

The Power of Place

Brigida Nailon CSB*

In Australia, for thousands of years, small communities of Aborigines spread across the continent, developing unique patterns of social organization. The land moulded 'the first Australians' who came together at special places, to share ritual, trade and enjoyment.¹

A changed situation began for Aborigines with the first fleet invasion in 1788. Europeans imposed themselves on the land to make the place their own, to change it from a penal colony to a prosperous free nation in which a feeling of rootlessness lay because of the claim that this place was *terra nullius* – 'nobody's country'.²

Today, more than 200 years later, the injustice of taking the land lies deep in the psyche of many Aboriginal Peoples. History depends on the eye of the beholder. A little Aboriginal child at the Hyllus Maris School in Ardmona accused me with her big wide open eyes, 'You took our land!' A boy at Nulungu College in Broome, when told to, 'Get off the grass!' replied, 'I'm not a white boy!' Both incidents are indicative of strong feelings in these children, and reflect those in Aboriginal communities.

N.G. Butlin, an expert in economic history wrote that 'A society functions as an integrated whole or disintegrates'.³ It is obvious from media reports that there is 'a spanner in the works'. Richard McEncroe put his finger on it recently when he wrote an article for *The Age* entitled 'Nation of Riches is a Poor Performer'.⁴

* Brigida Nailon joined the Brigidines in 1949. After working in Catholic Education in Victoria until 1979, Hyllus Maris asked her in 1980 to work on a pilot scheme at Kurrarook for an Aboriginal Community School in Victoria. Her ongoing participation in areas of Aboriginal endeavour took her to work in places in the Kimberley WA, the Goulburn Valley, Victoria, *Nungalinga College* in Darwin, and *Bachelor College* in Maningrida, Northern Territory. In 1997, she presented a PhD thesis 'Encounter between Catholicism and Aborigines in the Kimberley' at Latrobe University. Some of her writing on mission history has been published.

1. Sylvia J. Hallam 'The First Western Australians' in C.T. Stannage, ed., *A New History of Western Australia* (Perth: UWA Press, 1981), 35.
2. Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia* (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the Cambridge University Press, 1999), i.
3. N.G. Butlin, Emeritus Professor of Economic History at ANU, *The Age*, 20 March 1990, 13.
4. Richard McEncroe, 'Nation of Riches is a Poor Performer', *The Age*, 28 March 2006, 10.

John Molony, from ANU, wrote about the place of the convicts and their children:

The first, white, native-born Australians, usually the children of convicts, came to maturity in the decades to 1850, 90% of these sprang from convict parentage and so were made to feel second-rate and outsiders to society. During the governorship of William Bligh, 1806-10, the majority of white native-born were of illegitimate birth, known simply as 'National Children'.⁵

A dominant question within colonial society in the early period of settlement was that of the alienation of the land ... the initial step was to take away the land from those to whom it had belonged. During Governor Lachlan Macquarie's time in office, 1810-21, the Crown gave away the land to the powerful and the wealthy. During the time of Governor Brisbane, 1821-25 a few of the white native-born acquired a meagre forty to sixty acres, but the majority remained as landless as the Aborigines, the old black Australians.

In the early colonial period of white settlement, the majority of the free settlers, who received over 95 per cent of the land, felt little or no bonds with it or with its original inhabitants.

Because the native born held so little land in proportion to their number, they were never significant as landowners or, as squatters, they were less involved in the process of land alienation from the Aborigines and not motivated in the same way to use violent means to drive them from it.⁵

Tom Stannage,⁶ a Western Australian historian, suggests that the major traditions of interpretation of history in and about Australia were devised originally to help define Englishness and to validate and serve the British Empire. Such history is usually scientific and undergirded by Anglican Christianity, by English language and literature, and with a moral purpose: to bear the idea of progress. This short extract from Stuart McIntyre's history illustrates this point well:

The thousand officers, troops, civilian officials and felons who landed at Sydney from the eleven vessels of the First Fleet formed a bridgehead for later immigrants, bond and free, who spread out over the continent, explored and settled, possessed and subdued it. This is a story of a sleeping land brought to life by purposeful endeavour... The sound of an axe on wood, English steel on antipodean eucalypt broke the silence of a primeval wilderness. The scientific passion of

5. John Moloney, *The Native Born: The First White Australians* (Melbourne: MUP, 2000), 1-7.
6. Tom Stannage 'New Norcia in History: Changing the History: Changing the Frame', in D. Hutchinson, ed., *A Town Like No Other* (Fremantle: Fremantle Art Centre Press, 1995).

Cook, and the diligent foresight of Phillip, redeemed this strange and distant redoubt of nature from earlier neglect.⁷

But this assumption of a story of economic and social progress is challenged by N.G. Butlin, Emeritus Professor of Economic History at ANU when he calculates the effects of disease and resource loss for Aborigines consequent upon white settlement.⁸

Tom Stannage says that the early historical line taken was English, Protestant, Christian, male, and imbued with racial superiority, powerfully linked to the idea of progress so that the British were seen to be the most socially efficient and therefore had the right to rule. This sort of thinking led to 'Social Darwinism', and the acceptance of an 'inexorable law of natural selection'.⁹

'To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it!'¹⁰ In Australia, places were already named; so new names signified a rootless gap, widened by legislation that made greater rifts in a common humanity. Kevin McKelson, a missionary in the North West points to incongruity of names where along the Kimberley coast places are named after ships, e.g., 'Cygnet Bay', 'Roebuck Bay', and 'Beagle Bay'. The Aboriginal community where he worked was called 'La Grange' after a French Mathematician in the Prussian Court.¹¹

On 29 November 1986, Pope John Paul II in Alice Springs addressed Aboriginal Peoples of Australia:

Among those who have loved and cared for the indigenous people, we especially recall with profound gratitude all the missionaries of the Christian faith. With immense generosity they gave their lives in service to you and to your forebears. They helped to educate the Aboriginal people and offered health and social services. Whatever their human frailty, and whatever mistakes they may have made, nothing can ever minimize the depth of their charity. Nothing can ever cancel out their greatest contribution, which was to proclaim to you Jesus Christ and to establish his Church in your midst.

From the earliest times men like Archbishop Polding of Sydney opposed the legal fiction adopted by European settlers that this land was 'terra nullius' – nobody's country. He strongly pleaded for the rights of the Aboriginal inhabitants to keep the traditional lands on which their whole society depended.¹²

In this article I shall write about some of these 'missionaries of the Christian faith' and I begin with the thirty-nine year old John Polding OSB, consecrated 29 June 1834 as Vicar Apostolic of New Holland, the first Catholic Bishop to take up residence in Australia. It was almost fifty years since Arthur Phillip had assumed government over the eastern half of the country.

Polding at first directed his energy to the convicts. When transportation of prisoners to New South Wales ceased, he turned his attention to Aboriginal needs. On 10 January 1840, he wrote to France, to 'The Lyons Society for Mission Aid', saying, 'These savages – the object of so much contempt – appear to us intelligent, cheerful and very observing.' Unfortunately the French did not come to keep the tribes remote from what Polding called, 'the destructive breath of a civilisation which is neither inspired nor directed by religion.'

In 1842, Polding enlisted the help of Passionist Fathers, three Italians and one Swiss. Moreton Bay had just been opened up for free settlers and by 24 May 1843 the missionaries were housed at the former penal colony of Dunwich (North Stradbroke Island). Their leader, Father R. Vaccari, appointed by Rome as 'Prefect Apostolic'¹³ abandoned the mission, so though Polding's efforts came to nothing,¹⁴ he made public his intention,

to lay upon the conscience of all who have property in these colonies, the thought that there is blood upon their land and that human souls, to whom they are in so many ways debtors in the name of natural justice and in the name of the Redeemer, are perishing because no man careth for them.¹⁵

Two Benedictine monks, Salvado and Serra had offered themselves for mission work in Western Australia in 1845. They named their place 'New Norcia' after St Benedict's birthplace.¹⁶ On 25 February 1847, the Catholic diocese of Perth came into being, taking up the whole Western section of New Holland.¹⁷

Tom Stannage suggests that the Benedictine vision enables us to glimpse the possibility for a different framework for Australian history, beginning with the spirit of a community, distinguished by prayer, labour and service, for the glory of God.¹⁸ One of Salvado's Aboriginal companions introduced him to a large number of Aborigines whose leader said, 'Here is my fire, now it is yours too. I stay here; you come and go, then you come back to go away and come

7. Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 1.
 8. N.G. Butlin, *Our Original Aggression: Aboriginal Populations of South Eastern Australia 1788 – 1850* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1983), xi–xii.
 9. Stannage 'New Norcia in History', 101.
 10. P. Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1972); *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1972), 76.
 11. K. McKelson, SAC, 'Nadya Nadya Country' in R.M. Berndt and C.H. Berndt, eds, *Aborigines of the West: Their Past and Their Present* (Nedlands, UWA Press, 1979), 214.
 12. 'Address to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders', nn.9-10. See *The Pope in Australia: Collected Homilies and Talks* (Strathfield: St Paul Publications, 1986), 169-170.

13. Frances O'Donoghue, *The Bishop of Botany Bay: The Life of John Bede Polding, Australia's First Catholic Archbishop* (Melbourne: Angus and Robertson, 1982), 71-72.
 14. R. Wiltgen, *The Founding of the Roman Catholic Church in Oceania, 1825 – 1850* (Canberra: ANU, 1979), 360-376.
 15. John Harris, *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope* (Sutherland: Albatross Books, 1990), 117.
 16. Sylvia Hallam, 'Bishop Salvado and "The Australians"' in *New Norcia Studies* 1 (April 1993), 31-34.
 17. Wiltgen, *The Founding of the Roman Catholic Church*, 372, 388.
 18. Stannage, 'New Norcia in History', 101.

again, and then you stay; now we are great friends.' In this ceremony, Salvado recognised Aboriginal ownership of land but in a very short time the Mission's leases totalled 7285 hectares. When in 1853, Salvado returned from Europe with three priests and thirty-seven lay brothers, it was no time before he controlled a self-supporting mission village.¹⁹ His monks taught practical skills to equip Aborigines for colonial society.²⁰ From 1860, however, measles and influenza almost obliterated the traditional landowners. Salvado's friendship with Governor Weld (1869-1875) encouraged legislation that made Aborigines a 'protected people', but which would later hinder self-determination.²¹ When the Forrest Government reduced mission subsidies in the 1890's, Aboriginal families were forced to leave 'New Norcia' to look for employment.

In Victoria, Tasmanian pastoralists took up residence in the early 1830's and the state was established late in 1835. The Catholic Diocese of Melbourne was set up in 1847 with James Alipius Goold as its first bishop. Within twenty years, the scale and efficiency of pastoral settlement brought dreadful disruption to indigenous society. Gold was found in 1851. Sixty-eight locations of known killings of Aborigines between 1836 and 1853 are recorded in *Koorie*, a book containing information about places of trauma where blood was unjustly spilt. The 'Massacre Map' of Victoria records several thousands of known murders over 17 years.²² It is hard to understand why more help was not offered to Aborigines by the churches and general populace in the tragic early days, though it is recorded that as early as 1826, the Anglican clergy were commanded not to take part in political life, and the few priests of the Catholic Church were fearful of expulsion.²³ A concerned Catholic layperson, W.A. Duncan, Editor of *The Catholic Australasian Chronicle*, was dismissed for his forthright support of social justice issues. He wrote, 'We have deprived them of their means of subsistence, we have driven them from their haunts, we have communicated to them our diseases and our vices; in a word an edict has gone out for their extermination.'²⁴

Some have asserted that these events never happened, but the disowning of 'place histories of massacres' involves denial,²⁵ something Archbishop Polding never did. He wrote in a pastoral letter:

The stain of blood is upon us – blood has been shed far otherwise than in self defence – blood, in needless and wanton cruelty. It is said, even now, that as Europeans progress northwards, blood is so shed.

Shall we not protest against this? Bishops and priests, all ministers and disciples of Christ, shall they not protest by word and deed.²⁶

But in the main, his exhortation fell on deaf ears. Russell Skelton recently accused his contemporaries that 'When it comes to indigenous Australians at risk, paralysing complacency prevails.'²⁷ This perennial problem is nothing new in Australia where the 'whisper of guilt' is rarely heard by the dominant society.

In the early days, mission enterprises in the Port Phillip District were short lived. In 1837, the Anglican Church established an Aboriginal village on the south bank of the Yarra River but its school closed two years later. The Baptist School on Merri Creek closed when Aboriginal people moved on in 1847. Because of falling population and pressure from pastoralists, the Wesleyan Missionary Society Mission on the Barwon River closed in 1848.

In 1850, Charles La Trobe, Superintendent of the Port Phillip District (whose father had been a leading Moravian minister in London), and Charles Perry, the Anglican Bishop, welcomed Moravian missionaries from Europe. They resided first at Mt Franklin and then moved to Lake Boga. With the help of several Churches, La Trobe donated £50, and four years later the Melbourne Diocesan Board of Missions gave £110. Around Lake Boga, settlers demanding more Aboriginal labour undermined the mission by calumny. Gold prospectors broke fences and disputed claim to the land by the missionaries who left in 1856.

From around 1860, colonial administration responded to the Aboriginal predicament by confining Aborigines to missions or reserves.²⁸ In 1863, at Coranderrk, near Healesville, 2000 hectares were set aside under the direction of a white manager. Its residents ran stock, grew crops, operated a sawmill, a dairy and a bakery. Days were set aside for hunting. Artefacts were produced.²⁹ Trouble began in the late 1860s with pressure from covetous neighbours to resume the valuable land, and Colonial policy became increasingly restrictive and authoritarian until the battle for control of Coranderrk Mission became a test case in Colonial Politics. On 28 March 1881, a deputation of twenty-two Aboriginal men led by William Barak, walked all night to Parliament House in Melbourne, forty miles away, to ask that they not be moved from the place.³⁰

In 1857 the new Governor of Victoria, Sir Henry Barkly, invited the Moravians back, suggesting a new mission site in the Wimmera. William Spieseke and Frederick Hagenauer walked up the Wimmera River until they reached Antwerp Station where Horatio Ellerman, an affluent Presbyterian

19. Hutchinson, *A Town Like No Other*, 37-48, 45-48.

20. Lois Tilbrook, *Nyungar Tradition: Glimpses of Aborigines of South-West Australia 1829 – 1914* (Nedlands, WA: UWA Press, 1983), 47.

21. Hutchinson, *A Town Like No Other*, 48, 49.

22. Cultural Heritage Trust, *Koorie* (North Melbourne: Creative Solutions, 1991), 19.

23. Manning Clark, *A Short History of Australia, Illustrated Edition* (Ringwood: Penguin Books Australia, 1963), 63.

24. Harris, *One Blood*, 432.

25. Maria Tumarkin, 'Traumascape: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy' (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2005), 9.

26. Joint Pastoral Letter of Archbishop Polding and the Bishops of the Province, given at the Second Provincial Council, 14 April 1869. See *The Eye of Faith: The Pastoral Letters of John Bede Polding*, Gregory Haines, Sr Mary Gregory Forster & F. Brophy, eds (Kilmore Vic: Lowden Publishing, 1978), 404.

27. Russell Skelton, 'Black and Blue' *The Sunday Age*, 16 April 2006, 15.

28. Jane Lydon, *Eye Contact: Photographing Indigenous Australians* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), xiii.

29. Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia*, 106.

30. Lydon, *Eye Contact*, xiv, 20.

squatter welcomed them. He offered them a limestone ridge called Bungobudnutt by the Aborigines, but named Ebenezer Mission by the Moravians. Unknown to them, this was a site of significance to the local Wotjabaluk people, who returned regularly for ceremonial purposes. It was also the place of the Aboriginal camp, which Ellerman and his party had raided in 1846.³¹ Nathanael Pepper, an Aboriginal, gave local leadership. His grandson said in 1980, 'Only for the missionaries there wouldn't be so many Aborigines walking around today ... Our people were finished before the mission men came ... Old Hagenauer took them sick ones and gave them medicine and food too.'³²

Ebenezer became a training place for missionaries supported financially by Presbyterians at nearby Horsham. In 1862, Hagenauer left for Gippsland to found a mission and he called it by a biblical name 'Ramah'. The Aborigines added their word, 'yuck' meaning 'our' and Ramahyuck Mission came into being. Another missionary from Ebenezer transferred to the Anglican Lake Condah Mission in 1865, and in 1867, two others founded Point Pearce Mission in SA, where Aborigines had been violently forced away from traditional waterholes. Close by was the Lutheran Hermannsburg Mission, which had founded other missions, and each mission received a lease of 100 square miles of 'waste land'.

In 1868, the Presbyterian Church of Victoria agreed to superintend the Moravian missions and accept the financial costs of £300 annually.

When, in 1886, *The Aborigines Protection Act* was passed in Victoria, any Aborigine not of full descent, under thirty-five years of age, had to leave all missions and reserves.

In 1885, Hagenauer had travelled to Queensland and as a result of his report, Mapoon Mission was founded in 1891 with a reserve of 100 square miles, despite opposition from groups wanting free labour, pearling and beche-de-mer industries.

In 1898 Weipa Mission was founded with Aurukun Mission following in 1904, and in 1914, Mornington Island Mission in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

In 1875, Duncan McNab, a Catholic diocesan priest from Victoria, volunteered his services to Bishop Quinn of Brisbane to work for Aborigines in Queensland. In 1876 he sponsored three applications for Aborigines for homestead blocks of 640 acres with contiguous boundaries. This was the least amount of land being granted to newcomers at sixpence an acre. The Land Office could not handle the concept; neither did Aborigines have the money. Moreover, there was no precedent for allowing individual Aborigines to own land. After being tabled and discussed in the Legislative Assembly, the case failed although McNab argued that the Governor had power to grant land without payment.³³

McNab remained with the Blacks not far from Mackay, on a reserve used as a labour pool. When labour was no longer needed, what the government gave, it could take away, free from either electoral rebuke or Imperial reprimand. Only Duncan McNab spoke strong words of protest. In 1877, from January to May, he applied to Douglas, the Minister for Lands, for six reserves, at Kenilworth, Imbil, Maroochy, Kilcoy, Mount Brisbane and Belleview. Reserves for Kilcoy, Mount Brisbane and Belleview were refused and the others ignored.³⁴ When some Aborigines became Christians, neighbouring selectors petitioned against the Durundur Reserve, complaining that good land had been assigned to Aborigines who should be confined to mountains and scrubs.

McNab pursued his campaign for the recognition of Aboriginal marriages he had celebrated, he submitted registration certificates to the Registrar in the Maryborough district in May and June 1878, but his efforts were thwarted in Brisbane by the Registrar-General, Henry Jordan. Jordan sought legal advice from the Master of Titles, who prepared a brief, forwarded via Douglas, to the Attorney General, Samuel Griffiths, for comment. McNab was threatened with fines but none of the marriages were registered.

In July 1878, McNab drafted a major report to Archbishop Vaughan of Sydney asking that Catholic missionary efforts be initiated and directed from Rome. In 1879, James Alipius Gould wrote to Cardinal Simeoni of Propaganda Fide in Rome recommending McNab, who was going to Europe to try to get missionaries and to see the Colonial Government in London.³⁵

McNab raised Aboriginal issues with authority figures in both Church and Colonial Government. In 1881, his *Memoria to Rome*³⁶ moved the Pope to commission the Jesuit General to found a mission from Adelaide to the Northern Territory.³⁷ McNab visited the Jesuits in 1882 before the first group left Sevenhill, and later in their Palmerston mission in 1884, and in 1877. Between 1882 and 1899, nineteen Jesuits worked in their Northern Territory Mission. Except for Fathers O'Brien and MacKillop, all were from Austria-Hungary.³⁸ In 1906 the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart began their missions in the Top End.

In Perth, Father Gibney believed it was wrong for British sovereignty to annex all land, lease and sell it to colonists while making no provision for indigenous inhabitants. He argued that colonial Governors had abrogated their responsibility to grant land to Aborigines and, when pressured by land hungry speculators, they bowed to the will of powerful self-interest groups. He wrote to the Government, 1 January 1879, asking for a reserve of 50,000 acres for a mission. John Forrest wrote back, 'Not yet, wait for the exploratory party'.³⁹ Soon the published report announced 20 million acres of good well-watered

34. Brigida Nailon *The Writing on the Wall: Duncan McNab, 1820 - 1896* (Echuca: Brigidine Sisters, 1904), 225, 50.

35. *Ibid.*, 76-79, 117, 104.

36. *Ibid.*, 84-99, 102, 117, 201-21, 236-42.

37. *Ibid.*, 223-224.

38. Harris, *One Blood*, 462.

39. Forrest to Griver, 21 January 1879. Archives Catholic Archdiocese of Perth.

31. Harris, *One Blood*, 190-191.

32. Bill Edwards, *Moravian Aboriginal Missions in Australia 1850 - 1919* (Adelaide: Uniting Church Historical Society, 1999), 19.

33. Legislative Assembly, Queensland, 1876.

country was available. Named 'The Kimberley', after the Colonial Secretary in London, pastoralists could take out huge leases.⁴⁰

'Any missionary enterprise depended on the dedication and personality of a single exceptional person,' wrote John Harris, who spent many years as a teacher and school principal in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities. In the frontier years in Western Australia, he saw Matthew Gibney, Duncan McNab and Nicholas Emō as the most outstanding individuals in late nineteenth century Catholic missionary efforts. Bishop Gibney's voice was heard thundering, 'So long as there is traffic in human flesh between certain gross and unscrupulous men, and as long as I consider the blacks are being cruelly treated under the sacred name of justice. I shall not cease to raise my voice.' Harris sees him standing as a giant among his fellows.⁴¹

Bishop Griver invited McNab to come to Western Australia and as chaplain of Rottneet Island Prison in April 1883, McNab studied Kimberley languages and wrote long letters to the Governor of WA that were tabled in the Legislative Assembly by May 1883.⁴² He then visited remote frontiers where land speculators were taking up leases along the rivers and evicting Aborigines from tribal lands.⁴³ He wrote about the negative experiences of Aborigines trapped in the pearling industry at Cossack, outlawed in the hills and working on stations on the De Grey River, recommending that reserves be placed near rivers rather than on stony ground where there was neither water, nor Aborigines. Bishop Griver had told him to found a mission,⁴⁴ so from 1884-1887 he struggled at Goodenough Bay on the King Sound,⁴⁵ until broken in health, he left the mission and went back to Victoria, where on 29 August 1887, he wrote to Cardinal Moran with advice for future missionaries.

When Gibney became Bishop, he wrote again in 1888 to ask for Government support in giving land to help the Catholic Church provide a strong staff of missionaries. Later that year, Cardinal Moran presented Bishop Gibney's request to Pope Leo XIII, who asked the Abbot of the Cistercian Sept Fons Monastery in France for monks. Two years later Abbot Ambrose Janny was appointed to take charge of the mission.⁴⁶ He and Father Alphonse Tachon were received in audience by the Pope and left for Australia.

Bishop Gibney sailed with the new missionaries from Perth to Derby in WA to be welcomed by Mr Emmanuel of Liveringa Station, Mr Martin of Lillmoolooro Station and the Resident Magistrate Mr Gilbert Lodge. The sight of eight Aboriginal prisoners loading drays, and eighteen others road-making in the heat of the day seared into the Bishop's consciousness:

They were linked to each other or to their barrows, with chains passed around their necks and locked on the ankle – the bit of cloth keeping

the hot, heavy chains from the ankle flesh – the deep shirt collars between the iron collars and the skin of the neck. The four new prisoners had never seen a white man until the policeman arrested them for stealing sheep.

From Western Australia, the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Perth recorded 'fifteen Aborigines shot on the Murchison', 'sixty-three killed between the De Grey and Gascoyne'.⁴⁷

Stuart McIntyre's triumphal British framework for Australian history at first passed over the darker side of the historical picture, but later he wrote of Aboriginal recruitment into the pastoral industry and the process of invasion that was even more fiercely contested.

During the 1880's perhaps a thousand Aborigines were killed in the Alice Springs pastoral district of the Northern Territory. At Battle Mountain, in far west Queensland, as many as 600 Aboriginal warriors confronted settlers and the native mounted police in 1884. So difficult was the European occupation of the north, and so demanding the circumstances of its pastoral industry, that the occupiers had no alternative but to employ Aboriginal labour. The incorporation of Aboriginal communities into the open-range cattle industry occurred at the point of a gun, but it gave participants a significant role. They constituted a pool of labour from which pastoralists drew the drovers, servants and companions who sustained and maintained their enterprise.⁴⁸

H.C. Coombs, a recent government administrator, suggested that killing of blacks by whites can best be seen as a component in the competition of whites and blacks for Aboriginal resources; and that loss of those resources was probably more destructive than the direct killing.⁴⁹

Throughout the exploration and development of colonial Australia, our shared history with Aborigines involved the labour and skill of thousands of black men, women and children. They worked for Europeans in a wide range of occupations as interpreters, concubines, trackers, troopers, servants, nursemaids, labourers, stock workers and pearl divers. Henry Reynolds claims that:

Labour was by far the most important element of exchange between settlers and indigenes. With the end of convict transportation to mainland Australia in 1840, the outlying regions suffered from endemic labour shortages. Aboriginal and Islander men and women

40. The Western Australian Year Book, 1886.

41. Harris, *One Blood*, 431-32.

42. Notes and Proceedings of Legislative Council 1883. Paper 16.

43. McNab to Gibney, 3 November 1883 ACAP.

44. Nailon, *The Writing on the Wall*, 186-187.

45. McNab to Gibney Correspondence. ACAP.

46. Nailon, *The Writing on the Wall*, 201, 206.

47. A.O. Neville 'Relations between Settlers and Aborigines in West Australia' in *The West Australian Historical Society Journal and Proceedings* 2:19 (1936), 43.

48. Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia*, 105.

49. H.C. Coombs, H. McCann, H. Ross and N.M. Williams, *Land of Promises: Aborigines and Development in the East Kimberley* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1989).

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42. Notes and Proceedings of Legislative Council 1883. Paper 16.

43. McNab to Gibney, 3 November 1883 ACAP.

44. Nailon, *The Writing on the Wall*, 186-187.

45. McNab to Gibney Correspondence. ACAP.

46. Nailon, *The Writing on the Wall*, 201, 206.

47. A.O. Neville 'Relations between Settlers and Aborigines in West Australia' in *The West Australian Historical Society Journal and Proceedings* 2:19 (1936), 43.

48. Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia*, 105.

49. H.C. Coombs, H. McCann, H. Ross and N.M. Williams, *Land of Promises: Aborigines and Development in the East Kimberley* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1989).

were absorbed into the economy in every industry and occupation ... the Aborigines were virtually powerless ... The law, which theoretically treated all people alike, always favoured the whites.⁵⁰

Bishop Gibney wrote in his diary, in 1890, after he and Abbot Janny set off to find a place for the mission:

The evening we arrived at Yeeda Station, Mr Rose described a station out from Beagle Bay, owned by an Englishman who ran 14,000 sheep and 2,300 cattle. Aborigines did all the laborious work. Also on Yeeda the Aborigines shored the 6000 sheep, grew the vegetables and did the teamster work.⁵¹

Since McNab had advised him to lease or buy a 'run', rather than rely on the land given by the Government, Bishop Gibney and Abbot Ambrose spent some months of exploration on horseback until they were satisfied. Bishop Gibney applied for a pastoral lease of 100,000 acres of well watered land off the Reserve. He paid the Resident Magistrate the £25 fee.

For ten years, the Cistercians ministered at Beagle Bay Mission, and in 1901, Pallottine missionaries came there.⁵² Working with them were Irish and Australian sisters of St John of God. More than fifty men and women served the Catholic Church as Kimberley Missionaries before 1915⁵³ and in more recent times many other Religious and Lay Missionaries joined the Catholic Missions. These spread across into East Kimberley and south to Balgo Mission in the desert. The first Australian Pallottine priests were Fathers Roger McGinley, John Hennessy and Joseph Kearney. Each is now a missionary of more than fifty years service. In the early 1940's Archbishop Prendiville of Perth, with the help of Bishop Raible SAC, initiated a move to set up the Wandering Mission, south of Perth to serve Aboriginal Peoples.⁵⁴

In the 1960's the successful demand for equal pay for workers on sheep and cattle stations resulted in families of Aboriginal employees having to leave. Upheavals and tensions increased with the arrivals of Aborigines among non-Aborigines. At the Tardun Mission, the Pallottines started a Primary School to cater for students from the Murchison area.⁵⁵ The earlier history is found in *Led by the Spirit*, where Brother Wim van Veen SAC abridged the Tardun Chronicles 1926-1964.⁵⁶

A thread of continuity exists from Ebenezer to Ernabella Mission founded

by the Presbyterian Church in SA in 1937. The Government moved residents of Mapoon to a new place at Bamaga on the tip of Cape York when bauxite mining leases were granted in 1957 and 1965.

In 1973 the Presbyterian Board of Ecumenical Mission and Relations tried to transfer their missions as incorporated communities to Aborigines. The Queensland Government rejected the move. In 1978 the church, (since 1977, the Uniting Church in Australia), withdrew from its administrative functions at Mornington Island and Aurukun.⁵⁷

In 1974, Aboriginal Christian leaders, missionaries and the then Methodist officials met to reflect upon the past and future of the Uniting Church Arnhem Land Church Communities. A document, *Free to Decide*, marked the end of mission and the emergence of an indigenous church. Denominational boundaries disappeared for Arnhem Land people when the Anglican and Uniting Churches presented the opportunity for combined Christian leadership training. Late in 1973, a theological College at 'Nungalinya' in Darwin came into being.

In 1983, Nungalinya College commenced an extension in North Queensland, 'Wontulp-Bi Buya', which received the support of the Catholic Church as well as the Uniting, Lutheran and Anglican churches. Aboriginal Christian Leaders were not to lose the distinctiveness of the local churches, based on the traditions brought by their own missionaries. This was the concern of the AIM and Baptist missions, which did not join Nungalinya at the beginning.⁵⁸ Mauri Heading SJ, a former member of the Wontulp Bi Buya College of Queensland board, was commissioned by the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council to find a way for the Catholic Church to become a partner Church in Nungalinya and its national network. He joined the Nungalinya staff in June 1991 and in March 1994 the Catholic Church, represented by a partnership of NATSICC and the Darwin Diocese, was incorporated as a member Church of Nungalinya College. This partnership between NATSICC and the Darwin Diocese operates under the name of 'Manalama'.⁵⁹

In Perth, The St Vincent Pallotti Hostel, or Rossmoyne Mission Centre was opened in 1956 to be a training centre for Aboriginal youth attending mainstream secondary schools, or working as apprentices in the metropolitan area of Perth. Over the years Aboriginal students came to Rossmoyne from all over WA. John Luemmen, its founder, tells a story about its importance in the lives of some.

It was a great joy to be invited as an Honorary Guest to the Premier showing of the play, 'Bran Nue Dae' in 1990, written by Jimmy Chi who had been a Rossmoyne student and the first Aboriginal university student in WA. 'The Pigram Boys' and other actors, were also former students. After the show, Steven Albert came to me and

50. Henry Reynolds, *Black Pioneers: How Aboriginal and Islander People helped build Australia* (Ringwood: Penguin Books Australia, 2000), 6-7.

51. Diary of Bishop Gibney as edited by Daisy Bates. Archives Catholic Diocese of Broome.

52. Brigida Nailon, *Nothing is Wasted in the Household of God: Vincent Pallotti's Vision in Australia 1901 - 2001* (Richmond: Spectrum Publications, 2000), 25.

53. Brigida Nailon, *Emo and San Salvador* (Echuca: Brigidine Sisters, 1905), 2:259-60.

54. Nailon, *Nothing is Wasted*, 216

55. *Ibid.*, 125-128, 144, 273.

56. John Luemmen and Brigida Nailon, *Led by the Spirit: A Migrant Priest tells his Story* (Riverton: Pallottines, 1999), 95-99.

57. Edwards, 'Moravian Aboriginal Missions', 9-29.

58. Harris, *One Blood*, 858-859, 864-65

59. *Nungalinya News* 108 (Dec 2005). 4.

said, 'Pop, if we had not learnt discipline at Rossmoyne by you, we would never have been able to go through the training for this play'.

Paul Keating, former Prime Minister, called for reconciliation, saying: 'In giving us an idea of the creative possibilities in bringing the indigenous and non-indigenous cultures of Australia together, "Bran Nue Dae" hints at the benefits which might flow from a general reconciliation between black and white Australia.'⁶⁰

Speaking of Aboriginal spirituality, Pope John Paul II addressed Aboriginal Peoples, in 1986:

The silence of the Bush taught you a quietness of soul that put you in touch with another world, the world of God's Spirit. Your careful attention to the details of kinship spoke of your reverence for birth, life and human generation. You knew that children need to be loved, to be full of joy. They need a time to grow in laughter and to play, secure in the knowledge that they belong to their people.⁶¹

When I was travelling down through SA from Maningrida with another teacher in 1995, a shopkeeper asked us if we were from 'The Lands'. I had never heard the term before and it warmed my heart. The places, rivers, harbours and lakes, which the white settlers favoured were also important places to Aborigines, marking tribal boundaries and often places to which several groups had access. Place is always invested with meaning and impregnated with memory. It is a keeper of memories – a means by which the past comes to be secured in the present.⁶² Last year, in 2005, part of Ebenezer mission land near the Wimmera River was returned to the Aboriginal community.

Aboriginal kinship patterns sometimes require avoidance procedures and mainstream education is not always best. Some Aborigines choose different initiatives and with the help of volunteer and trained teachers, choose a place, for example, Irrkerlantye Learning Centre, one of two schools providing transitional education for camp children, parents and camp elders, in a world on the fringes of the white society of Alice Springs.⁶³ Such places are special, places 'to grow in laughter and to play, secure in the knowledge that they belong to their people.'

In this article, I have omitted a multitude of people who work for reconciliation, but by mentioning some, I have tried to give the reader a perspective by which to appreciate the relationship between the Churches and Aboriginal Peoples and the importance of the 'power of place'.

60. Luemmen and Nailon, *Led by the Spirit*, 93, 94, 60-61.

61. 'Address to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders', n.4. See *The Pope in Australia*, 167.

62. Maria Tumarkin, 'Traumascapes', 7.

63. Russell Skelton, 'Black and Blue' *The Sunday Age*, 16 April 2006, 15.