

MARGARET M. PAWSEY: *The Demon of Discord: Tensions in the Catholic Church in Victoria, 1853-1864*. Melbourne University Press, 1982; pp. xvi + 183.

MARGARET M. PAWSEY: *The Popish Plot: Culture Clashes in Victoria 1860-1863*. Sydney, Studies in the Christian Movement, No. 8, 1983; pp. ix + 211.

Dr Pawsey's two books constitute a significant contribution to the history of Australian religion: while the subject matter of both is a short period in the history of Catholicism in the state of Victoria, these studies have much wider implications and interest, and thus each is doubly welcome.

*The Demon of Discord* is an account of the less edifying aspects of the episcopate of the Catholic bishop of Melbourne, James Goold; those aspects that have to do with money, conflicts with the laity, scandals and dissensions. The approach is by way of what Pawsey describes as a 'minute scrutiny' (p. 133) of events, combined with what amounts to a pioneering exercise in the economic history of religion: the author has the sources and the ability to sort out accounts and financial statements.

Undoubtedly this method and these sources have been vindicated, and one might have said triumphantly vindicated had not that adverb seemed out of place in the unmasking of so much that seems merely petty and discreditable. Pawsey is right in suggesting — which she does in the most polite of scholarly ways — that previous historians of the episcopate of Goold (including myself) have seen only the surface and have not appreciated that the Victorian reality — revealed now as one of faction, bitter disputes, power struggles, legal battles and arrant clerical authoritarianism — is not very different, and hardly much better, than in the Sydney Catholic imbroglios

to which so much historical attention has been given. Indeed, surely it is worse. At least Polding in Sydney emerges from his quarrels with substantial claims to being a saint, whereas Goold surfaces from Pawsey's dredging of the murky pools of Victorian church politics as a rather nasty and devious tyrant. His intending biographer, Rev. Professor F. X. Martin, O.S.A., will have a large task in redeeming his subject's reputation from this scarifying treatment.

The value of Dr Pawsey's exercise in historical micro-surgery cannot be gainsaid: it goes close to the bone and sinews of the historical operation. But to the heart? Is it all not a little heartless? Pawsey's approach is that of the surgeon-technician, cutting into history with sharp scalpel, getting beneath the skin certainly, exposing the fabrication of the human machine at its level of basic function. But the patient seems anaesthetized. Is this history fully awake and alive? Well, yes — and no. Is this Goold? Yes, but at his worst, and seen to the most disadvantage. Just as the Irish Famine Relief Fund in Melbourne in 1862 was certainly, as Pawsey demonstrates, a powerful rallying ground for determined critics of Goold. But it was also the Irish Famine Relief Fund. So intense and acute is Pawsey's concentration on what is going on beneath the surface, so subterranean her focus, that it is hard not to lose sight of that surface — which is, after all, a real part of what is there. The same might be said for the approach to church affairs via finance, economics, the view from the pocket so to speak: it is an angled perspective, true so far as it goes. Its criteria are those of balanced bookkeeping, proper accountability, credit and debit. On those standards Goold's regime may fall short of proper measure, but is it a proper measure to apply? Or at least an *only* measure? Even that undoubted and grievous loss to the Victorian Catholic church, of an input of lay minds and hearts in the counsels of religion, an exclusion determined by narrow rigour of Goold's autocracy — is that some final and totally vitiating disability?

Strangely, the use of these novel and insightful modes of viewing the religious past — in fine detail and through the ledgers — which have seemed, at least to this reviewer, to offer so much promise of scope and depth, seem less rewarding in application. It cannot be said that the fault lies in the manner of application: Dr Pawsey has done a fine job of demonstrating just what these techniques can do. Indeed it is the very excellence of her performance which leads one to say with such conviction — not enough.

*The Popish Plot* is a lesser book, but none the less valuable in its originality and historical contribution. It is about sectarianism and cultural animus as directed against Irish Catholics in Victoria, 1860-3. What Pawsey documents is of such a kind as to induce an earlier reviewer to suggest that it would have been best left buried, not resurrected for historical posterity. I do not share that opinion: much of the value of the book lies in the presentation to present view of prejudices and bigotry now almost in the realm of the inconceivable. It thus is an indispensable aid to the basic comprehension of nineteenth-century religious and cultural history and, like Hitler's racial persecutions, a salutary reminder to the present to keep itself in order. Yet the technique of concentrating on minute detail is again in question. The detail of anti-Catholicism oft repeated, with predictable variants, has an effect akin to that (I am assured) of exposure to pornography: after the initial impact, it declines to the tame and then degenerates into the tedious. Dr Pawsey's book should have been constantly shocking to all right-thinking ecumenical persons, who should have remained aboil throughout with righteous anger at the re-presentation of these ancient affronts. But I fear they will just be bored. It is not only the soporific effect of the basic material — all of those electrifying sectarian insults, taken together, cancel each other out into mild farce — it is because Pawsey does not analyse enough. Her earlier critic's instincts were

right if his conclusions were wrong. There is not much point in exhuming such material unless it is thoroughly and rigorously analysed as a socio-religious phenomenon of its day. There *is* analysis, but not nearly enough: an opportunity has been missed.

The result is that the whole construction sinks under the spectacular weight of its unsorted piles of disinterred sectarian and anti-Irish garbage, taking down with it valuable cargo virtually unnoticed. For Pawsey is in fact a highly intelligent and perceptive commentator. There is the demonstration that the Catholics and the Irish could never escape their overseas histories and thus could never live entirely in Australia (could that have made them love Ireland and Rome *more?*); there is the crucial brogue as stigma and give away; there is sectarianism as mass popular entertainment; and so on.

Religious historians will remain in debt to Dr Pawsey's industry and methodology, both for what she has done and the limitations she has demonstrated as inherent in the endeavour. To say her work raises questions is to pay it the highest of compliments, given that she has done this with the highest quality of scrupulous scholarship and that these questions are new, unusual in their implications and very important.

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