

**THE AGE 1892+ :**  
**AN EARLY BRISBANE CATHOLIC NEWSPAPER ❖**

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Sr Rosa MacGinley

*The Age* began publication on 1 October 1892 and continued into the later 1920s when it was bought by Archbishop Duhig and converted into *The Catholic Leader*, Brisbane's still successfully continuing Catholic paper. I will deal here only with its first ten years.

*The Age* was not the first Catholic paper in Brisbane. Bishop Quinn, soon after his arrival in May 1861 as the first bishop of the newly demarcated colony of Queensland,<sup>1</sup> acquired some interest in *The North Australian* which was published in Ipswich - its second newspaper in terms of circulation - and which had at the time a Catholic editor who was prepared to voice and defend Catholic issues.<sup>2</sup> The paper, while proclaiming its policy of freedom from religious bigotry, vigorously denied that it was an official Catholic organ.<sup>3</sup> The paper, however, ceased publication in 1865 and Quinn appears to have lost money in its failure. It was not until 1878 that the bishop again entered the newspaper field; this time with his own publication, *The Australian*, whose masthead was decorated with emus, kangaroos and various other Australian symbols, complete with a motto 'Advance Australia'.<sup>4</sup> Published weekly, it described itself as a Catholic journal which aimed to present a Catholic viewpoint on both home and overseas issues.

We are led to enquire what was a Catholic paper at the time. There were papers, such as the *North Australian*, with Catholic editors who in general covered Catholic affairs sympathetically.<sup>5</sup> They were of a piece with the many newspapers whose editors at the time supported a particular political or religious line and were very often owner editors. Like the *North Australian* also, a number of these papers were fairly short-lived. Others, like *The Age*, were Catholic by policy but were not, as we shall see, officially diocesan publications. They

typically exhibited a degree of individualism, commenting on general issues such as politics, immigration and current happenings as the editor saw fit.

A feature of the development of 19<sup>th</sup> century Catholicism, in fact, was utilisation of the increasingly influential popular press, often a private enterprise venture by a group of Catholic laymen and usually several priests. Patrick O'Farrell refers to the earliest such venture in Sydney as the initiative of Archdeacon McEncroe who, with his previous United States experience of 'a liberal democracy, had argued that, in order to rid themselves of social and political disadvantages, Catholics urgently needed the leadership and voice of a newspaper'.<sup>6</sup> Financed by leading Catholic laymen, this was achieved with the foundation in 1839 of *The Australasian Chronicle*, edited by the young Scottish convert, W.A. Duncan.<sup>7</sup> On its ceasing publication in 1848, McEncroe established *The Freeman's Journal*, to be published for nearly a century to come and around which 'there grew up a group of active, vocal laymen, best described as Liberal Catholics'.<sup>8</sup> The *Freeman's* could be highly critical of particular diocesan policies it considered not in the best interests of its Catholic clientele. Many such papers read today as an Irish Catholic ethnic press which was determined, at the same time, to be vocally Australian in its claim for Catholics to their full share in colonial development.

Within this colonial context, the early Queensland papers referred to above find their location. The *Australian* appears to have gone into a decline some time after Bishop Quinn's death in 1881 – it was still surviving in 1901 when *The Age* makes an unflattering reference in its assertion that 'priests retired years ago from the ownership and management of *The Australian* [and are] in no way responsible for its opinions and mis-statements' (27.7.1901). It may have been this situation which prompted William Crofton to establish his own paper as an owner editor. As quite a young man he had had newspaper experience in Dublin and, following his arrival in Queensland, obtained a position on the staff of the Brisbane *Courier*; he had also been chief accountant of the Brisbane Newspaper Co. Ltd.<sup>9</sup> He called his weekly publication *The Age* and claimed at different times that it

was a Catholic newspaper (1.10.98), that it was the ‘organ of the Catholic community’ (15.9.1900) and that it was founded as a Catholic paper (27.9.1902). William Crofton was to prove emphatic and decided in his own views.

Amid a plethora of articles and items on a wide range of topics, calculated to have something for most readers, what are some of the salient emphases that strike us today in *The Age’s* first ten years of publication?

First of all, it is genuinely Catholic; covering Catholic news from all over Queensland and at the same time giving us a first hand feel for early communities at that time, whether their centre of location was Cooktown, Barcaldine, Rockhampton or Warwick – these towns, among others, appear to have had special correspondents. We can trace the building of churches and schools, and read accounts of the Christmas and other special Masses celebrated in all of these places with detailed descriptions of the Latin liturgical music selected for the occasion and the names of organists and soloists, often women. In a number of cases, this reporting predates the arrival in the town of religious Sisters, so often considered the harbingers of culture for local Catholic communities. In Barcaldine, a case in point, we read that the choir was ‘beginning to show signs of great life and activity’ (28.4.94): the previous Sunday, Conconi’s Mass was sung with ‘great beauty and power, which shows what can be done in distant districts if only we utilize the talents at our service’. Mrs Halloran presided at the new organ while Miss Forrest’s *Ave Maria* was ‘immensely admired’ by the reporter. Miss Lucy Sheehan was heard ‘to great effect’ in the *Agnus Dei* and Mr and Mrs Reid sang the *O Salutaris* with ‘great dignity, accuracy and grace’. There is frequent mention of the activities of local branches of the Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society – the predominant organisation for Catholic men and in most regional centres the only one – and of Catholic literary and debating societies, both in Brisbane and the larger regional cities. There is favoured mention of the opening of Maronite churches in Australia and attention drawn to the mission being held for Maronite Catholics at St Mary’s, South Brisbane (7.4.94).

Above all, there is a rich panorama of personalities, at a time when the population of the colony was small enough to allow of lengthy obituaries, as well as accounts of Catholics, and others, deserving of mention for some enterprise or contribution to their local community. A number of these were involved in local or parliamentary politics, such as John Leahy, a Thargomindah squatter and strong parliamentary supporter of the Scottish premier, Thomas McIlwraith. Usually a biography is given, detailing background in Ireland or elsewhere and colonial experiences. It is of interest that a number of Scottish Catholics feature, such as Donald MacIntosh, prominent MLA for Warwick, and Alexander Macpherson, a trained botanist involved in developing the Brisbane Botanical Gardens. Thomas Finney, principal of the leading Brisbane firm of Finney, Isles & Co., a non-Catholic Irishman, received a number of lengthy references for his contribution as an outstanding citizen and member of the Legislative Council. His firm was to be followed by other leading retailers whose principals were Catholic, as both personal references and the paper's advertisements show. A number of Irish Catholic doctors, often prominent personalities in a regional area, are mentioned, usually in connection with some local involvement. Among them, we find Kevin Izod O'Doherty, who as a medical student was transported to Van Diemen's Land, later pardoned, completed his medical studies and was drawn to Queensland by Bishop Quinn; others include Doctors P.J. Moloney (Fortitude Valley), McNeely (Rockhampton, later Brisbane), Geoghegan (Ipswich and Gympie) and J.J. Mullen (Brisbane, later Sydney). The younger generation who merit notice appear drawn to law, with yearly mention of successful students entered for the Bar examinations from Nudgee College.<sup>10</sup>

There is regular reporting of the successes of the Catholic schools, for both boys and girls, in the public examinations, especially the Junior and Senior examinations set by the University of Sydney.<sup>11</sup> In addition, for girls, were the achievements in the music examinations conducted by the London Trinity College of Music and other British music associations, where outstanding results were gained by All Hallows and other schools of the Mercy Sisters, even at the distance of Cooktown. Already, as reporting in *The Age* reflects, convents in

both urban and rural areas were noted centres of music teaching. Over this period, the Christian Brothers were extending their schools in Queensland, taking over or replacing several lay-run Catholic schools, as in the case of the well established St James School in Brisbane in 1893, whose outstanding headmaster, Jeremiah Long, had earlier set a high standard.<sup>12</sup> In Toowoomba in 1899, the Christian Brothers replaced the St Patrick's Boys School with their own college. Mr E.X. O'Gorman, 'for many years the capable and energetic head teacher of St Patrick's' (*Age*, 10.4.97) joined the State teaching service and we next hear of him in Chillagoe, a developing mining centre. Bishop Quinn's St Killian's Boys School, South Brisbane, was still continuing, with its 'popular teacher, Mr O'Sullivan MA' in charge (21.12.01). A Mr R.J. Kelly had set up a highly successful Civil Service Training College by the early 1890s which was still operating a decade later. In addition to the Civil Service and Sydney University examinations, it entered students, both young men and women, for Commercial examinations and those of the Queensland Pharmacy Board, in which a number of girls were successful.

*The Age* also ran long articles on current questions concerning the Church. One was the issue of 'Out of the Church No Salvation' (an eye-catching headline, 11.6.98). It quotes a Jesuit theologian, a Fr Schoupe, on the understanding of the body and soul of the Church: the body the visible membership, while the soul embraced all those in good faith observing the law of God as they knew it. The article continues with a statement to the same effect of Cardinal Manning in England and in an 1854 address of Pope Pius IX. A later issue (28.1.99) contains an explanation by Cardinal Moran in Sydney: 'there are innumerable souls', he says, who, though outwardly separated from the Church, 'are nevertheless united with her in spirit'. By 1898, long articles begin to appear on Science and Religion, with Cardinal Moran a prominent contributor. He explains the days of Genesis as long eras in which geological and other changes gradually occurred; in the opinion, he continues, 'now very generally adopted by scientists, the earth reached its present state and was equipped with its rich and wondrous adornment of vegetable and animal life by a gradual process extending over untold centuries ...'

(22.10.98). In an article entitled ‘What the Church Can and Cannot Change’ (27.5.99), *The Age* explains that it ‘is the discipline, not the doctrine, of the Church that can be altered to meet local and temporal exigencies’, adding that ‘no one system of discipline can be adapted to the requirements of all men’. Among matters of discipline open to alteration, the article lists the language of the liturgy; Church architecture and music ‘in which matters the Church has interfered much less than she might have done’; celibacy of the clergy; religious orders, their existence and their constitutions; ‘sundry, not all, of the impediments to marriage’.

*The Age* also entered into lively political debate in line – and often dispute – with other newspapers circulating in Queensland at the time. What is clear from the editorials is William Crofton’s commitment to the development and prosperity of Queensland, with a keen interest in particular in the northern industries such as sugar. He remained, through the several elections occurring in this ten year interval, a declared supporter of the Conservative Party of Thomas McIlwraith,<sup>13</sup> which at the beginning of the 1890s was supported by most Catholic voters. He was equally vocal in his opposition to the incipient Labour Party of Thomas Glassey,<sup>14</sup> a Northern Irish Protestant of fine character and open acceptance of Catholics, who had much to suffer for his advocacy both of ‘one man, one vote’ and of women’s suffrage. Lengthy discussions went on in *The Age*’s editorials and other articles on European socialism and its tendency to communism, with which Labour’s objectives were seen to be linked. A J.J. Lane of Gympie in a series of long and informed articles in 1896 traced the development of socialism in French and German politics and condemned communism as a political theory. In his fourth article (25.7.96), he came to the concept of Christian Socialism, pointing out that there was a Catholic Socialist Party in Germany and quoting Bishop von Ketteler who strongly supported the right of working men to organise. Crofton, however, in his editorials remained opposed to Labour but did not succeed, despite his polemics, in preventing Catholics from supporting Labour and standing as parliamentary representatives. A prominent Labour MLA, Frank McDonnell, a committed Catholic and founder of the firm of McDonnell & East, succeeded in gaining favourable mention

in *The Age* only in the early 1900s, especially for his successful advocacy in 1900 of the extension of the government Scholarship system to private, including Catholic, schools.

The question of Socialism and the extent of its adoption by organised Labour in Australia, and especially by the newer phenomenon of Labour-in-Politics, became a heated one in Australia by the mid-1890s. It was in the interests of conservative parties to play a strong anti-Socialist card, a policy which reached a high pitch in the 1905 campaign of the Prime Minister, George Reid. A strong sectarian note also came into this. As more Catholics were drawn to support Labour, Cardinal Moran entered the debate with several statements during 1905, pointing out that the term 'socialism' as used in Australia had various meanings. He emphatically distinguished the more radical forms of socialism being voiced in continental European politics - which he condemned - from 'what he called legitimate democracy, the movement for social reform in Australia'.<sup>15</sup> With this endorsement, there was a clear opening for Catholic support for Labour in which, as Patrick Ford points out,<sup>16</sup> Catholic members formed a right-wing directional element, having a resemblance, as later comment has noted, to European centre parties, as in Germany.

Sectarianism featured strongly in the public debates of the later 19<sup>th</sup> century as most papers had openly factional slants, especially as the colonies attained self-government. *The Age* proclaimed itself as opposed to sectarianism, stating that, if a candidate was 'not otherwise suitable...to represent the electors', his religion was 'no recommendation' (6.5.93). Bishop Quinn was quoted to the effect that a good Protestant was to be preferred to a bad Catholic.<sup>17</sup> *The Age* commended 'hardworking Germans around Laidley' (27.1.94) and warmly endorsed the Scottish Association and its charitable outreach (24.3.94); moves to form a Queensland Irish Association merited support in view of its being 'of a non-sectarian and non-political nature' (26.3.97). When Catholicism came under attack, as in a 1903 article in the Sydney Protestant paper, the *Watchman*, *The Age* could hit back in strong terms but added that 'the vast majority of our fellow Protestant citizens' reject such 'bellicose' attacks

(6.6.03). Michael Hogan, in his study of sectarianism in Australia, refers to the absence of anti-Protestant polemic as such in Catholic papers, to their wide reporting of general incidents both in Australia and abroad and to their wider interest in continental European affairs than shown in other Australian papers.<sup>18</sup> His study is based chiefly on the NSW and Victorian press, but this observation is also borne out by *The (Brisbane) Age*.

*The Age* was strongly opposed to Federation on the grounds that Queensland would be ruined by the larger and more firmly established business interests of New South Wales and Victoria – this despite the support for Federation of many prominent Catholics, including Cardinal Moran and Crofton’s own political hero, T.J. (Thomas Joseph) Byrnes, the brilliant young Queenslander from the ranks of McIlwraith’s Conservative Party who, in 1898, became the colony’s first Australian-born Premier.<sup>19</sup> He saw Byrnes, however, as conceding no more than minimum national powers to the proposed federal government, while Byrnes’s untimely death that same year, aged 38, prevented his participation in the final shaping of the Federation’s scope. In 1899, when Federation was inevitable, Crofton published an Epitaph to be inscribed on Queensland’s tomb: ‘In regretful memory of a Young and Vigorous Colony/ which Escaped from Bondage, Dec.10, 1859/ Flourished for 40 Years/ and Voluntarily returned to Bondage AD 1899’. He did, however, approve of the franchise legislation for the new Commonwealth: complete manhood and womanhood suffrage with both men and women having equal right to be elected.<sup>20</sup>

William Crofton was in fact a definite advocate of higher education for women and their entry into professions such as medicine, as shown in many articles he published, both from within Australia and from overseas.<sup>21</sup> Among examples, we find an article entitled ‘A Word for the Girls’ (13.2.97) proposing that girls had ‘more need of learning a means of livelihood even than the boys’; the fact that most women married was ‘no reason why every woman should not be in a state of economic independence...A woman is as important a unit of society as a man.’ Typical of similar items, a par (31.10.96) noted that the *Riverina Herald* was published solely by women, while



another (13.1.94) commended lady cyclists for wearing ‘rational dress’: ‘a knickerbocker suit of clothing...appears to be safer than a skirt’. Crofton also followed, in the course of this ten year period, the fortunes of the struggle for women’s suffrage. A long article dealt with the granting of the women’s vote in New Zealand in 1893 and the Marist Bishop Grimes of Christchurch urging all Catholic women to enrol as voters and to exercise this right. When South Australia accorded the vote to women the following year, a par noted that the Dominican nuns turned out in force to vote, something, the par claimed, the Sisters in New Zealand always did and was ‘an example which should be followed by all our religious communities’ (9.5.96).<sup>22</sup> At the same time, *The Age*, with its claimed even-handedness, carried articles claiming that women would lose their unique influence if they entered the struggle of parliamentary politics.

In many incidental references to Ireland and Irish affairs, Crofton, like the editors of so many similar Catholic papers in Australia, strongly supported Home Rule for Ireland as advocated by John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party in the British parliament. This meant in essence the re-establishment of the Irish parliament in Dublin (abolished by the Act of Union in 1800) and the level of self-rule operating in Australia and Canada, an objective endorsed by the Australian Commonwealth parliament in 1906. This was to be attained by due representation and parliamentary process. In the decade preceding Federation when republicanism was publicly voiced in Australia,<sup>23</sup> *The Age* in an article on Australia as a Republic came to the pragmatic conclusion that it was inadvisable: ‘The earth’, the writer claimed, ‘has grown small since 1776 and the Powers have grown very large and very greedy...’ – Australia would be defenceless in the case of attack. Despite this conservatism, *The Age* was opposed to the Boer War, asserting that it did not concern Australia and that the Boers would not be easily defeated. ‘Peppering them with British or Australian bullets’, *The Age* (14.10.99) claimed somewhat ironically, was not ‘the right way to convert them to liberal and tolerant conceptions of their duty to their neighbours...’.

William Crofton was one among many 19<sup>th</sup> century idiosyncratic newspaper editors in Australia. The new century, especially following the First World War, brought a more monochromatic Australian society and Australian Catholic Church.<sup>24</sup> With this consolidation of Australia's Catholicism, such free-ranging Catholic papers as *The Age* gave way to official diocesan papers devoted more exclusively to religious content and with the avoidance of secular political and sectional party commentary.<sup>25</sup>

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*Rosa MacGinley pbvm*  
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*is a Research Fellow of the Australian Catholic University*  
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*and a founding member of ACU's Golding Centre*  
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*for Women's History, Theology and Spirituality.*  
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## ENDNOTES:

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- 1 The colony of Queensland was detached from New South Wales by decree of the British government in June 1859, this separation to take effect from the following 10 December. James Quinn of Dublin was appointed first bishop that same year. In 1875, to honour the O'Connell centenary, he altered his surname to O'Quinn.
- 2 See Yvonne Margaret McLay, *James Quinn: First Catholic Bishop of Brisbane* (Melbourne: Graphic Books, 1979), p.167. At the time Catholics formed a greater proportion of the population in Ipswich than in Brisbane and were more active; in 1862, over half the city councillors were Catholics (p.139).
- 3 *Ibid.*, p.167. The Anglican Bishop Tufnell occasionally used the *North Australian* for his public statements (p.131). He and Quinn campaigned together on the issue of continued government aid to denominational schools.

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- 4 Most early Australian Catholic papers, while giving much coverage to Irish topics, exhibited a distinct Australian emphasis. This not only expressed determination to be part of the developing nation but appears to have implied ‘the more Australian, the less British.’
  - 5 A number of editors, especially of the numerous regional newspapers of the time, were Irish and mostly Catholic. See Noel McLachlin, ‘Irish Organs and Reversible Nationalism: the *Irish-Australian* and Irish Australia, 1894-5’, in Oliver MacDonagh and W.F. Mandle, eds, *Irish-Australian Studies: Papers delivered at the Fifth Irish-Australian Conference* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1989). McLachlan comments: ‘Churchmen discreetly apart, I suggest journalists (not lawyers or academics or authors or generals) were Ireland’s most distinguished exports in the nineteenth century ... a surprisingly neglected dimension of the cultural history of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.’ (p.187)
  - 6 Patrick O’Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community: An Australian History*, 3rd Revised edn (Sydney: New South Wales University Press, 1992), p.66.
  - 7 On Duncan’s Queensland career, see John Mackenzie-Smith, ‘William A. Duncan: Catholic Patriot and Champion of Human Rights’, *Proceedings of the Brisbane Catholic Historical Society*, Vol.9, 2004.
  - 8 O’Farrell, p.93.
  - 9 McLay, p.211.
  - 10 Law could be pursued in Queensland, where medicine entailed university study, usually in Sydney or Melbourne.
  - 11 These two levels of public examinations were initiated by Sydney University to prepare and qualify older school students for university studies. They were equivalent, respectively, to Grades 10 and 12 in secondary schooling today.
  - 12 On Jeremiah Long, see Brian Steele, ‘J.W. Long: The Grand Old Man of Catholic Education’, *Proceedings of the Brisbane Catholic Historical Society*, Vol.8, 2002.
  - 13 In the 1893 elections, the *Age* (6.5.93) rejoiced that McIlwraith won against ‘the intense radicalism of Sir Charles Lilley and the still more extreme and dangerous theories’ of the Labour Party under Glassey.
  - 14 ‘Labour’ remained the spelling for some years.
  - 15 Patrick Ford, *Cardinal Moran and the A.L.P.* (Melbourne University Press, 1966), p.272.
  - 16 *ibid.*, p.274. Irish Catholics of the time have been described as essentially ‘economic conservatives’; most Irish immigrants came from tenant holdings in rural areas and had no experience of industrial labour agitation.

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- 17 In the *Age*, Crofton expressed unqualified admiration for Quinn, with reference, for example, to his promotion of land settlement and in the yearly coverage of the commemoration of his death in St Stephen's Cathedral. Crofton had earlier, in his *Brisbane Courier* days, been a strong critic of the bishop's authoritarianism. (McLay, *James Quinn*, p.211)
  - 18 Michael Hogan, *The Sectarian Strand: Religion in Australian History* (Penguin Books, 1987), pp.102-13. Regarding Queensland, he makes the observations that Catholic settlers were 'spread fairly evenly through the largely non-urban society' and that 'Probably in no other colony was Catholic integration in the general society so well developed...' (p.110).
  - 19 Cf. the various references in the *Age* to Byrnes's outstanding scholastic career and his political fortunes leading to Attorney-General, then Premier; in 1893, he contributed a series of sketches on Lacordaire, the famous French Dominican, to the *Brisbane Courier*. (*Age*, 18.11.93)
  - 20 New Zealand in 1893 was the first of the Australasian colonies to grant the parliamentary franchise to women; women, however, could not stand for parliament. South Australia in 1894 granted both rights.
  - 21 One par (30.6.94) went as follows: "Shall women work or shall they marry?" inquires a daily paper. They generally have to work in either case. Put the question in some other form.'
  - 22 Despite the issue being raised in parliament by 1890, female suffrage in Queensland was delayed by the continuance of both restricted manhood suffrage and plural voting. These impediments were not removed until 1905, when the women's vote was also granted.
  - 23 The *Age* (22.10.92) noted that Thomas Glassey declared in favour of an Australian Republic, a minimum wage of 3 pounds a week and a 44-hour week; the following year (*Age*, 25.3.93), Sir Charles Lilley was quoted as in favour of separation from Great Britain. (In 1907, 2 pounds, 2 shillings a week was established as the basic wage in Australia.)
  - 24 It has been argued that until the First World War Australia remained colonial in its population profile and social variegations and that a distinctive Australian ethos became paramount in the inter-War period. The 1933 Census records the most Australian-born population to date, with only 13.6% of the general, and 9.7% of the Catholic, population born overseas. The lower Catholic figure reflects the 20th century fall-off in Irish migration.
  - 25 John A. Coleman, in *An American Strategic Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), p.150, refers to a parallel transition in the United States. He queries the reasons for the loss of autonomy in this area of lay initiative.