

# **DREAMS AND REALITIES**

## **SOME INSIGHTS INTO THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC RURAL MOVEMENT**

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## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

## INTRODUCTION

*"They frightened me, old friend. All they want for a rural policy is a sheep, a goat, three acres - and a migrant."* So commented a former Governor General returning from a rural conference in Albury, according to Alan Reid, a political journalist writing a newspaper story<sup>1</sup> in October 1954. Who were the mysterious they? Forerunners of the communes of the sixties, perhaps the cult movements of the seventies? Certainly it was a religious organisation, but one where most of the members belonged to that oldest form of institutionalised Christianity - the Roman Catholic Church. Co-operation was an esteemed principle, but the freedom *"to do your own thing"* was not. The National Catholic Rural Movement (NCRM), as it was called, was an expression of Catholic Action, a concept formulated in Rome, but which the Australian hierarchy was struggling to establish in a country far removed from Europe. Yet, with a mixture of somewhat naive romanticism and ironclad ideology, the NCRM had its own idealistic visions for Australia, much as the poet McAuley<sup>2</sup> was to write in 1956.

*"Help of Christians guard this land from assault or inward stain.*

*Let it be what Christ has planned His Eden where you reign."*

By 1950 the National Catholic Rural Movement<sup>3</sup> had about 6000 members, 300 rural groups and a periodical, *"Rural Life"*. The NCRM, however, was never a truly 'grass roots' rural based movement nor did any initiatives develop from the country branches. During the period of its growth, post war reconstruction was a subject of wide interest and debate in Australia and there was strong support for such concepts as decentralisation and land settlement which were central to NCRM theories. Yet attempts to implement NCRM policies provoked suspicion and antagonism because they ran counter to values deeply held in Australia at that time. With the incoming tide of new technology and cultural changes in post-war Australia the assumptions basic to the NCRM's vision crumbled as surely as sand castles on the beach.

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<sup>1</sup> Reid, A., Sun Herald, Sydney, October 1954, quoted Truman, T. *Catholic Action and Politics*

<sup>2</sup> Coleman, P., *The Heart of James McAuley* (Sydney, 1980), p.63.

<sup>3</sup> National Catholic Rural Movement Archives, File 1941-1963, St Thomas More Centre, Melbourne.

## CHAPTER I

### THE BACKGROUND TO THE FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC RURAL MOVEMENT

Catholic action was in many ways an adaptation of the Roman Church to loss of power and influence which had been both temporal, evidenced by the loss of the Papal States in Italy in the nineteenth century, and spiritual, for increasing numbers of people disregarded Papal pronouncements in the twentieth century. The term 'Catholic Action' was first used by Pope Pius XI in 1922 and in 1928 he gave a definition of Catholic Action as *"the participation of the Catholic laity in the Hierarchic Apostolate for the defence of religious and moral principles, for the development of a wholesome and beneficent social order under the guidance of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, outside and above political parties with the intention of restoring Catholic life in the family and society"*.<sup>4</sup>

It was thus an attempt to use Catholic lay people to extend the influence of the Church to *"Christianise all things and all men, with all the means possible and permissible."*<sup>5</sup> The ideas formulated by Catholic Action organisations were not binding on Catholics and many Catholic intellectuals were critical of the introduction of Catholic Action.

Parish organisations that were established in both Catholic and Protestant churches during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, such as youth clubs and mothers' clubs, formed the basis of the development of Christian social initiatives.<sup>6</sup> These parish groups in a way acted as an interface between the church and the wider community. The scope for Catholic Action, however, could be much wider if Catholic lay people were to make the social theories of the encyclicals their first priority in groups of which they were members. In Rural Life, there is a mention of organisations where laymen, acting on Catholic Action guidelines, could exert an influence such as the Australian Primary Producers Union, The Wheat and Woolgrowers Federation, Shire Councils and the Murray and Murrumbidgee Water Users' Association. Truly the members of the Rural Movement were *"mobilised in an apostolate of associations, of organisations"*.<sup>7</sup>

The relationship between the state, Church and society, so secure in the thirteenth century, has been the subject of many Papal letters and encyclicals. Chief among these have been the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII in 1891, which emphasised the importance of family life and regional communities and that of Pius XI (1931) *Quadragesimo Anno* in which he wrote of the organic society. In the individualist capitalist society economic life is governed by competition, in the collectivist society the state dominates individuals. Other than these extremes, according to the Catholic theory of social order<sup>8</sup>, would be the alternative system of powerful social units standing between the individual and the state. People performing the same social function would group together in these social units. Pius XI considered that these groups would mostly be vocationally based, somewhat in the manner of mediaeval guilds where workers in a similar occupation banded together. The function of the state, then, was to "*produce order into human relations*", but in such a way that control was minimal, indeed the state should interfere with individual lives as little as possible. The state and the church would have complimentary functions, the church setting forth the way in which individuals could lead good and moral lives. While this may have been the theory, in 1953<sup>9</sup> the delegates at the Albury NCRM Conference could pass a resolution which proposed "*that the aggregation of holdings, and the purchase of land by people who will not cultivate it or by those who have adequate holdings already should be prevented by law*". Such a proposal asks for considerable state intervention in the affairs of the individual.

In the prewar years in Australia, members of the Catholic Church had been careful to ensure that their personal religious commitment was seen to be separate from their decision making. Particularly this had been so in politics, where, as the old NSW joke went : "*There are 10 Catholics in a Cabinet of 12, so we can't possibly vote for State aid to Catholic schools*". There were good reasons for this attitude. Sectarian bitterness had erupted at times particularly during the conscription debates. Most Catholics were descended from Irish convicts or emigrants in a society still dominated by those with English backgrounds and this had given rise to a religious tribalism. In fact for the Catholic Church in Australia, as O'Farrell<sup>10</sup> has observed, sectarianism, partially fostered by the hierarchy, had led to a ghetto mentality with the Catholic community being suspicious of the power of outsiders. There was however considerable interest in the social theories being debated by Catholic intellectuals in England and Europe, especially in the *Campion Society*, a university based discussion group in Melbourne and in the newspaper '*The Catholic Worker*'. In November 1937, the Episcopal Committee on Catholic Action founded the Australian National Secretariat of Catholic Action to be funded by annual financial quotas from each diocese in Australia and New Zealand, based on the number of parishioners in the diocese.

It is interesting that an analogous group, the Christian Social Movement, an Anglican organisation, was founded in Sydney in 1943.<sup>11</sup> Soon after the foundation of ANSCA, it was evident that there were differences in the way that the Melbourne Archdiocese (where ANSCA was based with Frank Maher as director and B.A. Santamaria as his assistant) and the Sydney Archdiocese viewed the structure and functions of Catholic Action. In Sydney Archbishop Kelly considered that the role of Catholic Action was to increase the levels of such virtues as chastity and piety and that sport was the "*modus operandi*" for this improvement. In Melbourne great emphasis was placed on the importance of a Catholic intellectual approach to social issues. The greatest division concerned the autonomy of the laity with the Sydney archdiocese insisting on clerical and hierarchical control as in the Italian model while the Melbourne archdiocese under Dr Mannix allowed the laity a more active role as happened in France and Belgium.<sup>12</sup> The National Catholic Rural Movement was formed in 1939 as a specialised movement like those favoured in Belgium and France. B.A. Santamaria was appointed as secretary. In his autobiography "*Against the Tide*" he mentions that the NCRM developed from discussion groups,<sup>13</sup> similar to the Campion Society that had been set up in such small towns as Koroit and Morwell. A member of the Catholic Teachers' Association, Ted Hennessy, had argued that the discussion topics, such as sociology and history, were irrelevant to the needs of farmers although it could well be argued that such issues were particularly stimulating and broadening in outlook to laymen in country areas. Frank Maher also encouraged the use of Catholic Action in concrete direct forms rather than discussion groups. In May 1941, Bishop Henschke of Wagga Wagga was appointed Episcopal Chairman, which meant that the NCRM was responsible to him and therefore under the direct control of the Catholic Church. The NCRM owed much to Santamaria's hard work and organising abilities. When war broke out, Santamaria was not called up for military service,<sup>14</sup> but helped as secretary of the Catholic Rural Movement in the organisation of War Agricultural Committees and the fruit harvests in the Goulburn Valley and around Mildura. NCRM membership became particularly strong in these areas and it is possible that Santamaria's personal contacts and networking contributed considerably to the growth of the movement. In 1942, the Catholic Social Studies Movement was created by Santamaria and some other Catholic laymen in order to work against the influence of communists in trade unions and in the Labor Party. In 1946, Santamaria became responsible for the general administration of the Australian National Secretariat, as well as the specialised NCRM and the new CSSM, while Frank Maher concentrated on research and education issues. In 1951 Santamaria was officially appointed director of ANSCA. In October 1954, Dr Evatt made his statement about outside influences affecting the Labor Party and the "split" in the Labor Party occurred the following year with the denouncement of Santamaria and 'The Movement'. The national secretariat of Catholic Action closed in 1954. In December 1957 the National Civic Council was set up to

continue an anticommunist campaign but as a civic association. In 1960 Santamaria resigned as Secretary of the NCRM.

Santamaria's eloquent and persuasive speeches on NCRM objectives and Catholic social principles helped to promote the growth of the NCRM; he spelt out policies relevant to rural Australia and hopes and dreams for a future with which country people could identify. James Griffin, associated with Santamaria in the 1930's on the 'Catholic Worker', once characterised Santamaria as that "*perpetual altar boy*".<sup>15</sup> This pungent criticism hits its mark for indeed Santamaria appeared to accept completely and absolutely Papal pronouncements on social questions, although such statements cannot be considered infallible in Church terms and certainly are open to analysis on sociological and economic criteria. The greater good of the Catholic church was always of main concern to Santamaria and he saw the NCRM as "*a great religious movement, aiming at the spiritual restoration of the country, by dealing with all those temporal and material things which are driving men and women away from the Catholic life*".<sup>16</sup>

It is unclear as to what former utopian conditions Australia was to be returned, in view of its history in which spirituality could not be considered a dominant note, but visions of what could be, and fears of what may be, were essential to Santamaria's theories. In drawing up these scenarios he was much influenced by discussions with his friends. In his autobiography, Santamaria attributes to Ted Hennessey the view that "*the farm was the natural habitat of the family*" and that rural populations were the basis for population growth in Australia. Ted Hennessey had left the Education Department after many years of teaching to lead a self sufficient farming lifestyle and the idea of "*independent farming*" can be traced to his influence.

A most experienced economist, Dr Colin Clark, was a very important influence on the policies advocated by Santamaria and the NCRM. Colin Clark had done important work on the formulation of the concept of the gross national product in England but had resigned from the Queensland Public Service when his proposals to break up large pastoral holdings in the beef country near Rockhampton were not accepted. Clark became the Director of Agricultural Economics in Oxford and returned to Australia on his retirement.



Santamaria himself acknowledges that psychologically he was influenced by his own European peasant background and that ideas from the agrarian movement in Canada and the United States impacted on this background. Other important influences were the Distributist philosophies of Belloc and Chesterton, and the ideal of a working proprietor. Specifically the American Rural Life Movement provided an approach to Catholic social theory in which family and rural issues were interwoven. Many of their early publications are held in the file material of the NCRM and articles from their journals were often reprinted in Rural Life. Consequently in the NCRM the theories and basic concepts were already formulated for members in a fashion similar to any Marxist cell group. Discussion and amplification could take place but as Santamaria himself wrote, the function of members was in "*the practical application of a Christian rural philosophy*". The 1950 ANSCA document "Problems of Policy" noted that the National Catholic Rural Life conference in America had not produced a living movement with precise objectives and yet run by the farmers.<sup>17</sup> The same pattern was to repeat itself in Australia.

According to the journal, Social Survey<sup>18</sup>, which was a publication designed to publicise the teachings from the social encyclicals, subsidiarity is the underlying Christian social principle. By this is meant that in any social organisation the State should not take over functions that can be carried out by smaller bodies. There would be essentially a decentralist form of government with power being distributed to various groups. These groups, organised on the vocational basis of the members, such as farmers, doctors etc., would work together as a harmonious co-operative whole. In 1947, Denys Jackson<sup>19</sup> wrote the pamphlet "*Australian Dream*" issued with the imprimatur of Archbishop Mannix of Melbourne. In this fanciful utopia, a prosperous rural society lived on their family farms in a bush countryside. Spiritual values reigned supreme in a 90% Catholic population, many of whom had come to Australia in a large scale immigration scheme. The large families on the farm supplied all their own needs while co-operative organisations marketed the rest, so each region with the small central city was self sufficient. In general the citizens followed the occupations of their fathers, although clever boys went to University. Girls received an education fitting them for their vocation as home makers and mothers. Truman<sup>20</sup>, in Catholic Action and Politics discusses the projected political organisation of state and federal parliaments and the senate in detail. In general however the Church was represented in governments at all levels. In this exemplar of social principles the Church would set the basic policies of the community even though the Church and State had different functions. In effect the ordinary people would not have a vote in determining the policies of the Government which would be directed by Catholic social principles for the common good.

This idealised land of Merrion was rather a flight of fancy by its convert author and indeed the scenario for its existence included the obliteration of Sydney by atomic bombs and a victory by America in a nuclear war against China. The imprimatur meant that it was consistent with Catholic teachings but as the qualification in 1954 to the annual Social Justice pamphlets declared,<sup>21</sup> *"In so far as these statements declare PRINCIPLES, Catholics will accept them without discussion ... the APPLICATION of the principles, as distinct from the principles themselves, does not, of course, seek to close discussion on the matters suggested"*. The picture of the corporate society as presented by Jackson was of concern to many liberally minded people who read the pamphlet and was even invoked in the hysterical hours of debate before the fall of the Cain government in Victoria in 1955. The vision of the 'Australian Dream' was not one to which most Australians would subscribe, although it included such environmentally sound principles as reafforestation and soil conservation.

In many ways Australia in the post war period was undergoing a transformation that made the theories of the social encyclicals sit uneasily with the new structural and cultural realities in Australia. The narrow range of occupations was to become ever more diversified, from motor mechanics to ledger keepers, so a neat vocationally organised order was less likely in a more fragmented society of greater specialisation and complexity. The unions gained in strength and could claim to be the "social units" between the people and the government. The cities grew, especially as the post war housing shortage was overcome, and while commodity prices were good the drift of population from country to city increased. Most of all, Australia was more prosperous than ever before, unemployment was low and a flood of new consumer goods entered the market as technological change geared up. More and more people saw themselves, and acted, as individuals rather than as members of a group in society and thus they exercised their right to choose what to do, what to buy, where to live and what to believe.

In notes for the annual conference of the NCRM in 1951, Santamaria had summarised the reasons for the formation of the NCRM.<sup>22</sup> *"The first was religious, the second was national and the third was civic"*. The first fundamental reason was the belief that religious beliefs and practice were much higher among people who lived a rural life than among city dwellers. Evidence from Spain and Italy was cited to support this assertion, although in France religious practice had declined markedly in rural areas. Some Australian statistics were also in support, notably the survey in Port Augusta in 1948, where only 48% of Catholics in Port Pirie went to church regularly while 80-90% of those in rural areas attended church regularly. Rural people

have always been more conservative than city dwellers and the local church has served, particularly for women, as a point of social contact, but any analysis of Australian society and its patterns was only in its infancy. Interestingly enough, Mol's survey in 1961<sup>23</sup> showed that the percentage of Catholics regularly attending at Catholic services was 66% in the Australian community, rising to 83% for those in rural occupations, the percentage of regular churchgoings for professional and managers was 78%, while manual workers had the lowest attendance rate at 58%. Perhaps a newly graduated lawyer with an Irish Australian background, living in a city, would be just as likely to be a strong Catholic, for in the period up to the late sixties in Australia there tended to be a direct handing down of Catholicity from one generation to the next, reinforced by sending Catholic children to Catholic schools.

In every State rural families had more children than city dwellers and this fecundity was the second reason for the importance of rural life. In 1940, in the midst of World War II, there was a general community apprehension that Australia had only a small population and that it could easily be overcome by a foreign invader. In post-war Australia huge migration programmes had commenced so it is understandable that the second reason would be termed to be one in the national interest. It was, of course, also in the direct vested interest of the church to have a steadily growing Catholic sector in the national population. Bishop Henschke in his presidential address to the eleventh annual convention of the NCRM in 1951<sup>24</sup> reviewed ten years of work and declared that *"the decline of agriculture is the most important social trend which militates against the institution of the family"*. The obvious implication was that rural families were somehow superior to those in cities, as far as the Catholic Church was concerned. Population, according to Bishop Doody at the same convention at Armidale, was the country's greatest need, and a positive rural policy might stop the drift of people to cities and encourage closer settlement. In an address on the regional framework of Australian development, Santamaria stated that in a civilisation *"founded upon small industry, the small farm, the small town, it is clear that a stable social order will emerge favouring the institution of the family"*. On this small-scale agriculture, he declares, was built the civilisation of Europe.

The third reason given was civic, that is, for the good of democracy in that the independent small farmers would constitute a force for democracy. In an international meeting of Catholics on Rural Life in Rome 1962,<sup>25</sup> where delegates came from all countries where there was a rural Catholic Action movement, emphasis was put on the importance of the small farmer as a defence against the Marxist theory of collectivisation which had dispossessed the peasants of Russia.

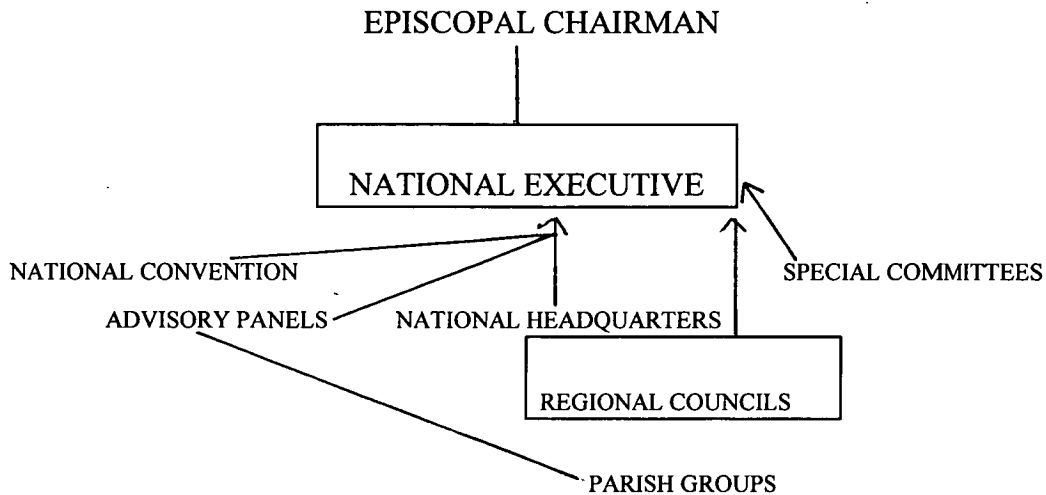
The threat of invasion of Australia retreated after the Coral Sea battle and as the Allies' victory in Europe became more certain Australians started to debate post war reconstruction. Economic policy and planning were the concerns of the Post-war Reconstruction Committee and an important policy area was that of agriculture. In 1943 ANSCA was a member of a group of Melbourne Christians who responded to a request from the Curtin Government for an input into the planning for post war Australia. Together Anglicans Catholics and non conformist church members drew up a Twenty Point Programme,<sup>26</sup> which was later reproduced and widely circulated in Catholic churches in the Bishop's Social Justice Statement, "Patterns for Peace" (1943). The points were based on principles of equity and Christian social doctrine but were very generalised. Many of the points dealt with rural issues such as the need for decentralisation and the settlement of families on the land. With the development of a co-operative spirit in rural communities, it was claimed that there should be relief for rural debt, a fair return for farm products and that the first principle of farming should be to provide for the needs of the farmer and his family. There was also a call for the establishment of a self governing body to direct agricultural development and policy. In Rural Life in 1956<sup>27</sup> these same points were listed in an editorial as "*what we stand for*" and each point would have received support from the majority of Australians at that time.

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## CHAPTER 2

### NCRM GROUPS - STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION

The NCRM itself claimed to be completely democratic, indeed that the ideas of the everyday member could be directed to the top levels of the organisation and become national policy. An abbreviated format<sup>28</sup> is shown:



The Regional Councils were made up of three lay representatives and the Chaplain of each group in the region as well as the regional Chaplain. The administrative structure would prove a formidable obstacle to any dissident views which would first have to be agreed to by other regional councils and then be just one input against those from the national convention, advisory panels, national headquarters and special committees. An article in 1950<sup>29</sup> declares that the first characteristic of a member of a group should be "teachableness" or docility "*to Vicars of Christ, to learn the Christian and traditional view of agriculture, to accept the directives and guidance of his Headquarters, to obey generously the wishes of his group President*". The article considers that if a member hasn't come in that frame of mind, then he should not be there at all. The second virtue, and perhaps even more important, was seen as charity, giving time, talents and enthusiasm with a generous spirit. The other two virtues were declared to be methodical business-like procedures and discretion. At each meeting a task was to be allotted to each group member. A group was to be judged not on the discussions of group topics, but on "*the sum total of apostolic work undertaken and achieved between group meetings - work that is designed to change the minds and hearts of others*".

Despite all these directions, a memo<sup>30</sup> in 1953 deplored the state of NCRM groups in that only a very small percentage of the groups were doing the kind of work the NCRM should do, with some groups stagnant or nominal. The largest number of groups were active but in work more suitable for parish committees such as collecting for the missions or running parish balls. The memo concludes that too rapid expansion has been at the expense of the principles of Catholic Action. *"The rural group is not an isolated faction. It is one arm of a Catholic social movement setting out to establish a Christian society within a new Australia"*. The groups were successful in setting up co-operative credit unions; by 1959 there were 30 co-operatives organised by NCRM members<sup>31</sup> with a total of one million pounds invested and forty thousand pounds out in loans. It is noteworthy that more than eight hundred thousand dollars were in the form of housing co-operatives. Two small settlements had been established, Maryknoll near Melbourne and San Isidore near Wagga. Members of both communities did not derive their income from farming but from outside jobs, although acreages were cultivated. Another success of the groups was the sponsoring of migrants to Australia, usually in small numbers such as the six migrant families settled at Crookwell NSW, although a few members in Koroit and Port Fairy parishes of the Ballarat diocese actually settled over 200 migrants.<sup>32</sup> The number of members in the groups appeared to peak in 1951, although in 1957 there were still 4000 members<sup>33</sup> and 500 new members were enrolled.<sup>34</sup> However as the report in that year stated, much of the credit for success in sustaining the membership must be given to the bishops and priests. Indeed from the earliest days they acted as recruitment officers encouraging members of their parishes in country areas to join the NCRM. In Wagga in 1956 there were 38 groups, mostly because of the influence of Bishop Henschke.<sup>35</sup>

The Split in the Australian Labor Party in 1955 brought Santamaria and the "Groupers" to national prominence and focussed attention on the policies of the Catholic Social Studies Movement. The NCRM had a weekly broadcast over a radio station in Bendigo and publicised in 1958 the message that the NCRM still enjoyed the support of the Hierarchy and the Holy See and that this extended to its leadership.<sup>36</sup> Ormonde<sup>37</sup> considers that the Catholic contribution to social debate in Australia ceased after 1954 and that for the five years previously it had been in decline with Santamaria devoting almost exclusive attention on foreign and defence policies. This is not borne out by the articles in Rural Life during this period as they show an emphasis on current social issues from the viewpoint of the man on the land although the NCRM was also used as a platform from which Santamaria could express his views on various matters. There is no doubt however that the Split impacted sharply on all Catholic Action movements, including the

NCRM. A letter from one of the groups in Wagga<sup>38</sup> in 1956 points out that the NCRM men were some of the first to join the National Civic Council, that organisers were being lost from the NCRM, that there was a lack of favourable publicity and only small resources of personnel. But the organisation struggled on with an increase in yearly subscriptions. Slowly the focus of the articles in Rural Life changed and the emphasis was placed more on right-wing opinions than on rural affairs. This is evidenced by the change in Rural Life, the periodical. In February 1956<sup>39</sup> it was declared to be "*an Australian Monthly devoted to building the Australian way of life on a rural foundation and achieved only by the rebuilding of rural communities on a Christian foundation*". By February 1975<sup>40</sup> while the periodical was still in print, it was described as "*a quarterly dedicated to educating adults for responsible social action in town and country*".

One fundamental attitude that never changed was that towards the role of women in society. The cornerstone of the expectations built around the family farm was the fecundity of the farm wife, producing children and thus satisfying the need for population growth in Australia and the need for human resources on a labour intensive farm. "*Are we to breed like jack rabbits*" asked Jesse McPherson, one of the earlier Australian feminists. Hopefully so, may have replied the NCRM. Clark<sup>41</sup> had worked with Borrie the Australian demographer, and was particularly interested in population studies. He judged that a married couple, not using contraception, would have, on average, eight children by their forties with an interval of about two and a half years between births. Santamaria, in spite of the theory of the state having only minimal control over individual lives called<sup>42</sup> for interference in this area in his Statement on Reconstruction "*the function of the State is to ensure that the reform which is envisaged is not hindered by vested interests in the sphere of either contraception or abortion*". Australia was of course a pluralist society with other groups having different viewpoints on the issue of limiting family size but this aspect appears to be entirely disregarded. As to the drop in the Australian net reproductive rate which occurred in the sixties, while sociological reasons are undoubtedly important, Clark could say<sup>43</sup> "*Some demographers attribute these heavy falls in the 1960's to the appearance of oral contraception. This seems an unlikely explanation*". Many surveys have shown that Catholic women used the "Pill" to the same extent as non-Catholics by the end of the sixties.<sup>44</sup> A technological change altered forever the scenario in the Australian Dream of Jackson of the fertile mother with her many small children. As late as 1975 in International Womens Year, it was declared in Rural Life that getting women out of the home was just a means to reduce the birth rate.<sup>45</sup> This fundamental chauvinistic attitude of the NCRM to regard women in terms of breeding stock was

one reason why Santamaria and Clark were regarded by many Australians as blinkered zealots who saw the realities of life only in terms of their preconceptions.

Yet women played an important role in the NCRM. In 1943 the first women's group was formed<sup>46</sup> and by the eighth national conference a woman speaker was proud of the flourishing women's groups. In 1950 there were seventy women's groups. The structure of their meetings was different to that of the men's with heavy emphasis on mothercraft, infant welfare, domestic science and handicraft, whereas the men's groups were concerned with introducing credit unions, agriculture and field days. In both groups time was allowed for Gospel discussions. The first women's groups<sup>47</sup> came into being as supper committees for the first men's groups. Then an official Catholic Action movement was formed for country women and a Manifesto was drawn up with emphasis on "*the family as the controlling factor in national life and planning*" but also with the hope of the "*provision of all possible services for country mothers*".

The personal contacts of women and the social occasions which they made of meetings both probably contributed to the spread of NCRM groups in country areas where there was limited social contact. Meetings were held at different homes if possible and combined with the men's groups for Gospel discussion and supper. In 1950 women were encouraged to ask any Catholic lady to join, not just farmers' wives, but "*teachers' wives, nurses, bankers' wives*". In fact, "*the place of women in the movement is just as important as men*". Women were encouraged to join local organisations such as the Country Womens Association and be involved with country services such as the hospital and child health centre. In 1950 they were also charged with spreading of the ideal of "Independent Farming".<sup>48</sup>

One of the most vital needs was said to be provision of home help so that sick or tired women could have the benefit of a holiday but the shortage of domestic help was sheeted home to the attitude of young girls who "*no longer feel that they should do domestic work*".<sup>49</sup> Bishop Henschke<sup>50</sup> was one of the speakers who deplored the unsuitable way in which young girls were educated with little emphasis on their role as a wife and mother. This too was a theme with the women speakers who considered that the education of girls fitted them for a job in the city so a prime objective was the redirection of rural education with more training in sewing and domestic science for "*domestic accomplishments are more necessary than commercial ones*" And so it



... may have been for countless generations, but in post-war Australia and in the western world generally there was a move to educate girls in a similar fashion to boys and to give them skills by which they could obtain work outside the home.

Certainly some of the most bullying comments on the position of women appeared in Rural Life in 1956<sup>51</sup> in a series of articles by the Reverend Joseph O'Dwyer who did ask for readers who disagreed with him to submit their replies. As to marriage, he declared "*it needs for success the twofold basis of masterfulness in a man and submissiveness in a woman*". Women in the country, he continued, were happier than anywhere else because they were in a position of dependence on men. He did agree that a woman could be lonely, especially if "*she does not have enough children to fill her time*". But woe betide the woman if her family joined the drift to the city; "*whenever a family has deserted the land, all too often the cause has been the woman, as in the case of Adam*". No comments were received about his articles, but the very fact that they were printed speaks volumes for the attitudes of those responsible for Rural Life.

The women members of the NCRM continued to exert their influence. By 1959, the speaker on the women's place in NCRM considered that women should attend meetings "*as equal partners, not just as silent servants waiting till it is time to get supper*".<sup>52</sup> The National Executive of the NCRM had a special Women's Committee. Women took an interest in affairs outside the home, even querying<sup>53</sup> how the running of NCRM credit unions affected the moneys going to other Catholic funds such as the Schools Provident Fund. In 1960 a training school for the NCRM was held for both men and women together, a big departure from those earlier days when the sexes were kept in separate groups and only the domestic scene was to be the responsibility of women. In 1959, the Women's Committee was represented on the National Executive by three members<sup>54</sup> The topics addressed by the women speakers at NCRM meetings were focussed on home and community issues although with one exception. That was an internationally well known advocate for environmental concerns, Barbara Ward<sup>55</sup>, who was a member of the well known Catholic publishing family in England and an ardent anti-communist.

Towards the end of the National Catholic Movement, one woman speaker summed up women's contribution as 'those intangible things', but their participation was important in networking and supporting the groups in the initial stages. Later, perhaps because of men moving to join the

National Civic Council, women came to play a more important part in NCRM group organisations.

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## CHAPTER 3 - TWO CENTRAL THEMES:

### 3.1 DECENTRALISATION

### 3.2 INDEPENDENT FARMING

While there was general agreement in post war Australia on the importance of decentralisation as a means of developing Australia and decreasing the spiralling population growth of the state capitals, the map of how to attain this goal was largely uncharted. Decentralisation was part of the policy of all State governments and also of the Commonwealth Ministry of Post War reconstruction. In Australian Catholic social theory, decentralisation was of major importance, because of the social encyclical "*Quadragesimo Anno*", for when "subsidiarity" is adopted as a fundamental principle of social organisation, then authority must be in the hands of small local government.<sup>56</sup> As Auster notes,<sup>57</sup> the question "*Where shall we live?*" was given a religious dimension in Catholic thought in this period.

The planning profession was newly established in Australia in this era and it was imbued with idealism and hopes of building better communities for returned servicemen. Some of its most influential leaders internationally such as Mumford, put forward ideas on importance of the integrated and "holistic" approach to planning and the importance of the concept of the region. Others such as Stapledon (1941) set forth the ideal of small towns in a countryside farmed by small owner occupiers with some members working on the farm while some worked in nearby industry. These ideas had a great impact on NCRM land policies on how the countryside in Australia should be developed and one of the popular NCRM broadcast tapes was that based on Ebenezer Howard's work and entitled "*Garden Cities of England*".<sup>58</sup>

Decentralisation was discussed in a "*symposium on a matter of immense current interest and importance*" by the Australian Institute of Political Science (1948).<sup>59</sup> There were many speakers and decentralisation was considered from three aspects. There could be settlement of migrants and others in rural areas, industries could be dispersed to country areas to increase the opportunities for local employment, and on the administrative side there could be a devolution of centralised powers. The question of practicality was one that could not be avoided, however

desirable it was in social terms to prevent a concentration of Australia's population along a narrow coastal strip. As far as the economic aspects of decentralisation were concerned, Hytten<sup>60</sup> sounded a note of warning in that dispersal of industry throughout Australia would be a reversal of existing economic trends. He emphasised that Australia presented very different problems from those present in an industrialised country. Food processing industries could conveniently be located in the country. Otherwise the best location for any industrial plant would be one where the costs of raw materials, transport and labour could be minimised as Australian industries had to compete with those producers overseas. When Australia began its regional survey program economic development became the primary goal of post war reconstruction. Economic rationality, as Auster has observed, has never been the goal of either community planners or religious organisations.

In the early fifties Australia began a period of industrial growth with the expansion of secondary manufacturing industries. Rural Life often criticised the shift as "*the disaster of our excessive industrialisation*",<sup>61</sup> but as the fifties proceeded the ideal of decentralisation, in all its facets, gradually faded and Australians became a more urban consumer oriented society.

In 1949 the Great Snowy Mountains Project was commenced and the NCRM was keenly interested in the outcomes. Santamaria's address in Rural Life in 1950<sup>62</sup> posed the question as to whether large scale monolithic industries or small industries were to use the power generated, and declared that the policy of the NCRM was that power should be diverted to the Murray and Murrumbidgee Valley rather than Sydney or Melbourne. The Murray Valley Development League represented local organisations and the local government. NCRM members were very active in obtaining representation on the MVDL and worked towards persuading other members towards acceptance of their vision of decentralisation in line with the policy that<sup>63</sup> "*your rural organisations ..... are not only the defensive organisations of those sectional interests, they are the weapons whereby you can have a Christian or unchristian social order*". The influence of NCRM members working through the Murray Valley Development League is claimed as a major factor in preventing the British Overseas Food Corporation from acquiring Murray Downs, a large property in the Murray Valley, which the corporation had wanted for large scale farming.<sup>64</sup> This however was but a small victory in the grand plan.

Great changes were also taking place in the social structure of Australia in the post war period. In 1946 the first fare assisted British migrants began arriving in Australia, with the immigrants required to work for two years according to Government direction. In later years similar agreements were made with the governments of Holland, Italy and other European countries. By 1970 over two and a half million migrants had settled in Australia. It was this combination of water, energy and people which led to the proposals of the NCRM for the settlement of migrants on small farms in the fifties. Even in 1959<sup>65</sup> the same vision was again enthusiastically set out, only this time it was the water resources of Northern Australia and the rice growing potential of 1000 square miles. The migration flow to Australia had slackened by then, but the call in *Rural Life* was for "*a vigorous policy of maximum migration of 300,000 migrants per year*". In earlier years the hope was expressed that with the influx of migrants a new social order could be built, a "*Christian social order based on the small farm, the small industrial unit*". The dream of the migration flow forming Christian communities was a fantasy that was capable of extension. *Social Survey* in 1955<sup>66</sup>, commenting on the Social Justice Statement of 1951 largely written by Santamaria pointed out that it was considered that Australia had a "divine destiny" - that an Australian Christian Commonwealth strengthened by migration would play a major part in the conversion of Asia to Christianity. Evidently the NCRM had been enlightened to "*what Christ had planned*" to an extent comparable with that of the prophets of the Old Testament. Most Australians, whether Catholic or not, who read these calls for mass settlement of migrants could be forgiven for a certain degree of scepticism, if not downright suspicion, for at this time there would have been about a quarter of a million farms in Australia mostly owner occupied and the idea of one million more foreign farmers on the land was a threatening prospect. These settlers were of course seen at first as independent farmers; not just subsistence farmers, but self sufficient where the needs of the farmer and his family were satisfied mostly by the products of the farm and the surplus production could be sold while perhaps additional income could come from handicrafts. Each farm was to be no larger than was necessary to provide for the family and as early as 1949<sup>67</sup> Ted Hennessey outlined this lifestyle in an article in *Rural Life*. This romantic "*back to land*" ideal was to become widely popular in the hippie communes of the sixties. In this earlier version of self sufficiency the small diversified farms would be grouped in co-operatives with other farmers. Not surprisingly this rural visionary proposal was strongly criticised by those outside the NCRM and an editorial in *Rural Life* could state<sup>68</sup> that "*as soon as a type of small scale intensive agriculture is advocated, a hornet's nest of opposition is stirred up in some quarters ... what is the basis of this hostility? More often than not it has a subconscious religious motive*".

This declaration raises a central issue that must be discussed when considering the history of the National Catholic Rural Movement. Were the rural policies of the NCRM opposed because of sectarianism or were they inherently doomed to fail? The group was undoubtedly a religious movement. While there was dissension in the Catholic community over the role of Catholic Action in Australian life, the NCRM was under the direction of the hierarchy and was composed of Catholic priests and laity. It had as its goal the establishment of a Catholic social order in accordance with the principles of the Papal social encyclicals as interpreted by the NCRM secretary and chairman. An examination of two fundamental policies of the NCRM provides some conclusions of interest. The first policy is that of reliance on the small-scale family farm as the basis of Australian agricultural production and the second is the policy of "colonisation" or closer settlement of newly arriving migrants in the Australian countryside.

Professor Samuel Wadham<sup>69</sup> from Melbourne University, a powerful member of the Rural Reconstruction Commission in 1944, could say that *"the past history of the Australian countryside is a tale of disillusionment, telling of the large number of people who have come from the country areas to the city disillusioned owing to loss of money and waste of effort."* Many of the dairy farms in Victoria, he declared, were too small for a decent living to be made and the lives of the women and children on the farm were lives of drudgery, restricted opportunity and poor living standards. In a survey giving only some indication of the position, which he thought was probably worse than shown, only 50-55% of farms in NSW and Victoria had such a basic amenity as a kitchen sink, while very few had any means of heating water in the bathroom. Wadham came from Protestant stock and could be regarded as part of the Melbourne establishment, but had a genuine concern for farmers, especially what may be termed the "battlers", as he had considerable knowledge of the problems of the "soldier settlers" who had been established on the land after World War I. Then the Commonwealth Government had given out loans, fertiliser, land and machinery for nearly 40,000 returned soldiers but the majority of farms had failed despite hard work and the belief, widespread in the 1920s, that farming was more satisfying than any other way of making a living and that it would contribute to the national good. While inadequate care was taken in selecting farms and men with sufficient experience the unpredictability of the Australian climate with droughts and floods also played a part for nearly all the farmers had no capital reserves to survive such times. Indeed, many farmers and their families came close to starvation. Thus, members of the Rural Reconstruction Commission of which Wadham was a member could write of the realities of reconstruction from a basis of familiarity with life in rural Australia which was outside that of the policy makers of the NCRM.

The Commission had an enormous influence on post war planning but were against propping up uneconomic farming industries and encouraged industries on the basis of low costs of production. They were also concerned about soil erosion and depletion and the importance of supplying country people with as many of the amenities of city life as possible, such as water and electricity and the opportunities for education and recreation.

In a lecture in 1946 on necessary principles for agricultural development Wadham noted<sup>70</sup> that all the political ideas which dominated Australian land settlement in the past were based on the assumption that a one man farm was the right objective, but that in Australia small farms were uneconomic from the start and had cost the country millions of pounds in subsidies to prop them up while many farm labourers received only subsistence wages. He congratulated the NCRM on recognising that, although the family farm was their ideal, it could not be a one man farm, but it had to be one which could give employment to at least two and preferably three men working full time and using machinery in co-operation with other farmers. The conclusion of the 1942 Rural Reconstruction statement, he stated, was all important, that is, farming must fit into a commercial system and adapt itself to the economic requirements of that system if it was to survive. In this way, he said, Australia could "*maintain the standard of living of which we are alleged to be so proud*".

The NCRM took a different stand. In 1950, Bishop Henschke<sup>71</sup> at Armidale was sure that the NCRM after ten long years had at last diagnosed "*the nature of the illness*" from which the land was suffering and he said that this conclusion had been reached largely because of the contributions to the discussion made by the farmers themselves. The disease was declared to be "*the menace of Commercial Farming, with its grim heritage of speculation ... and above all, the defeat of the spirit of the rural peoples*". Today we may well consider problems of soil erosion and salinity as a legacy from exploitation of the land, but the policies of the NCRM would probably not have lessened these problems and would have brought additional social problems as well. The editorial of 1951 in Rural Life was firm in the policy position that the NCRM stood for more farms but smaller farms, resulting overall in a greater output of agricultural products.<sup>72</sup> At the NCRM convention<sup>73</sup> in 1952, Colin Clark rejected Wadham's statements as the opinions of a man who had no qualifications as an economist. Clark in 1941<sup>74</sup> had correctly forecast that there would be a world wide demand for Australian meat and grain but was quite incorrect in forecasting a high demand for eggs, dairy products and fruit as the market for such products

shrank in the fifties.<sup>75</sup> Wadham in 1946 had judged that the general prospects for the overseas sale of Australian primary products was good, except perhaps for butter which he thought would be replaced by margarine. Santamaria previously had attacked the 1942 Rural Reconstruction Report in his publication "The Earth Our Mother"<sup>76</sup> and relied heavily on the advice of Colin Clark, as he stated at the 1951 Annual Convention, that for the next 20 years at least prices for primary produce would be high and therefore it was safe to encourage greater agricultural production and also diversified farming. In 1940 the Catholic Truth Society published the manifesto of the NCRM with a cover showing a farmer ploughing his field in the traditional manner, plodding along beside a horse and plough. In post war Australia, another tide of change was to make this picture seem out of date and irrelevant to Australian agriculture.

The impact of new technology made a revolutionary change to Australian agricultural practices and to the lifestyles of Australian farmers. New machinery such as tractors, milking machines and hay balers soon found a place on most Australian farms. The introduction of electricity and telephone lines to many rural areas lessened the isolation and improved living conditions. New techniques and methods in farming such as improved pastures, the use of fertilisers and new seed lines also helped to increase agricultural production by 50% during the 1950's.<sup>77</sup> The drift of rural population to the cities continued, in 1933 47% of the Australian population lived in capital cities. By 1961 the figure had risen to 56%. Capital investment in mechanisation had decreased the need for labour. The policy of small scale farming, as advocated by the NCRM, looked back to the past and to the old European way of farming. Except for some areas, Australia posed very different challenges to primary producers such as the seasonal effects of drought and flood and the large acreages often necessary to make a property viable. Although most farms in Australia were still owned by the one family, economically, except for some hobby farms, farming in Australia became a commercial enterprise. The criticism of the NCRM policy of agriculture in Australia being based on small, intensive and diversified farms just able to support a family appears to be fairly based on a knowledge of Australian conditions and the likely developments in primary production. The claim that criticism was motivated by a sectarian bias does not appear to be substantiated.

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<sup>56</sup> Social Survey : The Underlying Christian Social Principle, Vol 4., No. 6, June 1955, p.15.

<sup>57</sup> Auster, M., Making the Earth Like Heaven : Christian and Secular Professional Attitudes to Australian Land Settlement, The Journal of Religious History, Vol. 16, No. 3, 1991, p.305-314.

<sup>58</sup> File, 1941-1963, Melbourne.



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## **CHAPTER 4**

### **LAND SETTLEMENT SCHEMES:**

#### **THE ATTEMPT IN TASMANIA**

In the resolutions passed by delegates attending the Conference in Albury in 1953<sup>78</sup>, Australia's primary duty was declared to be the production of as much food as possible, and it was proposed that the agricultural economy should be organised for maximum production. This may seem an encouragement to commercial farming, but the NCRM still held firmly to the concept of the small family farm. While this inconsistency appears perplexing, there is no doubt that the emphasis was changing to land settlement schemes for which it was proposed State and Federal governments should make grants of suitable land and guarantee loans made to projects by outside bodies.

In the development of Australia, the idea of land settlement in the form of planned colonies had often been proposed, usually as a British policy with British migrants, such as the "Million Farms" campaign of Carruthers in NSW in the 1920's. Even in 1950, there had been such post war proposals as the relocation of parts of Britain's industrial population to undeveloped areas in Australia.<sup>79</sup> In the post war period, although great numbers of European migrants were entering Australia yet the unemployment figures remained low. Santamaria<sup>80</sup> in his autobiography notes that the NCRM, while he was secretary, had attempted to initiate migrant land settlement schemes in Victoria and Tasmania as Italian and Dutch authorities had committed themselves to making loan capital available. In 1952 Santamaria in a letter to Mannix was highly optimistic about prospects for land settlement schemes<sup>81</sup> and noted that for the first time since the Reformation in the Anglo Saxon world, a government would actually carry out a Catholic social policy. He had approached various State Governments around this time for grants of land.

The State of Tasmania is the most decentralised of all the Australian states with the greatest number of persons living in rural areas. In 1953, under the Cosgrove government there were a number of administrative bodies such as the Tasmanian Closer 'Settlement Board and the Agricultural Bank dealing with land settlement. Cosgrove, himself a Catholic, had written that

"the state urgently needs more farmland and persons willing to clear and develop it". The Commonwealth government had financed a settlement scheme for returned soldiers and as 239 applicants had been settled on various farms these state authorities had developed a considerable expertise. It was late in 1952 that Cosgrove<sup>82</sup> received a letter from Santamaria to the effect that an Italian migration official was to visit Tasmania in 1953, requesting the Government assistance in his visit. It also invited "*yourself, Vince (Gair) and Joe*" (E.J. Riordan, Minister for Lands and Immigration in Queensland) to meet at the close of the Premiers' conference in Sydney. The conference was actually held in Canberra on the 19th January 1953 after the Italian official, accompanied by the Italian consul, had visited the state and received a report on "Mussel Roe", land available for settlement. The laconic report is breathtaking in scope. For 30,000 pounds is offered a great tract of country on the north east coast of Tasmania, down the whole course of the Great Mussel Roe River to Ansons Bay, a square block 33 kilometres long by nearly 30 kilometres wide, some freehold but mostly Crown leasehold. For nearly a century the land had been used as grazing country "*under indifferent easy going management*", but it was considered suitable as a long range development scheme, with the climate being agreeable for a wide range of animals and pasture plants. The extensive report dealt quite comprehensively with land use and management, including water supply and use of fertilisers, to give an overall cost of development for initial pasture establishment. The blocks, after development, would be large, perhaps 5 to 10,000 acres each, continued the report. This type of development was not in accord with the idea of small holdings, intensively managed, which was the NCRM vision of the family farm, indeed migrants from peasant type forms of agriculture would probably be daunted by acres of eucalypts! So it is not surprising that this offer was not taken up, and 'Mussel Roe' was then offered to a British developer who, however, wanted the crown land to be converted to freehold for his British settlers.

During 1953 negotiations were carried out between the Labor Government of Victoria, Santamaria and members of the Victorian branch of the ALP.<sup>83</sup> An amendment to the Land Bill was proposed so that Crown land could be available for closer settlement by private persons or organisations if it was not required for soldier settlement. This land could be made available to the National Catholic Rural Movement to enable the settlement of Italians with foreign capital on Crown lands in Victoria. In Cabinet, the Lands Minister, Mr Holt, was said to oppose this on the principle that communities of peasant farmers could be set up and so the working conditions of rural workers might be undermined. Mr Holt subsequently resigned in December 1953 but details were not released publicly until after October 1954.

Early in January 1954 from an address, 252 Swanston Street, Santamaria wrote to Cosgrove,<sup>84</sup> thanking him for supplying the costs of Soldier Settlement and proposing that an independent registered company should be the authority carrying out the land settlement scheme even though the Italians wanted to lend their money through Land Settlement Boards in conjunction with Italian technical advisers. This line of action, considered Santamaria, could lead to definite political complications, for Australians would expect governmental agencies to help Australians. Furthermore he would like to have an independent registered company established, a permanent organisation that would not be affected by changes in public opinion or by changes in government. Also enclosed was a policy statement on land settlement, colonisation and migration which contained the extraordinary statement:

*"Our contribution to public affairs in Australia is commonly condemned both inside and outside our own ranks as being -*

*(a) merely the effort of entirely negative anti-Communists who having obtained industrial and political influence and responsibility, have no constructive attitudes to national problems.*

*(b) merely a selfish endeavour to win sectional privileges for our own social group.*

*The Colonisation Project was first advanced at these meetings as the most definite action we could undertake to disprove both contentions. If carried out successfully it would simultaneously provide the economic basis for increased migration, increased food production and national development. It would be the greatest constructive task on which we could embark in the various States and furnish a concrete basis to whatever claim we may make to national responsibility.*

This settlement was described as one where there would be a central township where industries for processing the products of the area would be located. Then there would be a ring of small three or four-acre blocks on which would live either industrial or agricultural workers. These people would provide a seasonal labour force. Further out would be full-time farms "which should be based on the European pattern of family farming, diversification and intense culture." It was noted that the size of the farm would depend on the characteristics of the region, but it would be relatively small so that each settler would have a minimum outlay of capital.

In the outlines of the proposal which followed it was proposed that a Co-operative Settlement should acquire and develop land and that this body should be sponsored by the National Catholic Rural Movement but be legally separate. Training in the law is always useful! The co-operative

society was to have first option on any farm to be sold so that there could be no extensive property holdings. The settlement was not meant to be totally agricultural, totally of foreign extraction or totally Catholic in composition. The basis of the settlement was to be the production of agricultural produce because

- "(i) *Developing shortages in primary production for local consumption;*
- (ii) *The probable extension of industrial unemployment through the exhaustion of our overseas balances and our consequent inability to import necessary raw materials;*
- (iii) *The favourable situation of the overseas market for primary products over the next twenty years;*
- (iv) *Australia's commitment to Asia under the Colombo Plan."*

The policy document declared that these statements were based on facts so well known that they need not be reiterated and that these considerations provided a reasonable basis of argument for agricultural settlements against that viewpoint which had concluded that for every million in the growth of Australia's population only 23,000 farmers would be needed. Finally it was emphasised that the settlement should be controlled by a voluntary organisation which would include representatives of the settlers.

This archival material is of particular interest because it underlines several important points. The NCRM under the chairmanship of Dr Henschke was undoubtedly a form of Catholic Action. The Catholic Social Studies Movement or the "Movement" was later to be defended as a lay organisation. Yet the documents show the overlapping roles of the two organisations and how closely they were intertwined. This is not just because the documents came from a common address or indeed from an author involved in both groups but because of the congruence of policy objectives. The colonisation project or land settlement scheme of the NCRM was projected as the prime objective of the "Movement" for this was the group that had obtained political and industrial power and was trying to prove that it was more than just negatively anticommunist. As Ormonde notes<sup>85</sup>, the issue of whether the "Movement" was Catholic Action was a crucial matter for Australian Catholics at the time and indeed brought into focus the age-

old debate about the separate jurisdictions of Church and State. Catholic Action groups, according to Pope Pius XI, were not allowed to take part in politics. Yet these documents provide evidence that the two groups were working as one unit to achieve the goal of settling migrants on rural land holdings.

The policy document also clearly shows the influence of the opinions and forecasts of Colin Clark which are presented as unassailable facts on which to make Governmental decisions. The outline of the plan of the settlement was clearly derived from the ideal of current English theorists. If a localised workforce had been produced to provide relatively unskilled labour on the farm or in the factory as needed, these workers would have been very vulnerable to periods of unemployment and low wages. The voluntary organisation or independent registered company acting co-operatively with Government authorities appears to resemble the "powerful social unit" between the individual and state as proposed on the ideal Catholic social order, but it is a matter of concern that hope was expressed that the organisation was to be so independent of government action or public opinion. Finally, the migrants intake was to be cosmopolitan in ethnic origin according to the policy document. Yet the accompanying letter states that it was the Italian Government which was to provide finance for the migrant farmers. This suggests that there was a rather flimsy effort being made to deter criticism of the scheme on the basis of ethnic blocs.

In reply to the letter Cosgrove suggested that at Marrawah on the North West Coast land could be purchased and cleared for 19 pounds an acre and that quite a lot of land was available. A small settlement of ten to twelve was suggested and settlers, provided they held freehold of their land, could make application to the Agricultural Bank for loans. The Minister for Agriculture supplied the details of a minimum of 29,000 acres in the high country near Preolenna that was very suitable for farming. In March 1954, during a continuation of correspondence, proposals by the Italian Consul-General were put forward for the scheme. The area required was 5000 acres, an Italian bank ICLE would advance 2500 pounds to a maximum of 3500 pounds per family, twelve cows per family would be necessary, and fifty farms were being planned.

Almost immediately the warning bells begin to sound. The Office for Tourism and Immigration noted that migrant settlement should clearly be shown as only part of a general settlement scheme or public reaction would be unfavourable. The fear that these foreigners might

congregate in tight enclaves was obviously very close to the surface. The other fear was one that had been an issue in the Labor party since the use of Kanaka workers in Queensland and Chinese in Victoria - the threat to Australian living standards. Tasmania may well have been one of the poorest Australian States but there was no way in which it would tolerate the spectre of introducing subsistence farmers battling against poverty.

The Tasmanian Government was obviously concerned about these issues but continued to be co-operative and there appeared to be a close relationship between Santamaria and Premier Cosgrove. But then as in all schemes came the most concrete of stumbling blocks - money. An Italian Bank identified by the acronym I.C.L.E. was to be the financier of these new settlers. Earlier a somewhat petulant note from Santamaria to Cosgrove had complained that the Italian representative, the Labor Attache Dr Maselli, had not been co-operative and had been negative about the project. Santamaria cited "*sectarian reasons, strangely enough*" for this lack of co-operation and had suggested that the role of the Italian legation should be diplomatic while an organisation such as the National Catholic Movement should be the negotiating body with the Government. Perhaps there were internal problems but as far as the Agricultural Bank was concerned, any agreement with I.C.L.E. was to be treated as just a normal commercial transaction. In accordance with state law the Agricultural Bank would treat the prospective settler just as any other individual applicant but it must have a first mortgage over those items for which it was to provide finance. Also the Bank would grant assistance only where the property was capable of providing the farmer and his family with a reasonable standard of living "*measured by Australian standards*". It was noted that it was doubtful whether a reasonable standard of living could be derived from twelve cows and it was considered that the total herd of 600 milking cows would not be easy to obtain. As well it was noted that local conditions could require a period of apprenticeship for the settler.

A copy of these comments from the Agricultural Bank was taken by Cosgrove in June to show Santamaria, who suggested a rather dubious scheme where two titles could be given on a farm, one for the house and one acre and one for the remaining acreage. In this way both the Agricultural Bank and I.C.L.E could hold a first mortgage. If it came to a sale, of course, neither piece of the whole would be as valuable as if they were sold as one unit.

A very detailed analysis was done by the Closer Settlement Board in conjunction with the Agricultural Bank on the costs and economics of a family settling on a farm. Two separate calculations were done and living expenses of 400 pounds per year were included. While this may seem generous, the farmer had to find mortgage repayments and rates as well as other necessary expenditures. There was a calculation of the income to be expected from cows and an intensive horticulture crop such as potatoes. It was concluded that a farm should be about 100-130 acres in size with a minimum of 80-90 acres of arable land. As to the cows, 12 was not enough. There needed to be at least thirty in the herd, 20 cows, 4 heifers, 5 calves and one bull. The total cost of the farm and its establishment was set at 8097 pounds. Mr W.E. Crowe, the Assistant Secretary of the NCRM, and Dr Maselli, came to Hobart in July for a meeting with the Agricultural Bank Board. Dr Maselli was the representative for the bank ICLE and made it clear that the cost of settlement per individual farmer was too high as 5083 pounds was the maximum he could approve per farm even with the involvement of the Agricultural Bank.

In a letter to Cosgrove from Mr Crowe on the 4 October 1954 concerning the July meeting, the Agricultural Bank officials were criticised for their attitude in that they considered that placing migrants on existing farms was preferable to land settlement, that they did not favour communal use of equipment, that they would not depart from existing practice and that *"the question of creating racial blocs - a political matter - was influencing their judgement"*. Finally, a Government cover letter states that the finance suggested by Dr Maselli was *"underestimated and impracticable and that this conclusion was accepted by all concerned when the estimates drawn by the Director of Land Settlement were considered"*. Mr Crowe wrote in December 1954 *"financially the colonisation project in Tasmania has passed beyond the bounds of practicality"* and that was the end of negotiations.

Of course, the NCRM, together with the Industrial Groupers, was regarded very circumspectly in the Labor Party after the October crisis of 1954 and indeed the Tasmanian Government files were held over during this period, but this factor did not have a direct bearing on the failure of the plan. The land settlement scheme failed because of mundane but ultimately directive realities. Early in Australian history pioneer families had struggled under the poorest of conditions but in the 1950's Australia's standard of living was said to be the highest in the world and, as Wadham had mentioned, was a source of national pride. It may seem laughable that there was dissension over the number of cows each farmer was to own, but this herd was to be the source of income



for a family and determine whether or not they would live in poverty. The gap between the amount of money the Italian bank was prepared to underwrite and the amount that the Tasmanian Land Settlement Authority considered was necessary to settle a farmer was unbridgeable. The accusation appears valid that there was an underlying fear in Government circles of creating racial blocs in the Tasmanian countryside and of the public reaction to such blocs, but the whole attempt to settle migrants on small acreages in Tasmania stands as an example of armchair theory meeting the real world.

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78 File 1941-1963, Resolutions passed by the Delegates at Albury NCRM Convention 1953.  
79 Auster, M., *Making the Earth Like Heaven*, p.305.  
80 Santamaria, B.A., *Against the Tide*, p.49.  
81 Campion, E., *Australian Catholics*, p.167.  
82 Premier's and Chief Secretary's Department Records. Tasmanian Archives. Volume 6, PCS 1/197 28-43, 1953.  
83 Murray, R., *The Split*, p.97-99.  
84 Ibid, Volume 6, pc51/233 25/4-29, 1954.  
85 Ormond, P., *The Movement*, p.120-137.

## OVERVIEW : CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Bishop Henschke announced in 1966 that although he hoped for "*a second spring*", meetings were becoming too great a burden for busy country priests and the National Catholic Rural Movement went into recess<sup>86</sup> Earlier the Bishops had stated that "*the success of the Rural Movement is the condition of the success of all Catholic Action. The failure of the Rural Movement would mean the ultimate failure of Catholic Action whatever might be the local success gained in other fields.*"<sup>87</sup> This prediction was coming true.

Membership of the NCRM had peaked in 1950 and then dwindled away despite the attitude of many country priests who encouraged their parishioners to join groups and despite the attempts to recruit members who were not actually living on the land but rather working in country towns. B.A. Santamaria was of course secretary of the NCRM as well as leader of the "Movement" and the National Director of Catholic Action and this association probably caused a loss of membership, both of those who joined the new National Civic Council and those who wanted to disentangle themselves from the network of conflicting religious and political loyalties after the Labor Split.

There were, however, inherent weaknesses in the assumptions on which the NCRM social policies were based. Criticism, soundly based, was made of the theory that small heavily labour-intensive marginal farms were the best way to boost Australia's agricultural production and to manage the land. As the fifties proceeded, the concept became more and more untenable as technological change altered farming practices. Colonisation or land settlement schemes provoked distrust and the suspicion that immigrant enclaves might be set up where the standard of living would be very much poorer than that found in the Australian community as a whole. Attempts to establish such land settlement schemes then failed, as in the example in Tasmania, when they met the realities involved in gaining Government approvals and the economics of implementation. Even that hoped for increase in population numbers was under threat as Australian Catholic women made choices according to their conscience and personal situation.

That vision, derived from Catholic Action principles of an Australian Christian Eden based on a new social order was illusory, a dream of young and imaginative theorists, for post war Australia was not just a passive context in which this dream world could be created but a vigorous complex pluralistic society undergoing a remarkable period of change and technological advance. Native born Australian Catholics had recently been united with the rest of the community in the struggles of World War II and many of the men and some of the women had served in the armed forces. The Australian Catholic population shared many of the cultural values held by other Australians of their age and class. Thus Australian Catholics were likely to believe in social justice, summed up as a "fair go", have a tendency towards individualism and to hope that most of their countrymen could enjoy an Australian standard of living. New incoming European migrants may have had different values but their arrival was too recent to make any impact on cultural norms. The great rallying cry of the French Revolution translated as "Liberty, Fraternity and Equality" would express, rather grandly, the values held by most of the Australian population, including Catholics, in the post war period.

It was otherwise for the authors of the principles underlying Catholic Action. "A Manual of Catholic Action", the authoritative text, could state that<sup>88</sup> *"Liberalism, child of that bloody mother, the French Revolution and grandchild of rationalist Protestantism, broke up the framework of the Christian civitas, that glory of bygone days, by proclaiming religion to be but a private affair."*

Catholic Action sought to incorporate religion into every aspect of daily life, an approach that would justify the worst suspicions of those non-Catholics who feared the power of the Church of Rome. The failure of Catholic Action to secure the loyalties of the majority of Australian Catholics demonstrated that the Catholic Church is not monolithic and that there are divergent Catholic viewpoints among hierarchy and laity. With the failure of the National Catholic Movement, therefore, Catholic Action also failed, and religion has remained the private affair of the person concerned. Australian Catholics as a whole have gained as sectarianism and suspicion have been reduced and the right of the individual conscience has been acknowledged.

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<sup>86</sup> File 1941-1963, Bendigo Advertiser, 1966. St Thomas More Centre, Melbourne.

<sup>87</sup> Truman, T., Catholic Action and Politics (Melbourne 1959), p.82.

<sup>88</sup> Givardi, L., A Manual of Catholic Action, p.107.

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