

## THE INFLUENCE OF MARY MACKILLOP



"From the little aid we received from those who should support us, it seemed... folly to go on. That it was folly in the eyes of the worldlywise I had long known, but from year to year I hoped for the best, and so long as the bishop was satisfied, and the interests of the poor children's faith served, I did not care for the anxiety and suspense to be endured..."<sup>1</sup>

On 24<sup>th</sup> May 1891, in the midst of a great economic depression, Sarah Ann Baker died of pulmonary problems, probably tuberculosis, in Howard Street, North Melbourne, leaving two sons, John (Jack) aged 7½ years, and Henry (Harry) aged 5. Sarah Corcoran, an immigrant from Tipperary, Ireland, had married Charles Baker, the son of a Beechworth miner, in a registry office in the Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1885, but Charles had abandoned her. She was unable to attend properly to the boys and they were filthy and unkempt when she consented to their placement in the care of the St Vincent de Paul Society. *In extremis* Sarah returned to the faith from which she had lapsed and agreed that the boys should be baptised. They were placed in the care of the nuns in St Joseph's Home which

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of Mother Mary MacKillop to Dr I F Campbell, Rector, Scots College, Rome in 1884; quoted in Paul Gardiner S.J., *An Extraordinary Australian, Mary MacKillop*, Sydney (E.J. Dwyer), 1994, at p. 306. The last phrase is not to be understood in the modern sense. She means: "I was not concerned about the anxiety and suspense to be endured."

Mother Mary MacKillop had established the previous year in the suburb of Surrey Hills. Mother Mary was present in the house within a month of their admission.

There is a moving description of her attitude to the waifs and strays of the world by one of her nuns, Sister Lucy, which Fr Paul Gardiner quotes in her biography:

“She had driven some miles in a snow storm, but her first wish was to visit the school. There was a poor little bare-footed and ragged boy standing in class. Mother went straight to him, and putting her arms around him she kissed him saying, ‘Ah, Sister, these are the children I love.’”<sup>2</sup>

In the July and August following, Jack and Harry were fostered out separately to the care of Catholic families in the Victorian countryside. Jack later settled in Melbourne and drove trains for the Victorian Railways; Harry became a farmer on land near Jeparit in the Wimmera district. Just how much influence Australia’s future saint exercised over the two is conjectural, but the evidence indicates it was substantial. Both went on to found vigorous Catholic families. Jack demonstrated a persistent devotion to the saint under whose protection Mary MacKillop had placed her foundation. After his marriage, in 1907 to Mary Ethel White, he named the eldest of his four children, John *Joseph*, and his youngest, Patricia *Josephine*. Harry converted *his* wife, Edith May Pickworth, to the Catholic faith from Protestantism and the couple had six children: their second boy was named John Gavan.

In 1950, Gavan settled with his wife, Joan, and their growing brood, in the Adelaide suburb of Kensington Gardens. His first two children, the elder of whom is the author of this piece, attended nearby St Joseph’s Primary School, Tranmere, conducted by Mother Mary’s redoubtable nuns.

The influence of St Joseph, foster father of Our Lord, has continued in the Baker family. The writer came to the realisation that his calling was other than a religious vocation on the Saint’s Feast Day, 19<sup>th</sup> March, 1969; he was admitted to the New South Wales Bar the same day two years later. When, 21 years later, he again sought entry to religious life, the letter of rejection reached him on 19<sup>th</sup> March. The dedication of this website to the patronage of St Joseph acknowledges the Saint’s continuing influence in *his* life and in that of the Catholic faithful.

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Mary of the Cross shared the lifestyle of the poor and in her submission to the *Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith* in 1873 to approve the Rule of the Institute of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, she stressed the need to provide schools which did not demand payment. Her vision resembled that of Francis of Assisi. To safeguard these ideals, she begged of Rome, after the manner of St Francis, that the prescription of the Rule “never to acquire property or to have convents or land of their own” be upheld.<sup>3</sup> But, as occurred with the Order founded by St Francis, practicalities demanded that Rome would refuse this request.

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<sup>2</sup> *An Extraordinary Australian, Mary MacKillop*, op. cit., p. 455.

<sup>3</sup> *An Extraordinary Australian, Mary MacKillop*, op. cit., pp. 127-8.

Mary saw clearly the perils of allowing government involvement in Catholic education, the perils—though she may not have identified them as such—of Masonic influence, and she refused government aid. When, early in 1874, she visited Scotland seeking support from her father’s people for the mission of her sisters in Australia, she met the Franciscan nuns in Glasgow. The head nun, a “woman of much sense and experience”, told her how blessed the Josephites were in being unrestrained by government. Mary was to tell her nuns:

“She spoke so touchingly of the miseries of Religion, arising from the control of government, and confirmed me more than ever in all my past ideas on the subject.”<sup>4</sup>

One of Mother Mary’s earliest supporters was Roger Vaughan, Archbishop of Sydney from March 1877 to August 1883. Vaughan saw clearly the influence behind Henry Parkes’ promotion of secular education in New South Wales, an influence encapsulated neatly in Parkes’ exhortation—

“[L]et us be of whatever faith we may, let us still remember that we are above everything else free citizens of a free commonwealth.”<sup>5</sup>

The subjection of religious faith to the demands of the state has ever characterised the Protestant compromise. All authority on earth, as in heaven, is owed to God; not to the state. God comes first; the state afterwards. Here is the ground of the Masonic subversion of Catholicism which the Popes from Clement XII to Leo XIII have exposed and condemned.<sup>6</sup> When Parkes attacked Vaughan for his stand, the Archbishop replied—

“He thinks to silence me with the cowardly cry of ‘sedition’, and to make the world believe that whenever I open my mouth on the education question and denounce his odious bill, that I am disloyal. Cannot I appeal to the past, to many a bloody struggle since Agincourt, when he, whose name was given to me, Sir Roger Vaughan, was knighted in the field of battle by the Prince himself! Does my accuser imagine that though the people of the country are opposed to my religion that they will stand silently and approvingly and see me gagged?”<sup>7</sup>

The perennial cry of the Protestant that the Catholic is treacherous because he puts God before the state demonstrates the Protestant’s blindness to right order, and his defective understanding of the reality of his Creator and Redeemer.<sup>8</sup>

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In the efforts to foster the work of her nuns, Mary had problems with the Institute’s founder, Fr Julian Tenison Woods, who took umbrage at the redrafting of his Rule by Vatican authorities and blamed her for the changes mandated by the Church.<sup>9</sup> But Fr

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<sup>4</sup> *An Extraordinary Australian, Mary MacKillop*, op.cit., p. 142.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in *The Australian Dictionary of Biography* under Parkes, Sir Henry (1815-1896). See <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A050455b.htm>

<sup>6</sup> From 28<sup>th</sup> April 1738 when Pope Clement XII issued his Bull *In eminenti*. The teachings of the Popes are set forth in the article *Leo XIII & Freemasonry* at <http://www.superflumina.org/freemasonry.html> . on this website. See generally the articles grouped under the heading *Freemasonry and the Church*.

<sup>7</sup> *An Extraordinary Australian, Mary MacKillop*, op.cit., p. 261, footnote 2.

<sup>8</sup> Because he reduces God’s authority to his own, the Protestant’s understanding of God is reduced to a contrivance of his own. ‘God’ becomes subordinate to the ends he regards as more important.

<sup>9</sup> Fr Woods’ disappointment at the frequent refusal of others to obey his whims flowed inevitably from his own frequent refusals to obey superiors.

Woods was a minor irritant compared with the problems she faced with bishops who were duplicitous, and frequently lying, notably the brothers Matthew and James Quinn, Bishops respectively of Brisbane and Bathurst; and Christopher Augustine Reynolds, Bishop, later Archbishop, of Adelaide whose dislike of Mother Mary and the sisters of her Institute descended into calculated malice. If there was one element the Roman authorities had been content to retain in Fr Woods' draft Rule, it was that of central authority. The overwhelming majority of the Australian bishops refused to acknowledge that authority and the rights that followed, persistently pressuring the Josephite nuns in their dioceses to forsake the lawful vows they had taken to the Institute's Superior and submit to their authority. Some treated the nuns hardly better than slaves. It took 14 years for the Vatican to confound this episcopal malevolence.

Reviewing the Catholic history of the country one must wonder whether things have improved in the 120 years that have intervened. The failure of Australia's bishops to heed the lesson *never to submit* Catholic education to government (or Masonic) control through the acceptance of government aid has contributed substantially to the comprehensive failure of our Catholic schools.<sup>10</sup>

In common with every other religious congregation in the Church that of the Sisters of St Joseph has been ravaged and its numbers reduced to a rump by the grant, authorised by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, of access by the secular to the realm of the sacred. The remnant of the Josephite nuns have little understanding of the hardships their forbears endured, year in, year out, prior to Vatican II; little understanding of why Mary of the Cross and the nuns who followed her should have chosen to embrace such a life of rigour. As late as the 1950s, the eldest child would bring each Monday one shilling (ten cents in present day money; but worth much more then) to pay for the children's schooling—if the family could afford it. The nuns would go out in twos, following the protocols established by their saintly Foundress, begging for support from the local people, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, relying on Christ to buttress this meagre stipend. And often it was non-Catholics, rather than Catholics, who supported them. Schooled by their arduous life, the nuns trained the children with rigour. One small instance will illustrate: to teach appropriate posture, they would frequently require the children to sit with arms folded *behind* their backs for ten minutes at a time.

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In her heavenly home, Mary MacKillop understands the workings of Divine Providence perfectly; understands why it is that Almighty God has allowed the devastation of the work upon which, following the inspiration of the erratic Fr Woods, she embarked from a little school in Penola in the State of South Australia in

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<sup>10</sup> Catholic education succeeds in this country only in those families where the parents refuse to risk the faith of their children by allowing their attendance at nominally Catholic schools. This endeavour, paid with a great price by hundreds of the faithful, is the chief resource for the renewal of the Catholic faith in this country.

1865.<sup>11</sup> She understands, too, how the education and training of God's children in this country may be restored, if only there will appear young women to respond to that mighty vocation.

The good the saint accomplishes in his life does not end with his death but advances with the passage of the years.<sup>12</sup> The good that Mary of the Cross accomplished persists and, once the madness of the present age is thrown off, we may hope to see Catholic primary school education flourish anew under her inspiration. Short of a miracle, this will not occur through the Institute she founded. It will occur through the immaterial inheritance she has bequeathed to posterity, the spirit of selfless love of God and of her neighbour St Mary of the Cross breathed.

Michael Baker

August 8<sup>th</sup> 2010—*101<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the death of Blessed Mary MacKillop*

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<sup>11</sup> Since He is supremely good, God would not allow evil to be in His works were He not good and omnipotent even up to this point, as to bring forth good even from evil. St Augustine, *Enchiridion de fide, spe et caritate*, XI, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Notwithstanding Shakespeare's hyperbole to the contrary; cf. *Julius Caesar*, Act III, sc. ii.