David went to Balgo for six months with Fr Alphonse and two St John of God nuns, Sr Angela and Sr Winifride. We came back, then years later we went to La Grange. Fr Francis was there already. I stayed there doing the cooking for Fr Francis and cleaning. Vera Dan was there helping too, she taught. We had four lay people who helped. Betty Prendegast, Margaret Elliot, Joan Newing and Joy Hopf (Joy left soon, she was first). 39

So, as an individual, two generations after Felix, Magdalen made important contributions to mission methods, (i) she went with her husband and children to Balgo to work with the missionaries for 6 months, (ii) she did the cooking, and the cleaning at La Grange Mission, (iii) she worked as a member of a lay missionary team.

Leonie Widjie's story covers about 70 years of mission life. Her godmother was Agnes Guilwil (Agnes Puertollano) and Leonie was baptised before the turn of the century.

My parents take me to Fr Alphonse. 'Take these two, my little ones, to stop here in school' . . . Paperbark Church, little one, belong us . . . Garden: hoeing, cleaning up the onions and the rock melons; morning we take flowers and we pollinate the pumpkins all round the way we go, we girls, and women too, big mob women. Before plenty men and women. Not plough, men and women, big garden and coconuts, and lemon trees. Morning we go to school. Evening, we go there. Then I went working with Mary and Brother, and Agnes Puertollano in the kitchen. We cooked sweet potato, onions, pumpkin, we cooking cabbage, talk about cabbage! beetroot, carrots, we cook 'em. We take 'em, put 'em on plate.

From other oral sources we find that Leonie was an assistant teacher for many years. 40 Leonie's contribution which supported the mission was fourfold, (i) in the garden, (ii) cooking in the kitchen, (iii) Keeping alive the songs of her uncle Felix, and (iv) teaching in the school.

Elizabeth Fidelis Victor was born in Beagle Bay and her father, Victor Tieildiel was Nyulnyul, the brother of Felix. Her mother was Remi's sister, formerly one of Felix's wives. Fidelis mentioned three
tribes touched by the missionaries, Nyulnyul, Nyikina, Bardi. Her grandfather had many sons, and she was born in 1905.

At Beagle Bay we had dormitories. St John of God nuns were mothers to us. Mother Margaret Alacoque taught me.

The first to get sick [leprosy] was Alice, then Mary and Aunty Cassie. Matthias and I went to the Leprosarium in 1935. At first the patients were in the bush at Beagle Bay and Sr Brigid used to look after them.

We went 3 miles to school. [I] used to work for the Fathers, cooking, one from the community, Sr Aloysius. Sr Margaret used to give the orders. Some girls used to work from the Novitiate. We used to have our own garden. Mother Margaret did it.²¹

In 1897, the control of the Natives was handed over to the West Australian Government. The stipulated 1% of revenue (which in 1897 meant nearly £30,000) was replaced by £5,000 and any such other amount as parliament might choose to vote. A sub-department was set up to administer native affairs.²²

The Aborigines Act of 1897, which was an amendment to the Aborigines Protection Act of 1886, removed equity in educational opportunities for Aborigines as compared with other Australians in West Australia. Because Aboriginal education became the responsibility of the Aborigines Department at this stage, later Education Departments were able to evade responsibility for Aboriginal children, and there are cases when this legislation enabled white parents to have Aborigines and half-castes removed from State Schools.²³

What was the Church doing in the Kimberley while this legislation was being enacted in far off Perth? During 1897, at different times, 28 people were baptised in Beagle Bay, and Thomas Puertollano, a Filipino, was the godfather to many of them. One of them was Agnes Guilwil, a little girl of about 11, according to the records. Thomas later married her.²⁴

Years later, H V Howe, an old pearler who used to lay up over the summer months at Cygnet Bay, Boolgin, and Sunday island wrote of Agnes Puertollano:

Fr Nicholas’s domestic affairs were usually taken care of by Thomas Puertollano, or ‘binghis’ trained by Agnes Puertollano to ‘cookem tucker, washem clothes, diggem garden and milkem nanny goat’.²⁵
The Disaster Bay Baptismal Records written in French indicate that Fr Jean Marie Janny baptised two Aborigines at the point of death in 1897. Among later entries are those of the Puertollano family who were there assisting Fr Jean Marie in the early 1900's.

In Broome, Fr Nicholas Emo had enlisted the wife of his sacristan to assist in the administration and the teaching of his very small institution. In 1897 this fact caused a furore in Perth and he was eventually forced to close the school.

A draft of a letter regarding a report on Aborigines of the region of the Kimberley,46 is found in the Perth Archives:

... The Bishop being unwell, I am directed to reply to your letter of 27th enclosing a report of Mr Marsden on the Mission for Aborigines at Broome. With regard to the Matron of the Native school I have the honour to assure the Board that a great deal of care was taken in her selection.

Of her, and of the school, Fr Nicholas wrote me about the time of opening the latter:

'Already eighteen of the Aborigines have learned the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Apostles Creed and the Act of Contrition. They say prayers at rising and at going to rest, before and after meals, and every evening they recite the Rosary which I say for them in English. Truly the sight of so many of these poor creatures kneeling before the altar at Mass, and Rosary every day is a great consolation to me.

Divine Providence has, without doubt, favoured me at this time by enabling me to meet with a half-caste matron47 (my sacristan's wife). The daughter of an Englishman and an Aboriginal woman, she received a Christian education in Perth and suits my object in the two ways of knowing well the Native language and enjoying a certain prestige among the Aborigines. I see her always surrounded by Natives of all ages and thus she seems to be a suitable person for the post of mistress.

I am content for the present that she teach them along with Catechism and prayers, to cook, to wash and mend clothes, although I wish them also to learn further to read and write and understand in some degree the elements of Sol-fa.'48

Your Board will see from this that Fr Nicholas did not make a random selection and it is to be regretted that Mr Marsden should have thought it right to report unfavourably of the matron on account of rumours which, he says himself, he scarcely credits.49

Fr Bourke (Vicar General), wrote from Perth:
NELEN YUBU

I enclose for you a copy of the Report sent into the Aborigines Protection Board by the gentleman who visited your school at Broome some time ago. I forward you also a copy of the letter I sent in the report to the Board and you will see that neither the Bishop nor I think much of what this Mr Marsden has to say against your schoolmistress...50

In Broome, Herb Thomas (Police Corporal) wrote:

...I heard the rumours he speaks of and immediately made inquiries and found them false. I have been in charge of police here from the beginning of the mission which I visit frequently always having access to every part of the school, and have always found it scrupulously clean.

The matron, Mrs Almonia was living two weeks at the Police Station during my wife’s illness and I found her to be a good housekeeper, cook and laundress and very clean in her habits.

The mission house is not a mansion and would no doubt be better if larger but the lack of space does not make it prejudicial to the health of the children as their bedrooms are not confined but full of ventilation.

I might mention that there are persons here prejudiced against the mission (all on account of the assistance afforded Natives by the mission and some with the additional prejudice of religion). This was very apparent at the Broome quarter-sessions in February last when ‘Dowa’, a South Sea Islander, was tried for setting fire to the mission. The foreman of the jury asked the question: How are all the Native women living at the mission employed? This question was thoroughly answered, and showed that only one native woman, ‘Fanny’, was living at the mission and she assisted the matron in cooking and washing. This should set at rest the rumour of the matron giving the women to Malays.

Mr Marsden never reported the matter to me, nor did he ever mention anything about the mission. He had ample time and opportunities while here to have ascertained the falseness of the rumours which he scarcely believed...51

1 August 1897. From Fr Nicholas Maria Emo, missionary, Mission of Broome, comes a document written in Spanish about the cross-cultural nature of his little Church:

Present State of the Mission for Aborigines in Broome (N.W.)

Aborigines on land and sea, about 250. At certain times of the year the number is bigger.

Baptisms: The following have received Baptism, 3 men, 6 women, 4 boys, 6 girls. Total of 19. (Three girls and one boy are due for Baptism on 15th of this month... the number of Christian Aborigines will be 23).
Marriages: Between an Aboriginal woman and Manilaman, 1.
Between an Aboriginal woman and a Christian American Negro, 1. Between two Aborigines, 2. Total 4.
Orphanage - School: There are boarding in this poor orphanage, 3 boys, 8 girls. Total 11. (Among these are four half-caste girls).

Note: One gentleman, one of our neighbours, has sought admission for five half-caste of both sexes. I have been promised three more Aboriginal boys when there will be more room available. Then, a great number of Aboriginal boys and girls who are roaming about will be able to attend to school and classes . . .
The girls know how to cook, wash, iron and mend the clothes—although in the last item they are not yet perfect!
Manilamen of reputable character are willing to marry two of the grown-up girls, as soon as they are of marriageable age.
The principal aim of this orphanage has been to correct their vices, inculcate moral behaviour and to accustom them to live a social life. It can almost be said that they have achieved a good standard of education.  
Letters were written, to support the work of Fr Nicholas and to counteract the malicious rumours:

...During the past sixteen months I have been in the habit of frequently visiting the Mission school. I have never seen anything to find fault with and consider that those in charge deserve great credit for the way they have managed it.

I further consider that the work being done at present by the Mission school is a most praiseworthy one and worthy of the support of all who have the welfare of the Aborigines at heart.  

26 August 1897, a document with 27 names appended reinstated the good name of the school, but the damage was done. It was closed:

We the undersigned have much pleasure in stating that the Mission Station formed here by Rev. Fr Nicholas has been the means of greatly improving the conditions of the Aborigines both morally and intellectually.

Several children are supported solely by the Mission and are well fed and looked after.

We further consider that the present management of the mission is most satisfactory.
NELEN YUBU

Before the turn of the century, the seed of faith in Jesus had been planted in the Kimberley, despite Government opposition. All over the Kimberley it had already been watered by alien Filipino sailors who aligned themselves with Fr Nicholas. Among the team he took to Drysdale River Mission were Filipino families, so all the time, women went on missionary expeditions with the men.

An itinerant Spaniard, he enlisted the help of an Irish Bishop in Bishop Gibney, and a Spanish Bishop in Bishop Torres.

In the beginning, Fr Nicholas belonged to the French Cistercian order which sent out Dutch monks among the French, and dispensed him from his vows in 1906. In the end, when this missionary came to die, he belonged to the Aborigines and a great wail from his Aboriginal friends heralded his entry into another life. He was buried on a sand hill in Lombadina where the family of his staunch supporter, Thomas Puertollano, lived. When Thomas was buried in Beagle Bay in 1942, as the Japanese flew over to bomb Broome, his papers still showed him as an alien, but the contribution made by his family, especially that of his Aboriginal wife, Agnes, towards the building up of the Catholic Church in the Kimberley can never be measured. The clash of many cultures would continue as this cosmopolitan church began to grow, but it would form something new, something living, as it determined its destiny.
2ibid., p.142.
7Tony Swain and Deborah Bird Rose, Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions: Ethnographic and Historical Studies, AIAS, (Bedford Park, 1988).
8ibid., p.78. (Anne Pattel-Gray is the Executive Secretary of the Aboriginal and Islander Commission of the Australian Council of Churches. A candidate for ministry with the Uniting Church in Australia, she is also the Vice-Chairperson of the New South Wales Region of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.)
9M’nteba, op.cit, p.135.
11ibid., p.x.
12ibid., Attwood, p.138.

2P Hasluck, *Black Australians, A Survey of Native Policy in Western Australia, 1829-1897.* (Melbourne, 1942).

3The Aborigines Act, West Australian Acts and Statutes 1897, Act 5, para.7. B.L.

4Baptismal Registers of Beagle Bay and Disaster Bay Missions, 1897. ADB.

5Howe to Miller, 5 December 1969. ACAP.


7emendation in the margin - “a fitting matron, a half-caste woman.”

Note: On the same sheet, notes in pencil were made by Bishop Gibney. Probably they refer to the Annual Report of the A.P. Board (para.7).

“No one could guess from this that both of the R.C. Missions maintained 10 times as many Natives and half-caste children as the Anglican Swan Mission favoured by the Board to the extent of maintaining all its inmates in addition to having a special grant for building purposes. Most self-denying efforts are being made by one of the Trappist Fathers to establish a school at Broome. The Board, although aware of what he has and is doing ignores his efforts as far as pecuniary help is concerned and I know of no other reason for the exceptional treatment than sectarian bias.”

8Draft of a letter regarding Marsden’s Report, 28 May 1897. ACAP.

9Bourke to Emo, 6 June 1897. ACAP.

10Thomas to Emo, 20 July 1897. ACAP.

11Nicholas Maria Emo, Report in Spanish from Broome. 1 August 1897. ACAP.

12Brownrigg to Emo, 1 August 1897. ACAP.

13Statement regarding Fr Emo’s School by 27 Broome residents, 26 August 1897. ACAP.