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Faith, Ireland and Empire: The Life of Patrick Joseph Clune Csr 1864-1935

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McCarthy, A. (2016). *Faith, Ireland and Empire: The Life of Patrick Joseph Clune Csr 1864-1935*. *Pastoral Liturgy*, 46(3), 11-12.

Christopher Dowd. *Faith, Ireland and Empire: The Life of Patrick Joseph Clune CSSR 1864-1935*. Strathfield NSW: St Pauls, 2014.

This biography of Archbishop Patrick Clune was launched at the same time as Odhran O'Brien's biography of Bishop Martin Griver.¹ Both ecclesial biographies are important additions to the historical understanding of the development of the Catholic community of Australia, and in particular Western Australia. The historical detail also gives valuable insights to the wider community of settlers and how the politics of settlement developed. Western Australia is currently experiencing something of a 'bust' compared to the 'boom' of previous years with the high price of iron ore and the enthusiastic markets that encouraged vast construction development. From the reading of these two biographies, this pattern has been around for a long time.

Bishop Martin Griver took over the management of a missionary diocese that was struggling under the effects of financial mismanagement, a time of 'bust'. He brought the fledgling local Church into a more secure ecclesiastical governance and then handed his work over to his protégé and coadjutor Matthew Gibney who was ordained a bishop on 23 January 1887 in the cathedral that Griver had built.² Bishop Gibney led the rapidly growing Catholic community through a time of 'boom' with the gold rush and the huge influx of settlers from the Eastern parts of Australia and overseas. By the end of his term however, Bishop Gibney had eroded the financial affairs of the diocese to a state of "cataclysmic bankruptcy"³ and was made to resign so that Patrick Clune could take over and once again restore good governance. The 'boom' times of the gold rush came to an end and there was by then a serious need to build more churches and schools to accommodate the new migrants. In January 1911 it was officially announced that Fr Patrick Clune was the new bishop of Perth and it was greeted with great enthusiasm.⁴ Clune was strongly supported by clergy and laity in his appointment and this was the only reason that he felt he could therefore accept the "heavily mortgaged mitre of Perth".⁵ The twenty four years of 'boom' now had moved to 'bust' and the new Bishop Clune had to rectify the whole situation. This is described in detail in the second half of the book.

The first half of the book is a fascinating journey pieced together from a large number of sources. Unlike Griver, Clune did not write lots of personal letters and journals so his actual point of view can only be discerned through the lens of his actions and from secondary sources. Growing up in Ireland through a time of poverty and conflict he was encouraged and supported by others outside his family because of his natural intelligence and personality, even though he was only an average student. He was very young, only 22, when he was ordained to the priesthood on 24 June 1886⁶ and shortly afterwards sailed for Australia where he was assigned to the diocese of Goulbourn. It was a time of high emigration from Ireland and already 3 of his siblings had moved to Australia and they were later joined by another brother and their father. To his surprise, he was given a teaching appointment and his gregarious personality assisted him in his work. St Patrick's College was staffed by diocesan clergy until it was given into the care of the Christian Brothers. The young clergy were not trained teachers and were given very heavy workloads which eventually caused the young Fr Clune to become ill. Following his recovery he moved to pastoral activity which really suited him much better.

Clune had a strong capacity as a preacher and orator which eventually led him to join the Redemptorist Congregation, a desire ignited by a mission held in the Goulburn area in 1889. He had previously thought that he would prefer monastic life but that was not available at first. Now he was confronted by a serious desire to be part of a monastic discipline and deeply impressed by the Redemptorist community. Once he made the decision he had to repay the Goulburn diocese for his seminary training and eventually he returned to England to join the Redemptorist novitiate. He became a very good missionary and then a particularly important event took place. The Irish part of the Redemptorist Congregation had long hated being under the English province. Once the Irish were a separate province of their own then they were assigned Australia as part of their jurisdiction. The members of the congregation could decide whether to stay with the English province or move to the new Irish province and Fr Clune decided to go with the Irish. The involvement of these men with the Australian Church was very

¹ Odhran O'Brien, *Martin Griver: Unearthed* (Strathfield NSW: St Pauls, 2014).

² *Ibid.*, 233.

³ Christopher Dowd, *Faith, Ireland and Empire: The Life of Patrick Joseph Clune CSSR 1864-1935* (Strathfield NSW: St Pauls, 2014), 116.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

formative and the details of this history deeply resonate with the development of my own Catholic childhood attending Saturday novenas and having parish missions in the lead up to the Second Vatican Council.

Fr Clune eventually was placed in the diocese of Perth at the North Perth Monastery and became a popular preacher which helped him develop a rich network of friends. When he eventually became bishop those networks were an important support. In the first decade of his bishopric he had to contend with controlling diocesan debt, he secured metropolitan state for his diocese and thus becoming an Archbishop, he pacified the previous bishop and undertook his *ad limina* visit. Besides all this, global war broke out in 1914 and it had an immediate impact on the Catholic community as several thousand young men volunteered for military service.⁷ By 1916 Archbishop Clune also enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces and became a Lieutenant Colonel as he saw the war as “a glorious struggle for justice and freedom on the part of the Empire and its allies.”⁸ The Archbishop saw firsthand the appalling loss of life and horrendous conditions in the trenches and wrote a report to clearly define what was necessary in the deployment of chaplains and the support that they needed in order to be fruitful in their ministry. On his return to Western Australia in 1917 he was able to tell the community first hand of the horrors of war and yet he also saw it within a framework of “meaning and hope by invoking the necessity of civic virtue and the expectation of reward and peace in the after-life.”⁹ He was later seen to be in direct opposition to Bishop Daniel Mannix, coadjutor in Melbourne, who was leading the anti-conscription push in the public arena. Archbishop Clune and his Anglican colleague, Chaplain-General Riley made it clear that they supported conscription which defused some of Mannix’ power. Clune was speaking from actual experience on the war front and felt that it was a just war whereas Mannix felt that it was the “bitter fruit of capitalist rivalry.”¹⁰

Following the First World War the Irish Troubles became a significant cause of discontent in Western Australia and Archbishop Clune was required to carefully lead his Catholic community in the context of increasing sectarianism. Clune was always royalist and conciliatory but very clear about the lack of justice in the treatment of the Irish people. In 1920 he visited Ireland again and was in the thick of the troubles. He secretly met with Michael Collins and they worked together to formulate the conditions for a ceasefire, and end to hostilities, so that the Irish could readily prepare what was necessary to develop proposals for negotiations with the British. Clune’s intermediary discussions with Lloyd George on behalf of Sinn Fein and the Irish people had only one objective; to put a stop to the violence ripping the country apart. The British wanted all arms surrendered but that would mean a full capitulation, not a ceasefire. His peace mission failed, perhaps to the unpredictable nature of Lloyd George’s leadership, but his efforts were deeply appreciated by his own people.

Another major issue for Archbishop Clune was the cathedral. It was beginning to look shabby and was not adequate for the size of the congregation having been built 50 years prior by Griver. Having been impressed in 1918 by the opening of the Geraldton Cathedral which was designed and built by Mons John Hawes, he brought Hawes to Perth to work on a combination of new and old, retaining the original and adding new sanctuary and transepts. Some of the other clergy wanted a completely new building and eventually in Hawes’ absence and different plan was accepted. In 1926 the new foundation stone was laid and the cathedral was extended with Clune ensuring that the old blended with the new and that the stained glass windows and the artworks gathered would be truly beautiful and bring people to God. However, only the sanctuary, the side chapels, the transepts and the sacristies were completed because of the Great Depression and the absence of sufficient funds. Eventually, a complete renovation holding the old and the new was not completed until 2009, with many Archbishops serving in between.

Archbishop Clune died in May 1935¹¹ and was mourned by a great many people from all walks of life. He led a remarkable life and greatly contributed to the Church and the Australian community. This biography is a worthy addition to the history of the Catholic Church and of Western Australia.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 186.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 343.