Chapter Ten

'She Came From a Fine Catholic Family'[1]: The Religious Daughters of the Maitland Diocese.

Murray's funeral on 12 July 1909 had brought his diocese together in an unprecedented way. It is striking, but not unexpected, that the newspaper accounts of his obsequies should have been silent about one group who were integral to the diocese — the religious women. Although the reports do not include them they were undoubtedly there and had played their part behind the scenes. These daughters, spiritually and (for the most part) physically, of the Maitland Diocese, embodied Murray's hopes for his people in a central and distinctive way and they had been prominent in their realization. From all backgrounds and from all parts of the diocese, these women were the gift of families of the Catholic community. Over three hundred entered religious life in the Maitland Diocese during Murray's episcopacy. Through their schools and special identification with domestic virtue they both extolled and exemplified the character of Catholic womanhood and family life, thus playing a key role in the development of the diocese. Understanding who these women were, where they came from and why they committed themselves to the church, is essential to understanding the making of the diocese and the moulding of its people.

The formal part of a woman's entry into religious life began with her profession. This moving and highly symbolic ceremony marked her out in many ways as different from her married or spinster sisters. The outward signs of her consecration — veil, ring and cross — designated her separation from the world as the bride of Christ. The cross, the pre-eminent Christian symbol, with its inherent tensions and contradictions, was especially integral to the life of the religious woman. The gospel imperative to 'take up your cross daily and follow me' inspired and encouraged the joyful acceptance of suffering. The paradox of dying to the

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1 *Obituaries of the Sisters of St Dominic, of the Holy Name Province*, Book 2, 1930-1958, p. 27, OPA.

world and to self in order to live was synonymous with Christian and, in more obvious ways, religious life .

The popular view of women religious has stereotyped them as soulful, insipid, sentimental and usually young. Both Catholics and non-Catholics alike have tended to isolate nunly qualities as being those of submission, obedience and sexual denial. On the one hand, the Catholic Church presents these qualities as positive. Bishop Matthew Quinn of Bathurst, for example, enjoined each young Sister of Mercy on her profession day :

> Be grateful, remain silent, dutiful, obedient, servant to the bishop and long suffering until death releases you to your heavenly reward.[2]

On the other hand, non-Catholics usually saw these same qualities as negative and even destructive. Edmund Blair Leighton's nineteenth-century painting, 'The Vows', portrays a young nun climbing the convent wall to meet her lover, full of yearning for him and seeking rescue from an abnormal way of life. Images of the unfeeling, sexually repressed female or of the young woman who had forsworn the world because of an unhappy love affair were, and are, common.[3] The laity, including some Catholics, have long found it difficult to comprehend why a young woman would choose religious life in preference to the married state. The reality is more complicated.

All of those who entered religious life as members of a sisterhood in the Maitland Diocese would have seen it as an act of special commitment to God and the church. As the catechism had taught them, 'God made us to know, love and serve Him here on earth; and to see and

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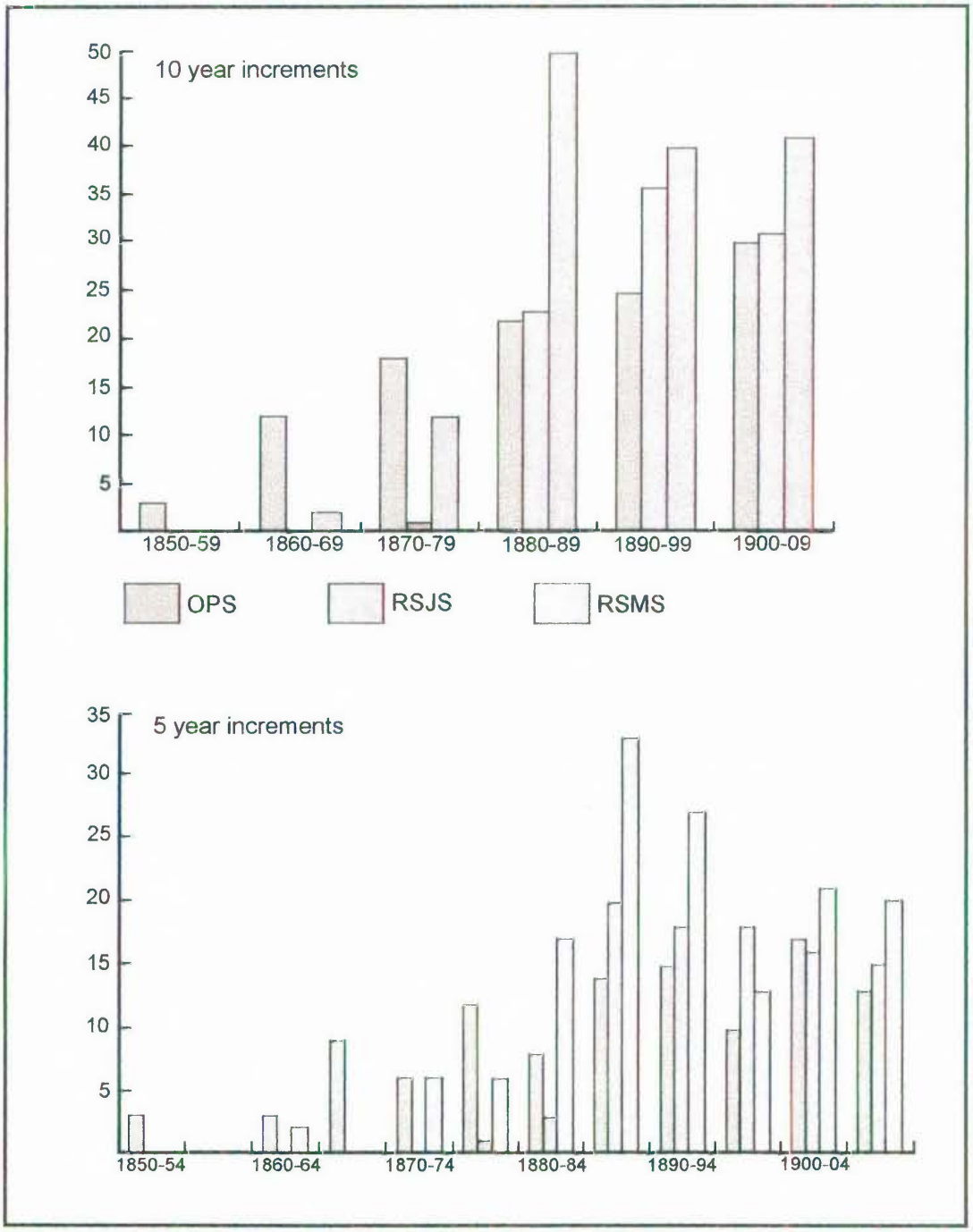
2 *Freeman's Journal*, 19 February 1870.

3 There is a long tradition of negativeness even hostility to nuns because their lives appear to be an aberration of a normal and acceptable way of life. S. P. Casteras, 'Virgin Vows: The Early Victorian Artists' Portrayal of Nuns and Novices', *Victorian Studies, Vol.*. 24, No. 2, Winter 1981, p.180. For a discussion of attitudes to Anglican nuns, see J. S. Reed, '"A Female Movement": The Feminization of Nineteenth-Century Anglo Catholicism', *Anglican and Episcopal History Journal*, 1988, pp.199-238.

Religious Professions, 1850-1909



Profession 1850-1909, Comparison; Maitland Dominicans(OPS)/Lochinvar Josephites(RSJS)/ Singleton Mercies(RSMS).

enjoy Him for ever in Heaven'.[4] Religious life was a unique way of loving and serving God and of attaining salvation. We should not underestimate the strength of the commitment of sisters to their chosen path for it gave focus to their very reason for being. There were, however, other forces attracting young women to religious life. High levels of recruitment to sisterhoods in the second half of the nineteenth century reflected a resurgence of interest in the conventual life which had many aspects besides the spiritual.

Paradoxically, religious life could and did offer many worldly advantages. It could free women to lead lives which could in some circumstances be far more distinguished than those of their married or unmarried sisters. Unfettered by marriage, motherhood and or the care of ageing parents, religious women received an education and could gain power, position and security, experiences usually denied women. Nuns, in their capacity as major superiors and as administrators of large schools and hospitals, enjoyed a professional status and an area of influence equal to those of many men. These particular roles partly explain the negative image held by those, especially men, who reacted against the self-sufficiency of nuns. On the other hand, opportunities for power and position — the impressive role models to be found in some senior nuns — also explain some of the attractiveness of religious life for young women.

Religious life gave a woman certain guarantees and freedoms. Once she was a vowed member of a community she was provided with shelter, food, clothing and care until death. She was assured of suitable and worthwhile work which gave reason to her life. Hers was not a useless nor wasted existence. Nor was it one of 'cultivated lassitude', a state so often attributed to some nineteenth-century women of the privileged classes.[5] By her vow of poverty a sister renounced the independent use of

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4 *Catechism of Christian Doctrine, Adapted For Australia by the Second and Third Plenary Councils*, Sydney, c.1895.

5 Robert Dunne, Archbishop of Brisbane, was highly critical of his blood sister's seemingly useless life, that she confined herself to the parlour and cultivated invalidism. For a full discussion of Dunne's attitude see, N. Byrne, *Robert Dunne 1830-1917: Archbishop of Brisbane*, Brisbane, 1991, pp. 34-35.

her own property. However, she actually retained its ownership and could dispose of it by will or deed of gift to whomsoever she wished. This was possible even in those sisterhoods, such as the Sisters of St Joseph, which did not require a dowry.[6] A married woman, by contrast, handed over all her goods to her husband until the Married Woman's Property Act of 1879, which wrought significant but only gradual changes for women.[7]

The glamour and excitement associated with religious life could play their part in a young woman's decision to enter the convent. Local newspapers frequently reported the clothing ceremony held in convent chapels, and invitations to attend were often extended to the public. One correspondent described the 'immense congregation assembled at St Patrick's Church, Singleton, to witness the solemn and especially interesting ceremony of the clothing of five young ladies'.[8] The description of the five girls dressed as brides being presented to the bishop, and their acceptance of new religious names and simple religious habits, had its strong emotional appeal. On another occasion a reporter described the festivities which followed the ceremony. There was

> an enormous bride cake from the establishment of Mr Abel of Newcastle prettily made from a design by Mr McDonald (father of one of the brides) - built in four tiers - embellished with the names of the professing sisters and the coat of arms of his Lordship, the Bishop.[9]

These ceremonies marking the entrance of a young woman into religious life had all the trappings of a wedding day for, indeed, here was a young bride giving her life to her divine bridegroom.

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6 S. Campbell-Jones, *In Habit: An Anthropological Study of Working Nuns*, London, 1979, pp. 73-77.

7 For a discussion of the Married Women's Property Act, see, J. Mackinolty and H. Radi (eds) *In Pursuit of Justice: Australian Women and the Law, 1788-1979*, Sydney, 1979, pp. 66-75. For some insights regarding the economic dependency of married women, see M. Lake, 'Identifying the Masculinist Context', *Historical Studies*,, Vol. 22, No. 86, April 1986, pp. 10-13 and 122.

8 *Freeman's Journal*, 14 August 1880.

9 *Ibid.*,, 17 June 1890.

The idea of religious life conformed with the highest ideals of late nineteenth-century attitudes to piety and womanhood.[10] While the general view of nuns collectively was not always sympathetic, attitudes to individual sisterhoods and to their members could be very different. The sentiments expressed by Edward Butler, a Catholic M.P., in a speech to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly in 1870, for example, were most positive. Referring to the Sisters of Charity, he claimed that

> those noble women were the most perfect offspring of Christ's church that has ever appeared in the world since the days of Christ himself.

Butler's idealization of religious women as a perfect species was a common individual reaction.[11] Religious women were also seen as something of a mystery and as other-worldly. Even making allowance for the sentimental hyperbole of one priest of the Maitland Diocese who eulogised them as 'angels' and a 'portion of earth's purest creatures', women religious were commonly idealised and placed on a pedestal.[12] They had a very special place.

The women of the Maitland Diocese could enter one of the three sisterhoods which Murray brought to, and settled in, his diocese. They were, in the order of their coming: the Dominicans, 1867, the Sisters of Mercy, 1875, and the Diocesan Sisters of St Joseph, 1883. Each sisterhood came with its own distinctive apostolate, traditions, ethos and status within the church. Questions of tradition and status influenced the aspirant's choice among these sisterhoods.

Of the three congregations, as I have said in Chapter Six, the Dominican Order was the oldest and most prestigious within the church as a whole. Its foundation dated from 1206, when nine women of noble birth approached a Spanish aristocrat, Dominic de Guzman, for spiritual direction and protection from the errors of the Albigensian heresy.

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10 M. Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920*, London, 1985, p. 5.

11 Speech by Edward Butler, New South Wales Legislative Assembly, 2 September 1870, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 September, 1870.

12 Father Andrew Phelan in his farewell address to the Maitland Diocese, *Maitland Mercury*, 29 May 1869.

Dominic, already a priest of his diocese when he began his fight against the Albigensians in 1204, established the Convent of Holy Preaching for these supplicant women at Prouille in France. Here they followed a rule which Dominic wrote for them, comprising the observance of the three monastic vows, the canonical office and the practice of silence and fasting. The new sisterhood established a school for converts from the Albigensian heresy and for children of the nobility.[13] Only some ten years later did Dominic himself found his order of men. That same year, 1216, Honorius III confirmed and approved the Order of Friars and Nuns, that is, the Order of Preachers and Preacheresses.[14]

The intellectual endeavours of the Dominican friars, which replaced the traditional manual labours of other mediaeval monks, led them outside the walls of their monasteries. Establishing schools and preaching in almost every university city throughout Europe, the Dominicans became confidants of, and advisers to, emperors and kings.[15] In the established hierarchy of religious orders, the Dominicans number among those orders with solemn vows and papal exemption.[16] Canon law, the leadership and subsequent canonization of Dominic and the Dominicans' unique rôle in the church assured their high standing and status. Their fight against heresy, their place in the Inquisition and their scholarship similarly gave them power and prestige, all of which reflected upon the Dominican Nuns. The sisterhood was an enclosed order, and its recruitment of daughters of the nobility and wealthy added to its lustre.[17]

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13 The most scholarly and insightful study of the Dominicans still remains, M. H. Vicaire, *St Dominic and His Times*, London, 1964. pp. 119-123. For a history of the Dominicans in New South Wales, see A. O'Hanlon, *Dominican Pioneers in New South Wales*, Strathfield, 1949.

14 Vicaire, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 153.

16 For a discussion of the difference in status between nuns with solemn vows and religious women with simple vows, see M. Dortel-Claudot, *The Evolution of the Canonical Status of Religious Institutes with Simple Vows from the Sixteenth Century Until the new Code*, R. M. MacGinley, (trans.) Institute of Religious Studies, 1989. See, also, 'Admission, Vows and Dispensation, Secularization and Migration '. In particular, note that 'the professed religious may migrate from one order to another more severe; from this point of view, the Carthusian Order is the most perfect'. *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 16 vols, New York, 1907-17, Vol. 5, p. 756. It was not possible for a member to transfer to a religious order lower in the hierarchy. It was possible, however, to transfer up the scale.

17 Vicaire, *op. cit.*, p. 118 and O'Hanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-18.

The circumstances of the establishment and traditions of the Sisters of Mercy were very different. With a foundation in Ireland in 1837, these women had their sources of security, too, both in their Celtic traditions and in the person of their foundress, Catherine McAuley. An extraordinary woman, Catherine was wealthy, well educated and admired by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. She attracted women of her own class to her cause and, most importantly, gained the support of bishops, who were ready to endorse her proposals for educating the poor of Ireland. The uncloistered state of the new foundation drew women to the sisterhood. Often referred to as the 'walking sisters', they taught in parish schools, visited the sick and poor in their homes and worked in hospitals.[18] While these sisters did not have centuries of tradition to call upon, they had an inspirational leader whose actions and writings, even after her death, continued to support and encourage their endeavours.[19]

The recognition of a founder or foundress is crucial to the iconography and piety of a religious congregation.[20] Although Catherine McAuley died in 1841, just fourteen years after establishing the Sisters of Mercy, she had greatly influenced those who later became the founding members of the sisterhood throughout England, America and Australia. Her sisters had taken great pains to record the 'many beautiful spiritual lessons, so simply and lovingly offered by the saintly foundress'.[21] These lessons were put into the hands of each sister so that she could return to the words of the foundress for direction and inspiration. The many books written about Catherine kept alive the memory of her personality and

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18 M. Bertrand Degnan, *Mercy Unto Thousands*, Dublin, 1958, p. 134 and A. Bolster, *Catherine McAuley in Her Own Words*, Dublin, 1978, p. 12.

19 *A Guide for the Religious Called Sisters of Mercy*, Parts 1, 2 and 3, London, 1888; *Familiar Instructions of Rev. Mother McAuley, Foundress of the Institute of the Religious Sisters of Mercy, Dublin, Ireland*, St Louis, 1927 and *A Little Book of Practical Sayings: Advises and Prayers of Our Reverend Foundress Mother Mary Catherine McAuley*, Dublin, n.d., RSMSA.

20 For a discussion of the impact of foundresses on their early followers and later generations, see M. E. Kenel, 'Women Religious As Mentors', *Human Development*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1989, pp. 5-9.

21 *Familiar Instructions of Rev. Mother McAuley*, St Louis, Mo., 1888, p. vii. See, also, *Guide for the Religious Called Sisters of Mercy*, London, 1888, Parts 1, 2 and 3.

spirit.[22] As a consequence the foundress, even in the remote Australian colonies, had a continuing presence in each Mercy convent.

The Sisters of St Joseph did not have the strength and support of a charismatic foundress such as Catherine McAuley to call upon. Although the Diocesan Josephites claimed Julian Tenison Woods as their founder, their devotion to him was unofficial and private, and Mary MacKillop, the co-founder of the original Josephite group, was never acknowledged. This situation arose because of the controversy surrounding Tenison Woods himself and because of episcopal antagonism towards Mary MacKillop.[23] That the diocesan Sisters of St Joseph had no acclaimed founder made them a unique group within the nineteenth-century Australian Church and added to their sense of insecurity. It was not until the 1960s, in response to the demands of Vatican Council II, that the Lochinvar Sisters of St Joseph began to consider their origins and to build on their association with Mary MacKillop.[24] Nor did the Sisters of St Joseph have anything resembling the traditions, scholarship and litany of canonized saints of the Dominicans. Criticism and suspicion had attended the original foundation of the Sisters of St Joseph and conflict and coercion had marked the beginning of the diocesan order.[25] Given these origins, the development of the Lochinvar sisters was closely allied to their search for acceptability, for orthodoxy and for legitimacy.[26] Their class as well as

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22 See those listed above and also, M. V. Hartnett, *The Life of Reverend Mother Catherine McAuley: Foundress of the Order of Mercy*, Dublin, 1864, By a Sister of Mercy, Anonymous, Life *of Catherine McAuley: Foundress and First Superior of the Institute of the Religious Sisters of Mercy*, New York, 1887, and T. A. Carroll, *Leaves From the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy in Four Volumes*, New York, 1881, 1883, 1889, 1895.

23 For a broader discussion of these issues, see B. Zimmerman, 'The Search For Legitimacy: Mother Mary Aquin Leehy and the Sisters of St Joseph of Lochinvar, 1890-1960', M Litt., University of New England, Armidale, 1987, pp. 8-32.

24 As part of the renewal encouraged by Vatican Council II all Religious Congregations were called upon to rediscover the spirit and charism of their respective founder or foundress. W. M. Abbott, (gen ed.) *The Documents of Vatican Council II, 'Perfectae Caritatis'*, Melbourne, 1967, pp.462-483,

25 P. Gardiner, *An Extraordinary Australian: Mary MacKillop*, Alexandria, 1994, pp. 57-78. The foundation was uncanonical in Quinn's use of the professed Sister Hyacinth Quinlan who had not been released from her vows in Mary MacKillop's sisterhood before becoming part of Quinn's new group.

26 For an account of these circumstances at Bathurst, see Zimmerman, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-32.

the circumstances and nature of their foundation left them more vulnerable than the Dominicans and Sisters of Mercy.

Just as the circumstances, origins and development of the three religious sisterhoods guided the choice made by the potential novice, so, too, did the characteristic spirit of each group. The ideal sister varied from one congregation to the other. These distinguishing qualities are by their very nature difficult to establish precisely. An integral part of the life of each sisterhood, they were imbibed and almost taken for granted by their initiates. In trying to capture the distinctive ethos of each, we must rely on a few written sources which require close scrutiny. It is necessary to read between the lines, to interpret the gaps and to listen to the silences. On the surface, the language appears bland and benign, but the conventual life produces its own 'genres of expression' and hence its own distinctive meaning.[27] It was the unique spirit as much as the inspiration of the respective founders which attracted young women to the ranks of sisterhoods.

Our major source for this purpose are the obituaries, profiles and jubilee booklets which the respective congregations compiled over the years. Although some obituaries date as late as the 1930s, a period well outside the years of Murray's episcopacy, they nevertheless personified idealized qualities which remained constant until the changes wrought by Vatican Council II in the 1960s. On one level, these sources are simple records of the family background and lives of the sisters. On another, they enshrine those aspects of religious life to which each religious community was committed.[28] It should be understood that the anonymous authors of these obituaries, by training and socialization, were not given to praising themselves or one another paradoxically. The very essence of religious

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27 G. Dening, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language: Passion, Power and Theatre on the Bounty*, Cambridge, 1992, p. 5. Dening maintains that he experiences the past by 'the genres of its expression and the ways of its preservation'. As an ethnographic historian his challenge is to represent not just change but the processes of change.

28 These records tend to be very brief and for some sisters no details exist because records were either not kept or destroyed. Religious women of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century had a great penchant for cleaning and ridding the convent of accumulated papers. For this reason some of the early histories of the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of St Joseph have been lost.

life demanded self-effacement, conformity and uniformity. Sisters were discouraged from focusing upon, and giving attention to, themselves. That the following comments were made at all, albeit after the sister was dead, makes them even more valuable for the present purpose. These records provide one small window through which we can observe the varied idealism of the three women's orders.

The three had a number of common priorities. Each sisterhood, in recording aspects of the lives of its members, idealized certain shared virtues. Prized by all were endurance and steadfastness in prayer. One of the highest accolades which could be paid to a sister related to her prayer life; that 'she had a great spirit of prayer',[29] 'a generous and prayerful spirit',[30] 'a great love of the Blessed Sacrament',[31] and that she spent 'every free moment in prayer in the chapel'.[32] Other virtues are obvious in statements such as 'she was a self effacing, humble religious',[33] 'a sweet and gentle teacher',[34] 'a simple, gentle person'[35] and 'quietly efficient'.[36] Endurance, manifested in uncomplaining stoicism in the face of pain, suffering and long illness, was highly regarded.[37] Apart from the personal qualities of the individual woman, the obituary might remark that 'she came from a fine Catholic family',[38] was 'born of holy parents'[39] and had a 'highly respected family who were generous benefactors'.[40] That she came from a 'family and home such as John O'Brien would have lauded' was one comment.[41]

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29 *Obituaries of the Sisters of St Dominic of the Holy Name Province*, Book 1, 1867-1929, p. 5, OPA.

30 *His Mercy Endures Forever, 1875-1975*, Singleton, 1975, p.4, RSMSA.

31 Profile of Catherine Barry, RSJLA.

32 *Obituaries of the Sisters of St Dominic of the Holy Name Province*, Book 2, 1930-1958, p. 1, OPA.

33 *Ibid.*, Book 1, 1867-1929, p. 44, OPA.

34 *Ibid.*, Book 1, 1867-1929, p. 1, OPA.

35 Profile of Joseph McLaughlin, RSJLA.

36 *St Aloysius Hamilton, 1915-1984*, Newcastle, 1984, p. 14.

37 *Obituaries of the Sisters of St Dominic of the Holy Name Province*, Book 1, 1867-1929, p. 40, OPA

38 *Ibid.*, Book 2, 1930-1958, p. 27.,OPA.

39 Profile of Loyola McDonald, RSJLA.

40 Profile of Margaret Mary Murphy, RSJLA.

41 Kieran Keogh, Obituary Notice, *Newcastle and Maitland Catholic Sentinel*, 1 June 1955, RSMSA. John O'Brien (1879-1952), that is Father Patrick Hartigan, came from Yass studied at Manly College and was ordained in 1903. K.T. Livingston, *The Emergence of An Australian Catholic Priesthood, 1835-1915*, Sydney 1977, pp. 130-131. He became well-known as an author of popular verse, in which he

Each sisterhood outwardly expressed its ideals in teaching and efforts in this regard were duly acknowledged. Epitaphs such as she did 'splendid work for the benefit of Catholic education in the diocese'; she was 'a teacher of rare ability and unlimited patience' and she was 'an outstanding infants' teacher', were common.[42] However the sisterhoods brought different approaches to their teaching. Dominican traditions of learning, traditions in which the nuns took great pride, underpinned their schooling of the children of the diocese.[43] The teaching abilities of the Dominicans were not measured merely in terms of results, although, no doubt these were important. One sister who died in 1911 was honoured for 'her great work in New South Wales on behalf of religious education'. She was described as 'a keen educationalist who encouraged the building of up-to-date schools'. Most importantly, however, she 'urged sending sisters to university to equip them more efficiently for the schools'.[44] Such a proposal was quite revolutionary but it reflected the way in which Dominicans saw themselves and the need, as they perceived it, for the highest possible secular education. Sisters were praised for being 'fervent in prayer and earnest in study',[45] 'a brilliant woman and diligent student',[46] for promoting 'higher learning for sisters'[47] and 'throughout her long life for remaining a student'.[48] True to the Dominican spirit, scholarship and intellectual labours held a high place for the Maitland Dominicans in their assessment of their deceased sisters.

Dominicans and Josephites were in marked contrast with each other. The Sisters of St Joseph also stressed schooling, but their emphasis was very different. Instead of learning for its own sake, they concentrated on students' results. Because of their shaky and dubious origins, these

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idealises Catholic family life. *Around the Boree Log and Other Verses*, Sydney, 1990 [1921].

42 Francis Healy, Obituary Notice, *Freeman's Journal*, 15 August 1886, RSMSA, Baptist Mc Donnell, Obituary Notice, *ibid.*, *and* 10 January 1935, RSMSA. Obituary Notice, Austin Dwyer, Newspaper cutting, c. May 1970, RSMSA.

43 *Obituaries of the Sisters of St Dominic of the Holy Name Province*, Book 1, 1867-1929, p. 35 and p. 48, Book 2, 1930-1958, p. 14, OPA

44 *Ibid.*, Book 1, p. 23, OPA.

45 *Ibid.*, Book 1, p. 13, OPA.

46 *Ibid.*, Book 1, p. 44, OPA.

47 *Ibid.*, Book 1, p. 45, OPA.

48 *Ibid.*, Book 2, p. 64, OPA.

women were intent upon establishing and building a solid reputation. 'A career full of splendid results' was one accolade.[49] Descriptions such as she was 'a pillar in educational work'[50] and that 'she laid the faith foundation on which future generations would build',[51] show what store they placed upon solid academic achievement. The Josephites were also aware of the need to prove themselves as a religious community. We find recorded that one woman 'laid the foundation and set the standards for religious and apostolic commitment'. 'Prayer, dedication and loyalty', virtues upon which the 'institute had been built and sustained',[52] distinguished this particular sister.

The obituaries of many of the Sisters of St Joseph highlight and praise 'ordinariness'. The fact that a woman 'led the ordinary life of a Sister of St Joseph' counted for much in the Josephite community.[53] By contrast, the Dominicans extolled the extraordinariness of their members. One Dominican sister was remembered as 'a woman of rich culture, outstanding mental endowments and striking personality'.[54] The Dominicans were also ready to praise physical attributes. One of them was described as 'fairly tall, slim, graceful, with a manner that combined elegance with warm friendliness'.[55] That a sister was 'tall, dignified and graceful in appearance',[56] was evidence of a gift to be acknowledged. These particular accolades point back to the genteel and aristocratic origins of the Dominican order and to the sisters' awareness of them. At the same time such sentiments were at odds with the self-effacement and anonymity characteristic of religious women and especially the wearing of a habit.

While the Maitland Dominicans held dear to their traditions as Dominicans, they were also conscious of their Irish origins. Initially they

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49 Profiles of Bertrand Crowe and Gonzaga Connolly, RSJLA.
50 Profile of Bertrand Crowe, RSJLA.
51 Profile of Joseph McLaughlin, RSJLA.
52 Profile of Catherine Barry, RSJLA.
53 Profiles of Agatha Bussell and Rose Philson, RSJLA.
54 *Obituaries of Dominican Sisters, of the Holy Name Province*, Book 1, 1867-1929, p.22, OPA.
55 *Ibid.*, p.6, OPA.
56 *Ibid.*, p.13, OPA.

maintained close contacts with their mother house at Kingstown, with Cabra, outside Dublin, and with Wicklow. Over a period of twenty years, from 1867 to 1887, these Dominican houses sent 29 sisters, either professed or in training, to the newly established convent at Maitland. Five Irish-born immigrants entered the Dominican convent at Maitland. These pioneering women were a link with their Irish houses and their obituaries duly acknowledged its importance. Obvious reference to a sister bringing with her 'the old world culture', underlines the continuity of their traditions.[57]

The Sisters of Mercy were also conscious of their Irishness, but they valued it in a slightly different way. Between 1875 and 1881 the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland sent 22 sisters to Singleton who were either professed or postulants.[58] The majority (and the first) of these young women came from the Mercy Convent at Ennis, Co. Clare, while six came from the Mercy Missionary School at Callan, County Kilkenny.[59] Another 26 sisters, born in Ireland, were living in New South Wales when they entered the Sisters of Mercy at Singleton. Their heritage inspired a special courage, 'a missionary zeal'[60] and an 'apostolic zeal' for which the Irish have been acclaimed and of which the sisters were justly proud.[61] The readiness of Australian-born Singleton Mercies to leave their homes and diocese to go to foundations throughout Australia and New Zealand bears testimony to their zeal.[62]

The Sisters of Mercy were particularly aware of Catherine McAuley's legacies, including her concern for the poor. They took very seriously her emphasis on the mercy of Christ as a motivating force in

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57 *Ibid.*, p. 64, OPA.

58 Register of Sisters of Mercy, Singleton, RSMSA.

59 Sometime in 1884 , the Sisters of Mercy at Callan opened a missionary school for the training of young girls for convents in Ireland and the foreign missions. The school was established under the auspices of Moran of Sydney, Murray of Maitland, Dunne of Wilcannia and other Australian bishops. A single typed sheet, 'Our Future Nuns', RSMSA.

60 *His Mercy Endures Forever, 1875-1975*, Singleton, 1975, p. 4, RSMSA.

61 Obituary for Mother Mary Stanislaus Kenny, *Almanac of the Diocese of Maitland and Family Home Journal for 1911*, Maitland, 1911, pp. 50-51.

62 For example, Mary Kate Byrne of Merewether, Frances Wilkinson of Wallsend, Barbara Hoffman of Gresford and Margaret Smith of Raymond Terrace were 'given' to New Zealand. Profiles of Sisters of Mercy, Singleton, RSMSA.

their lives and her admonishment to succour the poor, the sick and the ignorant. Each sister took a fourth vow which formalized her commitment to the poor and the care of the less fortunate.[63] Obituary testimonials such as 'everyone loved her, especially the sick and poor and more so the unfortunate tramps',[64] show the importance of this tradition. Commitment to the spirit of mercy was reflected in descriptions which identified a 'gentle, kindly disposition',[65] and a 'gentle nature, of loving sympathy and understanding'.[66] The ultimate accolade was that she was a 'faithful daughter of the saintly foundress'.[67]

Refinement and good manners had been important to Catherine, who is reputed to have said that 'religion refines and elevates the character; a perfect religious is a perfect lady'. She insisted that 'the rules of good breeding and religious politeness' should govern the sisters' dealings with others.[68] But by comparison with the Dominicans, the emphasis here is on middle-class refinement rather than aristocratic élan. A contemporary noted that Mercy sisters practised 'the usages of good society' among themselves and that they took pains to preserve a 'ladylike refinement of manners and ideas'.[69] Lay sisters were required to 'have manners and appearance suited to religious who must be seen in public'.[70] The practice of refinement of manners and ideas was not always easy in some areas of the Maitland Diocese. A Sister of Mercy recounts the story of a member of her community at Murrurundi who 'meant to have some style and intended to have a carriage drive up to the convent verandah'. Having planted a number of trees on either side of the drive she was thwarted in her efforts to have a grand entrance when wild goats

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63 *A Guide for the Religious Called Sisters of Mercy*, Parts 1, 2 and 3, London, 1888, Part 2, pp.145-146.
64 Reminiscences of Stanislaus Kenny, RSMSA.
65 *St Aloysius Hamilton, 1915-1984*, Hamilton, 1984, p. 14.
66 Kieran Keogh, Obituary Notice, *Newcastle and Maitland Catholic Sentinel*, 1 June 1955, RSMSA.
67 *Footprints of Mercy, 1921-1971*, Newcastle, 1971, n.p.
68 Mercy Congregation Maxims in C. Clear, *Nuns in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, Dublin, 1987, pp. 27, 80, and 98.
69 *Loc. cit.*
70 *A Guide for the Religious Called Sisters of Mercy*, Parts 1, 2 and 3, London, 1888, Part 3, p. 462.

ringbarked every one of them.[71] Some sisters obviously aspired higher in worldly respectability than they ought to have done.

In the case of each sisterhood the total effect of these records is much greater than the sum of the statements which they make. Each sisterhood espoused and practised as far as possible the virtues which were peculiar to the religious state and to their own order. Despite the similarities, reading their records side by side, we find that the nuances resonate differently. The Dominicans emphasized qualities distinguishing them as upper-class ladies who were very conscious of their own special place in the church. The Sisters of Mercy were concerned with respectability and social standing while the Sisters of St Joseph were bent on proving that they were adequate to their task and were in that respect, if in no other, comparable to their Dominican and Mercy counterparts. The seeming preoccupation with rank and status, particularly among the sisterhoods from Ireland, is partly explained by the Catholic Church's desire in Ireland to make itself acceptable to Irish Protestants, especially the upper classes.[72] It is related, too, to their origins and to the standing of Dominic and of Catherine. Class values were also important in the Diocese of Maitland. As we have seen, religious communities reinforced these values in a number of ways, particularly through the schools they staffed.

A story is told of Harry McNamara and his wife, Rosanna, a farming family of Raymond Terrace, who had fourteen children, nine girls and five boys. Three of their daughters became Sisters of St Joseph. Twice a year the McNamaras went to Lochinvar to visit the convent and their daughters. On one occasion Harry met Bishop Murray, who was also visiting. They chatted about the state of the colony and 'the bad conditions on all sides'. Just as they were about to go their separate ways, Murray hailed McNamara with, 'What about giving us some more of those fine

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71 Reminiscences of a Sister of Mercy at Murrurundi, 1879-1901, n.d., RSMSA.
72 Clear, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

girls of yours?' Harry quickly retorted, 'You have enough but you can have the old woman here!'[73]

For families such as the McNamaras, convents were not seen as places of 'convenient stowage for withered daughters' but as places where women chose to be.[74] The choices they made and the processes involved were governed by the economic circumstances, social status, education and skills of the women concerned. It is difficult in a predominantly rural area, such as the Maitland Diocese, for the historian to work out a precise class structure. However some indication of the economic circumstances of aspirants can be gleaned from admission registers and electoral rolls. Fathers' occupations generally include farmers and landholders. These descriptions give no indication of size of holdings or their prosperity. Maitland, the upper Hunter and the Manning River districts, for example, had a high percentage of land owners and farmers, among the majority of whom were many tenant farmers. From Newcastle, a mining area, came the daughters of miners. Each sisterhood boasted a cross-section of tradesmen's daughters but none had many recruits from professional families, though here the Dominicans stand out from the other two. This relative lack of professions resulted from the fact that many Catholics in the diocese were either assisted immigrants or descended from them and from convicts. By and large, the Sisters of St Joseph, mainly from rural areas, tended to be from lower-class families, with some middle-class representation. However, the choices are not totally predictable. Josephites, for example, had a higher number than expected of postulants coming from families with freehold land. The daughters of shopkeepers and contractors tended towards the Sisters of Mercy, who thus attracted a greater number of middle-class women than the Josephites. It may be that some women from this newly established middle class found the Sisters of Mercy less daunting than the more sophisticated and upper-class

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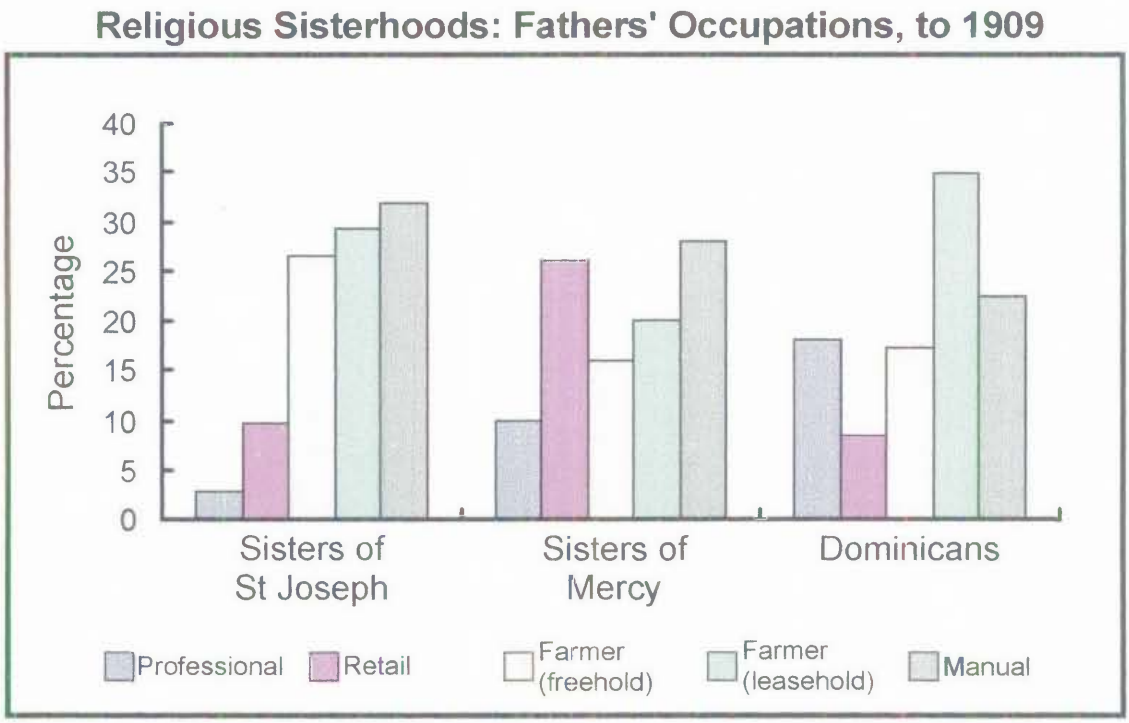
73 M. Boyle, *A Road That has No End: 200 Years of a Family, 1778-1978*, Hong Kong, n.d., p. 54.

74 J. Milton, *Animadversions*, July 1641, quoted by B. Hill, 'A Refuge from Men: The Idea of a Protestant Nunnery', *Past and Present*, No. 117, November 1987, pp. 107-130 and especially p. 109. See this article also for a discussion of the rôle and perceived rôles played by nunneries before the Reformation.



Occupations of Fathers

Dominicans. The Dominicans had fewer girls from the semi-skilled, unskilled and struggling farming families.

Both the Dominicans and the Sisters of Mercy required a dowry. The dowry, a specific sum of money or its equivalent, was paid by the postulant to the religious community in which she wished to make religious profession. We have no evidence about the quantity of money involved in these dowries in the Maitland Diocese but in Ireland between 1840 and 1857 Sisters of Mercy in Galway paid between £200 and £375. In the late-nineteenth century, Dominican Sisters in Ireland paid up to £500.[75] Enormous sums of money, they confirm the wealth of sections of the Catholic community. The dowry had a threefold purpose. Invested, as required by canon law, it produced income for the religious community and funds for the religious were she to leave the convent. Among communities with solemn vows, such as the Dominicans, all postulants were required to bring a dowry. More recent institutes, which generally required simple vows, allowed some latitude. The constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy, for example, determined whether or not a dowry was required, but Catherine McAuley herself would not refuse a candidate for religious life if she did not have a dowry.[76] Mercy candidates without dowries became lay sisters, requiring only, according to Catherine, 'a vocation, a good constitution and an ordinary education'.[77]

Poverty and humility were the hallmarks of the Sisters of St Joseph, and Mary MacKillop and Tenison Woods rejected dowries as contrary to the spirit of their new sisterhood.[78] Mary's unhappy experience of the Sisters of Mercy in Melbourne had set her against formalised social distinctions among her group. While the lack of dowries meant that the Josephites were financially vulnerable, their ranks were open to a broader group of women. As at Maitland, most Josephites were from the poorer classes. Certainly the provision of a dowry would have been impossible

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75 Clear, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

76 T. M. Healy, 'The Dowry', *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Sydney, 1967, Vol. 4, pp. 1028-9 and A. Boudinhon, *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 5, pp. 146-147. Clear, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

77 *A Guide for the Religious Called Sisters of Mercy*, Part 3, 462, RSMSA.

78 *Explanation of the Rule and Constitution of the Sisters of St Joseph in the Diocese of Maitland*, Maitland, 1901, pp. 12-17.

for certain families. Many nuns, such as the daughters of William and Ellen Tobin of Largs, came from large families. This particular farming family gave six daughters to religious life: two to the Sisters of Mercy as lay sisters, one to the Congregation of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart at Kensington, in Sydney, and three to the Sisters of St Joseph at Lochinvar.[79] Providing a dowry for each of these daughters would have been difficult for any family let alone an ordinary farming family struggling to make its way. A young woman's choices, therefore, were not always absolutely free but were shaped by the economic circumstances of her family. At the same time the church offered a surprising range of options for aspiring postulants.

Opportunities for different forms of service also existed within each congregation. The Dominicans and the Mercies each held to the monastic class structure of choir and lay sisters. Mary MacKillop had strongly opposed the use of the monastic class system and had refused to have this distinction among her sisters.[80] However, class distinctions had been part of the tradition of religious life for centuries. During the middle ages, sisterhoods attracted the daughters of the nobility and gentry who brought with them their servants and accoutrements. The main function of the choir sister was to chant the Divine Office in Latin at set times throughout the day and night, a requirement which demanded a certain level of education and literacy. Choir sisters, the élite, fitted all other activities around these hours of prayer. Lay sisters, originally from the servant class, did the manual work, the housekeeping and cooking for the convent or monastery, leaving the choir sisters free for their liturgical obligations.[81]

The choir and lay sisters were, and remained, separate groups within any sisterhood. It was expedient for both the lay sisters and the community that the different grades of choir and lay sister be preserved and, as a Mercy publication of 1888 put it, that 'distinctions between them

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79 Entrance Register of the Sisters of St Joseph, RSJLA and the Sisters of Mercy, RSMSA.

80 Gardiner, *op. cit.*, p. 410.

81 W. B. Ryan, 'Lay Sisters', *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol VIII, Sydney, 1966, p. 580 and M. P. Greany, 'Dominican Sisters', *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. IV, Sydney, 1966, pp. 984-5.

should be well marked'.[82] To this end they wore distinguishing religious habits. The choir sister of the Sisters of Mercy had a train attached to her habit, a mediaeval relic signifying wealth and status. The habit of the lay sister lacked a train and she wore an apron, a coloured one over her habit while working and a starched white one for formal occasions. The apron was 'an essential part of her religious dress'.[83] The Dominican lay sister wore a black scapular instead of the white of the choir sisters.[84] The lay sisters' training in religious life was also different, but 'carefully attended to'.[85] Moreover the two groups did not eat together; lay sisters sat at the end of the refectory table. They also took their recreation separately. They were domestic servants who worked long hours looking after the needs of the choir sisters and of the house.

The Sisters of St Joseph at Lochinvar did not have the formal distinction of choir and lay sisters, although some among them did assume the rôle of a lay sister within the congregation. Of the three sisterhoods, the Josephites were the least hierarchical and the most inclusive of all their members. The house sisters, as they were known, were not marked out in any formal way; their novitiates were not different; their habit was not distinctive and they were not separate from the rest of the community in the chapel, the refectory or recreation room. They took their place in the community like every other sister, according to their seniority and order of religious profession. Every sister in the community did her share of sewing, cooking and house work. The choice of a domestic rôle within the Josephites was not necessarily dependent on education but usually on the fact that a particular woman did not want to teach. It is tempting to explain these differences in terms of egalitarianism but the idea of equality was a political and secular one and by its very nature could not exist in a religious sisterhood. It is true, all the same, that religious observance (prayers and recitation of the office) within the Josephite community did not demand the same distinctions which were to be found among the Dominicans and the Mercys.

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82 *A Guide for the Religious Called Sisters of Mercy*, Parts 1, 2 and 3, London, 1888, Part 3, p. 465.
83 *Ibid.*, p. 462.
84 Clear, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
85 *A Guide for the Religious Called Sisters of Mercy*, Part 3, London, 1888, p. 466.

Class and status in relation to Christian belief and practice are only beginning to be investigated and understood. It is one of the paradoxes of Christianity that while it makes no distinctions of status in the matter of salvation it depends on and fosters rigid social and legal hierarchies. In the Catholic Church today and among the present members of Murray's three sisterhoods there is a tendency to minimize the importance of these aspects historically and even to deny that they did, in fact, exist. In the broader historical context the debate about class and its emergence in Australia has been at times furious but not always productive.[86] Australian historians have not yet reached agreement about the emergence of class and class consciousness in Australian society and tend to direct most of their discussion to the links between class and political parties. As E. P. Thompson has argued, class consciousness arises when a particular group becomes aware that it has interests and experiences in common which identify and distinguish it from other groups.[87] For Thompson, class has conflict at its centre. As we have seen in relation to the guilds, leadership and authority militated against class conflict, although tensions could occur.

By virtue of their religion, the Catholics of the Maitland Diocese were an identifiable and distinctive group within the Hunter and beyond. Their common religious interests and experiences set them apart as did their socio-economic divisions and class consciousness. While the majority of Catholics saw themselves as working class, defining themselves in terms of their labour, politics and behaviour, there were those among them who were clearly possessed of a middle-class consciousness.[88] Within this scheme of class consciousness and status were the religious congregations of the Maitland Diocese who, in their

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86 For a study of social class in a localised area, see, B. Webster, 'Stations in Life, A Study from Below of Social Class in Rockhampton 1910-1921', M Litt., University of New England, 1993.

87 E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London, 1980, p. 9.

88 For further insights into the development of class consciousness in Australia see, J. Rickard, *Class and Politics: New South Wales, Victoria and the Early Commonwealth, 1890-1910*, Canberra, 1976 and R. W. Connell and T. H Irving, (eds) *Class Structure in Australian History*, Melbourne, 1992 and Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

own ways, were just as aware of class and status as other sections of the community. The sisterhoods were an élite group, each presenting a distinctive public face to the Catholic world outside and also maintaining class distinctions within itself.

A striking number of women from the Maitland Diocese became lay sisters. Of the 36 women who entered the Dominicans between 1867 and 1909, almost two-thirds (23) were lay sisters. By contrast, of the 60 women who entered the Sisters of Mercy between 1875 and 1909 slightly more than one quarter became lay sisters.[89] The differences partly reflect the ecclesiastical status of the Dominicans as well as the class consciousness of their individual members. Certain circumstances determined the condition of lay sisters. Both congregations required a particular standard of education for those women who wanted to be choir sisters. Some women lacked intellectual ability while others had no formal education, a lack which excluded them from becoming choir sisters and teachers. Other women made choices regarding their status within the order based on more practical considerations. Since the Dominicans were engaged solely in teaching, the only alternative for women who did not want to teach was to be a lay sister. Some older women who entered did not want to train as teachers. It is, nevertheless, an oversimplification to see these lay sisters as mere drudges. They could and did make their own mark in their own domains.[90] The Gilmore sisters, Agnes and Nora, for example, had been trained as professional bakers, and Nora had conducted a thriving business in Maitland. When they entered the Dominican Convent as lay sisters, at the ages of 24 and 28 respectively, they brought their skill and enterprise with them and trained young lay sisters as cooks and bakers for many years.[91] Women such as Bridget Kennedy from Newcastle and Catherine Keating and Mary Kelly from Maitland became Dominican lay sisters and convent managers. These were capable women, skilled sempstresses and cooks.[92] Lay sisters had their own forms of power and influence. A convent kitchen was a

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89 Entrance Register of the Dominican Sisters, OPA and the Sisters of Mercy RSMSA.
90 McGrath, *op. cit.*, p.121.
91 *The Obituaries of the Sisters of St Dominic of the Holy Name Province*, Book 1, 1867-1929, p. 26 and Book 2, 1930-1958, p. 2, OPA.
92 *Ibid.*,, p. 42, p. 27 and p. 23, OPA.

clearing house for gossip. As servants they observed much, had access to superiors and looked after priests when they visited.

Financial and class considerations did not always determine the lay or choir status of religious woman. The Londrigans of Denison, near Scone, were a well-to-do family who gave two of their daughters to the church. Ellen, a lay sister in the Dominican order, was an unassuming character who devoted her life to serving her community, 'even in her old age'.[93] By contrast, her sister, Mary, who became a Sister of St Joseph, began her active religious life as a primary teacher until her appointment as novice mistress, a position which she held for two terms. Finally she reached the highest office in her congregation when she was elected Sister Guardian, also for two terms. Subsequently elected vicaress, second in the hierarchy of the sisterhood, she held that office for three terms.[94] Ellen and Mary, from the same family and social background, took very different paths which reflected their own individuality and aspirations. The requirements of dowry, education and class were not concerns for them. Both contributed to their religious congregations, each in her own way, one as a humble lay sister, the other as a leader. In each case, the choice to enter a particular sisterhood highlights the individuality of such decision-making.

Blood sisters could make one of a number of different choices. Certain families, like the McNamaras, developed a tradition of daughters entering sisterhoods. In the period from 1867 to 1909 eight families in the Maitland Diocese gave a total of sixteen daughters to the Dominicans. Daughters of two of these families, the Dwyers and Herrmans, also entered the Mercys and one, the Heagneys, had a daughter join the Josephites. From the time of the foundation of the local Sisters of Mercy in 1875 until 1909, seven Maitland families gave eighteen daughters to their congregation. One family, the Moys, who gave three daughters to the Sisters of Mercy at Singleton, had cousins, two sets of them, also called Moys, in the Josephite community at Lochinvar.

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93 *Ibid.*, Book 2, 1930-1958, p. 24. OPA.
94 Profile of Sister Mary Alphonsus Londrigan, RSJLA.

Forty-one women from sixteen Maitland families entered the Sisters of St Joseph in the period from 1883 to 1909. Among these, the Moylans had given four daughters to Lochinvar and two daughters to the Dominicans. The Londrigan and Heagney families, as we have seen, each with a daughter at Lochinvar, also had a daughter in the Dominican Convent. In addition, the Barrys and Tobins each had three daughters who were Sisters of St Joseph and one with the Sisters of Mercy at Singleton. Numerous cousins, aunts and nieces of the same families numbered among one or more of the three congregations. For example, the three Tobins who were Sisters of St Joseph had four Tobin cousins who were also Josephites. In later years, two Tobin nieces entered the convent at Lochinvar.[95]

The entry of blood sisters into different religious sisterhoods reveals the extent to which decision-making was multi-faceted. Some decisions were determined by the rules of a congregation. The Constitutions of the Sisters of St Joseph and the Sisters of Mercy, for example, both stated that if more than two sisters (children of the same parents) were admitted into the Institute, the third could not have a vote while her two sisters were members of the chapter (the voting body). This rule was meant to protect institutes from the unwarranted influence of powerful families.[96] But some women were obviously asserting their independence by taking a different course from a blood sister. Because of ties of race and blood, religious women of the Maitland Diocese had networks which transcended the boundaries of their own orders, thus providing opportunities for the informal spread of information and for the widening of choice. These ties established lines of communication all over the Maitland Diocese, helping to connect different social groups and building up the Catholic community generally.

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95 Numbers taken from the Dominican Obituaries, and the Entrance Registers of the Sisters of Mercy, and the Sisters of St Joseph.

96 *The Constitutions of the Sisters of St Joseph in the Diocese of Maitland, 25 July 1888*, West Maitland, p. 20, RSJLA. For further discussion in relation to the Sisters of Mercy, see S. McGrath, 'Women Religious in the History of Australia 1888-1950: A Case Study - the Sisters of Mercy Parramatta', *Journal of Royal Australian Historical Society*, December 1995, Vol. 81, Part 2, p. 197.

The ages of women entering religious congregations in the diocese reveal that they usually had some previous experience of the world and had developed useful skills. For the Dominicans the average age of their choir sisters was 23 and for their lay sisters 25. The oldest postulant was 40 and the youngest sixteen. Seventy-three per cent of women who entered the Dominicans were aged 21 an age which suggests that they deliberately waited to take this step at the moment of their legal maturity. For the Sisters of Mercy, the average age of their choir sisters was almost 24 and for their lay sisters 22 . Their oldest postulant was 35 and youngest 16. About half were 21 years and over.[97] These were not simply young innocents coerced into religious life, but women who made the choice to enter as mature adults. At the same time, given that the average age of marriage for women in the Maitland Diocese in this period was between 21 and 29, they were not irretrievably beyond marriageable age.[98]

The age profile of the recruits entering the Sisters of St Joseph reflects the lower socio-economic background of the families from which they came by comparison with the Dominicans and Mercies. The average age for the Sisters of St Joseph was 23, their youngest recruit 14 and their oldest 41. Forty percent of women were 21 years and over and 60 percent were 20 years and under.[99] The majority of these young Josephite novices were not making the choice to enter the convent as mature women as in the case of the Dominicans and Mercies. The fact that they tended to be slightly younger on average and did not require a dowry suggests that their entering may have eased the financial burdens of their families. Theirs was not an expensive choice, and it may well have been taken less freely. At the same time, the Sisters of St Joseph gave women from poorer families, the chance to enter religious life with whatever opportunities it might offer. Their humbler origins and lack of money did not necessarily deny them such choices.

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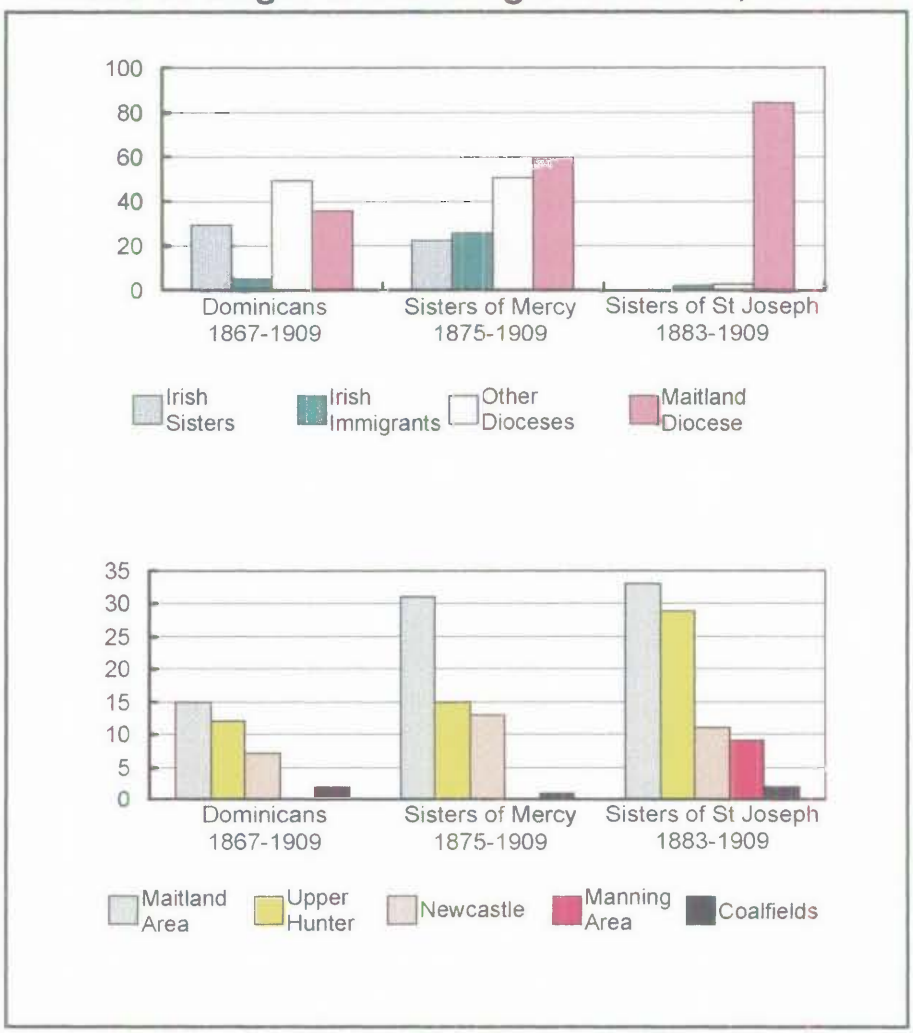
97 Entrance Registers of the Sisters of St Dominic, OPA and the Sisters of Mercy, RSMSA.

98 The Marriage Registers for the Catholic Parishes of West Maitland, East Maitland and Singleton in the period from 1856 to 1866 show that the majority of females married between the ages of 21 and 29 with a significant number marrying between 30 and 39. Parish Archives of West Maitland, East Maitland and Singleton.

99 Entrance Register of the Sisters of St Joseph, Lochinvar, RSJLA.

Places of Origin of the Religious Sisters, to 1909



Religious life gave women the opportunity to make geographical moves of their own accord, although some women chose to stay close to familiar places. Religious life allowed for such variety of personality. One important influence on an aspirant's decision to enter a religious order was the experience of women who had gone before her and whom she knew well. In boarding schools girls lived in close contact with such women and observed the conventual way of life on an intimate level. In many ways boarding-school life would have been akin to convent life itself and these schools produced a significant number of recruits. The Dominican school at Maitland fostered many vocations for all the Maitland sisterhoods largely because it was well established and prestigious. Between 1885 and 1891, 22 ex-students of the Maitland Dominicans entered the local Dominican Convent, while seventeen became Sisters of Mercy and six Sisters of St Joseph.[100]

From the time of the Dominican foundation in 1867 until 1909, the year of Murray's death, 36 young women joined the Dominicans from the Maitland Diocese, many of whom had attended the Dominican School at Maitland. Another 49 had come from other areas where the Dominican Sisters had made foundations.[101] Women from far-flung areas were attracted by the prestige and long history of the Dominican order.[102] The Sisters of Mercy at Singleton also drew women from areas and dioceses beyond Maitland. Mercy foundations had been made at Broken Hill (1889) and in New Zealand, at West Port (1891) and South Dunedin (1897). Twelve women came from New Zealand to enter the Sisters of Mercy at Singleton, a step showing startling initiative and commitment. The call to leave everything that was familiar to them and to travel great distances involved a greater sacrifice than simply leaving home to 'serve the Lord'. Another 39 Mercy postulants came from the Sydney, Goulburn and

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100 Single hand-written sheet with a list of the names of ex-students who entered various religious congregations, n.d., OPA.

101 The Dominicans had established boarding schools at Tamworth in 1876, Moss Vale 1891 and Strathfield 1894 .

102 These areas included Maryborough in Queensland, Moree, Gunnedah, Young, Goulburn, Albury, Carcoar, Orange, Wagga Wagga and Tumut. *Obituaries of the Sisters of St Dominic, of the Holy Name Province,* Book 1, 1867-1929, Book 2, 1930-1958 and Book 3, 1959-1981, OPA.

Armidale Dioceses and 60 from the Maitland Diocese itself.[103] Like the Dominicans, the Sisters of Mercy drew their support mainly from the larger centres, from Singleton in the Upper Hunter where their mother house had been established, and from Newcastle.

Unlike the Dominicans and the Sisters of Mercy, recruitment for the Sisters of St Joseph came largely from the home diocese. Between 1883, the time of the Josephite arrival at Lochinvar, and 1909, 71 women joined the congregation from the Maitland Diocese. Two other recruits, born in Ireland, came to Australia and later joined the sisters at Lochinvar, while only nine came from areas outside the diocese: three from Port Macquarie, which had been part of the Maitland diocese, two from Sydney and the others from Melbourne, Binalong, Uralla and Tamworth. Of the three sisterhoods, the Sisters of St Joseph, because of their scattered and isolated schools, had the closest connections with the diocese as a whole and with its families

Women joined the ranks of the Dominicans, Sisters of Mercy and Sisters of St Joseph in the Maitland Diocese because of religious convictions. However, a number of factors determined their choice of a particular sisterhood and their status within that sisterhood. The establishment of convents throughout the diocese provided contact with religious women, the necessary schooling and opportunities to choose. For some, education and economic considerations determined the choice of a sisterhood and for others, their own age was significant. But these aspects alone do not account for their choices. The particular ethos and idealism of each sisterhood attracted certain types of women. The Dominicans, with their long religious tradition, sophistication and scholarship, appealed to the better educated and class conscious in particular. The Sisters of Mercy, with their commitment to Mercy care and the ideals of Catherine McAuley, had their attractions especially for the daughters of the socially aspiring. The Sisters of St Joseph, hardworking, diligent, and mainly the products of Maitland itself, catered for the daughters of the common man. It was important that postulants knocked

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103 Register of the Sisters of Mercy Singleton, RSMSA.

on the door of the home which best suited them and in which they would feel comfortable. Once they had taken the decision to enter religious life, they usually made their choices accordingly. Nor was distance necessarily a consideration. The sisters who came from New Zealand to Maitland were an extreme case of a common phenomenon.

The many paradoxes of the Catholic Church diffuse its structures and traditions. In many respects religious sisterhoods are its most paradoxical. The most spiritualized and idealized in conception, the sisterhoods were also the most practical and utilitarian. Murray quite deliberately brought three very different sisterhoods to his diocese. They were to be his fighting force in the battle for the hearts and minds of his people. The origins and ethos of each group determined the use Murray made of them and, in the final analysis, those whom they drew to their ranks. Murray's élite corps were the Dominicans, with their long traditions of intellectual endeavour and of fighting against heresy. They were in Maitland to teach the children of the wealthy. It was important for Murray to establish a secure base, both social and material, with women whom he knew and trusted and the Dominicans met that standard. The Sisters of Mercy, whose foundress had seen her sisterhood grow quickly and achieve wide acceptance, were in the diocese to teach the children of the upwardly-mobile families of Maitland's established towns. Finally, the Sisters of St Joseph were the foot soldiers who moved into small, remote areas of the diocese to continue the fight and to advance the cause of Catholic religion.

Entering a sisterhood was a question of choice, as was the particular sisterhood chosen. For women it was a positive choice involving a denial but also an empowering of self. The Catholic Church gave women alternatives not open in the same way to women of other denominations.[104] During the late nineteenth-century married women in Australia were regaining some of the rights which had been long denied them — controlling their own property, for example. Girls were

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104 J. Studdert, 'Attitudes to Monasticism: Changes in Anglican Attitudes Towards Monasticism Between the Suppression of the Monasteries and 1900', MA (hons) University of New England, 1976, p. 302.

beginning to take up an increasing range of employment opportunities: going to factories rather than domestic service, for instance, because it gave them more free time.[105] Married women and religious sisters were both in matrimonial relationships. But by entering a sisterhood women could endow themselves with more options in life than many of their secular married sisters. In a curious way the church both empowered these women and insisted on their docility, a prime example of the paradoxes and tensions of religious life.

The religious daughters of the Maitland Diocese derived in the main from its people. Those families who raised money for churches, built schools, and whose Catholicism was an integral part of their everyday lives, gave to the church their most precious gifts of all, their daughters. Such generosity gave these families a much greater sense of participation in the ownership of the Church of Maitland. Their generous giving was also a measure of the success of the making and moulding of the diocese.

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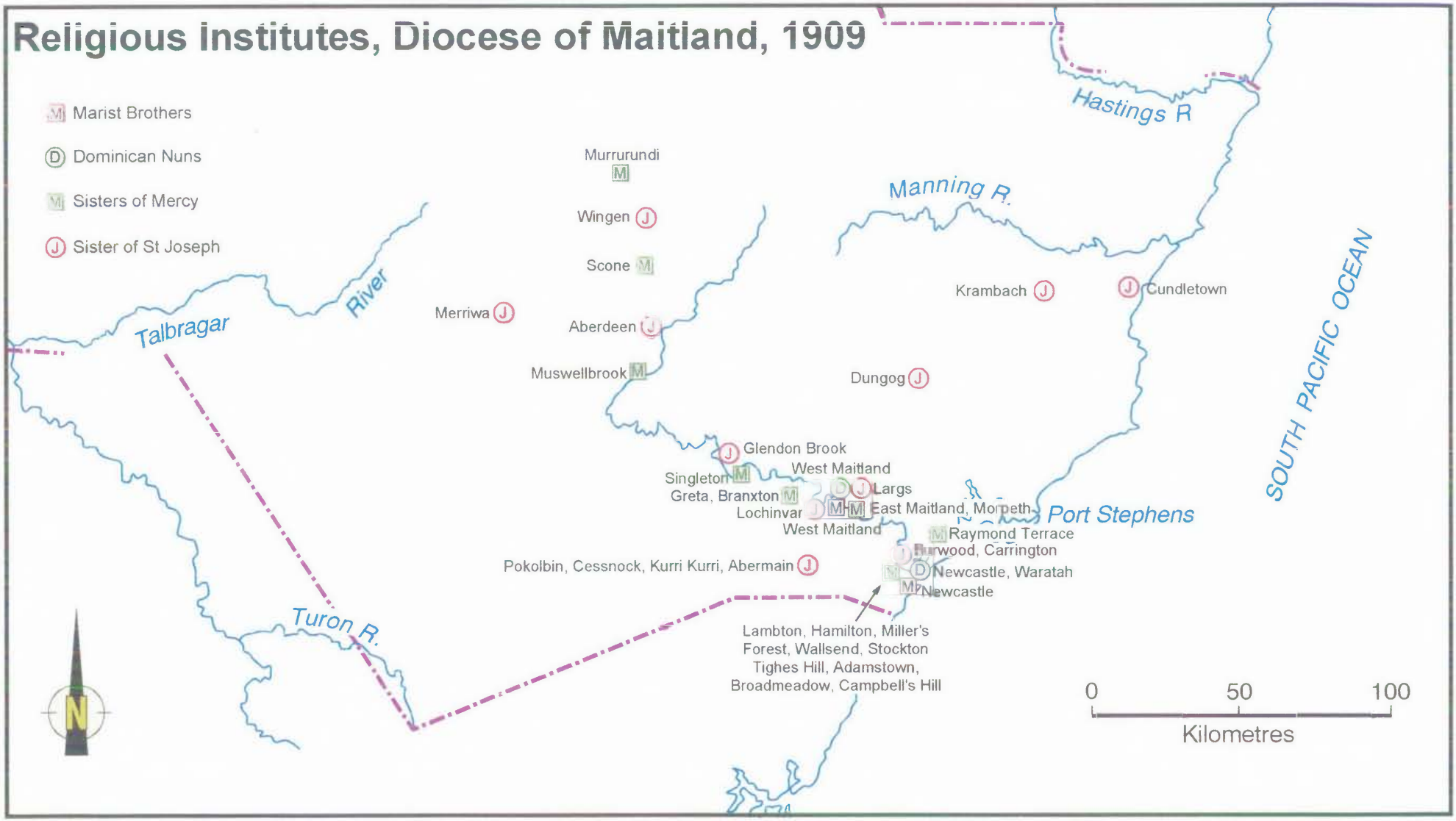
105 B. Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter, and Poor Mary* Ann: Women *and Work in Australia*, Sydney, 1975, pp. 56-61.


Religious Institutes, Diocese of Maitland, 1909
Marist Brothers
Dominican Nuns
Sisters of Mercy
Sister of St Joseph
Hastings R
Manning R.
Murrurundi
Wingen
Scone
Merriwa
Aberdeen
Muswellbrook
Talbragar
River
Krambach
Cundletown
Dungog
SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN
Glendon Brook
West Maitland
Singleton
Greta, Branxton
Largs
Lochinvar
East Maitland, Morpeth
Port Stephens
West Maitland
Raymond Terrace
Burwood, Carrington
Pokolbin, Cessnock, Kurri Kurri, Abermain
Newcastle, Waratah
Newcastle
Turon R.
Lambton, Hamilton, Miller's Forest, Wallsend, Stockton Tighes Hill, Adamstown, Broadmeadow, Campbell's Hill
N
0
50
100
Kilometres

(xvi) Campbell's Hill Cemetery, Maitland.

Conclusion

'Rough-hew them how we will'.[1]

Bishop James Murray's will specified that if a monument were to be erected in his honour it should cost no more than fifty pounds. It seems that the Catholics of Maitland acquiesced in this regard. The monument over Murray's grave in Campbells Hill cemetery is a simple one. A large granite Celtic cross rises above a central stone which bears the inscription:

Pray for the soul of
Right Revd James Murray D.D.
Bishop of Maitland
1866-1909

The monument stands alone, dominating an oval approximately 33 feet in diameter at the centre of the Catholic portion of the cemetery. Just beyond is the burial plot of the Dominican Sisters and the graves of priests and Catholic laity. The position of Murray's last resting place affirms the view of himself which he had developed and nurtured throughout his episcopacy. The bishop's influence on his people and his centrality in the Catholic community stand emphatically revealed.

One can glean a great deal about a community, both past and present, from its cemetery. The hopes and aspirations of people, their religious affiliation and practice and their economic and social circumstances are revealed in many ways. The Campbells Hill cemetery is no exception. The inscriptions on Catholic headstones testify to the Catholicity of these people. The elaborate monuments point to the individual triumphs of men such as W. T. Mitchell and Robert Hyndes of Maitland and Thomas Drinan of Branxton. All are evidence of the successes of the Catholic community generally, suggesting that Catholics were hard-working, enterprising people who had made their way not only

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1 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them, how we will', *Hamlet*, Act Five, Scene 2, line 12.

among their own people but within the wider community of nineteenth-century Maitland. While in the end their sights were set on the things of heaven, their eyes had also been fixed on the earthly opportunities which Maitland offered. If the cemetery at Campbells Hill were an accurate metaphor for the Maitland Diocese of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, then all was as it should have been. The Catholic community was intact; the central position belonged to Murray; the people were in their place.

One could argue that the making of the Maitland Diocese was an act of Divine Providence, that all that had happened was the will of God. The faith of Catholics would tell them that this was so. But the making of the diocese and the moulding of its people had involved the human element, human beings with all their strengths and weaknesses. Many players in many guises had played particular roles. All of these characters interacting and collaborating, sometimes with conflict and tension, subtle though these may have been, had produced the outcome that was, in 1909, the Maitland Diocese. This thesis has, therefore, set aside the impact of providence in an effort to study the exercise of power and the creative use of that power at a particular time and in a particular place. It has tried to show the interactions among the Catholic community and the various parts of the church hierarchy and to uncover the conversation and struggle between above and below.

The most obvious expression of the exercise of power related to the choices made by individuals, small and limited though these choices may sometimes have been. Priests, for example, were bound by obedience to their bishop and were dependent upon him for a place in the diocese. Nevertheless, priests exercised considerable ecclesiastical and personal power. By virtue of their priestly state they reflected the power of the bishop and were crucial to the power structure of the church. The sacramental church could not function without them and, indeed, in their dealings with the people it was the administration or denial of the sacraments which rendered them most powerful. Their power and authority were also tied to the position they held within specific parish

communities. Priests like Patrick Finn of Hamilton and Thomas Nealon of Raymond Terrace were able to confront Murray as they did because of their parochial power base. The priest, especially one who served in a parish for his entire priestly life, was not unlike a local squire, a man of unquestioned and intimate authority who dealt with the everyday lives and concerns of his neighbours. The length of tenure of priests, such as Patrick Thomas Corcoran of Morpeth, allowed for the exercise of a great deal of both practical and personal power.

Religious women were bound by their vows, rule of life and form of governance. Paradoxically these factors both circumscribed and empowered them. Religious superiors within each congregation were placed in a delicate situation politically. Any direct confrontation with their bishop could only result in his will prevailing. However, we have seen how superiors such as the Dominican, Agnes Bourke, and the Sister of Mercy, Stanislaus Kenny, used the power of their position and their own personal authority to accommodate the demands of Murray, at the same time promoting the needs of their sisterhoods. In effect, the diocese and its demands provided the opportunity for the three orders of religious women, the Dominicans, Mercies and Josephites, to exercise initiative and enterprise, particularly through their schools. Their practice and teaching of Christian virtues, especially piety, their provision of career opportunities both within religious life and beyond, their enabling of other women by endowing them with a place and recognition within the community, all these things made religious women indispensable in the making of the Maitland Diocese and in the moulding of its people. At the same time religious women, through their own internal organization and by their system of schooling, reinforced and perpetuated the pyramid of social rank on which Murray himself so much depended.

The faithful were often severely limited in their choices by their social and economic circumstances, but they facilitated and directed change, particularly in relation to schooling. They were willing participants, not simply passive observers. People throughout the Maitland Diocese owned their church in a way that was not possible in

Ireland, through their offers of land, money, goods and time. Buildings like St John the Baptist Church at Maitland and St Catherine's College at Singleton were triumphalist in many ways, but just as triumphalist for most Catholics were their small bush churches and schools. These buildings gave Catholic families, like those of Bulahdelah, Cessnock, Krambach and Merriwa, a different future from that which they might have otherwise enjoyed and hopes of an eternity which might have been otherwise uncertain.

In the making of the Maitland Diocese one catches a glimpse of the way late nineteenth-century democracy worked. Here a small but significant minority were thinking about their lives differently. During a period when men and, in the end, women were discovering the implications of egalitarian citizenship, the details of Catholic life —giving to building programmes, deciding to have a school and even making choices about children's names — might be important expressions of choice within the community of faith.

Murray's significance in the making of the diocese is undeniable. However, he had been well served by those priests, such as Dean Lynch and Andrew Phelan, who had gone before him. The Maitland Diocese needed a man with Murray's personality for the next phase of its development. Shaped by circumstances and by events in Rome and Ireland, Murray had come with a blue print for establishing his diocese. He was seemingly uncompromising in his beliefs and rigorous in his assertion of them. People, religious and priests were to be united and unified in their allegiance to him, in the proper practice of their religion and on the issues of mixed marriages and schooling. To this end he often took a hard line in his dealings with priests, religious and people. At the same time he knew that he had to persuade, that he had to rely upon people as agents of change, for little would have happened without such willingness. Murray had the ability on occasions to step back and so to allow the various processes to take place. But in so doing he gave them — priests, religious and people — decision-making power. This could have been a problem for him, but herein lies the essence of his charm; he was

capable of simultaneously empowering and managing people, a very attractive skill. The depth or the superficiality of his achievement has been one of the many issues of this thesis.

We should not underestimate the power and impact of Murray's physical presence, all the more significant because he was the first resident bishop. Throughout this thesis Murray has loomed large, just as he did for the Catholics of the Maitland Diocese. Prepared to roll up his sleeves (figuratively speaking), to ride hundred of miles on horseback and to go round bush settlements early in the morning ringing a bell, he physically claimed both his people and territory. For the most part his was a warm and tangible presence. (Note in the group photograph taken with his family how easily he sits with them and they with him). Priests and religious women had a similar physical presence within their local communities. Priests who had served long years in a parish, and religious sisters who went to remote areas to teach, were a visible and living expression of the Catholic Church. For the Catholic people at large bishop, religious and priests were, as O'Farrell says, 'familiar, fellow travellers across the face of a hard land'.[2] This physical presence, appropriately garbed, appealed as much to Catholics as the ironbark or bricks and mortar of church and school buildings. But by their very devotion to, and dependence upon, this physical presence it may well be that the people gave themselves power to resist the more invasive demands of the new piety. Mere loyalty thus covered numerous sins of omission.

The Irish who made up the great majority of the Catholics of the Maitland Diocese, had come from a country steeped in religious tradition, but one generally lacking the formal practices and ways of Pius IX's Roman Church. Ireland itself was a land of holy wells, holy mountains and places of pilgrimage, producing an environment permeated with a spiritual consciousness more encompassing than that of Christianity. Religiosity was all-pervasive, not bound only to church or priest. The colonial experience was different. As I say, here the people were involved

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2 P. O'Farrell, *Vanished Kingdoms: Irish in Austraia and New Zealand, A Personal Excursion*, Kensington, 1990, p. 142

in the building of the church and the creation of holy places. But also because of the impact of current religious reforms in the colony, the Irish were asked to focus in a new way on the rituals of the Romanized Church. Even so, the old was not yet completely submerged into the new. Nor was the new unambiguous in its impact on daily life. Within the church there was room for diversity and choice in devotional style and religious forms.

This thesis has cast a net over some of the teeming choices, the multiplicity of decisions, which constituted the Diocese of Maitland in Murray's time.