route, he throws a flood of light on what Catholic tradition really is, and lands passing but heavy blows on Newman's account of the faculty of conscience, (McCabe did not believe we had a separate faculty describable as a 'conscience') and, by way of contrast, on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*'s account of authority in morals. These essays perfectly embody his distinctive brand of fearless intellectual iconoclasm pursued from rootedness in a deeply Catholic tradition . His editor Brian Davies has done us all a huge service in getting these inimitable essays and sermons into print. More please.

EAMON DUFFY

RABBIT PROOF FENCE

Rabbit Proof Fence is a stunning movie both for Christopher Doyle's photography which plays lovingly over the brooding landscape of Outback Australia and for Peter Gabriel's sound track which follows the human emotions and the evokes Dreaming themes of the story. The movie is about the forced removal of three young mixed-race Aboriginal girls from their tribal family in accordance with the policy of the Australian state governments in 1920's, '30's, '40's and beyond. The forced removal of aboriginal children from their parents is a complex problem, but the Director (Phillip Noyce) following the screenplay of (Christine Olsen) wisely refused to get involved with side issues and focused squarely on the essential issue — the trauma of separation of children from parents and the yearning of the children to get back to their parents and live once again in their home community. By sticking to basic story of Molly, Gracie and Daisy walking a thousand miles and more to get back home while eluding the police sent out to catch them, Noyce allows the movie gains strength and universality.

In the opening scenes we are given first hand experience of the government's policy as we watch three young mixed-race aboriginal girls, Molly (Evelyn Sampi), Gracie (Laura Monaghan) and Daisy (Tianna Sansbury), two sisters and a cousin, being dragged away from their mothers and grandmothers. Significantly, there are no aboriginal men in this scene or much in evidence in any scene. Why? The girls' fathers were white men and long gone. The abduction scene is short, but violent. The girls (8 to 14 years old) are weeping, screaming, kicking and resisting, their maternal parents helpless as the girls are packed into a motor car by white policemen coming from the distant city of Perth. White male station hands and workers building the *Rabbit Proof Fence* stand passively by allowing Western Australian law to take its course. The time and place is 1931 at Jigalong, W.A.

When the girls are driven away the women return to their bush camp, defeated. Each huddle in their blanket and begin making that aboriginal keening cry associated with death. One woman elder repeatedly hits her head with a rock as is typically done at funerals. Incidental touches like this one which pepper the movie, actions so

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genuine and true, give Noyce's direction the stamp of validity. After their capture, Molly, Gracie and Daisy are taken by auto and by train, caged up in its baggage car, to Moore River Station 1500 miles (2000 kms) to the north. They arrive at the Station at night to be greeted, not unkindly, by a nurse in an impeccable white costume (we might think of an Anglican or a Catholic Sister), and are sent off to the bed in the girls dormitory. The process of removing aboriginal identity begins the next day. The girls are awakened by bells, given a "white breakfast" to eat, uniform clothes to wear, told to recite simple prayers at meals like the white folks do, are ordered to speak only English, and on Sundays sent to the small Station church to sing white English hymns. At Moore River girls are routinely told they have no mothers, and so have no relatives or fathers they might contact if they tried. What they have is each other as they are made over into mixed race, *dormitory girls*. The white staff show a relentless kindness of that impersonal maddening sort common to administrators. The girls are scrubbed and cleaned, counted and watched over. They are taught the new language they must learn, *Yes, Miss Jessop, Thank you Miss Jessop*, and are told that *responsibility* and *service* will be their watchwords now. The friendliness of the staff is like fool's gold and is filled with *humbug*. After one session with them Molly says they *make her sick* and she wants to go home to her country and to her mother, a mother she knows *he has* whatever they say. She has a dream of home and decides to run away. By now the girls have already learned that running away from Moore River is regarded as a wicked thing to do and will be punished severely —an isolation booth, cutting off of hair and a strap will be used. A staff member, a fearsome looking aboriginal tracker named Moodoo, will hunt them down.

The rest of the movie consists in a battle of wits between three young girls scrambling to get home and a bureaucracy centred in Perth determined to prevent them from doing so. Molly, the leader, brings Daisy the infant along and persuades a somewhat reluctant Gracie to go, too. The government has on its side the tracker, Moodoo, numerous police, detailed maps of the countryside, the telephone and telegraph and the newspapers —all the levers of bureaucracy; on their side, Molly and the girls have native skill in reading the country, tenacity in walking and the half-sympathetic support of Australian bush folks who will give three harmless waifs a half-helping hand. The screenplay captures the language of the bush which is normally spare, laconic and laced with meanings that are only half expressed. The Director, Noyce pans the camera over black, white and coloured faces which allows us to know something of what the people are thinking, but not everything. The Bush is a mysterious place. As the weeks pass and the girls struggle walking south relationships subtly change. Moodoo, the tracker begins to admire Molly as a clever girl. The authorities in Perth become increasingly exasperated and try to explain to each other how much they are really trying to help all these mixed race girls in their charge. They are responsible, they say, for saving them from themselves even when they

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are unwilling. Why won't their charges learn that Moore River Station is a place of advancement, of re-education for them?

The removal policy was carried out by the *state* governments of Australia, and differed slightly from place to place (the national government was forbidden by the Constitution of Australia at that time from legislating on Aboriginal affairs), but the intention and affect were the same -separate light skinned aboriginals from their families and take them from the Bush. At the head of the bureaucracy stands the *Chief Protector* of all aboriginal people in Western Australia, A.O. Neville, (played convincingly by Kenneth Branagh). He is presented as the well intentioned, stubborn, insensitive bureaucrat who reveals, unwittingly, the large measure of simple self interest that lay beneath the government policy. In a chilling slide lecture to a group of his white middle class women supporters he explains calmly what must be done for persons of mixed race. Bluntly put, blackness must be bred out of them. If unregulated interracial marriages are allowed a new third race will be generated, but, he notes warmly, if a mixed race person marries a white then that child will be only a quarter black, and if again, that person marries a white all trace of aboriginal blood will disappear. It his task as Chief Protector to control all marriages between the races (very few legal marriages were ever allowed) and to facilitate whitening process. All mixed race children, especially those of lighter colour, will be removed from parents and from tribal contacts to enable them to advance in status, even *despite themselves*. Neville is proud to say that he follows precisely what the law intends.

The flight of the three girls and their successful return to their Dreaming land and reunion their mothers (even if it is only of a brief duration) is a victory for humanity, for kindness and for recognition of very basic human rights. The movie is entertaining, uplifting and not *preachy*. It teaches us the lesson we need to learn and relearn —love in a family is ultimately a more important value than social engineering. It does this in a very human way and all the more powerfully when we remember that the screenplay is based on a book by Doris Pilkington Garimara that tells a family story which happens to be *true*! At the end of the movie we actually get to see two of women who had run away along the Fence.

The Australian removal policy which led to what is called the *stolen generations* is a complex problem. Beside the supposed *high mindedness* of government policy to advance aboriginal people lay much self interest and humbug. Whitening was at bottom a policy of racial removal. But what of the mixed race persons already alive? In one scene the Protector thanks an audience of middle class women for employing his mixed race charges as maids, domestics, menials, farm workers, etc. Well they might hire them as a easy source of cheap labour. Moore River and the Stations like them gave only limited education, enough to allow mixed race children to grow up to serve and perform the undemanding tasks of a servant class. Whether the likes of Neville quite understood

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this or not, they were producing a servant class for the entrepreneurial to make use of. No quality education was given to these girls since no better future was ever envisaged for them.

Yet not all was bad at Moore River. At first Gracie, the middle child, says that she does not want to run away, *I like it here*. There were some things to like even at Moore River. There was food, a bed, a structured life, a staff with a spark of love for them. Discipline was clear and enforced. There was at least the appearance of safety in the dormitory. *Dormitory girls* did not have to marry early nor marry if they not wish to. They were also protected from sexual predators who would abuse them. This movie does not enter into the question of sexual abuse of aboriginal children or adults which is just as well because that evil would have distracted us from the main purpose here which was to show the heartbreak and evil of removing children from parents for purposes of social engineering. This is not to say that there was never sexual abuse or exploitation of girls or boys at places like Moore River, but mixed race children were at risk in some traditional communities, too. While it is a matter of obvious fact that white men entered into relations with aboriginal women (the existence of a mixed race population demonstrates that), their mixed race children were not always treated well in fully aboriginal communities. Removal of mixed and yella skinned children sometimes was truly required because children were living in situations open to physical and sexual abuse. Mixed race children were not always wanted in black communities. Unmarried Macassin pearlers had been on the north coast of Australia for two to three hundred years, and yet no mixed race population was to be found there. In some cases, a few cases at least, removal was not simply on the initiative of roaming agents from the Aboriginal Protectors office. White fathers sometimes assigned their children to mixed race educational institutions because they simply did not want them to be raised in the Bush. Perhaps they should have, but they frequently did not do more because they were usually unable to legally marry the child's aboriginal mother.

The remarks of the preceding paragraph may seem to soften and even generate some justification for the old removal policy. They really do not. They only show that as with most moral issues along with the black and white some shades of grey can be found. The shades of grey here show that not everyone involved was equally guilty, but the black and white remains for them all. The *stolen generations* are a reality flowing from a basically mistaken and insensitive policy. But the outback of Australian is not the only place. Outside We also need to keep in mind that outside Australia re-education schemes involving separation from parents was also government policy. The United States, Canada come more immediately to mind but there were others as well. *Rabbit Proof Fence* is a success with three or four or whatever number of stars a really good movie deserves.

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