

**ITALIAN LAY CATHOLICISM IN BRISBANE AFTER
VATICAN COUNCIL II:
THE ITALIAN CATHOLIC FEDERATION**

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Although this paper focuses on the Italian Catholic Federation (*Federazione Cattolica Italiana*) in Queensland, some background information on this national association of Italian lay Catholics in Australia is necessary. This paper will firstly discuss the foundation of the FCI in Melbourne and the role of the Scalabrinian fathers in this initiative, within the context of the growing involvement of lay people in the life of the Catholic Church promoted by Vatican Council II. The reasons for the rapid growth of the FCI in various Australian States will then be outlined. The discussion of the establishment of the FCI in Queensland in the 1980s will show how the different circumstances of Italian migrants in Brisbane changed the priorities of the local branches of the FCI. A primary motivation of the FCI in Queensland was not anymore the need to assist Italian migrants in their process of settling and adapting to Australian society. The primary motivation was instead a desire to increase the involvement of Italian migrants and their families in the life of the local Church, by making them active participants rather than passive spectators. Moreover, outreach to youth was as important for the Queensland FCI as the material assistance to Italian born migrants. Finally, the current situation of the FCI in Australia will be briefly discussed.

In-depth interviews and conversations with FCI members and Scalabrinian fathers are an important source of information for this paper, as well as observations of FCI functions and meetings.

The beginnings of the FCI in Australia

Although the FCI was only established in Queensland in 1980, this association had been operating in Melbourne since 1960 and, as such, it pre-dated the Vatican Council in its encouragement of lay participation in the apostolate of the Church.

The beginnings of the FCI in Australia are associated with Aldo Lorigiola, a Scalabrinian priest whom Campion included amongst the ‘great Catholics’ in the history of Australian Catholicism.¹ Born in 1926 in Villafranca in the province of Padua and ordained in Chicago in 1951, Lorigiola arrived in Australia in 1955. Even before arriving in Australia, Lorigiola had intended to create an association of Italian migrants ready to collaborate with the Scalabrinian Fathers in the spiritual and welfare activities of the Church. His American experience certainly influenced this project. Lorigiola admitted that:

...the ICF {Italian Catholic Federation} did not originate in Australia: it was founded in San Francisco, California, in 1934 by a small number of Italian migrants with the aims to remedy the total lack of care experienced by the Italian communities of that State. The religious indifference was, as always, quite remarkable.²

Various studies have documented the alienation of many Italian Catholics from the life of the local Church in Australia before the 1960s.³ The apparent neglect of religious practice by many Catholic Italian migrants was regarded as a serious problem for the Church in Australia, also by Bob Santamaria. As early as 1939 he tried to attract the attention of the local Church to the difficulties Italian migrants faced in settling themselves in a new country. However, the solution he proposed in 1939—in line with the Government policy of the time—

was complete assimilation of the migrants and the future disappearance of any cultural difference between ‘old’ and ‘new’ Australians.⁴

With the arrival of the Scalabrinian fathers in Australia in 1952, other solutions were proposed, often backed by Vatican documents such as the Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia* (Family in Exile), published in August 1952. The new priests supported the integration of migrants rather than their assimilation. They argued that the migrants’ religious and cultural heritage could enrich the life of the local Church and it was unrealistic to ask the migrants to give them up in order to be assimilated within Australian society. Of course, cultural, social and linguistic barriers needed to be overcome in order to reach this goal.

Lorigiola’s initiative in founding the FCI was based on his desire to show the Australian hierarchy that Italians, if properly encouraged, could be as active as other Catholics in the practice of their faith.⁵ Moreover, looking back at his enthusiasm in promoting the involvement of the laity, Lorigiola admitted that he was inspired by the hopes and expectations of *rinnovamento* (renewal) raised by the pontificate of John XXIII and his surprise announcement in 1959 of a new Ecumenical Council.⁶

In his plans for a new Catholic lay association, Lorigiola decided that the FCI would be open to both men and women, since he was not impressed by the gender separateness of organisations such as the Holy Name Society and other female Australian Catholic associations.⁷ The new association was also to operate in accordance with the Scalabrinian policy of a ‘pan-Italian’ identity: regional or municipal origins, which characterised most associations founded by Italian migrants after World War II, were to be discounted.⁸ A Brisbane member of the association summed up the national focus of the FCI with these words:

We are like a family: There are no Sicilians, Abruzzesi, Neapolitans, Northerners. We are Italians. That’s all. The FCI has always been Italian.⁹

The same policy was adopted by the Scalabrinians in London. Anne-Marie Fortier, in her study of the *Centro Scalabriniani* in London, noted that their early politics of community ‘sought to unite a regionally fragmented population’.¹⁰

In those Cold War times, there were some expectations that the FCI would play a part in the fight against communism. Soon after its foundation, Bob Santamaria approached Fr Lorigiola and asked whether he was interested in involving the FCI members in the anti-communist activities that the National Civic Council was carrying out in the trade unions. Although he personally admired Bob Santamaria, Lorigiola did not think that direct involvement in trade union politics was an appropriate task for the FCI.¹¹

Lorigiola was aware of the Capuchin Fathers’ difficulties in establishing the *Azione Cattolica* (Catholic Action) among Italian migrants in Melbourne a few years earlier. He knew that the migrants, because of their experiences in Italy, often associated Catholic Action with politics and most of them did not want to be involved in politics. As an association, the FCI in Australia remained faithful to Lorigiola’s line.

As the Scalabrinian historian, Fabio Baggio, has noted, the thirty men and women who became the first members of the FCI in the parish of All Saints in Fitzroy in December 1960 were soon followed by many other migrants:

The enthusiasm of the pioneers inspired many other Italian communities that were under the care of the Scalabrinian missionaries, and in three years the *Federazione Cattolica Italiana* already had 13 branches. In 1966, they already had 1,147 members, divided into 25 branches in different Australian localities. The year after there were 35 branches and the F.C.I. became known across Australia.¹²

Interviews with FCI members also suggest that the FCI was successful in its initial stages because, for many Italian migrants, it was much more than a religious association. In his pastoral experiences in

Wollongong, Lorigiola had realised that cultural and linguistic barriers were hindering the process of integration of Italian migrants into Australian society. In the second half of the 1950s, before moving to Melbourne, his experience with Italian migrants in Wollongong had convinced Lorigiola that his role as a pastor could not be limited to religious activities:

At the time there were about 7,500 Italians in Wollongong, almost all young and in the great majority unmarried. They needed interpreters to deal with lawyers or real estate agents and also in court, because they did not understand English. We Scalabrinians knew English because we had learnt it in the USA. The Italians would buy a block of land and an old timber house but in most cases they did not understand anything during the negotiations. So we devoted ourselves entirely to social services for the Italians.¹³

This assistance by the Scalabrinians in Wollongong included help with translation of legal and work documents and interpreting for Italians in courts or hospitals; the organisation of English language courses for Italian migrants and of Italian language courses for professionals such as nurses and doctors who had daily contacts with the migrants; visits to the sick and the elderly in hospitals and nursing homes.

When the FCI was established in Melbourne, it also began to organise a range of social events that gave Italian migrants the opportunity to socialise in a familiar environment (dinner dances, beauty pageants, *Carnevale*, Mother's and Father's Day, Christmas and New Year's Eve celebrations, etc.). These events were soon organised into a yearly timetable, following a 'calendrical logic that, according to Fortier, year after year, provides a sense of continuity and stability to community life'.¹⁴ Fortier further argues that the Scalabrinians were trying 'to recreate a familiar environment in order to facilitate the smooth transition of migrants into a new social environment'.¹⁵

The FCI did not operate on the basis of gender separation and many Italian parents who may have been reluctant to let their young

daughters go out at night, allowed them instead to attend FCI gatherings or functions usually held in parish halls. They considered these occasions and places as safer than other ‘secular’ venues. Interviews and informal conversations with FCI members confirmed that, in this way, the association has offered many opportunities for endogamous marriages.

The number of Italian migrants significantly increased by 1960, hence the scope for religious, charitable and social activities by the FCI also broadened. In collaboration with the Scalabrinians, the FCI began to carry out a series of similar initiatives in all the cities and towns where its branches existed: spiritual retreats and conferences; fund-raising in response to natural disasters in Italy or Australia; collaboration with the Scalabrinian priests in preparing the liturgy of Italian Masses and participation as ministers of the Eucharist and Bible readers; religious education classes in Italian for adults; pre-marriage education courses and the presentation of plays of a moral and educative nature.

The beginnings of the FCI in Queensland

The FCI arrived in Queensland only in 1980, twenty years after its foundation. Considering the strong links between the FCI and the Scalabrinian Order, it is not surprising that the establishment of this association in Queensland coincided with the beginning of a Scalabrinian presence in Brisbane.

The Scalabrinians began their Queensland mission in 1952 in the North Queensland parish of Silkwood in the South Johnstone district and remained in the little sugar cane town until 1968. They played a significant role in the beginnings of an important Italian religious festival, the “Feast of the Three Saints”, but they never established a branch of the FCI there.¹⁶ Archbishop Patrick O’Donnell, coadjutor archbishop of Brisbane, approached the Scalabrinian fathers in 1965 to find out whether they were interested in working among Italian migrants in Brisbane. The suggestion possibly originated at the top of

the local hierarchy, from Archbishop Duhig (by then almost 100 years old and close to death)—but came to nothing.

It took another fifteen years before the Scalabrinians and the FCI began their work in Brisbane, but it is important to state that when the Scalabrinians arrived in 1981, they did not find a complete vacuum as far as the pastoral care of Italians in the Archdiocese was concerned. The Capuchin Fathers and the Canossian nuns had already been operating among Italian migrants in Brisbane since 1945 and 1949 respectively. The Capuchin fathers were based in Wynnum and their religious and material assistance of Italian migrants was initially provided from bases at the “Crypt” in Fortitude Valley and *Casa San Francesco* in Elizabeth Street in the city. In 1969 they moved to the parish of St Thomas More at Petrie Terrace, where they stayed until 1981. The Capuchin fathers were responsible for the promotion of lay groups that collaborated in their apostolate to the Italian community: the “Third Franciscan Order”, “Catholic Action” and the “Association of Italian Catholic Women”. These associations were all based at *Casa San Francesco*. The Canossian sisters established hospitals and hospices in Gregory Terrace and Oxley. In their service to the sick and the elderly, these nuns always paid particular attention to the Italian community.¹⁷

However, in the late 1970s, as a consequence of the urban development of Brisbane and their marked social mobility, many Italian migrants were moving outwards and the range of activities carried out by the Capuchins, Canossians and lay associations could not fully satisfy the religious and social needs of Italian Catholics. The first-generation migrants who had arrived in Australia in the aftermath of World War II were ageing and those who lived in the northern suburbs found it hard to attend the Italian Mass in inner-city New Farm or the social functions at *Casa San Francesco*. So the conditions seemed to be favourable for a return of the Scalabrinian fathers to Queensland.

Their pastoral style, based on “flying missions” and characterised by a high mobility, seemed to be suitable for these new challenges.¹⁸

The impetus for the Scalabrinians’ return to Queensland and the establishment of the FCI in this state was provided by the determination of an Italian man who was living in Woolloowin, Mr Nicola Nave. A member of the FCI section of North Brisbane recalled how:

Mr Nave wanted to have an Italian priest in our parish, because we didn’t have one, we had to go to the Crypt in the Valley. He approached the parish priest, Mons. Cleary, who told Nave that it was too hard to get Italian priests.¹⁹

When interviewed himself, Mr Nave explained that the lack of an Italian or Italian-speaking priest hindered their access to the sacraments:

Many women wanted to go to confession but they were not able to because they did not speak or understand English.²⁰

When Mons. Cleary was replaced by Fr McMullen in 1975, Nave reiterated his request and the new parish priest was more positive. However, it took another five years before Nave’s dream could be realised. When, in 1979, some Capuchin priests came to Woolloowin to preach in Italian, the response of the local Italians was enthusiastic and Fr McMullen then invited Mr Nave to form a committee in order to discuss what could be done for them. At one of these meetings, a Mr Pezzopane and a Canossian nun were present and they mentioned the work that was being done in the southern states of Australia by the FCI. The responses of the committee members revealed that there were some concerns about the nature of the FCI. When the association was discussed,

We remained a bit sceptical because we thought it was a political group. But during the discussion every doubt faded. Maybe it was faith that guided us.²¹

However, some doubts on the role of the FCI persisted and the association was only established after the Woolloowin committee invited Italian priests and FCI leaders from Melbourne for special events which attracted significant numbers of parishioners. The first of these was a retreat held by Sauro Antonelli, then national president of the FCI and Fr Luciano Ferracin, a Scalabrinian priest, focussing on baptism and faith in Jesus Christ, which was attended by 60 people. Subsequently, Fr Vito Pegolo arrived in August 1980, visiting many Italian families in Woolloowin and surrounding areas.²² On Sunday 26 October 1980, around 500 people participated in the Italian Mass officiated by Fr Vito. The anointing of the sick was administered to 35 people, roses were distributed to the elderly and badges and *tessere* (membership cards) were finally distributed to the first members of the FCI in Brisbane.²³

According to various FCI members, the establishment of the FCI in Woolloowin brought about a new spirit of service and the great joy of being together sharing a common ideal.²⁴ Four years later, another FCI branch was formed in a northern suburb of Brisbane. A small group of Italian migrants had noticed that several Italian migrants and their families in the Aspley area attended the Mass in English every Sunday in different parishes. Supported by Scalabrinian Father Francesco Lovatin, the small group, led by a woman, Giuseppina Musarra, wished to gather all the Italians around the Scalabrinians. Father Lovatin conducted various home visits, followed by a Mass in Italian in July 1983. The Mass was so successful that an informal group of 40 people began to meet monthly under the direction of Fr Lovatin and Mrs Musarra. Eventually a new branch of the FCI was officially established in Aspley on 26 February 1984.²⁵

It is interesting to note that the founders of the FCI in Aspley did not target Italians who had abandoned the practice of their religion, as the FCI pioneers had done in Melbourne and then Sydney in the early 1960s. The primary targets of the new FCI section in Aspley

were instead first and second generation Italians who were already practising their faith in Australian parishes. The Scalabrinians and the lay Catholics who cooperated with them in the establishment of this FCI section, felt that it was important to provide persons with an Italian background with the opportunity to attend a Mass in Italian: a religious event and space that they could feel as their own and that would allow them to express their religiosity through Italian language and culture. While the Wooloowin section initially attracted mainly first-generation migrants, the Aspley section was soon able to include in its membership persons of Italian background who were born or grew up in Australia. These persons confirmed in interviews that, if no other alternatives were available, they would have continued to attend the Mass in English, but they were happy that the FCI gave them the opportunity to practise their faith and socialise with persons of the same ethnic background.

The functions and priorities of the FCI in Queensland

The primary outcome of the collaboration between the FCI and the Scalabrinians in Brisbane was that many Italian Catholics felt for the first time that they really belonged to the Church. Italians who had attended the Mass in English before the arrival of the Scalabrinians noticed the difference:

Before we used to go to the Mass in English, and as soon as the Mass was over, we went home. But since the Scalabrinians arrived in Brisbane everything has changed, they brought a revival for Italians in this city.²⁶

A comment by one of the first FCI members in Brisbane reveals the type of religious activities that the association began to undertake in collaboration with the Scalabrinians. It also shows that those involved were moving away from a passive way of living their religious life to a more active one:

The first steps of the FCI were like learning how to walk. We were like children, we didn't know anything. We didn't even know how to read in the Church, how to prepare the youth choir, how to prepare the adults and the children for reading in the Church; we didn't know how to recite the rosary with other families on Thursdays. But there was much enthusiasm; at the beginning we did a lot of work.²⁷

Similar comments were made by members of the Aspley section of the FCI:

There are many Italian Catholics within the Australian community who probably would never have collected money during Mass, or would never have read at Mass. Their role would have been that of a spectator. We Italians were used to sitting at the back of the Church. When the FCI and the Italian Mass started, we discovered our call.²⁸

The participation of FCI members in the preparation of the liturgy for the Italian Mass was accompanied by the organisation of social functions and bus trips. As a member of the FCI put it, 'the religious aspect goes hand in hand with the social aspect; you cannot have only the religious side'.²⁹ Just a week after the first membership ceremony, the North Brisbane section of the FCI organised a trip to Surfers Paradise. Members of the FCI remember with joy the participation of many young people and how the trip 'greatly enriched the union between young and less young'. Also the rehearsal of Italian songs for Christmas made this celebration 'a beautiful family occasion'.³⁰

This focus on youth and the unity of the family was significant. Although 'material assistance to Italian migrants' continued to be one of the official aims of the FCI, as stated in the Constitution of the association, the economic and professional situation of Italians in Brisbane in the 1980s was very different from that of Italians in inner-city Melbourne or Sydney in the 1960s; so the demands of the initial period of settlement were not as urgent. In his recent study of the Italian community in Brisbane, Baggio argued that, by the early 1980s, despite the difficulties that many women were still experiencing, the

integration process of Italian migrants into Brisbane's social fabric had been largely successful. Second generation Italians had by then "conquered" Brisbane's economic and professional sectors. Hence, Baggio describes 'a now more mature Italian community, kept occupied with maintaining its true national identity also within the second generation and promoting its culture within an Australian society that was increasingly multicultural.'³¹

In such a context, it is not surprising that for the FCI and the Scalabrinians in Queensland, outreach to second-generation Italians was very important. As Cahill noted, 'one feature of the Brisbane [Scalabrinian] venture has been its focus on the second generation's needs'.³²

According to Fortier, the assumption of this policy is that:

Immigrants and, more important, their descendants, will acquire a stronger positive sense of selfhood by tapping into their cultural background. A reinforced sense of positive self-identity would then favour a greater openness towards others, thus increasing social harmony in pluralist contexts.³³

This policy was initially successful: not long after the foundation of the North Brisbane FCI branch, a youth group was formed. However, apart from the influence of the Scalabrinians, there were broader developments that impacted on the growth of the FCI.

The growing participation of young people of Italian descent in the activities of the FCI in Brisbane at this time mirrored similar developments in other Australian States. Broader changes in society and Government policies encouraged second generation migrants to join an Italian organisation. A comment by Sauro Antonelli, FCI national president from 1978 to 1985 ('It had become pointless to deny having an Italian background: actually, it was something to be proud of!'³⁴), indicates that the new policy of multiculturalism supported by politicians such as Don Dunstan, Al Grassby and Gough Whitlam had

encouraged ethnic minorities to publicly express their identity and culture. Mariella di Fabio, FCI national president from 1986 to 1987, well encapsulated the motivations of second generation Italians who decided to join the FCI in this period. Her views deserve to be quoted at length:

It was a time when the term “multiculturalism in Australia” was starting to be really understood. We, young Italian-Australians wanted to express ourselves in a certain way. We were discovering our Italian heritage and were proud of it. I believe we joined an “Italian” group because we wanted to connect with like-minded young people, who shared similar cultural, religious and family values. Many of our parents could not speak English well and found it hard to communicate effectively with our non-Italian friends’ parents.³⁵

FCI members who joined the Aspley branch in the 1980s expressed similar concepts in interviews and informal conversations with the writer of this paper.

In the case of the FCI in Queensland, participation in its activities gave Italian Catholics a greater sense of belonging to the local Church. Little by little, this association gave its members the opportunity to become more active in the life of their parishes. At the beginning not everyone was ready to appreciate a greater involvement of lay people in the liturgy. It was particularly hard for some Italians to see women as ministers of the Eucharist. ‘Women never went near the altar’, commented a FCI member in an interview.³⁶ But then they began to accept this novelty as another consequence of the liturgical changes ‘that the Pope wanted’ in the post-Conciliar period. With regard to the relationships with Australian priests and parishioners, several FCI members encountered difficulties with those who did not always welcome the contribution of Italians to the parish; did not support Masses in Italian; were not happy about the introduction of new religious statues or festivals in their local churches and parishes. Cahill has argued that when the FCI was set up in 1960 it was greeted suspiciously ‘because it stepped

outside the assimilationist model favoured by the Australian hierarchy and their senior priests and represented the ethno-specific model'.³⁷ Interviews with Italian Catholics active in their parishes seem to suggest that some traces of the same mentality have continued to persist at the grassroots level, even in an era when multiculturalism was the official State policy in Australia. However, most members of the FCI in Queensland, especially of the older generation, still remember with gratitude and affection the support and encouragement they received by members of the hierarchy such as Archbishops James Duhig and Francis Rush.

Conclusion: the FCI today

Currently the FCI is comprised of nineteen branches throughout Australia with over 800 members. There are nine branches in Victoria, seven branches in New South Wales and three branches in Queensland. A booklet published by the FCI in 2009, shows the changes that have occurred since the days when the association was formed in a small room of the All Saints' parish:

There is a National Executive known as the *Comitato Direttivo Centrale* (CDC). Its main role is to coordinate and guide the activities of the FCI which are primarily agreed upon at the bi-annual "Congresso Nazionale" which is held in turn in the various States. The FCI is guided by a constitution and most branches, including the CDC, are incorporated.³⁸

Today the FCI is more structured and better organised than it was in its initial stages. However, it is evident that, like many other Italian clubs and associations, it has lost much of the enthusiasm and drive that characterised the early days. The FCI is currently an ageing, mostly inward-looking organisation that finds it hard to recruit new members. The ageing and the reduction in numbers of the Scalabrinian fathers means that many sections, particularly in Victoria, cannot rely on the presence of a Scalabrinian priest as their chaplain. Yet, these sections continue to carry out various activities, showing that

the encouragement of lay participation in the apostolate of the Church promoted by Vatican II has obtained some success.

The FCI is now less focused on the assistance of Italian migrants, whose material needs are not as urgent as they were in the 1960s. The proliferation of clubs based on regional affiliations or on the celebration of a patron saint's festival has also offered Italian migrants many other alternatives for fulfilling their social and religious needs. Most branches of the FCI still organise social activities on special occasions (in particular, Mother's and Father's Day and New Year's Eve); but their main focus today is the participation of Italians in the religious life of the parish. Various members feel that the FCI's initial goal—the spiritual and material assistance of Italian migrants—has been achieved and that the FCI should now pursue different strategies. Camillo Impellizzeri, national president of the FCI from 2004 to 2007, admitted:

I believe that the FCI did most of its work at the beginning, when the needs of the migrants were really great. While today we continue to exist in order to offer the migrants, in particular the elderly, a sense of belonging. We are not serving the same needs as then.³⁹

By the early 1990s all youth groups in the Southern States had ceased their activities. Queensland is the only State in which a youth group (*FCI-Giovani Insieme*) is still active, comprising young second-generation and even third-generation Italians. *Giovani Insieme* joined the FCI in 2004 and was originally a Woolloowin parish group of youth of Italian background animated by Fr Mauro Conte, at that time a young Scalabrinian priest just arrived from Italy. The group has always used English as their language of communication but its members have maintained that it was their distinctive cultural identity that drove them to join an Italian church group rather than other parish groups. Importance given to family values and the extended family and lack of interest in the “drinking culture” have been mentioned in

interviews with members of *Giovani Insieme* as the main differences between them and their Australian peers.

Following similar efforts made by some FCI sections in Sydney, recently the FCI in Brisbane has started to diversify its activities by extending its outreach towards Sudanese migrants and refugees, whose difficulties in settling their families in Australia are similar to those experienced by Italian migrants in the past. This novelty reflects the changes that have occurred in the Scalabrinian policies, which from the 1990s have moved from an exclusive focus on Italian migrants towards a pluri-ethnic ministry. Similar changes have been noted by Fortier in her study of the *Centro Scalabrini* in London, which in 2000 opened its doors to Filipino parishioners and other Catholic migrant communities.⁴⁰

Associated with the proposal to work with other ethnic migrants is another suggestion brought forward by various FCI members in Queensland—in particular, second and third-generation Italians: that the association should drop the adjective “Italian” from its name. Since the initial aim of integrating Italian migrants into Australian society has been reached, the FCI should follow other goals and should not be restricted by an ethnic connotation that may prevent persons from different ethnic backgrounds from joining the FCI. The proposals of extending the outreach of the FCI to other ethnic groups and changing the name of the association have been discussed at various FCI congresses. Despite Scalabrinian approval of these proposals, so far they have never been approved because of the opposition of the older members (first-generation Italians). Despite their disagreement with these views, the respect that the younger members feel towards the FCI pioneers and *gli anziani* [the elders], may explain the difficulties in pushing forward major changes.

Also the proposal of changing the name arouses much opposition from first generation migrants, who are reluctant to introduce radical changes in the association. They still feel that the FCI has a role to play

in alleviating the loneliness of elderly Italian migrants, in particular the sick ones and those who live in nursing homes. Finally, it should be remembered that when the FCI was formed in 1960, the inclusion of the name “Italian” was quite challenging, at a time when both State and Church were promoting the full assimilation of migrants. Paganoni has argued that ‘the founding of the FCI was a well-mannered and typically Italian gesture of defiance in the Australian Catholic environment of the time’.⁴¹ The memory of the era of assimilation is still strong in the minds of many older Italians; something that the youngest FCI members probably do not fully appreciate. Since its beginnings, the FCI has provided encouragement and support to those who felt that their identity, language and culture were not valued by Australian society. From their point of view, the disappearance of the word “Italian” from the association name does not signal the successful integration of Italians into Australian society but a posthumous victory of the assimilation policies from a bygone era.

It can then be suggested that the shift from an “ethnic church” to an “émigré church” that Fortier has seen happening at the *Centro Scalabrini* in London may describe the current position of the FCI in Queensland—but not of the FCI on a national level.

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He is now an Honorary Fellow at the ACU School of Theology (Brisbane), where he lectures in Church History.

Stefano, who is a regular contributor to the “Osservatore Romano” is the author of one book about popular religiosity among Italian emigrants in Queensland and another on the history of the Italian Catholic Federation in Australia.

In October 2011 he was awarded the annual “Abbot Placid Spearritt Memorial Scholarship” by the Benedictine Community of New Norcia (Western Australia).

ENDNOTES:

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28. Toscano, *Personal Interview*.
29. Sarina Nicotra (FCI member, North Brisbane branch), *Personal Interview*, 16 Apr. 2009.
30. Carmela Bozzi (FCI member, Aspley-Geebung branch), *Personal Interview*, 30 Apr. 2009.
31. Anna Sassu (FCI member, North Brisbane branch), *Personal Interview*, 16 Apr. 2009.
32. Boccalatte and La Spina, *20 anni di vita della Federazione Cattolica Italiana*, 6-7.
33. Baggio, *Italians of Brisbane*, 71.
34. Cahill, *Missionaries on the Move*, 284.
35. Fortier, *Community, Belonging and Intimate Ethnicity*, 66.
36. Quoted in Girola, *Ignem Veni Mittere*, 130.

37. Quoted in Girola, *Ignem Veni Mittere*, 138.
38. Toscano, *Personal Interview*.
39. Cahill, *Missionaries on the Move*, 149.
40. Italian Catholic Federation in Australia. *Ignem Veni Mittere = I Have Come To Bring Fire* (Brisbane: Italian Catholic Federation, 2009), 2.
41. Quoted in Girola, *Ignem Veni Mittere*, 165.
42. Fortier, *Community, Belonging and Intimate Ethnicity*, 69.
43. Anthony Paganoni, *Valiant struggles and benign neglect: Italians, Church and Religious Societies in Diaspora: The Australian experience from 1950 to 2000* (New York: Centre for Migration Studies, 2003), 224.