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THE ROMAN MOULD OF THE AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

1846-1878

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ABBREVIATIONS

M.L.	Mitchell Library
S.A.A.	Sydney Archdiocesan Archives
S.M.H.	Sydney Morning Herald

Translations throughout the whole of the thesis are
my own.

INTRODUCTION

An historical analysis of the Roman Catholic Church in the Australian colonies between 1846-1878 presents a number of questions as to origins, composition and attitudes that as yet remain unanswered. This present work has avoided the general themes and tries to explore one limited problem - what was there in the Church of that period that can now be seen as distinctive and primary? If some headway can be made in answering that question it is possible that other aspects of the Church may thereby be illumined.

The Church between those years was already sufficiently well established to have taken on the characteristics that marked the course of her future. Given the origins of the majority of her members it is natural that the most notable quality that has caught the attention of historians has been her Irish heritage and its consequences. But from the vantage point of a century and more, it is now possible to ask what distinctive features remain today as a result of that heritage. And if the answer is that little remains, except lightly worn customs such as an occasional procession on 17 March and an Irish page in the Melbourne Advocate, it is possible that some other attribute of the Church of the

past was of even greater significance than the Irish background.

At first sight it may appear almost frivolous to say that the most important characteristic of those years probably can be summed up by using the word Roman. After all one is entitled to expect that any society which describes itself by the deliberate choice of a name will express something of its own essence in its denomination. To say that the Catholic Church in the Australian colonies between 1846-1878 became a Roman Church could therefore appear to be a truism, or merely begging the question. Yet it ought to be remembered that another note of this Church is expressed in the word Catholic, and in time and place this catholica has assumed the flesh of the nations. To speak of the Catholic Church in Holland and of the Catholic Church in Spain is to speak of the same entity. It is nonetheless true that each presents vastly different manifestations of the same catholica, despite the historical links of the Church of the past in those two countries. The same is true of the Roman note. The Church in Germany, between 1846-1878, called itself Roman, just as the Church in Australia did. It is the contention of this thesis that the Catholic Church in Australia became a Roman Church in the sense that the word was understood in Rome itself. Indeed it may well be true that no other manifestation of

the catholica, including the Italian, became more Roman than the Australian Church.

According to the constant teaching of the Roman theologians of the nineteenth century the Roman Church was the true and only genuine Church of Christ, in which the Roman Pontiff taught infallibly, exercised supreme jurisdiction over the whole Church, and was the source of the power of orders.¹ This teaching was given a dogmatic form at the first Vatican Council. To find a Church which in all things looked to and depended upon Rome for guidance in its teaching, eagerly sought the Roman stamp of authority on its discipline, and rejoiced in recognizing Rome as the source of its sacramental wellsprings, would be to discover a daughter Church of Rome, one which could be called truly Roman.

Australia was a new mission field in the first half of the nineteenth century. On every count it appeared the least attractive of all. No nation was likely to clamour to establish a padroado over a convict settlement. No ambitious ecclesiastic was moved to desire the title to Hobart, Adelaide or even Sydney. Personnel, finance, even books and vestments, all had to come from elsewhere. Here

1

See P. Parente, Theologia Fundamentalis (Rome 1946) p.118 and S. Sanguinetti, De Sede Romana B. Petri Principis Apostolorum (Rome, 1867), p.203.

was an opportunity and a challenge to the Congregation de Propaganda Fide to exercise its wellnigh plenipotentiary powers and shape a new Church in the Roman mould. Under the direction of men like Frasoni, Barnabò, Franchi and Simeoni the Congregation was equal to the task. It was a question of finding the willing cooperators who would work with the Roman mind.

Three separate forces combined to give to Australia a Roman Catholic Church - England, Ireland and Rome. The English contribution was ephemeral and gave way to an 'Irish take-over'.¹ It was a 'take-over', or, dependent upon one's attitude, an undertaking forced by circumstances, which impelled Irish prelates and priests to come and sustain a people, in the main of Irish blood, who could not be served adequately by the English Benedictines, despite their generous aspirations. The debt that Catholic Australia owes to Polding and the Black Monks is just one small segment of the debt that Christianity and Western civilization itself owes to Benedict and his sons. The memories of men are short, but the day could yet come when Australia will claim her Polding, as England claims Augustine, and Germany honours Boniface.

1

T.L. Suttor, 'The Catholic Church in the Australian Colonies 1840-1865' (Ph.D. thesis, A.N.U. 1961), p.iii.

Since the time of Patrick, Ireland was Catholic and, in its own way, loyal to Rome. But it would be a mistake to imagine that before 1850 the Catholic Church in Ireland was Roman in the sense understood by Rome. Before the days of Maynooth most of the Irish clergy were trained in France and, later, Maynooth itself did little to orientate the Irish Church towards Rome. In 1850 Propaganda sent Paul Cullen back to Ireland as Archbishop of Armagh to unify the Church there and to bring it into line with Roman law and custom. Cullen had spent thirty years in Rome in preparation for his task, and he understood his mandate fully. Although he reported in 1852 that at least one bishop spoke publicly 'without respect for...the Pope',¹ by the time of his death in 1878 he had done much to direct the Church in Ireland Romewards. Yet his work in Ireland, like Polding's in Australia, was transitory. By 1880 the ethos of Maynooth was in the ascendancy and Ireland began again to moderate its dependancy on the papacy and the curia.²

1

Cullen to Franconi, 26 June 1852 in P. Mac Suibhne, Paul Cullen and his Contemporaries with their letters from 1820-1902, 3 vols. (Naas, Co. Kildare 1961-) vol.III, p.129.

2

A story still told with mild humour in Rome in the 1940's related how Leo XIII (1878-1903) interviewed an Apostolic Visitor whom he had sent to Ireland to investigate the affairs of the Church there. 'Well, Your Excellency, how are the bishops of Ireland?' asked the pope. 'I met no bishops in Ireland, Your Holiness, I met eighteen popes instead.'

If Cullen's work in Ireland was transitory his work in Australia has endured. From Dublin he was able to influence the choice of bishops for Australian sees so that in one way or another all the prelates appointed to those sees until 1878 were Cullen's men. He was their friend and confidant, he formed most of them personally as students in Rome and priests in Dublin, or they thought with Cullen's Roman mentality. These were the men who left a lasting stamp on the Catholic Church in Australia and, irrespective of their birthplaces and the other influences which marked them, before all else they were Romans. They were a group of men dedicated to the purpose of the papacy and the curia, which was to build a Roman Church in spirit, faith and discipline here in the Australian colonies. A simple indication of their success is the fact that today nineteen of the twenty five bishops ruling Australian sees are Roman trained, eighteen of them in Cullen's Alma Mater, Propaganda Fide.

A Church is made up of more than a hierarchy and a clergy even when it can be shown that the clergy took their lead from the hierarchy and formed a unity with them. The question thus remains as to how the lay members of the Catholic Church in Australia reacted to the process of making their Church Roman. While this thesis suggests that the bishops were the formative element of the Church in the nineteenth century and the role of the layman was passive,

it remains true that a special set of historical circumstances combined to turn the minds of the laity to Rome and to make them more receptive to Roman direction.

In Australia itself the Catholic Church was a minority group, which reflected in its own interior life, as well as in its attitude to the society around it, the tendencies common to such groups. There was always the inclination to withdraw and rely on its own resources, most evident ultimately in the solution to the education question. This, coupled with a certain aggressiveness, was a form of spiritual 'triumphalism' which manifested itself in the attitude that only the Catholic Church possessed the truth in religious matters, and membership of it could compensate for deficiencies in social status and personal possessions. It was not by accident that Catholic Australians were frequently to the fore in the construction of a spirit of nationalism. More than any other Australians, partly because they were Catholic and partly because they were mainly of Irish stock, they felt a certain alienation from the culture, the bonds of Empire, the ties of loyalty to the Crown that were part of the total mental and emotional outlook of most other Australians. But nationalism was a slow growth and Catholics sought a common bond, a centre of unity, a figure-head, and, in their hesitancy, a leader to guide

them. It is scarcely to be wondered at that this void would be filled by a religious figure who, while not dividing or lessening their loyalty to Australia, would nonetheless supply the want. The ancient longing of the Church for a Pastor Angelicus was never more evident than in the Church in the Australian colonies in the nineteenth century.

To the bishops, Rome meant Propaganda Fide and the pope. To the laity, Rome meant the pope, and Pius IX (1846-1878), or Pio Nono, as he became known in the English speaking world, was increasingly a figure of immense importance in the minds of Australian Catholics. The historical circumstances, known variously as the Risorgimento, or, on another level, the Roman Question, combined to make Pio Nono the object of derision and rejection by many non-Catholics, while at the same time he became the object of love and respect on the part of Catholics. It is not necessary to judge the actions of the men of the Risorgimento, or the reactions of Pio Nono to the work of making Italy into a nation, in order to understand why Australian Catholics turned more and more towards Rome and the pope during that long pontificate of thirty two years. But it has been necessary to trace in this thesis, in some detail, the events from Gaeta to Porta Pia and beyond, to see how they were reported in the

Australian press, Catholic and secular, so that the process which helped to form the Roman Church here might be understood.

While the work of the Risorgimento went forward Pio Nono was not idle in forging the weapons which served to strengthen the spiritual basis of Catholicism. The definition of the Immaculate Conception in 1854 fostered faith in the supernatural, in the efficacy of prayer, in hope of an after life and in the value of the virtue of purity. The Syllabus of Errors in 1864 was a direct challenge to the liberal society which Pio Nono grew to detest after 1848, and the definition of Infallibility in 1870 served to strengthen immeasurably the power of the papacy itself. In Australia amongst all sections of the Catholic Church, these actions, which were manifestations of papal power, were received with joy and equanimity and in their own way tended to hasten the process of romanization. When Pio Nono and Cullen died in 1878, had their minds turned to Australia, they would have been able to rest content in the knowledge that here at least their work was done, and well done.

Patrick Francis Moran, Cullen's nephew trained by him in Rome and Dublin, perhaps unconsciously provided the initial source that guided the direction of this thesis. He studied his work, History of the Catholic Church in

Australasia (1895) with official documents, letters, short biographies and reminiscences that indicated the direction the Church in Australia took. The Archives of St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, containing numerous other official Roman documents, letters to Propaganda, and correspondence between the bishops of the period, are the most valuable source for primary material. Catholic and non-Catholic newspapers of the day are surprisingly rich in reports and comments on the Roman Question and thus they help an understanding of the reactions of the laity, while sermons and pamphlets abound on the theological implications of Roman teachings. It might be added that one factor before all else made research on this topic possible. Although a century apart from Cullen and the bishops of colonial Australia my Alma Mater was also Propaganda Fide. My indebtedness, although perhaps different from theirs, is apparent.