

CATHOLIC THOUGHT AND CATHOLIC ACTION:
DR PADDY RYAN MSC

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Melbourne in the 1930s was the scene of the vigorous Catholic intellectual life of the *Campion Society*.¹ Sydney was quite different, and for reasons much debated but still far from clear, its version of the *Campion Society* was much less impressive, and there was not much in the way of a public or lay Catholic intellectual life.² In Sydney, Catholic philosophy, apologetics and controversy in the 1930s and early 1940s was almost a one-man show. The man was Father Paddy Ryan. If it was a question of attacking Communists, or replying to objections on radio, or debating philosophers, or setting up Catholic adult education, or writing a pamphlet to prove the existence of God, one contacted the Sacred Heart fathers at Kensington and got Father Ryan on the job. Born near Wodonga in 1904, he had studied at the Gregorian University in Rome, earning in 1929 doctorates in theology and philosophy with the highest honours, with work on the “Question of God” in modern European philosophy.³ He taught philosophy, of a strictly scholastic orientation, at the Kensington seminary thereafter. A series of lectures for the Catholic Evidence Guild at Sydney University which summarise scholasticism were printed in full in the Catholic press, at that time more hospitable than later to the discussion of intellectual topics.⁴

His ability as a controversialist was first widely recognised in a debate with Anderson in a symposium on “Science, philosophy and Christianity” at Sydney University in 1936. The printed version⁵ makes it sound very little like a debate at all, but at least both Anderson and Ryan put coherent views. Anderson argued that “in so far as religion sets up a doctrine of meaning or explanations above the facts (“supernature”) it is unscientific”, and that Christian morality wrongly “takes the standpoint of the individual recipient of benefits” instead

¹C.H. Jory, *The Campion Society and Catholic Social Militancy in Australia 1929-1939* (Sydney, 1986).

²Jory, ch. 11; N. McDonald, *War Cameraman: The Story of Damien Parer* (Port Melbourne, 1994), ch. 4; B.F. Duncan, *From Ghetto to Crusade: A Study of the Social and Political Thought of Catholic Opinion-Makers in Sydney During the 1930s* (PhD thesis, Dept of Government, Sydney University, 1987), pp. 221-4.

³P. Ryan, *De via morali quam ad Deum cognoscendum proposuit Eduardus le Roy*, thesis, 1932.

⁴P.J. Ryan, ‘The new scholasticism: its origin and history’, *Catholic Press* 26/4/1934, p. 6, ‘The fundamental tenets of scholasticism’, 17/5/34, p. 12, ‘The fundamental tenets of scholasticism’, 7/6/34, p. 6, ‘Philosophy and theology: the attitude of the moderns’, 12/7/34, p. 10.

⁵O.U. Vonwiller, J. Anderson & P.J. Ryan, ‘Symposium on science, philosophy and Christianity’, *Science Journal* (Sydney University), Michaelmas 1936: 24-36.

of exalting cultural achievement. Ryan then summarised the scholastic position on the knowability of God by natural reason, the reasonableness of faith, and the evils of taking scientific theories beyond their limits. He argued that inconsistencies between the Catholic faith and modern philosophies, such as materialism, are due to the faults of the latter.

Anderson and Ryan met again in 1939, in an symposium with two biologists on 'The origin of life'. The largest hall in the University was packed with 500 people; others were turned away. Ryan here defended one of the most controversial assertions of mid-century scholasticism, one in which he took a special interest: it was that spontaneous generation of life from the non-living is impossible, whether now or in the distant past, for purely philosophical reasons. Ryan argued that the "immanent nature of activity in living things" meant there was a difference in kind, not degree, between the living and the non-living, which could not be crossed without divine intervention.⁶ Though Catholic philosophy generally was giving up the fight against evolution by the 1940s,⁷ Ryan did not. In his later pamphlet on the existence of God, he does however argue that if the theory of evolution were true, God would be even more needed, since "the Author of world order would have endowed the primitive organisms with the powers necessary to produce, by gradual development, the present order of the plant and animal kingdoms".⁸ Donald Horne recalls attending the debate as a convinced Andersonian of long standing, and still being surprised at the position Anderson took:

I had been a believer in Darwinism ever since I had read in *Cassell's Book of Knowledge* that 'The protoplasm was the beginning of the wonderful story of evolution', and when Pritchett and I stayed back at the university one night to attend a symposium on evolution at which Anderson would be speaking I expected that, since a Catholic priest was to be one of the other speakers, Anderson would launch all his fury against the ignorance and superstition of this clerical bigot. The large lecture theatre was brimming with people, and Anderson sat intent, silent and sad-eyed, while the priest jumped on the theory of evolution and a scientist picked it up. Anderson sprang into the ring and floored the priest with a couple of blows. I was astounded when, after an obeisance towards Darwin because, like Freud, he had rejected the dualism of man and nature, he then

⁶'Symposium on "The Origin of Life" ', *Catholic Press* 20/7/1939, p. 27; 'Symposium on the "origin of life", *Catholic Freeman's Journal* 20/7/39, p. 30; cf. 'Evolution', in Question Box, *Catholic Freeman's Journal* 18/4/40, pp. 6-7; similar from the Anglican camp in T.C. Hammond, *Fading Light* (London,), ch. 6.

⁷F.A. Mecham, 'Evolution and man', *Australasian Catholic Record* 26 (1949): 19-28, 262-8; J. Burnheim, 'Biology versus Catholic philosophy: a new approach', *Australasian Catholic Record* 27 (1950): 267-71.

⁸P.J. Ryan, *The Existence of God: The Argument from Design*, Annals publication no. 49 (Kensington, 1950), p. 22.

pummelled evolutionary ethical theory, on, blow after blow, because it was full of progressivist illusions. Things might not get better. They might get worse. With Anderson one did not know where one was.⁹

There is a much greater sense of the cut and thrust of live argument in the report of a debate Ryan held, also in 1939 and at Sydney University, on freewill. His opponent was A.G. Hammer, a lecturer in psychology at Sydney Teachers' College, later Professor of Psychology at the University of New South Wales. An audience of 500 was again estimated. Hammer claimed that "all our decisions are as necessary as the explosion of a bomb", and asserted that "we can predict all human acts with absolute certainty, granted a sufficient knowledge of a man's heredity, environment, and other factors extrinsic to the will". Ryan took his stand on the "clear and unmistakable testimony of consciousness that it is very often in his power to choose freely amongst various actions which he has motives to perform". He is reported, in perhaps a moment of overkill, as having "proceeded to prove that the testimony of consciousness is absolutely reliable". Some interesting exchanges during the discussion are reported, which give some sense of Ryan's ability to argue on his feet – as well as the style of public trading of certainties that has come to play less part in the tradition of public debate:

Mr O'Neill, an ardent determinist: Dr Ryan assumes the "self" or "ego" to be an abiding reality. But as a mere succession of states, the "ego" could not be self-determining.

Dr Ryan: My appeal is to facts of experience. We have the direct and immediate experience of the "self" as an abiding reality and the subject of successive states quite distinct from it. The facts cannot be explained away by futile indulgence in metaphysical speculations concerning the nature of the "ego".

Mr O'Neill: Your proof from the validity of consciousness means that all illusions are impossible. Yet there are illusions.

Dr Ryan: How do you know that there are any illusions except from your consciousness of them? But the objection is pointless because I appeal, not to the testimony of consciousness merely as testimony, but as presenting objective evidence which enables us to distinguish between illusion and reality, between deliberate and indeliberate acts.

The chairman of the debate, John Passmore, perhaps less well-informed about the history of philosophy than he was later to become, then intervened with a historical point. "Relinquishing his duties as chairman", he accused Ryan of reviving Descartes' philosophy, and "attacked the notion of a self-determining

⁹D. Horne, *The Education of Young Donald* (2nd ed, Ringwood, Vic, 1988) pp. 179-80.

principle, declaring it to be absurd". Ryan said that Descartes' philosophy was not the same as Aristotelico-Thomistic philosophy.

Mr Passmore: The only person other than Descartes who adopted Dr Ryan's line of approach was St Augustine, a man not regarded as a philosopher by anyone outside a certain religious organisation.
Dr Ryan: Not one word of that is correct.¹⁰

Ryan did not confine his campaign to open debate. After collecting statements from students at Sydney Teachers' College, he had a letter written by his superior to the Director of Education demanding that something be done about the immoral teaching at the College. The determinism taught by the Andersonians at the College was the focus of the complaints. Dr Rumble's Radio Replies was used to publicise the campaign.¹¹

Ryan's interest in Sydney University continued. He claims:

I personally have argued for hours with graduates of Sydney University in a futile endeavour to convince them of their own existence, – so deeply had their very reason been undermined by scepticism and sophistry.

In condemning things of this sort, we are not condemning critical or progressive thought. We are condemning a perverse negation which spells the suicide of thought and makes all progress impossible.

In defending self-evident truths like one's own existence and personality, or easily demonstrable truths like the existence of God, we are merely defending the foundations without which all talk of justice and injustice is so much meaningless twaddle.¹²

Donald Horne had the opportunity to tangle personally with Ryan in 1941, when Horne, as editor of *Honi Soit*, was a representative at a 'Youth Parliament' which saw a clash between Stalinists and Catholics. Horne recalls, "In the evening I drank beer with some of the Stalinists, infuriated by the unscrupulous red-herring tactics of the clerical fascists, who were not concerned with the constructive work of the Youth Parliament but with disrupting it by obscurantist Gestapo methods . . . Whenever the name 'Catholic Action' was mentioned

¹⁰'Have we freewill? Lively debate at Sydney University', *Catholic Freeman's Journal* 27/5/1939, p. 20.

¹¹Reports on A.G. Hammer, W.H.C. Eddy and Dr Woodward, in Ryan archives, section Articles, folder Teachers' College Reports, with letter of M.D. Forrest MSC to G.R. Thomas, NSW Director of Education, 14/12/39; Dr Rumble, Question Box, 'Must teachers be agnostics', *Catholic Freeman's Journal* 19/10/39, p. 10; 'Is censorship immoral', 2/11/39, p. 6; 'Methods at Teachers' College', 16/11/39, p. 6; 'Man not rational!', 23/11/39, p. 6; 'Teachers' College dogmas', 30/11/39, p. 6; 'Teachers' College defended', 7/12/39, p. 6; 'Animals at Teachers' College', 14/12/39, p. 12; 'Action at the Teachers' College', 21/12/39, p. 6.

¹²P. Ryan, Question Box: 'We stand for order and sanity', *Catholic Freeman's Journal* 3/7/41, p. 8.

I would fall quiet with hate. We didn't know much about it, but there were rumours of hysterical meetings and secret plottings in some kind of conspiratorial Catholic anti-Communist campaign that was going on in Sydney. Any Catholic student who wore a Holy Name badge seemed a servant of a black and unscrupulous clerical reaction which, under the subterfuge of anti-communism, represented an ambition of Francoism in Australia.¹³ The Catholic resolution which particularly disturbed the 'Parliament' was one affirming "its complete adherence to the principles of democracy; its repudiation of the Totalitarian ideologies whether Nazi, Fascist or Communist". As Ryan said, Catholic Action, like any genuine democratic Australian, would be in favour, so it was fair to ask why the 'Youth Parliament' rejected it. "Characteristic in this respect", Ryan adds, "is the letter by Mr D.R. Horne, published in 'Honi Soit' issue of June 27, 1941. Mr Horne writes with deep emotion – with more heat than light. I gather from the references to the 'unbalanced priest' who speaks over Radio 2SM, 'the vaporisings of Dr Ryan', the 'Catholic papers' and sundry threats of Blitzkriegs to come, that he is making some sort of attack on me. But he does not face the real point at issue . . . A genuinely democratic Youth Parliament really representative of the Youth of Australia would deserve support. But the same cannot be said of a Youth Parliament which provides a convenient cloak for anti-democratic and anti-British propaganda."¹⁴ Rumours of Catholic plots, Stalinists exposed . . . much more was to be heard of these themes in the coming years.

Ryan gave a series of lectures on campus in 1943, which provoked the usual polarisation of opinion.¹⁵ There is a thoughtful reply to his arguments for the existence of God by medical student Doug Everingham, later Minister for Health in the Whitlam Government.¹⁶

Ryan was employed by the Church in a huge range of activities during the 1940s and 50s. In 1936, during one of the hierarchy's periodic wringings of hands over the loss of young Catholics after they left school, lecture courses on apologetics and social theory were instituted, with Ryan as director.¹⁷ He was again involved, providing much of the study material, when the movement was reformed, with great but temporary success, in 1938.¹⁸ After the War, he headed a "Workers' School of Social Reconstruction".¹⁹ In 1954, the problem

¹³Horne, pp. 262-4.

¹⁴'The cat got out', in Dr Ryan's Question Box, *Catholic Freeman's Journal* 10/7/41, p. 8; Horne letter in *Honi Soit* 18 (14) (27/6/41), p. 2.

¹⁵'Enquiry not hindered: Ryan on religion and science', *Honi Soit* 15 (12) (22/4/43), p. 1; '2 aspects of Ryan's 1 truth', *Honi Soit* 15 (24) (26/8/43), p. 1.

¹⁶D. Everingham, letter, 'Dr. Ryan refuted', *Honi Soit* 15 (26) (30/9/43), p. 3.

¹⁷'Catholic Action: Educational lectures inaugurated', *Catholic Press* 19/3/1936, p. 10; 'Catholic Action Association', 3/12/36.

¹⁸Jory, p. 105; Duncan, ch. 10; 'Rev Dr Ryan's course of public lectures', *Catholic Freeman's Journal* 13/7/39, p. 21; see the regular 'Secretariate of Catholic Action' page in the weekly *Catholic Freeman's Journal* during 1939 to mid-1941.

¹⁹P. Macphail, 'What's being done about adult education', *Catholic Weekly* 5/9/1946, p. 3; lecture notes of the School are in the Ryan archives.

was as unsolved as ever (“There is practically no such thing in Australia as the Catholic mind”, according to Ryan²⁰) and an Adult Education Institute (Director, Paddy Ryan) was set up in the city, to offer courses in apologetics, theology and public speaking (but not philosophy, where it was presumably not thought worthwhile to compete with the Aquinas Academy). Enrolments, however, were never more than a few score. He debated on the radio on more or less anything; in a single broadcast of 1941, he dealt with the permissibility of moderate consumption of alcohol, the idiocy of chain letters (“shows the depth of absurdity to which people can fall when they lack genuine religion”) and the responsibility of H.G. Wells for the War (“If people teach, as Mr Wells does teach, that the Ten Commandments are so much junk, they have no right to complain if Hitler presents them with a working model of their own philosophy”).²¹ Radio replies were one area where Ryan did have a rival, however. His colleague at Kensington, Dr Rumble, specialised in the genre, and books of his replies sold millions in Australia and overseas.²²

It was the Red Peril, however, that came to take up most of his energy. Catholic emotional involvement in the Spanish Civil War had resulted in Catholics being more concerned than most Australians about the perils of international Communism. While many Australians maintained a generally favourable view of the USSR at the time when Stalin was on the same side during the war against Hitler, and the membership of the Communist Party of Australia reached a peak in 1944, Catholic circles remained solidly hostile to Stalinist claims.

In 1943, Ryan answered one of the most effective leftist pamphlets of the day, Dean Hewlett Johnson’s *Socialist Sixth of the World*. This was the pamphlet which had converted to Communism the young Frances Bernie, hitherto active in Catholic youth organisations, leading to her leaking papers from Dr Evatt’s office to the Communist Party, and later to her appearance before the Petrov Royal Commission.²³ Ryan’s answer, concentrating on the lack of freedom of religion in Russia,²⁴ sold some 45,000 copies.²⁵ There was a reply by the indefatigable Communist, Lance Sharkey, longtime General Secretary of the Communist Party of Australia. Sharkey says that Lenin is as much in favour of a moral way of life as Father Ryan. But the fact that employers and their press laud the strikebreaker as a hero, while the workers regard him as a scab

²⁰Quoted in Turner, *Catholics in Australia: A Social History*, (Melbourne, 1992) vol. II p. 111.

²¹P. Ryan, ‘Radio replies and comments’, *The Southern Cross* 2/5/1941, p. 5; ‘Rev Dr. Ryan’s Question Box’ appeared weekly in the *Catholic Freeman’s Journal* from 7/3/40 to 18/12/41; Protestant objections in ‘Dr. Ryan and intolerance’, *The Watchman* 2 (1) (Feb, 1942), 8, 9, 13; ‘The Loyal Orange Institution of N.S.W. replies to Dr. Ryan (R.C.)’, *The Watchman* 2 (3) (Apr 1942): 10-11.

²²E. Campion, *Australian Catholics* (Ringwood. Vic, 1987), pp. 134-6; biography in *Who is Father Rumble?*, pamphlet (St Paul, Minnesota, n.d.).

²³*Royal Commission on Espionage: Transcript of Proceedings* vol. 3 p. 1329.

²⁴P.J. Ryan, *Dean Hewlett Johnson’s Socialist Sixth: A Commentary*, (Sydney, 1943).

²⁵Campion, *Australian Catholics*, p. 133.

(“the most immoral creature on earth”) “refutes Father Ryan’s standpoint that there is a general, fixed system of morals that applies to all conceivable conditions”. Further, Sharkey says, it is not part of Communism to attempt to uproot religion. It must be allowed to wither away with the “improvement of the material conditions of the masses” and “the development of knowledge of nature through scientific investigation”.²⁶ Ryan replied in a series of articles, collected into a pamphlet with the title *Said Comrade Sharkey*. It is a superior piece of propaganda. The chapter on ‘Comrade Sharkey’s “Truth” about Spain’ is illustrated with pictures of murdered priests in Spain; that on ‘Religion in Soviet Russia’ has an enormous amount of evidence about the truth of Stalin’s persecutions.

Ryan’s finest hour came with a public debate at the Rushcutters Bay Stadium on Sept 23, 1948, on the topic “That Communism is in the best interests of the Australian people”. His opponent was Edgar Ross, a member of the central committee of the Party. Despite rain, 30,000 turned up, clogging the trams. Half of the crowd had to hear the debate outside through loudspeakers. Ross opened with a quotation from Pope Leo XIII on the need to find a remedy for the misery and wretchedness of the working class. He went on to condemn monopoly capitalism, Imperialism, atomic bombs, American bases. “Against this, the Soviet Union stood strong, secure, stable and prosperous (applause and boos)”. “The family was the bulwark of Soviet society (Laughter). In no country of the world were human rights so explicitly acknowledged. The Catholic Church in Russia enjoyed complete freedom of activity. (Dr Ryan scribbles furiously and waves a gently protesting hand to shush the audience)”. Ryan then spoke. He alleged Communism was based on a degraded philosophy of life, that its programme necessarily involved ruthless and unlimited dictatorship, and that the Australian Party had no loyalty to God or country, but only to Moscow. “The audience broke out into coughing as Dr Ryan went measuredly into the influence of the philosopher Hegel on the thought of Karl Marx”, but perked up when he waved the Communist Manifesto and discussed the possibility of getting a divorce in Russia simply by sending a card through the post to the registrar. Even more shockingly, he alleged that workers in Russian were forbidden to strike. Ross, in reply, “claimed that Dr Ryan had given a lot of generalisations on philosophy, a few lies about the Soviet, but nothing about the practical tasks confronting the worker in the real situation today”. Catholic preaching about the evils of society was like trying to cure cancer with an aspro. To Ryan’s claim that all the Catholic bishops in Russia were dead, in exile or missing, Ross replied that the churches were open “in thousands” in Russia. “To the laughter he shouted, ‘Do you think I would pull the wool over your eyes?’ One solitary shrill feminine voice shouted: ‘Yes’ ”. Ryan asked what reliance could be placed on Ross’s word, when “according to Lenin, Communist morality was wholly subordinated

²⁶L.L. Sharkey, *Reply to Father Ryan*, (1943), summarised in *The Sharkey Writings*, ed. L.H. Gould (Sydney, 1974?), pp. 159-62; also L.L. Sharkey, ‘Marxism and morals: Dr. Ryan answered’, *Tribune* 2/10/48, p. 7.

to the class struggle of the proletariat”. “In saying that the Catholic Church supported Fascism, Mr Ross was (again the quiet unimpassioned voice) a liar. The Catholic Church was the deadliest enemy of Fascism, and of Red Fascism, too (Wild applause)”²⁷

Ross writes briefly of the occasion in his memoirs. He complains that “both sides were supposed to have equal rights in admittance to the Stadium and ring-side seats. But when the doors were thrown open the ring-side and many rows back were already stacked with nuns, priests and students from catholic institutions, who led the cheering and booing.” (According to others, the Communist Party Central Committee had done its best to round up all available members of the Eureka Youth League and the New Housewives Association.²⁸) Of the reaction Ross writes, “A report of the event took up half the front page of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and had the positive effect of introducing communism to thousands of people.”²⁹ He omits to mention that the other half of the page was taken up with the latest news on the Berlin blockade. An ability to put an upbeat construction of the facts was becoming increasingly necessary to Party members, and would become more so. Ross was one of the leaders of the Coal Strike the next year that did so much to assure Menzies’ election victory.

Ryan’s wish to spend some of his time in such an abstruse matter as the influence of Hegel on Marx is a perfect example of what Frank Knopfelmacher was later to call the “seminarian-deductive” attitude to political doctrines. It is characterised, according to Knopfelmacher, by a “naive” kind of intellectualism, which is pre-Freudian and pre-Marxist in believing in the “authentic force and causal efficacy of intellectual convictions”.³⁰ Ryan certainly did believe this, though whether it is naive is arguable. In any case, Australia has cause to be grateful for the “intellectualism” that led to the Cold War being fought here, not with the secret killings of many other countries, but by Ryan lecturing the Communist housewives of New South Wales on Hegel.

Ryan continued to speak against Communism to large audiences, notably at the time of the Coal Strike.³¹ During the campaign for Menzies’ anti-

²⁷‘Stadium’s record crowd hears political debate, with big anti-Communist majority’, *Sydney Morning Herald* 24/9/1948, pp. 1, 3; ‘Huge stadium crowd shows wide interest in Communism’, *Tribune* 29/9/48, p. 8; ‘Ryan versus Ross’, *The Watchman* 8 (10) (Nov, 1948): 219; full text of the speeches in ‘Full report: Dr. Ryan in debate with Communist’, *Catholic Weekly* 30/9/48, pp. 1-4, 19-20; the Russian “postcard divorces” were an out-of-date allegation, as other Catholic experts were well aware: F. Sheen, *Communism and the Conscience of the West* (Garden City, N.Y., 1948), ch. 7; Ryan earlier on this in ‘Divorce by postcard’, *Catholic Freeman’s Journal* 18/12/41, p. 8.

²⁸*News Weekly* 15/9/1948, reported in ASIO file on Catholic Action, Australian Archives series A6122/30 item 1222

²⁹E. Ross, *Of Storm and Struggle* (Sydney, 1982), p. 113.

³⁰F. Knopfelmacher, *Intellectuals and Politics* (Melbourne, 1968), pp. 76-7.

³¹‘Dr Ryan to lecture’, *Catholic Weekly* 13/3/47, p. 5; ‘Priest’s bitter attack on communism’, *Sydney Morning Herald* 9/10/1947, p. 4; ‘Dr Ryan’s attack on Communism at Religion and Life Conference’, *Catholic Weekly* 16/10/47, pp. 7, 21 (full text in Ryan archives, section Articles, folder Communism); ‘Priest attacks Reds at Paddington’, *CW* 6/11/47, p. 7; ‘Public

Communism referendum of 1951, he toured the country, earning headlines in local papers like ‘ “Peace” movement part of Communist plot for war’ (*Armidale Express*), ‘Big audience hears Dr. P.J. Ryan talk on the Red menace’, (*Goulburn Evening Post*), ‘Anti-Communist authority in Walcha’, (*Walcha News*).³² These speeches, and Ryan’s study materials, are the prototypes of the thousands of Evils of Communism speeches in emotion-charged church halls that are such a central element in the Catholic Childhood of legend. An interesting feature of Ryan’s own treatment of the issue, not always imitated, was his insistence on the positive aspects of Catholic social philosophy, and its incompatibility with *laissez-faire* capitalism:

What we need is not less capital, but more capitalists: not the abolition of property, but the wider distribution of it among private owners. We want this to enable the worker to become an owner so that he might achieve economic independence and political freedom. The industrial capitalist admitted in theory the right of personal property, but denied it in practice to the great majority of his fellow men.³³

Ryan is of course not saying anything unusual here. His programme is in line with the “corporatist” view of society, as a potentially homogeneous whole of organizations representing various interests, which also found expression in the Catholic bishops’ social justice statements.³⁴ The project aroused little enthusiasm outside the Catholic Church, and was eventually allowed to lapse, as the fight against Communism took centre stage; the Hawke government’s “politics of consensus” has some resemblances to it. Ryan’s position was average, except possibly for his support for bank nationalisation, which did not find much support from other Catholic leaders.³⁵

meeting’, *Canberra Times* 18/2/1948; ‘Civil war only aim of communists’, *Argus* 2/3/1948; ‘Challenge forced Ryan to retract’, *Tribune* 23/6/48, p. 7; ‘Communist debater answers ‘loaded’ question by priest’, *Tribune* 11/12/48, p. 8; ‘The red menace in Australia’, pamphlet printed by Record Printing Company, Rockhampton, 1949, with text of Ryan’s address at Rockhampton of 3/5/49; ‘Socialists’ cure is worse than disease, says priest’, *Sydney Morning Herald* 29/9/1949, p. 4; ‘Military conquest of Australia planned by Reds’, *Sydney Morning Herald* 21/4/1950, p. 3 (also *Sun* of same date); ‘Communist aim – world conquest’, *Honi Soit* 22 (21) (14/9/50), p. 2; T.P. Boland, *James Duhig* (St Lucia, 1986) p. 328; J.P. Maguire, *Prologue: A History of the Catholic Church as Seen From Townsville* (Toowoomba, 1990), p. 155.

³²Dates respectively 26/5/1951; 20/8/51; 31/8/51.

³³‘Socialists’ cure worse than disease, says priest’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29/9/1949, p. 4; more fully in ‘Social justice for all: Dr Ryan, MSC, expounds Christian programme’, *Catholic Press*, May 1941 and P.J. Ryan, *World Problems*, Annals publication no. 14 (Kensington, 1938); C. Lewis, *People Before Profit: The Credit Union Movement in Australia* (Kent Town, 1996), p. 15.

³⁴M. Hogan, ed, *Justice Now! Social Justice Statements of the Australian Bishops, First Series, 1940-1966* (Sydney, 1990); M. Hogan, ‘Australian Catholic corporatism: proposals for industrial councils in the 1940s’, *Labour History* no. 62 (May, 1992): 91-105.

³⁵G. Henderson, *Mr Santamaria and the Bishops* (Sydney, 1982), p. 71.

The public speeches were only the tip of the iceberg of Ryan's anti-Communist crusade. Ryan had been during the 1930s a leading proponent of "Catholic Action", a phrase with a range of meanings covering any lay action from prayer to politics.³⁶ Party political action was excluded, but political action to combat Communism was not. As early as 1940, or possibly even in 1937, he had investigated the possibility of setting up Catholic cells in the unions,³⁷ and around the end of the War, he was effectively the founder of the Movement in Sydney.³⁸ B.A. Santamaria credits Ryan with having achieved the difficult task of convincing Cardinal Gilroy that enthusiastic support for secret anti-Communist action was necessary.³⁹ Gilroy appointed Ryan the Sydney director of the Movement about 1946, with the title "Director of the Catholic Social Science Bureau", and an office in the city, though without much in the way of money to run it.⁴⁰

The story of the success of the Movement and its allies in Sydney is still far from written. Suffice it to say that in 1949 there were many Communist-controlled unions, and within a very few years there were almost none. Facts have come to light, however, about one comparatively small but interesting aspect of the Movement's activities in Sydney, their collaboration with the security services. The matter casts some light on Ryan's opinions on the morality of various actions.

The records of an ASIO investigation of 1953 into leaks of information from the Commonwealth Investigation Service, the forerunner of ASIO, to Catholic Action in the late 1940s provides an insight into contacts between the security services and Ryan's operation. A senior officer, in the course of denying that he had passed any information to Catholic Action, writes:

1. I was an officer of Commonwealth Investigation Service from March, 1933, to October, 1949, when I transferred to ASIO. I had official contact with Catholic Action over the greater part of this period and visited the office of that organisation regularly up to about 1946. My dealings were with Dr Ryan, [deleted] and two persons whose names I do not now recall who were employed by the organisation prior to [deleted]. I was aware that Brigadier Gallegan and Mr Barnwell, of Commonwealth Investigation Service, were in con-

³⁶P.J. Ryan, *An Outline of Catholic Action*, Annals publication no. 5 (Kensington, 1935); summary in Duncan, pp. 158-60; other Ryan pamphlets in the Annals series are *On creed and dogmas and all that* (no. 6, 1936); *The restoration of all things in Christ* (no. 9, 1936); *The Church and marriage* (no. 10, n.d.).

³⁷Jory, pp. 119, 144 n. 6; Duncan, p. 232; see Ryan's Question Box, *Catholic Freeman's Journal*: 'Red attack on Catholic Action', 14/3/40, p. 7; 'Catholic Action versus Communism', 28/3/40, pp. 6-7; 'Join your union', 22/5/41, p. 8 and 'What is Catholic Action?', 13/11/41, pp. 9, 24.

³⁸P. Ormonde, *The Movement* (Melbourne, 1972), p. 3; G. Williams, *Cardinal Sir Norman Gilroy* (Sydney, 1971), p. 51; Henderson, p. 26; J. Kane, *Exploding the Myths*, p. 23; R. Murray, *The Split* (2nd ed, 1972), p. 46.

³⁹B.A. Santamaria, *Against the Tide* (Melbourne, 1981), p. 85.

⁴⁰Williams, pp. 52-3.

tact with Catholic Action in that period also.

2. From approximately 1946 my C.I.S. duties became supervisory and I ceased to visit Catholic Action office, although I was in telephone contact from time to time. Brigadier Galleghan was also in contact, I think mainly by telephone, but Dr Ryan visited Commonwealth Investigation Service's office on at least one occasion to see him.⁴¹

(Brigadier "Black Jack" Galleghan, earlier commander of the Australian troops in Changi, was at this time Deputy Director of the C.I.S. in Sydney, and was soon to go to Europe to select nearly 200,000 anti-Communists, mostly Catholics, for Calwell's immigration program.⁴² Bill Barnwell was also an anti-Communist specialist, and also went to Europe to select refugees.⁴³)

Further documents in the same ASIO file indicate that the C.I.S., and later ASIO, continued to employ an officer at Catholic Action headquarters, with Ryan's approval, for the purpose of acquiring information about suspected Communists which came from Catholic Action members. (Payment, £2, subtracted by Catholic Action from the officer's salary). Catholic Action felt the security forces were ill-informed about, especially, union matters, and were happy to fill the gap.⁴⁴ The relationship between the two organisations was not close, and had its vicissitudes. From the point of view of ASIO, the aim was to get information without giving any in return, and Catholic Action sometimes resented giving high-quality information, such as shorthand records of high-level Party meetings, without sufficient reward in terms of information usable for propaganda purposes. On the other hand, C.I.S., and later ASIO, suspected that information they gave sometimes returned to them from other sources. To check this, in 1948 an officer supplied some false information, which was received back via Naval Intelligence. More disturbing was a leak of security information in 1948, though its nature is not disclosed. The investigation of 1953 revealed that a Catholic Action officer had actually worked from ASIO's office at Edgecliff.

It will be appreciated that if [deleted] used the Edgecliffe (*sic*) ASIO office for the purpose of carrying out Catholic Action organisational work, it left ASIO open to grave repercussions, if this became known to persons unkindly disposed toward this organisation. Such persons could imply that ASIO and Catholic Action were "hand in glove", and working in common to the point of sharing the same office.⁴⁵

⁴¹'Liaison with Catholic Action', (27/10/53), in ASIO file on Catholic Action, Australian Archives series A6122/30 item 1222.

⁴²S. Arneil, *Black Jack: The Life and Times of Brigadier Sir Frederick Galleghan* (Melbourne, 1983), pp. 131-45; A. Davies, 'Black Jack' Galleghan and the 'D.P.s': Australian immigration and a modern Major-General', *Australian War Memorial History Conference*, Feb. 1983, pp. 1-16.

⁴³M. Bialoguski, *The Petrov Story* (1955, repr. Melbourne, 1989), p. 36.

⁴⁴K.C. Davis (NSW State Secretary of the Movement) to author, 15/7/95.

⁴⁵'Irregularities and improper control of sources - leakage of security information', in ASIO

More alarmingly for all concerned, some information about the liaison was publicly exposed. On 6 Aug 1949, W.T. Dobson, secretary of the Industrial Group in the Federated Clerks Union, dragged himself from Sydney Harbour into Nielsen Park, rang the police, and claimed that Communists had thrown him from a Manly ferry and stolen a bag containing secret documents relating to Catholic Action.⁴⁶ Two days later, he changed his story, confessing that he was a fanatical anti-Communist and had made the story up to smear Communists.⁴⁷ Dobson's confession was a relief to both sides. The Communists enjoyed portraying "Diver" Dobson as typical of anti-Communists, and escaped any suspicions that their political methods might include throwing their opponents off ferries. The Catholics and security gained a general scepticism about any documents that might be associated with Dobson. That was just as well, because the Party still had the documents (though no story as to how they came to have them), and proceeded to splash photostats of them in *Tribune* and *Labour News*. They led with a particularly choice item, an official letter to Calwell agreeing to his request that a phone line be urgently installed for Dobson in his hotel room.⁴⁸ Calwell made no attempt to deny its authenticity, and was compelled to explain in Parliament:

Mr. CALWELL. – I did make representations to the Postmaster-General at the request of Mr. Dobson. He came to see me, and fooled me. He came to me as the assistant secretary of the industrial group of the Federated Clerks Union and said he had the blessing of the head-quarters of the Labour party in New South Wales. I plead those facts in extenuation of my lapse. He was accompanied by another prominent representative of the industrial group, and he told me that he was carrying on certain work which, I believed, was of national importance. I made representations to the Postmaster-General to the effect that Mr. Dobson might be given telephone facilities, if that were possible, and a silent number to enable him to carry on the work of the industrial groups inside the union.

Mr. BEALE. – Was that work of national importance?

Mr. CALWELL. – That, to me seemed to be work of very great importance.⁴⁹

Calwell went on to suggest Dobson was linked to the Communists, and to the file on Catholic Action, as above; summary in D. McKnight, *Australia's Spies and Their Secrets* (Sydney, 1994), pp. 202-3.

⁴⁶'Anti-Communist union official says he was thrown off ferry', *Sydney Morning Herald* 7/8/49, p. 1.

⁴⁷'Police reject story of murder attempt on ferry', *Sydney Morning Herald* 8/8/49, p. 1; 'Industrial group plot exposed: Australia saved from tragedy', *The Rock* 5 (33) (18/8/49): 1, 8; ' "Stupid, crude": Dobson case', *SMH* 26/10/49.

⁴⁸'Calwell linked with Dobson', *Tribune* 13/8/49, p. 1.

⁴⁹*Commonwealth of Australia, Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives* 21 Sept 1949 (vol. 204 p. 395; further pp. 463-6); see also 'Calwell's bid to slide out of scandal won't fool workers', *Tribune* 24/9/49: 3

Liberal Party, presumably on the principle that the more theories about Dobson there were, the better. In view of later events, it is not to be expected that either Calwell or the Movement should be keen to mention their co-operation, but the Parliamentary record is there. Calwell, one of the founders of the Groups,⁵⁰ had fallen out with them by 1948, but was still prepared to support their anti-Communist initiatives in 1949, the year in which the Groups caused his dumping from the Victorian state executive of the Labor Party.⁵¹ Further documents, said to be pages from Dobson's private notebook, included such gems as "Ryan appears to get a lot of unofficial information from Security".⁵² Since these facts are now confirmed by ASIO documents, there seems no reason to deny that the Dobson notebook was as genuine as the Calwell letter.

Dobson had committed an extraordinary series of frauds. In 1946 he had got a trip to Europe on Royal Navy ships by posing as a war correspondent for fictitious publications. He had been jailed for fraud in Hong Kong, but escaped prosecution in Manila. In Shanghai in 1948, he created a great deal of trouble with allegations of corruption against an Australian member of Parliament and an immigration official in Shanghai, and by claiming that one of the "top ten" Nazis had got into Australia as an immigrant, after escaping in a U-boat to Japan. The allegations proved unfounded, and Dobson eventually confessed to fabricating them in order to pressure the Australian consul to help him while he was imprisoned by the Chinese (awaiting trial for fraud, naturally). Unfortunately, one of the Dobson allegations had meanwhile turned out to be true, namely, that Australia had admitted as an immigrant a Mrs Glatzel, alias 'Diana Hamilton', who had broadcast Nazi propaganda in Shanghai during the War. Since the revelation of this information would have created unfavourable publicity for the immigration program, the matter was suppressed, and Dobson got a free trip home.⁵³ The only good aspect from the anti-Communist point of view was that the combination of Dobson's falling on his sword and the revelation's appearing in *Tribune*, whose credit rating was poor, caused enough doubts about the whole matter to have it forgotten among larger matters like the Coal Strike and the coming election.

In connection with the takeovers of political bodies, there arose a subtle question of moral philosophy, disagreements over which caused much anguish in Movement and anti-Movement circles. The question is, may one vote at meetings of organisations to which one pretends to belong, but does not? James McAuley, generally supportive of the Movement, had been most worried about the question, and was assured by Santamaria that stacking of meetings with people ineligible to vote had never been a Movement tactic – or if it had once

⁵⁰Calwell, *Be Just and Fear Not*, p. 218.

⁵¹P. 172.

⁵²*Tribune* 27/8/49: 3; also 7/9/49: 6; copy of latter, with denials by CIS officer, in CIS file on Dobson, Australian Archives series A432/82 item 1949/851.

⁵³Australian Archives series A1838/1 item 1542/36 (Dept of External Affairs, Security file on Dobson).

or twice happened, in Sydney, it had been put a stop to.⁵⁴ The NSW central office of the Movement did issue instructions against stacking union meetings in general; approval was occasionally given when there was considered to be a “moral certainty” that Communists would stack the meeting. The belief that stacking was widespread is probably to be attributed to knee-jerk reactions of those defeated in union elections by Movement candidates.⁵⁵ On the other hand, students at Sydney University, where the Movement had spectacular success in 1951 and controlled all major student organisations, reported that Ryan positively encouraged Arts and Engineering students to vote at Medical students’ meetings, and vice versa. Father Pryke, then chaplain at Sydney University and later a critic of the Movement, recalled that “Dr Ryan had once come back from the Vatican and reported to him and some Movement people that he had consulted some top moral theologians at the Gregorian and Lateran Universities and they had advised that Catholics were morally justified in doing anything that Communists did”.⁵⁶ Many Catholics were not prepared to lie on demand, and left the Movement over such tactics.

Ryan’s point of view must be seen in an internationalist perspective. The “top moral theologians of the Gregorian” were of course seeing the problem in terms of Hungary and Czechoslovakia – and Italy, the subject of some very pessimistic assessments in Church circles.⁵⁷ There does seem something ridiculous in urging the future victims of Stalinism in, say, Czechoslovakia in 1948, to watch the people planning to hang them from lampposts vote illegally at meetings, but to scrupulously avoid doing the same themselves. Ryan and his supporters, like the Communists themselves, transferred their vision of an international struggle of immense forces of good and evil to the sleepy backwater of 1950s Australia. Those who had lived all their lives in Australia, especially, found it out of contact with local reality. The onus of justification for dubious tactics, then, probably shifts to the question of whether the Movement really believed a takeover of Australia by Communists from within was possible. It is the moral consequences of the question that account for its ability to generate so much heat even now.⁵⁸ Another factor to take into account is that the inner Sydney branches of the ALP were not the scene of decent and civilised exchanges of views in the first place. Branch-stacking was a way of life in them long before the Communists, let alone the Movement,⁵⁹ and there would not have been much point in getting involved at all in them without being prepared to match “normal” tactic for tactic. Still, it is a high-risk strategy, to say the

⁵⁴Santamaria, pp. 276-7; cf. Ormonde, pp. 36-8; S. Short, *Laurie Short* (Sydney, 1992), p. 187.

⁵⁵K.C. Davis to author, 9/5/95 and 17/5/95.

⁵⁶Ormonde, p. 43.

⁵⁷See, e.g., R. Hall, ‘Should you ever go across the sea from Ireland . . .’, *Eureka Street* 5(2) (Mar 1995): 24-9, at p. 29.

⁵⁸P. Ormonde, ‘A sort of healing’, *Eureka Street* 4(9) (Nov, 1994):16, and letters of K. Davis and P. Ormonde, 5(1) (Jan/Feb, 1995): 7 and 5(2) (Mar, 1995): 8.

⁵⁹G. Richardson, *Whatever It Takes* (Sydney, 1994), pp. 57-8; Kane, p. 41.

least. What if (as Guy Fawkes no doubt wondered) one is found out? This can be a problem even for those who do not pretend any special ethical superiority, as Richo discovered. It is far more of a problem for churchmen, whose *raison d'être* involves a bid for occupation of the high moral ground. When it was discovered that Ryan was, so to speak, subordinating morality to the struggle against the proletariat, people came to suspect that “everyone, from the Cardinal down, is guilty of conniving at flagrant dishonesty”.⁶⁰ Nothing came out into the full glare of publicity, but it is not difficult to understand why the Sydney bishops and the Vatican became extremely anxious to pull the plug on the Movement.

Computational casuistics is not easy.

Gilroy appointed his auxiliary, Bishop Lyons, to oversee the Sydney Movement. Lyons did not get on with Ryan, nor, it appears, with many other members. In 1953 Lyons had Ryan replaced as director with a Jesuit seen to be a partisan of the Melbourne Groupers. Ryan was widely thought to have been unjustly treated, and the resulting tension contributed to the parting of ways between the Sydney and Melbourne branches of the Movement that had such far-reaching consequences at the time of the Split.⁶¹ Ryan himself resented the Melbourne takeover.⁶² The tension is illustrated by an event at the 1954 conference of the Movement in Melbourne. Ryan moved that in future, not all the speeches be given by Santamaria, as happened that year, but his motion was soundly defeated.⁶³ Ryan was a key speaker at the meetings in 1956 at which the vast majority of New South Wales Movement men decided to accept the Sydney bishops' policy of staying with the Labor Party instead of joining their Victorian and Queensland colleagues in what later became the DLP.⁶⁴ At the meeting of seven to eight hundred Movement leaders held at St Paul's, Kensington, on 30 September 1956, which finally saw the decision to “stay in and fight” agreed to by almost all, Ryan spoke after Bishop Carroll. A participant recalled:

The substance of Dr Ryan's address was that he would obey his Bishop even if he thought he was wrong, but on this matter he knew his Bishop was right – history proved that break-away parties never lasted – “they were not worth two bob”.⁶⁵

It was this meeting, as it happened, that provided the occasion for the closest

⁶⁰McAuley to Santamaria, 30/8/1955, quoted in Santamaria, p. 276.

⁶¹Henderson, pp. 103-5; Williams, pp. 54-5; Santamaria, p. 167; Murray, pp. 128-9; Ryan's complaints about Lyons in 'Memorandum to His Eminence, Norman Cardinal Gilroy, Archbishop of Sydney, October 1952, Subject: The present state of the organisation in the Archdiocese', in Ryan archives, section Articles, folder Communism.

⁶²K.C. Davis to author, 9/5/95.

⁶³G. Henderson, 'B.A. Santamaria and the cult of personality', in *50 Years of the Santamaria Movement*, ed. P. Ormonde (Sydney, 1952), pp. 43-58, at p. 44.

⁶⁴Santamaria, pp. 204-6; Kane, p. 127.

⁶⁵M. Carroll to Santamaria, quoted in Kane, p. 144.

the bishops came to public exposure as liars. In 1959 the *Catholic Weekly* officially denied claims in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that Catholics had been adjured to stay in the ALP “as a matter of loyalty to the Cardinal”. One of the participants at the Kensington meeting offered to name the speakers and the most prominent of those present, if the claim were made again. Nothing more was heard of the matter.⁶⁶

In a brief document of 1962, ‘Why the Movement failed’, Ryan argues that the original policy of purely fighting Communism was not kept to, and the Movement began to target non-Communists and thus became rightly seen by many Labor leaders as a danger to themselves. Further, in some places – though not Sydney – there was infiltration by the enemy.⁶⁷ It is not entirely clear what Ryan means by the “failure” of the Movement. If it was not intended to take control of the ALP, but only break the Communist hold on unions, then it would appear to have succeeded. If, on the other hand, its aim was to effect a spiritual transformation of Australian workers and replace monopoly capitalism with a harmonious society of medieval guilds, providing contented artisans and farmhands with the leisure to master scholastic philosophy, then doubtless it failed to do so, but the prospects of success were surely so low as to make depression at the outcome inappropriate.

Ryan was still on deck in 1968, complaining about the laxity of Church responses to *Humanae Vitae*; there is no possibility, he thinks, of a Catholic disagreeing in conscience with the Pope’s ruling.⁶⁸ He died in 1969.⁶⁹

Catholic intellectual life has become more diverse since Paddy’s day. Its leaders are, in their various ways, more professional, better able to stay abreast of overseas developments. But who could get thirty thousand on the trams out to Rushcutters Bay?

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⁶⁶Kane, p. 142; Santamaria, pp. 206-7; cf. Kane to Gilroy, 21/12/1956: “We are unable to reconcile your Eminence’s reported intervention with the statement of your Secretary that you take no part in the affairs of political parties”.

⁶⁷P. Ryan, ‘Postscript 1962: Why the Movement failed’, typescript, Paddy Ryan archives, St Paul’s Seminary, Kensington. I am grateful to Mr Tony Caruana, archivist at St Paul’s, for help with these archives, which have provided much of the information on Dr Ryan.

⁶⁸P. Ryan, ‘Catholic conscience and “*Humanae Vitae*”’, typescript, Ryan archives.

⁶⁹Obituary, ‘Crusader for truth’, *Catholic Weekly* 23/1/69, p. 3.