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OPUS DEI
AND ITS ARRIVAL
IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

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A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Religious Studies
at Massey University.

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2001

Some biographers of saints have in the past been interested only in highlighting extraordinary things in the lives of God's servants, from even their earliest days in the cradle. They have, unintentionally perhaps, done a disservice to christian truth. They even said of some of them that as babies they did not cry, nor drink their mother's milk on Fridays, out of a spirit of penance. You and I came into this world crying our heads off, and we most assuredly drank our milk in total disregard for fasts and ember days.

—Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, *Christ is Passing By*, 1974:26.

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ABSTRACT

Opus Dei, the Catholic Church's first personal prelature, has attracted a great deal of passion and argument in its 60 or 70 years of existence. Very little has been written about Opus Dei in this part of the world, and as far as I am aware, no previous academic research has been done. The purpose of this thesis is to give the reader a brief overview of Opus Dei and its beginnings in this part of the world.

I have begun by looking at the development of the pioneer Georgian and Victorian world where Australasian Catholicism has its roots, at the people who made up that world, and their customs and beliefs. The success or failure of the Opus Dei enterprise in this part of the world is obviously very much bound up with the kind of people and religious attitudes they encountered on arrival.

A variety of new Catholic groups sprang up during the twentieth century. A number, like Opus Dei, had their origins in traditional European Catholicism, but soon spread further afield. Other groups remained more exclusive. A comparison shows that while Opus Dei's structure and status in canon law is at present a unique one, other groups are similarly organised in many respects.

Is Opus Dei a sect or cult within the Catholic Church, as some allege? A brief discussion on sects and cults follows, and concludes that though Opus Dei does exhibit a number of the typically identifying signs of such groups, it does not belong in either category.

The world scene and the local Church situation of the time are considered in the following chapters as Opus Dei arrives in Oceania and settles into first Australian and then New Zealand life. It will be seen that the prelature is often at odds with what is happening in both the national Catholic churches and the wider community.

My conclusion finds that there is much good in Opus Dei for the Church to affirm, but members' energies are probably too narrowly focused. A meeting of minds within the wider Church would be beneficial to all.

Appendices enlarge on information given in the text, and list further sources of information for those who would like to investigate further.

INTRODUCTION

Even today the name Opus Dei is not well-known in this part of the world outside the Catholic Church and certain academic circles. This Roman-based organisation, founded early in the twentieth century by a Spanish priest, has attracted controversy from the start. It offers a severe, highly structured lifestyle which places great emphasis on the virtues of hard work and devotion to traditional Catholic values and spirituality. After a rather slow beginning, it has spread to many parts of the world in recent decades. Members were invited to Australia by Archbishop Gilroy of Sydney in 1963, and to New Zealand in 1988 by Bishop Gaines of the Hamilton Diocese. Many Catholics, lay and religious, are wondering just what impact this exotic newcomer will have on their local communities in the long term. It is not easy to obtain detailed and unbiased information about Opus Dei in Australasia. The organisation's byword is "discretion," and most "outside" comment comes from those who disagree with Opus Dei's methods and theological stance.

As Spanish sociologist Joan Estruch discovered when researching the topic for *Saints And Schemers*, any non-partisan writing on Opus Dei will attract a broad range of complaint (Estruch 1995: 3-4). The result will be insufficiently obsequious for some and too uncritical for others. The prelature's leadership dislikes most publicity, and does not approve of anyone who is not a member writing about Opus Dei (Kamm 3/1/1984:38). Whatever is said will never be quite right, because the author does not have the correct inner "understanding." Those who dislike Opus Dei and its activities want the organisation either ignored or rigorously criticised.

Founder Josemaria Escrava developed his vision gradually. He began by offering spiritual direction to workers and university students in Madrid. In 1928 he thought of developing a work that encouraged people to deepen their Catholic understanding and practice, taking their faith into all areas of life rather than airing it only in church on Sundays. At first Escrava was interested only in men's spiritual development, but in 1930 decided to include women. With the founding of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross in 1943, Opus Dei took the shape it maintains to the present day, a lay organisation with a branch for priests (Berglar 1994:327-328).

To understand Opus Dei and its founder it is necessary to look at the early 20th century Spanish world from which they sprang. It was a time of turmoil and bitter debate. There was a tremendous amount of poverty, especially in rural areas, causing many to turn to socialism for solutions to their plight. The Catholic Church was losing some measure of the control it had exercised for centuries over all areas of Spanish life. The great tragedy of the era was of course the Civil War of 1936 to 1938. Both sides committed terrible atrocities

against soldiers and civilians alike (Mitchell 1982:6-7;78-80). Thousands of priests and religious were murdered. Escriva had to flee, wearing a wedding ring as part of his disguise. Opus Dei began to grow at the end of this period of bloodshed and ideological fury. With prim right wing General Franco, the “sphinx without a secret,” in charge of the country when hostilities ceased, the Catholic Church came into its own – at a price. Only one model of virtue was espoused, that of the “caudillo,” meaning leader or chief – a devout, brave, incorruptible patriot, a manly soldier of the faith. Escriva promoted this ideal in his best known work, *El Camino, The Way*, a collection of 999 pious sayings and exhortations. Women’s development was much less emphasised. It was enough for them to be “prudent.”

Some see Opus Dei as a positive force in an amoral secularised world that has largely lost its way (West 1987:160-162; Hertel 1987:99). Idealistic young people are attracted by the prelature’s emphasis on loyalty and order, its drive for academic and spiritual excellence, and the supportive fellowship offered to newcomers. There are few grey areas with Opus Dei (Collins 1986:103-107). The words of the Pope and Magisterium are law, divinely inspired.

Criticism of Opus Dei is basically the same world wide. Liberal elements in the church see the prelature’s theological stance as pre-Vatican II and life-denying. They point out that while much emphasis is given to matters of obedience and sexual morality, little is said on major concerns such as poverty, war and social inequality. There are complaints of secrecy, the splitting up of families, and ill feeling and lack of co-operation between Escriva’s priests and diocesan clergy (Walsh 1989:160-176; Kamm 3/1/1984:38).

Escriva often spoke proudly of spending his whole adult life involved with a variety of universities. The most frequent complaint about Opus Dei is that it targets rich and intelligent students on campus, often encouraging them to join without even consulting their parents. Feminists condemn the treatment of women members. There are also stories, mostly unproven, of involvement in sinister political and financial dealings (Hutchison 1997:229-292).

Escriva’s beatification in 1992 raised a great deal of protest. The Pope proceeded in spite of receiving many submissions opposed to the cause, including a number from Spanish bishops. John Paul II had created Opus Dei a personal prelature in 1982, the only one in existence to date. The Pope supports Opus Dei. His personal assistant, Dr Joaquin Navarro-Valls, is a long time member.

Opus Dei was invited into both New Zealand and Australia in the first instance to take over university chaplaincies. A small group of priests and laymen came first. When they were established, women members from Spain, the United States and South America fol-

lowed, setting up separate residences for themselves. The organisation shares its founder's concern with education at all levels from kindergarten up. All members, male and female, who are capable of obtaining degrees are expected to do so, to doctoral level where possible. Celibate members in Australasia are well qualified and highly motivated. Even the women who do the housework and cooking may be professional people with degrees.

Most literature in English on Opus Dei is either self-published and hagiographical, or written by highly critical opponents. There is much repetition on both sides. Ex-Jesuit Michael Walsh's *The Secret World of Opus Dei*, published in 1989, was for years the main source of information for the curious (Walsh 1989). Three interesting books have since appeared, one of them a translation from the Spanish.

Beyond the Threshold is written by Maria del Carmen Tapia, mentioned in Walsh's book (Tapia 1997). She once worked with Escriva in Rome, and later headed the women's branch in Venezuela before becoming disillusioned and leaving the organisation. Spanish sociologist Joan Estruch's *Saints and Schemers* is a scholarly and fairly unbiased examination of Escriva and the prelature he created (Estruch 1995). The least successful volume is Robert Hutchison's *Their Kingdom Come*. A banner across the jacket proclaiming that this is "the book the Catholic Church won't want you to read!" sets the tone. Much of the material is taken from earlier publications. Journalist Hutchison's odd surmise is that Opus Dei is preparing for a holy war against Islam (Hutchison 1997). He does however offer some interesting pieces of information not found elsewhere.

Opus Dei is often accused of being a sect or cult with its own leader (third Prelate Javier Echevarria) and secret deviant rules and activities. It is by no means the only specialised group within the Church. All kinds of movements exist, following a particular leader or charism. Focolare, founded by Chiara Lubich during World War II, is now a powerful force world wide. Communion and Liberation and the Neocatechumenate have a considerable following. Ecclesia Dei hopes for the restoration of the Latin Mass. Australia has its own unique Little Pebble, a layman who proclaims as his divine mission in life the gathering of many wives and the fathering of a multitude of children. He has not to date been excommunicated.

Though many of the distinguishing marks of sects and cults could be applied to Opus Dei – and a range of other Catholic groups – I will suggest that the prelature is rather an example of *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*, a little church within the church. Opus Dei has no separate doctrines of its own, and is a recognised and fully functional part of the universal Church.

There is a slight but growing apprehension that Opus Dei may attempt to capture the Papacy when John Paul II dies. An increasing number of Cardinals are members, one of the latest appointed being Peru's well-known Juan Luis Cipriani. Its hold is much stronger in some countries than in others, however. Its influence on Australasia's down-to-earth society has been slight. Traditional Spanish piety is foreign to most people in this part of the world. Australia has between 300 and 400 members after nearly 40 years of missionary activity. The New Zealand figure is considerably less. These numbers include members imported from overseas to take on leadership roles, and foreign members studying and working in the area.

There are many shades of interpretation to Opus Dei, even in such seemingly straightforward matters as the date of foundation. Members claim Escriva was divinely inspired while attending a retreat on 2nd October, 1928. This is the date recorded and celebrated. Yet Berglar's officially sanctioned book has Escriva himself as the only "member" for the first ten years (Berglar 1994:50;57-58,etc). The probing Estruch puts the founding of the prelature about ten years later than claimed.

It is not possible in a study of this length to do more than briefly consider the main sources of information available. Rather than attempt any in-depth analysis of the Opus Dei phenomenon or take a stand on which stories seem the most likely from among many competing claims, I have endeavoured to find a middle ground from which to inform the reader. As Joan Estruch soon discovered, without hard evidence it is often impossible to discern which version of a particular tale, if any, tells the truth. Even with all the first-hand Spanish resources he had at his disposal, Estruch was often unable to unravel the conflicting rumours, speculations and stories that were passed to him (Letter from Professor Joan Estruch, 3/3/2000).

Gathering information on the prelature was a challenge. Neutral material especially was hard to find. Written resources on Opus Dei are limited in this part of the world, though that is not necessarily a disadvantage, as much material is repeated in both pro- and anti- Opus Dei sources. My research was hampered considerably by a lack of co-operation from all kinds of people, from some bishops and academics down, who refused to share information they held, or discuss their Opus Dei experiences, good or bad. I was also hindered on numerous occasions by not being able to reveal my sources after personal discussions, or write as frankly as I would have liked. Because of the controversy and strong emotions any mention of Opus Dei arouses in the Catholic world, and the fact that the prelature sometimes threatens to take legal action when anything they have not first approved is written about them (Walsh 1989:14, for example), I decided to err on the side of caution. To protect my private sources of information, pro, neutral and anti Opus Dei,

I have chosen to keep all names confidential. I must say that all members of Opus Dei whom I met treated me with courtesy and respect, answering my questions to the best of their ability. There was also, however, the occasional “joking” reference to previous cases where the prelature had considered suing individuals who had in some way “misrepresented” them. It was interesting to see the depth of feeling aroused by this comparatively new arrival on the Australasian scene.

It is unlikely that the full truth will ever be known about many of the controversies surrounding Opus Dei and its founder. All of the earliest figures on the scene are dead, sources of evidence incomplete, and many surviving documents lie in secret files that will never reach the public gaze. There is still much interesting material in circulation, however. Those wishing to know more may seek out the available literature, or contact further sources of information, some of which are listed in Appendix Q.

PERSONAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis is about real life, not hagiographical dreams. It deals with success and failure, honesty and evasion, good and bad. It is about real people doing their best to succeed in an imperfect world. It is about colliding world views, idealism often gone wrong, and love misplaced. It concerns people who, from the founder down, gave everything they had and everything they were to a vision of a better way of life.

All the criticisms aired here, and the history that does not match the official version, I discovered on my own. Members whom I met were at all times loyal to their organisation. They spoke of the peace and joy life within Opus Dei had brought them, of their admiration for the founder and his successors. They were kind, open and hospitable to me at all times, and I regret any grief or disappointment that my investigations may cause them. An academic study by its very nature must be impartial, looking at the evidence and the stories on both sides. This does not imply a lack of care for my Opus Dei friends. On the contrary, I salute their devotion to their ideal, their busy, talented lives, their service to others, and their love of God and humanity. My affection and admiration for them is unchanged.

The story of Opus Dei contains many valuable lessons for us all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Peter Donovan for his endless patience, kindness and wise counsel throughout the trials and tribulations of preparing this thesis. My good friend Fr Brian Austin's technical expertise and sense of humour saved the day on many occasions. The kind hospitality and moral support of the Capuchin friars of Kilbirnie made the process of researching and writing so much easier.

So many people assisted with the preparation of this thesis in their various ways, with snippets of information, invitations, personal stories, the lending of books and journals, tracking down obscure references, giving me time off work, offering encouragement and advice. I am extremely grateful to them all.

Chapter 1

CATHOLICISM IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

No one knows for sure who were the first Catholics to set foot in New Zealand and Australia, in what was then regarded in the west as the remotest and most forlorn part of the world. Possibly they were crew members of one of the early voyages of exploration in southern waters. Various nationalities had called at ports in the south well before 1700. Explorers gave their names to the areas they “discovered.” Spanish Torres passed through the strait that bears his name in 1605. The Dutch followed, Arnhem in 1623, Carpenter 5 years later, and Tasman in 1642. The first Englishman was Dampier, arriving at Dampier Land in 1688. There may have been others whose names are lost to history. None of these early visitors had any interest in colonising Australia, and left without carrying out any detailed examination of the land mass that lay before them. As far as we know, Tasman’s sailors in 1642 were the first Europeans to set foot in New Zealand. They were not impressed with this country either, and sailed away forever. One sailor on the *Heemskerck*, Jories Claesen van Bahuys, may have been a Catholic (Schouten 1992:29).

It was left to English Captain James Cook, over 100 years later, to make a thorough investigation of the coast line. Michael King speculates that certain members of Cook’s 1769 expedition, because of their nationality, were probably Catholic (King 1997:31). Cook’s men were closely followed by the crew of a French merchant vessel, complete with a Dominican chaplain, Fr. Paul Antoine de Villefeix. On December 25th 1769 this Catholic crew probably celebrated the first Christmas service in New Zealand.

The first Catholics to stay any length of time in this part of the world, some years after these visits, were tough adventurers and men who had fallen foul of the law. Most were Irish. Some returned to the old world after working out their contracts or serving penal sentences, while others formed alliances with local women or fellow convicts and settled in the colonies for good. New Zealand was an “open” territory at this time, neither a penal settlement or yet a colony. Life was consequently quite lawless, even worse perhaps than in early New South Wales. The far north, now a tranquil haven of historical sites and holiday homes, had then a notorious reputation as a kind of brawling “wild west” of the Pacific.

After Cook claimed Australia for Britain, colonisation began, first by using part of the east coast, known as Botany Bay, as a dumping ground for convicts and political activists. The First Fleet arrived in Australia in 1788, just before the outbreak of conflict in France. The French Revolution of 1789, and its call for liberty, fraternity and equality, spurred people into examining both their religious and philosophical stands and the social structure

in which they lived. The horrendous events of this uprising deeply disturbed the British and European upper classes, who saw radicalism and dissent as a threat to their position. At the other end of the scale, those already inclined to free thinking and secularism were encouraged by the revolutionary events in France.

The Enlightenment philosophers had already developed a radical new approach, to examine and question inherited beliefs, to doubt first, rather than accept as given and attempt to re-validate, as constructivist thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle and Plato had done in the past (Capps 1995:12). The revolutionaries saw Man (and presumably Woman), rather than God, as the prime mover in their world. To them the traditional blind faith and blinder obedience were the marks of a fool rather than a saint. This rather testy rejection of religious values was soon to become a feature of life in colonial Australasia.

As shipping movements in the area increased, crews began dropping anchor in New Zealand bays. They sought timber to repair damage to their vessels, and sources of fresh water and supplies (Simmons 1978:7). Whalers, sealers and buccaneers set up camp at convenient spots along the coast, trading and sometimes living with local Maori. Runaway seamen and convicts and survivors of shipwrecks also made their way ashore in both North and South Islands. It was here that relationships with local women developed, and the first mixed-race children were born. Some of these early visitors were Catholics who would later travel to Australia to have their marriages formalised and children baptised. A few Maori took an interest in Catholicism, some making their own way to Sydney to be received into the church (King 1997:42).

In the meantime, settlement was increasing in Australia. The First Fleet had delivered some 750 convicts, and men to take care of them. The first religious service in the colony, conducted by the evangelical Rev. Richard Johnson, was held on Sunday 3rd February, 1788 (Campion 1987:3). Johnson's ministry was received on the whole with surly indifference. The primitive chapel he built himself was burned down by convicts, and they used his tracts as hair curlers and playing cards. After some years he returned discouraged to England with his wife and children.

Transportation would continue until the mid 19th century. Around a quarter of all those shipped to Australia, 30,000 men and 9,000 women, came from Ireland. Others were of Irish descent. Almost all of the first Catholics in the country were Irish convicts. Most of the Scots and English were transported for stealing, sometimes simply for taking food to ward off starvation. A considerable number of the Irish detainees, on the other hand, were political prisoners, usually otherwise respectable people convicted of riot and sedition, that is, some kind of protest against English rule. As O'Farrell points out, however, Archbishop Kelly exaggerated in 1922 when he claimed the majority of Irish convicts were merely political offenders who were "in their personal character high-minded, industrious and

progressive” (O’Farrell 1968:2). In fact there were plenty of violent criminals in the Irish contingent as well. Many were peasants who spoke only Gaelic.

Some devout convicts, stranded in a hostile environment without the services of a priest, were seen going off quietly to say the rosary or pray (Campion 1987:4). After the 1798 Irish rebellion 3 priests, Frs. Harold, Dixon and O’Neil, were among the transportees. Only Fr. Dixon was permitted to briefly exercise his ministry. On hearing that Governor King had cautiously allowed Dixon to work with the convicts, the Holy See constituted him rather grandly the Prefect Apostolic of New Holland. This lasted only until the Castle Hill rebellion. Dixon returned to Ireland in 1808. Until the 1840’s Catholics would be forced to attend Protestant services. O’Farrell writes of the “obsessive antagonism” that had its roots in this Anglican/English Protestant control over Irish convict Catholicism, a bitterness and suspicion that was to become part of the culture and a cause of dissension for generations to come (O’Farrell 1968:3).

Australia was opened for free settlement. Sheep, which were to become a mainstay of the economy, were introduced in 1797. In 1836 the government began an assisted immigration scheme which would attract over 200,000 in the next 50 years. About half were Irish, mostly impoverished men and women from rural areas.

For its first 40 years New South Wales was primarily a convict settlement. The 1828 census showed that 2 out of every 3 inhabitants had a convict background. Victoria, South Australia and New Zealand were mostly areas of free settlement. There was little control over who entered New Zealand before 1840, when it was annexed by Britain. There were, however, only about 2000 Europeans living in the country by then.

Protestant missionaries arrived in New Zealand in 1814, despatched by the anti-Catholic Rev. Samuel Marsden. They moved out from the Bay of Islands to convert the Maori to Christianity and share the benefits of European civilisation. Spiritually, progress was slow at first. Maori were not impressed with this strange new import whose articles of faith were often at odds with their own long-held Polynesian understanding of the supernatural. As well, many European cultural underpinnings, bewildering to such a different society, were presented as part of the “package,” the Christian world view. Most of the Europeans in the area were certainly not living a Christian life, which did not help the missionaries’ witness. Maori were eager to develop literacy skills, and soon were teaching one another to read and write. They also welcomed European technology in the form of woollen blankets, axes, shovels and other metal tools, and, tragically, guns.

The few Catholics in the country were left to their own spiritual devices. If they wanted to see a priest, they had to travel to Sydney, on one of the 2 or 3 vessels undertaking the journey each week (Simmons 1978:9). Thomas and Mary Poynton, named the mother and

father of New Zealand Catholicism by King, took their children over for baptism. Thomas, an Irish political prisoner, had married Mary, Australian-born of Irish parents, after serving his sentence in Sydney. They moved to the Hokianga harbour in 1828, where they ran a store and a sawmill. The Poyntons had good relations with both Maori and Europeans. They prospered and became models of good-living Catholicism.

Early missionary activity forms an integral part of the history of colonial New Zealand. There was no such activity across the ocean. In fact although provision was made for a chaplain to accompany the First Fleet, the settlement was from the start basically a secular one (Hogan 1987:9-10). The chaplain was funded by the government and sent off to assist Captain Phillip in enforcing a “due observance of religion and good order among the inhabitants of the new settlement.” In other words, the British government was concerned far more with social cohesion and control than the nurture or salvation of souls. The whole enterprise was very much an Anglican one. No attempt was made to provide spiritual care for the Catholic members of the contingent. Nor was any thought given to the native population of Australia, the ancient Aboriginal race who had enjoyed undisturbed possession of this vast island for many thousands of years.

There was some dispute about whether Aborigines were human enough to possess souls. Their spiritual lives were a mystery. David Collins asserted in 1798 that he had found the one people on earth who had no sense of religion (Hogan 1987:17). Dampier had described the Aborigines as “the miserablest people in the world.” Captain Cook disagreed, finding them tranquil and at one with their environment. The British government, while not particularly interested in the Aborigine, wanted to avoid the sort of conflict and bloodshed that had proved such a problem in colonising North America. Phillip was instructed to leave the original inhabitants to their own devices, and punish anyone harming them. In fact, numerous violent encounters between Aborigine and settlers occurred over the years, with casualties on both sides.

Rev. Samuel Marsden, the second chaplain appointed in New South Wales, did unsuccessfully attempt to convert an Aboriginal boy in his employ. Marsden soon lost interest in Aboriginal salvation, but was to have more success with Maori when he moved on to New Zealand. Others attempted to educate Aboriginal children, with indifferent results. The nomadic lifestyle of the tribes made it difficult to sustain relationships with the few well-meaning Europeans who took an interest in them.

Aborigines had in fact an ancient complex belief system rooted in their kinship with the land. They were more “religious” than most of the settlers. Many of the convicts were illiterate former slum dwellers and vagabonds who had never had any kind of moral education, let alone been exposed to religious values or Christian living. Morality was an upper class luxury well beyond their reach. Hogan quotes an eyewitness report of a shipload of female

convicts arriving in 1890, to find the men of the colony waiting to select a servant-concubine each (Hogan 1987:21). To survive in this male-dominated wilderness the women had to submit to these slavish relationships.

Catholics in Australia were to wait over 30 years for permission to have their own chaplain. Visiting ships' chaplains were flooded with requests from both convicts and free settlers. Two priests had requested permission in 1787 to sail with the First Fleet, but were turned down by Lord Sydney (Campion 1987:13). An Irish priest, Jeremiah O'Flynn, appointed Prefect Apostolic of Botany Bay, made the journey to Sydney in 1817, only to be rejected by Governor Macquarie. O'Flynn did not give up without a fight, going into hiding and exercising his ministry in defiance of the Governor's orders. He was winning converts when he was finally caught, jailed and deported. He left the Blessed Sacrament behind in a settler's cottage.

Devout lay people, including some convicts, had kept the faith alive during the long years of isolation. Campion tells the story of men such as Lawrence Mooney of Albany, who would climb Mount Clarence every Sunday to say the rosary, turning westward to Ireland and mourning his isolation from the spiritual sustenance of the Mass. James Dempsey, a Sydney stonemason, prayed with convicts sentenced to death. It was at his house that Fr. O'Flynn left the Blessed Sacrament (Campion 1987:4-5).

Irish Catholicism was a folk religion in those days, a whole way of life bound to community, family and national identity. It gave structure and meaning to lives spent often in huge hardship and disappointment, easing the journey through this world and promising respite in the next. Its curious mixture of formal Roman Catholicism, pious practice, tribal culture, superstition and ancient myth bonded people to one another and to their native soil. Irish Catholicism and British Protestantism were to be the formative religious influences in the European settlement of New Zealand and Australia, with Protestantism very much in the position of power.

The first two "official" priests, Frs. Philip Conolly and John Joseph Therry, were appointed less out of religious concern than in the hope that their presence would calm rebellious Irish tendencies (Hogan 1987:25). The government paid both Anglican and Catholic salaries. Anglican leaders were not happy about the Catholic appointments, or any other "competition" for souls. Samuel Marsden even accused the Methodists in 1821 of "poaching" children from his Sunday school. He made no secret of his abhorrence especially of Catholicism, earlier calling convict Fr. Dixon's brief Sydney appointment a "victory for the Kingdom of Satan" (Campion 1987:11).

Abhorred by their Anglican rivals or not, Frs. Conolly and Therry set about ministering to the Catholic population who gladly welcomed them. Both men were later to attract

controversy and discontent. Maynooth-trained Conolly went to Hobart after a year, and had the first simple weatherboard church built. Sadly this place of worship was to be neglected along with many of Conolly's pastoral duties as time passed. He became embroiled in arguments with both parishioners and church authorities, and died at the comparatively early age of 53. He may have been an alcoholic (O'Farrell 1968:16). Therry was more popular, and would last longer. His church was to be Sydney's St. Mary's Cathedral, which took 12 years to build. He was a busy and dedicated chaplain, feeding Aborigines who camped at the bottom of his garden, and keeping a saddled horse ready for emergency calls.

There was far too much work for one priest, however energetic. By 1833 there were around 18,000 Catholics in Australia – and most of them were under Therry's pastoral care. He became embroiled in disputes with the government over education, Anglican domination, and other issues. He got into serious financial muddles, and fought with Frs. Daniel Power and Christopher Dowling, sent to replace him as chaplain. Formal ecclesiastical authority finally arrived in the colony in the form of William Ullathorne, the Benedictine Vicar General of the Bishop of Mauritius. Australia was then a distant part of this Bishop's territory. Ullathorne was to be followed in 1835 by the first Australian Bishop, English Benedictine John Bede Polding, who would work in Sydney for 42 years.

In New Zealand meanwhile Anglican and Methodist missionaries had begun to make some headway with the native population. A number of Maori had accepted Christian baptism, while others were sympathetic to the ideals of this imported faith. Protestant missionaries had the field to themselves until the first 3 Catholics finally arrived at Thomas Poynton's home at Totara Point on 10th January 1838. They were members of the new French Marist order founded by Fr. Jean Claude Colin in Lyons. The leader of the new missionaries was the urbane Bishop Jean Baptiste Francois Pompallier. He was accompanied by Fr. Catherin Servant and Brother Michel Colombon. Local Catholics were delighted at this impressive arrival, and flocked to the newcomers. The first Mass was celebrated in Thomas Poynton's house (Simmons 1978:11).

Administration-wise, New Zealand was not connected with nearby Australia, but was part of the largest diocese in the world, covering 65 million square miles of ocean dotted here and there with island clusters. The territory was bounded by New Zealand in the west and Easter Island in the east. Pompallier was the Prefect Apostolic of the South Seas, a title created in 1830 for Fr. Gabriel Henri Jerome de Solages, who died without ever reaching New Zealand (King 1997:38-39).

Soon after the French arrived the "opposition" made their first move. Wesleyan missionary Nathaniel Turner sent Maori who had adopted his faith to throw both the Marists and their possessions in the sea. The local Maori, friendly with the Poyntons and impressed with the newcomers, stepped in and averted disaster. By chance the Marist party had landed

at the returning harbour of Kupe, the legendary mariner who first sighted New Zealand. This coincidence was especially significant to local Maori.

The two French priests got off to an impressive start in New Zealand. Within 3 months they were both preaching in Maori, and Pompallier was composing hymns. Maori enjoyed the colourful solemnity of Catholic ritual, and as other native peoples had before them, found their own religious beliefs more in tune with Catholicism, with its air of awe and mystery, its litany of saints and splendidly robed sacred priesthood. Protestantism by comparison seemed often dull and plain.

Pompallier charmed many with his aristocratic manners and bearing. A number of Maori came forward for baptism. Services were held giving Maori catechists the opportunity to debate doctrine with their own people. Pompallier began building what he jokingly called an “Episcopal palace” at Papakawau, a simple building with just enough space for worship and sleep. Brother Michel was expected to cook outside in a shed – no problem, Pompallier said, when the staple New Zealand diet consisted of potatoes, fish and pork, washed down with water (King 1997:50).

In 1839 two further groups of Marists arrived to assist with the work. It seemed to the Protestant community that just as they were getting some results for all their hard work and prayer, these minions of the scarlet woman of Babylon had come to sow dissent and undo all their efforts. They feared as well that the French planned a political take-over of the whole country. Pompallier did not stoop to exchange insults with the rival missionaries, but certainly regarded them as heretics (Simmons 1978:50). The “tree of the church” he used to explain the apostolic succession showed the Protestant denominations as dead fallen branches. The devout Thomas Poynton was direct in his views, referring to local Wesleyans as “mangy curs.” These exchanges, common in both New Zealand and Australia, show that while some did try to leave behind old rivalries and make a fresh start in the colonies, others made sure that sectarian strife flourished in the new world as well (Jackson 1987:2).

Pompallier attended the meeting that led to the first signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, and ensured that religious freedom would exist under British rule. Because three churches were already active amongst both settlers and Maori, no one denomination became the official Church of the country. Pompallier advised his priests to keep away from political issues. Later he and some of the priests would become British citizens.

Unfortunately Pompallier’s charmed progress in New Zealand did not last. There were various reasons for this. First, he was not a good manager of money. He had great dreams and ideals, and fondly imagined “heaven would provide.” In fact, he arrived with only £113, which was soon gone. Pompallier moved with ease amongst the highest ranks in the

little colony, enjoying the social life, while his priests and brothers felt more and more marginalised and excluded from the European community around them (Simmons 1978:12-15). Much of their ministry involved travelling and living in conditions of poverty and hardship. Pompallier extravagantly bought a schooner, and travelled around New Zealand, going as far south as Port Chalmers. He fought with Fr. Colin, the founder of his order, who persuaded him to tender his resignation when he returned to Europe (Simmons 1978:34-35).

As Simmons points out, it was difficult to conduct a coherent discussion or debate by mail when letters could on occasion take a year or more to arrive (Simmons 1978:19-20). Pompallier had done very well out of his superior, receiving 40 men in 5 years, and an enormous £37,156 from the Department for the Propagation of the Faith between 1836 and 1845. He was in Europe for 4 years, returning in 1850 to administer a northern diocese based in Auckland and staffed by secular clergy. The Marists who remained would work south of Taupo under another Bishop. Unfortunately Pompallier was to become embroiled in the same problems the second time around, charming many people but antagonising others, including his new priests, getting in debt and making administrative errors. One of his more successful moves was to bring a group of Mercy nuns with him in 1850. Ten years later he was to make another expedition across the world, returning with Franciscans, seminarians, and 4 French lay women, including the formidable Suzanne Aubert (Munro 1996:20).

Catholics remained a suspiciously regarded minority in both countries as the population grew through large-scale immigration. Towns and cities were carved out of the wilderness, but poverty and hardship remained the reality for most of the mainly working class settlers, and their pastors. Many single men, and some families as well, lived in remote forest and bush areas with few if any of the comforts of the civilised world. In the vast distances of Australia these people would rarely see a priest. Their children grew up unbaptised and often uneducated as well (Jackson 1987:24-25).

Most Catholics in Australasia were still Irish. Between 1841 and 1850 23,000 people left Ireland to settle in New Zealand and Australia. This figure rose to a post-famine total of 102,000 between 1851 and 1860. The next decade saw the departures lessen to 83,000. They were to taper off in succeeding years (Jackson 1987:19). Not all the Irish immigrants were Catholic, of course. Several prominent 19th century Irishmen in both colonies had Protestant backgrounds. From the early days of settlement small numbers of Catholics of other nationalities sailed to Australasia as well. These included German, Italian, French, Polish, Yugoslav, English and Scots. In spite of the early Marist presence in New Zealand, the strongest Catholic influence in both countries would be Irish. The French priests and religious gradually died out and were replaced mainly by Irish men and women. Even today there are a number of Irish-born and educated priests and religious in this part of the world.

The mid 19th century discovery of gold in both Australia and New Zealand changed life for many Catholics. Their numbers increased as thousands of people flocked to the gold fields from overseas. Women and children followed their menfolk, schools were built, and communities developed (King 1997:86-87). Many of the first schools were informal and impermanent arrangements, lasting only as long as there was an available miner's wife educated sufficiently to impart a little knowledge to the local children (Simmons 1978:57). Priests arrived to care for the spiritual needs of the often rough and ready settlements, and churches were built. Lay teachers eventually took over the schools, to be followed later by nuns and brothers. Those Catholics who discovered gold and prospered were able to improve their position and status in the wider community. They had the means to educate their children well, buy better quality homes, and establish themselves in business. There was also good money to be made in providing goods and services for the often isolated mining communities.

In this open, sparsely populated world lacking the modern amenities of Europe and Britain co-operation between neighbours was often crucial to survival. There are many recorded instances of kindness and support that reached across social, religious and ethnic boundaries. Jackson gives examples of early ecumenism in both countries (Jackson 1987:36-37).

There was not only ecumenical but international co-operation in the pioneer world. Many assume that because Wellington's splendid St. Mary of the Angels is staffed today by the Marist community, it has always been a Marist church. In fact, the original St. Mary's was built by Irish Capuchin Fr. Jeremiah O'Reily, and was named for St. Francis of Assisi's St. Mary of the Angels (O'Sullivan 1977:51).

Patricia Brooks tells the unusual story of how Fr. O'Reily obtained his first substantial funding. As he arrived in Wellington harbour in 1843 his ship collided with another vessel departing for the Philippines. After surveying the bleak region where he was to live and work, Fr. O'Reily wrote to the Bishop of Manila requesting financial aid for his new apostolate. Franciscan friars had in the past done extremely well in evangelising the Philippines. The Bishop sent enough funds to buy land and build a house on the site now occupied by the present St. Mary of the Angels (Brooks 1998:51).

Fr. O'Reily became the much-loved first priest of the settlement, and was known as the Apostle of Wellington. He was a talented preacher, a scholar, a tireless pastoral worker, friend to the whole community, rich and poor, Catholic and Protestant. Non Catholics would attend Mass just to hear him preach. Once when the Presbyterian minister was ill O'Reily took the service in St. John's, with the approval of the elders – an unheard-of happening well over 100 years ago (Jackson 1987:56).

Another Wellington resident who refused to let sectarian differences get in her way was Mother Suzanne Aubert, the French founder of the Sisters of Compassion, the only

surviving New Zealand order of nuns. After working in Auckland, Meane and Wanganui she came with 3 of her nuns to Wellington in January 1899 and began to care for the poor and outcast members of the community. Many of her "clients" were elderly single men who had immigrated long ago to work in the bush and mines, and assist in the building of roads and railways. Now, their strength gone, they could no longer care for themselves, and rarely had any relatives in the country (Munro 1996:251). Wellington came to a standstill for Mother Aubert's funeral in 1926. Her soup kitchen still operates, serving over 20,000 meals a year. Social deprivation of a different kind brings people to the sisters' doors at the dawn of the third millennium.

Interestingly, Wellington's famous Archbishop Francis Redwood, who began as the youngest bishop in the world and lived to become the oldest, clashed with Suzanne Aubert over her welcoming people of all creeds and none. Redwood may have been a popular figure on chatting terms with the Protestant clergy and in the habit of walking with Rabbi van Staveren, but he was not quite so ecumenical when it came to charitable issues. Catholic nuns, he felt, should concentrate on caring for their own. Mother Aubert of course blithely ignored him.

Australia too had its outstanding pioneer figures, including women such as Caroline Chisholm and Mary McKillop. Caroline Chisholm, an English convert who came to Australia in 1838, met migrant ships when they arrived in Sydney harbour, befriending especially young single women, those who were the targets of unscrupulous men in the colony, and helped place them in employment. In a mere 6 years she found work for an incredible 11,000 people. She would sometimes journey into the country with groups of new arrivals, in defiance of the roaming bushrangers who never harmed her convoys. Caroline Chisholm is the only woman ever to be featured on an Australian banknote (Campion 1987:23-25).

Mary McKillop, daughter of a Scot who had studied for the priesthood in Rome, became the first member of the Josephite sisters, a community of teachers started by Fr. Julian Tenison Woods to educate poor children. The sisters, led and encouraged by Mary, refused to accept any government funding, relying on school fees and begging for their survival. Early on they even refused to give piano lessons, the mainstay of many congregations, because the poor did not have pianos (Campion 1987:47-50). Mary McKillop survived excommunication by an irate Franciscan Bishop of Adelaide, and was beatified by John Paul II before enthusiastic Australian crowds on January 19th, 1995.

An interesting Australian character of the earlier 20th century was Dr. Leslie Rumble, a seminary lecturer who converted to Catholicism after looking at a variety of Protestant churches first. He began a Catholic radio station in 1931, and was soon hosting a religious question and answer programme each Sunday. By the time he retired in 1968, he had sold 7 million copies of a book based on his radio programme. He was serenely confident of the

correctness of his replies and the authority of the One True Church (Campion 1987:135). His New Zealand counterpart, retired Marist Fr. G.H. Duggan, still tirelessly gives newspaper readers and others the benefit of his expertise.

Education was in fact a major issue for 19th century Australasian Catholics. A number of denominations opened their own schools early on in both countries. This was not just out of a desire to give children a good basic education, but to ensure they were under the “right” religious and moral influence from an early age. There was a strong secular element as well in the pioneer communities that opposed church control of education. Protestant and Catholic clergy had a battle on their hands – against one another, the government, and these who wanted a secular education system. The Catholics did not have the numbers needed to back their demands, and lacked the support of the historical institutions that would have been available to them in the old world.

The issue was complicated in Australia by the setting up of different state governments. South Australia for example in 1844 had a population that was only 6% Catholic. Most people were Anglican, with Dissenters being the next largest group. There was less sectarian strife than in New South Wales, with its convict origins and much larger Catholic population (Hogan 1987:43).

In spite of Dissenting leaders wanting freedom from government interference in church matters, state aid to churches was extended, and granted to schools as well. Governor George Gipps in 1839 proposed that there be just two kinds of public schools, one for Catholics and the other for the general population. Both would receive state funding. Naturally Protestants complained and the plan was dropped (Hogan 1987:53-54).

Eventually, in spite of opposition, the Catholic school system flourished. In 1833 there were 11 church schools in the whole of Australia. By 1848 this had increased to 48. In 1858 there were 174 Catholic schools. Though the Anglicans were doing very well with government support, Bishop Broughton complained that Catholics had an unfair advantage because of the commitment and availability of celibate clergy and religious. Many of these people worked for nothing, or for little financial reward in the education system. There was some “crossing over” of pupils. Even when church schools were available, not all Catholic children attended them. As well, some Protestant pupils were enrolled at Catholic schools, and both were educated together in the state system. In Ireland mid-century, all denominations attended government-funded primary schools. The powerful Irish Cardinal Cullen, overseer of the mission field, attempted to have “mixed” schools abolished. He believed that state schools were hotbeds of Protestant proselytisation. Within a few years Australian parents who did not send their children to Catholic schools when they were available were refused the sacraments (Jackson 1987:88-89).

When state aid was withdrawn later in the century teaching sisters stepped into the breach. In 1880 there were 815 of them in the country. By 1890 the number had risen to over 2000. In another two decades over 5000 nuns were teaching in Australia (Campion 1987:46).

The New Zealand Education Act of 1877 made state education free, secular and compulsory. Simmons believes Dunedin Bishop Moran's vehement opposition to the secular cause, and the bitterness his campaign aroused, actually contributed to the passing of the Act (Simmons 1978:66). Moran founded the *Tablet* newspaper and stood unsuccessfully for Parliament largely to promote his dogmatic views on education. He shocked a nation that had become accustomed to reasonable Bishops who usually co-operated with civil authority. Many people were keen to see state aid restored to denominational schools, but gave up when they saw that the churches could not reach an agreement among themselves. Catholics were marginalised, and Moran refused not only the sacraments but Christian burial as well to parents who did not send their children to church schools (King 1997:97). Auckland's Bishop Cleary was to continue the debate, at the same time demanding state aid for Catholic schools and condemning the practice of having Scriptural instruction in state schools. He objected to any religious instruction that was not Catholic. This confused stand did little for Catholic credibility, and was opposed by at least some of the other New Zealand bishops.

While Catholic and other mission schools did their best in both countries, neither the church system or the "free, secular and compulsory" state education benefited many Maori and Aborigine. Disease, dislocation and often persecution became their lot. For a time both were believed to be a dying race. European encroachment gradually led to the loss of their religion and traditional way of life. The Maori Wars in New Zealand and settler aggression in Australia damaged the missionary cause and led to some converts giving up their new faith. The Aborigine had no documented agreement like the Treaty of Waitangi to offer them even partial protection against the settlers' rapacious demand for land. There are still many issues to be settled today, especially in Australia.

The First and Second World Wars, with their mass destruction of property, dislocation of millions and huge mortality rates, accelerated the fragmentation and secularisation of society. Many after experiencing Passchendaele and Gallipoli, Leningrad and Dachau and Dresden, found it hard to believe in a personal God who had benevolent control of the universe. Australians and New Zealanders fought both with and against Catholics of other nationalities. Both prayed to the same God, and believed that he was on their side.

Old conflicts were often forgotten with post-war prosperity in the 1950's. Many left rural areas in both countries to seek a better and more satisfying life in the city. Considerable numbers of Maori and Aborigine moved to the cities at this time (King 1997:172-173),

only to find they were often excluded from the better jobs and housing. Refugees and immigrants from all over the world began arriving in the area, bringing new customs and religious views. Gradually the differences between people seemed less important. Though the population increased, church attendance gradually fell. The secular way, always prominent in pioneer days, finally prevailed. Religious observance and belief seemed to many an anachronism, an un-necessary frill to life that served no useful purpose. The changing standards and beliefs of clergy and theologians too bewildered many. Did not the Bible say God was unchanging? Eastern and New Age religion attracted many young people – and some who were not so young. The next generation would become the first to attempt to live without a God. Since the 1960's there has been in the west a steady decline in public confidence in all institutions, not just the Church (*The Tablet*, 19/6/1999:860).

The 1960's and 1970's also saw the beginning of the women's movement. Using forceful and well-researched arguments, educated western women demanded equality with men in all areas of life. Some, such as Mary Daly and Australian Germaine Greer, felt confined and betrayed by the Catholic Church. They wrote books bitterly criticising the Church and the male sex for millennia of abuse of women. Books such as Daly's *Beyond God the Father* (1973) and *Gyn/Ecology* (1979), and Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970), while often extremist in language and theory, gave those who wished to pay attention a whole new way of viewing social, sexual and spiritual relationships in the western world and to some extent beyond. Women from Biblical times to the days of local heroines Mary McKillop and Suzanne Aubert had chafed against the restrictions placed on them by a dominant male leadership. Now there was a whole new structure and philosophy to support women, lay and religious, in their desire for autonomy. All kinds of minority groups joined the fray, demanding as well that their voices be heard and respected.

Much of this debate, and the resulting changes in community attitudes, largely passed Opus Dei by. The founder continued to speak of the vital importance of apostolate, the joys of Catholic marriage with large families – and the indissolubility of these marriages (*Conversations with Monsignor Escriva de Balaguer* 1993:141-155). Members of the prelate arrived in Australia just as the Second Vatican Council was beginning its deliberations (West 1987:162). We will look in later chapters at the far-reaching changes this Council brought about, and the situation of the Church today. The hierarchical church still stands, but much of its power has gone forever. Its members, both lay and religious, espouse such a bewildering variety of world views it is little short of a miracle that they are still contained within the same organisation (Collins 1986:88). Much of the future success or otherwise of the Church will depend on the character and philosophy of the next Pope. Both traditionalists and liberals are naturally praying for the Pope of their choice.

There is still in both countries a rather blinkered nostalgia for what are seen as the old certainties. Catholics United for the Faith's small membership battles for adherence to the

letter of the law. AD 2000 magazine was founded in Australia in 1988 to set people straight. "I don't want confusion in my Archdiocese," pronounced the cleric pictured on the first cover (*NZ Tablet*, 22/6/1988:12). Unfortunately these well-meaning attempts, rather than grappling with the complex moral and social problems that face the world at the turn of the millennium, have people looking over their shoulders to a mythical golden past that was not golden for many, and has now gone forever.

Today's Catholic papers are an interesting mix of old and new thinking. The *NZ Catholic* of February 28th, 1999, carried articles on Bill Clinton's misdemeanours, spiritual direction, and feminism and doctrine. The editorial warned readers of Monsanto's genetic engineering of plants. An interesting selection of letters commented on age-old concerns such as divorce and re-marriage, paganism and the need for mission, and the current shortage of priests (*NZ Catholic*, 28/2/1999:9-10). The style of some letters is such that they could have been written 100 years ago.

The next issue of the *NZ Catholic* carried two even more interesting statements on March 14th, both on the same page. The first shocked many readers. The Holy See had made a diplomatic approach to the English government on behalf of deposed Chilean dictator General Pinochet, for "humanitarian reasons." The other quoted the Pope as saying that "love for the poor must be preferential, but not exclusive." The leaders of society, he said, were being neglected, and it was they who provided jobs and "other solutions" for the poor. This is the message Opus Dei has been spreading world wide, and living out for decades. A special meeting was called in Genoa to discuss giving "ethical formation to society's entrepreneurs" (*NZ Catholic*, 14/3/1999:6). No mention was made of the fact that the rich, especially in impoverished areas such as Central and South America, have often gained their positions and wealth through the labour of the poor.

By this stage, few readers may have been surprised at the Pope's statement. Though John Paul, *TIME* magazine's Man of the Year in 1994, has long been respected as an intellectual and philosopher, a freedom fighter and charismatic man of the people, he is also seen, as journalist John Elson pointed out, as the product of a conservative, patriarchal church; and increasingly given to making autocratic statements on sensitive issues (*TIME*, 26/12/1994-2/1/1995:29). While renowned for his all-embracing concern for the whole human race, and at the time seeming to listen intently to others's ideas and concerns, this much-travelled Pope will nevertheless not deviate in any way from traditional Catholic stands. Unquestioning obedience on the part of the faithful is seen as the only valid response to his pronouncements. He corrects priests and theologians whose opinions differ from his, and for years has been appointing more and more bishops who share his world-view, such as Opus Dei's Juan Luis Cipriani of Lima, now a Cardinal. The Church's brief official opening of mind and spirit to the outer world seems to be nearing its end.

We have seen that the Catholic presence in Australia and New Zealand began more or less by accident, with explorers, adventurers, runaways and convicts bringing their Catholicism with them to this far corner of the world. The first official religious presence in both countries was Protestant and especially Anglican. It would be decades before Catholic priests were allowed to work freely in the area, offering pastoral care to members of their Church, and instructing converts as well. In spite of the early French Marist presence in New Zealand, both countries in time developed a Catholicism with mainly Irish roots. From the start Australia and New Zealand had a strongly secular element in their community, a hard-headed pioneer core that saw value only in practical endeavours that produced concrete results. Religion was a distraction and a weakness to such people. Catholic/Protestant boundaries were often breached because of the necessities of pioneer life, and gradually became less important. Twentieth century wars and social change broke down more boundaries, and also led to falling church attendance as people gave up on organised religion, or sought alternative means of religious expression.

Opus Dei arrived in this part of the world during the Vatican II deliberations. John XXIII “opened the windows” at the Vatican to let fresh air into the ancient structures, but it seems that under John Paul II the windows are closing again. Opus Dei has flourished under the present Pope, whose views it shares. I will explain how this unusual organisation had its beginnings in the visions of a young Aragonese priest, and after a slow introduction gradually spread around the world. Opus Dei is a controversial body with an unusual structure. I plan to compare it with other “different” Catholic groups and consider the possibility that it may be, as is often alleged, a sect or cult operating within the wider Church. We will briefly consider the life and personality of the founder of Opus Dei, and then look at the organisation’s arrival in Australia and New Zealand. The various activities of members in this part of the world will be examined in some detail, and progress made by the organisation considered.