

RE215

G.Madden

Second Assignment Due 27th May

"Protestant - Roman Catholic relationships were marked
by deep antagonism until the 1960's." Discuss this
claim with respect to Australia.

Approx. 3000 words.

The overwhelming tide of suspicion, invective and abuse that marks Catholic - Protestant relations until recent Australian history can obscure the surprisingly frequent occurrences of co-operation and friendship between the adherents of the creeds. While issues like education, marriage, conscription, British foreign policy and the like generated sectarian abuse especially from the leading clergy, at the level of local communities, the possibilities for a new start in such relationships in a new country were sometimes realised. Overall, however, these opportunities were stymied and the violence of the attacks in print and word would likely have had a grislier outcome if not for the good sense of most Australians not to take clergymen too seriously. ✓!

The history of the relationship between Protestants and Roman Catholics in Australia is a confusing mixture of episodes of remarkable co-operation and toleration interspersed amongst dreadful sectarian bitterness. The opportunity which was providentially provided of a post-enlightenment western nation starting from scratch was destroyed by the importation of tired old disputes from overseas. The failure to grasp this chance was disruptive but not catastrophic to our nation, only because of the tendency right from the establishment of the first settlement in New South Wales for much of the population to view religion as of secondary importance, with the leaven of indifference saving Australia from the total real violence and damage to society our religious leaders seemed to be determined to visit upon this nation.

To discuss the claim that there were deep antagonisms in Roman Catholic - Protestant relationships until the Nineteen-sixties, I will first outline the evidence that there were times and circumstances in Australian history when the opportunity for dialogue and co-operation the new land provided was taken up and the suspicions fostered by old conflicts disregarded. Having noted the exceptions to sectarian conflict, the issues over which the Churches managed to waste enormous effort attacking each other will be explored. The factors by which, perhaps more by accident than any firm commitment by the community, these difficulties were not the cause of massacre, revolution and significant bloodshed will allow an appraisal of the depth of the impact of sectarian conflicts on Australian society.

That deep antagonism has not always been the norm in Australian Catholic - Protestant relations can be demonstrated from very early in the history of the colony:

Possessed as I am of your Lordship's liberal sentiments on this head, and not doubting Mr. Dixon's professions ... I have allowed him to exercise his clerical functions once a month, under stipulated restrictions. As there is no other Catholic Priest, I am hopeful much good, or at least no harm, will result from it. (1)

Governor King's concession in 1803 to allow a convict to perform his vocation as a priest with the support of his superiors in England is an extraordinary example of the very early effect of the unusual conditions found in the colony on the Governor's attitude to the Catholic question. Notwithstanding that this privilege was quashed as soon as the Castle Hill riots involving a broad range of convicts were blamed on Catholics alone, (2) it is noteworthy that years prior to toleration in England, and in an English

gaol no less, New South Wales was experiencing not only toleration but official patronage of Catholic Clergy.

When emancipation came in 1829, the official standing of the Catholic Church was further improved by its adherents occupying important public service positions.(3) Much to the annoyance of the Anglican hierarchy, but with no dissent from the government, Australia became the site of an ecclesiastical province in 1842 and Dr. Polding could even be described by the Times of London as "Archbishop of Sydney" (4)

The toleration of the expanding Catholic influence from the Protestant government was surpassed in astonishing ways by lay Protestants in Sydney contributing generously to the construction of St. Mary's Cathedral. (5) J.T.Campbell, a Protestant, acted as treasurer for this cause (6) and it was Macquarie who laid the foundation stone, presumably in the absence of the local Bishop from Mauritius. Similar Protestant

support assisted for Melbourne's Cathedral, St. Patrick's. (7)

That Governor Bourke could see the previous policy of State aid to Churches going almost exclusively to the Anglicans as being "of so unequal an amount that ... cannot be supposed to be generally acceptable to the colonists," (8) again shows that colonial government was sensitive to the differences the new country presented and could do what would have been unthinkable in England to promote the interests of stability in New South Wales.

Social issues proved to be notorious fermenters of sectarian angst, but did at times show a less divisive face. St. Vincent's hospital, while a Catholic institution, treated many Protestants and was the site of an extraordinary revolt by lay Catholics against insensitive treatment of Protestants by a Catholic Chaplain in the mid nineteenth century. A Priest had removed a Protestant Bible from the hospital and a group

of prominent lay Catholics defied their Bishop, Polding, to oppose this action. Noel Nairn sees this as the work of an intellectual lay "ginger group" determined to keep the Catholic Church from departing too far from general society. (9) Carolyn Chisholm's efforts for emigrant women provided shelter for women of any creed. She managed in the face of considerable hostility to stay "at the same time wholly above and beyond sectarianism and sectional issues." (10) Education was not enough a divisive issue to prevent convent schools being popular with Protestants (11,12) and Catholics going to State schools to such an extent that threats were needed from the clergy to prevent the practice. (13) The extent to which the perceived injustice of no State aid to Catholic schools dominated debate on the issue for nearly a century, can obscure the confused beginning to the issue in which Anglicans supported denominational schools and Catholic elements were more

in tune with early moves towards a national school system. (14)

The difficulties the Churches faced away from the major centres fostered a commonality of interest. The bush parsons of the late nineteenth century found the people had taken what they could get. The Anglican Bush Bretheren found the legacy of this situation:

I'm worried about me kids. It's a proper mess. When me first was born we was livin' out back o' Cobar and no parson come round except the Wesleen, so he done her. After that I never saw no one for years till the Cathlick priest turned up and he done me second. Then we shifted out onto the Paroo and had Billy, but no one was comin' round except the Pressie, so he done Billy. Then we shifted down Forbes way and the archdeacon used to call and he done Tommy and Vera. Lord 'elp us, Rev'rend; how are we goin' to bring 'em all up in their different religions? (15)

In the bush a religious service would likely be attended by all the locals irrespective of the allegiances, and often in a Church built by subscription of the whole community and shared by all denominations.(16)

These examples of the sectarian nature of Australian Church history being overcome show a distinct tendency in that they are local, lay and practical in focus. Frequently the leading clergy, which were largely imported and inconsistently practical, opened wounds that the Australian circumstance had begun to heal. A service in Young in 1894 by the Redemptorists illustrates the point well. In a community in which the whole population had contributed to the Catholic church, school, hall and presbytery; and with the whole town Protestant and Catholic assembled to hear one of the Redemptorist preachers, Dominic Mangan CSsR:

He warned Catholics that they must not send their children to the state school, else they would be denied absolution in the confessional. He warned against religiously mixed marriages. With stunning sarcasm he dismissed the claims of other churches, Anglican, Presbyterian or Methodist. (17)

Such ill starred actions by Catholic and Protestant clergy alike made certain sectarian rivalry would often swamp the positive moves for unity of purpose in the Church until recent decades.

The sectarian problem in Australia began with Catholic against a largely Anglican establishment, and proceeded to become more heated later in the nineteenth century when the rivalries in Ireland were reproduced with ultra protestant groups attacking the perceived Romish menace.

The convict beginnings of Australia began the confrontation between Catholic and Protestant in a distinctive and most unequal way:

To the Protestant ascendancy of penal Australia - comprising the governors, the officers, the administrators, the leading churchmen and citizens - there were two essential conditions of civilisation: the Protestant religion and British political and social institutions. On both counts the Irish were barbarians. (18)

At best, the Catholic Irish convicts were one third political and two thirds petty criminals. (19)

Understandably their gaolers regarded them as potential rebels and religion was a possible rallying point for such trouble and as such needed to be rigorously

controlled. The speed with which Dixon's public ministry was [?] ceased indicates the sensitivity involved.

The O'Flynn affair cemented in Catholic folklore the plight of the priestless community stripped of the man sent by the Pope to assist them. This could for the Catholic community be seen as the way authority had always dealt with them when, in later conflicts, their efforts were being thwarted. That Macquarie's assessment of the man that he was a "meddling, ignorant, dangerous character," (20) seems to be almost certainly accurate from his previous adventures, has in no way prevented this. (21) From the government's viewpoint Joseph Therry was also dangerous and insubordinate to the extent of losing his official status and again the intention was to have him removed, but the times not allowing a direct approach as with O'Flynn the tenacious priest remained. The clash between priests of narrow vision who had no tact nor subtlety, and an equally petty establishment who feared them as a threat to their

ascendency was not isolated, but once the Catholic community became part of the society it could be irritated by government but did at least have representation. Any success they had, however, was evidence of a danger to the nation in the eyes of the extreme Protestant groups who dominated the anti-Catholic side of the sectarian question.

The example for all future enemies of Catholicism was John Dunmore Lang. His vicious tirades against Popery and his fight to balance immigration of Protestants with Catholics led him to see conspiracy even in Chisholm's work. (22) His style suited the day, however, and was echoed in the generally anti-catholic press of his day with such calumnies as:

the Colonist's insistence that "Popery strikes a blow at the root of all liberty", the Standard's allegation that money collected from the laity was used for the institution of brothels, [and] the Colonial Observer's pronouncement that Catholicism was a "serious obstacle to the political advancement of any country". (23)

Such sentiments led to Catholic newspapers which traded insult for insult but which in no way had the power of the major newspapers.

Anything to do with education has been a part of sectarian difficulties, indeed Bourke had noted opposition to his education plans by Broughton as when:

the cry of danger to the Church, of Popery and infidelity, was raised in this little community for the first time, and the harmony, which hitherto prevailed between Protestants and Catholics, appeared to be hazarded. (24)

The attempts to get a single national system of education continued to founder on the need for Catholic involvement from the 1830's to the 1860's. But the issue of state aid for denominational schools did not become a strictly Protestant - Catholic problem until the inability of the Churches to keep up with the growth of the country and the inefficiency of the dual system led to all but the Catholics compromising with a "secular" education which allowed religious instruction supplemented by a developing Sunday School system. With

removal of aid to denominational schools the de facto method of their elimination by the State governments to ensure a more efficient education system, the refusal of the Catholic schools to disappear and the use of slave labour from the religious to sustain them left an embarrassing problem. From the secular governments' point of view the Catholics, not knowing what was good for them, had left themselves in a situation in which it could appear they were being defrauded of the taxes they were paying for education. Bishop Goold, however, saw it as "religious persecution in the shape of a Godless and compulsory system of education," and suggested the Victorian government would imprison parents for their faith. (25) In such an atmosphere denying communion to parents of children at state schools and denigrating such schools as "seed-plots of future immorality, infidelity, and lawlessness," (26) become, while still outrageous threats and unnecessary slander, understandable. The isolation of the Catholic community

over schooling ha perpetuated their separation and fostered suspicion to grow in its ignorance. (27)

Such ignorance has fostered conspiracy theories, largely Protestant, of armed Catholic revolution. Most ~~were~~ associated with various Orange lodges, emphasising the importance of the Irish experience to the conflict. The fact that organised armed struggle seemed conspicuous in its absence from the Australian scene never deterred such wild speculation. The famous assassination attempt by O'Farrell upon the Duke of Edinburgh in 1868, was the trigger for wild fears of a Fenian revolt, but was preceded in 1867 with Orange rioters firing on Catholics in Melbourne killing a child. (28) The Duke lived, but the Catholics were seen as the terrorists and the Orangemen the patriots.

Such tensions could be seen even after Federation when a simple celebration of Empire day at schools could lead to Catholics being criticised for being disloyal, in preferring Australian to British flags being flown.

(29) Cardinal Moran noted that, "Those who are the champions of **I**mperialism and Empire Day ... are, many of them, avowed enemies of the Catholic Church." (30) Such forces resurfaced during the conscription debate by suggesting Catholic disloyalty in the face of rampant volunteering and dying by young Catholic men. Mannix, like Moran before him, emphasised Australia over Empire and was accused of being pro-German, seditious, in league with the I.W.W. and a pacifist. (32) The obviously imported nature of this problem was reinforced by Catholic bitterness over the execution by the British of the leaders of the Irish rebellion, which had been in itself unpopular amongst Australians of Irish extraction. The number of troops in Ireland which added to the deficiency at the front aroused much of the opposition to conscription.

The debate over the "Ne Temere" decree, as if designed to cause maximum dissension could find both sides claiming their opponents to be bastards. The

decree, which seemed mainly to give the Catholics more difficulty in sorting out the increasing numbers of mixed marriages, was seen by some as interfering in the jurisdiction of the civil authority. The attempt to make application of such strictures illegal in New South Wales in the 1920's found the alleged situation, in which priests were harrassing people as if they were living in sin if they were not married in accordance with Catholic law, reversed, with the government threatening that marriages performed by priests would be invalid and their offspring illegitimate. (31) The bill was ultimately unsuccessful, and while the ultra-protestant groups were supporting the Nationalist government, the Anglicans and even the Presbyterians opposed it.

After reaching its last peak in the twenties sectarianism waned, and after a last gasp hopelessly enmeshed in the anti-communist campaigns in the Labour party of the fifties, the fire had left the debate by

the 1960's. The sectarian conflicts had been largely imported, fueled by decisions in Rome which isolated Catholics theologically from their Protestant fellows, history and events in Ireland, and the political issues like state aid for education. The agenda was set by the siege mentality of the ever-martyred Catholics and the conspiracy driven societies of the Orange lodges. The clergy were as a whole un^Australian and probably unchristian in their intolerance of their neighbors alternative religious expression.

Having seen that toleration and even co-operation between Catholic and Protestant was not only possible but a recurring happening in Australian history especially at the level of the laity, this must be reconciled with the sectarian animus between the churches at higher levels. It is this contrast which is apposite in exploring the comparative lack of violence resulting from the very heated exchanges of religious views throughout Australia's history.

Despite the ugliness of sectarian bigotry and violence, Australia never knew the terrible religious hatreds released in the Irish civil wars, or the mutual massacres of Serbs and Croats. (33)

In spite of their leaders hurling insults at each other, such "antipathies were unlikely to affect personal relationships between neighbours." (34) Even Lang could tolerate individual Catholics and co-operate politically with them should the circumstances require it. (35)

The dire warnings about the danger posed by the opposition camp were largely delivered by the clergy, which may explain why they frequently were not given much weight by a large number of Australians. A typical opinion was:

The elders, deacons, and churchwardens in Australia are the most pragmatical and cantankerous set of people it is possible to imagine. Only an angel from heaven could please them, and he, even if he suited one section, would ipso facto, displease another. (36)

The "pox upon all their houses" sentiment was widespread. Denominationalism had brought the Churches into enough disrepute to have them specifically excluded from Sydney and Melbourne universities.[?](37) Mr. Smith of the Victorian Legislative Assembly commenting during an education debate in 1872 said:

Victorians have to combat the three superstitions of three Kingdoms - the English superstition of Church as State, the Scotch superstition of degrading the Bible to the level of Cocker of Colenso; and the Irish superstition, which prefers Rome rule to Home rule. It is a most unfortunate fact that our Churches are still more exotic than patriotic... (37)

The purely secular and the merely indifferent were poor targets for participation in religious violence, unless perhaps it could have been turned into a sport. Humour could also play a part in defying religious bigotry, as the Catholic paper "The Austral Light" could parody ridiculous Orange rumours with breathless reporting of Catholics who failed to contribute to the coffers of the Jesuits being "kidnapped and tortured in the dungeons under St. Patricks Cathedral," and suggesting that "the money will be put into dynamite and dark lanterns for a rainy day." (39)

Where circumstances decided for the Churches that co-operation was essential, for example in the Bush, it was often possible to ignore the bleatings of the leaders of Churches and the practical bent of many local Churchmen could assist this. All Australian Churches found themselves to be minorities, and while this could foster fears of domination by others in those used to

being part of a majority faith in their country of origin, it also meant having to live with each other, Bollen claiming that, "by and large they did this remarkably well." (40)

Protestant - Catholic relations in Australia have been marked by a fortunate inability to cause large scale violence, for all the imported baggage of hatred that was brought to the country. While there had been an opportunity for Australia to be a place where sectarianism was avoided, controversy and ill feeling seemed unavoidable. The violence of the conflict was in the words and the politics, but in general curiously absent from the neighbourhood. It seems the indifferentism and secularism so bemoaned by the clergy acted as a steadying influence for a society which otherwise may have, to its detriment, paid too much heed to the Churchmen.

An interesting essay with a somewhat cynical, but not for that reason false, assessment of the influence of clerical leaders. Do not neglect to take note of class differences between Poles & Catholics on the whole for a considerable period & the fact that ignorance & superstition continued to produce caricatures of others.

END NOTES

1. Woolmington, J.(ed.), Religion in Early Australia, Cassell Australia, Sydney, 1976, p.31-2.
2. O'Farrell, P., The Catholic Church and Community, N.S.W. University Press, Kensington, 1985, p.5.
3. Ibid. p.30.
4. Murtagh, J.G., Australia: The Catholic Chapter, The Polding Press, Melbourne, 1969, p.54-5.
5. Breward, I. Australia "The Most Godless Place Under Heaven"?, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1988, p.14-5.
6. O'Farrell, op. cit. p.19.
7. Campion, E. Australian Catholics, Viking, Ringwood, 1987, p.25-6.
8. Woolmington, op. cit. p.94.
9. Nairn, N.B. and Moloney, J., The Catholic Church in Australia, Nortel Films.
10. Luscombe, T.R., Builders and Crusaders, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1967, p.45.

11. Hogan, M., The Sectarian Strand, Penguin Books
Australia, Ringwood, 1987, p.110.
12. Campion, op. cit. p.61.
13. Clark, M.(ed.), Sources of Australian History,
Oxford University Press, London, 1957, p.368.
14. Bollen, J.D., Religion in Australian Society,
Leigh College, Enfield, 1973, p.38.
15. Southall, I. Parson on the Track, Lansdowne Press,
Melbourne, 1962, p.48.
16. Breward, op. cit. p.63.
17. Campion, op. cit. p.62.
18. O'Farrell, op.cit. p.3.
19. Ibid.
20. Woolmington, op. cit. p.34.
21. Luscombe, op. cit. p.11-17.
22. Breward, op. cit. p.11.
23. O'Farrell, op. cit. p.56.
24. Ibid, p.53.
25. Hogan, op. cit. p.93.

26. Clark, op. cit. p.370.
27. Gillman, I., Many Faiths One Nation, Collins, Melbourne, 1988, p.12.
28. Hogan, op. cit. p.104-5.
29. Campion, op. cit. p.70-1.
30. Ibid, p.70.
31. O'Farrell, P.(ed.), Documents In Australian Catholic History Vol II., Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1969, p.234.
32. Murtagh, op.cit. p.160.
33. Breward, op. cit. p.91.
34. Gillman, op. cit. p.27-8.
35. O'Farrell, op. cit. p.51.
36. Wannan, B. The Great Australian Book of Insults, Currey O'Neil, South Yarra, 1982, p.229.
37. Bollen, op. cit. p.58.
38. Clark, op. cit. p.360.
39. O'Farrell(ed.), op. cit. p.184.
40. Bollen, op. cit. p.30.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bollen, J.D., Religion in Australian Society, Leigh College, Enfield, 1973.

Breward, I., Australia "The Most Godless Place Under Heaven"?, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1988.

Campion, E., Australian Catholics, Viking, Ringwood, 1987.

Clark, M.(ed.), Sources of Australian History, Oxford University Press, London, 1957.

Gillman, I., Many Faiths One Nation, Collins, Melbourne, 1988.

Hogan, M., The Sectarian Strand, Penguin Books Australia, Ringwood, 1987.

Luscombe, T.R., Builders and Crusaders, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1967.

Murtagh, J.G., Australia: The Catholic Chapter, The Polding Press, Melbourne, 1969.

Nairn, N.B., and Moloney, J., The Catholic Church in Australia, Nortel Films.

O'Farrell, P.(ed.), Documents in Australian Catholic History Vol. II., Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1969.

O'Farrell, P., The Catholic Church and Community, N.S.W. University Press, Kensington, 1985.

Southall, I., Parson on the Track, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1962.

Wannan, B., The Great Australian Book of Insults, Currey O'Neil, South Yarra, 1982.

Woolmington, J.(ed.), Religion in Early Australia, Cassell Australia, Sydney, 1976.