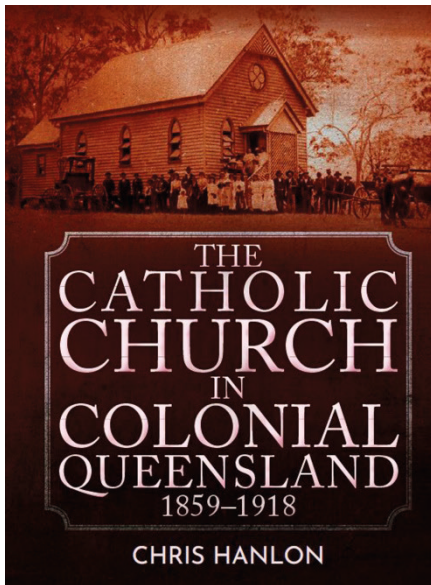


BOOK REVIEWS

Chris Hanlon, *The Catholic Church in Colonial Queensland: 1859-1918*, Brisbane, Archdiocesan Archives, 2020



Church historian Dr Chris Hanlon's work covers the period from 1859, when the colony of Queensland was separated from New South Wales, and when Fr James Quinn was appointed the first Bishop of Brisbane, until the end of the First World War. This is not a narrative history, or a

chronological record of events. Instead, the author divides his subject matter into four main sections or themes.

The first section or chapter deals with what historian Geoffrey Blainey calls "the tyranny of distance". Bishop Quinn's diocese comprised the whole of Queensland, with just a handful of clergy to cover this vast, thinly populated area. Fr Hanlon describes in detail the almost heroic visitation by the bishop of remote areas of his diocese, an

activity that surely contributed to his own subsequent health problems. Fr Hanlon also gives us an insight into the various early Provincial Councils, when Bishop Quinn and his fellow Irish-Australian bishops in NSW often found themselves at odds with the English Benedictine Archbishops of Sydney (Polding and Vaughan). Many students of this period would argue that the work of the late, esteemed Catholic historian, Patrick O'Farrell, was too Sydney-centric – the Archbishops of Sydney were the heroes, the Irish Bishops, the villains. Fr Hanlon's work helps to restore the balance.

Chapter Two deals with immigration, beginning with Bishop Quinn's bold initiative in setting up his Queensland Immigration Society. His scheme was at first endorsed by the Colonial Secretary (Premier) RGW Herbert, but when it proved so successful, and the number of Irish catholic immigrants increased dramatically, the government became nervous, and the society was suppressed. Fr Hanlon also deals with the successful and tireless efforts of Fr Robert Dunne of Toowoomba (later second bishop and first archbishop of Brisbane) to settle Catholic immigrants on the land – the Darling Downs in particular. We also read of attempts to create new dioceses in Queensland, and of the intrigues that often accompanied the enterprise.

In the third section, called Church and State, Fr Hanlon records the activities of various politicians, public

servants and magistrates of the period, and their interaction with church authorities. These pen-pictures or vignettes leave us wanting something more.

The author's final section deals with the subject of education, which was a major issue between church and state throughout this period. The early Queensland bishops (Quinn, Dunne, and to a lesser extent, Duhig) figure prominently in this section. But Fr Hanlon to some extent departs from the well-worn path of government schools versus catholic schools. We also learn of the role of lay people (women and men) and the part they played in handing on the faith; of the various "missions" conducted to consolidate the faith of the people; and of attempts to evangelise the indigenous people.

Any criticisms? Fr Hanlon has not been well-served by his proof-reader (or readers). There are a number of misprints and "typos" and perhaps some unnecessary repetitions.

As an amateur historian, I thought I was fairly well acquainted with early Queensland church history, but Fr Hanlon's work showed me I still have much to learn. His work may be described as a social history of the period. He introduces us to many characters whose names have been long forgotten. I recommend the work not just to history "buffs", but to the general reader. It is the result of meticulous research and helps us to know where we have

come from, and the forces that have made us who we are today.

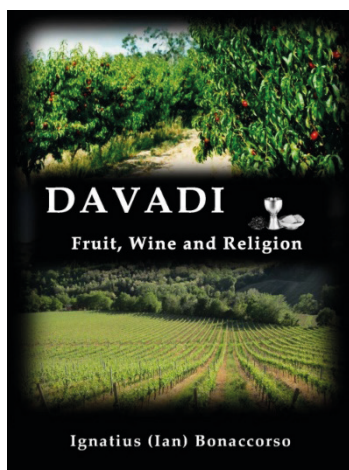
Rev Bill O'Shea

Brisbane

September 2020

[Our thanks are due to the Editor of The Catholic Leader for allowing us to use this article which first appeared in the September 21 edition of that paper.]

Ignatius (Ian) Bonaccorso, ***Davadi: Fruit, Wine and Religion***, Acacia Ridge, Qld, Clarke & Mackay Printers, 2020.



The establishment of Catholicism in Australia has a long and substantial history dating back to the missionary dioceses after the Brigge Commission of 1820, and arguably further. Of note was the activism of colonial Australian bishops in recruiting religious orders from Britain and Europe over the nineteenth century. While the Irish historical and cultural influences

on the Church are well-known, missionary priests and religious men and women of all origins emigrated in order to evangelise, teach and provide pastoral care in the colonies. Throughout this history the connection with Rome facilitated the calling of Italian missionary priests in particular and of various orders – Capuchins, Franciscans, Jesuits and Passionists, for example – not least because the recruiters had themselves been trained in Rome.

Although a strong body of work now covers the history of the Italian religious presence in Australia – including tensions between Irish and Italian clergy, and between Irish priests and their Italian migrant flock – very little is known about the lives of a vast number of individual Italian missionary priests and other religious people in colonial history. As various historiographies record, this has been addressed through both collective biographies and biographical works, which nevertheless remain scarce. Ian Bonaccorso's biography of Father Girolamo (Jerome) Davadi (1845-1900) contributes to the rare exceptions. Of course, Father Davadi has not escaped the attention of scholars and other historians to date, due mainly to his being one of a number of priests recruited by the Irish Bishop of Brisbane, Rev Dr James Quinn (1819-1888). Invariably, however, this young priest from the Marche region, under the Papal States during his early years, appears as an annotation in such histories, leaving many to question what kind of priest he was and what he

did in Australia. Not so in this recent biography, which sits within the genres of local community history and religious history.

In essence, Bonaccorso's *Davadi: Fruit, Wine and Religion* is a biography of both a man and a community, that of Stanthorpe, but one that is expansive in its assembly of historical detail. It is structured thematically, although the first chapter stands out as an account of the research process which took the author to Italy to uncover answers to questions about Father Davadi's family origins, personal experiences, and the circumstances in which he left his homeland in 1872 and why. Rome, of course, was under siege as part of the battles of the Risorgimento for Italy's nationhood. Bonaccorso interweaves this drama and the pressures on the Papacy in the first two chapters in order to situate the impact of events on this young priest and two fellow seminarians and friends, Father Benedetto (Benedict) Scortechini (1845-1886) and Father Constantine Rossolini (1845-1893), all highly regarded ecclesiastical aides during the First Vatican Council. Bonaccorso identifies a clear explanation about their decision to become missionary priests in the young colony of Queensland. The subsequent chapters reconstruct Father Davadi's life history and movements through the support of a number of primary sources, including an impressive range of newspaper research. These chapters are characterised by the themes of 'Davadi arrives in Stanthorpe', 'Wheels of

Progress’, ‘A New Dawning’, ‘Joy and Tragedy’, ‘Colleagues and Confidantes’ and ‘The Shepherd Rests’, before an ‘Epilogue’.

Yet, this is not an ordinary biographical study. There are multiple layers to Bonaccorso’s book, which do justice to the range of complex factors emerging over the second half of the nineteenth century, relating to the politics of the Irish Catholic Church and a nascent mining town in a colony only thirteen years old at the time of Father Davadi’s arrival. Brisbane’s and greater Brisbane’s colonial history; the history of Church infrastructure, including the establishment of the Sisters of Mercy at Stanthorpe; tensions from the Mitre League; migration history; racial discrimination: these all are features which Bonaccorso explores. Central to Father Davadi’s presence is the key question of how instrumental he was to the establishment of the agricultural, orchard and viticultural industries in the region. Far from the stereotype of a reclusive monk, this was a man whose commitment to his calling as a missionary priest was reflected in his care for the community and beyond, and for the environment.

To follow the fragments of Father Davadi’s life history in Bonaccorso’s book is to understand that the passion of this Italian migrant goes beyond official duties. In the first instance, Bonaccorso reveals how such duties were performed devoutly, while also meticulously documenting the priestly orders of celebration, with

notations of baptisms, holy communions, marriages and funerals – of great interest, no doubt, to family historians. Father Davadi's role went further in personally purchasing land and orchestrating the building of three churches in Stanthorpe, Wallangarra and Sugarloaf, and the Stanthorpe Sisters of Mercy convent. He was entrepreneurial in raising funds by involving the community and extended his missionary work to the Wallangarra railway workers. He handled Irish clergy persecution and jealous public slander honourably. One might understand Father Davadi best as a renaissance man when considering the personal role he played in supporting the development of agriculture, fruit and wine-growing, which Bonaccorso links to his Italian upbringing and identifies through a series of encounters and stories within the Granite Belt's history.

On the fringes of this history are the squatter graziers and the Chinese, who are mentioned in Bonaccorso's book, but also the missing presence of Aboriginal Australians with whom the three priests were intended to work. In Stanthorpe the Kambuwal people were of course relocated by the 1870s, which leaves the reader wondering how Fathers Davadi, Scortechini and Rossolini reconciled this stark and cruel history. Of particular significance are the investigative skills Bonaccorso demonstrates in examining Father Davadi's ill health, the decisions made by Archbishop of Brisbane Rev Robert Dunne (1830-1917) for his care, and his ultimate death, which readers

will find insightful. Overall, *Davadi: Fruit, Wine and Religion* reveals the life and work of a dedicated, innovative, honest and gentle priest whose life reveals a remarkable testament of religious and community commitment. No-one can remain untouched by reading the life history Bonaccorso has written of Father Jerome Davadi.

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10 October 2020