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**CONVERTING SALVATION: Protestant
Missionaries in Central Australia, 1930s-40s**

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CHAPTER SIX: 'The Usurpation of the Whole World': Duguid, Love and Flynn



By late 1938, Duguid was back in Australia, Ernabella Mission had now been established under the superintendency of Rev. Harry Taylor, and Love was back at Kunmunya after his visits to the Centre.² Love had mailed the Banner with a brief note on his return: 'Back home: I love the people, I love the colour and beauty of the

tropical north-west, but the people are humble savages, to care for whom is our bounden duty and privilege.'³ Duguid himself had thrown off his torpor, and was again firing letters off to Ministers, corresponding with all and sundry on the evils of the AIM, and keeping a close and fatherly eye on his baby Mission.⁴ Despite his apparent failure while overseas to garner the full-blooded support of the Colonial Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, Duguid continued to

¹ Levinas frequently quotes a line from Pascal's *Pensees*: "'That is my place in the sun'. That is how the usurpation of the whole world began.' Levinas writes, in one passage: 'Was not my 'in the world' or my 'place in the sun' and my home a usurpation of places that belong to the other man, already oppressed by me or hungry?': Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, B. Bergo trans. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 175. The inset photograph was the front cover to a publication produced by the Australian Presbyterian Board of Missions in 1946 entitled (ironically) *Foreign Missions 1946*. It is said to depict an Aborigine 'on duty as a shepherd to a flock of 800 sheep' at Ernabella. I use it here partly as a ironic comment on the belated enthusiasm of the Presbyterian Church for the Central Australian indigenes it had ignored until Duguid brought them rudely to its attention; also as a comment on the AIM/Flynn v. Duguid fracas in the Church which in many ways was itself a debate on whether or not the Australian Aborigines were capable of taking a role as 'fellow-citizens' of the nation. Duguid plainly thought they were, and Flynn doubted that they were, and often gave the impression that he was indifferent to the matter: see below, this chapter.

² We will look more closely at Love's important 'inspection and preparatory' visits to Ernabella in 1937 in chapter 7, below.

³ *Presbyterian Banner*: vol. 43, no. 8 (August 1938), pp. 32-33.

⁴ For example: Harrie Green, the UAM missionary at Ooldea, told Duguid of a station owner 'with native blood' who had been made to stay in prison cells for accommodation during treatment at the Alice Springs AIM Hostel: Duguid, "Duguid: Series 1: correspondence": Green to Duguid, 9 May 1938. Another letter writer, a Central Australian businessman, commented that no one he had ever talked to in the outback could recall the AIM Patrol Padre holding a service: '[he] never tried to converse on the things of the Spirit but would talk droughts, opals, sheep and make himself a jolly good fellow': *ibid.*, Wilkinson to Duguid, 10 June 1938.

work on its Convenor, J. MacDonald Webster, complaining to him that the AIM was still representing 'that Mrs. Smith left her money to start the work of AIM.'⁵ He was unable to find succour in this matter now even from Secretary Matthews, who had supported him from the beginning on Ernabella: 'I noted your reference to Smith of Dunesk. I must leave this to you to carry through. The Moderator General will not listen to anything about John Flynn and his Committee and therefore this matter never comes up between us.'⁶ Much to Duguid's fury, Flynn had become a kind of protected species both within and without the Presbyterian Church.

expressions of surprise

For the supporters of the AIM in the Presbyterian Church of South Australia, 1939 started with an unpleasant surprise. On 24th January, Rev. David Chapman wrote to the General Secretary of the AIM, CP Hughes, with a statement and a query. 'The Church of Scotland Committee [the Colonial Committee]', Chapman stated, 'has taken the extraordinary step of selling the Smith of Dunesk properties without any reference to our Committee or Assembly.' The query was: 'One wonders why and what is behind it.'⁷ Perhaps what he wanted to say was who was behind it. The obvious suspect, Duguid, denied any knowledge of or involvement in the sudden sale of the properties.⁸

By March, it was time again for the State Assembly, certain now to be a lively affair given the inevitable diminution of what had been regarded as something remarkably rare: an everlasting flow of Scottish money. Chapman was now

⁵ Ibid., Duguid to Webster (copy), 14 May 1938.

⁶ Ibid., Matthews to Duguid, 5 Nov 1938. The Moderator-General referred to was Rev. John MacKenzie.

⁷ Presbyterian Church of South Australia, "SRG/123/355 – Correspondence with General Secretary of AIM - 1939-42, 1946-47 ", in *Papers of Presbyterian Church of South Australia* (Mortlock Library: Adelaide): Chapman to Hughes, 24 Jan 1939.

⁸ *Presbyterian Banner*: vol. 44, no. 4 (April 1939), p. 27 (correspondence from Dr. Duguid): 'Last month, the Moderator-General, in a letter, asked if I had heard anything about the possibility of the Church of Scotland taking over control of the Smith of Dunesk Bequest, and I replied, it was news to me and that I have had no communication on the matter since in Scotland. This evening I was told by phone that the Scottish Church had sold the Smith of Dunesk properties, and I was regarded as being responsible for this. The news is a complete surprise to me. Allow me to state openly that I have never been consulted by the Church of Scotland on the matter. I have supplied to the Overseas Committee the same information I have given here... The Church of Scotland will be willing I am sure to shoulder whatever responsibility there is in the matter.'

Moderator of the State Church and John Flynn had been elected Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. In the debate on the 'deliverance' of the Report of the Smith of Dunesk Committee, Charles Duguid moved, seconded by Rev. Martin, that the Assembly approve the payment 'this year' to Ernabella Mission of three-quarters of the net annual Smith of Dunesk income. An amendment to Duguid's motion was moved, and carried, that the payment to Ernabella Mission be (merely) £75. Duguid had again been foiled, although his Mission was just beginning to share in the spoils of the Smith monies.

Moderator Chapman then moved that the Assembly express surprise at the 'precipitate action' of the Church of Scotland in selling the Smith of Dunesk properties in South Australia without advice from Australia or even notifying the SA Assembly of the intention to sell the land.⁹ Expressions of surprise and angry questions were sent righteously on their way to Scotland. Meanwhile, the Ernabella Mission Report to the Assembly indicated the Mission was making headway and was already regarded by the Aborigines as 'a haven of refuge' even though the work of the missionaries 'remained unremitting' with the necessities of mission life, food and building materials having to be freighted 1000 miles from Adelaide. But Duguid, the writer of the Report, was grateful for the support the Mission had received, especially from 'anthropologists throughout Australia [who] are in strong support of the work being done at Ernabella.'¹⁰ Again, 'the anthropologists' were called in to provide an imprimatur to Duguid's creation.

In his Address, the new Moderator, Rev. Chapman, spoke of the 'untold possibilities' of the Australian nation, a continent surrounded by water, 'a race of purer blood' than any other on earth, 'a white Australia' whose 'neighbours are all coloured' and who 'need our gospel'. The Church must thus be loyal to the 'missionary vision' of the Great Commission to go into all the world and preach the Gospel unto all Nations.¹¹ Chapman's missionary vision was perhaps too

⁹ Presbyterian Church, "Blue Books": 1939, Minute 60.

¹⁰ Ibid., 1939, Report of the Ernabella Committee. Duguid was thinking here of people such as Elkin, Cleland and Wood Jones, who had all signified their support for Duguid's venture.

¹¹ *Presbyterian Banner*: vol. 44, no. 4 (April 1939), pp. 5-6.

broad; it looked into 'all the world' but neglected his own State and its original inhabitants. But he had asked some legitimate questions at the Assembly: what had happened to the AIM's secure flow of monies from the Smith properties? Why had the properties been sold? What was going on?

some better distribution of the revenue

Part of the answer lies in a cache of letters in the files of the Smith of Dunesk Committee of the SA Church between the Colonial Committee in Scotland and the South Australian Church.¹² The first sign that the Colonial Committee might respond to Duguid's persistent prompting was a letter sent in October 1937 by Webster of the Scottish Committee to the Clerk of Assembly of the SA Presbyterian Church, Rev S. Martin.¹³ Webster had raised the matter of the distribution of the Smith funds, advising that his Committee had lately learned that only £20 had been allocated in the previous year 'to the Aborigines'. He acknowledged that Duguid had raised the point again. He encouraged the Australian church, now that a 'Scheme' was under way for 'work among the Aborigines', to devise 'some better distribution of the revenues'. This communication was inadvertently not put before the Assembly until 1939.¹⁴

On 4 September 1939, well after the sale of the properties, and probably in response to the Assembly's expressions of surprise earlier in the year, Webster wrote again to Martin informing him of the background to the decision to sell the properties: that his Committee had 'for some years past' been considering the whole subject of the Bequest. Mrs. Smith's original intentions regarding the 'education and evangelisation' of the Aborigines of South Australia, who had in fact not died out, had to be given weight as well as the knowledge that there was

¹² Presbyterian Church of South Australia, "SRG123/331 - Smith of Dunesk Mission Committee - papers re legal and financial matters, 1921-1940", in *Papers of Presbyterian Church of South Australia* (Mortlock Library: Adelaide).

¹³ Duguid, "Duguid: Series 1: correspondence": Webster to Martin (copy), 25 Oct 1937.

¹⁴ Presbyterian Church, "Blue Books": 1939; see Minute 60 for Martin's *mea culpa* for his omission, stated as an 'inadvertence', to put Webster's letter before the Assembly in 1938. Probably, given that Martin had supported Duguid on the matter of Ernabella and 'a better distribution' of the Smith funds, his failure to produce the letter earlier was an 'inadvertence' as it benefited the Duguid cause to have the Scottish Committee on side.

now 'an activity among them'.¹⁵ Webster advised that once the Committee determined that it had full legal control over the Bequest as well as a responsibility to dispose of the funds in accordance with the donor's wishes, the decision had been made to sell the properties. That had now been done. The 'price' had been £5792. The Committee had also decided that the sum from rents and interest on money from sales up to October 1939 be paid to the Moderator of the SA Church with instructions that, pro tempore, half the amount was provided to the Ernabella Mission. Webster invited suggestions from the SA Assembly before 'we draft a final new scheme' for the utilisation of the revenue from the Bequest. He concluded that he was 'deeply thankful to the SA Assembly for acting as Trustees for our Committee for so many years.'¹⁶ Was this a whiff of lese-majesty, or a blow for justice, or both? Or perhaps simply a final loss of patience with squabbling colonials?

Chapman responded to these inconvenient events with a letter to the Colonial Committee complaining of the discourteous lack of consultation given the SA Smith of Dunesk Committee despite the fact 'that for over 40 yrs it had transacted practically all matters relating to the property.' He left the Scottish Committee in no doubt that the local Church, if consulted, would have advised against the sale of the properties, 'as they believed it more beneficial to the trust to hold them.'¹⁷ On 2 January 1940, Webster advised Martin that the Colonial Committee was prepared to instruct its solicitor to hand over the nett proceeds of the sale of the Smith lands, the amount to be invested in Government securities on condition that the General Assembly gave a Declaration of Trust that it would deal with all income from the Smith of Dunesk funds as directed by the Colonial Committee. The Committee would in its turn give due weight to any recommendations from the SA Church as to the distribution of the income.¹⁸ And that was where the matter rested, for the moment. The main point now was the consideration that the returns from the Fund, having been capitalized, would be reduced over time by inflation, so the resulting interest 'pot' each year would

¹⁵ Presbyterian Church, "SRG123/331": Webster to Martin, 4 Sep 1939. Webster was referring of course to Ernabella.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., Chapman to Webster, 18 Dec 1939.

¹⁸ Ibid., Webster to Martin, 2 Jan 1940.

correspondingly diminish in value, whereas the rental value of the properties would have tended to keep pace with inflation, and provide an amount that would probably increase over time, in absolute, if not real terms. Yet Ernabella suffered, too, from the same financial disadvantage. A distribution in their favour under the old 'rental' scheme would have provided the new Mission with a superior ongoing benefit. It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that the Colonial Committee simply lost patience with proceedings in the 'paradise of dissent' and wished to wash its hands of the matter. The whole affair, from one view, is a fascinating vignette of the uncomfortable relationships that often existed between the 'home churches' of the motherland and their progeny in the colonial and settler society of Australia.¹⁹ The Scottish Church, clothed, as it continued to remind its colonial brethren, with full legal power, had finally tipped the balance in the Smith of Dunesk matter firmly in the direction of the pro-Ernabella forces, with its 'determination' that there be a 'better distribution' of the monies. Duguid's persistent and sometimes heavy-handed attempts at lobbying the Colonial and Continental Committee had been rewarded.

the dread danger of race extinction

The October 1939 *Banner* carried an editorial by the new Moderator-General of the Australian Presbyterian Church, the Right Rev. John Flynn, OBE. He began with a statement that must have been forced by the events of the last few years: although the AIM is a mission to white people, the sisters rendered aid to 'aborigines and half-castes' whenever required. Later in the same editorial he spoke of his concerns about the 'microscopic' family and the lessening of race fertility: 'this dread danger of race extinction demands also the close attention of those who lead in spiritual things.' But there was hope when men and women took up mission work or what Flynn called 'long range evangelism.' He paid tribute to those who had done so. Among such lives, he added, 'I know of none more impressive than that of one of our own brethren, the Rev. JRB Love.' The Moderator-General then proceeded to give an account of the life and influence of 'Mr. Love, of Kunmunya.' It was men like Love, with their broad vision, who

¹⁹ See Hilary M. Carey, *Believing in Australia: a cultural history of religions* (St Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen and Unwin, 1996), p. xv.

showed the way, said Flynn.²⁰ Was this only a genuine tribute from Flynn, with whom Love had retained amicable relations, or was it also a politic way of keeping the exemplary missionary, who was now associated with the 'Ernabella cause', on side?

The next issue of the *Banner* contained a warm account of 'Ernabella Night' at the Adelaide Town Hall. It was apparently a glittering occasion. The Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress were present as well as the Governor and his wife. Dr Duguid, according to the *Banner*, gave a 'most arresting' lecture, and there were many 'happy features' about the evening:

The chairman was the Moderator-General who knows the Inland so well, and who has done so much to cast a mantle of safety over it and make possible the wider work in which Ernabella is engaged.²¹

On the Mission site itself, however, there were some 'unhappy features'. Harry Taylor had resigned in late 1939. Rumblings at Board level about his superintendency had existed for some time and these may have forced his departure.²² Mr. Ward was now Acting Superintendent, although Matthews confided to Duguid that he was 'just a useful sheepman, an Assistant'. He thought Love would be the best appointment, although he first wanted to 'sound out' TGH Strehlow on the matter.²³ The well-educated Patrol Officer with his Hermannsburg and Central Australian connections was much respected in Presbyterian circles.

At the State Assembly in March 1940, the distribution of the Smith monies was again, not surprisingly, on the agenda. The protocols of battle unfolded as

²⁰ *Presbyterian Banner*: vol. 44, no. 10 (October 1939), pp. 6-9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 44, no. 11 (November 1939), p. 4.

²² Matthews had complained to Duguid about Taylor's lack of ability 'at accounts' and his 'exaggerated sense of our ability to spend money on Ernabella': see Duguid, "Duguid: Series 1: correspondence": Matthews to Duguid, 13 Oct 1938; 28 Nov 1938. He forwarded in derision a copy of an order of Taylor's for 'border collies and pipes': *ibid.*, Matthews to Duguid, 5 Dec 1938. For his part, Duguid continued to support Taylor. Later, in October 1939, after another visit to the Inland and his 'epic' trek with Albrecht and Strehlow, he refuted the claim that Taylor was a laughing stock: 'It was the Oodnadatta Sisters who said this; probably I am a laughing stock there'. He added bitterly: 'If the white people of Oodnadatta ever acclaim Ernabella as a fine thing, there will be something wrong at Ernabella.' Duguid felt Taylor had the respect of the natives; while he was not an inspirational leader and did have a bad memory and no eye for detail, his medical work was good and 'he was very fond of the natives': *ibid.*, Duguid to Matthews, 3 Oct 1939.

²³ *Ibid.*, Matthews to Duguid, 5 Mar 1940.

before. Supporters of Ernabella moved for three-quarters of the nett Smith income to be paid to Ernabella for 1940²⁴; however an amendment distributing the amount 50%-50 % was successful. Another motion from an Ernabella supporter that the Church of Scotland be advised that all future proceeds of the Smith of Dunesk Funds be devoted to the work of the Aborigines at Ernabella was also defeated.²⁵ Again, despite the powerful intervention by the Scottish Church, and despite the persistent advocacy of the Ernabella cause by Duguid, Love and others during the previous few years, the State Assembly, as a body, had to be dragged, reluctantly, towards giving the cause of the Mission to the Aborigines its full due. Soon after the end of the Assembly, Duguid had neatly described the maneuvering that led to Ernabella getting only half rather than three-quarters of the Fund: 'when Ernabella was near the post it was jockeyed out of position.'²⁶ Duguid's frustration at this outcome was soon countered by his optimism over the announcement of the appointment of JRB Love as Superintendent of Ernabella, to take effect from March 1941. Duguid thought this appointment 'the greatest stroke of fortune for Ernabella' as Love was 'held in the highest esteem by the anthropological and missionary world.'²⁷ Another apparent 'stroke of fortune' for the Mission was the appointment of Duguid himself to the newly constituted Aborigines Protection Board, which would allow the combative humanitarian to exert his influence from within the administration of Aboriginal affairs for South Australia.²⁸

a project for white settlers

Within the womb of the AIM, however, Chapman was still recovering from the shock of the Scottish Church's intervention into the placid world of the Smith of Dunesk Committee when the Colonial Committee suddenly stipulated a 75:25 allocation of the Smith monies in favour of Ernabella.²⁹ He began a counter offensive. Chapman advised CP Hughes, the General Secretary of the AIM, that

²⁴ Moved by Martin, seconded by Booth: see Presbyterian Church, "Blue Books": 1940, Minute 64.

²⁵ Ibid., 1940, Minute 101.

²⁶ Duguid, "Duguid: Series 1: correspondence": Duguid to Webster (copy), 19 Mar 1940

²⁷ Ibid., Duguid to Webster (copy), 30 Sep 1940.

²⁸ Ibid., Duguid to McIntosh (copy), 23 Jan 1940.

²⁹ The new stipulation came in form of a radiogram sent by the Colonial Committee to the effect that the allocation of the Smith of Dunesk income be 'equal proportions for last yr, and for current year $\frac{3}{4}$ Ernabella, and $\frac{1}{4}$ AIM': Presbyterian "Blue Books": 1941, Report of the Smith of Dunesk Committee, p. 45.

his Committee had asked for a review of the new allocation 'in view of all the work being done for Aborigines in SA by the AIM'; he was 'working up some notes on this work' and asked for 'all possible data at your disposal'.³⁰ He brought out his ammunition at the March State Assembly: A Statement of Services rendered to the Aborigines in SA by the AIM submitted by the Smith of Dunesk Committee.³¹ It was a foolhardy, if slightly ludicrous, attempt to defend the indefensible or, at the least, to prove that which the Committee was not able to prove. Chapman's Statement was simply a restatement of the figures for 1934 for the three AIM Hostels at Beltana, Innamincka and Oodnadatta which Duguid in 1935 had shown, and Chapman had conceded, were questionable. In addition, two letters were provided in evidence, one which said very little and even apologised that 'the statistics are not accurate', the other from an interested party, the General Secretary of the AIM, CP Hughes, who provided some figures for 1939-1940 which were open to the same charge Duguid had made in relation to the 1935 data, namely that they did not clearly distinguish between treatments and patients. And that was all, except for Hughes to say, rather weakly and against most of the evidence:

It has always been our policy to do everything possible medically for the aboriginals and apart from this you know that the Sisters have always included the aboriginals and half-castes in their Sunday Schools.³²

Eventually, as Howard Zelling pointed out years later, even Flynn, in dismissing Dr Duguid's powerful rebuttal to Chapman's Statement in 1942, did so on the grounds that the charges of lack of care for Aborigines were 'irrelevant' as the Southern Patrol of the AIM, to which the Smith of Dunesk funds were contributed, 'was a project primarily for the white settlers of the Far North'.³³

As it was, in 1942, the SA Assembly, with its hand finally forced by the still powerful 'Home Church', determined that three-quarters of the Smith Funds were to be allocated to Ernabella, and one-quarter to the AIM. It was to remain

³⁰ Presbyterian Church, "SRG123/355": Chapman to Hughes, 12 Nov 1940.

³¹ Presbyterian "Blue Books": 1941: Report of Smith of Dunesk Committee, pp. 46ff.

³² Ibid., 1941: Report of Smith of Dunesk Committee, p. 48. .

³³ *The Advertiser* (SA), 6 Sep 1972.

at this allocation into the future.³⁴ This particular battle between Duguid and Flynn, much of it fought in surrogacy, over resources and the hearts and minds of the local Presbyterian Church, was finally over. It had been a significant part of the larger battle to persuade a reluctant national church to inaugurate the new Mission in South Australia. The Smith of Dunesk Committee was discharged by the Assembly, having lived a twilight existence since the rapid expansion of the Movement created by its former Missioner, Flynn. The combative Charles Duguid, in his hour of triumph, would manage to refrain from magnanimity, methodically ticking off to the Assembly the sins of inaccuracies and deceptions of the whole discreditable story of the Smith of Dunesk Fund in South Australian Presbyterianism.³⁵ And David Chapman chose this Assembly to announce his retirement from 20 years as Convenor of the AIM Council. His resignation letter would express his sadness 'at the thought of severing so long an association with the work of my old class mate the Right Rev. Dr. Flynn.'³⁶

this National Asset

The AIM had been wounded slightly in the skirmish over the Scottish monies but in the larger scheme of things it moved on irresistibly, as it had since 1912, simultaneously creating and attaching itself to powerful national narratives of nation-building, Inland mateship and whiteness. The February 1942 *Presbyterian Banner* eulogised the AIM as a 'National Asset' and its potent, if sometimes inaccurate, edicts resonated with Presbyterian congregations in time of war and change:

The AIM is definitely making a contribution to the national effort...It serves no particular class or creed. While it seeks out our own kith and kin scattered throughout the wide spaces of the Inland, it does not neglect the aborigines, Afghans and other coloured folks with whom our workers are often brought into contact...the AIM has done something to help our Commonwealth solve the problem of filling up our vast vacant spaces. In

³⁴ How far into the future is unclear, although Rev Bill Edwards, the 'last missionary' at Ernabella before it was given back, with the Lands, to the Pitjantjatjara people in the early 1980s, thought that monies from the 'Smith Fund' were still being distributed to Ernabella in the late 1970s: personal communication to author, 2002.

³⁵ Presbyterian "Blue Books": 1942: Addenda: Dr. Duguid's Statement on the Smith of Dunesk Report, 1941.

³⁶ Presbyterian Church of South Australia, "SRG/123/352 – AIM Council of SA – correspondence of Financial Secretary – 1939-45" in *Papers of Presbyterian Church of South Australia* (Mortlock Library: Adelaide): Chapman to Racklyeft, 29 Apr 1942.

this disordered warring world it behoves us to see that not only our welfare but our existence as a free and independent nation depends upon us not only holding it but diligently and wisely developing it with people of our own British stock.³⁷

So at the end of this small but significant episode in parochial Presbyterianism, where is the iconic 'John Flynn' left? To find him, we should start with his historiography, the history of *his* history. The end of the Great Australian Silence and the gradual incorporation, albeit contested, of Aboriginal people and their relations with the European intruders into the history of this country has meant that successive commentators on John Flynn have had, increasingly, to consider his relations with indigenous Australians.³⁸ In Ion Idriess's book, which spectacularly constructed the icon of Flynn of the Inland, we notice the almost complete absence of Aboriginal people except as a sort of exotic, dangerous savage, speaking (but not heard) in 'guttural' tones, and spearing cattle and white men.³⁹ The reverse violence is rarely, if ever, mentioned, although Idriess notes numbers of whites wore cartridge belts, 'for men generally go armed in the north if travelling through 'bad-nigger' country'.⁴⁰ The great 'empty' land is emptied of its original inhabitants, or they are reduced to a form of pestilence: 'in places there would be blacks, poison weed, bush-fires, famine and plenty, perhaps accident and sickness'.⁴¹ Invariably Idriess's 'blacks' are disembodied, 'othered' creatures, just threatening sounds in the bush to 'the padre on the wallaby': 'Then came a savage sound, sudden and menacing, the song of wild men triumphant at some primitive deed. He jumped at the sound and stood still. Natives!...In rising and falling cadences came that savage song. There was something of the earth 'earthy' in that throaty chant, a feeling in it carrying the growl of the primitive beast.'⁴² The faithful prospector's dog at the padre's side, no 'primitive beast', is all that keeps him company. Such were the sort of representations of the Aborigine in *Flynn of the Inland*. There is little direct evidence as to what Flynn thought of them, although he once characterised the

³⁷ *Presbyterian Banner*: vol. 47, no. 2 (February 1942), p. 14.

³⁸ See W.E.H Stanner, *After the dreaming: black and white Australians, an anthropologist's view* (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission (Boyer Lecture), 1969).

³⁹ Ion L. Idriess, *Flynn of the inland*, Classics ed. (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1973 (first pub. 1932)).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 118.

book as 'one of the truest pictures of Australian life that has ever been penned'.⁴³ It is probable that, like many of his generation, he would have found little with which to quibble regarding the representations of Aborigines as they would likely have matched his own.

In the 'official' biography, Scott McPheat treats the Flynn narrative as solely having reference to white people.⁴⁴ 'Aborigines' are not at all mentioned in the index, and rarely in the text other than as incidentals to the heroic story of placing hospitals, wireless technology and aviation in the 'wide open' space of the Inland. A metaphor for his treatment of indigenes in the book is a photograph of the padre Kingsley Partridge 'sending a morse message on a portable pedal set while on patrol', while next to him stand an Aboriginal man and a boy, possibly his son, naked and holding spears, watching apparently uncomprehendingly as this evolved miracle-man, totally unconcerned with their presence (as is the caption), contacts a distant (but closer) colleague: with the mulga scrub and hills of Central Australia in the background, the present (but absent) Aborigine and the technological bwana in touch with the wider civilized world.⁴⁵ But little is revealed in McPheat's book of Flynn's attitudes to the Aborigines, unless one can infer something from the silence.

A small vignette, however, sheds some light on Flynn's fierce 'inexorability'. When Flynn was organising forces and funding for his original visit in 1911 to the Northern Territory which, as we have seen, was to be the catalyst for the AIM, there was at one point a possibility that some of the 'Territory fund' may be diverted to an Aboriginal mission in Western Australia. Flynn wrote to his contact: 'Have just jumped to the table to write NO...! Walcott Sound is started. Whatever do they think it means starting in N.T.? Hang on for all you are worth.'⁴⁶ Flynn's reaction is telling: the warning bells clearly rang when his sources of finance were threatened. He went on to retain most of the responsibility of fund raising for the AIM in his own hands. Resources were

⁴³ Cited McPheat, *John Flynn, Apostle*, p. 180 from 'Notes written on 25 November 1940. A.I.M. files'.

⁴⁴ McPheat was a padre in the AIM and was commissioned by the organization to write Flynn's biography nine years after his death in 1951.

⁴⁵ McPheat, *John Flynn: Apostle*, facing p. 97.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

always scarce compared to the things Flynn's relentless energy wanted to accomplish. Part of the complex of reasons why Flynn provided some resistance to the establishment of Ernabella and the attachment of the Smith of Dunesk funds to that venture, through the AIM operatives in South Australia, must have been, as JRB Love pointed out, an understandable reluctance to lose funding to which the organization had become used. But we must ask if there was more to Flynn's seeming indifference or even hostility to a mission for Aborigines than a mere reduction in funds.

A more recent biography on Flynn, Max Griffiths' *The Silent Heart*, provides a more comprehensive and balanced assessment of Flynn's attitudes towards Aboriginal people.⁴⁷ Griffiths is a former Superintendent of the AIM and writes of Flynn from a position of sympathy and admiration. He acknowledges, however, the strength of the charges of racism and lack of caring that Duguid brought against Flynn. If, he writes, there was a racism present in Flynn's thinking, it was merely a reflection of the attitude of most of the Australian community, that Aborigines were a poor and primitive people who were likely to remain so, and were thus, in a sense by definition, excluded from the 'imagined community' of the Inland and the rest of the nation.⁴⁸ Griffiths sees, however, an eventual if indirect benefit to the Aborigines of the Inland through Flynn's work in 'preparing the outback' for 'the new age for the Aboriginal people'.⁴⁹

Flynn's alleged racism has been confronted even more directly in Brigid Hains's very recent and stimulating work on Flynn. In *The Ice and the Inland*, Hains argues the frontier has become embedded in the modern Australian imagination as a permanent fixture, a potent myth, as she says, of a nation tempered by the struggle to live in an extreme natural environment.⁵⁰ She sees Mawson and Flynn, as cultural folk heroes, as central to the creation of the frontier myth. Flynn in particular attempted to draw the rest of the nation, living on the seaboard, into the life of the 'Inland', and the isolated and isolating lives of the

⁴⁷ Max Griffiths, *The Silent Heart: Flynn of the Inland* (Kenthurst, N.S.W.: Kangaroo Press, 1993).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 166-167.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁵⁰ Hains, *The Ice and the Inland: Mawson, Flynn, and the Myth of the Frontier* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002).

'bush' people correspondingly into the life of the nation. The two 'heroes', she concludes, were essentially nation-builders, shaping and enhancing the 'symbiotic relationship' between the metropolis and the frontier.⁵¹

the questions of white and black are wholly bound up with each other

Hains, like Griffiths, accepts Flynn's 'blind spot' in relation to the Aborigines and the racial problems of the frontier but places him somewhere in the middle of the spectrum of the racial attitudes of his day. Hains notes that Flynn resisted the urging of some friends and supporters, including JRB Love, to take up the problems of race relations in the Inland. She cites Love, in a 1914 letter to Flynn, as arguing that 'the questions of white and black are wholly bound up in each other. We cannot deal with one apart from the other'.⁵² But as we have seen above, Flynn and the AIM held steadfastly to the view that the Church had another department that dealt with Aborigines and their different needs, and that particular 'problem' had very little to do with them. Flynn's willing complicity in the 'effective British occupation' of the Inland and the privileging of settler interests was, Hains concedes, deeply antithetical to indigenous interests.

In a subsequent article, examining specifically the charges that Charles Duguid brought against Flynn, Hains has again provided a nuanced and sympathetic picture of a man who, while occasionally denouncing the treatment of Aboriginal people, was 'slow to do anything about it in his own institutions'.⁵³ As both Love and Kramer suggested at the time, Flynn and the AIM had formed an alliance with a deeply racist white settler culture that left them on one side of a great divide. Nevertheless, Hains cautions against 'moralistic historical judgement' on Flynn's 'incomplete humanitarian vision'.⁵⁴ It is a fair warning. A rush to judgement may be unjust.

the 'move aside' clause

Yet public figures are accountable for their actions and attitudes, and while it is

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 171-176.

⁵² *Flynn Papers*, NLA, Box 3, Folder 2: Love to Flynn, 9 Feb 1914, cited *ibid.*, p. 125.

⁵³ Brigid Hains, "Inland Flynn: Pioneer? Racist? Or product of his time?", *Eureka Street* (May 2003): 31-34, p. 34.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 34.

important to understand the extent to which such people may be enmeshed in the implicating discourses of their time, it is open to subsequent narratives to question earlier ones from the perspective of their own discourse(s). From a perspective that posits the relationship between the European intruder/settlers and the indigenous people of this country as the country's single most important moral and social question, then and now, Flynn's failures, if that is what they were, must be counted against him. JRB Love, and even Duguid, spoke the same language as Flynn in most things, were caught in similar discourses, yet both were able to make the sympathetic leap of imagination which allowed them to accept some responsibility for people seemingly 'moved aside' by the white race's 'history' and 'discourse'. It was ironic, and perhaps tragic, that Flynn himself saw this clearly. Hains quotes him:

We Australians who, light-heartedly, for four generations, have been reading to Aborigines the 'move aside' clause, will surely be called up to render an account of our stewardship – God only know how soon.⁵⁵

Flynn's 'stewardship' of the white settlers of the Inland was superb, and has been generously acknowledged by a grateful 'white' nation. Whether that is all that needs to be said, or whether his actions and enthusiastic participation in settler discourse in fact expose him as irredeemably complicit in the colonialist expropriation and appropriation of the Inland on unjust terms – the usurpation of the whole world of the Aborigines – is a matter of judgement and hermeneutics. The 'stewardship' (itself a term resonant with colonialist paternalism and notions of racial superiority) of indigenous people was something Flynn was prepared to leave to others. The standard defences of Flynn come under a number of related rubrics: that the Presbyterian Church dealt with Aborigines through its missions and the Board of Missions, not through the AIM;⁵⁶ that Flynn had enough on his plate and that he, and his organization, could not have achieved what he, or it, did without a single-minded devotion to the cause of the white settler;⁵⁷ that any accommodation with the

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ This was the principal 'defence' used by the AIM itself, both against Duguid's charges and subsequent, similar charges.

⁵⁷ A 'defence' used often by some old Centralian hands: Winifred Hilliard, author of *The People In Between*, and a long-term missionary at Ernabella, argues this (personal communication with author).

'blacks' would have resulted in the disaffection of the whites and the consequent loss of goodwill and, thus, effectiveness of the AIM;⁵⁸ that by the assistance given to Aborigines, admittedly originally as out(side)patients and through the Royal Flying Doctor Service, was ultimately more beneficial for Aborigines than almost anything else done for them by Europeans;⁵⁹ that by casting his 'mantle of safety' over the Inland, he made it possible for white women to migrate there and thus 'ease the pressure' on the benighted and abused Aboriginal women;⁶⁰ that white women also tended to 'civilise and domesticate' the Centre, with eventual benefits to Aborigines.⁶¹ These are awkward defences, it should be said, a mixture of rationalization and special pleading, and varying degrees of merit.

a national saint

This study suggests further possible 'charges' against Flynn's already contested reputation on Aboriginal matters, that is, that by aiding and abetting attempts to resist Duguid's efforts, firstly, to attach resources clearly misappropriated to alternative, European uses, to an Aboriginal cause; and, secondly, to establish a Mission for Aborigines designed not so much to 'convert' the local Aborigines as to 'conserve' them, 'save' them as a people, as a 'tribe', as a culture, Flynn was pursuing policies directly inimical to indigenous welfare and interests. The evidence on both 'charges' is strong. It is highly unlikely that Flynn did not know the details behind the Smith of Dunesk controversy or believed that since the Deed of Gift did not specify Aborigines as recipients that that was the end of the argument. Duguid raised all these matters in his Moderator's Address, and afterwards in a number of public statements, as well as private correspondence to authorities within the Church, which pointedly made reference to the AIM's (mis)appropriation of the money. At the very least, as JRB Love said, it would have been a 'fine thing' for the AIM to have released the money willingly, and, as Howard Zelling pointed out years later, Flynn, elected as head of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in 1939, was in an excellent position to do this 'fine thing'; certainly one word from him to his South Australian cadres and all opposition to

⁵⁸ Both Kramer and Love understood this 'defence' for the AIM, although Love thought the AIM should have stood up against the 'bush' discourse.

⁵⁹ The 'Albrecht' defence: see below, this chapter.

⁶⁰ The 'George Simpson' defence: see above, chapter 4.

⁶¹ Hains uses an argument along these lines in *The Ice and the Inland*: see pp. 102-103.

the Ernabella claims to the money would have stopped. He did not do it. That Flynn also subtly resisted the establishment of Ernabella (in ways other than resisting access to the Scottish money) by his machinations at the 1936 Assembly is also probable given Duguid's claims to this effect along with some collaborative testimony.

Flynn's motivation for his actions (or sins of omission regarding indigenous Australians) is a more problematical question. Was it a concern to hoard money to which his organization had become used, or was it dislike of Duguid, or was it an indifference to the fate of the Aboriginal inhabitants of this country, despite some statements to the contrary which Hains makes the most of in her 'defence' of Flynn?⁶² Or something else? In these sorts of cases it is difficult to construct an answer that is not a complex amalgam of many factors. Whatever the case is here, it should be said that John Flynn's inaction on some matters, and his actions in other matters we have examined, in relation to Aboriginal people, must continue to leave a stain on his reputation as 'a national saint'.⁶³ Indeed, it was the 'straight-out' Albrecht, on whose mission Flynn first tested his famous wireless sets, who once said of the AIM founder that 'it is wrong to surround Flynn with a sort of a halo of a saint' and that acts of discrimination by the AIM 'cast a dark shadow over Flynn and his work'.⁶⁴ The Lutheran missionary believed, however, that Flynn was an instrument of God's purposes, 'to bring

⁶² A problem for Hains is that while she is able to cite a small number of sympathetic pronouncements by Flynn on Aborigines, they come principally from the same early issue of the *Inlander*, viz., 2(1), 1915: see *Flynn Papers*, NLA. It is almost as if Flynn said what he said, to get it on the record, so as to limit any possible attacks on his public discourse on Aborigines, then proceeded to adopt the attitude of indifference, even contempt towards them of which he was 'accused' by Duguid, principally, but also Albrecht and Zelling. This does involve some speculation and is possibly unfair to Flynn, but it is a possible interpretation in the circumstances. There is a good deal of evidence that John Flynn, as a minister, churchman, and leader of an important organisation, was a most politic and accomplished *politician*, capable of this sort of dissembling and subtle manipulation of the public record. Any case against this interpretation has to still account for the crucial differences between Flynn's public record (the statements Hains cites) and his private remarks and attitudes (attested by Duguid, Albrecht and Zelling). Hains also in her work has a tendency to repeat citations, as if new, which gives an impression that Flynn said more than he actually did on this subject. Not that Hains is necessarily attempting an orthodox 'defence' of Flynn: indeed she notes that in the writing of her book she was 'haunted' by Flynn's attitudes towards Aborigines. I have felt similarly at times about some of JRB Love's discourse on Aborigines. All that said, Hains's book on Flynn and Mawson is a stimulating discussion of Mawson and Flynn and the meanings of the Australian 'frontier'.

⁶³ A characterization made by Hains and others: see Hains, *The Ice and the Inland*, p. 168.

⁶⁴ F.W. Albrecht, "Albrecht Material," in *Lutheran Archives* (Adelaide, 1926-1978): 'Letter from Pastor FW Albrecht re Dr. John Flynn', n.d. (but written after the 1972 furore (see the beginning of chapter 2, above)).

some comfort and new hope into hopeless situations in the bush.⁶⁵

How do we then balance these Presbyterians against each other, Flynn against Duguid, and Love? Beside my suggestion that John Flynn tended to see the Inland as a vast palimpsest over the inevitable erasure of whose original, indigenous inscriptions he wished to write modernity's nation-building, domesticated, racially homogenous script, I posit these 'missionaries' to the Aborigines as oppositional to this erasure, indeed dedicated to their 'salvation'. Yet in some ways one of the interesting things about the Presbyterians was not their differences so much as their similarities. It was not perhaps a coincidence that the most powerful denouncements of Flynn and the AIM were made by a fellow Presbyterian. Inga Clendinnen, in writing about disputes between 16th century Franciscan Orders over treatment of their Mayan Indian converts, has noted that ideological conflicts are often made 'more painful and bitter' by being conducted, as she put it, 'within the terms of a shared rhetoric'.⁶⁶ Something similar was perhaps occurring in very different circumstances in the disputes and arguments of Australian Presbyterians four centuries later. That shared rhetoric, or discourse we may say, begins to break down during such conflicts, both sides feeling keenly the 'outrageous betrayals' of the other side. Duguid and Flynn shared belief in a Protestant Gospel of Social Justice, doing good to and for one's fellow man, with less emphasis on an evangelical Gospel fixed and fixated on the conversion project, the urgent saving of 'native' or 'settler' souls.

Ernabella was a mission created on the imagination of a man whose vision was not evangelical but humanitarian. There is little evidence in any of Duguid's correspondence or his published works of the evangelical desire to convert savages and save souls characteristic of most missionary activity in the last three centuries since the Enlightenment and the Great Awakening movements.⁶⁷ In this he was (ironically) similar to his great antagonist, Flynn, who throughout his

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Inga Clendinnen, "Disciplining the Indians: Franciscan Ideology and Missionary Violence in Sixteenth-Century Yucatan," *Past and Present* 94 (Feb., 1982): 27-48, p. 28.

⁶⁷ See Stanley, ed., *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*.

career seemed equally as indifferent to evangelical imperatives.⁶⁸ They believed more in a 'benevolent Providence' than in a judgmental God, more in a God of Love than a God of Law; they both believed in the necessity for the development of the Inland as a necessary ingredient in nation-building, both exhibited an attachment to discourses of Protestant, British and white superiority. They parted ways on the matter of the Aborigines and, as Clendinnen suggests, it was their shared discourse that, in part, made their disagreement so disagreeable. It also sheds a large significance on the point of divergence. JRB Love steered a middle course between these two restless engines of energy and ambition, yet he too, although (occasionally) caught as was Flynn in dark and discriminatory discourses contemptuous of Aborigines, diverged, when it mattered, towards the 'men dispossessed and without food', whose whole world had been usurped by Flynn's white men.

⁶⁸ See *Flynn Papers*, NLA.