

THE CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

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THE central social facts are simple. Of eleven and a quarter million Australians in 1966, close to three million are Catholics. Most of them are of Irish descent. These facts have exercised formative social influences on Australian Catholicism: it has been the religion of a minority, and its history has been centred on the development of an expatriate Irish group and its descendants. From these two social facts—and particularly from the disharmony and tension between them—spring much of the individual flavour and vitality of Australian Catholicism.

Despite English influences, and, more recently, Southern European migration, it is substantially true that the Church in Australia is a former colony of the Irish Church. Though now independent, and of distinctive, mature personality, Australian Catholicism remains very much a set of variants, embellishments, and contrapuntal movements on the original Irish theme. But this truth harbours a profound social contradiction. In Ireland, Catholicism has been the religion of the vast majority: its character, its attitude towards its environment, has been considerably influenced by its majority situation. Whatever its disadvantages in status, it has fought oppression and disability from a position of numerical strength. Because of its largely Irish derivation, the Church in Australia was cast in a similar mould, but in fact did not have the same majority basis. The aggressive vigour of Australian Catholicism has stemmed, in large part, from Irish sources and attitudes; its social outlook has been the reflexion of—and more appropriate to—a deprived majority. Yet the fact is that Catholicism in Australia has been a minority religion. As a consequence, a dominant feature of Australian Catholicism has been a continuing tension, division, and at times vacillation

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between, on the one hand, the outlook of its Irish inheritance, and, on the other, attitudes dictated by Australian actualities. To distort and exaggerate to extremes this often vague dualism: the thrust of a headstrong, aggressive, intolerant Irishism has gone together with, and been opposed by, a tendency towards the cult of conformity, the praise of pluralism and the search for an effete ecumenism. There have been those who have harshly asserted their separate proud identity; there have been those who have sought self-effacement, absorption into their non-Catholic environment. As Irish influence declined, particularly in the present generation, the real social situation of the Church has become more evident, the pressures of a minority situation felt with more sensitivity. And, as elsewhere, the champions of past traditions and the analysts of present conditions are often in conflict, to the detriment of both causes. Although more evident recently, the dichotomy is as old as Australian Catholicism. While the distinctive Irish tradition has been assertive and uncompromising, there have always been those who through temperament, realistic appreciation of circumstances, or the temptations of conformity, have argued that the Church should follow paths less strait.

Within the boundaries of this tension and debate, the Church has grown, now tending in one direction, now in another, often in both; always retaining its identity and character in terms of its dual face to the world. It is in this disposition that matters of difference provide a continuing unity. Real though their contest is, those who stress traditional 'separatist' attitudes, and those who emphasize the demands of environment have one major element in common. Both are extroverts in their concern for the world. Clearly, those who dilate on the pressing claims of the world on the Church are very much concerned with that relationship. But the eyes of the Church in Australia have traditionally looked outwards towards the world, and dwelt on the problems of that relationship. No doubt it would be untrue to claim that there have been no Australian mystics: but they have not been in evidence. Australian sanctity has been the sanctity of missionary dedication and endeavour. The characteristic tradition of the Australian Church has been not merely practical, it has been world-regarding. This has been a consequence of missionary objectives pursued in the face of hostility. The basic need for practicality arose from pioneering circumstances. The Church needed the rudimentary machinery of salvation—priests and

churches. There was little recognition then of what is fairly widely accepted now, that even the rudimentary machinery ought to be more culturally complex. Such was the immense and accelerating demand for this machinery, right from the beginning of Australian settlement, that even those whose cultural grasp of Catholicism was wide and profound were forced to concede essentials not only priority, but because of limited resources, bestow little else. Nor were the great mass of the laity then capable of receiving more than the essentials. Those critics who now—justifiably—deplore the thinness of the intellectual stature of the Australian Church, often fail to appreciate that this present generation is the first to be able to afford the luxury of intellectual jam with its religious bread and butter. Nor do they pay sufficient regard to the fact that the Australian Church is still a missionary one. And this not only in relation to Asia. Within Australia, the Church is expanding rapidly. Since the 1940s, natural increase and the influx of nearly two and a half million migrants, many of them Catholic, have created a new missionary situation for the Church. Once again resources are being strained to meet the basic demands of the practice of the faith, and once again the practical virtues have tended to take precedence over the reflective: this time, however, the tendency has been not nearly so marked, and has met strong resistance.

Missionary demands do not entirely explain the practical bias of the Australian Church, let alone its concern with temporal affairs. The hostility of the Church's Australian environment and the nature of its Irish derivations were important also. By the end of the eighteenth century the Irish Church had an ancient tradition of scholarship and contemplative life. But by that time, and throughout the nineteenth century, that Church, oppressed, ministering to a poverty-stricken peasantry, was in overwhelming emphasis a practical church, fighting for its life and rights. With enormous national and spiritual vitality, yet proscribed, a pariah in a country overwhelmingly its own, the Irish Church had turned naturally to the engagement with the source of its grievances, political power. It became, necessarily, involved in the world of politics. The Irish, both clergy and laity, brought with them to Australia, dispositions formed in that continuing struggle. They found in Australia an environment of rejection, exclusion and hostility very similar to the one they had left. Thus confronted, their reactions followed the Irish pattern. As in Ireland, Catholics

divided into a majority who declared war, or incipient war, on the world, and a minority who defected, or sought to win, that world by conciliating it. Such reactions left little room for introspectivity. They were outgoing, concerned with the pressure of outside affairs.

The Church in Australia has been, in the main, the Church of Martha, more than of Mary. For all that Mary's is the best way, that of Martha has not been without nobility. The necessities of circumstance cast the Australian Church in this role, and its response has been the development of a degree of social concern not evident in Irish Catholicism. The Church of the poor and needy grew to understand them and their sacrifices well. However, the concern of this Church of Martha with the work of the world need not have been so belligerent or obsessive had not that world, from the beginning, presented such a hostile, adamant face. Catholicism came to Australia with Irish convicts, convicts who were casualties in the war with the ascendancy world of Ireland. Even in their felony the Irish stood apart. Whereas the English and Scots were mostly thieves, nearly a third of the 2086 transported from Ireland between 1791 and 1803 were convicted for riot and sedition. And whereas the English and Scots convicts were nearly all Protestants, the Irish were Catholics. A minority group (about one-fifth) among those transported, these Irish convicts came from one type of Protestant ascendancy to another. The gulf was even greater in Australia. There, in the early years of the nineteenth century, developed an exacerbated form of the Irish social relationship of prejudice, fear and hatred. In the relationship between English Protestant ascendancy and Irish convict Catholicism, established with the foundation of Australia, were the origins of that 'permanent bitterness, hatred and anger between those two views of the world which were to divide European civilization in Australia so long as its members were interested in questions of the nature of man and the meaning of life'.¹ So central and persistent has been this corrosive, tragic theme in the history of Catholicism's relations with its Australian environment, so pervasive its conditioning influence, that its elements require at least a brief sketch.

At a time when both a negative de-Christianization and a positive ecumenism have diminished the force of dogmatic differences, it is not easy to believe, let alone understand, the previous

¹ C. M. H. Clark, *A History of Australia*, Vol. I, p. 174.

intensity of clashes between differing Christian conceptions of man and his destiny. Nor does the modern mind readily accept the enormous social and economic gulfs which divided differing conditions of men. Nevertheless, the Australian Church still lives among the residuum of attitudes and assumptions formed in a divided age. To the Protestant ascendancy of penal Australia there were two essential conditions of civilization, the Protestant religion and British institutions. On both of these counts the Irish were barbarians. Of this there was ample evidence: from the misery and ignorance of eighteenth-century Ireland sprang brutality, drunkenness, irresponsibility, malevolence. The righteous Protestant regarded the Irish with dark suspicion and short contempt. And fear. English rule in Ireland bred rebellions, and enshrined the power of the priesthood as leaders of discontent. Popery and priestcraft, expressed in resistance to English rule, were a sinister menace to that higher order of civilization which the English so passionately believed they represented. As in Ireland, so in Australia, the rulers—for instance, Governor Hunter in 1800—were ridden by the nagging fear that they might be overwhelmed by a Catholic flood, and the land laid waste by the poverty, ignorance, superstition and tyranny which Catholicism represented. The shrunken, muffled echoes of that fear could be heard a century and a half later in the response of some few Australians to Southern European immigration. The Protestant vision of Irish Catholicism was not without its unfortunate realities. Governor Brisbane was to record in the early 1820s:

... every Murder or diabolical Crime, which has been committed in the Colony since my arrival has been perpetrated by Roman Catholics. And this I ascribe entirely to their barbarous ignorance and total want of education. . . . They are benighted and bereft of every advantage that can adorn the mind of Man. . . .

It was a Catholicism of poverty and peasantry, violent, crude, with a priesthood largely sharing its passions and prejudices. Its heart was bitter against the English oppressor, its religious temper narrow, unlovely, belligerent. These things Protestants saw, adding unto their obsession that Catholicism was a gigantic conspiracy to enslave men, and destroy all that was free and good in civilization. They were blind to, or would not accept, the qualities which contradicted their estimate—the intensity and other-worldliness of Irish faith, its charm, nobility, humanity,

the remarkable devotion of the Irish to their priests. And Irish Catholics, in their rejection of Protestant England, rejected too its cultivation of refinement, learning, urbanity, the arts and pleasures of a liberal civilization.

Conflict and oppression confirmed and intensified the antagonists in their opinions and outlooks. In 1804, just outside Sydney, Irish convicts justified fears aroused by the Irish rebellion of 1798. The demands of an Irish-led assemblage of about 300 for liberty and death to tyrants were met by eight hangings, and various lesser punishments. Who was to blame? The Irish, their priests, the Church of Rome. The nature of Catholicism's Australian inheritance is summed up neatly in the circumstances of the first Mass: it was celebrated for a congregation of prisoners in 1803, under strict regulations drafted by Governor King, and with police surveillance, by an Irish convict priest, transported for his participation in the 1798 rebellion. The first free priest arrived in 1817, only to be deported by Governor Macquarie as muddling, ignorant and dangerous. The first Catholic—and Irish—chaplains to the Australian community came in 1820, thus beginning, thirty years after the arrival of the first Catholic convicts, the continuous history of the Church in Australia.

With such origins, this history was to be, naturally, one in which the advancement of Catholicism was entangled with the cause of Ireland. Practically these causes became but two aspects of one gigantic ancient wrong, which both priesthood and laity were dedicated to remedy. Nor was the issue merely between Irish and English, Catholic and Protestant. It was also—though few were to think in such abstract terms—an issue between Church and State, an issue of freedom against injustice and oppression. For the first chaplains found their pastoral work restricted, defined by the laws and practices of the colony, prescriptions which conflicted for them with the laws of God. In dispensations which set an enduring, characteristic tone to government attitudes, they received not rights, but privileges, condescensions. The Church began in Australia under a cloud of disabilities imposed by the state: the immediate Catholic reaction—and this too was to set a pattern—was not gratitude for the freedoms enjoyed, but respectful insistence on the granting of freedoms still denied. Similar situations of oppression and disability existed elsewhere, particularly in Ireland. But elsewhere, other, freer traditions had once existed, to temper the present with memories of a more glorious

past. The Australian Church was born in a prison. Even when liberated, its mentality remained influenced by its harsh infancy: it was an alien and an outcast in a hostile world. Its natural, youthful disposition mixed impassioned aggressive denunciation of injustice with uncertainty and lapses into servility. Because it was Irish it opposed the colonies' dominant Englishness; because it was Catholic it was in conflict with ascendant English Protestantism; because it was oppressed by the state it was ill-disposed towards existing English Protestant government; because it was a prisoner and poor, it was at odds with the rich and the authoritarian. Its necessity, the law of its existence, was a fight for survival and freedom.

The habits of this struggle have died hard. The burden of its origins and its history lay heavily on Australian Catholicism. Tension and residual bitterness still exist between Protestantism and Catholicism. Militant Protestants still demonstrate their eagerness to exploit any opportunity to attack the Catholic Church. There are still those Catholics who are not saddened, but rejoice in a complacent determination to reply. The lingering and occasional recrudescence of sectarianism and bigotry may be ascribed to the fierce intensity of earlier conflicts, the continued existence of issues—such as education—over which such conflicts took place, and the fact that the most vigorous legacy which declining Protestantism bequeathed to its secularist heirs was its anti-Catholic venom. The consequences of this bitterness have been far-reaching. Long after the real religious issue had become one between belief and unbelief, Australian Christians were more influenced by the Catholic-Protestant division than by the threat posed by materialism and irreligion. In part, irreligion spread by default. Its enemies were not only divided; they were occupied in dispute. Well into this century both Catholics and Protestants accused each other's churches of breeding atheism, materialism and rationalism. Both ascribed these evils to a revolt of generous and capable minds from a sterile bigotry. From these continuing bitter exchanges only the infidel—acknowledged to be generous, capable, intelligent—emerged with honour. Australian Christianity must bear the responsibility for furthering the prevalent illusion that only outside religion does tolerance, moderation, breadth of vision exist. Having fostered this illusion, Australian Christianity is beset by temptations to compromise with it.

The scars and wiles of pugilism are evident in Australian

Catholicism, but its struggles have nurtured its finer qualities too: it has courage, strength, determination, tenacity; it is tough and disciplined. Denied the enervations of leisure and ready acceptance, the Australian Church has developed a form of austere, self-assured vitality.

The appointment of an English episcopate followed logically on the fact that Australia was an English colony. The arrival of John Bede Polding, O.S.B., as first bishop in 1835 reflected the fact that New South Wales was part of the English Benedictines' South African vicariate, and that the N.S.W. administration needed a Catholic ecclesiastical authority with which it could treat. While English facts were one thing, Catholic facts were another. Australian Catholics were Irish. Of thirty-two priests in 1839, six including the Bishop were English; twenty-six were Irish. Ullathorne, a Benedictine, believed that in so obviously an Irish mission, the Benedictine set-up was doomed to failure. In the 1840s the feast of St Patrick was celebrated with great solemnity and fervour by Sydney Catholics, while that of St Benedict passed almost unnoticed. The friction inherent in this situation was minimized by the still penal situation of the 1830s, and then by Polding's greatness as a Churchman. However, when Polding died in 1877, Irish-Australian Catholicism, vastly strengthened by the flood of free Irish emigration of the previous thirty years, was strongly critical of the appointment of an English Benedictine successor. The episcopate of Roger Bede Vaughan, O.S.B., was brief. With the arrival in 1885 of the distinguished Irish cleric Patrick Francis Moran as Archbishop of Sydney and his elevation to the Cardinalate, the predominantly Irish character of the Australian Church received Vatican recognition. Recognition of the further development of that Church into a character essentially Australian may be dated from the consecration of Archbishop, later Cardinal, Gilroy in 1940. The long arch-episcopates of Drs Mannix and Duhig, ending in the 1960s, were the protraction of an earlier phase.

Each phase, English, Irish and Australian, has contributed something distinctive to the character as well as to the growth of the Australian Church. No phase has been without a healthy self-criticism. Although some bishops early in the century were reluctant to employ those local clergy trained at Cardinal Moran's St Patrick's College, Manly—they preferred Irish priests—other bishops, no less Irish, were critical of the products of Irish colleges.

They saw that some of the Irish priests lacked the refinement and culture—the polish—necessary to gain them acceptance in the smarter areas of colonial society. The Australian-born priests increasingly tended to be the natural clergy of Catholic society as it became distant from its Irish origins. Although the 1920s and the 1930s saw some abrasions between the old order and the new, the transition was remarkably smooth. This change has also seen modifications in the exercise of internal ecclesiastical authority. In the nineteenth century, and earlier years of this century, the clergy exercised a strong dominance in Catholic affairs. This situation reflected the same factors as operated in Ireland—a largely ignorant laity and its need for leadership—as well as the demands of a missionary situation for decisive leadership. Because this type of clerical-lay relationship became traditional, and the elements of a missionary situation still exist, clerical authority has remained strong, though the changes of the last ten years, in terms of consultation of the laity, have been immense. The results of the tradition of strong clerical leadership have been two-fold: on the one hand a tendency towards an excessive unthinking lay deference, on the other a trend towards just as excessive and unthinking a rejection. Fortunately, with recent developments within lay Catholic intellectual life, and with the profound changes—or rather new emphasis—within the constitution of the Church, the potential dangers of this situation have been averted. Nothing could be more revealing of the health and adaptive vitality of the Australian Church and its internal relationships than the spirit of swift thoroughness in which the hierarchy, clergy and laity have accepted the decrees of the recent Council.

The fifty years of Benedictine episcopate were troubled by the gap in outlook and understanding which separated it from the great majority of clergy and laity. It suffered too from internal frictions and discomforts within its own monastic foundation. Nevertheless, in addition to an enormous achievement in bricks and mortar, and despite the essentially missionary nature of their enterprise, the Benedictines imparted the dream and some of the realities of intellectual life to a pioneering Catholicism. At its most formative time, Australian Catholicism had the advantage of leadership which could not be dismissed by the ascendancy as vulgar and disloyal Irish. And it was Polding and Vaughan who set the shape of Australian Catholicism on the most enduring—and probably the most vital—public issue it has faced: education.

They committed the Australian Church to uncompromising opposition to the liberal and secular educational systems adopted by Australian governments in the 1870s. It was they who embarked on the policy, followed since, of erecting and maintaining in the face of state refusal to provide financial assistance, a separate Catholic educational system at primary and secondary level. The fact that this, the most spectacular and sacrificial assertion of Catholic individuality, came under English, not Irish, leadership, suggests that explanations of the flavour of Australian Catholicism which concentrate on mere Irishness are too narrow. Environment and the general quality of nineteenth-century Catholicism were obviously major conditioning factors.

As a consequence of this momentous decision, from the 1870s to the present a major part of the energies and resources of Australian Catholicism has been devoted to education, and to a campaign to secure recognition of its claim to financial justice from the state. The Catholic educational system has been an extraordinary achievement, a monument to determination, dedication and sacrifice on a heroic scale. It has been comprehensive and democratic, offering education widely and on a sufficiently large scale as to be available to almost all Catholics, of whatever social or economic level. Its faults have been mainly the faults of charity: initially oriented towards the poor, it has tended to lag towards the rear as its children have advanced in the world. This is changing. So is the character of the system. Until recently—again the last five or ten years—it has been almost exclusively the preserve of the religious, mainly brothers and nuns. With the increasing introduction of lay teachers, the system—and its image among Catholic parents—is in a state of flux: much of the traditional praise of the system is in terms of the value of tutelage by religious.

However, the system's major problem is that its claims on the state for financial justice have been substantially ignored or rejected. Largely—though the whole truth is complex—this is the result of the community's dedication to secularism, its refusal to recognize the claims of what it regards as indoctrination. Consequently, Catholic education has experienced continued financial difficulty, none, apart from the tests of its foundation, more critical than that at present felt. Inundated by the post-war flood of children, understaffed, beset by the accelerating expenses of expanding educational requirements, the system has shown signs of

grave strain. The response of the hierarchy has been, on the whole, an attempt to maintain the system *in toto*; the means—rationalizing the system to produce greater efficiency, and diversion of almost the whole of revenue into educational funds. Meanwhile the nature and continuance of the system have come under controversy among Catholics. Again the basic issue, although usually implicit, is that of relationship to the world. The defenders of the existing separate system argue that Catholic education has been the Australian Church's particular crusade, creating unity and idealism, inspiring sacrifice, moulding character and sense of identity, conferring real freedom. The system's radical opponents within the Church concede, in effect, the truth of this argument, but construe what has happened in terms of the erection of cowardly barriers against the world, isolationism, ghettoism, narrowness. Catholic education, they contend, unfits the Catholic for the secular world in which he must have his Christian leavening mission. This debate on essentials and principles is somewhat remote from the majority of the Catholic community which sees the issue in terms of practicalities—the demands on their own pockets—and immediate educational problems—size of classes, paucity of facilities and so forth. Pragmatism is strongly ingrained in a Church which has fought, without respite, for so many aspects of its practical life. There has always been conflict between those who have pursued principle with little regard for machinery of implementation—providence will provide—and those whose regard for realities, practicalities, seasons their view of applicable principles. Catholic education in Australia has been the triumph of principle over practical difficulties. While the present practical difficulties have led to discussion of the principle, what is involved is not merely an educational issue, but a question vital to the character of the Australian Church. When Archbishops Polding and Vaughan determined not to conform to the currents of liberalism and secularism which produced Australia's educational system, their decision committed the Australian Church to an outlook on its world which was implicitly hostile, unyielding, non-compromising. This outlook found sustenance in the dispositions of the Irish, clerical and lay. And it has produced a Catholicism which, whatever its faults and limitations, is of firm, self-respecting and unique character. There can be little doubt that this individual character, the close unity of clergy and laity, the vigour and intensity of Australian Catholicism, have derived

substantially from the educational system, the effort to maintain it, and the grievance it constitutes. The continuance, abandonment or modification of this system, are matters pertaining to the whole disposition of Australian Catholic life. Change is certain, but its vital effects seem little appreciated, particularly by those who counsel partial or total abandonment. Even the champions of continuance at times prejudice their own cause. A Catholic character to which grievance is central is neither fully balanced nor completely healthy, whatever apparently excellent qualities it produces. Apart from the pressing danger that practical problems will overwhelm the principle of a separate Catholic system, it is vital that the campaign for complete state recognition be won. Until it is won, Australian Catholicism and Australian society generally will suffer from the problems, psychological, social and spiritual, of being less than free. The recognition of the state's financial obligations towards Catholic education has become a focal issue between Church and society. To abandon it while any hope of success remains would be to deprive not only the Church but Australian society of the opportunity of shrugging off its bitter past and of achieving a balanced and generous social maturity.

The attitude of the hierarchy is clear for retention. This, judging from the generous—indeed sacrificial—financial response to the present crisis, has the strong support of the majority of clergy and laity. Certainly, existing practical trends are towards a narrowing of the system, a slow proportional shrinkage to cover only part of the Catholic body, with the remainder serviced in catechetics. This shrinkage, the tendency towards restriction of the former educational services of the Church to an élite, has been used as an argument for substantial modification of the comprehensive ideal: limited resources should be devoted not to the complete education of some Catholic children, but should be dispersed in less intensive, mainly catechetical form, over all. The present policy of retention is firmly grounded on the undoubted fact that once the basic principles on which Australian Catholic education has been erected are modified—a cutting of Catholic suits to acknowledge the absence of state cloth—the cause is lost, and even the modified system will decline rapidly as pressures eventually impinge on it, to say nothing of the moral loss to the character of the whole Australian community. There are, however, grounds for hope that the political situation—

discussed later—may hold within it the resolution of these problems.

Australian Catholicism still bears the marks of its origins in social and economic inferiority. From the penal beginnings, and especially after the flood of free emigration began in the 1850s, the Irish Catholic 'lower orders' set out to succeed in the society they had joined—to secure money and rank, public and social recognition. Many of them did succeed, sometimes at the cost of the pretence that their Catholicism was an individual foible, not a social obligation. In terms strictly of faith, the casualty rate was low. Because of the respectability, security and comparative protection from bigotry which they offered, certain areas of the Civil Service became the earliest focal point for the ambitions of poorer Catholics. This trend became evident in the later years of the nineteenth century, and has continued: only recently has a prosperous economy diminished the obsession with security and caution which has been characteristic of a socially emergent Catholicism. And only recently have more than a few Catholic parents had the resources or opportunity to consider the professions for their children: those who did, chose the safe professions where status and reasonable income were virtually assured—those of medicine and law. The Church itself, in both ministry and teaching, absorbed much of the cultural energy and intellectual ability of Australian Catholicism. Up to the Second World War the contribution of Catholics to Australian intellectual and cultural life was substantially less than their numerical resources warranted. They had avoided the more hazardous areas of intellectual, artistic and creative activity. Even in the areas they were present, the hostility of their environment fostered withdrawal; their habits were cautious and indrawn, their dispositions unimaginative, unadventurous. Only since the war have Catholics begun to play any important part in University life, and the proportion of Catholics holding academic positions is still far less than the Catholic proportion of the population. The same holds true of Catholics in all areas of intellectual and culturally creative activity.

It is no great exaggeration to say that lay intellectual life of a vital and widespread kind is a very new development in Australia, a departure from the dominant Catholic tradition. Its newness has brought problems. It is, to some extent, inevitable that the new intellectuals should find themselves more in harmony with the

secular tradition than with the Catholic. They feel themselves aliens in the Australian Catholic tradition, and more intelligible to their secular counterparts, or at least to the intellects of Catholic traditions elsewhere. The most urgent problem of contemporary Australian Catholicism is that of achieving a creative harmony between its emerging intellectual leadership, its distinctive traditions and its rapidly maturing rank and file. The urgency of achieving some integral relationship is apparent from the fact that the rapid development of intellectual life has produced, as one of its aspects, a second movement towards conformity. The first movement was social and economic, that now in progress is intellectual, ideological, and for that reason more vital. The new phenomenon apparent amongst some of the younger intellectual élite, lay and clerical, is one of deference towards secular intellectual life and its institutions, a deference more total, self-abnegatory, than selective. (It could be maintained that this attitude is essentially traditional. For while the Church erected an educational edifice of its own, it accepted the syllabuses, examinations and inspection of the state, to which it added religious instruction. It might be contended that the result of this peculiar, if understandable, compromise has been that Catholic schools have unwittingly purveyed some of the insidious secularism they were established to avoid.) Just as a socially and economically depressed Catholicism deferred to and aped the values and habits of its non-Catholic betters, so now a renaissance Catholic intellectualism pays homage at shrines not its own. Both of these conformist tendencies have sought to reduce Catholicism to its least self, an entity which while still surviving as separate, yet merges most happily with its secular environment. The most distinct facet of this present conformist movement has been a philosophic ferment which has been strongly critical of traditional and particularly Thomist modes of thought, pilloried as arrogant, divisive and stultifying. This has provoked a reaction, at times harsh and sterile, which has insisted on conformity to old intellectual patterns. The most regrettable aspects of this running exchange, potentially of great value, have been the bitterly abusive tone of some extremists, the tendencies in both camps towards an exclusive narrow cliqueism, and, worst of all, the absence of real dialogue. Yet in regretting the features of warfare, it is hard to escape the conclusion that something vital is at issue—the character of Australian Catholicism, its social attitudes.

Yet, as with so many aspects of the life of Australian Catholicism, the issue remains implicit. It is fought at a more or less narrow or superficial remove, neither view being fully and clearly aware of what is at stake. Intellectual life is too young, too immature, too excited by its recent liberation, for the basic, self-examinations to be other than seldom made. When they are they are hindered by the absence of knowledge. Australian Catholicism's zest for living in the present has made its self-consciousness a shallow one, though this is also, perhaps, a national characteristic. It is particularly weak in the discipline of social self-analysis—sociology and history. There has been hardly any sociology: what history there has been is largely piety, or self-praise. This situation is changing, and at an accelerating pace. Nevertheless at a time of extraordinary intellectual vitality and ferment, the language of Australian Catholic intellectuals is the language of theories and concepts, not the language of facts. They have ideas about themselves and their context, but few facts. While this imbalance exists, the present lack of real contact between intellectuals and ordinary Catholics is likely to continue. At the moment, the Church in Australia has two forms of lay leadership, which pursue virtually separate existences—the intellectuals, and those Catholics, prominent in non-intellectual areas of public life, who are loyal and energetic workers in the day-to-day affairs of the Church.

Politics and religion being what they are, their confrontation and interaction have always attracted intense interest—and intense emotions. The Church in Australia has had a spectacular history in this field, the conscription crisis of 1916–17 and the Australian Labour Party split of 1954 coming particularly to mind. Sensational though the events and depictions of these involvements have been, their impingement on the Church as such has not been of such vital importance as their publicity might suggest: bitter and disruptive though controversy has been, it does not go so deeply to the roots of the Church's social being as does the education issue. Indeed it has been the education issue which has most continuously involved the Church and Catholics in public affairs. Catholic education, despite Catholic efforts to argue the case in terms of principle, of justice, has remained a matter of politics. It seems clear now that it will admit only of solution at the level of party politics. Friction between Church and State on this issue has created an atmosphere of tense confrontation which lends itself to

the danger of violent eruption—often on other issues. The apparent intrusion from time to time of churchmen and Catholics as such into the political arena is in no sense an aberration, rather is it the emergence and focusing of disharmonies never far below the surface relationships.

As in all their social relations, Catholics' attitudes to public affairs and political activity have been divided between the desire for independence and the wish to conform. Given the weakness of the Catholic social group in nineteenth-century Australia, it was natural that those who did enter political life did so within the framework of the then existing political groupings. Most of them, with little education, were unaware of the impingement of their religion on public affairs; those that were, sought to minimize it. Except on one issue. Education. The existing political ascendancy was firmly hostile to Catholic claims on that issue, indeed to Catholic aspirations generally. The formation of a new party—party of outsiders—the Labour Party, in the closing years of the century offered, it seemed, an opportunity for Catholics to secure a powerful voice, hitherto denied, in public affairs. The difficulty, not appreciated at that time, was that this party was the product of nineteenth-century liberalism and radicalism—that is, of movements associated with the decline of religion, of forces either apathetic towards or actively opposing religion. This is not to say that the Labour movement itself was necessarily anti-religious, but that it developed in association with lines of thought which were, implicitly or explicitly, more irreligious than religious, more un-Christian than Christian, oriented towards humanism, the service of man, rather than the service of God.

Initially possessing a distinct socialist flavour, the New South Wales Labour Party had, by 1898, rid itself of extreme doctrinaire elements, and in the period 1900–10 a Catholic alignment with political labour developed, encouraged by Cardinal Moran. The social basis for this alignment was obvious: most Catholics were workers, and the Labour Party was their natural political outlet. Further, the Church, in *Rerum Novarum*, had shown its sympathy towards social reform. Both Church and Labour Party condemned social injustice. It was this sharing, to a marked degree, of a similar set of social attitudes, which obscured, in the Catholic thinking of the time, complications and conflicts. Indeed the amount of that thinking was very slight, and what comment there was, demonstrated an almost total absence of searching considera-

tion of principles. Partly this reflects the training of a dominantly Irish clergy, partly the pioneering situation in which clearly advantageous practicalities seemed more important than complex, disputable principles. The alignment between Catholics and Labour Party was natural on both a human and social level. It is a comment on the Australian Church's theological and philosophical heritage that the matter did not, at that time, seem to impinge on those fields, except, occasionally, in the instincts rather than the minds of Catholics. For the fact that a degree of tension existed between the Catholic Church and its social environment did not mean that these environments were identical. In reality, the Labour Party, product as it was of nineteenth-century liberalism, radicalism and secularism, was part of that environment between which and the Church there existed tension. It was not until a new intellectual—and theological—ferment entered into Catholic life in the 1940s that the nature of this tension began to be appreciated—and that only when circumstances (increased Communist activity within the Labour movement) made the matter obviously a practical one.

Nevertheless, even in 1910 when that alignment was expressed first in Labour election victories, some Catholics, even active Labour supporters, were uneasy about their linkage with elements which were militantly socialist or irreligious. Nor could these elements be accused of hypocrisy: the Labour Party has always contained a venomously vocal anti-Catholic streak. This uneasy minority of Catholic opinion expressed itself in protest and censure, not rejection. They arraigned policies and attitudes that would, they claimed, alienate Catholics from what was fundamentally a good and Christian movement. However, most Catholics saw no cause for alarm: a party must not be judged by its objective, nor by the ideals of individual members, but by its immediate programme of practical policies. This essentially unreflective, non-theoretical, here and now outlook characterized Catholic attitudes towards Labour until the 1940s. Yet, such were the practical political circumstances, that all the reflexion, all the theoretical niceties—even had they been entertained—were, in a sense, irrelevant. Catholics were prisoners of the political situation. Protestantism was traditionally non-labour. The non-labour parties were traditionally hostile to Catholicism, making little disguise of their feelings of contempt towards the Catholic community, entertaining no Catholic claim. The result,

prior to the formation of the Labour Party, was certainly a substantial degree of Catholic apathy and subservience in public affairs. So if Labour was bad, the non-Labour parties were a good deal worse. The Catholic-Labour alliance was fostered by the intransigence of all other political groupings. Whatever the limitations and discomforts of the Catholic-Labour relationship, it did at least give Catholics some political expression, some freedom to pursue equality of status. There was present from the beginning, a determination among those Catholics uncomfortable with Labour to re-create that party along more congenial lines. However, from the beginning, they were confronted by a determination to prevent them doing this: the catch-cry then, as now, to justify the rejection of Catholic claims, was sectarianism. There is a good deal of truth in the observation that Catholics alone are expected to be 'unsectarian'. Those critical of Catholic viewpoints and interests—including some of those Catholics who have identified themselves most closely with existing political structures—have branded Catholic pressures as selfishly sectarian, in so far as these have been specifically Catholic, and opposed to the *status quo*. Such pressures were un-Australian. They were alien and hostile to Australia's common citizenship. Catholics were required, as a public duty, to refrain from voting or thinking as Catholics. This assertion, by a bigoted 'liberalism', of a distinction and conflict between Catholic interests and Australian interests, the proclamation of the tyranny of majority opinion, has eroded some areas of less resilient Catholic strength, particularly on the education issue.

For all its frictions and disadvantages, the alignment with Labour expressed, in the early years of this century, the need and determination of Catholics to be involved in Australia's common citizenship. Undoubtedly, the alignment facilitated, made possible even, the considerable progress that has been made in that direction. However, even with Labour, Catholics as such were not wholly welcome and their major, particular claims were largely unrecognized. In the face of a refusal to admit their individuality, their religious identity, and their claims to justice, particularly educational justice, some Catholics tended, by way of compensation, to proclaim their virtues to themselves. The urge to conform was one reaction to a difficult situation. Another was an increasingly assertive consciousness—and inflation—of the magnitude of the achievements of Australian Catholics.

In 1954 Dr H. V. Evatt, then leader of the Federal Labour Opposition, denounced the predominantly Catholic 'Groups' which had been working in the Labour movement since the early 1940s in a substantially successful effort to destroy the influence of the Communist Party. He claimed that these Groups represented a Catholic, indeed a clerical (Dr Mannix supported them), bid to take control of the Labour Party. This was followed by an outburst of sectarianism, expulsions and splits within Labour, and eventually by the formation of the Democratic Labour Party. The long-standing Catholic political commitment to Labour had been challenged by Labour itself, and was now shattered. What remained was still a very substantial Catholic commitment, but the alignment as such was sundered: a large and vigorous minority of Catholic opinion repudiated Labour and turned to other political outlets, mainly the Democratic Labour Party which distinguished itself from Labour mainly on the issue of Communism.

The disruption of the alliance was disastrous for Labour (it has not held Federal office since), but it was a liberation for Catholics as factors in politics. That the alignment was shattered in 1954 was largely the result of political circumstances, accidents. But when the rift occurred, it revealed that, at a fundamental level, it was long overdue. The social and economic harmonies, which were the basis of the Catholic-Labour alignment initially, no longer existed in anything like the same degree. The first half of the twentieth century had brought great changes in Australia, and in the position of Australian Catholics. By the 1950s, the political policies of Australian Labour—short of down-right socialism—were the victims of its own success, and that of its policy-pirating opponents. These policies, assisted by rapid economic growth, had so improved the worker's lot that Labour's old slogans were no longer so meaningful or widely attractive. The Catholic population had not only shared in the rising prosperity, but had ceased to be what they were before, a group at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. Now they occupied all rungs on that ladder, if few in numbers at the top. For Australians as a whole, affluence, particularly after 1945, took them away from Labour, and this was particularly true of Catholics. Even without the vigorous precipitations of 1954, it seems that Labour and an increasing section of the Catholic vote would have gradually parted company on the same grounds as they had come together, economic and social. However, the breach when it came was sudden and painful,

creating chaos and confusion and great bitterness between Catholics of differing viewpoints and allegiances. Certainly it came before its time, its meaning and consequences little pondered, and alienating from Labour, on grounds of principle, many Catholics who were still at one with it on socio-economic grounds. This precipitate eruption did much damage within the Catholic camp, especially in the injection of venom and the fostering of divisions. Nevertheless, the split with Labour, and internecine conflict within the Church, was not without redeeming benefit. Lamentable as civil wars are, they do raise and clarify fundamental matters at issue, and force participants to ponder questions of identity, meaning, destiny. The split with Labour and the divisions among Catholics took place on the question of Communist danger and influence. This was an ideological issue raised fair and square in a political world ideologically barren, and one which also focused attention on developments in Asia, of which Australia needed to heed. More, the split and the questions it raised induced a vigorous and searching intellectual ferment among Catholics, and between Catholics and non-Catholics, on a wide variety of political, social and religious topics. The relations between Church and State were much debated, so was the topic of Catholicism in the free society; and the question of clerical involvement in politics. So far from plunging Australia back into a new age of bigotry, the sectarian explosion begun in 1954 seems to have somewhat cleared the air. Certainly the last decade has brought to Australian Catholics a clearer and healthier awareness of their own identity and problems.

Perhaps even more importantly, the end of the slavish attachment to Labour changed the status of the political activities and votes of Catholics from those of prisoners to those of desirable, sought-after supporters. The desertion of sufficient of the Catholic vote to support the continued existence of a third party, exclude Labour from office, and maintain a Liberal-Country Party Government—all for ten years—has demonstrated that Catholic opinion is a vital political factor, not to be ignored as it formerly was. So far the party most receptive to these lessons has been the Government, beneficiary of the end of the old Catholic-Labour order. The Catholic vote now has to be courted. And the issue of most vital concern to Catholics is education. It is significant that the Liberal Government has made increasing, though specialized and partial, grants available to Catholic schools. If

Labour is to woo Catholics it must undertake to do more. In the present position of a fine balance between the two major political groups, and the power of decision lying with Democratic Labour Party voters, increasing recognition of Catholic educational demands is already a trend, and should the existing political situation continue, complete recognition seems likely. Politics, however, are well beyond prediction, and Catholic opinion is not the only potentially decisive factor in Australian politics. Should the Federal election of late 1966 result in a change of government, the political importance of Catholic opinion will diminish.

Whatever this might mean, significant too are the terms in which the Liberal Government has extended some degree of assistance (subsidies towards building science facilities) to Catholic schools—national interest, development, unity can tolerate no partiality or sectionalism in the provision of funds. For all that this may be a political phrase-making, it is phrase-making very different in character from that to which Catholic claimants have been accustomed. Formerly, government funds have been *withheld* on precisely these grounds—national interest and unity. Intolerance dies hard, and it was ingrained into Australia's history from its origins, yet there are grounds for hoping that the outcome of the Catholic-Labour split will not only be some solution to the education question along the lines of the traditional Catholic demands, but also a form of national recognition and integration which the Church in Australia has hitherto been denied. If present trends continue, this recognition and integration will be accorded to Catholics as themselves, not as curious deviants from secularism. In retaining a strong social identity, in its stressing of principles—freedom, equality, justice, all the non-material human values, to say nothing of spiritual values—the Church in Australia has contributed more than any other continuing social force to the liberating and vigorous emergence of Australian society from the narrow legacies of its peculiar origins.