

MEMOIRS BY AUSTRALIAN PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS AND EX-RELIGIOUS

James Franklin*

Autobiography is history from the inside. Real history – how events appeared to those who took part in them. That is not to say that memoirs are always true, or fair, balanced and unbiased. As Clive James says, “all attempts to put oneself in a bad light are doomed to be frustrated. The ego arranges the bad light to its own satisfaction.”¹ Nevertheless, what people say about themselves is at the historical front line – the primary evidence of what it was really like to be there.

The article selects some interesting parts of a few of the memoirs by Australian priests, brothers and nuns. And by ex-priests, ex-brothers and ex-nuns, who sometimes write the most dramatic stories. Perhaps ex-religious can speak more freely than those still under vows. Or maybe to write a gripping autobiography requires a strong fascination with oneself that does not fit ideally with the mental attitudes appropriate to permanency in religious life.

I have included simply what I find interesting. But I have looked especially at the accounts of first commitment to the religious life, in the hope of understanding the huge wave of vocations around the 1950s and the sudden receding of that wave. Another theme that emerged of its own accord is the extraordinary separation between life “inside” a religious order and what was going on in “the world”.

The range of views on religious life arranges itself naturally according to how angry the writers are about their time “in religion”. Let us start at the angry end of the spectrum. Readers should correct for any bias resulting from that; those with more positive stories will be heard later.

Ex and Angry

John Hanrahan, author of *From Eternity to Here: Memoirs of an Angry Priest*, plainly should never have persisted with his “vocation”. That is clear from every page of his book. For example, he writes, at about the midpoint of his training, “Poverty was no problem, but the vows of chastity and especially obedience were becoming increasingly difficult, especially when I considered successive superiors devious morons.”² Certainly, the intelligence of his superiors is called into question by their decision to allow

* James Franklin is Vice-President of the ACHS and *Journal* editor. He is Professor of Mathematics and Statistics at UNSW. This is the revised text of a presentation to the ACHS on 13 May 2012.

him to proceed to ordination.

Hanrahan joined the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Juniorate at Douglas Park in 1953, aged 13. Already he complains about the Christian Brothers who taught him in Albury: “But I think I ran away to become a priest partly to escape the sadists, who wielded their tailor-made straps with rampant piety.”³

Out of the frying pan, into the fire. In the Juniorate and Novitiate, there were no straps, but he found more sadists:

Apart from rules, Father Master was passionate about humiliation (ours) and loved acting-out. One day he came onto the sanctuary to perform Benediction. He approached the altar, and went into a ritual of his own. As sacristan, I knew I was approaching some scabbled moment of destiny. Father Master raised the altar cloth and peered under it. He searched that vase of hydrangeas. He peered into them. He raised the skirts of his chasuble and probed the pockets of his religious habit. He knelt down and raised a piece of the sanctuary carpet. He turned to us with an Orson Welles’ shrug.

‘OK, Brother Hanrahan, I give up. Am I getting hot or cold, or are you going to let us in on the secret of where you have hidden the monstrance so I can expose the Sacred Host and the rest of us interested can get down to worship?’ In my rush from the sacristy I dropped the sacred vessel and bent a couple of the gold spikes.⁴

Another very garrulous complainer is Chris Geraghty. It takes him two volumes to cover the period to not long after ordination – the first is *Cassocks in the Wilderness*, set in St Columba’s Seminary, Springwood, and the second *The Priest Factory*, about St Patrick’s, Manly. The first explains what it took for the seminarians to get involved in the local community – a bushfire: at one point they were side by side with the young Communists saving the hall of the Eureka Youth League. *The Priest Factory* has ten pages of abuse of Bishop Muldoon and an account of taking the anti-Modernist oath in 1962.⁵

It is interesting to compare Geraghty with Paul Crittenden, a near-contemporary of his at Manly, later Professor of Philosophy at the University of Sydney. His memoir *Changing Orders* has thirteen pages on Muldoon’s faults, but they are not as colourfully rude as Geraghty’s.⁶ He does say that the skills he learned in organising and money-raising as Muldoon’s curate in Mosman came in useful later when he was Dean of Arts at Sydney University.

Heaven, Where the Bachelors Sit is Gerard Windsor’s widely-read and highly coloured story of life in the Jesuit Seminary. He makes it clear that

the vow of chastity was never going to suit him. Another unhappy-Jesuit memoir is titled *Give Me A Child When He Is Young*.⁷

One last troublemaker. Morris West was born in 1916 and joined the Christian Brothers who had taught him, at the age of 13. He writes, “On my part, the decision to join the Congregation was an act of fugue. For the Congregation it was part of a programme called ‘fostering vocations’, but in fact, as I see it now, a seduction of the young and immature into a choice which they were quite unready to make.”⁸



Morris West

... in the Congregation I had my first experience of techniques designed to wash the human brain and bend the human spirit. They were practised by my novice-master, who, though he is long dead, I still regard as an ignorant and coarse man, psychologically maimed, anti-intellectual, spiritually blind, who did grave and sometimes irreparable damage to many of the youths in his charge.

He humiliated them with gross penances: shaving their heads, sentencing them to extra field labour, making them take meal after meal on their knees. He bullied them at lecture time. He tyrannised them with spiritual fears: damnation in every sexual thought, double damnation for every impulse of pride and revolt.⁹

West proceeded as far as teaching in schools but had the good sense to leave in 1939, just before his final vows. “My departure was timed for the hour when students and masters were in chapel. The Brother Provincial gave me a cool handshake and a reminder – somehow almost comic in the circumstances – that I was still under vows until their term expired at Christmas.”¹⁰ He joined the Army, married, wrote a novel (about life in a religious order, what else?), divorced and requested an annulment. It was refused and thus he became officially excommunicate on remarriage.

Then he created trouble. Big trouble. The best-selling novel in the United States in the year of the Vatican Council, 1963 was not Mary McCarthy’s *The Group* nor J.D. Salinger’s *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters*, but Morris West’s papal wish-fulfillment fantasy, *The Shoes of the Fisherman*. And that followed his huge success in 1959 with *The Devil’s Advocate*.

Perhaps the work of Morris West and Graham Greene should be seen as important in preparing the public mind for “the spirit of Vatican II”, at least in the English-speaking world. As is clear from the history of the Soviet Union, making the old order look ridiculous is an important prelude to changing it. (Edmund Campion recalls acquiring an addiction to Graham Greene in Manly Seminary, of all places.¹¹)

Of nun memoirs, the most negative is a much later one, Colette Livermore's *Hope Endures*. She joined Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity in 1973 and left eleven years later, having worked with the very poor in Manila, Papua New Guinea and Calcutta. She argues that the order did not take care of the physical and mental health of its own sisters.¹²

Balanced views?

Now let us hear from two ex-religious who took a reasonably balanced view. They have criticisms of the long period they spent in religious life and are glad to have left, but they say they generally enjoyed it and that most of their fellow religious were good and dedicated people.

Paul Brock was the son of the editor of the *Newcastle Sun* and school captain of Marist Brothers, Hamilton, in 1959. Like three of his siblings and the two immediately previous captains of the school, he entered religious life, in his case joining the Marist Brothers. He writes (much later) of his sense of vocation at that time:

The overwhelming idea that kept burning in my brain and which galvanised my decision to enter religious life was a saying that St Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, used to repeat to the young Francis Xavier ... The telling saying used by St Ignatius was a quotation from the Bible: 'What doth it profit a man if he gains the whole world, yet suffers the loss of his own soul?'

Why struggle to achieve and gain things here on earth if life is really fundamentally a preparatory testing ground to see if we could avoid being condemned to a life of eternal pain and misery in Hell, and graduate to an eternal afterlife of happiness in Heaven? Why waste time pursuing the normal aspirations of things like physical possessions, marriage and ambition? Therefore it seemed to me far better to pursue a life of self-denial through the religious vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience and, as a result, have more assurance of gaining Heaven. Furthermore, I was living within an environment where I was constantly being told by priests, nuns and brothers that the finest thing that anybody could do with his or her life was to give it all up to God as a priest, nun, or brother.¹³

(Compare Edmund Campion: "What I remember [from Riverview] is the men who taught us by their lives the moral absolutism of that saying of Jesus about the world having nothing that compensates for losing one's soul."¹⁴)

Brock lived as a brother for fifteen years and says of his fellow brothers, "Notwithstanding the tiny minority of Brothers whose covert acts of wickedness ended up being exposed and condemned by the courts, by and large my memory of the Brothers I knew and lived with is of very fine men

of integrity, generosity and whole-hearted commitment to the education of the boys and girls, young men and women they served as teachers.¹⁵ After several years with the thankless task of teaching poetry to the ungrateful masses at St Joseph's, Hunters Hill¹⁶ he left the Brothers in 1975, concluding, "In retrospect, I should have realised from my earliest monastic years that I was really not cut out for a life long commitment to celibacy."¹⁷ He married twice and had three daughters, and a successful career as an academic in education and then a policy adviser in education in Canberra and Sydney. In 1997 he was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease. Most sufferers die within three years, but his form of the disease has been much slower to progress and he continued working from a wheelchair. He is more forthcoming than many ex-religious on his subsequent faith situation. He writes:

By the time I was diagnosed I no longer believed in a personally interventionist deity. I think it's illogical, for example, to thank God for the survival of one person in a car crash that killed all the other occupants ... But I remain a spiritual person ... I am still as much driven today by the essential truths of Christ's Sermon on the Mount as ever I was during all my years as a devout practising Catholic.¹⁸

Cecilia Inglis's memoir opens in 1981. She is in the office of the Mother Superior of the Mercy convent in Singleton. She is about to leave after thirty years of religious life. It takes the reader a few moments to realise that she is not in the office to say goodbye to Mother Superior. She *is* Mother Superior.

Her book *Cecilia: An Ex-Nun's Extraordinary Journey* was published by Penguin in 2003. It is well-written and she is an attractive personality: interested in lots of things and in people, able to work on self-knowledge and reinvent herself, in some ways tough but never self-satisfied.

She was born in 1935, the seventh in an Irish-Catholic working-class family in Newcastle. An elder sister became a Mercy nun and a brother became a priest.¹⁹ At sixteen she decided to become a nun. She writes:

There was that sense of 'calling' I had – a vocation to save the world, or at least my corner of it. There was the Jesus of the Gospels that I loved to imagine: sitting among His disciples, at weddings, tired by the well, having compassion on the hungry and tired multitude, talking about the ways His father in Heaven cared about us. I think I wanted to share this Jesus with other people who didn't know Him.

There were also those feelings of peace and devotion during the family rosary, at morning Mass, and during retreats. I looked forward to living in a place where

this devotion was cherished and nourished, and where people cared about each other.

On the other hand, religious life was a drastic choice. It meant leaving behind family and friends, and everything familiar – even the clothes I was used to. It meant wearing all this funny black stuff, being locked away behind walls, and I couldn't even imagine what I'd be doing all day there.²⁰

Her account of her eighteenth birthday (14 February 1953) explains what they did do all day:

That day I rose at 5 a.m. when the bell clanged out...

I got up, but not with the leap exhorted in the novices' guide – 'as if the bed was on fire'. I struggled out, still three-quarters asleep, and splashed my face with cold water ... I got dressed as quickly as I could organise myself. Voluminous undies, a bra and singlet, black stockings fastened to my newly acquired lace-up corset, a long black half-petticoat ... So far, as required for the sake of modesty, I had been dressing under my calico nightie ... though the screens were still closed around my cubicle ...

I only got one clean coif and veil a week. I didn't have to worry about it covering my crowning glory because my hair was cut off the previous September at my reception as a novice ...

I moved very quietly when I pulled back the screens around my bed and left the dormitory, as we were still in the Great Silence. This was a very solemn time from night prayers till the end of Mass when the whole house was in profound silence ... stories were told – perhaps apocryphal – of saintly nuns in the olden days who lay on the floor all night with broken hips rather than break the Great Silence.

Most of the nuns were already kneeling in the stalls along the sides of the chapel waiting for the prayers to begin. There were about thirty-five or forty of us ... I faced the altar, and the folded high seat of the stall stuck into my back. It was uncomfortable – probably meant to be – but not uncomfortable enough to keep me awake at this time of the morning ... Sometimes the sister behind me would give me a poke in the back when I looked in danger of rolling right out of the stall into the aisle.

I was supposed to be meditating, but I was not quite sure what that meant, so I was always glad when the 6 a.m. Angelus bell rang ... We sat on the high stall seats, faced the centre, and said the Office – Prime, Terce, Sext and None – all in Latin ... When Office finished we filed out of the chapel – still in complete silence – to the community room for the 'lecture'. This was a ten-minute or so gathering where the novice mistress could correct us for anything ... For instance, she might think we were not walking quietly enough in the Great Silence, or she

might have noticed some sisters not keeping the ‘custody of the eyes’ (that is, eyes cast down at all times). Then she read from *The Lives of the Saints* ... I liked storytime, and sat and listened with my eyes down, concentrating on my sewing ...

Mass in Latin was always the real beginning of the day, and on special feast days we had singing too ... I loved the singing. Some sisters, especially the music teachers, had exquisite voices and the harmony would swell to fill the chapel ... There was no singing on the day of my eighteenth birthday, however, as it was already Lent – the season of silence and penance preparing for Easter, when my parents would be permitted to visit me. I saw them last on Boxing Day for three hours when they came by train from Newcastle.

After Mass I went back to the dormitory to make my bed and tidy up before breakfast. [we’re still not up to breakfast!] ... Breakfast was cereal with milk, which often tasted slightly off because the day’s milk had been mixed with the day’s before ... cold toast and a little butter ... we ate in silence ... After breakfast we did my charge (chores ...) By nine o’clock we were ready for the proceedings of the novitiate to begin. There were talks by the novice mistress on religious life, study of the rule of our Order, meditation, and learning the customs to be observed.

We broke for ‘lunch’ ... No biscuits today, and Lenten silence was everywhere until recreation time at 4.30 p.m. ...

On this day I walked close behind Sister Julie and whispered, ‘Today’s my birthday!’ as we went up the steps to the novitiate. She half-turned to me and whispered, ‘Happy birthday!’ and we both had a quiet grin – until we ran slap-bang into the novice mistress. She said nothing but froze us with a look ...

Before the 1 p.m. dinner there were more prayers ... It was my turn to read in the refectory – a real ordeal ... At a sign from Reverend Mother – a tinkle on her small bell – I began to read from the assigned book. Today it was on the life of Saint Therese ...

Then it was back to the novitiate for the afternoon of study, music practice and private spiritual reading ... At 4 p.m. I went to have a cup of tea again. Today there was fresh bread and jam – a real treat for hungry young people. By 4.20 I was back in the chapel for Vespers before recreation, when Mother suggested a walk around the farm, and we were free to walk and talk as much as we liked. We sauntered along in threes – ‘No twos, please!’ – and at last I could legally tell people it was my birthday. We laughed and joked as we walked, and in spite of the stresses of silence and regimentation, life was good among my friends. Our friendships were meant to be general, however, not exclusive, so there were no ‘best friends’.

Recreation was short but we always packed a lot into it, and let off steam. We went to Office again at 5.05 ... After Office we had a lecture again – another story from *The Lives of the Saints*. Some of the stories were a bit weird ... At study between six and seven o'clock we had set topics and time flew till the bell rang for supper ... I was hoping it wasn't just beetroot as it sometimes was, but was relieved to see bowls of salad with cold meat on the table ... I joined [the nuns in the chapel] to struggle with evening meditation till night recreation began at eight o'clock. This hour was my favourite time of the day. I'd talk and laugh with the others as we sat and did our sewing or some other craft ...

Promptly at nine o'clock the night prayer bell rang out and we all went into immediate and deep silence. We'd go back to the chapel for some more Office (called *Compline*) and a litany of the saints ... By nine-thirty I was changing my shoes for slippers ... I fell into bed as fast as I could because I was always tired, and knew 5 a.m. would come all too quickly.

At 10 p.m. the lights went out.²¹

Inglis – or Sister Mary Scholastica, as she then was – with minimal teacher training, was given a mixed kindergarten–first class of 75 at Tighes Hill.²² She learned to cope with and like teaching and became a high school geography teacher. She graduated from Newcastle University with study on top of a full teaching load. But eventually, following her mother's death, she became severely depressed. She was admitted to St John of God Hospital Burwood and had sixteen treatments of ECT. Someone new took over the treatment and after stopping the ECT, asked if she thought she should leave religious life. She says "The idea of leaving had never occurred to me."²³ She recovered and went back to the convent. By then the major changes in religious life resulting from Vatican II were well under way. She was all for them, and took to counselling work and generally interacting with the wider community. At one point she is looking after a friend's small boys while the friend is away. The boys barge into the bathroom and see her topless. One of them says "My mummy's are only little ones. You've got big fat nipples." She shoos them out, falls about laughing, and comments that she didn't know whether she had big ones or not as she'd never seen other women's breasts. She became Mother Superior at Singleton but had had enough after a while, among other reasons, because of conflict with more conservative nuns. She left and obtained dispensation from her vows.

She had a hard time at first, with glandular fever, living alone, a long struggle to find a job, and a conviction for shoplifting. She got a teaching job and gradually sorted it out. She found a good husband through an ad

in the paper, after some gruesome experiences on the singles scene (“a lot more toads out there wanting to be kissed than handsome princes”²⁵). Some psychotherapy was helpful. She concluded from it that her father was more important to her than she had realised, and she hints that a wish to please him was significant in her decision to enter the convent. Here she explains to the therapist something about how different things were in the convent:

I told him how the superior opened our letters, and had the right to read or even withhold them from us, both the letters which arrived for us and the letters we wrote. How we had to ask permission to write a letter. Permission might be refused, and if it was permitted, you were given just one sheet of paper. You then put your unsealed envelope and letter on the superior’s desk for posting. This was a humiliating way for grown professional women to live, but again *it was just the way it was*.²⁶

(It should be appreciated that “the way it was” was due not just to immemorial custom and the decisions of superiors but to the provisions of the 1917 Code of Canon Law, which decreed the censorship of letters, travelling in twos, eating separately from “seculars” and not attending the funerals of family members. Archbishop Kelly in Sydney insisted that nuns should not visit their dying parents.²⁷)

A rather similar story is by Eileen Jones. She was born in 1927 and grew up poor and poorly educated in Coogee. After some jobs and a near-engagement to a non-Catholic man who refused to marry in a Catholic Church, she joined an order of nuns (which she does not name but is the Brigidines). She was then just over 30 so needed a dispensation. Two features in common with Inglis’s story are the role of choral music as an attraction of the religious life; and the problems of harsh decisions by superiors when she needed something, especially, in her case, treatment for serious medical conditions. She obtained a PhD in psychophysiology and left the order aged almost 70.²⁸

Happy Souls

What is needed for a fair view of religious life is stories from, for example, ordinary parish priests who had their ups and downs but mostly just got on with their work and were overall happy with their lives. There are some such memoirs, but they are hard to find – they are published by small presses and not found in most libraries. Maybe they are not especially well written. Maybe the reading public wants something more salacious.

One example: Kevin Condon was born in Ireland in 1932 and grew up on a poor farm. He gained a scholarship to high school, which he says came

with a tacit expectation of joining the Dominicans,²⁹ an expectation which was reinforced by a talk from his uncle, a Dominican prior. Although he is clear that that was unreasonable pressure, he says he has no regrets. He was sent off to Australia, which he was happy enough with though he would have preferred Nigeria. He was generally happy with everything he was ordered to do later, such as being parish priest of Wahroonga. His superiors seem to have been generally cooperative with him too. He is obviously blessed with a positive personality and a knack of getting on with people; though he does see himself as lacking in self-confidence, and soon after arriving in Australia he took a written course in “positive thinking” advertised in a newspaper (without telling his superiors).³⁰ As to celibacy, he mentions some challenges but keeps to it and thinks it worked well for him, though he is against it being compulsory.

Another priest happy enough with his lot is Noel McMaster. From suburban Melbourne, he joined the Redemptorist Juniorate in Galong in 1954. He describes a style of training somewhat similar to Morris West’s but less severe. While agreeing it was narrow, he is less concerned by it. He describes himself at that time as “phlegmatic, callow, casual”, personality traits no doubt useful in the context.³¹ After some years teaching at the seminary and as an army chaplain – activities he sees as worthwhile but not entirely suiting him – he found more fulfillment in the Kimberley as parish priest of Kununurra and later Halls Creek. He came to see the typical church style of operation as somewhat out of tune with aboriginal culture and spirituality. That and his liking for the liberation theology of Juan Luis Segundo were factors in certain tensions between him and successive Bishops of Broome, but there was no serious falling out and he completed his mission successfully.

A different kind of story is the very detailed account of study in Rome in the Sixties by Peter Brock, younger brother of Paul Brock. It includes this story about canon law and the separation of clergy from laity. The very pious Italian spiritual director at Propaganda College explained to the students how pastorally broad-minded he was: once when cycling through the countryside he was approached by a young woman who asked him to hear her confession. Canon law of course did not permit a priest to be alone with woman – confession could only be heard with the two separated by a wire grill. So, he upended the bicycle and heard confession through the back wheel.³²

A positive nun memoir, very focussed on the inner life, is Mary Lalor’s *The Inner Road*. In 1928 when she was six, her mother died, soon after

giving birth to the last of ten children. Her father remarried and had six more children and she helped care for them. At the age of sixteen she discovered a vocation to the contemplative life.³³ Her father refused to allow that but did permit her to join the Sisters of Charity, which her elder sister, aunt and great-aunt had already joined. She completed the novitiate and taught primary school for some years, but retained her feeling that she was called to a contemplative order. She was allowed to join the Carmelite Monastery at Parkes in 1955. Although happy there, she felt in 1973 an “inner instruction” to live a Carmelite-like life outside the monastic setting. She left and founded a community in a shared house in inner-city Melbourne to pursue “Carmelite contemplative life in an open setting”.³⁴ That proved to be the foundation of a small order. Throughout, most of the text is not about these facts of what she did, but expressions of her love for God and especially of her devotion to Mary, such as:

Beloved Lord, Father All-Holy, Jesus Lord, Holy Spirit, I desire to do as You have said: Rest in our oneness, so that I may become more completely love, more completely light, for Your Glory and the good of my brothers and sisters.

Mary, you tell me also: Rest in our oneness. O thank you!³⁵

Obviously it is such thoughts that fill her mind most of the time.

Finally, my two favourites

The first is *Banished Camelots: Recollections of a Catholic Childhood: A Celebration and a Requiem*, by John Redrup. Its account of boyhood between the wars combines a fine recall of detail with a sense of the child’s point of view without too much adult reinterpretation. It includes a very positive, even starry-eyed, view of his years in the Marist Brothers’ Juniorate in Mittagong, 1932-37. He recalls his reaction to the recruiting talk at his school by the head of the Juniorate. He is aged 11:

As Brother Hubert told the story, his Juniorate seemed to me to combine the best features of all the English Boarding Schools I’d been reading about for years past in Magnet, Gem, Champion, Nelson Lee, Boys’ Own, and Chums. There were playing-fields for every conceivable sport, a dam for swimming in and illimitable surrounding bushland in which to adventure. To be sure, Brother Hubert made no mention of Billy Bunter-style dormitory feasts ... but my imagination amply corrected that oversight.

I’m sure that the gentle Brother must have spoken of the more serious and spiritual aspects of training for a Marist Brother’s life and of the subsequent vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience that would serve to separate new disciples utterly from ‘the world’ that I’d hardly begun to be aware of; but I

suspect that I absorbed little of this side of his message. What I did carry away ... was the notion that God determined whether a boy should become a Marist Brother by granting him the privilege of a ‘vocation’ ... In that class-room, on that day, I decided that I loved the Marist Brotherhood and that God wanted me to become a Marist Brother.³⁶

He is too young at that time to join, but after a while the Brothers visit his parents, then hard-hit by the Depression. His father is not keen but agrees, saying to him, “The Brothers have explained to us that if we allow you to follow your wish and go to their Juniorate at Mittagong, you’ll be assured of a finer education than perhaps we could otherwise afford to give you.”³⁷

He did enjoy the Juniorate, even if conditions were not quite as he had originally imagined them. His account of the daily regime resembles that of Cecilia’s in the convent, except that it starts at 5.30, there is a lot more farm work, and there is a usual school day – the boys all study for the Intermediate and Leaving Certificates and high academic standards are expected. He writes “I developed a deep affection for the prayerful round of life that the Brothers maintained at their Juniorate. Until the storm-clouds of adolescence began to gather, I could still picture no better life for myself than to join their calm Order and doubts about my vocation never entered my head ... a large part of our vocation, I feel sure, stemmed from frank hero-worship.”³⁸

Of course, with teenaged boys, you still needed discipline. It worked like this. A series of coloured Monthly Behaviour Cards were given out, and too many pink or red ones meant days taken off the annual 10-day holiday at home. Points were lost for faults on the following scale:

Special Friendships	20	Unkindness	10
Breaking Silence	10	Irreverence	10
Disobedience	10	Unpunctuality	5
Inadequate effort	5	Bad language	5
Lack of frankness	5	Poor Demeanour	5
Un-sportsmanship	5	Untidiness	5

Does all this seem to suggest that the average Junior felt oppressed? Certainly not I ... I regarded our playing-field as reassuringly level, the boundaries clearly marked, and the goal-post luminously clear and firmly-set.³⁹

But he does criticise one aspect: the prohibition of special friendships, which he believed badly affected his ability to make lasting friendships in later life.⁴⁰

He completed the Leaving Certificate in the Juniorate, but was told that he was too young to join the Novitiate and would have to repeat the year. The disappointment added to a summer holiday with girls around, and he found his vocation had disappeared. He became a radical university student, a senior journalist on *The Age*, and a consultant to UN development agencies.

My last example is François Xavier Gsell's *The Bishop with 150 Wives*. Gsell was born in Alsace in 1872, apprenticed as a cotton-spinner, joined the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and studied in Rome with Eugenio Pacelli (later Pope Pius XII). After a dispiriting time in administration in Randwick, he spent a few years in Papua before being appointed Apostolic Administrator of the Northern Territory, charged with re-founding the Church there.⁴¹ He did so with success but was keen to move on to strictly missionary work among aborigines. In 1911 he established a mission at Nguuu, Bathurst Island (the mission fictionalised as Mission Island in the movie *Australia*). Naturally conditions were very difficult, but he made it a success. In contrast to the failures of recent times in those regions, he ran a peaceful settlement with economic activity, including agriculture and a sawmilling business. His book shows a close attention to aboriginal culture, of which he often takes a sceptical view. For example, he describes the



Bishop Gsell (centre) with Fr John McGrath MSC and Fr Paul Fleming MSC and mission boys. Photo courtesy of Annals Australasia

perfect communism of aboriginal society, and adds that like communism in Europe, that does not imply equality, since everything is run in the interests of the Party (that is, the elders).⁴²

Actual missionary success was slow. There was not a single adult convert up to the time he left in 1938. But in 1921 there occurred this remarkable event, the first of the incidents that give the book its title:

Little Martina belonged to the Maolas tribe and she came from the north of the island. An intelligent, lively little girl and quite clever at small tasks, she was not, perhaps, distinguished from other little ones about the mission ...

There came to me a hairy anonymous man who said, "I have come to fetch my wife."

"And who is your wife?", I asked.

"That one," he said, and he pointed to Martina.

Nothing could be done, I knew. No one might challenge the law of the tribe. No one had ever thought of doing so. Martina, not yet baptized, must go with this hairy, anonymous man and be lost in the sad company of tribal women, slaves, owned body and soul by the men of the tribes ... the light we had tried to direct towards little Martina would be darkened for ever ...

But now a most extraordinary thing happened. Martina said, "No, I will not go with that man."

I am astonished, and to myself I say, "But the little one may not resist the tribal law ... Can I resist a strong custom of these people? I cannot." ... as her little fingers clutch my cassock she cries, "Oh, help me, Father. Do not let me go with this old man who is ugly. Please, I want to stay with the Mission ..." ... the little one accepts her fate and, trying to stifle her sobs, she goes with that man to begin a life which, I know, has less joy than that of the lowest beasts of the forest. The incident passes ...

But in five days' time Martina is back. The man has taken her to his district, more than forty miles from the Station ... She has resisted her man and he has driven a spear into her leg to drive a right spirit into her small body; and then, when it was dark, she has escaped ...

It is evening, and they come – an ugly mob of muttering, gesticulating tribesmen – and they are at the Mission gates. Martina is in my arms; she believes, poor little one, that I can save her ... I am deeply distressed and call on God to help ...

"You," I said, "have come a long way: and so you are very tired. And also, you are very hungry. But come, you are welcome and there is flour and tobacco for you ... they eat their fill, and they smoke, and then they sleep. ...

I pray that God, now, will guide me ... There comes to me an idea. I will buy Martina from these men. But this is not the custom. For payment – tobacco, flour, calico – they will lend Martina to any unscrupulous brute who may desire her, but ... they will not sell her ...

Now I proceed with great cunning. On a long table in front of the Mission House, ... I place a good blanket, a sack of my best flour, a hatchet of good-quality steel, a mirror, a handsome teapot, some gaily coloured beads, a pipe and some good tobacco, some yards of brightly patterned calico, some tins of meat and pots of treacle. It is all worth perhaps two pounds sterling ... tribal custom, often so inexorable, makes the price these sleeping men must pay when they awaken a high one, but my table carries for them untold riches ...

My guests are early risers and I, hidden behind a fence ... watch them approach ... At once they see my stall and they crowd near it chattering like monkeys, gazing at my merchandise longingly ...

Finally, I say carelessly to hide my deep anxiety, “It is all very easy for you: you may have everything ... the calico, the flour, the tobacco ... but in return, you must let me have the girl ... The men are struck dumb with astonishment ...

They begin a discussion in low, urgent tones ... they can be severely punished by their tribal elders if they make this bargain ... they may win the enmity of spirits ... on the other hand, would they, they ask themselves, be wise to let such a windfall slip by? ...

Although the council seems to sit interminably, at last it ends and now there comes to me that hairy anonymous old man who claimed Martina as his wife, quite justly according to native law. His face seems slit from ear to ear in a grin as he approaches.

“Everything is good,” he declares happily. “We sell the girl, but there is a condition: you must keep her for yourself always; she must not be passed on to any other man.”⁴³

Martina grew up a Christian with the nuns and chose a Christian husband from the Mission; she had five children and eventually died of leprosy. Gsell bought another hundred and fifty betrothed females in the years following.

As Bishop of Darwin in the 1940s, he was ultimately responsible for the Catholic Church’s share of the policy of child removal of “half-castes”, now called the Stolen Generation. He has this comment:

But, I may be asked, is it not cruel to tear these children away from the affectionate environment of their homes? The question is naïve. What homes and what natural affection have these little ones? Yes, if they had families, and if they

were surrounded by that love and affection family life offers to the young even amongst primitive peoples, it might be cruel. But these creatures roam miserably around the camps and their behaviour is often worse than that of native children. It is an act of mercy to remove them as soon as possible from surroundings so insecure. After that, I think, they must be kept at school until they marry, when they can establish a home ...⁴⁴

A remarkable footnote to this story: on 23 Oct 2012 the new member for Arafura in the Northern Territory Parliament, Francis Xavier Kurrupuwu, paid tribute to Gsell in his maiden speech. Mr Kurrupuwu is named after Gsell and is Martina's great-grandson.⁴⁵

Final remarks

The selection of memoirs that has been published has some biases. As mentioned, there are more by ex-religious than religious, especially in easily available books, which gives a certain negativity of tone to the selection. There is a general shortage of nuns' stories.

There are none by an abuser of children (although there is a partly autobiographical book by an alleged abuser⁴⁶).

Also lacking is anything much from the more distant past, before the 1930s. Apart from Gsell, the only one I have seen that goes back to "Around the Boree Log" days is Archbishop Duhig's string of anecdotes (starting on page 1 with the housekeeper at his first presbytery who "cooked fish better than anybody I have since known", and continuing with the importance of a good horse in a priest's life and his successes in buying real estate, and an interview with "the then-famous duce").⁴⁷

One of the most dramatic effects of Vatican II was the collapse of vocations. That has often been taken by conservatives as a sign of the evil effects of the Council. In the light of the stories above, it may well be asked, was the decline of vocations a good thing or a bad thing? It is true that very many people benefited from the ministries – sacramental, educational, nursing – of the vocations of earlier times, so there is much to regret in the decline. But it is clear from the stories that before 1965, many people joined religious life who should not have done so. That should be taken into account when discussing the high level of vocations at that time.

List of Memoirs by Australian Religious and Ex-Religious

Bishops

- James Duhig, *Crowded Years* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1947).
Francis Xavier Gsell, *The Bishop with 150 Wives* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1956).
Julian Porteous, *Caught in the Stream: Looking Back on the First Fifty Years* (Book House at Wild and Woolley, Sydney, 1999).

Priests

- Edmund Campion, *Rockchoppers: Growing Up Catholic in Australia* (Penguin, Ringwood Vic, 1982) and *A Place in the City* (Penguin, Ringwood, Vic, 1994) [partly autobiographical] and *Lines of My Life: Journey of a Year* (Penguin, Camberwell, Vic, 2003).
Brother Andrew MC [Ian Travers-Ball], *What I Met Along the Way* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1987).
Ernie Smith, *Miracles Do Happen: A Priest Called Smith* (Collins Dove, North Blackburn, Vic, 1993).
Luke Fay, *A Long Harvest* (Galilee, Wendouree, 1990).
John McKinnon, *Living fully and Loving Deeply: A Diocesan Priest Reflects on Celibacy and Sexuality* (Catholic Institute for Ministry, Canberra, 1991).
Martin Branagan, *Chattering Teeth: A Book on the Life of Fr. C. Martin Branagan, C.Ss.R. O.A.M.* (M. Branagan, Townsville, 1997).
Maurice O'Connor OSA, *Never a Dull Moment* (Augustinian Press, Brookvale, 1997).
Kevin Condon OP, *Here I am Lord: Memories and Musings of a Wandering Dominican* (Information Australia, Melbourne, 2000).
Peter Brock, *Home Rome Home* (Spectrum, Melbourne, 2001).
Len Thomas, *Free to be Priest* (Spectrum Publications, Richmond, Vic, 2005).
Tim Norris, *Golden Priest, Wooden Chalice*, ed. Tess Livingstone (Connor Court, Ballan, Vic, 2005).⁴⁸
W. T. Southerwood, *The Child Won't Live* (Stella Maris Books, Launceston, 2008).⁴⁹
John McSweeney, *Light of Other Days: A Memoir* (OMP Publications, Sydney, 2009).⁵⁰
Noel McMaster CSsR, *From Coburg to the Kimberley: A Narrative of Lifelong Learning in Catholic Faith and Ways* (David Lovell Publishing, Kew East, Vic, 2010).
John I. Fleming, *Convinced by the Truth: Embracing the Fullness of Catholic Faith* (Connor Court, Ballan Vic, 2010).
Gerald O'Collins SJ, *A Midlife Journey* (Connor Court, Ballan Vic, 2012).

Priests: Other Autobiographical Material

- The Diary of James Alipius Goold OSA 1812-1886: First Catholic Bishop and Archbishop of Melbourne, 1847-1886*, ed. Brian Condon and Ian Waters, prepared for the Melbourne Diocesan Historical Commission of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne [Book : 1997]
Thomas J. Sweeney, *Letters from Rome 1946-1953*, ed. Bernadette Draper (Church Archivists' Press, Virginia, Qld, 1996).

Giuseppe La Rosa, *Diece anni tra gli Italiani in Australia*, ed. Domenico La Rosa, Barbara McGilvray, (Domenico La Rosa, Italian Historical Society of NSW, Petersham, NSW 1995).

Robert Egar, *Why I Am a Priest: Seven Priests Tell Their Story* (Archdiocese of Adelaide, Adelaide, 2001).

Ex-Priests

Michael S. Parer, *Dreamer by Day: A Priest Returns to Life* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1971).

Ian Guthridge, *Give Me a Child When He Is Young* (Medici Publications, Port Melbourne, 1987).

Greg Dening, *Performances* (Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1996), ch. 1?

Gerard Windsor, *Heaven, Where the Bachelors Sit* (University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1996). [ex-novice]

Jim Madden, *This Turbulent Priest: The Story of a Priest and His Church* (J. Madden, Summer Park Qld, 1999)

Chris Geraghty, *Cassocks in the Wilderness: Remembering the Seminary at Springwood* (Spectrum Publications, Richmond, Vic, 2001) and *The Priest Factory: A Manly Vision of Triumph, 1958-1962 and Beyond* (Spectrum Publications, Melbourne, 2003); *Dancing with the Devil: A Journey from the Pulpit to the Bench* (Spectrum Publications, Melbourne, 2012).

John Hanrahan, *From Eternity to Here: Memoirs of an Angry Priest* (Bystander Press, Northcote, Vic, 2002).

Paul Crittenden, *Changing Orders: Scenes of Clerical and Academic Life* (Brandl & Schlesinger, Blackheath NSW, 2008).

John N. Molony, *Luther's Pine: An Autobiography* (Pandanus Books, Canberra, 2004) and *By Wendouree: Memories 1951-1963* (Connor Court, Ballan Vic, 2010).

Patrick McClure, *Seize the Day: From Priest to CEO* (Longueville Books Woollahra, NSW, 2011).

John Burnheim, *To Reason Why: From Religion to Philosophy and Beyond* (Darlington Press, Sydney, 2011).

Robert Crotty, *Three Revolutions: Three Drastic Changes in the Interpretation of the Bible in One Lifetime* (ATF Theology, Hindmarsh SA, 2012).

Brothers

John Braniff, *Close to the Wind : Growing Up Catholic, Working Class, Migrant and a Religious in Australia 1955-2005* (David Lovell Publishing, East Kew, Vic, 2009).

Ex-Brothers

Morris West, *A View From the Ridge: The Testimony of a Pilgrim* (Harper Collins, Pymble, 1996)

John Redrup, *Banished Camelots: Recollections of a Catholic Childhood: A Celebration and a Requiem* (Bookpress, Sydney, 1997). [ex-junior]

Paul Brock, *A Passion for Life: An Inspiring Story of Resilience and Hope* (ABC Books, Sydney, 2004).

Nuns

Mary Lalor, *The Inner Road (A Legacy of Love) : Autobiography of Sister Mary Lalor, Foundress of the Little Sisters of Our Lady of Mount Carmel* (Little Sisters of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Hawker, SA, 1984; Kingstown Press, Dublin, 2003).

Ex-Nuns

Cecilia Inglis, *Cecilia: an Ex-Nun's Extraordinary Journey* (Penguin Books, Camberwell, Vic, 2003).

Eileen Jones, *The Accidental Poet* (Ginninderra Press, Canberra, 2007).

Colette Livermore, *Hope Endures: An Australian Sister's Story of Leaving Mother Teresa, Losing Faith, and Her Ongoing Search for Meaning* (William Heinemann, North Sydney, 2008).

Margaret Bolton, *Not Another Nun Story* (Ginninderra Press, Adelaide, 2010).

Nuns and ex-nuns: other autobiographical material

Helen Jenkins, ed, *The Great Silence: Leaving Convent Life* (H. Jenkins, Annandale, 1996).

Some unpublished memoirs are summarised and extracted in Anne O'Brien, *God's Willing Workers* (UNSW Press, Sydney, 2005), including those of Sr Bernard Haughey DOLSH, who taught in an aboriginal school in Bowraville 1919-50 (pp. 212-14), Sr Marcellus Baraguay RSM of St Patrick's Business College (pp. 219-20) and Sr Dorothea Hanly SGS, written in 1945 (pp. 186-9).

Sweet Mothers, Sweet Maids: Journeys from Catholic Childhoods, ed. K. Nelson and D. Nelson (Penguin, Ringwood Vic, 1986) contains brief memoirs by Deirdre Cook, Veronica Brady and Margaret O'Sullivan.

End notes

¹ C. James, *Unreliable Memoirs* (1980), 20.

² John Hanrahan, *From Eternity to Here: Memoirs of an Angry Priest* (Bystander Press, Northcote, Vic, 2002), 71.

³ Hanrahan, *From Eternity to Here*, 16.

⁴ Hanrahan, *From Eternity to Here*, 59.

⁵ Chris Geraghty, *The Priest Factory: A Manly Vision of Triumph, 1958-1972 and Beyond* (Spectrum Publications, Melbourne, 2003), 141-151, 324-6.

⁶ Paul Crittenden, *Changing Orders: Scenes of Clerical and Academic Life* (Brandl and Schlesinger, Blackheath, 2008), 138-41, 182-92.

⁷ Ian Guthridge, *Give Me a Child When He Is Young* (Medici Publications, Port Melbourne, 1987).

⁸ Morris West, *A View From the Ridge: The Testimony of a Pilgrim* (HarperCollins, Sydney, 1996), 6.

⁹ West, *View from the Ridge*, 6-7

¹⁰ West, *View from the Ridge*, 32.

¹¹ Edmund Campion, *Rockchoppers: Growing Up Catholic in Australia* (Penguin, Ringwood, Vic, 1982), 15-16.

¹² Colette Livermore, *Hope Endures: An Australian Sister's story of leaving Mother Teresa, losing faith, and her on-going search for meaning* (Heinemann, 2008); synopsis at <http://www.colettelivermore.com.au/book.htm>

- ¹³ Paul Brock, *A Passion for Life* (ABC Books, Sydney, 2004), 96-7.
- ¹⁴ Campion, *Rockchoppers*, 4.
- ¹⁵ Brock, *Passion for Life*, 106.
- ¹⁶ A brief recollection, possibly exaggerated, of Brock's teaching in *Oxford Book of Australian Schooldays*, ed. B. Niall, I. Britain and P. Williams (Oxford University Press, 1997), 265.
- ¹⁷ Brock, *Passion for Life*, 106.
- ¹⁸ Brock, *Passion for Life*, 107-111.
- ¹⁹ Without intending anything negative by the comparison, the phenomenon of multiple vocations in families could be compared to copycat suicides, in the sense that early teenagers can make dramatic decisions about their lives and do so in imitation of others. A study of vocations in families is Beverley Zimmerman, 'She came from a fine Catholic family': religious sisterhoods of the Maitland diocese, 1867-1901, *Australian Historical Studies* 31 (115) (2000), 251-272.
- ²⁰ Cecilia Inglis, *Cecilia: An Ex-Nun's Extraordinary Journey* (Penguin, Camberwell Vic, 2003), 49.
- ²¹ Inglis, *Cecilia*, 71-84.
- ²² Inglis, *Cecilia*, 100.
- ²³ Inglis, *Cecilia*, 175.
- ²⁴ Inglis, *Cecilia*, 208-9.
- ²⁵ Inglis, *Cecilia*, 325.
- ²⁶ Inglis, *Cecilia*, 294.
- ²⁷ Anne O'Brien, *God's Willing Workers: Women and Religion and Australia* (UNSW Press, Sydney 2005), 190.
- ²⁸ Eileen Jones, *The Accidental Poet* (Ginninderra Press, Canberra, 2007).
- ²⁹ Kevin Condon, *Here I Am Lord: Memories and Musings of a Wandering Dominican*, 8.
- ³⁰ Condon, *Here I Am Lord*, 27.
- ³¹ Noel McMaster, *From Coburg to the Kimberley* (David Lovell Publishing, Kew East, 2010), 16.
- ³² Peter Brock, *Home Rome Home* (Spectrum, Melbourne, 2001), 62.
- ³³ Mary Lalor, *The Inner Road (A Legacy of Love): Autobiography of Sister Mary Lalor, Foundress of the Little Sisters of Our Lady of Mount Carmel* (Little Sisters of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Hawker SA, 1984), 1-16.
- ³⁴ Lalor, *The Inner Road*, 56.
- ³⁵ Lalor, *The Inner Road*, 141.
- ³⁶ John Redrup, *Banished Camelots* (Bookpress, Sydney, 1997), 228.
- ³⁷ Redrup, *Banished Camelots*, 245.
- ³⁸ Redrup, *Banished Camelots*, 266, 271.
- ³⁹ Redrup, *Banished Camelots*, 279.
- ⁴⁰ Redrup, *Banished Camelots*, 280.
- ⁴¹ Donovan, Peter, Gsell, Francis Xavier (1872-1960), *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/gsell-francis-xavier-6502>; J. Franklin, The missionary with 150 wives, *Quadrant* 56 (7/8) (July/Aug 2012), 30-32.
- ⁴² F. X. Gsell, *The Bishop with 150 Wives* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1956), 32.

⁴³ Gsell, 80-86.

⁴⁴ Gsell, 154-5.

⁴⁵ Northern Territory Parliament Hansard, 23/12/2012, <http://notes.nt.gov.au/lant/hansard/hansardd.nsf/WebbyMember/5D932B61F4D4E7D469257AA6001496D6?opendocument>

⁴⁶ John I. Fleming, *Convinced by the Truth: Embracing the Fullness of Catholic Faith* (Connor Court, Ballan Vic, 2010)

⁴⁷ James Duhig, *Crowded Years* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1947); it can be compared with his biography: T. P. Boland, *James Duhig* (University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1986).

⁴⁸ Review at http://www.ad2000.com.au/articles/2006/mar2006p18_2195.html

⁴⁹ Review at http://www.catholicleader.com.au/news.php/reviews/the-child-wont-live-a-joyous-priests-life-story_48335

⁵⁰ Review in *Australasian Catholic Record* 88 (2) (2011), 250-1.

⁵¹ Review at http://www.ad2000.com.au/articles/1997/jul1997p15_648.html
