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The quest for ecclesiastical territory – Catholics and Protestants

For its first 50 years, the martial law of the British colony of New South Wales acknowledged only the Church of England and a few Protestant churches as legitimate religious denominations. After the liberalising Church Act of 1836,¹ other denominations flooded into the new British territory, reflecting the diversity of its settler population. The multiplicity of denominations lent a distinction to the settler townships where Catholic and a plethora of Protestant churches coexisted in close proximity. With the perceptive eyes of a newcomer, Bishop Otto **Raible** observed on his arrival in Australia in 1928, ‘a curious competition of church towers in the towns’ not found in Europe, where the religious differences had a more regional character.

Whereas the settler towns were crowded with competing denominations, in their remote mission enterprise the churches maintained this regional character, and accommodated themselves into informal territories. The conquest of these territories drew the Australian colonies into the mission era, lagging somewhat behind the ‘century of missions’ when European mission societies formed and missionary training colleges were established at an astounding rate. Between the founding of the London Mission

¹ *An Act to promote the building of Churches and Chapels and to provide for the maintenance of Ministers of Religion in New South Wales 1836* (NSW).

Society in 1795 and the Steyler Mission Society in 1875, new mission societies were formed at the rate of one in every five years in England and the German-speaking regions of the Continent.

In the colony of New South Wales – and therefore on the whole Australian continent – the emergence of missions was haphazard. After 15 years of British settlement, a school for Aboriginal children at Parramatta was the lone beacon of effort (1814–26) until an attempt was made at a government station in Wellington Valley behind the Blue Mountains (1821, 1824–26). The next mission attempt was by Rev. Lancelot Threlkeld for the London Missionary Society (LMS) at Lake Macquarie near Newcastle (1826–28). By 1830, all these efforts were dormant, though several new starts were made during the following decade.

The Catholic outreach to Australia (1830s)

The Catholic Church in the nineteenth century was in active renewal, reaching out to the world. In the period of the Napoleonic wars, the Italian Risorgimento and the 1848 revolutions, prosperous and influential monasteries were secularised, their treasures looted, the buildings burnt or made available as quarries of ready-made building material for townsmen. Moreover, the rising bourgeoisie and disappearing aristocracy meant that the Church lost its traditional support and source of patronage. To survive this social upheaval, the Church needed to reinvent itself to appeal to the rising classes, and to women, as its new power base. The adoration of the sacred heart became a popular signal for the greater inclusion of laity in church functions, and the veneration of the blessed virgin, especially through recitation of the rosary, became a central tenet of western Catholicism, as it had long been in the Orthodox Church. The Vatican adopted the principle of the Immaculate Conception in 1854.

This renewal brought forth a proliferation of new monastic societies. Between 1850 and 1870, the Vatican approved 116 new religious congregations, and several of them took root outside of Italy, including in nations that were not predominantly Catholic.² Some of these directly addressed themselves to the inclusion of laity and evangelising mission, and, of these, the **Society of the Catholic Apostolate** (SAC) (1835) and

2 Anne Cunningham, *The Rome Connection: Australia, Ireland and the Empire, 1865–1885*, Crossing Press, Darlington, 2002, p. 53.

the **Missionaries of the Sacred Heart** (MSC) (1854) became particularly active in Australia – the SAC (or Pallottines) in the Kimberley and the MSC in the Northern Territory.

Across the English-speaking Protestant world, this became a time of strong foment between Catholics and Protestants. Malta, with a predominantly Catholic population, had become part of the British Empire in 1800, resulting in political stand-offs between the churches in the 1840s.³ In the United States, the anti-Catholic movement was becoming institutionalised with the formation of an American Republican Party (1854), which emerged out of nativist anti-foreign sentiments and the emergence of a militant Protestantism. At the same time, Catholic Ireland was getting rapidly impoverished from oppressive land laws and crop failures (1845–57), which were also giving rise to religious tension.⁴

In countertendency, the Oxford movement of the 1830s and 1840s achieved an approximation of liturgies between the High Anglican Church and Catholics and created some elbow room for the Catholic Church in the British colonies. In New South Wales, civic society was beginning to gain numerical strength and began to lobby for the cessation of convict transportation and the replacement of martial law with civic government. During the period of office of the liberal Sir Richard **Bourke** as governor of New South Wales (1831–37), public grants for churches, schools, teachers and chaplains became available, and the active suppression of Catholics eased.

This created an opportunity for a more decisive presence of the Catholic Church in New South Wales, and Benedictines at Downside (Bath) were the first to respond to these political shifts. This Benedictine community had established itself at Downside in 1814, after a long period of exile in France, so they were keenly aware of political opportunities in a changing world, and, unlike other monastic orders, the Benedictine congregation consisted of autonomous communities who were able to make their own decisions. The headmaster at St Gregory's College was Dr John Bede **Polding**, special protégé of the president of the English Benedictines. He had been orphaned early in life (his father originally named Polten, from Germany) and raised in the Benedictine fold by his maternal uncle, Rev. Dr Bede Brewer. Polding had declined a bishopric

3 H.I. Lee, 'British policy towards the religion, ancient laws and customs in Malta 1824–1851', *Melita Historica: Journal of the Malta Historical Society* 3.4 (1963): 1.

4 Cunningham, *The Rome Connection*, p. 53.

in Madras, preferring what he referred to as semi-retirement as one of the professors at Downside.⁵ On the advice of Polding, one of the former students at St Gregory's, William **Ullathorne** OSB, was established in New South Wales in 1832 as vicar general of Bishop Morris to erect a formal Benedictine presence. Ullathorne took charge of the Catholic priests already labouring in Sydney (John Joseph **Therry** and Philip **Conolly**) and oversaw the completion of three churches and St Mary's cathedral in Sydney. Encouraged by Governor Bourke's reforms, he suggested it was time to appoint a bishop. Polding now offered himself, so Ullathorne was given the opportunity to decline his appointment as vicar apostolic of New Holland and Van Diemen's Land in favour of his esteemed mentor Polding.

Polding was consecrated in May 1834 and arrived as the first Catholic bishop in Australia in September 1835, to become embroiled in a lively battle of wits in the press that pitted him against his Protestant counterpart, the Anglican Bishop William Grant **Broughton**. For the Anglicans, the one redeeming feature of the new Catholic bishop was that he was not Irish. Polding formed schools and began to recruit priests for his new vicariate when the convict period was coming to an end and the 1836 Church Act made room for a more solid Catholic institutional presence. In 1838, the Marist Bishop Jean Baptiste Pompallier arrived in New Zealand and a large group of Irish clergy (including Rev. John **Brady**) arrived in Sydney.

Arrival of German Protestant missionaries (1838)

That same year two groups of German Protestant missionaries also arrived. One group was hastily put together as pioneer missionaries for the Moreton Bay region near the secondary convict station. They were sponsored by the Presbyterian migration advocate J.D. **Lang** and formed **Zion Hill** mission to pacify this new frontier. The Aboriginal people of Moreton Bay had received bad press resulting from the shipwreck of the *Stirling Castle*, particularly after the rescue of the captain's wife Eliza **Fraser** in August 1836. This missionary group included two ordained pastors, one trained in Basel (Christopher **Eipper**) and one in Halle

5 **Advertising**, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 April 1848, p. 2, National Library of Australia, Trove (henceforth Trove).

(K.W.E. **Schmidt**), eight missionary wives and initially nine artisans who were the first contingent of men trained by the recently formed **Gossner** Mission Institute in Berlin. They were farewelled from Berlin in July 1837 and arrived in Sydney in January 1838.

The other group consisted of two ordained missionaries from the **Dresden Mission Society**, sponsored by George Fife **Angas** as chair of the South Australian Company, along with a large group of German immigrants. The company sought to attract agricultural settlers to form model communities, and made it a condition of funding that the German settlers must be accompanied by missionaries to address the problems that would be created by the dispossession of Aboriginal land. In both cases, the missionaries were expected to form ‘Moravian-style’ missions, which meant that lay colonists were to form a small agricultural settlement to support two ordained pastors who were to acquire the local language and conduct school and religious instruction among local Aboriginal people, with minimal support from the state. At Zion Hill, the ‘Moravian model’ worked reasonably well because the colonists and Pastor Schmidt were all trained by Gossner, and the whole group arrived together having shared the strains of the journey, including the death of one of the men. But in South Australia, the two missionaries arrived from the Dresden Mission Society in Saxony in October 1838, a month before the Prussian community led by Lutheran Pastor August **Kavel**. Pastors Clamor **Schürmann** and Christian Gottlob **Teichelmann** commenced a school in Adelaide, whereas the Lutheran migrants moved 6 km out of town to form the settlement of Klemzig. Kavel’s people understood themselves as religious refugees with a quite different theological formation, so the missionaries – reinforced in 1840 by pastors Samuel **Klose** and Eduard **Meyer** – worked in isolation from the German migrants, who provided minimal assistance.⁶

In the end, it mattered little what the missionaries were actually doing or how well they worked with their colonists. The Zion Hill group created fertile fields and orchards, primarily to support themselves; offered casual work to Aboriginal people; and conducted a school, also primarily populated with the children of the colonists. They praised the learning capabilities of their Indigenous pupils and attempted to acquire the language, while the various local Aboriginal groups of the Moreton Bay region invited them to important functions and diplomatic missions

6 Christine Lockwood, ‘The Two Kingdoms: Lutheran Missionaries and the British Civilizing Mission in Early South Australia’, PhD thesis, University of Adelaide, 2014.

and tried to work out just how these newcomers could contribute to society. After five years, Governor **Gipps** asked the missionaries to move 'further afield', because he planned to disband the convict station and release the Moreton Bay region for settlement. Government funding had been tied to public subscriptions and decreased every year due to waning public interest, and ceased altogether in October 1843. By this time, the 'Moravian-style' experiment, with its massive investment of human capital, had been declared a failure by all but the missionaries themselves, and their agricultural success became one of the arguments used against them. The Moreton Bay region, with advancing settlement, seemed open for a Catholic initiative.

Benedictine conquest of the Australian colonies (1840s)

Bishop Polding really wanted the whole Australian Catholic diocese to be a Benedictine one. What was needed was a Benedictine monastery to train religious in the colonies. In November 1840, Polding embarked with the Vicar General of New South Wales William Ullathorne and Rev. Henry Gregory on a lengthy European tour, departing on the *Orion* via Valparaiso, on the direct shipping route from Sydney. Rev. Osmund Thorpe CP describes the public spectacle of their departure:

In order to give the Catholics an opportunity of expressing in a striking manner their respect for their Bishop, the steamer *Clonmel* was chartered to accompany the *Orion* down the Harbour ... the *Clonmel* was rushed and more than four hundred and fifty pushed their way on board. In spite of threats none would disembark. Eventually the steamer moved away from the wharf ... and from the decks of the *Clonmel* men, women and children kept up a ceaseless cheering.

But these four hundred and fifty people were but a small section of the crowd that had assembled in Sydney to show honour to Bishop Polding. Seven thousand people walked with him from St Mary's Cathedral to the wharf. Non-Catholics were nearly as interested as the Catholics. All business was suspended that day, and the entire population seemed to be down by the foreshore. All the ships were flying their colours, and when the *Clonmel* and the *Orion* began to move down the Harbour, the guns boomed out and from the crowd came a great burst of cheering.⁷

⁷ Osmund Thorpe, *First Catholic Mission to the Australian Aborigines*, Pellegrini & Co., Sydney, 1950, p. 21.

In *The Australian* newspaper, directed at a largely Anglican audience, the event sounded much less spectacular. After commenting that ‘Our metropolis affords a very beggarly account of public amusements, and therefore we fain gladly accept whatever is presented to us’, the paper merely noted about the ceremonious departure of the Catholic clergy:

A large concourse of the Roman Catholic community accompanied them to the place of embarkation, and cheered them as they left the shore. Another large party of ladies and gentlemen on board the *Clonmel* steamship, followed the *Orion* outside the heads to bid them a last farewell.⁸

The papers reported that Polding and Gregory reached the Benedictine convent of St Callixtus in Rome on Christmas Eve, and that Polding was delivering a series of sermons in February and was arranging ‘with his Holiness for a subdivision of his extensive vicariate’.⁹ Bishop Polding must have created the idea of a very large Catholic population in New South Wales and adjacent colonies. Ullathorne later said, with some exasperation, that Polding ‘never detailed a case very well’:

Seldom was a case put to me, or a circle of facts communicated, but something or other, that was important to decision, and had to be kept in view in action, was received and never came out ... One got fragments, never being certain of having got the most essential ones. It is this which has embarrassed so many of his affairs with the Holy See, and caused him to be so often misapprehended. He never detailed a case well ...¹⁰

Polding’s return to Sydney on 10 March 1843, with a 19-strong retainer, was a triumph. He arrived with only two Benedictine Fathers (Garoni and Gregory), but brought five aspirants to the sanctuary and some Irish Christian Brothers to conduct urban schools, as well as four Passionist priests destined to form the first Catholic Aboriginal mission in Australia.¹¹ One of these described their arrival at Sydney:

8 ‘Port Macquarie’, *The Australian*, 17 November 1840, p. 3, Trove.

9 ‘Middle District’, *Geelong Advertiser*, 25 July 1842, p. 3.

10 Ullathorne, *From Cabin-Boy to Archbishop*, Chapter 26, cited in Thorpe, *First Catholic Mission*, p. 24.

11 Cardinal Moran’s history mentions the Benedictines F.F. Garoni and Gregory, four Passionist Fathers, three Irish Christian Brothers, two secular priests, and five aspirants to the sanctuary for a monastery. Patrick Francis Moran, *History of the Catholic Church in Australasia: From Authentic Sources*, Frank, Coffee & Co., Sydney, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 227. **Shipping Intelligence** on 11 March 1843 announced the following arrivals: The Most Reverend Dr Polding, Archbishop of Sydney; Rev. Dr Gregory, Rev. Messrs. Canoni, Snell, Viccari, Sanchioli, Pacheali, Young, McCarthy, Hallaman; Messrs. Healy, Dume, Smith, McClennon, Roach, Murray, Carroll, Larkin, Scannel. The Italian names are all wrong. *Australasian Chronicle*, 11 March 1843, p. 3, Trove.

Our disembarkation and our entrance into the City was indeed a glorious affair surrounded with all solemnity, for the Archbishop and we with him, were welcomed by the Catholics who number over 18,000, in a way that the people are accustomed to welcome only the Sovereign Pontiff in Italy. A special procession consisting of many school-girls, fifty or more boys of the college of the two Confraternities, all the clergy with a band and many distinguished laymen, was organised to escort us. The clergy, the band, many laymen and the heads of the Confraternities boarded a large steamer and came out to our ship *Templar*. In the meantime a huge crowd was gathered on the shore. Then the Archbishop and ourselves were conducted to the landing-stage to the sound of band music and shouts of welcome from the people, shouts that grew louder as we approached the land. A procession was formed and we passed through the City to the accompaniment of welcoming cries from the crowds of people. In that way we reached the Cathedral where the bells were ringing in a festive tone and the organ was being played. Then the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* was sung to a sweet and touching air. Afterwards the Solicitor-General read a short but forcible address of welcome to the Archbishop in the name of all the Catholics of the City. The Archbishop replied in words so full of feeling that most of those present had tears in their eyes. Then the *Tē Deum* was sung. And finally the Archbishop gave his blessing to the large number of people present. When all this was over we left the cathedral in the same order in which we entered it and proceeded to the Archbishop's House, accompanied all the time by the band and by cries of welcome from the people. This solemn entry is such a tender and glorious mark of respect towards our holy Catholic religion that one cannot help feeling joyful to the point of tears.¹²

The local press, predictably, gave a more sober account, and pointedly alleged that to welcome Archbishop Polding the St Patrick's Total Abstinence Society Band played 'See the Conquering Hero comes'. The press reported with its usual superficial diligence that to staff the Moreton Bay Catholic mission 'five Italian' priests accompanied the archbishop and Rev. Gregory: **Snell** (actually Swiss), **Vicari** (actually Raimondo Vaccari), **Canoni** (actually Garoni OSB), **Sanchioli** (actually Maurizio Lencioni) and **Pacheali** (actually Luigi Pesciaroli).¹³ After his return to Sydney as archbishop, Polding rescripted St Mary's as a Benedictine cathedral and his residence as a Benedictine monastery with obligatory choral recitation of the Divine Office, although most of his religious were not Benedictines.¹⁴

12 Vaccari in Sydney to Mgr Lione Colmo, 15 March 1843, in Thorpe, *First Catholic Mission*, p. 208.

13 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 March 1843; and '**Shipping Intelligence**', *Australasian Chronicle*, 11 March 1843, p. 3, Trove.

14 Thorpe, *First Catholic Mission*, p. 80.

During his European tour, Polding had successfully conducted a sensitive diplomatic mission for the Holy See to Malta, gaining such favourable disposition from the Pope that he was appointed Count of the Holy Roman Empire and Bishop Assistant at the Papal Throne. He was also raised to the Archbishopial See of Sydney, meaning a promotion both of the bishop and of the vicariate, which now received its own Australian hierarchy of jurisdictions. Adelaide and Hobart became separate episcopal Sees, and Western Australia became an apostolic prefecture.¹⁵ All this meant that Polding returned to Sydney with an armful of titles suggesting that he was more learned, noble and elevated than the Anglican bishop: a doctor of theology, a count and an archbishop. It was like throwing down the gauntlet, and the press had a feast.

The Anglican Bishop of Sydney Broughton lodged a very formal and public objection, claiming that the ‘Bishop of Rome’ (meaning the Pope) had no authority whatsoever to institute any episcopal See within an already existing diocese, and that this act was ‘in breach and contravention of the canonical laws, usages, and common order of the household of faith’ and infringed on the Anglican’s ‘undoubted ecclesiastical rights and independence, according to the principles of that Catholic Church to which we have never ceased to belong’. Bishop Broughton felt that this ‘attempted invasion of the See of Rome’ was ‘an act of direct and purposed hostility towards us’ and instructed all his ministers to read his protest out in public. The Protestant press referred to it as an ‘attempt on the part of a foreign prince to confer a title and territorial jurisdiction within the realm of England’.¹⁶ Lord Stanley in the Colonial Office, who had sanctioned Polding’s elevation with a ‘grand dinner’, ignored the Australian protests.¹⁷

There arose some confusion about how to properly address and refer to an archbishop, who was also a count and a doctor, and whose status relative to the Anglican bishop was under dispute. After a personal interview between Polding and Earl **Grey** in April 1847, a circular was sent to Governor Fitzroy and other governors of the colonies, clarifying that an act of parliament now formally recognised the rank of the Irish Roman Catholic prelates ‘by giving them precedence immediately after the prelates of the Established Church of the same degree’. Subsequently,

15 Thorpe, *First Catholic Mission*.

16 ‘**The Church in Australia**’, *The Courier* (Hobart), 14 April 1843, p. 4, Trove.

17 **Advertising**, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 April 1848, p. 2, Trove. Bede Nairn, ‘**Polding**, John Bede (1794–1877)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University (henceforth *ADB*).

‘the Roman Catholic prelate in New South Wales will be addressed as the Most Reverend Archbishop Polding, and in Van Diemen’s Land as the Right Reverend Bishop Wilson’. Archbishop Polding would in future be officially addressed as ‘Your Grace’.¹⁸

The Scottish promoter of Presbyterian immigration, J.D. Lang, relished this public battle, never failing to substitute ‘popish’ for ‘papal’, ‘Romish’ for ‘Catholic’, and ‘Popery’ for ‘Vatican’. He was keen to show up rifts within the Catholic Church. Such a rift was just occurring in Germany, where in 1844 the Bishop of Trier had put on public display, for the first time in over 30 years, the cathedral’s most sacred relic – the seamless robe of Jesus – to encourage pilgrimages and donations. This so outraged a young priest, Johannes Ronge, that he wrote an incensed public letter to the bishop, was excommunicated and, with Johannes Czerski, formed a breakaway sect of German Catholics (Deutschkatholiken) who renounced indulgences, confession, celibacy and submission to Rome. The holy coat in Trier was not displayed again until 1898, and only three times since then. Lang penned what he called a Litany of the Holy Coat.¹⁹

Dr. Lang is going to England, Holy Coat ! pray for us !
 To bring out both Swiss and Germans, Holy Coat ! pray for us !
 To cultivate the vine at Port Phillip !!! Holy Coat ! pray for us !
 He ‘s worse than Ronge and Czerski, Holy Coat ! pray for us !
 Those heretical Silesian priests, Holy Coat ! pray for us !
 Who, madly daring to think for themselves, Holy Coat ! pray for us !
 And to examine the word of God, Holy Coat ! pray for us !
 Have renounced the Pope and all his work !!! Holy Coat ! pray for us !
 Including thee, Most Holy Coat !!! Holy Coat ! pray for us !
 He will defeat our grand conspiracy, Holy Coat ! pray for us !
 In which Bishop Polding and Bishop Murphy, Holy Coat ! pray for us !
 With all the French priests in Tahiti, Holy Coat ! pray for us !
 Are now engaged with might and main, Holy Coat ! pray for us !
 To ROMANIZE THIS SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE !!!
 Holy Coat ! pray for us !

To ‘romanize the southern hemisphere’, Polding had appointed two vicars general. The Rev. Dr John Brady, who had been among the group of clergy arriving in New South Wales in 1838, became vicar general in Perth

18 ‘Sydney news’, *The Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser*, 22 April 1848, p. 4, Trove. Presumably, the reference is to the Church Act of 1836, which placed all religions on an equal footing, removing the privileged position of the Anglican Church in New South Wales.

19 ‘Original correspondence’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 March 1846, p. 3, Trove.

in 1843, where he was elevated to Bishop of Western Australia in May 1845, and Rev. John Joseph Therry, one of the first two Catholic priests in New South Wales, became vicar general in Van Diemen's Land.²⁰ In the same year that Polding extended the Catholic mantle to the west and south, he also dispatched the four Passionists to the north to form the first Catholic mission in Australia at Moreton Bay. It did not escape J.D. Lang's notice that the Catholics were setting up ecclesiastical jurisdictions in areas where the Catholic populations were sparse:

the real character of all this, as a regularly organised plan for the establishment of Romish domination in these regions, is evident from the case of Swan River, where the entire population does not exceed four or five thousand souls, of whom a large majority are Protestants. What the real object is of appointing a bishop, with a whole array of priests and sisters of charity, for such a mere handful of people as the Roman Catholics of that Lilliputian colony must necessarily be, it is not difficult to divine.²¹

Lang was prominently involved in the colonisation of Moreton Bay in the 1840s and 1850s and intended this as a Protestant region, preferably Presbyterian. The Catholic mission on Stradbroke Island was a direct competition to the Lutheran one set up with the help of Lang at Zion Hill. While scoping a site, Archbishop Polding noted, not without satisfaction, that the Lutheran mission counted as a 'house of hunger' among local Aborigines, and had thoroughly failed:

a native settlement had been undertaken by German Lutherans, and had completely failed, all the ministers connected with it being farmers. I did not deem it prudent to begin our mission on the same site.²²

It has done little good and it is not likely to do more. The children are taught in English; and it was lamentably ludicrous to see so much good pains, as Mr Smith [Rev. Schmidt] evinced, to make these little creatures answer precisely as parrots might. The blacks have taken a prejudice against them. They call their house a house of hunger, because they get nothing. ... They complain bitterly that the Germans invited them to work and then kept the crops for their own families.²³

20 The Catholic Archdiocese of Perth, 'History'; J. Eddy, 'Therry, John Joseph (1790–1864)', *ADB*, published first in hardcopy 1967.

21 'Original correspondence', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 March 1846, p. 3, Trove.

22 Polding to Cardinal Franzoni, Sydney, 10 April 1845, in Thorpe, *First Catholic Mission*, p. 194.

23 Polding to Murphy, Moreton Bay, 2 July 1843, in Thorpe, *First Catholic Mission*, p. 191.

The first Australian Catholic mission (Stradbroke Island, 1843–47)

The Indigenous people visited Zion Hill mission (now Nundah in Brisbane) as it suited them, and the Quandamooka of Stradbroke Island drew their lesson from the experiences of Zion Hill. The island men agreed to work for the Passionist missionaries in the garden, but only on the condition that they would be entitled to the harvest.²⁴ At any rate, Polding decided that the site was not suitable for agriculture (he claimed there was no fresh water!) and that it was only temporary. The mission soon faltered.

Money had become a major issue straight away. The Passionists arrived in the year of Australia's first wave of bank failures in which six banks collapsed, the largest being the Bank of Australia in 1843. Depression and confusion caused a run on the Savings Bank of NSW in May 1843, and resulted in a Select Committee on Monetary Confusion in August 1843.²⁵ The missionaries remained at the archbishop's residence in Sydney for nearly three months, so the latter complained that he was forced to provide for about 20 persons sitting down to dinner every day.²⁶ The Passionist relations with the archbishop quickly soured to the point that Vaccari and Polding communicated by correspondence in Latin. Polding was not only in charge of financing the mission, he also micromanaged its planning. Tensions soon arose between Vaccari, who had been appointed as prefect apostolic in charge of a separate 'apostolic mission', and Polding, who treated him as a subordinate.

When Polding had asked for missionaries before he left on his recruitment drive in Europe in 1840, the Protestant mission effort was expanding. The South Australian Lutherans were about to start two new mission locations besides Piltawodli, at Encounter Bay and Port Lincoln, and the Wesleyans had opened a mission at Buntingdale near Geelong in Victoria. A government protectorate station also operated in Victoria and another one at Flinders Island (Tasmania). German speakers were so predominant

24 Polding to Franzoni, Sydney, 10 April 1845, in Thorpe, *First Catholic Mission*, p. 194.

25 Bryan Fitz-Gibbon and Marianne Gizycki, 'A History of Last-Resort Lending and Other Support for Troubled Financial Institutions in Australia', System Stability Department, Reserve Bank of Australia, Research Discussion Paper 2001–07, October 2001.

26 Polding to Therry, May 1843, in Thorpe, *First Catholic Mission*, p. 190.

in this mission effort that of the seven missions in Australia by the end of 1840, five had German speakers (**Wellington Valley, Zion Hill, Piltawodli, Encounter Bay and Port Lincoln**).

Polding wanted to see a more institutional Catholic participation in the expanding mission activity. He had wanted to recruit Benedictines, was met with a refusal and then chanced upon Father Raimondo Vaccari through his ecclesiastical friends at the Retreat of Saints John and Paul on the Coelian Hill.²⁷ Vaccari had several influential friends, among them Cardinal Oriolo, a highly esteemed Franciscan, and Vincent Pallotti (canonised in 1963) who had just formed a new order in 1835 (the **Pallottines**). ‘To have been a friend of such a man is an honour no degree of subsequent failure can obliterate’, wrote Fr Thorpe.²⁸

Subsequent failure indeed eventuated at the Stradbroke Island mission, which had no reliable supply line, so the missionaries suffered famine and had nothing to offer to Aboriginal people after the 60 government blankets and the calico dresses made by Sydney Catholic women had been distributed. The three Italians had no facility for language acquisition so they did not even attempt a school, neither did they have funds to take in and feed children. They were merely trying to survive their difficult situation on the island at a disused and leaky government station on a two-year lease. Aboriginal people who lived around Dunwich were acquainted with Europeans from their contact with convicts and military and spoke English, but only the Swiss Fr Joseph Snell was multilingual (German, French, Turkish and Italian) and had some English. The missionaries struggled to understand the frontier stories of deceit, betrayal and abuse that the Indigenous people were trying to relate to them. For the first seven months, Aboriginal people only stayed at the mission for about 10 weeks altogether, though sometimes the missionaries were taken on travels around the island, just like the Zion Hill missionaries.

The mission was doomed to fail because from the beginning Polding had no faith in the Passionists. He referred to them as ‘bunglers’, ‘ignorant of the world’ and ‘contracted in their notions’, and sought to prevent a direct line of communication between them and the Propaganda Fide. ‘I am determined to procure if I can our own people.’²⁹ The Passionists did not

27 Thorpe, *First Catholic Mission*, p. 23.

28 Thorpe, *First Catholic Mission*, p. 36.

29 Polding at Moreton Bay to Heptonstall, 9 June 1843, in Thorpe, *First Catholic Mission*, p. 191. Rev. Thomas Heptonstall OSB was Polding’s cousin and the procurator of the Benedictine Brothers in London.

report to Polding, and Polding did not report to the Propaganda Fide about the mission. By the end of the second year, Rome criticised Polding for the failing mission compared with Bishop Pompallier's thriving Māori missions. Polding's 'own people' were invited to make another attempt at mission in Western Australia. The three Passionist priests left their superior, Vaccari, on Stradbroke Island and made their way to Sydney in June 1846 in the hope of joining the proposed Benedictine mission in Western Australia. When they reached Sydney, Archbishop Polding was on his second European tour, and the Western Australian mission party had itself also encountered many tribulations. They were reassigned to Bishop Dr Francis **Murphy** in Adelaide, where they were separated and quietly unhappy.³⁰

The Catholic extension to Western Australia (1846)

The first vicar general of Western Australia, Rev. Dr John Brady, 'lived in a miserable hovel without comforts of any kind, on the simplest food', according to Catholic historian Dr R.R. Madden, who was the colonial secretary of Western Australia at the time, and a devout Irish Catholic. Madden found that 'the colony was administered by Irish Orangemen in the interests of Orangemen ... unprincipled astute bigots in authority'.³¹ Actually, Brady only spent two months in the tiny residence in Victoria Avenue with Fr John Joostens and catechist Patrick O'Reilly, before setting off to Rome in early 1844 to recruit more staff and seek an elevation.³²

During his two-year European tour, Brady submitted a manuscript for publication, in Italian and English editions, *A Descriptive Vocabulary of the Native Language of W. Australia*.³³ It does not specify which language it deals with, other than indicating the Swan River colony area, and Brady must have gathered the information it contains within a few weeks before his departure to Rome – or borrowed it from an unspecified source. The Vatican was led to believe that there was a substantial population in the new Swan River colony, with at least two million Indigenous and 3,000 Catholics.³⁴ Madden commented on this gross exaggeration:

30 **Departures**, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 December 1847, p. 2, Trove.

31 Madden to Rev. Dr Meagher, Vicar-General of Dublin, 27 September 1853, in Thorpe, *First Catholic Mission*.

32 The Catholic Archdiocese of Perth, 'History'.

33 John Brady, *A Descriptive Vocabulary of the Native Language of W. Australia*, Rome, 1845.

34 The Catholic Archdiocese of Perth, 'History'.

A map has been printed in Rome ... wherein the whole continent of Australia is divided into Roman Catholic Bishoprics, and therein the Catholic population the town of Perth is set down at 3,000. Now when I left the colony in 1848, long after this map was made out, the Roman Catholic population having increased in the meantime, the total number of Catholic did not amount to ninety, resident in Perth and in a circuit of ten miles round it ... The total number of Catholics throughout the entire colony of Western Australia was about three hundred.³⁵

Brady was anointed as Bishop of Western Australia in May 1845, and in early 1846 he returned with 27 new staff from France, Ireland, Italy and Spain, an event covered extensively in the press. The *Sydney Morning Chronicle* reported the arrival of 12 priests, six Sisters of Mercy, eight Irish students, in a party of 27 altogether.³⁶ Other sources give different figures for the composition of this group. Fr Georg Walter SAC is surely wrong in referring to 20 priests.³⁷ Dom Salvado OSB, one of the group, mentioned six priests in the party consisting of three French and one Irish priest, himself and Dom Serra; six Sisters of Mercy; and 14 novices, students and lay people.³⁸ His count of 26 omitted the Italian priest Angelo Confalonieri. Stefano Girola specifies that there were seven priests in this group, and that only one of these could speak English.³⁹

Bishop Brady divided the team to cover the southern, middle and northern parts of his bishopric. The Sisters of Mercy were to stay in Perth. The French priests were sent south to Albany to commence an Aboriginal mission. They walked to Mt Barker where they had trouble interacting with the Indigenous people and were treated with suspicion by the English settlers, who gave them no support. They nearly starved to death and left for Mauritius within a couple of years.⁴⁰

35 Madden to Meagher, 27 September 1853, in Thorpe, *First Catholic Mission*, p. 244.

36 **British Extracts**, *Morning Chronicle* (Sydney), 24 January 1846, p. 3, Trove.

37 Georg Walter, *Australien: Land, Leute, Mission*, Limburg, 1928, p. 118.

38 Rosendo Salvado, *Memorie Storiche dell' Australia*, S. Congreg. de Propaganda Fide, Rome, 1851, translated E.J. Stormon, *The Salvado Memoirs: Historical Memoirs of Australia and Particularly of the Benedictine Mission of New Norcia and of the Habits and Customs of the Australian Natives*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1977, p. 22.

39 Stefano Girola, 'Fr. Confalonieri's legacy in the Australian church', *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, 28 October 2009, p. 23.

40 Walter, *Australien*, 1928, p. 118; Girola, 'Confalonieri's legacy', p. 23; Neville Green, 'Aborigines and white settlers in the nineteenth century', in C.T. Stannage (ed.), *A New History of Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1981, p. 91.

Northern outreach at Port Essington (1846–48)

Father Angelo Bartolomeo **Confalonieri** and two young Irish catechists, James Fagan and Nicholas Hogan, were sent north to the latest British outpost at Port Essington, established in 1838. They travelled on the *Heroine*, which had just brought back the German explorer Ludwig Leichhardt from his triumphant overland voyage to the new outpost (1844–45). The *Heroine* struck a reef in Torres Strait and the only two survivors of the wreck were the ship's captain and Fr Confalonieri, who were picked up by a passing vessel and landed at the struggling port of Essington.

Father Confalonieri had been trained in a Capuchin monastery and hardened in the Italian Alps. He arrived at his destination with his bare life, stripped of all material possessions except a cross and a scapular. He separated himself from the military settlement and adopted instead an Indigenous lifestyle at Black Point from 1846 to 1848. The Iwaidja had a long history of contact with Macassan trepang fishermen, who were actually the reason for establishing an outpost at Port Essington, and they had the custom of addressing strangers in a form of trade Malay. The Iwaidja suffered from malaria, bronchitis and an influenza epidemic that claimed many lives. Confalonieri attempted to use his traditional medical skills to alleviate the suffering of the afflicted, until he himself succumbed to malaria.

Confalonieri brought the future potential of this trading area to the attention of the Vatican, which quickly erected the diocese of Victoria – a vast ecclesiastic territory stretching all across the north and into Queensland, so called before the separate colony of Victoria was formed, and named after the Port Essington outpost. Archbishop Polding gained Papal approval for three new dioceses in May 1847: Melbourne with Bishop J.A. **Goold**, Maitland with Bishop Burchall and Victoria (in the north-west) with Bishop J. **Serra**. Polding was responding to the news that the Anglicans were about to form four bishoprics in Australia and were 'making every attempt to take possession of those very vast states, and consequently it will be necessary to oppose their plans energetically'.⁴¹

41 Polding to Franson, 22 and 25 February 1847, cited in Ralph M. Wiltgen, *The Founding of the Roman Catholic Church in Oceania, 1825 to 1850*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series, No. 143, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR, 2010, p. 389.

Polding proposed a Spanish bishop for the north because ‘it seems to me that a Spanish bishop deprived of subsidies could successfully call upon the charity of his fellow countrymen in the Philippine Islands. The churches there are very rich and Christianity has done so much good among the indigenes that they now number four million Catholics’.⁴² Thus, the practice of leaning on the help of Filipino Catholics was established from the beginning of the Catholic extension to northern Australia (see Chapter 5). The British outpost of Port Essington, however, was abandoned in 1849.⁴³

The Benedictines of New Norcia (1846)

Two of the most colourful characters in the group of Catholic clergy arriving in January 1846 were Dom José (Joseph) Serra OSB and Dom Rosendo **Salvado** OSB, who established the Benedictine monastery and Aboriginal mission at New Norcia, about 140 km north of Perth. These two were from the splendid Benedictine monastery San Martin Pinarío in the centre of Santiago de Compostela. The monastery, built in 1494 and now one of the most important baroque buildings in Spain, had become a refuge for the multitudinous pilgrims who annually flocked to the Santiago cathedral that forms the destination point of the now popular Camino de Santiago (St James Way, Jakobsweg), one of the three most important Catholic pilgrim routes next to Rome and Jerusalem. Dom Salvado (1814–1900) was from a wealthy and musical family, a gifted pianist and composer who became the organist at St Martin’s in Compostela in 1832. However, in 1835 the Spanish Benedictines had to flee Santiago de Compostela and they took refuge in southern Italy, at the Benedictine monastery of La Cava, which had already been restored after its closure under Napoleon. (The abbey church that the Benedictines built at New Norcia, incongruous in its Western Australian landscape, shows striking similarities to the façade of the La Cava monastery in Salerno.) When Bishop Brady was recruiting for Western Australia in 1845, the Spanish Benedictines had given up hope of being allowed to return to Santiago de Compostela, so the two friends, Serra and Salvado,

42 Polding to Frasoni, 22 and 25 February 1847, cited in Wiltgen, *Founding of the RC Church in Oceania*, p. 389.

43 Regina Ganter with Julia Martinez and Gary Lee, *Mixed Relations: Asian–Aboriginal Contact in North Australia*, University of Western Australian Publishing, Crawley, 2006; Girola, ‘Confalonieri’s legacy’.

volunteered for the Australian mission. The Benedictine colonisation of Western Australia, in effect, arose from the suppression of monasteries in the Spanish revolution.

Setting up a mission site took more than a year. A Catholic squatter, John Scully, invited the Benedictines to form a mission near his property about 130 km north of Perth and gave liberal assistance to settle the party of five missionaries at Badji Badji. During the absence in Perth first of Salvado and then of Serra and Denis Tootle OSB from Downside early in 1846, the Irish catechist John Gorman died and the only remaining missionary, Dom Leander Fontaine, became extremely distraught. Serra and Salvado returned from Perth with two volunteers to shift the site to Moore River, then all of them drifted back to Perth to finally negotiate a lease for the site. On their return in December 1846, they found the mission site destroyed, and they received a notice to vacate because they had inadvertently settled on a sheep run. They then selected 20 acres on the northern banks of the Moore River and, supported by 17 French and Irish volunteers, cleared the land so that on 1 March 1847, the feast of Saint Rosendo and name-day of Rosendo Salvado, the founding of the mission was repeated on the same day as the previous year, but now on a third and final site in Victoria Plains, among Murara-Murara people.⁴⁴

Liberal funding was made available in Rome for the mission and, while Serra and Salvado lobbied for home rule of their mission efforts, Bishop Brady in Perth sought to retain control of the mission and its funding. While in Europe to raise funds for the mission in 1848, Dom Serra was elevated to the first Bishop of 'Victoria', but after an intervention from Bishop Brady, Serra was demoted to coadjutor of Bishop Brady. Serra left for Western Australia in September 1849 with 38 Spanish and Italian Benedictines and an Irish monk to set up a monastery. A dispute arose between Serra, who now sought to focus his efforts on the Perth region, and Salvado, who wanted to advance the northern mission.⁴⁵ Serra started a monastery on the outskirts of Perth called New Subiaco after the monastery founded by St Benedict in the sixth century.

44 Dom William, 'Salvado, Rosendo (1814–1900)', *ADB*, published first in hardcopy 1967.

45 E. Perez, 'Griver, Martin (1814–1886)', *ADB*, published first in hardcopy 1972.

By this time, Salvado was in Europe accompanied by two Aboriginal converts⁴⁶ to show the results of their mission activities and publicise the promise and achievements of emerging mission.⁴⁷ Salvado was consecrated as Bishop of 'Victoria' in August 1849, but by this time the Port Essington outpost was getting disestablished, so there was barely a Catholic flock in this vast northern bishopric.

While Salvado was in Europe to raise interest in an effort in the north, Brady and Serra ended up in terrible clashes over funding. The Perth diocese fractured along ethnic lines – between Brady with the Irish and Serra with the Continental Catholics. Brady became embroiled in legal action with Serra, was admonished during his visit to the Vatican in 1850 and, after a disciplinary visit from Archbishop Polding in 1852, Brady withdrew to Kilmore, Ireland.⁴⁸

Salvado returned to Western Australia in 1853 with 36 more Benedictines, but remained at Subiaco during Serra's absence (1853–55) before returning to New Norcia in 1857. The mission was finally declared independent of the Perth diocese in April 1859 (after Serra's final departure), with Salvado as its administrator, whereupon 47 monks from Perth chose to move to New Norcia. Serra returned to Europe to try to reverse this decision, and being unsuccessful severed his links with Western Australia and did not return.

Fr Martin Griver from Barcelona, who had arrived together with Serra in 1849, became Bishop of Perth after Serra, though he was not a Benedictine monk. Griver hoped to continue the work of Confalonieri in the far north but was caught up in the rivalry between Salvado and Serra.⁴⁹ He was 'a man of wonderful asceticism; after his death a wooden cross 12 inches long was found attached to his shoulders, fastened permanently into his flesh by five iron spikes'.⁵⁰ It was during Griver's tenure that Salvado achieved home rule for New Norcia with Salvado's appointment as Lord

46 One of the Aboriginal converts was Francis Xavier Conaci, a gifted student who died in 1853 of a chest complaint, the other was John Baptist Dirimura, who also died soon after their return. They were robed in Benedictine habits by Pope Pius IX, and were met by the king of Sicily and Naples, who promised financial support.

47 Rosendo Salvado's *Memorie Storiche* was published in Italian (1851), in Spanish (1853) and in French (1854).

48 Ernest MacGregor Christie, 'Angelo Confalonieri: First missionary to Port Essington, North Australia', ca 1950, PMS 3686, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (AIATSIS).

49 Perez, 'Griver, Martin (1814–1886)', *ADB*.

50 New Advent, The Catholic Encyclopedia, 'Perth'.

Abbot of New Norcia in March 1867. New Norcia by now controlled up to 1 million acres, bred horses for the British army in India and had access to the convict labour that flooded into Western Australia from 1849 to 1868.

The Benedictine colonisation of Western Australia, with its massive importation of new staff and ecclesiastical authority over a vast territory, was only reined in with the arrival of Austrian Jesuits in Darwin in 1882, to which Salvado reluctantly consented (see **Jesuits in the Northern Territory**), and with the appointment of the Irish Matthew **Gibney** as Bishop of Perth in January 1887, who facilitated the arrival of French Trappists in the Kimberley in 1890 (see **Beagle Bay**). Salvado's northern diocese was too vast and too underpopulated to extend a Catholic, let alone a Benedictine, colonisation. But it served as an effective block to the extension of Protestant activity into the west and north for decades.

Early Protestant mission effort in Western Australia

By the time the first 27 Catholic missionaries arrived with Bishop Brady in 1846, Protestant missionaries had already made a start in Western Australia. Wesleyan minister Francis Armstrong conducted a government-funded mission at Mt Eliza from 1834 to 1838. A German/Italian group made an attempt at Guildford (Giustiniani 1836–38), and this was followed by Smithies, which was relocated twice before it failed (1840–54).

Two years before German Lutheran missionaries attempted 'Moravian-style' missions in Moreton Bay and South Australia, another Moravian-style experiment was initiated by the 'Western Australian Missionary Society',⁵¹ which also included German speakers. The party consisted of the Italian scholar and physicist Rev. Dr Louis Giustiniani and his German wife Maria, and the catechists Abraham Jones, Friedrich Waldeck and Frederike Wilhelmine Ludovika Kniest. They arrived at the Swan River colony on 26 June 1836 on the *Addingham*, and established a mission at Guildford outside Perth where Friedrich and Frederike were married on 14 August 1836.⁵² Giustiniani was a former Roman Catholic who

51 The Australian Church Missionary Society in Dublin was integrated into the Western Australian Missionary Society in London in September 1835.

52 Dave Nutting, 'German Australia'.

preached in English, German, French and Italian, and had some knowledge of Hebrew, Syriac, Greek and Latin. He became an outspoken critic of the government and named settlers who were engaged in abuses to the Colonial Office, so he was soon surrounded by enemies and allegations. The only other clergyman in Western Australia was the Anglican Rev. John Wittenoom who had no interest in mission activities. Wittenoom was also a Justice of the Peace and magistrate, and the two priests often occupied opposite sides of the courtroom when Giustiniani defended and Wittenoom sentenced Aboriginal prisoners. Giustiniani was refused naturalisation and the allocation of mission land, and complained to Lord Glenelg about the xenophobic British culture of the Swan River colony. Borowitzka agrees that this was a 'period of intense British nationalism and patriotism' and describes Giustiniani's efforts to civilise the settlers and protect Aborigines from lawful abuse as a complete reversal of settler expectations.⁵³ Moreover, Giustiniani engaged himself in social justice activities for labourers and was seen as a class traitor and a threat. One catechist left within three months, another was charged with indecent conduct with Aboriginal women, in a colony where settlers were chopping the ears off mutilated Aboriginal corpses and engaged in what they called 'mercy killings' of wounded Aborigines. Giustiniani was forced to leave and finally departed in February 1836.⁵⁴ He was the first, but not the last, missionary to be driven out of Western Australia. His replacement, Rev. William Mitchell, with experience in India, gave up almost immediately, due to the 'low level of civilisation'. The Guildford citizens were no more welcoming of the Catholic Fr Griver and 17 brethren in 1849.⁵⁵

A Wesleyan initiative tried to pick up from Giustiniani's efforts at Guildford. The Methodist Rev. John Smithies arrived with his family in June 1840 and set up a mission school in Perth where the children worked as domestic servants, sleeping in dormitories. After a spate of deaths, the school was relocated in 1845 to a farm, called Wanneroo. Visiting from Adelaide, Anglican Matthew **Hale** was inspired to open Poonindie mission near Port Lincoln, which took over Schürmann's already existing mission in 1853.⁵⁶ Poor soil at Wanneroo caused Smithies to relocate to

53 Lesley J. Borowitzka, 'The Reverend Dr Louis Giustiniani and Anglican conflict in the Swan River Colony, Western Australia 1836–1838', *Journal of Religious History* 35.3 (2011), p. 357.

54 Borowitzka, 'Reverend Dr Louis Giustiniani'.

55 Perez, 'Griver, Martin (1814–1886)', *ADB*; and entry in Catholic Encyclopaedia, also available at **Wikisource**.

56 A. De Q. Robin, '**Hale**, Mathew Blagden (1811–1895)', *ADB*, published first in hardcopy 1972.

York in 1852, but by 1854 only three children were left in his care and Smithies moved to Tasmania in 1855. Wybalenna had closed down in 1847, but Smithies did not attempt to commence a mission in Tasmania.

Conclusion

The intense competition between Catholics and Protestants that coloured public life in the Australian colonies also manifested in the mission effort. In 1846, when the Catholics arrived in Western Australia to commence a mission, the whole continent had only 10 missions, of which five were staffed with German speakers, although two of them were already declining (Zion Hill was on notice to vacate and on **Stradbroke Island** Vaccari was left alone). Wellington Valley in New South Wales had already been wound down. The emerging colony of Victoria had four government protectorate stations and Buntingdale mission, and in South Australia four Lutheran missionaries were struggling along with three mission stations.

There was no cooperation between these various mission efforts. On the contrary, they were flagships of territorial competition, between Benedictines and other Catholics; between Catholics and Protestants, and among Protestants between Anglicans and Dissenters; between English-speaking and German-speaking missions; and, as we shall see, even between different Lutheran denominations. Despite observable xenophobia, the Scottish Presbyterians collaborated with German speakers first at Moreton Bay (Zion Hill), in the 1860s in Victoria (**Ebenezer**) and in the 1890s at Cape York (**Mapoon, Aurukun, Weipa**, Mornington Island).

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