

## CATHOLIC RURAL VIRTUE IN AUSTRALIA: IDEAL AND REALITY

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On St Patrick's Day 1943, Éamon de Valera, Taoiseach of Ireland, broadcast on Raidió Éireann a remarkable speech on 'The Ireland that we dreamed of'. It begins:

The ideal Ireland that we would have, the Ireland that we dreamed of, would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who, satisfied with frugal comfort, devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit – a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contest of athletic youths and the laughter of happy maidens, whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. The home, in short, of a people living the life that God desires that men should live.<sup>1</sup>

In 1921, 'John O'Brien' (Father Patrick Hartigan) published his book of poems on rural Australian Catholic life, *Around the Boree Log*. A verse from 'The Little Irish Mother':

*There's a Little Irish Mother that a lonely vigil keeps  
In the settler's hut where seldom stranger comes,  
Watching by the home-made cradle where one more Australian sleeps  
While the breezes whisper weird things to the gums,  
Where the settlers battle gamely, beaten down to rise again,  
And the brave bush wives the toil and silence share,  
Where the nation is a-building in the hearts of splendid men –  
There's a Little Irish Mother always there.<sup>2</sup>*

1 Audio in RTE Archives: <https://www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/eamon-de-valera/719124-address-by-mr-de-valera/>, text at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Ireland\\_That\\_We\\_Dreamed\\_Of](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ireland_That_We_Dreamed_Of); discussed in Michele Dowling, 'The Ireland that I would have': de Valera and the creation of an Irish national image', *History Ireland* 5/2 (Summer 1997): 37–41; Tricia Cusack, 'A "countryside bright with cosy homesteads": Irish nationalism and the cottage landscape', *National Identities* 3 (2001): 221–238; earlier expressions in Patrick Maume, 'A pastoral vision: the novels of Canon Joseph Guinan', *New Hibernia Review* 9/4 (Winter 2005): 79–98; Catherine Candy, *Popular Irish Novelists of the Early 20th Century: Patrick A. Sheehan, Joseph Guinan, Gerald O'Donovan* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1996).

2 John O'Brien, *Around the Boree Log* (London: Angus & Robertson, 1978): <http://www.middlemiss.org/lit/authors/obrienj/poetry/littleirishmother.html>; discussion in Jeff

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That too is the ‘life that God desires that men should live.’ Both visions are rural, Catholic, Irish, virtuous, poor (actually, virtuous *because* poor) (and somewhat gendered, but not grossly: men are supposed to be virtuous as well as women).

### **The world context of the rural ideal**

There is a very long back-story in Western civilization to the idea of that the old virtues are preserved among simple rural people, in contrast to the many vices indulged in by rootless cosmopolitans and cynical city intellectuals. We will treat it very lightly here by way of background.

Les Murray recalls the ancient Greek contrast between rural Boeotia and urban Athens. Fashion-conscious and frenetic Athens is contemptuous of Boeotia as slow-moving and old-fashioned, but poetry, Murray says, does not work so well in the Athenian mode: ‘Conflict and resolution take the place, in a crowded urban milieu, of the Boeotian interest in celebration and commemoration, modes that perennially appear in spacious, dignified cultures.’<sup>3</sup>

Probably the most admired hero of ancient Rome was the farmer Cincinnatus. With the early Republic in grave danger, the envoys of the Senate find him at his plough. They give him absolute power as dictator. He saves the state and immediately relinquishes power and returns to his farm. Such classical ideals were revived in the eighteenth century. Thomas Jefferson wrote (in a passage quoted by B.A. Santamaria):

Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if He ever had a chosen people, whose breasts He has made His peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue ... Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age or nation has furnished an example.<sup>4</sup>

Robert Burns’ poem ‘The Cotter’s Saturday night’ (praised in Robert

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Brownrigg, ‘Irish mothers and Mother Ireland in the verses of “John O’Brien” and other poetical priests’, in J Brownrigg, C Mongan and R Reid, eds, *Echoes of Irish Australia: Rebellion to Republic* (Galong: St Clement’s Retreat and Conference Centre, 2007), 167–181.

3 Les Murray, ‘On sitting back and thinking about Porter’s Boeotia’, in *The Peasant Mandarin* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978): 172–184, at 173.

4 Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, quoted in B A Santamaria, *The Earth Our Mother* (Melbourne: Araluen Publishing, 1945), 30; later developments in Kevin M Lowe, *Baptized with the Soil: Christian Agrarians and the Crusade for Rural America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Menzies' 'Forgotten people' speech of 1942<sup>5</sup>) includes the lines:

*Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil  
Be blest with health, and peace, and sweet content!  
And O! may Heaven their simple lives prevent  
From luxury's contagion, weak and vile!*<sup>6</sup>

The political tone of rural virtue tends to the conservative. It is a familiar fact that rural political parties are generally conservative.<sup>7</sup> The British Marxist Raymond Williams, in his *The Country and the City* (1973), remarks acidly that every writer praising the unchanging tradition of rural virtue seems to agree that that timeless order broke down under the stress of imported city vices and radical ideas at just the same moment, namely, when the writer was a child.<sup>8</sup>

Rurality as a political ideal can also be expensive. The Common Agricultural Policy that at one stage soaked up 73 per cent of the European Union's budget, producing wine lakes and butter mountains, was premised on a 'rural fundamentalism',<sup>9</sup> especially French. The 1958 Stresa conference founding the Policy 'expressed their unanimous wish to preserve the character of European farming, which was predominately based on small-size, family holdings'.<sup>10</sup>

The rural ideal played well in Australia too, though here it competed with a more left-wing rural narrative of the 'Australian bushman' and noble shearers founding the Labor Party. The idea that small landholders would find frugal prosperity and simple happiness working their land was behind

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5 <http://www.liberals.net/theforgottenpeople.htm>

6 <http://www.robertburns.org/works/82.shtml>

7 E.g. in Australia, Marc Brodie, 'The politics of rural nostalgia between the wars', in *Struggle Country: The rural ideal in twentieth century Australia*, ed. Graeme Davison and Marc Brodie (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2015), ch. 9; Elizabeth Kenworthy Teather, 'The Country Women's Association of New South Wales in the 1920s and 1930s as a counter-revolutionary organisation', *Journal of Australian Studies* 18 (1994): 67–78.

8 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), ch. 2.

9 Ian R Bowler, *Agriculture Under the Common Agricultural Policy: A Geography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 16

10 Rosemary Fennell, *The Common Agricultural Policy: Continuity and Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 20–21; John Gray, 'The Common Agricultural Policy and the re-invention of the rural in the European Community', *Sociologia Ruralis* 40 (2000): 30–52.

early government visions for convicts, propaganda encouraging emigrants, and legislation allowing selection.<sup>11</sup> Albert Facey's *A Fortunate Life* portrays the result – a hard life but one many were grateful for.

### **The European Catholic ideal of rural virtue and piety**

The Catholic version of the rural ideal was somewhat different from the classical one, naturally emphasising the piety as well as virtue of rural people, and connecting with older medieval and early modern 'ages of faith' when the population of Europe was mainly rural. As the Church in countries such as France failed to retain the allegiance of the new industrial working classes, popular Catholicism in Europe came to be increasingly



Jean-François Millet, *The Angelus* (1857–9)  
Musée d'Orsay, Wikipedia commons

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<sup>11</sup> James Franklin, *Corrupting the Youth: A history of philosophy in Australia* (Sydney: Macleay Press, 2003), 238–244; Coral Lansbury, *Arcady in Australia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1970).

rural. Millet's painting of peasants praying *The Angelus* captures the image nineteenth-century Parisians had of simple rural piety.<sup>12,13</sup>

In film, the classic version is the Italian movie *The Tree of Wooden Clogs*.<sup>14</sup>

In the mid-twentieth century, the ideal of Catholic rural virtue was particularly associated with two regimes in Europe, those of Salazar and De Valera. B A Santamaria spoke in 1940 of

the great inspiration which Salazar in Portugal and de Valera in Ireland have drawn from the social doctrines of the Church ... [in] two countries, at least, a determined effort is being made to reorganise the national economy on Christian lines, to break the shackles of anarchic and irresponsible capitalism, and to make economics subordinate to human happiness.<sup>15</sup>

Salazar was especially articulate about his model of Catholic rural virtue,<sup>16</sup> so it is worth quoting him at some length as an example of the international nature of the Catholic rural ideal.

In contrast to contemporary assumptions that a main business of governments is economic development, Salazar took at least some degree of rural poverty to be not a bug but a feature. That is because 'material life, economic development, and the unceasing rise in living standards' would 'leave in darkness all that is spiritual in man'.<sup>17</sup> (De Valera too preferred frugal comfort.<sup>18</sup>) Technological improvement is not wrong, but needs to be done in ways not destructive of traditional society:

12 Wikipedia commons, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Angelus\\_\(painting\)#/media/File:JEAN-FRAN%20MILLET\\_-\\_El\\_Angelus\\_\(Museo\\_de\\_Orsay,\\_1857-1859.\\_%C3%93leo\\_sobre\\_lienzo,\\_55.5\\_x\\_66\\_cm\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Angelus_(painting)#/media/File:JEAN-FRAN%20MILLET_-_El_Angelus_(Museo_de_Orsay,_1857-1859._%C3%93leo_sobre_lienzo,_55.5_x_66_cm).jpg)

13 Similar in Jules Breton's 'Song of the Lark and Blessing the Wheat'; see Maureen Ryan, 'The peasant's bonds to Gaul, God, land and nature: The myth of the rural and Jules Breton's *Le Chant de l'alouette*', *RACAR (Revue d'Art Canadienne/Canadian Art Review)*: 19 (1/2) (1992): 79–96.

14 <https://www.filmcomment.com/article/on-earth-as-it-is-in-heaven-ermanno-olmi/>

15 B A Santamaria, 'What the Church Has Done for the Worker', pamphlet, 1940, quoted in Gerard Henderson, *Santamaria, A most unusual man* (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2015).

16 Felipe Ribeiro de Meneses, *Salazar: A political biography* (New York: Enigma Books, 2009), 339, 623.

17 AO de Salazar, *Discursos e notas politicas* (Coimbra: Coimbra Editora, 1965), vol. 6, quoted in Michael Sanfey, 'Salazar and Salazarism', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 92 (2003): 405–411.

18 Mary E Daly, 'The economic ideals of Irish nationalism: frugal comfort or lavish austerity?', *Eire-Ireland* 29/4 (Winter 1994): 77–100.

Neither by wealth nor by the luxury of technology are we satisfied ... Without distracting ourselves from the activity that gives everyone a greater share of goods and with these, more material comfort, the ideal is to flee from the materialism of our time: make the field more fecund, without silencing the songs of the girls; weave cotton or wool on the most modern loom, without weaving class hatred into the threads and without expelling from the workshop of the factory our old patriarchal spirit.<sup>19</sup>

Governments should instead be encouraging traditional rural culture:

The Casa de Povo [House of the People] should be major centres for a corporative education of the people, and a home or hearth for the village or the town. There the country people should meet after their daily toil, in innocent games, for simple plays, theatre or choirs.<sup>20</sup>

Salazar explains what is wrong with city life:

Misery seems a secretion of progress, civilization. It is not in the countryside (even in full crisis) where life is simple and without ambition, that misery turns afflictive, dramatic. Its great tragedy without remedy first develops in the cities, the big capitals, as insensitive and tough as they are civilized. Mechanization, automatization of progress which turns men into machines, isolates them brutally substituting their desires and affective impulses with complicated and cold interactions.<sup>21</sup>

That does not just apply to factory workers, but to white-collar workers, the habitués of city cafés:

Men who have been brought up and who live exclusively between the school, the government office, and the café—and it is from among them that most of our public men have been recruited—must not take umbrage if we believe that their education has been defective. I do not say, as many do, that city life is a false type of life: it is what it is, vigorous and real despite its artificiality and its defects. I say that it is incomplete, especially if we would judge the life of the nation by it, and if we assume that the life of one class in a city is the genuine life

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19 A O Salazar, *Discursos e notas políticas* (Vol. 2 1935–1937) (Coimbra, 1945): 276. (Thanks to Robert Stove for translation)

20 *Entrevistas de Antonio Ferreira a Salazar* (2 edition, Lisboa: Parreira A.M. Pereira, 2003, with introduction by Fernando Rosas), interview of 1938, 153. (Thanks to Jean Page for translation.)

21 Salazar, *Entrevistas*, 171.

of the city itself. When we go from the capital to the provinces, from the town to the village, from the club, the newspaper office or the drawing-room to the countryside, the workshop and the factory, the horizon of social realities widens before our eyes and we form quite a different opinion of what constitutes a nation. The distance which separates us who haunt the cafés, who frequent public offices, who have become Ministers and have a share in what may be called the omnipotence of power, drawing up ideal schemes of reform, tracing the lines of important schemes, almost deciding the fate of the world – the distance which separates us from the real nation is immense. The sense of unlimited power which the town gives us because it is dealing with abstract ideas, can find no sustenance in Nature, itself so calm and so retiring, challenging with a smile our impatience and our pride in our creative power.<sup>22</sup>

Naturally, rural smallholders will be politically conservative and reject Communism:

See how the self-interest of States, overall the so-called capitalist States, is to create the greatest number of small property-holders who, far from favouring Communism or Socialism, tend to constitute the conservative reserve of the Nation, that which most opposes the development of libertarian ideas.<sup>23</sup>

Unlike Europe, colonial lands such as the United States and Australia had no peasantry with roots stretching back to the Middle Ages. Attempts were made to create a Catholic rural America, with a small degree of success.<sup>24</sup> These efforts too were admired by Santamaria.<sup>25</sup>

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22 FCC Egerton, *Salazar: Rebuilder of Portugal* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1943), 151–2.

23 Salazar, *Entrevistas*, 41 (interview of 1932).

24 David S Bovée, *The Church and the Land: The National Catholic Rural Life Conference and American Society, 1923–2007* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010); Christopher Hamlin and John T McGreevy, ‘The greening of America, Catholic style, 1930–1950’, *Environmental History* 11 (2006): 464–499; Michael J Woods, *Cultivating Soil and Soul: Twentieth-century Catholic agrarians embrace the liturgical movement* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2009); Allan C Carlson, ‘“Flee to the fields”’: Midwestern Catholicism and the last agrarian crusade, 1920–1941’, *Chesterton Review* 33 (2018): 53–75.

25 Richard Doig, ‘A “New Deal” for Australia: The National Catholic Rural Movement and American agrarianism, 1931–49’, *Rural Society* 10 (2000): 139–152.

## **Santamaria and the National Catholic Rural Movement**

In his early working life, Santamaria was not the head of a vast and multifaceted anti-communist 'Movement' but Secretary of the National Catholic Rural Movement, which he described as 'the most personally rewarding work in which I have ever engaged'.<sup>26</sup>

As with many of Santamaria's projects, it was a development of Archbishop Mannix's ideas. A sermon of Mannix's on a visit to the country in 1940 summarises his and Catholic views on the positives of rural life:

### STAY IN THE COUNTRY: ARCHBISHOP MANNIX'S ADVICE

A plea for the welfare and development of country life which is vital to Australia was made by the Archbishop of Melbourne (Most Rev. D. Mannix, D.D.) in addressing a large country gathering in Victoria. His Grace said it was consoling to know that all the Catholic people were not confined to the city, but that a considerable sprinkling of them was to be found in the country. Families in the city after two or three generations seemed to die out; they did not seem to last long for one reason or another. He hoped none of those residing in the district to which he was talking would think of going to the city. People should remain in the country as long as they could make a living ... those who were now there should stick to their holdings. Large tracts of land were not vitally necessary; the main thing was to have a sufficiency to make a decent living. Those who got a decent living should not be anxious to turn their backs on the country for the lights, cinemas and other so-called attractions of city life.<sup>27</sup>

Mannix was right about city families having fewer children. A study found that rural Catholic married women had one and a half times as many children as city Catholic married women.<sup>28</sup> So differences between urban and rural behaviours are not purely a matter of perception.

We now know the NCRM mostly through the perspective of later years,

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26 Bruce Duncan, *Crusade or Conspiracy? Catholics and the anti-Communist struggle in Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2001), 30–32, 86–89, 154–5.

27 'Stay in the country: Archbishop Mannix's advice', *Bunyip* (Gawler), 24/5/1940: <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/96698982>, in James Franklin, Gerald O Nolan and Michael Gilchrist, *The Real Archbishop Mannix: From the sources* (Ballarat: Connor Court, 2015), ch. 10; Mannix perhaps understates the problem described in the American song of 1919 about soldiers returning from WWI: 'How Ya Gonna Keep 'em Down on the Farm (After They've Seen Parem)?'.

28 Lincoln H Day, 'Fertility differentials among Catholics in Australia', *Milbank Quarterly* 42 (2) (1964): 57–83.

when it became another branch of Santamaria's suite of anti-Communist front organisations funding his crusade in the unions.<sup>29</sup> Our view may also be obscured by later leftist caricature of it as about settling peasants with three acres and a cow, a picture specifically disavowed by the movement itself.<sup>30</sup> But in its heyday in the 1940s, when membership grew to 6000, it was neither of those things but a serious movement with economic and philosophical arguments in favour of encouraging self-owned rural smallholdings.<sup>31</sup> It did have a specifically Catholic vision:

The life on the land is one which is most suited to the practice of the Christian virtues. Therefore, to defend and propagate the life on the land is a definite work of Catholic Action. As Catholic citizens, we have a vital interest in this matter, since the Catholic Church alone possesses the principles which will place rural life on a solid basis.<sup>32</sup>

Santamaria's 1945 manifesto, *The Earth Our Mother*, despite the romantic title, is a work of serious economic reasoning on how rural smallholdings can be made a success in the face of capitalist pressures to consolidate land in large estates.<sup>33</sup>

As it turned out, economic forces proved hostile. The model of small owner-operated businesses has continued to be viable in the suburbs but in the country has been mostly driven out by industrial-scale highly-capitalised enterprises. As Santamaria put it, 'If the agrobiologists were to make their fantasies come true, we might have almost no farmers.'<sup>34</sup> So it is. Australia could have had a version of the Common Agricultural Policy but chose not

29 Kevin Peoples, *Santamaria's Salesman: Working for the National Catholic Rural Movement, 1959–1961* (Mulgrave Vic: John Garratt Publishing, 2012); Race Mathews, *Of Labour and Liberty: Distributism in Victoria 1891–1966* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2017), 224–6; Duncan, *Crusade or Conspiracy?*, 155.

30 Tony Ayers, 'Cottage Catholicism: Young Santamaria and the lure of the pastoral', *Arena Magazine* 34 (Apr/May 1998): 20–23.

31 Kathy Madden, 'Dreams and Realities: Some insights into the National Catholic Rural Movement', Master of Humanities thesis, University of Tasmania, 1994: [https://eprints.utas.edu.au/20338/1/whole\\_MaddenKathy1995\\_thesis.pdf](https://eprints.utas.edu.au/20338/1/whole_MaddenKathy1995_thesis.pdf)

32 'Catholic Rural Movement', *Catholic Freeman's Journal*, 23/1 (1941): <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/146374103>. Attempts to found rural Catholic communities described in David De Carvalho, 'Whitlands 1941–1951: An Australian experiment in utopian Catholicism', *Australasian Catholic Record* 80 (2003): 145–163; Gael Smith, *Maryknoll: History of a Catholic rural settlement* (Maryknoll: Artistic Wombat, 2002); a utopian vision in Denys Jackson, *Australian Dream: a journey to Merrion* (pamphlets, Melbourne: Australian Catholic Truth Society, 1947–8).

33 Discussion in Duncan, *Crusade or Conspiracy?*, 87–88.

34 Santamaria, *The Earth Our Mother*, 23.

to. ‘O’Brien’s’ Hanrahan had the last word—‘we’ll all be rooned’, and not by floods and drought but by economic forces unopposed by government intervention.

### **Irish settlement of rural Australia**

Santamaria and Mannix were city theorists with a vision, which may or may not have coincided with or influenced reality. We now turn to the reality itself, the real Catholic rural communities of Australia.

Fr Therry’s and Bishop Polding’s long days on horseback are well-remembered features of early Australian Catholic history. The communities they visited had grown up through a process of settlement described in a neglected classic of Australian Catholic history, James Waldersee’s *Catholic Society in New South Wales, 1788–1860*. Through the efforts of James Meehan, the most active surveyor in the colony in Macquarie’s time, many of his fellow transportees from the revolution of 1798 and other Catholics received land grants in the Camden and Campbelltown areas and beyond.<sup>35</sup> Favourable reports sent back to Ireland resulted in chain migration and a swathe of Catholic settlers in the Goulburn, Yass and Boorowa areas and along the Murrumbidgee.<sup>36</sup> Caroline Chisholm helped supply Irish women to marry the Irishmen in those regions. According to her evidence,

There is a very great demand for them as wives there. An Irishman likes to marry his own countrywoman; and there are a great number of Irish there who are doing extremely well, who formerly got into what is called a little bit of trouble; and they think that their own countrywomen will understanding [sic] them best.<sup>37</sup>

Boorowa was known as the most obviously Catholic region in New South Wales. The Protestant John Dunmore Lang, visiting the town in 1862, wrote,

Burrowa is one of the most thoroughly Roman Catholic districts in New South Wales. As everybody in the Duke of Argyle’s county

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35 Bernard Dowd, ‘James Meehan’, *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 3/2 (1970): 8–12.

36 James Waldersee, *Catholic Society in New South Wales, 1788–1850* (Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 1974), chs 4–5; Brian Maher, ‘The Catholic communities of southern New South Wales’, *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 11 (1989): 18–32; Brian Maher, *Planting the Celtic Cross: Foundations of the Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn* (Canberra: Brian Maher, 1997).

37 Report of Select Committee of the House of Lords on Colonization from Ireland (1848): quoted in James Waldersee, ‘Pre-famine Irish emigration to Australia’, *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 4/2, (1973): 23–35.

at home is called Campbell, so everybody in and around Burrowa is called Ryan. This, at least, is the general rule, although there are particular exceptions. Burrowa, in short, is the head-quarters and paradise of the Ryans, and might almost be supposed to be a veritable slice of the county Tipperary.<sup>38</sup>

Galong even had Ryans as grandee squattocrats.<sup>39</sup> (By and large the squattocracy were Protestants to a man.<sup>40</sup>) Bathurst and the Lachlan also had high proportions of Catholic settlers,<sup>41</sup> while the Hunter Valley in NSW was home to a significant number of Catholics, who often settled ‘beyond the established villages and towns.’<sup>42</sup> Other areas of strong Catholic rural settlement were found in southwest and northeast Victoria<sup>43</sup> (sometimes speaking Gaelic<sup>44</sup>).

One aspect of rural Catholicism noted by several observers was its generally anti-sectarian character. Fenian scares, Orangeism and conflicts about jobs and education were largely city phenomena and in the country a spirit of tolerance and cooperation between different denominations was regarded as normal.<sup>45</sup>

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38 John Dunmore Lang, *Notes of a Trip to the Westward and Southward, in the Colony of New South Wales; in the months of March and April, 1862* (Sydney: Hanson and Bennett, 1862), 27; full story in Malcolm Campbell, *The Kingdom of the Ryans: The Irish in Southwest New South Wales, 1816–1890* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1997); Waldersee, *Catholic Society*, 120–1; Brian Maher, *A Slice of Tipperary: A story of Boorowa N.S.W. Catholic community* (Bruce ACT: Brian Maher, 2016).

39 Max Barrett, *King of Galong Castle: The story of Ned Ryan, 1786–1871* (Weston Creek ACT: Genie Publishing, 2000).

40 Don Aitkin, *The County Party in New South Wales* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1972), 103, 140.

41 Malcolm Campbell and Robert Tierney, ‘The missing Catholics: Religion and population decline in the Lachlan district, 1870–1890’, *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 18 (2016): 115–138; a detailed local history in Gavin Cashman, *Avoca: The faith of the pioneers* (Black Springs NSW: The Centenary Committee of the Church of St Vincent de Paul, 1988).

42 Beverley Zimmerman, *The Making of a Diocese: Maitland, its Bishop, Priests and People, 1866–1909* (Carlton South, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2000), 44–45; earlier Michael Belcher, ‘The Catholics of Wallis Plains 1820–1835: Catholics in a pre-institutional environment’, *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 34 (2013): 2–17.

43 Terry G Jordan and Alyson L Greiner, ‘Irish migration to rural Eastern Australia: a preliminary investigation’, *Irish Geography* 27 (1994): 135–142; Regina Lane, *Saving St Brigid’s* (Carlton South: Bridin Books, 2014), ch. 2.

44 Val Noone, *Hidden Ireland in Victoria* (Ballarat: Ballarat Heritage Services, 2012), 43–48.

45 Confirmed by James Logan, ‘Sectarianism in Ganmain: a local study, 1912–1921’, *Rural*

The *Yass Courier* reported:

On Saint Patrick's Day 1859 the Yass solicitor George C Allman addressed a banquet of the town's most prominent men and women. In his address, Allman, the son of a Protestant Irish settler, Captain Francis Allman, praised his town as a 'successful experiment', a place where people 'of all opinions, grades and religions may meet and remember that they belong to a common country'. His sentiments were echoed by the Reverend Patrick Bermingham, one of the town's two Roman Catholic priests, who described the evening's celebration as one 'calculated to make the inhabitants of the southern districts appreciate the sterling good qualities of each other without reference to race or creed'.<sup>46</sup>

Fr Hartigan ('John O'Brien') was a strong supporter of good relations among Christians, both in words and actions.<sup>47</sup>

The mixing of populations and the low density that meant everyone needed to help one another in hard times encouraged a lack of sectarianism. Everyone had to attend everyone else's ball or bazaar or there wouldn't have been enough people to go round. Father Carragher, parish priest at Ungarie in the 1930s and certainly well imbued with Catholic culture after studying philosophy and theology at Valladolid, said 'If we didn't support one another out here, we'd all have to close our doors.'<sup>48</sup> Sparse populations also encouraged the evil (from the clerical point of view) of mixed marriages.<sup>49</sup>

### **Catholic education and culture in the bush**

It was one thing to settle remote regions with people nominally Catholic, another to develop Catholic devotion, education and culture in those areas with so little contact with the 'outside world'. For all the days spent on horseback by pioneer priests, bush people's contact with formal religion was

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*Society* 10 (2000), 121–138.

46 *Yass Courier*, 19/3/1859, in Malcolm Campbell, 'A 'successful experiment' no more: the intensification of religious bigotry in Eastern Australia, 1865–1885', *Humanities Research* 12/1 (2005): 67–78.

47 Frank Mecham, "*John O'Brien" and the Boree Log* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1981), 72, 161, 171, 187, 269.

48 Fergus Cloran, *I Saw the Bay First* (Glebe: Fast Books, 1993), 79; also in Jack Waterford, 'On being rural, Irish and Catholic', *Canberra Times* 10/9 (1983): 13: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/116405831>

49 PM Lynch, 'The apostolate of the back-blocks: how to advance the interests of religion in remote country districts', *Proceedings of the Third Australasian Catholic Congress*, 1909 (Sydney: St Mary's Cathedral Book Depot, 1910): 89–102, at 92.

inevitably spasmodic. A letter home to Ireland in 1862 says

I know some people living (what we call the bush) in the Interiour far in the country. They might be catholics if they hapen to have a family they cant run to a Priest to get them christined they come down here some times with as many as half a Dozen at a time and get them Baptized and the whole of them well able to talk to the Priest. Catholics has the worst chance for anny such thing in the bush.<sup>50</sup>

A similar theme (with some stereotyping of the Irish) is the point of Banjo Paterson's poem 'A Bush Christening' (1893) which gives an outsider's view of the Irish community. It sets the scene with the tenuous hold of religion in the outback:

*On the outer Barcoo where the churches are few,  
And men of religion are scanty,  
On a road never cross'd 'cept by folk that are lost,  
One Michael Magee had a shanty.*

A priest finally arrives to baptise Magee's son but by then he's aged 10. He concludes that christening must be something like branding horses so he heads off for the bush. The priest has to baptise him by throwing a bottle of whisky after him. By then he's forgotten what name he's supposed to christen him with so he takes the one on the whisky bottle and it's 'Maginnis Magee.'<sup>51</sup>

Waldersee suggests that the first generation of rural Catholics were often not very devoted to their faith. But there are plenty of recollections in later times of major efforts by rural families to reach what masses were available. Kathleen Fitzpatrick recalls the world of her grandparents in rural Gippsland around the 1850s:

One of the deprivations the Irish colonists felt most was that of the familiar offices of the Catholic Church. A priest came to Nar Nar Goon every six months, arriving on Saturday and staying until Monday morning. When it was known that he was coming Irishmen from miles around bundled their families into buggies and saddled their own horses and converged on Nar Nar Goon on Saturday, when

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50 Michael Normile (NSW) to his father Michael Normile (Clare), 18 Apr 1862, in David Fitzpatrick, "'That beloved country, that no place else resembles': connotations of Irishness in Irish-Australasian letters, 1841–1915", *Irish Historical Studies* 27 (1991): 324–351, at 337.

51 *The Bulletin*, 6 Dec 1893: <http://www.middlemiss.org/lit/authors/patersonab/poetry/christen.html>

they all went to confession and spent the night at the Limerick Arms or with friends or just camping. On Sunday morning there was Mass, held alternately at the Limerick Arms and the farm of Mr John Dore, a shipmate of Daniel O'Brien's in the olden days; and after mass there were weddings and baptisms. When these were over there was a splendid banquet for everyone at the Limerick Arms. A great day for the Irish, from which they returned to their farms nourished spiritually and physically, socially and, no doubt, alcoholically.

Nothing astonishes me more, in the history of Daniel and Brigid O'Brien, than the tenacious campaign they waged to bring their children up as civilised people ...<sup>52</sup>

Of course a certain amount of self-help is possible in religion, as in 'John O'Brien's' poem in which the little Irish mother in her slab hut expands more and more the 'trimmin's on the rosary'.<sup>53</sup>

It was difficult to project Catholic education into remote communities. The woeful standard of knowledge is a theme of 'John O'Brien's' poem 'Tangmalangaloo':

*There everything is big and grand, and men are giants too –  
But Christian Knowledge wilts, alas, at Tangmalangaloo.*

The imposing bishop visits the bush school. He asks the unfortunate pupil 'Why is Christmas day the greatest of the year?' and gets the answer 'It's the day before the races out at Tangmalangaloo'.<sup>54</sup>

The tendency of the first post-Irish generation in remote regions to lose its religion is lamented in an address to the Australasian Catholic Congress of 1909:

In the Australian bush how rarely is the Catechism completely mastered, simply because a priest is rarely seen ... The youth of Ireland have the Martyrs of Faith as the heroes of their dreams ... On the other hand, the youth of the Australian bush, when seeking for some hero, must select from his scanty acquaintanceship either some silent, uneducated bushman, ignorant of many things, but particularly

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52 Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Solid Bluestone Foundations: Memories of an Australian girlhood* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1986), 36–37.

53 <http://www.middlemiss.org/lit/authors/obrienj/poetry/trimminsonrosary.html>

54 <http://www.middlemiss.org/lit/authors/obrienj/poetry/tangmalangaloo.html> ; a true story: JA Mecham, 'The biography of "John O'Brien": Father Patrick Hartigan', *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 7/1 (1981): 24–27; Mecham, "John O'Brien" ... 143.

of religion ... This portrayal of the bushman's unfavourable religious environment is strongly expressed, for if it is not wholly true of the first generation of Irish Australians, it becomes increasingly true of each succeeding generation. In the former it is largely corrected by the Irish tradition imbibed from the Irish father, thanks to the God-given ability for picturesque narrative and vivid explanation that is the birthright of every son of Erin. On the other hand, the Australian bushman is a silent man, like the children of all the lonely places of the earth ... Moreover, many of our Catholic women are ignorant of their Faith and totally incapable of either influencing a careless husband or instructing their sturdy children.<sup>55</sup>

(At least Protestantism in the bush is not much of a contender, he says, as out there they don't know whether Luther was born before Christ or not.)

The task of basic religious instruction in the bush fell mainly to the nuns. Mary McKillop began her work in Penola, a typical tiny bush community far from anywhere. She said 'We are for the back-blocks ... it is our business to gather in poor children abandoned in out-of-the-way places; when that is over, we ought to make way for others.'<sup>56</sup> The rural dioceses usually had convents even in the smallest towns.<sup>57</sup> When cars became available, some roving nuns like the 'caravan sisters' were able to move beyond the constraints of convent life and meet people where they were.<sup>58</sup>

Courtesy of the massive subsidy to rural postal services that kept rural postage as cheap as in the cities, written material could nourish remote faith. The tens of thousands of subscribers of magazines like the Jesuit *Messenger* and Missionaries of the Sacred Heart *Annals* included many in rural areas.

55 T Maguire, 'The soul of the pioneer', *Proceedings of the Third Australasian Catholic Congress*, 1909 (Sydney: St Mary's Cathedral Book Depot, 1910): 103–111, at 105–6.

56 George O'Neill, *Life of Mother Mary of the Cross (MacKillop) 1842–1909: Foundress of the (Australian) Sisters of Saint Joseph* (Sydney: Pellegrini, 1931), 394.

57 Marie Crowley, 'The contribution of women religious in rural Australia', *Australasian Catholic Record*, 87 (2010): 20–29; Marie Crowley, *Women of The Vale: Perthville Josephites 1872–1972* (Richmond Vic: Spectrum Publications, 2002); Mary Ryan, *For Whom Alone We Go Forward or Stay Back: A History of the Sisters of Mercy Wilcannia-Forbes Congregation 1884–1959* (Allawah, NSW: Sisters of Mercy Wilcannia-Forbes, 2004); M Assumpta O'Hanlon, *Dominican Pioneers in New South Wales* (Sydney: Australasian Publishing, 1949), ch.7; a biography in Margaret M Press, 'Leehy, Mary Agnes (1873–1960)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/leehy-mary-agnes-7153/text12351>

58 Edmund Campion, *Australian Catholics* (Ringwood Vic: Penguin, 1987), 192–4; Penelope Edman, *Around the Kitchen Table with the Missionary Sisters of Service* (Rangeview Vic: Missionary Sisters of Service, 2008).

In 1914 a distributor of *The Messenger* wrote, 'In some of our Catholic homes in the bush *The Messenger* is the only thing that keeps the Faith alive. The people live in the mountains and cannot come to Mass.'<sup>59</sup> Correspondence courses for the bush were also developed to substitute for the school and adult education available in cities.<sup>60</sup>

Catholic culture in a more general sense included guilds, friendly societies and social events like race meetings. They needed the support of towns, but not big ones:

In January 1875 the general meeting of the Boorowa Holy Catholic Guild met and heard reports of a most successful first year of operation in which membership, attendances, and the financial position of the Guild had all been strong. The Chairman, the Reverend J Dunne outlined plans to strengthen the Guild's library in the following year. The Guild was instrumental in the organization of the Saint Patrick's Day celebrations in Boorowa the same year. The proceedings commenced with a procession from the town to John Nagle Ryan's neighbouring paddock, where 600 people gathered to attend a race meeting and games.<sup>61</sup>

Not many of the leading figures of the Australian church came from truly rural backgrounds. Two of the conservative intellectuals of the Australian church did so. The Thomist philosopher and anti-communist crusader Dr P J (Paddy) Ryan came from a farm near Albury.<sup>62</sup> Sydney's other celebrated Thomist philosopher, the founder of the Aquinas Academy for laity, Dr Austin Woodbury, came from the Hawkesbury.<sup>63</sup>

Eileen O'Connor's two main associates came from poor rural backgrounds. Her co-founder of Our Lady's Nurses for the Poor was Fr Edward McGrath, from a difficult childhood in Kelly country in Victoria,<sup>64</sup> while her first

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<sup>59</sup> Campion, *Australian Catholics*, 131.

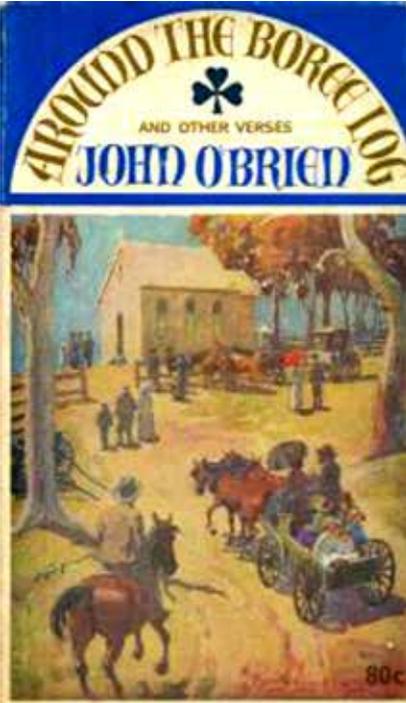
<sup>60</sup> Campion, *Australian Catholics*, 192; John T McMahon, *College, Campus, Cloister* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1969), ch. 7; Janice Garaty, *Providence Provides: Brigidine Sisters in the New South Wales Province* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2013), 169.

<sup>61</sup> Campbell, *Kingdom of the Ryans*, 158; more on Boorowa's Catholic culture in 'James McDonald, Henry Curran, bushrangers and a Boorowa dream', *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 38 (2017): 20–33.

<sup>62</sup> James Franklin, 'Ryan, Patrick Joseph, 1904–1969', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 16 (2002): <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/ryan-patrick-joseph-11591>

<sup>63</sup> Julie Thorpe, *Aquinas Academy 1945–2015: A very personal story* (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2016), 2.

<sup>64</sup> John Hosie, *A Lonely Road: Fr Ted McGrath, a great Australian* (Hindmarsh: ATF



Cover of the 1968 edition of *Around the Boree Log*

recruit and successor, Theresa McLaughlin, came from an equally poor farm near Lithgow.<sup>65</sup>

Tim Fischer, Deputy Prime Minister and Ambassador to the Vatican, played up his origins as the ‘boy from Boree Creek’, which is in the Narrandera area, ‘John O’Brien’ country.<sup>66</sup>

### *Around the Boree Log*<sup>67</sup>

‘John O’Brien’s’ picture of a ‘simple folk and hearty’, happy and devout rural people is dismissed as ‘glutinous sentiment’ by some supercilious modern intellectuals. City folk.<sup>68</sup> That is surely too dismissive of the report of someone who was on the spot and recorded in fine detail what he saw. It is perhaps not all that was happening, but certainly part of it. His picture of life ‘At Casey’s after mass’ is straightforwardly based on the observation of someone who was there:

*Past the kitchen door they rattled and they took the horses out;  
While the women went inside at once, the menfolk hung about  
Round the stable down at Casey’s, waiting dinner down at Casey’s;  
And they talked about the Government, and blamed it for the drought,  
Sitting where the sunlight lingers, picking splinters from their fingers,*

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Press, 2010), ch. 4.

65 Jocelyn Hedley, *Hidden in the Shadow of Love: The story of Theresa McLaughlin and Our Lady’s Nurses for the Poor* (Strathfield: St Paul’s, 2009), 12–18.

66 Peter Rees, *The Boy from Boree Creek: The Tim Fischer story* (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2001), ch. 2.

67 Cover image of *Boree Log*: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_O%27Brien\\_\(poet\)#/media/File:Aroundtheboreelog.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_O%27Brien_(poet)#/media/File:Aroundtheboreelog.jpg)

68 Fitzpatrick, ‘That beloved country’, at 330; even Patrick O’Farrell speaks of ‘O’Brien’s’ ‘cloying’ and ‘nostalgic sentimentality’: *The Irish in Australia* (rev. ed, Kensington: University of New South Wales Press, 1993): 149, 192.

*Settling all the problems of the world beyond a chance of doubt.  
From inside there came the bustle of the cheerful wholesome hustle,  
As dear old Mrs. Casey tried all records to surpass;  
Oh, there's many a memory blesses her sweet silver-braided tresses;  
They were "lovely" down at Casey's – always joking down at Casey's—  
Spending Sunday down at Casey's after Mass.<sup>69</sup>*

'O'Brien's' most famous creation, Hanrahan whose catchphrase is 'We'll all be rooned', is depressive, but his pessimism is mocked in the poem.<sup>70</sup> Everyone else is positive.

### **Cullenbenbong**

'John O'Brien' was not an insider of his community and was producing poetry, not memoir. It could be suspected that his somewhat rose-coloured picture has some degree of propagandist purpose. So it is valuable to read a straightforward memoir that in effect says the same thing as he does. This is *Cullenbenbong*, by Bernard O'Reilly, who later became an authentic Australian hero by leading a difficult expedition that saved victims of a plane crash.<sup>71</sup> The tiny farming community of Cullenbenbong lay in a valley at the western edge of the Blue Mountains. His picture matches 'John O'Brien's' exactly:

When the riding party reached the top of Tinkers Hill, where it joined the Ganbenang road they came up with other families on horseback, for it wasn't merely the baby's christening day, it was the one Sunday of the month when Father Hogan drove out from Hartley to the little wooden church at Lowther.<sup>72</sup>

On went the cavalcade. Yarning comfortably they splashed through the gravelly shallows of Marsden's Creek, while the horses kicked spray high in the air and the warm sun slanted down through a fairyland of willows in their tender spring dress. Then the climb up to the Divide amongst the new-blooming black-thorn, with other families joining in until the party was at full strength—the various Cullen and O'Reilly

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69 <http://www.middlemiss.org/lit/authors/obrienj/poetry/atcaseys.html>

70 "John O'Brien", 'Said Hanrahan', *Catholic Press*, 31 July 1919, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/106072280>

71 David Stove, 'A hero not of our time', in D Stove, *Cricket Versus Republicanism* (Sydney: Quakers Hill Press, 1995), 4–13.

72 Bernard O'Reilly, *Cullenbenbong* (Brisbane: WB Smith & Paterson, 1944), 25–6.

families, the McAvineys and McAuleys, the Flanagans, Ryans and Kellys—all ages, on all types of horses, sometimes double and treble banked, yarning and smoking and singing and acting the goat, drinking in the spring sunshine, the breath of clematis and the songs of the birds—lovely old people, lovely old days.<sup>73</sup>

He recalls his father's prayers when by himself:

Presently with the help of the family Dad would be ready, and we would all trail out to where the horses were tied under the acacias and see him off ... Then would come the patting of the pockets: 'Matches, tobacco, knife, glasses, rosary beads.' The beads were always in his pocket, even if he were only going up the hill for a hearth log; not for the sake of displaying his religion, but for company he'd tell you; like the glasses he was forever breaking and mending them with bits of fine wire. It was Dad's practice if riding at night to say his prayers as he rode, and then he'd be all ready for tea and bed when the destination was reached. It wasn't a bad idea, and we still keep it up.<sup>74</sup>

O'Reilly even has a spontaneous touch of De Valera and Salazar's view that prosperity can be a bad thing:

Too soon a little prosperity came to the valley and the sulkies which were the first expression of it hastened the destruction of one of the happiest features of the valley life. So it was in many other quiet valleys. Later still came the motor car, a cold nasty thing which took all the comradeship from the road, and made every fellow traveller a nuisance or a potential enemy.<sup>75</sup>

### **Kelly Country**

While 'John O'Brien' and Bernard O'Reilly were telling the truth, it was not the whole truth. They weren't all saints out there. Original sin was not absent in rural parts, nor subsequent sins.

The low density of population in rural areas could mean a distance from civilising influences, including the rule of law, which the less saintly might take advantage of. According to an opinion piece in the Catholic press of 1859, it was well-known that rural morals were terrible, and the clergy were not on top of the problem.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> O'Reilly, *Cullenbenbong*, 29

<sup>74</sup> O'Reilly, *Cullenbenbong*, 136–7.

<sup>75</sup> O'Reilly, *Cullenbenbong*, 29

<sup>76</sup> 'Rural morals', *Freeman's Journal* 10/12 (1859): <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/>

Take the case of Ellen Quinn. Born in County Antrim about 1832, she was something of a truant at school. The family arrived in Port Phillip as assisted migrants in 1841 and moved to a farm outside Melbourne. She became pregnant to and married John ('Red') Kelly, an Irishman who had been transported to Van Diemen's Land for stealing pigs.<sup>77</sup> Her *ADB* article continues:

The extensive Quinn and Kelly clans tended to skirt the fringes of the law, and for Ellen and Red financial difficulties, several moves, further births and mounting police attention set a definitive pattern. Red began drinking heavily. In 1865 he stole a calf and served four months in gaol. The following year he died, an alcoholic, of oedema, leaving Ellen with seven children aged from 18 months to 13 years.

As she struggled to raise her children on inferior farmland, she became notorious for her sometimes-violent temper, resulting in several court appearances. After moving her family into the far north-east of Victoria to stay near relations, she leased a selection of 88 acres (35.6 ha) there and sold 'sly grog' to make ends meet. The bushranger Harry Power became a family friend, introducing 14-year-old [son] Ned to the life of a bandit. In 1869 Ellen took a lover, Bill Frost, and became pregnant, he promising marriage. The baby—her ninth—was born in March 1870, but Frost did not keep his word. Trouble with the law increased, with several of Ellen's siblings and offspring suffering periods of imprisonment.

Late in 1872, with Ned in prison, she met George King, a 23-year-old Californian horse-thief, and once more fell pregnant ...<sup>78</sup>

And so on ...

Things went from bad to worse when young Ned turned out to be a psychopathic killer well outside the range of the usual rural petty crims.<sup>79</sup> Ellen was conveniently in prison to see Ned before his execution. Big crime then went back to Melbourne where it belonged. Ellen Kelly became respectable in old age though never well-off, and died in 1923.

Ned Kelly's few writings show a more than Irish-sized chip on the

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article/114837871

77 Grantlee Kieza, *Mrs Kelly* (Sydney: HarperCollins 2017), chs 1–2.

78 Jacqueline Zara Wilson, 'Kelly, Ellen (1832-1923)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Supplementary Volume (2005): <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/kelly-ellen-13021>

79 Russ Scott and Ian MacFarlane, 'Ned Kelly—stock thief, bank robber, murderer—psychopath', *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* 21 (2014): 716–746.

shoulder. Like some later mass murderers, he was given to writing spiels of garbled history in manifestos full of imported resentments to ‘justify’ his murders:

I have been wronged and my mother and four or five men lagged innocent and is my brothers and sisters and my mother not to be pitied also who has no alternative only to put up with the brutal and cowardly conduct of a parcel of big ugly fat-necked wombat headed big bellied magpie legged narrow hipped splaw-footed sons of Irish Bailiffs or english landlords which is better known as Officers of Justice or Victorian Police who some call honest gentlemen.<sup>80</sup>

That is from Kelly’s ‘Jerilderie letter’, written at the time he held up Jerilderie from Saturday to Monday (allowing mass to be said on the Sunday).<sup>81</sup> In another letter he wrote, ‘thank God my conscience is as clear as the snow in Peru.’<sup>82</sup>

While the Kelly gang were certainly not church-going folk, the clergy did manage to insert themselves into the story at the last moment. On 28 June 1880, the Irish-born priest Fr Matthew Gibney was travelling by train through Glenrowan. He learned that Ned and his gang had been surrounded in Mrs Jones’ Hotel and were shooting it out with police. He left the train and tended the apparently seriously wounded Kelly, heard his confession and gave him the last rites. Although Kelly advised against it, Gibney entered the burning hotel to minister to the remainder of the gang. He found three of them dead and anointed the remaining one shortly before he died.<sup>83</sup>

The Kelly clan were by no means typical of the community among which they lived, the poor selectors of north-east Victoria. Methodist and Catholic farmers who mostly got on well, they were mostly law-abiding and patriotic folk, contributing to one another’s churches and charities. They saved money by not throwing it away on alcohol, and when they did have a quiet drink it was mostly in licensed premises, not in illegal shanties like Mrs Kelly’s. Two respectable Protestant selectors went bail surety for Mrs Kelly when

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80 Ned Kelly, Jerilderie letter (1879), 30: <https://www.nma.gov.au/explore/features/ned-kelly-jerilderie-letter/transcription>

81 <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/5932022>; Mecham, “John O’Brien”, 116–7.

82 Ned Kelly, Cameron letter (1878): [http://kellygang.asn.au/wiki/Cameron\\_Letter](http://kellygang.asn.au/wiki/Cameron_Letter)

83 VE Callaghan, ‘Gibney, Matthew (1835–1925)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/gibney-matthew-6305/text10873>; a fictional story of priest and horse-thief in Banjo Paterson, ‘Father Riley’s horse’: <http://www.wallisandmatilda.com.au/father-rileys-horse.shtml>

she was in Beechworth jail with a newborn baby.<sup>84</sup> Even in Kelly country, respectability was the norm.

### **Child slavery?**

Other than horse thieving, one sin for which rural Australia provided particular opportunities was child slavery. In Australia's best-known rural memoir, *A Fortunate Life*, Bert Facey is sold into slavery aged eight by his grandmother, though he doesn't use that word.<sup>85</sup>

Child slavery could occur in closed institutions, such as the agricultural schools for migrant orphans, Tardun and Bindoon.<sup>86</sup> But equally hidden from prying eyes were remote farms, where there was little to prevent poor farmers working young relatives non-stop.

Mary Ann Corrigan, born in Enniskillen, arrived in Australia aged 21 on an assisted passage in 1878 and gained employment on a pastoral property in south-eastern New South Wales. Because of some unspecified problem, she went to the newly-established convent of St Benedict in Queanbeyan and was taken in and did housework. On a visit to relatives in Bathurst she met her future husband, a blacksmith, and they married in the Catholic cathedral there in 1884. She named her firstborn Joseph Benedict, the rather unusual second name believed to indicate gratitude for her time at the convent; the nuns embroidered his christening robe. When young Ben was five and with two younger brothers, his paternal grandfather called and suggested Ben come to stay with him for a while on his small farm at Limekilns, a tiny village well out of Bathurst on the Sofala Road. He was to stay there for nine years, and it was not a pleasant time. Old Patrick Chifley had come from the bottom of the heap in County Tipperary and as a boy barely survived the potato famine. He had not long before buried the last of three wives. A daughter kept house but labour was needed to work the considerable number of acres (by Irish standards) that Patrick had accumulated. 'The old Tartar',

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84 Doug Morrissey, *Ned Kelly: Selectors, squatters and stock thieves* (Redland Bay: Connor Court, 2018), especially chs 2–3.

85 AB Facey, *A Fortunate Life* (Fremantle: Fremantle Press, 2018), ch. 5.

86 Barry M Coldrey, *The Scheme: The Christian Brothers and childcare in Western Australia* (O'Connor WA: Argyle-Pacific Publishing, 1993), ch. 12; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Case Study 11: Christian Brothers, 2014, <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/case-studies/case-study-11-christian-brothers>; general discussion of institutions in Richard Hil, Joanna Penglase and Gregory Smith, 'Closed worlds: Reflections on institutional care and child slavery in Australia', *Children Australia* 33 (2008): 12–17.

as Ben later called Patrick, was demanding and Ben's life for nine years was a tough round of milking cows, cutting firewood, bagging potatoes and general dogsbody. He slept on a chaff-bag bed in a four-roomed wattle and daub shack with earth floors. He did attend the local state school (as was compulsory) but its quality was poor and available better schools in Bathurst were not considered. At home he learned he was 'the descendant of a race that fought a long and bitter fight against perjurers and pimps and liars'.<sup>87</sup>

Ben survived to become an educated man, economic theorist and prime minister. But with some residual resentment against banks.

### **Conclusion**

Catholic rural Australia did maintain a distinctive culture—distinct both from rural Protestant culture and city Catholicism. Forged in poverty and Irish heritage, it also took advantage of economic opportunities and freedoms not available in Ireland. Those who wished to maintained a strong Catholic devotion in circumstances where churches were distant and priests present only intermittently.

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<sup>87</sup> David Day, *Chifley: A life* (Pymble: HarperCollins, 2002), 3–37; D B Waterson, 'Chifley, Joseph Benedict (Ben) (1885–1951)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/chifley-joseph-benedict-ben-9738>