

CATHOLIC MISSIONS TO THE ABORIGINES IN NORTH QUEENSLAND

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By the time the first Catholic priest set foot in North Queensland in 1863 the general attitude of the white immigrant society toward the original inhabitants had already been well determined. By and large Catholics were no different in their attitudes from the rest of the European settlers. Ignorant of the basic presuppositions and values of aboriginal society, fearful of what was strange and unknown, they were primarily concerned with their own survival in an alien environment. The image of the blacks painted by reporting in the *Freeman's Journal*, (produced by a group of Liberal Catholics) did little to challenge the general attitude:

"murder of two sawyers by the blacks", "more outrages by the blacks...Burnett district: 1400 ewes driven away from Mr Hay's station and the shepherd murdered", "more murders by the blacks...a man and his daughter about 12 years of age on the Station of Mr Wilkins 12 miles from Gayndah", "the aborigines in the neighbourhood of the lower Condamine once again in arms driving everything before them and killing cattle in all directions", "a Mr Stuart on Mr Trevethan's run beaten in a most barbarous manner...some of his sheep driven off", "murder of Mr Colin McKay and four of Mr Trevethan's men by aboriginal natives", "deadly feud among the blacks", "aborigines have again commenced hostilities", "Mr Clarke has fallen a sacrifice to the assaults of these savages".¹

That the white settlers were themselves doing violence to Aboriginal people and customs was adverted to by only a few. Some Catholics in New South Wales had spoken out against what was being done to the Aborigines: W.A. Duncan had written in 1840, "We have deprived them of the means of subsistence; we have driven them from their haunts we have communicated to them our diseases and vices; in a word, an edict has gone out for their extermination."² Archbishop Polding had appeared before the 1845 Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines decrying the values prevalent among many of the settlers:

I have myself heard a man, educated, and a large proprietor of sheep and cattle, maintain that there was no more harm in shooting a native, than in shooting a wild dog. I have heard it maintained by others, that it was in the course of Providence, that the blacks should disappear before the white, and the sooner the process was carried out the better,

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for all parties. I fear such opinions prevail to a great extent. Very recently in the presence of two clergymen, a man of education narrated, as a good thing, that he had been one of a party who had pursued the blacks, in consequence of cattle having been rustled by them, and that he was sure they shot upwards of a hundred. When expostulated with, he maintained that there was nothing wrong in it, that it was preposterous to suppose they had souls.³

The first priests who came to North Queensland were almost exclusively concerned with the spiritual welfare of the Catholics among the immigrants. The memory of the complete failure of an earlier attempt to establish a mission to the Queensland Aborigines on Stradbroke Island in 1843 probably helped ease their conscience concerning their responsibilities to the blacks. That mission at Dunwich had failed for many reasons: a frightening isolation, a lack of administrative skills on Archbishop Polding's part, the problem of religious obedience when the superior with the final decision was living in a totally different environment, thousands of miles away geographically and mentally from the practical pastoral problem. There was also a lack of adequate preparation of the men selected for the work, coupled with probably the most important factor: the priests' complete absence of understanding of Aboriginal culture and custom, allied with a certain naivety concerning the ease with which the Aboriginal people would understand and accept the Catholic belief:

The missionaries were confident that, with a knowledge of the language, they would be able to bring them all to the worship of God.....The missionaries calculated also on being able to get the blacks to live in huts together, so as to form themselves into a little community, and should they succeed in doing so, they were confident that all would soon embrace the Christian faith.⁴

After two years at Dunwich the priests were discontented and dispirited. In June 1846 three of them, a Frenchman, Father Joseph Snell, and two Italians, Father Luigi Pesciaroli and Maurice Lencioni, left the mission heading for Western Australia; the fourth, Father Raymond Vaccari, superior of the mission, remained till mid-1847 before he too left for Sydney and thence Valparaiso.⁵ Whatever knowledge of the Aboriginal languages and culture they had gained over

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their three years on Stradbroke Island was never to be used. Their sojourn there also left no lasting memory with the Aborigines. Archdeacon Rigney in 1858 met a young Aboriginal man who had been part of that early mission: "All traces of his religious education had completely vanished from his mind."⁶

Polding had been well aware of the probable effect the failure of the mission would have. In 1845, when Cardinal Franzoni in Rome had been considering withdrawing the religious priests from the Moreton Bay mission Polding had pleaded with him not to do so since withdrawal would produce a bad effect on the minds of both the Aborigines and the Europeans:

The former would lose all confidence in the missionaries...
The Europeans would be only too glad to lay hold of it as
proof that it was useless to attempt to civilize the
Aborigines.⁷

Polding evidently saw a direct relationship between evangelisation and "civilization". The Archbishop's presentiment was correct; no other attempt at a Catholic mission to the Aborigines in Queensland was made till 14 years later. In 1860 two priests, Father Tissot and Father Cusse, were sent to Brisbane by an Augustinian community from Nîmes in France to work with the Aborigines in Queensland. In regard to an Aboriginal mission however nothing eventuated. Father Tissot, already 60 years old, took charge of the mission to the European settlers in the Maryborough area; Father Cusse worked for a time as a professor in the Bishop's seminary in Brisbane before moving to Newcastle where he died in 1866.⁸

By the 1860s in Queensland the idea that the Aborigines were a doomed race was growing in acceptance. The missionaries, Protestant as well as Catholic, considered that their work among the native people had been a failure. There was also the belief that the Aborigines were dying out. The neglect of the Aborigines was so great that in 1868 the Pope felt obliged to "remind all Australian bishops of their duty towards their Aboriginal brethren."⁹ Not that Archbishop Polding had lost his deep concern. In 1869 he wrote:

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We have dispossessed the aboriginals of the soil.... In natural justice, then we are held to compensation...The Fathers of this Council [the Australian Provincial Council of 1869].... desire solemnly 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 to natural justice, and in the name of the Redeemer, are perishing because no man careth for them.¹⁰

In North Queensland about that time there was one Catholic priest who felt a similar concern for the Aborigines. Father P.M. Bucas, a native of Brittany, had come to Queensland via New Zealand. In the latter place he had worked with the Maori people and had run into trouble with authorities after instructing Maoris in some aspects of modern warfare and the use of rifles.¹¹ (Peter Marie Bucas had fought with the Papal Zouaves in Italy before coming to New Zealand.) In 1870 in Mackay Father Bucas took up lands "on his own account and responsibility...with a view to make a home for the native aborigines of the district."¹² In this he was assisted between 1870 and 1880 by the Sisters of St. Joseph. However the project ran into trouble from two directions. The idea of an Aboriginal settlement became fused with the idea of an orphanage for white children of North Queensland.¹³ The local Catholics felt they were being saddled with uncalled-for responsibilities, even though the orphanage was a very simple affair with slab huts and uneven clay floors. By 1879 both the orphanage and the mission to the Aborigines were viable but Bishop Quinn was not happy with the project.¹⁴ Eventually in 1880 Father Bucas was sent to work in the recently established Vicariate of North Queensland. About the same time the Sisters of St. Joseph were replaced by the Sisters of Mercy. The latter were not used to Aborigines; one of them complained to the Police Magistrate about the "considerable number of Aborigines in the Neighbourhood". The Native Police were sent to warn off "the wild Blacks".¹⁵ The result was the Aboriginal part of Father Bucas's idea died. The orphanage alone continued - eventually to be moved to Neerkol outside Rockhampton.

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Father Bucas had been advised earlier that it was impossible to wed an Aboriginal mission and a white orphanage. The man who had given that advice was perhaps the only Catholic priest in those early days in Queensland who had any clear insight into Aboriginal needs before the advancing white settler society: Father Duncan McNab. Father McNab came late to his work among the Aborigines. Born in 1820 in the Highlands in Scotland, he was ordained in 1845. Until 1867 he worked in Scotland when, seeking a cure for tuberculosis, he left for Australia. For nine years he worked in Victoria, mainly at Melbourne, Portland and Sandhurst. In 1875, already 55 years old, he was accepted by Bishop Quinn to work among the Aborigines in Queensland. McNab based his work on a few simple propositions: if the message of Christianity was to be taught to the Aborigines, they had a right to be taught it in their own languages; if they were to be free to listen to his teaching, they needed the security of their own land, and at the same time the equal protection of the laws of white society. McNab encountered difficulties both from the Church and from the Government. Bishop Quinn expected McNab to take up land for the Church,¹⁶ but McNab argued that the Blacks would not leave their land for permanent Reserves unless forced to do so. Also he thought Church Reserves could create the idea that the Church was there to support the Aborigines, rather than leaving them in the position to support themselves, and perhaps the Church. Nevertheless for a time he acquiesced in Bishop Quinn's wishes and cooperated in the early stages of Father Bucas's schemes in Mackay. Later the Bishop was to accuse McNab of becoming a tool of the Government. McNab believed that unless one worked through the Government and the legal processes in the Colony little could be achieved for the Blacks. Appointed a Commissioner for the Aborigines by the Government, McNab argued that individual Aborigines should have as much right to grants of land as white settlers, but that they should not be forced to pay for it as if they were aliens in their own land. In 1876 as a result of his efforts, two resolutions about land grants and care for the Aborigines were passed by the Queensland Legislative Assembly, but without any real effect. The Secretary for Lands did nothing in face of local pressures. Even when land was set aside for Aborigines, white

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settlers complained that it was good land; the Aborigines should have only mountains and scrub. McNab also ran into trouble with the Government when he fought for the legal recognition of Aboriginal marriages. He fought this battle with the hope of thereby protecting the property and inheritance rights of Aborigines in terms of white man's law. In 1879 he took his fight to Europe. In Rome he argued that the Catholic bishops of Australia,

though they had done much for the religion among the colonists, and desired the conversion of the unbelievers (ie the Aborigines) would not apply themselves to it, thinking they had enough to do with the Catholic colonists. One of them was said to hold the theory that God wished to save the Aborigines through the natural law alone, others said that the natives were not of their dioceses. After the Provincial Synod in Melbourne, the Bishops declared publicly, that they had neither the men nor the money, and they fulfilled their obligations towards the natives when they helped, according to their promise to the Holy Father, a Society of religious men commissioned by him to do the work of conversion.

Because of this situation, McNab argued that missionaries should not only be sent by the Supreme Pontiff, but also that they should remain directly subject to him.¹⁷

In London he wrote to the Colonial Office that,

although the Aborigines did not have homes in the sense of fixed abodes, they had a territory which was their own, on which they had a right to reside and did so for their maintenance to the exclusion of all others. This home and right they had never resigned. It was taken from them.¹⁸

In June 1880 he again wrote to the Colonial Office, this time from Paris suggesting that issues be raised with the Governor-in-Council in Queensland under relevant headings as

protection, provision, acknowledgement of natives as British subjects, with the right to legalised and registered marriages, Black troopers to be limited as to power, redress to be given by Law and natives to be given sufficient land, allowed to have homestead areas, to be given boats and nets along the coasts, and to be allowed to live with dignity rather than being forced to live like paupers.¹⁹

It was as if Duncan McNab had known the message the Aborigines of the Burdekin area had asked James Morrill to carry to the white settlers when he returned to the society of his birth after 17 years living

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with the Aborigines following his shipwreck in 1846. The Aborigines begged Morrill:

with tears in their eyes that I would ask the white men to let them have *some* of their *own* ground to live on. They agreed to give up all on the south of the Burdekin River, but asked that they might be *allowed* to retain that on the other, at all events that which was no good to anybody but them, the low swampy grounds near the sea coast.

McNab's concern for the Aborigines became well nigh an obsession. Yet his was a realistic assessment of the economic and cultural problems created by the clash of the two races. He saw clearly the first steps towards some type of resolution of these problems. However, in his lifetime, few in Church or State would take any effective notice of his voice. Between bouts of illness brought on by fever and sunstroke he continued to work directly with the Aborigines in the Kimberleys, and in the Townsville area,²¹ and indirectly for them through speaking about and collecting for their Mission in other parts of Australia.

The year McNab died, 1896, another Catholic approach to the Aborigines in Northern Australia also ended. In that year Father Donald MacKillop (a Jesuit, and a brother of the Foundress of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Mother Mary MacKillop and a cousin of Duncan McNab) was withdrawn from his mission. Though this mission was not immediately situated in North Queensland it still deserves mention here because the organisation of Aboriginal society was not limited by colonial boundaries, and because of the general approach to the Aborigines MacKillop envisioned. The Jesuit mission had been Rome's response to Father Duncan McNab's suggestions in 1880. From 1887 to 1889 Father MacKillop worked near Palmerston on the Daly River. Later in 1890 he was appointed superior of the mission based in Darwin. He saw his missionary work as one of long-term dialogue with the Aboriginal people, though he too was to become disillusioned, and want to give up the mission in 1894.²² He made a special study of their social customs and laws, their medicine, their sorcery and religion, and of the structure and idiom of their tribal languages. He too argued for "land rights" for the Aborigines. In his case he had thought in terms of

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territories for Aborigines similar to the Reductions in Paraguay, set up by the Jesuits in 1609 to protect the Guarani Indians. Like McNab his was a voice crying in the wilderness. He always knew the odds were against his vision, and he knew the reason:

Not from any unfitness on the side of the aborigines; not certainly from want of will, or through the failing of the spirit of sacrifice in the Society of Jesus, but to put it kindly, because the Anglo-Saxon race is what it is. Proud in its present superiority, that race will remember the lessons of history only when an invading people shall have meted out to it the justice which it has shown to the helpless black man. A hundred years, perhaps hundreds, may pass; but with the teeming millions of Asians at our door, who shall say no day of retribution will come upon Australia?²³

There was one other specific initiative taken by the Catholic Church in relation to the Aborigines in these early years of settlement, though this too was to be quickly side-tracked from its original purpose. As a result of a meeting of Archbishop Polding and the Australian Bishops in Sydney in 1873, Rome decided in 1877 to set up a distinct Vicariate in Queensland²⁴ whose responsibility was to be for the Aborigines throughout the whole of Queensland. The difference between a Vicar-Apostolic and a diocesan Bishop in Roman Catholic Church organisation is that Vicars-Apostolic are seen as direct representatives of the Pope; they have a wider, roving authority with powers more flexible and less restricted than those of bishops - ideal for a missionary situation. Quinn let the new Vicariate be based in Cooktown which had its own church since 1874.²⁵ Aborigines there would be less contaminated from contact with white society than their brothers further south and as a result more open to evangelisation. This was to overlook the racial violence that had been associated with the establishment of the Palmer gold-field. The new Vicariate, originally called the Vicariate of Queensland, was set up on 27 January 1877. Its boundaries were described as being "cut off from the diocese of Brisbane by a line running due west to South Australia from Cape Hinchinbrook."²⁶ However its territorial boundaries were not always clearly understood. As late as August

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1927 the Apostolic Delegation in Sydney in writing to Bishop Shiel still referred to it as the Queensland Vicariate for the Aborigines.²⁷ Earlier Robert Dunne, the Bishop who succeeded Quinn in Brisbane was caustically enquiring what was the situation as there appeared to be a Vicariate in Queensland coextensive with his own diocese. If any other missions to the Aborigines were to be created he wondered what would be their relationship to the Vicariate and to the existing dioceses. A Plenary Council (in 1885) considered appointing a Prelate to have charge of the Blacks over all Australia. That scheme was not realised. "Luckily perhaps" - Dunne wrote, "as it might simply have meant a body of ecclesiastics under that pretext collecting irresponsibly over the colonies."²⁸ However it was not the matter of boundaries nor collections that led the Vicariate to change from being a mission to the Aborigines to being equivalent to any other diocese for the white settlers: that development was brought about by the growing number of white settlers in the area, and by the personalities of the early Pro-Vicars Apostolic. Dr. Cani, an Italian priest who had come to Brisbane with Quinn in 1861, was appointed the first Pro Vicar-Apostolic of the Northern Vicariate. His missionary ideas seem often to have been romantic rather than realistic, more suited to dreams from a city chapel than to the wilds of North Queensland.²⁹ When Cani became the first Bishop of Rockhampton in 1882 Rome appointed another Italian, Monsignor Paul Fortini to succeed him in the far north. This self-styled familiar of the Bourbons was an even more disastrous choice. Believing that the dress and manners of a Renaissance ecclesiastical prince were fitting to Port Douglas and Cooktown of the 1880s Fortini lasted two unfortunate years until replaced in 1884 by Mgr. John Hutchinson, as Irish Augustinian. From that time the Vicariate was more or less equivalent to any other diocese in Queensland, the needs of the white Catholic population consuming the greater part of the Vicar-Apostolic's energy as well as his clergy's.

About the time the Augustinian Fathers were taking over responsibility for the Vicariate to the Aborigines the last stage of Aboriginal resistance to the white advance in Queensland was being acted out.

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Father McNab in his letters to the Colonial Office had described how effective the Native Police had been in North Queensland in putting down resistance. On Hinchinbrook Island he reported a missionary, Mr. Fuller, had found only women and children, as the men had all been shot by the Native Police a few weeks previous.³⁰ In September 1884 the battle of Battle Mountain in the Argyll Mountains, sixty miles north of Cloncurry, was fought between the warriors of the Kalkadunga and the Native Mounted Police. This battle marked the effective end of any large scale Aboriginal resistance. The Kalkadunga were slaughtered in great numbers, the survivors dispossessed of their tribal lands, their way of life destroyed.³¹ In 1878 it was estimated that the tribe consisted of 2000 men and at least as many of women and children: twenty-one years later, a police sergeant reported that he could only locate 101 people from the tribe.³² By the late 1880s a definite Government policy began to emerge. This policy was to be based on the idea of missions or reserves where the Aborigines would be provided with food and protection - till they died out.³³ Archbishop Duhig as late as 1947 still took it for granted that the Aboriginal race was dying out.³⁴ Eventually in 1897 the Government decided on definite Aboriginal Reserves, and Protectors of Aborigines were appointed for specified districts.³⁵ In the same year the first estimate of numbers of Aborigines revealed no tribe with any country south of Cardwell.³⁶

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No other serious attempt at establishing a special Catholic mission to the Aborigines in Queensland was made till the 1920s when attention turned to the newly created Aboriginal Reserve on Great Palm Island. The Queensland Government had created this Reserve in 1918 after a cyclone had devastated an earlier Reserve at Hull River near Tully. Prior to this time a few Aborigines had been living on Palm.³⁷ Walter and Reggie Palm-Island were sons of the chief of this original small group.³⁸ In setting up the Reserves the Government

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gave little thought to the significance of tribal distinctions. Over the years Aborigines were brought to the Reserve from many parts of North Queensland and beyond: from Cape York, Cloncurry, Alice Springs, and the Northern Territory.³⁹ By 1926 there were over 600 there. Aborigines who had not been "broken" did not accept willingly their transportation to Palm Island. Some when taken there escaped apparently by swimming to other islands before getting back to the mainland.⁴⁰ The first Government Superintendent of the Reserve, Captain Robert Curry understood something of Aboriginal customs. On Palm he respected their decision to camp in different parts of the island. This maintained at least the basic tribal differences, and allowed tribal elders to exercise a little of their traditional role. Curry encouraged the blacks to collect shell and to make spears and boomerangs to sell to tourists who came to the island by boat each Wednesday. Though reduced to being a side-show attraction, performing on cue for the visitors, the Aborigines did maintain a certain independence under Curry; at least they could keep the money they earned by their enterprise. After a time the Government began to use Palm as a dumping ground for Aborigines who had failed to cope with life on the mainland, people with a problem with alcohol, or in need of medical care. In part Palm also became a penal colony.⁴¹ In 1927 a special "Lock" hospital was set up on Fantome Island, about a dozen miles across the water from Great Palm. This was mainly for people suffering from venereal disease. The Aboriginal population continued to grow, mainly by reason of the numbers removed there from other parts of Queensland. In those years the death rate always surpassed the birth rate.⁴² Not till many years after World War II did this picture change.

The Catholic approach to the Aborigines on Palm accepted the general paternalistic vision within which the Reserves had been conceived. Bishop McGuire, the man most immediately responsible for the establishment of the Catholic Mission on Palm Island, spoke of the Aborigines as "naturally moral", living "with honour among their own people".⁴³ But he still saw them as an inferior race, the "poorest,

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sickest and most helpless people in the world"⁴⁴ gradually being wiped out by disease. The Church would help them "live decently and die Christianly".⁴⁵

It seems a few of the Aborigines were already baptised Catholics by the time they were brought to the island through some earlier contracts in various parts of the North.⁴⁶ Between 1918 and 1924 some priests visited the Reserve on the coastal steamer which also brought the tourists.⁴⁷ However regular steamer visits ceased after 1924 with the completion of the Cairns-Brisbane railway link.⁴⁸ From about that time the pastoral responsibility for Palm Island fell on the shoulders of the parish priest of Ingham, who travelled over by launch from Taylor's Beach.⁴⁹ In 1926 the Bishop of Rockhampton, Dr. Shiel requested permission to establish a mission on Palm but was refused. At that time the Government was said to be not in favour of a mission being set up within the Aboriginal Reserve, though ministers of religion could visit regularly. There was one piece of land on Palm however, that was not included in the Aboriginal Reserve. In 1913 a private lease had been taken out covering about 21 acres at a place later called Butler Vale. By the 1920's a small boarding-house had been built there, run by a Mrs. Curzon and her two daughters. Two Baptist ladies lived there, working at the Aboriginal Reserve as missionaries whenever they could. The Anglican Bishop of North Queensland, Dr. Feetham, also visited from time to time.⁵⁰ Dr. Kelly admits that neither he nor Father Mambrini, who also used to visit the island from 1926 onwards had any success in increasing the number of Catholics among the Aborigines. This was seen as being due to the fact that the priests spent insufficient time on the island to give any adequate instruction in religion. In 1927 an option on the Butler Vale property was obtained. The acquisition of this property gave the Catholic Church the ideal site for a mission only a couple of miles from the administrative centre of the Reserve but Bishop Shiel still had no way of providing a priest who could reside permanently on the island. The Reserve remained the pastoral responsibility of the parish priest of Halifax, Father Dave O'Meara,

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until shortly after the first Bishop of Townsville, Terrence McGuire, took possession of his diocese in 1930. In the meantime the religious life of the few Catholics on Palm was kept alive largely through the work of two of the blacks, Emily Prior and Louie Bamfield, who used to gather the people to say the rosary each week.⁵¹

Within a month of his consecration, Bishop McGuire visited the Palm Island Reserve. The next month he asked a visiting Missionary of the Sacred Heart, Father Paddy Molony to give a short mission to the aborigines there. Father Molony later described his first visit to the island:

I spent four days here and found only 15 Catholics and only one of those confirmed. Fifteen Catholics out of a population of eleven hundred.....Who is to blame for this shocking neglect? At once my own conscience stung me, when I remembered that I had given many missions near Black settlements and never gave those poor neglected souls even as much as a thought. Looking back now I cannot understand how I could have been so indifferent towards the spiritual welfare of the poor Blacks. I suppose the oft repeated calumny that nothing could be done with them had borne its evil fruit.⁵²

Paddy Molony's conscience and imagination had been stirred. The following year he returned to give another mission on the island. This time he stayed a year and a half. The first Mass he said on Palm Island on this trip was on 26 July 1931, the feast of St. Anne. For this reason he dedicated the Mission under that title. On this visit the Aborigines gave Father Molony a great welcome:

As I drew near the dining-room, I could see many lanterns waving too and fro on the beach. I soon realised that these were so many beacon-lights of welcome. When the boat was still far from the shore quite a number of black-fellows rushed out, knee-deep in the water to welcome me. Only one of these was a Catholic - all the others have become Catholics since.⁵³

By 1933 the number of Catholics had grown to 262, including some new arrivals; 209 had been baptised, 110 confirmed, about 50 were attending Holy communion every Sunday.⁵⁴

The Anglican Bishop of North Queensland Dr. Feetham, accused the Catholic missionary of proselytizing.⁵⁵ There were probably some

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grounds for the accusation: many of the early Aborigines on Palm came from the former Anglican mission at Yarrabah, while the possession of Butler Vale which allowed a permanently resident priest, gave the Catholic mission a definite advantage. "The authorities accused the Church of getting in by subterfuge."⁵⁶ Sectarian rivalries became strong. Father Connors, the priest who succeeded Father Molony, and the Rev. E. Gribble, the Anglican Minister to the Aborigines on Palm remained openly hostile towards each other, as each did towards the Government Superintendent, Mr. Delaney. It has been suggested that one good effect of this Reformation legacy was that it allowed a partial replacement to develop for the earlier tribal identities that were being eroded. The identification with a particular Church, and eventually on Palm with a particular school - "I'm a St. Michael's boy" - has been seen in this light. The general hope however was that the Aborigines would be converted to the extent that they would come to accept the normal structures of any Australian Catholic parish.⁵⁷

St. Anne's Mission was promoted as the missionary concern of the whole Australian Catholic Church. In the Townsville diocese, Lenten collections were directed to that end; school children were encouraged to see Palm Island as their special project.⁵⁸ Special financial assistance was received from the Pontifical Mission Aid Society. Archbishop Michael Kelly of Sydney added his personal interest and financial help. In 1933 that prelate agreed that some Sisters of the Congregation of Our Lady Help of Christians, who were under his authority, would work on Palm Island.⁵⁹ In February 1934 the Archbishop insisted on coming to Palm Island to bless the foundations of the convent there, as a fitting way in his estimation to mark his 84th birthday. When the religious sisters arrived on the island they spent their time visiting the people in the camps, teaching the mothers some aspects of Western hygiene and sewing as well as catechising them in their faith.⁶⁰ A simple school began in October 1934 with a roll-call of 97.⁶¹ Three years later Archbishop Kelly offered £700 to build "a perfectly equipped school" on the island⁶² hence the school's name "St. Michael's and All Holy Angels".

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An anonymous "Visitor" to Palm Island in 1936 expressed both the Catholic hope and the reality of the Mission at that time:

In the savage state the lubra was condemned by tribal custom to be a man's slave, a half-starved drudge, liable to be beaten, deserted or sold according to the will or at the need of her lord and master. Living on the fringes of white civilisation her condition was little better, but under the paternal rule of the Settlement she is protected and fed, and in the Christian community of St. Anne's, her rights as maid, wife and mother are recognised and respected.⁶³

When the Government decided in 1939 to move all the Aborigines who were suffering from Hansen's disease to Fantome Island the Sisters of Our Lady Help of Christians were asked to take responsibility for staffing the Hospital.⁶⁴ When they arrived they found

the moral conditions of our poor people in a deplorable state. The building accommodation is temporarily inadequate. The sexes are intermixed. There is much to be desired in the way of cleanliness and so on....Tomorrow we hope to set some people on the way to make their own bread, which will provide occupation and may overcome the present problem of their diet.⁶⁵

By June "the general hygiene and cleanliness of the place" had improved, the cooking of meals more satisfactory and specific treatment of leprosy had commenced.⁶⁶ As well, eleven people were coming for daily prayers and instruction and six children were at school for an hour each day.

Over the following years the major changes in the Mission were concerned with its internal workings: towards the end of the war the Australian Sisters of Our Lady Help of Christians were replaced by an international order, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary; the priests from the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart were replaced by Townsville diocesan priests, who in turn were replaced by Franciscan Friars. At times there were complaints that the new religious sisters had little understanding of the Aboriginal people; at other times there were complaints that too much emphasis was given to the requirements of the inner religious life of the Sisters to the detriment of their work among the Aborigines. There were charges of

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mutual lack of concern between clergy and religious; there were also the almost inevitable psychological depressions and mental break-downs occasioned by isolation from the wider community of European priests and religious.

In the 1960s serious thought began to be given to the possibility that the Church's approach to the Aborigines needed a profound re-evaluation. Already by the early 1950s Father Basil Foster had been aware that "the days of the simple 'myall' native are practically over and we now have an ever growing reading public among the new generation of natives who are eager to read anything and everything".⁶⁷ As the Aborigines began to agitate for change in their relationship to white Australian society, some Catholic priests and religious sought to move with them. In the process several were to discover the need to face their own deep religious and psychological re-education. They also discovered what it meant to be labelled "communists" and "radicals" as they questioned some of the preconceptions of their society and their Church. But that part of the history of Catholic missions in North Queensland is still being lived out.

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11. Bishop Shiel Journal notes - Archives St. Patrick's Cathedral Rockhampton (ASPR)
12. QVP 1885 Vol I p.668 No. 47. Rev. Father Bucas to Dr. Cani 29 July 1885.
13. Brigida Nailon C.S.B. "Champion of the Aborigines, Father Duncan McNab 1802-1896" in *Footprints* Vol. 4 No. 6 Feb. 1982 p.14.
14. Fr. W. McEntee C.P. "The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in Queensland 1869-1880" Thesis for B.A. Honours History U. of Q. 1978.
15. Nailon, *op. cit.* p.14
16. Bishop Quinn had set up a place at Nudgee outside Brisbane to provide land, employment and food, but the Aborigines had not remained there. *ibid.* p.14.
17. Nailon, *op. cit.* in *Footprints* Vol. 4 No. 7 May 1982 p.25.
18. *Ibid.* pp.25-26.
19. *Ibid.* pp.27-28.
20. James Morrill *Sketch of a Residence among the Aborigines of Northern Queensland for Seventeen Years* (Queensland, 1863) p.24.
21. McNab was in Townsville between August and December 1882 (Baptismal Register No. 1 Archives Sacred Heart Cathedral Townsville [ASHT]) His name appears again in the Baptismal Register 1888-1893 at Ayr-Brandon. The *Townsville Herald* 8 July 1882 carried a highly complimentary article on his work among the Aborigines (*Advocate* 5 Aug. 1882).
22. Dunne to Moran 25 May 1894 Archives St. Mary's Sydney (ASMS) Qld. file.
23. Vic Feehan "Donald MacKillop S.J. Advocate and Apostle of Aborigines" in *Footprints* Nov. 1981 Vol.4 No. 5 pp.35.
24. T. Linane *From Abel to Zundolovich* (Armadale, Vic. n.d.) Vol. 2 p.19.

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25. Glenville Pike *Queen City of the North, A Pictorial History of Cooktown* (Mareeba, 1974) p.53.
26. *Advocate* 8 May 1880 p.4.
27. ASPR Shiel file.
28. Dunne to Moran 30 June 1894 ASMS Qld. file. This was probably an oblique reference to Father MacKillop's successful lecture tour in 1893. He raised £800 (O'Farrell, *op. cit.* p.273).
29. An unsigned critique of Dr. Cani and Mgr. Fortini in Italian is held in the Archives at the Cairns Cathedral - a translation of which is in ASPR.
30. Nailon, *op. cit.* *Footprints* Vol. 4 No. 7 p.27.
31. Armstrong, *op. cit.* pp.140ff.
32. Paul Wilson *Black Death White Hands* (Sydney, 1982) p.7.
33. N. Loos *Invasion and Resistance Aboriginal-European relations on the North Queensland frontier 1861-1897* (Canberra 1982) p.110.
34. James Duhig D.D. *Crowded Years* (Sydney, 1947) p.49.
35. Armstrong, *op. cit.* p.158. Loos, *op. cit.* pp.172ff.
36. G.C. Bolton *A Thousand Miles Away: A history of North Queensland to 1920* (Canberra, 1963) p.37.
37. J.D.M. Long *Aboriginal Settlements* (Canberra 1970) p.115.
38. Sister Barbara Linge FMM to Father Publius Cassar 4 April 1975. (Fr. Cassar File Ingham Presbytery) (Sister Linge spent 26 years on Palm Island).
39. Palm Island Oral HIstory Collection, History Dept. James Cook University. Tape 2 Side A Joe Garbutt.
40. *North Queensland Register (NQR)* 30 June 1924 Supp. PIII, 4 July 1924 p.57, 22 June 1925 p.60.
41. Linge to Cassar 4 April 1975.
42. Aboriginal population in 1936: 1116;
 1918-1920: deaths 51, births 24;
 1935-1938 " 135, " 120.
 (Long, *op. cit.* p.116).
43. McGuire to Dr. J. Simmonds 12 Jan. 1932. ASHT Palm Island file.

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44. McGuire to Capt. and Mrs Hopkinson July 1935, *ibid.*
45. McGuire to Fr. Perkins 23 March 1934, *ibid.*
46. *Townsville Catholic News (TCN)* March 1940.
47. "Visitor" (Anon.) *The Palm Island Settlement and St. Anne's Catholic Mission* (1936).
48. Bolton, *op. cit.* p.319.
49. The first recorded Mass on Palm Island was celebrated by Dr. Kelly in 1924. (*TCN* March 1940).
50. *Ibid.*
51. Fr. Publius Cassar "Some Historical Facts on Palm Island" (Unpublished paper, Fr. Cassar file).
52. *TCN* March 1940.
53. *Ibid.*
54. "Visitor" *op. cit.* p.12.
55. *NQR* 12/9 Aug. 1933.
56. Linge to Cassar 4 April 1975.
57. On a visit to the island in 1937 Bishop McGuire wanted to see the Holy Name Society established, telling the Aboriginal men what a difference it had made to the men on the "outside". (Fr. Cassar unpublished paper.)
58. *St. Patrick's Magazine* 1936.
59. Kelly to McGuire 10 Aug. 1933. ASMS, Brisbane file.
60. Sister Monica Connolly FMM to Fr. Publius Cassar 25 June 1975. (Sr. Monica spent about 20 years on Fantome Island.)
61. Fr. Cassar unpublished paper.
62. Ed. O'Donnell to McGuire 13 July 1977. ASMS Brisbane file.
63. "Visitor" *op. cit.* p.16.
64. *TCN* March 1940; ASHT Fantome Island file.
65. Sr. M. Peter to Ryan 6 March 1940 ASHT Fantome Island file.
66. Sisters' Diary Fantome Island (Fr. Cassar file).
67. Foster to Ryan 15 May 1954 ASHT Palm Island file.